

# STORIES of New Jersey

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1060 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey

## JERSEY TOMATOES

The long white road cuts through the fields of green plants hung thickly with bright red fruit. Up and down the rows men and women, young girls and boys stoop over the heavily laden bushes plucking the fruit from the stems and piling it up in baskets. All day they keep at their task in the broiling sun, calling pleasantly to one another; or singing now and then to while away the long hours. A steady procession of wagons and motor trucks winds down the road, each vehicle piled high with a tottering load of baskets. All day and night the wagon train moves in a steady stream toward the canneries and the waiting city markets.

As far as the eye can see stretch the fields, each sprinkled with its group of industrious pickers, its piles of overflowing baskets. This is Gloucester County, the third of all the counties in the United States in tomato production. Its 9,000 acres of tomato fields furnish a livelihood for thousands of people and the crop finds its way to the markets, stores and pantry shelves of far off cities and towns.

Grandmothers of today, or at least great-grandmothers, can remember when a tomato was considered poisonous. They were called "love apples" because they were used in France in courtship as a token of love. The tomato of that day was a far smaller fruit than that now grown. It is only within the last fifty years that the development of the present large, luscious and highly nutritive product has taken place.

The tomato is a native of South America, where it was discovered by the Conquistadors who introduced it to Europe. About the year 1600 the Italians discovered its value in making sauces, especially for spaghetti. And no one has been able to better them in this particular use of it. Nevertheless, the rest of the civilized world was content to let the Italians take the risk of poisoning, and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that it was considered seriously as a food. People began growing a few plants in their gardens but no one thought of such a thing as a tomato farm.

The first seeds found their way to New Jersey from Florida in 1812, when Dr. Ephraim Buck of Cumberland County began experimenting with them. To the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and to the large canning companies we owe the present development of the tomato and its importance in the diet of every family. Scientists have analyzed it and found it high in mineral salts, iron, calcium and phosphorus content. It is among the most versatile of foods -- cooked, pickled or raw it is equally palatable and nutritive.