

# "Jersey Fresh": A Fresh Idea in Farm Products Marketing

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New Jersey farm products have always enjoyed an excellent reputation, not only at home in the Garden State, but farther afield as well. With one of the most diverse agricultures in the Nation, New Jersey produces over 150 different agricultural commodities. While the famed Jersey tomato may be the most well known, Garden State farms actually grow everything from asparagus to zucchini.

With production worth about \$600 million annually, agriculture also ranks as one of the State's largest industries. Fruit and vegetable crops account for about a third of this farm gate value, ranking New Jersey seventh in the Nation for production of fresh market vegetables. New Jersey also comes in second nationwide for production of blueberries, third for cranberries and peaches, fourth for asparagus, and fifth for sweet corn, summer potatoes, and tomatoes.

One critical key to this strong Garden State agriculture is freshness. New Jersey agriculture is faced with both the pros and cons of coexisting with the densest population in the Nation. But while growing urbanization presses Garden State agriculture to adapt, it also means that New Jersey sits in the middle of one of the ripest markets in the world. And it's that proximity that makes freshness a natural selling point.

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## Campaign Begins

This scenario, combined with a gradual loss of retail shelf space for New



Jersey agricultural products, was the backdrop for the 1984 birth of the "Jersey Fresh" campaign to advertise and promote New Jersey farm products in season. Recognizing agriculture's vital role in New Jersey's economic health, the Governor and the State legislature allocated \$325,000 to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture for this campaign. The program had two prime objectives: to increase consumer awareness and to increase trade usage (the proportion of grocery store produce that comes from New Jersey) throughout the State and surrounding market areas.

Armed with professionally developed point-of-purchase materials and radio and billboard advertising, the department set out to inform consumers about the availability and freshness of "Jersey Fresh" farm products. Initially, radio and billboard provided the program's primary means of advertising. The department also established a "Jersey Fresh" matching

funds program. By encouraging agricultural organizations to tie their own promotions to "Jersey Fresh," the impact of these program dollars was doubled.

The department's division of markets maintained regular contact with the retail sector, distributing "Jersey Fresh" ad slicks (which stores could use in advertising) and point-of-purchase materials to identify New Jersey produce. Food chains also were encouraged to add their store names to radio billboard ads identifying their retail outlets as sources for "Jersey Fresh" products.

Billed as one of the first programs of its kind, "Jersey Fresh" gave a star performance in its first year. Consumer awareness and trade usage made considerable gains—a fact substantiated by two Gallup surveys.

Comparison of a precampaign poll with one taken after the program's first year showed that consumer awareness of New Jersey farm products had doubled from 7 to 14 percent in just 1 year. From a precampaign level of 12 percent, trade usage jumped dramatically to 20 percent after the first year.

The "Jersey Fresh" success story spread quickly. As the program grew in prominence in agricultural marketing circles, other States began to adapt the "Jersey Fresh" model to their own situations.

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### **Gains Continue in Second Year**

Meanwhile, the New Jersey State Legislature, impressed with the program's significant 1-year gains, doubled the budget for the 1985 season. While that second season brought little change to the program's creative thrust, the intensity and reach of "Jersey Fresh" grew dramatically.

More chain food stores took advantage of the chance to add their names to "Jersey Fresh" radio and billboard

ads, and took the initiative in featuring "Jersey Fresh" in a variety of ways. The logo appeared in chain ads, and many stores made "Jersey Fresh" point-of-purchase materials a regular part of their produce displays. Some chains even organized their own innovative "Jersey Fresh" promotions. These ranged from week-long features in print advertising to events bordering on full-fledged county fairs.

To complement trade activity, the department focused a major effort on consumer-oriented promotions—from tours to brochures to seasonal fairs. With free commodity samples, food preparation demonstrations, agricultural exhibits, entertainment, and contests, these promotions demonstrated the diversity of "Jersey Fresh" farm products in action.

The Philadelphia Zoo featured one of these "Jersey Fresh" events, combining a Halloween celebration with a focus on New Jersey's fall harvest. The zoo offered on-premises trick-or-treating, with a spotlight on New Jersey's fresh fall farm products.

Department personnel also organized a food communicator tour designed to send the "Jersey Fresh" message directly to the media. Food and agriculture writers from New Jersey and surrounding States boarded buses for a guided day-long farm tour highlighting specific New Jersey commodities. Both this and the zoo promotion have now become popular annual events.

National Agriculture Week was the focus of another "Jersey Fresh" special event, held week-long in a heavily-trafficked shopping mall. The department also developed "Jersey Fresh" recipe brochures, each featuring one major New Jersey farm product—such as eggplants, peaches, sweet potatoes, or apples—complete with consumer tips and a variety of recipes for that "Jersey Fresh" commodity.

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## Quality Grading Program Begun

That 1985 season saw an important expansion of the program's scope. In an effort to increase retail use and further enhance buyer confidence, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture developed a new marketing tool for the State's farmers—the "Jersey Fresh" Quality Grading Program.

To pack selected commodities under the "Jersey Fresh" Quality Grading Seal, growers agreed to be licensed and to follow department packing guidelines. Produce that qualifies for the "Jersey Fresh" Quality Grading Seal meets or exceeds the requirements for the top USDA grade for that commodity. Even in its first year, this voluntary program generated strong grower and buyer interest.

Initially, the program attracted 34 growers packing five commodities. Recognizing that Quality Grading promised buyers consistent high quality and uniform pack, growers saw that the program meant enhanced marketability—and increased profits—for their products.

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## Third Year—Looking for New Markets

At the end of that 1985 season, a Gallup poll once again showed "Jersey Fresh" continuing to make great strides, with consumer awareness rising to 17 percent. Recognizing the program's success, the State legislature approved \$875,000 in "Jersey Fresh" funding for 1986.

Encouraged by survey results and continuing legislative support, the department began to look at opportunities to send the "Jersey Fresh" message outside the immediate region.

The introduction of two 30-second television commercials highlighted 1986, the program's third year. A generic message about the freshness

and goodness of New Jersey farm products was followed by a 5-second tagline highlighting a specific commodity in season, along with the names of three food chains carrying the item.

Television now replaced radio as the primary means of advertising. "Jersey Fresh" commercials aired throughout New Jersey and the surrounding New York City and Philadelphia areas during the summer. This TV message also aired in Boston, marking the first real major expansion of "Jersey Fresh" outside the region.

Other 1986 additions to the program included new point-of-purchase materials, a stronger focus on extending the benefits of "Jersey Fresh" to direct marketers, and greater participation from agricultural groups.

To encourage that thoroughly broad-based participation, the department expanded its "Jersey Fresh" matching funds program. More than \$200,000 was made available to interested agricultural organizations to promote New Jersey farm products. A regional peach festival in the Camden area, and a "Jersey Fresh" festival celebrating the State's agricultural diversity were financed with these funds. Both promotions have become major annual events that attract thousands of visitors.

The growth of the "Jersey Fresh" Quality Grading Program continued apace, too, with grower enrollment up 50 percent over 1985 and the list of eligible commodities growing to 15.

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## Fourth Year—"Demand the Freshest"

Once again, a Gallup poll at season's end showed "Jersey Fresh" maintaining a steady rise in trade usage and consumer awareness. Trade usage of New Jersey produce in grocery stores grew to 21 percent, while consumer

awareness reached 23 percent. The State legislature matched the momentum by approving \$1,275,000 in "Jersey Fresh" funding for 1987.

Encouraged by the continued climb in positive public response, the department set its sights on still higher accomplishments for the 1987 "Jersey Fresh" Program.

Until 1987, the general intent of "Jersey Fresh" had been to create consumer awareness through high visibility by billboard, radio, and television advertising, along with special promotions and the distribution of point-of-purchase materials. This effort was essentially soft-sell and educational in its consumer message, generally relying on tradition and the Garden State reputation for its impact. Ads primarily informed consumers about the availability, quality, and freshness of New Jersey grown farm products.

In 1987, this tone changed. The addition of a new slogan—"Demand the Freshest"—set the campaign's current, more aggressive tone. With "Jersey Fresh" recognition well established, the program was now ready to urge direct consumer action.

Recognizing that freshness tops the list of consumer priorities when buying produce, "Demand the Freshest—Jersey Fresh" said that consumers should not settle for just any product on the shelf. The slogan did two things: It urged consumers to demand the freshest product available, and it presented "Jersey Fresh" as the answer. Television ads, billboards, and new point-of-purchase materials reflected the "Demand the Freshest" theme, reinforcing the idea that "Jersey Fresh" was the product that best satisfied consumers' needs.

The program's fourth year included another notable addition. The department created a new television commercial, featuring the hearty

endorsement of New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean. The audience for the "Jersey Fresh" message also grew in 1987 when the department extended the program's geographical reach to include the New England market area.

Chain store involvement reached an all-time high in 1987, with many chains organizing more individual promotions and routinely featuring "Jersey Fresh" in advertising. Department marketing personnel visited retail buyers throughout the East Coast and eastern Canada, making new contacts and distributing "Jersey Fresh" point-of-purchase materials and other buyer-related information.

These visits remain an important link of communication between the department and the retail stores. The chain store produce buyer learns up-to-date information about crop conditions and supplies, while the department sees firsthand how the program can be adjusted to meet specific, individual needs.

Grower and buyer enthusiasm for the "Jersey Fresh" Quality Grading Program continued to mount, with 115 growers enrolled in 1988. The list of farm products eligible for this marketing bonus continued to grow too, with 28 commodities approved for the program's 1988 season.

Summer 1987 also saw a high point in the excellent media coverage enjoyed by "Jersey Fresh," including Governor Kean's presentation of a basket of "Jersey Fresh" produce to President Reagan during a Garden State visit. An Associated Press laser photograph took the moment nationwide.

Other valuable national coverage included a feature spot on NBC's "Today" show, when Willard Scott, one of the country's most popular broadcasters, highlighted "Jersey Fresh" apples in season.

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## Looking Ahead

The 1988 season campaign theme, "Farm Fresh To You Each Morning," is featured in a new 30-second TV spot. The trademark of the "Farm Fresh" campaign is a sunrise farm silhouette, which can be seen on point-of-purchase materials including price cards, window signs, availability charts, and consumer recipe and information brochures.

One goal is the eventual merger of the "Jersey Fresh" promotional program with the "Jersey Fresh" Quality Grading Program, targeted for 1990. This merger will generate a single

logo, recognized by retail stores and consumers alike as a promise of quality and consistency in New Jersey farm products. Use of the new, unified "Jersey Fresh" logo will therefore be tied to the grower's participation in the Quality Grading Program.

This merger is the next logical step in a program which has grown, in just 4 years, from an advertising logo to something much bigger. "Jersey Fresh" is now a clear forerunner of efforts designed to preserve a valuable, viable industry—and a way of life—for future generations in the Garden State.