

Bill and the giant peach

Mattawan farmer's fuzzy fruit takes world record for size

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MATTAWAN — Bill Schultz currently is the proud grower of the world's largest peach.

The monster peach is a hefty 30.9 ounces, beating the previous record of 30.5 ounces held by Paul Friday, of Coloma.

Schultz, 49, of Mattawan, has been a farmer all his life and never had a record holder until now. He might have had a world-record peach two years ago, but he didn't realize it until it was too late.

"I broke the record two years ago and didn't know it," Schultz said. "We ate it."

His peach unofficially weighed in at 2 pounds at his home, but he did-

n't think it was anything other than a really big peach.

He didn't realize that his peach would have been a potential record holder until he was shown a newspaper clipping showing Friday's peach.

"We had him beat by 2 ounces," Schultz said.

Please see BILL, Page 2



Bill Schultz, of Mattawan, holds his world-record peach, which weighed in at 30.9 ounces, beating out the previous world-record peach at 30.5 ounces.

COURTESY OF BILL SCHULTZ

Continued from Page 1

Bill and the giant peach: Fuzzy fruit a record

Schultz said the peach didn't taste that good once he realized what he and his family had eaten.

"We were just saddened," Schultz said. "It was like when you hear about people eating the world record fish and not knowing it, and then saying it didn't taste that good."

But now, Schultz owns the record holding Flamin' Fury 24-007 peach. The only problem is, he doesn't know what to do with it.

"I'm trying to find some way to preserve it, but I can't find a jar with an opening big enough to fit it," Schultz said. "I would can it as a whole peach."

Schultz said he's hoping there's someone out there who has a jar with a big

enough mouth so he can keep the giant peach.

"I'd like to preserve it forever," Schultz said. "Or until I get tired of looking at it. Or until my wife gets tired of dusting the jar."

Schultz said the peach could have gotten bigger, but some miscommunication on the farm led to it being picked a little too early.

The giant peach was verified and witnessed by Lee LaVanway, who has been the Market Master at the Benton Harbor Fruit Market for more than 10 years.

"It's kind of exciting because we've been known for generations as having the best-tasting peaches in the world," LaVanway said. "Now we have the biggest peaches in the world."

LaVanway said he was very pleased that Schultz called him to have the peach verified and witnessed at the fruit market, which was the recent subject of an article in the *New York Times*.

LaVanway said that even though the industry has declined, the quality hasn't.

"You don't see (our peaches) very much in supermarkets," LaVanway said. "They're not picked very green and hard with no flavor. Michigan peaches are luscious and different. The varieties are selected for flavor, not shipping quality."

While both LaVanway and Schultz attribute the size of the peach to the rough weather last April (Schultz said he lost about 60 percent of his crop, meaning more nutrients for the surviving crop), LaVanway said he also believes peaches grow larger because of the area's soil.

LaVanway also said that the way the soil acts should help the giant peach retain



COURTESY OF BILL SCHULTZ

Mattawan farmer Bill Schultz hasn't decided what to do with this peach, a world-record 30.9 ounces.

its taste despite its size — that is, if Schultz decides to eat it.