

## Meet the Directors: Distinguished Farmers, Citizens, Lead the Tri-County Cooperative Market

The historic, Hightstown-based Tri-County Cooperative Farmers Market on Route 33 is ably led through prosperous and not-so-prosperous economic times by a distinguished, bright, dynamic team of farmers from central New Jersey. More than 30 Garden State farmers – from almost all 21 counties -- participate with Tri-County Cooperative Market during the season to bring the freshest produce to consumers, other farmers for their retail markets, restaurant owners and chefs.

As a non-profit cooperative, Tri-County has a governing board and monthly meetings to ensure the continuing success of the venture, founded at the height of the Great Depression in 1934.

Below are brief biographies of Tri-County Cooperative Market's officers.

President: George Asprocolas, Co-owner, Asprocolas Acres, Millstone Township, Monmouth County

George's generous nature and background as a teacher touch on all who enter the Tri-County Market during business hours, as he seeks to educate restaurant owners, chefs and regular patrons about new types of produce and new ways of growing vegetables. George, a graduate of Kean College in Union, spent several years teaching in Edison before launching his own

landscaping company. He ran his landscaping company for 14 years near Edison before moving to Millstone Township in Monmouth County.

In 1993, he launched Asprocolas Acres on 70 acres of land he owns and leases in Millstone Township to grow a wide variety of vegetables and ground cherries. Unlike many farmers who have such a large operation, Asprocolas has no farm stand of his own at the front of his property. Instead, he takes his produce around from week to week during the season to a variety of farmers markets all over the Garden State, including urban areas like Jersey City, Newark and Trenton.

Asprocolas majored in industrial arts education at East Stroudsburg State College and Kean College and graduated from Kean College. His background in carpentry and building trades has come in handy in his career producing vegetables. He grows a variety of ethnic squash and eggplant, okra, conventional and hot peppers on his farm.

He has served as President of the Tri-County Cooperative Market since 2000 and is now in his 18<sup>th</sup> year working amicably with the organization's participating farmers and restaurant buyers.

Aside from his duties as president of the Tri-County Farmers Cooperative, George serves on the Millstone Township Agricultural Advisory Council and he sits on the Open Space and

Farmland Preservation Council for Millstone. He is a trustee of the Friends of Millstone Historical Society and is a member of the New Jersey Farm Bureau and the Monmouth County Board of Agriculture.

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Vice-President: Robert Balz, Co-owner, R&K Farms, Monroe Township

Robert Balz is a third generation farmer who was raised on a farm in Monroe Township in southern Middlesex County, where he still lives. He retired in the spring of 2018 from the Plant Food Company in nearby Cranbury, where he worked as plant manager for four decades.

Now fully “retired,” Balz and his wife Karen are back to full-time farming. In his 50 plus years in farming, Balz has successfully grown hundreds of varieties of vegetables and many varieties of cantaloupes and watermelons. Balz and his wife run R&K Farm Market from the front end of their 14.5 acres of preserved farmland on Ridge Road in Monroe Township and they also actively farm another 95 acres of leased land in Manalapan Township. They also participate at a number of farmers markets around the Garden State, including the Tri-County Cooperative Market in Hightstown.

Balz, who did not attend college, learned farming first-hand from his father, Donald, and grandfather, Bertram Marshall. He has served on the Middlesex County Board of Agriculture for many years.

Given his “retired” status, Balz was recently installed as Vice-President of the Tri-County Cooperative Market.

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Treasurer: Kim DeWolf, Co-owner, DeWolf’s You Pick Farm, New Egypt

Kim DeWolf’s family has been farming in New Jersey since the late 1600’s, first in Bergen County, and, since 1967, on 222 acres of fertile soil in New Egypt.

In her youth, Kim learned the art and science of growing a wide variety of vegetables and fruit from her parents, John and Elaine DeWolf. She now runs DeWolf You Pick Farm, where she raises a wide variety of ethnic specialty crops and strawberries and blackberries, with the assistance of her brother, Peter, and mother, Elaine.

Patrons of DeWolf You Pick Farm fancy the farm’s sweet corn and wide range of ethnic vegetables, including -- but not limited to -- fava beans, habanero and chile peppers, long beans, bitter melons, tomatillos, long Italian [cucuzzi] squash, Indian

eggplant, Italian eggplant, and a wide variety of less prominent but important African, Jamaican, Thai and Mexican vegetables.

Despite being raised on the family farm in New Egypt, DeWolf took short courses in vegetable growing and agriculture at Rutgers' Cook College in New Brunswick and studied at Burlington County College.

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Secretary: John Hauser, Co-owner, Hauser Hill Farms, Old Bridge

Other farmers in the Tri-County Cooperative Market wonder what kinds of vitamins John Hauser takes, because they don't understand how he can manage the work load at both Hauser Hill Farms and the Browntown Bus Service, which he's been doing for most of the last three decades.

Hauser is a 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer and graduate of Delaware Valley College in Doylestown, Pa. His great-grandfather started farming land off Ticetown Road in then-rural Old Bridge Township in 1860. Young John learned from working on the farm from his childhood with his mother Marie, and late father, Clarence. His father Clarence started the Browntown Bus Service in 1950, a business that has since expanded in size with the population of Old Bridge and continues to this day.

Hauser is in his 12<sup>th</sup> year as Secretary of the Tri-County Farmers Cooperative Market. He and his wife Midge and his brother and sister and mother farm 48 acres of land they own in the heart of bustling Old Bridge Township. Hauser leases another 200 acres of land.

Hauser Hill Farms is famous for their peaches, white peaches, white donut peaches and all varieties of apples. Hauser and his family grow more than 30 varieties of apples during the summer and fall, and gallon jugs of Hauser Hill Farm apple cider are made the old-fashioned way, with manual apple pressing equipment and a simple network of tubes, funnels and farm hands.

John's wife, Midge Hauser, is the current president of the Middlesex County Board of Agriculture. John is a past president of the county board and also is a past president of the South Amboy-Sayreville-Old Bridge Chamber of Commerce, a past president of the New Jersey Horticultural Society, a past president of the New Jersey Direct Farmers' Association, and a past director and county representative for the New Jersey Farm Bureau. He is also currently the vice-president for the Middlesex County Fair Association in East Brunswick.

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