

2002 PROGRAM WORK TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

Agricultural Marketing and Agribusiness Management PWT (#2001-08)

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Marketing and management often determine the success or failure of all types of agribusiness firms (i.e. farms, input suppliers, food brokers and manufacturers etc). Also, within the last few years many farmers and growers have just discovered the importance of good marketing and management, at the same time other agribusiness have come to realize the need to improve and fine tune theirs. There is an increasing demand for applied research, outreach and assistance in the area of marketing and management. However, there is a misconception better marketing and management is a “silver bullet” that will cure the financial woes of agriculture.

One PWT meeting was held in June, with 11 College representatives, 2 Extension staff, and 2 industry representatives present. It is our goal to increase the involvement of Extension and industry in future PWT meetings. It should be noted that several members of this PWT have worked closely with College Tree Fruit Industry Task Force.

The activities of this PWT can be divided into two distinct categories: 1) formal education and outreach, and 2) assistance to individual farmers, groups of farmers and agribusinesses. In terms of formal education and outreach the following were specific activities: an Agribusiness Outlook conference (attendance = 150); a 2-day marketing workshop (attendance = 70); a dairy markets and product research conference (attendance = 100), a 2-day seminar for Northeast cooperative managers and directors (attendance = 150), and a 3-day conference for future cooperative leaders (attendance = 60). While the above are specifically directed at marketing and management, PWT members often discuss these marketing and management topic at other conferences such as the Seeley horticultural conference, NYS vegetable conference, the direct marketing conference, etc. All the above activities have formal evaluations. PWT members were also speakers at probably hundreds of smaller meetings. In addition, there is a monthly article series entitled “Smart Marketing”, and PWT member have written numerous articles for several types of media (i.e. journals, department publications, as well as the agricultural and general press).

Direct assistance to farmers and agribusinesses is probably even more important but much more difficult to document and report, since in the area of marketing and management these activities often must be held confidential. Activities in this area may include any of the following: facilitating strategic planning, reviewing business and marketing plans, market research, assisting in product improvements, facilitating merger discussions, identifying outside experts to help the agribusiness, and assisting with

financial issues. Recent tangible outcomes of these activities include: the creation of a fresh apple marketing cooperative, the possible construction of a new apple processing plant (projected to use 3 million bushels of NY apples and employ 300), the development of a natural beef company, continued expansion of one of the two largest U.S. organic firms, and the merger of a northern NY dairy cooperative and the major dairy cooperative in New England. On more depressing note, we have tried to follow and analyze the bankruptcy of a major agribusiness in the Northeast.

While the composition of the PWT does not necessarily represent a multidisciplinary approach, the very nature of the Team's efforts requires it because our activities are dealing with specific industries (i.e. dairy, fruits, vegetables, horticulture, crops). There certainly is integration of PWT members' individual or group research and extension activities. There is limited integration across the PWT, but that is one of the goals for the coming year.

As a PWT there has been no applications for outside funding. However, individual members and groups of members have been active, and have signed on as participants in many of the marketing grants for which farmers and agribusinesses have applied.