TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER: A FARM PERSPECTIVE

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As production manager for a large corporate farming operation, with farms throughout the southeastern USA, it is my responsibility to insure consistent and profitable production levels of high quality vegetable crops every year, on a crop by crop basis. Double cropping is an important component of our farming practices and production goals. Methyl bromide is now used extensively in our farming operation to manage, prior to planting, unforseen and unpredictable crop losses from soilborne pests and diseases; to insure consistent production levels; as well as provide a way to maintain our labor force and packinghouse operation.

In addition to soil fumigation with methyl bromide, other IPM strategies which we simultaneously employ for soil pest management include, use of pest resistant crop varieties, natural flooding, cultural practices, and summer cover cropping. Our annualized crop rotation scheme is based primarily on economic and marketing factors which consider the costs and problems that come with crop diversification, redistribution, and scheduling of producing acreage. In general, our production practices have been developed, and continue to evolve over time, using and considering information from previous experience and observation, on-farm experimentation, university research and recommendation, consultants, and other people and publications from the agricultural industry.

Based on the information and recommendations supplied from these various different sources, new products and technologies which we decide are worthy of testing are typically evaluated first on a limited basis to determine their merits and benefits. Given the scale of our farm operation, it is not easy for us to trial new methods on a small plot basis. For example, our farm equipment, irrigation system, and crop production and harvesting practices are not easily redesigned to accommodate small plot trials. We must also consider the disruption of our packinghouse operation. Even small changes in our packinghouse operations and efficiency can be an inconvenient and expensive proposition to us. In general, new technology must be fairly well advanced and developed, and fit our current cropping, harvesting and processing system, before we commit to any large scale field trials.

With the pending loss of methyl bromide, and expected changes in farming practices looming on the horizon, we are actively involved in collaborative research with the university on alternatives to methyl bromide so as to be 'production ready' when the phaseout does occur. At the same time however, we have many concerns about the future, including changes in labor and equipment requirements, labor costs and supply, long term consistency and performance of methyl bromide alternatives, international market competition, and changes in future regulatory policy.