NEW YORK
Fruit Quarterly WINTER 2011

Editorial

Why Should Growers Fund Research?

I just returned from the fall Board meeting of the NYS Berry Growers Association. At the fall meeting, we spend part of our time meeting with Ithaca and Geneva faculty and Extension staff who are working with berry crops – getting updates on work they've been conducting, discussing emerging needs, and batting around ideas for how research or educational programs can be done differently. It's my favorite activity with the Berry Growers Association.

But this meeting was a sobering one. Spotted Wing Drosophila (a fruit fly) has been found in NYS and already caused economic losses in fall raspberries. Blueberry scorch virus and blueberry shock virus, two potentially devastating diseases to the blueberry industry in this state are knocking on the borders. Critical survey work must be done to confirm if they are in New York State. Brown marmolated stink bug is in the state, but it's not yet clear if it will be an economic problem. Weed control in berries continues to be a challenge. On the positive side, a new strawberry variety developed in NYS will be available to plant this year, another is in the final stages of testing. New raspberry varieties aren't too far away. Blackberry production in tunnels is showing great promise. A high tunnel production guide for berries will soon be available.

Truly serious problems face the industry, but opportunities in the industry abound as well. Interest in locally grown products continues to increase. Whenever transportation prices rise, smaller scale growers can more ably compete against large scale shipped in product. And NYS holds what may be the ultimate trump cards. We have a great water supply – something our Western and Southern competitors cannot rely on every year. We also have a great team of researchers and Extension staff performing yeoman's duty to bring in grant dollars to be able to do work vital to the industry.

Unfortunately, grant dollars are becoming harder to come by. Nationwide, universities are telling their faculty and staff that they must come up with their own operational expenses. The success rate for funding is less than 10%. At Cornell, the college no longer provides funds for hiring technicians in the College of Agriculture. Cornell researchers must come up with approximately $75,000 a year in outside funding if they want to have a technician to maintain their plots, collect and analyze data that results in recommendations that help us run our farms more effectively.

It's time for every single grower in NYS (of any agricultural product) to put some of their own money into research that is being done to benefit us. Yes, we all pay a lot of taxes and we should get something for our industry from those taxes. But agriculture doesn't get much from state tax dollars, and that's not going to change. Get used to it. Do something positive rather than gripe about it. The Berry Growers Association automatically puts $50 of every member's dues into a research fund that is used by Cornell researchers to benefit our industry. If every one of the over 300 berry growers in NYS did their part, we would have over $15,000 to help fund summer assistants, travel, and some supplies for our research and Extension team to continue to help the industry. Whether you want to help fund industry driven research by an individual donation or through the Berry Growers Association doesn't matter. What matters is that we start supporting our respective industries with our own dollars. If we aren't willing to help support ourselves, why should a state or college administrator think the industry is worth supporting?

Dale Ila M. Riggs
President, NYS Berry Growers Association
Owner, The Berry Patch
Stephentown NY

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2011 NEW YORK STATE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

President **Tom DeMarree,** DeMarree Fruit Farm
7654 Townline Rd.
Williamson, NY 14589
PH: 315-589-9698; CELL: 315-576-1244
demarreeff@aol.com

Vice President **William R. Gunnison**
Gunnison Lakeshore Orchards
3196 NYS Rt. 9W & 22, Crown Point, NY 12928
PH: 518-597-3363 (W); 518-597-3817(H)
CELL: 518-572-4642
gunnisonorchards@yahoo.com

Treasurer/Secretary **Bruce Kirby,** Little Lake Farm
3120 Densmore Road Albion , NY 14411
PH: 585-589-1922
bruce.kirby@hughes.net

Executive Director **Paul Baker**
3568 Saunders Settlement Rd., Sanborn, NY 14132
CELL: 716-807-6827; FAX: (716) 219-4089
pbaker.hort@roadrunner.com

Admin Assistant **Karen Wilson**
630 W. North St., Geneva, NY 14456
PH: 315-787-2404; CELL: 315-521-0852
FAX: 315) 787-2216; wilsonk36@hotmail.com

Cornell Director **Dr. Terence Robinson,** NYSAES
630 W. North Street
Hedrick Hall, Room 125, Geneva, NY 14456
PH: 315-787-2227; CELL: 315-521-0435
tlr1@cornell.edu

Director **Peter Fleckenstein**, Marshall S. Skiff Orchards
4472 Cherry Valley Tpk., LaFayette, NY 13084
PH: (315) 436-1045; CELL: (315) 664-0391
peterfleck@verizon.net

Director **Dan Sievert**
Lakeview Orchards, Inc.
4941 Lake Road, Burt, NY 14028
PH: 716-778-7491 (W); CELL: 716-870-8968
lvorchards@hotmail.com

Director **Roderick Dressel, Jr.,** Dressel Farms
271 Rt 208, New Paltz, NY 12561
PH: 845-255-0693 (W); 845-255-7717 (H)
rdresseljr@aol.com

Director **Robert DeBadts,** Lake Breeze Fruit Farm
6272 Lake Road, Sodus, NY 14551
PH: 315-483-0910 (W), 315-483-9904 (H)
bobdebadts@aol.com; (Summer – use FAX only)

Director **Peter Barton**
55 Apple Tree Lane, Paughquag, NY 12570
PH: 845-227-2306 (W); 845-227-7149 (H)
CELL: 845-656-5217
pbarton@bestweb.net

Director **Doug Fox,** D&L Ventures LLC
4959 Fish Farm Rd., Sodus, NY 14551
PH: 315-483-4556
dfox12@toast.net

Director **John Ivison,** Helena Chemical Co.
165 S. Platt St, Suite 100
Albion, NY 14411; PH: 585-589-4195 (W)
CELL: 585-509-2262
ivisonj@helenachemical.com

Director **Chuck Mead,** Mead Orchards LLC
15 Scism Rd., Tivoli, NY 12583
PH: 845-756-5641 (W); CELL: 845-389-0731
chuck@meadorchards.com

NYS BERRY GROWERS BOARD MEMBERS

Chair **Dale Riggs,** Stonewall Hill Farm
15370 NY Rt 22, Stephentown, NY 12168
PH: 518-733-6772; stonewallhill@taconic.net

Treasurer **Tony Emmi,** Emmi Farms
1572 S. Ivy Trail, Baldwinsville, NY 13027
PH: 315-638-7679; emmifarms@aol.com

Executive Secretary **Paul Baker**
3568 Saunders Settlement Rd., Sanborn, NY 14132
CELL: 716-807-6827; FAX: (716) 219-4089
pbaker.hort@roadrunner.com

Bob Brown III, Brown's Berry Patch
14264 Rooseveldt Highway, Waterport, NY 14571
PH: 585-682-5569

Bruce Carson, Carson's Bloomin' Berries
2328 Reed Rd.
Bergen, NY 14416
PH: 585-494-1187; bcarson1@frontiernet.net

David Coulter, Coulter Farms
3871 N. Ridge Road, Lockport, NY 14094
PH: 716-433-5335; coulterfarms@aol.com

John Hand, Hand Melon Farm
533 Wilber Ave., Greenwich, NY 12834
PH: 518-692-2376; handfarm@yahoo.com

Terry Mosher, Mosher Farms
RD #1 Box 69, Bouckville, NY 13310
PH: 315-893-7173; tmosher@direcway.com

Chuck Mead, Mead Orchards LLC
15 Scism Rd., Tivoli, NY 12583
PH: 845-756-5641 (W); CELL: 845-389-0731
chuck@meadorchards.com

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Editors Terence Robinson and Steve Hoying
Dept. of Horticulture
New York State Agricultural Experiment Station
Geneva, New York 14456-0462
PH: 315-787-2227
tlr1@cornell.edu; sah19@cornell.edu

Subscriptions & Advertising **Karen Wilson**
NYSHS, 630 W. North St., Geneva, NY 14456
PH: 315-787-2404; FAX: 315) 787-2216
wilsonk36@hotmail.com

Design Elaine L. Gotham, Gotham City Design, Naples, NY
PH: 585-374-9585; elg2@cornell.edu

Production Communications Services, NYSAES, Geneva, NY
PH: 315-787-2248; gro2@cornell.edu
Joe Ogrodnick
PH: 315-802-3932; jmo3@cornell.edu

APPLE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ADVISORY BOARD 2011

Chairman **Walt Blackler,** Apple Acres
4633 Cherry Valley Tpk. Lafayette, NY 13084
PH: 315-677-5144 (W)
wblackler@gmail.com

Alan Burr
7577 Slayton Settlement Road, Gasport, NY 14067
PH: 585-772-2469; greenapple47@juno.com

Steve Clarke
40 Clarkes Lane, Milton, NY 12547
PH: 845-795-2383; apelsteve@hvi.net

Rod Farrow
12786 Kendrick Road, Waterport, NY 14571
PH: 585-589-7022

Mason Forrence
2740 Route 22, Peru, NY 12972
PH: 518-643-9527; forrencejm@verizon.net

Ted Furber, Cherry Lawn Farms
8099 GLover Rd., Sodus, NY 14551
PH: 315-483-8529

Dan McCarthy
NY State Dept. of Agriculture & Markets
10B Airline Drive, Albany, NY 12235
PH: 518-457-8857; dan.mccarthy@agmkt.state.ny.us

Peter Ten Eyck, Indian Ladder Farms
342 Altamont Road
Altamont, NY 12009
PH: 518-765-2956; pgtell@aol.com

Robert Deemer, Dr. Pepper/Snapple Group
4363 Rte.104
Williamson, NY 14589
PH: 315-589-9695 ext. 713