

The Blueberry News

Official Newsletter of the Florida Blueberry Growers' Association
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Officers: Officers: Jerry Mixon, Jr. (president), Dean Deihl (vice president), Sheri Brothers (treasurer), Jeff Williamson (secretary and newsletter editor).

Board of Directors: Jerry Mixon, Jr., Dean Deihl, Ken Patterson, Jimmy Miller, Gerald Mixon, Bob Payne, Steve Blount and Paul Lyrene.

Disclaimer: The information in this newsletter was selected with good intentions by the editor. It does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editor, the Florida Blueberry Growers' Association or the Association Directors. The reader should not assume that the information presented in the newsletter is being recommended for his or her farm. Especially where pesticides or growth regulators are mentioned, be sure to follow their labels exactly. If you have comments, corrections, or suggestions regarding the newsletter, please write to the editor.



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy Holidays to your and your families!

In addition to being the holiday time of the year it is also the time of year when we need to be checking our frost/freeze protection tools. Irrigation is the primary tool we have to combat frost and freezes. I would recommend checking all of your irrigation lines to see that they have been flushed to prevent untimely nozzle stop-ups, now is also a good time to attend to any repairs that have been neglected throughout the year. In dealing with irrigation you have to have power; make sure you have plenty of diesel available to your engines and if you are electrically powered see to getting a back up generator in case the power company you deal with decides to cut you off.

Another tool that I have found valuable is signing on with a weather forecast or weather watch service. Below, are a few I have come across that you may find useful:

- Florida Automated Weather Network (FAWN)
- AWIS Weather Services
- Winter Weather Watch Program (Polk County only)

This newsletter is also the official announcement of the approval of a SLN label for Dormex for the state of Florida. Many thanks go to Dr. Jeff Williamson in his tireless efforts in getting this product approved for Florida blueberry growers. I encourage all growers to use Dormex with caution. There are still a few unknowns in proper percentages to apply when using this product. READ AND FOLLOW THE LABEL!

Please take a moment to express your condolences to the Ducharme family in the passing of Dr. Ernie Ducharme earlier this year. Dr. Ducharme was a pioneer, an experimenter, and an inspiration to Florida blueberry growers and certainly will be missed by our industry.

Finally, my prayer for you and yours, is to have a safe and blessed holiday season and that the Lord would bless our efforts in the coming harvest.

Jerry Mixon
FBGA President

DORMEX APPROVED FOR FLORIDA BLUEBERRIES

After much waiting Florida blueberry growers finally have another tool available for their use. As of November, 1999, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services granted a Special Local Needs Label (SLN) for the use of Dormex on Florida blueberries. The product is being marketed by the California-based Dormex Company USA LLC. The product will be distributed throughout Florida and Georgia by Helena and Chemnut. It is my understanding that the central receiving point for Dormex throughout the southeast will be Albany, GA. There is a large Helena warehouse in Albany. Growers interested in using Dormex this winter should contact their local Helena or Chemnut supplier and have them place their order through to Albany. If you have any trouble obtaining Dormex through the procedure described above, you should contact Mr. Maurice DeBenedetto in California at (559)229-8183 (Pacific time). Dormex Company USA LLC is offering a \$1.00 per gallon rebate this year if you send your invoice to Mr. Maurice DeBenedetto at 246 W. Shaw, Suite #154, Fresno, California 93704 before March 15, 2000.

Below is some additional information on Dormex based on our research in Florida.

Why Use Dormex?

To date, all of our experiments have clearly illustrated the efficacy of Dormex at stimulating earlier and stronger spring leafing of southern highbush (and Climax rabbiteye) cultivars. This in turn often, but not always, resulted in earlier ripening berries. Increased berry weight (size) a slight increase in total yield were also noted in some cases. Increased vegetative budbreak and earlier ripening from Dormex have been demonstrated under a range of environmental and climatic conditions during several seasons in Florida for the variety Misty .

What Rate do I Use?

The simple and correct answer is to follow the label directions which call for up to 1.5% (v/v) Dormex in 50 to 100 gallons of spray per acre using up to 0.5% (v/v) of one of the nonionic surfactants, Latron B1956 or Agri-Dex. Our research has shown that the number of vegetative budbreaks increased as Dormex spray concentration increased up to 4 % (v/v). However, Dormex spray concentrations above the recommended rate resulted in significant flower bud thinning in all experiments and reduced total yield. Dormex applied at 1.5 % (v/v) has consistently shown increased leafing and earlier fruit ripening without significant flower bud thinning. Dormex applied at 1.5 % (v/v) has actually increased total yields in some cases. This is probably a result of increased mean fruit fresh weight combined with minimal, if any, fruit thinning.

Effective spray timings. Again, follow the label directions which call for applications to be made 30 or more days before flowering. Based on our field experiments, applications of Dormex in Alachua County, Florida, during mid-December to early January have consistently increased vegetative budbreak and advanced fruit harvest dates of the responsive cultivars. During "normal" winters, differences within this time frame in Alachua County have not been significant. Late December in Alachua county is usually about 30 to 40 days before the beginning of flowering for most southern highbush cultivars grown there. Application of Dormex to plants that had received no chilling resulted in less efficacy and more flower bud injury emphasizing the importance of restricting application of Dormex to the dormant period when some chilling is likely to have occurred, but before flower bud swell has progressed past stage 2 (that is well before bud scales begin to separate). Delaying application until, or just prior to, the beginning of flowering (usually mid- to late January in Alachua County) has resulted in serious flower bud thinning and yield reduction.

What Cultivars Benefit From Dormex?

This is a very important question but one which we do not have enough data for to answer completely. Our field experiments, and the 1999 Florida E.U. P. Program, evaluated Dormex applied to the following cultivars - Misty , Climax , Gulf Coast , Star and Southmoon . No significant flower bud injury was observed for any of these cultivars when Dormex was applied at rates of between 1.0 and 2.0 % (v/v) to dormant plants during mid-December through early January in north-central Florida. In all cases vegetative budbreak and leafing were advanced and in most situations harvest date was advanced and berry quality was improved. However, that is not to say that all cultivars respond equally to treatment with Dormex. The cultivars which appear to respond best to Dormex application in terms of greater vegetative budbreak, and yield and fruit quality enhancement are those cultivars that are inherently weak foliage in the spring such as Misty .

The cultivar Sharpblue has shown a higher than usual sensitivity to Dormex resulting in flower bud injury and fruit thinning which has reduced yields. Sharpblue flowers tend to be more swollen and have slightly more open bud scales during the winter than other blueberry cultivars grown in Florida and this difference in development and flower bud structure may account for its increased sensitivity to Dormex. Furthermore, Sharpblue is naturally a relatively strong leafing cultivar. For these reasons, Dormex should not be applied to Sharpblue in Florida at this time.

In summary, the potential benefits from Dormex when used correctly include strong spring budbreak and vegetative growth, shorter fruit development periods with earlier harvest periods, increased average fruit weight (size), and slight increases in total yield. Some growers who participated in the Florida E.U.P. program indicated that they felt concentrated bloom and harvest periods, and shortened fruit development periods, obtained with Dormex could help with disease and insect control and potentially reduce the number of annual pesticide applications needed in Florida blueberries.

On the other hand, when applied incorrectly, Dormex can result in flower bud injury, excessive fruit thinning and yield reductions. Also, potential users should be aware that Dormex is classified as a restricted use pesticide. Extreme caution should be used when handling and applying this material and ALL LABEL DIRECTIONS SHOULD FOLLOWED EXACTLY.

Florida Pilot Blueberry Insurance Program

USDA has just this week - expanded its Pilot Blueberry Insurance Program into Florida. Coverage is now available to growers in Alachua and Highlands counties for this year's crop. Application can be made immediately, but there is a 10 day waiting period once an application is made before coverage begins. The final signing deadline is January 14th.

The policy covers berries against loss by: Any form of adverse weather; Fire; Plant disease (but not damage due to insufficient or improper application of disease control measures); Insects (but not damage due to insufficient or improper application of pest control measures); Insufficient number of chilling hours to effectively break dormancy; Failure of irrigation water supply, if caused by adverse weather or fire; Wildlife, unless control measures have been taken, but were ineffective.

Basic catastrophic (CAT) coverage will cost the grower just a flat \$60 fee for all acreage grown within a county. Optional coverage levels requiring additional premium - are available guaranteeing the grower between 50% and 75% of historic berry production. The policy provides a maximum coverage price per pound of \$2.10.

For more information regarding this program please contact Carden & Sprott Insurance of Winter Haven @ 888-296-7533.

BLUEBERRY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Blueberry Hill Nursery. Come by and see our plants or order and pick up in Salt Springs, Ocala, or Hawthorne. Call (352)685-2769 or (352)481-2736. Lic. No. 47217069.

Doc Applications, Inc. Gulfcoast, Sharpblue, Misty available in 1-gal. pots, or bare root. Liners also available. Call Dave Weber 941/325-8215. Lic. no. 47219637.

Elixson Wood Products, Inc. Pine bark - shredded, nuggets, or fines available. Ph (904)964-6649.

Island Grove Ag. Products. Don't buy plants until you've talked to us. We have all varieties including the new highbush releases from U of F. We will grow specifically for your needs. Contact Sheri Brothers or Ken Patterson at berrygirl629@aol.com or (352)481-5558. Lic. no. 47217870.

Inspection table, (10 x30) variable speed, wheels, like new, \$1000 (904)462-5635.

Av-Alarm electric bird scare device, \$50 (904) 462-5635.

Miller Blue Nursery. Rt. 3, Box 5700, Palatka, FL 32177, Telephone (904)325-7373. Let us supply your blueberry plants. All varieties. All sizes. Bare root and potted. Please call for prices. Lic. no. 04720531.

Mixon Family Farm, Inc. We have excellent quality blueberry plants for sale. We have Misty as well as all the newest releases from the University of Florida including Sapphire, Jewel, Star and Sante Fe. We will custom grow for your specific needs. Call Jerry Mixon (863)439-8335 for price and availability. License n0. 472255191

My Blue Heaven Blueberry Nursery. Southern highbush varieties. Centrally located in Dade City. Give us a call, we're happy to help. Lic. no. 47221916. Debra Troyer (352) 567-4256, 18414 Lawrence Rd., Dade City, FL 33523.

ADVERTISING INFORMATION

We welcome advertising from blueberry nurseries and suppliers. The cost is 30 cents per word per issue of the newsletter in which your message appears. Send your blueberry-related message and a check payable to **FLORIDA BLUEBERRY GROWERS' ASSOCIATION** to our address given below under membership information.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

To join or renew your membership to the Florida Blueberry Growers Association, mail a check payable to **FLORIDA BLUEBERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION** to our address: Florida Blueberry Growers Association, P.O. Box 141733, Gainesville, FL 32614

The Association annual dues depend on which membership category you fit best.

1. Regular Florida Member - \$10.00 per acre of blueberries, except a minimum of \$50.00 and a maximum of \$200.00.
2. Out-of -state member - \$50.00
3. Associate member - \$100.00 (Equipment and chemical companies, etc.)
4. Educational and Research - \$10.00 (University and USDA personnel who do not grow blueberries commercially)