Report on NARBA's 2020 Pricing and Marketing Survey

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Thank you to all the growers who responded to our survey and to everyone who helped spread the word. Special thanks to Jennie Popp and Leah English at the University of Arkansas who designed the 2018 version of this survey and allowed us to adapt it to 2020.

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Raspberry | Blackberry | Pricing | COVID-19
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Respondents

Number of respondents. NARBA's online survey was open from June 1 and we asked respondents to answer by June 22. After compiling and analyzing these responses for the initial report released in August, we left the survey open until Nov 3 to capture additional responses from later in the season. Overall we received 294 responses. Of these, 10 indicated that they are not growing caneberries and an additional 125 were incomplete or invalid. Results were considered incomplete if price data were not entered or if the entered data were a clear outlier. The results in this report are calculated using the remaining 155 valid responses, a roughly 50 percent increase from 2018.

Location of respondents. Respondents were asked to provide their location at the state/province level. These responses were grouped into regions for privacy and statistical purposes. The three regions with the highest percentage of responses were Midwest, east of the Mississippi (21 percent), Southeast (19 percent), and Southwest/South (18 percent). Canada provided the fewest responses with four percent of the total responses.

Region	Respondents (%)
Canada	4
Mid-Atlantic	14
Midwest, East	21
Midwest, West	6
Northeast	6
Pacific Coast and West	12
Southeast	19
Southwest / South	18

Table 1. Percentage of growers from each region

Crops grown. The majority of caneberry producers surveyed grew blackberries (50 percent), with 20 percent growing raspberries and 30 percent growing both (figure 3).

Years in caneberry production Our respondents have a wide range of experience, ranging from respondents in their first year of caneberry growing to a respondent with 70 years experience growing raspberries. On average, our respondents had ten years of experience growing blackberries and 17 years growing raspberries. Canadian growers are most experienced, where 83 percent of respondents have over ten years of caneberry experience. The Northeast and Pacific Coast and West regions also have over 50 percent of respondents with

Fig. 1. Regions used in this survey

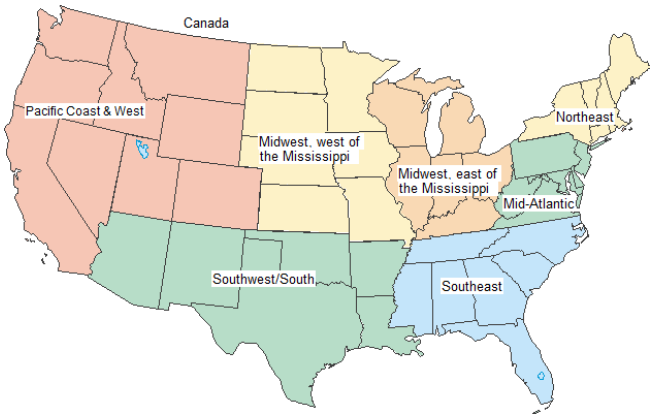


Fig. 2. Caneberries grown by respondents in 2020

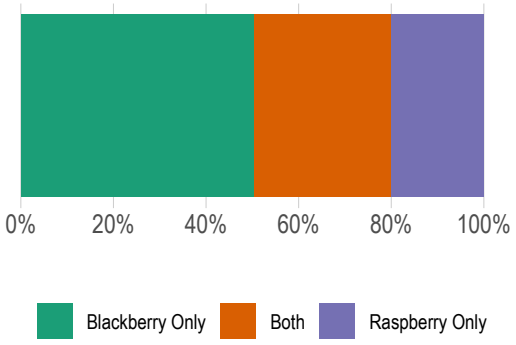
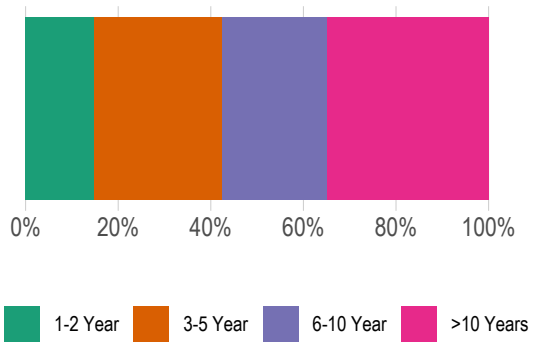


Fig. 3. Years in Caneberry Production



more than ten years of experience. Midwest, west of the Mississippi, Southeast, and Southwest/South have more than half of their respondents with five or fewer years of experience. The Northeast and Southeast had the most new growers, with just over 20 percent of respondents from these regions having only one to two years experience.

Acres in production. The average caneberry farm in our survey had around 4 acres in caneberry production, with the smallest grower reporting 0.02 acres of caneberry production and the largest grower reporting 100 acres. The distribution of acreage was similar between blackberries and raspberries. 'Less than one acre' was the most common response for both blackberry (34 percent) and raspberry (29 percent) growers and fewer than ten percent of respondents had more than ten acres of raspberries. The majority of respondents had one to ten acres of caneberries.

Marketing Methods

Since we were focused on direct-market prices—partly because growers have little control over prices in wholesale and processing markets—few large producers participated and few growers (11 percent) indicated they sold both wholesale and retail. Our survey distinguished between "small" wholesale, primarily sales to local stores and restaurants and fruit stands, and "large" wholesale, or sales to supermarket chains or through major marketers. Approximately 58 percent of respondents sold only at retail and 20 percent sold only to wholesalers. U-Pick was the most popular marketing method, used by over half of both types of grower. For both caneberries, farm stands were the next most popular marketing method, however it was somewhat more popular with raspberry growers (57 percent) compared to blackberry growers (46 percent). Farmers markets were used by around one quarter of the respondents. Selling to small wholesalers was the most popular method of wholesale marketing, followed by selling to large wholesalers and processors. Raspberry growers were more likely to sell to small wholesalers, and blackberry growers were more likely to sell to large wholesalers and processors. Other marketing methods included selling to local schools and selling online. The popularity of different marketing methods varies by region. The table 3 shows the percentage of growers in each region using each method. The rows will not sum to 100 percent as many growers use multiple marketing methods.

Pricing

For each market type, we asked growers what prices they receive. The following section summarizes these results.

Sales units. We did not ask growers to convert their prices into a common unit (e.g., pounds) which would have made averaging and comparisons easier, but instead asked them to report prices in the units they sold in. Averages and comparisons are difficult to make with confidence. Clamshells containing 6 oz. or 12 oz. of berries may sometimes be reported as half-pints or pints. In addition, "oz." can mean either volume or weight, while a "gallon" is not actually a legitimate measure of a dry material like berries, only of liquids, and there are also great differences in how high buckets or cups are mounded up. However, for this analysis, we assumed volume measures were comparable (e.g. one pint equals two half-pints) and that a pint of berries weighs ¾ pounds. We also excluded flats from this analysis, since their price and composition were highly variable.

Average prices. Table 3 summarizes the average prices per pound received by respondents by region and marketing method. Across all regions and marketing channels, blackberries sold for an average price of $4.98 per pound and raspberries sold for an average price of $6.61 per pound. There was moderate variation in these prices across regions, with average prices for blackberries ranging from $3.98 per pound in the Pacific Coast and West to $6.44 per pound in the Northeast, and average prices for raspberries ranging from $5.31 per pound in the Pacific Coast and West to $7.56 per pound in the Southeast. There was substantial variation in prices across marketing methods with average farm stand prices for blackberries reaching as high as $10.67 per pound and processor prices as low as $0.53 per pound, both in the Pacific Coast and West. For Raspberries, average prices ranged from as high as $17.33 per pound at a farmers' market in the southeast, and as low as $3.31 for U-Pick raspberries in the Pacific Coast and West.

For most blackberry growers prices have been stable, with 57 percent of blackberry growers reporting that their prices are the same as last year. Only 34 percent of raspberry growers reported receiving same prices as last year. For blackberry growers, 19 percent reported that their prices are higher this year than last year, and only five percent reported that their prices are lower. For raspberry growers, 16 percent of respondents reported that their prices are higher this year than last year, and no growers reported that their prices are lower. For growers reporting the same price this year as last year, the majority of growers have kept these prices for two to three years (figure 4).

Table 2. Percentage of growers using each market type by region

Region	Marketing Type Used (%)						
	Farm Stand	U-Pick	Farmer's Market	Wholesale (small)	Wholesale (large)	Processor	Other
Canada	66.7	0.0	0.0	16.7	33.3	0.0	0.0
Mid-Atlantic	31.8	45.5	36.4	22.7	9.1	9.1	9.1
Midwest, East	66.7	63.6	36.4	15.2	3.0	12.1	0.0
Midwest, West	33.3	66.7	44.4	22.2	11.1	22.2	11.1
Northeast	44.4	55.6	22.2	22.2	0.0	11.1	0.0
Pacific Coast and West	27.8	44.4	27.8	22.2	5.6	16.7	11.1
Southeast	33.3	46.7	23.3	13.3	23.3	6.7	6.7
Southwest / South	28.6	71.4	28.6	7.1	7.1	3.6	3.6

Table 3. Average prices per pound received by respondents by market and region

Region	Average Price Received ($/lb)						
	Farm Stand	U-Pick	Farmer's Market	Wholesale (small)	Wholesale (large)	Processor	Other
Blackberry							
Canada	7.33	NA	NA	NA	3.33	NA	6.67
Mid-Atlantic	7.43	4.48	6.78	4.27	NA	2.83	NA
Midwest, East	6.51	3.77	7.00	5.33	NA	2.83	8.00
Midwest, West	5.07	3.62	5.99	4.53	4.20	2.75	3.50
Northeast	6.67	5.33	8.00	NA	NA	NA	6.67
Pacific Coast and West	10.67	3.25	6.07	7.47	NA	0.53	3.72
Southeast	6.04	4.30	7.00	3.67	5.63	1.50	9.03
Southwest / South	4.39	3.91	5.72	NA	NA	3.50	6.66
Raspberry							
Canada	6.67	NA	NA	5.00	5.00	NA	6.67
Mid-Atlantic	8.61	5.07	8.60	7.00	NA	3.33	10.00
Midwest, East	7.74	5.08	8.29	6.92	3.33	7.50	11.33
Midwest, West	7.33	5.83	5.33	4.00	NA	4.00	NA
Northeast	7.67	4.93	9.33	7.17	NA	4.50	6.67
Pacific Coast and West	5.00	3.31	10.67	7.07	NA	NA	5.33
Southeast	5.00	4.00	17.33	7.33	NA	NA	5.83
Southwest / South	5.11	4.33	7.33	NA	NA	NA	NA

COVID-19 Impacts

COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented disruption in markets around the US and globally. To help understand how this crisis has impacted caneberry growers, we included several questions asking about COVID-19 impacts. In particular we asked how customer volume, sales per customer, and total sales have changed in comparison to a normal year, and whether the respondent thought these changes were due to COVID-19. In addition, we asked several open-ended questions about how growers are adapting, which give a sense of the diversity of responses to the crisis.

Changes in customer volume and sales. Figure 5 summarizes the responses for blackberry and raspberry producers. For customer volume, 56 blackberry producers answered the question, with 50 percent having a usual level of customers, and 50 percent having more customers than usual. For raspberries, 26 growers answered the question, with 62 percent having the same level of customers as usual and 38 percent having more customers than usual. For sales per customer, 57 blackberry producers answered the question, with 75 percent of respondents having the usual level of sales per customer and 25 percent having a greater volume of sales per customer. Similarly for raspberries, 28 growers answered the question, with 82 percent having the usual level of sales per customer and 18 percent having greater than usual sales per customer. For sales, 69 blackberry producers answered the question, with 20 percent having fewer sales than usual, 43

Fig. 4. Number of years growers have had the same prices

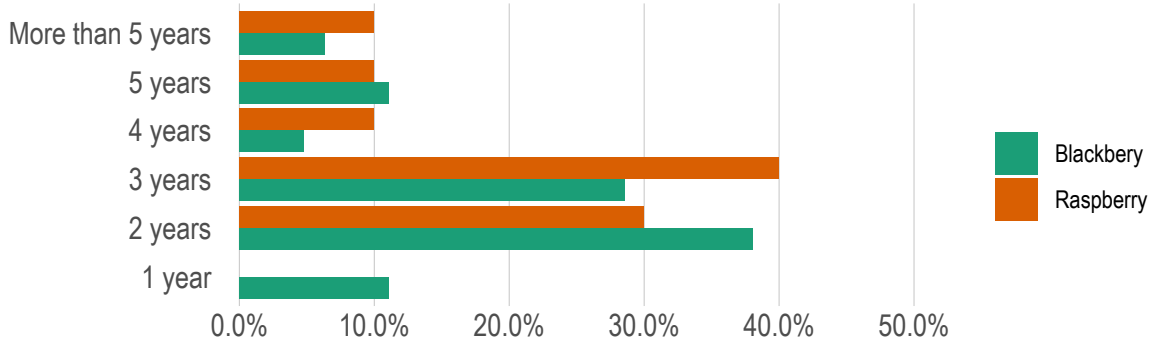
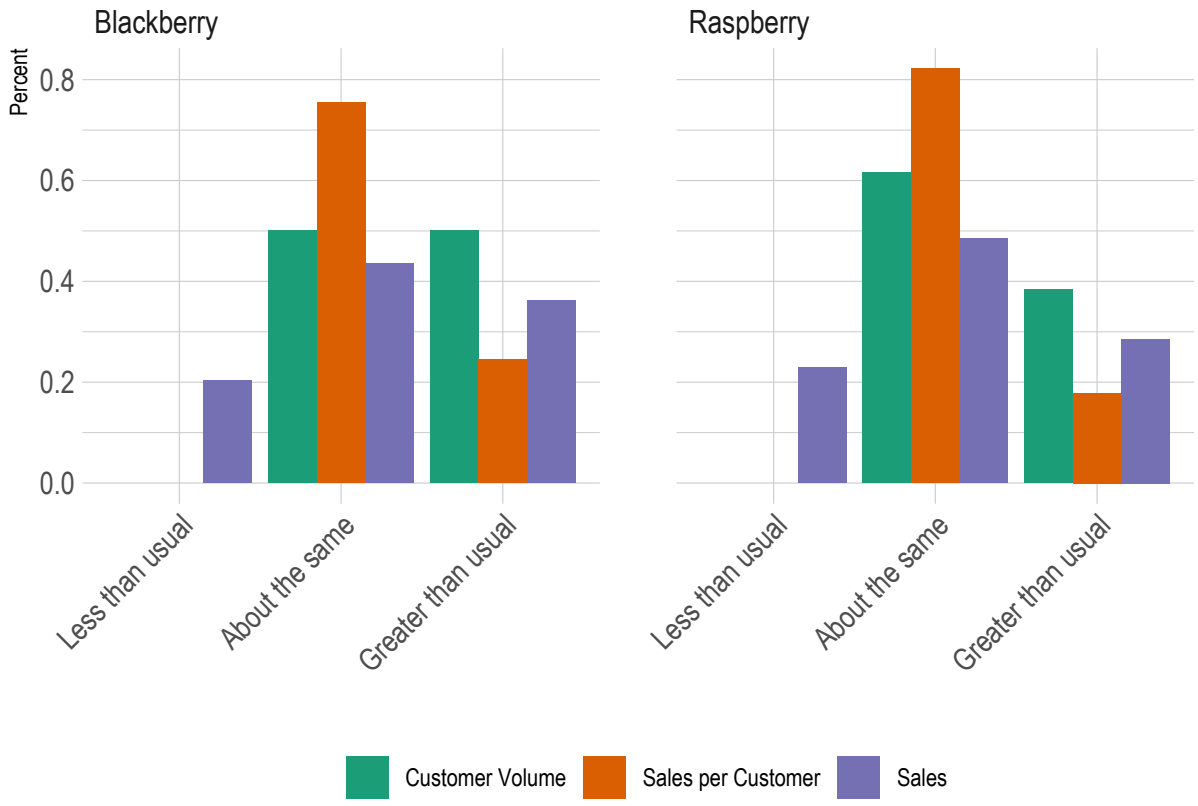


Fig. 5. Responses to questions about changes in volume and sales this year



percent having a usual level of sales, and 36 having more sales than usual. Similarly with raspberries, 35 producers answered the question, with 23 percent having fewer sales than usual, 49 percent having a usual level of sales, and 28 percent having more sales than usual.

While some marketing channels, like institutional and restaurant sales, have suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic, anecdotal reports suggest that direct-to-consumer sales have increased (2, 3). This appears to be the case for our respondents, with a majority experiencing usual, or higher than usual, customer volume, sales per customer, and sales.

To investigate the link between the change in sales and the sales method we looked at how these responses changed as respondents had increasing wholesale sales. Since we did not ask respondents how their sales and volume changed for each specific market, we calculated the effect of wholesale sales on their responses using a statistical model. To prepare the data, we classified ‘wholesale (small)’, ‘wholesale (large)’, and ‘processor’ sales as wholesale sales and calculated the wholesale percentage of each respondents sales. We

then fitted a ordered logistic regression model (1) where the respondent's answer is predicted as a function of their percentage of wholesale sales.

Figure 6 shows the results of the analysis for the change in customer volume and sales. The effect of the percentage of wholesale sales on respondents' answers for total sales and sales per customer was statistically insignificant (i.e. there was no measurable effect) so we do not show results for this model. Only customer volume displayed a measurable relationship between the percentage of sales that were wholesale and the change in customer volume. For the change in customer volume, an increasing percentage of wholesale sales reduced the probability of the respondent answering that their customer volume had increased for both types of berries. These results are indicate that growers have had more direct-to-consumer interactions, while sales to wholesalers have remained steady. However, the data do not show that these extra interactions led to an increase in sales.

Selected Grower Responses

Several questions in the survey asked respondents to enter text comments. While we originally thought to include a checklist of possible COVID-19 adjustments, instead we decided to let respondents highlight whatever aspects they chose in their own words. Below is just a selection of these comments.

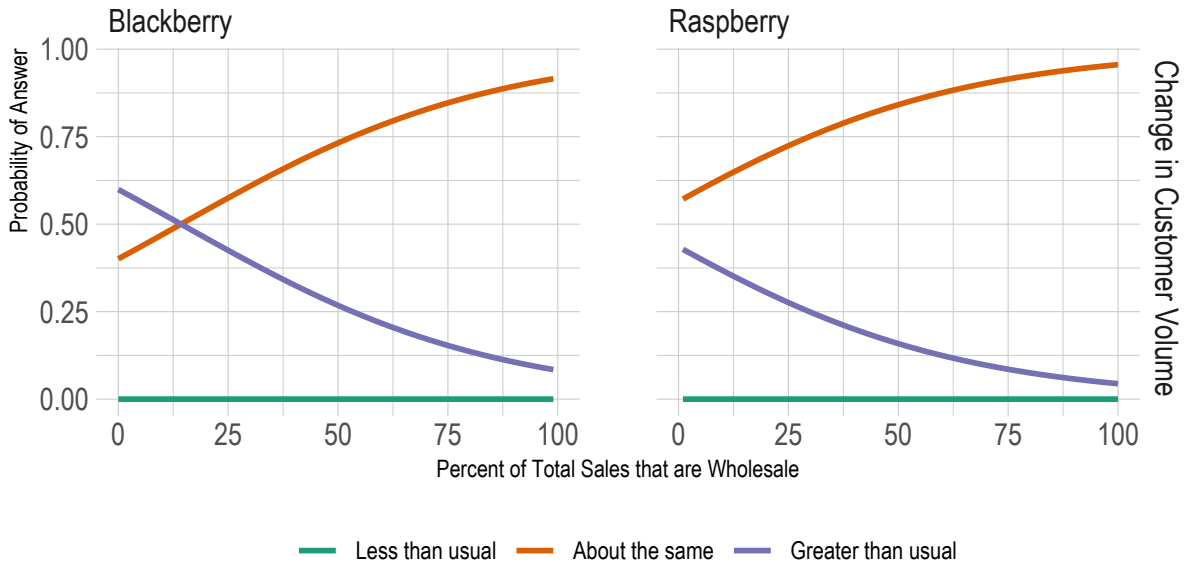
What adjustments are you making for COVID-19?

- Separate check-in and check-out stations. Extra cleaning/sanitizing, social distancing. Customers will be supplied new pulp pints in new cardboard trays (charge of $1.00 per tray is new this year), no reuse of trays or pulp pints). Installing handwashing stations (one at entrance and one at porta-potty); have used hand sanitizers in past. Encouraging small groups. We will switch to electronic payments.
- Asking people to wear a mask at the stand and one car at the stand at a time.
- I haven't yet sold any berries, but I suspect my two restaurant buyers will decrease purchases and my farmers market customers will increase purchases. Depending on demand, I might sell only 1/2 pints to maximize sales and please maximum number of customers.
- Specific COVID-19 signage in multiple locations.
- Added COVID-19 specific health training along with normal food safety training for everyone.
- Following state guidelines for reopening: recommend wearing masks, parents keep kids with them, observe social distancing. All employees wear masks.
- Because we have to limit the number of customers in the patch, it actually is more difficult to get the berries picked as quickly as we normally would. This is a young patch of berries, so we could get many more customers if we didn't have to limit the number in the patch. I do not request that my customers wear face masks. I let them monitor themselves. Social distancing works best.
- Sanitizing more, keeping the field clean, and limiting crowds at the farm by implementing by-appointment-only.
- No adapting.
- We have more experience with strawberries than blackberries given we just started picking blackberries yesterday. As a result, some of my answers are more related to strawberry season. We are implementing a scheduling system to gain access to the field due to COVID. We are charging $3.00 per person to gain field access and limiting the total number of guests that can be in the field at one time. That influenced our decision to keep blackberry pricing flat. We did not offer strawberry PYO this spring and increased pricing in our store to $35 per flat of eight 1-pound containers. Demand was huge. I need PYO blackberries to operate this summer because I do not have enough labor to harvest both them and my peach crop.
- Selling by the container this year instead of by the pound but the prices for the boxes we are selling are approximately the same as if the customer filled the box and paid by the pound.
- We have diversified markets to take advantage of the demand for local food as well as hedging against supply chain disruptions that seem to be the norm in 2020 due to Covid-19. This is something we were working toward anyways but Covid has accelerated the process.
- Picking by reservation and limiting the number of people in the field at one time. Selling mostly by the gallon so we don't have to weigh fruit. Required masks during check in and when near others.
- Increased wash stations, promoting social distancing, and requiring all workers to wear gloves and masks.

Do you have any COVID-19 advice to share?

- Follow specific advice of your state extension services and ag schools. Find the information which is readily available online including at NARBA website, understand it, apply it, and then figure out how to do all of this and still be profitable. Even during this pandemic consumers want high quality healthy food and are buying berries at what are good prices for the growers. Be thankful that consumer demand is remaining strong so far.
- Follow CDC advice. This is no joke. If your harvest crew gets COVID-19 you may get shut down and lose your entire harvest.

Fig. 6. Probability of respondents' answer depending on their percentage of wholesale sales



- Keep people informed on social media about your changes before season starts
- Selling by the box reduces interaction between your staff and the customer but also guarantees you get the most money for your crop because they buy the box whether they fill it or not
- Just follow CDC guidelines, use common sense and make your customers feel safe at your farm.
- Respect the needs of each individual visitor. Practice social distancing and make the farm experience fun and enjoyable. Try and limit multiple touch surfaces.
- Follow science and be safe.
- Don't be so consumed by Covid prevention that you neglect food safety! Masks and gloves that are dirty can become petri dishes for other food safety issues so make sure frequent hand washing and not touching the mask are emphasized.

Additional comments.

- The farmers markets I attend have launched pre-order pre-payment on the internet in response to COVID-19 and it has proven quite successful in the six weeks it's been in operation. The expectation is that this system, coupled with pre-pandemic customer browsing and buying, will continue even after the pandemic is over because it boosts overall sales.
- I would be interested in learning how pack houses are handling COVID. I know the meat packing industry has had many issues of outbreaks and I have heard of a few in the fruit industry. I have not seen any operating guidelines in the trade journals yet. I'm curious how employees are most at risk and what are the best safety measures to implement. It appears this is a greater risk area than employees working outdoors harvesting.
- Sales of blackberries this year have been excellent. We went through strawberry sales, and they were definitely better than last year. Blackberries are following suit. Seems more people want fresh fruit, and are also trying their hand at making cobblers and also making jam. Also, the customers appreciate a trip out to the farm to see where their fruit and produce come from. More people say they will be buying local this year.
- Many of the adjustments could become SOP in the future.

Discouraged comments.

- This is the last year I will grow blackberries. Foreign market price has made it impossible to grow blackberries at a profit. Between weather disasters and pricing that hasn't changed in 40 years we can't even make it worth growing any more even with large acres. Higher labor cost and overall input cost have driven me out of the business. America wants cheap food at any cost to the economy and the people that have sacrificed their lives to give it to them.
- Mexico dumped blackberries on the market for $5.50 a flat. American Farmers can't survive at these prices.
- Our prices are low in our minds as we compete with low price imports and bigger specialty market fruit stands, little guys like us are retiring from the fresh fruit market and now we now use most of our fruit in our own fruit winery!

- Our blackberries are just starting to bloom. In past years, we had berries setting at this time. We have had cool weather and a lot of rain, this year.
- On April 18 we had a temperature of 26 during the night which resulted in approximately an 80% loss in our production of blackberries this year 2020.
- The combination of severe weather events and current dry spell are hurting us, not COVID. However, it is no fun selling berries at a U-pick with masks on. Families are being gracious and know all berry growers are struggling this year. Still, with almost 4 acres of blueberries, we have never experienced this kind of crop loss to weather events and birds (Starlings & Cedar Wax Wings). I am not sure we have the resiliency to farm during climate change. Weather has changed so much in 10 years of owning this farm.

Positive last words.

- I really think our business will increase as people love to be outdoors away from the virus.
- Local farm stands in our area are doubling sales over previous years.
- This will be our greatest year ever!
- Best year we have ever had for U-pick sales.
- People were really happy to have a chance to be outdoors in a safe environment.

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NC STATE

For more information, contact the North American Raspberry & Blackberry Association (`www.raspberryblackberry.com`, `info@raspberryblackberry.com`) or Dr. Daniel Tregeagle (`tregeagle@ncsu.edu`). Further caneberry extension resources can be found at `rubus.ces.ncsu.edu`
A version of this survey that includes a table of prices reported by individual growers is available from NARBA. Click this link `http://eepurl.com/dtD2xP` to request the report.

NARBA
North American Raspberry & Blackberry Association

Region Definitions

State	Region
Alabama	Southeast
Alaska	NA
Arizona	Southwest/South
Arkansas	Southwest/South
California	Pacific Coast and West
Colorado	Pacific Coast and West
Connecticut	Northeast
Delaware	Mid-Atlantic
Florida	Southeast
Georgia	Southeast
Hawaii	NA
Idaho	Pacific Coast and West
Illinois	Midwest, East
Indiana	Midwest, East
Iowa	Midwest, West
Kansas	Midwest, West
Kentucky	Midwest, East
Louisiana	Southwest/South
Maine	Northeast
Maryland	Mid-Atlantic
Massachusetts	Northeast
Michigan	Midwest, East
Minnesota	Midwest, West
Mississippi	Southeast
Missouri	Midwest, West
Montana	Pacific Coast and West
Nebraska	Midwest, West
Nevada	Pacific Coast and West
New Hampshire	Northeast
New Jersey	Mid-Atlantic
New Mexico	Southwest/South
New York	Northeast
North Carolina	Southeast
North Dakota	Midwest, West
Ohio	Midwest, East
Oklahoma	Southwest/South
Oregon	Pacific Coast and West
Pennsylvania	Mid-Atlantic
Rhode Island	Northeast
South Carolina	Southeast
South Dakota	Midwest, West
Tennessee	Southeast
Texas	Southwest/South
Utah	Pacific Coast and West
Vermont	Northeast
Virginia	Mid-Atlantic
Washington	Pacific Coast and West
West Virginia	Mid-Atlantic
Wisconsin	Midwest, East
Wyoming	Pacific Coast and West
Ontario	Canada
Quebec	Canada