

Blue Ridge Produce opens in Culpeper

Business Summary: Blue Ridge Produce aggregates fresh fruit and vegetables grown in Virginia's Northern Piedmont and markets them to wholesale customers in Washington D.C. and throughout the region. The company also grows organic tomatoes and lettuce in 1.5 acres of onsite greenhouses and accesses supply along the eastern seaboard to provide fresh produce year-round.

Blue Ridge Produce opened this month with a celebratory gathering and Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting at the former Willow Run Property near the Culpeper Regional Airport. The gathering had representatives from Chicago, the Shenandoah Valley, and economic development leaders from our region.

Why such broad interest in a produce company located in Culpeper?



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Jim
Charapich

According to Chief Executive Officer Mark Seale, the company has over 40 growers ready to bring locally grown produce to market through the Blue Ridge Produce Channel. "Local" products are in high demand on every level including the large wholesalers in the Washington D.C. market. These wholesalers are answer-

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ing the demand from grocery stores, restaurants, and institutions for consumer interest in local, quality produce.

The potential to bring together a variety of growers is exciting. In the Blue Ridge business model, growers of all sizes can benefit; smaller "artisan" farms as well as large tract growers can sell their product through the Blue Ridge Produce channel.

The company will be working with growers to produce the most profitable crops. One of the keys to success is to support the Blue Ridge producers in becoming GAP Certified.

"GAP Certified (Good Agricultural Practices) is important to our customers," said Seale. They want quality and GAP Certified produce is

worth more to our customers."

A primary mission of Blue Ridge Produce is to build a brand identity consistent with the foothills of the Blue Ridge. With attributes like clean air, clean water, centuries of well managed farm land, and a strong sense of community, our region is known for a quality that is reflected in our products. Blue Ridge Produce will be known for that quality. Seale continued that his goal is to build the Blue Ridge Brand of quality alongside of the growers' farm name brand. A partnership that is built on the core principles that the company embraces \ Community, Consistency, Transparency, and Quality. We want our customers to know the name of the grower as well as the Blue Ridge name. We are in this together.

The business has the potential to enable more productive

use of farm land in our region. It has the potential to encourage a new generation of entrepreneurial farming (there is a current opportunity for Asian vegetable growers). It has the potential of bringing a new level of prosperity to some of our farm families by connecting the affluent Washington market with the local quality producers.

According to Seale, the Washington market for produce is over \$16 billion and that only 7 percent of that is sourced locally. The figures also suggest a significant environmental benefit in reducing the carbon footprint from long distance shipping of produce products.

Bravo Blue Ridge Produce for bringing "Made in the Piedmont" to a new level. Welcome to Culpeper.

Jim Charapich is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Culpeper Chamber of Commerce and Visitor's Center