

Meet the Farmers: Larry Bonnani

Ransom Hill Garlic

Jamesville, N.Y.

Ransom Hill Garlic took home its third consecutive Blue Ribbon at the Great New York State Fair this August.

"I guess I can say that I have the best garlic in New York State," the farm's owner, Larry Bonnani, says with a smile.

He has been planting garlic, harvesting and curing it for ten years. Rooted in tradition, Ransom Hill Garlic is known for three kinds of garlic, which it ships and sells throughout the United States. The Bonanni family is known for their German White Garlic, their German Red Garlic (which has a purple glow once the skin is removed), and *especially* for their Italian Heirloom Garlic. The Bonanni family has been growing the Italian Heirloom Garlic for nearly 80 years!

"This is seed that my grandmother brought here from Supino, Italy in 1934," Larry explains. "She grew it until she passed in 1978, and then my sister took it over. Then, ten years ago, my sister said, 'Larry, it's your turn.'"

According to Ransom Hill Garlic's website (www.ransomhillgarlic.com), the Heirloom garlic can best be described as a Hardneck Italian Purple Rocomblee. It generally produces a bulb with eight to 12 cloves, larger than the average bulb which yields around six or seven cloves.

"The Italian Heirloom Garlic has a nice garlic flavor," Larry says. "It's the garlic I was brought up on. My father, at 96 years old, still eats it! He's very healthy and he eats it all of the time!"



Above, Larry Bonnani holds two bulbs of garlic. To the right, hot chili peppers hang from his Downtown Farmers Market booth. In the winter, Larry dehydrates the peppers and the garlic, and grinds both down to create hot garlic powder. Guests may try a sample of the hot garlic powder (and regular garlic powder) at Larry's stand.



Larry's customers love it too. A frequent exhibitor at garlic festivals, Larry started to sell his garlic at the Downtown Farmers Market four years ago. Not only does he know many of his customers by name, he is able to predict exactly what they'll buy before they return week after week.

"A lot of customers come by and buy a pound of garlic every week," he says. "One man bought two pounds! He said, 'That's enough for a week and a half.'"

His favorite part is seeing the people enjoy it. "It's the expressions on their face, and me being able to share planting methods," he says.

Some of his customers – who buy several pounds of garlic to plant themselves – have a hard time understanding why Larry would want to divulge his techniques. Larry rationalizes that this way: "The thing is, they might plant 100 plants, and as soon as their neighbors, kids and friends find out, they'll exhaust them of their garlic. Then, they'll have to come back to me and buy more," he laughs.

But it works out - Larry says he learns from his customers as well. They've taught him a few new recipes over the years.

"Some of the ladies suggested making a tea out of the garlic if you have a cold. They say it makes you feel better... And it does," he says with a nod.

Every October – right around the time the Downtown Farmers Market ends for the season – Larry plants 35,000 bulbs of garlic across one acre of his land in Jamesville. Rain, shine or snow, the process takes two full weeks.

"It's all done by hand – it's all done on my hands and knees," he says.

The roots grow through the winter. Then, in early spring, the garlic pops up in the same way tulips do. Larry harvests the garlic during the first week in July, and allows it to cure in a cool place for a few weeks.

Farmers Market attendees can expect to see Larry's garlic at the Market around the first week in August. They also look forward to his grapes at the end of September.



Make sure to say hello to Larry at the Downtown Farmers Market!