



MINNESOTA FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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October, 2001

NOTE FROM THE BOARD

By Floyd Broman, Broman's Greenhouse & Vegetable Farm

Greetings from Rogers, Minnesota, in the Northwest metro area.

When you raise vegetables and/or farmstead products it can be challenging to receive a good profit margin. This is a good time to think about the present season, what was good and what was not, and start planning for a new season in 2002. Weather is a key factor, but let's not make this the key issue. Minnesota weather will always be erratic.

Questions to ponder:

- Did I raise what people want and are buying?
- Did I promote and market it well?
- Did I raise quality product?
- Did I have product available timely for its season?
- Did I make a profit on these vegetables?

Grower's Worksheet – Check all that apply and then review and evaluate your responses.

Did I raise what people want and are buying?

- We have a limited supply
- We don't like to grow some of these items
- We had a good supply
- We could do better
- Other

Did I promote and market vegetables well?

- We worked to display product temptingly
- We used good signage (price information, Minnesota Grown)
- We made it easy and convenient to buy
- We are too busy
- Other

Did I raise a quality product?

- We used good cultural practices
- We addressed & corrected problems
- We didn't address all problems
- We let nature take its course
- We seek best varieties for our conditions
- Other

Did we have product available timely for its season?

- We had other things to do
- We planned it right
- We planned too early or too late
- Other

Did we make a profit on these vegetables? Identify!

- No, it's too labor intensive
- No, it's not what people want
- No, we grow it because we always have

- Yes, there is a demand
- Yes, it fit our operation
- Yes, it could be profitable with some planning

What vegetables do we grow best?

What vegetables do we grow poorly?

What vegetables are most profitable?

What vegetables are least profitable?

We are farmers that must run a profitable business. When doing this, we must continue to assess what works for our business. We have to adapt to change and let go of practices that are nostalgic, but not practical in today's society. We grow for the consumer, not for our own likes and dislikes.

TIME FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

October 1st marks the beginning of a new membership year for the Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. Renewal of your membership makes you part of an active, growing organization working to improve the fruit and vegetable industry in Minnesota, and the Upper Midwest, for growers, consumers and related businesses.

In today's economy when everyone is looking for a bargain, the question is, what do your membership dollars buy?

Membership in any association brings tangible and intangible rewards and benefits. The tangible benefits are easier to define. The intangible benefits, however, can be equally important, or in some cases, even more important, than the tangible rewards.

Tangible grower benefits in MFVGA mean you have the opportunity to receive a reduced registration at the annual educational conference and trade show. Direct members of the association receive their choice of one of five publications offered at no charge or at a reduced rate.

MFVGA helps to sponsor small fruit and vegetable research that benefits growers from all over the region.

MFVGA is a member of the Minnesota Grown Promotion Group and works with that group and others to promote local growers and their products.

MFVGA is also in the process of developing a web page. Our intent is to provide a place for you to more easily obtain information. We are looking at adding links to other resources and would appreciate your input on what types of information you would like to find. We are also looking at adding links to member farms to help consumers find the freshest, highest quality produce possible.

Your membership dollars help provide the funds necessary to publish a newsletter five times per year. The MFVGA Newsletter is designed to provide information on the production and marketing of fruits and vegetables, provide information on additional resources that are available to growers, provide information on the annual educational conference and trade show, provide vendors with the opportunity to reach growers with product information and to help keep growers aware of current changes in the industry.

Your dues also provide for administrative support. This support includes the day-to-day handling of routine phone calls and correspondence. Administrative support also includes organizing the conference and trade show, editing the newsletter, compiling the financial information and preparing the annual tax return as well as grant

administration. The office acts as a central location for the exchange of information. When information critical to your operation is received, it is included in the next issue of the newsletter, or mailed directly to members.

What seems to be the most intangible, yet most important, benefit of membership is the ability to connect with other members to discuss current problems and possible solutions. Learning from someone else's experience instead of your own "trial and error" approaches can save a lot of time and headache.

MFVGA is a non-profit association committed to Minnesota's fruit and vegetable growers and related agribusinesses. If growers, businesses and other interested individuals are committed to the association, MFVGA can be a vital resource for area growers. Your involvement is the key to success – both for you as a grower and for the association as a whole. Please send your membership dues today to support MFVGA's continued efforts on your behalf.

As growers and members, this is your association. Make it work for you. Take advantage of the opportunities – attend the conference and field days.

MFVGA & MINNESOTA GROWN TEAM UP FOR STATE FAIR BOOTH

Working the booth at the "Great Minnesota Get-Together" is always an experience. When you take the time and make the effort to interact with the people who pass the booth, it can be a lot of fun.

This year area growers were kind enough to donate Minnesota Grown radishes for fairgoers to sample. The radish always generates comments. Radish lovers say things like "Mmmm, good. I love radishes. I live on these in the spring." Others, who like radishes, but choose not to partake in the sampling, make comments like "I like them, but they don't like me" and "It's too early for heartburn." There are always a few "Where's the salt shaker?" thrown in as well. If you work the early shift, you get a lot of "too early in the day" comments, as well as the "I just had breakfast." Although people will have ice cream for breakfast, they choose to wait until later in the day for a radish.

One gentleman was genuinely happy to see the radishes and when asked if he would like to try one, he said "Sure." He tapped his shirt pocket and added, "I brought my Tums with me."

A young family stopped by the booth with their little girl. Her parents asked, "Do you know what a radish is? Want to try one? Grandpa and Grandma make radish sandwiches." She was sport enough to take a bite, but spit it out. Apparently she thought it was a little too early for radishes, too.

Radish sampling was a new experience for some fairgoers. One young woman said "Radishes...I don't think I've ever had a radish." She tried one and said "I like them."

My favorite comments came from middle-aged women. One said "Nature's little toothbrushes". The other said, "It's like a breathmint." ?????

If you volunteered for a shift, or two, we thank you. You probably heard a few interesting comments of your own.

Thank You

Even though it has been a difficult growing season, area producers were generous with their donations for the MFVGA/Minnesota Grown booth at the 2001 State Fair.

Changes within the Agriculture/Horticulture building itself necessitated changes to our booth as well. After a couple of days of trial and error, the eight-foot produce cooler worked very well. Perishable produce looked fresher longer and the over-all look of the booth was classy and professional.

Produce for the display was donated by Dehn's Garden, Inc., Ed Fields & Sons, Inc., Green Barn Garden Center, Jewel Lane Farm, Knoll Farms, Inc., and Riverside Farms.

Radishes for sampling were donated by Knoll Farms, Inc. and Ed Fields and Sons, Inc.

Special thanks go to Ken Slyzuk and Slyzuk Farms, Inc. for storing the radishes until they were brought down to the fair. Bonnie Dehn from Dehn's Garden, Inc. provided a number of fresh flower arrangements to decorate the booth. The flowers added a lot of color and interest to the booth space and many people stopped to comment on their beauty. Thank you, Bonnie. Special thanks also go to Pine Tree Orchards, Inc. for allowing us to store the radishes and the surplus produce for the display in their cooler. Without access to refrigeration at the fairgrounds, it would be very difficult for us to keep the display looking fresh.

To everyone involved in making the State Fair booth a success, Thank You.

USDA CREATES FRUIT AND VEGETABLE INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced on August 22, 2001 that it has established a 20-member Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee.

The purpose of the committee is to examine the full spectrum of issues faced by the fruit and vegetable industry and offer the secretary of agriculture advice on how USDA can tailor its programs to meet the fruit and vegetable industry's needs. The exchange of views and information between the industry and government is intended to improve understanding of the effect of USDA programs on the industry, and to contribute to those programs' effective and efficient administration. The committee is being established under the authority of the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 (Public Law 92-463).

The secretary of agriculture will appoint representatives of the nation's fruit and vegetable industry to serve two-year terms, including six individuals representing fresh fruit and vegetable growers or shippers, four fresh fruit and vegetable wholesalers, two brokers, two retailers, two fruit and vegetable processors, two foodservice suppliers, one official from a state department of agriculture, and one trade association representative.

PLANT SALE PROCEEDS USED TO HELP FUND SMALL FRUIT RESEARCH

The Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and Minnesota's berry growers are proud to report that proceeds from the 2001 berry plant sales have been used to help support small fruit research programs conducted by the University of Minnesota.

A total of \$2,000 was given to support various small fruit breeding and management studies. Projects at the North Central Research and Outreach Center in Grand Rapids include cultivar and selection trials in strawberries and blueberries and flame renovation management in strawberries as well as other studies. Proceeds will also help support strawberry and blueberry breeding and evaluation projects directed by Dr. Jim Luby at the Horticulture Research Center in Victoria, the Sand Plains Station in Becker and the West Central Research and Outreach Center in Morris.

The small fruit breeding program annually conducts yield trials of strawberry cultivars and advanced selections at several sites in Minnesota. In 2001, they harvested trials planted in Excelsior, Grand Rapids and Morris. These trials had approximately 15 named cultivars and 20 selections. Cultivars in this trial included Winona, Mesabi,

Northeaster, Annapolis, Kent, Honeoye, Cavendish, Jewel, Lateglow, Mira, Sable, Cabot and Brunswick. In 2001, a new trial was planted that included the new cultivar Evangeline, two selections from Nova Scotia and 25 of their advanced breeding lines.

In 1981, the University of Minnesota and the USDA began a cooperative strawberry breeding program to develop hardy cultivars for the north central region of the U.S. Today, this program has enlarged to evaluating over 3,500 seedlings per year. The first introduction from this program was Winona™, which was made available to growers in 1996. The second introduction, Mesabi™, was made available in 1999. Several exciting selections are currently being evaluated in replicated yield trials.

Blueberry breeding has been conducted since 1967 with the goals of developing adapted cultivars that would permit local commercial production for u-pick, fresh market or processed products. Since 1983, six blueberry cultivars have been released and a new developing commercial blueberry industry in Minnesota has resulted. Some 5,000 seedlings are being evaluated at Becker and over 200 selections are being evaluated at Becker, Grand Rapids and Staples in observation trials and yield trials at Becker and Grand Rapids. In 2000, a new replicated yield trial was planted at Becker and Grand Rapids.

In 1998, a new raspberry selection and cultivar trial was planted at Grand Rapids. It contains new cultivars and selections from Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Australia and Morden Manitoba. Both summer and fall fruiting types are included. Several new cultivars have been added since 1998 including several selections from Nova Scotia and Nova parentage.

In 2000, black currant trials were planted at the Horticulture Research Center and the North Central Research and Outreach Center. This is a cooperative project with Dr. Rex Brennan, Scottish Research Institute. The goals are to evaluate potential cultivars for Minnesota, evaluate mechanical harvesting potential for black currants, and develop germplasm with resistance to white pine blister rust.

Cultural studies include a blueberry trickle irrigation study, a study of blueberry organic growing systems, and studies involving strawberry burning for weed control and renovation and strawberry cover crop management for weed control.

Information on the University of Minnesota small fruit program will be presented at the 2002 Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference, which will be held in St. Cloud, Minnesota from January 31 through February 2, 2002. Plan now to attend.

ORDER BERRY PLANTS EARLY FOR THE 2002 PLANTING SEASON

MFVGA is currently in the process of finalizing details for the 2002 strawberry and raspberry plant orders. Order forms will be sent out in the next few weeks and we would appreciate your response as soon as possible. Last year we had trouble getting certain varieties. This year, with earlier orders, we hope to eliminate that problem.

Please note that there will be ordering deadlines and we cannot guarantee availability of plants ordered after the deadline. Order early to assure your best chance of getting the varieties and quantities you request.

Order forms will be sent out as soon as all details are finalized. If you are not on the berry order mailing list and would like an order form, please call the MFVGA office at 763-434-0400.

MDA ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE AG GRANTS

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture is now accepting applications for grants from Minnesota farmers, researchers, nonprofit organizations, and educators who have innovative ideas for sustainable farming systems. The MDA's Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program will award up to \$210,000 to grant projects this fiscal year.

Individual grants up to \$25,000 are available for three-year projects that benefit the environment, increase farm profits through cost reduction or enhanced marketing, and improve farm family quality of life. Eligible projects may include but are not limited to enterprise diversification; cover crops and crop rotations to increase nitrogen uptake, reduce erosion, or control pests; conservation tillage and weed management, especially in organic production; integrated pest management systems; livestock production and manure management systems; nutrient and pesticide management; energy production such as wind, methane, or biomass; and growing for and accessing marketing opportunities.

Minnesota Agriculture Commissioner Gene Hugoson said the MDA's grant program provides wonderful opportunities for farmers and their advisors.

"Grants provide producers with an opportunity to display their creative approaches to agricultural and environmental enhancement. The results and details of the grant projects are highlighted in the *Greenbook* publication, which is free and available to the public."

Since 1989, a total of 208 grants have been awarded throughout Minnesota. Examples of approved projects include Leo Seykora in Steele County who is looking at the effects of rye as a cover crop for wooly cupgrass control in organic soybean production. John Fisher-Merritt in Carlton County is demonstrating the design, installation, and cost effectiveness of an automated temperature control and monitoring system on an earth heated and cooled produce root cellar. Dave and Diane Serfling in Fillmore County are comparing farrowing in January in straw bedding in pens, huts, crates, and free stalls to supply hogs to a specialty market demanding humanely raised, antibiotic free and high quality meat during the summer months.

Projects must be on Minnesota farms. Joint applications for watershed projects or from farmer groups are encouraged. Matching funds may increase funds available for multi-participant projects.

Applications and more information are available from the MDA website, www.mda.state.mn.us or by contacting Wayne Mosen, Energy and Sustainable Agriculture Program, MDA, 90 W. Plato Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55107, 651-282-2261 or e-mail at Wayne.Mosen@state.mn.us. Completed applications must be received at MDA by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, December 14, 2001. An independent panel will review applications.

U of M GLEANINGS

By Cindy Tong, Dept. of Horticultural Science, University of Minnesota

It's early September as I write this, and the students have just gotten back to campus. Yesterday was the first day of classes, and I was constantly interrupted all morning, talking to several students. Amazingly, they managed to register for classes. This is now done on-line, so it is relatively easy for students to register for classes, but with about 40,000 undergraduates on the Twin Cities campuses, classes fill up fast. Last month I spent over an hour one day helping a transfer student register for classes because a lot of the classes she wanted to take were full. She finally decided that it was less important to her to graduate within four years than to get the quality of education she wanted.

This is the time of year when crops are getting harvested. Cabbage for our nutraceutical study is coming in almost every other day now. Cabbage contains chemicals that may help in fighting some cancers, so we have been studying how varietal differences, fertilizers, mulches, field spacing, and storage affect levels of these chemicals. Basically, once the cabbage is delivered, we boil a quarter of the cabbage in water, blend the boiled cabbage, and

freeze the blend. Later, we'll analyze the cabbage blend using a technique called high-pressure liquid chromatography to separate the different chemicals from each other so we can pinpoint the ones we're interested in and then quantify them. There is a lot of cabbage, so there is a lot of work to be done. This study involved several different departments. Other people involved in this study are looking at how light quality, temperature, and drought affect levels of these chemicals; how watercress, which has similar chemicals, inhibits lung cancer development; and how watercress and cabbage diets affect rat colon cancer.

Earlier in the summer, we weren't sure if some of the cabbage was going to last until harvest. Some of the Chinese cabbage I received for the nutraceutical study looked like it had Phytophthora rot and others looked like they got tip-burn. Phytophthora rot starts at the stalk and moves into the head. The rotted tissue turns brown and smells bad. Tip-burn is caused by uneven distribution of calcium. Inner leaves turn brown and papery, and secondary infection and rots can occur, so the brown areas then turn slimy.

It was a tough summer to grow vegetables. On campus, first the cutworms appeared then the armyworms. Fortunately, there weren't very many Colorado potato beetles most of the summer, so the potato plants that survived the cutworms had a good chance to grow. First, there was too much rain and cold, then too much heat and humidity but no rain. Pepper and eggplant fruit set was poor on campus, probably due to the heat and drought. Peppers won't set fruit at temperatures under 60.8° F or over 89.6° F due to poor pollen production, and their ideal temperature range is 68-77° F. Similarly, eggplant does best when daytime temperatures are between 70° F and 85° F and night temperatures are between 65-75° F. High temperatures and drought cause both peppers, eggplants, and tomatoes to drop their flowers. Now I'm seeing a lot of eggplant flowers, but it may be too late to get sizable fruit. At least it was a good year for cucurbits. The summer squash, pumpkins, and winter squash are all doing well. There's even enough for me AND the squash bugs now massing on my pumpkins.

Pumpkins turning orange in the field mean that Halloween can't be too far off. Well, as I write, it's still two months away, and it won't be easy keeping those pumpkins around that long. Pumpkins are chilling sensitive, so should not be subjected to temperatures below 50° F for very long. After harvest, pumpkins should be cured at around 80° F for three weeks, then stored at 50-55° F and 50-70% relative humidity. Wiping them off with a dilute bleach solution, especially at the stems might help keep rot away. I hope you had a productive summer, and if you have pumpkins, will have good luck storing them until Halloween!

How Bears and Berry Plants Survive the Winter

By Thaddeus McCamant, Specialty Crops Management Instructor,
Northland Community & Technical College

As winter approaches, bears are busy eating and building their fat reserves so that they can survive all winter without eating. At the same time, perennial plants lucky enough to escape bears and humans are also storing energy. Instead of eating and becoming fat, plants harvest the energy from the late summer sun to build up starch reserves in their wood or roots.

Bears use their fat reserves to keep warm in the winter and to tide them over the period between waking up and finding their first crucial meals in the spring. Plants do not need to keep warm in the middle of winter, but they do need starch reserves to grow rapidly in early spring when their leaves are too small for photosynthesis.

Strawberry growers can see the action of the stored reserves if they wait too long to remove their straw. The plants will grow in the darkness under the straw. Without sunlight, the plants cannot photosynthesize, and the growth of covered plants is based entirely on starch reserves. Raspberry growers can see the action of starch reserves when primocanes start exploding out of the ground. Although the primocanes are green, there is not any significant photosynthesis until the leaves expand, which often does not occur until the primocanes are over a foot high. Without the starch reserves, the canes would sprout with two small leaves and slowly and steadily grow.

Female bears must eat enough in the fall so that they can give birth and nurse their cubs for several months before they wake up in the spring. Many plants bloom in early spring before their leaves emerge and must rely entirely on starch reserves to produce flowers. Plants that are short of starch reserves will have small flowers, and their fruit will either fall off or be stunted.

Berry growers should take steps to make sure that their plants are storing the maximum amount of starch in the fall.

1. Protect woody plants from premature leaf loss. Herbicides, drought, diseases and insects can all defoliate shrubs and reduce starch reserves.
2. Do not allow water stress or weeds to reduce photosynthesis in the fall.
3. Do not cover strawberry plants early. As long as the temperature reaches the fifties during the day, those strawberry plants will still be photosynthesizing.

I recently talked to a home gardener who confused her strawberry growing practices. She thought that mowing her strawberry plants in October would help them survive the winter. The plants survived, but she harvested pea-sized strawberries the following summer. Her strawberry plants were so low in starch reserves, that the fruit was stunted.

MINNESOTA GROWN NOTES

New Minnesota Showcase Distributed at Fair

The new version of the *Minnesota Showcase* was filled to capacity at 16 pages! Minnesota food processors Gold'n Plump Poultry, M.A. Gedney Company, Cruz Tortilla's, Country Choice, and Simeks were cover advertisers. The inside of the publication included more advertising and coupons from Minnesota companies, editorial about apple orchards, pumpkin patches and other fall activities and instructions on how to order the *Minnesota Grown Directory*. The next issue of the *Showcase* will be published next May and as an insert to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and *Minneapolis Star/Tribune*. Contact Paul Hugunin for details.

Summer TV Ads

Over \$45,000 of television ads promoting farmers markets and Minnesota Grown produce was aired this summer on Channels 4, 5, 9, 11 and 29. They began the week of July 16th and continued through the week of August 13th. In order to broaden our reach and frequency we produced a 10-second version of each ad to supplement the 30-second ads we normally purchase.

Apple Sampling

The Minnesota Grown Program will be investing \$8,000 to help Minnesota apple growers conduct demos in retail grocery stores this fall and early winter. The cost-share program pays half the cost of sampling – the grower provides the product for sampling and the other half of the cost. The emphasis is to fund sampling of Minnesota apples in other states and to sample Minnesota apples after November 1.

Legislative Change

The legislature made a change to the statute covering the Minnesota Grown Program during the 2001 session. As requested by program staff at the MDA, the legislature eliminated the late fee for renewing an expired Minnesota Grown labeling license. In the past, growers who didn't renew their license by December 31st were required to pay a \$10 late fee to renew the license.

Apple Posters

The Minnesota Grown Program has printed new apple posters and apple price cards to help identify and promote Minnesota Grown apples. The posters and price cards are available free of charge to licensed growers and to retailers. The poster features color photos of six Minnesota varieties (McIntosh, Cortland, Haralson, Regent, Fireside and Honeycrisp). For each of these six varieties there is now a color price card.

Christmas Tree Advertising

Over \$20,000 will be spent to promote real Minnesota Grown Christmas trees this fall. The campaign includes metro radio ads touting the environmental benefits of real trees versus artificial trees, a banner campaign on Startribune.com, and cost-share funds for newspaper advertising.

Minnesota Grown Apparel

The Minnesota Grown Promotion Group has added a printable order form for apparel to its web site at www.minnesotagrown.com. The site also gives visitors the option of requesting a printed copy that would be mailed to them. Watch for information about a brand new style of golf shirt to be added to the web site soon.

Under Construction – 2002 Minnesota Grown Directory

In all, nearly 200,000 copies of the 2001 *Minnesota Grown Directory* were distributed across Minnesota. The 2001 *Minnesota Grown Directory* was also the largest in history with over 475 listings. Growers listed in the 2001 *Directory* will be receiving renewal notices in late November or early December along with their Minnesota Grown license renewal. Contact Brian Erickson with any comments or suggestions for the 2002 *Directory*.

Grape Growers Join Minnesota Grown Promotion Group

The Minnesota Grape Growers Association has joined the Minnesota Grown Promotion Group as an associate member. John Marshall, owner of Great River Vineyard in Lake City is their representative to the board. The first joint project between the Minnesota Grown Program and the MGGA is a brochure listing Minnesota wineries and other information about Minnesota grapes and grape growing. Several thousand copies of the brochure were distributed at the State Fair.

Web Update

The website (www.mda.state.mn.us/mngrown) has added a “Producer’s Corner” which so far includes:

- a Minnesota Grown License Application,
- a brochure entitled “Answers to Ten Commonly Asked Questions about the Minnesota Grown Program”,
and
- a link to the Minnesotagrown.com site for ordering Minnesota Grown apparel. This site now has a printable order form to use when purchasing apparel.