

Tomato Marketing at Plowbreak Farm

Kara Cusolito

Kara Cusolito is co-owner of Plowbreak Farm in Hector, NY, where she and her husband Aaron grow six acres of produce that serve 100 families and 30 restaurants weekly in the Ithaca, Watkins Glen, Trumansburg and Seneca Lake area. The farm's five high tunnels work all year, housing tomatoes (as well as cucumbers, peppers and zucchini) in the main season, and lettuce and other hard greens in the winter months.

Who we are at Plowbreak Farm

About the farm, when we started, philosophy on certifications

- All produce sold within 20 miles of the farm
- Not Certified Organic or GAPS because we currently don't need to be, though would consider if it opened up a worthwhile market opportunity for us

What we grow and who we serve

CSA, local, independently-owned restaurants, *local food co-op GreenStar

Tomatoes at Plowbreak Farm

An overview of what we grow and sell, and to whom

Wholesale accounts

Work with GreenStar Cooperative Market

Advice on translating that to work for you in your markets

About our wholesale program

How we grow tomatoes:

Marketing is just as much about growing quality produce as presenting a final product

- NRCS High Tunnel Program and about our tunnels
- Spacing and growth habits of plants
- Fertigation (120 lbs per acre pre plant bloodmeal/alfalfa meal half and half; in-season 3-5# N per week, 5-10 # K per week once fruits begin ripening); we are keeping phosphorus inputs out of tunnels
- Friends have done leaf tissue samples but we have not gotten into this level of detail

Choosing varieties

- Johnny's Seeds is our preferred company but there are many quality companies out there
- Leaf mold resistant varieties are necessary
- Greenhouse production varieties are expensive but good

Grafting

- Benefits: Soil-borne disease resistance, 25 percent higher yield
- Photos and description of Germ chamber set-up and type of humidifier

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Marketing Tomatoes at Plowbreak Farm to wholesale accounts

- Be early, offer standardized product and meet the market where it already is
- Early to market – we don't try to be *first* necessarily, and we don't try to fight the cantankerous spring temperature swings, but we shoot to list them for sale in mid-July
- Standing orders – we offer price breaks and first priority to those who commit to a weekly order through tomato season
- Contracts (these are really more like handshake deals but they work)

Our tomato products

Roma

Cherry (saladettes)

Cherry clamshells (“Toy Box Tomatoes”)

Beefsteak

Heirlooms

Traditional tomato packaging and sources

25 lb boxes – for romas

15 lb flats – beefsteaks and heirlooms

8 qt shippers – cherry tomatoes

Clamshells and labels

- Putting more plastic into the world is not ideal, but my goal is that my clamshells are displacing non-local tomatoes in clamshells
- Pass labeled clamshell samples around
- Sources for clamshells and labels