



Gazette Photo/Abbey Keifman

**Eric Jacobson, subcontractor for Bedford Plastics, and Doug Foster, irrigation system supplier with Trickle-eez, inspect the blackberry plants that were put in the ground Thursday morning. The 20-acre farm called Blackberry Bottom will grow five varieties of blackberries which will be ready for harvest from mid-July to late August next year.**

# Bedford plastics firm plants blackberries

**By Abbey Keifman  
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Bedford Reinforced Plastics, Inc. has purchased 20 acres of a farm in Bedford Township, named it Blackberry Bottom and begun planting blackberries.

The project began in January and the plants were put in the ground on Thursday. Around mid-August, the trellises will be installed, according to Shannon Foor, the business development manager at Bedford Plastics.

The leap from plastics to berries isn't as far as it seems.

Foor said Bedford Plastics began selling fiberglass to Trellis Growing System, a company out of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Both companies invested, along with a grower, in an installation blackberry farm in Ohio. The 10-acre farm was a success, and again the two companies invested with a grower in Iowa on a 20-acre farm.

"The natural progression went from selling material to investing with other partners to now owning and operating our own berry block," Foor said.

The trellis system is a rotating one, which can lie flat and be covered in the winter to protect the berries. After the last frost, the trellises stood up, and all the blossoms, and subsequently the berries, will grow on one side, facing away from the scorching afternoon sun. The system should also allow for an overall healthier berry as well as reduced harvest labor.

"The berries will be able to grow in an open and airy environment without being exposed to the sun's harmful rays," Foor said. "You're basically guaranteed a crop each year."

With the system designed by Trellis Growing System and built with fiberglass that lasts for over 25 years in the fields from Bedford Plastics, the berries that were being grown at the farms in Ohio and Iowa were bigger and survived the winters. According to Foor, the blackberries should be sweeter and have a longer shelf life than most sold in markets.

Most blackberries in the Bedford County area are brought up from the southern states and Mexico, Foor

explained. He said that the season typically closes mid-summer, but Blackberry Bottom will have its harvests between mid-July and early September. "We're filling a hole in the supply chain," Foor remarked.

Blackberries, which are high in antioxidants and considered a "super-fruit," are becoming very popular as a wine base, and the farm will be growing five different varieties of berries. Most of the berries will be sold, to markets in New York, Washington, D.C. and other large cities, but Foor hopes to set aside some rows for local sales.

He also would like to see the variety of products expand. "In the future as we expand we'll probably look at wine-making, jams and jellies, et cetera," he said.

Blackberry Bottom will be the largest commercial farm of its type between New England and northern Virginia. Foor said, "It's a pretty steep investment on the front end of things," but explained that the company potentially could receive around \$45,000 per acre in revenue when the berries are sold.