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# TOMATO FARMING SUCCESS

## Seed trials help Del Jardin Fresh cultivate tomato excellence

**BY KEITH LORIA**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**F**or decades, Juan Lopez, president and owner of farming consulting firm Del Jardin Fresh, has been looking for ways to grow the best tomatoes.

“I’ve been farming for 20 years, and you learn something new with every crop,” he said. “My goal has always centered on quality, with an emphasis on how we can do things better and yield superior results.”

This quest for constant excellence was instilled in him at the age of 11 when his father bought a farm

in North Carolina, relocating the family from Chicago. He taught a young Lopez the intricate ways of agriculture and the land.

By the time he finished high school, Lopez was captivated, and farming became part of his identity. So profoundly engaged was he that his dad bought him a tractor and some land of his own, launching a lifelong passion for farming.

Over the years, he briefly dabbled in various aspects of agriculture, including a decade spent with a large repacker on the retail side of the supply chain. Eventually, he realized his dream by starting his own

business, and in 2014, Del Jardin Fresh was born.

Del Jardin Fresh provides comprehensive produce-growing services to farms across the southeast, encompassing everything from initial soil preparation and variety selection to ongoing cultural practices, including the design and execution of spray programs and fertilizer management.

### Seed time

Collaborating with breeders, distributors and other agricultural experts, Lopez has experimented



Del Jardin tomatoes benefit from nurturing the soil. Photos courtesy of REGEV, Summit Agro USA.

with numerous seed varieties, seeking perfection in every bite — whether it's grape, cherry, roma or round tomatoes.

In the past 10 years, Del Jardin Fresh has had successful trials with seed companies including Bejo Seeds, HM.CLAUSE, Syngenta, Sakata, Hazera, Seminis and Enza Zaden. Lopez has trialed more than 10 different tomato varieties during this period and tested 20 more in various stages of trials across his four growing locations.

"The biggest reward of working with seed breeders is witnessing the positive outcomes and growing in the right direction," he said.

With farms in North Carolina, South Florida and Tennessee, comprising little more than 800 acres — 20 of which are organic — Lopez also grows yellow squash, zucchini, watermelons, bell peppers, jalapenos and cucumbers.

Soil health, he noted, is paramount to his success.



**Juan Lopez, owner of Del Jardin Fresh.**

"We have to fumigate and implement numerous micros and natural biology to restore the soil," Lopez said. "We analyze many soil samples because we understand that after fertilizing, everything — good and bad — can be depleted. Therefore, we strive to put back as much beneficial material as possible into the soil."

In 2020, Lopez was introduced to REGEV's hybrid fungicide for vegetables, created by STK Bio-Ag Technologies and distributed by Durham, North Carolina's Summit Agro USA. The product combines the disease control activity of a natural botanical fungicide with the efficacy of a chemical ingredient.

## Attacking disease

REGEV, Lopez explained, is a pre-mix of Difenconazole and Australian tea tree oil, producing a dual mode of action, which notably improves resistance management and leads to yield increases. It works by rupturing the cell membranes of disease-causing organisms, reducing chemical residues.

Lopez applied REGEV to his entire tomato crop and now champions the product as a way to protect his tomatoes from pathogens.

"Every year is different; Mother Nature throws numerous challenges

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**“With rising costs, achieving better yields is crucial for remaining competitive in this business. Additionally, engaging in some organic production has underscored the vital importance of maintaining healthy soil.”**

— Juan Lopez, Del Jardin Fresh

### Best management paths

Lopez relies on decades of hands-on experience in developing a comprehensive program. Once he starts building a crop cycle and collects soil samples while scouting the crop weekly, he can precisely determine the best soil health management techniques to implement.

“We have clear targets for where we want to be, and we ensure that we stick to our plans. Once we are on track, we can start planting greater quantities of product,” he said. “With rising costs, achieving better yields is crucial for remaining competitive in this business.

Additionally, engaging in some organic production has underscored the vital importance of maintaining healthy soil.”

Unquestionably, the biggest challenge he has encountered in maintaining soil health has been weather, an issue that presents no easy solutions.

“You must rely on your experience when facing weather events,” Lopez said. “For instance, we anticipate substantial rainfall this week, so we will increase the application rates of certain products and ensure our fungicides are applied in a timely manner. Proper timing is critical, and effective forecasting before adverse weather occurs is our best strategy.”

Lopez aspires to grow more commodities in the future — perhaps even fruits — and expand acreage across the states where he cultivates tomatoes. He envisions a future where he embraces even more diverse agricultural practices, contributing to the industry and enhancing sustainability within his operations.

“Success in farming isn’t just about growing crops; it’s about nurturing the soil, embracing challenges and continually striving for improvement,” Lopez said. ■

*A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is an award-winning journalist who has been writing for almost 20 years. View his recent writing at [keithloria.contently.com](http://keithloria.contently.com).*

your way,” he said. “REGEV is one product I lean on to combat early blight disease in tomatoes. If early blight strikes, it can impair 20%-40% of your crop. Thus, having REGEV in my spray program allows us to minimize production losses.”

His advice to other growers is to incorporate REGEV into their program

to help prevent disease proliferation.

Beyond REGEV, Lopez employs AVIV, another microbial fungi that has proven effective against bacterial and fungal diseases affecting his tomato plants.

He also works with BioSafe and Southeast Ag Solutions for additional microbial solutions.



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