



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
LD 2256 An Act to Provide Emergency One-time Relief from the Wild Blueberry Tax for
Growers in Maine

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and honorable members of the Committee on Agriculture Conservation and Forestry:

My name is Julie Ann Smith, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Farmers Coalition, a collective of progressive farmers deeply committed to ensuring the sustainable growth and protection of Maine's vital farming industry.

It is no secret that Maine farmers have been struggling for many years and our wild blueberry industry is in danger of extinction. Despite grower efforts and success in increasing production, the price of the 2022 crop was lower than the price paid in 2013. While the data for 2023 is not yet available, it is anticipated to be even lower than 2022.

In light of the significant increases in inputs such as fertilizer, crop protectants, and labor, and after years of substantial income loss, many growers chose 2023 as their last year of production.

It is imperative that we work together to protect the production of this heritage and culturally significant food. Maine has the unique distinction of being the only state in our country to commercially produce wild blueberries. If our growers continue to see devastating financial losses, Canada will become the sole source of commercially available wild blueberries.

LD 2256 is a critical first step in helping wild blueberry growers recover some of their significant financial losses and assist them with investing in future production by refunding the tax they paid on a crop that did not provide any income. Much like the dairy industry received bailout funds and is supported by the Maine Dairy Stabilization

Program, we need to explore options to protect and preserve our wild blueberry industry.

We humbly ask the committee to support this one-time tax refund for Maine's wild blueberry growers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important opportunity for Maine. I would be happy to answer any questions.



"Blueberries for Sal," by Robert McCloskey, Copyright © 1948

Historic to Present, Maine Wild Blueberry Production and Value 1924-2022¹

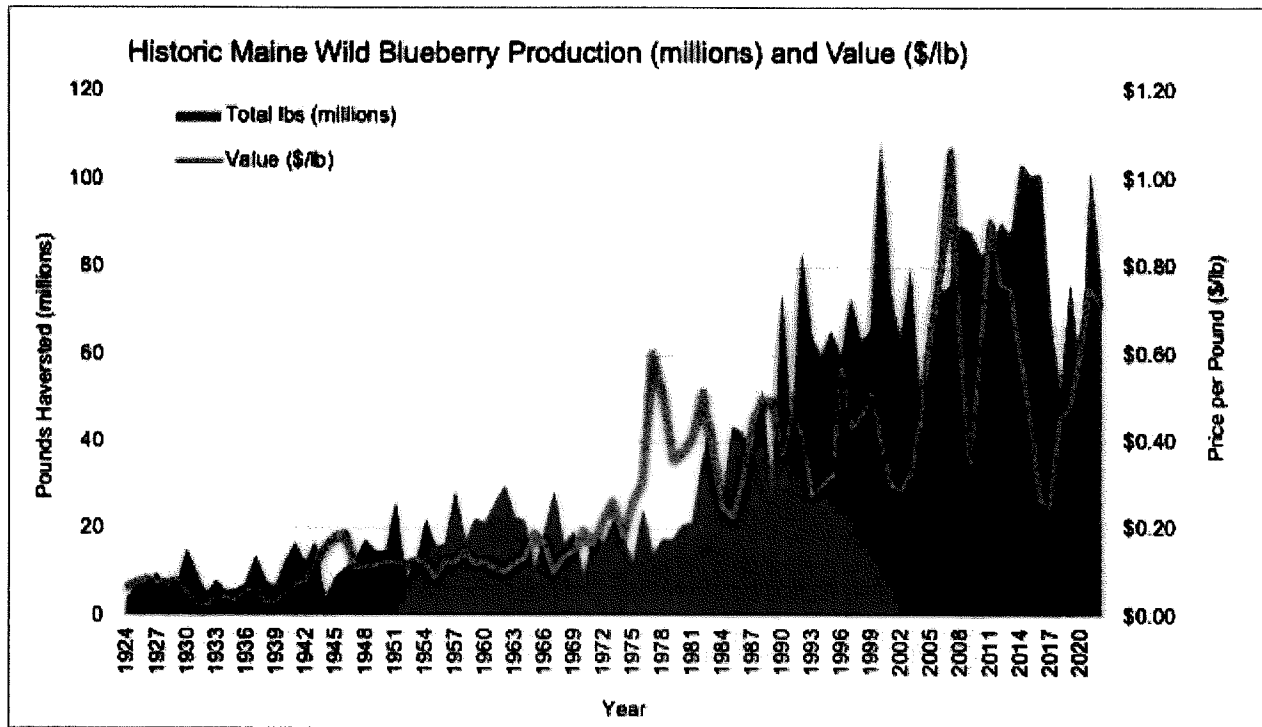


Figure 1. 1924-2022 Maine wild blueberry production and statistics. *Source: 1924-1989 Maine Department of Agriculture (1924 to 1928 includes imported berries), 1990 to 2022 New England Agricultural Statistics Service, and the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine based upon aggregate tax records.*

¹ <https://extension.umaine.edu/blueberries/factsheets/statistics-2/crop-production-statistics-2019/>

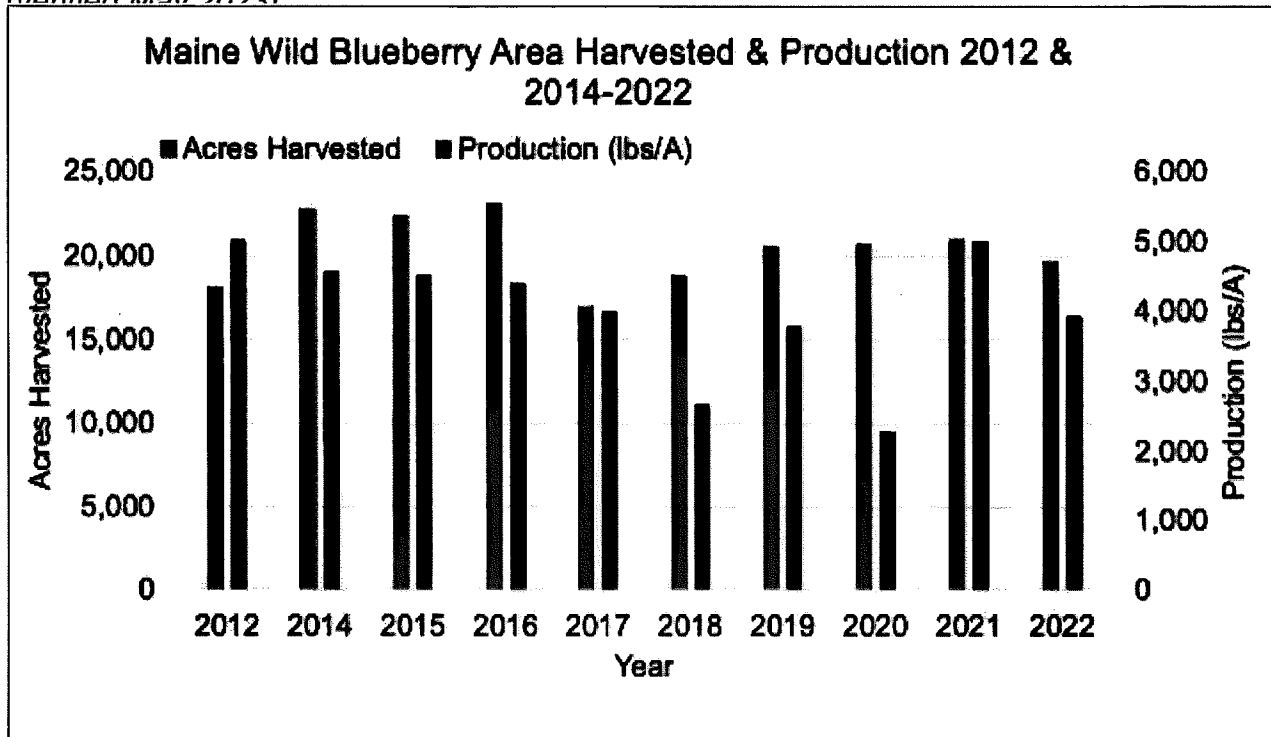
Current Maine Wild Blueberry Production and Value

Table 1. 2012-2022 Maine wild blueberry production and value

statistics. Source: USDA & NASS. 2022. USDA/NASS, National Agricultural Statistics Service. QuickStats Ad-hoc Query Tool. Available at <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/> (verified May 2023).

Year	TOTAL			USE		PRICE	
	Harvested acres	Weight million, lbs	Weight/Area lbs/acre	Fresh % of total weight	Processed	Fresh \$/lb	Processed
2022	19,700	77.6	3,940	1.0%	99.0%	2.30	0.700
2021	21,000	103.8	5,000	1.0%	98.9%	2.30	0.750
2020	20,700	47.4	2,290	1.5%	98.5%	0.82	0.600
2019	20,500	77.9	3,800	1.6%	98.1%	1.19	0.461
2018	18,800	50.4	2,681	3.1%	96.7%	1.05	0.455
2017	17,000	67.8	3,988	0.5%	99.3%	2.20	0.249
2016	23,100	101.8	4,409	0.4%	99.4%	0.79	0.270
2015	22,400	101.1	4,514	0.5%	99.4%	1.90	0.460
2014	22,800	104.4	4,579	0.6%	99.4%	2.00	0.600
2013	–	87.9	–	0.6%	98.5%	1.95	0.750
2012	18,110	91.1	5,030	0.5%	99.5%		

Maine wild blueberry harvested acres and production (lbs/A) in 2012 and 2014-2022. Source: USDA & NASS. 2022. USDA/NASS, National Agricultural Statistics Service. QuickStats Ad-hoc Query Tool. Available at <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/> (verified May 2023)



Current Maine Wild Blueberry Production and Value – Graphed

Maine wild blueberry production price by use, fresh or processed between 2007 and 2022. *Source: USDA & NASS. 2022. USDA/NASS, National Agricultural Statistics Service. QuickStats Ad-hoc Query Tool. Available at <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/> (verified May 2023).*

