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## FROM GOOD LAND

BY KELLY SMITH



### BLACK AND BLUE

*The next time you fly, you might be tasting East Hampton soil.*

EAST HAMPTON—Peter Dankowski considers himself the last farmer in East Hampton. His grandfather, Henry, came from Poland and first started farming in

Queens, NY, before moving to East Hampton around 1932. Peter followed his grandfather and father, Henry Jr., into the fields. He rattles off today's working acreage: "250 acres of potatoes, 250 acres of field corn, which is used to feed cows, and 25 to 30 acres of assorted vegetables which we wholesale to local farm stands, grocery stores and restaurants."

Land is quickly disappearing here on the East End where potato fields are turned into 100,000 square foot "single family dwellings" and most farmers are forced to subdivide or sell off their land completely. It seems amazing that the Dankowski's farm which ranges from East Hampton to Mecox keeps expanding. But the biggest development for the farm is the six growing acres of Blue Bliss Potatoes for Terra Chips which has an exclusive with Jet Blue Airways to supply snacks for hungry travelers.

Mr. Dankowski works in conjunction with another potato farmer in Maine, whose season is several weeks behind Long Island in providing potatoes to Terra Chips. This fall will be the farm's first harvest of the Blue Bliss and Mr. Dankowski already has the growing down pat. He says he will irrigate next year's crop in a sandier loam type of soil for a better harvest.

The blue potato has a "high specific gravity" meaning high starch and low sugar which makes for a healthier chip with 40 percent less fat and a nutty taste, according to Long Island-based Terra Chips. The small- to medium-sized potato has ink colored skin, a dark pur-

ple interior and is dry which makes it great for chipping. Terra Chips does that in their Brooklyn plant.

Although Mr.

Dankowski's blue potatoes are very profitable, he seems to have a soft spot for the old standby. "Long Island grown Superior Potatoes," he says passionately of the bright whites the farmer has built his reputation on, "nothing else can touch them. They are so moist and flavorful. You can eat the skin and all."

Touching on the subject of pesticides and herbicides, Mr. Dankowski notes that most people are uneducated about the farm environment. He says he feels sorry for women in that the chemicals they put on their bodies in the name of beauty, such as nail polish and hair color, are more harmful than anything he puts on his plants. A tight lid is kept on all farm equipment, he says, and it is controlled and approved by the EPA, tested environmentally friendly, licensed and catalogued by the farmer. "We use ounces as opposed to the quarts and gallons back in the day. I think the farmers are really careful," Mr. Dankowski says, "and I don't want to spend any more money than I have to."

Sometimes the politics involved in farming today frustrates the farmer but Mr. Dankowski has no plans to sell the farm and hopes his daughters find a way to keep it going after his retirement. In the meantime, he says, "I'm still here turning the wheels." And his potatoes are flying high. □

*Kelly Smith, a journalist in East Hampton, has been writing about the East End environment for over a decade.*