



Consumers Want More Mushrooms than U.S. Farmers are Producing MP3

Gary Crawford [00:00:00] Yes, there are lots of songs about mushrooms I've been able to dig up. Unfortunately, most of them we can't put on the air, so we're stuck with this.

Singing Voiceover [00:00:09] I'm an edible mushroom, I'm a bland and...

Gary Crawford [00:00:13] Yeah, but what, I mean, what could I do but let the little fellow sing. After all, he's a fun guy. We are once again coming to you from the Agriculture Department's farmers market in Washington, D.C. and the VegU-cation tent. We've got a couple of visiting VegU-cation experts here who are presenting to customers. Here's some information on and two samples of mushrooms. And we also.

Singing Voiceover [00:00:32] I'm an edible mushroom...

Gary Crawford [00:00:33] No, no, no, you've had your 30 seconds of fungus fame.

Singing Voiceover [00:00:36] Oh, come on.

Gary Crawford [00:00:36] So let's talk first with Laurie Harrison with the American Mushroom Institute. Now you've been telling me Americans are wanting to buy more and more fresh mushrooms, were paying more for them. But U.S. mushroom farmers are having trouble keeping up with the demand that one, the number of growers is down. At the last count there were only 307 in the whole country? Ten fewer than just two years ago. They tried to keep production up, though, but the AG Department has just reported production this season, down 8 percent from last year. So, Lori, why haven't mushroom growers expanded production to meet the demand?

Lori Harrison [00:01:10] Mushrooms are grown indoors. It's not like other crops, like corn, where you can just plant another section of land. There is a significant capital investment. So, a lot of mushroom farmers are delaying expanding because they're not sure of the labor.

Gary Crawford [00:01:27] Ah that's right. Mushrooms have to be carefully harvested by hand. Takes a lot of workers to do that. And we've heard farmers of all types of crops complaining that they can't find enough people to work on the farms. So, there's a shortage on mushroom farms as well?

Lori Harrison [00:01:39] In Pennsylvania, especially on any given day, their labor force is 20 percent less than full. They're at a 20 percent deficit.

Gary Crawford [00:01:46] Oh, yes, and Pennsylvania's the biggest producer of mushrooms. But, Lori, I heard you tell some folks over there that the weather and climate variations are also causing problems for mushroom growers. But why would that be if the mushrooms are grown inside in dark growing houses?

Lori Harrison [00:02:02] Mushroom growers use a lot of straw and hay, that's the nutrients the mushrooms grow in. So, if you've got straw or hay that's been waterlogged, or through without a lot of rain, then those nutrients are compromised, and it'll affect the yields of the mushroom.

Gary Crawford [00:02:21] Okay. Now let's go over here to Heather Harter with the Mushroom Council. She says to help satisfy the demand, the U.S. is importing more and more mushrooms this year from January up through July. We brought in from other countries 18 percent more than the same period of time in 2018.

Heather Harter [00:02:37] And while we're seeing consumers really interested in buying more mushrooms, that coming in from the imports is helping sustain the market right now.

Gary Crawford [00:02:44] Now, these imports are helping to keep consumer prices for fresh mushrooms from mushrooming.

Singing Voiceover [00:02:49] I'm a bland and fat...

Gary Crawford [00:02:50] Oh, no, no, no, that's one mushroom we could do without. In Washington, Gary Crawford reporting for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.