

PIONEERING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR BRODIS BLUEBERRIES AND MAINE'S WILD BLUEBERRY INDUSTRY

ABOUT BRODIS BLUEBERRIES. Brodis Blueberries is located in Hope, Maine, with 35 employees. Brodis has been selling blueberries for 150 years and has been owned and operated by seven generations of the Brodis family. The Brodis farm encompasses over 800 acres, 170 acres of which are blueberry fields. Gwen Brodis, owner of the farm, has been making jams since the early 1960s. Currently four generations of the Brodis family grow, harvest, pack, sell and manufacture blueberry products.

THE CHALLENGE. In the past twenty years the wholesale processors, to whom most wild blueberry growers sell their crop, have paid growers below the cost of growing the berries. As would be expected, the number of wild blueberry growers in Maine has declined significantly. In 2017, Brodis began aggressively building their fresh and frozen wild blueberry line, along with value-added products which include jams, sauces, muffins, and pies. Gwen Brodis' grandson also started a distillery on the farm that makes a wide variety of products, some 100% made from our wild blueberries and others with flavorings from them. Brodis' sales doubled yearly until 2022, when their current outdated equipment reached its maximum throughput. Brodis turned to Maine MEP, part of the MEP National Network™, for help.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. In 2023 Maine MEP and the University of Maine's AMC helped Brodis expand their facility and invest in over \$125,000 in new equipment. Brodis then became the first wild blueberry grower in Maine to integrate an optical sorter into our packing line. Because of the highly technical nature of the equipment, the company engaged Maine MEP and the University of Maine's Advanced Manufacturing Center to coach and guide them through the purchase and set up of the equipment.

"To say we could not have done this project to implement the United States' first optical sorter to be used on wild blueberries is an understatement. In fact, the technology was so far beyond my comprehension, that I only ordered the machine AFTER the Maine MEP and University of Maine's AMC team agreed to guide and support me through the process. To top it off, it took several new pieces of equipment to be specially configured for the optical sorter to function properly. Maine MEP and University staff and students supported me every step of the way in getting it done. The results were beyond my dreams, achieving four times the volume through the machine with about half the labor. It is likely that this could be a future game changer for wild blueberry growers throughout Maine."

-Ron Howard, Owner

RESULTS



400% increase in throughput



\$125,000 invested in pioneering technology



Utilizing technology to create a sustainable future for Maine farmers for generations to come.

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