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Staff Picks: What's Hot This Summer

I am a raving fan of the Maui pineapple. Immediately, you notice the pineapple's unusual appearance – the outside hull itself is a golden color, not the typical deep green.

Then you slice into it, revealing equally golden flesh followed by a flavor and aroma that is simply shocking. The taste is mind-blowing – sweet and assertive, with lower acid than you might expect. Looks good, smells good AND tastes good – a winning combination!

-Meagan Masingill

Even though we just received our first shipment, I love the Blossom Bluff white nectarines—they are amazing! Because they pick their fruit on the riper side, the sugar content is unbelievably high. Although I'd recommend cooking or grilling these nectarines, their intense flavor makes them an excellent fresh eating fruit—maybe with a small side of vanilla ice-cream.

-Denise McAllan

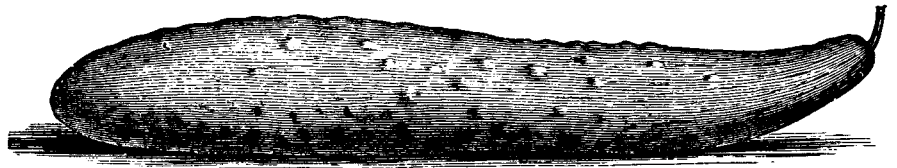
PRODUCE NOTES

July 22, 2008

July Market Report

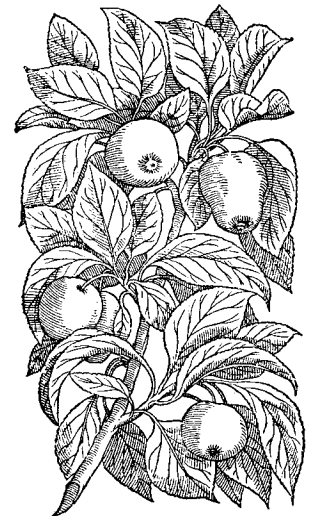
After a long, dry spring—the driest on record for eighty years—summer finally erupted in all of her splendor; the abundance is in full swing, and most items are local! Other than the cold, dry spring weather, the most profound changes to affect farmers and distributors are increasing fuel and seed costs, with diesel hitting the five dollar mark in recent weeks—we expect to see costs rise steadily over the coming months.

In produce news, Brentwood corn is now done, with Santa Cruz/Hollister/Yolo County corn expected to last until mid-August. Bunched greens and lettuce are in excellent supply with great quality and prices, as is cauliflower in all colors—white, purple (Graffiti), and orange (Cheddar). Meanwhile, all things cabbage and bok choy related are floundering in the heat, with bugs creating lots of problems. Broccoli prices remain high because of quality problems with knuckling and yellow beads, and bunch beets are scarce. Also hard to find is bunched spinach; availability will be sparse for a few weeks due to mildew.



Cucumbers, eggplant, tomatoes, zucchini and their summer varieties are profusely available, with excellent pricing, as are potatoes, with prices coming off on russets. Hard squash should return in from the Goleta, California area starting in a few weeks, bell pepper supply is expected to languish until the end of July, when California crops begin, and new crop sweet potatoes should recommence by early August.

The import apple season was lighter than usual this year, and many varieties are tight. However, local California Galas will begin in two weeks, and new crop Washington apples are only six weeks away! With the exception of a few stragglers, import pears are almost done—California Bartletts starting in two weeks. Blackberries will end by the beginning of August, and Blueberry supply stays strong from Oregon and Washington. Strawberries are at their peak, and priced to sell! There's not much news on the citrus front, but in the past week lemon availability has tightened up.



July Market Report (continued)

Yolo County melons are on the verge of exploding volume and variety-wise—stay tuned! Grapes moved production to the Central Valley: Black Emerald and Flame varieties are very available, and Muscats, Perlettes, and Thompsons are coming soon! Rainier and red cherry varieties will stay strong this week, with Oregon Lamberts and Vans starting over three weeks later than normal—the Oregon Bing and Ranier crops did not yield anything this year. Stone fruit continues to be strong, although yellow peaches gapped very slightly this week. Both yellow and white nectarine supply peaks through this week and next, and plums persist in their proliferation! Avocado supplies from the Santa Barbara area are good, particularly on large sized fruit, and the Market continues to strengthen price wise on small fruit such as 84s.



- Denise McAllan, Purchaser

Tomato Update

It's been several weeks since tomatoes captured the public interest, as the assumed cause of an outbreak of food-borne illness which affected the nation. Salmonella Saintpaul, a relatively uncommon strain of the bacteria, was found to be responsible for hundreds of cases of food poisoning in the U.S., affecting 36 states as well as the District of Columbia. David Acheson, the FDA's food safety czar, originally believed that this outbreak stemmed from tomatoes grown in Mexico & Florida, however, last week, the FDA announced that tomatoes are no longer considered to be at risk, nor were they found to be the culprit. Produce carrying the bacteria may have been contaminated by one or more sources along the distribution chain: by other produce or water sources at the farm of origin, at the packing facility, or at distribution or shipping facilities. It should be pointed out that no organic tomatoes have been implicated, and that organically grown tomatoes were not under investigation with regards to this situation.

There has been a significant financial impact on tomato growers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, restaurateurs, and food product companies. "Consumer confidence further erodes, and the food industry faces estimated costs of at least \$100 million", Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said on July 1, 2008. Demand has decreased considerably (consumer demand is 35 to 40 percent of normal, demand from restaurants is only 65 to 80 percent of normal). Low demand has driven down prices. In some markets, prices have dropped 35-45% in the 6 weeks.

One positive effect of the tomato scare is the national attention being given to the local food movement. Local farmers' markets and C.S.A.s are gaining popularity. "The latest food-borne outbreak has given a boost to the local food movement, which promotes buying produce from nearby farmers (advocates are sometimes called locavores)... With each incident, it's pushing people more and more to buy locally and from family farms," says Craig Minowa. Minowa works as an environmental scientist for the Organic Consumer Association, a group committed to supporting small, local and family-owned farms. Farmers' markets throughout the country are experiencing record sales this year.

-Lorrie Wesa

