

Sudo Farms Grows its Market Share

Nobby Sudo will be growing squash again this coming season on his 140-acre vegetable farm between Lethbridge and Coaldale. And, again, much of the squash he harvests will be heading to Japan.

The owner of Sudo Farms Ltd. has found yet another niche, a gap in the marketplace he's prepared to fill. It's one of the reasons Sudo Farms was chosen by SouthGrow as winner of its 2010 Excellence Award in Business Retention/Growth/Expansion category.

Sudo Farms produces a range of specialty vegetables, including Chinese cabbage, snow peas, snap peas, pumpkin, zucchini, and beans. While much of his produce is sold in Alberta, Sudo keeps watch on other market possibilities. He had tested the Japanese market previously with little success, but crop failures in Russia and New Zealand, countries on which Japan relies for its produce, opened a gateway, especially for his squash.

Sudo came to Canada from Japan in 1974 on a farm training program. Unable to afford the land and equipment necessary to operate a grain farm, he turned to produce, building slowly and creating a diversified variety of vegetables.

"I couldn't get started on my own for a long time, but when I did, I started strategically," says Sudo. "I've put more than half my effort into developing markets. I enjoy the marketing side of the business."

With his family's help, he found success. In warm weather, his squash, beans and zucchini thrived; in cool weather, his cabbages carried the day. And, because

they mature at different times, he was able to spread his effort evenly.

But his skill as a marketer has been the catalyst of his profitability. Unable to compete with larger producers straight up, he has found other ways to sell his produce. Because Canada imports vast quantities of produce from the United

States, trucking firms that roll north are eager for loads to take south, to California, for instance, where Sudo has found customers, and they're willing to deal on the price. He'd like to sell more locally, but large grocery stores aren't eager to deal with small producers.

"The concept of the 100-mile diet doesn't work so well when your produce is trucked from southern Alberta to Edmonton, then shipped all the way back," he says. "It's cheaper for the large chains to do it this way, but it takes two days on the road, and that impacts freshness."

With Japan now in its sights, Sudo Farms, one of only a few niche vegetable growers left in the region, is an example of how marketing skill and ingenuity converge for business success.



Nobby Sudo has put his produce on Japanese tables.

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