

# Blackcurrant Production

## Introduction

Blackcurrants have traditionally been grown on a countrywide basis as a garden fruit mainly for jam production and also for confectionery purposes. This crop is grown on a large scale in the south-east for processing. All processing crops are grown on contract and are used for juice and jam manufacture. The present area under blackcurrants is approximately 100 ha. giving 1,000 tonnes annually. The crop has a gross value of €.75M and 90 per cent of the output is exported. Blackcurrants grow best in well-drained soils in parts of the country which have comparatively low rainfall, good sunshine and are relatively free of late spring frosts. The crop requires protection from wind and shelter must be provided.

## Market

There is only one buyer contracting for Blackcurrants presently. Poland is the major European producer and has excess area over requirement causing depressed prices. It is not advisable to grow this crop on a large scale without a market commitment.

## Production Methods

Blackcurrants are grown commercially in rows spaced at 3.0 m apart at a spacing of 0.3 m in the row. Density is high in the row. This system is described as the hedge system.

The hedge system is used in commercial plantations for two reasons. These are:

- (1) To facilitate mechanical harvesting
- (2) For earlier crops of a commercial size

The crop is propagated in situ. A soil analysis is carried out and lime and fertilisers are applied according to recommendations.

The ground is ploughed and cultivated. A black polythene mulch 50 cm wide is placed in lines 3 m apart. Stout blackcurrant cuttings 20-25 cm long are planted through the polythene mulch to a depth of 17-22 cm in October.

The cuttings are rooted in the following spring. The shoots which emerge are cut back to 3-5 cm from ground level to an outward pointing bud. Four to five strong shoots emerge in the following year.

The first commercial crop is harvested in three to four years and a full crop is harvested in the fifth to seventh year.



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*This is one of a series of fact sheets on potential income generating activities.*

*All fact sheets are available in the Advisory Section of the Teagasc Website*

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The inter rows are kept weed free by cultivation or herbicide application. Weed control in the row is unnecessary for the first 3-4 years due to the polythene mulch. When the mulch disintegrates dichlobenil (Casuron) is used to control weeds in the row. Regular fungicide application is required to control leaf spot and mildew.

Pesticide application is required to control big bud mite and aphids. Harvesting is carried out by means of a custom built blackcurrant harvester. The blackcurrant harvester is an expensive machine and purchase by an individual is not justified unless the area of the farm in blackcurrants is large. For this reason harvesting is carried out by contract. With mechanical harvesting the setting of the machine affects the quality and cleanliness of the produce. Some crop losses occur when the setting used excludes leaf debris and small fruit.

Approximately 70 per cent of the crop is harvested when leaf debris is excluded. The 30 per cent yield loss is compensated for by the reduction in labour required to remove the debris.

### **Establishment Cost and Profit Margins**

Establishment Costs Per Ha. - €1,800

Annual Production Costs - €2,200

Yearly Balance (when in production) -

Price range from €500 – €700 a tonne

Yield range 5-12 tonnes per ha.

Net Margin €300 – €4,000 per ha.

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