The Organic Blueberry Industry in Oregon: Results of In-person, On-site Interviews with Growers in 2015-2016

Javier Fernandez-Salvador
Assistant Professor
Small Farms Program
Bernadine Strik
Professor
Dept. Horticulture
Oregon State University
Target Audience

• All organic/transitional blueberry growers currently certified or planning to start organic blueberry production or “conversion” as of summer 2016
• Group included initially an estimated 69 growers
• Completed 32 grower interviews (48% participation rate)
Methods

• In-person interviews of varying length were conducted in fall, winter and early spring. Growers had little time to meet in summer!
• Combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected
• Interview includes: production systems (row management, fertility, irrigation, pest issues and control); harvest and post-harvest practices; marketing and sales; research needs and impact
• Included 69 certified growers in the original pool, the majority (43) are located in the Oregon valleys of the I-5 corridor from Ashland to Portland
• Small groups are located in Hood River & south west coast
Most interviewed producers (53%) were “small” in total farm size (0.1-8 Ha) and considered very diverse growers with small blueberry area.
Results

Reasons for being organic:

Additional certifications:
Results: production systems

- Diverse production systems (only 29% exclusively blueberries)
- Irrigation: 14% use drip, 61% overhead irrigation and 25% a combination of both
- Row management: 48% planted on raised beds, 36% flat ground, 10% combination, the rest other
- Planting age: 70% had fields with plants at least 10-years-old
- 100% pruned at least some part of their fields annually
Results

• Pest problems in order of importance: Weeds (#1), Spotted Wing Drosophila (#2), Mummy berry (#3) and Blueberry Shock Virus.
• Vertebrate pests: Birds (89%), rodents (86%) and deer(46%)
• Harvest: by hand (82%), by machine (11%), the rest both.
• Sales: direct to consumer (45%), to retailers (20%), to wholesale buyers (20%), to processors (15%)
Example Farm Profile

New area planted – not yet in production. About 0.8 hectares of 2-year-old ‘Duke’ and ‘Liberty’

• Soil: pH tested and adjusted prior to planting
• Pre and post planting fertility based on aged animal manure compost
• Drip irrigated, “low” raised beds, flowers removed for 2 years (no crop)
• Sawdust mulch replenished.
• Biggest issue is weed management and support available to learn and have a successful crop
• Crop will be hand picked, direct sales at FM and CSA
• Learned all management from OSU but feels fertility management information is confusing
Example Farm Profile

Low yield 12y old planting. About 2 Ha. 12 different cultivars

• Soil: pH not tested and limed prior to planting
• Pre and post planting fertility based on aged horse manure and bedding, applied inconsistently through the years
• Started with overhead and switched to drip irrigation on flat ground, now trying to make a raised bed with compost, correct pH and mulch with “weed mat”
• Biggest issue is weed management and support available to learn and have a successful crop
• Crop will be hand picked, direct sales at FM and U-pick
• Learned all management from OSU but feels fertility management information is confusing
Results

• Most growers interviewed point at the following challenges to their production:

- Current methods for reaching small growers needs improvement and there is a need to prioritize a system to reach them.
- Interest in OSU research but small growers would like more involvement.
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Thank you!

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