



SHARON GEKOSKI-KIMMEL / Suburban Staff Photographer

The 2002 Whitesbog Blueberry Festival in Browns Mills included sales by Norman Croneberger of Deptford and Everett Robbins of Mount Holly. The blueberry could win Assembly support today.

A state fruit fight gives fourth graders a lesson in politics

FRUIT from B1

said. Still, any bill approved by the Assembly must pass muster in the Senate and be signed by the governor before becoming law, so tomato backers still could rally for a block-the-blueberry campaign.

But fourth graders at Veterans Memorial Elementary School in Brick, Ocean County, would counter that the facts more than tip the scale in favor of the blueberry.

"The tomato is not native to New Jersey," says a teacher

not fruit — of Maine.

"The tomato is not native to New Jersey," Kurasz said. "It's not even native to North America."

She said another factor against the tomato was an 1893 U.S. Supreme Court decision that the tomato, while scientifically a fruit, is a vegetable for legal purposes.

Fischer, who called the campaign a highlight of a 20-year teaching career, said that gave her an idea.

She plans to talk

Vote is near even as a rival class pitches tomato.

Blueberry as the state fruit? There are 2 schools of thought

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By Joseph A. Gambardello
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

In the politics of fruit — and nearly everything in New Jersey is political — the blueberry is poised to make heavy out of the tomato.

That should become evident today as the Assembly considers a bill to make the blueberry, specifically the highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), the state fruit.

In the meantime, a bill to bestow honor on the Jersey tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*) apparently has stilled on the vine in committee limbo.

And to think this is a fight started by schoolchildren looking for a practical lesson in government.

"We're kind of upset about it," said Laura Fischer, whose 2001-02 fourth-grade class at Marlboro Elementary School in Monmouth County took up the tomato's cause after careful deliberation.

She noted that the tomato bill had been introduced a year ago, months before legislation backing the blueberry appeared in February and breezed through.

That prompted her to wonder why the blueberry had so much more clout in the Statehouse than the storied Jersey tomato.

The tomato-as-state-fruit idea "fell victim to petty politics, and that is upsetting to the children," Fischer said. See **FRUIT** on B7



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Still, any bill approved by the Assembly must pass muster in the Senate and be signed by the governor before becoming law, so tomato backers still could rally for a block-the-blueberry campaign.

But fourth graders at Veterans Memorial Elementary School in Brick, Ocean County, would counter that the facts more than tip the scale in favor of the blueberry.

With the help teachers Suzanne Kurasz and Gail Damiano, the students took up its cause after also considering the peach, the cranberry and the tomato.

"The children thought it fitting that the Garden State have a state fruit," Kurasz said.

The children picked the blueberry because it is "one of the few fruits that is native to New Jersey" — and was first cultivated in the state — as well as tasty and nutritious, she said.

The wild blueberry, it should be noted, is the state berry —

not fruit — of Maine.

"The tomato is not native to New Jersey," Kurasz said. "It's not even native to North America."

She said another factor against the tomato was an 1893 U.S. Supreme Court decision that the tomato, while scientifically a fruit, is a vegetable for legal purposes.

"The tomato is not native to New Jersey," says a teacher who wants the blueberry made the state fruit.

Fischer, who called the campaign a highlight of a 20-year teaching career, said that gave her an idea.

She plans to talk to her former students, who have remained active in the tomato's cause, to see if they want to take another tack

and try to make it the state vegetable.

"I'm going to get those kids together again and not let this go," Fischer said.

And perhaps they will find something that is rare in politics anywhere — a solution that makes everybody happy.

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