

N.Y. Corn Growers Take Charge

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Around the country, the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of New York is the hustle and bustle, crowded streets, traffic jams, noise, and pollution. It's hard to imagine that on the outskirts of all this chaos are down-to-earth New York corn growers.

Ron Robbins, president of the New York Corn Growers Association (NYCGA), describes NYCGA members as "people who are driven to succeed and have the foresight to see the need to be involved."

By working together, they have overcome many legislative issues, the most difficult being the strict regulations involving pesticide registration. From 1988 to 1992, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) forbid any new weed or pest control products to enter the New York market. Without access to new and improved, safer and lower-use pesticides, New York corn farmers were at an economic disadvantage compared to neighboring states. The NYCGA joined forces with the Farm Bureau, and after a five year battle with DEC, the rigid pesticide regulations were lifted.

Another pressing issue for NYCGA is the Clean Water Act, which involves investigating non-point sources of pollution. For example, Southview Farms, located in Western New York, was sued by citizens who claimed manure from the farm

was seeping into water sources. Southview Farms spent half a million dollars fighting the case and won. Unfortunately, the case was appealed and the not-guilty verdict has now been overruled. "This will probably impact the New York farmer more than any other national issue I can recall," said Robbins. "We are surrounded by water on three sides and are in a prime area for regulations." Already a highly regulated state, this incident could trigger stricter regulations, investigations and lawsuits.

Still another challenge for the New York corn grower is the loss of farmland. New York farmers plant an average total of 1,150,000 acres of corn per year. However, in the past 12 years, urbanization has had a hand in decreasing farmland by 300,000 acres. "We have one of the highest tax rates in the nation. With high tax rates and declining farm income, many farmers that own land near urban areas must consider selling out for urban development," said Jim Czub, New York's delegate to the NCGA board.

But there is hope on the horizon. New York corn growers are just one law away from a feed grains checkoff. The current New York Marketing Order allows promotional funds to be collected from almost all commodities, except feed grains. NYCGA is cur-

rently working hard to legislate a change in this law, with the goal of passing a state checkoff by the summer of 1995.

Even without the additional market investment dollars a checkoff would produce, corn farmers are doing their best to promote the construction of an ethanol plant in New York. "Ethanol use and production has become a priority issue for the Empire State's Council of Agricultural Organizations (CAO), of which we are a member," said Robbins. To show their support, the NYCGA has testified at hearings on the Clean Air Act and has collaborated with Pal Energy Oil Company at a recent trade show to promote ethanol use.

"Starting out with no money and no paid staff has made it difficult for the organization (NYCGA) to grow. We have finally been able to make ourselves more visible to farmers, and our leadership has gained respect in our capitol," said Robbins. NYCGA is in the process of planning a membership drive this month, with a goal of totaling 400 members.

The NYCGA also participates in trade shows to promote corn and membership in the association. During "Empire Farm Days" held in August, all three-year memberships, new or renewed, received a bag of free seed corn, donated by several seed corn companies. Free samples of popcorn and biodegradable plastic bags

were also used to lure both farmers and non-farmers into the booth to discuss new uses for corn.

The NYCGA has earned respect from both consumers

and the government. And Robbins adds, "We may not grow the most corn, but we do have the most consumers living in our backyard—and those consumers are the foundation of everyone's future!"

The Sweet In Sweet Corn

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre co.) — Sweet corn has gotten sweeter over the years; and many of the newer hybrids retain their sweetness longer, giving gardeners a longer harvest window, and consumers more flexibility in storage.

It's no longer necessary to dash from the garden to a pot of boiling water in order to have sweet sweet corn.

Regular sweet corn contains a double dose of a recessive gene called sugary (su). Sweet corn kernels contain almost twice the amount (10 percent) of sucrose as field corn, plus a water-soluble polysaccharide that produces a creamy texture.

However, the sugar in regular sweet corn rapidly converts to starch after harvest, losing 50 percent of peak sugar concentration in just 24 hrs at room temperature.

"Silver Queen" is an example of a standard sweet corn. The new sweeter sweet corn

hybrids have even higher concentrations of sugar, and this sugar converts to starch more slowly. One gene involved in this improvement is the shrunken gene (sh2). The sh2 hybrids can have a sucrose content as high as 37 percent at harvest, that drops only to 29 percent after 2 days storage at 80 F. However, the sh2 sweet corns are low in water-soluble polysaccharides so lack the creamy texture of the regular sweet corns.

Examples of sh2 hybrids are "Illini Xtra Sweet," "Milk 'n Honey Supersweet," and "Butterfruit."

Another gene involved in some of the sweeter sweet corns is the sugar enhanced gene (se). It produces both extra sweetness (with a more complex flavor due to a mix of sugars) and tenderness.

Some corns in this group have the registered trademark EH, which stands for Everlasting Heritage (e.g. Kandy Kom EH).



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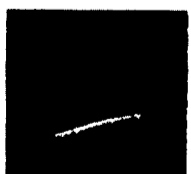
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