

Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention to Go Virtual for 2021

This year will be one we will all remember for many years to come as our world has been turned upside down in many ways. While the 2021 Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention will be unlike any of the past 43 annual gatherings of growers in Hershey, the Convention Joint Committee and program chairs are working hard to make sure this year’s virtual event will meet the main goals of the Convention – providing growers with a robust educational program on the latest in growing and marketing practices and enabling them to be in contact with the suppliers of the latest innovations in equipment and supplies.

The virtual format even offers some advantages in that growers will be able to attend the educational sessions and visit the exhibitor “booths” not only during the four days of the Convention but 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week during the rest of February and all of March. There will even be the opportunity to interact by a “chat” function with others attending the virtual Convention – which will serve to tide us over until we have the chance to meet in-person again at the 2022 Mid-Atlantic Convention.

Below are answers to some frequently asked questions about a virtual convention:

**What does virtual mean?**

During COVID-19, it seems everything has gone virtual – school, church, shopping, - and the Mid-Atlantic Convention. That means there will be no in-person educational sessions or industry trade show at the Hershey Lodge this winter, but if you have access to a computer, smart phone or electronic tablet, and the internet, you will be able to hear and see expert speakers from across the nation tell how you can improve your production, marketing and profitability. Plus you will be able to see on the screen what new products and money-saving deals in equipment and supplies industry exhibitors are offering this year in the trade show part of virtual event. Some exhibitors will even be available to “chat” with you online during certain time periods – especially 11:00 a.m. to noon on Tuesday and Thursday.

**What about room reservations?**

Well, the good news is you don’t need any – you can sleep in your own bed for free! (If you already made a reservation, cancel it – or change it to February 1 to 3, 2022 if you can!). Not only will you be saving the cost of your hotel room, you won’t be using any gas driving to Hershey and you can enjoy yet more home-cooked meals. While the virtual format attempts to replicate many aspects of an in-person event, they haven’t developed a virtual banquet platform that is very satisfying so we have not included a banquet in this year’s Convention although we will be offering a bring-your-own Ice Cream Social on February 10. You can enjoy your own ice cream and chips while virtually chatting with other growers (be sure to get some Hershey chocolate syrup or Reese’s Pieces to make the experience more authentic!).

**How much is the registration fee and how do I register?**

This year we are offering a flat registration fee of $40 per person that will enable you to access all the educational sessions, the exhibitor booths, the research posters and the rest of the virtual Convention website not only during the four days of the Convention from February 8 to 11, but 24/7 until the end of March. What better way is there to spend cold winter evenings? Since the Convention itself is online, all registrations will also be online with the payment being by credit card or by check.

**If I miss the Convention dates, will I still need to register and pay to see the recordings of the educational sessions?**

Yes, only people registering and paying the $40 fee will have access to the session recordings, trade show and posters on the virtual Convention website even after February 11. There are substantial costs involved in presenting the Convention virtually that the Convention Joint Committee needs to cover.

**Is there a discount for being a member of one of the sponsoring organizations?**

Not this year – we purposely are keeping the registration fee to a minimum to enable and encourage as many growers as possible to participate in this year’s virtual event – but **PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE** remember thatyour association needs your continued membership to continue to serve you this year and in the coming years. The fact that the in-person Convention in Hershey is not being held this year is a major financial loss to your association so it is very critical that growers continue to support their associations with their membership dues in 2021.

**Will there be a printed program to see what topics and speakers are on the schedule?**

While the sponsoring associations have published tentative program in their respective newsletter, the virtual Convention website will have the final program in a format that you can print out to plan which sessions you want to participate in. Check it out at [www.mafvc.org](http://www.mafvc.org).

**Will I be able to get pesticide credits?**

We are planning to be able to offer pesticide credits for Pennsylvania, Maryland and New Jersey growers as we usually do. Please note that each individual seeking to get pesticide credits will need to register separately and pay the $40 fee. You will enter your pesticide license number, birth date and other contact information when you register. The educational sessions will be offered from the Zoom platform, which allows us to have a record of who is logged on during each presentation that qualifies for a pesticide credit. So just like the in-person event, you will need to be “present” (logged-in) during the particular presentations that qualify for core and category credits in order to receive the credits.

**How will the trade show work?**

Instead of walking up and down the aisles of the Great American Hall or the Aztec Room, you will go to the trade show page on the virtual Convention website and pick which exhibitors you have an interest in “visiting”. They will be grouped by the kind of products or services they offer. When you click on an exhibitor’s booth, you will be able to see a description/pictures of their products or services plus, if the exhibitor desires, any special show deals they are offering, product demonstration videos, or virtual chat portals to enable you to interact with the exhibitor in real time. Exhibitors are most likely to be available for live chats during the period from 11:00 a.m. to noon the Tuesday and Thursday of the Convention although they can set additional hours. Their booths will be available to visit 24/7 from February 8 to March 31, 2021.

**Will all the regular exhibitors be in the virtual trade show?**

All the exhibitors at the 2020 Mid-Atlantic Convention were invited to participate in the virtual trade show. While many long-time exhibitors will be part of the virtual event, some have chosen not to have a virtual booth. We are encouraging them to at least be a sponsor or an advertiser on the virtual Convention website. But one advantage of the virtual trade show is that, unlike an in-person trade show, there are no space limitations to the number of exhibitors. So we are hoping to be able to include some new exhibitors that have been on our waiting list in years past.

**What are research posters?**

At the Hershey Lodge, you may have noticed posters on easels lining the hallway outside the Nigeran and Trinidad Rooms. These posters report on the research work of graduate students and other researchers whose work is supported by industry and/or not included on the program otherwise. The virtual Convention offers the opportunity for researchers to present this type of information in a printed form with text and pictures. In many ways it may be more convenient for you to view posters online at your leisure than in front of an actual poster in a crowded hallway at Hershey. There will be a page on the virtual Convention website that will list these research posters.

**Will there be written Proceedings?**

No, we will not be producing a printed Proceedings booklet with summaries of the vegetable, potato, small fruit and market session presentations. Since the educational sessions will be recorded and available through the end of March to all persons registered for the Convention, it was not felt necessary to produce this booklet this year.

**What about the annual awards usually presented at the banquet?**

As noted earlier, we are not going to try to create a virtual banquet, but we will have a page on the virtual website announcing the recipients of the various awards that are usually presented at the banquet by the sponsoring associations.

The Mid-Atlantic Convention has been jointly sponsored by the State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Vegetable Growers Association, the Maryland State Horticultural Society and the New Jersey State Horticultural Society for the past 43 years making this year’s Convention the 44th meeting. In 2014, the Virginia State Horticultural Society also began meeting at the Convention. The Pennsylvania State University, University of Maryland, Rutgers University Cooperative Extension and Virginia Tech all assist in organizing the educational sessions.

The Convention has become one of the premier grower meetings in the Northeast. The educational program covers nearly every aspect of fruit, vegetable, potato and berry production. Commercial growers should not pass up this terrific educational opportunity. We hope this year’s program, despite its virtual format, continues our standard of a world-class grower educational meeting. So do yourself a favor and make a sound investment in your business by attending the 2021 Mid-Atlantic Convention - virtually.

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| **2021 Mid-Atlantic Fruit and Vegetable Convention** | | |
| **Tentative Educational Program Outline of Sessions** | | |
| **9:00-11:00/11:15** | **12:00-2:00/2:15** | **2:30-4:30/4:45** |
| **Monday, February 8, 2021** | | |
| Wholesale Marketing | Hydroponics/Greenhouse Vegetables | Creative Marketing |
| 3rd Party Liability | Honeybees for Pollination | Ag Workplace/Legal Compliance COVID-19 |
| General Vegetables | Post-Harvest Food Safety | Specialty Vegetables |
| **Tuesday, February 9, 2021** | | |
| Sweet Corn | Soil Health/Cover Crops | Organic Vegetable Production |
| Economies of Online Sales | Lunch/Learn - Vegetables | General Vegetables |
| Tree Fruit | E-Commerce | Tree Fruit |
| **Wednesday, February 10, 2021** | | |
| Pepper/Eggplant/Cole Crops | Vegetable Biocontrols | Farm Markets Post-Covid |
| Small Fruit | Agritourism | Small Fruit |
| Tree Fruit | Lunch/Learn - Tree Fruit | Tree Fruit |
| Vine Crops | Tomatoes | General Vegetables |
|  |  | Spanish |
| **Thursday, February 11, 2021** | | |
| High Tunnels | Pumpkins/Winter Squash | General Vegetables |
| Potatoes | Potatoes | Potatoes |
| Tree Fruit | Digital/Social Marketing | Tree Fruit |
| Small Fruit | Lunch/Learn - Berries | Small Fruit |
| CSAs |  |  |