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Turek Farms heads into Southern Exposure with sweet corn on its mind

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Jason Turek, a partner in both Turek Farms and its marketing arm, Cayuga Produce Inc., noted being a family-owned grower and shipper of fresh market vegetables means dedicating 100 percent to the business at all times and looking for growth opportunities.

One of the ways it does the latter is by attending produce shows and the SEPC Southern Exposure Conference has long been one of his favorites.

“There’s no better way to catch up with all your friends and people you do business with than by hitting these conferences,” he said. “It would take weeks trying to go around the country trying to catch everyone. This is a real relaxing atmosphere and lets you get business done.”



While Turek Farms is almost all about sweet corn in spring, the company is growing throughout other seasons. Turek Farms has been one of SEPC's exhibitors since the show first started, and will be back behind a booth this year as well. In total five people will be representing Turek, including people from Belle Grade, FL-SM Jones & Co., which it is part owner of.

"We pretty much just put a slideshow together of what's going on at the farm. We don't bring product because we feel like people are just there to see us and there's not a whole lot of fluff," Turek said. "The show does a pretty good job of letting people know who is going to be there and who is pre-registered, so we reach out to people and try to get them to come to the booth or sit down for a face-to-face meeting."

A veteran exhibitor at SEPC, Turek has always like the intimacy of the show, even though he admits it's gotten bigger and bigger every year.

"Anyone who is anyone in the produce business is at this show," he said. "Everyone has the same-size booth and that helps to keep things intimate, but attendance is way up from what it used to be. After all, it's pretty easy to talk people into going to Florida in the winter time."

Turek expects to be talking sweet corn at the show, and trying to get everyone geared up for the spring and spring-time promotions surrounding the product.

"It's our major thing, and it gets hot and heavy pretty much from April through Labor Day," Turek said. "Crop wise, so far from Homestead has been nice and on schedule, and the weather has been pretty favorable."

Still, he knows that things can change quickly and Turek is no stranger to some of the worst freezes in March. But he likes the indications for the season he sees so far.

“Last year was a strange year. The Northeast was probably the latest, slowest season we’ve had in 25-30 years, and the Southeast was pushing forward and burning up, creating a big void in July with a lot of demand and little product,” Turek said. “The price went up. We love to get some of those high markets but I think it sometimes stifles business. The Midwest was also hurt last year and a lot of acres did not get planted. Our farm, we were probably down 10 percent acre-wise because it was too wet to plant it.”

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“For us, the fall category for us continues to grow, with increases in pumpkins and hard squash,” Turek said. “Stuff in the fall arena has really gotten bigger for us. We used to be able to push corn through September, but in the Northeast, everyone seems to reset at Labor Day and is looking for fall produce.”

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