The 'Bluebelle' and 'Climax' Rabbiteye Blueberries

W. T. Brightwell[1] and A. D. Draper[2]

The 'Bluebelle' and "Climax' rabbiteye blueberries,* *Vaccinium ashei* Reade, originated in the cooperative blueberry breeding program of the Georgia Agricultural Experiment Station and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. They have performed well at Tifton, but have not been tested outside of Georgia. They merit trial throughout the Gulf and Southeastern states where rabbiteye blueberries are adapted.

*If known at the time of their release, one of these varieties could appropriately have been named Rabbiteye *Dixi* (Latin word signifying, "I am through") to signal the end of Dr. W. Thomas Brightwell's career in rabbiteye blueberry breeding. He retired in August 1974, after 34 years of improving the wild southern blueberry. All who appreciate fine rabbiteye blueberry fruit can thank Tom for his major role in originating 10 improved varieties. These varieties are the basis of the present industry. A.D.D.

'Bluebelle', tested as T-14, came from a cross of "Callaway' x 'Ethel' made by G. M. Darrow in 1946 and was selected in 1951. Plants are upright, moderately vigorous, and productive. In a replicated 5-year yield trial, it was equal to 'Tifblue' in production. The berries are large, 88 per cup, light blue, have a small scar and good flavor. Fruit ripening begins in mid-season, about with 'Tifblue', and extends over a relatively long period. Under favorable conditions, the berries size well throughout the season, thus being an excellent variety for pick-your-own plantings.

'Climax', tested as T-90, was selected in 1958 from a cross of 'Callaway' x 'Ethel'. Plants are upright-spreading, with the canes originating in relatively narrow crowns. The plants produce only enough new canes to renew the plant. Berries are medium in size, medium dark blue in color, have a small scar and good flavor. Fruit ripening begins early and extends for a short period; it has concentrated ripening. On June 22, 1971 and 1972, the amount of ripe fruit on the early cultivar 'Woodard' was 50% and on 'Climax', 75%. About 80% of the 'Climax' berries may be harvested at one time with a minimum shriveled or overripe. This variety should be excellent for mechanical harvesting.

Diseases have not been a problem with either variety. Cross-pollination is required for good fruit-set in rabbiteye blueberries; therefore, it is necessary to plant bushes of more than one variety.

Since rooted cuttings were distributed to nurserymen in the spring of 1974, a limited number of plants should be available to growers in the spring of 1975. The U.S. Department of Agriculture does not have plants for distribution.

[1]Horticulturist, Coastal Plain Experiment Station, Tifton, Georgia.
[2]Research Geneticist, Agricultural Research Service, Plant Genetics and Germplasm Institute, Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Maryland.