

Meet the Farmers: Otis Vezzose

CNO Produce Wolcott, N.Y.

If you've been in the farming world for long enough, you learn there are certain fruits and vegetables that tend to sell better when the temperatures are warm.

"When it's been hot like it has been this summer, everyone is looking for something cold," says Otis Vezzose, of CNO Produce, based in Wolcott, in Wayne County. "This summer, we have sold a lot of watermelon and cantaloupe."

By the same token, customers have their stand-by favorites that they turn to when temperatures get cooler, and they're in the mood for the comforts of fall.

"This fall, potatoes and sweet potatoes will sell well," Otis says.

As a produce dealer, Otis serves as the go-between between farmers and customers. The farmers he works with pick the produce, then Otis sells it at the Market. The key is being in tune to what customers are craving at any - and all points - throughout the growing season.

Around this time of year, it's all about the apples. "It might take a week or so before people realize they're back, but interest will pick up," says Otis.

Since Otis primarily works with two farmers based out of Wayne County - in what he describes as the "Heart of Apple Country" - you can bet Otis will bring some of the best apples Central New York has to offer when he makes the hour journey to the Downtown Farmers Market on Tuesdays.

"We have some Jersey Macs and Paula Reds," he says. "The apples might not as big as usual this year because of the drought, but they should still have a decent flavor."



Tomatoes are popular at the CNO Produce booth during summer months at the Market.



Tip: Calling all homebrewers - Next year, Otis is toying with the idea of selling hops at the Downtown Farmers Market. He says hops are one of the up-and-coming items being grown in Wayne County, and may be a way to serve a new group at the Market.

Otis and his family have had a presence at the Downtown Farmers Market since the early 1990s, but he says he was first bitten by the Farmers Market bug in 1960. Each week, he'd go to the Regional Market in Syracuse with his grandfather.

"He had a farm, and I didn't want to take it over because it was a lot of work," he says sheepishly. But Otis' shrug gives way to a smile when he admits: "But here I am, back here doing it."

In fact, he can't seem to stay away. Otis works part-time for the Village of Wolcott as a code enforcement officer, but he looks forward to the Market every Tuesday.

"We enjoy it," he says. "We like the people, and the camaraderie. In a way, everyone is a regular. We see the same faces."

