



Healthy Earth, Healthy Plants, Healthy Company

As field manager for California growing operations at The DiMare Company, Jeff Dolan knows what it takes to make a sustainable farming operation. After all, his family's business has been doing this for over 80 years.

"I began learning about sustainable farming as a kid growing up in Boston," said Dolan, who participated in one of Massachusetts Audubon Society Drumlin Farm's first projects comparing conventional and organic gardening systems.

Dolan credits this experience with teaching him two very important principles he incorporates today on DiMare's tomato farms: soil preservation and pest control.

With these two principles in mind, The DiMare Company is an ardent supporter of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which incorporates farming practices that effectively control pests while minimizing damage to the soil and the surrounding environment. As with other California Tomato Farmers members, IPM is not new to DiMare. Dolan's uncle, Tom DiMare — along with several other CTF members — was involved in the first IPM research center at University of California, Davis, in the 1970s.

"Like most other California farmers, we work with a licensed Pest Control Advisor, or PCA, to help build comprehensive pest management strategies," continued Dolan, who added that DiMare has a full-time PCA on staff. He added that harsher pesticides are replaced whenever possible with low-risk products, organic pesticides or with pheromones designed to reduce pest populations.

Dolan said the techniques used are often sophisticated and technical in nature, citing the use of remote telemetry, or weather stations, to assist in forecasting the onset of diseases such as late blight. This technology has helped to reduce the fungicide applications necessary to treat this disease. At other times, the techniques are as old as farming itself, with crop rotation playing a key role in DiMare farming operations because it breaks the cycle of soil pests and reduces the need for chemical fumigants.

Despite the new technologies now available, Dolan stresses that nothing beats having "boots on the ground" when it comes to a successful IPM program. "This means we walk the fields and look at what is going on at all times," Dolan said. "Our rule of thumb is that every field is monitored no less than twice a week, but it's usually closer to three or four times per week."

DiMare prides itself on being the largest vertically-integrated tomato operation in the U.S., with farming and packing operations in California and the southeastern U.S. and wholesale businesses located throughout the nation.

But it all starts on the farm.

With the fourth generation of DiMares now beginning to help out on the farm each year, there is strong motivation to ensure the company continues to thrive for future generations.