

From Wild Berries to Superfood Stardom: The Blueberry's Global Rise

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For thousands of years, Native Americans enjoyed blueberries as part of their everyday lives. Thanks to their natural shelf life, blueberries were an important food source, eaten fresh during the season and dried for later use. Beyond food, almost every part of the plant had a purpose: roots, stems, leaves, flowers, and fruit were used in medicinal remedies, while boiled blueberries provided dye for fabrics, textiles, and even body paint.



When European colonisers arrived, they quickly took a liking to blueberries. However, it took several centuries before blueberries were grown commercially. That changed thanks to USDA botanist Frank Coville, who discovered that *Vaccinium* species thrive in very acidic soil. Cranberry farmer Elizabeth White read Coville's work and immediately saw the potential, offering land on her farm for research and trials. Their collaboration paid off, and by 1912, the first cultivated blueberry crop was grown, and in 1916, the first commercial harvest was sold.

Even then, blueberries didn't instantly become a household favourite. It wasn't until around 2008, when researchers began calling blueberries a "superfood" due to their exceptionally high antioxidant levels, that demand really took off. In 2008, Americans ate less than one pound of blueberries per person. By 2021, that number had jumped to more than 2.5 pounds, and it's still rising.

Back in Australia, interest in growing blueberries began in the late 1970s. Early growers faced plenty of challenges, from sourcing suitable plants to battling local pests and diseases. On top of that, most Australians had never even seen a blueberry. In 1976, when Ridley Bell brought 12 trays of fresh blueberries to the Footscray Markets, traders had no idea what the fruit was or how to actually eat it!

Pioneers Margaret and John Tucker helped change that by hosting what is believed to be the first meeting of the Blueberry Growers Association at their Victorian home in March 1978. Fellow grower Karel Kroon contributed a guiding motto for the Association: 'Education (including providing recipes and helping consumers understand the fruit), Quality, and Flavour'. You could argue that this is just as relevant nearly half a century later.

To read more about the first 40 years of the Australian Blueberry Growers Association history, visit the Berry Industry Resource Library at bit.ly/BA-RL and search 'ABGA'



Australian blueberry consumption grew slowly at first, then picked up speed in the early 2000's, mirroring trends in the US and around the world. Today, the average Australian enjoys about 980 grams of blueberries each year, according to the Horticulture Statistics Handbook 2024/25.

The latest 12 months of data available through the Hort IQ platform, funded by Hort Innovation using multi-industry strategic levies and contributions from the Australian Government, shows the berry category is now consumed at least 2-3 times per week by 54% of households, and this is only topped by bananas (72%) and apples (66%).

The global growth shows no signs of slowing. A recent Rabobank report suggests blueberry production will continue to expand and diversify. While top markets are consuming more, there's still plenty of room for growth as blueberries reach new households in new markets.

Major exporters such as Peru, Morocco, Chile, and Canada continue to increase production. Mexico is facing rising cost pressures, while Europe is grappling with labour shortages and regulatory challenges. Australian growers are also looking outward, with export access to Vietnam granted in late 2025. Until now, most Australian blueberries have been exported to Hong Kong.

According to the International Blueberry Organisation, Africa is set to play a bigger role in the global supply chain. Zimbabwe, for example, has increased production from 0 to 7,000 metric tonnes in just 10 years. Its Southern Hemisphere season harvest gives it a valuable window to supply markets ahead of many Northern Hemisphere producers.

Around the world, blueberry consumption keeps climbing. In 2010, the BBC reported that blueberries had overtaken raspberries in popularity in the UK. Demand is strong in major European countries like the Netherlands and Germany, and continues to grow in places such as China and Thailand. Still, the United States remains the world's biggest blueberry fan.

So, what makes blueberries such a success? A winning combination of snacking convenience, health benefits, smart marketing, long shelf life, and great taste certainly helps. New varieties are constantly being developed, and global trade means blueberries are available almost year-round, keeping them top of mind for consumers.

To ensure their continued success in our domestic market, though, it's essential that blueberries not only build year-round availability but also deliver consistently excellent eating quality, value for money and shelf life. After all, even a superfood has to taste good.

Making sense of market data: what's available to berry growers and why it matters

Australian berry growers have access to more market intelligence than ever before. From consumer purchasing behaviour to export flows and domestic production trends, these data sets help growers make better decisions about what to grow, where to sell, and how to position their fruit in an increasingly competitive market.

Understanding how each source fits together is key.

Consumer insights: understanding demand through Hort IQ

Hort IQ, delivered by Hort Innovation, brings together national consumer and retail data into a single, easy-to-use platform. It provides insights into the Australian retail landscape, the drivers of fruit and vegetable purchasing decisions, how buying habits are changing, and how consumers perceive different products.

For berry growers, this type of data is especially valuable when planning varietal changes, packaging formats, branding, or promotions. Knowing why consumers choose berries – whether it's health, convenience, price, or provenance – allows growers and marketers to align production and marketing decisions with real demand, not assumptions.

Access is available to eligible people engaged in growing, marketing, selling, and developing Australian horticulture via the Hort IQ portal.

Find out more at www.hortiq.com.au

Hort IQ is funded by Hort Innovation using multi-industry strategic levies and contributions from the Australian Government.



Export intelligence: global and weekly trade data for berries

Global export data for berries is sourced from Global Trade Atlas (GTA), a market-leading system that draws on official import and export statistics from countries worldwide.

The data is updated dynamically in the Export Hub and allows trade to be examined at a detailed HS code level, giving growers and exporters a clear view of global trade flows, competitor activity, market price trends and emerging markets



Please join the Berries Australia Export Group at <https://berries.net.au/home/export> to receive email updates on trade-related issues and access to the Export Hub on the Berries Australia website. Joining the Export Group is only open to Australian berry growers, and the service is free.

It is important to note that not all berry commodities have technical market access to every destination shown in trade dashboards. Growers and exporters should always cross-check access conditions using Manual of Importing Country Requirements (MICOR) found at <https://micor.agriculture.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

This data has been made available using funds from the Hort Innovation Strawberry, Raspberry & Blackberry and Blueberry Funds with contributions from the Australian Government.

Domestic production & market context: the Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook



The Australian Horticulture Statistics Handbook for the year ending 30 June 2025 is now available at bit.ly/HSH-24-25 and has been produced under the multi-industry levy investment project 'Horticultural Statistics Handbook 2024-27 (MT24019)'.

For berry growers, the Handbook provides valuable context on production volumes, farm-gate and wholesale values, state and territory shares of production, and domestic versus export market balance.

Available as an interactive online dashboard, mobile-friendly format, and PDF, it allows growers to benchmark their sector, track long-term trends, and understand how berries sit within the broader horticulture landscape.

Taken together, these data sources give berry growers a clearer line of sight from paddock to plate – and beyond Australia's borders. Consumer data explains *why* berries are bought, trade data shows *where* opportunities exist globally, and production statistics provide the foundation for assessing supply, value, and competitiveness.

Used well, market data supports smarter investment, reduces risk, strengthens export planning, and helps ensure the berry industry remains responsive to both domestic and international market signals.



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