



# News Release

For immediate release

## GOVERNMENT OF CANADA INVESTS IN B.C. BLUEBERRY SECTOR

**SURREY, British Columbia, August 18, 2008** – The Government of Canada is providing \$185,000 in funding to the B.C. Blueberry Council for three projects that will help ensure a profitable future for British Columbia’s blueberry growers. The announcement was made today by Nina Grewal, Member of Parliament for Fleetwood-Port Kells on behalf of Federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz.

“Canadian blueberries are enjoyed around the world thanks to the hard work and expertise of our growers,” said MP Grewal. “The Government of Canada is committed to the long-term viability of the blueberry industry and is working with farmers to find innovative and sustainable initiatives.”

The funding will support two research projects that will help growers prevent the introduction and spread of blueberry diseases that damage plants and reduce productivity. They will also help develop an industry-wide approach to managing these diseases.

Funding is also being provided for the development of the B.C. Blueberry Industry Strategic Plan to set priorities and direction for B.C.’s blueberry sector.

According to Will Van Baalen, Executive Director of the B.C. Blueberry Council, today’s announcement is both timely and appreciated. “Without this support, many of our research projects and other initiatives would go undone,” says Van Baalen. “These funds will contribute to the provision of valuable information that will help keep the blueberry industry profitable and viable now and into the future.”

The province is the second largest producer of cultivated blueberries in North America, with an estimated production of more than 33 million kilograms in 2007.

Funding for these initiatives is provided through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food (ACAAF) program, and delivered by the Investment Agriculture Foundation (IAF) of B.C. The IAF is a not-for-profit organization that manages and distributes federal and provincial funds in support of innovative projects to benefit the agriculture and agri-food industries in B.C.

For more information on ACAAF, please visit [www.agr.gc.ca/acaaf](http://www.agr.gc.ca/acaaf). To learn more about the Investment Agriculture Foundation and the funding programs it administers, please visit [www.iafbc.com](http://www.iafbc.com).



-2-

For more information, media may contact:

**Media Relations**

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario

**613-759-7972**

**1-866-345-7972**

**Margaux Stastny**

Press Secretary

The Office of the Honourable Gerry Ritz

**613-759-1059**

**Gayle Farrell**

Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C.

**604-731-9912**



## **Backgrounder**

### **Development of Improved Strategies for Highbush Blueberry Disease Management**

This project will receive \$145,000 to improve the disease management strategies for the blueberry industry and assist growers in preventing the introduction and spread of disease.

The viruses addressed in this project have the potential to impact all blueberry growers. Approximately one-third of B.C. growers will participate in the testing programs, and the disease management information and recommendations gathered for this project will be made available to the entire industry.

Improving the ability to test for, and distinguish between the diseases, is crucial. This project will focus on improving the tools for disease diagnosis including: developing a testing mechanism for all known strains of scorch virus; establishing the optimal timing for virus testing; and developing a molecular test for blueberry premature fruit drop.

### **Development and Management of Bacterial Blight on Highbush Blueberry**

This project will receive \$20,000 to examine the factors that fuel the development of bacterial leaf blight, twig blight and stem canker on highbush blueberries. Bacterial blight can cause significant, economic damage in new plantings.

Factors such as environment, plant damage, age of plant and grower practices will be measured and monitored and various treatments will be tested.

Bacterial blight is present in virtually all fields and all growers will benefit from a better understanding of the disease's development. Using improved management options to combat bacterial blight will also lead to higher quality blueberries for processors and packers.

### **Development of the B.C. Blueberry Industry Strategic Plan**

This project will receive \$20,000 to develop a strategic plan to set priorities and direction for B.C.'s blueberry sector, including objectives for research, education for growers, and blueberry promotion. Consultation with industry will figure prominently in the planning process.

Federal funding for these projects is being provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food program through the Investment Agriculture Foundation of B.C.