

# Consumers Encouraged to Buy Strawberries Early

*Late season varieties may not be as plentiful*

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. –June 12, 2009-** If the current weather forecast prevails, the coming week will provide favorable conditions for strawberries to ripen and be picked. Farm stands, farm markets and pick-your-own strawberry operations are expected to be in full swing this weekend.

Many strawberry farmers have started picking early strawberry varieties this week, including Earliglow, Wendy, Annapolis and Lester, for farm markets and stands. Several growers have indicated that this year's early- and mid-season varieties have benefited from recent cool and dry temperatures which have promoted minimal disease pressure and increased sweetness. Cool and dry temperatures encourage a slower growth rate of both the plant and berry which results in increased sugar production, more uniform ripening and longer shelf life of the fruit.

However, several growers have indicated that late season varieties may not be as plentiful and are attributing this to cool and predominantly rainy weather conditions during the early fall of 2008. This resulted in several first plantings of late strawberry varieties to be held back in terms of growth rate before going dormant for the winter. Although these affected varieties have been able to increase growth during the spring, it will be too little to late for this year's harvest.

Early strawberries are ranging from \$3.50 to \$4.50 per quart. For pick-your-own operations, prices will likely range from \$1.75 to \$2 per pound. Overall, prices are expected to be similar to last year due to concerns over consumer food budgets.

Some Kingberries may have been slightly impacted during this growing season due to several light frosts during the bloom period. The most sought-after berry on the plant, the Kingberry is the primary or first berry of the plant. It is usually the biggest and most succulent berry and is highly prized by strawberry enthusiasts. However, most Monroe County growers indicate that they were able to provide for frost control in order to protect both primary and secondary blooms from critical cold temperatures.

## **Monroe County strawberry statistics:**

- 27 farms.
- 146 acres of strawberries.
- Approximately one half million pounds of strawberries.
- Number two in New York state in acreage and pounds.
- Farm revenue estimated at \$1.2 million.
- Season duration about five weeks.

New York is ranked ninth in the nation in strawberry production, harvesting 4.5 million pounds of strawberries in 2008, at a value of almost \$7.5 million. Nationally, strawberry production was placed at 2.53 billion pounds.

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: For attribution, you may use Bob King, Ph.D., director of the Agriculture and Life Sciences Institute at Monroe Community College. Feel free to contact King directly at (585) 313-3295 or (585) 292-2065 for interviews.*

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