ARDP’s Visionary, Cooperative Pursuit of Productivity

ew York State, following guidance from the NYS Horticultural Society and other industry leaders, established the Apple Research and Development Program (ARDP) in August 1990. Each year since January 1991, several of the state’s leading apple growers and processors, members of the ARDP advisory board, have quietly, thoughtfully and efficiently mapped out a plan of work for Cornell University researchers to address the industry’s most pressing production and post-harvest research priorities. Each December, they travel from the state’s major producing regions to Geneva to review progress reports of the previous year’s funded projects. In March, they meet in Albany to allocate funds to transform worthy research proposals into valuable projects for the next growing season.

During the nearly 25 years since this remarkable private sector collaboration to significantly improve orchard productivity began, well-conceived research programs have equipped growers with rootstocks to tolerate cold temperatures and resist fire blight, new varieties to meet ever-changing consumer expectations, and tools, systems and practices to control pests and disease while improving production efficiency, yields and fruit quality. In 2002, Dr. Terence Robinson, in trying to inform NY Fruit Quarterly readers of the benefits of the ARDP as they voted on whether or not to continue the program, observed in this space that “Growers should be proud of the efforts they have made to work together to fund research that benefits the entire industry. The ARDP has worked hard to spend the money wisely in ways that will help the industry.”

Growers have done more than just maintain this valuable cooperative enterprise to fund applied research during the past decade. In 2012, they voted to double research funding from an average of just under $200,000 annually to nearly $400,000 per year.

This year the industry’s resolute, long-term commitment to investing in its own productivity and future capacity to compete successfully in challenging domestic and international markets earned $500,000 in additional research funds from the New York State Legislature and the Cuomo Administration. In making this wise public investment, New York recognized that fostering the relationship between growers and growing regions, processors, university researchers and state officials in the pursuit of strong research programs to solve problems for this major industry is, in itself, highly valuable to a prosperous economy. Nationally, over the decades, the social return on such investment has been measured to be 20:1 and higher. In the nation’s second-ranked tree fruit production sector, a New York State industry that pumps $250 million in farm gate value and more than $1 billion in total economic impact into our economy every year, a solid and continuing public/private commitment to research makes uncommonly good sense.

In May, one processor and six grower leaders from the Lake Ontario, central New York, Hudson River and Champlain Valley production regions gathered in Syracuse to solidify research priorities and allocate the new public funds for research projects addressing those priorities. Once again, industry leaders and Cornell scientists engaged in a strategic, thoughtful, efficient process to move New York’s apple industry forward, this time with New York State as a full partner. This full partnership is a win-win, joint enterprise that earns myriad economic benefits for consumers and producers alike. Returns on investments in research improve both the public and the private good. The highly productive system developed to earn those returns over the last decade.

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quarter century will continue. Significantly enhanced funding for that system, wisely engineered by New York State’s leaders in 2014, should too.

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engineered by New York State’s leaders in 2014, should too.
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