

NEW YORK FRUIT QUARTERLY

Editorial

Research and Development Programs Do Make a Difference

Most successful business enterprises invest some portion of their profits into research and development. It is a basic understanding that survival depends on innovation that, in turn, creates new products and/or processes. It is no different in agriculture, and it has been the Land Grant University, frequently in collaboration with private industry, that has provided the R&D support.

For the past 100 years, Federal and State governments recognized the need for strong R&D programs at the Land Grant Universities and provided monetary support for salaries, facilities and operating funds. Over time this support has eroded as our elected representatives were faced with challenges in our society that are outside of the realm of agriculture. They continue to provide support for salaries, facilities and basic research, but NOT operating funds for applied research. New York is fortunate to have an amendment to the Agriculture and Markets Law that allows the establishment of R & D Programs in which the Dept. of Ag and Markets collects an assessment from growers for research projects on that crop. Three commodities in NYS (apples, onions and cabbage) have benefited from this amendment and have established grower-funded R&D programs that have significantly assisted in the funding of applied research.

The Commissioner of Agriculture solicits nominations and then appoints an Advisory Board that oversees evaluation of proposals from researchers and the awarding of funding. Because the Board is made up of individuals (growers, processors, marketers) closely associated with the particular commodity (apples, onions or cabbage), the funding can be allocated to high priority topics and to those where the results are generally close to grower utilization. The availability of these grower-generated funds plays a significant role in maintaining a significant research effort dedicated to solving problems currently facing the industry. The Advisory Boards meet annually with the researchers to review the research that was conducted the previous year and to set priorities for the following year. This interaction is beneficial to all parties involved and greatly enhances communication between the industry and the University.

Recently, leaders of the stone fruit industry in NY have filed petitions with the Commissioner of Agriculture for the establishment of R&D programs on peaches/nectarines, sweet cherries and sour cherries. Each commodity will also have its own Advisory Board, but before any board is appointed, the proposal for establishing an R&D program must be voted on by the growers. In preparation for this vote, open hearings will be held on June 7, 8 & 10 (prior to this publication being available). The Commissioner will review the comments and concerns raised at those hearings and make the decision whether to go ahead with a vote that would probably occur sometime this summer or early fall.

So, my request to growers of stone fruits is to take an active interest in this process and contact either your local extension agent or me if you have any questions. Nobody likes an assessment, but an assessment dedicated to research and development in stone fruits is necessary if research is to continue on these crops.

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