



Ontario Highbush  
Blueberry Growers'  
Association

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## Berry Growers Seek New Organization

Ontario's two berry grower organizations are proposing to join forces and create one new organization. Ontario Berry Growers' Association and the Ontario Highbush Blueberry Growers' Association have received agreement from the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission (Commission) for conducting an expression of opinion vote among all eligible growers of blueberries, raspberries and strawberries in Ontario. "Berry Growers of Ontario" is the new name proposed.

"We're planning **Berry Growers of Ontario** in order to help us growers earn better returns" explains Jenn VanDeVelde, a berry grower and current director of the OBGGA. Jenn emphasized why the new organization is needed now: "There are so many issues facing growers today that require a strengthened organization to effectively address on growers' behalf." "The new organization will give us the structure and authorities we need to better serve growers," stated Steve Kustermans, a blueberry grower and current chairperson for the Ontario Highbush Blueberry Growers' Association. "A unified voice for all berry growers will enable us to better get government's attention and resources to support our sector." The new organization is not seeking any authorities related to pricing or control of supply. It will be directing its efforts towards marketing and promotion, research and grower advocacy. "Our budget will be lean and modest," commented Jenn, "and will ensure that growers of each crop receive a fair allocation of resources towards that crop leading to more research, promotion and crop protection for every crop that we represent."

The proposed board of directors of nine will be comprised of three growers of each of the three crops. If growers vote in support of the proposal and subsequently the establishment of a new board is supported by the Commission and ultimately the Ontario Government, one of the key differences between **Berry Growers of Ontario** and the two existing organizations is that membership in the new organization will be mandatory rather than voluntary. Mandatory membership means that every grower of two or more acres of any combination of the three crops will be required to pay membership fees each year based on the number of bearing acres in production. This structure provides a fair and transparent way to fund the activities of the organization. The Commission expects to conduct the vote in late October and early November. Producers must be entered in the Commission's database in order to receive a mailed ballot. Growers that do not currently belong to one of the two existing organizations need to inform the FPMC analyst, Laurinda Lang, right away so that they receive a ballot. Laurinda can be reached during business hours by calling (519) 826-3242. More information is available in the growers and members section of the OBGGA website at <http://ontarioberries.com/site/growers-and-members.html> For more information please contact:

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