Ag Experiment Station Invents New Preferred Tomato

The TAMU Saladette, a new tomato line designed to meet changing consumer preferences and to boost Texas' fresh tomato industry, has been developed by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station and is being released for major commercial plantings.

Dr. Jarvis E. Miller, Experiment Station director, emphasized that research horticulturist Paul Leeper of the Experiment Station at Weslaco has spent eight years developing the new tomato variety.

"The new tomato is ideal for salads. And fruit quality and yields produced by the Saladette are better than existing fresh market varieties. The tomato will set fruit under a wider range of temperatures than existing commercial varieties, enabling growers to market fruit a month to six weeks earlier in the fall and a month later in the summer," Miller explained.

The new variety has been favorably received by consumers in pre-market tests, conducted by the station's marketing economics staff, and could serve to make fresh tomato production in South Texas profitable again, Leeper added.

Consumers put their stamp of approval on the Saladette during pre-market tests last season, and apparently were pleased with the somewhat smaller than regular hamburger-sized tomatoes which they found to be just as red, flavorful and juicy. Chain store buyers also heralded the tomato last season, the plant breeder explained.

A major economic asset of the new variety is that it is the first fresh market tomato that can be machine harvested. Growers also like the small vine and early-maturing characteristics and bulk-handling potential because it fills a slot in the fall market when supplies are limited.

Machines already are harvesting some 90 percent of the nation's processing and canning tomatoes. Agricultural engineers are working to develop a machine that can harvest fresh tomatoes without bruising them and are confident that this can be done, Leeper said.

Although the Saladette is intended as a fresh market variety, some will be used by the state's processing industry.

"Due to its small and shallow core, it is well-suited to tomato packers who desire to can chemically-peeled uncored whole tomatoes. These factors plus the fruit setting and yielding [illegible] city under adverse conditions [illegible] dicate that it could be [illegible] other tomato producin[illegible] the United States and in [illegible] foreign countries," Leeper [illegible] phasized.

W. R. Cowley, resident [illegible] tor for the Experiment [illegible] at Weslaco, said that develop[illegible] of the Saladette marks the [illegible] mination of years of [illegible] breeding and selection.

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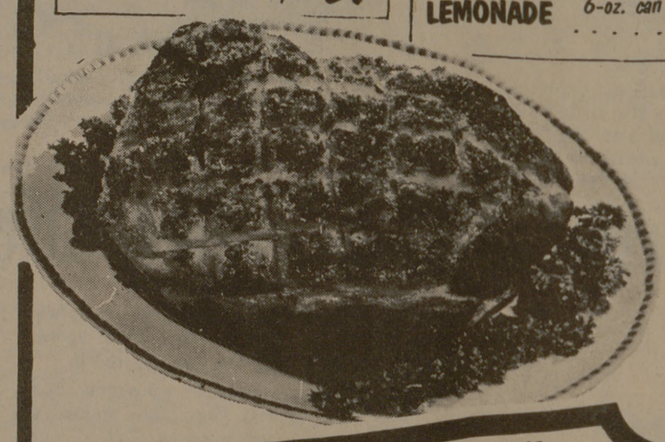

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