

Northwest Ohio Greenhouse Cluster Champion's Report September- October 2005

1. Greenhouse Contacts

Thirty-six greenhouse owners/managers were contacted during this period, either face-to-face, on the telephone or by leaving written materials at their operation. In several instances I left information about the cluster and then followed up with a phone call or stopped at the operation again. In one case I stopped three times before I could speak with the manager. Most of the contacts (25) were face to face while I spoke to six over the phone and left written information for the rest. Several of those I spoke to were harvesting vegetables or had other commitments so I'll talk to them later this month. One individual was not at all interested in speaking with me.

2. Knowledge about the Cluster

Most of those I spoke to had heard about the Cluster initiative through various sources, mostly the mailings that have been sent out. However, in at least six instances those I spoke to had not heard of our activities. In one case the mailing address was incorrect while in the rest they should have been receiving information from the cluster.

3. Branding initiative

Almost all were either supportive or neutral when asked about a local brand, with a few (all retailers) enthusiastic. One expressed dissatisfaction with other branding efforts (Ohio Grown) and one wholesaler didn't see any benefit to his operation.

4. Energy costs

Energy was a concern for everyone. Most, however, had no specific plans to increase energy use efficiency. Several were looking into or had bought wood/corn burners to heat parts of their operation. I mentioned the proposed tax credit for energy efficient heating units in the 2006 farm bill to several but pointed out that just getting the credit did not financially justify unplanned equipment upgrades. One grower mentioned his willingness to contact neighboring greenhouses about a combined order for propane. I've initiated efforts to overlay greenhouse locations with natural gas availability to determine areas where bulk propane purchases may be of advantage.

5. System for combining order

One smaller grower mentioned that he was forced to buy more plugs, liners etc that he wanted to meet minimum orders. He would be interested in a system where orders for specific plants/cultivars from several small growers could be combined to reduce over ordering.

6. Size of the industry

These numbers are based upon data from 25 operations

Square feet under cover: 3,826,000 Average: 153,000 Range: 2,660– 512,000

Square feet outside (4): 277,500 Average: 69,400 Range: 1,000 – 261,000

Full time jobs: 205 Average: 8.2 Range: 1 – 45

Seasonal jobs: 415 Average: 16.6 Range: 0 - 52