

PART IV TOMATO PREFERENCES

Popularity of Tomatoes

Among vegetables, fresh tomatoes rank third in popularity with consumers, after potatoes and lettuce. Tomato consumption has increased by 50% over the past 40 years, and continues to climb. In 2007, U.S. per capita consumption reached a record 20.3 pounds per person, according to USDA's Economic Research Service, and continues to be one of the world's most popular produce items.

Consumer Preferences for Florida Tomatoes

After tasting Florida tomatoes side by side with Mexican-grown and hothouse varieties, two out of three participants in a taste panel of 1,200 consumers said that Florida tomatoes had the best flavor. Of those who preferred Florida tomatoes, 60 percent said that overall flavor was the reason for their choice. Others singled out "sweetness," "texture" and "juiciness" as qualities they valued in the Florida fruit.

The independent study, conducted by Rose Research, Inc., in New York, confirmed an earlier series of flavor tests conducted over four years by the University of Florida and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In a subsequent survey, more than three-fourths of consumers surveyed indicated that they prefer USA-grown tomatoes over imports.

Foodservice Professional Preferences

Many foodservice professionals, particularly those highlighting locally produced or regional foods, find that incorporating Florida field-grown tomatoes into their dishes support their overall menu themes. The meaty texture and dense structure of Florida tomatoes makes them an ideal ingredient. Given their quest for maximizing flavor and texture chefs and cooks will likely find that using Florida field-grown vs. hot house tomatoes will enhance their dishes.