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Horticulture Update: Three years of blueberry research

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Research Projects

Fertilization

- P and K
- Sap analysis
- Ca and B in fruit, fruit quality

Ethephon

- Rate
- Timing*Rate

Pruning

- Pruning techniques and timing

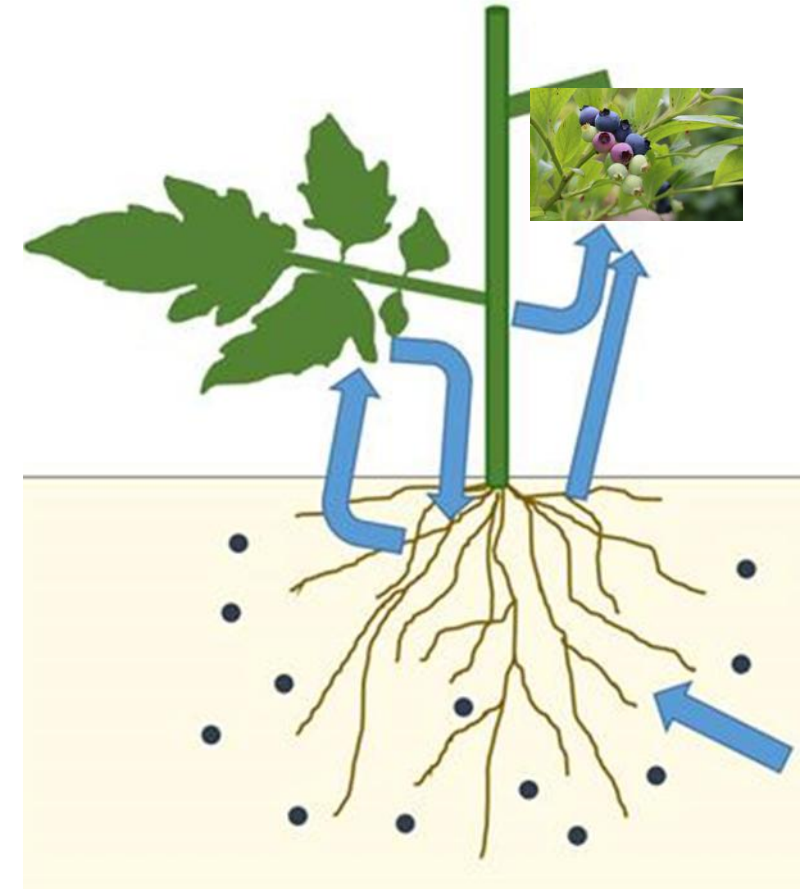


Fertilization – Sufficient Levels

Krewer and NeSmith, 1999

Sufficient or normal foliar concentrations of nutrients for rabbiteye

| Nutrient | Georgia (%) | Michigan (%) |
|----------|-------------|--------------|
| N | 1.20 - 1.70 | 1.70 - 2.10 |
| P | 0.08 - 0.17 | 0.08 - 0.40 |
| K | 0.28 - 0.60 | 0.40 - 0.65 |



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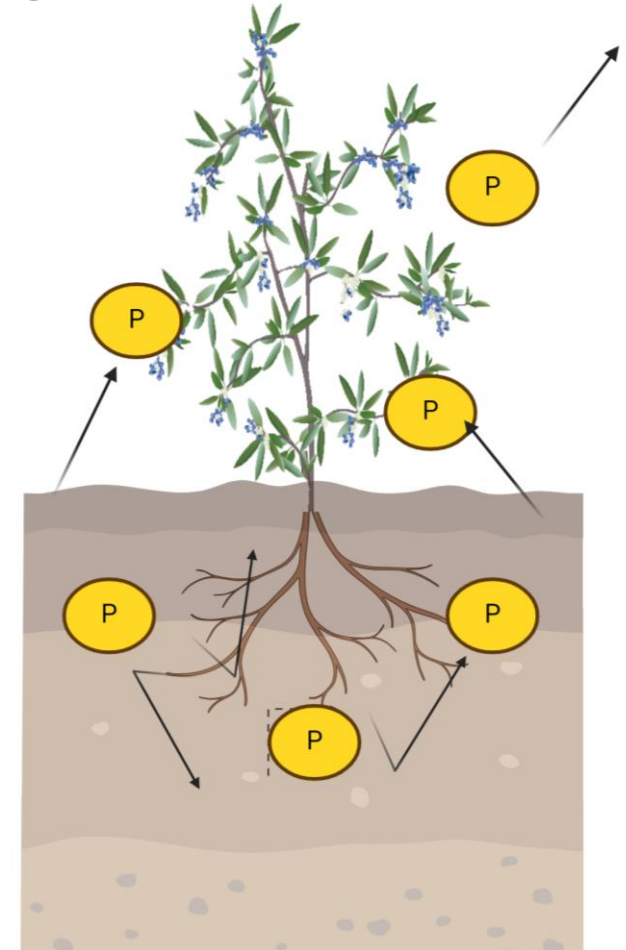
How much is recommended for P and K?

- Annual fertilization of 50 lb/acre of P and K
- Soil for blueberry needs 70 to 120 lb/acre of K
- Soils above 61 lb/acre no P apply



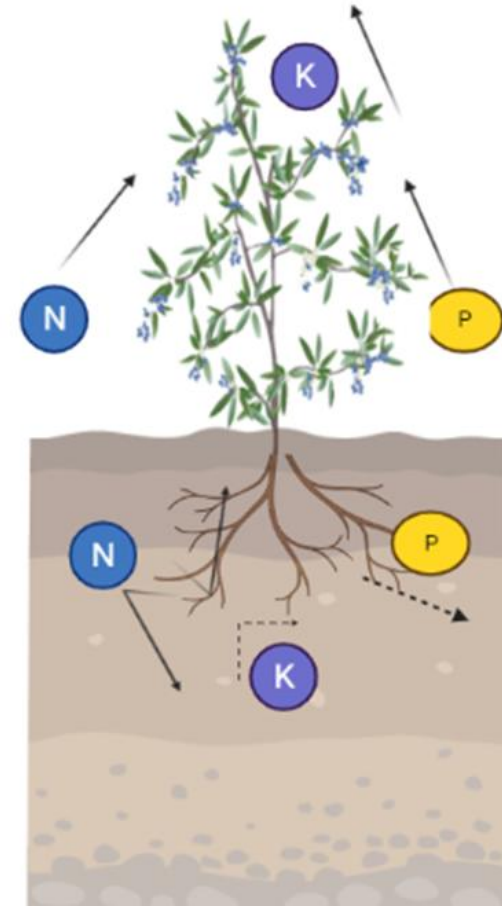
PK Fertilization

- What is already in the soil?
- When does the plant need it?
- Nutrient uptake
- Nutrient mobility in the plant and the soil
- How much nutrient is needed?

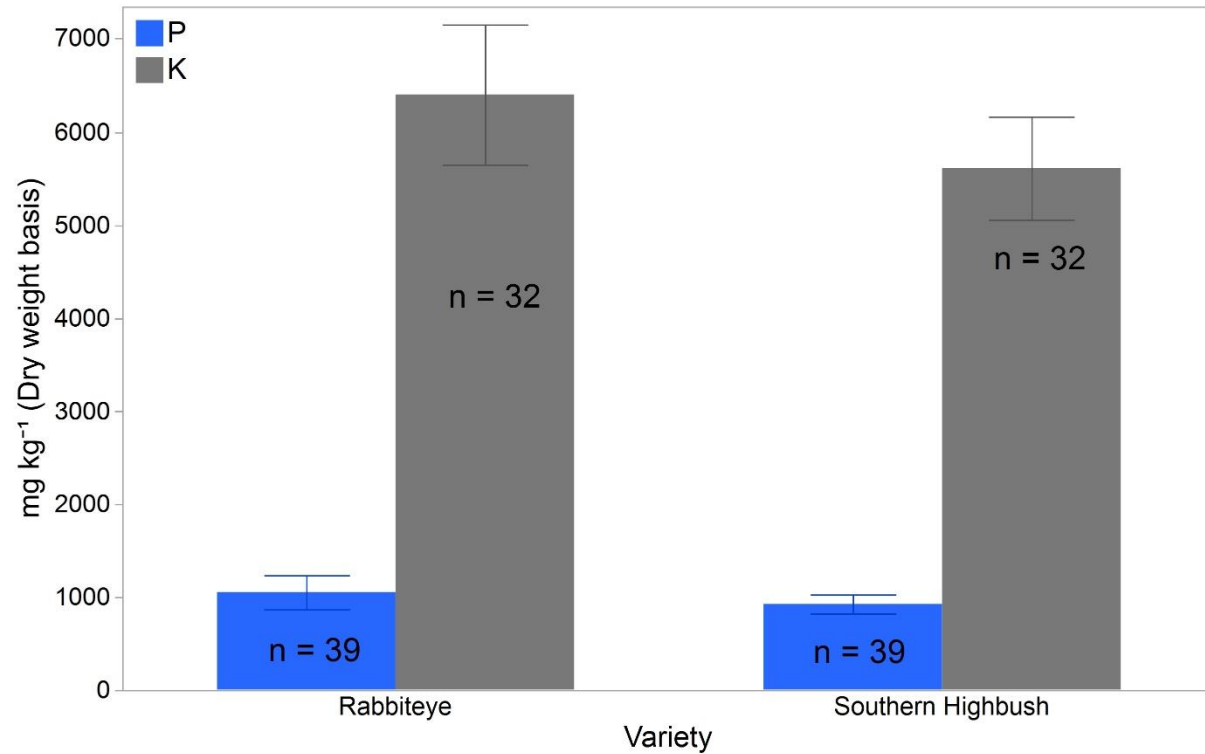


Nutrient Mobility

- **Phosphorus** is **mobile** in the **plant** but has low mobility in the soil. *Deficient plants are stunted and often dark green, and leaves may have a red tinge due to the accumulation of anthocyanins.*
- **Potassium** is **mobile** in the **plant**, **low to medium mobility** in the soil. *Deficient plants have older leaves with necrotic lesions*



Fruit: Phosphorus and Potassium



Experimental Design



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Experimental plots were established on four commercial farms with different nutrient management during the 2022 growing season.

| Experimental Sites | Farm 1: Nahunta – RE – P | Farm 2: Alma – RE – V | Farm 3: Alma – SHB – F | Farm 4: Hoboken – SHB – F |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Location | Nahunta | Alma | Alma | Hoboken |
| Variety | Premier | Vernon | Farthing | Farthing |
| Year of establishment | 2009 | 2013 | 2018 | 2014 |
| P fertilization (g/plant per year) | 33.8 | 16.5 | 15.5 | 27.1 |
| Reported Yield (kg/ha) | 3,970 | 9,073 | 9,640 | 13,608 |

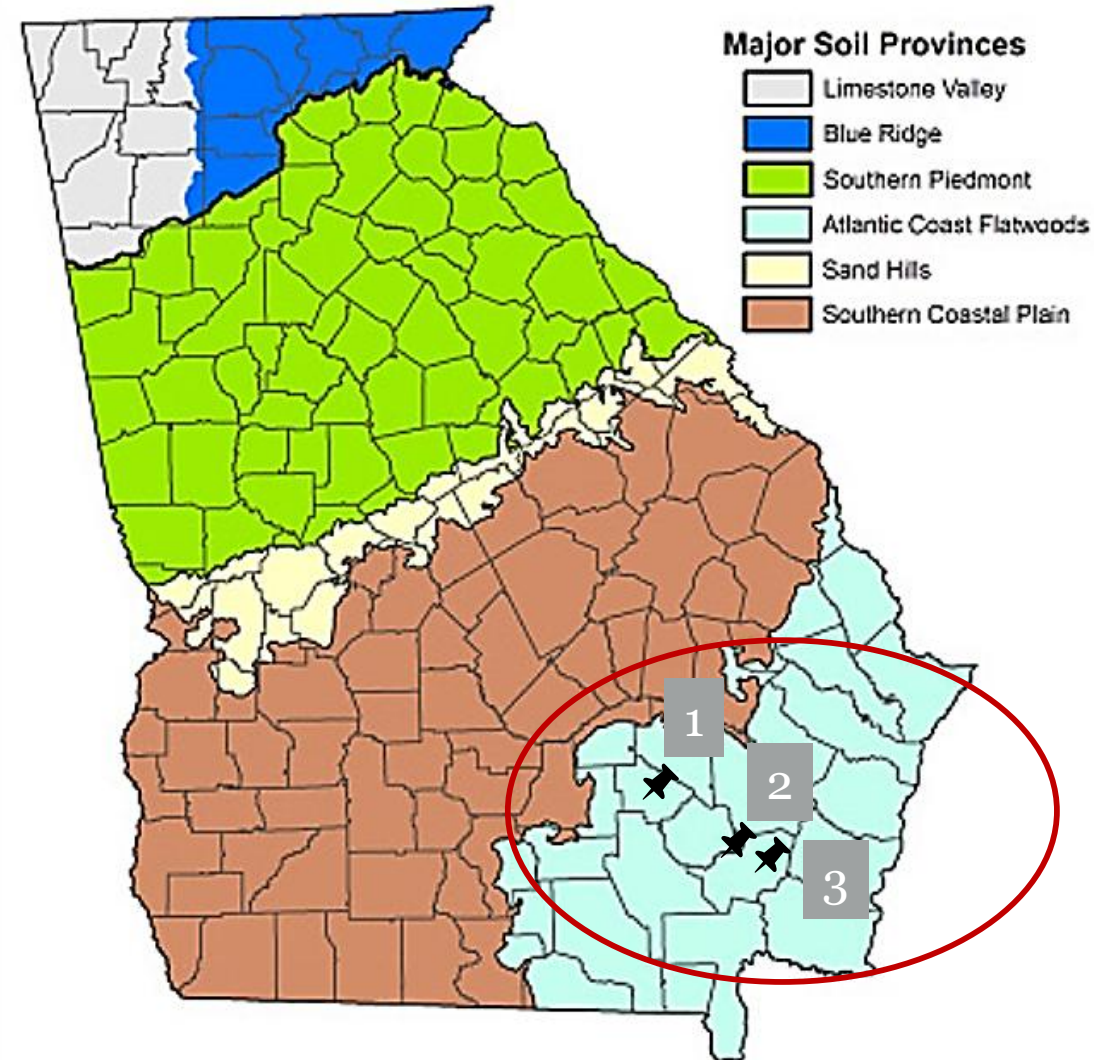
Location



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Soil Textures (NRCS, 2023)

- 1) Alma: sandy
- 2) Hoboken: fine sand
- 3) Nahunta: loamy fine sand



Six Soil Provinces in Georgia. Hancock et al. 2014.

Plant Material Information

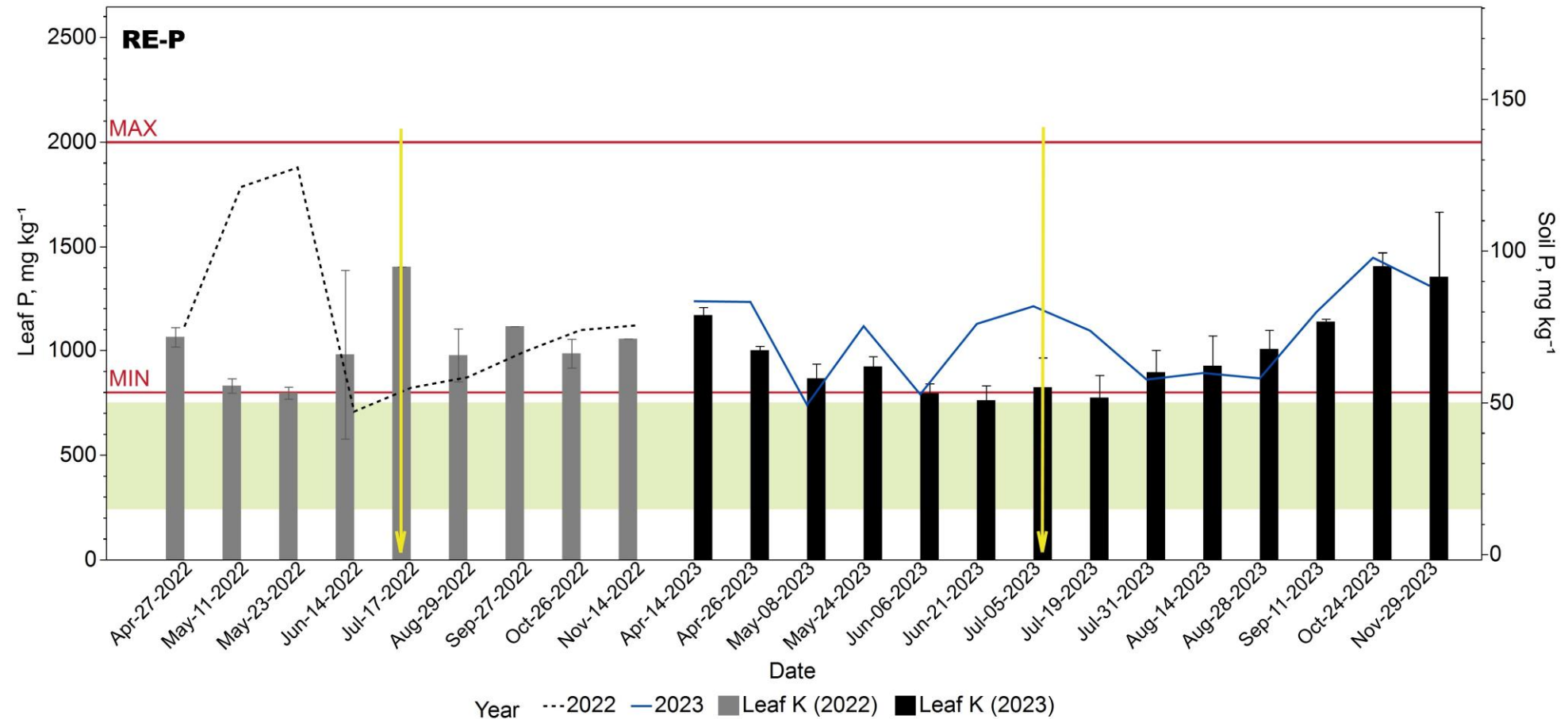


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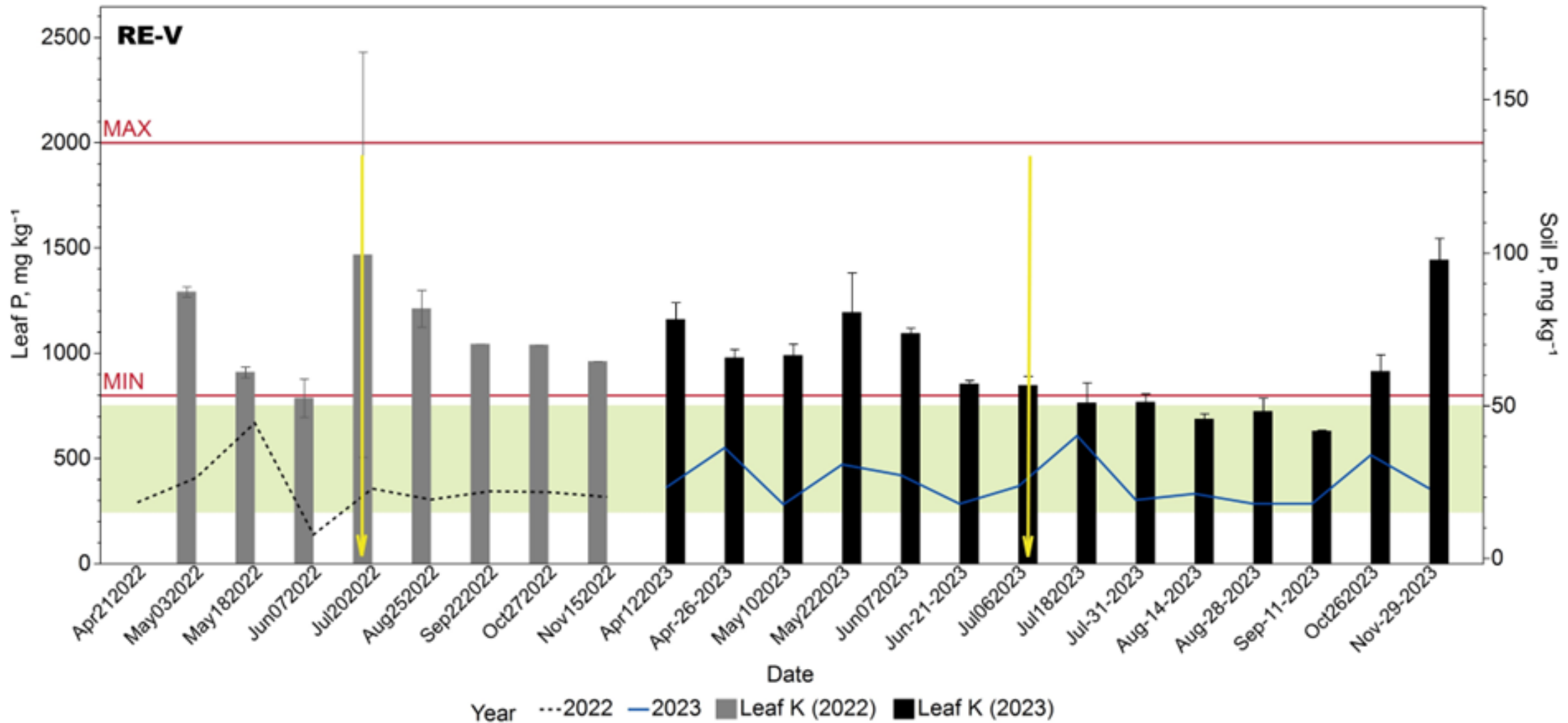
- Samples from old and young leaves were collected from May to July, in two-week intervals.
- Soil samples were also collected and divided into two depths, 0–10 cm, and 10–20 cm.
- Samples were sent to the Agricultural & Environmental Service Lab from UGA.



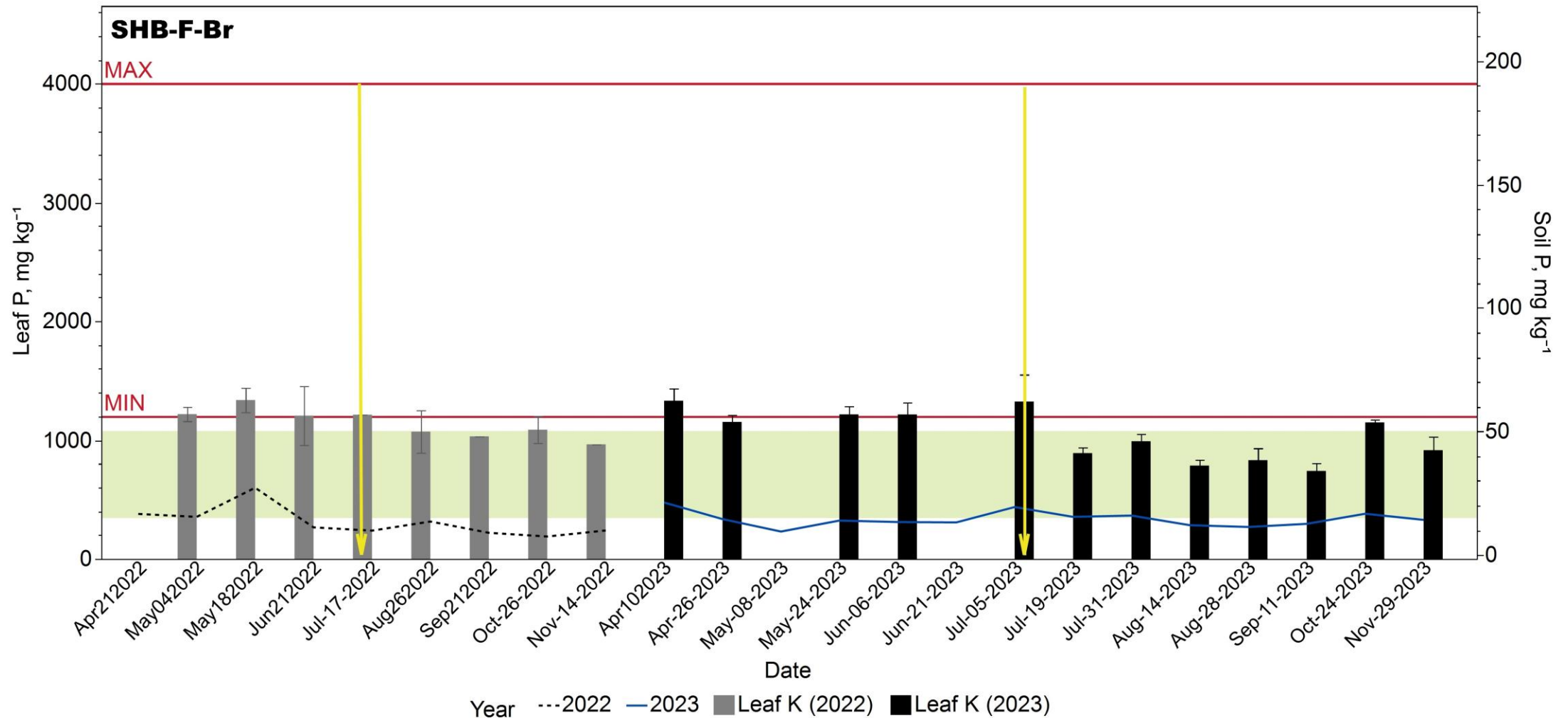
Phosphorus concentration in soil and leaf



Phosphorus concentration in soil and leaf



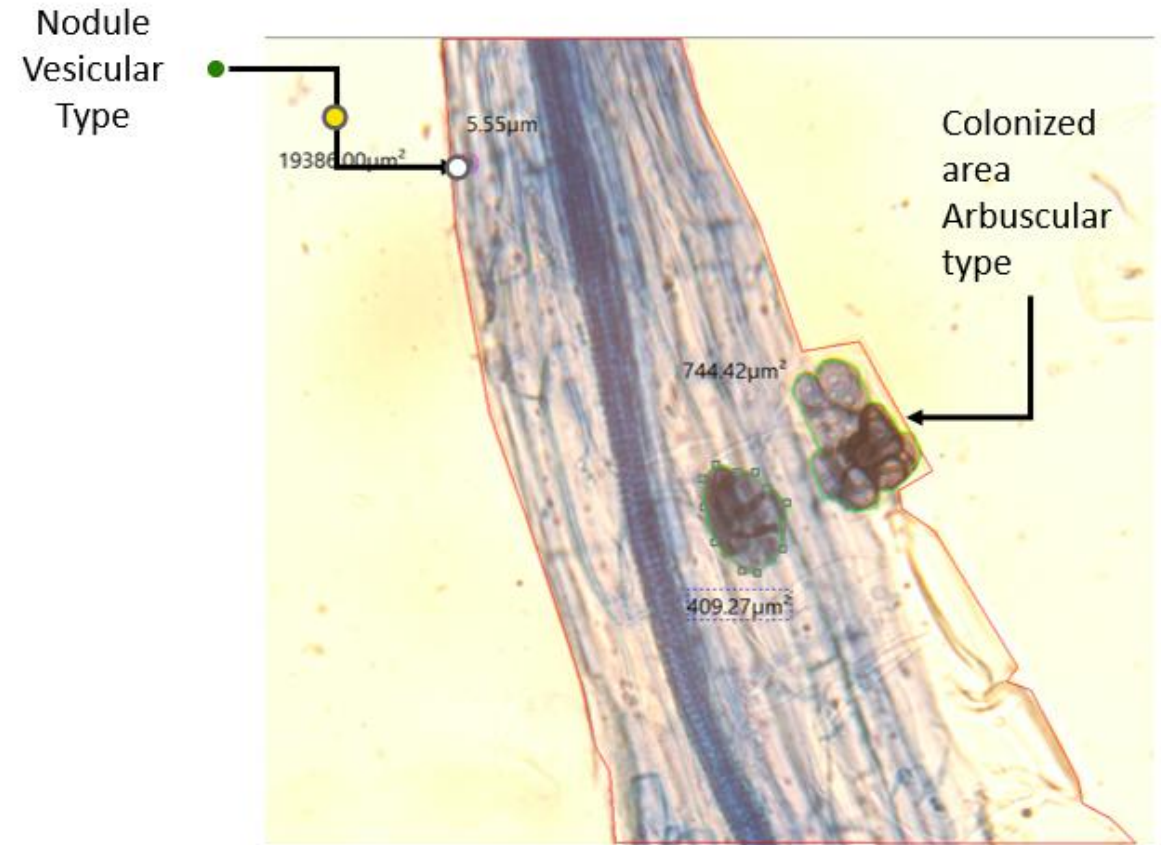
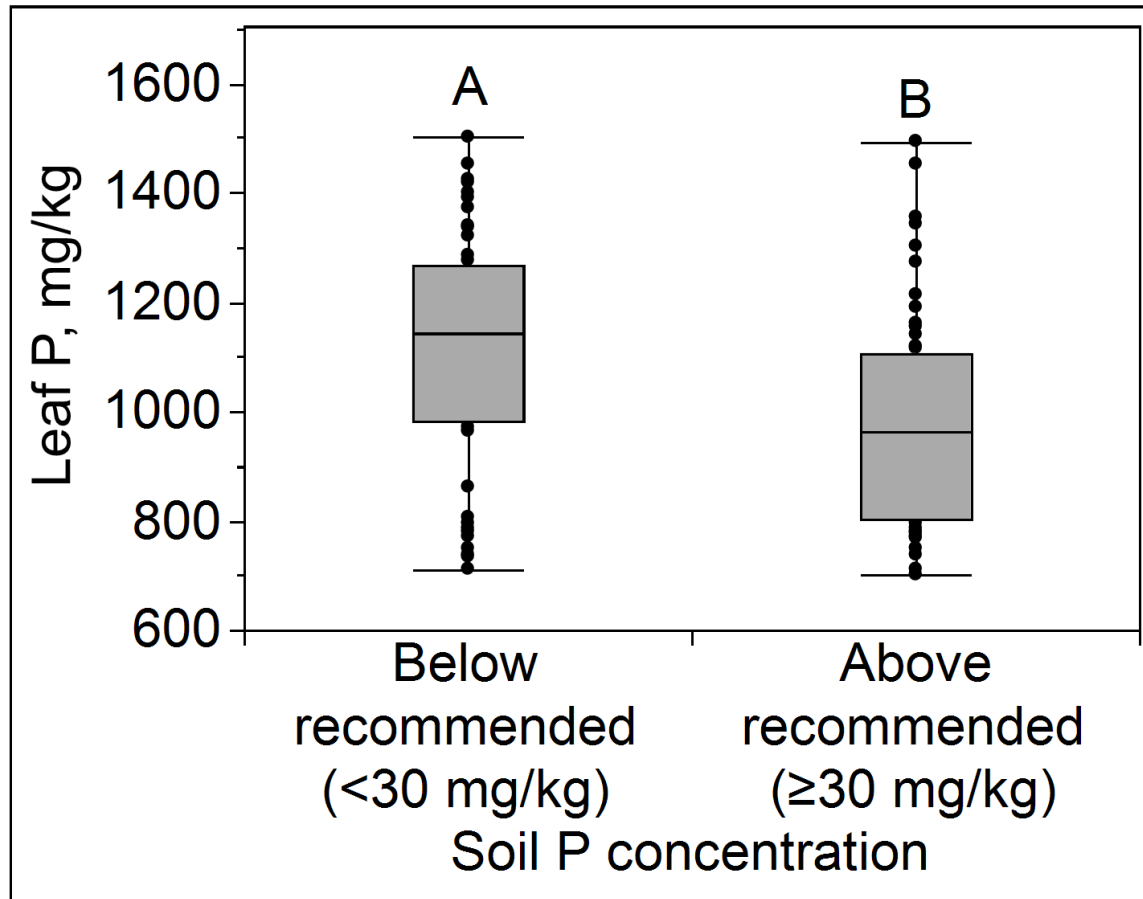
Phosphorus concentration in soil and leaf



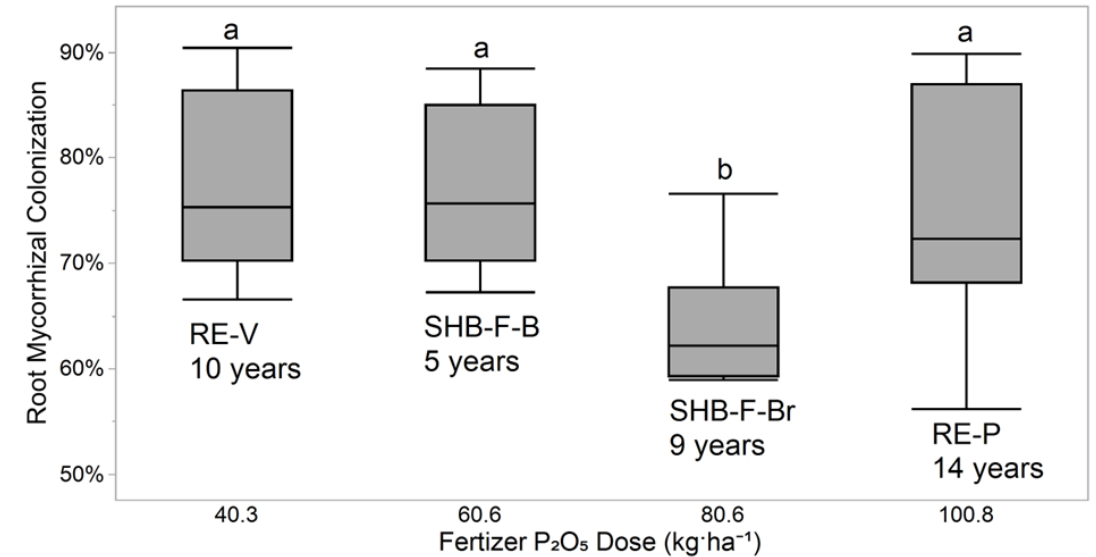
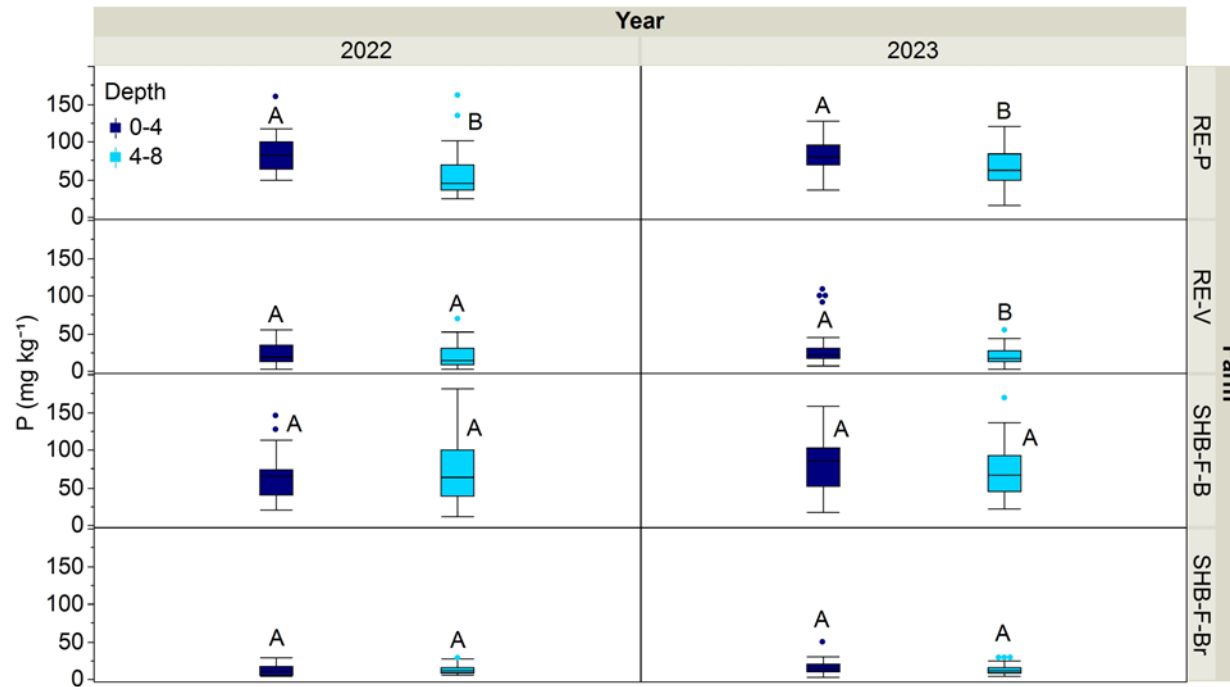
Leaf P interaction with Soil P



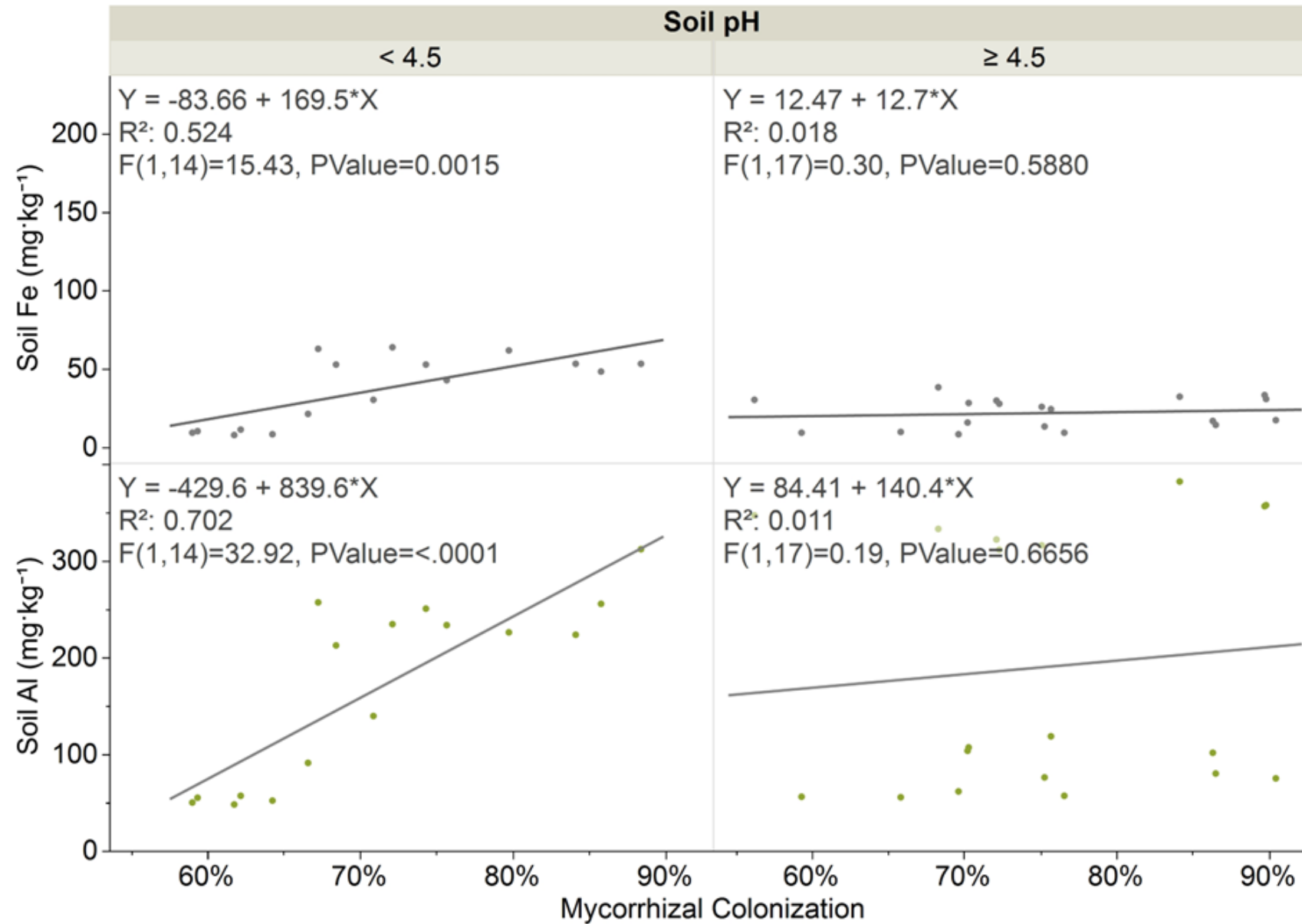
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Soil Phosphorus and mycorrhizal colonization

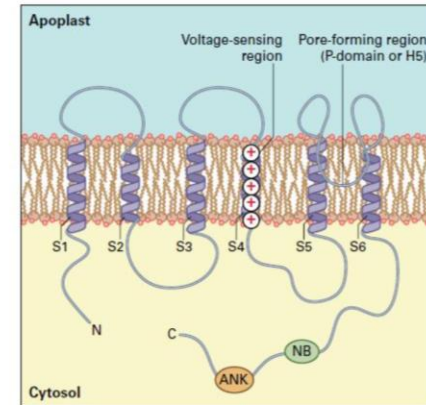


Mycorrhiza relationship with Al and Fe



Potassium

- K constituted 10% of plant dry matter
- K maintains electric potential gradients, activates enzymes, and regulates osmotic potential
- K maintains leaf relative water content and stomatal conductance, influencing freeze tolerance, gas exchange, and evaporative cooling
- Plants absorb K^+ from soil solution through K channels located in the plasma membranes of cortical and epidermal root cells



Experimental Design



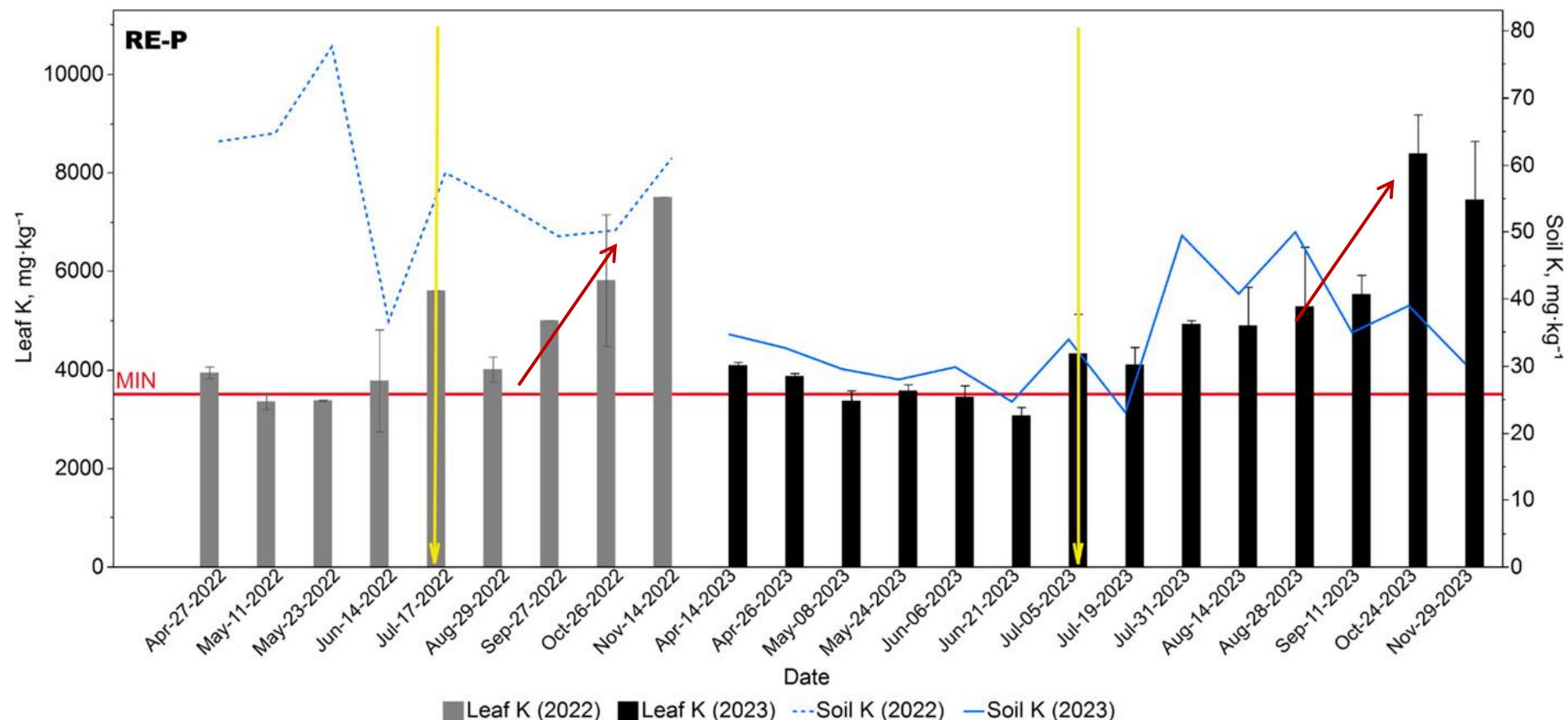
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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Location | Nahunta | Alma | Alma | Hoboken |
| Variety | Premier | Vernon | Farthing | Farthing |
| Year of establishment | 2009 | 2013 | 2018 | 2014 |
| K fertilization year | 100.8 kg/ha K ₂ O | 40.3 kg/ha K ₂ O | 60.6 kg/ha K ₂ O | 94.1kg/ha K ₂ O |
| Reported Yield (kg/ha) | 3,970 | 9,073 | 9,640 | 13,608 |

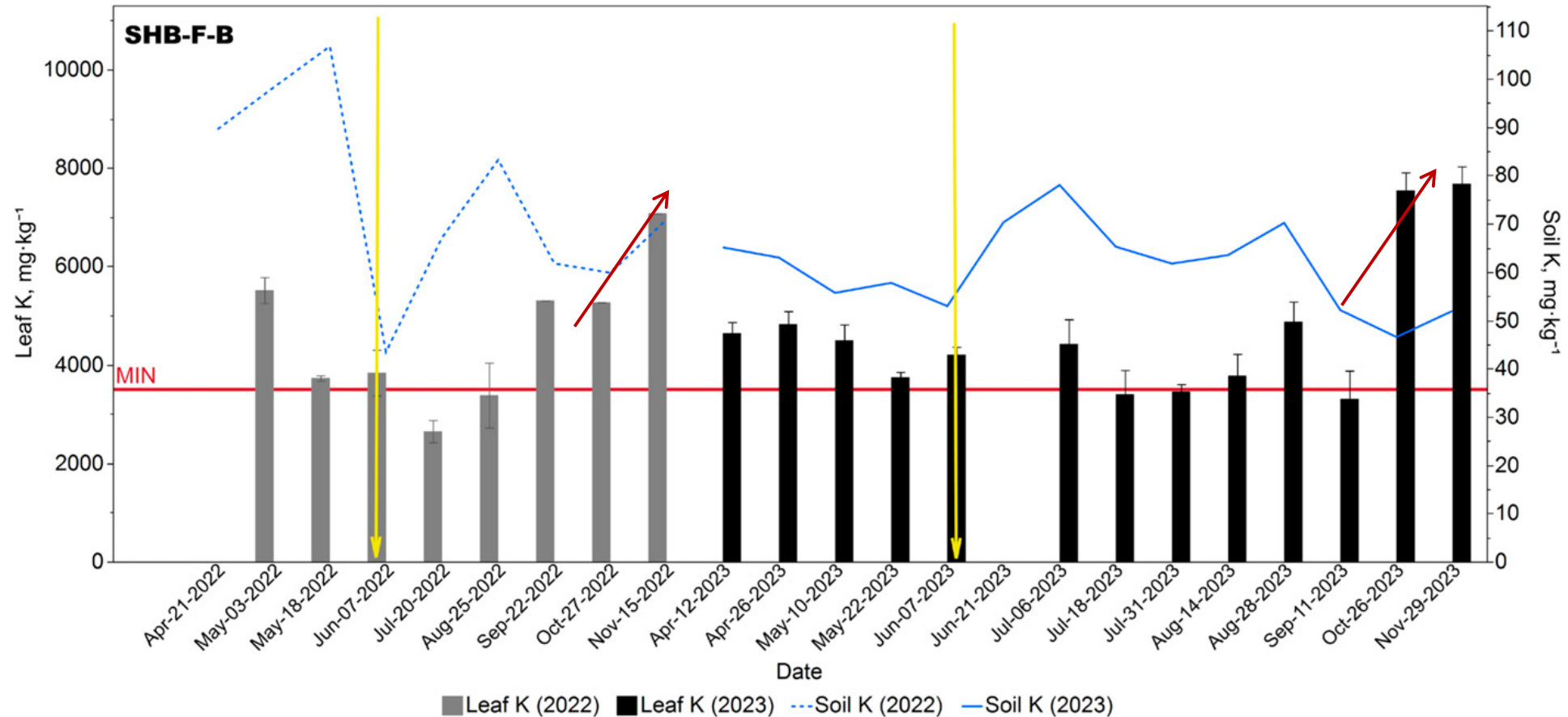
Potassium

Graph published in HortScience
Espinoza et al., 2024



Leaf and soil K concentrations from Apr to Nov 2022 and 2023 in RE blueberry commercial fields of 'Premier' (RE-P). Bars show the mean of three replicates, and error bars indicate the standard deviation. The red lines represent the minimum leaf K level (3500 mg·kg₁) recommended for blueberries in Georgia by Plank and Kissel (2024a, 2024b). Yellow lines indicate the date, 2 weeks after the end of harvest, which was used to compare with the sufficiency levels.

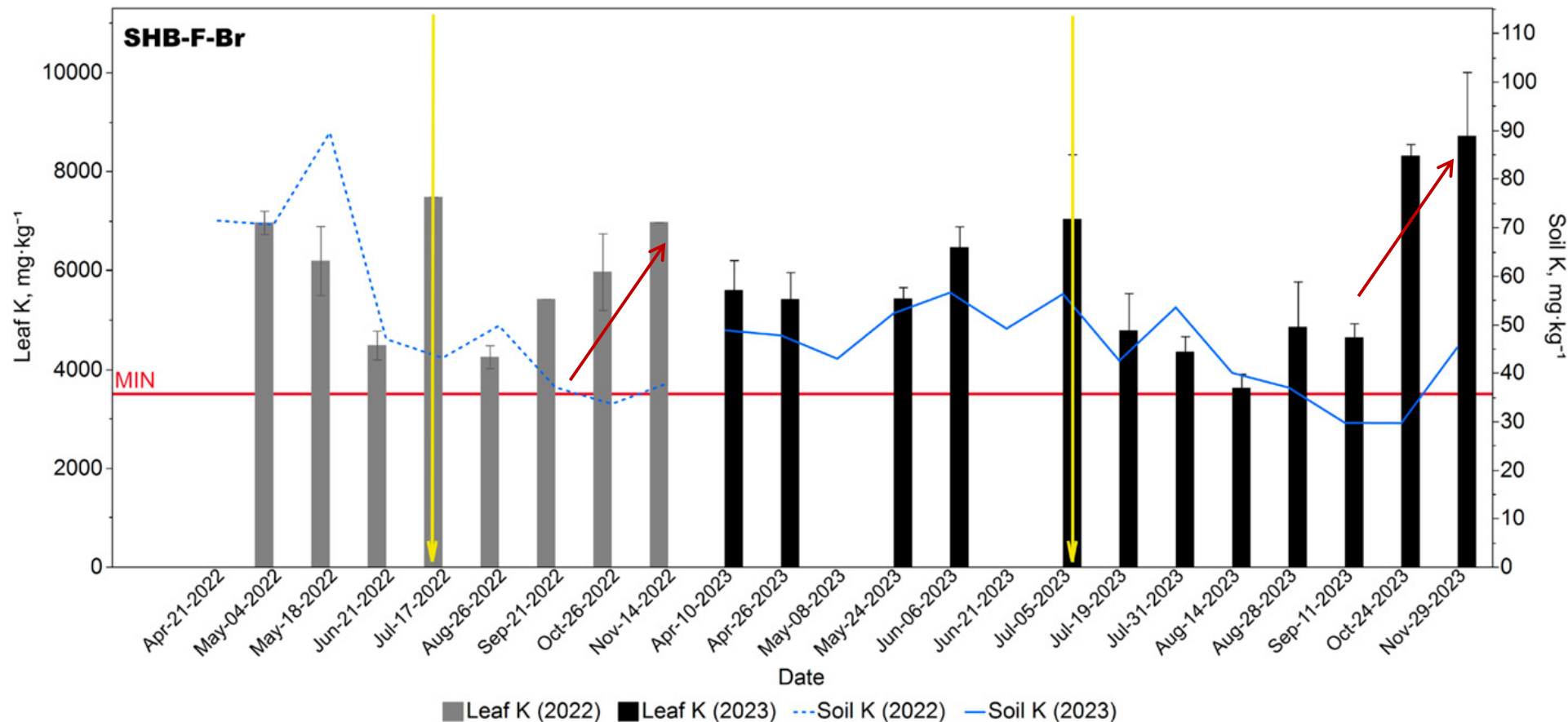
Potassium



Leaf and soil K concentrations from Apr to Nov 2022 and 2023 in SHB ‘Farthing’ (SHB-P-B). Bars show the mean of three replicates, and error bars indicate the standard deviation. The red lines represent the minimum leaf K level (3500 $\text{mg}\cdot\text{kg}^{-1}$) recommended for blueberries in Georgia by Plank and Kissel (2024a, 2024b). Yellow lines indicate the date, 2 weeks after the end of harvest, which was used to compare with the sufficiency levels.

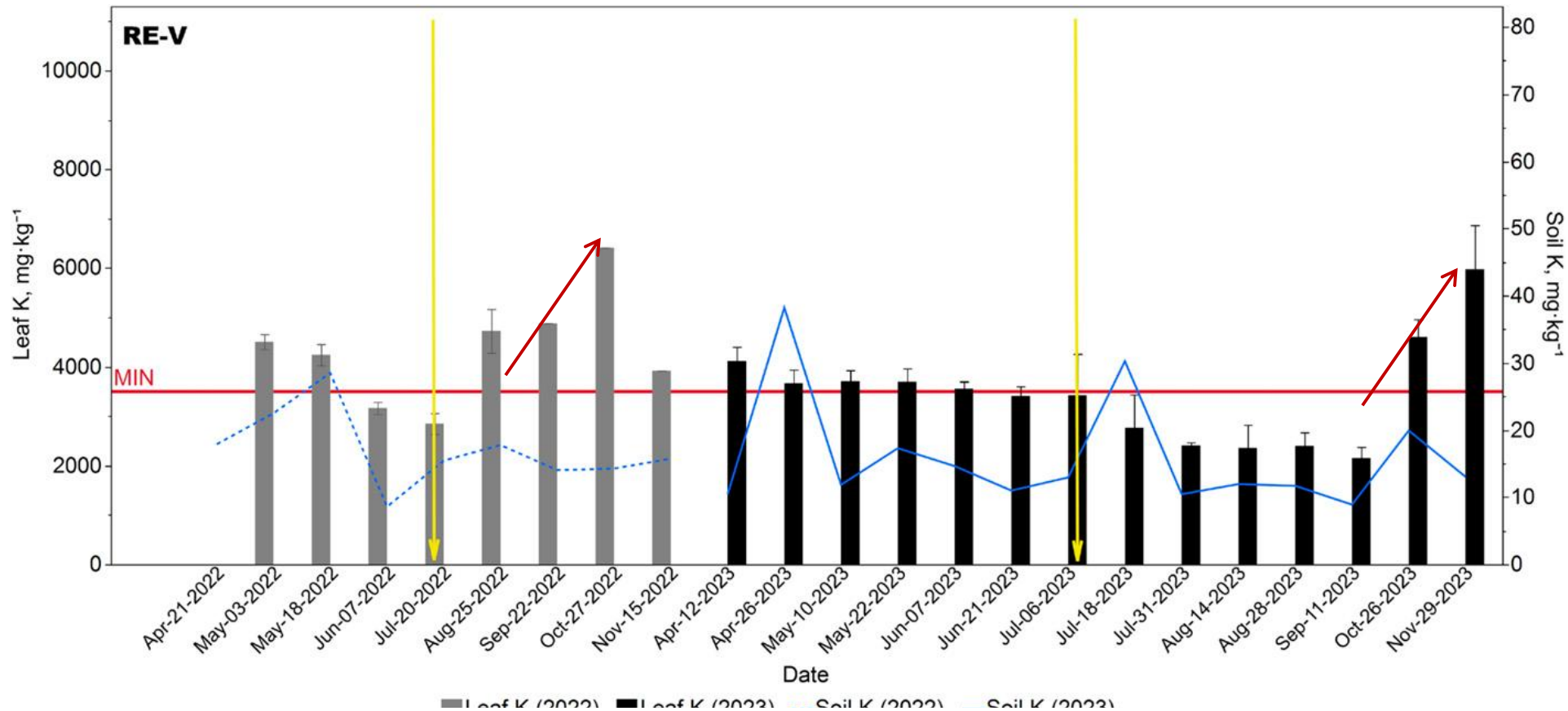
Potassium

Graph published in HortScience
Espinoza et al., 2024



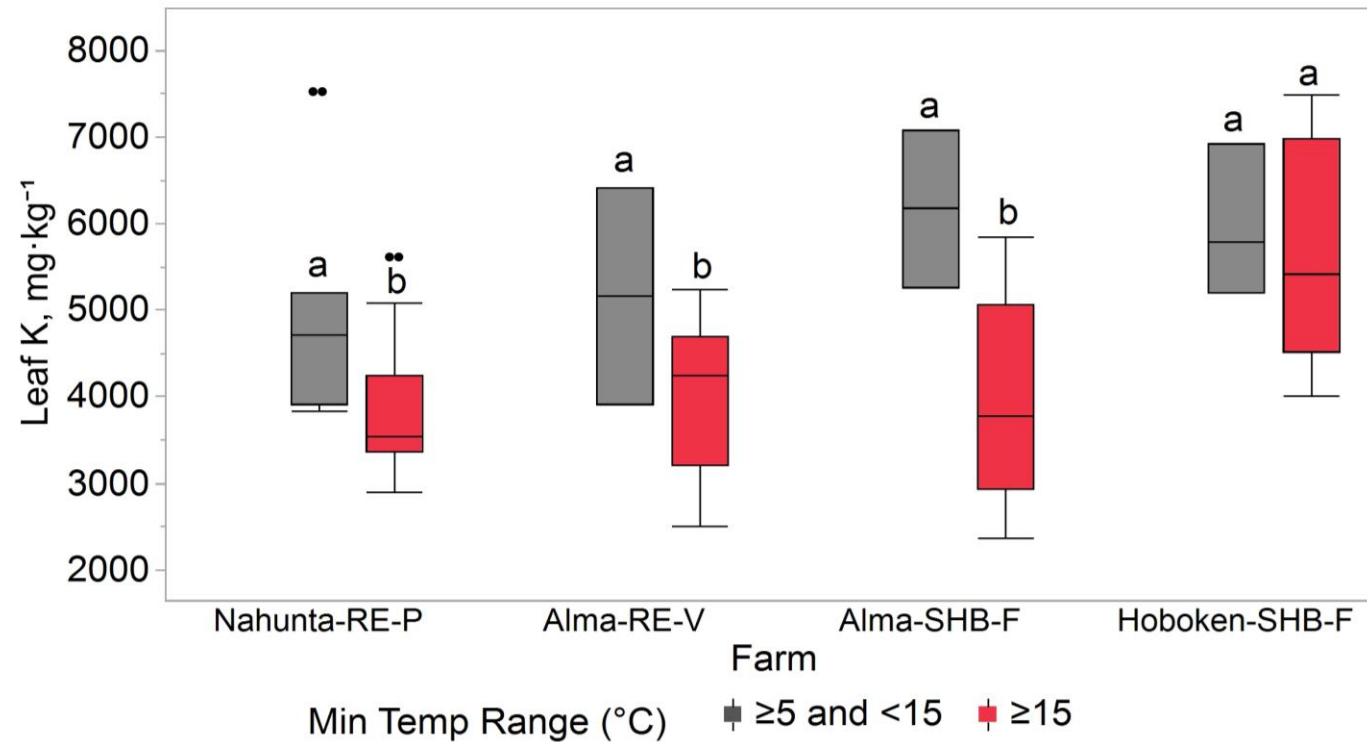
Leaf and soil K concentrations from Apr to Nov 2022 and 2023 SHB 'Farthing' (SHB-P-Br). Bars show the mean of three replicates, and error bars indicate the standard deviation. The red lines represent the minimum leaf K level ($3500 \text{ mg} \cdot \text{kg}^{-1}$) recommended for blueberries in Georgia by Plank and Kissel (2024a, 2024b). Yellow lines indicate the date, 2 weeks after the end of harvest, which was used to compare with the sufficiency levels.

Potassium



Leaf and soil K concentrations from Apr to Nov 2022 and 2023 in RE 'Vernon' (RE-V). Bars show the mean of three replicates, and error bars indicate the standard deviation. The red lines represent the minimum leaf K level (3500 $\text{mg}\cdot\text{kg}^{-1}$) recommended for blueberries in Georgia by Plank and Kissel (2024a, 2024b). Yellow lines indicate the date, 2 weeks after the end of harvest, which was used to compare with the sufficiency levels.

Potassium



Average leaf K concentration. Boxplots were categorized by the minimum temperature range the plant experienced on each sampling date. Letters mark the levels of significance between the minimum temperature range for each farm ($p < 0.05$ Wilcoxon Test each pair).

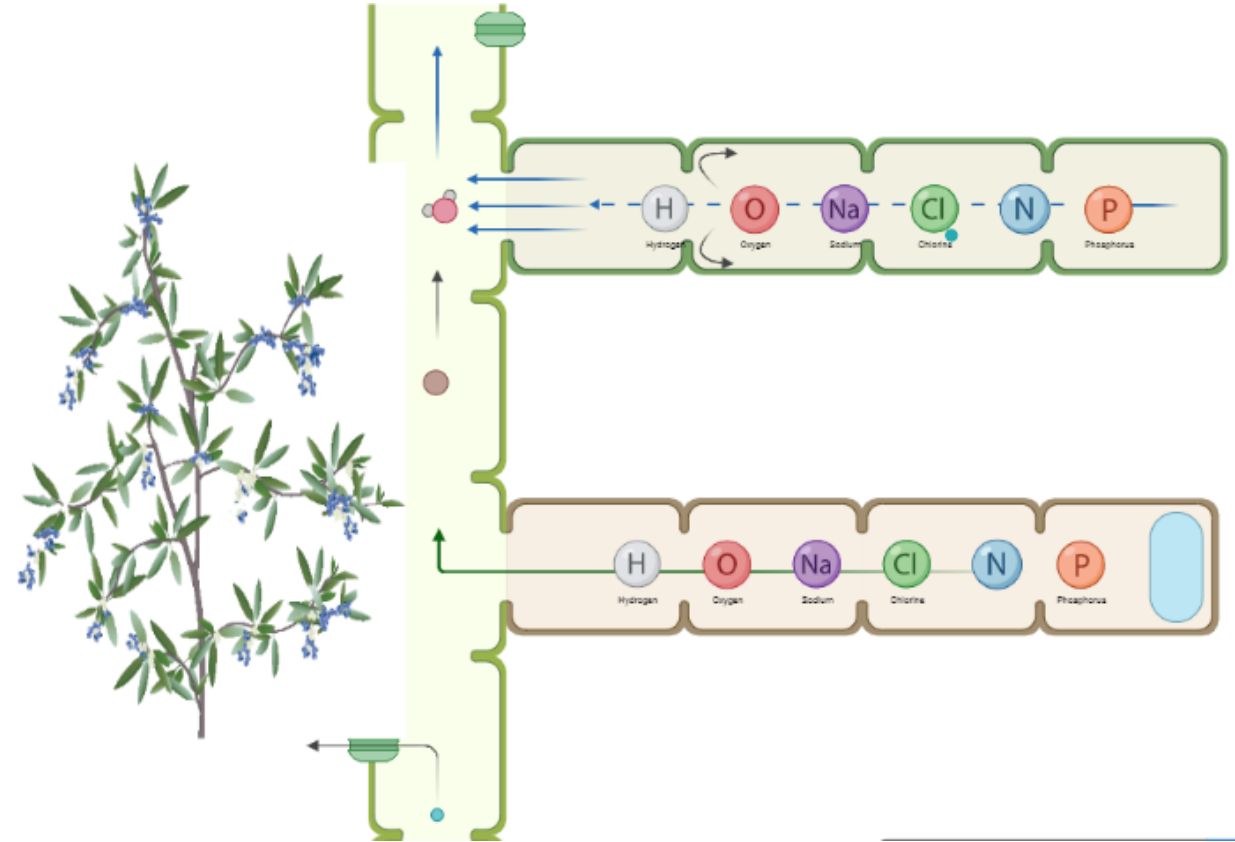
Conclusion

- Soil P content did not match the leaf P content, in fact, doses of soil P above the recommended level may result in lower P in leaves
- Higher doses of P fertilizer do not guarantee higher production
- Increasing doses of K fertilization are not translated into higher soil K concentrations nor are they a predictor for higher yields
- The K nutrient concentration of blueberry leaves was affected by seasonality and temperature



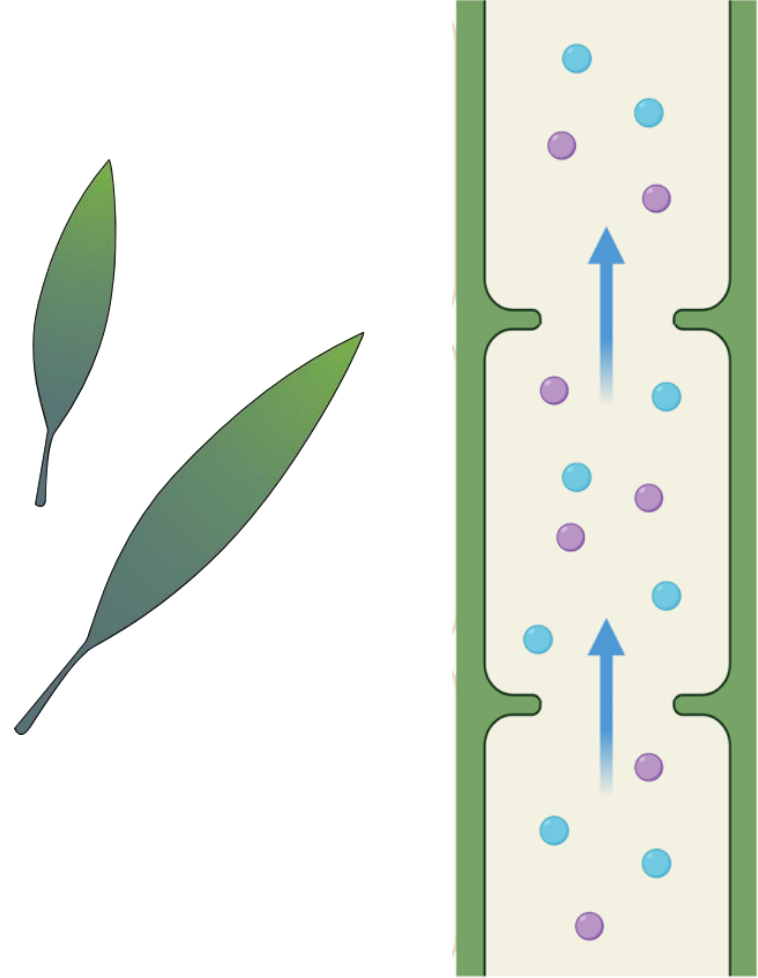
What is sap?

- Sap: the extractable liquid from the xylem and phloem (leaf or petiole), the fluid from conductive tissues.



What is difference?

- Leaf tissue sample, measures the accumulation of each nutrient in the plant.
- Analysis of sap composition: NPK and micronutrients that are readily available.



Objectives

- Identify the best methodology for tissue sample collection
- Identify similarities between sap, soil, and leaf tissue analysis
- Provide sap analysis as a service through the UGA laboratory



Blueberry field

Location:
Pierce
Bacon

Varieties:
'Brightwell'
'Farthing'

Sap nutrient
content

Tissue Type (old or
young)
Sample Type (leaf or
petiole sap)

Time: 9:00 am
12:00 pm
3:00 pm



RESULTS-BLUEBERRY



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Results- sampling time

| Sap Nutrients (mg/L) | Highbush | | | | | | | | | Rabbiteye | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----|------------|------------|----|------------|------------|----|---------------|--------------|----|--------------|--------------|----|--------------|--------------|----|
| | 9:00 AM | | | 12:00 PM | | | 3:00 PM | | | 9:00 AM | | | 12:00 PM | | | 3:00 PM | | |
| | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL |
| NO ₃ ⁻ | 50.7 | 36.7 | a | 56.3 | 51.5 | a | 37.4 | 35.5 | a | 26.6 | 16.1 | b | 53.0 | 44.3 | a | 43.4 | 39.8 | ab |
| Al | 9.0 | 4.3 | a | 11.1 | 6.1 | a | 9.7 | 4.7 | a | 12.6 | 5.4 | a | 12.2 | 5.9 | a | 12.0 | 5.5 | a |
| B | 6.3 | 4.1 | a | 4.8 | 2.8 | a | 5.1 | 3.6 | a | 12.5 | 9.1 | a | 5.4 | 3.6 | b | 6.0 | 3.8 | ab |
| Ca | 1049.9 | 379.5 | a | 909.4 | 320.8 | a | 814.5 | 239.4 | a | 1569.3 | 634.4 | a | 948.0 | 379.7 | b | 976.9 | 361.4 | b |
| Cu | 0.4 | 0.3 | b | 0.7 | 0.3 | a | 0.7 | 0.3 | a | 1.8 | 1.8 | a | 1.0 | 0.8 | a | 1.5 | 1.4 | a |
| Fe | 2.4 | 0.5 | a | 2.0 | 0.8 | a | 2.3 | *0.8 | a | 4.8 | 2.7 | a | 3.1 | 1.7 | b | 2.8 | 1.8 | b |
| Mg | 957.9 | 347.5 | a | 719.6 | 209.7 | a | 755.2 | 224.0 | a | 1114.7 | 358.4 | a | 892.0 | 300.6 | a | 903.7 | 321.1 | a |
| Mn | 23.3 | 13.4 | a | 19.5 | 10.5 | a | 17.7 | 9.0 | a | 35.1 | 14.4 | a | 25.8 | 12.5 | b | 22.8 | 12.4 | b |
| Mo | 0.2 | 0.1 | a | 0.1 | 0.0 | b | 0.1 | 0.0 | b | 0.2 | 0.1 | a | 0.2 | 0.1 | a | 0.2 | 0.1 | a |
| Na | 17.1 | 10.4 | a | 11.5 | 7.5 | b | 13.0 | 6.3 | ab | 33.4 | 17.1 | a | 22.1 | 13.7 | b | 22.8 | 14.3 | ab |
| Ni | 0.2 | 0.1 | a | 0.2 | 0.0 | a | 0.2 | 0.0 | a | 0.2 | 0.1 | a | 0.2 | 0.0 | a | 0.3 | 0.1 | a |
| P * | 207.2 | 40.7 | a | 195.4 | 44.8 | a | 178.9 | 42.2 | a | 231.8 | 76.9 | a | 202.0 | 51.5 | b | 176.3 | 35.6 | b |
| K * | 2322.6 | 514.9 | a | 2186.1 | 299.1 | a | 2124.5 | 326.7 | a | 2425.2 | 711.0 | a | 1965.1 | 361.3 | b | 1921.6 | 272.5 | b |
| S * | 246.5 | 73.5 | a | 238.2 | 72.3 | a | 246.8 | 73.2 | a | 599.7 | 339.3 | a | 345.2 | 184.6 | b | 339.9 | 188.8 | b |
| Zn | 6.6 | 1.8 | b | 7.8 | 1.4 | a | 7.3 | 1.6 | a | 8.2 | 2.7 | a | 8.1 | 2.7 | a | 8.3 | 2.2 | a |

SL: Significant Level. on the SD cell showed a significant difference between sampling times. Wilcoxon each pair analysis (p<0.05).

MAD: Median Absolute Deviation



Results- sampling time

Sampling time does not have a big impact on the sap nutrient concentration

| Petiole Nutrient mg/L | Highbush | | | | | | | | | Rabbiteye | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------|-------|----|----------|-------|----|---------|-------|----|-----------|-------|----|----------|-------|----|---------|-------|----|
| | 9:00 AM | | | 12:00 PM | | | 3:00 PM | | | 9:00 AM | | | 12:00 PM | | | 3:00 PM | | |
| | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL | Median | MAD | SL |
| NO ₃ ⁻ | 17.9 | 9.7 | a | 11.3 | 5.8 | a | 13.5 | 12.8 | a | 20.0 | 10.8 | a | 14.9 | 14.4 | a | 16.4 | 15.9 | a |
| Al | 5.0 | 0.0 | b | 5.0 | 0.0 | ab | 5.0 | 0.0 | a | 5.0 | 0.0 | a | 5.0 | 0.0 | a | 5.0 | 0.0 | a |
| B | 3.9 | 0.8 | a | 3.9 | 0.9 | a | 3.3 | 0.5 | a | 3.5 | 0.7 | a | 3.2 | 0.9 | a | 3.8 | 0.7 | a |
| Ca | 426.5 | 43.1 | b | 512.7 | 59.0 | a | 485.1 | 31.5 | a | 457.0 | 38.6 | b | 461.7 | 59.4 | ab | 508.7 | 45.9 | a |
| Cu | 2.0 | 0.0 | a | 2.0 | 0.0 | a | 2.0 | 0.0 | a | 2.0 | 0.0 | a | 2.0 | 0.0 | a | 2.0 | 0.0 | a |
| Fe | 4.0 | 0.1 | a | 4.0 | 0.0 | a | 4.0 | 0.6 | a | 3.5 | 0.5 | a | 3.8 | 0.2 | a | 3.6 | 0.7 | a |
| Mg | 576.2 | 81.2 | b | 650.8 | 59.1 | a | 647.9 | 66.7 | ab | 586.4 | 94.8 | a | 645.0 | 96.5 | a | 670.1 | 113.5 | a |
| Mn | 14.9 | 8.2 | a | 15.8 | 6.2 | a | 17.0 | 6.9 | a | 22.4 | 12.7 | a | 23.5 | 13.0 | a | 24.7 | 15.2 | a |
| Mo | 0.2 | 0.1 | a | 0.2 | 0.0 | a | 0.2 | 0.0 | a | 0.4 | 0.1 | a | 0.4 | 0.2 | a | 0.4 | 0.2 | a |
| Na | 14.9 | 10.9 | a | 14.1 | 10.1 | a | 16.3 | 9.9 | a | 18.8 | 14.8 | a | 14.9 | 10.5 | a | 13.3 | 9.3 | a |
| Ni | 0.4 | 0.0 | a | 0.4 | 0.0 | a | 0.4 | 0.0 | a | 0.4 | 0.0 | a | 0.4 | 0.0 | a | 0.4 | 0.0 | a |
| P | 353.6 | 97.3 | a | 429.1 | 111.5 | a | 376.6 | 57.6 | a | 344.0 | 117.6 | a | 357.6 | 133.8 | a | 438.6 | 156.1 | a |
| K | 2616.7 | 156.6 | b | 3006.6 | 305.1 | a | 2795.3 | 267.8 | a | 2766.2 | 480.9 | a | 2510.8 | 339.0 | a | 2794.9 | 312.0 | a |
| S | 270.4 | 33.9 | a | 293.3 | 62.9 | a | 288.2 | 71.8 | a | 236.8 | 41.2 | a | 233.0 | 42.9 | a | 233.3 | 32.8 | a |
| Zn | 15.8 | 6.6 | a | 23.3 | 8.3 | a | 18.4 | 5.9 | a | 21.5 | 5.0 | a | 18.4 | 6.3 | a | 17.5 | 7.0 | a |

SL: Significant Level. the SD cell showed a significant difference among the time of samples. Wilcoxon each pair analysis ($p < 0.05$).

MAD: Median Absolute Deviation



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Results- tissue age

| Sap Nutrients (mg/L) | Highbush | | | | | Rabbiteye | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|-------------|----|---------------|--------------|-----------|-------|----|---------------|--------------|
| | New | | SD | Old | | New | | SD | Old | |
| | Median | MAD | | Median | MAD | Median | MAD | | Median | MAD |
| NO ₃ ⁻ | 65.8 | 51.8 | | 30.5 | 27.5 | 34.8 | 25.7 | | 38.4 | 30.0 |
| Al | 5.0 | 2.5 | * | 12.6 | 4.6 | 8.3 | 3.9 | * | 13.9 | 5.0 |
| B | 3.3 | 2.1 | * | 8.4 | 4.3 | 5.3 | 4.1 | * | 10.1 | 7.1 |
| Ca | 680.5 | 187.6 | * | 1056.8 | 259.2 | 948.0 | 411.8 | * | 1278.9 | 566.8 |
| Cu | 0.5 | 0.4 | | 0.6 | 0.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | | 1.2 | 1.1 |
| Fe | 2.1 | 0.7 | * | 2.5 | 0.8 | 3.4 | 2.1 | | 4.4 | 2.6 |
| Mg | 676.5 | 217.1 | | 895.6 | 244.5 | 916.6 | 349.9 | | 1065.1 | 377.3 |
| Mn | 12.2 | 5.8 | * | 27.3 | 11.5 | 20.8 | 9.3 | * | 37.3 | 13.9 |
| Mo | 0.1 | 0.0 | | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.1 | | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| Na | 11.5 | 6.4 | * | 17.5 | 8.7 | 22.6 | 14.4 | | 27.4 | 14.8 |
| Ni | 0.2 | 0.1 | | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | | 0.2 | 0.0 |
| P | 213.1 | 52.6 | * | 181.4 | 41.9 | 202.0 | 44.1 | | 201.9 | 71.5 |
| K | 2082.5 | 299.6 | * | 2390.7 | 483.2 | 2051.7 | 389.4 | | 2110.5 | 480.9 |
| S | 205.9 | 64.2 | * | 287.4 | 73.7 | 380.6 | 223.2 | * | 482.6 | 283.2 |
| Zn | 7.0 | 1.7 | | 7.2 | 1.6 | 7.2 | 2.0 | * | 9.3 | 2.5 |

SD: Significant Difference. Nutrients with an * on the SD cell showed a significant difference between young and old tissue samples. Wilcoxon each pair analysis (p<0.05).

Values in bold represent the significantly highest values of a nutrient among tissue ages in a determined variety.

MAD: Median Absolute Deviation



Results- type

| Petiole Nutrient | Highbush | | | | | Rabbiteye | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------|-------|----|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|----|--------------|--------------|
| | Young | | SD | Old | | New | | SD | Old | |
| | Median | MAD | | Median | MAD | Median | MAD | | Median | MAD |
| NO ₃ ⁻ | 9.5 | 5.0 | * | 18.1 | 8.3 | 10.9 | 10.4 | * | 26.5 | 9.9 |
| Al | 5.0 | 0.0 | | 5.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 0.0 | | 5.0 | 0.0 |
| B | 3.0 | 0.5 | * | 4.4 | 0.5 | 3.5 | 1.2 | | 3.6 | 0.8 |
| Ca | 459.5 | 40.9 | | 491.4 | 66.6 | 455.5 | 59.3 | * | 492.0 | 51.3 |
| Cu | 2.0 | 0.0 | | 2.0 | 0.0 | 2.0 | 0.0 | | 2.0 | 0.0 |
| Fe | 4.0 | 0.3 | | 4.0 | 0.1 | 3.4 | 0.6 | | 3.7 | 0.3 |
| Mg | 647.9 | 52.1 | | 597.3 | 64.0 | 725.9 | 84.9 | * | 562.0 | 60.1 |
| Mn | 10.9 | 3.1 | * | 27.3 | 7.9 | 15.6 | 8.2 | * | 39.3 | 22.3 |
| Mo | 0.2 | 0.0 | | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.2 | | 0.4 | 0.1 |
| Na | 12.4 | 8.4 | * | 22.0 | 10.1 | 13.3 | 9.3 | | 18.3 | 13.8 |
| Ni | 0.4 | 0.0 | | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.0 | | 0.4 | 0.0 |
| P | 290.1 | 50.0 | * | 475.4 | 75.6 | 334.0 | 119.1 | * | 446.5 | 164.9 |
| K | 2678.2 | 180.0 | * | 2824.8 | 340.1 | 2690.9 | 295.4 | | 2696.7 | 527.3 |
| S | 239.1 | 37.4 | * | 345.2 | 47.6 | 229.2 | 29.5 | * | 246.6 | 52.2 |
| Zn | 13.5 | 3.1 | * | 28.4 | 6.0 | 15.2 | 3.9 | * | 24.4 | 7.3 |

Sap petiole sample could be a faster way to identify N deficiencies

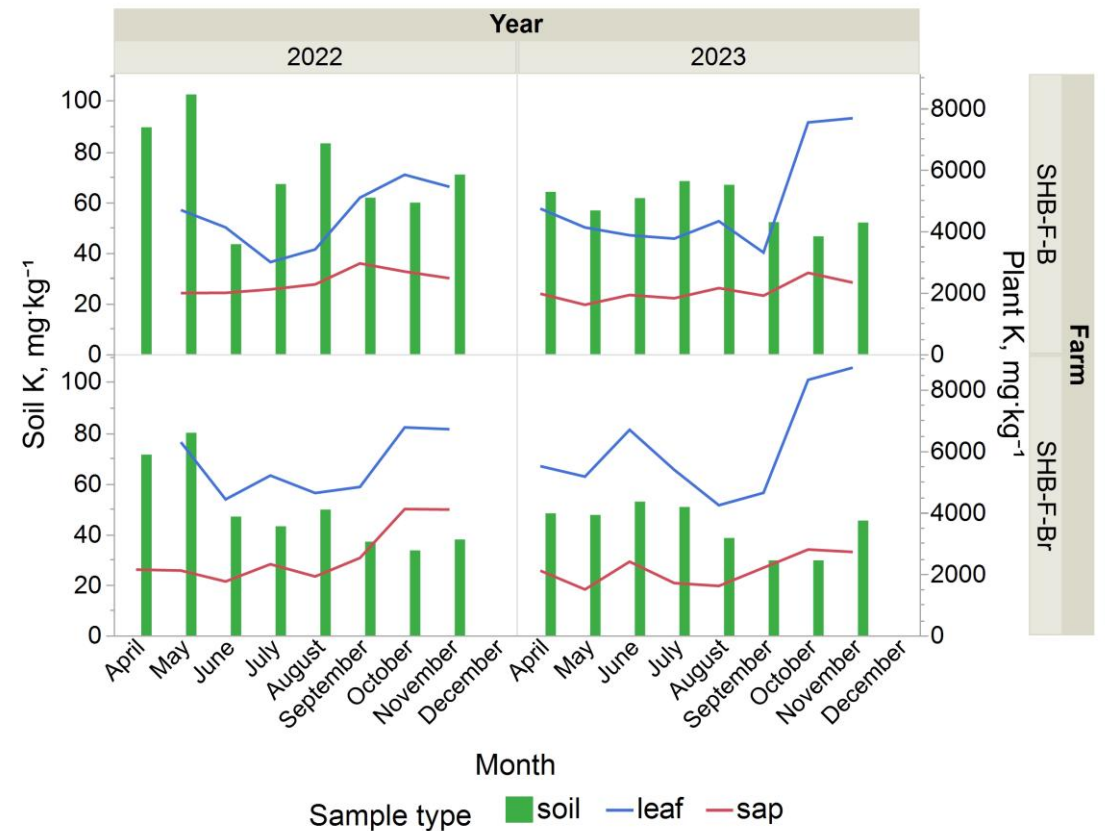
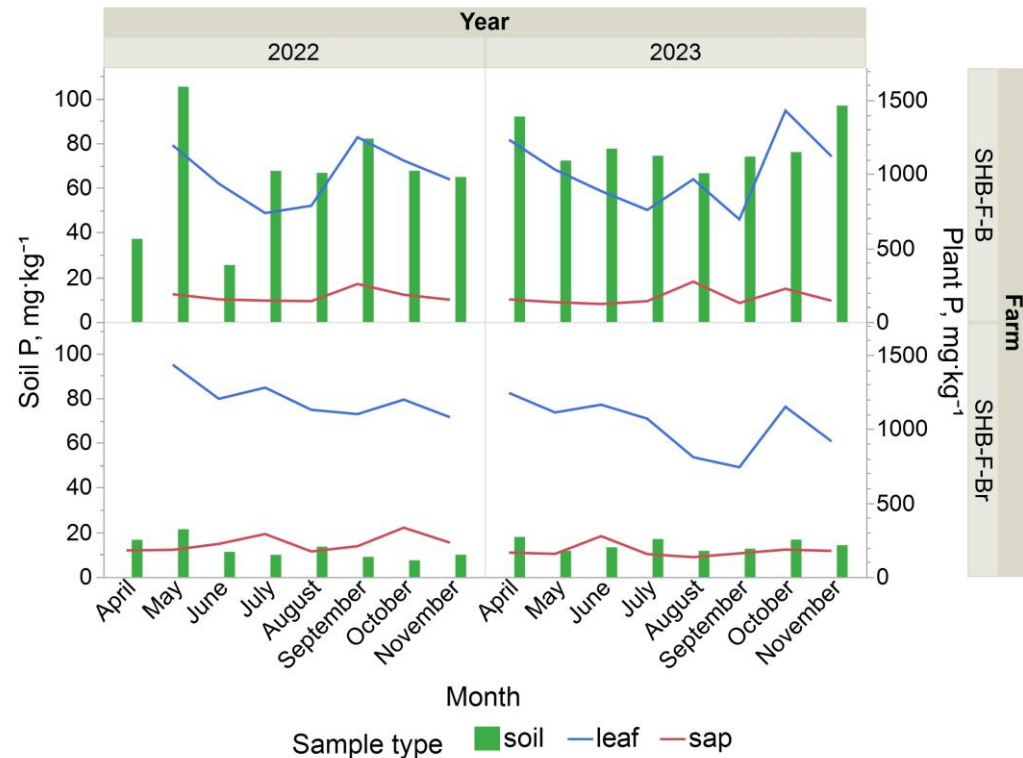
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Values in bold represent the significantly highest values of a nutrient among tissue ages in a determined variety.

MAD: Median Absolute Deviation



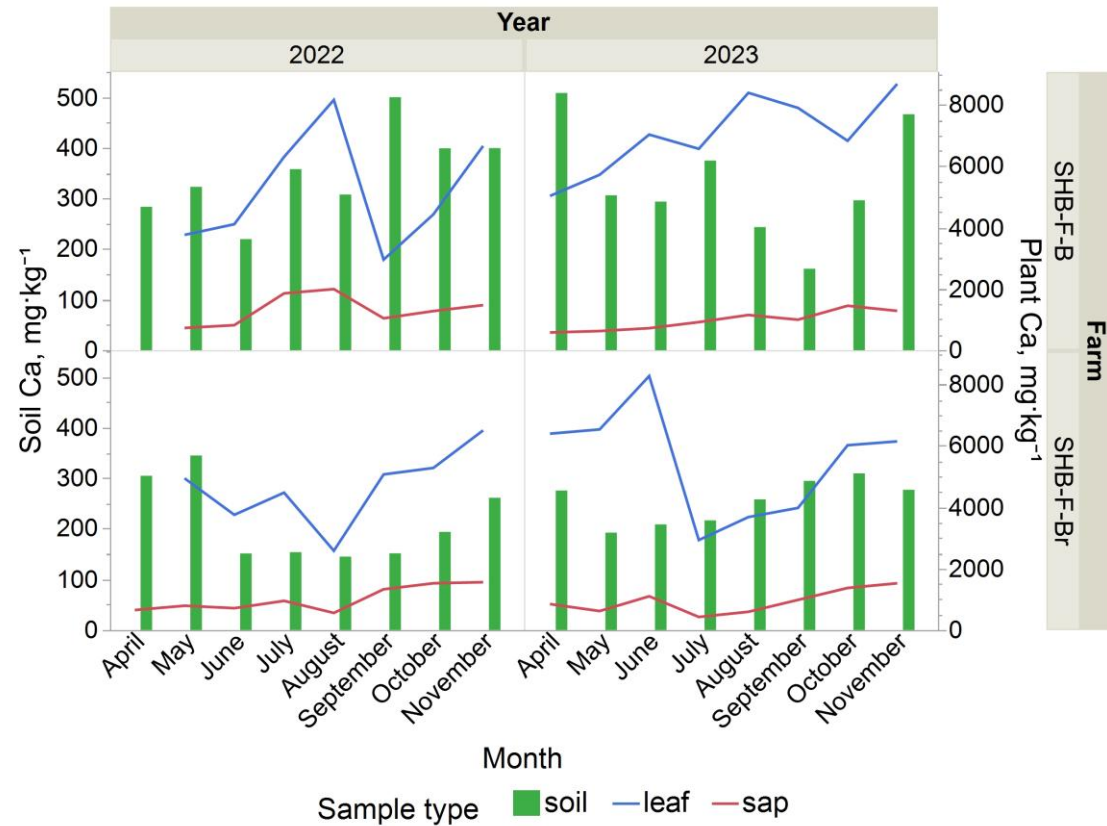
Trends: soil, sap, and leaf tissue samples



Sap and leaf nutrient content have a similar pattern
K increased after September



Trends: soil, sap, and leaf tissue samples

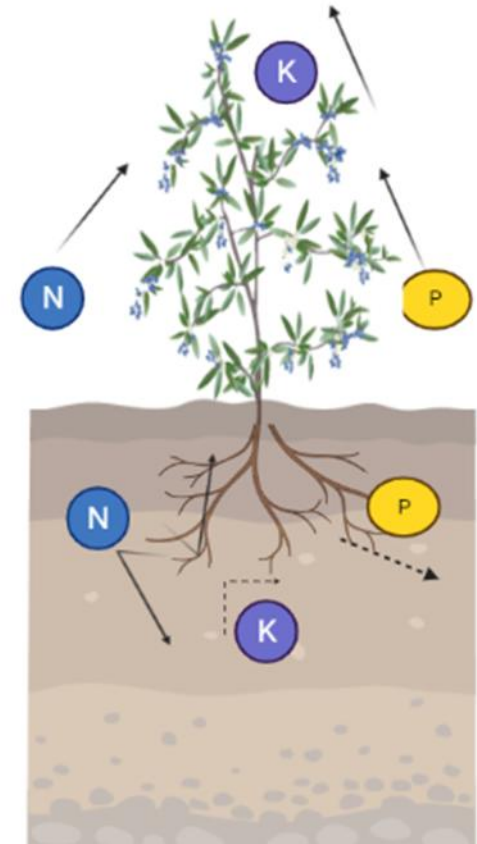


Calcium has low mobility in the plant



Summary

- Sampling time does not influence nutrient concentration in sap, samples can be taken any time during the day
- Old tissue had higher nutrient concentration, which could be linked to nutrient mobility, which is similar to leaf tissue sample
- Sap nutrient concentration changes through the year and has a similar trend to leaf nutrient concentration



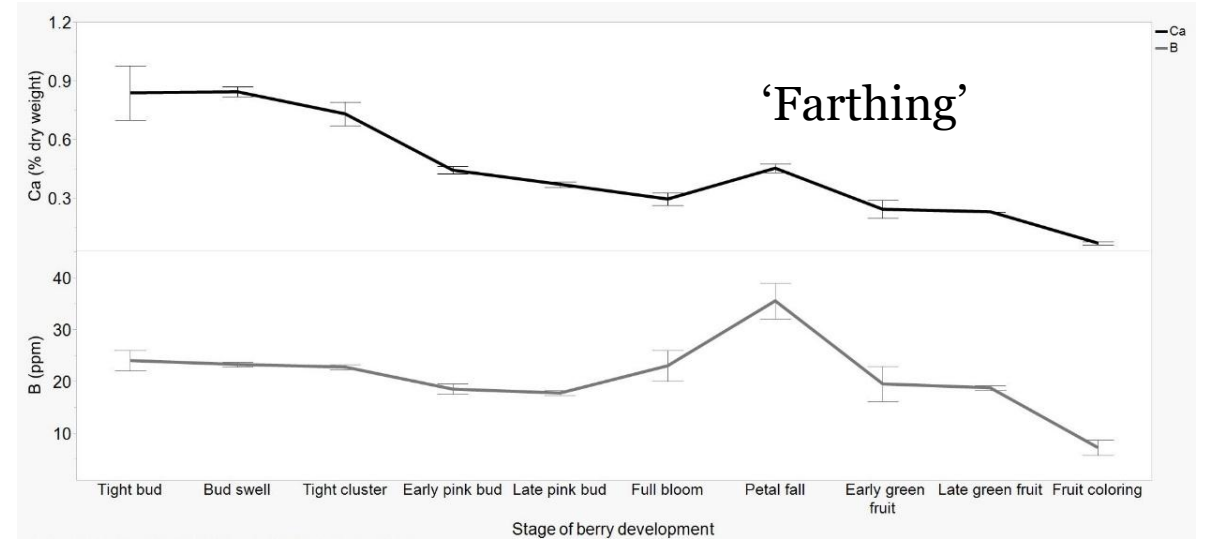
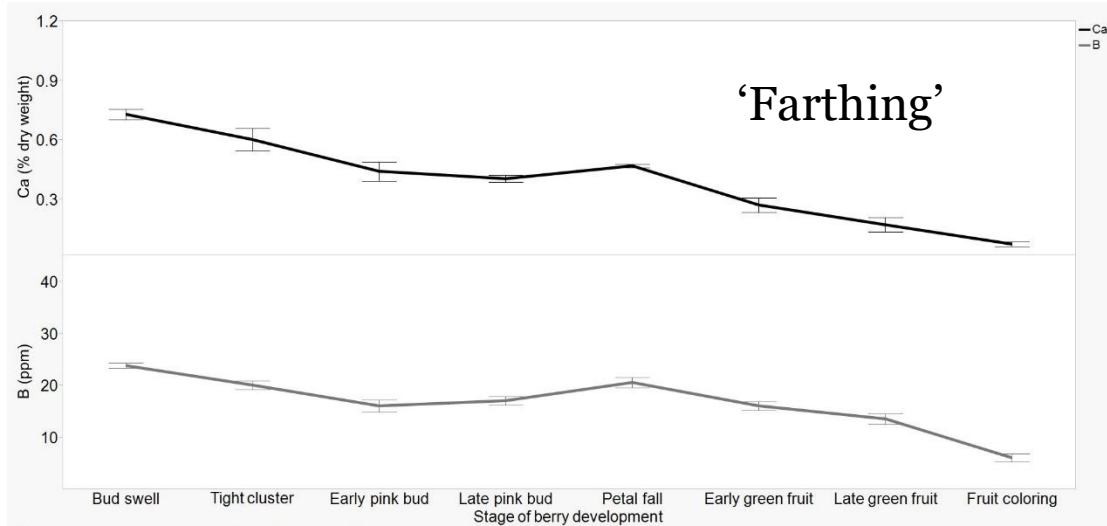
Sufficient levels for sap

| Mineral | | Current Level | Optimum | | | |
|--------------------|-------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|--|
| Total Sugars | % | 3,0 | 1,6 - 4,9 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | % | 4,4 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| pH | | 3,3 | 5,3 - 5,7 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | | 3,3 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| EC | mS/cm | 6,7 | 5,3 - 6,7 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | mS/cm | 7,2 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| K - Potassium | ppm | 2179 | 1740 - 2260 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 3004 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| Ca - Calcium | ppm | 1203 | 710 - 1290 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 1429 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| K / Ca | | 1,81 | | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | | 2,10 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| Mg - Magnesium | ppm | 938 | 420 - 630 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 1128 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| Na - Sodium | ppm | 18 | 7 - 15 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 25 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| NH4 - Ammonium | ppm | 130 | 30 - 100 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 61 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| NO3 - Nitrate | ppm | <20 | <20 - 45 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | <20 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| N in Nitrate | ppm | <5 | <5 - 10 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | <5 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| N - Total Nitrogen | ppm | 366 | 234 - 316 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 344 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| Cl - Chloride | ppm | 159 | 67 - 133 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 162 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| S - Sulfur | ppm | 182 | 87 - 143 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 265 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| P - Phosphorus | ppm | 382 | 132 - 308 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 395 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| Si - Silica | ppm | 25,3 | 14,4 - 21,6 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 27,2 | | ² | <div></div> | |
| Fe - Iron | ppm | 3,99 | 11,39 - 22,61 | ¹ | <div></div> | |
| | ppm | 8,46 | | ² | <div></div> | |

Do we need to develop sufficient levels for sap nutrient concentration?



Ca and B Accumulation at different growth stages



Plant Growth Regulator -Ethephon

- Plant growth regulators (PGR) are natural or synthetic compounds that alter physiologic processes in plants
- Ethephon is a PGR that releases ethylene during breakdown.
- Ethylene can also delay ripening.
- Currently, blueberry growers spray ethephon on new SHB cultivars.
- Fall application of ethephon delayed blooming by 7–10 days
- There is a lack of information regarding the impact of ethephon on new SHB cultivars.



(Lopez-Lauri, 2016; Rademacher, 2015; Crisosto et al., 1990; Krewer et al., 2000; Krewer et al., 2005; Nečas et al., 2023)



Objectives

Evaluating the effect of ethephon treatments on:

- Bloom delay
- Fruit ripening

Cultivars: 'Farthing,' 'Georgia Dawn' and 'Kee Crisp' in 2023

Cultivars: : 'Farthing,' 'Georgia Dawn' in 2024



Materials and Methods

- Location: a commercial farm in Newton, Georgia in 2022 and 2023.
- Three SHB cultivars: 'Farthing,' 'Georgia Dawn,' and 'Kee Crisp.'
- A randomized complete block design was used with five replicates per treatment. Each treatment included five plants.
- Ethephon was sprayed on 4-year-old plants once on November, 2022 using a backpack at four concentrations (0, 200, 400, and 800 mg.L⁻¹).
- Ethephon was combined with a 0.25% nonionic surfactant for application.



Materials and Methods

Location: a commercial farm in Pearson, Georgia in 2023 and 2024.

- Three SHB cultivars: 'Farthing,' and 'Georgia Dawn,' A randomized complete block design was used with five replicates per treatment. Each treatment included five plants.
- 800 ppm pf Ethephon was sprayed on
 - Early (10/11/24),
 - Mid+Late (10/25/24 + 11/7/23)
 - Mid (10/25/23),
 - Late (11/7/23)
 - Control (without ethephon)



Materials and Methods

Assessment of growth stages

- Three branches on each of the three central plants per treatment were tagged.
- The number of developing flower buds was counted in each branch from December 2022 to March 2023.
- Flower buds and fruit development growth stages were evaluated using a modified version of the scale developed by Michigan State University.
- Data were collected from the three central plants in each experimental plot.
- Each tagged branch was evaluated from the top 10 inches.



S1
Tight bud



S2
Bud swell



S3
Tight cluster



S4
Early pink bud



S5
Late pink bud



S6
Full bloom



S7
Petal fall



S8
Early green fruit



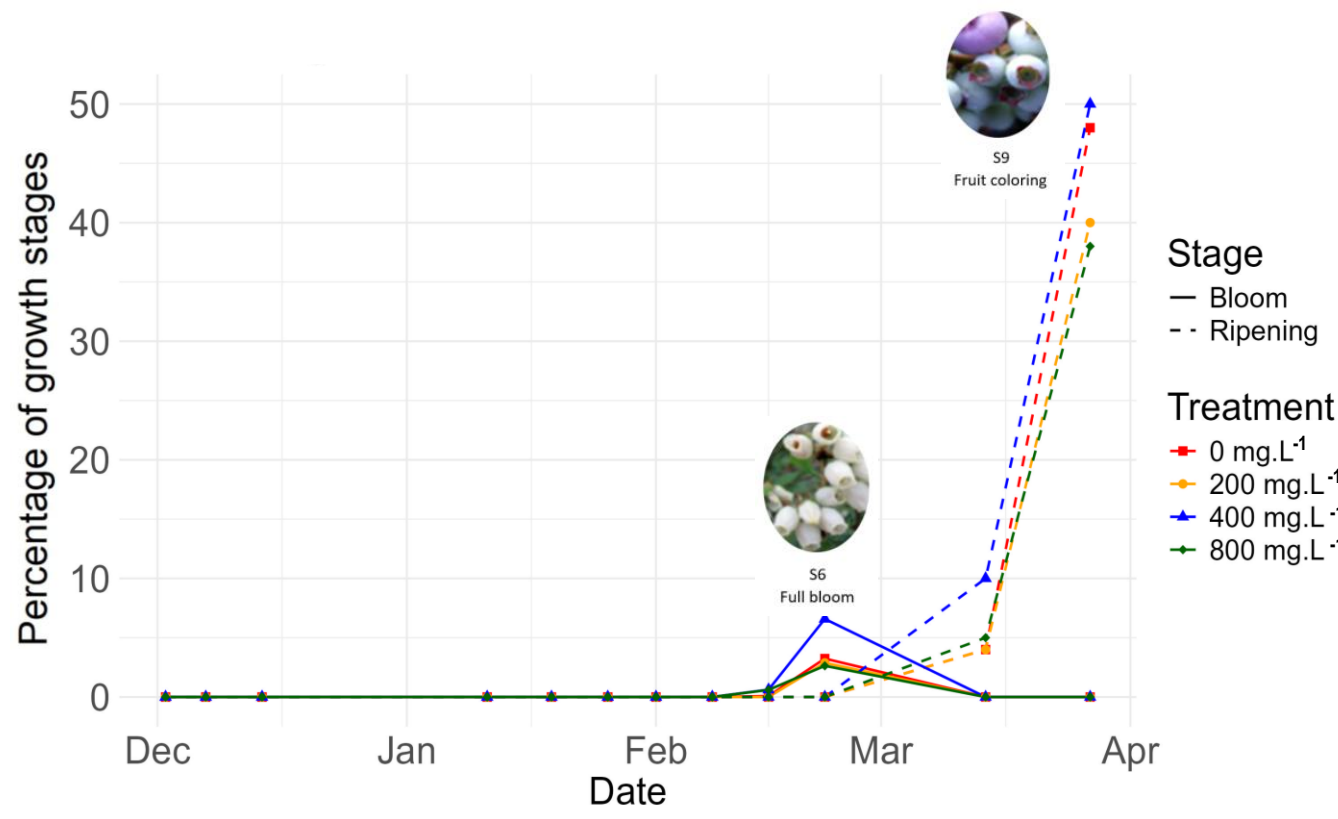
S9
Fruit coloring

Fabian Reyes



Results

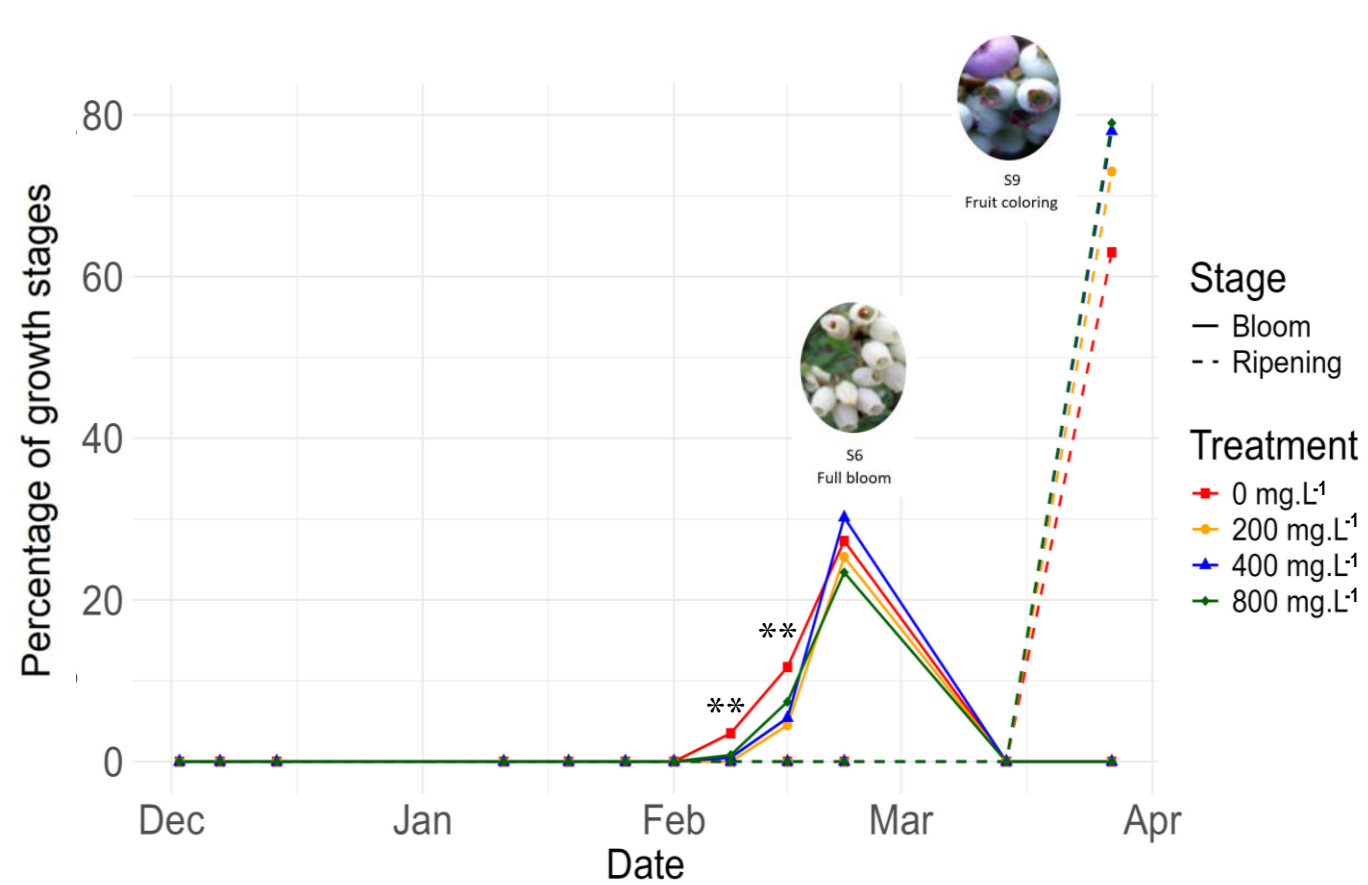
'Farthing'



Percentage of open flowers (Bloom) and berries at the fruit coloring stage (Ripening) from December 2022 to March 2023 for SHB blueberry cultivar 'Farthing.'

Results

'Georgia Dawn'

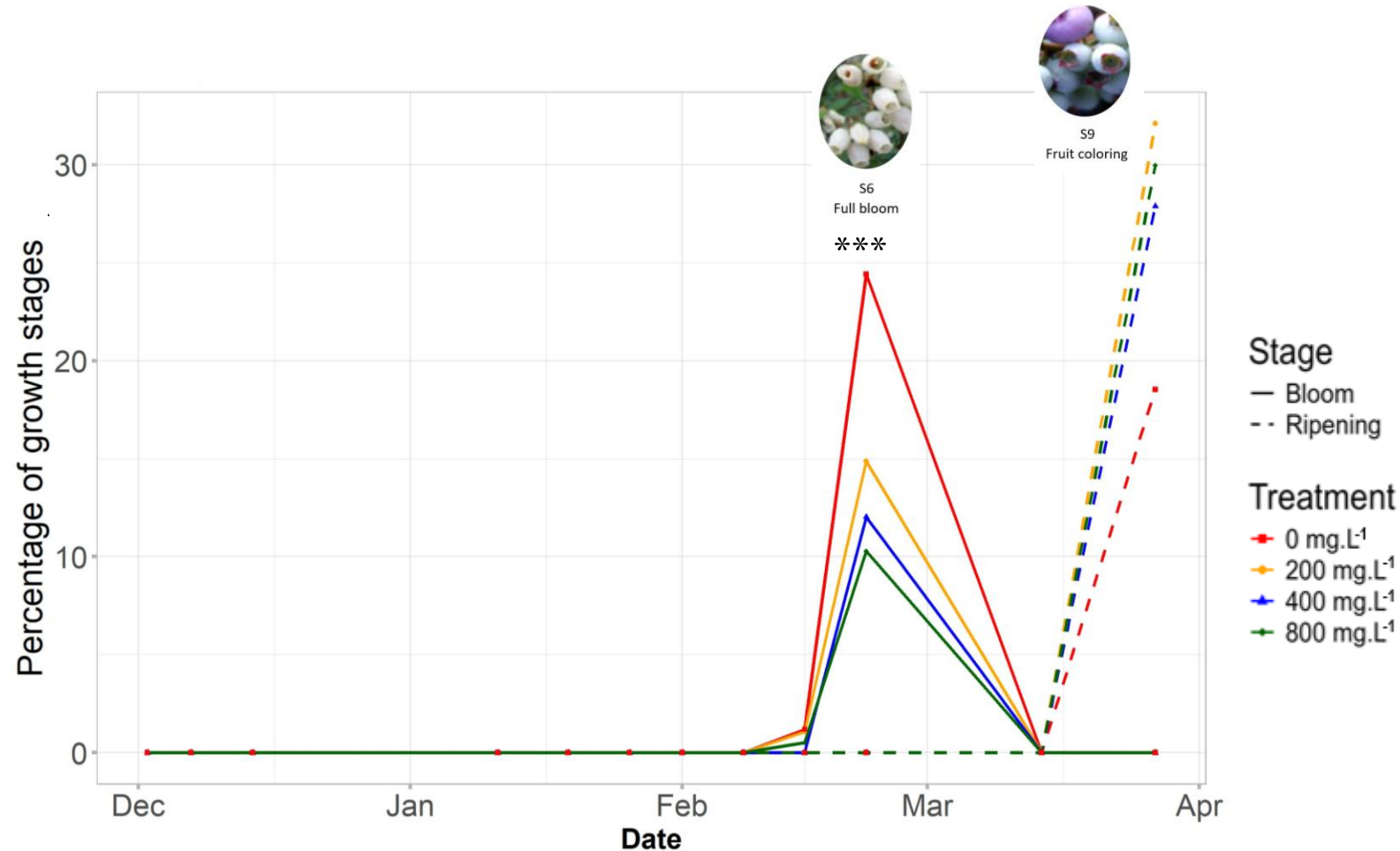


Percentage of open flowers (Bloom) and berries at the fruit coloring stage (Ripening) from December 2022 to March 2023 for SHB blueberry cultivar 'Georgia Dawn.'

** : significant at $P < 0.01$.

Results

'Kee Crisp'

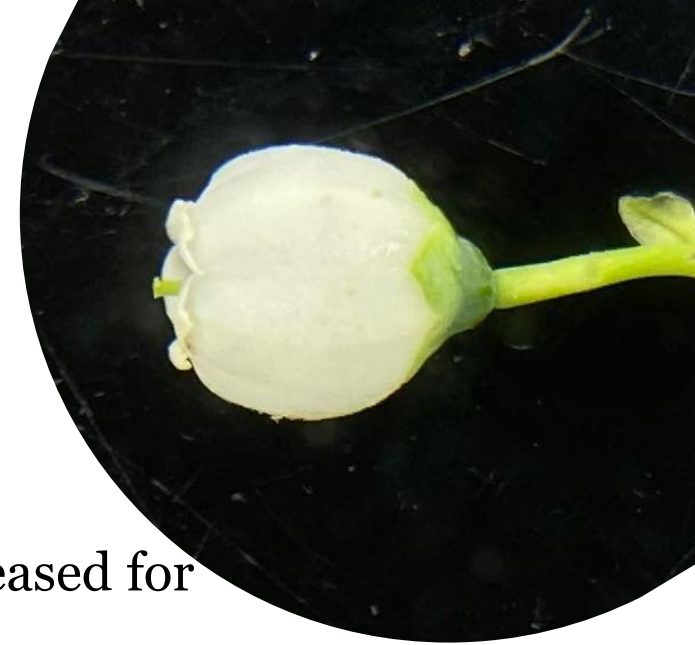


Percentage of open flowers (Bloom) and berries at the fruit coloring stage (Ripening) from December 2022 to March 2023 for SHB blueberry cultivar 'Kee Crisp.'

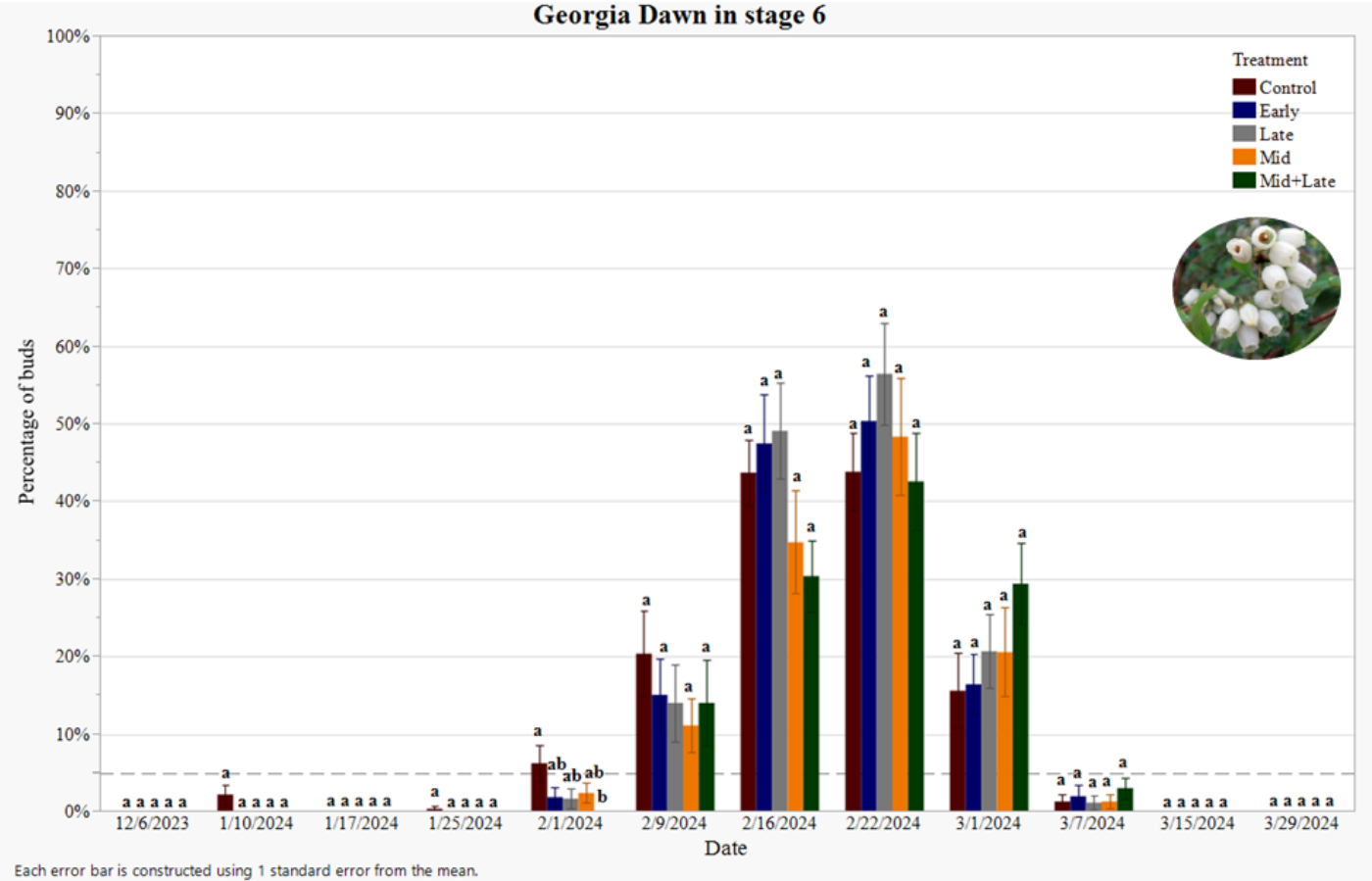
***: significant at $P < 0.0001$.

General remarks

- Ethephon delayed bloom in 'Georgia Dawn' and 'Kee Crisp' cultivars.
- No significant differences were found in 'Farthing.'
- As the concentration of ethephon increased, the bloom delay also increased for 'Georgia Dawn' and 'Kee Crisp.'
- The 'Kee Crisp' variety exhibited a more pronounced effect on blooming delay.
- Fruit ripening was not delayed by ethephon application. Thus, ethephon can be used as a tool to prevent freeze damage.



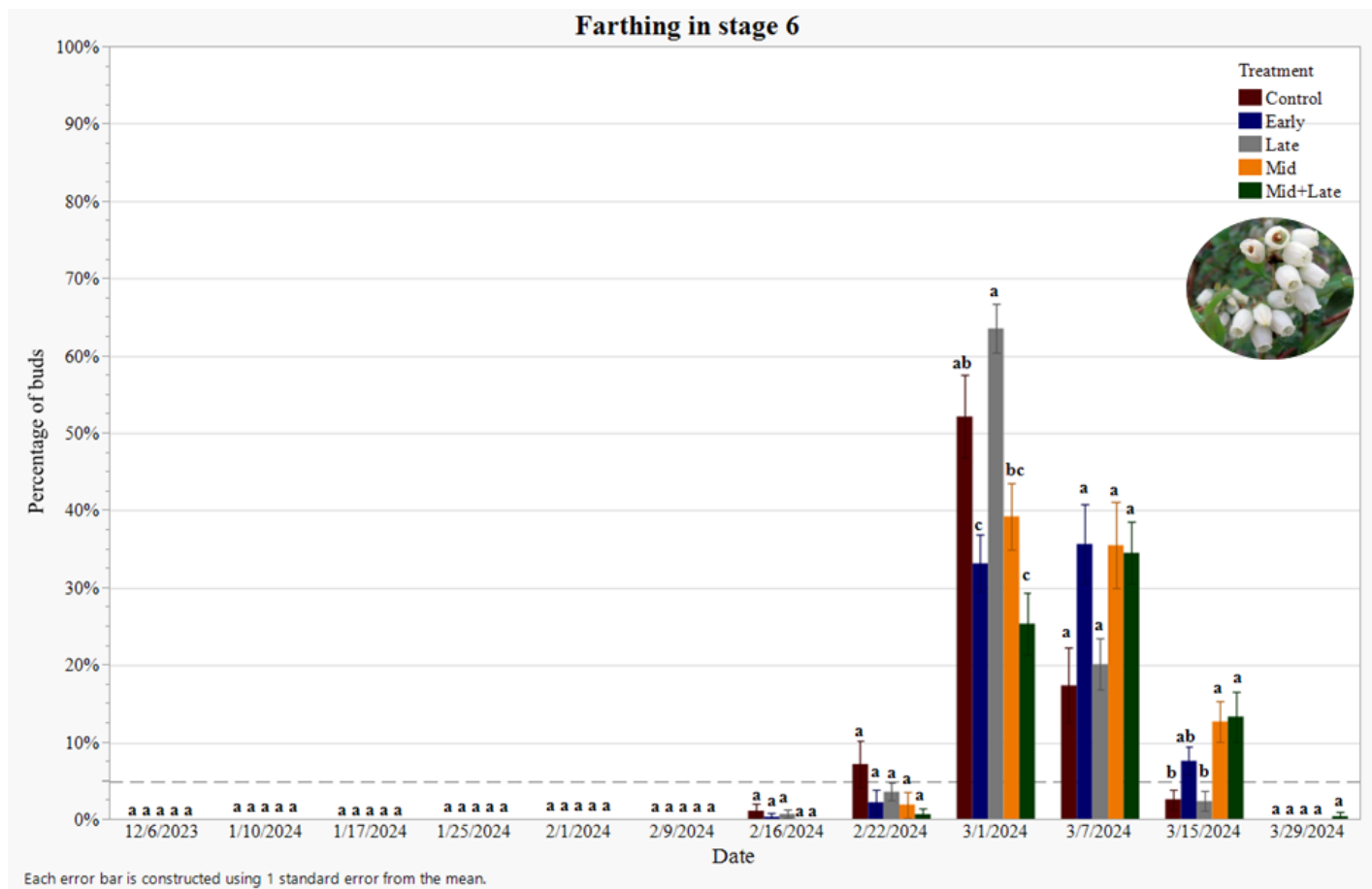
Results ‘Georgia Dawn’



| Georgia Dawn | |
|--------------|---------------|
| Treatment | Days to bloom |
| Early | 67 ± ab |
| Mid | 66 ± ab |
| Mid+Late | 70 ± a |
| Late | 67 ± ab |
| Control | 59 ± b |



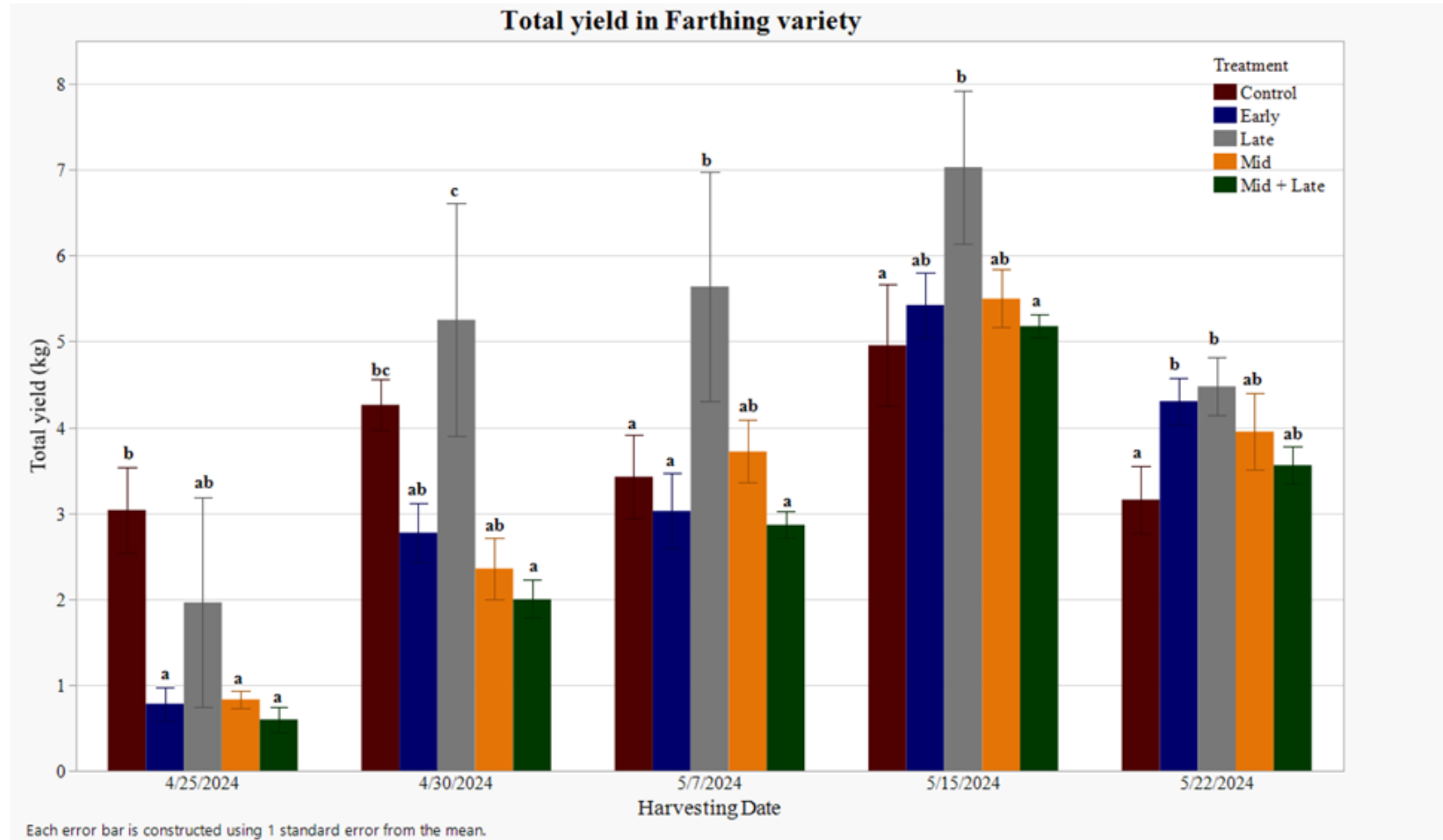
Results ‘Farthing’



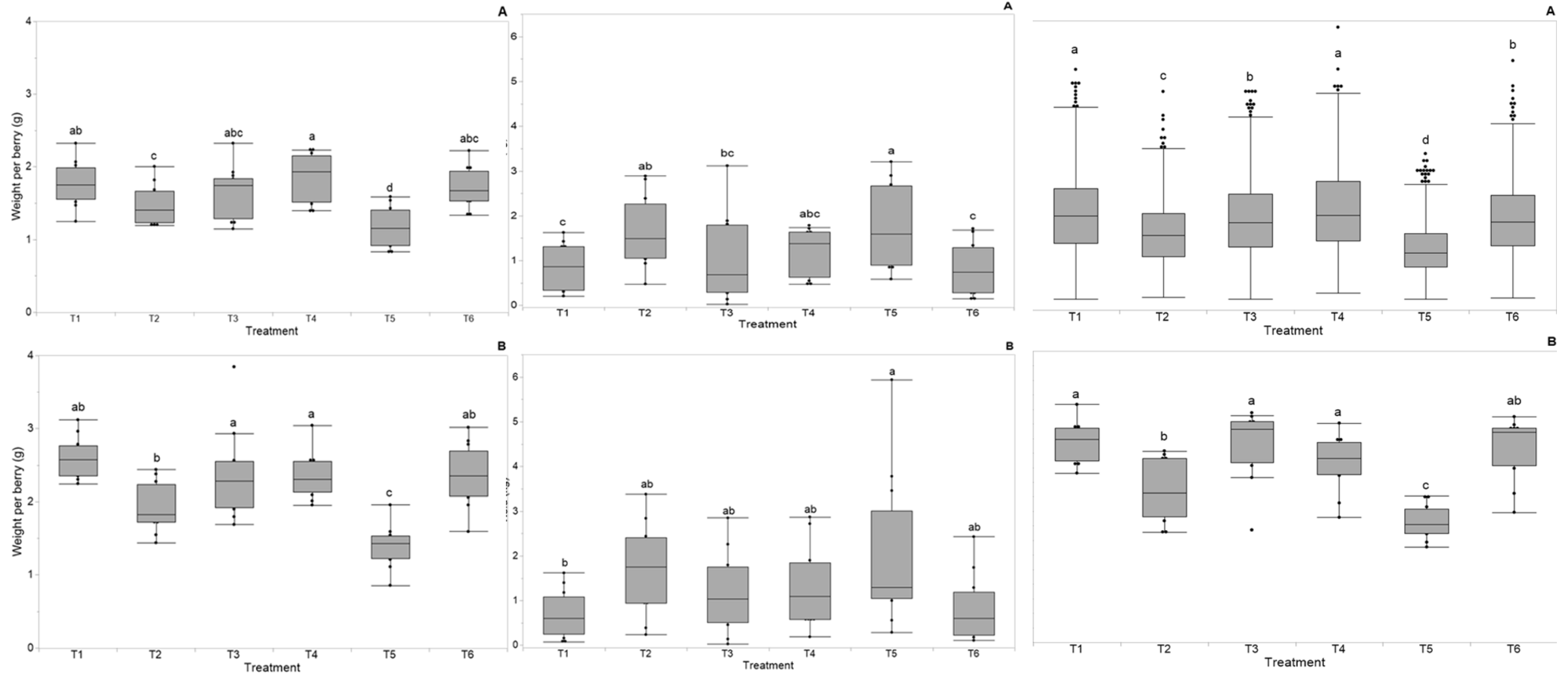
| Farthing | |
|-----------|---------------|
| Treatment | Days to bloom |
| Early | 84 ± a |
| Mid | 85 ± a |
| Mid+Late | 85 ± a |
| Late | 85 ± a |
| Control | 83 ± a |



Results 'Farthing'



Pruning Does Not Reduce Yield Of ‘Farthing’





Acknowledgement

- This work was funded by the Georgia Blueberry Commission and the Georgia Farm Bureau.
- We thank the growers that allowed us to use their farm.

Questions?

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Thank you!



College of Agricultural &
Environmental Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Pruning Treatments



Experimental Layout

| Treatment | Description |
|-----------|--|
| T1 | Hedge summer/hand pruned fall |
| T2 | Hedge summer/tipping in fall (commercial practice) |
| T3 | Hand pruned fall |
| T4 | Hand pruned summer/hand pruned fall |
| T5 | No pruning or hedging |
| T6 | Hedge and hand pruned summer/ hand pruned fall |



- Summer pruning was performed in August and fall pruning in November
- RCB - 3 replicates
- 3 locations
- 4 year old 'Farthing'

