

COGDELL BERRY FARM

RUSS

Nine hundred forty-three thousand six hundred and sixty, nine hundred forty-three thousand six hundred and sixty-one, nine hundred and forty-three thousand six hundred and sixty-two...

JOY

Russ, Russ. Are the Fast Forward folks coming the seventeenth, eighteenth, or nineteenth?

RUSS

No, they're coming the eleventh.

JOY

Okay.

RUSS

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.

VO

Today Fast Forward is at Cogdell Berry Farm; a family farming operation that grows – you guessed it – berries! Blueberries that is! But before we get started, let's get to the important stuff. What's the best way to eat blueberries?

RUSS

We've got fresh blueberries. We got blueberry smoothies, blueberry pie.

JOY

Blueberry crunch cake. We make blueberry cobbler.

JOHNNY

Blueberries are good in pancakes.

RUSS

Blueberry syrup.

JOHNNY

They're good in muffins.

RUSS

Blueberry jelly. We've got blueberry cider.

VO

And the best way?

ALLENA

I like to freeze them and then eat them in the wintertime because it's like a blueberry Popsicle but it's like a for real blueberry Popsicle.

VO

So when it comes to eating blueberries, there are a lot of...berriations?

Speaking of which, you don't happen to have any of that pie you were talking about, do you?

ALLENA

Well I'm not a cook, but I might can find someone to make you one.

VO

Now this is my kind of job! So let's find out a little more about this place. Johnny?

JOHNNY

Our farm has been in existence from 1913. We started planting berries in 2000, and we have over 500 acres in production now.

RUSS

Blueberries became more popular over the last 15 years. There's been more and more emphasis placed on the antioxidants and the health benefits of blueberries.

VO

And those antioxidants you mentioned, things like beta-carotene and ascorbic acid, remove chemicals that are harmful to a cell, slowing down cell damage, aging, and even helping prevent some forms of cancer.

But before customers get to enjoy all those healthy benefits, the blueberries have to go through a few steps, like making it to the stores, for example. So exactly how do all of those blueberries get from the plot to the produce isle?

RUSS

The blueberry is picked off the vine. It's placed into a one-gallon bucket. It's carried to a refrigerated truck where it's stacked onto lugs. And then we carry it to the packing shed and it's gone across the packing line where it's graded, and it's packed into a clamshell, stacked on a pallet and shipped to a distribution center and on it's way to your local grocery store.

VO

And whose job is it to count all those blueberries?

JOY

That would be the computer's job. I lose track.

VO

Computers on a farm? I'm listening!

JOHNNY

They go down through a color sorter, which has a laser that detects any soft fruit that's there and it kicks it out.

VO

Wait! Did you say it sorts blueberries with a laser?

ALLENA

Yes with a laser.

VO

Sounds like a teachable moment to me!

Laser light is different from other light beams because a laser is made up of just one color, or wavelength, of light, and all those light waves are lined up—also called coherent.

So when it reflects off of a surface, you learn about the properties of that surface by seeing how they alter the laser's color and coherence.

Cogdell Berry Farm's soft sorter uses this technology to separate the ripe blueberries from the overripe ones.

It shines a laser beam onto a conveyer belt full of fruit. When the beam reflects off the berries, data on that reflection is collected by the machine's sensors. Because healthy berries and overly soft berries reflect the laser differently, the machine determines which ones aren't up to Cogdell's high standards. That way only the most delicious blueberries make it off the conveyer belt and into your shopping cart.

But don't worry. Machines aren't running the joint. There are plenty of jobs for people around Cogdell as well. For instance...

RUSS

Fulltime employees, during peak season, we'll have 200 or so. And that's involving everybody from tractor operators, to mechanics to blueberry pickers, folks that work on the packing line. We should talk about all the secondary jobs that that are created

because of agriculture. We've got the tractor dealerships. We've got the folks that come here and are the technicians for the packing line equipment.

VO

That's a lot of blueberry jobs! And with the US producing more than half a billion pounds of blueberries last year alone, even more jobs are sure to...*crop* up!

Uh, look over there!

VO

Did you know that before a blueberry becomes a full-fledged fruit, each and every one has to be fertilized? Yep! And that fertilization happens when pollen is taken from one plant and delivered to another, resulting in reproduction.

The job gets done by honeybees like these! Excuse us! We'll uh...leave you folks alone.

Anyhow, his process is repeated hundreds of times, and the result is a field full of blueberries, like this one.

And when you plant different varieties of blueberries close together, like they do here, this reproductive process is called crosspollination. That causes more variation in the berries and increases the survival rate of new blueberry plants. And that means better blueberries for you!

We now return you to your regularly scheduled program.

VO

Okay, now where were we? Oh, right! Blueberries! So if I'm in high school and I want to get in the blueberry game, what should I do?

ALLENA

I wish that I had been more interested in agriculture in high school and that I had taken the classes that were offered. I wish I had been involved with FFA.

VO

FF what?

RUSS

Future Farmers of America. It's been around for a long time. It's in most public schools. It's a way for people that have a bent towards agriculture as youth in the schools to get involved in agriculture to learn more about farming and the farming profession.

VO

So the FFA teaches growing growers how to grow?

ALLENA

That's just a tongue twister to say.

VO

And I'm sure there's a bumper sticker in there somewhere.

Any last thought's before the sun goes down?

RUSS

Georgia is the second largest producer of blueberries in the country, but by the time this video makes it to your classroom there's a good chance that we could be the number 1 producer in the country of blueberries.

VO

That's partly because Georgia's growing season is long enough to produce two crops of different blueberry varieties, whereas northern climates might be limited to just one.

Of course there is another reason Georgia's so great for blueberries. Allena?

ALLENA

Because it's Georgia and Georgia is awesome.

VO

And that means more delicious jobs for Georgians. Which reminds me – where is that pie? Hmmm. I'll follow my nose, and hopefully see you next time on Fast Forward.