

Fruit - 2006

The five major fruit and berry crops grown in New Jersey are apples, blueberries, cranberries, peaches and strawberries. The mild winter and ideal spring weather conditions provided a good start for this year's fruit and berry crop. Sufficient soil moisture and above average spring temperatures were beneficial for fruit development. Frequent rain during late spring and early summer, dry conditions during late summer and early fall, all had different impacts on this year's fruit crops. As the season concluded, blueberries and strawberries had higher production, cranberries and peaches had lower production, while apple total production remained unchanged.

Total production of the five fruit and berry crops during 2006 amounted to 213.6 million pounds, up 0.1 percent from 2005's production of 211.1 million pounds. Value of utilized production of these crops totaled \$157.8 million, a 30 percent increase from the 2005 total of \$121.6 million. All fruit crops have contributed to the increase in value, except cranberries.

During 2006, among all major fruit and berry producing states in the nation, New Jersey ranked second in blueberry production; third in cranberry production; fourth in peach production; and sixteenth in apple production. Ranking crops by value of production within the state, blueberries ranked first with \$83.7 million. Peaches ranked second with \$35.7 million, while apples ranked third with \$18.1 million. Cranberries and strawberries ranked fourth and fifth with \$17.1 million and \$3.2 million, respectively.

Peaches: It was the third consecutive favorable growing season for New Jersey peach growers. Fruit set was good to excellent, while June drop was adequate because of the sufficient moisture. Frequent thunder storms caused some fruit loss around the state. Harvest of the early season varieties started ahead of schedule. Both quality and prices were above average. Production of the late season crop was much lower than anticipated due to extreme dry conditions in late summer and early fall. As the season concluded, New Jersey peach growers still experienced one of the best marketing seasons in recent years. Peach utilized production totaled 34,000 tons, up 0.9 percent from 2005. Season average price, at \$1,050 per ton (52.5 cents per pound), was \$134 higher than last year's price. Value of utilized production was \$35.7 million in 2006, 16 percent more than 2005. Gloucester county was the leading county with 15,000 tons while Cumberland was second with 8,000 tons. Camden ranked third with 3,150 tons and Burlington ranked fourth with 3,000 tons, followed by Atlantic with 1,600 tons.

Apples: It was a normal growing season for apple growers in New Jersey. Localized thunder storms damaged some apple crops during the summer months. Late season dry conditions also caused some apple sizing problems. In general, apple quality and prices were good. Fresh slice apples were a new trend for processed apples. Total apple production, at 45 million pounds, was the same as last year. The season average price, at 41.0 cents per pound, was 9.7 cents higher than in 2005. Value of utilized production was \$18.1 million in 2006 compared with \$13.8 million in 2005. The leading apple producing county was Gloucester with 16.0 million pounds. Atlantic and Warren tied second with 4.0 million pounds each. Burlington, Camden, and Hunterdon ranked third with 3.0 million pounds each. Monmouth and Sussex tied fourth with 2.5 million pounds each.

Blueberries: The blueberry crop's bloom and set of fruit were reported to be average to heavy. Blueberry production totaled 52 million pounds, an increase of 16 percent from last year. The season average price, at \$1.61 per pound, was the highest price ever recorded in the state. The value of utilized production for the 2006 blueberry crop was \$83.7 million, an increase of 51 percent from 2005. Atlantic and Burlington counties were the leading blueberry producing areas.

Cranberries: Cranberry total production was 485,000 barrels, down 9 percent from the 533,000 barrels produced in 2005. The season average price was \$35.70 per barrel, down 20 cents from last year. The value of production for the 2006 cranberry crop was \$17.1 million, down 10 percent from 2005. The cranberry crop's bloom, set of fruit, and fruit size was reported to be average to heavy. Burlington county was the major cranberry producing area in the Garden State.

Strawberries: There were 16,000 hundredweight of strawberries produced in New Jersey in 2006, 14 percent higher than in 2005. The season average price of \$200 per hundredweight is \$30 higher than a year ago. The higher production level and higher season average price brought the value of production to \$3.20 million, compared to \$2.38 million in 2005. Most strawberries were sold through direct marketing.