

# Farmer's cider is just plain peachy

## Grower uses ripe fruit for beverage

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Peach cider. If you haven't heard the words "peach" and "cider" in the same sentence, that's because in New Jersey, at least, no one had been making it. No one until Santo Maccherone of Circle M Farms in Mullica Hill, Harrison Township, Gloucester County, started.

The product combines ripe peaches and a processing procedure designed to retain its freshness and flavor.

Maccherone, who worked with the Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension Service to create the peach cider, said as far as he knows, there's nobody else in New Jersey doing peach cider.

Maccherone, 52, practically has peaches in his blood. His family has farmed the fruit since 1942.

"My grandfather started it and I'm the third generation orchardist," Maccherone said, adding that his farm consists of "a couple of hundred acres, 150 in fruit."

While Maccherone and family have been picking peaches and selling them throughout the state for years, he said, the cider is only a 2-year-old project. It was born of Maccherone's desire to be true to the taste of the peach.

"I pick my peaches on the edge of ripe and I hang in there to get that close to ripe," he explained. "But when you pick so close to freshly ripened, a lot of the peaches aren't suitable for shipping. Too fragile. Ripe peaches are not good for packing and shipping even though they taste the best."



(GANNETT PHOTOS: AL SCHELL)

Sara Lawall (left in photo above) and her two nieces, Lauren and Caroline Maccherone, separate peaches (below) at Circle M Farms in Mullica Hill that will be boxed and sent to markets from those extremely ripe ones that will be used to make peach cider.



Maccherone, tired of throwing his tastiest fruit to the ground, decided he needed a way to get that ripeness to more people. He contacted the Cooperative Extension looking for ways to use his perfectly ripe fruit.

The Extension Service helped Maccherone apply for a \$25,900 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant to outline the development of a business and marketing plan.

Maccherone began test-marketing the cider in fall 2003. It was a hit, he said.

This year, his peach cider sits prominently at roadside stands all over the state.

North of Asbury Park, at Sickles Fresh Market, the cider is sold with recipes for slushies using it as the fruit ingredient.

Maccherone said he hopes to next market the cider to big supermarket chains.