

Fall Harvest Time Is Here at Tri-County Cooperative Market

As summer turns to fall, ushering in shorter days and cooler temperatures, Garden State vegetable and fruit growers can relax a bit and breathe somewhat easier, as their seven day-a-week work schedules can now turn to six, and at some farms, five days.

According to the state climatologist's office, the past 12 months have seen the 2nd warmest October, 4th warmest May and 1st warmest August, tied with August, 2016. State climatologist David Robinson also reported the 3rd warmest September on record.

In spite of the extremely rainy, raw early spring in April, May and part of June, farmers from central and southern New Jersey counties who are members of the historic Tri-County Cooperative Market have persevered.

George Asprocolas, president of the non-profit Tri-County Cooperative Market in Hightstown, and proprietor at Asprocolas Acres in nearby Millstone, points out even with this year's unusual raw rainy spring and early summer weather, an abundance of produce is available now at the market, open Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings from 5:30 p.m.

"The cooperative is all based around your local New Jersey farmers and what they have available," said Asprocolas.

“This year was very unique because we had such a wet, rainy spring, so we had no early season produce whatsoever. This year, that didn’t come about until mid and late June,” he explained.

Every year is different, weather-wise, he noted. Veteran farmers like Asprocolas and Tri-County secretary John Hauser simply recognize the reality of working around the weather.

“Right now, here in mid-October, every year this is prime time for everything to be available,” Asprocolas added.

Virtually every kind of produce can be found at Tri-County until the first real frost hits. In recent years, that hasn’t happened until early or mid-December.

“Right now we have tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, watermelons, cantaloupes, yellow and green beans, okra, cucumbers, pickles, zucchini and all other kinds of squash, lettuces, kale, collards, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, a huge array. Anything you can find in the supermarket that is local, we’ll have it,” he said.

“And it’s normally picked that day. When you order your product, it’s picked that morning and supplied to you that evening. You can’t get much fresher than when it’s coming from the farmers’ cooperative.”

Because there's little demand for grain products, soybeans, and field corn, most farmers don't bring those items. But some farmers do bring edamame, edible soybeans.

"When it comes to pumpkins, straw, and cornstalks, we supply all kinds of ornamentals for homeowners and the farmers around the state involved in opening up their farms to the public for agri-tourism."

Tri-County Cooperative Market secretary John Hauser of Hauser Hill Farms, Old Bridge, said the plan this fall is to be open Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings from 5:30 to 8 p.m. or so, and then after Halloween, the market's hours will shift to Wednesdays only.

"If fresh produce is still available, we'll carry through, being open Wednesday evenings into December," Hauser added.

"Right now, we're just starting cranberry harvest season, so they're just coming in," Hauser said, noting blueberry season ends in late August.

"Now we start with cranberries, apples, fall and winter squash and cauliflower."

The Tri-County Cooperative Market, a unique, farmer-run non-profit organization, is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings this month. We invite you to stop by and see the

freshest, finest quality produce you'll find anywhere in the state.