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AJ Consalo taking the reins at a young age at Consalo Family Farms

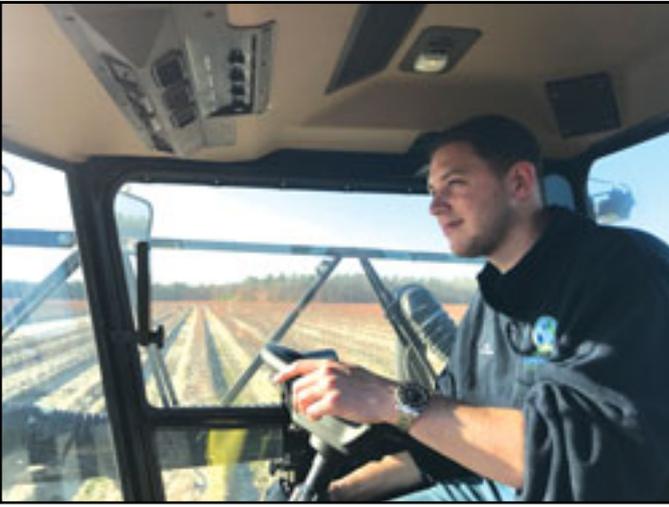
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At age 14, AJ Consalo started working for his father at Consalo Family Farms in Vineland, NJ. Today, at age 23, he holds the title of vice president of farming operations for the company.

“At the time I worked summers for my father,” said Consalo. “I used to go to the Vineland Produce Auction with him every day and write down the price of each product to help him follow the market.”

In 2012, at age 17, he had started his first job away from the family business at a blueberry and vegetable farm in Egg Harbor City, NJ, where he worked in the packinghouse to oversee quality control and packaging.

“My father definitely had an influence on bringing me into the industry because he was a third-generation farmer and produce distributor,” noted Consalo. “However, when I started working at



the AJ Consalo operating the Big John Tractor on a Consalo Family Farms blueberry farm in Egg Harbor City, NJ. farm I really got a feel for a different side of the industry. Seeing the farming side of the produce industry allowed me to see what was involved from seed to harvest to table. It was rewarding to be involved in this part of the business.”

That’s when Consalo became invested in what he was doing. He was soon committed to seeing his family’s legacy grow and to being involved in farming as a career.

With that in mind, Consalo attended St. Joseph’s University in Philadelphia.

“I graduated with a degree in business administration in May of 2017,” he said. “I knew it was important to finish my education, even though I was working on the farm as I was going to school. I felt secure with the farm in my future, but also fortunate for the opportunity to get an education at St. Joseph’s University.”

When his father approached him about purchasing additional acreage to add to the family’s farming operation, Consalo said he knew it was going to be a lot of hard work.

“I could tell my dad was counting on me to take the reins,” he said. “I had been working on this particular farm for three years while I was still in school. My father, as well as the previous owners, believed that I could take the farm to the next level. Their belief in me really pushed me forward in the industry.”

Today, Consalo handles everything from the company’s strict crop management program to packaging the final product.

Outside of work he spends a lot of time around cars, which he’s been interested in since he was a young child. He enjoys car shows and frequents the Atco Dragway in Atco, NJ, to spectate.

“I also enjoy playing indoor soccer during the winter when farm work slows down,” he said. “I played throughout high school, and to continue playing helps me get away from the long days on the tractor at the farm.”

Even at his young age, his accomplishments at Consalo Family Farms are notable. He and his staff work with Growmark FS and Crop Production Services to ensure that they are growing quality product for the end consumer.

“Growmark and CPS provide Consalo Family Farms with state-of-the-art fertilization programs,” he

explained. “The Consalo team and I meet with Growmark and CPS advisers and scientists to develop the best programs to ensure proper soil pH and nutrients for the crop.

“Working with these companies and learning new things from agricultural meetings with their representatives is something that pushes me to keep our crop management program in line,” he continued. “Being out on the tractor taking care of the crop is what I love to do most on the farm. And being up on the tractor, looking over all the crops on the farm, is really an indescribable feeling.”

He noted that the most stressful time of the year is during harvest and packaging because it all comes down to getting it done in such a small timeframe. But he has it down to an operable and efficient science.

“My co-workers trust in me to keep our packaging equipment running smoothly so we can get the product packed, cooled and ready to ship out to customers,” he said.

Learning every aspect of the farming industry is something Consalo finds exciting, and he said that every day a new challenge awaits him.

“Working with my family is what drives me forward to overcome day-to-day challenges,” he said. “It is great to work alongside my uncle, Jeff DiMatteo, who is the general manager of Consalo Family Farms, and my sister, Chelsea Consalo, vice president of produce operations. Working with them makes the long days on the farm a lot of fun.”

With seven years of farming already under his proverbial belt, Consalo has seen how quickly technology is moving forward.

“Watching my sister manage our food-safety initiatives is where I have seen the most advances in making sure we are taking the proper steps to provide our customers a safe quality product,” he noted. “Each and every new season brings new regulations and technology to monitor things like the cleanliness of packaging equipment.”

In the farming industry, Consalo is interested primarily in the continuation of the drive for better equipment for the field and packaging operations.

“I also see a push for equipment that has the ability to mechanically harvest products without causing damage to the plants,” he said. “Also needed is a push for better sorting equipment to ensure a quality packaged product.”

Consalo looks forward to each season of farming and learning new things, but he also hopes to see the other sides of the business and working with his father.

“Currently I am exclusively working in our farming operations,” he said. “In my future years in the business, I hope to learn how to follow the produce market prices and how to connect with the customers to who we sell our products.”