



## OBSERVATIONAL TOUR OF GEORGIA'S VIDALIA ONION PRODUCTION AREAS

Assignment Number: ST-115

PREPARED BY:

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THROUGH

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UNDER THE AUSPICES OF

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**TOUR OF GEORGIA'S VIDALIA ONION  
AND  
GENERAL VEGETABLE PRODUCTION AREAS**

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Mark Gaskell of the PROEXAG II contacted me during mid April about setting up a tour for several people from Central America to see onion production methods in the Vidalia area of Georgia and to talk with potential onion importers in Georgia. The schedule for the Georgia tour was as follows:

**TUESDAY, MAY 4**

- \*Air travel from Texas to Atlanta, surface travel from Atlanta to Tifton.
- \*Lodging at the Comfort Inn located at Interstate 75 Exit #19.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 5**

- \*Breakfast with Doyle Smittle at Denney's.
- \*Travel to the Vidalia area by van arriving at Plantation Sweets at about 10 AM.
- \*Visit with Kurt Schweitzer and Ronnie Collins of Plantation Sweets and look at their onion operations.
- \*Lunch at Plantation Sweets.
- \*Tour other onion operations in the Vidalia area including the Debruyne operation in Lyons.
- \*Lodging at Shoneys Inn in Vidalia.
- \*7:00 PM - Informal dinner meeting at Shoneys with Vidalia onion growers interested in comparing production, marketing, etc with onion growers from Central America. Meal sponsored by Rio Colorado Seed Company.

**THURSDAY, MAY 6**

- \*Breakfast at Shoneys in Vidalia.
- \*Continue tour of the Vidalia area with stop at variety trial at Delwin Dowdy farm. Depart the Vidalia area by 11 AM
- \*Lunch at Captain Joe's in Baxley, Georgia.
- \*Max Austin will meet us for lunch and briefly describe rabbiteye blueberry production at Morris Farms near Baxley.
- \*Travel to Tifton and visit the Coastal Plain Experiment Station and other sites in the Tifton area.
- \*Lodging at Comfort Inn in Tifton.

**FRIDAY, MAY 7**

- \*Breakfast at Cracker Barrel.
- \*Visit Georgia Vegetable Company and Tift-Pac packing facilities and vegetable farms in the Tifton area.
- \*Lunch at the Asgrow Seed Company research farm.
- \*Continue farm tour if needed and wrap-up discussion and comments.
- \*Return to Atlanta for flights to Central America

To assure good response from Vidalia onion growers, I asked Robin Raiford of the Vidalia Onion Committee to contact Vidalia

onion growers about the Wednesday evening dinner meeting. This dinner meeting was attended by key Vidalia onion growers who were not visited during the tour. Communication among Georgia and Central American participants in the tour was outstanding. A profitable import-export system for sweet onions appears probable if handled correctly. Both Vidalia onion growers and potential sweet onion exporters from Central America have indicated a desire to expand upon the initial contact. Although only a few import-export deals were made, open communication was established that could not have been established through phone and fax. Further communications should be established during mid June when the Vidalia onion growers have rested from the 1993 marketing season.

Due to the highly profitable 1993 Vidalia onion season, several Vidalia onion growers have already indicated an interest in participating in importing sweet onions from Central America during the period from December to April of 1994. None of the these onion growers have expressed an interest in importing onions that cannot be classified as sweet onions. Contacts will need to be made soon if sweet onions are to be marketed during December.

Most of the Vidalia onion growers have expressed interest in developing the type of relationship that occurred between Georgia Vegetable Company of Georgia and MANPROSA of Nicaragua for production and marketing of SEBACO SWEETS. However, the development of this type of relationship requires considerable contact and trust among the parties involved and usually considerable effort by a facilitator. The facilitator role was handled by myself and several people from the PROEXAG II project. Although the importation of SEBACO SWEETS was very successful this season, it is unlikely that importation of these or other sweet onions from Central America will meet with similar success during the 1994 season without considerable assistance from a facilitator.

Several onion growers from Central America suggested that two or three short (3-5 day) intense training periods in Georgia during the Vidalia onion production season would be of great value toward the development of sweet onion production for export. I presently do not know how this training could be most effectively accomplished.