

and lobbied for the plants' new designation.

"The folks that do it are pretty brave, in my opinion."

One person can bring in 1,000 pounds in one day if they're in the right spot.

"It's the hottest environment you can possibly imagine," said Jeremiah Kirby, of Indiantown.

Kirby and his wife raked in \$42,000 two years ago by picking on weekends and some evenings after working their regular jobs.

Buyers scattered throughout

of more than 1,750 applications, according to Department of Agriculture officials.

Even if you are harvesting on your own land, you need a permit if you intend to sell the berries.

Most buyers have permit applications on hand and help guide pickers through the process to ensure they have a steady supply to legally purchase.

"You've gotta educate them," said Michael Baker, who buys berries in Indiantown. "I got one guy who's gone to 100 different residences and gotten permission.

Buyers sell the berries to processing plants, which dry them. It takes 3 pounds of wet berries to make a pound of dry berries, Baker said.

The dried fruits are then resold to manufacturers to be transformed into pills, gel capsules or vitamins. The berries have been used for medicinal purposes for centuries and, since the mid-1990s, have been a topselling herb in the United States.