

Spotlight on Cottle Farms



Joy Cottle
Cottle Farms – Columbia, SC

It's been a busy winter and spring for Joy Cottle and the staff at Cottle Strawberry Farms in Richland County. Starting last fall she moved her strawberry farm to a new location and is excited to welcome customers to the expanded site.

Cottle and her staff spent months prepping the land, hand planting each strawberry plant, irrigating and covering during the cold months. The hard work has paid off as fields of green strawberry bushes swayed in the breeze under the sun loaded with white flowers and berries.

"I just love to farm," Cottle said on a warm spring afternoon at the farm. "I guess when you farm it's in your blood."

The family tradition has passed from generation to generation. Cottle's grandfather and father farmed strawberries. Her brother grows strawberries as well – over in Florence County. At her farm off Trotter Road Cottle grows two strawberry varieties including Chandler and Camerosa. She loves their sweetness and the dark red colors. Both varieties do well in South Carolina.

"It's a great family outing to bring your kids out here," Cottle said of the U-Pick operation at the farm. "The best part is watching the kids who come out to the farm."

She said she sees many of the same faces each year and hopes with the larger fields she'll new faces this year. Cottle also hires 17 people for seasonal help to harvest and sell strawberries at seven retail sites around the Midlands in addition to the Sandhills and Kershaw community-based farmers markets. While many people enjoy picking their own, not everyone has the time so Cottle Farms has an increased reach into higher population areas.

Cottle is also a proud member of the Certified SC Grown program and regularly sports a hat with the Certified SC Grown logo and has incorporated the logo into her farm's website and on the plastic buckets in which customers take their berries home. She said consumers are noticing the logo and what it means to buy locally grown.

"I like to promote that it's here and it's local and fresh," Cottle said. "People really like to know it's a fresh, local strawberry they are getting. It's picked, put in a container and sold the same day." The fresher the berry, the more nutritious it is. One cup, or six to nine berries, contains 140 percent of the recommended daily allowance for Vitamin C. And the fruit is also a good source for Vitamin A, iron and calcium.

With leasing nine acres at the new location, Cottle hopes to expand her business. She's interested in several other berries to extend her growing season beyond the April to June strawberry season with muscadine, blackberries or blueberries. With some additional field space now, she knows there is room to add more produce and extend the time she's in business.

So from April through June (weather permitting) Cottle Strawberry Farm at its new location at 2533 Trotter Road just east of Columbia on Highway 378 is open for picking your own strawberries or find them at any of their seven locations around the Midlands. Check them out online for more information and the farm's hours, go to: www.cottlestrawberryfarm.com or cottlefarms@aol.com.

