



Picking equipment gets interest at Mid-Atlantic convention

By DOROTHY NOBLE
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HERSHEY, Pa. (May 2014) — Any time CropCare Equipment demonstrated its Picking Assistant at the Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention, a group of curious growers gathered to see how this interesting equipment could enhance their operations.

Developed with strawberry harvesting in mind, the Picking Assistant is a battery-operated field hand in which the worker lies prone for planting, bed maintenance, weeding and harvesting.

The 12-volt deep cycle battery can provide 16 hours or more picking time depending on the terrain. The cart can be towed with a single all-terrain vehicle, tractor or truck and pulled into position by hand. Also, a recharger is part of the standard features.

Two models are available. PA 1400 features dual high torque gear motors, vinyl covered foam adjustable pads, quick-release pins and cushioned handles to adjust the picking height from 20 to 30 inches and a clamp mechanism to adjust the width from 36 to 66 inches. The speed of this model is 22 feet per minute. A 2-year warranty is provided.

PA 1500 includes all the PA 1400 features plus dual 12-volt deep cycle batteries and two speeds—22 and 44 feet per minute.

The all-weather canopy and roll-up side curtains on both protect the operator from sun and rain. This feature can be particularly useful when harvesting.

The produce tray holds five flats. Also, a storage tray at the back can hold supplies or product for greater efficiency.

Sales manager Steve Zook told attendees at the convention's equipment session that the cushions are designed for proper distribution of body weight.

A foot-activated pedal controls the travel speed with a switch for forward or reverse. Steering is controlled by the worker adjusting the steering bar with his left hand.

Zook pointed out that the prone position reduces fatigue considerably by eliminating the stresses of bending and stooping. Back injuries, too, are reduced.

With both hands free, operator speed and efficiency are both facilitated.

In addition, the equipment facilitates more gentle handling of produce or plants, thus maintaining quality. Planting and transplanting a wide array of crops, Zook says, is easier. For example, setting out onions and garlic can be performed much more rapidly. Numerous harvesting applications include picking strawberries and snap beans, cutting asparagus and salad greens of all sizes, pulling radishes, snipping herbs and more.

Zook said a large strawberry producer in Quebec evaluated productivity. In addition to increased worker comfort, he reported that their efficiency increased over 20 percent.

CropCare sales representative Richard Buch agreed. At the Mid-Atlantic convention demonstration he reported, "Growers say there is less operator fatigue. Also, the bottom line is that the growers can prepare a better crop."

Now in its fifth season, about 200 Picking Assistants are in use by various sized growers.

PBZ, LLC, a Paul B. Zimmerman, Inc. company in Lititz, Pa., manufactures the Picking Assistant. More information including a downloadable brochure can be accessed at www.cropcareequipment.com.

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