

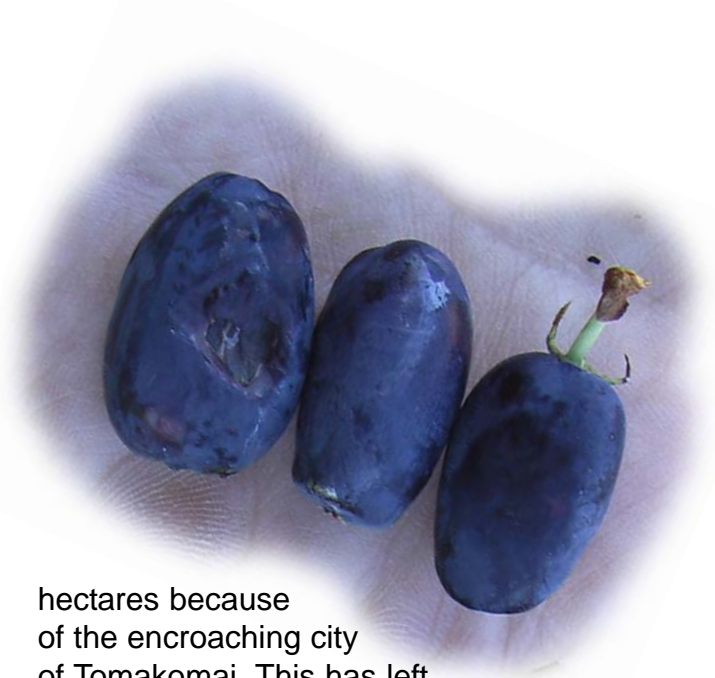
# Haskap Growers Unite

By Dr. Bob Bors  
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In case you are wondering, Haskap is the Japanese name for *Lonicera caerulea*. It is also known as 'Blue Honeysuckle', 'Honeyberry', 'Edible Honeysuckle' and 'Sweet berry honeysuckles'. When translated into English, it can be spelled as Hascap, Haskaap, and Hasukappu. Try searching the various spellings on the internet; you will be surprised how many Japanese websites talk about this fruit! With a population over 127 million, I recommend that we start calling this crop 'Haskap' and begin to focus on exporting to Japan where this 'new' crop is already known and accepted.

Earlier this year I visited retired Professor Maxine Thompson from Oregon State, who I believe is the only other researcher (besides myself) in North America breeding this crop. Although she has grown and bred Russian blue honeysuckles, she has switched to breeding mostly Haskap because of larger fruit size and later time for blooming. Under mild Oregon winters, the Russian types sometime bloom in February when there are no pollinators available. The Haskap however, are much slower to come out of dormancy and bloom when pollinators are available. On the Prairies the Russian types don't have that early blooming problem but it would be nice to have later blooming varieties to extend the season.

Maxine gave me interesting insight into Haskap production and marketing. It seems that acreage of this plant in Japan in the last decade was reduced from 500 to 100



hectares because of the encroaching city of Tomakomai. This has left processing plants with a supply shortage. I was shown examples of products made with Haskap, including juice, soft drinks, wine, flavoured noodles, gum, cake, candy, and jam. The items Maxine had were wonderfully packaged and quite aesthetic. Owners of one of the Haskap processing companies visited Maxine and were quite disappointed to learn that there was no commercial production of the crop in the US. With technology for processing and a market already existing, this seems to be a wonderful opportunity!

Maxine has shared her germplasm with me and I now have 2000 of her seedlings in the field and another 2000 in the greenhouse. I also have clones of her better selections which I plan to use in breeding as well as a huge collection of Russian varieties and seedlings. There is the possibility that Haskap could survive on the Prairies. This is because in Japan, Haskap is native to the northern island of Hokkaido, which in places gets as low -30°C each winter. Variety trials done by Richard St-Pierre showed that Black Currents were quite hardy in Saskatchewan even though the varieties were from all over Europe. Perhaps we will get lucky and Haskap will similarly be hardy. Regardless of hardiness issues I plan to

breed Haskap to the Russian varieties to obtain a wide range of ripening times.

I am planning to contact Haskap companies in Japan for information on fruit quality and what they would expect from a Prairie grown Haskap. This information will help me select new varieties suitable for their market. Concurrently, there are Agriculture Canada research grants that I could tap into if I could demonstrate both a willingness of Japan to buy and a willingness of Canadian growers to grow the crop.

Consequently, I would appreciate it if interested growers could send me letters of support for the 'Haskap Project' which I will use in grant applications. You can e-mail those letters to [bob.bors@usask.ca](mailto:bob.bors@usask.ca) or you can mail a letter to: Dr. Bob Bors, Assistant Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Plant Sciences, 51 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5A8.

Either in or with the letter of support I would like to have:

1. An email address, 2. Postal Address, 3. How much acreage you are willing to use to test this crop in the short run? How much acreage you would be willing to expand to,

if your tests were very favourable? 4. Would you be interested in attending a Haskap Conference? If so would you be willing to come to Saskatoon or would you prefer it somewhere else. They ripen in Late June in Saskatoon, would that be a possible time for you to visit? 5. Would you like to be actively involved in researching either the production or marketing of this crop?

Ideally, I'd like to get growers and researchers together on this and lay the

groundwork for co-operative testing and eventual production of this crop. If such a group were made up of members of the various fruit grower groups in the Prairie and perhaps other provinces, we could better attract

government grants and Japanese companies. I would love to be able to tell the Japanese companies how many Canadian growers are interested. I hope to hear from you soon. For further information on Haskap and other fruit research check out my website: [http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/dom\\_fruit/index.html](http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/dom_fruit/index.html)

