

Greetings to all of you,

As you probably know, Shengrui Yao has taken a position at New Mexico State University and the horticulture position at the University of Minnesota NCROC is again vacant. With the severe state of the economy in Minnesota and the U of MN facing potential large budget cuts, there is a strong possibility that the horticulture program at NCROC could be eliminated.

The horticulture program at NCROC has provided reliable information to growers and gardeners for over 60 years! Whether it is apple, strawberry, raspberry, or blueberry cultivar recommendations; the top 10 annual flower cultivar recommendations; or short season vegetable recommendations, NCROC horticulture has assisted you in making those choices. The horticulture program at Grand Rapids developed the cultural management program for blueberries in northern Minnesota, started pioneering work in the high tunnel culture that is becoming so popular in extending our short growing season and enables us to grow vegetables and small fruits that we could never grow before. In 1980, The University of Minnesota and the USDA started a cooperative strawberry breeding program which was located in Grand Rapids to develop hardy strawberry cultivars for the north central United States. Since its beginning, 3 cultivars have been released and 3-5 more will be introduced in the coming years. The NCROC horticulture program has been invaluable to the Department of Horticultural Science in St Paul because of its location and value to their breeding programs. NCROC is the coldest research center in the lower 48 and as such provides a unique environment to evaluate and develop hardy cultivars for cold climates! The latest U of MN Extension Publication "Minnesota Hardy", shows the importance of the location. On the back page is "Snowsweet", my namesake, which we found at NCROC is not hardy for the northern half of Minnesota. Inside the back cover in the section titled "look to the future" are the new Northern Accent roses "Sven", "Ole", and "Lena" all tested at NCROC; the new "wave" chrysanthemums all tested at NCROC; a hardy wisteria, tested at NCROC; a pink fruited blueberry; new black currants; and several new strawberry cultivars to be released as early as 2011 which were "especially selected for productivity and winter hardiness through some cold winters at the North Central Outreach Center in Grand Rapids." The location of Grand Rapids cannot be duplicated and its importance to area gardeners and growers, and the Department of Horticultural Science is so critical to NE Minnesota, the Department, state, and nation.

I think it would be a huge mistake to eliminate the horticulture program at NCROC. You have always been a strong supporter of the horticulture program at NCROC and I am asking for your support again. If you agree and would be willing to write a letter of support it should be addressed to Dr. Emily Hoover with copies sent to Dr. Greg Cuomo and Dr. Dan Erkkila at the addresses shown below. Please write your letter from the heart and what NCROC means to you personally and why the horticulture program at NCROC should continue to go on. Obviously, I have a strong passion for horticulture at NCROC and believe strongly in it. I hope you do too! Thank you for any support you can provide!

Sincerely,

Dave Wildung
Professor Emeritus

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