

## Blackberry Packaging and Produce Auction Prices

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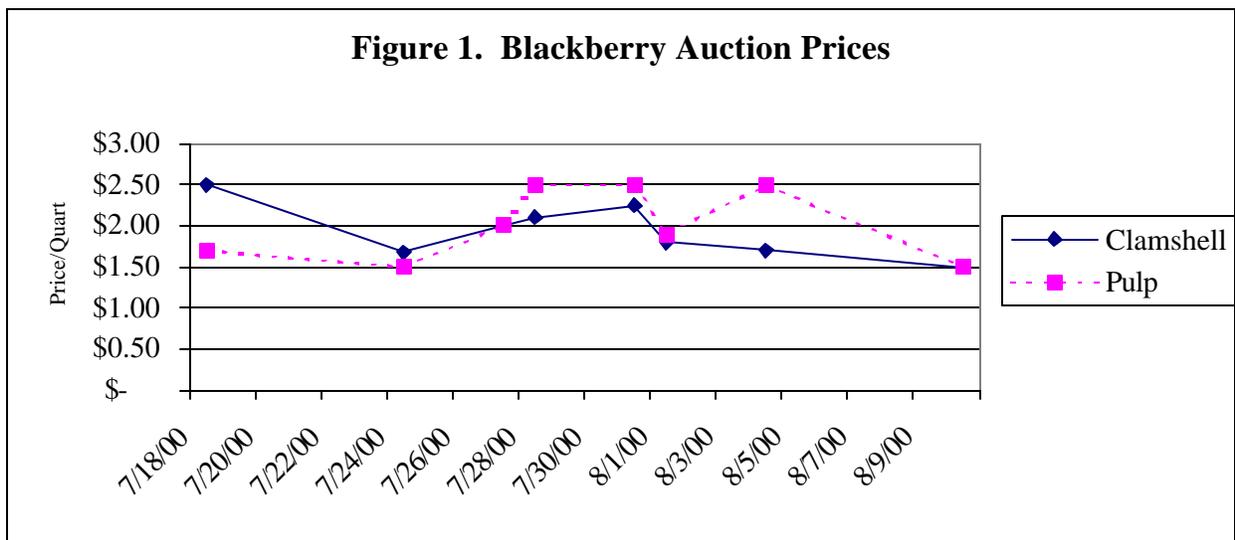
A marketing study was conducted in the summer of 2000 as an initiative of the New Crops Opportunities Center to determine price sensitivity for blackberry packaging in a produce auction market. One-quart plastic clamshell containers were provided to a producer who was already marketing 1-quart pulp containers for comparative pricing purposes. The study was conducted at the Fairview Produce Auction, Fairview, KY.

The different container types--168 quarts in clamshells and 209 quarts in fiberboard containers--were marketed over 8 auctions in the three-week period between July 18 and August 10. All berries were picked and refrigerated within 30 hours of transport to market. Berries were separated at auction by container type and offered for sale in lot sizes ranging from 6-24 quarts.

Average prices for each container over the 3-week period are shown in Table 1:

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Container Type</b>	<b>Average Price</b>
	<i>Pulp</i>	\$2.01
	<i>Plastic Clamshell</i>	\$1.94

Significant price differences occurred on July 18, when clamshells averaged \$2.50 per quart and pulp averaged \$1.70 per quart; and August 4, when clamshells averaged \$1.70 per quart and pulp averaged \$2.50 per quart. For all but one day of the study, the lots selling first in the auction garnered the highest price between the different packaging types.



## **Discussion**

Since this study indicates no significant difference in price due to packaging type, producers will have to weigh the pros and cons of each package in their individual situations.

### Container Cost

Plastic clamshell quart berry containers with an absorbent pad placed in the bottom may cost between \$0.06 and \$0.10 per container, depending on the quantity and container type purchased.

Pulp quart containers for berries vary greatly in price, depending on supplier used and quantity purchased. The pulp containers used in this study cost the producer approximately \$0.05; however, other kinds of 1-quart pulp containers have been priced as much as \$0.20 apiece.

A survey of regional packaging distributors indicates some difference in the 1-pint size. Prices for the 2000 season indicate 1-pint pulp containers may cost about \$0.05 less than their clamshell counterparts.

### Ease of Picking and Transport

The producers found the pulp containers easier and faster to pick into than the clamshells because:

- There is no lid to open and shut on the pulp containers
- There is no absorbent pad to place in the bottom of the pulp containers

However, the clamshells had a significant advantage in transport. The quarts in this study were sold in lots packaged in open aluminum beverage can boxes, which are more cost effective in small-scale production than the berry master boxes usually used for wholesale packaging. The plastic clamshells were able to be stacked directly on top of each other, while the open pulp containers are not. The produce auction manager also commented that buyers liked the easier stacking clamshells. Transport is a key consideration when producers select packaging.

### Ventilation

It is important to use plastic clamshell containers with some ventilation that allows the berries to “breathe.” When refrigerated, condensation will form on the top inside of the clamshell. Excessive condensation will result in the buyer not being able to see the berries through the top of the package.

## **Conclusion**

There was no significant difference in price between packaging types for blackberries at the Fairview Produce Auction in 2000. Price differences were due to certain lots being offered first in the sale order. Packaging preferences are best determined by producer and consumer preference, paying particular attention to packaging cost differences and end consumer preferences.

## **Acknowledgments**

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