Plans are already underway for the APC’s 2017 Winter Conference which will be held December 5-7 in Washington, DC. Please note that there are several changes to the normal schedule. As usual, the first day of the meeting is devoted to the Peanut Foundation’s projects review and meetings of the Technical Review Committee and the Foundation Board of Directors. The APC meetings begin at 3:00 pm on Wednesday, December 6. From 4:00 to 5:00 pm that day the four segments will caucus to select their board representatives and officer for the new board which will serve a two year term. We will not caucus again during the board meeting.

We are moving ahead with our strategic planning process so Thursday’s schedule has been changed to allow for the strategic planning committee to meet that afternoon. We will be putting on a workshop Thursday afternoon that should be of great interest to most of our members: “What do you do when FDA knocks at your door?” Well, come and find out as Amy Philpott of Watson Green LLC, and our food safety consultant, Steve Caltoun, give you some practical advice.

Registration for the Winter Conference will open October 1st, but you can go ahead and reserve your hotel room now. Our meeting will be held at the Marriott Metro Center Hotel in the heart of downtown Washington on top of the Metro Center subway station, making it a quick and easy trip from Reagan National Airport and close to many restaurants. For hotel reservations, please go to: https://aws.passkey.com/event/48990861/owner/560/home. We hope you’ll plan now to join us in Washington.
The first round of the NAFTA renegotiation has been completed and based on the information available so far there were no big surprises. As expected and in a departure from how negotiations usually get started, reportedly a considerable amount of text was introduced, much of it by the U.S. It appears that there will be at least two major specific issues of concern for the agricultural sector. The first of these revolves around the fate of NAFTA’s existing Chapter 19, which provides a process for challenging the use of anti-dumping and countervailing duties imposed by another NAFTA country. This process has been of practical benefit to many sectors of U.S. agriculture. However, the Trump administration is proposing to completely eliminate Chapter 19. The administration does not want an international (in this case NAFTA) process that can be used to challenge U.S. decisions on the imposition of anti-dumping and countervailing duties. The second issue involves a push, reportedly primarily from Florida fruit and vegetable growers, to use NAFTA to change the existing national laws regarding anti-dumping duties. (This is completely separate from the process in Chapter 19 of NAFTA.) The essential intent of this proposal appears to be to make it easier for U.S. producers of “perishable and seasonal” produce to successfully petition for anti-dumping duties on produce from Mexico. There seems to be at least some opposition within other sectors of U.S. agriculture to any attempt to include such a provision. The next round of negotiations moves to Mexico City in early September.

Though exports to China from the U.S. may be down compared to 2016, exports to other markets are up significantly. For the first six months of 2017, from January through June (the latest available statistics) as compared to the same period last year; exports to Canada are up 7.4%, to Mexico by 2.9% and to Japan by nearly 20%. Exports to the European Union are up by 31.5%. The relatively new market of Colombia is up by 68%. Even with the drastic reduction in exports to China, overall exports are down by only 34%.
PEANUT PROUD SEEKING DONATIONS FOR VICTIMS OF HURRICANE HARVEY

Peanut Proud is working on getting peanut butter to the victims of Hurricane Harvey. 34,000 jars of Peanut Proud peanut butter have been ordered for possible shipment the second week of September. Peanut Proud is currently seeking donations from peanut butter manufacturers which will hopefully result in 30,000 jars of peanut butter which will be available for shipment during Labor Day week. These are the first steps with regard to the response given the magnitude of the flooding and wind damage from the hurricane. Please check Peanut Proud’s website PeanutProud.org for updates on donation efforts and opportunities for contributing.
Meredith McNair Rogers, a more than 20-year veteran farmer from Camilla, Georgia, testified before the Senate Agriculture Committee that the peanut provisions included in the 2014 Farm Bill and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program work for farmers and consumers - and must be preserved in the next farm bill.

In her testimony, Rogers, who testified on behalf of the Southern Peanut Farmers Federation, said, "[Congress] provided a program that pushed our industry to market our products more efficiently in the domestic and export markets." It is a common-sense and market-based solution offering farmers a price floor that promotes stability and access to lending amidst market uncertainty.

Rogers testified before the full Senate Agriculture Committee at today’s hearing, "Commodities, Credit, and Crop Insurance: Perspectives on Risk Management Tools and Trends for the 2018 Farm Bill," on behalf of the Southern Peanut Farmers Federation.

As Rogers stated in her testimony, The Federation supports maintaining the current PLC program in the 2014 Farm Bill including the following key provisions:

- Current Reference Price for Peanuts
- Separate Peanut Payment Limit (as established in the 2002 Farm Bill)
- Storage and Handling Provisions

Citing the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s projection that net farm income in the U.S. for 2017 will hit $62.3 billion - a 49.6 percent decline since 2013 - Rogers affirmed the value that the PLC program provides for farmers in her community. "If the PLC program had not been in place, I am afraid many farms in the Southeast would no longer exist."

Rogers also noted that the downturn in the farm economy over the last three years comes at a time when demand for peanuts outpaces supply, as evident by early reports of contract prices for the 2017 crop that range from $475-$550/ton. "Shellers would not be offering these types of contracts unless signals from manufacturers and exporters clearly indicate that they need more peanuts for the marketplace," Rogers said. "These actions are not being driven by the 2014 Farm bill but instead by the markets and the rules of supply and demand."

"The bill continues to assure consumers a safe, affordable food supply," Rogers stated. In addition, the system in place ensures stability in times of both prosperity and times of economic downturn, which enables farmers like Rogers to continue producing the peanuts that people around the world know and love.

For more information and a copy of the complete testimony provided by Rogers visit, www.southernpeanutfarmers.org.
Launched in June at the USA Peanut Congress, a unique online Peanut Sustainability aims to equip anyone in the peanut industry to effectively tell the peanut’s sustainability story. Through the website, SustainablePeanut.com, growers, manufacturers, shellers and allies can find new videos, high-resolution photos, infographics comparing water usage and showing the peanut’s top-quality traits, digital materials and web copy.

“Through the American Peanut Council, our industry is working diligently to articulate and always improve how peanuts grow and come to market,” explained Ryan Lepicier, NPB senior vice president. “Conveying the peanut sustainability story takes all of us, and we want to make key resources easily accessible for everyone to use.”

Sustainability is more than a trend and buzzword. The idea of sustainable products and companies has become increasingly important to consumers, particularly the millennial generation. They care about a company’s transparency, consciousness and understanding of health. In fact, millennials have been known to pay more for sustainably-sourced products. Peanuts have a tremendous story to tell; we just need a way to help our whole industry be on the same page. Together, let’s make our sustainability story grow.
GEORGIA PEANUT COMMISSION VIDEO SERIES ‘THROUGH THE EYES OF A FARMER’ CONTINUES

Through the Eyes of a Farmer series visits with peanut farmers throughout Georgia. Look for these videos and more in the series on the Georgia Peanuts Facebook page or the Georgia Peanut Commission YouTube page.

Be sure to share it with your friends and use the hashtags - #throughtheeyesofafarmer and #farmerwatch.

STEVE BROWN NAMED FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY FOR APRES

Dr. Steve Brown was named Fellow of the Society for the American Peanut Research and Education Society (APRES) during an awards ceremony at the society’s annual meeting July 13 in Albuquerque, NM.

Dr. Marshall Lamb, USDA-ARS-National Peanut Research Laboratory, received the Dow AgroSciences award for research. Austin Hagan, Auburn University, received the Coyt T. Wilson Distinguished Service Award.

Also, Jianping Wang received the Baily Award for the best APRES Paper from 2016 Annual Meeting.

Six graduate students received awards in the Joe Sugg Graduate Student Competition. Those include: Section 1, sponsored by North Carolina Peanut Growers Association—Jake Fountain, University of Georgia, winner; Carolina Chavarro, University of Georgia, second place. Section 2, sponsored by JLA, Inc.—Wen Carter, University of Georgia, winner; and Stephen Leininger, Mississippi State University, second place. Section 3, sponsored by Dow AgroSciences—Lindsey Christman, North Carolina State University, winner; Brian Jordan, University of Georgia, second place.
ENCOURAGING RESULTS FROM AUSTRALIA, BUT NOT A “CURE” FOR PEANUT ALLERGY DESPITE THE MEDIA HYPE

The prevention and treatment of peanut allergy is getting to be a crowded field. It is encouraging that so much effort is going into this area, but it is hard to keep up with the results which tumble out in the scientific journals and to make sense of the competing claims which are made about their significance. A recent case in point is the global media interest in news from Australia about a group of children who did not react to peanut allergen up to four years after having peanut oral immunotherapy (POIT) together with doses of a probiotic. This was widely touted as a “cure” for peanut allergy and certainly a major “breakthrough” in its treatment.

Everyone welcomes progress to reduce the burden which peanut allergy places on children and families, but we need to pause and reflect on what was actually achieved in this study and how it was reported in the media. In this case there was often more hyperbole than fact. This was not the fault of the investigators, but rather the result of saturation media coverage which repetitiously hammered out a message to the world that peanut allergy had been “cured”. It hasn’t, of course, but the outcome of the Australian study could open up an exciting new chapter in the search.

So what did the study actually find? Researchers at Murdoch Children’s Research Institute in Melbourne have for some time experimented with combining peanut oral immunotherapy (POIT) with a specific probiotic bacterium called Lactobacillus rhamnosus commonly found in yogurt. This combination has the acronym PPOIT. Several years ago they had good results from a randomized controlled trial (JACI, 2015: 135: 737-44) in which children allergic to peanut aged 1 - 10 years received PPOIT for 18 months. A high percentage of them (26 out of 29 participants) achieved unresponsiveness (tolerance) to peanut allergen two months after stopping the therapy. Only 2 out of 28 children in the placebo group did. This was a dramatic difference, but what of the longer term?

To find out, the investigators decided to take children who did not react and test them for non-responsiveness (sustained tolerance to the allergen) years later. That is what the current study reported in The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health this month is about. To see if PPOIT benefits were long lasting, 48 of the original 56 children were followed for 4 years. This was not a large sample and it was not re-randomized. It consisted of 24 children drawn from the successful completers and 24 from the placebo group of the earlier trial. This was pragmatic, but it introduces the possibility of biased results and makes comparisons difficult.

What they found after 4 years of follow-up was that 16 of 24 children in the PPOIT group were still eating peanuts as and when they wished without any reactions, while only 1 child out of 24 in the placebo group could eat them. This suggests that long term tolerance had been achieved. To test that hypothesis, 27 children from both groups volunteered to stop eating peanuts for 8 weeks and then undergo a double-blind, placebo-controlled peanut food challenge. This found that 7 of 12 PPOIT treated children had sustained unresponsiveness to peanuts after 2 months of not eating them, while only 1 in 15 of the placebo treated children did. This was great news for these seven children and their families who, for all practical purposes, could now consume peanuts the way children without peanut
allergy could. But generalizing from this to the bigger population of peanut allergic children is the hard part.

The investigators admit their latest study did not include a group who were receiving POIT only and not the very high doses of probiotic (equivalent to 20 tubs of yogurt per day) along with increasing doses of peanut protein. As far as the 7 children from the PPOIT group who were tolerant after 4 years were concerned, the outcome, in the words of Professor Mimi Tang the lead investigator, “showed the probiotic peanut combination can actually change the immune response to peanuts and provide benefits long term years after having stopped the treatment.” The unanswered question is how does this happen and how long will it last? Would the probiotic + OIT approach work for other common childhood allergens, particularly milk and egg? Obviously these are crucial questions for future work.

The study also did not take account of the reported fact that up to 1 in 5 peanut allergic children may simply outgrow their condition over time, but there is no way to predict which ones. In a group of only 7 children in the PPOIT group at the end of the 4 year period, that phenomenon may have accounted for some of the sustained nonresponsiveness (true tolerance) found. But there is no way to know.

The investigators are well aware of the limitations of the most recent study - even if the media reports ignored them. They are designing a further and larger study to address these as well as to replicate their initial findings that PPOIT is better at achieving sustained tolerance than POIT on its own. That is essential if we really are to talk about a “breakthrough” in peanut allergy treatment. The other big gain that could come from this work is improving quality of life. As Prof. Tang said, “We had children who came into the study allergic to peanuts, having to avoid peanut in their diet, being very vigilant around that, carrying a lot of anxiety with that, and at the end of treatment and even four years later, many of these children who had benefitted from our probiotic peanut therapy could now live like a child who didn’t have peanut allergy.”

Until we know the answers to the questions which the Melbourne study raises, the public and the food allergy community are largely left at the mercy of an oftentimes ill-informed and sensation-seeking media. This cannot be in anyone’s interests. The Melbourne work could be a breakthrough in treatment, but only more research and time will decide that. In the meantime, media should take a deep breath, read the research, and stop sensationalizing about a “cure” for peanut allergy because we aren’t there yet.

Commentary by Dr. Matthew Greenhawt www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(17)30042-1/fulltext
In the last year of the Peanut Genome Initiative, The Peanut Foundation continues to invest your dollars in cutting edge research. We are finalizing the last few contracts for 2017 projects while others are off and running. These last few projects will add to the already impressive accomplishments to date. In general, we are still working on marker discovery, phenotyping and the last stages of the final assembly of the genome. We ran into a few snags on the final assembly of the genome, but it is on a very small portion of the total genome and even with the few snags, we have a very impressive final product coming. With some very new technology, we are working on levels of refinement that were not thought possible even a couple of years ago. I’m told we’ll check off that final accomplishment in a couple of weeks and have the genome available on PeanutBase where all the scientific community can access it. This is an incredible achievement and credit goes to some very smart people funded by The Foundation.

The final progress report for the Peanut Genome Initiative is in preparation. Committees have been assigned to work on different sections and those are due to be combined into a first draft by the end of the month. Another committee will prepare an executive summary in layman’s terminology and we hope to have a final report in a couple of months. I think you will find the final report to be impressive and that we have accomplished everything we set out to do and much more.

We are participating in a matching program with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in which they are matching our $250,000 to provide a $500,000 pool to fund peanut genetic research. This is a great way to leverage our research dollars. We have seven great proposals. By the time you read this, The Foundation will have provided NIFA with endorsements for the ones we support and NIFA will proceed to rank them. We should know how our investment is being spent very soon.

Advertising opportunities are available in APC’s monthly newsletter. Don’t miss your chance to gain more exposure to the industry marketplace. For just $60 per issue or $500 for the entire year (that’s 11 issues), you can have a half page advertisement in APC’s monthly newsletter. Also, if you so choose, we can link your ad back to your company’s website. For more information, please contact Christina Taylor at ctaylor@peanutsusa.com or (703) 838-9500.