

Comment Info: =====

General Comment: I am wholeheartedly in favor of the increase, which is strongly needed for important reasons I summarize here.

The National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB) has proven it can work effectively with even a small budget to increase consumer demand for watermelon through promotion and educational programs, which are based on sound research conducted by NWPB. Consumer studies in 2002, 2004 and 2006 show NWPB is indeed getting the job done, with the results showing increased consumption in each timeframe evaluated.

While NWPB is to be congratulated for its good work, in reality the results could

be so much better if only NWPB had more funds. The 2006 research results tell the story, with consumers saying they would purchase more watermelon if:

- 1) Their existing perception of watermelon as a summer fruit were changed. The study concluded this could be achieved through increased promotion positioning it as an all-year-round fruit that the whole family can enjoy;
- 2) More people were aware of watermelon's many health benefits, as only 1/3 of those surveyed were aware of its health benefits. Knowing that watermelon is good for the heart is especially key, with 81% of those surveyed indicating they would be more apt to buy the fruit if they had this information.
- 3) They had greater access to new recipes and appealing ways to incorporate watermelon into their diets, a factor cited as good incentive to buy watermelon more often.

Furthermore, as important as education and promotion are to increasing consumption, equally critical is crisis preparedness to circumvent food scares that could literally derail the industry. Scenarios of other commodities subjected to the brutal effects of unexpected crises are plentiful and serve as a lesson that thorough preparedness is crucial to prevent sales from plummeting.

As director of marketing communications for the association representing the U.S.

apple industry when the Alar scare struck in 1989, I experienced firsthand the tumultuous effects of the crisis that ultimately cost the apple industry many, many millions of dollars in losses and even drove growers out of business. The event had the dubious honor of ushering in a new era of safety concerns about produce, the very food group that had traditionally been viewed as strictly wholesome and healthful.

Now, it is mandatory for each commodity be fully prepared to address food crises head-on, or else be willing to accept the grim consequences. The NWPB simply must have more funds at its disposal to be in a stronger position to deflect any threatening situations that may strike. Otherwise, I can attest that the consequences stand to be devastating.

Maureen Ellis

Public Member
Board of Directors
National Watermelon Promotion Board