



What's in Season from the Garden State

Biweekly Highlights from Cooperative Extension, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

September 4, 2008

Accessories for Jersey Fresh Fare

Tomato: salt (optional)

**Sweet corn: corn holders;
toothpick (optional)**

**Peaches and Nectarines:
1-2 napkins (required)**

*In addition to the many Jersey Fresh promotional materials in use at farms stands, stores and restaurants, the NJ Department of Agriculture oversees 113 community farm markets, has expanded Jersey Fresh to other state products under the labels of **Jersey Grown** (trees, shrubs and flowers), **Jersey Organic** and **Jersey Seafood**. The program provides weekly/biweekly updates of fresh availability for produce/seafood to the wholesale industry and co-sponsors many events/festivals throughout the state. The NJ Department of Ag's Jersey Fresh website provides consumers with a search engine to find farm markets, roadside stands and pick your own farms searchable by commodity and/or county. Agri-tourism events around the state are listed as well as a table of what's in season:*

<http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov>

RUTGERS

New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station

The Homegrown History of Jersey Fresh

In the days when New Jersey's agricultural and allied industries such as canning dominated the state, New Jerseyans' diet bore out of this bounty. While trucks of tomatoes and other vegetables bound for Campbell's Soup in Camden or Heinz in Salem or crossed the borders to fresh markets in New York or Philadelphia, New Jerseyans ate what was seasonal and local.

As New Jersey's rural landscape became more and more suburban, residents' shopping venues changed to large supermarkets. As food markets increased in size, the distribution/availability equation of wholesale food purchasing changed and local produce growers were often shunned for year round suppliers of fresh food.

The simultaneous pressure on New Jersey's farmers to relinquish their land for lucrative real estate transactions, changed the face of the Garden State so that the once dominant rural landscape became a hidden treasure, out of sight and out of mind of New Jersey's increasing population.

In 1984, the State of New Jersey took a major step to recreate an awareness of fresh produce from New Jersey's farms. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture developed the *Jersey Fresh* program, under then secretary of agriculture, Art Brown, recently retired county agricultural agent and professor, Rutgers NJAES.

The early *Jersey Fresh* program featured professionally developed point-of-purchase materials and radio and billboard advertising. To increase grocery store use of New Jersey produce, the department established contact with the retail sector and food chains to become involved in the program.

Billed as one of the first programs of its kind, *Jersey Fresh* gave a star performance in its first year, making considerable gains in consumer awareness and trade usage. According to Brown, the *Jersey Fresh* success story spread quickly. As the program grew in prominence, other States began to adapt the *Jersey Fresh* model to their own situations.

The second season of the *Jersey Fresh* program expanded the scope by adding a *Jersey Fresh Quality Grading* program where growers agreed to be licensed and to follow department packing guidelines. This further enhanced buyer confidence and increased retail use. The foundation for the Quality Grading program is based on research and recommendations from Rutgers NJAES.

Twenty four years later, the *Jersey Fresh* program is still going strong, and its popularity is further fueled by the nationwide increased interest in local foods (perhaps the program was ahead of its time). New Jersey boasts a strong support movement to the *Jersey Fresh* program: Garden State growers, restaurants and supermarkets, statewide media publications, non-profit advocate organizations such as Slow Food and Northeast Organic Farmers Association of NJ, Rutgers NJAES research and outreach programs, local municipalities hosting community farm markets and an enthusiastic public.

See next article on page 2

New Jersey Department of
Agriculture's Jersey Fresh &
Seafood Availability Report

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Arugula | Squash - yellow |
| Baby Arugula & Baby Spinach | and zucchini |
| Basil | Sweet corn |
| Beets | Tomatoes |
| Cabbage | White Potatoes |
| Cantaloupes | Forecast: |
| Collards | Escarole and En- |
| Cucumbers | dive - 3rd week in |
| Dandelion | September |
| Dill | Lettuces - 3rd week |
| Eggplant | of September |
| Kale | Spinach - 3rd week |
| Leeks & Green | of September |
| Onions | Sweet Potatoes |
| Melons | - mid-September |
| Mint | |
| Nectarines | |
| Parsley | |
| Peaches | |
| Peppers | |
| Pickles | |
| Potatoes | |



| | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Atlantic Crocker | Farm Raised |
| Butterfish | Hard Clams & |
| Ling | Oysters |
| Lobster | Little-necks/Mid- |
| Sea Scallops | dlenecks |
| (Day Boat) | Specials |
| Squid | Cherrystones, |
| Sword Fish | Chowders, Top- |
| Whiting | necks |
| | Cape May Salt |
| | Half-Shelled |
| | Oysters |
| | Delaware Bay |
| | Oysters |



Hot or Not, Jersey Packs a Peck, even for Pickling

While tomatoes take top billing as New Jersey's flagship vegetable, peppers are no small potatoes. New Jersey ranks sixth in US pepper production and supplies 3.8% of the total US pepper production.

Bell peppers are grown in almost all counties in New Jersey, according to Wes Kline, Agricultural Agent for Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension in Cumberland County. The majority of the wholesale production and acreage is located in southern New Jersey in the counties of Gloucester, Cumberland, Salem, and Atlantic. There are smaller production areas in the remaining counties mainly for the retail trade. Wholesale fresh market peppers are shipped to the eastern US and Canada depending on the time of year. Most of the peppers produced in the state are for green fruit. There is a small acreage of red pepper production – which is the mature stage of green peppers.

Peppers are a warm season crop that do not tolerate frost. They grow best within the temperature range of 70 to 80°F and are sensitive to temperature extremes.

Some Like it Hot

Rick VanVranken, Agricultural Agent in Atlantic County conducts ethnic market research looking at the difference in pepper quality/maturity of jalapenos destined for various markets. According to VanVranken, "Vineland area growers have been growing specialty peppers for many years, originally Italian varieties such as Italian Long Hots (frying peppers), but they also grow sweet Cubanelles (frying peppers), jalapenos, serrano, cayenne, hot and sweet cherry peppers, pablano, and a few habaneros and others for the fresh market wholesale trade, and some to some regional processors (B&G in Delaware takes a lot of Jersey cherry peppers for pickling). While some are headed to small ethnic markets, most still go to standard American retail groceries. In that vein, the Vineland Produce Auction has tried to develop a brand name for *Jersey Hots*, especially for jalapenos."



Photos by Peter J. Nitzsche, Rutgers NJAES

Van Vranken notes the challenge hot pepper growers face, "American grocery produce buyers want blemish-free peppers, which means picking fruit young/immature. The Mexican market looks for an older pepper showing cracks. They won't buy them without cracks and claim they don't have the flavor/heat that Mexican consumers demand. Part of the research shows that different varieties have varying degrees of cracking (some don't crack at all), and secondary research is looking into what cracking infers to flavor (do more cracks mean hotter, milder or impact some other flavor attribute?)."

2008 International Pepper Conference Held in NJ

According to Jack Rabin, Associate Director for Farm Programs at Rutgers NJAES, "New Jersey's pepper productivity in terms of yield and fruit quality is competitive to the best production regions in the world for peppers. In recognition of this, this year Rutgers NJAES is hosting the International Pepper Conference in Atlantic City on September 7 – 10th." Since 1973, every two years pepper enthusiasts from around the world have met to discuss new technology, innovative ideas and cutting-edge research in all areas of pepper production throughout the world. The conference will include a field tour of pepper production in South Jersey where over 3,000 acres of peppers are grown each year for fresh markets in the northeast US.

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>