

## TOOLS FOR EFFICIENT POST HARVEST HANDLING AT CEDAR CIRCLE FARM

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At Cedar Circle Farm our post harvesting tools have evolved as we have expanded and diversified our crops and markets. Ten years ago we washed out of a large plastic tub outside of one of our greenhouses and packed directly into wax produce boxes. At this time our harvests and markets were minimal and this system met our needs. Today we supply 140 families with a CSA share, maintain a seasonally open farm stand, attend 3 farmer's markets and sell to a variety of wholesale outlets, ranging from school cafeterias to high-end restaurants. Our tools for post harvest handling have evolved as well. Our processing area includes 3, 3 bay stainless steel sinks, stainless counters and overhead high pressure hoses. Produce is stored in 3 walk-in coolers, as well as in 2 temperature controlled storage rooms in our barn, primarily used for roots crops, onions and winter squash.

On a physical level our tools for efficient post harvest handling include simple things like waterproof gloves so our staff can work in all weather, spray nozzles, handcarts, wax boxes and storage bags. We harvest into containers, or "totes" and pack into black plastic "crates" which are kept clean and out of the field. We have enough vehicles to move product from place to place, 2 farm trucks, 2 golf carts and a market van, as well as hand-held radios for communication between staff and management.

These physical tools are easy to purchase in farm tech. catalogs or at a local hard wear store and they help only so long as an efficient system is in place. Our harvest and post harvest system center on a "pick sheet", essentially an order form that our farm stand staff fills out at closing. In the morning our production manager adds orders for the CSA, farmer's markets, wholesale and our commercial kitchen to the pick sheet, totals the quantities and then writes up the harvesting plan on a whiteboard located in our processing area. Each crop is assigned to a certain staff member or group. The white board is the central point of our production crew's day. Our processing lead then directs produce as it comes in from the harvest using the pick sheet. We are a small enough operation that systems of training, record keeping and operating procedures and far more important than physical tools.

Most of our staff is seasonal and comes in at the busiest time of the harvest-year. Key members return for several years and these people help with training and quality control. We have written procedures for harvesting and processing every crop we grow, as well as procedures for storing and displaying that crop (which gives each item a longer shelf-life either in the stand or at farmer's markets). Improvement on these systems is encouraged; their fluidity allows staff to take ownership of their position on a daily basis and has created some excellent additions to our procedures over the years. Signs are posted outside of each of our walk-ins and storage rooms with a list of crops stored there. Communication between different areas of the farm, especially between our production staff and retail staff is improved by the use of several white boards that describe what crops we have in and in what quantities, crops that are arriving and

crops that are going out of season. Our most efficient tools in post-harvest handling are training, operating systems and an expanded processing area and storage units.

Of course there is always room for improvements and a wish list for new tools but our goal is to sell everything we pick and if we can't sell it then direct it to non-profits or staff. Record keeping allows us to track spoilage and to plan next years seed charts so that we are growing in pace with our markets.

If you are interested in our standard operating procedures for harvesting, processing and storage or our food safety policies please email me: [megan@cedarcirclefarm.org](mailto:megan@cedarcirclefarm.org) – we love to share and receive feedback.