

Young Growers Visit Two Market Wonders

By Alana Anderson, Young Grower Alliance member

December 6 was a cold, damp morning, but spirits certainly lifted for the 15 Young Grower Alliance members as we gathered under the porch of Brown's Farm Market in Loganville, Pa. We were greeted by the cheerful proprietor and his orchard production expert, Stan Brown and Matt Etter respectively, whose building is the quintessential on-site farm market. The market is overflowing with fresh fruit in the entrance room, arranged in eye-catching displays, and both well lit and staffed. Every time I turned there was a friendly face ready to answer a question or assist in finding an item. Stan and Matt walked us through all of the many rooms behind the market floor. The Browns put a lot of effort into finding and/or creating niche items that are hard to replicate elsewhere. In fact, their pies and gift baskets are legendary in the surrounding area!

All the attendees were remarkably struck by the quality of organization, product, labor, and family contribution at Brown's Farm Market. In every room we visited, from the cider press area, cold storage, bakery, to the newly added Brown Bean Cafe, all available space was devoted to ideal product placement. The majority of the YGA present own on-site markets or sell their produce at farmer markets in nearby cities, thus the high level of presentation and marketing not only caught our eyes from a visual perspective, it also gave us valuable tips for growing our businesses, as well.

The group then traveled to Strites' Orchard Farm Market, located north of Harrisburg, to see how their operation incorporates the store, as well as their new venture into community supported agriculture (CSA). The Strite family farming history began in 1843, but the first fruit trees were planted by Joseph C. Strite in 1914. Over time, the family acquired 300 acres which they now use to sustainably grow their fruits and vegetables. Matt and Jon Strite welcomed the group in the store, where many staple veggies were on display. However, Matt and Jon convinced their parents to also plant vegetables native to many families who have immigrated to

the area. We saw Bok Choy, Tat Soi, specialty squashes and pumpkins, and many other Asian and European known varieties. This has opened the door for new customers at Strites', and has given them the incentive to explore new selections as well as new ways to grow their vegetables. Matt related to us a story of updating the watering system in the greenhouses to greatly reduce labor and allow for time to be used more efficiently elsewhere.

The tour was geared toward two themes: crop diversification and innovative marketing. At both locations, the unequivocal decision by the families to address both themes has led to their great success. While the transition may be difficult, it is evident that the decision to pursue greater variety among your crops and capitalize on alternate marketing strategies generates positive results. Not only can diversity prolong your growing season, it expands your customer base.

Thanks to Stan and David Brown, and Matt Etter at Brown's Orchards and Farm Markets for a wonderful tour and a delicious lunch! Thank you to Matt and Jon Strite for showing us how you have helped the farm transition and the developments you plan to pursue in the near future! Anyone interested in joining the Young Grower Alliance should contact your local Penn State extension office or visit our website at <http://younggrowers.org>.