

STRAWBERRIES

This year's crop has arrived early in southern New Jersey

By LYNDA COHEN
For The Press

HAMMONTON — Looking for some homegrown strawberries? Then you'd better get to a roadside stand soon, or you might miss them.

With the warmer weather, strawberry season began early this year, according to Hammonton farmers.

At 206 Farm Market along Route 206, the Monzos began picking berries about two weeks ahead of schedule, according to Nancy Monzo, 40, whose husband, William, 49, is the third generation of Monzos at the 70-year-old business.

"When people see the blueberries out, they usually ask, 'Where are the strawberries?'" she said. But by then, it's too late.

The warmer weather also can cause the berries to be smaller, because they ripen quicker, Monzo said. If it gets too hot — which hasn't happened yet at Monzo's farm — they can turn to mush, she warned.

Typical strawberry seasons only last about three weeks, said Donald Perna, who works part time at the Glossy Fruit Farm Market a little farther down the road. It's already been about three weeks since the first berries were picked at the farm owned by the Rizzotte brothers, Dave, Tony and Hank.

Sure, you can still get strawberries at your local grocery store, but most of them are shipped from California.

"They get the big ones," Nancy Monzo said of the West Coast variety. "But there's no comparison in taste."



Nancy Monzo, of the 206 Farm Market in Hammonton, says warmer spring weather can mean earlier, but smaller, strawberries.

Staff photos by Vernon Ogradnek