

Why did you decide to go on the tour with Jim/I Love Produce?

The Organic Trade Association (OTA) was already traveling to China to promote U.S. agricultural products for export. We presented a two-hour seminar for retailers in Guangzhou and had a booth at BioFach in Shanghai where we presented two additional education sessions on the U.S. organic market and National Organic Program as part of the conference. We also toured Biofarm, an organic CSA in Pudong, and hosted a tour of Chinese retailers carrying organic. Jim Provost graciously extended an invitation for the OTA staff and Board to continue our China trip and travel with his team to the largest agricultural district in China, the Shandong Province. I Love Produce has been an OTA member for over 5 years, and we were eager to learn more about the opportunities and challenges that the company faces on the ground in China.

How many days did you tour before your return to the United States?

The OTA team consisted of myself, Marty Mesh the President of Florida Organic Growers/Quality Certification Services, and Todd Linsky the Vice President of Sales for Cal-Organic/Grimmway Farms. We left for Jinan on Sunday morning, traveled to Taian and Feicheng, and went our separate ways on Tuesday after three incredibly interesting and productive days traveling with Jim, his Chinese Partner and team.

What did you see while there?

We covered a lot of ground in a very short amount of time. Our first day in Shandong we met the Mayor and Minister of Agriculture in Taian, and then climbed Tai Shan mountain with a group of employees from the company's local facilities. On Monday we hit the ground running with a trip to the facility where organic broccoli was being processed for distribution to the Canadian market under the brand Green Organic. We observed the process from the intake of the raw broccoli through to the finished product, including complete transparency around the three critical control points identified in their HACCP to prevent contamination.

The following day we had a business lunch with the Vice Mayor and Minister of Agriculture in Feicheng and proceeded to the farm where thirteen varieties of organic fruits and vegetables are grown. We toured the farm, met the growers, and sampled delicious organic strawberries directly from the field.

What kind of "take-away" impression do you have following the tour with regard to organics from China?

The most basic "take away" for me is that we truly are a global society and that increasing organic agriculture and products worldwide is good for everyone. The Chinese farmers we met were concerned about preventing pesticide drift from nearby conventional fields and effectively controlling weeds; and the Chinese consumers we talked to were looking for organic products for an enhanced food safety guarantee and to provide their families with healthy products. Overall, our conversations contained similar concerns and aspirations to what I've heard in the United States.

What I encountered in China was a dynamic partnership between a group of committed growers, processors and distributors. Together, Jim and his team, have developed a sophisticated system, managed according to the strictest organic standards, that consumers can unequivocally trust.