

I read an article in the paper that talked about the decline in acres planted to Ollalieberry in the Pajaro Valley. As the berry person on the Central Coast, can you tell me a little bit more about what happened to this variety? It's such a tasty and productive variety, it seems it should have been around longer.

Ollalieberry has indeed been in the Pajaro Valley for a long time and had been a staple of the industry until just a few years ago. Hence the interest in what appears to be a rather sudden disappearance of the planted acres of this popular variety.

Ollalieberry, which strictly speaking is a dewberry and not a blackberry at all, is an excellent tasting variety when picked fresh and at the right maturity. Unfortunately, as Farm Bureau member John Eiskamp points out in the newspaper article, when it is picked for shipping it has to be picked a little earlier than that for optimum flavor. Furthermore, the rumpled and less than perfect conical shape of the fruit always made it a tougher sell in the supermarket. Several other varieties of blackberries have been introduced over the past few years which now better fit the needs of shippers than Ollalieberry did.

As most of your readership knows, Ollalieberry is an early producing variety, generally starting to fruit in late May to early June and continuing on to the end of June. It has always been the earliest blackberry type in the Pajaro Valley. This earliness has been turned into a detriment however. What the newspaper article neglected to address was one of the big drivers of the decline of Ollalieberry in our area is the rise of Central Mexico as a blackberry production powerhouse. Currently Mexico produces 80% of the fresh market blackberries consumed in the USA. This production starts in November and only stops at the beginning of June because of the onset of the summer rains. So the problem of Ollalieberry is that it produces too early now since it runs up against all the competition from Mexico.

In summary, the reasons for the decline of Ollalieberry in the Pajaro Valley are twofold, one in its difficulty to ship and secondly its earliness in production puts in heavy competition with fruit coming from Mexico.

This has been a brief article about the decline of Ollalieberry in the Pajaro Valley.

Please contact Mark Bolda at UCCE Santa Cruz if you have more questions on this topic or any other topics concerning blackberry, raspberry or strawberry production.