

SUMMARY
U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council
Blueberry Promotion, Research and Information Order

Background

The North American Blueberry Council (NABC) submitted a proposal for a national promotion program for blueberries (the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council) on December 2, 1998. The program is implemented under the Commodity Promotion, Research and Information Act of 1996. The final rule implementing the order was published in the Federal Register on July 17, 2000.

Initial Referendum Results

Before the program could be implemented, it had to be approved by producers and importers. Approval was determined by a majority of producers and importers voting for approval who also represented a majority of the volume of blueberries represented in the referendum.

In order to be eligible to vote, a producer or importer must have produced or imported 2,000 pounds or more of cultivated blueberries during the period from January 1, 1999 to December 31, 1999 (representative period). The referendum was conducted by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service from March 13 through April 14, 2000.

Results of this referendum, announced on July 13, 2000, showed that 68% of those who voted favored implementation of the Blueberry Promotion, Research and Information Order. Those who voted in favor represented 73% of the volume of cultivated blueberries represented in the referendum.

As required every five years by the USDA, a continuation referendum on the USHBC was conducted in 2006 with the Council receiving a strong endorsement from the industry. Results from the 2006 referendum show that 87% of those who voted favored continuation of the order. Those who voted in favor represented 94% of the volume of cultivated blueberries represented in the referendum.

A second continuation referendum was conducted in 2011 with the Council again receiving a strong endorsement from the industry. Results from the 2011 referendum show that 88% of those who voted favored continuation of the order. Those who voted in favor represented 98% of the volume of cultivated blueberries represented in the referendum.

Assessments

The Order authorizes a fixed assessment to be paid by producers (collected by handlers) and importers (collected by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection) at a rate of \$12 per ton. Assessments are used to pay for: promotion, research, and information projects; administration, maintenance, and functioning of the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC); and expenses incurred by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in implementing and administering the Order, including referendum costs.

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U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

The sixteen member U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC) administers the program under the supervision of the Secretary of Agriculture. The USHBC is represented by one member and alternate from each of the following regions:

<u>Western</u>	<u>Midwest</u>	<u>Northeast</u>	<u>Southern</u>
Alaska	Illinois	Connecticut	Alabama
Arizona	Indiana	Delaware	Arkansas
California	Iowa	New York	Florida
Colorado	Kansas	Maine	Georgia
Hawaii	Kentucky	Maryland	Louisiana
Idaho	Michigan	Massachusetts	Mississippi
Montana	Minnesota	New Hampshire	North Carolina
Nevada	Missouri	New Jersey	Oklahoma
New Mexico	Nebraska	Pennsylvania	Puerto Rico
Oregon	North Dakota	Rhode Island	South Carolina
Utah	Ohio	Virginia	Tennessee
Washington	South Dakota	Vermont	Texas
Wyoming	Wisconsin	Washington D.C.	
		West Virginia	

There is also one member and alternate from each of the top six blueberry producing states. State representatives are currently seated from Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, North Carolina, and Georgia. Three importers and alternates, one exporter and alternate, one first handler and alternate, and one public member and alternate also serve on the USHBC. Producers are nominated directly by state commissions or producers. All other members are nominated by the USHBC.

The duties of the USHBC include the following: develop annual budgets; appoint members of the USHBC to serve on committees; develop and evaluate projects of promotion, research, and information, and pay the costs of such projects; collect assessments; receive, investigate, and report to the Secretary complaints of violations of the Order; recommend amendments to the Order; employ a staff to administer the program; prepare and submit to the Secretary financial reports; and cause the books of the USHBC to be audited. The Secretary oversees the activities of the USHBC. In addition, the USHBC recommends to the Secretary regulations to carry out the terms of the Order.

Subsequent Referenda

Every five years, the Secretary of Agriculture holds a referendum to determine whether producers and importers of cultivated blueberries favor the continuation of the Order. Continuation referendum took place in 2006 and 2011 with positive results and the next referendum is scheduled for 2016. The Order will continue if it is favored by a majority of producers and importers voting for approval who also represent a majority of the volume of blueberries represented in the referendum. In addition, the Secretary may hold a referendum at any time after the effective date of the program.

The Secretary will also conduct a referendum if 10 percent or more of all the eligible blueberry producers and importers request the Secretary to hold a referendum. In addition, the Secretary may hold a referendum at any time after the effective date of the program.

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