

THE PRODUCE NEWS

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Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction continues with its years of success

By Keith Loria
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[The Vineland Produce Auction](#) has long been the premier produce auction in the country, and 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 cross-dock loading which the member farmers, brokers and distributors utilize.

The biggest topic of conversation around the auction, according to Carol DeFoor, office manager for the entity, is what products are selling.

"Everyone has beautiful produce because of the dry, warm nights and sunshine and all are anxious to sell the produce at its best," she said. "We had a very good year last year and are hoping to continue that success."

Most of the produce items are just starting to come online so nothing is particularly trending as of mid-May.

“We are seeing things coming in a week or two earlier than previous years due to the beautiful weather,” DeFoor said. “This should continue throughout the season. We are all hoping that everything will be in demand due to the high quality, variety and flavor.”

The Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction has been owned by growers since 1931, as a means in which the farmers of New Jersey could utilize to sell their produce.

“We are one of the few cooperative produce auctions remaining in New Jersey,” DeFoor said. “We provide a multitude of services for the growers and buyers, from picking and packaging supplies, ice to cooling services. The majority of growers and brokers are generational and have been working in conjunction with the produce auction since they were young.”

Its customers are typically produce brokers or buyers, and those at the auction have maintained successful relationships because its growers provide buyers with the freshest produce.

“There are times during the auction that the grower is selling before picking and packing the produce,” DeFoor said. “The buyer is getting the freshest produce with a longer shelf life for shipping. The brokers and buyers know each other and have developed relationships that go beyond just produce sales.”

The Vineland Produce Auction has remained successful for so long because its board of directors works to meet the needs of the membership and brokers, while maintaining the fiduciary responsibilities to ensure the success of the auction. Still, it is a difficult balance to maintain.

“Some of the biggest challenges for the Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction is, ‘how do we increase sales and bring back growers without interfering with someone else’s business?’” DeFoor said. “We have increased our advertising and presence with marketing in hopes of bringing attention to ourselves and our brokers for potential buyers. If the brokers increase their business that increases business for the growers.”

Another challenge is that the industry is constantly changing, so product that was in demand one year may no longer be in demand the following year.

“The weather may start out beautiful and prefect for growing produce and suddenly you get a rainy spell that won’t quit and you lose product and sales,” DeFoor said. “Farming is a gamble, and you must be able to take the highs and lows. These are just two of the issues that growers deal with on a yearly basis.”

Thanks to a great team at the Vineland Cooperative Produce Auction where everyone works together to get things done, things are looking good for the future.

“We utilize and appreciate the strengths of the employees daily — everyone brings different strengths to complete tasks,” DeFoor said. “We have a warehouse staff that are helping make a new catalog for the warehouse, and we have cooler personnel who understand and ensure all the food safety standards are met daily without constant direction. Everyone has a chance to grow and expand their knowledge.”