

# What's in Season from the Garden State

Bi-weekly Highlights from Rutgers Cooperative Extension

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## What do the Labels Mean?: Local

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Many consumers intensely scan food and farm product signs and labels to help them make purchasing decisions reflecting their budgets, health concerns, culture, and social values. The greatest power a consumer has is at the moment they open their handbags and wallets and spend their cash.

Purchasing local farm products of all kinds is a powerful choice. Local products travel fewer miles from boat to plate, field to fork, or farm to home landscape. Reducing food miles, reducing the energy consumed from field to fork is not only an environmentally beneficial purchase choice; for many consumers it is also a national security purchase decision.

The trouble is "local" labeling used for advertising purposes can be misleading. According to William Walker of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), "Local is not a legally defined produce term. Although most people expect it comes from the region, the term has no real meaning in the produce business. Legally it can [and many times does] come from far away."

Fortunately for New Jerseyans, the NJDA authorizes the use of several labels that help us identify products grown or harvested in our state. NJDA oversees the use of *Jersey Fresh—As Fresh as Fresh Gets*—for produce; *Jersey Grown* for horticultural products such as trees, bushes, sod, and flowers; and *Jersey Seafood* for products harvested by New Jersey fishermen.

These labels are legal terms and indicate the following characteristics:

- ❖ Products are acclimated to our soils or waters and climate
- ❖ Products were recently harvested
- ❖ Products meet or exceed defined standards for quality.

NJDA is continuing to expand the line of Jersey product labels. In the pipeline are labels for *Jersey Frozen*, *Jersey Products* and *Jersey Organic*.

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## New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Jersey Fresh Availability Report

### Current:

Arugula and Cilantro  
Baby Arugula & Baby Spinach  
Basil  
Beets  
Broccoli  
Cabbage  
Dill & Parsley  
Cucumbers/pickles



Eggplant  
Escarole/Endive  
Greens: collards, kale, Kohlrabi, mustard, dandelions & Swiss Chard  
Leeks & Green Onions  
Lettuces  
Nectarines  
Peaches

Peppers  
Radishes & Turnips  
Spinach  
Squash: yellow, zucchini, acorn, butternut, & spaghetti  
Sweet corn  
Sweet potatoes  
Tomatoes

White Potatoes

### Forecast (start date):

Brussel Sprouts - mid-Oct.  
Cauliflower - mid-Oct.  
Cranberries - early Oct.

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



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## Rutgers Steps up to the Plate and Puts its Money where its Values are

Our vital hospitality food distribution system revolves around customer service. How can we exercise our power when we spend greater than 50% of food dollars on anonymously prepared foods, foods outside the home, and hospitality served food? It is not easy to source or identify food as local unless the contracting, preparing, or serving customer demands local and/or the preparers and servers identify local when available.

Catered food service at Rutgers University is a large business. From scientific conferences to alumni events, caterers keep attendees served and fed. What we don't often see at these events is locally grown food from our New Jersey farms and waters. However, thanks to a new initiative developed by Dr. Kevin Lyons, Rutgers Director of Purchasing, that is changing. According to Dr. Lyons, "Rutgers Purchasing is finalizing contract agreements and arrangements to provide Jersey Fresh-only catering options to the University Community via multiple contracts with New Jersey catering firms."

Rutgers Cooperative Extension stepped up to the plate and served its first Jersey Fresh meal at a conference on September 13<sup>th</sup>. Working with Twin Oaks caterers of East Brunswick, NJ a sumptuous luncheon of Jersey chicken, seafood and produce delighted attendees. Highlights from the menu include Jersey calamari salad, eggplant parmigian, roasted Chicken Scarapiello, Perona Farms smoked salmon, Jersey tomato and cucumber salad, apple and peach cobblers, Peach Cider and Jersey Blues iced tea.

Feedback from conference attendees was overwhelmingly positive with comments like, "This is the best (fill in the blank) I ever tasted" and other enthusiastic remarks about using Jersey foods.



While Rutgers provides new opportunities for catered events to "go Jersey", what about Rutgers Dining Services, feeding thousands of hungry college students daily? Steve Zakutney, Senior Buyer for Rutgers Dining Services has been going Jersey all along. According to Zakutney, throughout the year Dining Services purchases local products as they are available. Since the most variety is available during the summer months, an abundance of Jersey Fresh produce is served to the summer students, seminar attendees and campers who frequent the dining halls during the summer.

Buying Jersey products year round provided the foundation for a full blown Jersey theme night to welcome students back for the 2006 fall semester. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, an all-Jersey meal was offered in the Rutgers dining halls on the New Brunswick/Piscataway campus, serving over 6,000 students. Highlights from the menu include Jersey steaks, veal, chicken, bluefish and scallops, Jersey Fresh salad bar, pasta with roasted veggies, rice pilaf with mushrooms, corn on the cob, pumpkin and turnip sauté, cream of peach soup and pumpkin turnovers. How did this special meal go over with the students? In a show of napkins (RU Dining Services' version of the suggestion box is bulletin boards for students to post feedback and comments written on napkins) the students complimented the variety and the local emphasis of the meal. Whether to repeat an all-Jersey dinner in the Spring is under consideration, but the Fall meal will now be an annual event. A sure way to pack on the freshman 15!

