

Challenges of providing locally grown organic tomatoes for large end retailers

Amy and Gail Hepworth, Hepworth Farms, 506 South Road, Milton, NY 12547

amy@hepworthfarms.com

Hepworth Farms is a seventh generation farm located in Milton, NY on the banks of the Hudson River in Ulster County. The farm is owned and operated by Amy Hepworth, Gail Hepworth and Gerry Greco. The farm produces 144 line items marketed as “grown within 100 miles.” In addition to tomatoes, specialty crops include peppers, eggplant, tomatillos, cucumbers, zucchini, okra, greens, lettuce, and herbs. Hepworth Farms is certified organic. Among the clients are Whole Foods Market, the Park Slope Food Coop with 17,000 members located in Brooklyn, processors, and CSAs.

Hepworth Farms practices a “whole farm alive systems approach,” which maximizes the entire life force of the farm, from microbial activity to farm workers. The farm produces 4,500 yards/year of compost as part of their soil health program. Every morning begins with a meeting with their workers, which includes 20 minutes of stretching and 10 minutes discussion of the work strategy for the day. The power of constant observation of the farm’s ecosystem guides daily management decisions.

In 2011, Hepworth Farms grew 117 varieties of tomatoes on 55 Acres. Amy will describe her disease management strategies, growing protocols and the challenges of growing such a large collection of vegetables following organic practices. Gail will review of the winners and losers of the tomato trial. Finally, Amy will discuss the limitations of the current certified organic protocol in relationship to sustainable practices and the benefits of including biotech in the environmentally friendly production of safe food.