



Q & A

Proposed Research & Promotion Program for Blackberries

In 2010, the North American Raspberry & Blackberry Association (NARBA) began the process of developing a Research and Promotion program (R & P) for blackberries. An R & P is created by a fruit or vegetable industry and authorized by federal legislation. These national 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 entirely funded by industry assessments.

What has happened so far?

A Blackberry R & P Working Group, composed of producers and marketers from across the industry has been formed. This group had a face-to-face meeting in Raleigh, NC in October 2010 and has had other meetings by conference call. A consultant was hired to develop a draft proposal and research industry statistics. The proposal was presented to grower groups across the country in Winter 2010-2011 and comments and responses have been gathered at meetings and via a survey. The Working Group has considered changes to the proposal, making some and rejecting others. Two of the major blackberry marketers have contributed funds towards continuing the process.

The U.S. International Trade Commission has been petitioned to create new import codes specifically for blackberries (a necessary step before assessing imported fruit). The ITC has approved our request, creating new codes for both fresh market and processed blackberries.

What can this program do for me – and for the blackberry industry?

The simplest draft mission statement developed by the Working Group was “increase consumption of fresh market blackberries.” In a longer version: The “Blackberry R&P Program will increase the market share for fresh blackberries and improve the sustainability of the blackberry industry by increasing consumption of blackberries, improving their quality and marketability, and fostering communication and cooperation within the blackberry industry.” The R & P program can invest funds it raises in many ways:

Promotion: nutrition messaging, advertising, media relations, sales development, etc. to a variety of audiences, such as consumers, supermarket buyers. Growers surveyed identified this as the primary purpose.

Research: production, packaging, handling, market, nutrition

Information programs directed to consumer, industry, trade, food safety

Who and what would be assessed?

- **Only fresh-market blackberries.** Processing growers (mostly in Oregon) were invited to join the proposal, but the Oregon Raspberry & Blackberry Commission, which represents these growers, has declined to participate. Oregon already has a state-level assessment program for blackberries.
- **All imported fresh-market blackberries would be assessed.** This assessment falls on the importers, not the foreign producers. Imports currently make up more than 75% of fresh-market blackberries sold in the U.S.
- **Blackberries from domestic growers producing at least 30,000 lbs. of fresh-market berries** would be assessed.

What is the amount of the proposed assessment?

The proposed assessment is one cent (\$.01) lb. of marketed berries. This is approximately 4.5 cents per flat (of half-pint equivalents). The assessment would be collected by first handlers. At current production levels, this would raise between \$1.25 million and 1.5 million annually.



How would the program be administered?

A representative industry council would be set up to manage the program under the supervision of the USDA. Council members are nominated by the industry and appointed officially by the Secretary of Agriculture. Members would serve 3-year terms. Based on concerns about whether the original proposal accurately reflected production levels of different areas, changes have been made. The new proposal is:

- 2 grower members from the Eastern U.S.
- 2 grower members from the Western U.S.
- 2 growers members allocated by amount of production*
- 1 grower member representing direct-market producers
- 1 at-large member, who could be a grower, researcher, consumer representative, or other
- 3 blackberry importers
- 2 foreign producers

* At current production levels, this would likely result in 4 West grower members and 2 East grower members.

What happens next?

The Working Group will continue to tweak the proposal and consider feedback from growers and importers. Early in 2012, a meeting with USDA will be held. The next step would be a formal submission of the proposal, and publishing in the Federal Register for formal public review. If the industry is sufficiently supportive of a proposal, USDA will administer a referendum of producers and importers.

Each eligible domestic producer of blackberries and eligible importer of blackberries is entitled to cast one ballot in the referendum. (Foreign producers do not vote.) The Working Group has proposed that the referendum must be approved both by at least 51% of producers and importers, representing at least 65% of production. Final determination of the establishment of the Council will be made by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

What can I do?

If you support the proposal: Talk to other growers, make sure they understand it, and gain their support as well. 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.

If you have questions or concerns: Talk to any member of the Working Group (or contact NARBA). Share your concerns and reasons you would not support the proposal. It is important that this program serve the needs of growers. Your concerns may bring about changes that help it do so.



More information is available from:

North American Raspberry & Blackberry Association

1138 Rock Restt Rd. Pittsboro, NC 27312
919-542-4037 – info@raspberryblackberry.com
www.raspberryblackberry.com/blackberryRandP/