

AMERICAN Vegetable Grower®

2014 VEGETABLE PRODUCTION MARKET OUTLOOK

**A look ahead to 2014 for growers
and those serving the vegetable production market**

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Rising production costs are prompting growers to look for new equipment that is more versatile and multifunctional.

Growers need to catch up with technology, but many feel the ROI is too long. With a seeming lack of new equipment coming out, it's become more about modifying existing models with additional bells and whistles. For example, when configuring planters, one company says it takes harvesting and irrigation practices into consideration.

Labor / immigration reform will continue to be a top concern for growers.

Immigration reform is making progress but may not make it out of the House. The focus on Capitol Hill seems to be on replacing the H-2A program with a more viable and user-friendly option. Meanwhile, this year's large crops could present challenges if growers are unable to line up enough help; not surprisingly, there has been a lot of investment in such equipment used in harvesting processing crops, like canning tomatoes. But that doesn't hold true for most vegetables, which as sold fresh and — with current technology — require hand-harvesting. In some areas of the country, such as New York, some large vegetable producers are considering switching to field corn and other row crops that do not require a significant amount of labor.

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is likely to move forward in the coming months.

As the deadline for implementation of the Produce Safety Rule grows closer, there is still confusion about the outcome, especially among smaller growers whose main concerns are related to water quality and natural fertilizers (manure/compost). While smaller growers may be exempt from certain provisions of the law, they still must treat food safety as a priority. For their part, vegetable groups with different postharvest features (i.e., cantaloupe and watermelon) say being wrapped together with the same rules is unfair.

Government regulators (water, chemicals, healthcare) don't seem to understand farming.

The federal government is perceived as not being educated enough about farming issues, and as being more imports-oriented rather than focused on domestic growers. The looming implementation of the Affordable Care Act adds another wrinkle to this perception. At the same time there are lingering Farm Bill questions; Specialty Crop Research Initiative projects appear safe, but there is still much concern over how they will be funded. For growers in

the Western U.S., water scarcity continues to be a pressing issue, especially in years when the snow pack in the mountains is below normal, such as this year. The scarcity may have further impact on regulations.

Seed varieties are being bred for sustainable production, longer harvest window and shelf life. The latest seed trials showed vegetable varieties with extended shelf life, some bred for fresh-cut (watermelon) and field-holding capabilities (cantaloupe). Breeders are striving for varieties that require less water and can withstand shipping long distances.

Sustainable production, new chemistries, alternatives to methyl bromide and biologicals hit the market.

Crop protection companies are trying to get the message out on how to produce more efficiently in greater quantities with fewer resources as water becomes scarcer, ag land disappears, and the world population continues to increase. More crop protection companies are acquiring biological products or dipping into the market. The industry continues to seek alternatives to methyl bromide; other products are not likely to be total replacements, so more products and practices are needed to fight soilborne pests and diseases.

Bees / pollinators are endangered.

The mainstream media increasingly is placing the blame for bee losses on pesticides, especially neonicotinoid insecticides. Crop protection companies are trying to promote their focus on bee health, while growers continue to weigh various impacts and how they can be prepared. Efforts are now being directed to better labeling of crop protection products over banning them.

Weather / climate change is worsening.

Simply put, weather is becoming harder to predict, whatever its cause. In California a lack of snow could mean water scarcity next winter. Last year's extremely warm spring had vegetable growers very concerned that insects would be rampant. It wasn't the case, but there is concern about how to deal with extreme changes in weather, with increasing interest in pattern/prediction and crop protection/growing systems and tools.

Invasive pests, new disease issues.

Invasive pests, though not as severe as with fruit growers, are a problem with vegetable growers. The medfly, which impacts numerous crops, is now en-

trenched in California. Potato growers are dealing with Zebra Chip, which is still considered to be a relatively new disease vectored by the potato psyllid. Brown mar-morated stink bug populations are increasing across the country, and the Bagra-da bug is a concern to growers in the deserts of California and Arizona.

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The locally grown movement grows.

Walmart is reemphasizing locally grown produce, and farmers markets are on the increase, according to USDA, and consumers are looking for a face to put on the produce they are buying. Is agriculture becoming cool? It would appear so, given the rise of reality shows like “Farm Kings.” Even larger growers are establishing so-called agri-tainment operations.

ABOUT AMERICAN VEGETABLE GROWER

American Vegetable Grower serves as a top information source for specialty crop growers seeking information about production techniques, crop protection, farm management, new varieties, and more. Our readers are commercial vegetable growers as well as other allied professionals in the specialty agriculture industry.

GrowingProduce.com is the digital location to find out the latest news and trends in the fruit, vegetable, and citrus sectors. The site features relevant content from integrated, cross-market resources *American Vegetable Grower* as well as *American Fruit Grower* and *Florida Grower* magazines. Featured videos, useful analysis, and opinion help round out this industry resource.

American Vegetable Grower corporate headquarters are located in Willoughby, OH, in the Cleveland metro area where its parent company, Meister Media Worldwide, was founded in 1932.

ABOUT MEISTER MEDIA WORLDWIDE

Meister Media Worldwide, headquartered in Willoughby, Ohio, provides integrated media solutions for worldwide specialized agriculture. A leader in the industry, the company provides information and networking opportunities to global markets, including fruits and citrus, vegetables, cotton, ornamental horticulture, precision agriculture, plant protection, and Latin American agriculture. Founded in 1932, Meister Media Worldwide now produces 13 regular magazines, along with eNewsletters and more than 20 websites, as well as trade shows and exchange events. In addition, Meister produces custom print products, web development, videos, and strategic business development services. Contact us at www.MeisterMedia.com.

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