

Greenhouse Plant Health, Diseases Focus Of Vegetable Day

Market Stand 'Image' Helps Draw, Keep Customers

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NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — Attempts to try to get potential customers "to stop at your place" through the use of attractive signs, frontage, lights, and displays can work big dividends for farm market operators, according to a Penn State marketing expert.

Larry Yager, marketing specialist with Penn State, provided tips on ways to increase the success of farm market stands to about 25 growers on Monday at the New Holland Vegetable Day at Summit Valley Elementary School.

Yager showed a series of slides that detail some of the more successful market stands throughout the state and country that use different techniques to promote products to customers.

"We shop with our eyes," said Yager. "We have to get their attention."

Growers should understand the importance of image to the consumer.

A farm stand does not have to be complicated and expensive, according to the Penn State marketing specialist. A simple tent set up in an area easily accessible to traffic may be all that's necessary.

Also, have the "power items," such as the sweet corn, tomatoes, and cantalope, when in season, placed in such a way that customers have to move through the store and beyond the other items offered for sale.

Yager provided the example of one grower who placed the sweet corn out front. People stopped and purchased only the corn. When the corn was moved to the back, inside the store, the sale of other items "quadrupled," according to Yager.

Also, proper display is important. He said producers have been very creative in their use of existing materials, such as bulk boxes (with raised, false bottoms) to provide a display. Also, use of wooden cable spoolers and tables have worked to promote products and increase the sale of items at a farm stand.

Lighting is also essential, according to Yager. The use of natural light is best, and when using artificial lighting, stand owners should beware that using fluorescent or incandescent lighting can make produce look different to the consumer.

In the past, the adage, "Pile it high and kiss it goodbye," made sense, and that was how produce was displayed. In the '90's, however, the consumer wants more value-added produce. Adding that special touch, including packaging fruit baskets or special holiday treats, or something as simple as tying a ribbon onto produce, can boost sales at a farm stand and keep customers coming back for more.

Providing free samples for customers has proven time and again to boost purchases of the product. Also, in displaying items, make sure the items are placed in such a way that is easily accessible — especially off the floor or ground. Yager showed slides of apples that literally gathered dust, even being on the floor in a bushel basket for a short time.

Provide sufficient width between the aisles. To place items for display, use the "ribbon effect" — alternate items such as red tomatoes and green peppers to provide an attractive contrast.

Yager said it is important to make sure the displays are full and well-dressed.

By allowing customers to pick up produce and smell it, people have the chance to experience the freshness that many stands guarantee. A big selling point is placing literature and other items nearby.

For more information, stand managers can consult two publications: Co-Op Bulletin #52, "A Guide To Planning The Farm Retail Market," published in 1994 by the University Of Delaware Cooperative Extension and Penn State's "Managing For Success: A Manual For Produce Markets," published in 1986, from Penn State.

Greenhouse Plant Injury

The most common reason for problems with greenhouse plant health stem from watering, whether it is too little, too much, or the composition of the water itself, according to Robert D. Berghage, assistant professor of horticulture, Penn State.

Berghage reviewed the following main causes of problems when diagnosing greenhouse plant injury:

- Over- or underwatering. Particularly overwatering, which can generate a variety of root and stem diseases.

- Fertilization. Without the proper balance of nutrients, too much nitrogen, phosphorous,

potassium, or micronutrients can lead to an array of problems associated with salt toxicity.

- Insects and diseases. Proper biosecurity is important. Make sure weeds are removed from inside and outside the building. Weeds can carry thrips and other insects that can prove harmful to greenhouse plants.

- Chemicals from other sources. Spray drift from nearby operations can affect greenhouse plants.

- Temperature and lighting. Improper night and day temperatures can wreak havoc with greenhouse plants.

- Handling. Improper handling can bruise plants and make them susceptible to disease and insect damage.

Growers should observe the plant by picking it up and looking at the root system. By looking at the roots, you can learn a lot about what type of disease or problem the plant has. Waterlogged root systems can serve as a breeding ground for fungus gnats. Also, high salt concentrations from excess nitrogen fertilization can pose problems, and the type of fertilizer is critical, because ammonium nitrate at high levels can prove toxic to plants.

Late Blight

Alan MacNab, Penn State extension pathologist, spoke about the importance of crop rotations to stopping fungus problems.



The most common reason for problems with greenhouse plant health stem from watering, whether it is too little, too much, or the composition of the water itself, according to Robert D. Berghage, assistant professor of horticulture, Penn State. Here, Berghage holds up examples of diseased plants, caused by iron toxicity, high salts damage, overfertilization, temperatures, and other causes.

"Fungicides do a great job... but also, rotation is very important," he said.

MacNab said it is possible growers could experience problems with late blight with tomato and vine crops this year, if conditions are right.

MacNab urged the growers to communicate with each other to

help identify and control the disease.

In all, about 200 growers attended other sessions at the Vegetable Day, focusing on fall root crop production, vine crop insects, sweet corn IPM, vegetable irrigation, pumpkin disease control, greenhouse design and ventilation, tree fruit insects, fumigation, and other sessions.

Dauphin County DHIA Recognizes Members

DAUPHIN (Dauphin Co.) — Elwillo Farms, Hershey, was recently recognized for their outstanding production and management in 1994 by the Dauphin County DHIA membership. William Capp, Sr., and his son William Capp Jr., were recognized for top herd management, high milk production, and high protein production in Dauphin County. The 190-cow herd of the Capp's averaged 22,335 pounds of milk and 718 pounds of protein.

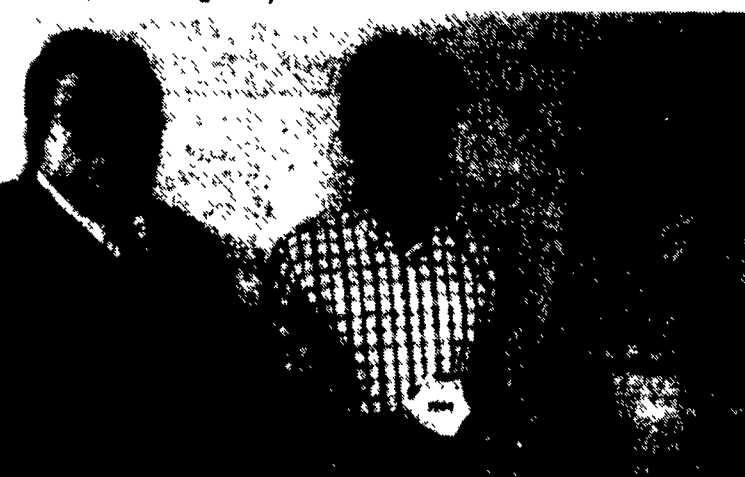
Restful Acres farm owned and managed by Frank Greybill, Hershey, averaged 832 pounds of butterfat to qualify as high herd in butterfat. Leroy Reihl, Lykens, and Catalpa Farm, managed by Dale and Ray Kennedy, Middletown, were recognized for having the lowest somatic cell counts.

The Dauphin County DHIA program was held in association with the Dauphin County Holstein Club annual meeting. This provides an opportunity for recognition by peers, socializing and merriment. DHIA President Leon Crissinger, Gratz and Holstein

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Dauphin County DHIA members recognized for high rolling herd average in protein are from left, front row, Kenneth Crissinger, Gratz; Eugene Feldt, Millersburg; and Tom Tobias, Halifax. Back row, Galen Lehman, Elizabethtown; Bill Capp Jr., Hershey; Jay Brandt, Hershey; and Ray Kennedy, Middletown.



Low somatic cell count award was presented to Catalpa Farms, Middletown. From left, Dave Shenk, Southeast region DHIA manager; Ray Kennedy, Catalpa Farms; and Leon Crissinger, Dauphin County DHIA president.



Top management, high milk, and high protein awards were presented to Elwillo Farms, Hershey. From left, Dave Slusser, general manager Pennsylvania DHIA; Sally and Bill Capp Jr., Elwillo Farms; and Leon Crissinger, county board president.