

Vegetable And Fruit Growers Participate In Workshops And Trade Show At 135th Convention

LOU ANN GOOD

**Lancaster Farming Staff
HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.)** — The Pennsylvania Vegetable Conference and Trade Show and the State Horticultural Association marked its 135-year history with a three-day convention held last week at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center that drew about 1,200.

Packed into the agenda were workshops for growers and industry and exhibits of equipment and products associated with the fruit and vegetable industry.

Patti Levis, executive secretary for the association, said that she remembers when a card table was all that was needed to display exhibits. Now, exhibits fill several rooms in both upper and lower levels at the convention center. Many of those attendance return annually for updates on the industry, but new faces are always interspersed among the crowd.

Carey Dillman of Dillman Farm of Indiana was one of those new faces. He displayed the family's homemade jams, jellies, fruit spreads, and other natural products. Sampling was encouraged.

"Our products are a higher quality because we put more fruit than sugar in them," said Dillman, whose purpose was to sell quantities to orchards, farm markets, and specialty stores.

For the hundreds of growers who attend the event, new and better ways of marketing their products are always uppermost in their minds.

A panel addressed marketing ideas into the next century. The panel was made up of growers who have found success in marketing. John Stark of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture moderated the panel that included Richard Pallman, Pallman Farms of Clark's Summit; Hillary Schramm Jr., Schramm's Farms and Orchards; Keith and Carol Hausman, Coppersburg; and Thomas Sowieralski, S-berry Farms, Frederick.

Pallman said that his family's pick-your-own strawberry operation uses classified ads and word-of-mouth as their only advertisement.

The Hausemans said that their 80-acre farm is a mixture of apples, berries, peaches, and greenhouse tomatoes, for retail, wholesale, and pick-your-own sales. The couple prefers to strive for more retail sales and has found success in setting up farmers markets in parking lots of area shopping centers.

Keith said that the competition is heavy. "But our advantage is that we are defined as a local grower with quality fresh produce. Keep quality there," he stressed.

Carol said that to be successful, this type of marketing requires creative displays. "Don't just stack greens together. Fill baskets, tip one over for interest."

Friendliness must be displayed even when customers are unmatterly. If a child licking an ice cream cone is dripping stickiness and touching the displays, Carol suggests the solution is to say in a friendly tone, "I see you are in a sticky situation," while offering paper towels and water for clean-up.

Schramm said the family's 400-acre farm that grows 35 different fruits and vegetables has seen a change in customers' purchases

during the past years.

"Thirteen years ago we sold by the bushel to a mostly rural community," Schramm said. "Now we are in the suburbs where they don't have time to cook."

Ideas to keep competitive, Schramm said, is to offer convenience, entertainment, and education.

Convenience includes offering dairy and bakery items to draw customers. Precut vegetables, husked sweet corn, and directions on how to cook items encourage sales.

An annual pumpkin festival with set-up displays of storybook characters, a cornstalk maze, and school tours has been an excellent drawing card to the market. An apple festival with hayrides to the orchard to pick your own apples, and hot cider with candy and caramel apples sales is proving just as popular. The Schramms also offer a strawberry festival that includes classes on preserving strawberries, pony rides, clowns, face painting, and sales of strawberry milkshakes, sundaes, and pies.

"The strawberry festival was an extreme success. We sold more pick-your-own strawberries than we had for the previous six years," Schramm said. Although the festival was held for only one weekend, the market reaped sales from that event for a month in repeat sales.

The secret to enticing sales is the perceived value that convinces people that your product is a little bit better than the others. One way to do this is to tell a story about your farm and family.

Educate consumers of the healthy benefit of eating fruits and vegetables. Schramm said they laminate reprints from Readers'



For many exhibitors, the Pa. Vegetable Conference and Trade Show is a family affair. Hope, 3; Leah, 5; and Naomi, 7, join their parents at the Tico Manufacturing display to sell irrigation equipment during the three-day event.

Digest, newspapers, and periodicals that talk about the health benefits of eating produce. The laminated articles are display above or beside the item sold.

Other activities offered during the convention are tours and luncheons sponsored by the women's auxiliary. New officers for the auxiliary include Pennsylvanians Mary Sue Shaw, president; Michele Konno, secretary; and Doris Trax, treasurer. Working in conjunction with them are auxiliary officers from Maryland: Betty Maphis, secretary; Marge Jacfuss, vice president; and Helen Black, treasurer.



Pennsylvania officers for the women's auxiliary are, from left, Mary Sue Shaw, president; Michele Konno, secretary; and Doris Trax, treasurer.



Maryland officers for the women's auxiliary include, from left, Betty Maphis, secretary; Marge Jacfuss, vice president; and Helen Black, treasurer.



Uniquely flavored fruit spreads, jams, jellies, and butters by Dillman Farm drew crowds for sampling during the Vegetable Conference and Trade Show. Cary Dillman said that this was the first appearance at the annual trade show and considered it a great success.



Patti Levis, executive secretary of the State Horticultural Association, elicits the help of her husband, Tom, in registering about 1,200 members for the annual show.