



AS IT IS

## Climate Change Affects Maine's Blueberry Crops

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Maine's wild blueberry fields are home to one of the most important fruit crops in the northeastern United States. But scientists working with the University of Maine have found they are warming at a faster rate than the rest of the state.

The researchers say the blueberries may be at risk because the rising temperatures have brought a loss of water.

The scientists studied 40 years of data and found that the state experienced a 1.1 degrees Celsius increase in average temperature. But the blueberry fields experienced an increase of 1.3 degrees Celsius.

The team's findings appeared in a study earlier this year in the research journal *Water*.

Rafa Tasnim is an ecology and environmental science student at the University of Maine and the study's lead writer. She said the lack of water caused by the temperature difference could result in smaller crop sizes and blueberries that are less likely to survive.

"What we are expecting is the temperature is going to increase a lot and we will not get as much rainfall in the summertime especially," said Tasnim.

Maine is home to the only for-profit producers of wild blueberries in the U.S. The berries are smaller and have a slightly different flavor than other kinds of blueberries. Most of the crop is used to supply frozen fruit. Maine growers compete with those in eastern Canada which also produce the fruit.

The wild blueberry industry in Maine has been affected in recent years by unpredictable markets, as well as last year's lack of water. Farmers produced 21.5 million kilograms of Maine wild blueberries last year. That was the lowest number since 2004.

The researchers found that wild blueberry growers might need to change the way they farm to prepare for future climate change. That could include changes to watering methods and fertilizer use.

Eric Venturini is executive director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine. He says the industry is ready to make those changes.

Venturini added that the organization is working to find out how climate change is affecting the blueberry industry and looking for ways to deal with those changes.

The berries are widely used in processed food products. In recent years, Maine and its growers have worked to market the berries as a superfood – a food containing compounds considered helpful to a person's health.

The blueberries are also part of yearly agricultural events and the main **ingredient** of blueberry pie, the state's official **dessert**. And Maine's official berry is, not too surprisingly, the blueberry.

I'm Jonathan Evans.

*Patrick Whittle reported on this story for the Associated Press. Jonathan Evans adapted this story for Learning English. Bryan Lynn was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**ingredient** – *n.* one of the things used to make a food or product

**dessert** – *n.* a sweet food eaten after the main part of a meal

