

Fruit News article February 2017

The weather has been cooperating with those of us who have trees to trim, while those who make extra income over the winter plowing snow are not happy with Mother Nature at all. In any case I am happy that the temperature fluctuations have been minimal, although this warm spell in February is concerning. The trees in my orchard are filled with an abundance of healthy buds, and I hope yours are as well. After last season we are all in need of some good fruit producing weather. 2016 was the kind of year that tested the strength and fortitude of even the most optimistic farmer.

When I last wrote for the Fruit Times we were busy preparing for the holiday season and the upcoming Pennsylvania Farm Show. Despite losing the coordination and assistance of the PA Apple Marketing staff members due to the failed PAMP referendum, the show preparations and operations went fairly well thanks to a great group of volunteers. The Farm Show attendance was slightly lower than 2016, but thanks to all the volunteer labor we still made over \$45,000 to put towards research projects for our industry.

I hope many of you got to spend some time at the Mid Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention in Hershey. I know I brought some new ideas back to the farm and have already begun to plug them into my plans for the upcoming season. This year was one of the largest crowds ever to attend the convention. The meeting rooms were full and the trade show was bustling with activity. Dr. Lehr's Keynote speech drew a capacity crowd and raised both cheers and jeers from those in attendance. His topics ranged from his plan to dismantle the EPA, to his optimistic agricultural outlook under the Trump administration, to his theory that humans are not the primary cause of climate change. Whether you agreed or disagreed with his comments, he definitely kept the crowd's attention. Hopefully no one was too offended by the opinions he expressed during his lecture. I can't say I agreed with everything he said, but I do enjoy being challenged and educated, and my thoughts and opinions are tweaked from time to time as I garner new information from every source I can find. I consider this a necessary consequence of having an open mind and a privilege in a free country. I have sat on the convention committee for a few years, and I can tell you that choosing the perfect speaker with limited funds is a challenging task. The committee vets the speakers the best they can with the information provided and then rolls the dice in regards to how the crowd will react. If nothing else this should make you want to attend next year's presentation. Or better yet volunteer your services to be on the selection committee to help choose next year's speaker.

During the week of the convention there was an open hearing with PA Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding and the current PA Apple Marketing Board to discuss the formation of a new and improved PA apple referendum. The hearing was well attended and Secretary Redding was very receptive to hearing the thoughts and opinions of growers, packers and processors alike. The framework of the reworked referendum, penned by the current PAMP board, leans heavily on tree fruit research and legislative support. The new proposed program includes a small percentage for consumer education, but greatly reduces significant funding for marketing. Grower assessments under the new program would only be about 1/3 of the current program. The new referendum should be ready for a vote later this spring. When choosing

which way to cast your ballot, please consider how important it is that we financially support the US Apple Association as they represent our collective voice in Washington DC, and how paramount it is that we have money available for research to face the apple growing challenges of the future. There is strength in numbers, and a referendum is a way that we can pool our money for the good of the group.

During our SHAP annual business meeting in Hershey, the election of board members was held. I would like to welcome Ben Rice as our newest board member. Ben is replacing Brian Knouse. Brian has served many years on the board and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his leadership and guidance over the years.

Crossing my fingers for a warm bloom period,
Tad

Tad Kuntz
SHAP President