

Ron Howard
Brodie Blueberries
LD 1670

My name is Ron Howard and my family owns Brodie Blueberries. We were one of the very fortunate recipients of the original AIIP Grant which has and will make an incredible difference in our long term success at sustaining our now 9 generation family farm. It offered not only amazing opportunities for us as a farm to improve our efficiencies and expand our market but helped us make stronger bonds with other farms and buyers in a cooperative nature.

Like many farms and certainly wild blueberry farms in particular, many of the recent years have returned prices below cost the cost of growing our crop making it impossible to build capital to improve. This is particularly troubling as the knowledge of the health benefits and popularity of wild blueberries have grown considerably in recent years and yet growers have not had the capital to expand and take advantage of this trend. The AIIP design to allow growers to submit for infrastructure and equipment was so timely.

Over the last few years I have applied for almost a dozen grants from local to national opportunities. The grants have included those that are so complex that farmers have to hire a grant writing professional if they want any chance to be successful.

This last AIIP grant administered by Department of Agriculture and Forestry and their partners proved by far to be wonderfully communicated, thorough, practical and offering flexibility that you never see elsewhere. The design of the application was thorough and easily understood. The webinars held by the department were timely and very helpful. Despite there being an appeal holding up the process, we were all included in communications to be aware of what was happening. I bring this up as I want you all to know that when you pass this bill, that you can be confident that it will be handled professionally and fairly.

And finally, these funds should be made available to small to medium size farms that do not have the flexibility to obtain funds to compete compared to the larger farms, processors and nonprofit farms.

Thank you!