

Millard County farm overcomes altitude, isolation to produce quality mushroom crop

By Matt Hargreaves, Editor, Utah FB News

Fillmore, Utah—In an industry not given the light of day by casual observers in Utah, there has been a great success in the dark growing conditions of the Mountainview Mushrooms farm in Millard County.

As one of the largest employers in Fillmore, Mountainview has been producing high-quality white, oyster and Portobello mushrooms for customers in the Salt Lake, Denver and Las Vegas metro areas since 1974, when the farm was created as a way of improving the economy in the rural area of Millard County.

“The farm was seen as a way to improve the economic well-being of the city because the highway (now I-15) didn’t come through town any longer,” said Loyal Adams, president and general manager of Mountainview Mushrooms. “We have more than 100 employees today and

offer competitive wages and very good benefits. The farm is real support to the town.”

Mountainview is the only mushroom farm in the state, mainly because the altitude and extreme weather conditions make it difficult to produce the fungus with much efficiency. Utah’s extreme ranges of temperatures and high altitude affect the process of aerobic growing that is crucial for producing quality mushrooms.

While neighborhood gardeners may think mushrooms sprout like weeds, the process to cultivate edible mushrooms takes much longer and is more labor intensive, taking approximately 70 days and a balanced mix of wheat straw (10,000 tons yearly), cotton and canola products, chicken manure and other essential nutrients to create the proper growing environment.

Notwithstanding its long-term success, little is known about the mushroom industry in Utah or the process for cultivating them.

“Many people don’t know we’re here because we are so isolated,” Adams said. “But the demand keeps growing and people are finding more ways to use mushrooms in their cooking. Especially here in Utah,

many families like to cook more during the holidays and are using mushrooms more often.”

While overcoming the misconceptions of mushrooms growing in strait manure, Mountainview has seen an increase in mushroom consumption of more than 20 percent in the Salt Lake and Denver areas, and a 39 percent increase in the Las Vegas metro area since 1990.



White mushrooms dot the growing bed at Fillmore’s Mountainview Mushrooms

Photo by Matt Hargreaves

Once the compost is prepared it is pasteurized. The pasteurizing creates beneficial microbes and destroys harmful bacteria. The result is a warm bedding of compost with the necessary nutrients to feed the mushroom spawn. Grain mixed with calcium carbonate is mixed in the compost and eventually becomes the starting point for tiny mushroom networks to form together and begin to form the mushrooms.

Once the initial stages of the mushroom are completed, a system of watering and infusing growing rooms with correct percentages of fresh-air is managed to ensure proper ventilation and humidification. After the button of the mushroom begins to appear, the mushroom size will approximately double every 24 hours. It is at this point that the harvesting is done to pick all appropriately-sized mushrooms.

All mushrooms do not grow at the same rate and so the growing process repeats itself weekly, three or four times per tray until all the mushrooms are harvested. Once the beneficial

nutrients are used up, the trays of Spent Mushroom Substrate (SMS) are dumped and sold to other agricultural producers who use the valuable compost for other growing endeavors.

“We get good production out of our growing rooms,” Adams said. “Each of the rooms (16 total production rooms with 27,800 square feet of weekly production area) produces between 7,000,000 and 8,000,000 pounds of mushrooms per year.”

One of the reasons mushroom consumption is increasing is because of the year-round supply of fresh mushrooms. While this presents an opportunity for constant revenues, it is a challenge to operate a farm with virtually no down time. Mountainview has to maintain a steady labor force (even employing workers through the night) and balance the costs of utilities and transportation costs on a 7-day workweek.

“We haven’t seen any labor shortages as yet but we’re always looking for more great employees,” Adams said.

Other challenges to the company come from not over-relying on one set of customers for orders. Learning from past experience, Mountainview now supplies an even third of its mushrooms to local retail outlets, restaurants, and nationwide pizza chains.

Mountainview’s other main challenge comes from the ever-increasing costs of utilities, which is used for its many climate controlled growing rooms, and diesel fuel used



Portobello mushrooms growing bed at Fillmore’s Mountainview Mushrooms

Photo by Matt Hargreaves

in the transportation and delivery process.

Despite trials from nature and the economy, Mountainview Mushrooms continues to produce a productive crop and provides a stable economic benefit to the local communities of Millard County—providing another example of how important agriculture is to maintaining the quality of life for rural Utah families.

Farm bill extension legislation already in the works

By American Farm Bureau

In the wake of the collapsed Doha round of World Trade Organization negotiations, lawmakers and farmers alike are taking a fresh look at proposals to extend the 2002 farm bill.

With the global trade talks faltering, Sens. Jim Talent (R-Mo.) and Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) in May introduced legislation (S. 2696) to extend the 2002 farm bill until the WTO discussions are completed.

Talent and Lincoln said an extension would ensure a level playing field for American farmers and ensure that other WTO member countries at least match the United States’ commitment to level disparities in the global marketplace.

“A farm bill extension, pending a fair agreement at the WTO, sends a signal to our trading partners,” Talent said. “We will not unilaterally disarm farmers and ranchers without assurances that we will get real and meaningful reforms for them in return. We must maintain the current framework until we know the rules of the game.”

Charlie Kruse, Missouri Farm Bureau president, said the legislation “makes sense for two reasons.”

“I have always believed extending the 2002 farm bill puts the most pressure on the Europeans to come to the table and discuss meaningful trade reform in the WTO,” he said. “Secondly, the current farm bill and safety net it provides are critically important to production agriculture, especially at a time when farmers continue to be hammered by increased energy and fertilizer costs.”

The Talent-Lincoln bill would also keep the current farm bill in place for at least one crop year after Congress approved legislation to implement a Doha agreement.

On the other side of Capitol Hill, Reps. Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) and Jim Costa (D-Calif.) also put forth legislation (H.R. 4332) that would extend the 2002 farm bill for one year.

Peterson, ranking Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee, and Costa, a committee member, said in a press release they hoped their bill,

>Farm Bill continued on P. 15

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