

NE_temp1422: Reaction to MAC Review [E-mail dated May 21, 2008]

Dear Dr. Rossi,

As acting chairperson of NE1018, I am writing to inform you of the steps we have taken to address the concerns of the Multistate Activities Committee regarding our proposal for renewal of the Postharvest Biology of Fruits project, NE_TEMP1422. The MAC deemed that Objective 3 (Develop technologies and practices that optimize market returns and promote increased consumption of health-beneficial fruits through preservation or improvement of fruit quality attributes) is essential to the project, but there was no clear indication that the expertise was available to address it. Consequently, it was suggested that an economist or marketing research expert be identified who could contribute the expertise required to meet Objective 3. In response to this suggestion, we have recruited Dr. Chengyan Yue, a recent Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota, to formally participate in NE_TEMP1422. In addition, we have received a pledge that two newly hired assistant professors in the Cornell Department of Applied Economics & Management, Drs. Miguel Gomez and Bradley Rickard, will participate in the new project after coming onboard in July. Miguel and Brad have expertise in horticultural management and marketing, and were hired to conduct research on economics and marketing of horticultural products, including fruit issues important to New York and the Northeast horticultural sector. At Dr. Yue's suggestion, sub-objectives 2b (Development of application protocols for small farms) and 3d (Fruit phytonutrients / antioxidants and human health) in the Methods section of the project proposal have been modified to include economic / marketing studies. The conclusion of 2b now reads, "Postharvest handling practices for emerging fruit crops (non-apple) will be optimized for small-scale farmers. Cost-benefit analyses of these practices will be performed using economic models." The last statement in 3d is now, "The influence of quality attributes, including antioxidant properties, on consumer purchasing preferences will be evaluated." We anticipate that Drs. Gomez and Rickard will also contribute to these studies and/or incorporate their own marketing studies aimed at meeting the goals of Objective 3.

The Committee also voiced a concern about our lack of expertise to conduct clinical studies on the nutritional and human health benefits of fresh fruits. To fill this gap, we have added several new members to the project, including Dr. Mary Ellen Camire from Food Science & Human Nutrition at the University of Maine, Dr. Amy Howell in Phytonutrients Research at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Dr. Rui Hai Liu from Food Science at Cornell University, and Dr. Joseph Scheerens from Horticulture & Crop Science at Ohio State University. With these additions to the group, we now have a strong nucleus of researchers with a common interest in the health benefits of berry fruits, thus adding more diversity to our project, which traditionally has focused mainly on pome fruits. We do, however, anticipate continued emphasis on apple quality, and Dr. Liu, renown for his research on the health benefits of phytochemicals in apple, will add a new dimension to this work. Finally, new members Dr. Donald Huber (University of Florida) and Dr. Gene Lester (USDA-ARS, Weslaco, Texas) bring expertise for studies on the postharvest sensory and nutritional quality of melon fruits, and other fruits of tropical and sub-tropical origin.

We hope that with these additions of expertise in economics, marketing, nutrition, and clinical studies, as well as diversification in the types of fruits being researched, the MAC will deem that approval of the proposal for NE_TEMP1422 is now warranted. We would very much appreciate your input and suggestions so that approval of the new Postharvest Biology of Fruits project will be granted at the MAC meeting in June. A copy of the revised proposal, with the added economic / marketing studies highlighted in yellow on pages 11 & 13 and an updated list of participants (Appendix A) is attached for your perusal.

Sincerely,

Bruce Whitaker
Research Plant Physiologist
USDA-ARS Produce Quality & Safety Laboratory