

The Romaine Hearts Story: when does \$8.50 = \$38.50?

One of Red Tomato strategies for achieving our mission is to *decommodify*, or add value to, local, ecologically-grown fruits and vegetables so that farmers compete more effectively in the marketplace. Enter Romaine Hearts.

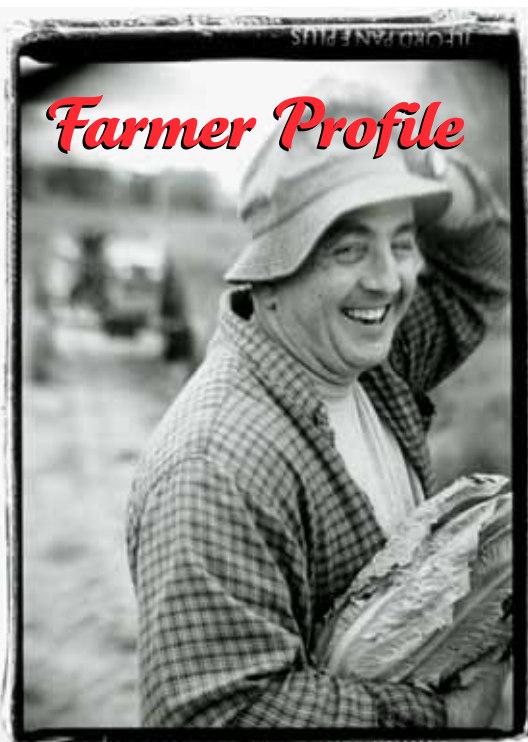
For decades, two generations of Bonannos copied the conventional produce model in every way and shipped tens of thousands of cases of leaf lettuce and romaine to nearby supermarket warehouses. By the mid-nineties they noticed that they were being paid the same price per case (around \$8.50 for 24 heads) that they were getting a decade before, while the cost of boxes, fertilizer, and labor had gone up 50-200%.

Working with Red Tomato since 1998, Pleasant Valley Gardens (PVG) has been searching for a way to stay in the lettuce business. Red Tomato conducted a feasibility analysis



in 2004 on marketing options for packaged lettuce (note: 70% of the lettuce consumed in the U.S. comes out of a package). We are now testing packaged romaine hearts, which we are selling to 2 major supermarkets. It's too early to tell whether the trial will succeed, but so far the math looks good: we are returning \$20.50 to PVG for the hearts, with a potential for \$18.00 more for the wrapper leaves which are peeled off the hearts, to be sold as "filets" to shops and caterers making sandwiches. That's \$38.50 for the same number of romaine heads that PVG sold to supermarkets for \$8.50. That's what we mean by adding value!

Our Romaine Hearts poly bag. World renowned illustrator Anthony Russo created six illustrations for Red Tomato, pro bono. We paid him in-kind with fruit. They serve as the graphic foundation of our packaging.



Richard Bonanno - Pleasant Valley Gardens. How good is the local produce?

A tenured professor left his job in North Carolina for it. Maybe it was fate. Maybe Richard Bonanno always knew that, somehow, he'd end up back at Pleasant Valley Gardens in Methuen, the family farm that his great-grandfather had started upon arrival from Italy in 1910. His studies would take him from Cornell University to Oregon State and, finally, to North Carolina State and a tenured position at that prestigious school. A Ph.D. in Weed Science made him one of the most sought after agricultural specialists in the country. It also taught him new ways to think about his own family's farm. So when he learned one day that his uncle wanted to sell his share of Pleasant Valley, Richard never looked back.

Today, Richard Bonanno is using all he's learned to grow some of New England's best lettuce, summer squash, zucchini, and peppers. Everything he does is the result of applied knowledge. How he plants. How he waters. How he harvests. Even down to the soft plastic containers which protect his summer squash as it's being picked. And you can see and taste that difference in everything he grows.

Red Tomato is proud to bring you the delicious produce of Pleasant Valley Gardens and Richard Bonanno. A man who brought home a great deal more than he left with.

Red Tomato's mission is connecting farmers and consumers through marketing, trade and education, and through a passionate belief that a locally-based, family farm, fair trade, ecological food system is the way to a better tomato.

Red Tomato (RT) is a mission-driven, nonprofit organization that works in the marketplace. RT works closely with farmers and scientists to create supply chains of locally-grown products that satisfy the needs of retail grocers and their customers (the ultimate consumers).

