



Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

THE STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION – 2008

Success comes in cans, failure in can't.

- Unknown Author

The success of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association in 2008 came in a lot of 'cans' and a persistent attitude. And although we cannot categorize the year as a 100% success, as an organization we achieved success in much of our work. GFVGA's accomplishments and achievements were realized because we looked at what we 'can do' not at the barriers of what we 'cannot do'.

While the top produce story this year would most likely be considered the tomato 'Salmonella *saint paul*' fiasco, your association worked hard to address the outbreak and try to overcome the negative publicity being generated by FDA and CDC statements. However, this crisis still provided many 'cans' for GFVGA to be successful in the future. Due to the outbreak, the association is now focused on the overall communication needs of Georgia's produce industry. We are pulling together a crisis management team so if a similar situation occurs in the future our industry will be better prepared. As we move forward, GFVGA will continue to succeed by working with and helping our growers, suppliers and industry partners through mutual cooperation. We have been fortunate the GFVGA leadership over the years has been committed to the GFVGA member and insuring this organization serves the needs of our industry.

During the past twelve months I have had the honor to serve as President of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. It has been a privilege to work with a group of tremendously committed individuals serving as GFVGA officers, directors and Advisory Council members. This group has continued the same high level of commitment demonstrated by past leaders, and expanding member services to better serve you. The following are a few highlights of GFVGA's accomplishments during 2008.

- **MEMBERSHIP in GFVGA.** As of December 31, 2008 GFVGA membership totaled 296 an increase of 21.3% over 2007. The association has 152 grower members, 37 associate, 63 allied, 42 honorary and members. 64% of the members are growers. While we had a membership fee increase in 2008, we believe the membership recognizes the value of a GFVGA membership and we continue to see growth.
- **LEGISLATIVELY, GFVGA PROVIDED STRONG INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP IN 2008.**
 - GFVGA played a significant role on the Specialty Crop Steering Committee working to insure our Southeastern fruit and vegetable growers were represented as the Farm Bill was passed and as the new farm programs have been implemented during the year.
 - GFVGA provided 'southeastern' leadership with visits and communications to our congressional delegations. In addition the association holds two seats on the United Fresh Produce Association Government Relations Committee, the GFVGA Executive Director serves on United's Board of Directors and the GFVGA President serves on the USDA Secretary of Agriculture's Fruit and Vegetable Advisory Council.
 - The industry coalition initiated in 2003 which includes GFVGA, Georgia Peach Council, Vidalia Onion Business Council, and Georgia Blueberry Association continued to utilize the services of Bob Redding for our governmental affairs representation in Washington.

- GFVGA continues to communicate the need for comprehensive immigration reform to congressional offices. Sherry Sparks serves as a central information exchange with other associations and specialty crop growers regarding labor and immigration reform issues.
- In addition to food safety regulations and testimony on the tomato fiasco, GFVGA spent tremendous time and effort on soil fumigant and buffer restriction comments to EPA.
- Our association provided testimony at four congressional hearings, submitted comment letters, attended 'listening sessions' and made numerous congressional office contacts on behalf of fruit and vegetable growers concerning:
 - 2008 Farm Bill implementation
 - Soil Fumigants and Buffer Restrictions
 - Funds for Fruit, Vegetable and Nut Research
 - Methyl Bromide CUE
 - Food Safety Regulatory Issues
- **COMMODITY PROMOTION** efforts continued in 2008 with a \$250,000 appropriation from the legislature earmarked specifically for 'fruit and vegetable promotion.' These marketing funds provided support for the Georgia Pavilion (over 3000 square feet) at PMA in Orlando. Also included at PMA was a twenty-four-page color insert in *Produce Business*. Other GFVGA marketing programs continued including:
 - Production of the 'SPRING CROPS' and 'FALL CROPS' availability brochures. These were mailed to over 1,000 retail produce buyers throughout the eastern United States and Canada.
 - On the farm 'Buyer Visits' continued to bring in out-of-state buyers to visit Georgia fruit and vegetable growers and see first hand how Georgia's quality produce is grown and packed.
- **THE 'GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES' FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM** was continued through an educational partnership cooperative agreement awarded by the USDA - Risk Management Agency. GFVGA members have this program available to them to become officially certified in FOOD SAFETY on the farm. Currently there are over 30 GFVGA members GAP Certified.
- **GFVGA SUPPORTED THE GA Commodity Commission for Vegetables.** Providing staff resources to help move the commission forward, GFVGA strongly endorsed the vegetable marketing order which passed with a 80% margin in February. The commission awarded the first research grants in December, 2008 totally over \$80,000.
- **THE ASSOCIATION CONTINUED** to improve membership services through,
 - In 2008 a transportation logistics program in cooperation with CH Robinson was implemented to provide better access to trailers to move produce.
 - *The Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Grower News* and the www.gfvga.org web site
 - Working with other commodity groups to sponsor the SE Regional Fruit and Vegetable Conference and Trade Show.
 - GFVGA also received block grants in 2008 to support the school Fruit and Vegetable Fresh Snack Program, Crisis Communications and Food Safety Traceability Education.

GFVGA is focused to continue to be the 'voice' of Georgia's fruit and vegetable industry. GFVGA needs your involvement in legislative activities . . . get to know your legislator . . . write letters to Washington and Atlanta . . . call your representative . . . participate in GFVGA meetings and activities. Be heard!!

The GFVGA leadership is committed, we need your commitment. Together we can make things happen!!

William L. Brim, President