

Progress Report

Evaluating Primocane and Floricane blackberry Varieties for Hardiness in Louisiana and Mississippi

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Public Abstract:

Blackberries are a popular and widely grown fruit crop in the United States. In 2017, the total value of U.S. Blackberry production was estimated at \$31 million U.S. dollars (AMRC, 2019). While Oregon is the predominant U.S. state growing cultivated blackberries, blackberry production also occurs in the southeastern United States. In particular, in Louisiana and Mississippi, this crop is popular for smaller fruit and vegetable operations and hobbyist growers. In 2017, Louisiana blackberries were produced on 112 farms covering 110 acres, resulting in a gross farm value of \$2,364,050 (Louisiana Ag Summary 2017). Production numbers were very similar in Mississippi where blackberries were produced on 129 farms totaling 109 acres in production (USDA NASS, 2017). GFV was not reported for Mississippi blackberries. Although production in these two deep south states is limited, producers and enthusiasts continue to have questions on variety performance in our environment where temperatures and humidity are high and rainfall excessive at times. Therefore, Louisiana State University Agriculture Center (LSU AgCenter) and Mississippi State University – Extension (MSU) collaborated to establish blackberry plots for small-scale trials in each state. In 2019, two sites in Louisiana and one site in Mississippi were planted. Because the plants occurred in the fall of 2019, data collection will begin in spring 2020.

Introduction

Until installation of this project, University led blackberry production trials were non-existent in Louisiana. In Mississippi, Dr. Eric Stafne was and continues to conduct research trials in blackberry production systems. The lack of trials and demonstration sites in Louisiana presents a problem when a commercial producer requests state specific information. Therefore, the short-term objective of this proposal was to plant blackberry demonstration sites in both north and south Louisiana and at the Beaumont Horticultural Unit in southern Mississippi to showcase several varieties of primocane and floricane blackberries recommended for planting in other southeastern states. The long-term goals of this project are to continue to monitor these sites for plant vigor, disease and insect incidence and estimated yields. It is the intention of the PI's to use these demonstration sites in local field days with county agents, commercial producers and avid home gardeners.

Methods

Five blackberries varieties (Prime Ark Traveler, Prime Ark Freedom, Osage, Ouachita and Natchez were planted at three sites in early November 2019. The two Louisiana sites included the Macon Ridge Research Station in Winnsboro located in the northeastern portion of the state and the Hill Farm Teaching Facility in Baton Rouge located on LSU's main campus in the southern portion of the state. The

third site was in southern Mississippi at the Beaumont Horticulture Unit in Beaumont, Mississippi. Because the blackberry plants were ordered from several nurseries, it took some time for them all to arrive at LSU. Therefore, they were potted into 1-gallon pots using a commercial media and maintained on a canyad under automatic irrigation until planting in the field. The plants that arrived earliest had tremendous growth so they were pruned back to match those that arrived immediately before planting in the field. The last variety to arrive was already planted in 1-gallon containers. Five plants of each variety were planted at each site on 5-foot centers. A trellis system was installed at each site with a double wire. Drip irrigation was also installed at each site. All three sites were mulched with pine straw for weed control. In the spring of 2020, we will begin plant growth measurements.

Louisiana producers were invited to the Hill Farm Teaching Facility on December 18, 2019 for the annual fruit and vegetable grower's field day where they were able to see the newly planted trial. Because we did not have data on these plants, the trial was not a large focus of the event. The next fruit and vegetable growers field day scheduled in Mississippi is in early June, where Christine Coker will include information on the first spring's growth of the blackberries planted at the Beaumont Horticulture Unit.

Results

As data has not yet begun, we have simply included a photo of the Macon Ridge blackberry trial. The other two trials were planted in a single row. To date all plants are thriving at each site.





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