

## **Farmer/Farm Profile – Edwin Matuszko, Linda Kingsley, and Joe Matuszko at Twin Oaks Farm**

Edwin Matuszko, Linda Kingsley, and Joe Matuszko are third and fourth generation farmers on Twin Oaks Farm located at 116 Stockbridge Street in Hadley. As of 2019, their family-owned wholesale vegetable farm is in its 40th year of operation. They grow cabbage, beets, leeks, bell peppers, eggplant, summer squash, zucchini, winter squashes, ornamental corn, mini-pumpkins, and swan gourds.

Ed, Linda, and Joe have found the strategies that work best for maintaining and building soil are observation of land, soil testing, and utilization of cover crops. Another practice is providing the right nutrients to crops to avoid soil depletion. They have been able to both grow their customer base and increase their profit margin by means of a quality product, honesty, and fair selling price for both farmer and buyer. It helps that they sell a niche product that fewer farmers grow, and have a higher-end customer base that is willing to pay more for quality produce. While gaining exposure within their community has largely come from word of mouth, they adhere to “actions speak louder than words.”

In addition to recent extreme weather events, another big challenge they face is the annual process of organizing a small, dependable, and engaged work force to help maintain their seasonal business.

Strategies they have used to deal with severe weather events include the diversification of crops to help mitigate major losses. In drought conditions, they have the ability to irrigate some crops. In the case of excess water, they may be able to do additional sub-soiling ahead of rain events and/or dig temporary run-off ditches for drainage. Before planting in the spring, they form a plot plan of vegetables determined by susceptibility of perceived weather events.

Twin Oaks Farm gauges its success as a combination of achievement (meeting objectives/goals) and profitability. Growing a diversity of crops has allowed a higher net return. This includes bell peppers, leeks, ornamental corn, summer squash, and zucchini.

While they have not tried no-till or agroforestry, these experienced farmers are willing to experiment with new methods such that they now plant cover crops every fall for soil protection. They also plant sorghum mix during summer to keep the soil covered after early harvested crops and before a fall cover crop of rye grass. Additionally, they have been growing a mustard as a bio-fumigant on fallow ground and as a rotational crop to help mitigate disease problems such as Phytophthora.

The local organizations and agencies that have been most useful to Ed, Linda, and Joe are UMass Extension and CISA for technical support and general assistance, as well as NRCS and MDAR for specific program opportunities.

The advice they most like to share is that the land is our most important asset, so always strive to maintain and improve soil health through good management practices.