

A Look at Central Maryland Agriculture

— by Van Starner, IR-4 Assistant Director

On June 22, 2016, IR-4 hosted a daylong tour looking at specialty crop agriculture in central and northcentral Maryland. This was the 18th tour that IR-4 Headquarters has offered as an educational opportunity for colleagues from all divisions of OPP at EPA who make regulatory decisions about new uses for various pest management tools for growers. Participants experienced a personal look at



farming practices and hear first-hand from growers about their pest issues and challenges. This year, tour participants visited four specialty crop farms, each with a unique operation and consumer target for their products.

The first stop was at Larriland Farms in Woodbine, MD, where participants rode tractor-pulled wagons with straw bale seats and learned about fruit and vegetable production (like strawberries, cherries, caneberries, peaches, apples, spinach, beets, tomatoes, potatoes, broccoli, etc.) on a 95% “pick your own” farm, where more than 5 acres are dedicated for customer parking! Tourgoers heard about the farm’s reliance on Integrated Pest Management practices to manage insect, disease and weed pests, using pesticides as-needed based on crop scouting and often only as a last resort. Strict adherence to product PHIs

(pre-harvest intervals) is critical, with u-pick customers in the orchards and fields daily.

At the second stop, Baugher’s Orchards near Westminster, MD, participants took another wagon ride tour of tree fruit, small fruit and vegetable production, hearing about their pest management issues and challenges. Baugher’s sell much of their produce through their retail farm market and restaurant, some pick-your-own, and some



wholesale and shipping from their packing operation. Tourgoers watched a “Smart Sprayer” airblast demonstration, a hi-tech sprayer with sensors that turn off the spray mechanism when it senses gaps in tree rows. Participants also were exposed to various boom sprayers used to apply various pest control products - from a 100-ft boom, Hi-boy rig used in sweet corn, to a custom made shielded sprayer for applying herbicides to control weeds between black-plastic covered strawberry beds.



First time tourgoers (l-r) Andrew Reighart, Vince Chen and Nathan Sell.



Following a BBQ lunch and browsing Baugher’s market, the tour moved on to the next stop at One Straw Farm in Whitehall, MD. This 175-acre vegetable operation supplies customers with organically-grown produce. Participants learned how organic growers manage pest issues using, as needed, pesticides certified for use in organic agriculture, and about the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program which serves as the primary outlet for their produce (in addition to direct sale to local restaurants and at various farmers’ markets in the Baltimore/D.C. area). During a leisurely walk around the farm, tourgoers saw the CSA packing house, hoop houses where they grow some vegetables and all their seedlings for transplant into the field, and row upon row of crops like potatoes, kale, broccoli, cabbage, onions, leeks and sweet corn. The nutritive and water-preserving value of compost was also highlighted.

The last stop on the tour was Bell Nursery in Burtonsville, MD. Through a grower network of 40 family farms, Bell grows annuals, perennials, trees, shrubs and other specialty plants exclusively for The Home Depot in the mid-Atlantic region and bordering states. In a brief video and walking tour, participants learned about Bell’s plant production processes and challenges they face in managing pest issues while adhering to the standards required by their customers (such as no use of neonicotinoid insecticides). Bell described work they have been

continued on next page



doing regarding safety to our pollinators, including results that support the premise that loss of honey bee colonies is due to a complex of stresses, including Varroa mites, hive beetles and other bee hive pests, loss of habitat and depletion of nutritional resources, exposure to pesticides, the stress of being moved all over the country for pollination of crops, etc.

After an enlightening but way too short visit at Bell Nursery, participants enjoyed a Tex-Mex buffet dinner in Burtonsville, wrapping up a long day that was information-packed and further strengthened the relationship between IR-4 and colleagues at the EPA.