



Cala Farm

One of the true joys of our work at Big River Farms is seeing a graduate of our farmer training program start their own successful independent enterprise. Nobody personifies this better than Rodrigo Cala (pictured left during an early snow) of Cala Farms "Origenes." Rodrigo, along with his brother Juan Carlos, are the owner operators of a diverse vegetable operation in Turtle Lake, Wisconsin.

Drive east on Highway 8 from Turtle Lake and soon you will hit the Calla's farm. If you happen to go there in August, you will find acres of green peppers, broccoli, and garlic, along with three hoop-houses filled with the most perfect looking heirloom tomatoes.

Rodrigo joined Minnesota Food Association's beginning farmer training program in 2006. Having arrived in the United States only four years earlier, Rodrigo was certain that he wanted to farm in his new country. The Cala brothers grew up in Mexico City but they were not typical city boys. Their mother ran a small farm on the outskirts of the city and every weekend Rodrigo would go with her to the farm and work. They would harvest in the early mornings and bring all their fresh produce into the city for the daily markets. Needless to say, Rodrigo came to Big River Farms with a lot of skills in place. What he needed was a chance to get training in Organic Certification and how to market his produce.

In 2008, Rodrigo and Juan Carlos bought their farm in Turtle Lake. With the help of Minnesota Food Association, they have created very good markets for themselves and have been Organically Certified since 2009. Their markets include green peppers for Chipotle restaurants, broccoli for Co-op Partners in the Twin Cities, heirloom tomatoes for Festival Food and Lunds, and garlic for smaller accounts around the St. Croix area. In 2011, they started their own small CSA within the Latino community in Minneapolis.

Rodrigo is not only a great farmer, he also has been a wonderful teacher and inspiration for other immigrant and minority farmers in our program. He always teaches a few classes as well as conducts a workshop at the Immigrant Farmer's Conference. Each year brings new successes and challenges for the farm but Rodrigo seems to take it all in stride. We can't wait to see how Rodrigo continues to grow as a farmer.