Agriculture in Connecticut

Agriculture in Connecticut has undergone vast changes in the past three decades. Tobacco and dairy farming, once the largest agricultural industries, have diversified with vegetables, nursery stock, and Christmas trees. During the past three decades, there have also been marked changes in the selling of produce from wholesale contracts with local supermarkets to direct retail sales. The development of a network of farmers' markets in Connecticut's major urban centers and densely populated suburbs is an important segment of direct sales of vegetables to consumers. As the popularity in direct retail sales in Connecticut has surged, so too has the need for growers to find a diversity of high value niche crops. Consumers accustomed to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in large supermarkets are looking for a greater diversity of ethnic and specialty crops at farmers' markets and roadside stands.

New Crops Program

Since 1982, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station has been investigating specialty crops to provide new opportunities for Connecticut's farmers. To date, over 40 fruits and vegetables have been evaluated in the *New Crops Program* including: globe artichoke, Belgian endive, radicchio, heirloom tomatoes, specialty melons, sweet potato, and okra. Research has included variety trials and experiments to determine the best cultural methods for growing each crop in Connecticut. Varietal trials of popular and common vegetables have also been conducted. Crops have been selected because they have a comparatively high market value and an existing or expanding market.

Additional Crops Studied to Date

- Okra
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Baby Carrots
- Brussel's Sprouts
- Specialty Melons
- Kabocha Squash
- Onions
- Leeks
- Chinese Cabbage
- Pak Choi
- Daikon Radish
- Vegetable Amaranth
- Specialty Pumpkins
- Grape Tomatoes
- Culinary Herbs
- Edamame
- Specialty Eggplant
- Specialty Peppers

Bulletins and Fact Sheets can be found on the web at www.ct.gov/caes

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The New Crops Program

CAES
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Specialty Vegetables

Over 40% of California's artichokes are marketed between Boston and New York. We have developed a method to successfully grow them as annuals in Connecticut.

Belgian endive roots are grown in the summer and stored for winter forcing, thus providing winter income for the grower. We have developed a clean way of forcing in an unheated basement.

Sweet potatoes are among the most nutritious of all vegetables. They are excellent sources of vitamins A and C. Varietal and cultural trials at our experimental farms have shown that they can be easily grown here.

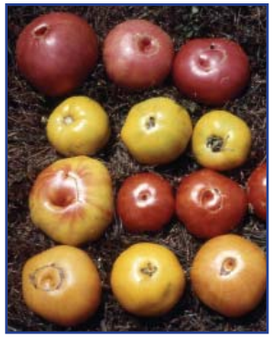
Ethnic Vegetables

Jilo (African eggplant) is popular with Brazilian consumers. Its principal use is in vegetable stew (ratatouille) and sweet and sour mixes with chicken and pork. We have determined the best way to grow the crop in Connecticut.

Calabaza squash, also known as tropical pumpkin, is mostly grown in tropical and semi tropical climates. It is highly prized by consumers of Hispanic origin. We are developing a cultivar with shorter vines and a shorter time to maturity.

Many consumers appreciate the unique flavor of radicchio and it has become a popular colorful ingredient in salad mixes. Varietal and cultural trials have been conducted at our experimental farms.

Common Vegetables



There is a strong market for heirloom tomatoes. Consumers say they taste better and have thinner skins than "regular tomatoes". We have conducted trials to determine which varieties do best in Connecticut.

Supersweet corn maintains its sweetness up to 3 weeks after harvest. Trials were conducted on white, yellow, and bicolor varieties.

There are many types of lettuce available in the marketplace. We have conducted trials on the three most popular types: iceberg, romaine, and looseleaf.

Specialty Fruits

To add diversity, many fruit growers are interested in adding minor specialty fruits to their operations. We have established two orchards at our experimental farms to evaluate 12 cultivar/rootstock combinations of Japanese plum.

Beach plum is a fruiting shrub native to the coastal dunes of the northeastern United States. Currently, consumer demand for beach plums is greater than the supply. Shrubs planted at our experimental farms are evaluated annually to provide growers with select elite individuals.

The newest watermelons in the marketplace are seedless 3-7 lb personal-size watermelons. They offer an attractive alternative for the consumer with limited refrigerator space or for small families. We have determined the best varieties and cultural methods for Connecticut.