

## **Expansion of the Eastern Broccoli Industry**

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With strong demand for local produce, and expensive transportation for vegetables from the West-Coast salad bowl, there is an opportunity to source much more broccoli from the East. However, current varieties are not sufficiently adapted to the weather during the heart of the Eastern growing season for reliable product quality. Currently northern Maine is the only part of the east with large-scale summer production.

The essential part of the solution is broccoli that will reliably make a top quality product here. Fortunately, several breeders have been working on that issue: Mark Farnham at USDA in Charleston SC, Phillip Griffiths at Cornell, and Jim Myers at Oregon State. There are breeding lines that will stand up to Eastern conditions. With that breakthrough in genetics, it's worth looking at what it will take to make this a viable industry.

We spent a year identifying the barriers to having substantial eastern production, and determining whether those barriers could be overcome. The western industry provides a reliable, high-quality product all year long, and they raise it very efficiently. Buyers who move a lot of volume are already their customers. A new source will have to meet high expectations of quality, consistent supply, volume and price.

One underlying principle is that every business in the chain needs to have reliable suppliers, a reliable market, and needs to make more money on eastern broccoli than what they would do otherwise. This principle applies to the breeders, seed companies, seed distributors, farmers, produce distributors and retailers. By helping advance each of these sectors, we expect to meet the larger goal while maintaining short-term profitability for all participants

A major part of the project is breeding to produce commercially available varieties that are reliable producers for Eastern growers. This work involves breeders from universities, the USDA and several major seed companies. It is an unusual bit of cooperation combined with healthy competition. Having a better set of varieties will be valuable for current growers as well as prospective growers. The first year of the rigorous regional trials have evaluated the best current germplasm, and clearly identified the needs. At the same time the breeders have been busy making crosses and increasing seed for new lines that will be tested in next years trials.

The distribution model favors having several regional production areas that can coordinate post-harvest handling and shipping. These locations need to be good places to grow broccoli, have appropriate infrastructure, and have growers who are willing to work together. We are working on developing those networks so they will be ready to produce as soon as the new varieties are released in several years. The most promising growers will have labor available at harvest time, and rotations where broccoli complements their other crops. In the initial network, its best if each farm has the potential to produce from twenty to a few hundred acres. Smaller farms are good candidates for supplying local markets, either individually or in small networks.

Further information is at [www.easternbroccoli.org](http://www.easternbroccoli.org)