Call for Collaboration: Vegetable Farmers Participatory Research

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Greetings, farmers! You are not just farmers; you are innovative researchers. When you test a new crop variety, fertilizer, or tool on a small scale, you're conducting important experiments that help you succeed. This hands-on approach gives you valuable insights into what works best for your farm, enabling you to make informed decisions before fully committing.

While university researchers often conduct their trials in small, replicated plots with limited number of "treatments", you, the farmer, implement field-scale methods that reflect real-world conditions. Your approach allows for immediate application of successful strategies, making your trials very relevant and useful to you and fellow farmers. In contrast, academic research can take longer to yield practical findings, as it typically focuses on isolated "treatments" rather than the holistic farming packages you consider.

This year, I've gathered some valuable insights from farmers about few crop varieties, noting that some yielded exceptional results while others significantly underperformed under the same conditions. To strengthen this type of observations and ensure they are statistically meaningful, I invite you to collaborate with me in collecting data that will allow us to make confident inferences applicable to you and other growers.

Here's my plan:

1. Identify growers: I'm seeking 6-10 growers who are willing to participate in this collaborative research.
2. One-on-one meeting: Together, we will explore new or innovative practices you plan to trial in the 2025 growing season. This could include testing new crop varieties, mulches, fertilizers, pesticides, or something else.
3. Designing "experimental plots": We will work together to create "experimental plots" within your rows/field, enabling us to collect statistically robust data. This might involve selecting specific sections of your beds/field for focused data collection.
4. In-season data collection: I will regularly visit your farm, at least once a month, to learn from your observations as well as to collect data on plant growth, pest infestations, or any other relevant information.
5. Harvest assessment: When it's time to harvest, we will record yield data and assess produce quality, such as measuring soluble sugar levels in pie pumpkins and tomatoes.
6. Data compilation and reporting: After gathering data from multiple farms, I will compile the results and produce a report to share with you and other farmers across the state.

What farmers need to provide:

- Initial meeting: A winter or spring 2025 meeting with me to plan and design the trial.
- Data collection permission: Allow me to collect data in the designated plot during the growing season.
- Harvest data: Provide harvest data from the designated plot, or allow me to harvest and weigh the produce, and conduct a quality assessment. But, if you need to harvest before I can collect the data, that will be ok too.

What farmers will gain:

- Valuable data: By participating, we can generate meaningful insights that will benefit you and our farming community.
- Support for trials: If you wish to experiment with a new variety or a tool, I may be able to invest in those resources (up to a several hundred dollars).
- One-on-one consultation: While I am at your farm, I would be happy to look at any other vegetable issues (such as insect pest or disease) you want to discuss and work with you to formulate or revise management plans.
- Mutual benefit: This partnership will allow me, as an educator, to gather significant data that can inform our growers while leveraging limited resources more effectively.

If you are interested in collaborating, please email me at shuresh.ghimire@uconn.edu or call 959-929-1031 to discuss further. Alternatively, you can fill out this 3-question form. Together, let's strengthen our farming community through collaboration and shared knowledge!