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**New Jersey peach industry doing its part to keep peach demand strong**

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By

Keith Loria

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Peaches are one of New Jersey's 10 most important fruit and vegetable crops, with an estimated wholesale value of \$25 million.

"New Jersey ranks fourth in acreage and volume of peaches in the U.S.," said Pegi Adam, marketing manager and consultant for the [New Jersey Peach Promotion Council](#). "We currently have 3,800 acres and produce about 20 million pounds. Volume figures are quite variable based on weather and other environmental factors and value is also volatile as we see a gradual shift from wholesaling to direct marketing by growers."

Back in 1982, the state harvested 14,000 acres of peaches and had many packinghouses and field buyers for the major supermarket chains. A popular phrase coined by the industry at the time was "apples for health but peaches for wealth," and 80 percent of the peaches were packed and sold wholesale.

"Promotion was targeted to wholesale buyers because peaches were shipped to all states east of the Mississippi River and the upper Midwest, Ontario and eastern Canada," said Jerry Frecon, professor emeritus at Rutgers University and consultant to the NJ Peach Promotion Council. "This has changed. We have less acreage, and fewer growers. A higher percentage of our crop is sold directly to consumers as we have fewer packers and shippers."

The main reason for this is many growers sold their land as demand for development increased.

"Fewer young farmers have gotten into wholesale peach production and other peach farmers have diversified or downsized their operations," Frecon said. "Some peach land is in field crops while a significant portion is in wine grapes a more profitable crop in New Jersey."

New Jersey is expected to have a steady volume of peaches from early July until September from shippers in the southern part of the state.

"We have had a normal season to date, but adverse weather is always a concern," Frecon said.

Peaches from New Jersey remain very popular, and continue to sell well, but New Jersey retailers need to do more, he said.

"We are close to our markets with 10 million people, and if we can get people to buy and consume peaches, we should be able to sell them all in our state," Frecon said. "Promoting the benefits of local and Jersey Fresh should give us an advantage. Unfortunately, we have challenges, getting our retailers to handle Jersey Fresh peaches, competing with peaches from other areas and competing

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with other produce items in the supermarket to maintain or gain shelf space.”

The wholesale market for peaches last year started off strong in early July, but by mid-August, it started to slow down, and New Jersey peaches were hard to sell on the wholesale market.

“Peach farmers with retail markets or selling in community farmers markets reported good sales,” Frecon said. “Farmers with U-pick operations had excellent movement all season because families wanted to visit farms and enjoy the outdoors. The pandemic affected these sales helping direct marketers and possibly hurting promotions in the wholesale markets.”

There are more produce items competing for shelf space in produce sections today, so peach producers are relying on different packaging options and more types of peach products, such as yellow fleshed peaches; yellow fleshed nectarines; yellow fleshed flat peaches and nectarines; white fleshed peaches; white-fleshed nectarines; and white- fleshed flat-peaches and nectarines.

“The New Jersey Peach Promotion Council is funding the development and suitability of these types for handling and distribution in wholesale markets,” Frecon said. “We are trying to follow the lead of other fruit varieties like apples which have increased their shelf space but developing new types and varieties available over a longer season.”

Surveys by Jersey Fresh, NJ Farm Bureau, and produce marketers have verified that consumers want to buy local products to not only help local producers but because they feel local is synonymous with fresh.

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## About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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