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Farm Spotlight: J. Glebocki Farms, Goshen, NY



Justin O'Dea
Commercial
Vegetables
Educator,
Ulster County

We've all heard stories that begin with two star-crossed lovers, and this one begins when one of these star-crossed pairs defied convention, fled their native Poland, and sunk their roots into a piece of black dirt. In 1894, Janek and Mary Glebocki, newlywed and seeking a fresh start in the US, bought 135 acres of glorious muck-drenched farmland off of what is now the Pulaski Highway on Maloney Lane in

Goshen. One hundred twenty years and five generations later, John Glebocki, looking wise for his years but with youth still on his side, sits in his farm office and searches for words to describe what he's trying to do to make sure that the Glebockis have the opportunity to stay on that same farm for generations to come.

Eighteen years ago, John Glebocki began running J. Glebocki Farms on 35 of the original 135 acres of the Glebocki farmstead, after years of working alongside his grandfather, Frank Jr. Historically a vegetable operation focused on celery, lettuce, and onions, his grandfather's business focused more primarily on wholesale onions, like many other black dirt operations. Cautiously, for the first ten years, onions remained the focus of John's fledgling tenure as farm superintendent, before transitioning into a diversified vegetable operation for the past eight. In talking with John, he frequently came back to commenting on the process of farm transition. Farm transition is inevitably a bittersweet process fraught with growing pains, and John noted several times that it was no exception for him. Not having a parent involved in the



farm and being young also added to John's transition trials, with a large generation gap to hurdle. He noted that, "Really, what I was doing at 20, I probably would have been much better off doing when I was 40." When the idea of farm transfer began to be put out on the table, John was fresh out of SUNY-Cobleskill and motivated to put fresh energy and ideas into the farm. But with his grandparents needing to reap some of their equity in the farm business for retirement, no real savings under his belt, and a short credit history, his transition proved to be very trialing. Beyond financial trials, there was also gaining the trust and acceptance of other family members involved in the business for many years. John mentioned that in the end, it was extremely important to make sure each person involved was respected accordingly, and how important it was to maintain those family relationships in

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becoming the primary steward of a family's 100-plus year-old investment.

Much of what John explained to me about how he has grown into his current business strategy was defying convention, as his forebears felt the need to do 120 years ago in the name of new opportunity. Underlying that risk though was John's clearly cautious propensity toward keeping tight tabs on the workings of his operation, scrutinizing their economic efficiency, and to working slowly and carefully into new ventures. He emphasized multiple guidelines he'd come to value, notably including knowing your costs and opportunities of production down to the 1' to 3' of row feet, how much product you can reasonably move, and setting boundaries for yourself to keep things manageable- even if it means you may miss a fleeting opportunity to sell more. That

underlying sense of caution has also informed how the business has evolved over the years. John had long standing concerns about the stability and profitability of relying on wholesale and single-crop commodity production, and with that he carefully began to steer the farm in new directions. John noted that from a young age, he enjoyed working at market and the opportunity to build a good face-to-face name for the business there. He started with expanding on that part of the business, which included beginning to diversify his crop array. On the 100 current acres that J. Glebocki Farms grows on with the help of approximately 30 employees

at peak season, he currently produces a myriad of vegetable crops and likewise has developed a diversified marketing strategy. Last year they sold at 12 Greenmarkets



in New York City, the local Chester farmer's market, to various institutions (including food pantries with local food budgets), various specialty wholesale markets in NYC, and to a 250 member CSA (with a big portion of those going to various work groups). They vary their percent direct market-to-wholesale ratio as needed to move product at the right price. For the coming year though, due to increasing costs of doing business in the metro area, they expect to cut back on some of their NYC-based markets and to focus on more local ventures.

Also, in accordance with inclinations of their current customer base and long-term strategies to simplify production, John remarked that they're increasingly utilizing more integrated management strategies, and cautiously transitioning to using materials approved by the Organic Material Review Institute (which Certified Organic growers are obliged to use) or at least tries to use materials with as short re-entry and days-to-harvest intervals as possible. They don't have plans to go through the organic certification process though. John notes though that thus far, this transition has been working for them in most aspects, with the exception of weed control, which he admits has proven to be more difficult than hoped without the help of herbicides.

J. Glebocki Farms has also started to venture into the world of value-added farm products.

Following a positive experience with selling tomato puree made from their crop at Farm to Table Co-packers, John's interest turned to how he could develop that part of the business as well. Most recently - and perhaps most ambitiously- is John's venture into the realm of field-to-bottle craft distilling. Currently, they're in the final leg of getting their NY State Farm Distillery License, which will increasingly require that a percentage of their ingredients are sourced from New York State to maintain the license (up to 90% by 2024). Anticipating that demand, they have already begun growing rye, barley, corn, and sugar beets on-site to supply their targeted array of unique whiskies, vodkas, and gin products. Along with business partner Bryan Ensall, Orange County Distillery is scheduled to go into operation as soon as they receive their license, and will be housed in the oldest building on their property, a Glebocki farmstead original 100-year-old barn.

The decision to take the risk and jump into the distillery business is an aspect that has John thinking about the future of the Glebocki family staying involved in



the farm. He has no expectations that his two young daughters will necessarily want to become farmers, stating that he knows that "there are some really undesirable aspects of farming" that turn away family farm heirs, and that for instance, "some people just really don't want to spend their day wrenching under a tractor." He hopes that by doing what he can to evolve the business, he can provide future Glebockis with more opportunity to stay close to the land that has grown and sustained their family for the past 120 years, and to help keep agriculture a viable part of their community.

For more information:

J. Glebocki Farms:
<http://glebockifarms.com/>

Orange County Distillery:
<http://orangecountydistillery.com/>