



MINNESOTA FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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December, 2001

UPPER MIDWEST REGIONAL FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS CONFERENCE AND TRADE SHOW

**St. Cloud Civic Center
St. Cloud, MN**

Educational Sessions – Jan. 31 – Feb. 2, 2002

Trade Show – Jan. 31 & Feb. 1

Trade Show Hours – Thursday, Jan. 31 – 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 1 – 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

The full educational program, registration form and membership application
are available on the MFVGA web site.

Please watch for changes to the educational program schedule.

For additional questions, call the MFVGA office at 763-434-0400.

A Note From The Board:

By Cliff Rowe, Berry Hill Farm in Anoka, MN

Hello, my name is Cliff Rowe, and like many of you, the work is not done when the season is over. Our season starts in the spring with strawberries. We do our demulching and plant our new crops, move into raspberries and thin canes and mow fall-bearing, go through blueberries and grapes and plant our pumpkins.

Our two main crops are strawberries and fall entertainment. We have about eight acres of strawberries servicing both the U-Pick and wholesale markets. In the fall we break in two again, Monday through Friday we do school tours and on the weekend we do "Family Fun on the Farm."

I am sure we all have made use of these warm days in November, getting cleaned up and ready for next spring, but don't forget to plan to attend the educational conference and trade show in St. Cloud on January 31st and February 1st & 2nd, 2002. See you there.

Dr. Otho Wells Featured Speaker on High Tunnel Production

Dr. Otho Wells will share information on high tunnel production during the Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference in St. Cloud, MN on January 31 and February 1, 2002.

High tunnels are relatively inexpensive protected growing structures that provide earliness, improved yields and enhanced quality. They extend the growing season in both spring and fall and even through the winter for some crops. High tunnels are not automated greenhouses; therefore, a commitment to daily manual ventilation is necessary if the potential of high tunnels is to be achieved. Siting, surface water control, orientation and care in construction are important in the success of high tunnels. Plastic mulching works great in tunnels – so do small tractors with rototillers if the sidewalls are high enough.

In addition to getting started in high tunnel production, Dr. Wells will discuss growing tomatoes and cool season crops in high tunnels. He will also share insights on using high tunnels to grow other crops like peppers, onions, melons, squash, okra, potatoes, sweet corn, strawberries and cut flowers. Any crop that can be grown outdoors can be grown in a tunnel; but, of course, there are issues of economics and markets.

If you grow sweet corn you know you can't get it too early. Customers line up to get the first sweet corn of the season – and they keep coming back. Earliness is not a matter of competing with the neighbor down the road; it is simply the fact that you have sweet corn as a means of expanding the marketing window. Dr. Wells will share his experiences with growing early sweet corn on Friday afternoon, February 1st.

Dr. Wells retired from the University of New Hampshire in 1999 after 33 years in research and Extension work that focused on ways to extend the growing season through integrated and sustainable methods. Much of his work was with plasticulture growing systems that include plastic mulches, row covers, high tunnels and raised beds for the production of crops for both wholesale and retail markets.

More information on Dr. Wells and his presentations will be included in the February issue of the newsletter.

Bob Ash To Speak At Banquet

Bob Ash, founder of Life Lessons in Indianapolis, IN, will be the featured speaker at this year's banquet during the Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference.

He founded his company in 1995 and since then has provided training to over 425 organizations and 145,000 people. Prior to 1995, Mr. Ash served in several positions in education, including janitor, teacher, principal and superintendent of schools. He also played a few years of professional baseball.

Bob combines laughter with practical ideas and tools to improve what it is we do in life. Bob comes highly recommended by those who have heard him. Don't miss the opportunity to laugh and learn while Bob shares insights on how to manage the changes that are inevitable in our lives.

The banquet will be held Thursday evening, January 31, 2002. Join us for a delicious Minnesota Grown meal and an evening of laughter with old friends and new friends. Banquet tickets are \$20.00 each. Sign up for the banquet on the attached registration form.

Food Safety Begins on the Farm

Recent outbreaks of illness caused by contamination of produce have gotten USDA and researchers to focus on preventing microbes from getting on fruits and vegetables. I recently had the opportunity to visit with the people who developed the "Good Agricultural Practices" program for preventing microbial contamination of produce.

They talked about how consumers eat many vegetables and most fruits raw, so disease-causing organisms on them won't be killed by heat, as they would be if the foods were cooked. People are also encouraged to eat more fruits and vegetables, and as consumption rises, the incidence of food-borne illness may also rise.

A single incident can hurt the entire industry. Contaminated raspberries from Central America made consumers suspicious of all raspberries. The same thing has happened with contaminated lettuce. Eventually consumers lose their nervousness and go back to eating the crop they were avoiding, but in the meantime, a lot of fruits or veggies go uneaten. So preventing contamination protects your customers, it protects your business, and it protects all growers.

Bacteria such as *E. coli* 0157:H7, *Salmonella* and *Shigella* usually aren't removed from produce by washing, and *E. coli* 0157:H7 is even resistant to chlorine, so the key is to keep these microbes from ever getting on the produce. That turns out to be tricky.

The pathogens can be carried in surface water, so irrigating from a pond or stream can introduce them into your fields. Humans, domestic animals, and wildlife, including birds and insects, can also carry them. They persist in manure until it has decomposed or been composted.

So what are some practical steps you can take to prevent contamination of produce you grow? One is to make sure that any manure you use is fully composted. You should incorporate all manure, raw or composted. The recommendations from the group at Cornell are to make any raw manure application no less than 30 days before harvest, and they presented some data suggesting that at least 120 days should go by before harvest. Yes, that's longer than a whole growing season!

Well water and municipal water are the safest choices for overhead irrigation, and for mixing and applying chemicals. What if all you have is surface water? There are no good solutions. Excluding all animals is difficult to impossible: water birds and small mammals will get to the water even if you fence out livestock, although fencing out livestock is certainly a good idea. Chlorination helps, but isn't practical for all applications.

My contacts at Cornell suggested that the goal is to minimize risk wherever you can. So if you have surface water for irrigation, and that's your only option, do what you can to protect your water source, have it tested, and move on to other areas where you can take action to minimize the risk of contamination. One such source of possible contamination is less-than-perfect hygiene on the part of people working on the farm. Soap, water, and paper towels have to be part of everyone's life: in the field, in the packinghouse, and at retail. Pick-your-own customers should also be encouraged to wash before picking!

Another sanitation step is cleaning the boxes, bins, lugs or other containers you use to transport produce from the field. If a container sits on the soil and picks up microbes, these can get inside other containers if they are stacked. Then the pathogens can get onto the produce. During the winter, animals can take up residence in the containers. You may want to take a look at your practices and see if there's a way to sanitize the containers at the beginning of each season, then clean them regularly during the season.

I have some materials from the Good Ag Practices program; if you'd like to have a look at them, please let me know.

—Jill MacKenzie
Assistant Extension Horticulturist—Fruit
612-624-3478 : : macke020@umn.edu

Minnesota Grown Notes

Minnesota Apple Growers Expand Markets through In-store Sampling

The Minnesota Grown Program is 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. Look for a summary of this year's sampling efforts in the next MFVGA newsletter.

Late Fee Eliminated!

The 2001 legislature made a change to the statute covering the Minnesota Grown Program's licensing process. 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 31 were required to pay a \$10 late fee to renew the license. This change will make it much more convenient for growers to participate in the Minnesota Grown Program. Licensed growers can expect to see their license renewals in late November or early December.

New Apple Posters Available

The Minnesota Grown Program has printed new apple posters and apple price cards to help identify and promote Minnesota Grown apples. The poster features color photos of six Minnesota varieties (McIntosh, Cortland, Haralson, Regent, Fireside and Honeycrisp). Each of these six varieties also has its own color price card. The posters and price cards are available free of charge to licensed growers and to retailers. Call Paul Hugunin at 651-297-5510 for samples.

Christmas Tree Advertising Ready

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. Over 20 Christmas tree growers signed up for the newspaper cost-share. Print ads this season will include full color ads in the *Star Tribune* on Friday, November 23, and in the *Pioneer Press* on Sunday, November 25. Each ad uses the "Scratch and Sniff" theme that was designed for the on-line banner campaign.

Check Out the New Golf Shirt

The new Minnesota Grown golf shirts have arrived and are available for holiday gift giving on-line at www.minnesotagrown.com. The Minnesota Grown Promotion Group's web site includes a printable order form and gives visitors the option of requesting a printed copy that would be mailed to them. The new golf shirts are forest green with navy trim and feature a silver embroidered Minnesota Grown logo. They are all cotton, generously sized and are available for \$19. Samples of all the Minnesota Grown apparel will be available at the conference in St. Cloud.

Maps Added to On-line Directory

If you provided a map with your 2001 *Directory* information, the map is now a part of your on-line listing. Please visit the site and give us your feedback on the map's accuracy and helpfulness. In all, nearly 200,000 copies of the 2001 *Minnesota Grown Directory* were distributed across Minnesota. 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*. Growers who were not listed in the 2001 *Directory* should also contact Brian Erickson at 651-296-4939 to receive an application for next year's book.

Plan to Attend the Marketing Conference on February 2nd!

While you're making plans to attend the MFVGA conference on January 31st and February 1st, be sure to sign up for the marketing sessions on Saturday. There will be three separate tracks to choose at all times. One track is

dedicated to issues and topics of importance to farmers' market vendors and managers. Bob Chorney will be making the trek here from Canada to share his farmers' market organizational and marketing skills.

The second track will highlight the unique opportunities and challenges associated with "entertainment farming". Whether it's a corn maze, haunted hayride, pig races, tours or scarecrow building contests, many growers are realizing that families are interested in more than just the edible portion of their visit to a farm. Whether you're just beginning to go down the entertainment path or whether you're an old pro, you'll find something beneficial in this session.

The third subject area this year is more related to the business end of marketing. Running a business without a marketing plan is like driving a car across country without a road map. This track will help marketers create a marketing road map for their business by presenting the basics of marketing plans and goal setting.

The cost of the Saturday marketing session is just \$30 in advance and includes lunch. MFVGA and MCTA members who are registered for Thursday and Friday educational sessions can add the Saturday registration for just \$20. Saturday registrations are accepted at the door for \$40 but lunch is not guaranteed.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

GAPs and GMPs for Apple Growers and Producer

Recent events including the *E. coli* 0157:H7 outbreak at an Edina preschool falsely attributed to apples or cider and the expectation that the food supply is the next terrorist target have raised consumer's concerns about apples and apple products. Food safety and security begins on the farm and in the orchard. You can help reduce the risks. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) will make some recommendations to help you increase your security, control pathogens such as *E. coli* 0157:H7, look at IPM and chemical usage, give an overview of FDA's Juice HACCP regulations and share results of recent apple cider sampling. Representatives from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture will be presenting a session on food safety and good agricultural practices on Friday afternoon, February 1st, during the Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference in St. Cloud, MN.

The session will include a discussion of the following topics: Security and biosecurity, controlling *E. coli* 0157:H7 and other pathogens, washing and packing apples, integrated pest management and handling chemicals in your orchard, and what to do when tracebacks or recalls become necessary. Safety measures for cider processors will include an overview of FDA's new Juice HACCP rules, labeling and warning statements, 5 log reduction of pathogens and results of the MDA's sampling surveillance.

Marketing is a challenge.

How do you convince people to purchase your products? Are you growing what consumers are looking for? Is your direct marketing effective? Can you wholesale your product? This year's educational conference includes a variety of marketing sessions and a variety of marketing topics. If you're thinking wholesaling might work for you, find out about the changes in the wholesale market from those directly involved – the buyers. What are they looking for? What are the current trends and how will anticipated changes impact producers?

Direct marketing topics include merchandising and ways to use today's technology to manage your customer information and implement part of your marketing plan.

Representatives from the Midwest Food Alliance will also be at the conference. Find out about their program and their growing presence in the region.

Attention Garlic Growers

If anyone is interested in learning about growing garlic in the upper Midwest you can join an e-mail garlic forum by sending your e-mail address to: girardin@rconnect.com Ask your garlic questions and get them answered by others who might have had similar experiences. Learn about culture, seed sources, marketing and much, much more.

MFVGA Board Positions Open

The MFVGA Board is looking for members who are willing to serve a three-year term on the Board of Directors. Three current members have terms that expire this year and we are looking for representatives from both the fruit and vegetable industries. If you are interested in serving on the MFVGA Board, or would like more information on what is required, please call Marilyn at the MFVGA office (763-434-0400). Your name will be forwarded to the nominations committee.

“Cross-Over” Registration To MCTA Sessions

The Minnesota Christmas Tree Association (MCTA) will be holding their winter meeting at the St. Cloud Civic Center in St. Cloud, MN on Thursday and Friday, January 31 and February 1, 2002. Persons registered for the Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference may also attend the Minnesota Christmas Tree Association educational sessions for an additional fee of \$15 per person.

For information on the Minnesota Christmas Tree Association’s educational program, please contact Pat Olive at 651-462-3126.

MFVGA Policy on Conference Registration Cancellations and Refunds:

MFVGA will refund registration fees for 2002 Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference in full if the MFVGA office is notified before Friday, January 25, 2002. If the MFVGA office is notified after 25th, but before January 28th, 75% of the registration amount will be refunded. No refund will be issued if registrations are cancelled after Monday, January 28, 2002.

2002 Trade Show Exhibitors

The following exhibitors will be at the 2002 Trade Show at the Upper Midwest Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference. The Trade Show will be held at the St. Cloud Civic Center in St. Cloud, MN on Thursday and Friday, January 31 and February 1, 2002. Additional exhibitor information will be included in the February 2002 issue of the MFVGA Newsletter.

Ag Resource, Inc.
Ag Tec
AgraQuest, Inc.
Agro-K Corporation
Barr, Inc.
Bayer Corporation
C.S.I. Chemical Corporation
Central Landscape Supply, Inc.
Chesmore Seed Company
Farmers Choice Food Brands
Glacier Valley Enterprises, Inc.
House of Webster, Inc.
Isanti County Equipment, Inc.
J.R. Johnson Supply, Inc.
Jordan Seeds, Inc.
MIDC Enterprises
Nelson's Vegetable Storage Systems, Inc.
Olson Power & Equipment
OXBO International
Paul's Electric, Inc.
Pyramid Publishing
Renaissance Fertilizers, Inc.
Rispen Seeds, Inc.
Roeters Farm Equipment, Inc.
Rusty's Ag Sales
Stokes Seeds, Inc.
UAP – Great Lakes – LaCrescent
UAP – Midwest – Howe

EXHIBITORS – HAVE WE RECEIVED YOUR APPLICATION?

It isn't too late to sign up for the 2002 Trade Show! For more information and an application form, call the MFVGA office at 763-434-0400.

U of M Gleanings

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

Agriculture has changed a lot since 1869 when the University of Minnesota started their first College of Agriculture classes. Farming has changed due to things like globalized marketing and genetically engineered crops. With new technologies like global information systems, precision agriculture, and gene sequencing, agricultural research is changing at a faster rate than ever before. The U of M's College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences (COAFES) recently released pamphlets describing visions for the College's future work. I don't remember anything like this being done in the past 10 years since I started working for the University, but I do know that a lot

of work has been going on to identify the priorities for the future. Work on the visions and priorities started in 1999, and included having “listening sessions” to gather input from Minnesotans about what COAFES should work on in the future. Faculty leaders -- I think these include department and research and outreach center heads -- identified high priority programs, which are 1) Emphasizing exemplary education, 2) Promoting safe and healthy foods, 3) Improving environmental quality, 4) Enhancing agricultural systems, 5) Revitalizing Minnesota’s rural communities, and 6) Serving urban communities. Other faculty members were asked to join committees to describe the visions for the programs, and now we are working on how to make them happen.

The sources of the 2000-2001 financial budget for COAFES included 44% from the state of Minnesota, 20% from grant awards for proposals written by faculty members to federal, state, and private agencies and foundations (like the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation), 12% from internal services and crop and livestock sales, 10% from endowments, scholarships, and program gift support, 7% from student tuition, and 6% from federal appropriations. With continuing decreases in federal and state funding for University programs, COAFES has to be smarter about using the resources it has, and has to find new ways to support continuing programs like the Master Gardener programs, the Upper Midwest Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference, the Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association conferences, and other Extension and outreach programs. How do we continue to improve potato, apple, azalea, wheat, oat, soybean, cattle, hog, and poultry varieties and breeds, provide high quality education for college students, help communities keep their water supplies safe, keep lakes clean, help industries remain viable, find ways to keep agricultural industries sustainable, help ensure that our food is safe, and keep Minnesotans informed with the dwindling resources we have? We won’t be able to do all the things we are used to doing in addition to instituting new programs to prepare for future problems (like possible food terrorism), if we want to do them all well. What programs do we cut? What programs should we start up? These are tough decisions to make.

Another indication that agriculture is changing and the need for overhauling COAFES’s work is what’s happening in Hollandale, Minnesota. When I started working for the U of M, Hollandale was a thriving agricultural community, with farmers growing potatoes, carrots, and onions. A long time ago, Hollandale’s rich muck soils grew a wide variety of vegetables, including celery, carrots, and asparagus. Now Hollandale’s farmers are auctioning off equipment, and of the dozen or so farmers I knew, there are only two or three still farming. I’m ashamed to admit that I learned this from a national potato magazine, and not from the farmers directly.

The loss of farms is becoming more common throughout rural areas all over the United States. One way to slow this process for fresh fruit and vegetable farms is to get more people to eat more fruits and vegetables, and to eat more locally-grown produce. Besides educating urban consumers and college students, I’m not sure how to do this. Sure, I can help Minnesota farmers keep their produce in good shape so that people will want to buy them, but there are other aspects to farming that are important if we want to keep Minnesota farmers in business. How do we get people to eat more fruits and vegetables? What produce should Minnesota farmers grow that people will buy? Are there value-added products that Minnesotans can develop that will have national or international appeal? What kinds of expertise does COAFES need to help farmers keep farming into the future? If you have any good ideas, please let me know. If you would like to add your comments about COAFES’ future directions or get a copy of the pamphlet describing COAFES’s visions for future work, contact the COAFES Dean’s office at 612-624-3009.

Minnesota Growers Contract And Financial Protection – The Minnesota Wholesale Produce Dealers Act

By John Malmberg, Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture

The Wholesale Produce Dealers Act and the Wholesale Produce Dealers Rules (Minnesota statutes 27.01-27.15) are designed to provide economic protection to Minnesota producers, farm marketing cooperatives and licensed dealers who do not receive payment after selling their perishable agricultural products. All wholesalers purchasing milk, eggs, poultry or fruits and vegetables are to be licensed and bonded. Retailers are to be licensed and bonded

if they purchase \$500.00 a month of produce directly from farmers. For further information check our website at www.mda.state.us/wholedeal

Before a seller enters into an agreement with a buyer, he may want to check the current list of licensed dealers on the MDA website to make certain the buyer is licensed and bonded. This provides the seller the protection of the Wholesale Produce Dealers Act in the event of nonpayment.

To see the list of licensed Wholesale Produce Dealers, go to www.mda.state.mn.us/lis/ Click on “Proceed to the LIS search page”. Go to the “Category” section and scroll to the end of the list. Click on “Wholesale Produce Dealer” and then click on “Submit Query.”

If you have questions, know of someone who should possibly be licensed, or need to make a claim against a wholesale produce dealer bond, call John Malmberg at 651-296-8620.