

# Learning To Market New York's Summer Tree Fruits

GENEVA, N.Y. — Diversifying apple orchards in the Northeast by increasing plantings of summer fruits such as peaches, plums, cherries, and nectarines was the focus of attention at the Second New York Stone Fruit School March 13-14 in Geneva, N.Y.

With the apple business doing so poorly and the outlook not too bright, apple growers are taking a new look at stone fruit," said Jim Bittner, who farms 500 acres of fruit along Lake Ontario. "On most of these apple farms, stone fruits were a bigger part of the operation 50 years ago than they are today."

No new apple plantings are planned in the near future at Singer Farms where Bittner is a partner. Current apple acreage is 200 acres. "It has gotten to the point where anyone can grow apples and prices show it," said Bittner. "We need to grow things that others can't or won't. Stone fruit fits there."

Bittner is planting many new summer fruit varieties in test blocks on the farm, hoping to capitalize on his proximity to urban markets, and convince consumers that summer fruit from local growers is riper when picked and tastes better than fruit shipped in from far away. "It takes work," said Bittner. "Our problem is that New York consumers don't know that we exist."

First among the many questions to be asked about growing stone fruit concerns marketing strategy. "When did you last attend a two-day meeting that had a full day devoted to marketing?" asked Steve Clarke, Milton, N.Y., grower.

Clarke, Bittner and the 80 other industry people, researchers and Cornell Cooperative Extension educators who attended the school talked first about marketing, followed by cultural topics: site selection, new varieties, pest control, and high-

density orchard training systems.

"The tone of the meeting was very upbeat," said co-organizer Robert Andersen, Cornell University professor of horticultural sciences who directs the stone fruit breeding program at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva. "In two days, we had over 22 presentations — an expanded format from the first meeting two years ago. Growers had the opportunity to make business contacts with marketers and many creative ideas were exchanged."

### Determine Your Markets Before You Plant

Wen-Fei Uva, senior extension associate in horticultural product marketing in Cornell's department of Agricultural Resource and Managerial Economics on the Ithaca campus, organized the marketing pro-

gram. It featured growers, brokers, processors in Ontario and New York, and Cornell specialists.

In her talk, Uva outlined stone fruit facts and industry trends in New York as well as per capita consumption trends for stone fruit crops in the USA. Michael Roznye from Red Tomato addressed grower optimism about market proximity in the Northeast, and described what his company does to link farmers to wholesalers.

Riper, better tasting fruit from New York orchards should gain market share in eastern chain stores, especially if growers combine quality assurance standards with new varieties having unique flavors and improved consumer popularity.

The other buzz is "region, region, region." The new Northeast Stone Fruit Sponsors industry association expects to take a pro-active role in engendering regional cooperation rather than

local competition among neighbors.

### Planting For Yield And Quality

In the horticultural sessions organized by Andersen on Tuesday, Stephen A. Hoying, CCE leader of the Lake Ontario Fruit Team, talked about getting orchards off to a good start.

"Summer fruit trees are not as tough as apple trees. For successful stone fruit plantings, growers should plan several years in advance," he said. Summer fruit growers must know the climatic characteristics of their sites and pay special attention to susceptibility to spring frost and minimum winter temperatures. They must also investigate their soils thoroughly because wet soils have low oxygen levels. Modifications are necessary in most New York soils through tile draining and/or ridging and by choosing the appropriate rootstock for the site.

The role of IPM was well covered by Peter Shearer from Rutgers University, one of four new faculty members hired to work on strengthening stone fruit production in southern Jersey. He showed that ground cover management is the key to controlling insects like thrips and tarnished plant bugs that cause bad surface blemishes. In the case of damage caused by the larval stage of the Oriental fruit moth, Shearer presented considerable data about achieving biological control with sex pheromones. Rotating controls and using them at the lowest possible rates can inhibit pest tolerance to chemical controls.

Plum Pox Virus (PPV) was another hot topic. This new scare has surfaced for the first time in New York. Virus survey activities by the New York State Plum Pox Task Force were outlined by David Rosenberger, superintendent of the Hudson Valley Lab in Highland, N.Y. This task force includes the New York State Department of Ag and Markets (NYSDAM), Cornell faculty, CCE educators, growers and USDA regulators.

Deputy Commissioner Rick Zimmerman represented NYSDAM at the school. Recently, all New York tree fruit growers received PPV information from NYSDAM Commissioner Rudgers that describes the disease and the New York survey activities for controlling it.

Rosenberger also reviewed control recommendations for common diseases of stone fruits. "Some diseases can be avoided by selection of resistant cultivars and by isolating new plantings from sources of disease inoculum," he said.

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