



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 11, 2012

CONTACT: Tammy Algood
615-837-5347
Tammy.Algood@TN.gov
** Photo Attached*

Despite Wilting Weather, Some Great Produce Still “Hot” at Local Markets

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - It's been hot, lately. Have you noticed? Tennessee's crops have noticed, too, hit with a deadly combination of record heat and drought conditions. In such widespread and long lasting situations, many summer fruits and vegetables stop growing and stop producing blossoms or fruits, even if the plant survives.

After an early and auspicious start, Tennessee's sweet corn has all vanished at local farm markets. Other crops anticipated for later in the season, like melons, may never make much of an appearance at all.

As if stress and resulting damage to crops is not enough, extreme high temperatures make harvesting remaining crops more difficult. Worker safety is a concern, as well as the shelf life of produce that's been picked. Harvesting very early or late in the day lessens heat stress for both plants and persons. Getting harvests out of orchards, fields and vineyards to cooler shaded areas to reduce field heat accumulation is even more important.

Still, there are some traditional Tennessee favorites that can't get enough of the heat, as long as water is supplied by some means. When irrigated, tomatoes, peppers and okra all defy triple digit heat to get bigger and better than ever. For those committed to fresh, local foods, making the most of what's available is crucial, not only to maximize their local fare, but to help local farmers keep their businesses intact for the future.

But how can these three crops continue to thrive when other fruits and vegetables fail in the heat? All three modern plants had their origins in hot climates. Both tomatoes and peppers emerged in western South America, spreading up to Mexico, where they were first domesticated, cultivated and transported to the Old World. Modern tomatoes and peppers still have a clear preference for the climate of their mutual ancestral home.

-MORE-

DESPITE WILTING WEATHER SOME GREAT PRODUCE STILL HOT 2 - 2 - 2

Okra is a native of West Africa, where the word for what we call okra is “gambo” – obviously the source of the modern term, “gumbo,” a dish for which the only essential ingredient is okra.

All three heat loving foods should be easy to find at farms and farm markets this summer, and all three are among the easiest types of produce to freeze, can and dry for later use.

For a list of Tennessee farms and farm markets, or for recipes featuring tomatoes, peppers and okra, visit the Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s Pick Tennessee Products website at www.picktnproducts.org.

#

Featured Pick Tennessee Products Recipe

Fresh Tomato Garden Salsa

Yield: 2 cups

2 cups peeled and chopped tomatoes

3 green onions, thinly sliced

1 jalapeño pepper, finely chopped

2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1/2 teaspoon garlic salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

In a serving bowl, combine the tomatoes, onions, peppers, cilantro, juice, salt, and pepper. Cover and chill at least 3 hours before serving.