

New Jersey draws record crowd to EPC outdoor meeting

By GORDON M. HOCHBERG

HILLSDALE, NJ — The largest crowd ever to attend a regular meeting of the Eastern Produce Council gathered Tuesday evening, June 8, to hear about New Jersey's fruit and vegetable crops heading into the 2010 season.

The meeting, held under a tent here at Demarest Farm on a pleasantly cool evening and hosted by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, drew a record 240 people, according to EPC Executive Director John McAleavey. The meeting was the last one before the council's traditional summer break.

New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher led the state's delegation and introduced the speakers who gave brief updates on some of the state's key crops.

John Rigolizzo of the Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey gave the vegetable report, telling attendees that despite poor weather earlier in the season, "we have some beautiful produce this year." He said that "everything is moving — and moving fast. Quality is excellent. It really is an amazing crop this year."

Phil Neary of Sunny Valley International gave the peach report, saying that "the peach crop is the best in 10-15 years." The crop is also expected to be early. Peaches could be seven to 10 days earlier than last year, "and last year was an early crop," he said.

Yellow peaches and yellow nectarines could start as early as the beginning of July, while white peaches and white nectarines could start in mid-July.

Mr. Neary also pointed out that the state will have "a full season of yellow peaches that will run through September," so he urged retailers and other distributors to keep promoting Jersey peaches for the entire season.

Francisco Allende, also of Sunny Valley, gave a very short but direct blueberry report. With the Jersey blueberry season one of the earlier on record, pints of blueberries were set up on all the tables for every attendee to take home and enjoy.

Pointing to those blueberries, Mr. Allende stated with pride, "There are pints on each chair — and they can speak for themselves. We're ready to go today."



Joey-Joseph of Victor Joseph & Son Inc. and Rob Goldstein of Genpro Inc.



Frank Reilly of King Kullen and Ken Brickel of Bozzuto's Inc.

THE FRESH WAVE

Nick Giordano sees good volume, quality and sizing in an early deal

By GORDON M. HOCHBERG

The 2010 New Jersey blueberry deal will be characterized by very good volume, quality and sizing — and a very early start, according to Nick Giordano, vice president of The Fresh Wave in Vineland, NJ.

"You're going to see a little bit of fruit on the 6th of June," Mr. Giordano told *The Produce News* Thursday, June 3. "Let me put it this way: there won't be enough labor to actually pick the amount of fruit that could be picked. Labor will be more of an issue [early on] than the fruit being ready."

Once the labor force arrives in full to New Jersey from point south — the normal progression — the blueberry crop should produce just what retailers and consumers want to see: excellent quality and sizing, and plenty of volume for the big Fourth of July pull.

In fact, "you'll get into volume between the 10th and the 15th of June," said Mr. Giordano. By the Fourth of July, "we should be at our peak."

Mr. Giordano has already seen good interest from retailers and other buyers in New Jersey blueberries, one of the state's signature items.

"Our job is to get them in here for early ads," he said. "So right off the bat, we're moving the fruit, because there's going to be a good bit of fruit, and quality is going to be good."

Blueberries are a key item at The Fresh Wave, which handles a full line of fresh fruits and vegetables from around the world from its headquarters in Vineland. As Mr. Giordano put it, "It's our most important crop. Absolutely."

Lat year The Fresh Wave handled about a half-million packages of Jersey blues. This year it expects to handle "probably about the same, maybe a little bit more — maybe 10-20 percent more," he estimated.

The vast majority of that volume will be packaged in one-pint clamshells, but the company also does two-pound and 18-ounce packs.

With the start of the Jersey deal just days away, Mr. Giordano talked a bit about the specifics of the crop.

"Right now I see no reason for quality to be an issue at all," he stated. "It should be excellent quality. That can all change with a hard rainstorm or excessive heat, but the way the weather's been, the way the bloom's set, quality should be excellent."

He added, "Sizing should be very, very good. There's no reason there should be any quality issues at all. It should be an exceptional quality year."

The Fresh Wave has represented two growers in Hamonton, NJ — Franceschini Farms and Billy Boy Farms — for about five years. "Right now we're pretty solid with what we have," said Mr. Giordano. "If we can find a grower that can bring good product here and add value to us, of course we would add a new grower. But right now we're not actively seeking any new growers."

With New Jersey blueberry growers gearing up for one of the earlier starting dates on record, combined with some blueberry growers in the South still shipping product, Mr. Giordano sounded a word of caution to buyers.

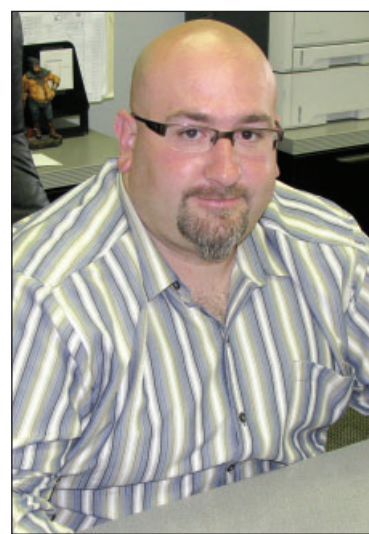
"The biggest thing with Jer-

sey this year, if you want the quality fruit, this is where you're gonna need to be because the way the growing areas are overlapping, ... there's going to be a two-tier market. There's going to be sloppy fruit that's old from an old growing area, and there's going to be high-quality fruit here [in New Jersey]. If you want the quality, this is really the area you need to be in."

While The Fresh Wave handles blueberries from all sources with pride, it perhaps takes a special pride in the berries from its home state.

"You can manage [the Jersey blues] a lot better," said Mr. Giordano. "When it's here, we're shipping it the day it's picked." The berries are "picked in the morning, cooled, and sent out late that afternoon. It's just the most ideal situation."

He concluded, "The buyer really needs to be aware of what area they're pulling from. If he wants really good quality and does not want shrink at store level, this is where you gotta be."



Nick Giordano



Henry Kreinces of Vision Import Group LLC and Bob Donio of Frank Donio Inc.



Joe Marino of Sun Valley Orchards and Joe Procacci of Procacci Bros. Sales Corp.