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**Honesty and quality keys to Russo Farms on-going success**

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By

Keith Loria

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[Russo Farms](#) are growers, buyers and shippers of fresh produce, and have been in business for more than a century, with retailers being its primary customer base.

Its primary crops are cilantro, dill, parsley, green onions, kale, collards, Swiss chard, beets, radishes, bok choy, cabbages and Napa cabbage.

The company also owns and operates its own trucks for delivery, and ship via direct grower relationships in New Jersey, dealing in sweet corn, peppers, squash, cucumbers, pickles and hot peppers.

“Over this past year, we’ve put about \$1 million in the business, mostly new equipment with a lot of it to do with out in the field,” said Thomas Russo, operations manager of the Vineland, NJ-based company. “Our future plans over the next year is to do a major expansion of our building, adding more cooler space and things of that nature.”

Among the new things added this year: a new sprayer, a new vacuum cooler and a new force air cooler, all with the goal to ensure that the company’s quality is top-notch.

“You always have to be improving,” Russo said. “You can’t stand still in this industry. Anyone who does is a behind-the-times grower. Food safety, delivery requirements and all of that requires absolutely A-1 quality, and the only way to achieve that is with investment.”

The 2023 season has been pretty good so far, with Russo explaining that in some cases the company is busier in the winter than it is in the summer.

“Certainly, our business changes,” he said. “Over the winter, there were a lot of product shortages and the only way we got through that is by having dealt with the same network of growers the last 30-plus years. When things are short, we are able to supply it mostly because we are farmers ourselves. When markets are cheap, we treat those growers correctly, because that’s how we would expect to be treated. So, when things are tight, people deliver product for us when they don’t for others.”

It all comes down to honesty. That’s how Russo’s dad believed in doing things, and how he has continued to run things at the farm.

“If product comes in that has a little bit of trouble in it, if we can bring that into our packaging facility, clean it up and make it work, and not clip the bill in half on the grower, that’s how we do things the right way,” Russo said. “We’re not looking to make the quick dollar when we know that’s not the right thing to do.”

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In New Jersey, lettuce as of May has been a pretty soft market, which isn't surprising considering the challenges growers have had this past year.

“What I think is going to trend is our core items — cilantro, parsley, dills, kales, cabbages — the things that have to go on the truck day after day after day,” Russo said. “My feeling as a farmer is could you hit the jackpot on the lettuce deal, possibly, but if it's not in the regular rotation of the items you are shipping, it's not worth taking the risk. Better to have the items on the farm that your customers demand from you week in and week out, order after order after order so you don't run short.”

Russo Farms is also global gap certified and a registered importer of Canadian produce.

“We do a lot of business in Canada and have done business there for over 30 years,” Russo said. “We have excellent grower relationships and it's built up over many, many years. We fill a nice little niche; we provide our own product and we're able to support our customers and keep them happy.”

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## About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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