

Buyers And Growers Examine Supermarket, Chain Store Contracting

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HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — Growers and buyers compared notes at the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention last week here at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center.

A panel presenting both buyer and grower viewpoints included James Hensel, buyer for Oregon Farm Dairy; Charles Breneman, buyer for Weis Markets; Richard Stauffer, buyer for Four Seasons Produce; Ronald Copenhagen, Lebanon County grower, and David Miller, York County grower.

"It's important to have a marketing contract before you grow the produce. Don't suddenly show up at the door to sell a truckload," said Hensel.

He suggests contacting buyers a year in advance to find out how the supermarket wants things packed, the quality expected, and the delivery process.

Copenhagen, who grows 70 acres of peas and double-crops other vegetables, said, "Chain stores never pay the highest prices, but they don't pay the lowest either when the bottom drops out of the market."

Growers should space out plantings as much as possible to stretch the length of time in supplying local supermarkets with produce.

Hensel said that a grower supplied him with 1,500 heads of broccoli from September through Christmas.

"Communicate often with the buyer. If it rained 10 days and you can't deliver, tell him as soon as possible," Hensel said.

Breneman said that Weis Markets has 160 stores and they prefer to deal with local agriculturalists. Even if you are told "no" one time, check periodically with the buyer.

Breneman said that he is aware that growing conditions can hinder quality, but the store must provide top-quality produce to consumers.

Produce coming in must pass standards by a trained USDA inspector. The delivery will be turned down if it is not packed

according to terms adhered to in the contract.

Breneman recommends that growers invest in a refrigeration unit if needed to maintain quality of products until they reach the market.

Stauffer said that Four Season Produce supplies 250 Pennsylvania stores and 600 stores along the eastern seaboard. They prefer new boxes be used in place of bins and that items such as asparagus be placed in one-pound bundles. Don't mix grades and sizes. More and more buyers are demanding consistent quality with the same packaging they would receive if ordered from California.

Ronald Copenhagen grows 70 acres of peas in Lebanon County and double-crops with other vegetables.

As a Christian, he said that he strives to maintain honesty in all dealings. Sometimes beans look wonderful, but Copenhagen believes that a buyer should be warned that they won't maintain the quality if they had been picked after lots of rain.

Unlike many growers, Copenhagen said that he plants a crop and then prays for a market. He cautioned against promising to supply too many stores and not being able to deliver.

On the other hand, if Copenhagen promises to supply a store, he will grow more than what he has committed to in order to compensate for bad weather.

"It's better to plow some under than not have enough," Copenhagen said.

"I do whatever it takes to accommodate a buyer. If beans aren't growing fast enough, I'll pick one-fourth of a crop rather than the whole one in order to have enough beans. But if you pick too young, you can kill the next yield."

Growers often need to meet buyers' odd delivery times. Many want delivery in the morning. This requires farmers to pick the crop the day before. It's also stressful to wait in line for several hours until the trucks ahead of you unload, Copenhagen said.



Growers and buyers held a panel discussion on selling to supermarkets and chains. From left are Ronald Copenhagen, David Miller, and Richard Stauffer.

Some stores require growers to carry liability insurance. Miller said that it costs him \$150 to \$220 per year to carry a \$1 million-\$2 million liability policy.

Miller grows cantaloupes, watermelons, and sweet corn in York County for several chains, roadside stands, and local groceries.

"I'm not an expert, but what works for us is quality, constant supply, uniformity in product, dependability, honesty, and communication."

Although it is difficult to provide constant uniformity, Miller believes in doing everything possible. He uses drip irrigation.

"Leave smalls and seconds in the field. It's hard to do, but the only way to uphold quality," Miller said.

Sweet corn especially needs to be top quality with no worms, no seconds, and the right age.

Both Miller and Copenhagen appreciate the stability in pricing that contracts offer.

From the buyers' viewpoint,

Breneman said that he sees increasing opportunities for growers because customers want local produce as fresh as possible.

Top Tomato Growers

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Schultz farm yielded an average of 18.17 tons of A grade fruit per acre.

"The tomato industry has had its ups and downs, but the last few years, significant improvements in quality has been accomplished," said Kohl.

He attributed quality improvements not only to growers' efforts

but also to Pik Rite for developing a portable harvester to work on the eastern seaboard. Pik Rite received the Industry of the Year Award for its diligence in harvesting development and for helping to advance the tomato industry.

This year, grower award winners received jackets instead of engraved plaques for their accomplishments.



LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The 13th annual 4-H Benefit Auction will take place on Saturday, February 20, beginning at 9:30 a.m., in the Farm and Home Center Auditorium, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster.

The auction will feature items including Kellogg's cereal, animal and pet products, Winross trucks, Breyer models, live plants, cookbooks, model train items, and much more! A few special items include a Penn State basketball signed by the men's basketball team, Diamond Spring Water, and a Pioneer Seed wagon. Numerous gift certificates for merchandise and area services will also be sold.

Food items will be sold throughout the day by participants of the 4-H Exchange Program. Proceeds from the auction will benefit the county's 4-H program, which involves about 4,000 youth, ages 8-19, in "learn-by-doing" 4-H projects and emphasizes the development of life skills. The program

is also fortunate to have the support of 500 adult and teen volunteer leaders. Monies raised will be used toward the purchase of educational materials, entry fees to events, transportation costs, volunteer leader support, and other 4-H expenses.

Gift certificates to be sold for services and merchandise include The Village Greens, The Amish Village, F.M. Brown's Sons Tack Shop, Bube's Brewery, The Castle Roller Skating, Simon Candy Co. Outlet, Hoss's, Dutch Apple Dinner Theatre, Fulton Opera House, and Esbenschade's Greenhouses. Tickets for the Strasburg Rail Road, Hershey Bears Hockey, Rainbow Dinner Theatre, and Sight & Sound performance of "Noah" will also be available.

To receive a complete list of sale items or make a donation for the auction, contact the Lancaster County Cooperative Extension office at (717) 394-6851.

Announcing the publication of Pictorial History of Eastern American Agriculture During the 20th Century

Recalling our Eastern U.S. agricultural heritage, a new book entitled 100 Years of Eastern American Agriculture (a pictorial review), will be published by Lancaster Farming in time for Christmas giving and the millennium celebration. This work will feature several hundred photographs that show life on the farm from 1901 through the 1990's. Lancaster Farming is commencing work on this pictorial history right now, but we need your help.

WE NEED YOUR HELP...

If you have photographs of bygone days that show old agriculture enterprises and events during this century, would you please share them with us and our readers? Prospective entries would include photos from family albums that show activities such as hay making, milking, range shelters for poultry, harvesting, planting, types of livestock,

fair or farm show activities, and farm organization and extension, 4-H, FFA ect.

In summary, Lancaster Farming is looking for photographs of people, places and things that depict the history of agriculture during this century.

-The photographs should be identifiable, including the names of at least some of the individuals in the photo, and the time, place and background of the photo.

-Lancaster Farming will print a credit line with each photo to identify the person or organization who shared it with us.

-You may bring your photos to our Lancaster Farming office, 1 East Main St., Ephrata, Pa. or send them to:

Lancaster Farming
Ag Photo History Book
Box 609, 1 E. Main St.
Ephrata, PA 17522

Of course, all photos will be returned to their owners unharmed. Space may prohibit us from printing every photo submitted.