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## ***USDA Decision Clears Path for Year-Round Availability of the Flavorful UglyRipe® Tomato***

### **Consumer-Driven Decision Means Mid-Summer Tomato Taste in the Middle of Winter**

[WASHINGTON—Jan. 17] The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has intervened in the national debate over the UglyRipe® tomato, freeing the heirloom beefsteak variety tomato from the shape restrictions imposed by the Florida Tomato Committee (FTC).

The tomato's developer, Joe Procacci, had been at odds over the tomato with the FTC, a group of competing growers sanctioned by federal law. The FTC is empowered to determine all size and shape standards for tomatoes entering the U.S. market from mid-October to mid-June, the time of year when many Americans claim they're unable to find a tasty tomato.

For the last three years, the FTC has found that the UglyRipe does not meet its rigorous standards, which are based on size and shape, but not taste. The FTC rejection meant that the tomatoes were prohibited for sale outside of the Florida growing region during the winter months.

The new USDA rule, published in today's *Federal Register*, amends the Florida Tomato Marketing Order to exempt the UglyRipe from the shape portion of the USDA grade standards as long as the UglyRipe is grown, packed, and distributed under USDA's Identity Preservation Program (IPP). The IPP uses the unique genetic fingerprint of a produce variety to assure that it is in fact the product claimed by its grower. The UglyRipe will still have to meet all of the other grade standards imposed under the marketing order.

The UglyRipe, available as conventional or organic produce, took over 20 years and more than \$3 million in research funding by Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation to develop. The brand is marketed by Santa Sweets, a Plant City, Fla. company owned by Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation (PBSC).

"Thanks to the USDA, consumers can now have the mid-summer goodness of tomato season all year round," said Joe Procacci, CEO, PBSC. "It's taken me 59 years in the tomato business to develop and market the UglyRipe tomato from Santa Sweets. The UglyRipe gets fan mail. There's no other way to put it. I'm thrilled!"

For three years beginning in 1999 the FTC exempted the UglyRipe from the standards of Florida round tomatoes and allowed the heirloom variety UglyRipe to be shipped outside the state. After the 2003-2004 crop of UglyRipes were already in the ground, the FTC refused to allow the product to be sold outside of Florida, claiming the UglyRipe was too misshapen and would damage the reputation of the Florida marketplace, resulting in millions of pounds of tasty tomatoes wasted.

Last year, USDA proposed a rule change to grant a partial exemption to the Minimum Grade Requirements for the UglyRipe tomato and in September published the public comments regarding the proposed change. The overwhelming majority of comments supported the change. Sample comments from these letters appear at the end of the press release. The Company has also received hundreds of e-mails from fans of the UglyRipe, many wondering where the UglyRipe can be found near them.

“I have sold tomatoes since I was a boy during the Depression,” said Mr. Procacci. “This is the first tomato that tastes like a tomato should taste, and yet is hardy enough to ship across the country. The UglyRipe fulfills my dream, to provide a backyard tasting tomato year round.”

The UglyRipe is set to be the first product in the USDA’s Identity Preservation Program, a comprehensive auditing system for verifying production, handling, processing and storage of unique, value-added crops. The program also affords participants opportunities to verify other product quality traits, such as variety.

Fans of the UglyRipe can also look forward to a new outlet to share their passion with other fans. Santa Sweets plans to launch a tomato blog in the coming weeks that can be accessed from its website [www.santasweets.com](http://www.santasweets.com). The Company also plans an online store for customers who prefer to order UglyRipes online.

“If Harry & David can sell pears in a box, then we can sell tasty tomatoes,” said Mr. Procacci.

Santa Sweets is a produce grower and marketer based in Plant City, Florida and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Procacci Brothers Sales Corporation. The Company’s focus is on growing the most flavorful produce on the market, including the UglyRipe tomato and Santa Sweets™ grape tomatoes. In addition to conventional tomatoes, Santa Sweets is also one of the largest growers of USDA-certified organic tomatoes. For more information, go to their website, [www.santasweets.com](http://www.santasweets.com).

Procacci Brothers, headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1948 and has since become one of the largest growers and handlers of fresh tomatoes in the world, handling over 275 thousand tons of organic and conventional produce per year. Procacci

Brothers and its Garden State Farms division supply the supermarket industry with a full line of fresh repacked and private labeled fruits and vegetables from around the world. In addition, they are a major supplier of pre-made gift baskets, packed fresh to order daily. From the freshest produce in the world, to the most innovative packaging, to attentive and personalized service, it's always the best. For more information, go to [www.procaccibrothers.com](http://www.procaccibrothers.com).

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