

Vegetable, Fruit Growers Learn What's New

LOU ANN GOOD

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HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — There's tremendous potential in marketing special appeal vegetables but there is also tremendous risk, participants learned at the Pennsylvania Vegetable Conference and Trade Show held at Hershey on January 29 through 31.

Rick Van Vranken, a New Jersey extension agent, told growers that the key to success is to test the market and start small.

"Consumers want quality, variety, and anything different," Vranken told those attending the workshop on marketing special appeal vegetables.

"Anything that is different in shape, size, color or taste can find a niche in the market," Vranken said.

The types of specialty produce and vegetables that have great potential are those with tropical or

ing and labeling is usually a problem.

Packaging can often increase the plant's value. This was shown by the edible lettuce greens grown in the New Jersey area. Those sold in bunches brought only a few pennies for the growers while those packaged in a carton sold for several dollars.

Studies show that vegetables and herbs that are packaged with a small pamphlet that tells how the vegetable is grown brings more lucrative results. And a recipe that is supplied with the vegetable leads to more sales.

Vranken encourages growers to market products directly to restaurants, health food stores, gourmet shops, chain stores and consumers.

Hanging Baskets For Profit

Vegetables and fruit growers who want to add to their profits by



June Alexander of Van Well Nursery shows 37 varieties of apples. For 35 years, Alexander has been in fruit tree sales in the Ohio area. Her favorite apples are Braeburn, Red Delicious, and Jon A Gold.



Pennsylvania Apple Queen Emily Lott of Biglerville came to the conference to learn new techniques to make her parents' fruit farm more successful.

ethnic ties. Consumers want baby and miniature vegetables, herbs, edible flowers and organic food.

Vranken cautioned growers that they must consider the difficulties with special appeal vegetables.

"There is little information available on growing the many varieties. Few pesticides if any should be used."

The vegetables also have post harvest problems because they are extremely perishable and packag-

raising hanging plants gathered some tips from Lamar Esbenschade, who has been in the Lititz greenhouse business for 32 years.

Esbenschade illustrated his talk with slides to show that the way a basket is hung in a greenhouse affects the plants beneath it. He cautioned growers to match the crop below with those above. Both need the same temperatures.

"Hang them north to south so that the shadows move. This is

extremely important," Esbenschade said, "otherwise the crop underneath will not get enough sun."

It is best to hang the baskets over the aisle so that the water drips in the aisle instead of on top of the plants beneath them.

"Don't overcrowd the greenhouse with baskets or you have a problem," Esbenschade said.

From experience he finds that hanging geraniums are now more popular than fuchsia. Impatiens and tuberous begonias are next.

"Try mixing plants in hanging baskets," Esbenschade said. "Mix in bridal veil and dusty miller, but be careful what you put together or you may crowd things."

Although some hanging baskets look great when first planted, they become unbalanced later.

"You must be concerned with what the plant will look like in the months ahead, for ultimately that is what increases business."

To make sure that the plant looks healthy later, Esbenschade advised that slow release fertilizer should be added to a good, porous mix.

Ten-inch baskets generally do better than smaller ones.

Wall baskets are extremely popular.

Color trends lean toward pastel colors. "Red is dominate but losing popularity because pastels show up better under patio lights at night — and that seems to be where most people have hanging baskets," he

said.

During the conference, more than 100 commercial exhibitors set up displays to show the latest equipment, pesticides, and products available to vegetable and fruit growers.

Food Watch

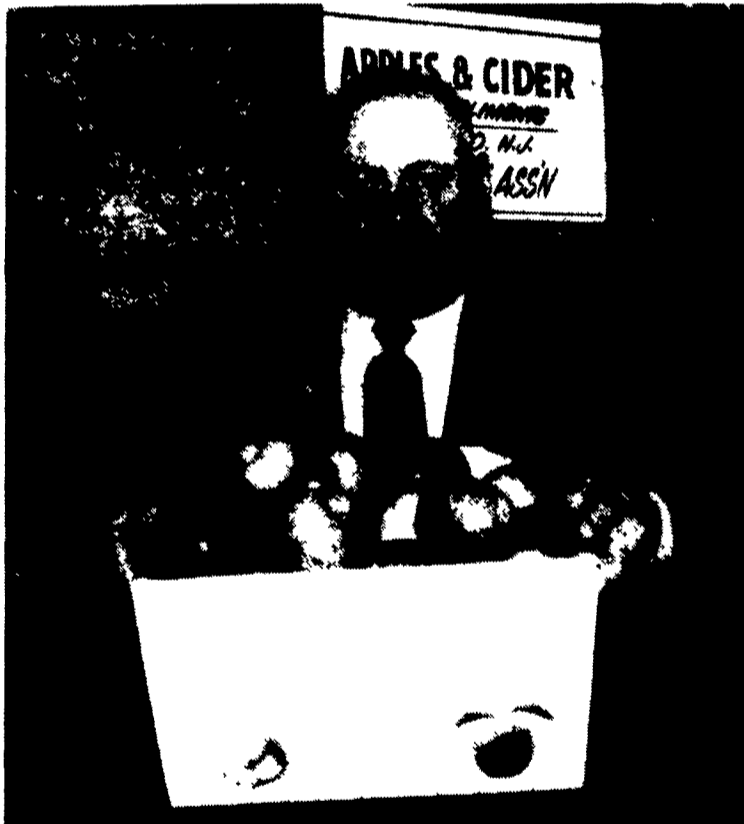
Fruit and vegetable growers find themselves in a nationwide crisis of confidence. To counteract the

handled safely.

- Food that is grown with a deep respect for the environment.
- Food that is affordable.
- Food that will ensure our future and our children's future.

Because of these beliefs, I pledge:

- To use products properly.
- To read and follow all label directions.



During the convention, Jack Mickey was elected president of the Pennsylvania Horticulture Association. "This is a valuable conference," Mickey said. "Those who attend get their pesticide license up to date and receive credits for many of the courses."

unfounded fears of the alar scare that gripped the nation several years ago, Food Watch was founded as a nationwide program to build confidence in food safety.

There is a growing concern in agriculture that a wedge is being driven between farmers and the technology they need to meet increasing demands for food and fiber.

During the Thanksgiving season, a TV commercial was aired to build confidence in food safety.

The program is launched by the Agriculture Council of America and is supported by contributions.

Growers are encouraged to display and abide by the Food Watch pledge. The pledge states:

- We believe all people have a right to healthful, abundant food.
- Food that is nutritious.
- Food that is produced and

• To produce, process and market food responsibly.

• To take every precaution and safety measure within my power and encourage others to do the same.

Promotion of Pennsylvania Vegetables

Daniel Schantz, who chairs the Pennsylvania Vegetable Marketing and Research Program, told growers that the organization has worked hard this past year to send out press kits, food articles, recipes, and special issues on fruit and vegetables to increase sales.

Point of purchase material, posters, ad slicks, logos, and a nutritional brochure and recipes are available to growers.

"You must be willing to speak with reporters and give your side of the story on controversial sub-

(Turn to Page B17)



Susan and Robert McCutcheon of Frederick, Maryland, offer free samples of their jellies. The most popular is black raspberry, but strawberry, peach, quince, and pumpkin butter flavors are also favorites. The McCutcheons offer mail-order services on sparkling cider, apple juice, and salad dressings in flavors such as vidalia onion and dijon vinegar.