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Nardelli Lake View Farms overcoming challenges

By

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The Nardelli family has been involved in the produce business for the greater part of a century and Nardelli Bros. Inc.- Lake View Farms has kept that legacy going.

The Cedarville, NJ-based company ships its own produce that it grows on its large farms in Southern New Jersey, and also offers cooling operations, packing and shipping and delivery and transportation services.

Its roster of products includes asparagus, beans, beats, blueberries, cabbage, cucumbers, eggplant, herbs, lettuce, mixed greens, nectarines, onions, parsley, pickles, peppers, peaches, radishes, spinach, sweet potatoes, strawberries, squash, tomatoes, turnips and yams.

“We’re going strong in New Jersey right now with the end of our wet items, such as collards and kale and greens still harvesting,” said Bill Nardelli Jr., vice president of sales for Nardelli Lake View Farms, who is part of the fifth generation of the family working for the company. “The weather has been very favorable. We’ve had a mild fall and things have progressed nicely to finish out the end of the deal here.”

Additionally, hard squash will continue to go through the Christmas season out of storage, and most of the dried stuff is finished in the Northeast.

However, in the fall, the company raises product both in Georgia and Florida, to keep things going year-round.

“What normally happens about now is we start to transition into Georgia, and we’re working corn out of the Southern end and starting some beans right now,” Nardelli said. “We’ll continue to go with that until the first part of December, and then we’ll start our greens harvest in Georgia.”

The company will next transition into South Florida, which Nardelli noted was running a little later than normal this year due to some weather gaps and getting things planted. He expects by the first week of December, there will be good availability on all the lettuces, parsley, cabbages, corn and beans.

“The dry items — peppers, cucumbers, squash and eggplant — are starting down there and becoming a little more regularly available,” Nardelli said. “For the most part, the quality is looking really good. The crops appear to be a little bit late but we’ll be not far off from harvest so things should progress fairly well.”

In 2021, the biggest challenge the company is facing is labor, and Nardelli hopes the participation rate of workers improves a great deal in 2022 for the entire ag industry.

“What coincides with that, and is an issue for our company as well as many others, is the transportation thing,” Nardelli said. “There’s a lack of equipment, rates are 20-30 percent higher than past years, and that was even before the price of fuel escalated over the last several months. The freight rates were high even when we had more economical fuel.”

Nardelli Bros has been in the trucking business since 1941 and this is the most challenging time it’s seen in 80 years, also exasperated by the lack of a driver pool.

“We don’t have enough young men coming into the field to be over-the-road truck drivers, and that’s unfortunate and doesn’t seem to be reversing in any way,” Nardelli said. “It’s a problem in all areas of the country, so that’s been tough for us.”

Even though it has its own fleet, the company’s trucks can only take a percentage of its substantial vegetable harvest, so it does need to rely on some outside transportation.

“It’s great having your own private fleet, but when you have to go to the outside, it’s been an issue,” he said. “There are very few companies left that follow the spot market of produce. You used to have guys transition to the Northeast for the harvest up here and then transition to the south, but they are fewer and far between now.”

Reflecting on the overall 2021 level of business, Nardelli said it’s still had more positives than not, and having a diverse portfolio of more than 80 products helps.

“What’s helped us as a region is being close to a major population on the East Coast,” Nardelli said. “It’s just an advantage on the transportation side of things. That always has been our strong suit and continues to be.”

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