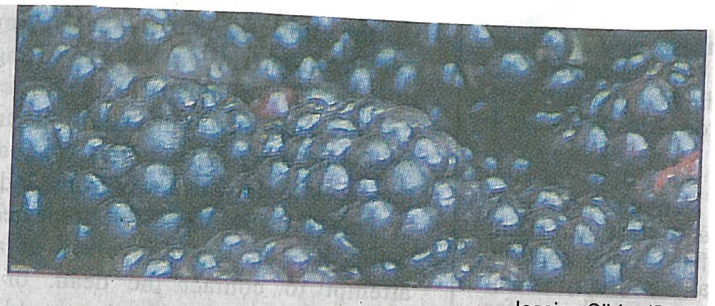
Happy folks at the Happy Berry



Jessica Sibley/Staff

Blackberries are a popular berry to pick throughout the summer months. The blackberry bushes at the Happy Berry are thornless, so leave the protective gloves at home.

By JESSICA SIBLEY
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SIX MILE — It's the perfect day trip, ending with plenty of fresh goodies to take home for a scrumptious pie or a sweet, healthy treat.

The choice is yours, but the decision isn't easy. Where to go first? Head for the blueberries or the blackberries? Or what about the grapes?

The mentality of visitors to the Happy Berry Farm is usually the same, and the end result yields a smile and baskets full of juicy goodness.

When Walker Miller and his wife Ann moved to the Upstate in the early-70s, Walker always envisioned running their own business even after he retired from Clemson University, which happened in 1999.

His youth was spent growing up around orchards during his youth in Southeastern Pennsylvania, and so he scouted for the perfect farmland here and finally found it in Six Mile after a four-year search.

"I wanted to specialize in something that wouldn't put me in competition with other farmers," Walker said. "So, I chose to grow blueberries."

At the time, in 1983, there were less than 50 acres of blueberries in South Carolina. After planting just three acres of blueberry bushes in 1981, their first harvest was ready two years later.

"We opened to the public and now, in 2009, we are farming 10 acres of crop on 17.5 acres of land," he added.

And for the Walkers, it's more than just an enjoyable career.

"It's a family business," he said. "Both my daughters, my wife and I work on the farm. We love what we do."

Dubbed the "Happy Berry Bunch," Walker, Ann, Zoe and Betty Ann have been welcoming visitors each summer, while blueberries begin to be harvested in June and run into August.

And while July is National Blueberry Month, the sweet treats aren't the only attraction that bring "happy" people back time and time again.

Blackberries are everywhere, while seedless and muscadine grapes are forecast for the first and second weeks of August.

Walker and his family crew love to see families with kids of all ages visit the farm, as picking berries seems to be a favorite among local residents and out-of-state visitors alike.

The Happy Berry Bunch also offers their goods at the Greenville, Pendleton and Pickens Flea market locations.

But as far as the harvesting goes, Walker said it's very difficult to maintain his crops.

"Basically, we have five acres of blueberry bushes," he said. Each bush will yield a total of 50 pounds, which turns into about 30,000 pounds per acre, per year."

But proper handling of birds and diseases calls for close attention from the maintenance crews each day.

"Robins, local and migrating, can pose a large problem to the crops, along with other birds," he added. "So, we implement numerous techniques to keep them away, none of which include doing any harm to any animals. So far, we've been lucky."

And when you come out for an enjoyable day on the farm, be sure to dress appropriately.

"Long pants and shirts are best, including a nice big hat to block the sun," he said. "It's a way to stay cool out here, as people tend to overdo it and pick for hours on end. Don't get me wrong, we love that — we just want them to be safe."

The Happy Berry Bunch also encourages first-time visitors to bring their own basket with a handle, but notes that baskets are available for purchase onsite as well.

But more than anything, Walker is proud of his sustainable operation.

"Locally and state grown food is important for the future of everyone," he said. "Here, we combine health with sustainability, good taste and lots of fun."

For more information, visit www.thehappyberry.com.



Jessica Sibley/Staff

Kaleb Markners, 3, and his sister Makenzy, 1, embark on a blueberry- picking adventure at the Happy Berry Farm in Six Mile.



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For another two weeks, blueberry picking will be at its peak. August is a popular time for picking all varieties of grapes as well at the Happy Berry Farm.