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N.J. blueberries expected to shine

By

Keith Loria

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Blueberries are one of New Jersey's signature crops, and with the season only weeks away, early estimations are that it's going to be a strong crop, on par with last year.

"Our kickoff is going to be around June 15 this year," said Denny Doyle, chairman of the New Jersey Blueberry Industry Advisory Council. "We have a nice crop showing so far. We were very concerned with some of the cold weather — we had a three-day cold event — but we've seemed to come out of that quite well."

From what the New Jersey Blueberry Industry Advisory Council is hearing, the growers in the state are gearing up and getting their packinghouses ready and looking forward to a fine season.

New Jersey's average crop size is around 39-40 million pounds, according to Doyle, who has been in the produce industry for over half a century.

Most of the blueberries grown in the state head to big box stores and a variety of traditional retailers on the East Coast, as well as to farm stands and farmers markets throughout the region.

"We also go to Chicago, Minneapolis, Texas — we go quite a bit across the United States and are also very big in Canada," Doyle said.

For the past 15 years, New Jersey farmers have been dealing with labor issues, and 2022 presents even bigger challenges in this segment than ever before, but that's not the issue that growers are most concerned about.

"The big story this year is the cost of everything going up," Doyle said. "Fuel, the cost of pallets, fertilizer is unbelievably high; the input costs are pretty horrific. There's no surprise to anyone about the cost of trucking today, and that totally impacts us."

New Jersey has a rich history of blueberry production and is an ideal region for growing the fruit.

"The cultivated blueberry industry was started in this state by Elizabeth White and Dr. Frederick Coville in 1911," Doyle said. "In a lot of areas where we grow blueberries, there are wild highbush blueberries grown naturally. It goes all the way back to the Native Americans who go all the way back to the 1700s. They used to come into this region and pick the wild blueberries in the forest. It's just a natural setting."

So, it's no surprise that blueberries rank very high in New Jersey as an important commodity, with Doyle noting it's in the top four consistently year after year.

“It’s a very important crop in New Jersey for sure,” he said. “The New Jersey Advisory board support the promotions for growers.”

For instance, it runs radio adds, flies banners across the East Coast and does a great deal on social media.

Retailers throughout the state do their part to promote locally grown blueberries as well and Doyle is looking forward to what’s ahead for 2022 promotions.

One of his current missions with the New Jersey Blueberry Industry Advisory Council is to bring in younger blueberry growers to the board to better understand what they do and get that next generation ready to continue New Jersey’s legacy in the blueberry industry.

[Keith Loria](#)

About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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