

Sunday Chronicle

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UF professor creates what could be the perfect tomato

By Dana Edwards

Special to the Chronicle

John "Jay" Scott may have discovered the perfect tomato.

The University of Florida's Gulf Coast Education and Research Center horticulture professor and tomato breeder released the Tasti-Lee tomato variety after 10 years of research. The tomato's rich red, juicy fruit and thick, yet tender, skin provides a product Scott hopes consumers will want to continue to buy.

The ability of Tasti-Lee to produce under a wide range of environmental conditions while retaining its vibrant color and flavor is essential to its shelf life. It can even be grown up and down the East Coast, from Florida to New York.

The tomato breeder said Tasti-Lee is different because of its flavor, freshness and health benefits. These tomatoes have up to 40 percent more lycopene, an antioxidant that contributes to the prevention of cancer, heart complications and other diseases. This antioxidant also lends more flavor and color to the tomato.

Because these tomatoes can ripen on the vine instead of picked green and ripened by ethylene gas, growing Tasti-Lee tomatoes is more cost-efficient and results in fresher tomatoes.

Scott expressed his concern for farmers and suppli-

ers allowing for this vine-ripening step to occur because other tomato varieties are picked green and placed in an ethylene gas chamber before going to market. He wants them to know they can wait to pick this tomato variety.

This crucial step allows for a more efficient use of resources, environment and capital, said Tasti-Lee economic analyzer Les Harrison, the regional specialized sustainable agriculture and technology agent in Leon County.

"This research was developed as an improvement program for tomatoes," he said. "It expands the market share, and savings are passed to the end user for a more competitive price."

Scott started his tomato kingdom in 1981 at Ohio State University. When he moved to Florida, the second-largest tomato-producing state, his Ohio State co-workers joked and told him to "put some flavor in them." That's just what he's done.

The tomato hybrid is a combination of a sweet flavor variety and an ultra firm variety allowing Scott to share a tomato seed recipe that is both disease and insect resistant and of good food quality.

Florida's October through June tomato season yields the greatest production in April and May, and again in November through January. In the winter, Florida and Mexico compete for U.S. tomato sales.

Currently, three farms grow Tasti-Lee, three farms are trial testing the variety and two farms are prospective growers. Publix and AGB supermarkets carry the tomato variety in what has begun as a grassroots movement, as Scott calls it.

Scott said he has gone through every kind of thought process to develop these perfect tomatoes. In addition to Tasti-Lee, his tomato breeding program has resulted in more than 30 varieties and breeding lines.

of Tallahassee is holding its annual fundraiser — Holiday Happening.

This two-day event is held at the historic Woman's Club of Tallahassee, 1513 Cristobal Drive, and features some of the area's most sought-after vendors. The event started on Nov. 5, and continues today. Doors will open today at 11 a.m. and shopping lasts until 4 p.m. Admission is free.

with regional vendors and artists and pick up some amazing gifts," said Donna Peacock, GFWC Woman's Club President. "It's a lot of fun for the whole family and a great time to take care of holiday shopping."

The GFWC Woman's Club of Tallahassee is a nonprofit service organization situated in the Los Robles community.

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