



Get To Know Your MFVGA Board Directors **This month: Brad Chmielewski**



Hello, fellow MFVGA members and community. I am more than happy to introduce myself. My name is Brad Chmielewski and along with my father, Mark, own and operate Stoney Brook Farms in Foley, MN.

Stoney Brook Farms started almost 50 years ago as Jerry's Farm Market in St. Cloud, MN. My grandparents, Jerry and Shirley, operated this retail outlet for fresh fruits and vegetables as well as bulk candy, flowers and Christmas trees. My dad grew up in the business and it soon expanded into our wholesale operation today. We currently supply area grocery stores and wholesale distributors with asparagus, snap peas, green beans, sweet corn, broccoli, squash, and pumpkins. We have around 700 acres in production, and we hand pick all of our products. I am really lucky to be able to farm alongside my Dad and it is always fun merging the "new" ideas with the old ones. Makes for great conversation at the breakfast table in the morning.

We are a big user of h2A labor since around 2006. We currently employ 24 migrant workers from Mexico. It is an expensive and highly regulated program, but I know we would not be in business today without it. If anyone is looking into the program and has any questions or concerns, I would be more than happy to share our experiences with it and hopefully steer you in the right direction with any recommendations.

As a "young" person in this industry at 31 years old, I am always looking ahead to what is next. We have started utilizing more cover crops and land stewardship methods on our farm. We find that soil health plays a big role in specialty crop production. With the unpredictable weather we have had over recent years, we do our best to make sure our soils are resilient to any flooding or drought conditions as best we can. We are also trying to mitigate soil erosion and have recently become a MN Ag Water quality certified farm.

We have started a corn maze and pumpkin patch. This year will be our 6th year, and we love having folks come to our farm to see all that we have to offer. This is also a great networking opportunity that gets our farm name and website out to the public for more exposure.

It looks like it is going to be a late spring with the wet and cold weather we have been having, but I hope to see the asparagus spears popping through the ground soon and start off 2022 with a safe and successful season. I wish you all the best in the upcoming year!