FRUIT PROGRAM WORK TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

Fruit Program Work Team

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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 2016, the Fruit PWT co-sponsored a Fruit Field Day at the NYS Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva (20 July), three business meetings (25 March, 1 September, and 13 December, all held in Geneva), gave presentations at the 2016 Ag In-Service in Ithaca (1-3 November), and participated in a tour of the Long Island fruit growing region (23-24 August). 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 Fruit Field Day featured 32 presentations spotlighting current research in berries, hops, grapes and tree fruit, given by 27 researchers to 500 attendees from NY and surrounding states and provinces, including participants of the IFTA Summer Tour, with displays and equipment demonstrations by 36 corporate sponsors.

The Long Island Fruit Tour organized by Faruque Zaman provided participants with the opportunity to see some current advances in the development of orchards and retail marketing initiatives in Suffolk Co., New York. The farms we visited were representative of both the larger established commercial operations in this unique fruit producing regions, as well as newer, small-scale operations focusing on specialty products and customized marketing approaches.

The tour started at Harbes Farm & Orchard, where owner Ed Harbes, Jr. showed us his high density plantings of new varieties for farmstand and bakery retail sales use. At Briermere Farms, Clark McCombe toured us to various orchard plantings where he has been using mating disruption to manage oriental fruit moth, assessing modified spray programs to combat plum curculio, and attempting to improve tree vigor in a newer planting on a challenging sloped site. At The Milk Pail, John and Jenn Halsey showed us sites impacted by flood conditions from last season's storms, and pointed out several trees in decline from dogwood borer infestations. The day also included a brief stop at Seven Ponds Orchard, where the group had a look at Tim Kraszewski's tree fruit and berry plantings. The tour continued the next day with a visit to Lewin Farms, where Brian Lewin brought us to an older peach block where a number of trees had large holes at the base of the trunk, most of them showing heart rot inside the trunks with secondary infestations of carpenter ants; the consensus
was that this was most likely an insect-related problem (e.g., borers or grubs), made more serious by infections by wood decay fungi. After a final visit to Richters Orchard with Andrew Amsler, the group had lunch followed by a tour of Bayard Cutting Arboretum.

At the CCE Ag In-Service, the Fruit PWT presented the following sessions: "Tools and Resources to help Growers Deal with Climate Change Effects" - Laura McDermott & Julie Carroll; "Fruit farm financial metrics and production economics" - Matt Wells (8 participants).

The Great Lakes Fruit Workers Conference in Collingwood, ON, Canada (15-17 November) was attended by 10 Fruit PWT members, who participated in the presentations and discussions on diverse fruit-related topics, as well as a tour of the fruit and hops production region around Georgian Bay.

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 (above); the New England, New York, and Canadian Fruit Workers Conference (held in Burlington, VT on 18-19 October), and the Cumberland-Shenandoah Fruit Workers Conference (held in Winchester, VA on 1-2 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 Long Island 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.