
BLACKCURRANTS, BLACKBERRIES AND RASPBERRIES TO BE CLIMATE-PROOFED

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Scientists will get the Northern European berry production ready for future climate challenges. A large North Sea Region, Interreg IVB, EU research project involving five countries has been launched.

Blackcurrants, raspberries and blackberries are the subject of a large EU project that aims to secure the future of Northern Europe berry production. Photo: Connie Krogh Damgaard

They are healthy, they are beautiful, they are delicious. Berries are small vitamin bombs that – in addition to looking good on the plate and tickling our taste buds – also contain a number of other health promoting compounds. But can these berryfruit cope with the future climate challenges that will deliver even more torrential downpours when it rains, and even more drought when it is dry?

If it were up to the scientists from the five European countries, berryfruit production of the future should be safeguarded through the development of new varieties and cultivation techniques that are able to cope with the expected climate changes. This is what is happening in a major new EU project – Climafruit – which is a collaboration between five North European countries. The Faculty of Agricultural Sciences (DJF), Aarhus University, is the Danish partner and project leader, who is already in the process of starting trans-national trials.

Berryfruit varieties for the future

One of the experiments involves testing berries from the same source under different climatic and growing conditions. The berries used here are blackcurrants, raspberries and blackberries, and they are now being planted at DJF's Research Centre in Aarslev, along with five other locations, in Sweden, Norway, Scotland and Germany. The varieties will therefore be tested under a range of different conditions so the best performers can be picked out, together creating a unique trans-national resource.

Blackcurrants are also used in another of the trials that DJF is responsible for. This is about optimizing water use in organic currant production. Scientists will examine when during their

growth the blackcurrant plants use water and by how much the watering can be reduced without plants being adversely affected.

Organic weed control in blackcurrants involves covering the ground with black polythene. Scientists will therefore also examine how weed control affects water use.

Climate-proof berries

The Danish part of the project has also yielded a two PhD projects, linked to Scottish Crop Research. One of them looks at the impact of various climate conditions on raspberries. The plants will, for example, be grown in climate chambers where temperature, water and light can be adjusted to determine if the plants can manage without water for certain periods and water thus be saved.

Another project PhD looks at the relationship between water stress and different blackcurrant varieties. If scientists find a variety that performs well under both drought and humid conditions, this would be a great help for blackcurrant producers.

The three-year Climafruit project focuses on blackberries, raspberries and blackcurrants. In addition to developing a sustainable and climate-proof berry production, one of the aims of the project is to establish a network of experts in the North Sea Region.

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