

Notes from Northeast Regional Postharvest Planning Meeting

(C. Callahan, with thanks for detailed notes and input from V. Nickerson & N. Richard)

January 29, 2015 – Amherst, MA (Report draft 2015 02 14)

RESULTS – A meeting was held for the purpose of connecting research and extension personnel with interests in the area of postharvest practices from around the Northeast region. The market segment focus of the group was fruits and vegetables. The meeting allowed for sharing current work, discussing common needs, articulating a shared vision and brainstorming on active measures to improve practice. The meeting included representatives from URI, UConn, UMass, UVM, and Cornell. Others from UMaine and UNH expressed interest but were unable to attend this meeting. Disciplines included horticulture, engineering, building science, food safety, food science, and microbiology.

OUTCOMES

1. A nascent **regional network with a common interest in postharvest practices** has been established. This has benefited from earlier work done to establish a network focused on food safety practices (e.g. some common members and sharing of lessons learned). The meeting helped the group to share current work and understand current needs that will likely benefit from transdisciplinary collaboration.
2. **Digital resource sharing** (fact sheets, web sites, reports, etc.) is being accomplished using a cloud-based storage service (DropBox). The group discussed a more complex and tailored approach to sharing these resources, but opted for something simple and existing to allow early use and benefit. Future work may focus on an improved design of this network component.
3. A **shared topic map** has been created to help guide work in the postharvest arena both in the near term and in the long term. The group identified the “packing house” as the central geographic feature that combines the most significant needs and areas of potential impact. (See Figure 1). This construct helped to share language and terminology and to clarify what part of the “postharvest” world we were going to focus on based on our experiences and observations. We also used this map to then identify some early stage actions that could be supported by current work and which could be enhanced by sharing (See Figure 2). This framework also informed the file folder structure of the DropBox file sharing platform (See Figure 3).
4. Several, focused **multi-state projects** have been identified for pursuit as a result of this meeting and subsequent discussions.

SHARED STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

This group seeks to support post-harvest quality, regional food security, linking product quality with safety, improving human well-being, addressing issues of scale and equity: raising the bar across businesses of all scales. Our principles include food safety, worker safety and health, produce quality, access to local food, and business profitability/sustainability.

SHARED GOALS

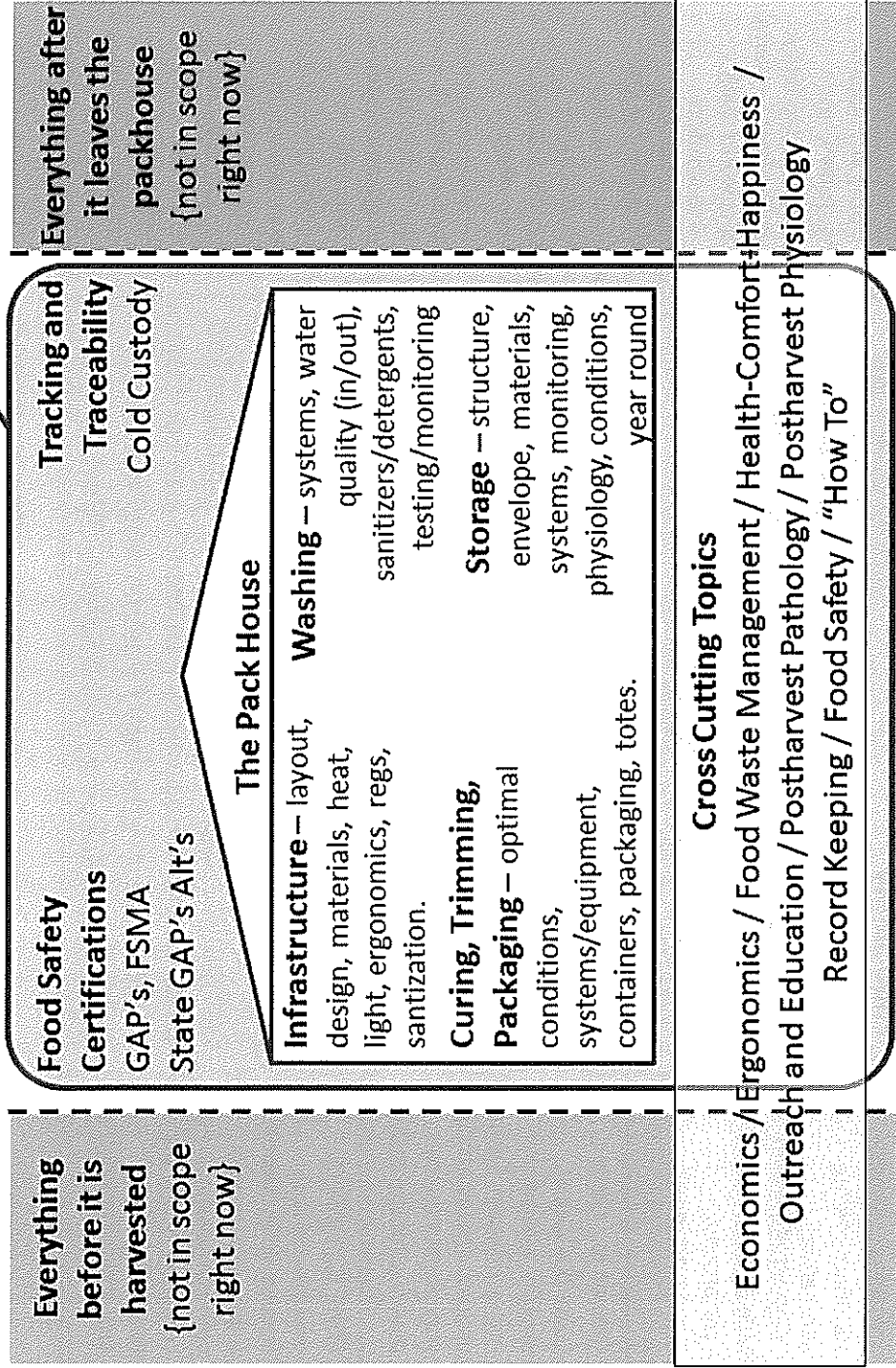
1. Enable northeast regional growers and processors to increase postharvest produce quality, shelf-life and safety with reduced product loss and increased profitability and sustainability.
2. Identify, verify, validate and codify scale appropriate, cost effective and energy efficient materials, infrastructure, equipment and process / structure designs for use in regional postharvest produce systems.
3. Develop and improve research-based knowledge focused on regionally specific scale, climate, product and varietal nuance experienced by growers and processors (e.g. harvest, handling, curing, trimming, storage practices and conditions).
4. Improve the efficiency, quality and impact of regional research and extension activities through coordination, collaboration and resource sharing (e.g. sharing existing resources, coordinated transdisciplinary teaming on joint research, collaborative outreach and educational activities, distributing disciplinary depth).

ACTIONS TO ADDRESS GOALS

1. Establish a cloud-based file and link sharing site for use by the team. Team selected DropBox for early use, may seek a more tailored approach later. [Callahan, by Feb 15]
2. Set a date for a follow-up discussion in late Feb/early March. [Callahan, by Feb 15]
3. Begin uploading existing documents to DropBox for shared review and use (using Drafts/Final subfolders) as follows (and per Figure 2):
 - a. Food Safety Certification Programs [Pivarnik and Hirsch]
 - b. Packing House / Infrastructure [Callahan, Doody, Nickerson]
 - c. Packing House / Washing [Bihn, Grubinger, Haddad, Hirsch, Pivarnik, Kinchla]
 - d. Packing House / Trimming, Curing, Packaging [Callahan, Doody]
 - e. Packing House / Storage [Callahan, Doody]
 - f. Crosscutting [All, but with less priority]
 - g. Tracking/Traceability [All, but with less priority]
[by March 3]
4. Summarize the status of each topic based upon assignments in #3 using the following template
 - a. Existing resources / case studies / knowledge (essentially what has been put in DropBox)
 - b. What gaps exist in resources (extension / training needs)
 - c. What gaps exist in knowledge (research questions)
 - d. What are specific problems that are recurring which we could address as part of a larger project
 - e. Good examples of stakeholder input to demonstrate need and importance.
[by March 3]
5. Draft outline, problem statement, proposed solution and components of solution to further work of this group; target NIFA SCRI CAP call expected in April 2015. [Callahan, by March 3]

Postharvest Defined

The part we plan to focus on...for now.



Based on discussion 2015 01 29 Amherst MA

Figure 1 - Our shared topic map.

