

Watermelons

Although no one knows exactly when the first watermelon was planted in Georgia, the fruit has been among the state's leading truck crops for many years.

Georgia melons were shipped to Northern states by boat as early as 1853. In 1856, an Augusta farmer began shipping watermelons to New York packed with straw in crockery crates. It is said that his profit was so great that he gave others the incentive to plant watermelons. Within the next 10 years, Augusta was shipping 60,000 melons each season.

By the 1890's, commercial production of watermelons gained a permanent foothold in Georgia. In fact, the fruit was considered king of the wiregrass area of the state.

Because of the state's success in the watermelon industry, the National Watermelon Association was established in Morven, Georgia in 1914. Originally known as the Melon Distributors Association, the organization continues to promote the best interests of the watermelon industry from production to consumption.

Watermelons have always held a major share of Georgia's truck farming industry. As highways and transportation improved, watermelon production and the state's truck farming industry increased.

For example, 32 million melons brought \$1,908,000 to the state in 1930. A record crop of 81,000 acres was planted in 1935. However, this acreage was not maintained; during the war, the federal government actually discouraged production.

Watermelons remain an important truck farming crop in Georgia. In fact the state is among the leaders in U.S. production.

The crop appeals to many farmers because it offers an early cash crop providing needed cash flow. In addition, the state has good growing seasons needed to produce a consistent crop with good yields and sweet melons. Popular Georgia watermelon varieties include Jubilees, Long Grays, and the most prevalent, Crimson Sweet.

Crisp County still claims the title of "Watermelon Capital of the World." The south Georgia county continues to handle a major portion of the melon crop through the State Farmers Market in Cordele.

