

Tour Shows Potential For Ohio Berry Production

PIKETON, Ohio - Farmers looking for an alternative, high-value crop or berry growers hoping to improve profits should attend the Summer Berry Tour, said Sandy Kuhn, berry coordinator at the Ohio State University Centers at Piketon.

"With the farm economy the way it is, Ohio farmers are looking for crops that could be high-dollar alternatives to corn, soybeans or wheat, and berries are one possibility," Kuhn said.

According to Ohio State University agricultural economists, black raspberries in Ohio generate an average annual return of \$1,575 per acre from pick-your-own operations and \$1,063 per acre from prepicked retail sales. Strawberries earn \$495 per acre from pick-your-own and \$150 from prepicked operations. In comparison, no-till corn generates only \$13 per acre of annual profit and no-till soybeans \$16 per acre. Corn and soybeans grown conventionally generate only \$1 of net profit per acre per year.

This year's Summer Berry Tour is July 27-28 and will visit five farms and farm markets in central Ohio. Two stops on the "drive yourself" tour are scheduled Thursday, July 27 and three on Friday, July 28, Kuhn said.

"Current producers will have a chance to look at other farms and get new ideas in areas such as marketing, production practices, diversification of crops, and irrigation," she said.

Growing strawberry plants on raised beds through plastic, called plasticulture, is one new production practice displayed at two of the stops. The plastic holds in heat and warms soils, allowing strawberries to grow and

be picked two weeks earlier than normal, Kuhn said. The plastic adds additional costs and may not fit every farm but gives the farm the ability to be "first on the market" with their product.

"Prospective growers can talk with current producers and get information on how to get started," she said.

New growers need to decide what berries to plant, what equipment to buy, where to sell berries, and how to provide the long hours of labor needed to properly manage a berry patch.

Growing berries is initially a high investment - as much as \$6,000 per acre for a 2- to 5-acre operation - and requires labor for planting, pruning, irrigating and picking, so potential growers should get as much information as possible before committing, Kuhn said.

Other topics discussed during the Berry Tour will include selling at farmers' markets, entertainment farming, disease issues, pick-your-own operations, labor, the American Berry Cooperative and family businesses.

The tour begins at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday at Rhoads Farm Market, on Rt. 56 east of Circleville. Rhoads is a diversified farm market that grows blackberries, raspberries, strawberries and other fruits and vegetables.

The second stop is west of Grove City on London-Groveport Road at Circle S Farm. Circle S Farm features more than 10 acres of strawberries, more than six acres of black and red raspberries, and a bakery and gourmet food business. An optional dinner on Thursday evening at Circle S Farm will include discussions with Ohio State University berry researchers Dick Funt,

state small fruit specialist, and Mike Ellis, plant pathologist.

Friday's tour begins at 9 a.m. at the Schacht Farm Market on Shannon Road in Canal Winchester. Schacht's grows strawberries, blackberries and a variety of other produce. Stop two on Friday is at Doran's Farm Market on Babbitt Road outside of New Albany. Doran's has raspberries, strawberries and other specialty crops. The final Friday stop is at Jacquemin Farms on Hyland-Croy Road near Plain City, featuring strawberries and raspberries, among other crops.

Recent health studies that show berries can reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease have increased their demand, and there are many new types of berries available with better flavor, shipping qualities, and other improvements that make marketing easier, Kuhn said. So now is a good time to start growing berries.

"The tour offers examples of good operations with all types of berries represented," she said. "We've chosen some of the more progressive operations in Ohio, and some that have had berries around for quite a while."

The Summer Berry Tour is \$15 per person for those eating dinner at Circle S Farm or \$5 per person otherwise. Advance registration is required.

For more information on the tour or a registration form, call the Ohio State University Centers at Piketon at (800) 297-2072 and ask for Kuhn or Melissa Fitzpatrick. Kuhn can also be reached by e-mail (kuhn.37@osu.edu).

Gov. Ridge Signs Bill For Additional Crop-Loss Payment

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Gov. Tom Ridge recently signed S.B. 1417 to allow the Department of Agriculture to make final crop-loss payments to producers who qualified under Act 57, the drought disaster relief law signed into law last year.

"Our farmers exemplify the best of Pennsylvania," Gov. Ridge said. "They work hard, and they don't ask for much in return. I was proud last year to sign legislation offering our farmers the largest state drought-aid package in the nation. And today I'm proud to help them again — as they continue to recover from last year's devastating drought."

"With this new law, our Department of Agriculture will be able to complete the job. We will send a final payment to qualified applicants, in an amount that will be nearly equal to what they already have received."

Gov. Ridge thanked Sen. Noah W. Wenger (R-Lancaster) and Rep. Raymond Bunt Jr. (R-Montgomery) for supporting this bill.

Last year, Pennsylvania provided more drought assistance for Pennsylvania farmers (\$5 million for hay assistance, \$5.6 million for crop insurance, and \$60 million in crop-loss payments for a total of \$70.6 million

in state funds) than in any other Mid-Atlantic or Northeastern state.

These final payments reflect the balance of the \$60 million portion of the existing disaster relief package.

The \$5.6 million portion of the package designated for crop insurance assistance will be administered directly through insurance underwriters and the federal Risk Management Agency. The Department of Agriculture has arranged to have the producers' crop insurance billing statement reflect the state assistance, eliminating the need for producers to be reimbursed.

"I am very proud of our producers for managing through a very difficult crop year," Agriculture Secretary Samuel E. Hayes Jr. said. "Likewise, I thank Gov. Ridge and Pennsylvania lawmakers for quickly responding with \$70.6 million in state assistance. This financial assistance has made a difference to our farm families. It has helped them to protect the viability of Pennsylvania's agricultural community and its capacity to produce food and fiber."

S.B. 1417, sponsored by Sen. William L. Slocum (R-Warren), passed the House 189 to 1, and the Senate unanimously. It takes effect immediately.

Dean Foods And Land O'Lakes Begin Joint Venture

FRANKLIN PARK, Ill. — Dean Foods Company (NYSE:DF) and Land O'Lakes, Inc., announced recently that Dean Foods has completed the purchase of Land O'Lakes Upper Midwest fluid milk operations.

The two organizations have also formed a joint venture to nationally market and license certain value-added fluid and cultured dairy products to further expand the Land O'Lakes® brand.

Both agreements include long-term licensing arrangements for use of the Land O'Lakes brand name.

"In this transaction, Dean Foods is acquiring a strong and successful fluid dairy business that commands the leading position in its regional market," said Howard Dean, chairman and chief executive officer of Dean Foods. "In addition, this acquisition offers Dean a unique opportunity to go to market with one of the best known brands in the dairy industry and to extend the Land O'Lakes brand name into new, value-added fluid and cultured dairy products and

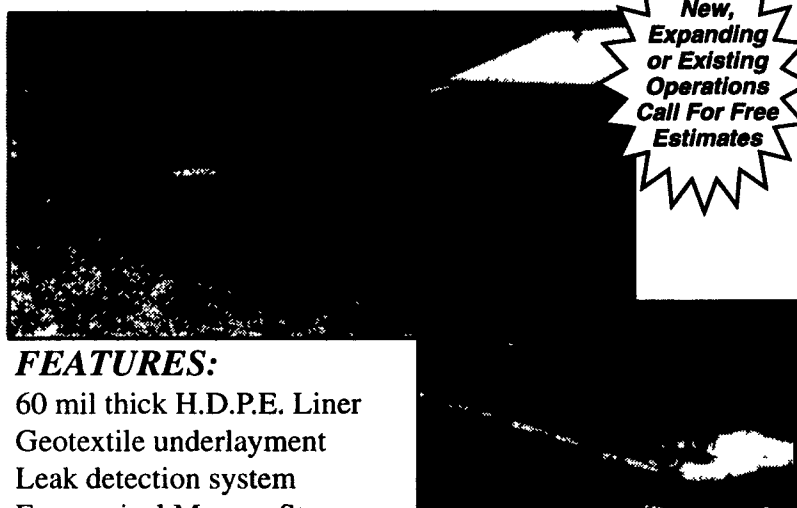
into new geographical markets."

"Land O'Lakes sees this joint venture as an opportunity to further leverage the strength of our brand and reputation for quality, and extend the geographic reach of our most innovative fluid

dairy products," said Chris Policinski, executive vice president and chief operation officer for Land O'Lakes Dairy Foods (Turn to Page A25)

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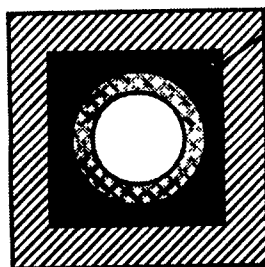
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