

## Field Evaluation of Blueberry Pruning Techniques

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**OBJECTIVES.** Pruning blueberry bushes is one of the most labor intensive and costly operations in a commercial planting. Proper pruning of blueberry plants will help obtain the desired plant size and shape, increase plant vigor and establishment of fruiting wood, reduce overfruiting and enhance size, and allow sufficient sunlight penetration into the canopy to assist with proper fruit development.

**METHODS.** In June 2010, immediately after the first harvest of a central Florida commercial blueberry planting that had been established for approximately 15 months, a trial was initiated to compare a grower standard pruning program to three pruning regimes (roof, box, and hedge) and an unpruned treatment in two southern highbush cultivars, 'Jewell' and 'Emerald'. Three field days were held throughout the year for growers to evaluate the differences between pruning regimes. Over 80 central Florida blueberry growers attended a final field day to observe results of pruning techniques. These growers were surveyed to determine if they would adopt any of the pruning techniques that were demonstrated.

**RESULTS.** Thirty-two percent of attendees from survey results indicated that they would adopt one of the demonstrated pruning techniques from the field day. Fifty-three percent of attendees indicated that they were continuing to evaluate alternative pruning methods, while 16% are planning to maintain their current pruning practices.

**CONCLUSIONS.** Florida blueberry production practices are still



Fig. 1. Above is the "box" pruning practice used on southern highbush 'Emerald' during a field day demonstration.

being refined as it is still an emerging industry. Central Florida has a subtropical climate which differs from other areas of the United States in which blueberries are produced. This field evaluation allowed growers to determine the effects of different pruning techniques and refine or adopt new pruning techniques for their operations. Proper pruning techniques will maximize returns for central Florida blueberry production.