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- Eric T. Stafne

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# Mississippi *Vaccinium* Journal

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## Ch-ch-ch-changes

Things are always changing — our health, the weather, the blueberry industry and it sometimes seems like we are not in control of what is happening. To feel in control we must look ahead and be prepared. The intent of the Mississippi Blueberry Education Workshops is to do just that by showcasing speakers that have new insights and new inventions. This year we were fortunate to have Dr. Munoz from the University of Florida as well as Rod Cook from AgView Consulting come and discuss technologies that we may be able to benefit from. Can new cultivars provide a better option with southern high-bush? Can technological advances within the blueberry industry lead to far better fruit quality when fruit is machine harvested for the fresh market? I have a feeling the answers are yes to both of those. Recently more than 60 folks took advantage of their sage advice. You can get a glimpse of their discussions within this issue. Also, sign up for your Gulf South Blueberry Growers' Association membership, it's cheap! As we all know, time may change us but it helps us deal with it if we are prepared.

## Update on Chill Hour Accumulation

**Eric T. Stafne, Fruit Extension Specialist, MSU-ES**

It looks as if we have plenty of chill hours this year. In comparing to the last couple of years, we are similar to last year but well ahead of 2017. Therefore we should expect no issues related to lack of chill this year. As of this writing (January 29) in Poplarville we have accumulated 528 hours between 45F and 32 F and 609 hours below 45F total.

For those that have forgotten, the MSU chill hour app is available at [https://webapps.msucare.com/chill\\_hours/](https://webapps.msucare.com/chill_hours/)

This year we have also added a Growing Degree Days model to the app. It is still in “beta” mode so there may be bugs. Let us know if you use it and find something that doesn't work right.

## Help with a Survey on Harvest Mechanization

Eric T. Stafne, MSU-ES

If you grow blueberries in Mississippi then please contact me to complete a survey on blueberry mechanical harvesting for fresh markets. Some of you have already completed this survey that was handed out at the 2019 Mississippi Blueberry Education Workshop in January. If you did it there — Thank You! If not, but would like to fill out the survey contact me at:

Email: [eric.stafne@msstate.edu](mailto:eric.stafne@msstate.edu)

I will send the survey to you. By doing this our project can better identify the opportunities and obstacles that exist for mechanized harvest for fresh markets.

The survey is anonymous and has 25 questions. If you would like to help us out, please contact me ASAP. This survey is being done in several states around the county and I would like to see Mississippi well represented.



## 2019 Mississippi Blueberry Education Workshop

Eric T. Stafne, MSU-ES

On January 22 in Hattiesburg the annual Mississippi Blueberry Education Workshop was held. Several topics were covered in relation to blueberry production and other areas of interest. First up was Don Vanderwerken, president of the Gulf South Blueberry Growers' Association to give a warm welcome to the audience.



Britton Walker, Outreach Coordinator of the Outreach and Education for Mississippi Fruit and Vegetable Producers program at the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce gave the first talk of the day. MDAC is working with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Mississippi State University, and Alcorn State University Extension Services to provide outreach and education to Mississippi fruit and vegetable producers who will be impacted by the “Standards for the Growing, Harvesting, Packing and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption” (commonly referred to as the Produce Safety Rule). She covered how MDAC is doing inspections dealing with the new Produce Safety Rule and what that means for blueberry producers. If you need to contact her directly, her phone number is 601-359-1104 (office), 601-722-3192 (cell) or [britton@mdac.ms.gov](mailto:britton@mdac.ms.gov). On-Farm Readiness Reviews (OFRRs) are free, voluntary educational farm visits offered by MDAC and will begin mid May to early June, 2019.

The second speaker was Dr. Mary Helen Ferguson, an Associate Extension Agent of Horticulture with the LSU AgCenter. She is based in Livingston, LA. She is currently working with specialty crop producers in Louisiana, including blueberries. Her graduate work focused on *Xylella* in rabbiteye blueberries. She gave an update on the Louisiana blueberry industry — where the acreage is and what is trending there.

-Continued-



## Workshop, cont.

Eric T. Stafne, MSU-ES

Rod Cook, owner and president of Ag-View Consulting, a company that works within the general berry industry and with various governments providing a range of services from horticultural development to market analysis and strategic planning came all the way from the West Coast to address our producers. Rod has served the blueberry industry for many years, currently serving as the Chair of the Blueberry Technology Sub Committee which hosted the first Blueberry Technology Symposium in 2018 for the US Highbush Council. The title of his presentation was “Mechanization of Blueberry Harvest” which covered the challenges we face as small farmers in adapting/adopting high tech solutions.



During and after lunch, we were fortunate to have Andy Gipson who serves as the eighth Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce. As a farmer, lawyer, pastor and former State Representative, Andy works with everyone in Mississippi to promote, market and strengthen agriculture and commerce in the state. He has owned and managed a cattle operation in Simpson County for more than 20 years and a tree farm since 2004. He is a member of the Mississippi Cattlemen’s Association and the Simpson County Development Foundation. Commissioner Gipson is the President of the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture, which protects and promotes regional agriculture. His presentation focused on the positive aspects of Mississippi agriculture. His initiatives include new job development programs as well as the Genuine Mississippi program (<https://genuinems.com/>).



-Continued-

## Workshop, cont.

After Mr. Gipson came Dr. Patricio Munoz, an Assistant Professor of Blueberry Breeding and Genomics in the Horticultural Science Department at the University of Florida. His research interests include the development of high yielding, high quality, and better disease/pest resistance southern high bush blueberry cultivars and to explore the genetic variability of commercially important blueberry traits using traditional breeding tools and quantitative genetics, with the aim of increasing genetic gain in selection traits, and optimizing the generation of new cultivars. More information on his program can be found at [www.blueberrybreeding.com](http://www.blueberrybreeding.com) He focused on crisp-textured southern highbush cultivars that could be machine harvested. A few suggested southern highbush cultivars to try in our area are: Optimus, Patrecia, Keecrisp, Farthing, Endura, and Indigocrisp. While we don't know if any of these will be consistently successful, it may be worthwhile to try them on a small scale to observe how they respond to our environment.

I (Dr. Stafne) was the final speaker of the workshop. Since the entire workshop was part of a larger project, "Scale Neutral Harvest Aid System and Sensor Technologies to Improve Harvest Efficiency and Handling of Fresh Market Highbush Blueberries," funded in 2014 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crop Research Initiative program (project number 8080-21000-025-09-R), it made sense to talk about some of the results from that grant. Mr. Cook covered some of the research-based topics and I did the extension part, primarily results of a survey we did a couple years ago. Below is one table showing the reported machine harvesting of fresh market berries by state. The entire report can be found here: <https://journals.ashs.org/horttech/view/journals/horttech/28/1/article-p10.xml>



| Location                 | Producers that reported machine harvesting of fresh-market blueberry |            |            |            |      | Avg (sd)   | Production for fresh market (%) <sup>z</sup> | 2014 fresh-market price (\$/lb) <sup>x,y</sup> |
|--------------------------|--|------------|------------|------------|------|------------|--|--|
|                          | ≤10%   | 15% to 25% | 26% to 50% | 51% to 75% | ≥75% |            |  |  |
| Georgia                  | 20   | 11         | 9          | 28         | 33   | 54 (31.02) | 57   | 1.7  |
| North Carolina           | 11   | 11         | 22         | 33         | 22   | 52 (27.98) | 82   | 1.8  |
| Mississippi              | 50   | 7          | 14         | 21         | 7    | 32 (27.27) | 58   | 1.3  |
| British Columbia, Canada | 67   | 0          | 8          | 4          | 21   | 30 (32.92) | NA   | NA   |
| Michigan                 | 50   | 24         | 6          | 3          | 18   | 28 (29.81) | 48   | 1.9  |
| Washington               | 80   | 0          | 0          | 0          | 20   | 25 (33.56) | 33   | 1.8  |
| Oregon                   | 74   | 4          | 0          | 13         | 9    | 24 (27.4)  | 51   | 1.5  |
| Florida                  | 84   | 0          | 0          | 0          | 16   | 20 (27.89) | 99 <sup>y</sup>                              | 4.0  |
| Total average            | 56   | 8          | 6          | 12         | 19   | 33 (31.83) |  |  |

U.S. Department of Agriculture (2015); \$1.00/lb = \$2.2046/kg.  
Percent of processed and fresh production not reported in 2014 for Florida; used 2015 statistics from U.S. Department of Agriculture (2017).  
NA = not available

## Workshop Sponsors and Vendors

**Mississippi State Extension  
&  
Gulf South Blueberry Growers Association**

*Thank you to our vendors for their sponsorship and support for today's workshop.*



### Gulf South Blueberry Growers' Association Membership



**GULF SOUTH BLUEBERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION**

P.O. Box 88  
Poplarville, MS 39470  
gulfsouthblueberry@gmail.com

**Annual Membership Dues - \$10.00**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Farm Name & Address (If different from above): \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Acres Planted: \_\_\_\_\_

Age of Plants: \_\_\_ 1-2 yrs \_\_\_ 3-4 yrs \_\_\_ 5-6 yrs \_\_\_ over 6 yrs

\_\_\_ New Member 2019

\_\_\_ Renewing Member 2019

\_\_\_ Current Member (paid at Spring 2018 field day)

**~ Please complete and return this form at the end of today's workshop ~**



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## A Few Technological Sources

Eric T. Stafne, MSU-ES

Rod Cook put together this list of technology websites that may be worth looking into to get a glimpse of what is happening in the produce industry.

<https://producepay.com/en/> A financial firm that makes crop advances, offers 24 hour payment on confirmed shipments and/or acceptance by the customer, is developing a software sales desk to match buyers and sellers and is working on the development of a price expectation product (currently does work with a number of berry operations)

<https://www.indigoag.com> A firm that utilizes remote sensing and a large data base management system to do predictive analysis about crop predictions (currently focused on typical large scale ag/row crops)

<https://use.farmersbusinessnetwork.com> A firm that is sort of an Amazon for farm supplies like fertilizers, spray chemicals, etc. (currently works more in row crops than fruit)

[www.localizeyourfood.com](http://www.localizeyourfood.com) A “app” that helps the consumer find local produce (currently limited in areas that it operates but adding area)

<https://www.foodlogiq.com> A firm that offers integration with the entire food distribution network. This offers more comprehensive traceability, faster response time for recalls, etc. being pushed by some large fresh marketing firms

<https://hummingbirdtech.com/> A firm utilizing drones to detect crop stress, yield predictions, etc (currently operating in row crops)

<https://www.farmobile.com> <https://www.agrimatics.com> Both designed primarily for locating and managing row crop harvest equipment. Allows real time information on harvested weights, location, need for transportation, etc.