



Yee Farms grows approximately 17 different Asian vegetables at its Florida farm.

Farm Offers Exotic Asian Produce

Yee Farms, a Florida-based operation, specializes in producing Asian vegetables for American customers.

The farm began in the 1940s when founder Yee Lung Kwong immigrated to New York City from his native China. There, he worked in a laundromat until he could afford to bring over his wife. The pair eventually settled in Great Meadows, N.J., using the mountainous muck soil to grow brassicas like bok choy, napa cabbage, and other Asian vegetables. Enthusiastic customers caused the Yees to expand by moving to lower elevations to take advantage of longer growing seasons. In 1968, they expanded further by taking operations down into Florida for winter production.

Decades later, Yee Farms is still family-owned and operated. The Florida farm remains the primary location, thanks to its cool nights and warm days that produce perfect growing conditions for Asian vegetables.

They handle everything on-site, from sowing and starting seeds to the harvest, transportation, vacuum cooling, storage, and loading onto trailers for nationwide sale.

Today, the farm grows approximately 17 different Asian vegetables, including napa cabbage, bok choy, baby bok choy, Shanghai baby bok choy, daikon radish, flat cabbage, Asian cauliflower, Chinese broccoli, watermelon radish, and winter melon.

Harvest season is November through May, and the produce is distributed and sold wholesale throughout the U.S. and Canada to supermarkets, restaurants, hospitality venues, and Asian markets. The farm also makes a point of putting on cooking demonstrations at various events to show customers how to prepare and cook vegetables they might not be familiar with.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Yee Farms, 9851 W. Boynton Beach Blvd., Boynton Beach, Fla. 33472 (ph 561-732-0162; info@yeeffarms.com; https://yeeffarms.com; Facebook: Yee Farms, Inc).

Family Makes Watermelons Their Business

Though they've raised and sold many varieties of produce and meat over the years, watermelons are synonymous with the Beattie family. A visit to the Iowa State Fair isn't complete without stopping at their Beattie's Melon Patch food stand for a fruit cup and perhaps a grilled kabob.

The 2024 fair will be the 46th year for the family, says Sherry Beattie, who started the melon growing venture with her husband, Gary, shortly after they were married. Gary and his father purchased and sold melons during Gary's college years, and he continued the business after his father retired. The young couple decided to grow melons on the sandy bottom land on their Runnels, Iowa, farm.

As the operation grew, they started as many as 25,000 cantaloupes in hothouses and learned that watermelons and pumpkins did best when seeded directly in the soil.

"It's a lot of physical labor," Beattie says. "We hoed the field three times per season." Then there was harvest, all done by hand.

Thankfully, the Beatties and their four children had help. Beattie's career as a photographer at their local school connected them with teenagers looking for jobs in the field and at the state fair.

The fair is 11 days, but it takes a couple of weeks to set up and a week to take down. Watching the melons being cut up is part of the fair experience, while barkers sell fruit cups of watermelon, or mixed cups with



Beattie's Melon Patch sells watermelon and other fruits and treats at the Iowa State Fair each year.

cantaloupe and grapes. It's a busy, hectic tradition for the Beatties and their children, grandchildren, and other relatives. Beattie manages the stand, and her husband restocks the coolers several times a day.

There have been changes over the years. After their children became adults, the Beatties started purchasing melons from a local grower. All the watermelons are seedless.

With a new building in 2010, they added a grill for kabobs and hope to have many more years at the fair.

Check out photos and videos on the Beattie's Watermelon Stand Facebook page.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Beattie's Melon Patch, 11961 SE 36th Ave., Runnels, Iowa 50237 (ph 515 966-2490; sherrylynnphoto@gmail.com; Facebook: Beattie's Watermelon Stand).



Cutting hay in chestnut alleys.

They Make Agroforestry Pay

Propagate has been turning fields into multi-use forests since 2017 with a 3-part program that pays off for landowners sooner and later. The program addresses three key barriers to agroforestry, according to Propagate co-founder Ethan Steinberg. He defines them as a lack of awareness of benefits, a lack of technical know-how for on-farm planning and implementation, and a lack of capital to cover initial startup costs.

"Our first step is to talk to the landowner and identify acres suitable for different tree crops and species," says Steinberg. "We want to understand the farm operation and what the farmer wants 10 to 20 years down the line."

Over the past seven years, the company

has applied the concept to more than 30,000 acres of agroforestry as active advisors. In addition, Propagate Ventures actively manages 2,250 acres through regional hubs in New York and Kentucky.

Propagate's Overyield IT platform helps farmers understand what trees or shrubs would best fit their fields, how much the transition would cost, and what labor would be required.

Once a plan has been developed, options include the landowner self-financing the transition or Propagate arranging for a third-party lease of the land at competitive rates. If the landowner decides to self-finance, the company will locate and apply for funding.

"If the owner leases the land for trees, no further investment is needed on their part,"

says Steinberg. "However, if they want to own the system, the capital requirement can be pretty big, from \$2,000 to \$10,000 per acre, depending on species and the genetics of the seedlings."

In the land lease case, the leaseholder owns the timber rights and any interim products, such as nuts. In addition to lease payments, the landowner may also receive a fee for managing the trees as they grow and mature. At the same time, they can put the land between rows of trees to use for cropping or grazing. If desired, the landowner has the option to waive the lease rate in exchange for a percentage of the revenue down the line.

"Typically, we see 20-year leases with two to four renewals expected," says Steinberg. "The lease rate is based on market conditions, with buyouts available to the landowner at any point in time."

With a plan and financing in place, Propagate provides the expertise and support to implement a tree-planting plan.

"We work as active participants with in-house equipment and personnel, as well as with a network of consultants," says Steinberg. "We've done cost share with farmers who want to own the trees and helped them find the trees and manage inputs. We help with the transition the best we can."

Propagate started in New York state. Targeted states include those east of the 98th meridian, the line running just west of the Minnesota border and along the eastern edge of the Great Plains.

The largest transition put in place by Propagate to date involves Hill Farms in Ohio and Kentucky. What started with a 130-acre pilot project quickly scaled up to more than 1,800 acres operated under a lease structure. The farm plan called for 70 percent

in chestnut and hay production, 8 percent devoted to in-field biodiversity, such as pollinator plants, and 22 percent in riparian restoration.

By 2024, 180,000 chestnut trees had been planted, making it the largest chestnut operation in the U.S. Black locust trees for eventual timber production were also planted. Owner Keavin Hill collects lease payments and management fees under a 20-year lease. He also produces hay in the alleys between the rows of chestnuts. When the young trees grow past browse height, Hill plans to use the land for managed grazing in winter and early spring.

In Kentucky, Propagate worked with a pasture egg producer to develop a mix of trees and shrubs for hen pastures. Over 2 years, separate fields were planted to chestnuts and elderberries with a mix of persimmons, mulberries, and willows in wetter areas.

Propagate provided Ben Lennon, a New York landowner, with a turnkey planting of nearly 6,000 black locusts in multiple stands. A 9.4 percent internal rate of return was projected for the farm. Everything was included, from suitability analysis through site preparation, installation, and post-install management support.

Steinberg says other pilot projects are underway. He notes that 10 acres is the smallest parcel he sees as viable. "Typically, we like to see larger acreages for scale and viability," he says. "As you get larger, there's more potential for value added."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Propagate Ventures (www.propagateag.com).