



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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PLENTIFUL RAIN, THEN HOT SUN, MAKE STATE'S STRAWBERRY SEASON SWEET

Nashville, Tenn. - After tangling with deep freezes and dry soils for the last couple of years, Tennessee's strawberry crop seems headed for sweet success.

"Most of the state's strawberry growers had steady, well timed rains through a cool spring, which determines most of a berry's size," says Rob Beets, marketing specialist with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. "Now the weather's turned sunny and hot – and since sunshine is what makes berries grow sweet, conditions are right for an outstanding crop of strawberries."

Tennessee's topography and accompanying temperatures also exert considerable influence over the timing of crops in Tennessee, with West Tennessee crops ripening first and East Tennessee crops ripening last. Weather is not the only determinant of when strawberries will be ready, however, as there are also significant varietal differences that help determine a berry's size, flavor and maturation date.

"Early Glow is the 'old time' variety that older Tennesseans remember," says Phyllis Gilliam, of Vine Hill Farm in Franklin. Gilliam has been a strawberry producer for five years. "They're smaller than newer varieties, and just the best tasting berries ever, great for jams. A dependable variety that has been grown in Tennessee for a number of years is 'Chandler,' and 'Dare Select' is a newer variety known for its size. Another newcomer, 'North Easter,' has more of an orange color. The different varieties ensure a longer season for strawberry growers, and the best berries for particular uses for the consumer."

"The Pick Tennessee Products Web site features a list of strawberry growers, farmers markets and strawberry festivals across the state," says Beets. "We also have several excellent strawberry recipes posted you'll want to use once you get your strawberries home."

Beets says to go to www.PickTNProducts.org and click on the banner that says "Strawberries" to access the directory. "The site lists the location and contact number for each grower," says the specialist, "so you can call ahead to get hours of operation, find

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out whether you should bring your own containers, and find out which varieties are grown at a given farm. When you call the grower, you can also get price information for strawberries that are self-picked as opposed to pre-picked by the grower, for instance, or prices for various size containers.”

“Strawberries do not continue to ripen after picking,” says Beets, “so if berries aren’t completely red at picking, they won’t turn red later or acquire that desired sweetness. Pickers can be disappointed with the flavor of their strawberries if they don’t choose only berries that are completely bright or dark red.”

Strawberries have a short life once they’ve been picked, holding up well only for about 4 days after picking. When possible, Beets advises that strawberries be stored unwashed in a single layer on a baking sheet and refrigerate. Just before using, rinse the berries under a gentle spray of cool water. Do not cap strawberries until after washing.

Visit www.PickTNProducts.org to find local strawberries, strawberry recipes and more information about other Tennessee farm products.

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