

Tennessee Grower Profile:

Laszlo Marton and family Galena Garlic Company

Fentress County – Clarkrange, TN

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County Agent Host: John Gunter

Chronicling Specialty Crop Marketing in Tennessee

FOCUS ON GARLIC

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Galena Garlic is a family business, with everyone using their unique skill sets. Laszlo shares, "It all goes back to having a shared vision for the farm. It is hard by yourself. Lean on your family and friends and reach out to others."

Series of grower profiles of selected specialty crops in Tennessee.

- Cut Flowers
- Persimmons
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TENNESSEE GARLIC MARKET SUMMARY:

According to Census data from the USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service, there was 26,200 acres of garlic for fresh market and processing harvested in the U.S. in 2021. Garlic is a vegetable, but it is often used as a flavoring for other foods. Garlic is also used for medicinal purposes and health benefits. In the 1990s, the demand for garlic in the U.S. increased with the popularity of international cuisine. This led to a large garlic import market, with much of the garlic consumed in the U.S. being produced in China. To market locally-grown garlic, Tennessee producers often direct market through farmers markets, on-farm stands, and community supported agriculture (CSA) shares. Due to the lack of processing facilities, most garlic is marketed as whole bulbs. Some producers market garlic to restaurants, but many chefs prefer garlic to be peeled and chopped or minced prior to purchasing. Garlic can also be sold in the immature state as scallions. Scapes, which is the flower stalk of hardneck garlic, can be sold or used to make a spread such as pesto. Other value-added techniques or strategies include braiding tops and dehydrating garlic for seasonings. Due to the potential risk of botulism, producers must use extreme caution and follow all food safety requirements when processing garlic for specialty items. More information about garlic types and production methods in Tennessee can be found in publication D75, "[Garlic for the Tennessee Vegetable Garden](#)".

For additional information for commercial growers visit the Southeastern U.S. Vegetable Crop Handbook.

COMMENTS & OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FARM

"I started with 7 varieties and found 4 that did well for us."

"We started growing garlic in 2003 and had our first harvest in 2004."

"We are currently harvesting around 5 acres of garlic."



"Our primary crop is garlic, but we also grow shishito peppers and lavender."

"There are culinary garlands and planting garlands. Basically, if it is over 2.5 to 3 inches, then it is a seed garlic because the bigger the clove you put in the ground, the bigger your bulb."

"It is best if you put the heavier end or bottom end down when planting. That is where the roots will come out."

"We grow garlic in rows in the field with straw. I found that it is easier to harvest when growing in plastic as it helps keep weed pressure down, but straw keeps the plants a little more moist, which leads to larger bulbs."

"We do not have any irrigation, but we have been considering it as drought leads to smaller bulbs."



Extension Specialists Dr. Annette Wszelaki and Rachel Painter learn planting methods at their farm in Clarkrange, TN.

"For a beginner, I would recommend growing with straw and try to keep the weeds under control. Using plastic requires equipment to lay the plastic, so it is best to start with straw."

"We use a cover crop mixture every year or every other year to keep the soil healthy. We also move the rows for soil health and to reduce disease pressure."

"Varieties that grow best in this area are hardneck. We grow varieties like German White, Music, Georgian Fire, and Pehoski. German White is a dependable and hardy producer. Music is a very popular variety with a long shelf-life. Georgian Fire is known for being spicy or hot. German White is a dependable and hardy producer. Pehoski is a purple garlic with big cloves."

"Dry rot can be an issue. This is usually an issue if you have not been taking care of your soil and it is too heavy or compacted. This can lead to bulbs that are stunted or die completely."



Shown here is Georgian Fire, a hardneck garlic with large cloves. This is one of the cultivars that Galena Garlic produces.

"Everyone likes larger cloves."

"I love color in garlic. It shows it is not washed or bleached and it is grown here in the U.S."

"Growing garlic is hands-on. After harvest, it isn't over. You have to hang it and dry it."

"The demand in the U.S. is greater than production."

"You have to be using social media and marketing your garlic. That is how people will find you and learn."

"The number one reason the market for garlic hasn't grown here is because of processing."

"I'm Hungarian and I grew up in South America, so I grew up eating garlic in almost every dish. It first started as a hobby and became a real business."

"We market by word of mouth and started selling at farmers market in Galena, Illinois and at a break room in a local hotel. I had to start selling by first changing the consumer's perceptions."

"To promote the garlic, we use sampling and educating the customer on ways they can use garlic and scapes with recipes. We help the customer see that they can become a



Laszlo Marton, owner of Galena Garlic says, "In the beginning, I just called other garlic growers and asked them questions. Find some others that will mentor you and learn from them. Come visit me and I will teach you! Find me at galenagarlic.com."

gourmet chef really quickly with fresh garlic."

"I consider growing and marketing garlic to be extremely successful."

"Have you ever tasted fresh garlic? I let people taste the garlic or give away a clove for them to take home and try it. After they try it, they will come back and be my customer forever!"

"One of the best things to do as a farm family is to have one family member that leads one aspect of the operation, such as production, and another family member or even hire someone to focus on sales and marketing. Everyone needs to understand

the other aspects of the business so that they can know the product and the customer, but everyone should focus on what they are best at."

"People are scared of failing when cooking, so we have to show them how easily it can be used."

"People don't have time anymore. The faster you can get your point across and get them to experience it, the better."

"Don't give up. You are going to have a bad year or a bad harvest. Just keep learning what not to do and keep going."

"I share everything. Most people that grow things like to talk about it with others."



Galena Garlic sells garlic in many ways. Debra shows how they bag entire bulbs to sell at their stores and farmers markets.



The cloves are soaked in a baking soda solution for approximately 30 minutes prior to planting. Laszlo instructs to plant after frost in the Fall and when you expect rain within 10 days of planting the cloves.

"You have to put yourself out there and try it. If you are passionate about it, it will grow."

"I think there is room in the market for all of us."

"The worst pest is hail. It will kill all of the growth above the ground."

"There are a lot of byproducts you can make with garlic or scapes to add value and diversify your offerings. We use the scapes to make a pesto out of it and our customers love it."



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