


Researchers from a southern Chilean university are looking for ways to improve blueberry production in volcanic soil, following studies that show significant crop losses due to nutritional factors. 

The Universidad Austral de Chile (UACH) research falls under the title "Diagnostic service and fertilization control for blueberries in volcanic soils in southern Chile", and has been co-financed by the country's Foundation for Agricultural Innovation (FIA).

The study has been taking place since 2009 with 12 growers in the southern regions of Los Ríos and Los Lagos, and has found that the North American nutritional diagnosis and production technology is far from suitable for the soil characteristics and climate of the area.

The research has shown that growers can lose up to 30% of their harvest in a season and it is common to lose 10%, due to low quality fruit as a result of nutritional deficiencies in the soil.

"It is estimated that losses vary per season between US\$3,500 and US\$10,000 per hectare," says the FIA.

The project aims to make blueberry fertilization control in volcanic soils more precise by adapting the existing technology, which would help growers determine and apply optimal nutritional strategies in terms of technical, economic and environmental factors.

"Growing blueberries in organic soils in the country implies having a clear objective for the quality of the fruit obtained each season," says project coordinator Dante Pinochet.

"This is because the product must arrive in optimal condition in destinations such as the U.S., Europe and now China."

According to statistics from the Office of Agricultural Studies and Policy (ODEPA), blueberries are Chile's third-largest fruit export, with shipments rising 34% year-on-year in 2011 to US\$337 million.

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