

Lesson: From Common Land to Commodity

Grade Level: 6-9

Time: 75-90 minutes

Essential Question

How did wild blueberries become one of Maine's most important agricultural commodities?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze primary sources to gather historical evidence.
- Explain how technology, law, research, and innovation shaped Maine's wild blueberry industry.
- Describe how the wild blueberry industry functions as an interconnected agricultural system.
- Use evidence from photographs, video, and informational text to explain how Maine's wild blueberry industry changed over time.

Materials

- **Reading:** [From Common Land to Commodity](#)
- **Handouts:** [Primary Source Note Sheets](#), [Primary Sources](#), [Maine Wild Blueberry Systems](#)
- **Video:** [Maine Wild Blueberry History](#)

Optional:

- [Recipe: Blueberry Smoothie](#)

Extension Activities

- Make blueberry smoothies with students and discuss technological innovations.
- [The Big Deal about Big Ag](#)- National Agriculture in the Classroom
- [Farm to Table and Beyond](#) - Resource National Agriculture in the Classroom

Background

Wild blueberries have been gathered in Maine for thousands of years. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new technologies, legal decisions, scientific research, and improved processing methods transformed them from a seasonal wild food into an internationally recognized agricultural commodity. Historians learn about these changes by examining primary sources such as photographs, advertisements, legal documents, and

artifacts. Today, Maine's wild blueberry industry continues to depend on an interconnected system involving farmers, researchers, processors, pollinators, consumers, and the natural environment.

Procedure

1. Engage (5 minutes)

Place primary source photographs and documents at stations around the room.

Students work in groups and record their observations on the Primary Source Investigation Sheet.

For each source they record:

- **Observe:** What do you see?
- **Infer:** What does this tell you?
- **Question:** What do you still wonder?
- **Connect:** Why is this important?

After students have visited each station, invite each group to share one observation, inference, or question with the class.

2. Explore (25 minutes)

Read **From Common Land to Commodity** independently or as a class.

As students read, have them highlight examples of:

- Legal changes
- Technological innovation
- Agricultural research
- Processing
- Marketing
- Human labor

Discuss:

- Why was the *Freeman v. Underwood* decision important?
- Which innovation had the greatest impact?
- Why wasn't one invention enough to build the wild blueberry industry?

3. Explain (20 minutes)

Watch the [Maine Wild Blueberry History](#) video.

As students watch, have them record examples of:

- Technology
- Innovation
- Research
- Processing
- Farming
- Marketing
- Pollination
- Challenges
- Changes over time

Pause occasionally to discuss:

- What problem was being solved?
- Why was this innovation important?
- How did this change the industry?

4. Elaborate (10–15 minutes)

Explain Agricultural Systems: An agricultural system is all of the people, natural resources, technology, and processes that work together to produce food, fiber, or other agricultural products.

Have students fill out the Wild Blueberry Food Systems worksheet.

5. Evaluate (5–10 minutes)

Have students answer the following exit question:

How did innovation shape Maine's wild blueberry industry?

Use evidence from:

- one primary source,
- the University of Maine video,
- and the reading

MLR Standards

Social Studies: A.1, B.1, B.2, C.1, D.1

Science: MS ESS3.1, MS LS2.1

ELA: R.1, R.2, R.7, R.11, W1, SL.1

