
THE IR-4 COMMODITY LIAISON COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT

IR-4's Commodity Liaison Committee (CLC) was formed in 1991. The CLC provides guidance on how to best serve minor crop producers. Most importantly, the CLC works tirelessly to keep their Congressional representatives informed about the valuable work being done by IR-4 and the need for increased federal funding to continue that work. We are spotlighting individual members of the CLC on a regular basis to provide a better understanding of the work they do for minor crop agriculture.

Cherry Marketing Institute

Red tart cherries are king in Michigan. Seventy to seventy-five percent of U.S. production occurs there on 28,100 acres along the western side of the state. Other states with commercial crops of tart cherries are Utah, New York, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Oregon and Washington produce some tart cherries but their focus is primarily on sweet cherries. Tart cherries, often called sour or pie cherries, are harvested with mechanical shakers and processed immediately by freezing, canning or drying. Yields can vary dramatically from year to year depending on weather. Generally, the U.S. crop ranges from 275 to 350 million pounds with a farm value of 35-60 million dollars.

The Cherry Marketing Institute (CMI) is a non-profit promotion and research organization with the mission of increasing demand for cherries through market expansion and promotion. CMI was formed in 1988 and is funded by tart cherry growers in Michigan, New York, Wisconsin and Utah. CMI President and Executive Director, Philip J. Korson II, leads the professional staff of four who are responsible for the wide-ranging involvement of CMI with the cherry industry. A well-designed and user-friendly web site (<http://www.cherrymkt.org>) offers a variety of information and promotions about cherries. CMI also exhibits at trade shows and sponsors promotions with food manufacturers and food service directors. Cherries have become a worldwide commodity and CMI is working to increase the market for cherries abroad. The Institute represents growers in national and international issues relating to production and keeps growers abreast of trade and consumer trends.

Cherry production in the U.S. has been consistently above consumption levels. In an attempt to reverse the declining

demand for tart cherries, CMI-sponsored research has been initiated to find new uses. A promising new meat product uses cherries as a binder to increase flavor, add juiciness, increase shelf life and reduce total fat. Exciting new health benefit work finds that the compounds making cherries red may relieve pain and inflammation better than aspirin or ibuprofen. Cherries may also provide antioxidant protection comparable to vitamin E and C supplements. Work is underway to make dietary supplement pills from cherries that provide the same benefits as eating actual cherries. Dried red tart cherries are also a new market opportunity showing tremendous potential for this very innovative industry.

CMI has invested heavily in research and strongly believes in being pro-active and visionary in its objectives. As an organization they believe in partnerships that leverage their resources and result in research that makes a difference for farmers. CMI also works closely with USDA, EPA and elected officials to ensure that people understand the impacts, problems and concerns of the farmers in the cherry industry. The Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) has placed the cherry industry in a dilemma. USDA requires zero tolerance for cherry fruit fly maggot in harvested fruit. However, the only fully effective means of preventing infestation is with the organophosphate insecticides that FQPA threatens to reduce or eliminate altogether. CMI has presented these and other concerns of the tart cherry industry to Congress and the EPA. With support from CMI, the Michigan Cherry Committee received an EPA Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program (PESP) grant in 1997 to investigate alternative strategies for maggot control. Other areas of CMI-supported research include variety and root-stock trials as well as work with fertilization, irrigation and pruning.

CMI is a strong supporter of the IR-4 Project. "IR-4 is an example of a very effective partnership that brings together registrants, farmers, EPA and universities to pool resources and target key tools for the future," said Phil Korson. "The future of the industry will be our ability to deliver to market products that are acceptable to the consumer and that meet the new environmental regulations that we all face. IR-4 is a key partner in the registration of new tools and the reregistration of old tools. Together, with IR-4, we all benefit."

Article by Sandy Perry