

Good Sprout News

ISGA SPROUTERS NEWSLETTER MARCH 2009

It has been a while since we last published a newsletter and the Board have been working together to ensure we get these out more regularly to keep you up to date with the happenings within the ISGA. 2009 is a milestone year for the association with our 20th year in existence. A big hats off to all those who have volunteered their time and effort over the years to keep the association running. Barb Sanderson has kindly agreed to write us a history of the organization which will be included over the next few newsletters that I am sure will be of interest to all.

2009 also marks the 10th anniversary of the FDA sprout guidance document, a much discussed and debated issue within the organization that has had far reaching implications for all sprout businesses globally, more about this from Bob later...

Thanks to Jay Louie who has put together a “challenge” to all members to give us some feedback as to what you want to see in the newsletter as the ISGA is driving to improve the benefits and value members receive from the association and we can only do this by understanding what our members are after from us.

The ISGA board has also agreed to run a membership drive over the next few months and we have been working on some incentive programs to assist with this drive, while these have not been finalised they will be over the next few weeks and we will send out information regarding this as soon as it is available, watch this space!!!!

We look forward to seeing you all in Chicago!!!

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE ISGA NEWSLETTER

I have always felt that the newsletter was the principal link between members. When the ISGA was started some twenty (20) years ago, I had always looked forward to receiving the ISGA newsletter. Ages ago, we felt like we were the only sprout grower in the business, besides our competitors. But to our surprise, there were over a hundred sprout growers just in the United States alone.

The ISGA is a non-profit membership organization. Key members of the association volunteer their time and energy to run the association. The ISGA did have a paid executive director at one time, but that was short lived. The sprouting industry was not made of wealthy entrepreneurs running multi-million dollar businesses. Membership fees rarely generated enough funds for the treasury to warrant a full time paid staff member to work on projects for the membership, or to even answer the telephone.

The ISGA newsletter has gone from a regular quarterly mailer to a maybe once or twice a year news mailing. The organizers of the ISGA had high ambitions, but after years and years of work, volunteered, unpaid work, it has taken its toll on the people who actually took on the responsibility of publishing that newsletter. Twenty years is a long time, and the ISGA membership should thank Barbara Sanderson for taking on that responsibility for many of those 20 years.

I may not be as ambitious as Barb, but I would like to see us get back to an informative means of communication between members. The ISGA is only as good as the effort each individual member puts into the association. For this newsletter, and all future newsletters, members will receive it in the form of an e-mail. I am old fashion, and would like to read a hard copy, but then reality sets in. Who want to print, fold, address and stamp 50 - 80 mailers every few months? If we paid a service to do this, it becomes a very expensive proposition. E-mail is quick and easy to send out, once it is set up. Perhaps we can actually send one out every few months.

News of the past convention and upcoming convention are primarily what you will find in our past newsletters. The ISGA president usually writes us a note of what has been going on in the industry from his/her perspective. Sometimes, we will write an article about a fellow sprout grower. Basically, we arm twist board members to come up with something to publish for each newsletter, and that often delays the newsletter publication. We, perhaps, publish a lot of things you may not be interested in reading. So, my question to you is, "What do you want to see in the ISGA newsletter?"

I would like to see the revival of the Question and Answer column dealing with everyday growing issues. I would like to see updates on what happened in that last recall or outbreak. I would like to know what the FDA is up to these days. I would like to see comments from the membership. But that is just me. What would you like to see published in the newsletter? Please send me your comments by e-mail. The newsletter is being published for you. My e-mail address is LouieFoods@aol.com. Please indicate as the subject of the e-mail "ISGA Newsletter" so I can easily go through the list my spam filter has isolated as being from an unknown sender. I look forward to your comments. - Jay Louie

History of ISGA - Happy 20th Anniversary!

ISGA has its roots in New England. Jonathan's Sprouts, New England's pioneer Alfalfa Sprout company from the 1970s, heard about government grants to promote agricultural commodities and called all the growers in New England. This was the 80's and competition had gotten so bad, the 9 or 10 companies that were selling fresh sprouts to the supermarkets by that time were spending all their sales dollars fighting each other for the business, trading customers like baseball cards. We banded together, forming the New England Sprout Growers Association (NESGA), got some grant money and began creating point of purchase videos and recipe flyers. We hired a PR firm to design an advertising campaign for us, but the budget was way beyond the means of our small group of growers who were still battling with price wars.

That year, Sunsprout Growers Association, a franchised group of Alfalfa Sprout growers from the USA and Canada, were gathering in Maine for their annual meeting. Our NESGA Sunsprout members brought our advertising campaign proposal to their meeting. Two Texas growers in that group knew of an association management firm in California that had brought the Kiwi fruit growers together and, with the financing from a Federal Marketing Order, put Kiwi fruit on the shelves of every supermarket in the country. Together with this management firm, the Sunsprout Growers and the NESGA growers launched the International Sprout Growers Association (ISGA). That was 1989. That was how we began. Next newsletter, learn about our early years.

2009 Convention Update Coincides with the 10th Anniversary of the FDA Guidance recommendations:

For the last several years, ISGA Conventions have been held in locations outside the US. These Conventions have been very professionally hosted, and have been informative, as well as a lot of fun! This year, partly in order to have a location more accessible and affordable to US sprout producers, and partly out of recognition of the need for the US sprouting industry to address issues specific to the US, this year's convention will be held in Chicago. Specifics will be sent out soon.

The NCFST (National Center for Food Safety and Technology) lab, that carried out much of the research behind the 1999 FDA Guidance, is located in Chicago. (see <http://www.ncfst.iit.edu/main/home.html>) The Director of the NCFST, Dr. Martin Cole, as well as several of the researchers there, have expressed interest in participating in the ISGA Convention.

2009 is the 10th anniversary of the issuance of the FDA Guidance recommendations. The Convention will provide a unique opportunity for the US sprouting industry to discuss with the FDA the perceived pros and cons of the Guidance. If there are any ideas or suggestions about how the Guidance could be improved, this will be the time to make a case for a change.

In addition to reviewing the US regulatory situation, the Convention program will as always be of great interest to sprout industry members from all areas around the globe.

Save the Date!

The ISGA Annual Conference will be held June 17-21, 2009 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, Illinois

Come celebrate ISGA's 20th Anniversary and enjoy all that Chicago - and the conference - has to offer!

Top 10 Reasons to Attend the ISGA Conference:

1. Learn what's new in the growing and marketing of sprouts
2. Network with fellow growers, industry experts, sprout consumers, and chefs that are finding new ways to present sprouts to the general public
3. Stay abreast of the latest research in sprout nutrition and safety
4. Support your professional trade association
5. Spread the love of sprouts by increasing our exposure to the public
6. Catch the Organic Expo, All things Organic, Expo Comida Latina & All Asia Food at McCormick Place: www.registernowchicago.com
7. See the sights and experience the rich culture of the "Second City":
8. World-class art museums, jazz and blues, architecture, shopping and fine dining along Chicago's magnificent lakefront
9. Experience a Chicago Cubs baseball game at Wrigley Field (one of the oldest and finest baseball venues)
10. Room rates of only \$199 including breakfast
11. Reconnect with old friends and colleagues
12. An additional Member Benefit: Join the TRB Listserve

The ISGA Technical Review Board is comprised of ISGA members, regulators, researchers and retail chain QA people. These people are on a Listserve that discusses such things as current recalls, current research into new safety measures for sprouts, related news in other commodities, etc. Any news, US, Canadian, Australian, etc. which reaches the members may be discussed on this forum.

The Listserve is open to anyone who wants to join in these technical discussions. If you are a member of the ISGA and would like to receive the TRB emails, please contact office@isga-sprouts.org with the email address that you would like to have the TRB mail sent to and you will be placed onto the listserv. You can also request to be taken off the listserv at any time.