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## **Sheppard Farms welcomes family member back to operations**

May 25, 2018

Eastern Fresh Growers, Inc., based in Cedarville, NJ, grows, sells and packs asparagus, bell peppers, cucumbers, green squash, lettuce, tomatoes and various organic produce.

Tom Sheppard is president of the company, and runs the 1,500-acre Sheppard Farms with his brother Erwin. Sheppard Farms is the primary grower for Eastern Fresh Growers and the family-owned business includes Erwin's son Brandon, nephew-in-law Fran, and back in the fold recently, Tom's son Alex who attended North Carolina State University for his BS in Mechanical Engineering, and later obtained his MBA from Old Dominion University. He's serving as Sheppard Farms' production supervisor.



“He was off applying his trade, working for Case New

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Holland for four and Liebherr Mining Equipment Co., out of Germany down in Norfolk the past three years, and he decided it was time to come back to the family business,” Tom Sheppard said. “It means more continuity. The next generation is now in-line. Erwin is 68, I’m 64, so we’re looking to start slowing down and the new generation is ready to step up.”

The other exciting development at the farm is that it is growing sweet corn for the first time ever, looking to see if it would be a good fit.

“We put in about 50 acres over seven weeks to add to our crop mix and our rotation of crops in the field,” Sheppard said. “We thought it would be a good fit for us because we already have vacuum coolers and harvesting aids and we had some extra crew available because we do so much asparagus early.”

Speaking of asparagus, the crop is off to something of a slow start in 2018 because New Jersey has experienced the coldest April since 1984, which has set things back about two weeks.

“Our total yield on asparagus are more than likely going to be down,” Sheppard said. “We’ve had really good markets and good quality, but we won’t get cranked up until the first of May and we’ll be done harvesting by the 15th of June depending on temperature.”

Still, it’s been an important crop for Sheppard Farms, and it expanded by 60 acres this year, though that won’t harvest until 2020.

The company has been using electronic sorting equipment the past four years and has found that has given a precise grade on the asparagus.

Elsewhere on the farm, cucumbers are expected to be harvested around June 20 with peppers following around July 15.

Tom’s brother David Sheppard split off about a decade ago to do exclusively organics with a new company — Jersey Legacy Farms, also based in Cedarville — and those are sold under Eastern Fresh Growers.

Being in New Jersey allows the company to offer fresh produce to the East Coast quickly and efficiently, and provide better value for Jersey-based and close-by retailers.

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