

Vegetable, fruit growers convene in Hershey

HERSHEY — Vegetable and fruit growers from across the state converged on the Hershey Convention Center this week for the annual Pennsylvania Vegetable Conference and Trade Show.

Beginning on Tuesday, the three-day event included seminars on all phases of producing and marketing vegetables, bedding plants and small fruits. More than 1,200 conference goers passed through the Convention Center's doors to take part in the educational presentations as well as to catch up on the latest fruit and vegetable technology as displayed by more than 100 commercial exhibitors.

This year's conference was the 127th annual meeting of the State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania, and was held in conjunction with the horticultural societies of Maryland and New Jersey, as well as the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association.

Highlighting opening day activities was the State Tomato Growers' Clubs' presentation of its annual production awards.

In the Class 1, (100 acres or

more) Machine Harvest category. Mark and Earl Stern of Lock Haven (Clinton Co.) were the top producers. The father-son team harvested 4,043 tons of usable fruit. Their yield averaged 25.6 tons per acre for the 158-acre crop. Both transplants and gel seeding were used to establish the crop.

Elvin Stoltzfus of Lewisburg (Union Co.) took top honors in the Class 3, Machine Harvest category for growers with 50 to 75 acres. Stoltzfus averaged 22.5 tons per acre from 70 acres, for an overall production of 1,575 tons of tomatoes.

The third winner in the Machine Harvest category was John Ziesenheim of Lake City (Erie County), who won Class 4 (20 to 49 acres) with a total yield of 1,046 tons. He averaged 25.6 tons per acre on the 41 acres planted.

Two winners were recognized in the Hand Harvest category. Robert MacBeth of Biglerville (Adams County) had the highest yield in Class 3 (15 to 24 acres). He harvested 504 tons of fruit from 16 acres, for an average yield of 31.5 tons per acre.

In the Class 4, Hand Harvest



Machine Harvest winners received plaques and congratulations from Ronald Huddy (right) of the Red Wing Co. From left are Earl and Mark Stern, Class 1; Elvin Stoltzfus, Class 3; and John Ziesenheim, Class 4.

class (5 to 14 acres) Daniel Fisher of Quarryville (Lancaster Co.) had the highest yield. Fisher's 6.5 acres produced 258 tons of fruit for an average yield of 39.7 tons per acre.



Daniel K. Fisher (represented by John Everitt, left) took top honors in Class 3, Hand Harvest category, while Robert MacBeth topped Class 4, Hand Harvest

Food for thought...

City restaurants may be key to higher vegetable profits

BY JACK HUBLEY

HERSHEY — You don't have to be an octogenarian to recall the days when the business of selling produce and other agricultural commodities was a door-to-door enterprise. Weekly housecalls from farmers were the norm, and freshness was in style.

For many Pennsylvanians, fresh produce can still be had by patronizing the countless roadside markets across the commonwealth. But suppose you're an inner-city chef charged with the task of providing high quality meals for an army of sophisticated restaurant-goers. Your business

quite literally depends on good taste. And meals that keep hungry customers knocking on your door are inevitably the product of fresh ingredients.

Marc BrownGold is one chef who realizes the importance of that elusive quality called freshness. The head chef at Philadelphia's 16th Street Bar and Grill, BrownGold quickly tired of trying to manufacture palatable dishes from the countless crates of flaccid vegetables that were arriving at his doorstep.

After discovering that Philadelphia lies within a two-hour drive of much of the state's best

quality farmland, he decided to turn to local growers with his problem.

"In Philadelphia chefs are starving for good quality, interesting vegetable products," says BrownGold. "And the tendency is to go to smaller purveyors who can work with us, rather than one large supplier."

This announcement turned out to be appetizing food for thought for the roomful of vegetable conference goers listening to BrownGold's talk on Tuesday.

Freshness isn't the only reason that BrownGold and other city restaurateurs prefer to buy locally. "I can't talk to a California grower about the kinds of products that I want," he says, adding that local, personalized service gives the buyer the opportunity to sample products before making an investment.

To charges that such direct service is a low-volume enterprise, BrownGold responds that it is a high-profit one as well. He has paid as much as \$35 for 12 half-pints of raspberries, \$18 for three pounds of eggplants and \$3 an ounce for herbs.

BrownGold's food purchases average \$20,000 a month, with more than \$3,000 of that total going for produce. He points out that there are more than 100 restaurants in Philadelphia, and many of them are significantly larger than his own operation.

BrownGold says that one way for farmers to take advantage of the city restaurant market is to cash in on the trends in ethnic foods. Mexican cuisine, for example, relies heavily on peppers, while oriental cooking requires such products as snow peas, Bok Choy (Chinese cabbage) and a long, white radish known as daikon. "These products are very hard to get on the Philadelphia market, and very expensive," observes BrownGold.

Restaurants serving French dishes need plenty of squash blossoms and baby vegetables such as eggplants, corn, peppers and French stringbeans which seem to taste better when called "haricot verts." "In the spring I

paid \$18 for three pounds of baby eggplants," recalls BrownGold.

Herbs are always in demand, notes the chef. "In the winter it's very hard to get fresh herbs, but even in the spring they're always expensive."

BrownGold, who dealt personally with two farmers last season, is convinced that more "farmer-chef interaction" is the

key to more appetizing menus and higher profits for producers. He is also working on a brokerage system to streamline the process for both buyers and sellers. Vegetable growers interested in tapping the Philadelphia restaurant market may contact Marc BrownGold at the 16th Street Bar and Grill, 264 S. 16th St., Philadelphia.

Canned hams being recalled

WASHINGTON — A Pennsylvania food products company is voluntarily recalling imported canned hams it distributed in five states in the Northeast because the hams may contain food spoilage organisms, a U.S. Department of Agriculture official announced.

Rialto Food Products Company of Philadelphia is recalling approximately 1,200 imported perishable canned hams from restaurants, delicatessens and similar outlets in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. USDA tests have detected the presence of food spoilage organisms in some of the hams.

The hams are sold in 12-pound red, white, and blue rectangular cans under the brand name "Rialto Brand Cooked Ham, Product of Holland". The product can be further identified by the establishment number 19 printed on the label, and by the code HSAZ embossed on the end of the can. No other products distributed by the firm are affected by the recall.

Donald Houston, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, said that anyone who has this product should return it to the outlet where it was purchased. Houston said the hams are fully cooked and are normally sold to food service facilities for slicing prior to sale to retail customers.

In extreme cases, food spoilage organisms can indicate the

potential for growth of other organisms that cause botulism, a form of food poisoning. So far USDA laboratory tests of the hams have not shown the presence of botulinum organisms nor have there been complaints of illnesses associated with the product.

According to officials of Rialto, the company imported approximately 5,600 of the canned hams from Holland. Of these, about 1,200 cans are now at retail outlets or have already been sold; the remainder are being held by the company. Rialto Food Products is notifying all distributors and retail outlets carrying the product that the hams should be returned to the company.

Buyout meeting

HONESDALE — An educational meeting on the "ALL HERD BUYOUT" provision of the 1985 Farm Bill will be held Thursday evening, February 13, 8 p.m. in the large group instruction room at the Honesdale High School. Speakers will include Thomas Jurcak, Lackawanna County Extension agent, and Beth Kotkiewicz, County Director, Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service (ASC).



Philadelphia chef Marc BrownGold believes that more farmer-chef interaction will benefit both restaurants and vegetable producers.