Sweet Cherry Summit Review

NW Michigan Horticultural Research Station

November 11, 2008
Summit Objectives

• To facilitate discussion
• To develop a roadmap for the industry
  – Marketing strategies, horticultural techniques, and consumer demands have changed
• To develop short, mid-range, and long-term goals
  – To ensure proper adaptations to change
  – To remain competitive in the global marketplace
Summit Topics in Brief

• Brine market future
• Finishing market
• Frozen sweet cherry market
• Current and potential status for fresh market sweets
• National and international look at varieties and rootstocks
• National and international markets
• Overview of current MSU sweet cherry research
• Grower panel
  – Representatives from all market segments
Summit Participants

- Industry leaders from all market segments
- Growers
- Processors
- Marketers
- Ag-chemical representatives
- MSU researchers and Extension staff
- 65 participants
Industry Needs based on Summit Discussion
Quality Improvements

• Consumers demand is for high quality
  – Sweet cherry quality needs to be improved for all market segments
• Tree training/pruning to improve quality
• Pest management strategies that maximize quality
Varieties for the Future

• New varieties needed for all market segments

• Testing current varieties
  – Continue with on-going evaluation process

• Finding potential varieties
  – Breeding programs only on west coast
    • Vastly different climate and availability
  – 'Club' varieties
  – Potential to test European varieties

• Rootstock/variety interactions
Stem-on Brine Cherries

- Improved varieties lend themselves to stem-on harvest
- Cultural practices/tree structure to maximize stems
- Rootstocks
- Harvesting options
- Growth regulator aids
Improving Production Efficiency

- Dwarf rootstocks
  - New rootstocks
  - Cultural practices
    - Irrigation
    - Nutrition
- Planting/training systems
- Harvesting technology
  - Over-the-row (OTR), beside-the-row (BTR), continuously-moving
  - Mechanically harvested fresh market sweets
Opportunities to Expand and Improve Fresh Market

• Infrastructure in MI
  – Presently, little foundation for this industry

• Production practices
  – Larger, firmer fruit
  – Smaller trees for hand harvest

• Labor issues
  – Migrant housing
  – Availability of workers in future

• Marketing strategies
Need to Improve Handling Systems

- Harvesting technology
- Cooling technology
Need to Improve Processing and Packaging

• New packaging
  – For both processing and fresh markets

• Eliminate pits/pit fragments in processing
Need for GAP Certification Standards

• **Good Agriculture Practices**

• GAP certification is verification of practices on-farm that minimize microbial contamination in producing fresh fruits, vegetables and tree nuts

• Need to standardize for all market segments/processors/farms
Meeting Needs of Changing Markets and Opportunities

- Local markets
- Regional markets
- National markets
- International markets
- Cooperation between all Michigan industries to better market products
Summit Prioritization Survey

- Sent out to Summit participants mid-December
- Input from other industry members
- Compiled results and input
Survey Results... top five most important priorities for the brine, canned and frozen, and fresh market.

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<tr>
<th>BRINE MARKET</th>
<th>CANNED &amp; FROZEN MARKET</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fruit cracking</strong></td>
<td>Eliminating pits/pit fragments 4.8</td>
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<td>4.6</td>
<td>Fruit cracking 4.7</td>
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<td>Eliminating pits/pit fragments</td>
<td>Obtaining &amp; testing new varieties 4.2</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>Plant nutrition 4.1</td>
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<td>Plant nutrition</td>
<td>New planting/training/pruning systems 3.3</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
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<td>Stem-on harvest</td>
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<td>Obtaining &amp; testing new varieties</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRESH MARKET</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fruit cracking</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Plant nutrition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing strategies/infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dwarfing and/or precocious rootstocks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Obtaining &amp; testing new varieties</td>
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N=11
Sweet Cherry Action Committee

- Met on 12 January
- Discussed survey results
- Prioritized research projects for short and long-term
  - Brine, canner/frozen, and fresh market were addressed individually
  - Cross over between market segments
Priorities for Brine Industry

1. Improve stem retention on mechanically harvested cherries
   - Crop load management
   - Growth regulators
   - Pruning/training

• Rated as the highest priority of outcomes
  • Excellent short-term goal
    • Impacts trees currently in the ground
    • Potential to quickly improve returns to growers
Brine Industry, cont.

2. Improve production efficiency
   - Disease and insect management (brown rot and plum curculio)
   - New planting/training/pruning systems
   - Irrigation and water needs
   - Dwarfing rootstocks
   - New varieties
   - Crop load management
   - Plant nutrition
Brine Industry, cont.

3. Fruit Cracking

4. New harvest technology
   - Major priority but would like to see project funded by non-industry dollars (USDA Farm Bill potential)
Priorities for Canner/Frozen Industry

1. Improve production efficiency
   - Disease and insect management
     • American brown rot and OBLR
   - Crop load management/pruning for size
   - New planting/training/pruning systems
   - Irrigation and water needs
   - Dwarfing rootstocks
   - New varieties
   - Plant nutrition
Canner/Frozen Industry, cont.

2. Fruit Cracking

3. New harvest technology
   - Major priority but would like to see it funded by non-industry dollars (USDA Farm Bill potential)
   - Long term goal for industry for all market segments
Priorities for Fresh Market Industry

1. Production efficiency
   - New varieties
   - Training systems/ rootstocks
   - Crop load management for size and quality
   - Irrigation (particularly for high density/dwarfing)
   - Disease and insect Management / IPM
   - Plant Nutrition

2. Fruit Cracking

3. New Harvest Technology (seek USDA funding)
Fresh Market Industry, cont.

- No current structure in Michigan
- No current funding mechanism
  - Difficult to research fresh market potential without funding structure
• **MCC collects funds**
  - $10/ton of processed sweet cherries
    • $5.50 goes to NCGIF promotion
    • $35,000 directly funds sweet cherry research
      - Allocated by Sweet Cherry Action committee
  - Joint funded positions--split 80% tart cherry and 20% sweet cherry
  - ~$300-500/year funds fresh market projects

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**Funding**

- How to fund more in-depth projects?
- How to fund fresh market projects?
Next Steps

• Arrange meeting with MSU researchers to address new priorities
  – 2009 proposals will reflect priorities

• *Sweet Cherry Action Committee* will meet February 20th to review 2009 proposals

• Arrange a follow-up meeting with MI fresh market growers to discuss options for a funding source
Thank You

- Summit presenters
- Summit participants
- Survey respondents
- Sweet Cherry Action Committee

- Phil Korson, Bill Shane, Greg Lang, Erin Lizotte, Jim Nugent