

## Southeastern Region Honors Outstanding 4-H Teens

**BETHLEHEM (Lehigh Co.)** — On July 10 at Moravian College in Bethlehem, the Southeast Region hosted the 4-H Fashion Revue with winners being selected in two age group categories. Senior winners will advance to a state level competition in State College on August 7.

Being judged on their garment's design, fit, and construction, and their personal presentation skills, the following seniors were selected as gold winners: Kristin Mattern, Lehigh County; Becky Hague, Cayce Bean, Tori Myers, and Karina Price all of Montgomery County; Rachel Welsh, Bucks County; Laura Peiffer, Schuylkill County; and Dana Schrantz, Northampton County.

Runners-up in the senior category were: Amy Lenhart and Kari Baker of Lehigh County; Oralyn

Folk, Berks County; and Sarah Geiger, Northampton County. Senior participants need to be at least 13 years of age.

Junior 4-H'ers participated in the 12 and under category. The top-scoring participants in this category were Ellen Nave, Montgomery County; Michelle Brown and Kara Brown, Chester County; Jenny Lenhart, Lehigh County; Shelly Kneebone, Jessica Knitter, and Sarah Blackadar all from Northampton County; and Amanda Gauker, Berks County.

Earlier in the day, participants were greeted by state senator, Joe Uliana of the 18th state senatorial district. As a part of the day's activities, 4-H'ers constructed a puppet stage and created a variety of puppets to donate to an intergenerational agency in Easton — Third Street Alliance.



Southeast Region 4-H Fashion Revue senior winners, from left, Kristin Mattern, Becky Hague, Laura Peiffer, Karina Price, Cayce Bean, Dana Schrantz, Tori Myers, Rachel Welsh.



Southeast Region 4-H Fashion Revue senior runners-up, from left, Amy Lenhart, Kari Baker, Oralyn Folk, and Sarah Geiger.



Southeast Region 4-H Fashion Revue junior winners included Kara Brown, Michelle Brown, Sarah Blackadar, Shelly Kneebone, Jessica Knitter, Jenny Lenhart, Amanda Gauker, and Ellen Nave.

## Pennsylvania Tomatoes Ripen

**HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)** — Pennsylvania's fresh picked, field ripened tomato crop is late like the rest of the state's vegetable crops. Growers across the state are expecting to start harvesting in earnest towards the end of July, about a week later than normal. Pennsylvania tomatoes will be available in farmers' markets, roadside stands, and supermarkets into October.

"Tomatoes are an important Pennsylvania vegetable crop," according to Fred Funk, a Lancaster County grower and chairman of the Pennsylvania Vegetable Marketing and Research Program. Pennsylvania's fresh market tomato crop is grown on more than 4,000 acres. Another 1,500 acres are used to grow tomatoes for food processors for use in several brands of tomato products. In addition, about 40 acres of Pennsylvania greenhouses produce tomatoes during the spring and fall months when they cannot be grown in the field.

Those acreages rank Pennsylvania fifth nationally in the production of processing tomatoes and seventh in the production of fresh market tomatoes. In number of acres, tomatoes trail potatoes, sweet corn and snap beans as a leading Pennsylvania vegetable crop. However, they are third in terms of value.

Pennsylvania growers use various cultural techniques to produce

tomatoes early in the season when consumers are anxiously awaiting the flavor of home-grown tomatoes. Some growers put small individual caps over each plant to guard it from late spring frosts and capture extra warmth from the early season sun. Recently plastic caps that are filled with water have been developed. The water absorbs heat from the sun during the day and holds it during the night to promote early growth of the tomato plant and provide extra frost protection.

Other growers utilize plastic mulch and plastic tunnels to push their tomato crops for early production. The tunnels may be just 2 to 3 feet high covering one row or high enough to walk in covering several rows. The latter are referred to as high tunnels and are essentially temporary greenhouses erected in the field until warmer weather comes. They all work to bring on that first batch of red ripe tomatoes just a little bit sooner when the market is better.

Tomatoes have a history of provoking controversy. Introduced to Europe from the Americas by Spanish explorers, they were commonly considered poisonous by both Europeans and Americans. Indeed they are members of the same family as nightshade, a weed that produces poisonous berries. But they share that deadly relative with several other well-known vegetable cousins, namely potatoes,

peppers and eggplant.

According to the *Wellness Encyclopedia of Food and Nutrition* (University of California at Berkeley-Health Letter Associates), it was not until the 19th century that tomatoes were commonly eaten, but then only after being thoroughly cooked. Europeans and Americans did not eat them raw until the end of that century. Today tomatoes (if both fresh and processed forms are considered) are second only to potatoes as the most popular vegetable in the average American's diet.

Not only did it take centuries for tomatoes to earn their place on the dinner plate, they have been the subject of numerous debates over their status as a vegetable or as a fruit. Supposedly the question was settled by the United States Supreme Court back in 1893 when they determined that tomatoes are vegetables in a tariff dispute case. To a botanist, however, they are without question a fruit — a berry to be specific — because they are the developed ovary of the flower containing matured seeds. But in the produce trade and on the table they are considered a vegetable, probably because they lack the sweetness usually associated with fruits.

Despite its popularity with Americans year round, tomatoes also often bear the brunt of consumer wrath over their lack of

taste. Tomatoes available during the winter months have gained a reputation for their lack of flavor compared to their summer-time cousins. Without question, a tomato ripened to a red color on the vine will have a superior taste. Pennsylvanians are fortunate to have a ready supply of these home-grown treats available at farmers' markets and roadside markets across the Commonwealth.

Tomatoes that must be shipped, however, must be harvested before they are fully ripe. These tomatoes can develop an appetizing flavor and texture if two basic conditions are met. First, the tomatoes must not be refrigerated. They should be stored at room temperature or at least above 55 degrees F. Unripe tomatoes that have been subjected to temperatures below this level will never ripen satisfactorily.

The second condition is patience. Tomatoes that are on the pink side need to wait a day or more to develop a deep red color (and the desired tomato flavor). They should also soften slightly. Only when they have fully ripened like this should they be refrigerated and only if necessary. Refrigerated tomatoes will have a better eating flavor if they are allowed to warm to room temperature before serving.

**Fettuccine with Fresh Tomato and Basil**  
6 ounces fettuccine noodles or 2 cups dried medium egg noodles  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
4 tomatoes, diced  
½ teaspoon dried basil or 2 tablespoons chopped fresh  
Pinch granulated sugar  
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley  
Salt and freshly ground pepper  
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

In large pot of boiling water, cook noodles until al dente (tender but firm). Meanwhile, in heavy skillet, heat oil over medium heat; stir in garlic, tomatoes, basil, and sugar and cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add parsley, and salt and pepper to taste.

Drain noodles. Toss with tomato mixture and Parmesan. (If sauce is too thick, add a few spoonfuls of pasta cooking liquid.) Pass extra Parmesan. Makes 2 main course servings, 4 appetizer or side-dish servings.

### Quick Buying Tips for Fresh Grown Tomatoes

- Tomatoes must ripen to a deep, rich red color to achieve their best flavor.
- Ripen pink tomatoes at 60 degrees - 70 degrees Fahrenheit in an open area with good air circulation.
- Never refrigerate tomatoes until they are red and fully ripened.