

# NEW YORK FRUIT QUARTERLY

## Editorial

### Why Plums?

It occurs to me that many New York fruit farmers may be asking themselves, why plums when we are primarily an apple state? Here's my take on this question.

First, Cornell's fruit breeding efforts at Geneva are long term and often multi-generational. The hybridizing that gave rise to our release of seven new plum varieties since 1993 was done over 35 years ago by John Watson (featured on the cover). He was the foremost plum breeder in the history of the Station. Prior to his retirement in 1987, John named four European plums: Iroquois, Mohawk, Oneida, and Seneca. After John's retirement, I took over the evaluation of John's large collection of advanced elite plums. Out of this collection we have named nine more European plums - some for fresh market, some for processing, and one dual purpose plum. In 1993 we named Castleton, Longjohn (in John's honor), and Polly. In 2003 we named NY6 and NY9. And in this issue of the Quarterly we announce the naming of four new plums, Rosy Gage, Blues Jam, Jam Session, and Geneva Mirabelle. There are still a few of Watson's elite plum selections remaining in evaluation.

It seems appropriate to complete John Watson's significant effort to develop improved plums for New York growers and make available the best new plum varieties from this program to fruit growers in New York State and elsewhere. Nevertheless, some may wonder, why spend time and resources on items that have limited potential markets(ers)? An even more compelling answer is that many New York fruit farms need to change their crop mix to remain competitive in the global economy. The plums described in this issue of the NYFQ are a viable and important option. Not for every farm, but important, nonetheless!

Over the past ten years some New York fruit farms have experienced much growth in on-farm retailing, cottage industries doing small-batch fruit processing, and green markets selling locally grown New York products. These four new plums have considerable potential for use in these venues. By keeping attuned to changes in farmer's marketing opportunities, the fruit breeders at Geneva are increasing the chances of new profitable ventures by New York fruit farmers and associated industries that add value to their products.

The release of these four plums marks the end of an era for stone fruit research at Cornell. Experiment Station scientists at both Geneva and Ithaca and their sub-stations, along with Extension field staff, have tried to serve New York farms that grow stone fruits and the consumers of these products. The unanswered question that looms BIG is whether New York farmers will step up to the challenge of providing leadership and planning for the funding that is so essential to the future of such applied research on stone fruits. After all, this work is aimed at solving farmer's key problems. The recent negative vote concerning producer funding for research by New York stone fruit growers leads me to believe that something is seriously wrong. The extremely low number of replies to the opportunity to vote leads me to assert to you that many, perhaps most, ballot containing envelopes were not even opened and read. The negative votes that were returned lead me to believe that most responders are feeling an acute economic pinch and did not understand that the return on investment for applied research is wonderfully high. I plead with New York fruit farmers to step up and rethink your relationship to Cornell's applied research on stone fruits!

Robert Andersen  
Professor Emeritus

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**FRONT COVER:** The late John Watson who led Geneva's plum breeding program for 35 years. Flowers of Obilinaya Japanese plum and fruit of Fortune Japanese plum.

**BACK COVER:** Apple production in China (clockwise) bagged Fuji fruit, terraced hill-side apple orchard, apples in outdoor market, intercropping in young apple orchard, Fuji apple tree.

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