

Ngā Mahi a Wai Māori

Northland Water Storage and Use Project



Growing Berry-fruit

In Northland the major berry-fruit crops (Rubus family) are raspberries, blueberries and strawberries. They all perform well in the Northland climate which offers sufficient winter chilling and warm spring and summer temperatures.

There is very little information available for individual growers to use to determine the likelihood of success of a proposed berry-fruit venture.

Raspberry and strawberry growing is predominantly based around most production being sold fresh into the market within a short time period after picking, with freezing being the alternative use.

Blueberries are picked continuously over the production season and are sold fresh or frozen for later use.

Berry-fruit requirements

In Northland the major berry-fruit crops (Rubus family) grown at present are raspberries, blueberries and strawberries. These crops have traditionally been grown in open fields but there is an increasing trend toward indoor production systems, covered structures, and soil-less media. This controls more of the production factors to achieve higher output, either in volume or at a certain time of the year when production is otherwise low. Covered growing systems are expected to increase in Northland in future.

Most of the Rubus family require some winter chilling to ensure that there is good flowering and fruit set. It is important for any grower to match the degree of winter chilling required by the different cultivars of the plant to the climatic conditions they are growing them in. They all perform well in the Northland climate which offers warm spring and summer temperatures.

Blueberries grow best in acidic soils with a pH of between 4.0 and 5.5 and the soil needs to be free draining. The rest of the crops are best grown in deep free draining soils. Berry crops require good reliable moisture from flowering through to harvest with the requirement for water increasing as the fruit increases its berry size.

All three crops have a very high labour demand around the time of picking.



Raspberry industry overview

Raspberry growing is predominantly based around most production being sold fresh into the market within a short time period after picking, with freezing being the alternative use. The price received is either dependant on the available supply and demand dynamics of the crop at the time of sale, or on supplying sufficient quantity to a supermarket chain to enable the supplier to negotiate a price.

There is no industry body responsible for raspberry production and there is no information on the quantity of raspberries imported or exported to be able to evaluate whether there are any premiums to be extracted from the market, other than the current fresh produce supply. Anyone contemplating the growing of raspberries would be best to examine the industry in more detail.

Blueberry industry overview

Blueberries New Zealand represents the interests of blueberry growers in New Zealand. It seeks to further the interests of the industry by improving new genetics, export market access and promotion and development of the blueberry industry here and overseas. The major plank of the promotion is that they provide excellent nutritional and health benefits. The blueberry industry has expanded, and supply is growing rapidly at present.

Blueberries take a couple of seasons to grow from planting to production. They are picked continuously during the production season and are either sold fresh or frozen for later use. Average yields can vary greatly but a mature block can be expected to produce more than 10 tonnes per hectare. There is no information as to what the returns are for production of blueberries.

Miro is a collaboration of Māori businesses with the aim of commercialising high value berry varieties in conjunction with land owners. Miro is primarily a marketing company with rights to certain blueberry varieties. Miro has indicated that a five-hectare blueberry crop grown in tunnels could return \$104,000 / ha / yr over the first eight years of production from an investment of \$300,000 / ha.

Strawberry Industry Overview

Strawberries in New Zealand are managed by Strawberry Growers NZ which has just passed a vote to impose a compulsory levy across the industry. It is estimated that the farm gate value of the industry in 2018 was approximately \$35m which was made up of an estimated 8,500 T with about \$8.9m of production being exported to Asian markets.

The organisation's strategic plan concentrates on biosecurity, food safety and agrichemicals, while growth strategies are in the areas of plant improvement, quality and promotion and export.

Strawberries are mainly grown in raised beds which are enclosed in plastic and are grown as an annual crop. They have a very high labour demand at the time of harvest from November to January.

Sources of Information

- Blueberries NZ: <https://www.blueberriesnz.co.nz/>
- Strawberry Growers NZ: <https://www.strawbsnz.co.nz/>
- Miro: <https://www.miroberries.com/>

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