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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.

Public Relations

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. The total estimated impressions for this time period is 1,912,124 - 600,000 more than last year. (PR jargon: *Impressions are the number of times your content is displayed.*) With over 54 different publication sources, the estimated media value is \$122,512. This data is important, but not the only metric we use to judge the success of a promotion. We also want to focus on **engagement**, and that is where our custom website content, pop up events and social media campaign come into play. (PR jargon: *Engagements are the number of interactions people have with your content.*)

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. Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding as well as representatives from the other partner organizations were featured at the press event held at the Mount Lebanon Lion's Club Farmers Market on August 9 to highlight the scope of need in Pennsylvania and honor those growers making a difference. Feeding Pennsylvania affiliated food banks serve nearly two million food insecure people each year, half of whom are children. Fresh produce from local growers is a valuable resource for the food banks.

New Website Content

Custom content was developed for the PA Veggies website in celebration of PA Produce month. This included:

- Features on four well-known chefs around Pennsylvania sharing their favorite summertime veggie recipes. <http://www.paveggies.org/vegetable-information/tips-pennsylvanias-finest-chefs/>
- 2017 PA Veggies Consumer Tips Infographic <http://www.paveggies.org/vegetable-information/veggie-info-overview-infographic/>
- The 2017 Toolkit for Farmers <http://www.paveggies.org/2017-toolkit/>
 - o Shareable social media images
 - o Talking points for promos, consumer excitement, marketing "cheat sheet"
 - o Shareable email images
 - o Marketing calendar for guiding farmers

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12th PA Produce Month Celebrated *continued from page 1*

- Preparing for Produce Month mailer
<http://www.paveggies.org/preparing-produce-month/>
- Editorials to share, based on themed press releases
<http://www.paveggies.org/5-tips-get-kids-veggie-bandwagon-tricks-included/>

Pop Up Events

These events were so well received by consumers in 2016, that we did it all over again in 2017. This year's pop up educational events featured three different elements, with one to two of these programs at nine community special events and farmers' markets in the Central and Southeastern regions.

1. Dirt Therapy – Kids love to dig in the dirt and this interactive activity allowed youngsters to dig up buried veggies out of a container of soil while Program representatives worked with them to identify the produce and talk about the many ways to enjoy them.
2. Tomato Tasting Trail – This farmer's market activity allowed consumers to taste new tomato varieties and discover perfect food pairings as they strolled around the market filling their baskets with August's bountiful produce offerings. They were encouraged to ask farmers about their favorite tomatoes and which varieties would be best for their recipes!
3. Chopped Salad Demo - This activity was designed to inspire even the busiest person to load up their market basket with an assortment of fresh veggies - not so they can be laid to rest in the crisper drawer, but instead be quickly prepped into a delicious, raw salad bursting with flavor. Consumers were provided with recipes along with veggie combination suggestions.

With potential exposure to over 30,000 consumers, 1,000 *direct* connections were estimated - direct meaning there was a conversation and personal interaction like sharing recipes, tips for cooking seasonally, kids programming and information about PA Veggies. Many more were reached indirectly through handouts provided at the pop up events. (These stats on connections do not include social media engagement, which was a focal point for creating excitement about the activities.)

Social Media and Web Campaign

Kitchen Table Consultants drove consumer reach this year by continuing to build an audience for PA Veggies through social media engagement. The August is PA Produce Month (PA Veggies) social media campaign pages continue to be maintained throughout the year. Facebook took the role as the most popular site for all of the different markets, farms, customers and potential customers, with Instagram at times showing even more farmer and consumer activity. The team shared engaging posts throughout the month, sharing custom content from the PA Veggies website, tips for

vegetable storage and preparation, and their good cheer and enthusiasm for PA Produce Month to keep followers engaged and excited about what was to come.

PA Produce Month social media sites are as follows, with Facebook and Instagram as the targeted platforms for promotion:

- www.facebook.com/PAVeggies
- www.instagram.com/PAVeggies
- www.twitter.com/PAVeggies
- www.pinterest.com/PAVeggies

Facebook stats for mid-July to mid-September were:

- 71 New page likes
- 1,797 Unique users saw PA Veggies content at least 3 times
- 28,324 People saw content
- 1,184 People were engaged

The Facebook post with the broadest reach (3,781 unpaid/392 paid) read as follows with the 2017 infographic: *"Veggie knowledge is a powerful thing! Here are a few important and fun facts to send you into the weekend. Now go connect with your local farmers and veg on! #paveggies #paproducemonth"*

Website Directories Updated

Using information submitted by growers this spring, the Program updated the directory of retail Farm Markets, Farmers' Markets and CSA's that is posted on the Program's website. The directory lists the markets in ZIP code order allowing consumers to search for markets near them. The Program also updated its directory of wholesale growers that lists growers by the crops they produce at the wholesale level. In this directory, the growers are divided into three or four groups based on the acreages they produce. The website also features a directory of the state's produce auctions.

Growers are encouraged to check out these directories and make sure they are listed and are listed correctly. Please note that the directories only contain information which you as a grower submitted to the Program this spring or in previous years. We would like to list all growers and their markets, so let us know if you were not listed. To obtain the forms to be listed in the directories, call the Program at 717-694-3596 or email us at pvmrp@embarqmail.com.

Other Produce Month Efforts

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 52 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.

Your Input is Needed

As stated in the Program's Mission Statement (top of page 1), the Program's sole purpose is to serve Pennsylvania vegetable growers. To do that effectively, we need your input on a regular basis. While growers are welcome to communicate their needs at anytime to the Program by phone (717-694-3596), email (pvmrp@embarqmail.com) or regular mail (2301 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110), each fall we offer two targeted opportunities for grower comments.

Grower Conference Call

For several years, we have conducted grower conference calls in the fall to allow growers to communicate their research needs directly with researchers. Last year and this year we conducted grower conference calls throughout the growing season so growers could ask extension experts about the problems they were seeing in their fields. The last call for this season is scheduled for **Tuesday, October 10 from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (Note change in the date from October 2.)** While any questions will be welcome during this call, it will be an excellent opportunity to suggest research topics for 2018. **To participate in the call growers should call 1-877-643-6951 at 8:00 p.m. When prompted, enter the following passcode 55835024#.** Please note, growers should NOT call this number with questions at anytime other than between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. on October 10. If you have questions at other times, call your extension office or the Program at 717-694-3596.

Annual Grower Survey

Please fill out the enclosed green "Annual Grower Survey" to help the Program's Board meet your marketing and research needs for 2018. We especially need your response for the first question for our Specialty Crop Block Grant to help evaluate the effects of our grant activities.

While your response anytime this fall is welcome, if you can return your survey by November 1, 2017, your responses can be compiled for review by the Board at its meeting scheduled for November 15, 2017, in Room 309 of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Building in Harrisburg starting at 12:00 noon.

Each comment submitted by growers is typed up for the Board members to review. The November meeting will be devoted to the annual election of officers, promotion plans for 2018, review of the research pre-proposals for 2018 and general business.

All meetings of the Board are public meetings that growers are welcome to attend. Any questions about the meeting or the Program should be referred to William Troxell at 717-694-3596 or pvmrp@embarqmail.com.

Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention

January 30 to February 1, 2018 – Hershey Lodge
www.mafvc.org

Point of Purchase Materials Still Available

The Program will continue to ship point-of-purchase items to growers through the fall although we do ask that all orders be submitted by November 30, 2017.



Supplies of banners, clip-on price cards, price stickers, and how-to-use information cards are all in stock and ready to ship. We no longer have any roadside signs although we still have most of the crop stickers available. We are out of the plastic price cards but we did print a supply of paper price cards of the same design. We have replaced the "Fun and Healthy Facts" brochures with a "Fun and Healthy Facts" activity card for students. Point-of-purchase materials were shipped to over 270 growers across the state so far this year.

The banner which contains the "PA Preferred" logo can only be distributed to growers who are licensed by the Department of Agriculture to use the "PA Preferred" logo.



PENNSYLVANIA

Vegetable Marketing & Research Program

The Program is also offering tee-shirt grocery bags imprinted with the "Fresh Local Vegetables" imprint shown here on one side and the "PA Preferred" logo on other side. These white, disposable (but recyclable)

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Review Referendum Set for March 2018

Every five years, the vegetable growers of Pennsylvania must vote whether to continue the Vegetable Marketing and Research Program. This referendum is required by the Pennsylvania Agricultural Commodities Marketing Act under which the Program is established. The last review referendum was held in March 2013 so the five-year period is up in March 2018.

As stated in the Program's mission statement on page one, the Program's sole purpose is to serve the growers of Pennsylvania by promoting Pennsylvania-grown vegetables and funding practical vegetable research. Since the Program was established in 1988, it has devoted over \$620,000 in assessment dollars to research funding and \$550,000 for promotion activities.

Working cooperatively with the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association which has contributed an additional \$750,000 to vegetable research, the Program and Association have funded over 350 projects in the last 30 years. The research projects have included numerous cultivar, herbicide and fungicide trials; disease forecasting and insect pest monitoring systems; development of disease resistant tomato varieties; evaluation of various production methods; and others. The reports of these projects have been made available to growers each year. Currently the reports for the last eight years are available on the Program's website at www.paveggies.org. Historically, the Program has tried to give special research emphasis to projects that benefit processing snap bean, tomato and sweet corn growers since processing growers do not benefit from the marketing activities of the Program.

Besides the \$550,000 in assessment dollars used to promote Pennsylvania vegetables, the Program has received an additional \$400,000 in state and federal grants for promotion activities. Since 1990 the Program has provided growers who retail their produce with professionally printed point-of-purchase materials. It has also maintained a press relations effort to get stories about local, Pennsylvania vegetables on the food pages of newspapers across the state. A vegetable recipe contest was sponsored for ten years that produced exciting recipes for the press releases and the Program's website. Billboards, radio advertising and, more recently, social media have been used to urge consumers to buy fresh, local Pennsylvania produce. For the last 12 years, the Program has celebrated August as Pennsylvania Produce Month to highlight the height of the local season. Retail fresh market growers are able list their roadside farm markets, their CSAs or the community farmer's markets they attend in the Program's online directory. Wholesale fresh market growers have the opportunity to list their farms in an online directory of wholesale growers arranged by crop, also housed on the Program's website.

The continuation of all these activities that support a vibrant vegetable industry in Pennsylvania is dependent on growers voting to continue the Program in March 2018. One of the issues the Program has faced from the

beginning has been identifying the names and addresses of all the growers in the state. No complete list exists other than the Ag Census list which is by federal law confidential and not available to the Program. Periodically the Program and the Department of Agriculture have reached out to various sources to update the list, most recently in 2017. By contacting produce auctions, chain store buyers, wholesalers, processors, brokers and other wholesale buyers, the Program has been able to add about 800 growers to its list of growers this year. The Program is designed to provide a structure for the entire Pennsylvania vegetable industry to work together to cooperatively fund vegetable research and promote locally grown vegetables. Thus collecting the annual assessment from all the state's growers allows the Program to be more effective in funding research and promoting growers crops.

The Board asks growers to vote "Yes" to continue the record of 30 years of support for the Pennsylvania vegetable industry.

Point of Purchase Materials

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plastic grocery shopping bags are 12" x 7" x 23" and 18 microns thick. These are standard grocery bag size and heavier than the cheapest grocery bags. With care they can be used for corn, putting the silk end in first, but they are NOT heavy-duty bags designed specifically for corn. While not as cheap as generic "Thank You" bags, they focus attention to the "Fresh Local Vegetables" you are selling. It was necessary to obtain a new supplier for the bags and there was an increase in cost – but the new bags are heavier than those from the previous supplier. The bags are now \$28 per 1,000 PLUS SHIPPING. Shipping is \$14 per case except in those ZIP codes beginning with 150,151,152,153,154,156, 160, 161, 162, 163,164, 165 and 167 where shipping is \$17 per case. The bags will be available for pick-up (with no shipping charges) at the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention in Hershey. They are also available at Harvest View Farm in Butler, Laverne's Produce Supplies in Martinsburg and Nolt's Produce Supplies in Leola although they are \$30 per case at these locations.

Growers receive a credit equal to half of their assessment payment (up to a maximum of \$25) to order point-of-purchase items from the Program at no additional cost. Orders for point-of-purchase items for 2017 will be accepted until November 30. If you have misplaced your order form, contact the Program at 717-694-3596 or pvmrp@embarqmail.com or visit our website at www.paveggies.org.

Questions

Growers are always welcome to contact the Program with any questions by phone at 717-694-3596, by email at pvmrp@embarqmail.com or by regular mail at PVMRP, 2301 North Cameron Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9408.