

Who to consult when planning for blueberry development

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The blueberry industry in the North Coast region of NSW continues to develop as a major emerging industry, with NSW producing 84% of Australia's production. The industry is intensive, high in value, a significant employer, and produces a quality product for the domestic and export market.

This factsheet aims to ensure the blueberry industry develops and operates in a sustainable, profitable and responsible manner by providing guidelines and contact information for potential blueberry producers.

Land Use Planning

Are you planning on developing blueberries and need to modify the land you are buying or own?

- Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) guide planning decisions for local government areas. Land use zoning and development controls identified in LEPs, allow councils and other consent authorities to manage the ways in which land is used.
- Land use zones and development controls will differ between councils so it is important that applicants contact their local councils before commencing an intensive plant agriculture development, to verify if development consent is required.
- Land use conflict between neighbouring landowners is a common occurrence. To reduce the possibility of conflict always attempt to maintain contact or notify them of your intentions. Refer to the Primefact *Precautions when buying rural land* for further information.

The current practice in the blueberry industry is to apply nutrients to plants via the irrigation system (fertigation). Water storage facilities of 2-3 mega litres per hectare are required to ensure adequate water is available to blueberries in dry seasons.

Water

Are you intending to build a dam or gain access to other water supplies for irrigation?

- Growers who want to put farm dams on their property are only able to have dams that can collect up to 10% of the runoff from minor streams. Dams that exceed these limits and pumps on streams require a licence.
- Activities within 40 metres of a river or creek such as riverbank erosion control, road construction and road crossing establishment are controlled activities under the *Water Management Act* and require approval from the NSW Office of Water. Approval may also be required for water supply works such as the construction of dams, bores and pumps.

Figure 1: Blueberry development



Image by Phillip Wilk

- For information on approvals for controlled activities within 40m of stream, water supply works and water licenses please contact the NSW Office of Water in Grafton on (02) 6641 6500, customer programs on 1800 353 104 or visit the water licensing page at www.water.nsw.gov.au.

Chemical, Sediment and Erosion Control

Chemical Application

- Farms using chemical irrigation must ensure that chemical runoff does not occur. Chemical runoff is to be collected and not have the potential to leave the site or enter waterways.

Sediment and erosion control

- When land is cleared ready for planting, appropriate and effective sediment and erosion control measures must be put in place and maintained to ensure no soil leaves the site. *Landcom Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils and Construction Volume 1 2004* and *Saving soil - A landholder's guide to preventing and repairing soil erosion* are good resources to use when determining appropriate sediment and erosion measures to prevent soil run off to storm water and waterways. Links to these guides can be found below under the section *More Information*.
- Once plants are established proactive measures such as maintaining healthy ground cover are still required to prevent soil runoff. A 1mm loss of topsoil over 1 hectare can result in over 14 tonnes of soil loss including crucial nutrients and organic matter.

Uncontrolled water movement through an orchard may remove valuable topsoil exposing plant roots to desiccation and/or may cause waterlogging leading to disease problems. A drainage management plan of the property needs to be drawn up to identify watercourses and drainage lines before any earthworks are undertaken.

Compliance information

- Soil and chemical runoff into waterways is considered an offence under the *Protection of Environment Operations Act 1997*. Fines of up to \$1 million with on the spot fines of \$4000 for an individual and \$8000 for a corporation can apply to the land owner

and/or operator. Local Councils can assist with information; contact Coffs Harbour City Council Environmental Health Unit on (02) 6648 4000 or Clarence Valley Council on (02) 6643 0200.

Figure 2: Established blueberry orchard



Image by Melinda Simpson

Vegetation

Are you planning on clearing native vegetation for blueberry development?

Awareness information

- If you are planning to clear any native vegetation you must comply with the *Native Vegetation Act*. North Coast Local Land Services (NCLLS) provides approval for the clearing of native vegetation.
- NCLLS also provides information on Native Vegetation Management as well as best practice advice and extension services relating to Horticulture and Natural Resource Management (NRM).
- For information on Native Vegetation Management please contact Senior Land Services Officer on (02) 6642 0633, for information on Horticulture contact Senior Land Services Officer (Sustainable Agriculture) on (02) 6653 9406 and for information on NRM contact Senior Land Services Officer on (02) 6659 9402.

Council preservation of vegetation controls

- Most councils have vegetation controls associated with specific land zoning under their individual Local Environmental Plans. For example, native vegetation on land zoned E2 – Environmental Conservation is generally protected and will require application to Council if vegetation is proposed for removal or modification.

Compliance information

- The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) administers *the Native Vegetation Act 2003* with the aim of preventing inappropriate broad scale clearing of native vegetation.
- For further inquiries, or to report suspected illegal clearing of native vegetation, please call OEH on 131 555 or visit the native vegetation page at www.environment.nsw.gov.au.
- For further enquiries regarding Council controls for Coffs Harbour Local Government Area contact a Biodiversity Officer on (02) 6648 4000 or for Clarence valley contact Councils ecologist on (02) 6643 0240.

Figure 3: Blueberry tunnel production



Image by Melinda Simpson

Pesticides

Spraying blueberry plantations for pests and disease

- The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) regulates the use of pesticides in New South Wales. The *Pesticide Act 1999* sets out requirements for lawful pesticide use in NSW.
- Pesticide use must not result in injury or damage to another property. Where blueberries are grown near residences or other sensitive locations there are high risks of pesticide drift, noise and dust which are particularly difficult to manage. For these reasons growers should avoid sites in close proximity to neighbours. Other requirements under the Pesticides Act include the need to complete accredited training and to read and follow the pesticide label directions.
- Chemical users should follow best practice and ensure that spray drift does not leave their premises. Before spraying pesticides farmers must identify sensitive areas around their farm and spray in conditions so the wind is blowing away from sensitive sites. It is

important to have a vegetated buffer strip between the areas sprayed and neighbouring properties or establish tree buffers at the time of planting out the orchard. Wind netting could also be used while buffer trees are establishing.

- For further information or to report an environmental incident, please call the EPA on 131 555.

More Information

Alt, S, Jenkins, A, Lines-Kelly, R (2009) Saving soil – A landholder's guide to preventing and repairing soil erosion, NSW DPI
<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/resources/soils/erosion/saving-soil>

Ireland, G, Wilk, P (2006) Blueberry production in northern NSW, NSW DPI Primefact 195
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/90356/Blueberry-production-in-northern-NSW.pdf

Kahler, M, (2011) Precautions when buying rural land, NSW DPI Primefact 1142
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/421996/Precautions-when-buying-rural-land.pdf

Landcom (2004) Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils and Construction Volume 1, Landcom
<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/water/BlueBookVol1.pdf>

Learmonth, R, Whitehead, R, Boyd, B, Fletcher, S (2007) Living and Working in Rural Areas – a handbook for managing land use conflict issues on the NSW North Coast, NSW DPI
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/234001/Living-and-working-in-rural-areas-complete.pdf

Wilk, P, Ireland, G (2006) Establishment and production costs for blueberries NSW DPI Primefact 133
<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/data/assests/pdf/0007/57238/Blueberry-establishment-and-production-costs.pdf>

Wilk, P, Ireland, G (2007) Current Best Management Practices for Blueberry Growers in Northern NSW, NSW DPI and Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/197190/Blueberry-soil-water-management-northern-NSW.pdf

Whitehead, R, Quinlan, K (2007) Living and Working with macadamias – answers to common questions, NSW DPI Primefact 257
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/

[0007/134539/living-and-working-with-macadamias.pdf](#)

Department of Primary Industry – Office of Water publications

Dams in NSW- do you need a licence? (2014)

<http://www.water.nsw.gov.au/Water-licensing/Basic-water-rights/Harvesting-runoff/Harvesting-runoff>

Dams in NSW- where can they be built without a licence? (2014)

<http://www.water.nsw.gov.au/Water-licensing/Basic-water-rights/Harvesting-runoff/Harvesting-runoff>

Dams in NSW- what size dam can you build without a licence? (2014)

<http://www.water.nsw.gov.au/Water-licensing/Basic-water-rights/Harvesting-runoff/Harvesting-runoff>

For updates go to

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/factsheets

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (March 2015). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

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