



Season 1 Episode 9 – Crop Variety Importance

October 31, 2022

Speaker 1:

Welcome to the Farming Basics podcast with Olivia Fuller. We'll have sustainable farming tips from growers across the state and extension specialists at Auburn University.

Olivia:

Welcome back to the Farming Basics Podcast. This is your host, Olivia Fuller. We've got Jacob Kelly here today, and today we're interviewing Andre De Silva, extension vegetable specialist here at Auburn. And, we're going to talk about the importance of varieties, why they're so important to choose the right one for your farm and your needs. So, welcome.

Andre De Silva:

Hey Olivia. Hey Jacob. Thank you for having me here. It's going to be a pleasure to talk a little bit about variety selection.

Olivia:

Why is that so important for a grower?

Andre De Silva:

Variety selection is the first step of a grower in the beginning of the season. Before they even prepare their land, blend their beds for vegetable production if they're doing bare soils, they need to select what variety to grow or what they're growing. Once the crop is selected, the variety will be the main point because this is not only important for increased the profits, but also because it's the first step of an IPM program. So, if you are a grower that want to plant a tomato crop, first you need to identify what is the issue in your areas. Do you have problems with nematodes or do you have problems with a particular disease or insects? Then you going to select a variety that's going to be a resistance for that.

Plus when are you planting that? If you're planting late in the season, you're going to need the variety that is resistance for heat stress. If you're plant early in decision cold stress. So, that's the importance of varieties. And, with the currently price in input costs for the fertilizer and chemicals for application, and this is not only in convention but also in organic production, a selection of a good varieties will ensure that you increase your profits because you can reduce the costs of the use of inputs. So, that's going to be the benefits of correctly or a proper variety selection.

Olivia:

And, what you're wanting to do with it too, if you're a market grower wanting certain types to take to market.

Andre De Silva:

Yeah, that's another important part because let's say if you are a watermelon grower and you want to plant, you are selling for a farmer's market, then you have a particular market or a number of clients who prefer seeded watermelon instead to seedless watermelon, you need to select a variety that can provide you fruits with seeded. Another good example is for yellow squash. Sometimes if you have clients that prefer a straight neck, than a cracker neck, you're going to need to select the variety that is cracker neck.

A good example of that, we have been talking with some growers in North Alabama, is that if you cross the border with Tennessee in Alabama, in Tennessee, they would prefer a straight neck yellow squash. But, if you are in Alabama, they prefer a cracker neck yellow squash. So, if you are a grower in North Alabama, you and you are selling in Tennessee, you want to select varieties that you're going to sell it in there and varieties that you're going to sell in state. So, that's a good example why variety selection is.

Olivia:

And, I even see in South Alabama, they want the biggest watermelon. They want to see who can come to market with this massive watermelon. But, in Birmingham when a lot of people coming to Pepper Place, they want those small ones that they can carry around and consume just they-

Andre De Silva:

Yes, that's a very good other point. If you want to increase the size of your watermelon and you are at that particular grower, then you want a seeded watermelon. Seeded watermelon tended to be bigger than seedless watermelon. But, on the other hand, if you are a grower that are selling your watermelon for a broker, you need

to identify what is your broker wants. There are brokers who prefer to attend big sales companies or grocery stores and they usually just buy 45 to 36 count. But, if you are a grower that want to do more local and you want to seed less watermelon with larger size, you're going to get a watermelon that yield better like 60s or 30 or a small one for 60 counts and bigger ones for 30 counts. So, that's another important.

Jacob:

You know, make all these recommendations to growers and things like that. It's in the vegetable handbook, some of these varieties and stuff. How do you come up with these recommendations and how do you get that information out to our growers?

Andre De Silva:

So Jacob, it's important to know that I'm not making recommendation, but more giving tips on how to select their [inaudible 00:04:41]. Once you identify your market, your area, and your issues of growing that crop, then you're going to come and make the recommendation or select that. Currently we have the vegetable handbook with all varies that can be grown in Alabama. So, if you access the Farm Basic app, you're going to be able to access those varieties. However, we are currently develop a strong vegetable program here in Alabama for extension, and what we are doing is we are doing several variety trials across the state where we are trying different the varieties of different crops.

For example, just in the E.V. Smith Research and Extension Center here in Shorter, Alabama, we have about eight different varieties trials in organic and conventional production. We have variety trials for broccoli where we identify those varieties that can be heat tolerant. We are testing 80 different varieties. Our recommendation for broccoli would be like grow some eastern crown, which is a very common variety that can be grown in Alabama. Another variety trial that we are doing is for lettuce, we are doing lettuce for convention and organic in open field and in high [inaudible 00:05:49]. So, there are several, we are testing 16 different varieties.

We are also doing that for tomatoes. We have 22 different varieties of tomatoes in the field today where we going to be evaluating them for vigor, for disease resistance, but also for yield and yield quality, fruit size. Because, if you are a grower that is selling for a farm's market, you want to a big breakfast tomato that you can increase the value of your product. But, if you're selling for retails or wholesale, you might going to need smaller and more number of fruits instead of big size of fruit because that's going to increase your profit by the end of the season.

So, that's the kind of things that we are evaluating. At the same time we're evaluating some... We are doing a pepper variety trial where we have different, we're going to evaluate those for yield and also hotness or how hot it is the pepper. So, we are just testing right now seven different varieties for peppers and we are going to compare with it with bell pepper, but we are doing that in organic and convention of production.

Olivia:

And, that's very exciting for Alabama. I think we've been behind in the vegetable world for a while and because we have a lot of smaller skill growers, it's important that they choose things that fit their farm and their desires,

like their end goals. And, I've seen for a long time a lot of growers just choose willy-nilly looking at what's fun and exciting online ordering that and then having a massive failed crop because they're not resistant to all of the things that we have in the soil here in the southeast so I think so important for them to understand.

Jacob:

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Andre De Silva:

I understand that most of our growers in Alabama, sometimes they are in smaller scale production and they want to diversify, which is important to maintain profitability. So, usually they access website for those seed companies online, they see what is better and then to just click there and make the purchase. It's okay to do that, but sometimes you are not buying what is going to be the best to be grown in your field. So, looking at advance, you need to first identify what is the challenge of production for your facility or your farm. Then what is the problem in the region and then select it.

I'm not saying that a grower should not select, let's say ghost pepper, which is something hot and some growers want to do that, but if that doesn't grow well in your area, you have a different pepper that's going to be also as the spice as ghost pepper, but is adapted for the region. So, you need to select varieties or [inaudible 00:08:48] that are adaptable to the environmental conditions of your field.

Olivia:

Yeah. The work that you're doing at E.V. Smith I think is so important for the growers here. Is there anything else you want to highlight that's going on out there right now?

Andre De Silva:

Yeah, we going to be doing a few days for those variety trials. So, we are welcoming all the growers. They will be able to see what's going on with their own eyes. We going to be doing hosting those few days on the harvesting time so they can see fruit. Those few days is going to... We are not select pick up date yet, but we going to be doing those few days in about two months from now, two to three months from now. So, you can expect that receiving for your county agents some advertisement of those few days. And, we are more than welcome where we going to be providing lunch and allowing all the growers to walk around with some educational sections as well.

Jacob:

Everybody likes a good lunch and a lot of my growers need to come because I've got guys down in southwest Alabama, we get rain every day. Mobile's the wettest city in the United States if you didn't know and they'll

plant double of what they expect to yield just because they know half of those plants are going to die out before they're ready for harvest. And, it's because of a number of diseases and stuff and things like that. And, they get sticker shock. They go on there and I'm like, Well, have you tried this variety? And, they go and they see these seeds are 50 cents a piece and I'm, "But you're planting seeds that are 25 cents a piece and you're planting double and you're spraying a bunch and you're still not getting the yields that you want."

So, maybe using one of these varieties that we've tested in our trials and that we know that this is a topnotch variety for Alabama or southwest Alabama or north Alabama or wherever. We know that this is a good variety. It's going to yield for you and it's resistant to some of these diseases you've been dealing with, which is going to reduce the amount of sprays you have to put out. And, that's cutting in that looking at the bottom line of the grower. They're going to end up saving money in the long run and hopefully profiting off of the amount of plants that they end up or vegetables they end up selling in the future.

Olivia:

All right. Well, thank you so much for coming in and chatting with us about vegetables. It's my favorite topic and I think we learned a lot.

Andre De Silva:

Yeah, thank you very much for having me.

Speaker 1:

This has been a production of Alabama Extension at Auburn University.