

NEW YORK FRUIT QUARTERLY

VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 2 • SUMMER 2000

Editorial

Strategic Planning Can Change the New York Apple Industry

This past winter, after discussing several partial alternatives, a decision was made to proceed with the development of a strategic plan for the entire New York apple industry. It is not sponsored by any one organization, although it has the support of the New York Apple Association, the NYS Horticultural Society, the NYS Department of Ag. and Markets and people at Cornell with critical expertise in the process. One key element was the promise of assistance from two Cornell faculty members. These are Dr. Bruce Anderson, who facilitated strategic planning for companies in 1999 with total sales of over \$30 billion, and Dr. Jerry White who has worked for 22 years with the New York apple industry and has access to a wealth of data on the apple industry. We also appreciate the administrative support of Joan Willis at the NYAA, who has sent the meeting notices out accurately, efficiently and timely.

The economic system is ruthless in telling us we need to change. It takes resources (money) away from people who are not using them efficiently and gives them to the enterprises that are. However, it is not very good at telling us how we need to change. This is why we need strategic planning. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of the industry, and evaluating the threats and opportunities that are present, we can develop an action plan that will make better use of economic resources and be rewarded through increased financial returns to the industry.

In order to facilitate the process, a Task Force of 25 people came together for the first meeting on April 24. One very pleasant surprise was the very strong support from Commissioner Rudgers, who not only addressed the group, but also agreed to be Honorary Chair and participated in the entire meeting. The group reaffirmed the need to carry out the process and suggested that a series of regional meetings be held in all parts of the state to solicit input from the industry and to make everyone feel a part of the process. Five regional meetings were held, plus one statewide meeting for storage operators and marketers. Approximately 200 people participated in these meetings from a broad cross section of the industry. These were followed by the second meeting of the Task Force on June 28. This completed Phase I of the process. Phase II will include procuring additional information from groups that were not well represented in the initial meetings, such as consumers and growers and marketers from other states. Phase III will include drafting the plan and Phase IV will be developing the action plan to carry it out. Our target date for completion is March 1, 2001. Tentative plans call for presenting the completed plan to the industry at a forum in February.

One of the things that has made this process succeed so far is that everyone in the industry knows we have to make changes. If we don't, we'll get the same results we're getting now. This realization leads people to accept an imperfect process because "there's no way it can get any worse." I remember John F. Peters, the long time VP of procurement for Knouse Foods, saying it took 29 cents per bushel of apples in 1950 to get growers to give up their independence and work together to form that great organization. If we allow a little for inflation, we're back to 29 cents per bushel of apples again. One quote Dr. Jerry White picked up recently is that "farmers need to develop their interdependence in order to maintain their independence." Unfortunately it takes adversity to create a willingness to do this. However, if we can swallow our individual pride, and put our heads together, we can determine new courses of action that will be successful. That's good strategic planning!

George F. Lamont, Chair
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Planning Task Force

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ABOUT THE COVERS

Front cover: Fruit field days and equipment shows during the summer are excellent opportunities for growers to learn about the latest innovations in fruit growing. Don't miss the Cornell Fruit Field Day and Equipment Show, August 17, in Geneva, NY.

Back cover: A selection of grapes from the grape breeding program at Cornell. See the article by Tim Martinson on p.22.

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This publication is a joint effort of the New York State Horticultural Society, Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva, and the New York State Apple Research and Development Program.



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