

Editorial

The Need for Research Continues

In 1990 the apple growers of New York voted on, and passed the New York Apple Research and Development Order, which required a contribution of two cents per bushel from every apple grower in the state to go into a fund to pay for research on the production of apples. That marketing order has been revoked and approved twice since 1990, but with no increases in the rate per bushel. The time has come to take a hard look at the amount we are contributing.

What did one dollar buy in 1990? A lot more than it buys today! Remember when Captan was one dollar a pound? Now it is more like triple that price. The cost of doing research has also escalated. The value of our two cents per bushel contribution has been greatly reduced by inflation since 1990, and research for the apple growing industry is suffering from the lower value of the dollar.

Has research helped you grow apples better in 2009 than you did in 1990? You bet it has. Compare your eight foot by sixteen foot planting of 1990 to your 800 or more trees per acre of 2009. Compare the resistance management program of today to the early IPM programs of 1990. The tower sprayers being

used today are replacing the high blasting sprayers of the past, and the apples coming out of storage have lost only one pound of firmness after six or eight or ten months of storage. These were all innovative practices when they began in the orchards of a research farm, and were carefully studied for several years before being introduced to the industry. They are now common practice on our farms.

Has the implementation of these new practices been beneficial for New York farmers? Indeed it has, the results have been more fruit of better quality on fewer acres. The statewide average yield in 1990 was about 400 bushels per acre, and by 2008 has increased to almost 700 bushels per acre. In the near future I think we will see a statewide average yield of 1000 bushels per acre. In 1990 fruit of two and a quarter inches diameter was the accepted minimum size, while today the minimum size is two and a half inches, and the fruit we produce today is certainly a more popular variety and in better condition than that which we shipped in 1990.

Do increased yields, better size, better insect and disease control, better fruit condition, and better varieties give better financial results to apple growers? Yes, of course

they do. While a lot of things have come together in the last few years to make apple farmers better off financially, much of our success can be attributed to better production practices that resulted from the research paid for by our ARDP money.

One last question. Do you think these improvements in our apple growing industry were worth two cents a bushel?

Yes, that two cents a bushel was the biggest bargain on the farm! That question leads me now to ask the big question. Is two cents a bushel enough for us to be spending on production research today? Not really. I believe there are many more issues ahead of us that can benefit from research. Given that the cost of research has gone up over the years, that we are producing more apples of better quality on less land, and that our past research investment has greatly improved the lot of New York apple growers, now is the time for apple growers to invest an increased amount in research and for the future of our industry.

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COVER: High density Tall Spindle Honeycrisp orchard, with pheromone dispenser inset.