FY 2015 PROGRAM WORK TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

Tree Fruit and Berry Program Work Team

Faculty Co-Chair
Arthur Agnello*
Department of Entomology
New York State Agricultural Experiment Station
630 W. North St., Geneva, NY 14456
Phone: 315-787-2341; Fax: 315-787-2326
E-mail: ama4@cornell.edu

Industry Co-Chair
James Eve
Eve Farm Service, LLC
8791 Eelpot Rd
Naples, N.Y. 14512
Phone: 585-374-5176
E-mail: jfw3@aol.com

Purpose:
The purpose of the Tree Fruit and Berry PWT is to serve as a forum for Cornell faculty and technical staff, CCE Educators and Specialists, and industry representatives and consultants, to confer on matters related to the New York tree fruit and berry industry, including production matters, business management, pest management, and other issues related to the establishment and maintenance of a healthy and profitable fruit industry in NY. Current situation and trends are shared and discussed, problems are identified, program needs are addressed, and group events and activities are planned; these include field days, tours, in-depth schools, and local & regional meetings.

During 2015, the Tree Fruit and Berry PWT sponsored an in-service tour of apple cider orchard, production, and retail operations in the Finger Lakes region (25 August), three business meetings (25 March, 29 July, and 16 December, all held in Geneva), gave presentations at the 2015 Ag In-Service in Ithaca (3-5 November), and sponsored the Great Lakes Fruit Workers Conference in Geneva (8-11 November). The three business meetings included participants who connected to the meeting via Polycom from Ithaca, the Hudson Valley Lab, and/or other locations around the state.

The in-service field tour organized by Mike Biltonen and Mario Miranda Sazo provided participants with the opportunity to see some current advances in the development of hard apple cider production and retailing in central New York. The farms we visited were representative of both the larger established commercial operations in this unique value-added fruit sector, as well as newer, small-scale operations focusing on specialty products and customized marketing approaches.

The tour started at Beak and Skiff/1911 Spirits in Lafayette, where Pete Fleckenstein gave us a tour of their U-Pick orchard on 'Apple Hill' and explained their production methods and approach to managing large numbers of the public who visit on weekends to pick fruit and tour the new cafe and tasting room. Next we went to the cider production facility and heard about their plans to expand their capacity in the near future with upgrades to their pressing equipment and packing line. Next, we were given a tour of the distillery by Luke Powers and heard of their distilled product development plans. Finally, we enjoyed a nice lunch and tasting at the cafe. Our next stop was Black Diamond Farm and Cidery in Trumansburg, where owner Ian Merwin provided an extensive tour of his orchards, where he grows dozens of traditional cider apple varieties, and explained some of the challenges of obtaining, producing and managing these specialty fruits. This was followed by a tour of his modest but efficient fermenting, bottling and storage facilities. Finally, we traveled a short distance up the road to the Finger Lakes Cider House/Good Life Farm in Interlaken, a small family operation run by Melissa Madden and Garrett Miller, which features a brand new tasting room featuring specialty ciders from not only their own farm (Good Life Cider), but also other local producers such as Black Diamond Cider, Eve'e Cidery, Redbyrd Orchard Cider and South Hill Cider. After a presentation about their operation in the basement production room, we finished the day with a tasting of their
diverse product line in the tasting room, where they also offer meals and appetizers featuring locally sourced organic ingredients.

At the CCE Ag In-Service, the Fruit PWT presented the following sessions: The missing link – ensuring the spray hits the fruit tree (Andrew Landers), 15 participants; Arctic Apples – What do you need to know about them (Kenong Xu), 15 participants; IPM in the small scale orchard (Julie Carroll, Kerik Cox, Art Agnello), 27 participants; Growing Berry Crops on a Small Scale (Marvin Pritts), 23 participants; and Introduction to modern orchard systems (Mario Miranda Sazo), 17 participants.

The Great Lakes Fruit Workers Conference was attended by 65 participants including fruit university researchers, extension educators, and private consultants, who presented 29 talks, toured commercial fruit production and research sites around Geneva and discussed common fruit research and extension priorities over a 3-day period. The field tour included stops at the FLCC Viticulture Center (Paul Brock)/The Technology Farm (John Johnson), where we attended presentations from Cheribundi (Ed McGuire; cherry value-added products) and Stonybrook WholeHeartedFoods (Greg Woodworth & Kelly Coughlin; seed oils); Red Jacket juice facility (Joe Nicholson); NYSAES Loomis Farm sweet cherry plantings and NC-140 peach plantings (Jaume Lordan/Greg Lang); USDA germplasm collection/Malus planting at NYSAES McCarthy Farm (Thomas Chao); NYSAES Food Venture Center/Pilot Plant (John Churey) and Enology & Brewing Lab (Chris Gerling); and NYSAES Robbins Farm; raspberry high tunnel plantings (Courtney Weber).

In addition to the formalized PWT group functions, PWT extension educators organized numerous winter fruit schools, summer tours, webinars, and field meetings where Cornell faculty presented the latest information on IPM practices and crop production strategies to stakeholder audiences. These fruit grower meetings frequently attracted participants from other states and Canadian provinces because of the high quality of the programs. PWT members are also actively involved in regional professional meetings such as the Great Lakes Fruit Workers Conference (held in Geneva, on 2-5 November); the New England, New York, and Canadian Fruit Workers Conference (held in Burlington, VT on 20-21 October), and the Cumberland-Shenandoah Fruit Workers Conference (held in Winchester, VA on 3-4 December). These professional meetings allow PWT participants to access the latest information generated by colleagues in other states while also showcasing our in-house expertise and research programs. More importantly, like the in-service summer tour, the informal networking that occurs at these professional meetings helps to build cooperative regional ventures among scientists and educators and helps to eliminate wasteful duplication of efforts.

Our PWT business meetings generally followed a common format, with approximately half of the meeting time dedicated to informal sharing of observations/problems noted or anticipated in tree fruit and berry crops during the current season. The other half of each meeting was used for updates on meeting plans, conferences that might be of interest to the group, collaborative projects, and policy issues that might affect either PWT members or the clients that they serve in the tree fruit and berry industries.

Participation of private crop consultants at PWT meetings (2 to 3 consultants at each meeting) allowed the group to benefit from a broader range of observations than would have been feasible otherwise because consultants regularly interact with numerous growers and, taken together, have scouting programs that cover more than 70% of the total tree fruit and berry acreage in the state. At the same time, the consultants benefitted by having first-hand access to the latest information and developments discussed at PWT meetings.