

Tomato Council Ensures Uniform Pack

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including grading, packing, and shipping.

The Jersey Tomato, a registered trademark, and the Jersey Plum Tomato have to undergo special procedures to qualify for packing by the Council. The tomatoes are to be stake-grown with scheduled, staggered plantings for consistent supply throughout the season in plastic mulch with drip irrigation. The tomatoes have to be picked vine-ripened, and the grower must use integrated pest management and nutrient management procedures.

Buyer benefits include high quality tomatoes with longer shelf life and consistent daily supplies. The method is proven in producing quality tomatoes. The tomatoes are picked firm but at a stage to ensure full flavor. The tomatoes are of uniform grade, size, and color, with PLU labels attached.

There are three grades. The first, Premium, packs tomatoes in 20-pound, two-layer containers. The second grade is Quality, packed in 25-pound place pack, including XL, Jersey XL, and Jumbo, and a consumer pack, large. The third grade is Chef's Choice, a 25-pound pack with XL, Jersey XL, and Jumbo.

About 60 percent of the product is marketed and shipped to New York and Philadelphia areas. They also market tomatoes to Miami, areas east of the Mississippi, western Pennsylvania, New England states, and occasionally west of the Mississippi.

Neary noted the Council works closing with large chain stores and other retailers. The Council is looking for good, quality tomatoes, those that are firm, don't crack, with a good final color, good taste, and overall good yield, he said.

Growers represent 375-400 acres, including plum tomatoes.

Workers pack about 1,200 tomatoes per hour, or about

10,000-14,000 tomatoes per day, at the Cedarville processing facility.

With the PLU and pack numbers, the Council can track the inventory to the pallet level, Neary said.

Only recently the Council started to contract for and grow asparagus, marketed also to chains. About 100-110 acres of asparagus have been packed.

Neary noted that more tomatoes are in demand than ever before. Per-capita consumption of tomatoes have risen from 15 pounds to 18 pounds.

Tomatoes, when they are brought in, are cleaned in a water bath, though they can also be spray-washed. The temperature is dropped to about 65 degrees to slow ripening until they arrive at the chain distribution houses. The chains "want full-color tomatoes," Neary said.

The Council owns the equipment and bins, but not the facility. The 30,000-square-foot facility was constructed at a cost of about \$700,000.

Seabrook Brothers, in Seabrook, N.J., packs a lot of different vegetable items for a variety of customers in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.

Seabrook began growing vegetables in 1893 by Charles F. Seabrook, a pioneer in agriculture, the commercial freezing of vegetables, and the development of the nursery industry in South Jersey.

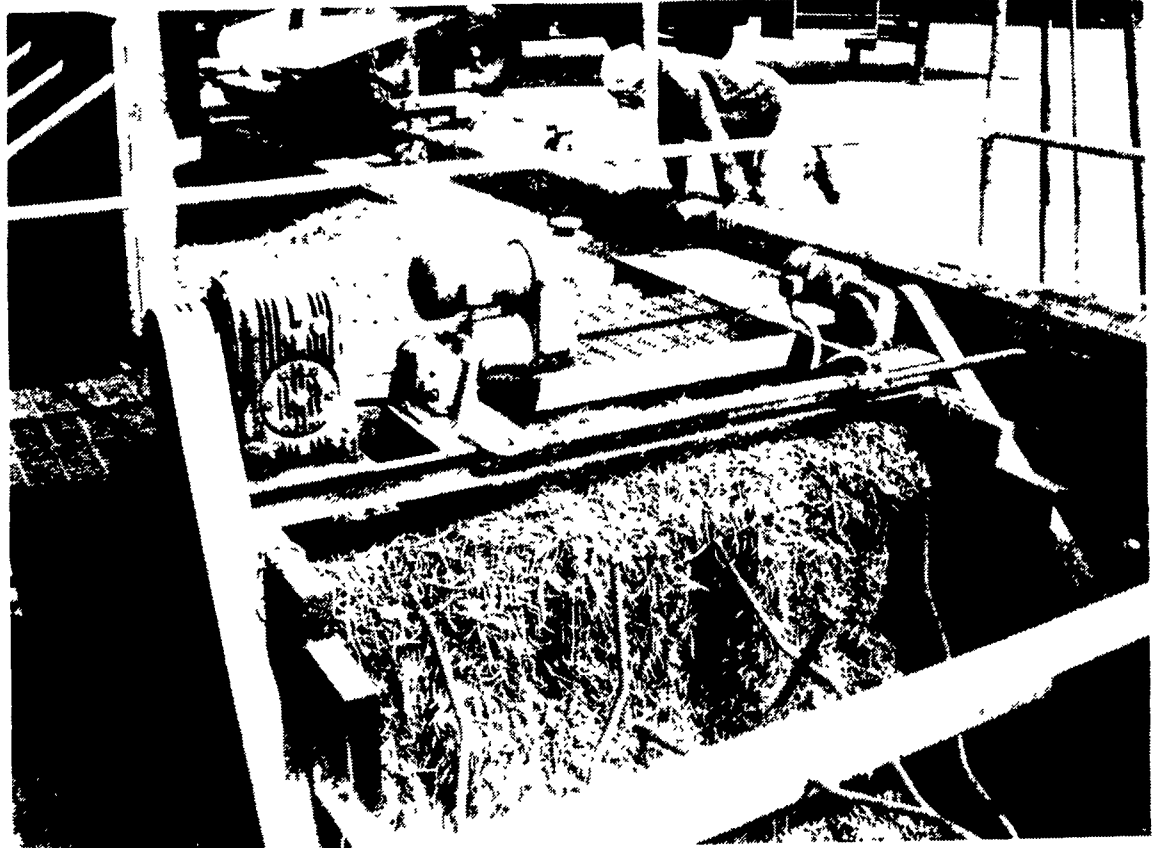
Seabrook's research on getting fresh vegetables to more consumers led to the development of frozen food processing, which began on a large scale in 1931. He founded Seabrook Farms Corp. near Bridgeton in 1933. Until 1976, according to the PVGA, the firm was one of the largest farming and frozen foods operations in the United States, controlling production of more than 30,000 acres of vegetable crops.

In 1978, three grandsons of Seabrook started Seabrook Brothers and Sons and con-

structed a frozen vegetable processing plant in Upper Deerfield Township at a cost of \$9.2 million. The plant freezes snapbeans, spinach, collards, mus-

tard greens, peppers, peas, and lima beans. They process more than 93 million pounds of produce from 22,000 acres, with a sales value of \$60 million.

All the major southern greens are processed at the plant, which employs 600, and 480 year-round. "We pack (Turn to Page 6)



All the major southern greens are processed at the plant, which employs 600 and 480 year-round. "We pack 500,000 pounds of green beans a day," said Jim Seabrook, Jr. Drew Norman, White Hall, Md., looks at the beans.



Seabrook Brothers, in Seabrook, N.J., packs a lot of different vegetable items for a variety of customers in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. From left, Chet Nakai, Andrew Carpenter, and Jim Seabrook Jr.



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