

## **Evaluation of Specialty Melons for Direct Market Sales in Southeastern Indiana**

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There is little actual diversity in the size, color etc of melons in the mass market today. Farmers seeking to establish a niche direct market may wish to consider producing and marketing melons of differing size, shape, color, flavor and/or texture to capture the imagination and market dollars of the consumer. While some of these melons may not have the qualities necessary to meet the stringent requirements of the mass market place (tolerance to shipping, long shelf life etc.) and may offer production challenges (not slipping at maturity, reduced size and overall yield, reduced disease tolerance etc) these shortcomings may in some cases be overcome by an increase in consumer interest and potential price at the market place.

The purpose of this trial is to assess the qualities of a number of melon varieties-cantaloupe and watermelon- which are thought to have qualities which will make them attractive to today's direct farm to market consumer. Melon production in the Ohio River Valley is often considered challenging at best...heavy soils, unpredictable rainfall and general lack of access to irrigation, high summertime humidity and related pest pressure are often cited as limiting factors to their culture. On the other hand the potential consumer base for a high quality melon with strong consumer appeal (farm market, roadside market, community farmers' market or for chef/restaurateur trade) in the region is potentially significant. Some of the varieties included in this trial are heirlooms of the past while others are new hybrids developed to meet the unique demands of this market niche. While melon qualities of consumer importance including average melon size, interior/exterior appearance and color, flesh color, texture and flavor are important indicators of melon desirability, observations were also recorded which indicated characteristics of the melon which have an impact on the ease/difficulty of production/marketing of the melon by the farmer.

It is important to understand that this trial and any data collected and presented are observational in nature and **do not** reflect standard replicated research protocol. It is the purpose of this trial to offer farmer and consumer alike a "snapshot" of the qualities of a number of melon varieties grown in one production season under one set of growing conditions and allow them the opportunity to assess for themselves whether or not these varieties may be desirable for their farm market or dinner table.

### **Materials and Methods**

**Melon Varieties-** Seed provided by various seed companies

**Soil and Soil Preparation-** Bedford Silt Loam, 2-6% slope. Existing sod ripped, plowed and rotovated preplant. 4'IRT plastic mulch applied on 8' centers.

**Planting-** Seed planted in plug trays in greenhouse at the Purdue Southwest Purdue Ag Center. Transplants held 3 weeks due to wet soil conditions prior to planting in field. Transplants hand planted through plastic mulch, 3 foot spacing in row, 8 foot spacing between rows, plants watered in with 15-16-17 water soluble fertilizer transplant solution approx 300ppm N, 10 plants per variety, June 9, 2003.

**Fertilizer/Nutrition Management-** Pre-plant application of 9-23-30 @ 500 # per acre.  
Agricultural lime applied equivalent to 5 tons per acre

**Irrigation-** None applied...adequate and timely summer rains

**Weed Control-** Sandea herbicide applied as over the top spray...nozzles over plastic removed and plugged, Cultivation of row middles 6/30.

**Other Pest Control-** Carbaryl / Chlorothalonil treatment at planting and again one week later.  
Thiodan/Bravo treatment thereafter at labeled rates.

**Harvest and Data Collection-**Data was collected on three scheduled harvest dates. No overall yield or average melon weights were recorded.