

Vegetable Marketing, Research Program Aggressively Promotes Pennsylvania Vegetables

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — For the past eight years the Pennsylvania Vegetable Marketing and Research Program has aggressively promoted Pennsylvania-grown vegetables in retail markets and on newspaper food pages. For the past two years, they have erected billboards promoting Pennsylvania vegetables during July and August. These promotional efforts are funded by Pennsylvania vegetable growers.

Billboards

In 1997, the Program posted 15 billboards across the state that reminded consumers that Pennsylvania produce was "In Season Now!" during July and early August. Billboards in the Pittsburgh, Erie, Altoona, Shippensburg, Central Susquehanna Valley, Scranton, Reading, and Chester County areas were visible to an estimated daily audience of 234,300 for 30 days. That translates into a potential of 7 million viewings although naturally most of the viewings would be repeat viewings for motorists who daily used those highways. Of course, there is also great value in having a promotional message repeated many times before the same audience.

The billboard campaign was made possible by a \$10,000 matching grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. It was a continuation of the Program's 1996 billboard project, also financed in part with a \$10,000 grant from the Department of Agriculture plus \$5,000 from the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association.

The 1996 project inspired the Department to work with the Food Merchants Association on a Produce Pilot Project to erect 25 billboards promoting Pennsylvania produce in 1997 in six southeastern counties. These were in addition to the 15 erected by the Vegetable Program. They were the same design as the Vegetable Program's and featured an adaptation of the Vegetable Program's logo. The pilot project coordinator, Jeff Patton, also worked with supermarkets to encourage them to purchase more local produce. The Department of Agriculture plans to expand this produce promotion project in 1998.

Point-of-Purchase Materials

As part of the Program's matching grant project, new supplies of price cards and price paddles were printed for the 1997 and 1998 seasons. The design of the full-color price cards was coordinated with the billboards while the price paddles were given a fresh new look, proclaiming in green letters "FRESH! Pennsylvania Produce."

For the past eight years, the Vegetable Marketing and Research Program has promoted Pennsylvania vegetables by supplying growers with point-of-purchase materials for their retail markets. Besides the new materials printed this year, growers could also order full-color posters, "Good Nutrition from Asparagus to Zucchini" consumer brochures, frequent buyers posters and cards, full-color logo stickers, and logo slicks.

As part of the Program's matching grant, a larger 7" x 11" full-color price was printed especially for supermarkets. It was the same design as the smaller 5" x 7" price card distributed to growers. These

were made available to the 104 stores in the Produce Pilot Project as well as to all Weis Market and BiLo food stores. The idea behind these price cards is to enable the supermarkets to identify their local produce as Pennsylvania-grown with attractive, professional signs comparable to signs distributed by promotion organizations from other regions of the country. The Program also supplied some Giant Eagle stores with its "Pennsylvania Proven Produce" posters.

Press Relations

Each year the Program sends out press releases to newspapers across the state highlighting the different local vegetable crops as they come into season. This year the results have been especially favorable.

The press release on sweet corn resulted in 29 articles in newspapers reaching 274,670 readers while the release on cantaloupes brought in 23 articles in papers read by 447,416. Releases on tomatoes, peppers, snap beans, cole crops, and pumpkins and squash prompted an additional 77 articles. So far a total of 129 articles have been published in newspapers read by nearly 1.8 million people across the state. In the years since the Vegetable Marketing and Research Program began its press relations efforts, hundreds of newspaper articles have reached nearly 14 million readers across the state.

Program Faces Referendum

Every five years the Vegetable Marketing and Research faces a grower referendum. The Program was established in 1988 under the Pennsylvania Agricultural Commodities Marketing Act of 1968. The Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct a referendum of the affected growers every five years to see if they want the Program to continue. The Program is funded by annual assessments which all growers in the state are required by law to pay. The Vegetable Program's assessment is \$25 for any grower growing one or more acres of vegetables for sale plus \$1.50 per acre for each acre over 10 acres. Greenhouse vegetable growers are also required to pay the \$25 assessment if they grow 1,000 sq. ft. of greenhouse vegetables plus \$1.50 for each 1,000 sq. ft. over 10,000 sq. ft. All vegetables, including sweet corn, tomatoes, snap beans, peas, pumpkins, squash, cantaloupes, peppers, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, etc. are included in the Program except white potatoes. Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, grapes and other small fruit are not included. Greenhouse space used to grow vegetable transplants is also not included.

The ballots for the 1998 referendum will be mailed March 20 to every grower currently on the list of growers. Other growers who do not receive a ballot in the mail can obtain one by calling 717-787-2376.

Vegetable Program Funds 14 Research Projects

Fourteen vegetable projects will be funded in 1998 by the Pennsylvania Vegetable Marketing and Research Program, with \$22,500 in grower assessment monies and \$20,000 from the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association. Two additional vegetable research projects are being funded with a \$3,700 grant from Furman Foods.

Over the past 10 years the Program has contributed over \$185,000 to fund 92 research projects, mostly at The Pennsylvania State University. The Vegetable Growers Association has supplied another \$100,000 over that time period.

The 1998 projects and their objectives are listed below:

Management of Horsenettle to Minimize Contamination in Harvested Beans - M. VanGessel & W. Kee - Univ. of Delaware \$2,250.

To examine the impact of Basagran or Reflex rate and timing on delaying the flowering of horse-nettle to prevent contamination of the harvested beans with horse-nettle fruit.

Increasing Productivity of Plastic Sweet Corn by Preventing Stunting - T. Bjorkman - Cornell University \$2,500.

To evaluate the use of the biological control agent *Trichoderma harzianum* to reduce stunting and increase the yield of early sweet corn grown under clear plastic.

Performance of Selected Bean Varieties in Root Rot and Clean Soils - G. Abawi - Cornell University \$3,105.

To determine and compare the productivity of available bean cultivars grown in a field heavily infested with root rot pathogens and a clean soil (fumigated section of the same field).

Effect of Tillage, Cover Crops, Chicken Compost, and Crop Rotation on Root Rot Severity and Yield of Snap Beans - G. Abawi - Cornell University \$3,105.

To evaluate the impact of cultural practices on root rot severity and yield of snap beans. (Final year of a four-year project).

Breeding Squash and Pumpkins for Disease and Insect Resistance - R.W. Robinson - New York State Ag. Station \$3,583.

To breed pumpkins, summer squash and winter squash for resistance to diseases like watermelon mosaic virus-1 and -2, cucumber mosaic virus, zucchini yellow mosaic virus, powdery mildew, and gummy stem blight (black rot) plus resistance to cucumber beetles.

Sweet Corn IPM - S. Fleischer - Penn State Univ. \$3,614.

To improve the monitoring program using electronic technology like the internet to collect and disseminate the information.

To evaluate transgenic sweet corn for horticultural properties and insect control at Centre and Lancaster County sites.

Vegetable Disease Forecasting for Pennsylvania - A. MacNab - Penn State Univ. \$4,500.

To evaluate a disease forecast network for Pennsylvania vegetable producers, and provide timely information to growers on favorability of environment for disease development, and times when fungicide coverage is most important.

To compare measured environmental readings with values predicted from National Weather Service data, and evaluate variation in environmental readings measured by different sensors and/or different locations.

Pumpkin Powdery Mildew - A. MacNab & T. Elkner - Penn State Univ. \$1,721.

To evaluate the level of resistance and tolerance to powdery mildew in new pumpkin cultivars.

Snap Bean White Mold and Gray Mold Control - A. MacNab -



Billboards across the state remind consumers when Pennsylvania produce is in season.

Penn State Univ. \$1,500.

To determine relative level of white mold and gray mold tolerance or resistance in selected varieties of snap beans.

Cucurbit Viruses - A. MacNab & E. Vorodi - Penn State Univ. \$1,612.

To help improve the knowledge about what viruses are most important in Pennsylvania cucurbit plantings.

To evaluate benefits of virus resistance now present in new summer squash varieties.

Calcium Nutrition of Tomatoes as Affected by Lime, Other Calcium Sources and Interacting Factors - C. Smith - Penn State Univ. \$4,000.

To evaluate several lime types and rates in their effectiveness in increasing calcium uptake.

To determine the effect of several other calcium sources on uptake.

To determine if interacting factors such as higher nitrogen and potash rates play a meaningful role in restricting calcium uptake.

Weed Control in Sweet Corn: Alternatives to Atrazine - M. Orzolek & L. Otjen - Penn State Univ. \$4,000.

To evaluate both experimental and non-labeling herbicides which may be acceptable alternatives to atrazine application in sweet corn.

To develop data which may help support a Section 18 for new experimental herbicides in sweet corn for Pennsylvania growers.

Development of Early Blight and Late Blight Resistant Tomatoes - M. Foolad - Penn State Univ. \$5,000.

To develop tomato cultivars highly resistant to early blight and late blight diseases and adapted to Pennsylvania conditions. Both conventional and molecular/biotechnological approaches of genetic improvement will be employed.

Ethylene Timing and Rate Study - Brubaker Agronomic Consulting Service \$1,700.

To determine the best time and rate for the application of ethylene to processing tomatoes to achieve concentrated ripening.

The Influence of Various Fertility Factors on Processing Tomato Quality and Yield - Brubaker Agronomic Consulting Service \$2,000.

To evaluate how zero, low, medium and high rates of manure, phosphorus, potassium, nitrogen

and calcium affect processing tomato quality and yield.

Fresh Market Sweet Corn Variety Trial - Brubaker Agronomic Consulting Service \$1,200.

To evaluate 10 to 20 se/su fresh market varieties in terms of early vigor, rust resistance, pulling ease, tip cover, green weight, ear size and tip fill.

Pallman Elected Program Chairman

Richard Pallman, a Clarks Summit greenwrap tomato grower, was elected the new chairman of the Vegetable Marketing and Research Board at the Board's re-organizational meeting on November 3, 1997. Pallman is also the president of the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association although his term in that position will end in January.

Pallman, who has served on the Program's Board since the beginning and on the former Vegetable Research Advisory Board, succeeds David Miller of York. Miller, who served one year as chairman, was elected vice chairman succeeding Pallman in that position.

Daniel Schantz of Zionsville, a former Board chairman, was named to fill the third seat on the Executive Committee. He succeeds Frederick Funk of Millersville, another former chairman.

Besides Mr. Funk, the other grower members of the Board are Robert Constantine of Smock, Don Geise of Northumberland, William Goodwin of Lake City, James Hoopes of Ulysses, Robert Kilgore of Brogue, and Robert Trax of Finleyville. Herbert Gebley of the Kutztown Produce Auction represents the collecting sales agents. The Secretary of Agriculture, who appoints the other board members, also sits on the Board.

Legal Action Taken

Against Non-Paying Growers
Legal action has again been taken against several vegetable growers who have not paid the annual assessment to the Program. The action was authorized under the regulations promulgated in January 1994 by the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Market Development sent certified letters to growers who had failed to respond to the 1996 assessment notices. Ten growers received letters from the Department of Agriculture's legal