



TODAY'S SUNBEAM

Keep it Jersey Fresh with trip to Web site

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By Tracy Wiggins

Seems as though the State of New Jersey has a love/hate relationship with Salem County. On one hand, we are the poster child for how the state wants to be: Rural, green, open. Then, with the other hand, it delivers the blows: We want you to merge your small schools into larger ones, you need to pay for your state police protection (which if the towns could afford it in the first place, they'd have a force of their own) and we're placing your parks on the endangered list unless you come up with some sort of funding plan.

While the state frustrates me most of the time, there is and always has been one department of the state that I have always enjoyed and has always been loyal to Salem County the state Department of Agriculture.

I am a big fan of Ag Secretary Charles M. Kuperus. He has visited the Sunbeam to answer any questions we've had about agriculture on both a county and statewide level. He has visited our county fair many times and has made many other visits to Salem County all in the name of promoting the importance of local farming.

But my favorite thing about Secretary Kuperus is that I believe he truly cares about his position. He even fits the image of an ag secretary I can't remember seeing him without his Jersey Fresh cap on!

He also keeps the best link on the state Web site www.state.nj.us. Just click on departments/agencies, then agriculture and you'll go right to the site full of information on any ag issue in the state.

My favorite part is the Jersey Fresh info. If you haven't been there, you really need to visit, especially now. Want to find a farm market? No problem. Looking to pick your own? The site can help you there, too. How about a great new recipe for that quart of blueberries you just brought home? It's got you covered.

Here are my top three favorites of the Jersey Fresh Web site.

The recipes: I love the recipes I've used from the Jersey Fresh site. I've used them for reference, for the Sunbeam Food Page every Wednesday and for my own dinner table. The site brings together the freshest, in-season ingredients and pulls them together in a way that makes your mouth water. Most of them are easy to make and use few ingredients, depending on the freshness of the stuff for taste. Here is one of my favorite recipes using two of my favorite Jersey Fresh veggies corn and tomatoes.

Corn, Tomato and Basil Salad

6 small ears of Jersey Fresh corn

2 teaspoons olive oil

6 cloves Jersey Fresh Garlic, peeled and minced

1 cup Jersey Fresh Basil, thinly sliced

30 Jersey Fresh cherry tomatoes, cut in half

2 teaspoons wine or balsamic vinegar

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Cut corn kernels from cobs. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add minced garlic. Sauté about one minute until it releases flavor do not brown. Add corn kernels and sauté until just cooked through, about four minutes. Remove from heat. Add half of the sliced basil. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer mixture to a bowl. Cool slightly, stirring occasionally. Stir in tomatoes, vinegar and remaining basil. Season with additional salt and pepper, if needed. Cover and chill three hours or up to eight hours.

I love visiting farm markets. Big, small, it doesn't matter; there's just something about buying your fruits and veggies in an atmosphere outside of the florescent lights of the supermarket. And you can't be the cost, especially nowadays.

The Jersey Fresh site has a complete, easy to navigate guide to markets all over the state. For each market there are directions, phone numbers and a description of products so you if it is the perfect market for you. It may even list a specialty of the market. For example, at Larchmont Farms in Upper Pittsgrove, it lists the many varieties of apples that it offers.

I think an interesting challenge would be to visit a different market each week of the summer, to sample the variety of produce out there. I know I've already hit three; how about you?

One of the newest parts of the Jersey Fresh Web site is the listing of New Jersey wineries. It's most interesting because there is a Salem County listing on there. I visited Auburn Road Vineyards, located in Pilesgrove, to buy wine for my mom for Christmas. I had a few sips Delicious! Who would have thought Salem County wine!

Coming up next weekend, Auburn Road will be participating in the statewide Walk in the Vineyard Wine Trail Weekend. You can find more information on this through a link on the Jersey Fresh site.

Well those are just my highlights of this great Web site. I hope you get a chance to visit it. Now that the produce season is in full swing, there isn't a better resource out there for finding the freshest, most delicious food Salem County has to offer. Unless, of course, it's coming from your own backyard.

Tracy Wiggins served as city editor of Today's Sunbeam. Her column appears every other Sunday.

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