Got the Blues? This Fruit's Health Benefits Spur Production

Washington Blueberry Commission

SEATTLE (PRNewswire) — Washington blueberry growers expect to meet growing demand by harvesting more than 90 million pounds of blueberries, making Washington State 4th in total U.S. blueberry production.

Fresh Washington blueberries are available at now at stores, U-pick farms and fruit stands across Washington State. Blueberry growers have launched superblues.net [1] to help consumers locate nearby u-pick farms and fruit stands statewide.

According to Washington Blueberry Commission executive director, Dr. Alan Schreiber, Washington's total blueberry crop grew by 31 percent from 2011 to 2013. "Growers are keeping pace with the popularity of blueberries" he said, "by increasing production to 10,000 acres including 2,500 acres of organic blueberries making Washington State the largest concentration of organic blueberries in the U.S."

"The Blueberry Commission continues to educate growers on all aspects of food safety from food handling and safety training sessions to fresh sales best practices," he said. "We expect to train more than 100 handlers again this season to ensure our berries are safe with third-party certification process in place for all wholesale and retail sales."

Awareness about the health benefits of blueberries has caused a spike in production, as well as emerging Asian market options. Blueberries are a good source of dietary fiber and vitamin C, help prevent urinary tract infections, and are high in antioxidants, which protect against cancer, heart disease, and other age related diseases.

Washington blueberry growers offer several varieties including Blucrop, Duke, Blue Jay, Elliott, Legacy and Liberty . "Demand for fresh blueberries continues to climb for their health benefits and taste profile. Large plantings in eastern Washington have contributed to the increase," Dr. Schreiber said. "Almost all the new plantings are of high-yielding varieties planted in higher densities, with highly efficient drip irrigation.

Washington blueberry production:

- 2006 18.4 million pounds
- 2007 28.5 million pounds
- 2010 60 million pounds
- 2013 80 million pounds

- 2014 projected at 90 million pounds

Washington is fourth in U.S. blueberry production with 10,000 acres of berries from 175 growers The state's blueberry season runs from June through August while processed 'blues' are available year round. Washington blueberries are grown in Skagit, Clark, Lewis, Snohomish, Thurston, Whatcom, Chelan, Yakima and Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, and Grant Counties.

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