



CONTACT:

Pegi Adam, 973-744-6090 pegi@mountsnow.org

Jerome Frecon, 856-307-6450 frecon@rcrc.rutgers.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

At First Blush....

**NEW JERSEY'S 2008 PEACH SEASON HOLDS ABUNDANT FRUIT
Buy Local, Think Green, Save Energy Costs...and Preserve Our Farms**

CLAYTON, NJ, (June 26, 2008) -- While peach growers know that anything can happen between late April, when peach blossoms fade and little clusters of fruit appear, the 2008 season so far looks like the most abundant in several years, according to the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council (NJPPC), the state's foremost organization for the peach industry. Peach clusters are so dense that growers have been thinning every variety, and a few growers in south Jersey were already picking peaches in mid-June, several weeks earlier than usual, thanks to development of newer and better varieties for an early season.

"All the trees of every variety are bearing their maximum fruit loads," says Ed Gaventa, president of the NJPPC. Gaventa, near Swedesboro, is already picking the first of his yellow peaches and Bill Heritage, owner of Heritage Station in Richwood, is picking whites. Both are south Jersey growers, who will supply growers from northern counties and Long Island to sell at their farm stands, until their own peaches come in, around mid-July.

"Last year, because of spring frost and low-temperature injury in South Carolina and Georgia, New Jersey emerged as the country's second largest producer of peaches, after California," he says. "We don't expect to retain that ranking this year, but we are consistently the fourth largest producer in the country. Typically, all we can produce gets sold as fresh peaches, none go to canning."

Phil Neary, director of grower relations & operations for Sunny Valley Intl., the state's largest processor and shipper, believes they will process 850,000-950,000 half-bushels – 100,000-200,000 more half-bushels than last year.

"This year's fruit is what we've all been hoping for—good color, perfect size, 2 ¾-inches in diameter. Last year, because of the dry spring weather, a lot of peaches didn't reach more than 2 ½-inches in diameter, smaller than the retail trade wants," says Neary.

New Varieties Commercialized

This year also, four new varieties, bred by Dr Joe Goffreda of Rutgers Fruit and Ornamental Research and Extension Center, have been commercialized and virtually sold out to growers. Dubbed the "four ladies, these new varieties were developed to extend and round out the state's peach season. Desiree is an early season, late June/early July; Victoria is a late season, September; Messina and Gloria are meant to fill an

August gap, between established harvests. " Of course, these won't bear significant fruit for about three years, 2010/2011.

Because New Jersey lacks the long growing season of southern states, it has been at considerable disadvantage in sales. Traditionally, the state's peaches are on super market shelves and in farmers' markets the last week or so in July, peaking in August (the official "Jersey Fresh Peach Month") and winding down in early September.

Costs and Distribution

"Input costs are much higher this year than ever," says Jerome Frecon, peach specialist for Rutgers Cooperative Extension. "The biggest costs are increases in energy, fertilizer, pesticides, labor, packaging (double that of last year). Growers have to cut in other places to make sure they cover costs. All peach growers and shippers have these same costs, but if you add transportation costs from distant areas, New Jersey peaches are a better buy. Regardless of costs, wholesale peach growers are price takers and not price makers."

New Jersey growers have an additional distribution advantage over California and the south, in that their peaches can be picked, packed, and shipped on one day, reaching markets in the eastern U.S. that same day, or by the next morning via overnight transit. Primary sales outlets are distributors/wholesalers, 40%; direct to retailers (chains, other direct marketers, specialty stores) 40%; retail at downtown farmers markets, 3%; on-farm markets and stands, 12%; u-pick, 3%; to processors for peach juice, jelly and others uses, 2%.

"So many entities are working diligently to keep this industry in our Garden State," concludes Gaventa. "Rutgers agriculture experts continuously work to breed varieties that are beneficial to farmers, agricultural and environmental quality. They aim for trees that are particularly well suited to New Jersey's climate and growing conditions, focusing on fruit to extend our season and be less susceptible to devastating bacterial spot disease, common to stone fruits from other regions. And, they also look to development of novel varieties, such as the flat peaches, that will get attention on retailer shelves."

Jersey Fresh peaches are available from mid-July through September, at downtown tailgate markets, farm stores, pick-your-own farms and in many grocery stores and restaurants, where "Jersey Fresh" signage usually identifies them.

Industry Notes

- Peaches and nectarines are available in standard ½-bushel packs as well as various specialty packs.
- Most growers and packers market fruit through cooperatives, brokers, wholesalers and commission merchants.
- Truckload quantities come from growers in the southern counties: Gloucester, Camden, Atlantic, Cumberland, and Salem
- Smaller growers disbursed throughout the state grow and distribute peaches through roadside retail markets, farmers' tailgate markets, and through many of New Jersey's top restaurants.

- The industry works closely with the Jersey Fresh program to maximize awareness of the quality and availability of New Jersey peaches – New Jersey peaches are Jersey Fresh...As Fresh As Fresh Gets.

- New Jersey peaches have a distribution advantage in that peaches can be picked, packed, and shipped the same day reaching markets in the eastern U.S. the same day, or by the next morning via overnight transit.

For further information, contact the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council, 1200 North Delsea Drive, Clayton, NJ 08312. Phone 856-307-6450 Ext 1. website www.jerseypeaches.com

For information and listings of restaurants featuring “Jersey Fresh” peaches and other Jersey Fresh products, contact the New Jersey Restaurant Association, 800.848.6368, www.njra.org

###