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Rich Marolda Jr. looks at New Jersey fall season and beyond

By

Gordon M. Hochberg

September 5, 2023

The quality of New Jersey vegetables has been quite good this summer, with pricing fairly normal, according to Rich Marolda Jr. He is optimistic for a good fall season. He's already looking forward to rolling out a couple of new items come next year.

"The quality's phenomenal this year, and our yields are great," Marolda told *The Produce News* Thursday, Aug. 10. "Everything really looks great on the farm this year."

He added, "Pricing has been fairly normal through the season so far. A couple of items really nosedived, like parsley, up until recently, and was very, very cheap, but it rebounded, due to rain in some other areas."

Asked for his thoughts on the state's upcoming fall produce season, Marolda stated, "I'm still pretty optimistic. We have a pretty robust sales program at Marolda Farms and Sweetvine, so even when things are slow, it seems like we're still connecting the dots. I'm always optimistic."

Marolda Farms, located in Vineland, NJ, is owned and operated by Richard Marolda Sr. and his wife, Sherry. Richard Marolda Jr. (their son) is the production manager and also spearheads the company's organic program; those products are shipped under the "Rock & Roll Organics" label by the entity known as Sweetvine.

The company harvests from about 250 acres of conventional acreage and close to 125 acres of certified organic acreage, according to Rich Jr.

"This year for the organic line, the herbs have been king," he said. "Cilantro and parsley, the volume has been fantastic, it's been huge. Ever since early summer, we've been going heavier with herbs. Again, I see cilantro and parsley, especially organic cilantro and parsley, being very big going into the fall."

He continued, "Also on the organic side, we'll have our usual items like kale, Tuscan kale, lettuce. And then on the conventional farm leeks, beets, also parsley. We try to keep our customers happy with our lineup."

Asked how the New Jersey fall produce season compares in relation to the spring and summer seasons, the company executive replied, "For our farms, the fall deal is extremely important because we are predominantly a wet veg operation. That's all the leafy greens that we do and the herbs. The season for those items is the spring, then the fall. Basically the fall is like a smaller version of our spring season. And because of the items we grow, the fall season is extremely important. It's that extra that we need to bridge us from New Year's 'till we start back up with our main lineup in May."

He continued, “Our fall deal pretty much goes to Thanksgiving. Then after Thanksgiving it’s just our most cold-hardy crops, some spinach and kale. Depending on how the weather goes, we may have some of our other items. Our main crop after Thanksgiving is leeks.”

But even in early August, Marolda was looking to next year when he would be adding two new items to the company’s lineup, both organic only.

“I’ve been wanting to get into fig production for a few years, and I started propagating fig trees this spring,” he said. “I feel like it has a lot of potential to be a successful venture. I’ve wanted to get into fruit for the last few years. It’s my foot in the door. I think it’s a good addition to the lineup. I was also able to get my hands on passion fruit seed, and I’ll be setting myself up with passion fruit as well.

“They’re all still in the greenhouse, he continued. “The passion fruit is going to be probably a little bit of a slower start. I have about 20 plants; I’m going to make more seed from the fruit that I get from the plants I was able to start. That’ll be a slower start, but I feel like that could be another commodity for our company.”

The plants for both figs and passion fruit will be put outside this coming spring.

As to the timing of the first harvest, Marolda replied, “Both items are summer fruits. Figs would start in the middle of August, and passion fruit’s around the same time. I’m hoping to have some fruit next season.”

Photo: Rich Marolda Sr. and his wife, Sherry, with their granddaughter Valentina.

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