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North Carolina Department of Agriculture touting local growers

By

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The [North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services](#) is tasked with promoting potatoes grown in the state, throughout the U.S. and Canada, and works to ensure state growers are successful.

As of mid-May, the state was kicking off strawberry season, which is always the kickoff to its general harvesting season, as it readies broccoli, blueberries, peaches, watermelon, followed by summer vegetables like eggplants, squash, cucumbers, onions, tomatoes and more.

“The reality is in North Carolina, we have such a wide variety of commodities, it really does allow us to carry our season from March all the way into November,” said Kevin Hardison, marketing manager for the department. “As far as what’s been planted already, most everyone says that the fields are in good shape and those items that have already been planted like watermelons, the conditions are really good.”

So far, weather has cooperated and there hasn’t been any significant pest issues. Some cooler weather has hurt the strawberry yield a bit, but the quality is expected to be top-notch in 2023.

The goal of the department is to increase the sales and awareness of North Carolina produce and products within the state, the nation and around the world.

“We just got back from CPMA and had a really excellent return with the growers up there,” Hardison said. “Our growers were talking with buyers they do business with and even some additional buyers that they haven’t done business with before. There is a lot of interest internationally and domestically in North Carolina’s products.”

One of the initiatives the department is planning this year is to raise awareness of the relevance of the culture to North Carolina growers to make sure consumers understand they are supporting the agriculture industry within the state but also the local growers.

“Whenever produce is in season, we make sure local is touted within the stores, at the farmers markets — both the ones the state owns and others — and make sure people see it’s locally grown and connect the farmer with the person purchasing the produce,” Hardison said.

One of the biggest issues North Carolina growers are facing is labor, which is a challenge that is being felt throughout the produce industry. Other challenges include lack of understanding about the specifics of what agriculture entails, and the need for enough water available and the safety needed when working in the fields and transporting produce.

“Communication and education on the farms are vital,” Hardison said. “We have really good soil in North Carolina, and there’s a nice variety of soils. We get warm from east to west which allows us to have a good long growing condition for most of our crops. These climatic conditions allow us to grow for longer.”

More and more North Carolina growers are also starting to grow in greenhouses, extending the season and allowing them to hit more customers up and down the East Coast for a longer period of time.

“A lot of people are still looking for locally-grown, but even hyper-locally grown, knowing something is grown within a certain amount of miles from their home,” Hardison said.

Moving forward, the department will continue working with its growers and helping them out any way they can.

[Keith Loria](#)

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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