

# ALASKA GROWN

## Farmer Profile



### Hard Work Makes for Hardy Tomatoes at Bell's Nursery

ANCHORAGE—Mike Mosesian learned the value of hard work from his father. Growing up on a 1,000 acre grape vineyard, he worked 24/7, because, as his father would say, “the grapes keep growing ...grapes don’t take days off!”

Mosesian cites hard work as the key to his success. He arrived in Alaska in the 1970s, with a Master’s degree in hand, but no money in the bank. Although his degree was in viticulture, Mosesian began growing tomatoes, mainly, he says, because he felt the tomatoes grown in the lower 48 states were so tasteless.

“I didn’t know a thing about tomatoes when I started,” Mosesian said, laughing sheepishly, “I thought a greenhouse was a house painted

green!”

Despite his inexperience, he learned quickly, helped along by his general horticultural knowledge and his chemistry minor. The demand for his local tomatoes was unprecedented.

“I made enemies,” he explained, “because I just couldn’t produce enough.”

In 1976, Mosesian bought Bell’s Nursery and expanded his operation, though he admits, “I didn’t know a pansy from a petunia.”

Since then, the business has flourished and Mosesian now supplies grocery stores with beefsteak tomatoes and English cucumbers during the summer months and poinsettias during the holiday season.

Mosesian grows his tomatoes hydroponically, using coconut fiber for substrate, but he never stops perfecting his

methods and experimenting with new technologies. He owns two robots, which save him a lot of labor in transplanting, and he is always experimenting with new varieties of his specialty crops.

The most difficult part of the greenhouse business, Mosesian says, is its vulnerable nature.

“There’s just so much that can go wrong, and when it does, you have about fifteen minutes to improvise and save the crop,” he said. And he’s careful to take precautions so that nothing ever does go wrong, if he can help it. “I have back-up generators for my back-up generators!”

Mosesian is always available in case something does go wrong—he hasn’t left the state for more than 24 hours in over a decade. This commitment to his business is a result of the work ethic his father instilled in him at an early age, and will continue to make Bell’s Nursery a successful enterprise for years to come.



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