

Pining for a case of Jersey Blues

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Food Editor

Those who were sad to see the ending of New Jersey's blueberry season will be heartened by news that there is still plenty of homegrown blueberry flavor to be had. It just comes in forms other than fresh berries.

The blueberry iced tea Jersey Blues has been available in farm markets and Wegmans Food Market in West Windsor since its inception a year ago. A mixture of blueberry juice and tea, it will soon be available at most large grocery stores serving central New Jersey.

Jersey Blues is one of four products created as part of a Rutgers University program to increase consumption of blueberries. It's manufactured by Blueberry Health Inc., a company created by Rutgers to develop, test and sell the products.

If it's true that timing is everything, Jersey Blues is proof. The idea for Blueberry Health came in 1993 when Garden State blueberry farmers found the market was flat. Since then the discovery of blueberries' high antioxidant content and research indicating the fruit may improve vision and reduce the threat of some cancers and heart disease have enhanced its popularity. This, in turn, has propelled sales of the company's two completed products, the iced tea and Blueberry Solid Extract, a food supplement manufactured by the company Herbalist & Alchemist and sold in health food stores.

Of course, some people buy the products just because they like the taste of blueberries.

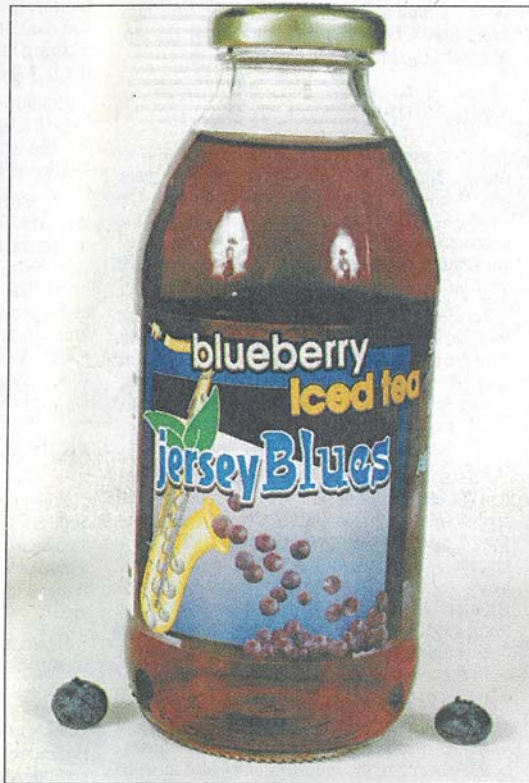
Two other products, a sports drink and a blueberry juice, didn't fare well in taste tests, although research continues as Rutgers works to add blueberry to the list of America's most familiar fruit juices: orange, apple and cranberry.

Beth Lambert of Herbalist & Alchemist, who is serving as managing director of Blueberry Health, said response to Jersey Blues has been positive.

"We've had great feedback on it," she said, with some customers calling to ask where they can buy it by the case.

While many are happy with the corn syrup-sweetened version now available, Rutgers is currently working on an unsweetened version to satisfy customer requests.

Lambert lauded the Rutgers project.



Staff photo by Frank Jacobs III

"It's wonderful to see all the resources at Rutgers used to help out a group of farmers who want to keep their land in farmland," she said.

Rutgers currently pays a bottler to create the tea, but is in the process of building a mini bottling plant for it.

Jersey Blues is sold primarily in New Jersey, with limited sales in Pennsylvania. It is sold at the following stores: Blueberry Hills Crafts, 11 Club House Road, Browns Mills; Pemberton Township Historic Trust, K-N-P Farms & Country Market, 132 Pemberton Road, and Piper Farms, 317 Magnolia Road, all of Pemberton; Bright Meadow View Farms, 25250 Mount Pleasant Road, Columbus; Wemrock Orchards, 300 Route 33 East, Freehold; Terhune Orchards,

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Herbalist & Alchemist Blueberry Solid Extract is sold at: Black Forest II, 553 Route 130, East Windsor; Princeton Health Foods, 1225 Route 206, Princeton Township; Gibson's Gym, 75 E. Washington Ave., Washington; Simply Natural, 1505 Parkway Ave., Ewing; and Best of Health, 335 Princeton-Hightstown Road, West Windsor.

330 Cold Soil Road, and Willis Greenhouse Corp., 1365 Lawrence Road, both of Lawrence; Pop's Farm, 238 Cranbury Station Road, Farmer Al's Market, 387 Route 522, and Hennessy's, 208A Vernon Road, all of Monroe; and Wegmans Food Market, 240 Nassau Park Blvd., West Windsor.