



Class 2 Hand Harvest (6-14 acres): Robert MacBeth, Biglerville, center, harvested 369 tons of tomatoes for Furman Foods on 13.5 acres for a 27.4 tons per acre average yield. From left, James Kohl; MacBeth; and Dwight Hess, Furman field representative.

Biotech Delivers Better

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by DNA Plant Technology Corp. Romig's company, Extended Product Life, Inc., is working on a strawberry variety that will, after freezing, retain 80 percent of the integrity — texture and taste — of a fresh berry.

In the end, however, companies must face the realities of cost and development in producing varieties. They must fully research consumer acceptance of using biotechnology to improve varieties or to introduce varieties with improved shelf life and disease and insect resistance while thinking about the realities of consumer acceptance and economics.

"It's not simply the task of developing that new variety," he said. "Scientists must be concerned about these interactions and how they're going to affect the eventual outcome of the harvested crop."

According to Romig, more consumers than ever before are spending food dollars on produce. In 1970, per capita consumption of produce was about 110 pounds; in 1993, that had risen to 130 pounds. Produce is "undervalued" by 10-15 percent, he said.

Consumers have increased their consumption of broccoli and tomatoes, in addition to all fruits and vegetables, through the years.

Altogether, Romig said biotechnology holds a "lot of promises" for growers, including improved insect and disease resistance and herbicide and drought stress tolerance.

"Traditional methods of genetic modifying, conventional plant breeding, has done us a great service — it's been fantastic," he



Dr. William Romig, Extended Product Life, Inc., spoke to about 150 vegetable growers about the realities of developing new varieties of fruits and vegetables through the science of plant genetics.



Class 1 Machine Harvest (60+ acres): Cliff Charles, Lancaster, center, harvested 2,648 tons of usable fruit for Furman Foods from 80 acres for a 33.1 ton per acre average yield. From left, James Kohl, Charles, and Dwight Hess, Furman field representative.

real cost, we've lengthened the growing season, we've increased diversity (and) the foods in the supermarket. . . ."

Industry future

"Science needs to drive our industry more and more," said Dr. Mark Bennett, associate professor,

vegetable crops, Ohio State University, who spoke about the future of the processing tomato industry in the East at the conference.

Bennett said that even though California holds 90 percent of the market for processed tomatoes, with Pennsylvania a distant 3 percent, there is room for regional



Class 2 Machine Harvest (10-59 acres): Bill Garman, second from left, harvested 1,000 tons of usable fruit for Furman Foods on 53.7 acres for a 33.1 ton per acre average yield. From left, James Kohl; Garman; and Dwight Hess, Furman field representative.

growers to capitalize on a market that "has a large population base in a short driving distance."

In 1992, according to figures he presented, Bennett said that California processed more than 10 million tons of tomatoes alone. To remain competitive, Pennsylvania growers have to achieve between a



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