



## Maine blueberry growers on alert

Farmers cope with dry conditions

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
BDN STAFF

The sunny and arid Fourth of July weekend was ideal for backyard barbecues, picnics and trips to the beach. But for blueberries? Not so much.

The fruit that grows wild along the rocky barrens of Washington, Knox, Lincoln and Hancock counties is parched. A dry spring was good for honeybees, but not for the sweet, indigo berries synonymous with Maine summers.

“There is usually enough blueberries for pies by July 4,” David Yarborough, wild blueberry specialist at UMaine Cooperative Extension, said. This spring, at the school’s research farm in Jonesboro, less than 3 inches of rain fell each month in April, May and June. The deficit was more than an inch shy for lowbush blueberries to flourish. Located in crucial Washington County, home to 90 percent of the state’s blueberry production, the tally is a key yardstick.

“It’s only two-thirds of what we needed. Plants need moisture. It was good pollination weather this spring, but berries need moisture to develop and to fill out,” Yarborough said. “We will always have blueberries; the question is how many.”

As Maine’s blueberry farmers enter the high-stakes month of July, most growers are taking a wait-and-see attitude while keeping a sharp eye on the forecast.

“It’s been an abnormally dry year. Once you get into mid-June, you start ample moisture for plants to have maximum growth and berries to size up,” David Bell, general manager of one the state’s largest blueberry producers, Cherryfield Foods, said. “What’s needed is a good soaker.”



The company, with thousands of blueberry acres from Cherryfield to Machias, has an irrigation system, but “Mother Nature always does it best,” Bell said. Many of the 500 blueberry growers in the state can’t afford the pricey watering systems and rely on rain. The lack of precipitation this season “is far from ideal for folks without irrigation,” Bell said.

With rainstorms hitting multiple Maine counties over the weekend, some relief has come. Family run companies such as G.M. Allen & Son Inc. were ready.

“Anything can change very quickly,” Annie Allen, vice president of the small Orland-based producer, said. “I don’t think we are at a critical point yet. It’s more dormant here now. If we get this rain, we will be OK.”

Her brother Martin Allen is slightly more alarmed by what he’s seeing in the fields.

“It’s pretty scary. We have few blue ones, and they are very small. If this keeps on another week, we will be in big trouble,” he said.

Coming on the heels of two stellar years for blueberry growers, even if the dry spell persists, the industry should weather the storm.

According to the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, 2014 and 2015 were the second- and third-largest harvests on record. The

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Dale Cottrell (left) and son Seth Cottrell work together to bend pieces of wood for the frame of a boat recently at Cottrell Boatbuilding in Searsport.

## Carrying on the tradition

### Searsport family builds small wooden boats

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

A few generations ago, every coastal Maine town or village would have had at least one family that specialized in building small wooden boats, each with a slightly different style that would set their craft apart from the rest.

Those days, mostly, are long gone. But one Searsport family is working to keep the small boat-building tradition alive and thriving in a busy workshop on Mount Ephraim Road. Here, Dale Cottrell, 65, and his son Seth Cottrell, 39, of Cottrell Boatbuilding transform wooden boards into seaworthy, elegant small boats such as wherries, yacht tenders, dories and daysailers.

“Our style is attention to detail,” Seth Cottrell said as he fitted long strips of wood into the steam box that would soften them so they could be shaped into the frame of a boat. “We’ve really sort of found our niche. Coming to work every day, no day is the same. It’s a lot of fun.”

Dale Cottrell, who was carefully putting a coat of paint onto a 15-foot-long Penobscot wherry, said that he grew up on the New Jersey shore, where he and his friends were in the ocean all the time. In the early 1970s, he moved to Maine and started building fiberglass canoes in Hampden.

“It got crowded in Jersey,” he said with a smile.

In the mid-1980s, Dale Cot-



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Dale Cottrell paints a Penobscot wherry recently in his shop, Cottrell Boatbuilding, in Searsport.

trell designed and began to build the Puffin dinghy, a small fiberglass boat that was intended to be a sailboat tender but also was used by people seeking an inexpensive way to get into sailing. Back then, his company was called Winterport Boat Co., and it built and sold more than 300 fiberglass dinghies a year before Dale Cottrell decided to shift his focus from fiberglass to wooden boats.

“Wood is great,” Seth Cottrell said, adding that he enjoys working with wood more than fiberglass.

And they have found that enough other people prefer wood to make their business

viable. Using materials such as cedar, oak and marine plywood, they can build 10 or 12 small boats per year. Most of the boats take them about six to eight weeks from beginning to end, and they usually have a backlog of at least three to six boats.

“We’re busy year-round,” Lynn Cottrell, Dale Cottrell’s wife and Seth Cottrell’s mother, said of the family-owned business. “It’s a nice way to make a living and a nice way to carry on a tradition that’s just so Maine.”

On a hot late-June day, the shop was crowded with boats in various stages of completion, and it smelled richly of cedar and paint. On the lawn outside, a finished Chaisson dory — a rugged boat that rows and handles well — waited to be transported to a YMCA camp on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire.

Lynn Cottrell said that the camp official who originally got in touch told her it had been very challenging to find someone to build a small wooden boat.

The Cottrells said they are glad to fill that need.

“We build small boats because it doesn’t take quite so long, and two people can move them around,” Dale Cottrell said. “And we like the customer base, the people who buy them. Most of our customers become friends.”



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A Puffin dinghy sits outside the Cottrell Boatbuilding shop in Searsport recently.

## Suicide rate in 3 careers worrisome to social worker

CDC: Deaths highest in farming, fishing, forestry

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

Greg Marley has lived on the coast of Maine for 35 years, and in that time the licensed clinical social worker has seen a lot of sad things, including the death by suicide of too many of his hard-working neighbors.

“This is a field I’ve worked in for a long time,” Marley, the clinical director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness Maine, said recently. “I know fishermen, I know foresters, I certainly know people in the construction industry who have died by suicide.”

That’s why a recent report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the suicide rates among people working in different occupations wasn’t surprising to the social worker, who’s part of the Maine Suicide Prevention Program. In the CDC’s weekly morbidity and mortality report on July 1, the agency found that people working in the farming, fishing and forestry fields had the highest rate of suicide overall, with 84.5 deaths by suicide among 100,000 people. The second-highest suicide rate was found among people who work in the field of construction and extraction, with 53.3 deaths by suicide per 100,000 people.

In sharp contrast, the lowest suicide rate was found in the education, training and library occupational group, with 7.5 deaths by suicide per 100,000 people — more than a tenfold decrease from the farming, fishing and forestry group.

“The study is interesting, and it’s useful,” Marley said. “But for me, heavily steeped in this field, I found little of surprise. It does tell me that, hey, maybe we need to do better or more active outreach in those areas.”

The CDC’s suicide rate report used data provided by 17 states in 2012. Maine wasn’t one of those states, because the state didn’t start participating in the CDC’s National Violent Death Reporting System until 2014. Still, Maine has some commonalities with some of the states that were included in the report, Marley said, especially Alaska, Oregon, Colorado, Wisconsin and North Carolina. Those are all places with a large rural population and where many farmers, fishermen or lumbermen work. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Maine is the most rural state.

Suicide is an important topic in Maine, where the suicide rate of people ages 10 and older is higher than the overall rate in the nation — 17.7 suicide deaths per 100,000 people in Maine compared with 14.6 deaths per 100,000 nationwide. Suicide also is the second leading cause of death among Mainers ages 15 to 34, and the fourth leading cause of death among Mainers ages 35 to 54. Men in Maine are four times more likely to die by suicide than women are, with firearms the most common suicide method used by men.

For the Pine Tree State, which has a rich and storied tradition of people — mostly men — working on the farm, on fishing boats and in the forests, the new study may highlight some old problems.

“I think there are a number of factors operating here,” Emily Haigh, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Maine, said. “Farmers, fishermen and foresters — they are largely male-dominated professions, and we know that males are more likely to complete suicide. Farmers,

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## Volunteers help put ‘home’ in homecoming for Maine combat veteran

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE  
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It’s a high-rent district, not far from the beach. Come August, Army veteran Waylon Holbrook and his family of four will move into the neighborhood, residing in a brand new home in this serene, leafy section of Kennebunkport.

“This is a great opportunity,” said Holbrook, who fought in Operation Iraqi Freedom and suffered injuries from roadside bombs. The nonstop, “day after day” combat took a toll on the 37-year-old, who returned from the war in 2005 with headaches,

backaches, a lame foot and seasonal affective disorder. Living in an apartment in an old, drafty farmhouse in Saco for years didn’t help his situation.

When Habitat for Humanity of York County announced it was seeking applicants for its first home for a veteran, the father of two young sons wasted little time.

“A lot of veterans come back and have struggles. But this is not a hand-out; it’s a hand up. It helps people become homeowners, and they don’t set them up to fail,” said Holbrook, who grew up in nearby Cape Porpoise and

lived in Massachusetts, Texas and Rhode Island.

Habitat selects families based on their living conditions and willingness to offer sweat equity. Chosen from a pool of 20, Holbrook and his wife, Nicole, agreed to put in 400 hours working on his home and other Habitat projects. The couple is buying their home through an interest-free mortgage.

“It has been an honor to have the opportunity to partner with a veteran who has given so much to our country and who continues to work so hard for his family,” Amy Nucci, executive director

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Army veteran Waylon Holbrook stands outside his new home being built by Habitat for Humanity.