

**USHBC INDUSTRY RELATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**February 28, 2008**

Acting Committee Chairman Ken Patterson called the meeting of the USHBC Industry Relations Committee to order at 4:30pm on Thursday, February 28, 2008. Committee members Dave Arena, Kathryn Clemons, Guy Cotton, Verne Gingerich, and Neil Moore, as well as USDA Representative Rafael Manzoni and USHBC staff members Mark Villata and Mary Nezbeth, attended the meeting held at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The first order of business was a review and prioritization of strategic goals assigned to the Industry Relations Committee. Mark Villata reviewed the committee's strategic assignments for 2007 to 2011, which were to.

**(1) Build and utilize the knowledge base on both supply and market for blueberries**

*(Industry Relations Committee for supply and Promotion Committee for market)*

- Develop world-wide production tracking system  
*Develop system to estimate productivity for supply/demand curve*  
*Keep statistics related to rapid growth of production*
- Convene annual international symposium to gather information on production and share information on research, promotion and food safety  
*International symposium is held every four years*  
*North American Blueberry Research & Extension meeting is held every four years*  
*NABC will study the possibility of hosting an international relationship forum*

**(2) Engage and encourage active participation of growers**

- Conduct orientation meeting for new members at USHBC meetings
- Provide opportunities for social interactions outside of meetings
- Consider the exploration and support of efforts to reduce dependence on labor  
*Might influence machine/equipment suppliers*  
*Provide equipment builders with an analysis of where the industry wants to go and what new developments are needed*  
*Acknowledge that growers will push this area due to need*
- Build structure and strategy to keep an inclusive versus fragmented industry

These assignments had not changed significantly since the last round of strategic planning. The committee noted that all activities are either in place, or will be addressed shortly and that all, with the exception of labor, would receive the same priority ranking, given that many of these activities will be conducted simultaneously.

The second agenda item was a discussion of actions taken to date to encourage USHBC involvement and participation. Villata noted that a "From the Field" section had been added to the USHBC *Bluespaper* for grower thoughts, testimonials or endorsements of the USHBC. Industry members are encouraged to submit articles and comments to this "letters to the editor" style section. He also noted that the North American Blueberry Council *Calyx* newsletter had been sent to USHBC members with an invitation to take part in the NABC tour and events that took place

prior to the USHBC meeting in order to provide growers and handlers with additional incentive to attend the USHBC meeting. The committee suggested that an article be placed in a future issue of *The Bluespaper* that will explain the responsibilities and duties of the North American Blueberry Council in order to clear up any confusion concerning functions of the NABC and the USHBC. Villata also noted that we will be offering the *USHBC Bluespaper* in email form as a means to develop an email mailing list of growers and improve communications.

The third agenda item was an update on new tariff codes for dried blueberries and blueberry juice. Villata reported that as of January 1, 2008 the following new tariff codes were added by the Committee for Statistical Annotation of Tariff Schedules:

- Tariff Code for Dried Cultivated Blueberries **0813.40.20.20**
- Tariff Code for Blueberry Juice Including Concentrate **2009.80.60.31**  
(both wild and cultivated)

He noted that there has been some suggestions that we might now want to petition to add a code for cultivated blueberry juice stock (*Cultivated Blueberry Juice Stock -- whole and crushed berries destined for processing into juice and/or concentrated juice*), and possibly consider assessment on dried cultivated blueberries. The committee will take this up at a later date.

Villata also reported that we have taken actions to date to narrow the definition of "blueberries" in the current U.S. Frozen Blueberry Standards so that only North American and South American highbush and lowbush blueberries (or other foreign produced blueberries with North American roots) are identified as a blueberry. This action was deemed necessary to address past sales of Chinese "wild blueberries" marketed as blueberries when they most likely were more closely related to a logberry than a blueberry.

With the assistance of Bernadine Strik at Oregon State, we have now finalized language that should address this issue. Proposed revisions are noted in bold type below.

#### Section 52.611 Product Description

Frozen blueberries are prepared from sound, properly ripened fresh fruit of the species **Vaccinium corymbosum**, **V. virgatum** (syn. **V. ashei**), **V. angustifolium**, and **V. myrtilloides** (some common names: highbush, cultivated, wild, lowbush, southern highbush, rabbiteye), including species and cultivars often called huckleberries, but not of the genus **Gaylussacia**; are cleaned and stemmed, are properly washed, are packed with or without packing media; and are frozen and maintained at temperatures necessary for the preservation of the product.

#### Section 52.612 Types of Frozen Blueberries

- (a) Native or Wild Type
- (b) Cultivated Type

We were planning to ask the USDA to consider this change but have now learned of another potential issue that could be considered as an additional modification to current frozen standards. Current frozen standards may be outdated with respect to how "defects" are scored, and our industry may wish to consider this issue in addition to the blueberry identification issue. He suggested that the USHBC consider this additional update to the standards and that this issue (and an overall review and potential update of the 1957 Frozen Standards, as well as a consideration of current Fresh Standards) could be addressed by an ad hoc committee specifically assigned to this issue.

Agenda item four was a discussion of international grower meetings. The goal of these meetings would be to encourage communication among international blueberry growing regions; share crop updates and production information; and share information on market promotion and health research. Villata suggested that, from a time and logistics standpoint, the committee might wish to consider an Internet based meeting. It was the consensus of the committee that the first step should be to hold a discussion with international representatives at the upcoming International Berry Symposium to be held in Corvallis, Oregon this July. Through this discussion we would determine their interest in Internet based meetings or consider other options suggested by the international representatives attending the Symposium. The Industry Relations Committee would then be better able to determine how to proceed with the international blueberry meeting objective once everyone has been given a chance to offer their suggestions.

Agenda item five was a review of the USHBC officer slate. No changes were needed at this time, however it was suggested that Lorrie Merker be recommended to cover the USHBC Assistant Treasurer position. The committee will make this recommendation to the Council as part of its committee report.

A discussion of future meeting locations followed. As locations had been selected through the Spring of 2013, there was no need to add additional locations at this time. However, as the October 2012 meeting is scheduled for St. Louis, Missouri and the February 2013 meeting is scheduled for Branson, Missouri, it was the consensus of the committee to remove Branson from the list and replace it with another southern location at a later date.

The final agenda item was the presentation of the *2007 Blueberry Acreage Survey Report* conducted by Cort Brazelton. Brazelton began his presentation by stating that acreage is increasing in existing and traditional regions, while at the same time we are seeing planting and production in new territories worldwide. He also mentioned better management, modernized production systems and varietal improvements on existing acreage, and plantings in regions with notably higher productivity per acre and earlier entrance into high-level production.

Brazelton provided a comprehensive report, some of the highlights of which were updates on acreage figures. He reported that acreage in North America has increased from 70,895 acres in 2005 to 85,502 acres in 2007 with most of this growth in the western states. He reviewed trends in North America starting with the West. Western trends include a gradual slowing of growth; a new focus on higher quality, better-flavored late season blueberry varieties; and a focus in California on earlier varieties and season extension. In the Midwest we see new plantings as well as efforts to replant with new varieties that, combined with updated horticultural practices, could lead to increased production. In the Northeast he reported significant blueberry plantings in current apple

regions in Ontario as well as new plantings and updated horticultural practices in New Jersey that could increase production. In the South rapid growth is seen in Georgia and Florida as well as new plantings of earlier highbush blueberry varieties in the Southern region. He noted that plantings with modernized production systems in the South should produce higher blueberry volumes in the future. He also noted that Mexico is starting to enter into a commercial planting phase.

Brazelton then discussed trends in South America highlighting the explosive growth in Chile and Argentina as well as new production regions in South America pursuing low chill, tropical and subtropical blueberry production.

European blueberry production trends include a continued focus on fresh blueberries with stagnant growth in many of the established blueberry growing regions, with the exception of Spain. He noted that future growth would be taking place in Eastern Europe and in the Southern Mediterranean region.

He noted that with growing blueberry consumption, many Asian countries and Australia, and to a lesser extent New Zealand, are all rapidly expanding markets. In response, commercial blueberry production is expanding in many areas in this region. Acreage growth is limited in Australia, though production is expanding. Most of the growth in New Zealand took place in the 1990's and early 2000's. Some commercial production has started in South Korea and Japan continues to produce a small amount of blueberries for their domestic market. China has been a region of particular interest to our industry and there has been growth in blueberry production in this country. However, the Chinese face numerous challenges including relatively low productivity. Soils and climates can be difficult in China and pollution in some regions is said to impact plant health, fruit quality and access to sunlight. Brazelton concluded his report with some forecasts of future trends and noted that worldwide production could increase from an estimated 489 million pounds in 2007 to as much as 806 million pounds by 2013.

The committee discussed the report and asked whether organic blueberry production could be included in any future reports as well as a chart that shows the months of fresh harvest in the various regions. It was also requested that any future report provide expanded data on the lowbush blueberry industry. The committee will now consider how to maintain this type of report in the future. Distribution of the report will be discussed by the Council at its upcoming meeting.

There being no further business Neil Moore moved, with a second from Verne Gingerich, to adjourn the Industry Relations Committee meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 6:45pm.