

THE PRODUCE NEWS

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Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction looking for repeat of record year

By Keith Loria
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As one of the premier produce auctions in the Eastern United States, the [Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction](#)'s success is of utmost importance to New Jersey and the Northeast region.

The Vineland cooperative is comprised of hundreds of member farmers and an elected board of directors. Member farmers grow a large selection of crops, including arugula, basil, cilantro, dill, mint, parsley (curly and plain), a variety of lettuces from bibb, Boston, endive, escarole, green leaf, iceberg, red leaf and romaine. Fruits grown by members include blueberries, melons, strawberries and peaches — but there is so much more.

The auction handles thousands of individual transactions during the average growing season, from early April to late November/early December year after year, which amounts to millions of packages being sold over the course of the growing season.

Located on 44 acres, the auction has nearly 130,000 square feet of cross-dock loading, state-of-the-art cooling facilities to maintain the cold chain and can cool approximately 200,000 packages in a 24-hour period.

This year, the auction started on April 25, and the season started strong with plenty of product available.

“It was an early start as the result of a mild winter but thus far, the prices for the growers have been good,” said Carol DeFoor, office manager for the Vineland, NJ-based company. “Quality produce is plentiful, and we are seeing a great variety of items including a variety of lettuces, greens, parsley, cilantro, etc. As 2022 was the best year in the Vineland Produce Auction’s history, it will be interesting to see how 2023 compares.”

The Vineland Produce Auction is in its 92nd year, and has members whose families go back to the first years of the auction. The cooperative has growers from all over the southern counties of New Jersey, as well as growers from Warren County in the northern part of the state.

“We continue to have a large impact in the produce industry on the East Coast,” DeFoor said. “As Benjamin Franklin said, ‘New Jersey is a keg tapped on both ends,’ referring to its proximity to both New York and New Jersey. We have major cities and a large population within three hours. The soil in New Jersey is a coastal soil and rich in organic matter making it very good for agriculture. This is why New Jersey produce is known for its flavor and taste.”

She is looking forward to a very strong spring and leading into an even better summer season.

“Our growers work very hard to make sure only the best quality of produce is delivered,” DeFoor said. “Our produce is fresh, in that our growers pick it daily and sell and deliver the same day.”

On the negative side, inflation and costs for growing products makes it difficult for growers to compete with products coming in from other areas at a cheaper price.

“The Vineland Produce Auction has an extensive warehouse department which sells packaging supplies to the growers our warehouse manager works very hard at keeping the cost to the grower down,” DeFoor said.

The Vineland Produce Auction is in the process of replacing one of its older hydro coolers, with the new unit helping to reduce cooling time for some of the items. That will be a big boon for customers, who are primarily produce brokers with the majority of them being generational buyers.

“The growers and brokers have all grown in the industry and both are needed for success,” DeFoor said. “I am proud of the people — every employee, every grower and every broker — who deal with the Vineland Produce Auction. We all know that we work together for success for everyone. This is a wonderful group of individuals.”