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**NJDA sees golden opportunities for Jersey growers in Philadelphia**

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By

Keith Loria

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The New Jersey Department of Agriculture sees big things ahead in 2024, especially with this being the 40th anniversary of Jersey Fresh, the longest continuously running state government agriculture brand in the country.

“We will be doing several produce visits, and our campaign will highlight Jersey Fresh as ‘The Freshest for 40 years’ during this anniversary year,” said Joe Atchison III, NJDA’s assistant secretary and marketing and development division director.

There are also plentiful opportunities to increase the Jersey Fresh program, as NJDA continually works to improve and expand the program.

For instance, NJDA is working to grow its new Organic, Sustainable and Regenerative Agriculture program to provide technical advice, education and marketing support for those sectors while providing contacts for retailers looking to source these products.

“We have several value-added products in our Made With Jersey Fresh program including sauces, salsas, canned tomato products, jams, beer and spirits and frozen eggplant cutlets all using Jersey Fresh fruits and/or vegetables,” Atchison said. “We are looking to add additional lines and participation from producers in the Garden State over the course of the year.”

Given its proximity to New Jersey, obviously, the Philadelphia market is very important to the state’s producers, especially those in the southern part of Jersey.

In fact, according to marketing surveys, 58 percent of consumers in the Philadelphia metro area, as well as in Montgomery and Bucks counties, say they purchase produce that is labeled Jersey Fresh, or from New Jersey.

“With Philadelphia and its suburban areas in South Jersey being a high population area, it provides an excellent opportunity for our growers to market and sell their outstanding product,” Atchison said. “Some of our farmers sell produce at various Philadelphia-area produce community markets, and then with some of our South Jersey community farmers markets and on-farm markets so close to the Philadelphia area, and near train stations that go to and from Philadelphia, it gives consumers easy access to our produce.”

Plus, having such close access to other businesses that need fresh fruits and vegetables, such as restaurants, and food processing companies, provides another revenue path for many of New Jersey growers.

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Along with farm and business visits to promote what is in-season, the NJDA will also have digital billboards on some of the busiest roadways in the country to help bring business to New Jersey growers.

“We will have Jersey Shore promotions on Jersey Shore boardwalks with special giveaway days for blueberries, tomatoes, and peaches, along with flying the Jersey Fresh banner along the beaches,” Atchison said. “Targeted social media campaigns and contests plus radio spots will promote our wonderful produce to those throughout the Garden State.”

With the calendar flipping to May, that means a busy time for New Jersey growers.

“Some of our top produce featured in May includes asparagus, strawberries, kale, lettuce, spinach, and other leafy greens, many of which New Jersey is a top 10 producing state in the U.S.,” Atchison said.

So far, the 2024 growing season is off to good start with early crops harvesting on time.

“While we have had some wet weather in much of the state, there have been enough dry periods for farmers to harvest these early crops and plant and care for crops that will harvest later in the season,” Atchison said.

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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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