

GIVE YOURSELF AN XMAS PRESENT-- JOIN THE NYS BERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

Paul Baker, Executive Secretary, New York State Berry Growers Association



This will be the first opportunity I have had to introduce myself to many of you. My name is Paul Baker and for the next few years or more I will be serving as your Executive Secretary of the NYS Berry Growers Association. I come from a long history of proud members of the farming fraternity, where I was a fifth generation farmer. I operated our family farm for over 30 years in Western NY where my primary focus was on fresh fruits and vegetables. Currently I am also the Executive Director of the NYS Horticultural Society and Agricultural Affiliates. I also serve as the Chair for the North East Focus group for agricultural research at the Kearneysville, West Virginia Experimental Station. This is where the USDA conducts the fruit research that has direct impact on the Northeast specifically and the US in general. This is the federal site where the experimental studies are conducted by USDA on your berry crops.

I accepted this opportunity because I am excited about an industry that offers so very much “up side.” Agri-business as it should be called (farming) is a very demanding field to select to earn one’s daily bread. Yet it is one that will never become obsolete so long as we continue to keep it competitive in our ever changing world markets. Consumers will always seek fresh food to enjoy for both nutritional and pleasure reasons. Even with all of the issues that swirl around us today such as possible labor shortages and rising production costs the US consumer will always have full shelves to select from. The important questions will be from where and at what cost in both dollars and food safety?

The table could not be set more perfectly for your industry. China continues to pump tainted food and toys into our neighborhood stores. People are becoming increasingly suspicious of their once “safe” food stocks. Consumers are realizing increasingly that food grown in close proximity to their own dwellings is perhaps the safest. Secondly the need for freshness is retuning to the top of the priority lists for consumers. They want food with less preservatives and additives. Fresh food offers them they highest level of nutrition. Researchers seem to uncover new links daily that confirm what we have always known that to eat fresh is to eat healthy.

If you want to throw a monkey wrench into any party, offer up to American pallets food that only offers nutritional benefits. We as consumers enjoy both the experience and taste of our foods. Witness as consumers seeking new ways to eat healthy without sacrificing flavor have increased the consumption of raspberries by 150% in the last five years. Blueberries are even more energized.

I invite you to join the New York State Berry Growers Association. We are planning to help you capture this market synergy. In order to meet the consumer needs we will need to invest in consumer education, improved marketing and of course research that will deliver to us new techniques to grow our diverse berry crops. New varieties are of course always on the top of the wish list but equally important will be improved cultural practices that offer us improved methods to deliver insect and disease free fruit to our consumers.

The NYS Berry Growers are committed to expanding both the marketing and research agenda for this industry. By joining this association you will be giving us the numbers necessary to carry your message of needs to both Albany and Washington. Your membership is a real time ballot for improved commitment to the berry industry in New York State.

I suggest that you join the Association and give yourself a Christmas present of knowing you are personally contributing towards improving your chosen passion. This self serving present will I am certain return you the reward of increased consumer demand and in the future improved variety knowledge and growing practices. As they say it all begins with your willingness to get involved and support your industry in this exciting era of consumer thirst for your products.

New York State Berry Growers Association

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