

North America's 2022 blueberry deal is quickly approaching its end.

Industry leaders indicate it was a good season, although production areas saw decreased volume with disappointing crop set in the spring and then some subsequent weather issues.

North Bay Produce Inc., based in Traverse City, MI, markets for grower-members in Michigan, the Pacific Northwest and Peru. The company also sells blueberries produced by Frank Donio, Inc., in Hammonton, NJ.

Thus, North Bay's blueberry manager Michael Girardin, has a solid feel for the industry.

The New Jersey deal ended in mid-July.

On Sept. 7, Girardin said the Michigan blueberry deal is "still trickling out," to be finished within a couple of weeks.

British Columbia and U.S. Pacific Northwest will also wrap up in that timeframe.

Then, North Bay will start Peru in large volumes. Girardin said Peru ships blueberries throughout the year. North Bay's seasonal involvement began in late August.

"The domestic deal was down as a whole this season," Girardin said, "but the quality was better this year."

From her Grand Junction, MI, headquarters, Nancy Nyquist, executive director of the Michigan Blueberry Commission, said Sept. 6 that Michigan blueberry shipping usually runs through Labor Day. Going into September, "there are still a few blueberries out there."

Nyquist described this as being a smaller crop than the 72.9 million pounds harvested in 2021. Final 2022 numbers are not yet available.

She confirmed that disappointingly hot days during spring pollination made a difference in Michigan's volume this year.

Still, overall, the quality and berry size overall were very good. "It was a great year," she said.

Girardin said the trend on Michigan's blueberry production volume is staying about the same. That does not mean it is static. He said growers are pulling out old varieties. That acreage is replaced by new, improved varieties.

These varieties are largely interchangeable for the fresh and processing markets.

Processing prices were strong in 2022, so a good portion of the crop was not available for the fresh market.

Nyquist indicates that Michigan blueberries are grown, harvested, and processed by more than 500 family farms and more than 22,000 acres are dedicated to growing blueberries. Michigan's blueberry industry contributes more than \$130 million to the state's economy.

Formed in 2017, the Michigan Blueberry Commission's main charge is funding critically needed, industry-driven research, by utilizing grower dollars and external partnership resources.