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In the know: U.S. berry demand and imports

September 17, 2012

According to the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, over the last two decades the strawberry industry has experienced a huge increase in the rate of consumer consumption of berries.



Strawberries are the fifth most preferred fresh fruit in the U.S., behind bananas, apples, oranges and grapes, respectively. Expanded domestic supply resulting from yield improvements and year-round availability has combined to secure consumer demand.

New health information on the nutritional benefits of strawberries, such as antioxidant levels, folate, potassium, vitamin C and fiber content, has also stimulated domestic consumption rates.

In 2011, the United States imported 394.2 million pounds of fresh and frozen strawberries from

Mexico, of which 243.5 million pounds—or 62 percent—valued at \$4.2 million were marketed as fresh product. Thirty-six percent of the total imported volumes arrive in the United States during the months of March and April when domestic supplies are limited.

Blueberries rank as the second most important commercial berry crop in the country, with a total crop value of \$863.9 million in 2011. The United States is the world's largest producer of blueberries with a total of 516.7 million pounds produced in 2011. But even this huge volume is not nearly enough to fill American consumer demand. The country imported 192.5 million pounds in 2011, with Chile providing 62 million pounds.



Raspberries continue to rank as the third most popular berry in the United States for fresh use, after strawberries and blueberries. Raspberries come in red, black, purple and yellow varieties. Summer-bearing varieties produce one crop between July and August. Fall-bearing raspberries grow a large crop in the fall and a smaller crop the following summer.

The United States is the world's third-largest producer of raspberries. Although production occurs across much of the country, most is concentrated in Washington, California and Oregon.

Washington State leads the nation in red raspberry production. In 2010, it produced 61 million pounds of red raspberries valued at \$50 million. Oregon leads the United States in black raspberry production with 1.8 million pounds grown in 2011, valued at \$2.3 million. California raised 81 million pounds of total raspberries valued at \$200 million.

Like other berry categories, the United States cannot produce enough raspberries to satisfy consumer demand. The nation imports fresh raspberries from November through May, most originating in Mexico.

In 2010, the United States imported 13,927 metric tons of fresh Mexican raspberries valued at \$118 million. During July and August, most fresh raspberries imported to the United States are produced in Canada. In 2010, the country imported a total of 442 metric tons of Canadian raspberries valued at \$658,000.

Blackberries are native to several continents, including Asia, Europe and North and South America. Documented human consumption was recorded more than 2,000 years ago. People have used the blackberry plant as a hedge to protect property, for medicinal use and as a source of nutritional consumptions.

Commercial blackberry production in the United States originated in the Pacific Northwest region in

1860, using plants cultivated from European domesticated species.

Today, Oregon is the predominant geographic source of cultivated U.S. blackberry production. In 2011, 53.4 million pounds of blackberries were produced there on 7,300 acres. Average blackberry yields per acre in 2009 were 7,730 pounds, dropping off slightly to 7,280 pounds per acre in 2011. In 2011, 4.03 million pounds were sold as fresh berries and the remainder was sold to processors.

In 2010, the United States imported 95.7 million pounds of fresh blackberries and 21.1 million pounds of frozen product. Relative to the 2006 data, U.S. blackberry import volumes for the fresh market were 29.6 million pounds, compared to 16.5 million pounds for the frozen market.

It is clear that the U.S. consumption levels of blackberries, especially for the fresh market, are trending upwards. The 2010 U.S. imported fresh blackberries were valued at \$147.3 million, almost three times the 2006 fresh imported value at just \$58.5 million.

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