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**NEW JERSEY PEACH PROMOTION COUNCIL PROJECTS A BANNER YEAR FOR GROWERS
New Varieties Show Promise to Extend Seasons**

Clayton, NJ (July 25, 2007) – New Jersey is taking the lead in East Coast peach production this year, making it the nation's second largest producer, after California. Early season storms decimated approximately 90% of the South Carolina crop and 50% of the Georgia crop, according to the USDA Economic Research Service. While projections for the 2007 yield are slightly lower than for 2006, the crop and the prices nonetheless are exceedingly good. Both seasons are the best in recent years. The USDA Fruit summary shows the 2006 utilized production totaling 34,000 tons; at a total value of \$35.7-million, 16% higher than 2005's value of \$30.8-million.

“The rains and cool weather of April, combined with a warm, sunny May have resulted in near perfect fruit,” says Ed Gaventa, chair of the Peach Promotion Council. “Moisture, followed by sunshine and heat make for good size and color in peaches.”

August is New Jersey's traditional “Jersey Peach Month,” by official governor 's proclamation. This year is benefiting from great growing weather, with clean, nice finishes and large fruit sizes. The crop is just what the markets want, according to projections of the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council.

With introduction of the new “Desiree,” bred by Rutgers as NJ350, future Garden State peach seasons may be getting jump-started to very early July. This large, yellow-fleshed, aromatic fruit is distinguished by its strong rosy color and full flavor early in the season. It's in limited supply now, but reaping raves from growers and consumers and holds the potential of giving New Jersey peaches a healthy edge with its competitors from the Carolinas and Georgia.

A second new variety, *Prunus persica*, designated by Rutgers breeders as 'NJF16', shows promise of being a premier flat peach that stands out on store shelves. It's distinguished from other peach varieties by a unique combination of large, showy, light pink flowers, abundance on trees and bright golden-yellow clingstone fruit that is both firm and juicy. It's now being harvested in a handful of orchards, such as Terhune's in Princeton.

Crop is Just What Buyers Want

Sunny Valley Inc, the state's largest peach packing and distributing company, reports that this year's crop is exactly what retail buyers want -- good size and firmness, vibrant color and strong fragrance. "Jersey Fresh peaches are all graded according to USDA standards and generally meet the top, 'US #1 Extra' and 'Fancy,' says Philip Neary, Sunny Valley's director of operations and grower relations. In 2006, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture inaugurated a voluntary *Premium Peach Standard* that growers can utilize to further distinguish fresh peaches as top of the line.

Jersey peaches are all thinned and harvested by hand. Fruit for commercial sale is typically packed in ½-bushel/25-pound boxes, with shipments averaging 1.5 to 2-million boxes (50-60% of the harvest) each year to supermarkets and wholesalers and the rest sold direct from farm stands, community farmer markets and pick-your-own farms. In response to retail requests, among them Costco, Walmart and high-end retailers such as Wegmans and Whole Foods, New Jersey is leading the way with innovative specialty packing, ranging from four-to six-pound consumer packs to clamshells and consumer-ready single layer trays marked with packing dates. Prices for the past 16 years have ranged from \$2 to \$22 for a 25-pound box, typically averaging \$10-13 a box.

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NJ Peach outlook 2007/2

While crops are never totally within growers' controls, subject as they are to weather, climate changes, pests and other vagaries of nature, New Jersey peach growers are constantly implementing new technologies and new varieties. Last year, for the first time in 20 years, eight new varieties were introduced, including new doughnuts, early- and late-season peaches and nectarines. These trees will be maturing in the next two-three years and growers have high hopes they will result in longer seasons and higher yields.

New Jersey growers generally sell 98% of their peaches as fresh fruit, within 250 miles of the orchards. Consumers can recognize the freshness by sweetness and firmness and have come to appreciate it, according to Gaventa. "From mid-July through mid-September, shoppers want Jersey-fresh peaches. Growers can sell all the fruit they produce and demand is increasing as awareness grows. Nothing beats fruit picked and eaten within two or three days."

Just-Picked Means Consumers Get the Freshest

For consumers, just-picked, Jersey-grown peaches are great for immediate eating, but also will last longer in the fruit bowl because they haven't traveled any distance. What to look for? According to Frecon, size is of little concern--ripeness is what counts. "Yellow peaches should have strong yellow or yellowish-red under colors, with patchy red over colors. White peaches, which are growing in popularity, should have creamy or white under-colors with the same patchy red over-colors. Green under-colors mean the peaches aren't yet ripe. Fragrance is very important--good healthy peaches smell strongly sweet. The final requisite is firmness -- they should be firm, but not hard and not mushy. Look for names like *Red Havens, Flaming Fury, John Boy, Encore, Laurol, Jersey Queen and Cresthaven.*"

Restaurants Joining 'Proud to Serve Jersey Fresh Peach' Program

Last year, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture introduced a cooperative program between "Jersey Fresh" and the New Jersey Restaurant Association to have restaurants post signage saying they are "proud to serve New Jersey produced and harvested products in season." To date, more than 140 restaurants have signed onto the program.

Of more than 40 peach varieties grown in New Jersey, 90% are yellow-flesh, 4% are white flesh, 6% are nectarines and 1% doughnut or flat. About 25% of the total are early ripening varieties, from about July 5th through August 1st. Mid-season varieties are ripe from August 5th to 20th, and late season are ripe from about August 25th to September 15th. Once the new varieties mature, they could stretch the season a bit farther.

Some 7,000 of New Jersey's nearly 806,000 acres of farmland are devoted to growing peaches in 90 orchards throughout the state, with the largest commercial growers concentrated in southern Jersey's Atlantic, Camden, Gloucester and Salem Counties and a couple in Hunterdon.

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NJ Peach outlook 2007/3

Twenty-five New Jersey Peach Promotion Council packers handle in excess of 65-million pounds (2,600,000 ½ bushel boxes). Most packers market the fruit through cooperatives, brokers wholesalers and commission merchants, with a few selling to retailers and processors. The major wholesaling outlets are in Glassboro, Hammonton, Vineland, Swedesboro, Millville, Newark, New York City and Philadelphia.

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