



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

www.PickTnProducts.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Can't Wait for Fresh Local Veggies? You Don't Have To! Try Local Fresh Frozen

NASHVILLE – Where's the freshest produce in your grocery store this time of year? Hint: It's NOT the produce aisle.

You can still find fresh local produce, even when this summer's homegrown tomatoes and sweet corn are still a couple of months away. Fact is, the "freshest" local produce available now is most likely in the freezer section at your local grocery store. Pictsweet brand fresh frozen produce, located in West Tennessee, is available year round in the frozen foods sections of most grocery stores across the state.

Through the winter, much of the fresh produce Tennesseans find at groceries store is grown more than 1,500 miles away. As a result, it may be harvested before it reaches its nutritional peak in order hold up under the weight of being packed, then artificially ripened during transport. That trip can take days or even weeks.

The problem with choosing "fresh from far away" is that the minute a vegetable is picked, it begins to lose nutrients. The amount of stress a vegetable is subjected to, like waiting in hot fields or enduring long truck rides to the produce aisles, impacts its nutritional value.

Frozen produce has proved just as nutrient rich, or even superior to fresh, through independent research. Scientists measured nutrient levels in produce that had been sitting in a fridge for three days compared to frozen equivalents. More beneficial nutrients were found overall in frozen samples from broccoli to blueberries. In fact, in two out of three cases, frozen fruits and veggies packed higher levels of antioxidants. Earlier research had already documented that freezing produce does not destroy nutrients. In one report, the vitamin C content in fresh broccoli plummeted by more than 50 percent in a week, but dipped by just 10 percent over an entire year when frozen.

In the case of frozen fruits and vegetables, produce also has the luxury of being fully ripe before picking. Many produce farms now locate their freezing and packing facility right on the farm site. The produce is picked, washed, then flash frozen, sometimes all within

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an hour or two. Freezing "locks in" many nutrients, and since freezing preserves foods, no unwanted additives like salt or sugar are needed. Frozen fruits and veggies often have single word ingredient lists, meaning just the name of the fruit or vegetable.

It's going to be a while before Tennessee farms and gardens will produce the fresh summer produce we all crave. In the meantime, the Pick Tennessee Products website, www.picktnproducts.org, offers recipes featuring all types of Tennessee grown and processed products that work well with fresh or frozen produce.

Visit www.picktnproducts.org to find Tennessee farms, farmers markets, farm-direct and locally processed products near you.

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Ham and Greens Pot Pie with Cornbread Crust

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 cups chopped cooked ham
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
3 cups low sodium chicken stock
1 (16-ounce) package frozen mixed vegetables, thawed
1 (16-ounce) package frozen chopped kale, thawed
1 (15-ounce) can black-eyed peas, drained
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1-1/2 cups plain cornmeal
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 eggs, lightly beaten
1-1/2 cups buttermilk
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Lightly grease a 13x9-inch baking dish and set aside.

Place the oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the ham and sauté 4 to 5 minutes or until lightly browned. Sprinkle evenly with the flour and cook 1 minute longer, stirring constantly. Gradually add the stock and bring to a boil. Cook 3 minutes stirring constantly.

Add the mixed vegetables and kale and return to a boil. Cook 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the peas and pepper flakes. Transfer to the prepared baking dish.

In a mixing bowl, combine the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, and salt. Make a well in the center and add the eggs, buttermilk, and butter. Stir until just moistened. Pour evenly over the ham mixture. Bake 23 to 25 minutes or until the cornbread is golden brown. Serve warm.