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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.

10th PA Produce Month Celebrated

The Vegetable Marketing and Research Program conducted its tenth 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. The Program shipped Produce Month point-of-purchase kits to individual growers, to auctions for sale to their market customers and to supermarket chains. A press release was distributed to newspapers and television stations across the state. The Governor officially proclaimed August as Pennsylvania Produce Month and the Program's website, www.paveggies.org, was updated with new directories of retail farm markets, farmers' markets and CSAs as well as a new directory of wholesale growers. And, for the first time, the Program launched a full-fledged social media campaign on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest.

Social Media Campaign

The social media campaign was undertaken with the assistance of John Berry, Penn State Extension educator and Monica Ganser, Penn State Extension program assistant, both in the Lehigh County Extension office. The August is PA Produce Month (PA Veggies) social media campaign pages were started in mid-July to prepare for August. Facebook took the role as the most popular site for all of the different markets, farms, customers and potential customers.

PA Produce Month social media sites are as follows:

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

Once August ended, it was decided to keep the different social media pages going at least through the fall. By doing this it will keep the followers engaged and bring more followers and/or potential customers to the pages.

As of September 7, 2015, there were 648 likes on the Facebook page, which has made it the top site for our campaign. Throughout the campaign it has been apparent that Facebook is the most used social media site, with more farms and customers being a part of it.

The promotions were geared towards both men and women ages 18 to 65 years old and located just in Pennsylvania. In the last week of promotion we received 265 likes with a weekly total reach of 2,258 - 78% of our fans are women and 21% of our fans are men. We got a good following of markets and farms that would share our information, share their pictures on the site and would use the hashtag (#PAProduceMonth). The phrase "When I Think August" and the photos to go along with them became a nice touch to the campaign. After making a few for some markets, they were able to share them with their followers, families and customers. There were a few who even shared their own pictures and added the phrase onto their pictures.



10th PA Produce Month Celebrated

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On Pinterest there are 123 pins and 8 boards started. This has become a popular place to find some of the recipes from the recipe contest. There have been 828 monthly viewers with 25 a day. The audience that is viewing our pins consists of 697 women. The Twitter and Instagram components had limited success and will have to be developed more for next year.

Overall, the social media campaign was a success. The Program has started a following and hopefully we can continue to build it throughout the year.

New Directories Posted to the Website

Using information submitted by growers this spring, the Program created a new, updated directory of retail Farm Markets, Farmers' Markets and CSA's that is posted on the Program's website at www.paveggies.org. The directory lists the markets in ZIP code order allowing consumers to search for markets near them. While there are several other online directories of retail markets, including the Department of Agriculture's Consumers Guide and Penn State's Ag Map, this directory allows the Program to focus on those markets selling Pennsylvania vegetables.

The Program also created a new updated 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. For example, for snap beans, growers are grouped into those producing ten or more acres of snap beans, those producing three to ten acres and those producing less than three acres. Within each group, growers are again listed in ZIP code order that allows buyers to identify growers in their areas. The website also features a new updated 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 the case of the wholesale directory, in the past three years. If you did not submit any information, we did not list your farm. 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

Two years ago the Program introduced a new design for the Produce Month point-of-purchase materials created for the month-long promotion. The new materials feature the same produce graphic used in the new banner introduced three years ago along with the emphasis on "fresh local vegetables". The new posters also highlight the Program's website at

www.paveggies.org where the recipes and market directories are featured.

Governor Tom Wolf issued a proclamation officially designating August as Pennsylvania Produce Month. The Governor's proclamation was announced by Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding at a press conference at the Culp Street Farmer's Market in Gettysburg on August 12. The Program's press release about PA Produce Month was referred to in 31 newspapers or websites reaching over one million print and online readers. In addition, 8 more articles reaching 100,000 readers referenced the presentation of the Governor's proclamation in Gettysburg. The media value of these articles was listed at over \$85,000.

To encourage greater participation in Produce Month, the Program mailed six small PA Produce Month posters to each grower ordering point-of-purchase orders from the Program. About 47 of these growers ordered the Produce Month kit in addition which included two large posters and 20 special Produce Month price cards.

Over 220 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.

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 243 stores by Supervalu, ShopRite (Wakefern), Four Seasons Produce, Redner's Warehouse Markets, Lancaster Family-Owned Markets, and Karns Quality Foods.

Mid-Atlantic Convention Opens February 2

The 2016 Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention will be held February 2 to 4 at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center in Hershey. This three-day educational meeting also includes a large industry trade show. Many of the researchers whose projects are funded by the Program will be speaking in the educational sessions so it is a good opportunity for growers to hear them speak in person. All growers should plan to attend. Information is available at www.mafvc.org or 717-694-3596.

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

Growers who want to accept the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) checks from senior citizens and WIC program recipients MUST be registered with the Farmers' Marketing Nutrition Program first. If you are not registered, prepare for next season by calling the FMNP office at 717-787-2940.

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 fall, it was suggested that grower conference calls be conducted throughout the growing season so growers could ask extension experts about the problems they were seeing in their fields. Calls have been conducted each month since June. The last call of the season is scheduled for **Tuesday, October 6 from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.** While any questions will be welcome during this call, it will be an excellent opportunity to suggest for research topics for 2016. **To participate in the call growers should call 1-877-643-6951 at the appointed time. 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 6. 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 2016. 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, 2015, your responses can be compiled for review by the Board at its meeting scheduled for November 18, 2015, in Room 202 of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Building in Harrisburg starting at 9:00 a.m.

Each comment submitted by growers is typed up for the Board members to review. The morning session of the November meeting will be devoted to the annual election of officers, promotion plans for 2016 and general business. The afternoon will be set aside for discussion of research topics for next year.

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

Point of Purchase Materials Still Available

The Program will continue to ship point-of-purchase items to growers through the fall – we do ask that all orders be submitted by November 30, 2015.



Supplies of banners, roadside signs, price cards, small price paddles, price stickers, brochures, and how-to-use information cards are all in stock and ready to ship. We are out of large "Simply Delicious" price paddles but can offer large "PA Preferred" price paddles in place of them. We also have some medium "Simply Delicious" tee-shirts but we are completely out of large, extra large and extra extra large shirts, hats and aprons. We are also out of binwrap and recipe cards. Point-of-purchase materials were shipped to over 300 growers across the state so far this year.

The banner and other items containing 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 above on one side and the "PA Preferred" logo on other side. These white, disposable (but recyclable)

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Board Recomends New Regulations

The Vegetable Marketing and Research Program Board at their June meeting recommended that the Department of Agriculture issue new regulations for the Program. The new regulations would formalize changes in the Program's assessment system that were approved by the growers in a referendum in the fall of 2013. For growers, the new regulations would also add a \$25 penalty on all assessment payments that are made after the January 31 deadline. For sales agents like auctions, processors, packinghouses and cooperatives, the new regulations would remove the requirement that these sales agents collect the Program's assessment from growers.

In the fall of 2013, the growers approved changes in the Program's Order that calculated a growers assessment based on the total number of production units (acres of field vegetable production or 1,000 square feet of greenhouse or high tunnel vegetable production). Previously, field production units and greenhouse production units were figured separately. The new regulations reflect these changes that were approved by the growers.

The Program Order provides for penalties for late payment to be fixed by the regulations. The current regulations allow a district magistrate to assess growers a penalty equal to the assessment but of at least \$100 and not more than \$500. Each year the Program spends hundreds of grower assessment dollars sending repeated reminders to growers to collect the annual assessment – usually over 300 growers a year have four notices sent to them. In recognition of the extra cost of postage, printing and staff time involved in mailing these reminders, and to encourage growers to pay the assessment by the January 31 deadline, the Board is seeking an automatic penalty of \$25 that will be added to all assessments paid after the January 31 deadline. (Note that the January 31 deadline is for the payment of the assessment for the previous year's growing season.)

The major change in the regulations involves the duties of sales agents. Under the new regulations, produce auctions, processors, packinghouses, and cooperatives will no longer be required to collect the assessment from the growers they deal with. Most do not, in fact, actually collect the assessment although some do require their growers to verify that they pay the assessment. Most of the auctions have greatly assisted the Program in identifying growers by providing the Program with the names and addresses of the growers that sell at their auctions. The new regulations will formally require that all sales agents, not only auctions, processors, packinghouses, and cooperatives, but also chain stores, brokers, wholesalers, and other buyers provide the Department of Agriculture with the names and addresses of the growers with whom they deal upon the Department's request.

For growers who are delinquent in paying their assessment, under the new regulations the Department may also request the sales agent to provide them with

the dollar amount of a particular grower's sales to them. This will provide the Department with the necessary evidence for prosecuting delinquent growers before a district magistrate. The Program Board has always sought to have growers willingly pay the required annual assessment to the Program. Unfortunately several hundred growers fail to pay the required assessment each year. This limits the amount of research and promotion efforts that the Program can undertake. The Board feels it is necessary for the Department to be able to effectively undertake legal action against these delinquent growers who take advantage of their fellow growers who do pay the assessment.

The new regulations will be submitted to the Independent Regulatory Review Commission and the General Assembly committees for review before being finalized. The Board feels they will help the Program identify the names and addresses of more growers by working with the various sales agents as well as increase the number of growers who pay the assessment in a timely manner. The Board asks for your support in this effort.

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. The bags are \$25 per 1,000 PLUS SHIPPING – call 717-694-3596 for shipping charges. Shipping is \$9 or \$9.50 per case for one or two cases depending on your area. Charges are slightly less for multiples of three or four cases. The bags will be available for pick-up (with no shipping charges) at the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention in Hershey and possibly other growers meetings this winter.

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 2015 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.