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Topashaw Farms continues sweet potato legacy

By

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Joe Edmondson entered the sweet potato business about 30 years ago. Growing the vegetable had been a family tradition, as his mother's father was one of the first people to grow sweet potatoes in the Vardaman, MS area, and Edmondson decided to start his sweet potato operation in order to strengthen his family's business.

“That’s what got me heading in the direction to start the packing operation and it’s been really, really good for us,” said Edmonson, owner of Topashaw Farms. “They brought the same work ethic that they used on the farm and it’s gone well.”

Topashaw Farms applies its experience and cutting-edge technology to ship sweet potatoes that have outstanding taste and the right color all year long. Edmonson noted that sweet potatoes are always popular, but that the beginning of the year sees a bit of a lull and that Easter will see sales that rival Thanksgiving. Planting begins in late February or early March and harvesting starts in November.

“We’ll be putting the beds out for the plants right around the corner,” Edmonson said in mid-January, adding that the current crop has been a good one.

“There were isolated spots where we had too much water out of the tropical systems that came through here,” he said. “Unfortunately, we were in one of those streaks where we got a lot of water, and of course, sweet potatoes don’t do well in wet ground. But other than that, it was a good year, and Mississippi overall had a good year.”

Working in Vardaman has been a great decision as it’s an ideal place for growing sweet potatoes for various reasons, including both the soil and the weather.

“I always kind of compare it to a Vidalia onion, it comes from Vidalia Georgia, and if you buy it anywhere else, it doesn’t taste the same,” Edmonson said. “It’s pretty much the same as a sweet potato that comes from here—if you get them from another state, they just don’t have the same characteristics as the ones from here.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, made an impact, but thanks to robust retail sales and campaigns that have promoted the health benefits of sweet potatoes, Edmonson noted Topashaw Farms has performed strongly during this challenging time.

“Probably like everybody else, we never know from one week to the next how it’s going to affect everything,” he said. “It’s brought a lot of uncertainty to the market for sure but other than that, we’ve actually been pretty fortunate as far as how it’s affected our production and everything.”

Success in the business, he added, boils down to hard work and a determination not to fail, just like in any other business.

“I said when we started this, I never had an ambition to be the biggest because that’s not what I want to be,” Edmonson said. “I guess your size will pretty much take care of itself, but you can always be the best. You can be the best at anything you do, and that’s how we’ve built our business. We didn’t know how big it would get, but we knew we could be the best, or strive to be the best.”

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