



Vineland Produce Auction meets needs of Jersey customers

By Keith Loria
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[The Vineland Produce Auction](#) has long been the premier produce auction in the country. Its success is important to New Jersey and the Northeast's ag industry overall.

Located on 44 acres in Vineland, NJ, the cooperative is comprised of hundreds of member farmers and an elected board of directors. The facility has nearly 130,000 square feet of crossdock loading, which the member farmers, brokers and distributors utilize.

The cooperative also has state-of-the-art cooling facilities to maintain the cold chain and can cool approximately 200,000 packages in a 24-hour period. There's also a full-service icehouse and a fully-stocked warehouse.

August is a month for finishing up the summer crops and getting ready for the fall season that's ahead.

"Fall produce is very important to us," said Carol DeFoor, office manager for the Vineland, NJ based auction. "Last year, fall produce helped our growers because of the higher-than-normal prices as a result of the lettuce issue in California. The fact that Jersey lettuce is very flavorful is another bonus for the consumers."

Combined, the member farmers grow a strong roster of crops, including arugula, basil, cilantro, dill, mint, parsley, a variety of lettuces, collards, kale, asparagus, beans, beets, cabbage, corn, eggplants, onions, peas, various peppers, squashes and turnips. Fruits grown by members include blueberries, melons, strawberries and peaches.

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

"We will have plenty of lettuces and cabbages this fall as well as other greens," DeFoor said. "The volume will be plentiful to meet the demands."

One item that is expected to be big this fall is pickles, but as always, there will be a nice variety of produce items available throughout autumn.

"So far, the year has been good but as with anything it could be better. Pricing wasn't there for some items this summer like last year, but other crops were able to make up the difference," DeFoor said. There is difficulty for growers to make a profit when the expenses continue to increase. We are seeing a fluctuation in prices where one day something is high and in demand and the next day it is harder to move."

Vineland Produce Auction will soon be getting a new hydro cooler, but was able to get through the season down one, thanks to the team in the cooling department who worked hard and kept things operating at an optimum level.

"We try and meet the needs of everyone in the area, all over the state of New Jersey," DeFoor said. "We sell product from any grower in the state, we have supplies for the farmers, and we have a lot of product available, which keeps us a success."

While some growers have expanded operations, other farmers have left over the last decade, but the volume has remained consistent.

"People sometimes forget about the quality of produce that New Jersey has," DeFoor said. "Our growers are expanding and we have more varieties available. And even if we don't have it in the auction, we can get it for someone. There's always a way to satisfy the customer."

Photo: Dan Deola, Rob Pustizzi and Elisa Coulter at the cooler office