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**North Carolina offers a fantastic growing destination**

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By

Keith Loria

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North Carolina is very geographically diverse, which makes an ideal place for growing produce. "We have mountains in the western part of the state, rolling hills/Piedmont in the central part of the state and sandy pine woods and coastal plains stretching down the beaches in the eastern part of the state," said Seth Grant part of the sales team at [Flavor 1st Growers & Packers](#) based in Mills River, NC.

"This allows for a long growing season for the state as a whole. As we like to call it up here in the mountains, 'down east' and the middle part of the state can plant and start picking earlier than the mountains."

Charlotte D. Vick, partner/sales and marketing manager for the Wilson, NC-based [Vick Family Farms](#), noted that in addition to the great soils, the weather is also very cooperative to growers.

"From apples to sweet potatoes to strawberries, watermelon and blueberries, North Carolina grows great produce," she said. "There are many other crops, and we have the best Department of Agriculture in the country that supports us with marketing, market access, research and great staff support. That is why agriculture is the No. 1 industry here and only continues to grow."

She also credits the intelligent farmers and supportive neighbors for helping the produce scene to prosper.

"We all sit on different boards that help strengthen our partnerships and to learn and support the industry," Vick said. "Collaboration is important to making our industry stronger. When farmers thrive, other players in the food system benefit too. I work with other farmers across the U.S., and in certain times (weather related events or market disruptions) we can help each other out. It has been important for me in sales to strengthen those relationships for the future."

David Bradley, supply chair specialist with the Nashville, NC-based [Nash Produce](#), noted that what makes eastern North Carolina a strong produce area is the rich agricultural history associated with the state.

"This area has been a strong tobacco producer for a very long time," he said. "With that, came diversification of crops on these local farms. North Carolina is one of the top diverse states in the country in terms of number of crops being grown. Additionally, North Carolina is the top state in sweet potato production. This has allowed Nash Produce ample opportunity for growth and become a major player in the industry."

Michelle Grainger, executive director of the NC Sweetpotato Commission, noted that since the earliest days, it's the climate that has helped the state's sweet potato industry thrive.

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“It’s hot, moist climate and rich, fertile soil are ideal for cultivating sweet potatoes,” she said. “Sweet potatoes need a combination of good moisture, in well-drained soil, and warm temps during the growing season. In addition to the ideal climate, we have an ideal community which makes the industry unlike all others. Our growers are committed to their craft and recognize the value in not only working alongside the commission and their neighbors, but also partnering with research institutions, the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences and other commodity associations and member organizations such as the NC Farm Bureau.”

With great growers, cooperation among companies and commissions and the department of ag doing its part, it’s no wonder North Carolina is a go-to produce town.

[Keith Loria](#)

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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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