

Development of a new broccoli industry in the Eastern United States

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The rising demand for broccoli has been a market largely been unavailable to New York vegetable growers because the season when it can be safely grown is quite short—between the heat of summer and the cold of winter. A recent breeding breakthrough has led to broccoli that performs well in Eastern summers and has the potential to make broccoli a significant crop in the East.

For the new germplasm to benefit growers, several things need to happen at the same time. Seed companies need to breed and market new varieties based on the new germplasm. They will only do so if there will be a substantial market for the seed in the East. There will only be a seed market if a lot of growers are confident that they can market the crop profitably. The market will only exist if major retailers are confident that they can obtain a year-round supply of quality broccoli from eastern sources.

Thanks to a recent grant, a group of researchers and businesses is setting out to do all these things, with the ambitious goal of establishing a thriving broccoli industry in the East.

New York vegetable growers have a great opportunity to take part. The economic team will be examining markets and distribution channels that have the best profit potential. The team includes distributors who have the capacity to ship, and supermarkets who are interested in sourcing.

Cabbage growers have the knowledge and equipment to raise broccoli, and are most likely to succeed with broccoli production. They may benefit from a market that is substantially larger than that for cabbage. However, the rotation limits, post-harvest handling, shipping and marketing may be a better fit for growers of other fresh-market crops. In the next two years we want to have in-depth discussions with many growers to explore where broccoli is the best fit.

We expect new varieties to become available in 2013 to 2015, and they will have been well tested in the region. In order to have year-round production in the region, we have teams in each of six likely production centers that can, together, maintain a year round supply. These are in Maine, Western New York, southern Virginia, western North Carolina, central South Carolina, and northern Florida.

The USDA's Specialty Crops Research Initiative has introduced a new paradigm in partnering with industry. In order to take part in the project, each company is committing to invest the startup costs and the initial risk. The produce industry asked for this industry match in order to make sure that the projects with the greatest value to industry are funded.