

Restaurants Direct

Paulette Satur

Satur Farms

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Satur Farms was started 11 years ago by me and my husband, Chef Eberhard Mueller, on ¼ of an acre of land in the wine country of eastern Long Island. We are currently farming 180-acres of specialty vegetables there, along with an additional 150 acres in Florida for our winter production.

As Chef, my husband was awarded four-stars from The New York Times when he opened Le Bernardin in NYC in the mid-eighties, and his reputation among his colleagues for quality is impeccable. Although I have a graduate degree in Plant Physiology, I had been in the premium wine business, selling wines to top restaurants in the city. From the start, we had a huge advantage in selling to restaurants. My husband knew what he wanted us to grow; I knew how to sell to restaurants. This is an insiders' view of what restaurants want and how to sell to them. To succeed in selling restaurants direct, you must run your farm as a top chef runs his kitchen. You must be rigorous in growing for and offering **quality**; meticulous in grading, washing, packing, chilling and handling. The common wisdom is that retail stores demand the high quality produce and restaurants took what's left. This line of thought will not work for you today and you cannot build from there. Below is an excerpt from the website of Per Se, the highest rated restaurant in NYC.



SATUR FARMS THE STORY OF EBERHARD MULLER

Dinner service at per Se is in full swing and the garde manger reaches for the cilantro shoots, part of the garnish for the night's foie gras course. The fact that he does so without even a cursory inspection says a lot about how highly he regards the farmer.

Excerpted from restaurant per se, menus & stories at www.persenys.com

Consistency in product availability is crucial in selling to restaurants. When chefs add an item to their menu, they don't want to be told that you're out of it the following week. We have a brutal seeding schedule that takes into account day length and temperatures as they affect maturity, so that we can achieve steady supply. We create our seeding schedules in the winter, and work into it our proper crop rotations.

It is advantageous to offer a wide **variety** of items. Orders must be a minimum size in order to cover cost of delivery. We grow specialty items that are not typically available in the distribution network in addition to commodity items. Because chefs want or need certain things from us, they will also order commodity items such as our spring mix, which they know to also be of high quality, at the same time. It's easy to want to grow everything that anyone asks for. Running crew around fields to cut several pounds of this or a couple of boxes of that will ruin your labor costs and have a devastating effect on your bottom line. If we want to trial a crop, we have

specific beds to do it in. Only if we are convinced that it is appropriate to add to our list, will we do so. If you stretch yourself too far by growing too many different things, quality will invariably suffer. We also break down items into repack boxes, so that chefs can order ½ lb of thyme, 1 lb of rosemary, with 5 lbs of haricot vert. We have an employee in charge of all repack, and she pulls crew members from our packing facility as needed. In order to increase our offerings, we contract with our neighboring farms to grow the crops that we do not. Our customers appreciate this access to a large variety of locally-grown produce.

We deliver 6 days per week into NYC, and email our updated availability list daily. We include photographs of both the produce and the fields, which is extremely important in giving our produce a sense of place and **freshness**. We could harvest our herbs once a week and be done with it, but then we are no better than any commercial distributor. You should aim to transmit the excitement of the season- when things are gorgeous and flavors amazing. It helps to be a source of inspiration.

Your office must be staffed and operated in a **professional** manner to instill confidence in your operation. Order-takers must be versed every morning what's in, what's out, what's new, what's in short or long supply. Most restaurant sales are done from 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm, between the lunch and dinner service. Never call a chef during service hours. Since most of our orders come in during a 2-hour period, we know to put all office hands on calls during this time. We use Quickbooks for invoicing and truck routing. Once our trucks are loaded and closed out, we will call restaurants if any shorts or problems have arisen. They must know if they are not receiving an item the next morning. In dealing with chefs, you must have a heightened level of concern for everything and an acute sense of urgency and follow through.