

What's in Season from the Garden State

Bi-weekly Highlights from Rutgers Cooperative Extension

October 9, 2006

Harvest History Detectives: Eye on the Jersey Apple



During the 1700 and 1800's an essential component of many New Jersey farms was the apple orchard. Apples served as a staple throughout the winter – stored in barrels in root cellars or processed for hard cider (alcoholic) or fermented for apple cider vinegar. The skins were saved and dried by the family's cooking fireplace and used to make teas during winter.

Win Cowgill, Agricultural Agent for Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Hunterdon County and Area Fruit Agent, explains that New Jersey's apple industry began in the 1700's in the cooler ridges of northwest New Jersey. Hunterdon County was a major producer of peaches in the 1800's and apple orchards were established as well. Hunterdon joined neighboring counties of Morris and Warren in a thriving apple industry. Wagonloads of apples were ferried into New York City along with vegetables from Bergen, Passaic and Union Counties. In the early 1800's barges of apples traveled along the Delaware-Raritan and Morris Canals to the ports of Trenton and Philadelphia.

Jersey cider had its own reputation. While shipped predominately to New York, large quantities of cider were also shipped to the Southern States. Apple Jack (apple brandy) produced by Lairds & Company in Monmouth County was also a favorite product (today, the Laird's distillery in Scobeyville, NJ is recognized as the oldest operating distillery in the country).

As much of North Jersey's sprawling farmlands gave way to cities, suburbs and highways, many of New Jersey's wholesale apple orchards succumbed to development. Orchard ground makes premier housing sites due to the elevation and scenic views. New Jersey still remains the 15th largest apple producing state in acreage, according to Cowgill, but New Jersey is now an "apple deficit state", importing apples from the larger producing states to supply the ten million residents. Despite the loss of acreage, New Jersey's vibrant apple industry has changed with the times and is now cutting edge. New Jersey ranks 13th in volume of apples produced. That represents 65 million pounds of apples grown annually, on 246 farms with 4100 acres under cultivation. These apples supply our many farm markets and tailgate farmer markets located in every major city in New Jersey as well as the numerous Pick-Your-Own apple orchards found throughout the Garden State.

Over the last 20 years, newer farming methods with smaller (dwarf) tree varieties planted closer together increases the number of trees per acre, the quality of apples, the yields per acre and makes trees easier to harvest. "On the older systems, the average yield in New Jersey was 350 bushels per acre. With the newer high density

Continued on page 2

New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Jersey Fresh Availability Report

Current:

Apples	Cabbage	Greens: collards, kale,	Spinach
Apple cider	Cauliflower	mustard, dandelions &	Squash: yellow, zucchini, acorn,
Arugula and Cilantro	Cranberries	Swiss Chard	butternut, & spaghetti
Baby Arugula & Baby Spinach	Dill & Parsley	Leeks & Green Onions	Sweet corn
Basil	Cucumbers/pickles	Lettuces	Sweet potatoes
Beets	Eggplant	Peppers	Tomatoes
Broccoli	Escarole/Endive	Pumpkins	White Potatoes
Brussel Sprouts	Green beans	Radishes & Turnips	



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@rcr.rutgers.edu

Web: <http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu>

For your county Rutgers Cooperative Extension office go to:

<http://www.rcr.rutgers.edu/county>



At the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm, field research assistant Gail Lokaj inspects the apple orchards near October harvest.

systems yields can be 1,000 – 1,200 bushels per acre,” says Cowgill. Rutgers participation in a national United States Department of Agriculture project “NC140” has been key in helping the New Jersey apple industry transform itself. NC140 has evaluated and tested dwarfing apple rootstocks that have been adopted 100% by New Jersey apple producers, greatly increasing their production and reducing their production costs.

Additional research at Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) research farms helps New Jersey apple growers stay on the cutting edge with high quality apples. NJAES has one of the few remaining apple-breeding programs in the US. The development of high quality eating apples that are disease resistant as well as productive are a priority. Cowgill evaluates over 60 apple varieties at the Rutgers Snyder Research & Extension Farm in Hunterdon County.

Despite all the sophistication of the New Jersey apple industry, you won't find many Jersey Fresh apples in the retail stores. Savvy New Jersey apple lovers know to seek the roadside stands, tailgate markets and farmer's markets to find the distinctive varieties of apples not available in supermarkets. In addition to the standards of Empire, McIntosh and Gala, New Jersey farms offer up varieties

such as Honeycrisp - a super crisp apple; Cameo, Liberty, Macoun - a sweet/tart juicy apple; the late apple Pink Lady; and Fuji – super sweet, crisp apple good for baking. Also, look for Suncrip, a variety developed by Rutgers NJAES – a crunchy and juicy apple with a “unique” flavor that Cowgill urges consumers to try. There are many more varieties – too numerous to mention here! Cowgill also hosts a website entitled the Virtual Orchard at <http://www.virtualorchard.net> that has additional apple information.

New Jersey apple growers, besides offering the freshest of apples and unique varieties, also provide a wonderful experience for visitors who venture out to the farms in search of Jersey Fresh apples. Pick-your-own apples, hay rides, and shops filled with cider, apple pies, apple butters and apple cider donuts make a farm visit a special treat. Find fall farm festivals, pick-your-own orchards, farm markets and recipes at New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Jersey Fresh website at: <http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov/>.

New Jersey cider is as renowned today as in old times from farmers like Melick's Town Market, Fralingers, Sunny Slope, Terhune Orchards, and others who grow apples and press cider. Each farmer uses a consistent distinctive blend of varieties, leading to a recognizable taste. Families who seek out farm-made cider develop preferences for their favorite blend.

Finally, the folk wisdom; “an apple a day” rings true – but now with research to behind it. Among recent findings: daily apple consumption boosts production of acetylcholine, which may assist in memory; reduces risk of cancers of mouth and pharynx, esophagus, colon, breast, ovaries, and prostate; provides apigenin, an antioxidant that, in animal tests in Japan, suppressed responses leading to asthma and allergies; can reduce risk of diabetes; help prevent heart disease; and prevents tooth loss. Hold off on peeling - the greatest concentration of antioxidants is in the apple's skin.

