President’s Message

Well, another year is in the books. Now it is time to go over those books and evaluate how things worked and what changes need to be made. It was an interesting year to say the least. Spring drought, hailstorms, and a seemingly never-ending apple harvest were all situations many of us found ourselves in this year. Bugs, diseases, and quality are problems we chase every year, but they are not the only ones. Workers to harvest the crop, where to sell the crop, and where you are going to store the bumper crop are also concerns on years like this. Early in apple season, a “pick-your-own” customer made a comment to me; “There are so many apples, it must be an easy year!” As I looked at the last five empty bins I had on hand going into a block where I needed about 15, I agreed with them that, yes, it was easy to fill bins this year, but an easy year it was not. Most customers don’t understand the logistical undertaking that a bumper crop presents. Just because we have a ton of apples doesn’t necessarily translate into profit.

As I sit down to write this, later this week the 2024 PA Farm Show will be starting. After the success of our apple wall last year, I’m hoping we make a strong showing there again this year. To all who have volunteered their time and for some, their employees’ time, I would just like to say “thank you.” This year’s volunteer signups have been extremely successful, and we filled many of our slots much earlier than we typically do. It reduces the stress immensely for our coordinators, as they are not forced to worry about calling around to find people to fill shifts or worry about running the booths short staffed. In the previous Fruit News, we ran a letter written by former SHAP President, Chris Baugher, outlining how much we need volunteers to make the Farm Show a success. I’d like to thank Chris for his efforts reaching out for volunteers this year. I’d also like to thank the entire Farm Show team for all of their hard work in making this event happen and be a large source of revenue for our research funding. For any who don’t know, most of the profit we bring in at the Farm Show goes to support the funding of SHAP’s research projects. Many of the great projects you hear about at Hershey are funded by this event. With the changes in our industry that we have seen in the last couple of years, the Farm Show will continue to be an important source of funding for our projects, and it is only possible with the efforts of our Farm Show committee and volunteers.

Close on the heels of the Farm Show is the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention. Over the last year we have been putting together a great program schedule that will hopefully offer a lot of educational opportunities for all who attend. From workshops and a bus tour on Monday, to presentations on robots in our orchards on Thursday, it looks to be a strong week. We will also be joined by the North American Strawberry Growers Association, so there will be some new faces around the Hershey Lodge. I’m always impressed by the variety of presentations we offer at the convention. There is always a meeting to sit in on and maybe learn something new that you can apply to a different crop. I look forward to seeing many of you there at the end of January.

SHAP President

Andrew Schwalm