

# Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine



Activities, Issues, and News—Spring 2016



## Special points of interest:

- \* Check out [www.wildblueberries.com](http://www.wildblueberries.com) for Wild Blueberry smoothie recipes

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## Frozen Wild Blueberries for School Nutrition Programs Accessing National and Local markets

Maine's frozen Wild Blueberries are well positioned in the growing market for healthy, whole foods that improve nutrition for our school children. Fruit sales at schools are currently increasing, with public school purchasing leading the way. In 2014, USDA's National School Lunch Program fed 30 million children each day (amounting to nearly 5 billion total meals served annually) at a cost of \$12.7 billion. In 2012, USDA purchased \$90M (~ 114 M lbs.) of frozen fruit, frozen vegetables, and frozen orange juice to serve in public schools. Public schools recorded a 48% increase in fruit purchases in 2000-2010 and the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 mandated doubling the amount of fruit served in every public school breakfast. In the private foodservice setting, institutions have more money and freedom to spend on foods of their choosing, and are offering more local and healthy options.

Despite this huge market, sales of frozen Wild Blueberries to USDA for school nutrition are currently very small. This year the Commission is undertaking a detailed effort to better understand how to expand Wild Blueberries' availability in the public school sector, as well as potentially within private foodservice (private high schools, colleges and universities, and health care facilities). Accessing new sales channels in these areas could help stabilize and grow overall sales of Wild Blueberries in today's



*Farm to School attendees enjoying frozen Wild Blueberry, granola, and yogurt parfaits*

unpredictable marketplace. The added benefit is introducing Wild Blueberries to millions of children who will one day be adults making food buying decisions.

The Commission worked with Ron Adams, former School Nutrition Director for Portland Public Schools, to undertake a market assessment of the public school and private foodservice sectors. Further, the Commission joined the American Commodity Distribution Association (ACDA) – a trade group comprised of regulators, state school nutrition directors, agricultural trade groups, brokers, food distributors, and food manufacturers who all sell to or buy from the USDA. Networking with ACDA members has already led to some promising contacts and potential new product development opportunities. In order to achieve new sales, however, barriers need to be overcome, such as educating school service directors about the difference between Wild and cultivated Blueberries, providing them with easy-to-use institutional recipes, and explaining nutritional/serving

information and nutritional benefit data.

On the state level, the Maine Department of Education (DoE), Child Nutrition Services is the liaison to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service that provides food and cash subsidies for public school lunch and sometimes breakfast and snacks for pre-school and school-age kids in Maine. The DoE also plays a role in fostering USDA-Food Nutrition Service programs such as Farm to School at the state level.

In March, the DoE and the Maine Farm to School Network organized a Farm to School training meeting for school nutrition directors. The agenda included presentations from the Wild Blueberry Commission, local farmers, the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, and School Garden Network representatives.

The Wild Blueberry Commission provided frozen Wild Blueberries for the snack parfait of yogurt, Wild Blueberries and granola. The Commission presentation focused on the availability of Maine Wild Blueberries, the product advantages, including taste, performance in foodservice applications, the nutritional benefits for children and adults, and institutional recipes for use in Maine school kitchens. Additional information about where School Nutrition Directors could purchase fresh and frozen Wild Blueberries was also distributed to attendees. 🍓

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## Wild Blueberry Commission Legislative Update

Maine's 127th Legislative Session was relatively light in terms of issues or bills of particular interest; however, Nancy McBrady, Executive Director is pleased to report that one bill the Commission did support will have a positive impact on Maine's Wild Blueberry businesses. Sales tax exemption legislation specifically targeting petroleum products used in commercial agriculture, fishing, and forestry – LD 1481 – passed with wide bipartisan support. Introduced

by Senator Paul Davis of Sangerville, the Maine Farm Bureau, the Professional Logging Contractors of Maine, and the Commission all advocated for the bill. The exemption will go into effect on January 1, 2017 and provide relief to farmers by exempting fuel, including off-road diesel, from sales tax. This legislation is similar to a 2011 law providing commercial fishermen with a sales tax exemption for off-road highway fuel for commercial fishing vessels.

At the federal level, the Commission joined a coalition of agricultural trade groups supporting Representative Bruce Poliquin's efforts to expand the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program that would allow schools to serve more fruits and vegetables in fresh, frozen, canned, or dried form. Representative Poliquin's legislation is part of H.R. 5003, the "Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016," which has cleared the House

Education and Workforce Committee and is heading to the House of Representatives for a vote. The expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program will allow schools to have additional and affordable options to increase the variety of nutritious and healthy fruits and vegetables that they can serve to kids year-round. Passage of this bill would allow high-quality and nutritious frozen products like Maine Wild Blueberries additional access to schools nationwide. 🍓

## A Special Thank You to owners of the Maine Agriculture License Plate

If you have an agriculture specialty license plate, thank YOU! Ten dollars of the specialty plate fee goes to support agriculture education in Maine. Maine Agriculture in the Classroom manages educational programs for schools with the fees collected for the Maine specialty license plate. Since 2007, the owners of Ag license plates have contributed to: 1) the volunteer reading project in over 2,500 Maine classrooms for over 55,000 students; 2) to date, 109 Agricultural Project grants of up to \$5000 each (most projects

are implemented in schools with school kids of all ages); 3) materials and training for over 800 pre-service teachers and 600 in-service teachers.

With school budgets

being cut every day, there is no telling where agricultural education would be without your support for the agriculture license plate. And there is so much more to

do. With 180,000 school-age children in our state, Maine Ag in the Classroom currently reaches almost half of them annually — a wonderful accomplishment! The 15,000 Ag plate owners in our state can be very proud. Before the specialty plate, Ag in the Classroom funding allowed us to reach only 5% of Maine's students. We couldn't do it without each and every one of you. **THANK YOU very much!** 🍓

*Excerpt from [www.agclassroom.org/ME/programs/index.htm](http://www.agclassroom.org/ME/programs/index.htm)*



## 5th annual Wild Blueberry Field Day Farm Trade Show

The 5th annual **Wild Blueberry Farm Trade Show** held in conjunction with the UMaine Cooperative Extension Blueberry Hill Farm Field Day is Wednesday, July 20 this year. Cooperative Extension educational sessions including crop discussions, research talks and in-field demonstrations will be on the agenda, along with a Wild Blueberry Association of North America – U.S. marketing presentation and trade show exhibits. The Farm Trade Show exhibitors represent businesses that sell products to or provide

services for Wild Blueberry growers. The exhibitors bring their products, services and knowledge to interested farmers at the Field Day. A free luncheon provided to more than 200 people during the Field Day is organized and managed by the Blueberry Hill Farm professionals and student research crew who take time out of their daily work schedule to prepare a barbeque luncheon for Wild Blueberry growers and other guests. Networking and educational opportunities are plentiful

during the full day schedule.

Equipment, product, and service companies are invited to exhibit at or sponsor the Field Day luncheon and activities for the Maine Wild Blueberry business. The Wild Blueberry Farm Trade Show will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the annual University of Maine Cooperative Extension **Wild Blueberry Field Day on July 20, 2016** at Blueberry Hill Farm in Jonesboro, Maine.

Additional sponsorships are available and exhibitors are welcome. There will be

a limited number of outdoor spaces available at the show and vendors must pre-register for an assigned space. Each registration will include a vendor company listing in the program, and lunch is free for all who attend. Sponsors will receive special recognition in communications and materials at the Blueberry Hill Farm. Please call Nancy England at 581-1475 or email [England@maine.edu](mailto:England@maine.edu) if you would like to register as an exhibitor or sponsor of Wild Blueberry Field Day. 🍓

## Eastern States Exposition Celebrates 100th Anniversary

### Wild Blueberry Commission needs volunteers for Ag Education

In 1916, Eastern States Exposition founder Joshua L. Brooks wanted “to create an entity to showcase New England’s agriculture and industry” and “foster the innovative spirit and reveal inventive and pioneering ideas and developments.” The National Dairy Show was secured as the inaugural event for the first Exposition in 1916. Eastern States Exposition milestones include:

- the 1919 construction of the Massachusetts Building on the Avenue of States,
- the 1927 creation of Storrowton Village,
- the 1953 visit of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and
- the first year record for 1 million visitors in 1978.

The Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine has exhibited at the Eastern States Exposition (the Big E) for 30 plus years with the primary objective to promote and educate the public about Maine Wild blueberry agriculture. The now 17 day Big E Exposition is a primary public outlet for Wild Blueberry Commission agricultural education. The Commission public education booth offers the greatest amount of agricultural information direct from growers to the largest number of New England area consumers. The Commission’s offer of promotional materials for Maine summer fairs and events, and agriculture education in the form of a teacher’s curriculum or “lesson kit” for in-classroom grades 5 to 7 are strong Maine-based programs that have been broadly distributed for more than a decade. The new Wild Blueberry Reading and Activity books for kindergarten through 3rd grade developed in 2013 are part of a special Maine Ag in the Classroom literacy project that is growing every year.

Big E attendance over the 17 days topped 1 million back



*Big E Wild Blueberry Commission foodservice and public education booths.*

in 1978 and the all-time record attendance of 1,498,605 was achieved in 2014. Fortunately, a significant percentage of overall attendees tour the Maine building and other state buildings on the Avenue of States each year. We have a great opportunity to meet and speak to consumers who love the berries that come from Maine. For this reason, we annually recruit 15 to 20 people from the Wild blueberry business to volunteer for the Wild Blueberry Commission’s public education booth. We are again inviting growers to consider this special opportunity to attend and meet consumers enjoying all that the Big E offers during the fall extravaganza.

We receive a lot of positive feedback from consumers who come from all over the country but most often from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York. Consumers are excited by the opportunity to speak to volunteers about

their experiences with the Maine berries and are heartily interested in Maine growers and friends who can answer dozens of questions and listen to comments about the Maine Wild blueberry crop and industry. The distribution of frozen Wild blueberry samples to fairgoers is a special plus for consumers wanting their “antioxidants for the day.” Most volunteer growers and family and friends attend the fair for two or three days, working at the education booth for about 6 hours leaving time to attend a variety of fair activities. Volunteer expenses at the fair are paid by the Commission. The Wild Blueberry public education and foodservice booth showcase a professional design and present a unique opportunity for growers to speak directly to consumers at the Maine Building. Please join us at the Big E in the Fall of 2016! Call Nancy England at the Wild Blueberry Commission 207-581-1475 to volunteer. 🍷

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**For this and more information about the Eastern States Exposition, link to [www.thebige.com](http://www.thebige.com)**

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## WBANA Promotes Maine Wild Blueberries in China and Southeast Asia

The objective of the Wild Blueberry Association of North America – U.S. (WBANA) export program is to promote Wild Blueberries, and increase market access and trade and consumer demand in offshore markets. The program includes WBANA participation in trade shows and trade missions, and working with Food Export Northeast and USDA-Foreign Agriculture Service to deliver product education, training and retail promotions.

In April 2016 WBANA exhibited at Food Hotel Asia in Singapore for the first time. The Food Hotel Asia show is the largest show of its kind in the region and occurs every other year in Singapore. Singapore, a sovereign and independent republic within the geographic area of the country of Malaysia, is an open trade market with a population of about 6 million people. The population is primarily Chinese, Malaysian and Indian and they have the highest per capita income in the world of \$58,497 USD.

Singapore is a strategic location in the Asian-Pacific region at the crossroads of international shipping routes for the sub-Indian continent, Australia, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the U.S. The nation/state is highly dependent on an international trade economy where they are the 15th largest importer and the 14th largest exporter in the world. Singapore is the second busiest container port in the world and re-exports 45-50 percent of their imports. Singapore is



WBANA booth at 2016 SIAL China Shanghai.

the 4th largest market for U.S. agriculture, fish and forestry products, though their largest trade partners are China and Malaysia, with the U.S. coming in at third place. Pharmaceuticals and medical technology production also are large sectors of this sophisticated high-tech, high-value economy.

In May 2016, WBANA participated for the 8th time at the SIAL China trade show in Shanghai. SIAL China is one of the largest trade shows in Asia, where thousands of food suppliers exhibit and about 45,000 people attend the show. Because the show is one of the largest in Asia, it draws traders from various markets and many of the large cities in eastern China, where most of the population resides. The USDA-FAS briefings at SIAL China for the last three to

four years have emphasized their new free trade zones, and e-commerce direct to consumers. The e-commerce and hotel, restaurant and institutional sectors have provided a great outlet for Maine lobsters sales into the China market, where growth has been exponential over the last three or four years. Presentations from large e-commerce corporations like Yihaodian (Walmart international is the largest stakeholder) and Alibaba have taken center stage in the growth of the China retail economy.

Shanghai is the busiest container port in the world. With a Shanghai population of over 23 million, retail and e-commerce growth in this urban area are strong. This young consumer population eats at restaurants more than cooking at home, and orders prepared foods online for home delivery for

their meals. The Chinese consumers' interest in foreign market foods stems in a large part from their distrust about whether Chinese-produced foods are safe and healthy. Market information supplied by Food Export Northeast tells us that consumers tend to prefer products with blueberry ingredients over fresh local blueberries, however local fresh berries are often half the price of the fresh imported blueberries coming from Chile. Within the last two years China approved a customs/inspection protocol for the shipment of fresh Canadian (British Columbia) blueberries into the Chinese market. Because the U.S. does not have market access for cultivated blueberries, Canada will lead the way in market access for their late production of cultivated blueberries. 🍷