

Second Annual Mushroom Task Force Strategic Planning Event

November 2, 2017

Summary Report

Submitted by Joy Drohan, science writer and editor, Eco-Write, LLC

Executive Summary

The Department of Plant Pathology and Environmental Microbiology (PPEM) at Penn State University (PSU), organized the Second Annual Mushroom Industry/Penn State Strategic Planning Event. The goal was to reassess the state and urgency of the Pennsylvania mushroom industry's most pressing issues, as identified at the group's 2016 meeting, and discuss how they might benefit from Penn State research. The time frame considered was about 5 years into the future.

Attendees (Appendix A) included key representatives of the mushroom industry in Pennsylvania, including the American Mushroom Institute (AMI) and the Mushroom Council. From PSU, faculty vital to the success of mushroom research and faculty from disciplines that could advance mushroom research attended and/or were invited.

The meeting began with brief introductions and an update on the state of mushroom research at PSU. *Bull noted that a ~\$1 million grant from OREI was a direct result of last year's meeting.* Three PSU faculty new to the mushroom industry presented short summaries outlining their recent research and how it could apply to the industry.

- **Lee Ahern**, associate professor of advertising and public relations in the Donald P. Bellasario College of Communications, discussed ways he and/or his colleagues might be helpful in meeting the industry's communications challenges, including fly issues and making neighbors more aware of the industry's economic importance.
- **Kathy Sexsmith**, new assistant professor of rural sociology in the College of Ag, discussed her work with immigrant farm workers and farm owners in New York's dairy industry and how lessons learned there might be transferred to the mushroom industry.
- **Dana Choi**, new assistant professor in ag and biological engineering in the College of Ag, discussed the use of intelligent sensing systems for automatic data acquisition to reduce production costs and increase productivity. She previously worked in the citrus industry on yield forecasting and inspecting postharvest fruit for defects.

Next, the group agreed on a vision statement for these annual meetings as proposed by Daniel Rahn of AMI: *The Penn State mushroom strategic planning meeting brings together leaders from the industry and academia, acting as the unified voice of the U.S. mushroom industry, to outline challenges and opportunities facing the industry, evaluate areas of expertise and resources available, and document gaps and develop strategies to fill them.*

The group agreed to meet again next year on Thursday, November 1, 2018, in the Kennett, PA, area, and to extend invitations to other major players in the industry from California, Texas, and Oklahoma. AMI board members should also be invited.

Next, participants each listed what they saw as the top three issues facing the PA mushroom industry today, and these issues were explored and prioritized:

- Labor—attracting and keeping labor, including at the management level; labor efficiency; succession planning
- Materials/Substrate—sustainability of peat and/or a replacement for it; increasing outputs and decreasing inputs
- Technology—integrating harvest-assist technology; mechanization; efficiency; hand-held data-gathering devices and web-based apps

Penn State's needs from the industry were discussed next:

- Student internships
- Graduate assistantships
- Funding to continue to coordinate IR-4 pesticide regulatory work

The group set short-term goals to be accomplished in 2018 and 2019. These include:

- improved communications on fly management and the industry's value to local communities,
- industry discussion of how best to address regulatory issues, and
- efforts to foster succession planning in the industry.

Action items were identified and tasks were assigned to meet opportunities and challenges.

Industry Attendees

Stephen Anania, Oakshire Mushroom Farm
Jim Angelucci, Phillips Mushroom Farms, Inc.
Shawon Gibbons, Mushroom Council
Geoff Price, Giorgi Mushroom Co.
Daniel Rahn, AMI
Christine Smith, L.F. Lambert Spawn Co.
Mark Wach, Sylvan, Inc.

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PSU Attendees

Lee Ahern, communications
Tom Baker, entomology
David Beyer, plant pathology
Carolee Bull, plant pathology
Dana Choi, ag engineering
Nina Jenkins, entomology
John Pecchia, plant pathology
Kathy Sexsmith, rural sociology

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