



## Blueberries are big, ripe and abundant right now

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**KALAMAZOO, MI --** Blueberry harvest in southwest Michigan is underway, and both fruit size and harvest volumes are great, Michigan **State University Extension** fruit educators report.

Frank Corrado, a grower of naturally grown blueberries, said that's what he's seeing, too. "After that terrible winter, who knew?" Corrado said. "It's a great year to do blueberries."

Corrado, who with his son, Joe, grows Joe's Blues line of natural blueberries, spoke Wednesday from the one of the former farms of Joe and Frank Kovach, Kalamazoo County fruit farmers who sold berries at roadside stands for years on M-43 west of Kalamazoo.

Kovach's granddaughters Amy Clark and Jody M. Lemmer have reopened one of the farms, on C.R. 388 between Kendall and Gobles, and are running the u-pick operation with help from the Corrados to manage the farm and covert it to "naturally grown" — without pesticides or chemicals.

Corrado said he and his son sell the Joe's Blues line of berries at markets and restaurants here and in Chicago. They recently got a small grant to work with other farmers interested in working toward organic production, beginning with natural practices that avoid chemicals.

BlueCrops, an early variety, "are coming in now big and juicy and tasty," Corrado said. Jerseys, a small, sweet variety, will be ready for harvest in a few weeks. Michigan grows more Jerseys than anything else, though most are sold for commercial use, he said

"Our whole point is to sell sweet varieties," he said, and to offer a picking experience for u-pick visitors that is pesticide-free and fun.

"We really try to make it an authentic experience. It's the real experience of going out in the field and creating fun. We want kids to have a good feeling about it," he said.

Both the Corrado's and the Kovachs' farms are open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week, he said. He advised **checking the website** to see what berry varieties are available at which locations. The Grand Junction farm at 360

60<sup>th</sup> St. opens tomorrow, July 16.

Here is the update from other Southwest Michigan crops, a weekly **report** by Michigan State University Extension fruit educators Mark Longstroth, Bill Shane and Brad Baughman.

### **Tree Fruit**

Soil moisture is adequate with good growth.

**Apricot** harvest is ending.

**Peaches** are growing rapidly. Early season peach varieties being harvested include PF-1, Earlystar, Desiree, and PF5D Big.

**Sweet cherry** harvest is winding down.

**Tart cherry** harvest is ending in SW Michigan.

**Japanese plum** harvest will start with Methly this week.

**Apples** are showing good sizing and shape development.

In **pears**, the crop potential is good.

### **Small fruit**

**Grapes** berries are at berry touch in Concord, Niagara, and some hybrids. Clusters are still open in vinifera and other hybrid wine grapes.

Blueberry hand harvest and machine harvest are underway. Bluecrop harvest began late last week. Fruit size for these first pickings was very large and harvest volumes are up.

Raspberry harvest is underway with both red and black raspberries.

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