

President's Message

The end of the harvest is near. For most of us, it couldn't come too soon. I hope it went well, or at least as well as could be expected for everyone. The way our tractors were sliding around in the mud and on the hillsides, I am mostly thankful that everyone on this farm stayed safe, no injuries to report. I hope you can say the same.

While putting away the harvest equipment, cleaning up the orchards and fields, and while preparing for the winter workload, I hope everyone can take some time to spend with family and friends and just wind down. It's been a long tough season. Winter will be on us soon. Take a little break to enjoy life before getting right back into it.

As we move into a new season and make plans for the future, I believe we need to do more than just figure out which variety or specialty crop is going to be the next big money maker, which planting system to use or what our marketing scheme will be next year.

We need to find a way to regain the trust of the public at large.

It seems that when I graduated from Penn State in 1982, most people understood very little about agriculture. Now it seems that nobody in the public knows anything about production agriculture.

What they think they know makes them afraid of our products. So much so that they feel the need to inspect and regulate us to the Nth degree. The troublesome thing is that many of these "regulations" are not government regulations. We have organizations in place to tell our story to our government representatives. American Farm Bureau, US Apple, National Peach Council, National Council of Ag Employers and SHAP all have committees designed to lobby for our interests with the government. These organizations have been effective in the past and they provide us a seat at the table, within the government.

We have no such mechanism when it comes to dealing with "Consumer Driven" audits. I realize that I am not telling you anything you don't already know. These types of audits will continue to cause anxiety for us as long as we fail to address them, and I expect it will only get worse. We have heard rumors of requests for social and environmental responsibility audits. This year we had, for the first time, requests for a list of chemicals used to grow our nursery stock. This is for information on trees we sold and were planted a year or more ago.

It seems to me that we must find a way to stand against this trend. I wish I had the answer. How do we accomplish this? The only thing I can think of is education, education, education. So long as the public doesn't know what we are doing, a certain vocal minority of them will perceive that we are out to get them, or at least that we don't care about them. Accomplishing this is a huge goal, but I believe it is something we must take on, if we are to maintain our sanity.

Chris Baugher
SHAP President