

How we grow and market specialty cut flowers in Rhode Island - Quick summary
Polly & Mike Hutchison, Robin Hollow Farm, Saunderstown, RI
January 17, 2017 Empire State Expo

Query audience for flower growing - why they are here.

We are “reformed” vegetable growers, having spent 14 years as a certified organic farmer on a 300 acre farm, of which 9 was in crop production. We have farmed with horses and mid-20th century tractors, with volunteers, apprentices, and full-time staff. The farm had between 300 and 2000 visitors a week, and our home was in the middle of it all.

All of it was left behind in 2006 as Polly went from part-time in flowers to full time at a new farm - much smaller, and much more seriously. Mike helped as he finished up at the vegetable farm and then worked off farm for a couple of years, and then joined Robin Hollow Farm full time.

Although we are almost the only full-time flower grower in my immediate area, there are a lot of vegetable growers that grow sunflowers or other mixed flowers part time. At the previous farm the flowers were as a pick-your-own aspect of the CSA, and vase life and harvest conditions were not a concern. As a full-time flower grower, the quality of the flowers and the amount of time they last for my customers is a primary concern. If I had one message for you today, I would say:

Do it right, or don't bother.

A few thrown-together bouquets may pretty up your booth, but growers who treat flowers as an also-ran item risk spoiling it for other growers and for locally grown flowers as a whole. Think of it like crappy salad mix. If other people sell it with rotting leaves and dirt and weeds, then customers may turn off buying it completely. Supermarket tomatoes have turned many a person off tomatoes for good, and they don't even try the warm, sugary ones. My flowers are guaranteed to last at least a week, and often last longer, and I stand behind them.

After 11 years, we grow full time with a highly diversified farm, both in crops grown and markets. Three farmers' markets May-October, sales to florists, and we do events, mainly weddings. In 2016 we did over 90 weddings. We grow on our home field of about .75 acre and three greenhouses and have been working up an additional 4 acres of leased land, with two large high tunnels there.

Virtual tour with slides

Post Harvest Care: separate slide show **These slides can be offered as a .pdf if you like.**

Events are not for the faint-hearted. It is an intensely busy thing to do, frequently on Saturdays when I have three markets already, and we have to be very organized to pull it all off. That said if you enjoy the theatrical aspect, it can be a lot of fun! Separate group of slides.

Questions. Offer coupons for \$50 off ASCFG membership.