

Vegetable growers told to follow consumer tastes

BY JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

YORK — Consumer eating habits are undoubtedly changing. And few segments of agriculture are in a better position to benefit from that trend than the area's vegetable growers.

That was the general message presented by several Penn State extension speakers during the February 19 York-Lancaster vegetable growers meeting, held at Rutter's Restaurant.

Keeping up with consumer preferences means planting the latest, improved varieties for maximum yield, appearance and taste. According to extension horticulturist Dr. Pete Ferretti, recent changes in the Plant Varieties Protection Act have sent the horticulture industry full speed ahead in the development of new varieties.

He further predicted that if promised genetic engineering developments come about as scientists expect, unbelievable strides in the plant industry are not far in the future.

Peppers are among vegetables seeing the most rapidly growing consumer demand. Based on University trials, Ferretti recommends a new bell type, dubbed Gator Bell, which matures two to three days ahead of others. Additional popular varieties include Bell Boy, Lady Bell and Green Boy.

A new blocky yellow, Marengo, shows considerable promise. Yellow peppers are the current craze in Europe, notes Ferretti. Sweeter and more tender than reds, they are considered the ultimate pepper on flavor and quality.

Popularity of Mexican foods has added to the demand for peppers, especially frying and "hot" types. In fact, Ferretti advised growers

to plant the seeds of "any hot pepper you can get seed of"

One top quality frying type is Fry King, thin-skinned and thick fleshed. For spicy palates, the Tam Mild Chile #2 and Tam Mild Jalapeno #1 are recommended

Sugar-enhanced, known as "super-sweet," corn is gaining plenty of public attention recently. However, the need by this type of corn for isolation from other varieties is a major drawback for small patch growers. Cross pollination with other varieties results in a starchy, tasteless ear of corn. This isolation requirement may limit the use of super-sweets for home gardens.

But Ferretti says that the good news for sweet corn lovers is that tasty corn may soon be available year round. Tasteless winter corn-on-the-cob has not helped sales levels of sweet corn in the past, since a batch of the flavorless, shipped type may completely turn a consumer against all sweet corn.

Varieties of sweet corn recommended for the area include the yellow Seneca hybrid, with good levels of cold tolerance, the bicolor Crystal-N-Gold, and white types Spring Crystal, Pearl White and Snowbelle.

Mulched corn, grown under slitted plastic, is gaining a following by growers aiming for the lucrative early market. Suitable mulching varieties include yellows Gold Dust, Seneca Star, Seneca Horizon and Sundance. Jazz, Crystal-N-Gold, and Pride-N-Joy are three bicolors which perform well under mulch, and recommended whites are Spring Crystal, Pearl White and Quicksilver.

Snap beans continue to be popular for both fresh retailing and processing. The variety Flo is a general, multi-purpose type, useful for both fresh and shipping and



Directors for the York vegetable growers include, front from left, David Miller, extension representative Tom Becker and Will Eshbaugh; and rear, Jim Markey, Heil Markey and Earl Miller.

adaptable for hand and machine harvest, with tolerance to anthracnose. Other popular greens are Strike, Eagle and B.B. Lake, although the last tends toward curling of the beans. Recommended yellow types are Goldrush, Midas and Majestic.

Last year's muskmelon trials in Cumberland County showed the variety Columbia to be the best of the lot. More locally grown and more perishable specialty melons appear to be a marketing trend of the future for growers to watch.

Honeydews are enjoying increased popularity, with Lamelight one of the best. Honeylope combines the best qualities of honeydews and cantaloupes, but keeps growers guessing on the best time to harvest. Another cross, Honeyshaw, blends the charac-

teristics of honeydews with crenshaws, but has no tolerance for shipping and useful solely for local retail sales.

A new cucumber variety, Comet 86, came through testing at Cornell with excellent results. Comet 86 displayed a tolerance to all major cucurbit diseases, harvested plentiful yields and matured at 60 days. Other recommended are Raider, Pacer, SZweet Slice, which tends toward curling and less disease resistance, and the standard Marketmore.

Broccoli continues to enjoy climbing popularity on America's dinnertables, promoted by the medical profession as nutritious, fiber rich and possibly anti-carcinogenic. The variety Packman is surpassing earlier Comet favorites, maturing early at 48

days. A new main season is Prominence, superior to the widely-grown Premium Crop. Good later varieties are Green Defender and Shogun.

Also high on the cole crop popularity list is cauliflower, with Snow Crown still the favored early. The longer maturing Sno-pak shows more promise as a late season type, due to better leaf cover of the head.

"Minor vegetables will continue to be profitable for growers," advised Ferretti, as retailers and food service ride the nutrition trend toward fresh produce.

One crop in constant high demand and perpetual short supply is asparagus. Growers should consider both Jersey Giant and Jersey Centennial, much

(Turn to Page A40)

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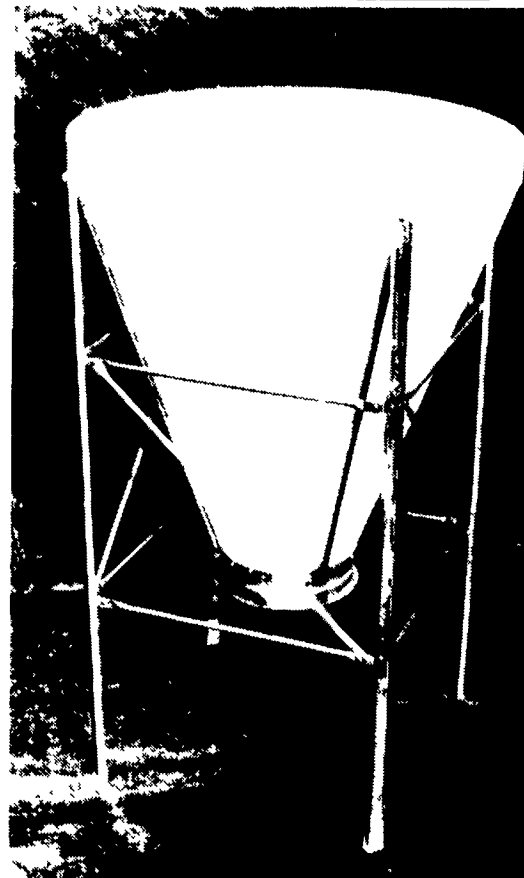
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