

The Council Letter

A Confidential Report to Directors, Members and Chairperson of Council
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WEEKLY Highbush BLUEBERRY CROP REPORT April 3, 2019

This is the first in a series of weekly North American Blueberry Council (NABC) highbush blueberry crop reports for the 2019 season. Reports will continue each Wednesday throughout the season with a final report on September 4, 2019.

MISSISSIPPI/LOUISIANA – *Eric Stafne*: Mississippi was hit hard by an early March freeze. Southern Highbush was at or past full bloom when temperatures in some areas reached 25 degrees Fahrenheit. Estimates of damage range from 25 percent on RabbitEye to 90 percent on early RabbitEye and Southern Highbush. Overall the Southern Highbush and early RabbitEye cultivars were severely impacted. Mid to late RabbitEye cultivars sustained less loss.

GEORGIA – *Alex Cornelius*: Georgia has been very fortunate to have made it through all the freeze events this year with a minimal amount of damage. Georgia was real close at one point to having a repeat of the last two years major crop loss. Because of cool events, rain, and cloudy overcast conditions, Georgia was extremely concerned about pollination. However, once again we are very blessed to have minimal amount of damage. The tail end of some varieties have had some pollination issues but for the most part we are in good shape. Georgia started harvesting some of the early varieties last week in very small amounts, with an increase in production this week while harvesting around rain in the forecast for Friday. Next week we will start increasing small volumes but are not looking to start much volume out of Georgia until the end of April.

FLORIDA – *Ken Patterson*: Florida has started off with a bang. Harvest began on March 9th and has slowly ramped up to almost a half a million pounds a day already. All the early varieties including Arcadia, Avanti, Chickadee, and Kestrel are all being harvested in the southern regions. The harvest is about a week early and the southern region should be harvesting in their peak within the next ten days. The northern region is beginning to scrap now and will show significant volumes in about ten days. There is some rain forecasted throughout the next several days which may curtail some harvesting but in general fruit production is going to ramp up quickly in the next seven to ten days. Fruit quality is excellent with these new early varieties. Labor is established on most farms but will possibly be a problem during the peak of the harvest. The USDA is reporting as of April fool's day 2,660,632 pounds of conventional fruit and 124,662 pounds of organics for a total of 2,785,294 pounds of fruit being shipped out of Florida so far.

NORTH CAROLINA – *Neil Moore*: North Carolina has been frost protecting early highbush varieties since the last days of February. It has been a long bloom period, some varieties like Legacy and O'Neal still have a lot of bloom to be pollinated. Temperatures this spring have been running on the cool side for the month of March. Frost damage is negligible right now. Rebel is almost finished bloom and will probably have some ripe fruit the first week of May. We will know

Blueberries

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in a couple weeks if we have pollination issues. The crop size looks to be good at this point but still need to finish bloom period on some varieties. Hurricane Florence's damage doesn't appear to be significant currently.

NEW JERSEY – *Denny Doyle*: Currently growers are applying herbicides and getting the fields ready for the harvest. Harvest is estimated to be the same timeframe as last year.

INDIANA – *Pat Goin*: Temperatures have finally become more seasonal. Rain is forecasted for tomorrow. Field work continues, growers are trying to finish pruning. We are in the bud swell stage. The crop looks to be average in size.

MICHIGAN – *Dave Trinkka*: Michigan blueberries are at bud swell in warm sites. Bushes will begin to wake up if the upcoming weekend's 60-70-degree temperature forecast holds true. Pruning and early season weed control are occurring. It was very cold in Michigan during the latter third of January. Temperatures -10 to -20 F were recorded over a large portion of the state. Scattered temperature injury is evident, but no severe damage has been seen. Bushes were in the deepest stage of dormancy when the coldest temperatures hit.

BRITISH COLUMBIA – *Anju Gill*: After a record cold February and early March, the near record warm temperatures the last two weeks have greatly advanced the crop. Due to weather, soil conditions are extremely dry for early April. Forecast is for heavy rains this week which should rectify this. The crop is developing rapidly. Early varieties are nearing the pink stage in the warmest growing regions. Cooler temperatures should bring a desired slowing of the crop. First round of mummy berry sprays have been completed and most growers have applied their first herbicide treatments. It is still too soon to comment on crop yields. So far, there appears to be good bud set with lots of flowers, little winter injury and light disease pressure. Major concerns now are getting through the next month without frost and then ample bees and good conditions for pollination.

WASHINGTON – *Alan Schreiber*: Washington state had record levels of snow in February and March. In addition, there were record cold temperatures in March. Despite the late and foul winter, the blueberry crops seem to have largely shaken off the abuse and come through with minimal wintertime injury. Plants are out of dormancy with growers applying herbicides and first fungicide applications and doing all the tasks that are required early in the season. Western Washington has been unseasonably dry. Winter injury seems to be relatively minimal. It is difficult to anticipate crop production prior to bloom and pollination.

OREGON – *Doug Kraemer*: Oregon has come into the spring with no winter damage being reported after a cold, wet February and a dry, warm March. Forecast is for a wet and cooler April. We are at pink tip with some of our varieties and I have seen some open blooms in Duke. The Duke bloom at this time looks to be very spread out. Hard to tell what the other varieties will do yet.

CALIFORNIA – *Todd Sanders*: Due to weather conditions, California is expecting to be roughly seven to ten days behind in the south and in the north could be between five to seven days behind. California is expecting a larger crop than last year which we finished at 63 million pounds. The USDA reported California shipped 200,000 pounds of conventional fresh and 2,330,000 pounds of organic fresh blueberries this season so far.

MEXICO – The USDA reported that the U.S. imported a total this season through April 3rd, 2019 of 42,330,000 pounds of conventional fresh from Mexico.

CHILE - The USDA reported that the U.S. imported a total this season through April 3rd, 2019 of 100,270,000 pounds of conventional fresh from Chile.

ARGENTINA - The USDA reported that the U.S. imported a total this season through April 3rd, 2019 of 16,510,000 pounds of conventional fresh from Argentina.

PERU - The USDA reported that the U.S. imported a total this season through April 3rd, 2019 of 51,360,000 pounds of conventional fresh from Peru.

URUGUAY - The USDA reported that the U.S. imported a total this season through April 3rd, 2019 of 1,470,000 pounds of conventional fresh from Uruguay.

GUATEMALA - The USDA reported that the U.S. imported a total this season through April 3rd, 2019 of 240,000 pounds of conventional fresh from Guatemala