The Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues makes progress on MRL Extrapolation and crop groups.

Rutgers University’s slogan, “Jersey Roots, Global Reach” has another success story to add to its tradition. The IR-4 Project, a national support program headquartered at New Jersey State Agricultural Experiment Station, develops data required by the US EPA to allow registration of modern, often lower risk, pesticides on specialty (sometimes called minor) crops. Specialty crops include most fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and ornamental horticulture. IR-4 concentrates one area of its food and herb research efforts on a system known as crop grouping.

Crop grouping allows tolerance establishment for an entire group of similar crops, by conducting residue research on only one or two crops that represent the entire group. In the U.S. crop grouping is a well-accepted and is a very cost effective approach for the establishment of pesticide tolerances. Crop Grouping/Classification is also used globally to help harmonize Maximum Residue Limits (MRL) on crop groups and to provide maximum crop protection in a more efficient manner. The US crop grouping regulation has brought great benefit to growers, researchers, agri-chemical companies as well as regulatory agencies. IR-4 has been a major contributor of data and research resources for crop grouping since the concept began in 1971.

With the rapid development of global food crop markets and import/export activities, an expansion of the crop grouping scheme was warranted. In 2002, the USDA and IR-4 sponsored “The International Crop Grouping Symposium” where attendees proposed to expand the current scheme through adding significant numbers of “new crops” specifically the introduction of many Asian crops that are now popular in New Jersey and revisions to the previously identified “crop groups”. In 2003, the IR-4/EPA Crop Grouping Working Group was formed to gather data and bring the new proposals to federal regulation. In order to assist this effort, IR-4 spearheaded the establishment of an International Crop Grouping Consulting Committee (ICGCC) which included over 200 people, representing 40 countries, with expertise in crops, regulatory initiatives and agri-chemical development.

Shortly thereafter, The Canada and U.S. Codex delegations discussed opportunities that the crop group initiative could bring to better harmonize international as part of an ongoing revision of the Codex system of Classification of Foods and Animal Feeds. The proposal was accepted by the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR).

This project is chaired by Delegations from the Netherlands and the U.S., is expected to become the international cornerstone for harmonization of crop grouping schemes internationally and use of common nomenclature that will ultimately harmonized MRLs and allow greater commodity trade among countries and open more markets for U.S. growers.

The acceptance and use of representative commodities by Codex is particularly important for growers of specialty crops because of the considerably more efficient use of scarce resources to develop regulatory data on these crops. After six years of effort a huge milestone was achieved this year. The CCPR agreed to forward the first set of completed commodities to the Codex Commission for implementation, which will revise the Classification of all fruit commodity groups. This group includes peaches, plums, cherries and other stone fruit, apples, pears and other pome fruit, blueberry, cranberry raspberry and other berries/small fruit, and assorted tropical and subtropical fruits. The CCPR also decided to fully implement the use of crop groups and representative commodities for all fruit commodity groups. Final publication and adoption of these new classifications is expected this summer.

This effort will benefit New Jersey growers in obtaining safe effective pest control products for their locally grown fruits and will also give them access to global markets for exporting their produce. It also helps regulators make more cost effective decisions, saving taxpayer dollars. Just as important, this
“Jersey Roots” research has provided an avenue for nations to agree on MRL standards, and the “Global Reach” of this research will help the developing world with economic growth.