



## **PROPOSED: A National Research & Promotion Program for Blackberries**

### **What is a Research & Promotion Program?**

A Research and Promotion programs (R&P) is created by a fruit or vegetable industry to support research and promotion to benefit that commodity. Authorized by federal legislation, these programs are designed to strengthen the position of the industry in the marketplace and to maintain and expand domestic and foreign markets. The programs are all fully funded by industry assessments.

An outstanding example of a successful R&P is the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council. Its support of blueberry health research and its effective promotions have been key to consumers' identification of blueberries as a particularly healthful food choice. An R&P for Processed Red Raspberries was also recently established (see [www.redrazz.org/our-story/](http://www.redrazz.org/our-story/)).

### **What can a Research & Promotion Program do for blackberries?**

Blackberry production and consumption are growing rapidly, but blackberries are severely underpromoted in the marketplace, and their outstanding health benefits are relatively unknown and unresearched. An R&P program is a means for blackberry growers to cooperate to promote blackberries and advance the blackberry industry. This strategy, as utilized blueberries and many other agricultural crops, has resulted in increased consumption levels which in turn have yielded an increase in returns realized by growers. The creation of a national program under the USDA provides an opportunity to:

1. Address new and changing opportunities to collectively build strong markets
2. Formalize informal working relationships across the industry under a grower-directed national program
3. Have blackberry imports into the U.S. pay their fair share of the cost of building blackberry markets through mandatory assessments collected by U.S. Customs.

A Research and Promotion program can choose to invest funds in many ways:

- **Research:** production, packaging, handling, market, nutrition/health benefits
- **Information programs:** consumer, industry, trade, food safety
- **Promotion:** nutrition messaging, advertising, media relations, sales development, etc. to a variety of audiences

### **How would a blackberry Research & Promotion Program be created?**

A lot of work has already been done. In 2010-2012, a Blackberry R&P Working Group, composed of producers and marketers from across the industry, developed a draft proposal and presented it to grower groups across the country. The group also successfully petitioned the U.S. International Trade Commission to create new import codes specifically for blackberries (a necessary step before assessing imported fruit).

The project was then tabled, due to lack of consensus on several aspects and the market dynamics at the time. Now, however, there is a growing sense across the blackberry community that the time is right and that this is a much-needed program that can provide great benefit to the blackberry industry.

Once a proposal is finalized, it will be presented to USDA, which will administer a referendum of producers and importers. USDA suggests a minimum of 12 to 18 months once the proposal is submitted for formal review before a program is declared effective and the Board is seated.

### **What is happening now?**

A new Steering Committee is being formed to refine the proposal and carry it forward, with staff support provided by the North American Raspberry & Blackberry Association (NARBA). This Steering Committee will revisit key aspects of the original proposal, with input from others they represent. These key questions

include:

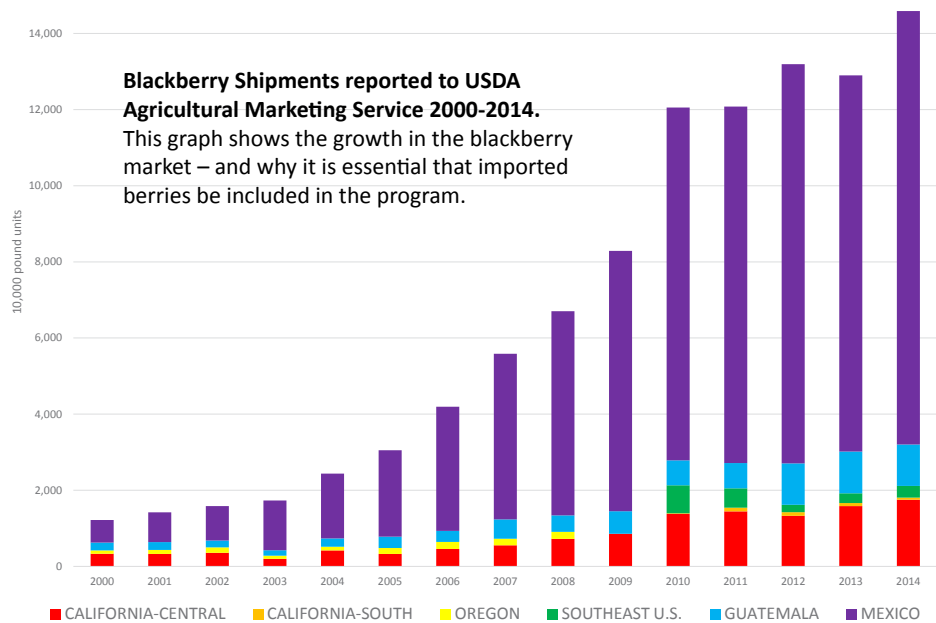
- The threshold for assessment. What scale growers should be assessed (and vote in the referendum)? A threshold of 30,000/lbs of marketed fruit (fresh market) has been suggested.
- Whether both fresh-market berries and processed berries (e.g. frozen) berries will be included in the program.
- The amount of the assessment. The original proposal called for a one cent (\$.01) per pound assessment on fresh-market berries, The rate for processed berries would be lower.
- The structure of the Board or Council that represents the participating growers and importers.

The North American Raspberry & Blackberry Association is also working to assemble economic data needed to support the proposal and a list of all growers and importers who would vote on and participate in the program.

### What would this program cost me?

Nothing worthwhile comes without a cost. The proposed program will assess all domestic growers and all importers above the threshold level. A one cent (\$.01) lb. of marketed berries is approximately 4.5 cents per flat of half-pint equivalents. It is estimated this would raise between \$1.25 million and 1.5 million annually for research and promotion.

It will also be necessary to raise funds for a bond of approximately \$150,000 that USDA requires before it will conduct the referendum. If the referendum passes, the funds will be returned to the donors. If it doesn't, USDA takes these funds to cover its costs to conduct the referendum. The blackberry industry must step forward to share this risk and commit to making the referendum a success.



### What can I do to help the process?

**Participate in the ongoing discussion** about the program's creation and authority. Ask questions. Attend grower meetings. Volunteer to contact others.

**Make sure you are on the list of producers and importers** NARBA is generating so you can get updates on the progress of this proposal.

**Contribute funds** to this effort and for the \$150,000 bond required by USDA. NARBA will hold bond funds in a special escrow account. A suggested amount is 25% of your estimated annual assessment at .01/lb.

**Support the proposal to USDA.** When the program is published in the Federal Register, make sure to submit comments and encourage other growers to submit theirs as well. Drafts of comment letters which can be personalized or bullet points that can be included in your own letter will be made available.

**Finally, be prepared to vote** once the referendum is announced. Find out whatever you need to know about this proposal so you are comfortable it is moving in the right direction.



For more information:

[www.raspberryblackberry.com/blackberryRandP/](http://www.raspberryblackberry.com/blackberryRandP/)

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