

## All About Corn

A sure sign of summer are the stalks of corn that we see in many farmers' fields. We watch their progress until we see the first ears of corn on display in the market or at a roadside stand. Corn is a versatile vegetable favored by people in all age groups. Corn is important as part of a balanced diet and is also important to our state and local economy.

New York State ranks fourth in the United States for both processing and fresh market corn production. Sweet corn is the highest value fresh market vegetable grown in New York. It was grown on 29,000 acres in 2004 and was worth \$59.9 million. Processing sweet corn, which mostly goes to Birds Eye Foods for frozen corn, was grown on 19,500 acres in 2004 and was worth \$8.6 million. There is no longer any corn canning done in New York State.

In Ontario County, fresh market sweet corn is grown on approximately 30 farms, according to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, on 1,532 acres and is worth \$3.1 million. Ontario County is fourth in fresh market sweet corn acreage in New York State, behind Orleans, Genesee, and Livingston counties. There was about 500 acres of processing sweet corn grown in Ontario County in 2004 with a value of about \$207,000. Sweet corn acreage has declined dramatically due to the closing of canning plants a couple of years back.

Corn offers us a whole spectrum of health benefits. Because it is a vegetable without any fat content, it contributes to reducing our risks of cancer and our risk of coronary heart disease. It also reduces our risk of hypertension by decreasing sodium.

Corn is one of the very best dietary sources of two antioxidant carotenoids, cousins of Vitamin A, called lutein and zeaxanthin. Like other carotenoids, they seem to play a role in preventing heart disease and cancer. Additionally, newer research confirms that a high intake of lutein and zeaxanthin is associated with a significant reduction in the risk of a chronic eye disease called macular degeneration that effects about a quarter of the population over age 65. These elements also play a role in slowing the development of cataracts.

With all the benefits to personal health and the local economy, eating corn is a delicious response to eating your vegetables and supporting our farmers!

Watch for fresh market sweet corn at local roadside stands and supermarkets starting in July. The earliest corn can go for \$4.00 per dozen, but prices will drop off significantly as supply becomes abundant. Area supermarkets usually have colorful exhibits of corn from local farms.

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