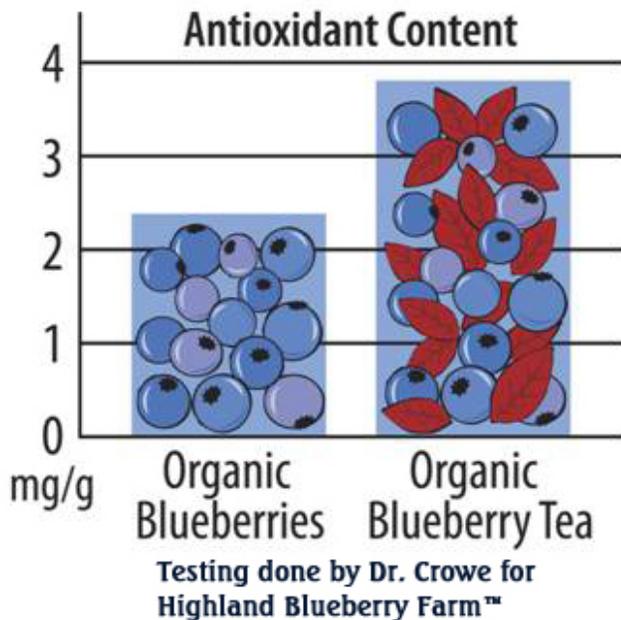


Innovations in blueberry product marketing

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Highland Organics® “A taste of wild Maine in every blueberry.”
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Together, Tom Gaffney and I have been stewards of Highland Blueberry Farm since 1989. We began transitioning our farm from conventional practices in 1999 and have been certified organic by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) since 2002. In that time, together with a community of family, friends, and wise advisors, we have been learning how to minimize what man has done to "cultivate" the plant and fruit, while maximizing what God has perfectly created. This principle has guided the care of the fields, the nurturing of pollinators, harvesting and processing, and the care of staff and customers. It is a work that we both have enjoyed.



As a part of Highland Blueberry Farm, Highland Organics® was privileged to introduce the first-ever organic whole plant *Wild Maine Blueberry Tea* in 2006. Our story began with a question: What value and purpose could the crimson-red blueberry leaves have? On a visit to the farm in 2004, Dr. Kristi Michele Crowe, then doctoral student at the University of Maine, Orono, Food Science and Human Nutrition Department, shared with us that she was looking for a project to do for the National Science Foundation program at a local high school chemistry class, Hampden Academy High School, Hampden, Maine. We posed this question to her and she thought it would make a great hands-on science project for the students. This would in turn benefit our farm with the research we needed to

answer this question. Dr. Crowe, teacher Bill Leathem, and students from the high school came to Highland Blueberry Farm, harvested the crimson red blueberry leaves by hand and returned to their lab with their samples. Together scientist, teacher & students, tested the blueberry leaves for anthocyanin levels. This is the first time that this type of research on low-bush wild Maine blueberry leaves had ever been done. To everyone's surprise, the anthocyanin count was higher in the blueberry leaves than they were in the organic blueberries that were tested from Highland Blueberry Farm!

What does this mean for you and me? Well, anthocyanins are also known as antioxidants. Antioxidants help to neutralize free radicals, which are unstable molecules that are linked to the development of a number of degenerative diseases and conditions including cancer, cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment, immune dysfunction, cataracts and macular degeneration. Fruits and vegetables are sources of natural antioxidants and among them blueberries have one of the highest levels of antioxidant activity.

Highland Blueberry Farm received 3 Maine Technology Institute Seed Grants for the research and development of the Organic Whole Plant Wild Maine Blueberry Tea. These grants have helped to develop equipment for harvesting and drying of the blueberry leaves. The first harvest begins in August with the harvest of the organic wild Maine blueberries and the second harvest takes place in September with the organic blueberry leaves, which is considered a waste by-product in the agricultural industry currently. This second harvest has given us the potential to become a year-round farm business, benefiting Maine with this first ever value-added product. The research phase of the grants allowed us the opportunity to work with many people and departments at the University of Maine, such as the Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition and the College of Engineers at the Advanced Manufacturing Center. Our product has undergone testing to determine optimum drying times for the blueberries and the blueberry leaves, while preserving antioxidants in both. In the past, young people from local communities would work with our family to harvest the blueberries. The second harvest of leaves would begin in the fall when the women from a residential discipleship program would come to the farm and harvest blueberry leaves, clean them and preparing them to be packaged with the dried blueberries into this first-ever whole plant blueberry tea. To see pictures and read more visit: <http://www.organicblueberrytea.com/pdfs/historyhighland.pdf>.

Highland Organics® is committed to utilizing earth-friendly packaging choices. As part of our efforts to minimally impact the environment, our unique Organic Whole Plant Wild Maine Blueberry Tea is sold in containers that we hope will encourage recycling/reusing among our customers. We have also begun switching our labels for our products over to the White Earthfirst labels which are offered by Lightning Label. These labels are made from corn and not petroleum. Our 1 oz. and 2 oz. tea tins, 1.5 oz. and 3 oz. barque labels have already made the switch! Soon all our labels will be Earthfirst.

We use Cellophane bags for packaging some of our gift sets which is a wood byproduct and is biodegradable and recyclable. All our shipping material used in packing product for mailing is packed with recycled materials that we use here on the farm. If it can be shredded or crumpled and it is clean and reusable, we use it. If we use packing peanuts, they are recycled ones that we have received from others or they are made with corn so that water will “melt” them away.

Along with our world famous Organic Whole Plant Blueberry Tea, we also offer our pureed and dehydrated organic blueberries as a snacking treat known as Organic Blueberry Barque. We just introduced to the market this year our organic blueberry barque in a glass sprinkle jar with a shaker top as our Organic Blueberry Sprinkles. We also have large steeping bags of the organic blueberry barque so folks can make a gallon container of our famous organic blueberry cold

drink which we sell at our farmers markets' in the summer, splashed with lemonade! This is a huge hit!

We became famous with our organic whole plant wild Maine blueberry tea as a premium loose leaf tea, but once our blueberry tea became available in tea bags that we hand fill at the farm, we really took off. Which is understandable since tea is the #1 drink in the WORLD! Couple that with being the only ones to offer a whole plant ORGANIC blueberry tea made with only 2 ingredients, and now we are just trying to keep up with the demand. In 2014, we began offering our blueberry tea bags with other flavors, such as our Organic Whole Plant Blueberry Tea and Organic Lemon Verbena; this tea bag makes an excellent cold tea. Our newest flavor, which has not been added to the website yet, is Organic Whole Plant Blueberry Tea, Organic Lemon and Organic Lavender. We started wild harvesting Chaga last year and we now add this to our Organic Whole Plant Blueberry Tea which makes a super antioxidant tea. We love what we do and our fun continues, as *we* continue to think outside our box!

