



**CONTACT:**

Pegi Adam, 973-744-6090, [pegi@mountsnow.org](mailto:pegi@mountsnow.org)

Peter Furey, 609-393-7163

[pfurey9119@aol.com](mailto:pfurey9119@aol.com)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**BUY FRESH...PICK FRESH...BUY LOCAL, NOW AT NEW JERSEY FARMS  
Garden State Farmers Use Innovative Techniques For Earlier Harvests**

**TRENTON, NJ (June 19, 2008)** – If you’ve never picked raspberries or strawberries right off the vine and popped them into your mouth, you’ve missed an intensely delicious experience. There’s no question that fresh-picked, locally grown produce retains the most nutrients and flavor. Fortunately for New Jersey residents, there are almost 500 farms and farm stands, within an hour of almost any town or city in the Garden State, where people can pick their own fruits and vegetables, or buy them already picked from on-farm retail outlets or community farmers markets in downtowns throughout the state. These downtown markets have expanded from just 50 in 2002 to more than 100 in 2008.

Increasingly, farmers are appealing to the state’s sophisticated food tastes and wide ethnic diversity, raising grass-fed beef cattle, exotic ostrich, quail, buffalo, lamb and goats. They’re also now making artisanal cheeses, aged in hand-hewn caves. Many farm markets have licensed bakeries offering home-baked pies, breads and other goodies. Non-food stocks include condiments, cooking equipment and landscape plantings.

“With our relatively short growing season, our farmers have to constantly innovate,” says Nieuwenhuis. “Our earliest harvests, asparagus and spinach, ripen in April and our season ends in mid-November with peppers, squash and pumpkins.”

Ongoing trials of new planting tools and methods that can yield earlier harvests have resulted in some farmers already selling the famed Jersey tomatoes, several weeks earlier than the traditional early July. Laying black plastic on fields in early spring warms up the

soil for early planting. Covering young plants with plastic hoops (high tunnel planting) or light, white, non-woven polyester “blankets,” porous to air and water while transmitting 85% of incident light can protect young vegetables, flowers, fruits from frost, cold wind, and insects, while accelerating growth.

By late June, more than 125 varieties of vegetables, herbs and fruit are readily available on farms throughout New Jersey. Farmers are reaching out directly to consumers through the internet, posting produce availability, pick-your-own opportunities, children’s activities, directions and other information. “We get reports from farmers that 50-75% of their customers find them through the internet,” says Nieuwenhuis. “Many farms now are agri-tourism destinations, with farm animal petting areas, children’s play sets and special seasonal events, around Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, . Parents enjoy the farm, while kids play. Everybody’s happy.”

“Patronizing local farmers benefits everyone,” says Richard Nieuwenhuis, president of the New Jersey Farm Bureau. “Consumers get fresh products, farmers stay viable, long-distance transportation costs and energy consumption are reduced and our farmland open space is sustained. A 2005 survey, conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson's PublicMind Polling Institute for the Farm Bureau, showed that 87% of more than 900 New Jersey residents polled felt it was important to have farming and farmland preservation in the state and prefer to buy produce grown here.”

A benefit of buying direct from the farmers is getting up close to where food actually comes from, along with an education on what makes it good. New Jersey farmers can tell customers exactly when the produce was picked, how it was grown, what soil conditions give it distinctive flavors. They can provide tips on preparation and storing and many other useful bits of information that couldn’t be gotten from anyone other than the farmers themselves. And, the farmers are continually finding new hybrids and techniques for getting earlier, more flavorful harvests.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture's "Jersey Fresh" website lists all the farm stands, pick-your-own farms and downtown community farmers' markets in the state, along with hours, seasons and what's available. The site also provides click-throughs to individual farms' websites. Go to [www.state.nj.us/jerseyfresh](http://www.state.nj.us/jerseyfresh) or the New Jersey Farm Bureau Produce Directory at [www.njfb.org](http://www.njfb.org), then click on "Produce Directory."

The New Jersey Farm Bureau is a member organization of more than 16,000 farmers and farm-related entities within the Garden State. It is the only organization solely dedicated to representing the grass-roots interests and directives of its members in educating all levels of government and the public on the farm community's policies and positions. The Farm Bureau also takes a lead in seeking out initiatives, activities and ventures to enhance the profitability of producer members and ensure the viability of agriculture in New Jersey -- *the Garden State for Good Reason -- our farms.*

For further information, contact the New Jersey Farm Bureau, at The Farmhouse, 168 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608. Phone 609-393-7163; fax 609-393-7072; email [mail@njfb.org](mailto:mail@njfb.org); website [www.njfb.org](http://www.njfb.org)

###