

Local table grapes could capture one-third of market

UNIVERSITY PARK — Seedless table grapes grown in Pennsylvania may be able to capture at least one-third of the market now going to Thompson Seedless grapes from California.

This conclusion came from a study carried out recently by College of Agriculture marketing specialists at Penn State. The findings were reported at a symposium on research for operators of small farms, held Tuesday at a symposium on research for operators of small farms, held Tuesday at the Agricultural Research Center of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Beltsville, Md.

"Consumers like the locally grown seedless table grapes once they become familiar with them," declared Carl W. Haeseler, Penn State scientist in grape culture.

He said grape growing offers an opportunity for families on small farms to increase their income. However, such farm operators

often find it difficult to sell grapes through large-scale commercial channels because of the small volume of grapes grown. The best solution seems to be in selling grapes through farm and roadside markets.

Marketing aspects of the study were directed by Laurence L. Yager of the Cooperative Extension Service, College of Agriculture. Yager and associates compared the new seedless variety Lakemont with California Thompson Seedless. Sales of the two varieties were compared at three roadside fruit and vegetable stands — one each in Berks, Cumberland, and Lancaster counties.

Initially, consumers were unfamiliar with Pennsylvania-grown table grapes. After trying them, buyers spoke highly of their flavor and texture.

The well-known Thompson Seedless grapes sold three times the volume of Lakemont. Con-

sumers said they bought the California grapes for their known quality and the larger size compared to Lakemont. Earlier studies showed, however, that small size was not objectionable.

Part of the study featured Lakemont grapes stored at 33 to 35° Fahrenheit for a month in sulfur dioxide atmosphere. Grapes thus stored remained in good condition for at least a month. Grapes spoiled when stored for a month without sulfur dioxide atmosphere.

"Sulfur dioxide storage can provide a more orderly marketing pattern than now possible by extending sales beyond the short harvest time," Haeseler commented.

He indicated the demand for seedless table grapes is highest during Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas seasons. Competition from Thompson Seedless is greatest in September and October.

"If local grapes could be stored in good condition until the heavy supplies of Thompson Seedless clear the market, local grapes could find a ready market," he added.

Yager and Haeseler say they believe local grape owners could compete with California producers, since shipping costs are increasing. At the time of the

study, the cost for shipping table grapes from California to Pennsylvania was about 10 cents a pound.

Initially, the Lakemonts were sold at the same price as the Thompson Seedless. If the Lakemonts did not sell after two days, the price was dropped 10 or 20 cents below Thompson Seedless



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