

President's Message

Happy peach season! What a difference a year can make. Last year at this time many growers were either picking a fraction of their normal peach crop, or worse, abandoning blocks altogether. This year it appears that everyone has a full crop of peaches. As the season has progressed though, it occurred to me that of the many crops we all grow, peaches seem to lag behind when it comes to technological advances. With the exception of the Darwin string thinner, peaches are almost grown the same way today as they were 60 years ago. Yes, the cultivars have changed and some blocks are planted at higher densities, but the most basic item involved in growing peaches is still the same; PEOPLE! Employees are needed to prune, hand thin, and harvest over multiple pickings.

The reason I say this is due to the industry—or even more broadly, nation wide—labor shortage. We all can do an amazing job of growing a beautiful crop, but if there is no one available to pick the fruit, our hard work doesn't amount to anything. I wish there was a crystal ball that I could look into for a magic solution, however, there seems to be no clear-cut answer. What I can say is that we all need to continue to advocate for ag-labor reform at the federal and state level. Let your legislators know how vital having qualified employees is to your business. Let them know that H-2A is a workable program, but still has its own downfalls, including the ever-increasing adverse effect wage rate. Finally, try to keep your current employees happy. That may seem simple or even silly, but if they have been with you for many years or even decades, they are a valuable tool to have. The cost of training a new employee is more than you might realize.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Brad, Kay, the entire Hollabaugh family, and their employees for receiving the "2021 Mid-Atlantic Master Farmer Award". This honor is awarded annually to three recipients across all forms of agriculture. Please take time to read the full article about their award beginning on page 11. On behalf of myself, the SHAP board, and the industry, I would like to congratulate everyone at Hollabaugh Bros., Inc. on this amazing accomplishment!

Ben Keim

SHAP President