

University of Florida changing tack to protect Florida blueberry growers

The University of Florida is changing its ways after an I-Team investigation revealed its agreements with competing farms in Mexico. Last month, an I-Team investigation found UF developed new types of blueberries to help Florida farmers make a living, but then sold the rights to grow those same blueberries to foreign farms, including Mexico. Mexico's growing season competes with Florida.

In an email blasted out over the weekend to the Florida Blueberry Growers Association, representing some 500 growers, the university said it plans to put Florida first when it comes to any new deals with foreign farms.

The email states, "In foreign countries that pose a potential competitive threat, our new licenses contain clauses that prohibit fruit of our licensed varieties from being imported to the U.S. during the Florida blueberry production window."

The university says it has international licensing agreements to protect Florida growers, so blueberries created at UF aren't "available in unlimited quantities to all willing buyers." In addition to Mexico, UF also has licensing agreements for its blueberries in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Japan.

Over the last three years, taxpayers have contributed close to half a billion dollars to UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, which houses the blueberry breeding program.

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