Harvest History Detectives: Eye on the Jersey Peach

Only remnants of New Jersey’s colonial history remain in our modern commercial landscape, but New Jersey peach production is a part of that heritage. Peach growing began in New Jersey in the early 1600’s when colonists began importing varieties from Europe. New Jersey was well suited to the growing of peaches because of its good climate and soils. Peaches were described as “so scarce in Europe that they were reserved for the very rich, but in New Jersey, so abundant that those falling to the ground were just left there.” (New Jersey Farm Bureau). Peaches were the first fruit to receive attention commercially and in 1683 “were available in New York by the wagonloads from New Jersey orchards.”

Today, New Jersey’s peach farmers produce about 60 million pounds of peaches on 8,000 acres, making the state the fourth-largest producer of peaches in the nation. Gloucester County leads the state in peach production. Jerome Frecon, Agricultural Agent for Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Gloucester County says, “Peach harvest begins on June 25 in South Jersey and continues through mid-September in North Jersey. New Jersey growers continue to diversify plantings with newer and tastier varieties of both yellow-fleshed peaches and nectarines, as well as more white-fleshed peaches and nectarines. A limited supply of flat white-fleshed or “doughnut” peaches will be available in late July and early August. Peach size is excellent with abundant rainfall in the past weeks.”

Out of the Orchard into the Bottle: Peach Cider

Santo Maccherone of Circle M Farms, a third generation peach grower from Gloucester County picks his peaches so close to freshly ripened, that a lot of the peaches are too fragile for shipping. Tired of wasting his tastiest fruit, he decided he needed a way to capture that ripeness. He contacted the Rutgers Food Innovation Center and a new product was born: Peach Cider. Truly the essence of a ripe peach, this drink can be found at local farmstands throughout the state, Wegmans, and some Stop and Shop stores will be carrying it soon.
What’s in Season from the Garden State

The Gourmet Peach

Take it from the top chefs. The secret to getting the best tasting ingredients is to get them locally, fresh off the farm. A sampling of Central Jersey chefs that design their cuisine around local seasonal foods are highlighted here: http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu/chefs.asp.

Two of our chefs whipped up recipes using Jersey Peaches. Try Chef Jim Weaver of Tre Piani’s Panna Cotta with Fresh Peaches and Red Wine or Chef Bruce LeFebvre of The Frog and the Peach’s Jersey Peach Semifreddo with Carmalized Cherries (note: Jersey Fresh sweet cherry season ends in June). http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu/Panna-cotta.asp http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu/Peach-Semifreddo.asp

Homegrown Memories

When summer rolls around in New Jersey, many of us conjure up fond memories of our youth. Drive-in movies, beach and boardwalk, frozen custard, amusement parks, bicycle rides, backyard barbeques. Stopping at a farmstand on the way back from the Shore. Peaches so luscious, the juice drips down your arm. Holding a tomato in one hand and a salt shaker in the other. Peeling fresh corn on the back porch. Seeing who could spit watermelon seeds the farthest.

If you’ve got a summertime memory of enjoying farm fresh produce, feel free to share it with us at njfarmfresh@rcr Rutgers.edu, or just read some memories from other folks who love Jersey Fresh: http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu/memories.asp.

“One day my cousin and I were enjoying some juicy Jersey peaches when we decided to turn it into a “Messy Peach Eating Contest”. With juice dripping down our chins and arms and lots of loud slurping, we were ready to be hosed down by the time we were done.”

Grape Expectations: New Jersey Wines

The growth of the New Jersey Wine Industry over the last few years has been phenomenal. Explains Gary Pavlis, Ph.D., Agricultural Agent for Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Atlantic County, “We currently have 33 wineries with only 18 a year and a half ago. Farmers looking for a more viable form of agriculture are turning to growing grapes, some are also opening wineries. The growth, viability and diversity of this industry is seen throughout the state and is evidenced by the recent results of the New Jersey Wine Competition. Gold medals were awarded to Tomasello Winery (Atlantic County) for a Vidal Ice Wine and a Villard Noir, Bellview Winery (Atlantic County) for a Blueberry wine and a Viognier, Almalthea Winery (Camden County) for a Merlot and a Chancellor, Unionville Winery (Hunterdon County) for a Chardonnay, and Alba Winery (Warren County) for a Port.

Much of the growth is along the Delaware Bay because of its moderating effects on the climate of that region. The bay temperatures keep the winters from getting too cold and the summers from getting too hot. As a result, the grape varieties being planted are extremely diverse. Well known varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Chardonnay are common place but Pinot Grigio, Viognier, Sangiovese, and Barbera are also being planted. The diversity in climate from Northern New Jersey to the south have resulted in a tremendous range of wine types and styles.”

Many wine events and festivals are taking place this summer: http://www.newjerseywines.com/.