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## Update on Formation of a USDA Research & Promotion Program for Processed Red Raspberries

Raspberry growers delivered an application to form the United States Red Raspberry Council (USRRC) to the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington, DC in late April, 2007. After many months of review the USDA published a proposed rule to create the USRRC in May, 2009. They received comments on the proposal through early June and are currently reviewing these comments. Most of the comments were very favorable and supportive of the proposal. We anticipate the USDA will administer a grower referendum on the establishment of the Raspberry Council later in 2009.

### Background

Washington raspberry growers currently cooperate to fund the Washington Red Raspberry Commission (WRRRC) which oversees research projects designed to help growers improve production and realize top quality berries. The WRRRC also funds some health based research on the nutraceutical properties of raspberries and helps to encourage new product development. The WRRRC has also led Fair Trade battles against foreign competitors who violated federal anti-dumping laws.

Raspberry marketing has been a part of the WRRRC work plan since it was organized in 1976. But changes in the worldwide market have presented challenges to our marketing strategy. It has been difficult for us to invest large sums in promotion when an increasingly large percentage of US berry consumption is supplied by imports. Over 45% of the frozen raspberries consumed in the US in 2006 came from offshore. We ask ourselves, "Why should we assess ourselves to build markets when our foreign competitors get the primary benefit?"

We sense that we need only to look towards the blueberry farmers for an answer to this dilemma. Washington's raspberry growers have nowhere near the marketing budgets of our strawberry and blueberry neighbors. Blueberry farmers around the nation set up the US Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC) in 2001 and the investment they were able to make in research and development has contributed to a large degree to record blueberry prices in recent years. The USHBC is an example of a USDA Research and Promotion Program (R & P).

The WRRRC is convinced that forming the US Red Raspberry Council will provide us the means to allow all raspberry growers to cooperate in marketing and also assess imported berries for funds to support our marketing efforts. Establishing an R & P program will require a grower referendum following extensive public hearings over the next months. Grower involvement and guidance is crucial to the establishment of the program. We urge you to research this issue and make your opinions known.

## Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Proposal

### ***Why do we need another organization to organize raspberry growers? Don't we have enough already?***

The Washington Red Raspberry Commission has provided a means for growers to cooperate on production research projects, plant breeding, promotional activities, health-based research, and public policy support for over 30 years. The Oregon Raspberry Blackberry Commission has provided similar services for Oregon growers. These Commissions have worked relatively well together but both are aware of numerous missed opportunities to build the long term health of the raspberry industry and that a significant percentage of the berries sold in the US are not making these same investments. The creation of a National Council under the USDA Research and Promotion program provides us an opportunity to:

1. Address new and changing opportunities to collectively build a strong future for raspberry markets
2. Formalize informal working relationships under a grower directed national Raspberry Council
3. Allow an opportunity for companies importing raspberries into the US to pay their fair share of the cost of building raspberry markets.

### ***What do we expect the Raspberry Council to do?***

The primary expectation of the US Raspberry Council will be to invest in research projects that help build a strong health message for raspberries. This has been the strategy many other ag crops, including blueberries and pomegranates, have used to make dramatic increases in consumption levels which in turn have provided a powerful uplift in process realized by growers.

### ***What will this cost me?***

Growers are undoubtedly familiar with the phrase "there ain't no Santa Claus". Nothing worthwhile comes without a cost. The proposed program anticipates a cap of 1 cent per pound assessment. The board will set the rate but it is anticipated that it will start at the maximum to make the needed research investments. This assessment will apply equally to domestic processed raspberries and to imported processed raspberries. It is fully expected that the 1 cent investment must return at least a 5 cent price strengthening. The performance of other Research and Promotion programs indicate this is a safe expectation.

### ***Who will be on the Board of Directors?***

The National Processed Raspberry Council will be composed of thirteen members and thirteen (13) alternate members, appointed by the US Secretary of Agriculture from nominations proposed by the following:

- Six processed raspberry producer members and alternate members from States producing a minimum of three million pounds (WA & OR);
- One processed raspberry producer member and alternate member representing all other States producing less than a three million pounds of raspberries (all other states);
- Three processed raspberry importer members and alternate members;
- Two foreign producers and their alternate members from countries exporting a minimum of three million pounds of raspberries for processing to the U.S. (currently Chile and Canada);
- One at-large member and an alternate recommended by the Council

### ***What are the Next Steps in the creation of the Raspberry Council?***

Comments on the proposed program were received through June 6, 2009 and were reviewed by USDA. They forwarded their recommendation to the Office of General Counsel (the attorneys for the federal government) for approval and we await their decision. The next step will be for USDA to publish a final proposal and move towards a referendum. Our best guess is that this will occur this fall.

***Who votes; How is it decided?***

Each eligible producer of raspberries for processing and eligible importer of processed raspberries is entitled to cast one ballot in the referendum. The Council will not be established unless the referendum is approved by a majority of producers and importers. Final determination of the establishment of the Council will be made by the US Secretary of Agriculture.

***What can I do to help this process along?***

It is best to begin preparing for an anticipated referendum this fall. Find out whatever you need to know about this proposal so you are comfortable it is moving in the right direction. If you have concerns voice them to the WRRRC and/or to the USDA. We need your help to make this Council the most effective possible for raspberry growers and others in the industry.

For More Information

A full copy of the Federal Register notice on the proposal is available at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-7981.pdf> or by contacting the WRRRC office. The procedures regarding the referendum are also published at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-8016.pdf>.

A good place to start learning about R & P programs is the USDA website located at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/rpb.html> . More information about the formation is also available at the WRRRC website ([www.red-raspberry.org](http://www.red-raspberry.org)). We'd benefit from hearing from everyone involved in berry production. Contact Tom Krugman, WRRRC Marketing Director, Henry Bierlink, WRRRC Executive Director, or a WRRRC board member for more information.

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