

A Message From the USHBC Chair

Dear industry members,

As chair of the USHBC, I want to personally acknowledge the concerns that I'm hearing regarding the exploratory conversations we're having around an assessment increase. I have appreciated all the calls, conversations and feedback that I've been receiving from many of you who recognize that something needs to be done, but I hear the concern particularly with the amount. As a grower, I also understand the immense challenges we are facing—rising costs, stagnant prices and razor-thin margins. These pressures are real. As a fresh and processed grower myself, my family and I know firsthand the struggles we're facing and the fear of continued low pricing.

The reality is that our industry is at a critical juncture. Blueberry production continues to increase—both here in the U.S. and globally—while demand is not keeping pace. Without proactive steps to grow consumer demand, we risk an oversupplied market that will continue to drive prices even lower. Industry leadership asked USHBC staff to research the situation closely and to identify viable ways to respond.

The USHBC also appointed an Assessment Steering Committee of growers to study the findings and consider what an assessment increase could accomplish by funding supercharged marketing efforts to ensure that blueberries remain competitive in an increasingly crowded produce aisle. We then instructed staff to work with the council's state and regional grower representatives to host regional meetings to share the analysis and committee recommendation, and to address questions and concerns.

Again, we know this is a very significant decision and we are not taking it lightly. We've heard the concerns, specifically about the proposed amount of the increase. Therefore, I will be asking the Assessment Steering Committee to reconsider its current recommendation of \$.015 for frozen and \$.025 for fresh, and deliberate further based on the feedback we're getting from the listening sessions with our growers.

Now is the time for growers to step up and commit to an assessment level that is both realistic and sustainable. We need your input: What level of assessment can you afford, while ensuring we have the necessary resources to grow demand? If we do nothing, we risk continued price declines. If we act together, we can strengthen our market position and secure a better future for all growers.

We are listening, and we are committed to working alongside you to find a solution that reflects the needs of growers across all sectors. I recognize that it can be difficult to gather all the facts, that's why I'm asking staff to launch a webpage with the most accurate and up-to-date

information on the process and progress of this exploratory effort. Please reach out if you have more questions or need additional details, and to share your perspective and be part of this decision. Your voice matters, and now is the time to make it heard.

Thank you for your dedication to this industry. Together, we can chart a path forward that protects our livelihoods and strengthens the future of blueberries.

Sincerely,

Bryan S. Sakuma

Chair, U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council