FROM FARM TO MARKET
Technicallrifonnation for the Commercial Vegetable Grower

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The cold and dark for so many hours each day makes me want to hibernate with a good book. Instead, many of us are working hard to pull together conferences to help make 1995 a great year for Nebraska specialty crop production and marketing. The preliminary program and pre-registration form for the Nebraska Vegetable Conference is found in this issue. It is very important for you to participate in the elections for the Nebraska Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association. The officers of this Association represent you to UNL, Cooperative Extension, the Nebraska Dept. of Ag, and the Unicameral. There are many people interested in what you have to say, and this is an opportunity for you to express yourself directly. The Regional Directors serve as resource people in the various parts of Nebraska.

The conference on Entrepreneurial Opportunities in Agriculture: The Value of Marketing is coming along very well with many outstanding speakers. It will be March 17-18 at the Holiday Inn in Kearney. We have invited two excellent speakers to discuss marketing vegetable crops. Both have strong personal experience as well as a broad perspective on these markets. I strongly encourage you to attend both if at all possible. I promise you it will be well worth your time and money. Since this conference will emphasize marketing and have speakers addressing vegetable concerns, the workshop at the February conference is emphasizing marketing specialty cut flowers. Some, not all, the information in this session will be of interest to and appropriate for marketing other crops. I realize specialty cuts is a small market in Nebraska, but it is one with good potential for growth and some very active individuals. Dr. Stevens has a wide range of experience in marketing and this promises to be an excellent workshop for everyone. I am looking forward to seeing you at the conferences this winter and the excitement of planning for the 1995 season. I wish each of you a happy and prosperous New Year!

--Laurie Hodges

FSMIP Administrator to Give Presentation at Conference

Dr. Harold Ricker, Deputy Director of the USDA Ag Marketing Service of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, plans to attend the 1994 Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Conference to speak on FSMIP projects regarding fruit/vegetable marketing in the United States. The Ag Marketing Service, a division of the
USDA, supports market research and development at the state level. The Federal/State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) provides matching funds to state agencies for studies aimed at improving marketing services in their states. Dr. Ricker also has responsibilities for implementing the Organic Standards Act for the USDA. Accordingly, he has a great deal of knowledge in this field and will be available to address questions regarding the implementation of this act.

The "Taste the Good Life...Nebraska Fresh Produce" promotional program was made possible through a FSMIP grant received through the Ag Marketing Service. The Nebraska Department of Agriculture received a matching grant of $16,000 to develop and implement this program. Interested Nebraska fruit and vegetable producers were introduced to this program and used it throughout the summer months. Possibly, you are one of them. In addition to Dr. Ricker’s presentation, I will be giving an overview of the program and the results of the evaluation which were recently completed. I look forward to seeing you there.

Happy Holidays.

-Lana Bushhousen
Ag Promotion Specialist
Department of Agriculture

Nebraska Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association Meets Tues Feb. 14 at the New World Inn, Columbus, NE at 3:30pm. Agenda items to be discussed and voted on:

Membership Drive: $25 / yr (Feb to Feb) for 1st individual in farm unit; $12.50 for each additional person in farm unit.

Sale of Sell What you Sow at the conference.

Sponsoring award in Horticulture Section of Nebraska State Fair.

Sponsoring the 4-H State Horticulture Judging Team (National Champions in 1993, 1994) $500 per team member, 4 on team. Contribution of several organizations is sought to replace at least the $500 formerly donated by AkSarBen. The balance of expenses are the responsibility of the team members. The more contributed by others, the less they have to come up with on their own. Two of the 1994 winners plan to major in Horticulture. The 4-H Horticultural Judging Team knows how to evaluate quality in horticultural crops. They could give us all a few tips!

Election of Officers and Regional Representatives for 1995. The slate of nominations will be in the January 1995 newsletter.

Growing the New Sh_2 and Se Sweet Corn

This past summer I made a big mistake. I bought sweet corn without checking it. The grower said it was supersweet (sh_2). What he didn’t know was the proper way to grow this corn. Many of the kernels on the ears, all 13 of them, were hard as rocks. The corn was inedible. I kicked myself for not checking the ears and I do not have good feelings about that farmers’ market vendor! He knew enough to sell sh_2 or supersweet corn, but not enough about how to raise it to ensure high quality for his market.

Sh_2 corn must be isolated. It must be isolated from field corn and it must be isolated from se (sugary enhanced) corn. The sh_2 designation comes from the presence of the "shrunken-2" gene. This corn is sometimes referred to as "shrunken-2" corn. The supersweet gene (sh_2)
must be in a homozygous state for the kernel to have the high sugar and tough pericarp (skin) characteristic of this corn. Pollination by standard corn, either field corn or regular sweetcorn (referred to as "sugary" or "su") or sugary enhanced sweetcorn (se) results in heterozygous kernels. These can be worse than eating immature field corn, and certainly not what one expects in "supersweet" corn. The high sugar in supersweet corn is due to the lack of an enzyme found in regular corn that converts sugar to starch combined with the genetics of the particular cultivar for specific flavor components. The kernel is sweet to begin with and stays sweet for many days after harvest. The corn endosperm is not "milky"; it is clear and watery. If you ever eat your way through a variety trial, you will discover some varieties taste more "green", some have more "corn-flavor", while others lack flavor and just taste like sugar-water. Each person will have a favorite. Some popular sh2 varieties include ‘Champ’, ‘Market Star’, ‘Sweeter By Far’, ‘Stargaze’ ‘Challenger’, ‘Sweet Belle’, ‘Dazzle’ (bicolor), and many others.

Sugary enhanced (se) sweetcorn has a different genotype from both standard (su) sweetcorn and supersweet (sh2) sweetcorn. The pericarp is very tender, making it very difficult to machine harvest but excellent to eat. The interior endosperm is milky and tends to have a more complex "corn" flavor than is found in the sh2 varieties. It does not need to be isolated from other corn, although some report better flavor and texture if it is isolated from standard field or standard sweetcorn. It does become starchy over time just like regular su sweetcorn, but at a slower rate. Varieties with sugary enhanced (se) germplasm include ‘Calico Belle’ (bicolor) , ‘Sweet Dawn’, ‘Champ’, ‘Legend’. ‘Snowbelle’, ‘Sugar Ace’, ‘Incredible’, ‘Bodacious’, and many others.

Isolation of sh2 can be in time, distance, or a combination of both. Fields or plots of sh2 should be at least 500 ft from any regular corn. If the maturity (tassel and silking) can be staggered from adjacent field corn, standard (su) sweetcorn, or sugary enhanced (se) sweetcorn, so much the better. Some growers have been successful isolating with less distance, especially if there is a dense tree windbreak or other obstacle reducing the movement of pollen from one field to the other. Considering the consequence is unmarketable sweetcorn, it is better to lean toward greater, rather than less, separation.

For my money, se corn is the way to go for farmers' markets. Kids and others with a sweet tooth like the high sugar of sh2 corn. Taking advantage of the long shelf-life without starch conversion, almost all the sweetcorn shipped north from Florida during the winter and early spring is sh2. Asgrow Seed Co. shipped some to the 1992 Nebraska Vegetable Conference for growers to enjoy. If you haven't tried some recently, I think you'll be surprised. Biting through the tough pericarp followed by the intense burst of high sugar, reminds me of the candy "pop-rocks". People who savor corn for its flavor and texture and prefer tender pericarp will enjoy the se varieties in season.

As with any vegetable crop, read the variety description and cultural information for each variety carefully. Most sh2 corn will not do well in soil below 65 F. and should not be planted as a first planting. It has very little endosperm reserve for seedling vigor and is very high in sugar making it a feast for soil-borne pathogens. Hold off a couple of weeks until soil temperatures increase, using a standard or se variety for the
first-early planting. Pay attention to the maturity and any special cultural information. Sweetcorn varieties also differ greatly in plant habit and characteristics of the ear other than kernel sweetness. For example, tip cover is important for earworm control and reduces bird damage. It will take some experimentation on your part to find the varieties that work well for you.

Bits of Interesting Information

...on the markets in the Northeast (and probably true elsewhere):

"One of our large food chains, ... now allows all 47 of their produce managers to buy locally. The number of their suppliers expanded from 170 in 1991 to 650 last summer. This is a major breakthrough. More fresh fruits and vegetables in the school lunch program is a market opportunity for...local food production systems. Some of our best restaurants buy locally."

"Research in our Department of Agricultural, Resource, and Managerial Economics shows that a food manufacturer using New York product creates greater added income than any other type of manufacturing. The expansion of an existing cheese plant with new jobs, for example, is three times more valuable in economic impact than a service job."

--David Call, Dean, Cornell Univ. in Cornell Focus 3(1). (1994)

"Consumption of vegetables has increased 15.5 percent since 1976 with frozen and fresh vegetables registering the largest gains (23.5 and 22.9 percent respectively)."

--David Poland in Cornell Focus 3(1). (1994)

Growers interested in purchasing copies of the 1995 North Central Weed Control Guide for Vegetable Crops ($1.50 each) or the 1995 Michigan Bulletin 312 Insect, Disease, & Nematode Control for Commercial Vegetables ($3.00 each) should drop a note indicating which publications are desired, the number, and a check made out to "UNL Horticulture Dept" for the appropriate amount and send them to Connie Backus-Yoder, 377 Plant Sciences-UNL, Lincoln, NE 68583-0724. These are "at cost" to you, as a convenience. Prices have changed since last year and since the last newsletter. Publications will sent as soon as the new issues arrive in Nebraska, usually in early-to-mid-March.

Publications of Interest

Growers interested in biological control (management) of insect pests will find these two publications from the University of Wisconsin very interesting and informative. They are North Central Regional (NCR) publications. You can also request to be notified when other publications become available. Add $1.25 per book for shipping and handling. Checks go to "University of Wisconsin-Extension", Cooperative Extension Publications, Room 245, 30 North Murray Street, Madison, WI 53715. The telephone number is 608-262-3346. Currently available publications are:

NCR481 "Biological Control of Insects and Mites: An Introduction to Beneficial Natural Enemies and Their Use in Pest Management @ $11.00

NCR471 "Biological Control of Insect Pests of
Cabbage and Other Crucifers" @$8.00.

Future publications in this series will feature biological control in alfalfa, apples, greenhouses.

Upcoming Events

January 10-11 ILLINOIS SPECIALTY GROWERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION & TRADE SHOW. Holiday Inn Conference Hotel, Decatur, IL. Contact Lowell Lenshow, phone 309-557-2107.

January 17-19 GREAT LAKES VEGETABLE GROWERS’ ANNUAL CONVENTION AND THIRD FARM MARKET SHOW. Amway Grand Plaza Hotel and Grand Center, Grand Rapids, MI. Contact Byron Carpenter phone/fax 616-842-8211.

January 24-25 North Central Regional Meeting of the Specialty Cut Flower Growers Association, Ramada Inn, Manhattan, KS. One day will be on SPECIALTY CUT FLOWERS and another day on MARKET GARDENS (any intensive garden enterprise producing product for direct retail sale). For details, contact Karen Gast, Horticulture Dept., KSU, 913-532-6170.

January 27-28 IOWA FRUIT & VEGETABLE CONFERENCE. Holiday Inn 6111 Fleur Drive (across from airport), Des Moines, IA. Emphasis is on "The Business Side of Horticulture Management". Speakers include the Produce Supervisor for Hy-Vee stores, Nebraska’s own Tim Vala on direct sales, Steve Demuth from Seed Savers Exchange, panels on retail marketing, marketing strategies for apples, and niche marketing. Dr. Warmund from Missouri will discuss small fruit research and provide information on production of currants for the fresh market. To register or obtain more details, call IFVGA at 515-282-8192.

February 2-3 MINNESOTA FRUIT & VEGETABLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION at St. Cloud, MN. Contact Betty Sannerud, phone 612-434-5929

January (end of month), NEBRASKA HOME-BASED BUSINESS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MTG. For details, contact Carol Thayer, Ext. Specialist in Small Scale Entrepreneurship in Grand Island (308-385-6420).

February 10-11 NORTH AMERICAN BRAMBLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION, Orlando FL. Contact Paul Otten, phone 612-659-2418 or FAX 612-659-2464.

February 12 THE INTERNATIONAL RIBES ASSN, Orlando FL. Contact Paul Otten, phone 612-659-2418 or FAX 612-659-2464. (Ribes includes currants, gooseberries, & jostaberries. These are up & coming fruits for specialty markets. See also the Iowa meeting listed above and previous issues of this newsletter.)

February 12-15 NORTH AMERICAN STRAWBERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION, Orlando FL. Contact Paul Otten, phone 612-659-2418 or FAX 612-659-2464.

February 14-15 NEBRASKA VEGETABLE CONFERENCE, New World Inn, Columbus, Nebraska. The program and registration forms are enclosed with this newsletter. Forms will also be available at County Extension offices. Contact Connie Backus-Yoder, Horticulture Dept., UNL, 402-472-8616.
March 17-18 DIRECT MARKETING CONFERENCE, Holiday Inn, Kearney, Neb. This conference will focus on developing marketing skills for specialty and alternative crop producers and home-based businesses. This promises to be an excellent conference to assist you in marketing your non-traditional agricultural crops, or traditional crops in non-traditional ways! The emphasis is firmly on marketing, not production. The conference is being presented due to concerns expressed by several extension specialists regarding the demand for marketing information and the key role marketing has in the success of new and non-traditional enterprises. There will be a trade show and dinner featuring Nebraska products. Dr. Ed Estes from North Carolina State will talk about marketing fruits and vegetables. Prior to becoming an ag economist, Ed was a buyer for a major grocery chain. Larry Snell is from Kentucky where he was and still is involved in forming and managing a packing and marketing cooperative for commercial vegetables. If you think you'd rather not do it all yourself, you'll find his experience and insights very enlightening. Registration forms and a detailed schedule of events will be available in January, through this newsletter or through local Extension offices. You will want to reserve Friday March 17 (including the evening) and Saturday March 18 (morning and early afternoon) for this conference.

April 7 (tentative) MELON GROWERS MEETING. Norfolk, Neb. Production, disease, and marketing. Details in subsequent newsletter.

Many thanks to each of you who returned the Opinion Poll for this newsletter which was in the last issue. The tally of responses will be in the January issue. We will be providing in the near future an index to past issues for those who save their copies. --Laurie Hodges and Connie Backus-Yoder.

Dr. Alan Stevens will present a half-day workshop on MARKETING SPECIALTY CUT DRIED FLOWERS, and other ornamental and decorative plant material, on Wednesday afternoon, February 15 from 1:30 to 4:30 as part of the Nebraska Vegetable Conference. This workshop will be sponsored by the Nebraska Dept. of Agric. Agric. Promotion & Development, the North and Central Regional Division of the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, and Nebraska Cooperative Extension. This is an excellent opportunity to learn about marketing specialty cuts, what is new in the industry, how others have tackled getting into the market, developing markets, maintaining or enlarging your market, and making money in the market. Registration for only the cut flower workshop, will be $5.00 to cover expenses associated with the refreshments and a copy of the Proceedings. Registration for the full conference will include the cut flower workshop. Please let your friends who work with dried horticultural material (wreaths, potpourri, decorative swag, etc.) know of this excellent workshop.
Preliminary Program
1995 Nebraska Vegetable Conference
February 14-15, New World Inn
Columbus, Nebraska

Tuesday February 14

9:00 - 9:15  Welcoming Remarks

9:15 - 10:00  So You Think You Want to Grow Greenhouse Vegetables?  Dr. Jay Fitzgerald, UNL.

10:00 - 10:45  Sustainable Agricultural Practices for Vegetable Production.  Dr. Hank Taber ISU.

10:45 - 11:30  FSMIP Programs for Marketing Horticultural Crops.  Dr. Harold Ricker, Deputy Director of the USDA Ag Marketing Service.

11:30 - 12:00  Introduction to the Trade Show Exhibitors.

12:00 - 1:30  Lunch and Trade Show

1:30 - 2:00  "Taste the Good Life...Nebraska Fresh Produce" Promotional Program - Review of the First Year.  Ms Lana Bushhousen, NSDA.

2:00 - 2:15  Panel Discussion of Experiences with the "Taste the Good Life...Nebraska Fresh Produce" Promotional Program.

2:00 - 2:30  Retail Store Produce Manager - Mr. Dennis Hecht, Hinky Dinky #5

2:30 - 3:00  Farmers Market Manager - Ms Billene Nemec, Lincoln Farmers’ Market

3:00 - 3:30  Break - Visit Trade Show

3:30 - 5:00  NFVGA Annual Meeting and Elections.  Mr. Russ Aerni, President

Wednesday February 15

8:30 - 8:45  Introduction and Welcoming Remarks

8:45 - 9:15  High Value Marketing - VCR by Rooy Media and Rodale Institute.

9:15 - 12:30  Panel Discussion on Marketing Nebraska Fruit and Vegetables

1) Wholesale Markets

2) Farmers’ Market

3) Organic Markets

4) Community Supported Agriculture

5) Greenhouse Vegetables

6) What To Do When Your Market Changes

12:30 - 1:30  Lunch and Trade Show

1:30 - 4:30  Workshop on Marketing Specialty Cut Dried Flowers (Regional Workshop of the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers).  Dr. Alan Stevens, KSU.