Atlantic City isn’t the only place for gambling in New Jersey. Gambling takes place each season in our rural settings, on our farm fields and orchards. With unpredictable weather and fluctuating markets – every season is a toss of the dice, but this year in New Jersey – luck was a lady.

“Apple quality is extremely high,” reports Win Cowgill, agricultural agent at Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension (RCE) of Hunterdon County. “Sugar has never been higher, due to bright sunny days and cool nights – it’s a great season for apples”.

Earlier in the year, however, what was in the cards for tree fruit crops looked dire. It all started in the early spring when March of 2012 resulted in record warm temperatures. Dave Robinson, state climatologist for New Jersey at Rutgers, explains how the odds ended up in favor for New Jersey apple growers, “This is an illustration of just how unusual March 2012 was across New Jersey and, for that matter, over most of the US and southern Canada east of the Rockies. By end of the mid-March “warm wave” flowers, shrubs and trees were blossoming and beginning to leaf out 3-4 weeks ahead of average. This created a worrisome situation overnight from the 26th-27th when cold air invaded the area and dew points fell between -10° at High Point Monument (Sussex County) and 4° in Upper Deerfield (Cumberland County). With such dry air and clear skies the only thing that kept the budding fruit trees and bushes from suffering virtually total losses was a strong wind that helped to mix the atmosphere and keep most orchards in the mid to upper 20°s.”

Jerry Frecon, agricultural agent of Gloucester County RCE sums up the hand that growers around the country were dealt. “Many states and areas were damaged by frost, like Michigan which lost 90% of its apple crop and New York about 60%. Even Washington State had a crop reduction from wide-spread hail storms. The apple crop in New Jersey, although not totally spared, has been quite variable. Some growers have a full crop while others have a lighter crop because of frost where orchards sites were lower and frost injured flowers and fruit.”

How did this early spring ultimately play out with the New Jersey apple crop? Like many other crops this season, apples in New Jersey are several weeks early. Cowgill explains that while there is a 10 – 12 day difference between north and south Jersey ripening times, for the most part apple varieties are ripening two weeks early. Hence, if your family’s tradition of picking apples falls on a regular date, you should expect different varieties than usual to be ripe at that time. Cowgill suggests calling ahead for
New Jersey Department of Agriculture’s Jersey Fresh Availability Report

Current:
- Apples
- Arugula
- Baby Arugula & Baby Spinach
- Basil
- Beets
- Cabbage
- Cilantro
- Collards
- Cucumbers
- Dandelions
- Dill
- Eggplant
- Escarole & Endive
- Kale
- Leeks
- Lettuces
- Mint
- Parsley
- Peppers
- Pumpkins
- Radishes
- Spinach
- Squash, winter
- Sweet corn
- Sweet potatoes
- Swiss Chard
- Tomatoes
- Turnips

Sidebar from page 1

Station help farmers and consumers dramatically reduce food loss - and produce quality lost - between the farm and the consumer markets. Reliable refrigerated transportation, interstate highways, refrigerated storage at retail, fungicides, and improved growing practices so dramatically reduced losses in the US, that this work was eventually discontinued.

While we take beautiful uniform quality fruit with few losses for granted year round, in less developed countries worldwide, they still lose half or more of their perishable produce before it ever gets eaten.

Where to find Jersey Fresh? Ask for it where you shop or dine or go to: http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov

To receive these reports by e-mail: njfarmfresh@njaes.rutgers.edu
Web: http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu
For your county Rutgers Cooperative Extension office go to: http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/county


Because of the apple crop loss in many states, consumers may find a slight increase in prices in out-of-state apples in supermarkets or processed products that contain apples. Frecon reports that while wholesale prices are high, and the wholesale market for fresh market apples is very strong with apple processors seeking sources of apples, New Jersey growers are holding prices down for their retail business and U-Pick operations. So, buying Jersey apples early this fall is a best bet!

A Look Back at the New Jersey Apple Industry
Photos courtesy of New Jersey State Archives, Department of Agriculture Photographs

Picking apples in Burlington County. Circa 1930s -1950s

A worker picks apples by hand in order to avoid bruising. A strap holds the apple basket close to keep from dropping the apples. Location: Bridgeton, Cumberland County, NJ Date: 1946

Unloading apples at Jersey Fruit Cooperative Association Cider Mill in Freehold, New Jersey. Date: September 16, 1944

Scene in packing house at Wemrock Orchards, Tour of Monmouth County orchards sponsored by the N. J. Apple Institute. Date: 1950