

Fresh Ideas

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The Pennsylvania Vegetable Marketing and Research Program is a state-wide marketing order established by a grower referendum, governed by a grower board and funded by grower assessments.

The Program's sole purpose is to serve the vegetable growers of Pennsylvania by promoting Pennsylvania-grown vegetables and funding practical vegetable production research.

12th PA Produce Month Celebrated

The Vegetable Marketing and Research Program conducted its twelfth annual celebration of August as Pennsylvania Produce Month this season. The promotion is designed to focus extra attention on Pennsylvania vegetables at the height of your season. This year we again collaborated with Kitchen Table Consultants to help direct our promotions and build upon our past successes.

The Program sent out a series of weekly press releases on specific topics pulled from the custom content created for the website, in addition to weekly emails to farmer members which included items from the “toolkit” like a marketing calendar, ready-to-share social media graphics, eblast graphics, a summer infographic, and editorials to help farmers develop content for customer engagement. Between mid-July and mid-September, a total of 72 articles were published throughout the state on PA Produce Month potentially reaching as many as 1,912,124 persons. To help highlight the abundance of fresh Pennsylvania produce available in August, the Program also worked with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Feeding Pennsylvania, and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank to recognize Southwestern Pennsylvania growers who donate produce to food banks at a press conference on August 9 with Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding.

New content added to the PAVeggies.org website included: features on four well-known chefs around Pennsylvania sharing their favorite summertime veggie recipes; a 2017 PA Veggies Consumer Tips Infographic and the 2017 Toolkit for Farmers. The Toolkit contained shareable social media images; talking points for promos and consumer excitement, a marketing “cheat sheet”; shareable email images, a marketing calendar for guiding farmers; preparing for Produce Month mailer, and editorials to share, based on themed press releases

The Program also conducted nine “Pop-Up” educational events at community special events and farmers’ markets in the central and southeastern regions with potential exposure to over 30,000 consumers and direct connections with about 1,000 consumers. Kitchen Table Consultants drove consumer reach this year by continuing to build an audience for PA Veggies through social media engagement on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest – all under the PAVeggies tag. On Facebook alone, 28,324 people saw the Program’s content and 1,184 people were engaged.

Using information submitted by growers this spring, the Program updated the directory of retail Farm Markets, Farmers’ Markets and CSA’s and the Program’s directory of wholesale growers, both of which are posted on the Program’s website. Over 200 Produce Month kits were shipped to the various produce auctions across the state where they were available to growers and to the non-grower marketers who purchase produce at the auctions while 71 kits were ordered from the Program by growers. The Program again offered PA Produce Month point-of-purchase materials to supermarket chains in the state. Posters and price cards were requested for about 250 stores by Acme, Supervalu, Four Seasons Produce, Lancaster Family-Owned Markets, and Karns Quality Foods.

The Program used \$20,409 for the PA Produce Month Promotion and website improvement efforts in 2017.

Point-of-Purchase Items Sent to Growers

The Program shipped point-of-purchase materials to 303 growers for the 2017 season. Items shipped included 36 banners, 42 restaurant signs, 91 roadside signs, 798 crop stickers for the roadside signs, 120 packs of clip-on price cards, 363 packs of plastic price cards, 32 packs of brochures, 153 rolls of price stickers, and 285 pads of “How to Use” information/recipe cards. The informational “How to Use” cards on less well known crops (beets, eggplant, kale, leeks, spaghetti squash, summer squash, Swiss chard, turnips and winter squash) enable consumers to enjoy these crops. The Program also supplied growers with over 140 cases of plastic “T-shirt” shopping bags that were imprinted with a vegetable graphic and “Fresh Local Vegetables” in dark green on one side and the PA Preferred logo in blue and gold on the other side. These bags are provided at cost to growers. The Program spent \$9,186 for the point-of-purchase materials in 2017.

Grower Education Efforts Undertaken

The Program distributed a weekly two- to six-page IPM update on tomato fungicide and sweet corn insecticide scheduling and cucurbit disease information to 290 persons by electronic mail, 51 by fax and 116 growers by mail plus the produce auctions during the 2017 growing season. Printing and postage costs were \$1,348.

In cooperation with the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association, the Program also conducted eight conference calls from June to October that allowed growers to ask Penn State Extension personnel about production issues they were encountering in their fields.

High Tunnel Display Erected

Funded by a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Program was able to erect a full-scale high tunnel display with live vegetable crops at the 2017 Pennsylvania Farm Show. The purpose was to show consumers how Pennsylvania growers are extending their growing seasons with the use of this technology to make more fresh, local Pennsylvania vegetables available to consumers beyond the regular growing seasons. The grant covered the \$26,250 cost.

New Board Members Appointed

Several new members were appointed to the Vegetable Marketing and Research Program Board during 2017. Leonard Burger III of Drums and James Stahl of Lititz were appointed to represent the eastern region of the state on Board. Both are fresh market growers. Nathan Richard of Catawissa, a processing grower, was appointed to represent the central region. Benny Yoder with the Countryside Produce Auction, was appointed to represent sales agents.

At their November meeting, the Board re-elected Christopher Powell of Strasburg as chairman, Scott Hoffman of Northumberland as vice chairman and Kenneth Metrick of Butler as secretary-treasurer. Other grower members are Stephen Ganser of Kutztown, Joel Kosa of Ulysses, Joseph Mason of Lake City, David Miller of York, Laverne Nolt of Martinsburg and David Peters of Gardners.

The Program's Board, which includes twelve grower members, has the primary decision-making authority for the Program. The Secretary of Agriculture appoints the Board members from nominations submitted by growers. The Secretary of Agriculture and a representative of sales agents also sit on the Board. The Board members are entitled to per diem payments for their services but they have voted to refuse any payment for their service other than reimbursement for travel expenses.

Program Helps to Fund 14 Research Projects in 2017

The Vegetable Marketing and Research Board allocated \$20,000 in assessment funds for vegetable research in 2017. In cooperation with the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association (PVGA), which contributed an additional \$59,126 from its General Fund, the two vegetable growers organizations funded 14 different projects. The approved projects, listed below, total \$79,126.

New Herbicide Options for Weed Control in Sweet Corn: Round 2

Dwight Lingenfelter, Penn State Univ. and Dr. Mark VanGessel, Univ. of Delaware **\$3,000**

Efficacy of Organic Biopesticides for the Management of White Mold in Processing Snap Bean in Pennsylvania

Dr. Sarah Pethybridge, Cornell Univ. and Dr. Beth K. Gugino, Penn State Univ. **\$6,800**

Fresh Market Slicer Tomato Variety Evaluation

Dr. Timothy Elkner, Penn State Extension **\$6,850**

Breeding Tomatoes for Disease Resistance and Other Desirable Characteristics for Production in PA

Dr. Majid R. Foolad, Penn State Univ. **\$12,000**

Authority MTZ: the Fit for Processing Tomatoes

Dr. Mark VanGessel, Univ. of Delaware; Dwight Lingenfelter, Penn State Univ. **\$3,000**

Phytophthora Blight Management

John Esslinger, Penn State Extension **\$2,400**

Keeping PA Vegetable Growers Profitable: Statewide Pumpkin Cultivar Trials

Dr. Elsa Sánchez and Dr. William Lamont, Penn State Univ., Timothy Elkner, Thomas Butzler and Robert Pollock, Penn State Extension **\$12,000**

Impact of Insectary Strips to Control Cucumber Beetles

Dr. Gladis Zinati, Rodale Institute **\$5,000**

Colored Bell Pepper High Tunnel Variety Trial

Dr. Timothy Elkner, Penn State Extension **\$4,000**

Issues with High Soluble Salt Levels in High Tunnels

Dr. Elsa Sánchez, Penn State Univ. and Thomas Ford, Penn State Extension **\$4,400**

Allium Leaf Miner Monitoring and Management

Dr. Timothy Elkner, Penn State Ext. and Shelby Fleischer, Penn State Univ. **\$3,500**

Leek and Celery Variety Evaluations

Dr. Timothy Elkner, Penn State Extension **\$4,750**

Tactics for the Management of Center Rot of Onion: Augmented Nitrogen Fertigation and Cultivar Selection.

Dr. Beth K. Gugino, Penn State Univ. **\$7,176**

Development of Fungicide Programs for Phytophthora Blight of Squash

Dr. Sally Miller and Jhony Mera, The Ohio State Univ. **\$4,250**

Reports on these projects will be available in March on the PAVeggies.org website or by calling 717-694-3596.