

Blueberry Netting Project Summary

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We have 20 acres of small fruit in western New York 8 of which are blueberries. Bird problems were an issue from the time we started harvesting blueberries. It seemed we tried everything and tried hard to make anything work but nothing did. Maintaining a barrier between the fruit and the birds was the only way we felt would give us bird control and netting became our option.

We did some research and talked to a number of growers and suppliers. We visited and saw first-hand a number of netting techniques, none of which we even wanted to try and emulate. In 2008 we made a contact with Smart Net Systems, a company headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia. Immediately we thought we saw something that would work well. In 2009 we covered our first 3 acre field, in 2012 we added 2 more acres and finally just last year we completed our 8 acre project. The cost was as followed in 2009:

YEAR 1 COST PER ACRE: 2009

Trellising Materials	\$1,825
Netting Materials	\$1,814
Misc. Materials	\$150
Wrapping Materials	\$50
Trellising Labor (\$10/hr.)	\$500
Netting Labor (\$10/hr)	\$240
Uncovering and Wrapping Labor (\$10/hr)	\$170
Total first year cost per acre	\$4,749

COST PER ACRE YEARS FOLLOWING:

Wrapping Materials	\$50
Netting labor (\$10/hr)	\$160
Uncovering and Wrapping Labor (\$10/hr)	\$170
Total cost per acre years following	\$380

(Inflation.....the cost of netting material went up 30% from 2009 to 2012)

The cost of this netting, as you can see is initially fairly high. Keep in mind however that the netting should be good for five years and your trellising should last more than 20 years. Spreading the cost out over this period of time makes this project, in our opinion, cost effective.

After undertaking a project like this and as we approach our fourth year, the question is often asked by others as well as even ourselves, "Would you do it again?" – the answer is *usually* yes!

Special Notes: Late last June we briefly visited a u-pick blueberry farm similar to our own, 3-4 acres in Leesburg, VA. The berries were all netted, rows individually, using a "T" post in the row to support the net. This method could require possibly much less labor and is an option worth considering. The posts we used were all 3-4" and 4-5" x 10' treated yellow pine. Pounded into the ground 3' and the net ceiling is only 7' high. This height is adequate and we suggest no higher. A 6' tall person working on any aspect of this project can easily and comfortably work at this height.