



PRESS RELEASE

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EPC Leadership Class Gains Field Experience In New Jersey

For Immediate Release: October 9, 2023. The fifth Eastern Produce Council (EPC) Leadership Class had a chance to get their boots on the ground at Hionis Greenhouses in Whitehouse Station, NJ, and the Clifford E. and Melda C. Snyder Research and Extension Farm at Rutgers University located near Pittstown, NJ, on October 3 as part of the ongoing EPC leadership education program.

Tim Hionis, co-owner of Hionis Greenhouses, provided a thorough tour for the group of the operation's main greenhouses currently overflowing with mums, fall ornamentals and Christmas poinsettias. "We are currently in the middle of fall mum season," Hionis told the group. "We grow about half a million mums per year."

The operation was founded by Hionis' father and mother (Spiro and Angie) three decades ago and is now run by Hionis and his three brothers (Pete, Spiro and Gerry). "We currently have two locations totaling 15 acres under cover and 65 open field, and we're expanding another four acres of hoop houses," says Hionis. "We've also been investing in more automation technology. This doesn't replace labor but allows us to use our valuable labor in other areas."

Jessica Sarter, Regional Account Manager at Pulmuone Foods related gaining a new appreciation for ornamental products making it to the retail venue. "Often at the end of the supply chain, you don't really consider everything it's taken to get it there," she said. "From getting seeds to root, to placing them in pots, to the growth that has to happen in unpredictable weather conditions - it's helpful to see first-hand all that goes into the product at this level."

The second leg of the day included a visit to the 390-acre Rutgers Snyder Research and Extension Farm. Peter Nitzsche, Morris County Agricultural and Natural Resources Agent, toured the class around the farm in a wagon ride, explaining the research projects under way. "Our goal here is to research and demonstrate innovative practices for growers," he said. "We currently have 120 cultivated acres which include a variety of projects from looking at butternut squash yields to an agrivoltaics project to determine the feasibility of growing crops between solar farm panels."

Megan Muehlbauer, Hunterdon County Agricultural and Natural Resources Agent explained her current hazelnut project to the class as well as several ongoing apple variety trials. The group enjoyed picking some Macoun apples to sample and take home. "The

farm tour showed various aspects of production affecting growing plants and different species,” said Max Pozzessere, Regional Sales Manager with Little Leaf Farms. “It was interesting to learn about different diseases and how the researchers are working to mitigate them, particularly how the research continues to be an evolving cycle because of the nature of the diseases.”

“These field experiences add so much to professional development because our participants are exposed to unique areas of the industry they may not encounter in their daily work,” said Susan McAleavey Sarlund, EPC Executive Director. “In addition to our classroom and conference activities, getting out into actual production and research facilities adds another layer of industry understanding.”

The EPC Leadership Program chooses up to 20 up-and-coming produce professionals for each Leadership Class, a professional development experience for those with less than 10 years of experience in the industry. Participants selected for this year’s program include: Brian Arena, Four Seasons Produce Inc.; Julie Barber, The Oppenheimer Group; Lauren Barczak, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp.; Jack Christy, The Oppenheimer Group; Andrea Cutler, Michael Cutler Company; Tyler Davidov, Suja; Anna Fagan, AeroFarms; Michael Hill, Nature Sweet; Chris Jacobsen, Silo; Mike Kominsky, Ventura Foods; Savannah Lloyd, Farm-Wey Produce Inc.; Joshua Minton, Frank Donio Inc.; Isaac Olivas, Fowler Farms; Luke Palizay, Pacific Trellis Fruit; Max Pozzessere, Little Leaf Farms; Nicolina Rutherford, Wakefern Food Corp.; Jessica Sarter, Pulmuone Foods; Jerry Scherwin, PennRose Farms; Christopher Scotti, John Vena Inc.; Eric Smith, John Vena Inc.; Karolina Sokolska, Hampton Farms; Alexis Sommers, F&S Fresh Foods; Joseph Strumolo, Wakefern Food Corp.; Stephanie Tramutola, A & J Produce Corp.; Jenna Vaccaro, Sugar Foods; and Nicholas Vargas, Wakefern Food Corp. Also participating in the New Jersey tour was Theresa Lowden, Vice President of the EPC and Executive VP, Produce and Floral at JOH.

PHOTOS:

Group at Hionis

Hionis Operation Overview -

Tim Hionis, co-owner of Hionis Greenhouses, explains production and technology aspects of the business to the EPC Leadership Class.

Mums Bloom

EPC Leadership Class views full foliage mums.

Mum Beds

EPC Leadership Class takes a look at some of Hionis’ half a million mums.

Rutgers Wagon Tour

EPC Leadership Class tours research projects via wagon at the Rutgers Snyder Research and Extension Farm.

Apple Picking

EPC Leadership Class picks Macoun apples to sample.

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