

April 20, 1999

Q&A on the Proposed NYS Research and Development Fund for Cabbage

by Stephen Reiners, Asst. Prof., Horticultural Sciences, Cornell University, Geneva

GENEVA, NY: The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets has announced that two hearings will take place to consider the petition to enact a Research and Development (R&D) Fund for cabbage growers in the state. The first hearing will take place on Wednesday, May 12, from 2-4 p.m., at the Best Western Batavia Inn. The second hearing will occur on Thursday, May 13, from 10-noon at the Ramada Inn on Routes 5 and 20, Geneva. At these meetings, growers may only present their concerns and questions. The vote will be conducted through the mail some time following the hearings.

The following are some commonly asked questions and answers regarding this proposed fund.

Q: Don't we already have a research fund for cabbage?

A: Growers in Western New York who grew cabbage for local sauerkraut processors established the NYS Cabbage Research Association in the mid-1960s. Their purpose was to raise funds to support research that addressed problems facing the kraut industry. The research projects funded generally involved variety development, plant nutrition, pest control (insects, diseases, weeds), and crop management practices. Sauerkraut processors support this Association and match the contribution of the growers toward research. The processors also play a key role in collection of the funds. In 1998, the amount available for research was only \$10,000, all contributed by kraut growers and processors. This amount of money can only fund a fraction of the research that is needed.

Q: Why is a Research and Development Fund needed for cabbage?

A: The United States Department of Agriculture has stated that it is their role to fund only basic or fundamental research. It is their view that this type of research is highly speculative and is designed to solve long-range problems of the industry and not the applied, field-oriented

work. Cornell University and other Land Grant universities will receive a decreasing amount of funding for applied research. If applied research is to continue, the New York cabbage industry needs to support it.

Q: What is a Research and Development (R&D) Fund?

A: A Research and Development Fund is an official regulation created by the Commissioner of the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. The initiative for proposing the fund must come from the producers who will be affected. In this case, it was the NYS Cabbage Research Association that drafted the petition. At public hearings, growers and other interested parties will have an opportunity to comment on the proposal. Following the hearings, the Commissioner submits the proposal to the growers for approval by mail.

Q: What percentage of growers need to support the proposal for it to pass?

A: The proposal can only be approved if 51% of the producers who participate in the vote say 'yes', and this 51% must represent at least 65% of the cabbage marketed in NYS in the preceding season.

Q: If approved, how much will this cost the grower?

A: The assessment is \$4.00 per acre. The estimated cost of production for fresh-market cabbage in the Northeast is more than \$3,000 per acre. An investment in a R&D Fund for cabbage represents less than 0.2% of the cost of production. If the R&D Fund was in place in 1998, more than \$60,000 would have been made available by such a fund.

Q: How much money does Ag and Markets take to administer the fund?

A: Their administrative costs cannot exceed 5% of all the monies collected.

Q: How is it determined which projects will be funded?

A: An advisory board consisting of 9 members (7 growers, 1 processor representative, and 1 member chosen to represent handlers) decides on the projects to be funded. A call for proposals would be sent out to all appropriate university, extension, and agricultural business personnel. The proposals would not be limited to New York. If the Advisory Board felt that appropriate work could be conducted in other states, those proposals could be funded. *Cabbage growers will be the ones who decide how to spend their money.*

Q. Are any cabbage growers exempt ?

A: This is not a voluntary program. Only growers who plant and market less than 5 acres in any year are exempt.

Q: How do growers pay?

A: All growers must pay their assessment no later than December 15 to the Commissioner of Ag & Mkts.

Q: Will the state match funds that growers contribute?

A: In the past, the state has not matched funds raised by commodity associations. There is the possibility, however, that legislation will be passed in Albany to match funds raised by producers. In 1998 and 1999, New York State appropriated \$100,000 of state funds for onion research, which more than doubled what growers had raised. An R&D fund demonstrates that the industry is serious about finding solutions to their concerns.

Q: What types of projects will this money be used for?

A: There are many research projects that would benefit >from increased funding from the cabbage industry. Some of these projects are already occurring to a limited degree, but a new source of funding would jump-start many of the projects listed below and move the New York State industry forward.

Breeding. Dr. Phillip Griffiths has just been hired as a cabbage breeder in the Department of Horticultural Sciences, Geneva. Many production problems could be addressed by breeding a better cabbage for New York-one that stores well, tastes good, and resists pests, insects, disease and even weeds through the use of varieties bred for resistance to Round-up.

Weed management. One of researcher Dr. Robin Bellinder's major efforts is to identify new herbicides that are safe on the crop. New York was the first state to develop the Third Party Label for the use of Dual on cabbage. Registrations for Goal and Lantagran came about because of research conducted in this program. Upcoming registrations will include use of Dual on direct-seeded cabbage, Stinger, Prowl, and, in a couple of years, Authority. Data needs to be developed to support herbicide registrations, use rates and patterns.

Insect control strategies. Cabbage is susceptible to many insect pests. Research conducted by Drs. Tony Shelton and John Curtis promises new and more effective ways to control thrips. In addition, resistance of insects to pesticides and biological controls (BT) continues to be a problem that threatens our industry. Research into new biological control insecticides, natural predators and genetically resistant varieties is a high priority.

Disease control strategies. Cabbage is susceptible to numerous plant pathogens best prevented by genetic resistance. Funds will facilitate

cooperation between the cabbage breeder and plant pathologists (Drs. Tom Zitter and Helene Dillard) to discover untapped disease resistance. In addition, research is needed to insure that growers will have effective chemical control options in the immediate future.

Variety selection. Trials need to be conducted to determine which varieties have the horticultural characteristics needed by the industry. Funding would allow for trials around the state and not just in one or two locations. Researchers in Food Science could identify varieties that make better slaw or producers could work with the Food Venture Center in Geneva to find new "value added" products for cabbage.

Storage. There is need for engineering research to design better refrigerated/ controlled atmosphere storage for cabbage. Control of temperature, humidity and airflow is mandatory if the quality of the stored cabbage is to be maintained. In addition, the use of ozone in storage needs to be demonstrated and researched.

Storage disorders. Each year, storage operators are faced with disorders that occur while the product is stored. A multi-disciplinary project involving a plant breeder, food scientist, postharvest physiologist, and cultural practice researcher is needed to focus on the problem that results in large monetary losses annually.

Soil Fertility. Researchers need to establish guidelines for use of the pre-sidedress nitrate test (PSNT) that will save growers money on their fertilizer bill and reduce the chance of over-fertilization. Research will also focus on whole farm nutrient planning to prepare for the day when fertilizer amendments may be regulated.

Nutritional quality. A plant breeder could select for cabbage high in sulforaphane, the anti-cancer component in crops of the Cruciferae family. The medical evidence in support of the health promotion and nutritional value of cole crops is building.

Eating quality. Per capita consumption of cabbage is modest, but it could rise more easily if cabbage tasted better. It is possible to improve the texture and flavor of cabbage through conventional plant breeding due to the genetic variability in cabbage.

Food safety. Microbial organisms found in irrigation or manure could threaten the safety of our food. This coupled with the fact that cabbage is eaten uncooked in coleslaw or salads, creates a potential health risk for cabbage producers. Research is needed to develop production methods and handling procedures that ensure that all cabbage products are safe.

Promotion and marketing. Although most of this money would be used for applied research, a percentage could be used to fund promotional projects. Communication designed to maximize coverage of cabbage such as press releases, web sites, and promotional field days could be funded.

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