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Marketing IPM-Grown Veggies

The burgeoning practice of using IPM (integrated pest management) labels on food began on Cornell's doorstep just four years ago. Executives from Wegmans Food Markets, Inc. approached Cornell in 1994, seeking a way to offer its customers IPM-grown sweet corn. IPM growers limit their chemical pesticide use by enlisting a variety of methods to reduce pest damage, resulting in high-quality crops and a healthier environment.

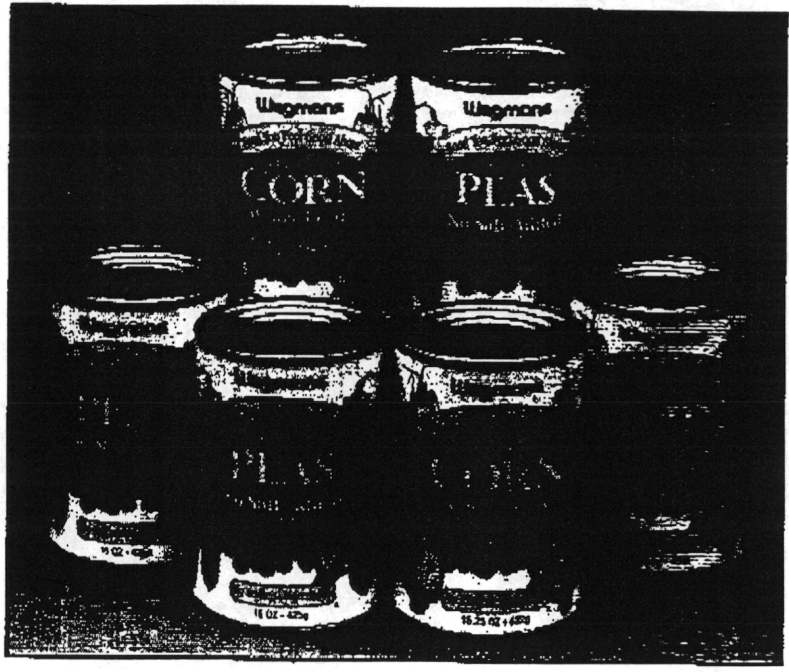
In response to Wegmans' request, Cornell IPM extension educators taught IPM methods to the grocer's sweet-corn suppliers. The first IPM label appeared in 1995 on sweet corn in one Wegmans store. When a survey of its customers showed substantial support for the new label, Wegmans decided to expand the labeling program to include canned and frozen vegetables.

Interested growers met with Cornell IPM extension educators and faculty and with representatives from Wegmans and Comstock Michigan Fruit, its supplier of processed vegetables, to iron out the details involved in marketing food under an IPM label. In 1996, they developed the first "IPM Elements" for six vegetable crops. These Elements establish rigorous integrated pest management and crop management practices for producing crops sold under an IPM label. As of 1999, there are IPM Elements for 16 vegetable and fruit crops in New York.

Growers who produce crops for IPM labels earn points for adopting various techniques included in the Elements. They must achieve a specific point total to market a crop as "IPM grown." Each grower maintains detailed records, which are independently audited, verifying use of these techniques. Wegmans IPM products feature the NYS IPM Program logo, which is owned and licensed by Cornell, on each of its IPM-grown products.

IPM labeling encourages and rewards environmental stewardship, represented in part by reductions in pesticide use. Adoption of 80% of the IPM Elements can result in pesticide reductions of 30-50%. All of the growers currently producing crops for IPM labeling at Wegmans have scored at or above the 80% level each year. Proponents of IPM labeling also see it as a means to educate consumers about IPM and about the environmental stewardship of their farmer neighbors.

Look for IPM labels on bins of fresh corn, tomatoes, cherries, and asparagus and on canned corn, peas, and



Wegmans labels for IPM-grown vegetables include a NYS IPM Program logo inside a blue ribbon and the following text: "Through IPM, growers use less pesticide over time by taking other steps to reduce pest damage. Your purchase supports the efforts of growers who truly care about the environment."

beans in most of the 50-plus stores owned by Wegmans in New York, Pennsylvania, and later this year in New Jersey. Other licensed users of the IPM logo include Eden Valley Growers, members of the New York Berry Growers Association, and Agrilink Foods. The nonprofit IPM Institute of North America will coordinate labeling procedures on the national level as growers across the country join the IPM effort.

—Margaret H. Cowles

Contact IPM at <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/ipmnet/ny/html>.

