

January ---, 2009

Honorable **Senator/Congressman** -----

Washington D.C.

Dear **Senator/Congressman** ----

On behalf of the highbush blueberry industry, and as a blueberry grower from your **state/district**, I am writing this letter asking for your support in encouraging the USDA to consider the purchase of both frozen and dried blueberries for donation to child and domestic feeding programs this year.

The blueberry industry recognizes the importance of the School Lunch Program and has been an active participant in the program over the years. We see this program as a means to not only encourage healthy and nutritious meal offerings to our nation's school children, but also as a means to develop a positive attitude toward blueberries among our future consumers.

Given the abundant crop of both cultivated (highbush) and wild (lowbush) blueberries in 2008, and the current supply situation facing the cultivated blueberry industry, we are once again in the position to make a substantial offering of cultivated blueberries for purchase consideration. This past October we issued a proposal to the USDA AMS Fruit & Vegetable Programs Commodity Procurement Branch for the purchase of a total of 20 million pounds of frozen (process) U.S. cultivated blueberries and a purchase of a total of 1 million pounds of dried U.S. cultivated blueberries for shipment prior to June 2009. On December 2, 2008 the USDA announced that it is inviting offers for the purchase of approximately 2 ½ million pounds of frozen highbush (cultivated) blueberries. While our industry is very pleased with this potential purchase, we can still offer substantially more blueberries to the USDA and hope that an additional purchase will be considered in the months to come.

Our industry is making this request in light of projected 2008 blueberry production totals that continue to set historic levels. Successive large crops have led to increased carry in inventory levels and a weakening of the market. In 2007 the North American blueberry industry produced 539 million pounds of blueberries, down slightly from the record level of 542.6 million pounds produced in 2006. At the present time, the cultivated (highbush) and wild (lowbush) blueberry industries in North America expect to shatter the previous production record and estimate a combined total of 646.2 million pounds of blueberries were produced in 2008, continuing the ongoing trend of increased blueberry production in the United States and Canada.

Given these projections, our industry has been working to increase demand for, and use of, cultivated blueberries in both the consumer and industrial markets. The U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC), the national research and promotion program for the cultivated blueberry industry, was established by a vote of our blueberry growers in 2000 and over the past eight years has been aggressively promoting blueberries both in the United States and overseas, while at the

same time funding pilot health studies to continue to generate greater awareness of the healthful properties of blueberries. We hope that in the future these efforts will continue to help us maintain a favorable supply and demand balance for the blueberry industry. However, at the present time a significant purchase of blueberries for the school lunch and domestic feeding programs would do a great deal to help our industry attain a more favorable inventory level.

Not only do children like blueberries, the school menu planner can now feel positive about including cultivated blueberries in his or her meal options, given the increasing evidence of their healthful properties. Menu planners will also find dried blueberries to be a convenient way to serve blueberries to their students. Dried blueberries can be easily added to foods, used as an ingredient in trail mix and snacks, or used as a topping.

Any assistance you can provide to encourage the USDA to consider additional purchases of our frozen and dried blueberries, beyond this initial announcement of a 2 ½ million pound offer to purchase frozen blueberries, would be greatly appreciated. We thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,