

Blueberry Farming in your Community...

Contributions and Challenges

British Columbia is one of the foremost producers of blueberries in North America and our locally grown berries are sold worldwide. Berry farmers are proud of their contribution to our province, but growing this crop has its challenges.

British Columbia blueberry farmers substantially contribute to our province by producing over \$35 million in blueberries annually.

Blueberry farmers are responsible, both directly and indirectly, for hundreds of jobs in our province. They also contribute to the rural atmosphere of British Columbia.

Blueberries in British Columbia

Blueberries have been grown in our community for generations and have a wide variety of health benefits. Not only are they an excellent source of vitamin A, but they are also a good source of both vitamin C and dietary fibre. Researchers have also found that blueberries may contain anti-cancer agents and may be beneficial for eyesight, the heart and memory.

Favourable soil and climate conditions and the hard work of our blueberry farmers have made British Columbia Canada's leader in blueberry production. British Columbia blueberries are among the highest quality in the world. Taste and high quality have made blueberries a favourite among British Columbians.

Challenges faced by blueberry farmers

Apart from typical agricultural threats to crops, including weather and disease, blueberry farmers worldwide must also deal with bird predation. Birds can consume as much as half a farmer's crop. For a farmer, this often represents the difference between profit and loss.

Among birds, starlings cause the most damage to blueberry fields in British Columbia. A voracious feeder, the starling was introduced to North America from Europe over a century ago. Since that time, about 100 birds have multiplied into the hundreds of millions that exist today.

Protecting against crop loss to birds

Blueberry farmers use a variety of tools, from noise devices to scarecrows to flash tape to netting, to protect their crop from birds – but all tools have their limitations. Noise devices have proven to be one of the most economically effective tools.

Blueberry FACTSHEET



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July 2001

There is no one method that farmers have been able to use with 100 per cent success. This is why an integrated approach, combining many different methods, is considered the most effective. Guidelines have been established that recommend that each farmer establish a plan specifying which approach is most effective for their particular farm.

Farmers are making an effort to minimise the impact of farm practices on their neighbours. Neighbours can help this process by working with the farmers to discuss and resolve any concerns.

Frequently asked questions

The use of noise devices to scare off birds often causes the greatest concern for neighbours. Some of the most common questions neighbours have in regards to the use of noise devices are:

Why do I hear so many noise devices?

Guidelines recommend a maximum of one propane-powered noise device for every five acres (two hectares) of blueberries. Since many farms are larger than two hectares in size, farmers often employ more than one propane-powered noise device.

Why can't noise devices be turned off on weekends and holidays?

Because of the feeding patterns of birds, farmers must be on guard all day, every day during blueberry season. The established guidelines recommend that farmers only use propane-powered noise devices from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. in order to minimise the impact to neighbours – despite the fact that birds may eat earlier or later than these hours.

Why didn't I hear noise devices 10 years ago?

Noise devices have been used in the Fraser Valley as a bird control technique for the past forty years. As the human population has increased, so has the demand for food. This has resulted in an increased number of blueberry farms and consequently, a need for more widespread use of noise devices. Increased urban development has also brought urban and rural populations closer together.

Why are some noise devices so loud?

The noise must be loud enough to startle and scare birds away; otherwise, birds will ignore it and simply continue to feed.

I have noticed noise devices firing even when I can't see any birds around. What's going on?

The purpose of noise devices is to keep birds away from the crop. When birds are not around, it simply means that the devices are working. The devices need to operate throughout the day to continually keep birds away and protect the crop.

Sometimes it seems that the noise devices are not an effective deterrent. Why are they still used?

Despite spending thousands of dollars on noise devices and other methods of crop protection, farmers are still not completely safe from bird predation. A few birds may ignore the noise devices, but most large flocks are deterred.

Why can't farmers use netting instead of noise devices?

Although netting may be feasible on some farms, on others it is too costly for farmers to install and maintain. Many blueberry fields are now harvested with machines because hand pickers are in short supply. Machine-harvested fields are difficult and expensive to net because the nets must be set high enough for the machine harvesters to clear.

Blueberry farming makes an important contribution to our community and economy. Blueberries, however, are subject to many agricultural threats, including bird predation. As a result, farmers must protect their crops from birds. Because of their effectiveness, noise devices are a popular method of bird control. Although they are often necessary to a blueberry crop's survival, farmers continue to take steps to minimise the impact of noise devices on their neighbours.

For more information please contact

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