Wednesday, June 30, 2010

Berry picking time is here

COUNTY — Summer time is blueberry and blackberry picking time in Pickens County.

Local blueberry growers are reporting that Climax and Premier blueberries are in peak and Tifblue, Delight and Centurion varieties are ripening in a crescendo. Blackberry picking is good with Chickasaw, Kiowa and Navaho varieties ripening now.

A blueberry should be totally blue and a little plump. It should be tickled off the cluster. If you have to pull it off, it is not ready. Most growers will tell you taste a few to hone in on what is a quality berry. The Happy Berry in Six Mile has a "Sin Bucket" if you feel you have exceeded the appropriate tasting limit.

Blackberries should be totally black and a little soft. If you have to tug it off, it is not ready. Because blackberries are a soft fruit, it is best not to pile them more than three or so berries deep, so take a low flat container.

Local growers do not make money on containers, and ask that pickers bring their own containers. They can be weighed on the scale and the weight subtracted at check out. Some growers charge by volume so pickers should use familiar containers. Something with a handle works well. Most growers will also have prepicked berries available.

When picking berries, dress for the weather. Good shoes are important, and flip-flops can be a problem on some of our Pickens County hills. Generally, bugs are not a problem but a "bug off" will not hurt.

The weather forecast for this fourth of July weekend is for a little cooler weather, and picking your own berries can be a fun family event. Obviously mornings and evenings are coolest, while the peak heat is at about 4 p.m.

For those looking for recipes, check out www.thehappyberry.com. Have a happy July 4.