

The Produce Pages

Serving the fruit and vegetable growers of Eastern New York



January 2018

Featured Farm

TERESA RUSINEK, ENYCHP

This month we feature Hepworth Farms in Milton, New York, operated by Amy Hepworth, Gail Hepworth and Gerry Greco. Being on the Hepworth farm over the past 17 years has truly been a learning experience. There are always new pieces of land Amy is reclaiming, new varieties of vegetables Gail is seeding, and new pests Gerry is taking me out to a field to identify. The Hepworth Farm has been a generous supporter of Cooperative Extension and agriculture, contributing many hours on advisory boards, hosting twilight meetings and research trials.

Can you give me a history of the farm?

Hepworth Farms was established in 1818 along the west bank of the Hudson River. In 1918, the Hepworth family opened a roadside market in Milton. During the 1920-40's cars and trucks would line up on 9w on the way back to the city to buy produce and fresh made fruit drinks at the 24 hour roadside market. The farm also produced and sold Bordeaux mixture to farmers who would come down with their horse and buggies to fill their spray wagons. In the 1940s a commercial cold storage and packing facility was built. The roadside market and storage/packing facility was sold in 2000. The Hepworth family decided to buy back the property in 2014. The buildings and grounds were renovated into a modern facility for packing and storage of the many varieties of vegetables the farm grows today.

Photo: Gerry Greco, Amy Hepworth and Gail Hepworth in the cabbage patch

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Cornell Cooperative Extension
Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program

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The *Produce Pages* is a monthly publication of the Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Program. **For more information about the program and our events, please visit our website at : <http://enych.cce.cornell.edu/>.**

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Serving the Educational and Research Needs of the Commercial Small Fruit, Vegetable and Tree Fruit Industries in Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Dutchess, Essex, Fulton, Greene, Montgomery, Orange, Putnam, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schoharie, Schenectady, Ulster, Warren and Washington Counties

Amy and Gail Hepworth are the seventh generation on the Hepworth farm. Amy graduated from Cornell University in 1982 with a degree in Pomology and took on the lead role in farm operations. Under her management, the farm underwent major changes including downsizing from 900 to 50 acres of fruit trees, using IPM and experimenting in organic production. By 1990 the farm began shifting away from fruit production into organic vegetable production. Currently the farm specializes in the production of fruiting vegetables on 550 acres and is the largest grower of organic tomatoes in the Northeast.



ENYCHP Veg Specialist Teresa Rusinek and Amy and Gerry discuss tomato pruning in high tunnel

What changes have you made to the operation over the last five years?

To keep up with market demands, Hepworth Farms has increased acreage, production, infrastructure and most of all investment in labor. They've grown from 25 to over 200 employees in the past 5 years. These increases required a lot of attention to detail. They have focused on automation and efficiencies in the packing house such as doubling the cherry tomato packing line. Amy, Gail and Gerry have worked closely with farm workers at all levels to build skills needed to

produce quality vegetables and to sustain the operation into the future.

What do you see as the greatest challenge your farm faces in the next couple of years?

Securing enough legal workers for production needs will be a challenge. The paramount challenge is increasing soil health in high production systems.

How have you used CCE?

CCE is an independent, unbiased source for information outside of the farm that is needed. CCE has provided resources, on farm problem solving, a

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What crops do you grow?

Hepworth Farms grows over 400 varieties of vegetables. Tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, summer squash, cucumbers and greens are main crops. They also plant crops based on customer requests and demand such as culinary herbs, okra and husk cherries. They grow winter greens in several high tunnels/greenhouses located on the home farm. There are 89 varieties of tomatoes growing on Hepworth Farms, many are heirlooms. Tomatoes are grown in the field and also under 7 acres of Haygrove high tunnels. Fun fact: If you lined up all the rows of tomato, it would total 128 miles.

Where and how do you market most of your produce?

Hepworth Farms grows crops based on their customer demand. They have a diversified market portfolio, selling directly to wholesale distributors, retail markets, CSAs, restaurants and participate in the local Heart of the Hudson Valley Farmers Market in Milton. Hepworth Farms strongly advocates in the market for locally grown. They are New York State Grown and Certified, GAP Certified, Certified Organic, and achieved the Best rating in Whole Foods Responsibly Grown Program.



Newly renovated packing/ storage facility at Hepworth Farms

broad perspective and independent applied research. Some of the more pressing research needs are: methods to control pests in least toxic ways, particularly soil borne diseases that persist in the soil for many years; and solutions to maintain healthy soils.

What does the future look like for your operation?

For the Hepworth farm, the future lies within the work force. Talents of farmworkers are continually assessed as they develop a model to move the operation to the next generation. The operation will continue to grow and innovate within in a framework of ecological, economic and social justice, retaining what works and identifying what doesn't.

What would you like other growers to know about you and the operation?

Amy is passionate to learn more about the relationship of agriculture and nature. She believes that farmers who work together have a better chance of success. She is committed to building workers' skills, assessing their talents, and giving them a chance to shine. At Hepworth farms,

workers are promoted based on their skill sets and achievements on the farm.

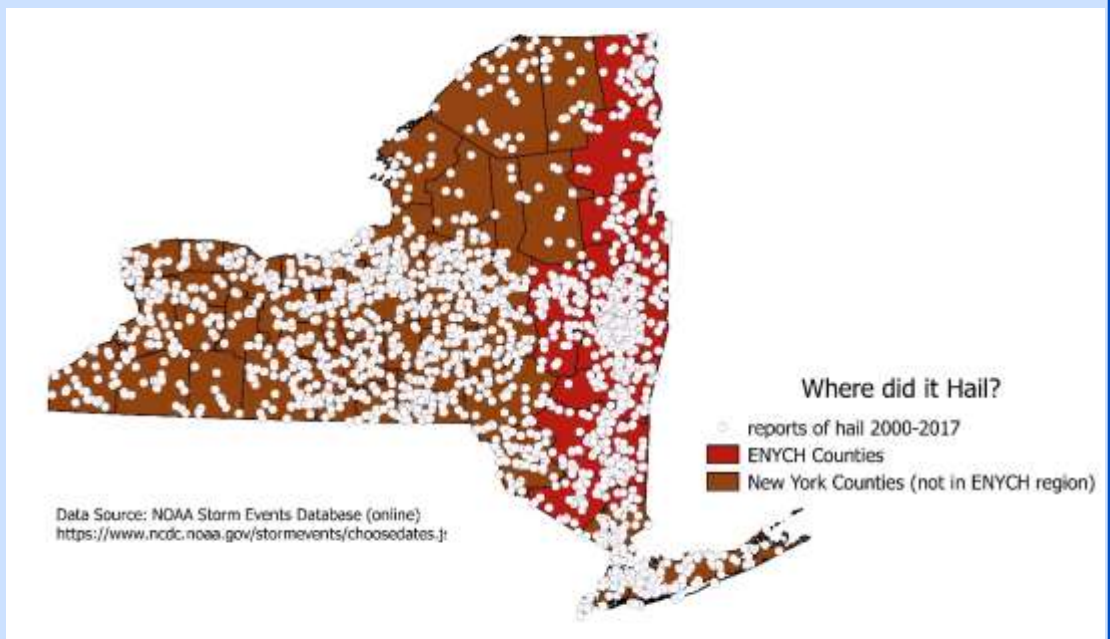
Amy stresses the importance of independent applied research, which she sees as a critical component to the sustainability of agriculture. She believes that all farmers should participate and financially support the Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture program as well as the Hudson Valley Research Lab, aka F.A.R.M. (Farmers Alliance Research Management).

What advice would you give new growers?

“Work on a successful commercial farm for 2-5 years before going into farming and keep an open mind. I have found that key factors contributing to our success are: you have to have grit; delayed gratification is more valuable than instant gratification; prioritize and commit - be ok with the sacrifices that farming takes because as we say here ‘tomatoes don’t know it’s Sunday’. Apply the principles of your life to your farm, seek the truth and think of your actions and the impact of your decisions for future generations.”

FYI:

If you wondered if you were in a “hail-prone” area? Below is a map of New York with the locations of hail reports from 2000-2017. The hail data comes from the NOAA Storm Events Database. It should be noted that the data is not collected by weather stations,



most of the sightings were reported by the public, trained weather spotters or emergency personnel (fire or police) which will skew the results to areas with more population.

Elizabeth Higgins, ENYCHP