Northern New York Agricultural Development Program News

Press Release: August 8, 2016

Northern New York Agricultural Development Program Project Identifies Fresh-Grown Crop With High-Value Potential

Canton and Willsboro, NY. The farmer-driven Northern New York Agricultural Development Program has released the results of field trials indicating that fresh market baby ginger produced by regional growers can sell for four times the price of conventional ginger sold in store.

But should every grower start planting that high-value crop?

The market potential of ginger as a season extension and profit builder for Northern New York market growers was evaluated as part of the Advancing Season Extension and Protected Cultured Efficiency Project funded by the farmer-driven Northern New York Agricultural Development Program. The project also included enterprise budgeting for growing the high-value alternative high tunnel crops of ginger, turmeric, summer lettuce and basil.

The term protected culture refers to the use of high tunnel and greenhouse structures that allow growers to better manage the impact of such elements as temperature, humidity, light, and moisture.

Six growers: one each in Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties at farms in Carthage, Glenfield, Malone, Peru, Potsdam, and Willsboro hosted field trials and record keeping for the project.

Project leaders are Amy Ivy, a regional vegetable specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension; Cornell University New York State Vegetable Specialist Judson Reid; and Crystal Stewart, a vegetable specialist and cost/benefit analyst with the Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Program.

Bob Weybright, a Cornell Cooperative Extension regional marketing specialist, conducted an informal survey of growers and buyers to evaluate market opportunities for Northern New York-grown ginger. He found some farms in the six-county region currently grow ginger on a small scale for CSA, community supported agriculture, or farmer's market sales. The fresh baby ginger produced by the regional growers can sell for four times the price of conventional ginger sold in store.

"Buyers indicated they enjoy the pleasant, light and surprisingly fresh taste of the NNY-grown ginger. Small volume, high margin ginger sales for fresh market sales appear feasible for farmers with high tunnel or greenhouse structures," Weybright said.

However, Weybright states in the project results report now available on the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program website that the limited survey and the noted high return income opportunity do not necessarily support large-scale production

expansion without evaluating value-added processing costs to extend crop value beyond the short fresh harvest window.

The Season Extension project worked with the participating growers on how to develop customized farm enterprise budgets to track individual crop production and income. The results report shares a sample budget form and data on the potential yield and timing for growing the high-value alternative high tunnel crops of ginger, turmeric, summer lettuce and basil.

The project also included field trials to fine tune fertility management for tomato production by both organic and conventional growers. As a result of the tomato production phase of the project, one farm has installed a fertigation system to maintain optimal fertility in the soil.

Ivy notes, “Having the funding to conduct a series of tests, as we did every two to three weeks through the growing season, is critical to giving growers an objective picture of what is happening with their crops and often reveals deficiencies that the growers did not think were present.”

Ivy adds, “This type of regionally-based, on-farm testing provides growers with the opportunity to discover areas for attention before crop health or crop yield is adversely impacted and to respond quickly to protect their crop and the income that crop represents.”

The work responded to grower-identified needs and opportunities related to season extension and protected culture technology and draws on previous NNYADP projects designed to help growers maximize productivity and profitability.

The Advancing Season Extension and Protected Cultured Efficiency report for 2015 is posted on the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program website at www.nnyagdev.org along with earlier vegetable production research results.

The farmer-driven Northern New York Agricultural Development Program provides grants for on-farm research and technical assistance projects in Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties. Funding for the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program is supported by the New York State Senate and administered through the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.