



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast

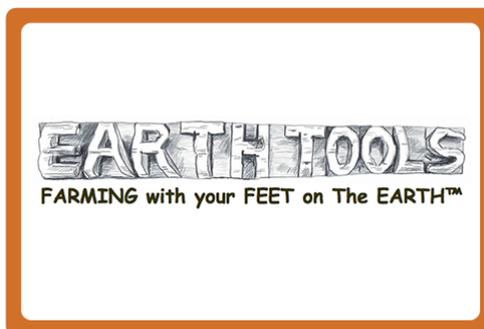


EPISODE 102

Shiloh Avery and Jason Roehrig of Tumbling Shoals Farm on Planning for Success, Smaller Markets, and Using Employees to Make Time to Manage

January 19, 2017

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Chris: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, episode 102, and this is your host, Chris Blanchard. Shiloh Avery and Jason Roehrig own and operate Tumbling Shoals Farm in northwestern North Carolina. With three acres tilled and almost a half an acre under plastic, they gross about \$145,000 selling certified organic vegetables through a CSA, three farmer's markets, a cooperative CSA, and a few restaurants.

Shiloh and Jason were very intentional about where they chose to start Tumbling Shoals Farm, and the smaller cities that they chose to market in. They share the factors behind locating in northwestern North Carolina, the advantages of marketing in smaller markets, and how their marketing decisions have shaped their production strategies. Jason and Shiloh tell us about the ways they've made use of high tunnels and Haygrove polytunnels to increase the reliability of their cropping systems.

We also dig into the lessons that Shiloh and Jason have learned about the power of having enough labor to leave them time to manage the farm, and the changes they are making based on some in-depth business planning as they move into their tent season on the farm.

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Jason Roehrig and Shiloh Avery, welcome to the Farm To Farmer Podcast!

Shiloh Avery: Thank you, Chris!

Jason Roehrig: Thanks for having us!



Shiloh: We are honored to be here!

Chris: I really appreciate your making time. This is the last interview of 2016, even though we won't go live until the middle of January with this show, so thank you for ending it on a nice note. I really appreciate that.

I'd like to start off by having you guys tell us about Tumbling Shoals Farm, where you guys are located, how many acres you're farming, where and how you're marketing your produce.

Shiloh: We're in northwestern North Carolina in a little tiny rural community. The closest larger town would be Boone, North Carolina, which is the home of Appalachian State University. The whole entire property's only 15 acres, and we're farming on actual tilled ground slightly less than three acres. Markets, we have a 90-member, this is where we were last year, we have a 90-member CSA where we actually pack the boxes and distribute them to distribution points. That's roughly about 25% of our sales; 25% to 30%.

We sell at three farmer's markets a week, and that's about 60%; 60 to 65% of our sales. We participate in a cooperative multi-farm CSA, which was just about 5% this past year. Then, we do a tiny bit of wholesale which adds up to about another 5%, and that's mostly to restaurants.

We are entering our 10th season, so this is a big season of transition for us, about big decisions. We've been spending a bunch of time in business meetings. I like to tell people we've been in corporate meetings talking about and planning where we're going to go in the next five years. For some reason, 10 years is a big number.

Jason: It's a milestone. Just a little bit more about the farm. We are a certified organic vegetable operation. We grow about 40 different crops, and then a number of varieties of each of those crops. We've got six 30 by 66 foot, which I know is an odd size, houses, and a Haygrove high tunnel that we ... It's 90 by 100. It's a multi-bay Haygrove high tunnel that we move around the farm to grow tomatoes under. We've got six 200 foot rows of berries; blackberries and blueberries, but we are primarily vegetables.

We've got just a couple rows of sunflowers. We started as an operation thinking we were going to be about 50/50 flower and vegetable production, but now we are almost entirely vegetable and fruit production.

Chris: Just to seize on that little detail, and then we'll kind of work our way out from there, why was that? I feel like we've talked to a lot of cut-flower growers who said, "Oh, we started off as vegetable growers and we ended up being cut-flower growers. You guys kind of went in the opposite direction.

Shiloh: Yeah, it's market driven. Alex and Betsy Hitt - you interviewed Alex on the podcast. I worked for Alex in ... I don't know, 15 years ago, whatever it was; 2003 I think or 2004.



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We were kind of modelling our operation after theirs, but what we discovered, and we discovered it rather painfully, because the big holy grail for cut-flower growers is to have a good amount of cut-flowers on Mother's Day, and we had beautiful flowers on Mother's Day, and we took them all to market, and we took them all back home with us, because we're in a market where people don't have mothers. It's a college town, and so people have moved there and their mothers are not necessarily there.

Our flower market is really pretty small in this area. It's really market driven. I've got to be honest, I'm a very social person, and for some reason the flowers fell mostly to me, and so I found myself doing flower stuff off by myself, and I would hear the crew over on the other side of the farm laughing, and I didn't like that very much. There was also a personality motivation, we also really like to eat, so food tends to be where we can really thrive in a marketing situation, because we can talk about how we prepare it, and where ... Flowers are interesting, and really challenging, and pretty, we just don't have that same passion. It's both market and personality, but honestly, it was really mostly market.

Chris: I'm curious, when you talked about markets you said your primary market is in Boone, North Carolina which is, I just Google-mapped it, it's 46 minutes from your farm heading off to the west. You've also got Winston-Salem about an hour and 15 minutes to the east of you. Why did you guys decided to market in Boone?

Jason: That started with a market survey that Shiloh did back when she was a student at Central Carolina Community College's Sustainable Agriculture program. Why Shiloh chose Boone? I think it's just because we liked it. It's a pretty town. It's a nice landscape. It's close to great recreation. We were interested in being close to that community. It had, at that time before we moved here, a farmer's market that really needed an operation like ours.

We saw an opportunity there and we jumped in. Winston-Salem, since that time, has developed a pretty good farmer's market, but at the time that we were looking, 10 or 12 years ago, it really didn't have much of a farmer's market. It had a reputation for small farms going there and not having the success that they should. I think they've really turned that around. The local food movement has hit Winston-Salem since that time, and there are opportunities there, and we're actually considering it at this point; doing some marketing in Winston-Salem, but at the time, Boone was the better option for us.

Shiloh: We chose Hickory, which is equal distance from our farm where we ended up as our secondary market. It's a town of about, I'd say 45,000, and that's where we were initially looking for land, was in two counties between Boone and Hickory, so it actually, as a secondary market, was really close to our target area. Where we ended up finding land eventually is actually an hour and 15 minute drive to Hickory, which is the same to Winston-Salem, but we have been going to the Hickory market, and as it developed, for the entire time we've been growing. We're entering our 10th season at that market as well. That has really developed into a rapidly growing into our primary market. It's not there yet, but it's rapidly growing. As we look toward Winston-Salem for expansion, it's not a substitute for Hickory as our secondary market.



Jason: No, and we're only an hour and a half from Charlotte, which is a city of 1,000,000 people, and it kind of had some of the same characteristics as Winston-Salem when we were shopping for markets in that it didn't really have a well-developed farmer's market, and we didn't feel like we were in a position to create such a thing. Settling on the Boone and Hickory markets really was a decision about how good the farmer's markets were at the time, and the potential that we saw there for them.

Shiloh: There was also the ... In Boone ... We're in a Zone 7 farm here, and Boone, I think, is a Zone 6 in that area. We go up a mountain to get to Boone. When we were doing our market survey 10 years ago or 12 years ago, we looked at that and we saw a niche opening for us to come in with early produce, just by being down off the mountain. We're in the foothills. We're a full zone warmer, and so we could see, easily, us coming in and filling a niche early and late.

It's also, we had looked at that market, and a lot of growers sell bedding plants as part of their operation, but that was all the growers had there early, and so we didn't pursue bedding plants as part of our operation, because that wasn't the niche. The niche, for us, was coming in there early with fresh produce, and then maybe being there a little bit late with fresh produce. That's specific to Boone, because it's a whole climate zone colder.

Jason: We are at 1,300 feet, and Boone is 3,300 feet, so we've got 10 or 11 degrees of climate advantage being here, only 45 minutes away, which has proved to be a big deal for us, but of course it's an arms race. As we came in with earlier produce, the farmers in that neighborhood saw the advantage to investing in season extension, and so everybody's doing that to get earlier and earlier produce there.

Chris: It's really interesting to me when you talk about the market planning that you did, and kind of targeting where you wanted to be growing, and where you wanted to be selling before you had a piece of land, it sounds like. Can you talk a little bit about that planning process that you went through 10 or 12 years ago?

Shiloh: Sure.

Jason: Yeah, I like to say that we were lucky in that we were born landless and without any money. Some farmers inherit their land, and then that's where they are. That's where they're farming. But, we didn't have such limitations. When we left the Peace Corps, we had \$5,000 and a Pontiac Grand Prix with 125,000 miles on it, where the transmission went at 128,000 miles, so it didn't last very long as an asset. But, the ability to shop for your market was, that was our primary thing that we made a decision about; is shopping for the market.

Shiloh: It wasn't only market, because honestly, if it were only market we would probably have landed in DC, or something like that, or New York. But, I went to school in Kentucky and fell in love with Southern Appalachia, and so my search for a place to land after Peace Corps definitely involved Southern Appalachia. I looked in Georgia, and South Carolina, and Tennessee, and Kentucky, and then through a friend of a



friend, I received a brochure; snail mail; while I was in Peace Corps for this sustainable farming program at Central Carolina Community College in Pittsboro, North Carolina, which is actually a little further east. It's not quite in the ... It's in the Piedmont of North Carolina near Chapel Hill and Raleigh. Got excited about actually taking some community college courses in sustainable farming.

We landed in North Carolina for that reason, with our eye always further west. But, Asheville is a bigger market; not by a lot, but by some. We were really looking Southern Appalachia. We looked in Roanoke, Virginia, and Blackbird, Virginia, and we looked at Chattanooga, Tennessee, and then we looked at Boone and Asheville, and really those regions, and where their markets were at the time, and where we could see them potentially going.

There was a lot of projection there, and we saw the Boone market, at the time it was an established market. It's now some 35 years old, I think, but it was ... It didn't have any early growers. We saw potential for that market to grow, but for us to get in as new growers, small growers, and then kind of grow with the market. That has actually proven to be true with Hickory as well. We honestly were focused a lot more on Boone at the time. Hickory was just sort of the secondary thing. That's evolved in our thinking quite a bit.

Yeah, we were easy to get in at that time, where Asheville was a much more, I want to say, flooded or saturated market. They didn't have a ... We were strong believers in a centralized farmer's market where people can make a living at a farmer's market, which we have seen in Carrboro, North Carolina near Alex Hitt's house, and even Durham, North Carolina where they're centralized markets; where people are coming in to grocery shop; the customers are coming to grocery shop rather than pick up a bunch of radishes. In Asheville, that didn't exist. There were lots of little tiny markets where customers are coming to pick up a bunch of radishes, or some hamburger or whatever, but not actually doing their grocery shopping. People weren't really making livings at those markets unless you went to all of them and that didn't appeal to us.

Jason: We actually traveled around to farmer's markets in all those communities, and people were very generous with information where they would, after talking to us for a little bit and finding out our interests and realizing that we were serious, they would give us numbers. They would tell us how much they were making at farmer's market. We were really grateful for that, but that was helpful in making the decision.

When we were writing the business plan, we were actually selling at the Durham farmer's market. In terms of customer counts and vendor counts, the farmer's market in Boone; the Watauga County farmers market, was comparable. We could look at our sales for a day in Durham, and easily translate that to what we might be able to accomplish in Boone. Now, Durham's a much larger community, and has, since that time, grown at a more rapid pace, but also, there's a lot more competition from growers there.

Chris: You just said something really interesting. You talked about customer count even. I don't know very many farmers who keep track of those kinds of details in marketing.



Is that something that you guys are still tracking, or is that something that you were mostly doing when you were in this market research phase?

Jason: No, we're still doing that. In fact, we're both on the boards of our respective markets. I sell at the Watauga County - the Boone farmers market with an employee every week, and then Shiloh has been going to the Hickory farmer's market. In Wataugawe actually make it a job of the market manager to estimate ... We get estimates of customers, because it's really difficult to actually do crowd counting when you get down to it, but we can know what the traffic flow is through the market roughly every week. Then, we continue to try to figure out what percentage of those customers we're actually selling to.

The easiest way for us right now is to estimate a median sale, and then divide our total sales by that to get a best guess as to what our customer counts are for a day. We don't actually have a clicker there that we're counting, but we are trying to figure out how many customers we actually have. That way, if we know how many customers we have, we can figure out how to better increase our income by serving those customers, or evaluate whether we need to look at reasons why we aren't taking in more customers.

On a busy August day in Watauga, there are more than 2,000 customers who go through the market, but only 300 or 350 of them are shopping with Tumbling Shoals Farm, and so we spend a lot of time thinking about why that is. I was at a great conference a few years ago, The National Young Farmers Conference, and they had some folks from the Green Market in New York City there who did market analysis for vendors in the Green Market. They had people, I think it was four people, stand outside their booth. One person would count the number of people who walked by, just with a clicker. A second person would count the number of people who looked at the booth. Again, a third person would count the number of people who looked at the booth, and then walked in and actually browsed. The last person was counting the number of people who actually made purchases.

Then, they had strategies, which they shared a few at the conference, of how to ... Each of those steps. If you have a lot of people walking by, but not looking, you maybe need to do some things with your signage. If you had a lot of people looking but not coming in, then there's some display things that you can do. If people are coming in but not making the final purchase, well, they had a list of things that you could do to actually get people to make that final purchase. That's why we find the customer count to be useful, is so that we can make decisions about where in our display and marketing that we can make improvements.

Shiloh: This is a lot of the ... Jason talked about the 2,000 people coming to market on a busy August day. Farmers in large market areas are always horrified by our farmer's market numbers. We chose a relatively small market area, and can definitely see the wisdom of being in a larger market. I was visiting a farmer in the DC area last year, and he was like in his third or fourth year of farming, and he had a 75-member CSA, and he was talking about doubling his CSA. I said, "Well, how are you going to do that? What's your advertising plan?" He just looked at me and he's like, "There are a million people



next door." He's like, "It's just like taking candy from a baby." Which, I don't know if you've ever tried that, because it's really hard.

But, we like to say, about being in a rural area and growing organic crops, that somebody has to do it. Somebody's got to serve the smaller markets; the rural markets. We definitely see a niche there. I am the only certified organic grower, and actually the only organic grower on a Saturday at the Hickory farmer's market, at least until this year. There's a niche there for doing what we do.

Another thing that we feel like is that we are actually a very important part of our community. Our county is Wilkes County, and they did this promotional video with these somewhat famous musicians, The Kruger Brothers, who live here. They did a Wilkes County promotional video, and Tumbling Shoals Farm is actually in that video. It's our one second of fame. We're actually a very important part of the community. People know us. We have relationships with our customers in this community. It's kind of easy to reach everybody in the community. We don't have to worry about people out there that we haven't reached. I've got to say, it's good for the ego to be a big fish in a small pond. We're a little tiny speck of a farm in the grand scheme of farming, but everybody in our immediate area knows who we are and what we do. It's good for the ego.

Jason: Yeah, and we're in a community where if your picture is in the local newspaper people actually notice that and they comment on it. Shiloh and I have been places, and we're transplants here, we're not from Wilkes County, but we've been places and just had a waiter, or a sales clerk say, "Hey, are you the people from Tumbling Shoals?" Just because they recognized us being out in public. There's this small town celebrity that is kind of a cool thing.

Chris: I agree about the big fish in a little pond. When I was farming, we marketed up in the Twin Cities; Minneapolis and Saint Paul in Minnesota, and we also marketed in Rochester, Minnesota. The Twin Cities being one of those infinite markets, and Rochester being about 100,000 people at that time. It really was ... We were a big fish in a small pond in Rochester, and it was a very different experience to be up in the Twin Cities and marketing. People didn't know us as much up there, and it was a good market for us, but it definitely had a different emotional reward.

One of the things, just as I was looking around at your farm on the internet, you guys have a really cool farmer's market display. I wanted to ... I mean, with 60% of your sales coming from farmer's market, that's a lot of the vegetables that you guys are moving. You guys had set things up so that your displays are very tall and narrow, at least what I saw online. Can you talk a little bit about how you actually achieve that look, and why you went in that direction?

Jason: When we were out researching communities and farmer's markets, we parked our car a couple blocks from the Blacksburg farmer's market, and then started walking towards the tents and things. From about a block and a half away, we noticed a display. That's telling in that it was standing out from the other displays so much. We walked right to that farm and started talking to them. I wish I could give them credit. I



don't even remember the names of the farmers at this point, but they had a display they had built from old barn wood, and it was kind of a two-shelf system, which is what we used at farmer's market. We knew immediately that we needed to copy that, because we're firm believers in stealing other people's good ideas as opposed to innovating ideas. An innovator's either rich or broke, and we're just looking to make a living.

We came home immediately and figured out how to copy that display, and built some structures that, they're kind of heavy, and a little bit tedious to set up. When I go to farmer's market by myself without any help, I've got to be the first one there in the morning setting up, but it's absolutely worth it. Starting back when we were in Durham, we noticed people who were on the other side of the market walking that, they would notice our stand and then just come right over to us. After that, it's up to us to make the sale, but the display has paid for itself many times over.

Chris: Yeah, it's worth the effort to set that up every week. I mean, that's not a small thing when you add an extra 15 minutes of a half an hour to your market day every week of the market year.

Jason: Yeah, it's setting up and taking down. Really, right now it's that time investment that is the difference. The initial investment in the materials is really pretty small once you divide it out over the number of seasons that we've used the market stand. But, it matters for sales. People look at us and they think, "Well, there is someone who has a professional operation. Their food must be good because it looks good here." People eat with their eyes as much as they eat with their mouths, and the experience that they have in purchasing the food has a lot to do with the experience that they have when they're eating it. We're trying to build on that and tie into that, and get them to have a good experience right from the start.

Shiloh: I spent a number of years working in the grocery business; co-op groceries in the produce departments, and I learned a whole lot about how display works on ... I hate to sound like this, but the psychology of the shopper. You've got to draw them in. If you just look like everybody else in the farmer's market, then what is it that's drawing those customers to your booth? The old adage is, "Pile it high, kiss it goodbye." Our display really works on those principles; the use of color, and the vertical striping. We learned from the ... I had wonderful teachers in the grocery business, and learned that much about display, and then of course we saw that ... We were ... That drew our eyes; that display in Blackbird, from a block and a half away. Emulating that, I would say it has always rewarded us ever since we started doing it.

We talk a lot about Durham. We had what we called a practice farm. While we were working and taking classes at Central Carolina and working for other farmers, I was working for this farmer, John Soehner, and he asked us, "Well, you know, this neighbor of mine wants me to farm this acre behind his house. Why don't you all do it? It's been bugging me for years." He really got us set up. It turned out it was a half acre and it used to be their garden. John let me borrow his equipment, and I would drive it down the road. We farmed this little half acre, and we called it our practice farm. That's when we were selling in Durham. We sold at a number of local markets in



that area; the Chapel Hill area.

We started out, our very first farmer's market that we ever went to, we started out with a card table, and no table cloth, and no signs, and like six bags of muddy lettuce. Then, just a couple years later, we were selling in Durham, and we had built that display that we copied from the Blackbird farmers, and we won an award for the most attractive display. That's not paying off monetarily necessarily; an award from a farmer's market, but it is evidence that we are drawing the eye of the customer. If we're drawing the eye of the farmer's market in general, I think we're probably drawing the eye of the customer. You've got to back that up with quality produce, but we definitely believe that display has ... Investment in display, and the time investment really has always paid off for us.

Chris: What else, besides the display, are you guys doing to enhance your customer's market experience?

Jason: There are basic customer service things like interacting with the customers, and greeting them as they come by. Which, it's not natural for me. I'm an introvert, and so my inclination would be to stand back behind the stand and scowl, but I know that if I force myself to come out front and just say, "good morning" or "hello", or whatever it is, that that's going to make that person feel more comfortable and willing to walk in.

It's interesting teaching employees that, because some of them come to us with great customer service experience, and some of them don't, but we kind of coach them through the farmer's market experience early in the seasons, and help them to understand that interaction. Then, the other thing we do a lot of is cook. I cook dinner every night. I consider it part of my job at the farm to use the produce that we grow. We are able to help people understand how to use the produce we grow, which I think is something really valuable that people appreciate. Instead of growing radicchio and just saying, "I don't know. It's bitter." Being able to help someone understand how they might prepare it, that they could enjoy it.

Shiloh: I'm a very social person, so it does come naturally to me, but this is really a, I'm going to call it a benefit of being in a small community. It really is much easier to build these relationships. I've been going to this market for, I'm going into my 10th year, so I've been there for nine years. I know these people. I know their names. I know their kids. I know where they went on vacation. It's just a relationship. It's just like when a friend comes up. You'll ask them about their kids, or their vacation, or their health situation. You know things about them just because you talk to them once or twice a week for 30 weeks, or whatever the season is.

It is much easier because you have a smaller customer count, to really, truly build relationships with your customers. I think that's an enhancement of customer's experience, is, they know you, you know them, they're ... I don't know. It's like a friendship.

Jason: Shiloh has a notebook that she takes to farmer's market, and every once in awhile I'll get a glance in there and there'll be things written in there like, "The redhead with the



brown bag's name is Carol, and she has two children away at college." And things like that that she just writes down to refresh her memory, or to just be able to glance back at that so that she knows who people are. She's very intentional about that part of it.

Shiloh: You're giving away my magic secrets!

Jason: Yeah, that is [crosstalk].

Chris: You mentioned earlier, Jason, you guys are just wanting to make a living on your farm. Are you guys making a living from the farm?

Jason: Yeah. Well, we haven't ... I left my off-farm job in 2010, and we haven't had any other income besides the farm since 2010. That's making a living. Of course, we are always planning on how to do better, but we live a fine lifestyle on the farm, where we're satisfied with it. The things we think about now are how to prepare for retirement, and health insurance changes, and those sorts of things, and how the farm needs to step up and cover those things as well.

Shiloh: This is really part of our big transition heading into year 10. We're big planners. We wrote this business plan, and we did that, and we achieved those income goals, and we kind of plateaued at year nine. Now we're like, "Okay, we are changing our focus. We're getting older, and we're changing our focus to thinking about these things. Retirement might require putting a little more money away. Maybe as we age, we would like some better standard of ... " Not that we have ... We have a fine standard of living, we really do, but maybe we want to travel some, and so we're looking toward the future like, "Okay, well maybe it's time for the farm managers to make a little more money."

That's been part of our big transitional planning process. We looked at whether the smart decision was to contract and reduce labor, and reduce our paid labor, and reduce our expenses, and grow less, which definitely fits in our current market, or to expand. By expansion I don't mean in terms of acreage, I mean in terms of investing, and more labor, and more and better infrastructure.

We just spent some weeks of pretty intense business planning meetings. We basically wrote two new business plans for the upcoming five to 10 years where we expand and we contract. The big reveal, as we like to explain is, that we chose expansion because in the grand scheme of things, we see more income potential in the expansion. Again, it's investment and labor and infrastructure, and we just saw a lot more potential for ... It wasn't super clear-cut, but the contraction model had the farm managers doing a lot more of the farm labor; the in-the-weeds farm labor.

One of our weaknesses as managers has been that we've been spending way too much time in the weeds with the crew, so to speak; leading from the front, which can be beneficial, but it's been taking away from time to spend on whole-farm management. The contraction model definitely had us spending a higher percentage of the, I'm going to call it manual labor. It sounds terrible, but the regular, everyday, weed the carrots, hoe the lettuce, whatever, transplanting, and not adding any more



time for us to do a better job at our marketing; really be walking the fields and looking at the crop needs, and doing proper analysis; sending disease samples, sending tissue samples, researching pest life-cycles for example. That's what I'm calling the whole-farm management where you are doing some crew management, but you're also managing this farm as a whole; the whole ecosystem.

The expansion, and investing in more labor, I'm going to say frees up a little more time for us to step back and look at the whole farm, and maybe be doing some of these things that we haven't been spending enough time managing. One of the big things for us is water control. I invested in a tensiometer, I don't know, in 2009, and it flooded in 2009, so it wasn't super useful, but I don't think I've used it since, because I just haven't been spending ... I've been spending the time in it with my head down with the crew harvesting crops, transplanting crops, taking care of crops, instead of letting the crew run that part of the farm while I step back and manage water.

I heard on one of your podcasts someone like quadrupled their green bean yield just by managing water, and that was very inspiring to me to really figure out how to get that time as a farm manager rather than as a farm laborer.

Jason: When we look at the problems we had in our career of farming, we definitely see how having more time to manage to make decisions would have enabled us to head off some of those things. When we have a crop failure, we can look back and say, "Oh, if we'd only done this at this time instead of having been working with the crew then we could have fixed it." That's been an evolution in our abilities as farmers. When we started at Tumbling Shoals Farm, our first season growing here was 2008. We had some good business skills, but really, we were lacking in a lot of the production skills. There had been a couple things that had happened that have been eye-openers, just watershed moments.

At one point we were, and Shiloh and I disagree where we heard this, but we were reading something that you had written that said, "Good farmers do not have crop failures." That really made us think about things differently, because we were very accepting of crop failures. Our farming mantra was, "We'll win some, we'll lose some." And the whole idea that you don't lose any at all was a new concept to us. That made us think about how we were looking at the farm differently.

Around the same time, we were hearing things about and his high-growth, high-net operation, and per unit-area, and really looking at the differences in that and what we were doing and seeing that perfect weed control is not an option, it is absolutely necessary to make a living on a very small-scale acreage, as we were doing. I think I had read in an agronomic textbook somewhere that 100% weed control is an aesthetic choice, not an economic choice, and we had based our farming strategy on that idea, but, as it turns out, that might be true in a corn field, but it's not true in a small-scale vegetable operation. Getting that ... "perfect" is the wrong word, but getting as close as you can to having complete control over those weeds is important to the bottom line. Those were things that, early on, we weren't doing. We've evolved to realize that we were needed to do; evolved to realize that we needed to do, but also recognized that that means that we're making the right decisions at the right



time, which takes time to do for the management.

- Shiloh: Yeah, so we like to say we started out as firefighters or triage nurses, and we're evolving into farm managers, because that's what ... It needed to be a full-fledged fire to get our attention when we were beginning. "Look, that crop we're about to lose to weeds. We better get in there." Instead of staying ahead of it with proper planning. Like Jason said, it takes time to actively, intentionally manage. That's where our transition is leading us. We're working on being active, intentional managers instead of firefighters [crosstalk].
- Chris: Of course, the funny thing about being an active and intentional manager, you used that weed control example, when you're actively and intentionally managing, you go out there and you look and you said, "Oh, I've got a field full of just germinated weeds." And you get somebody out there, you get it cleaned up, and it takes a little bit of effort, but when you're in firefighting mode it takes a lot more effort, because instead of getting them when they're a half inch tall, you're getting things when they're four inches tall or a foot tall, and then it takes real effort to get those things under control. It's almost ... It's an interesting dynamic there when you look at doing that management work and breaking yourself away, you go, "Oh, well, I've got to put more energy into management." But, ideally, that means that there's less energy going into the technical work.
- Jason: Our models were Alex and Betsy Hitt at Peregrine Farm who do a great job of that management; so well that you don't even notice that they're doing it. When we were learning to farm, and watching their operation, we didn't really realize how good they were at making those decisions and doing things at the right time. All we thought was, "Oh, they take Tuesday afternoons off, and if it's a hot day they're in the shade doing something, because they planned for that, and they know how to make that happen." They were quitting, at the time Shiloh was working for them, they were quitting farming for the year around the first of October. All those things really appealed to us; having the free time, and the time off in the winter seemed like a very important thing, but we didn't realize how very good they actually were at making the decisions that allowed them that.
- For our first few years we were just running around everywhere, working all the time in the summer. Even though we were taking winters off, ostensibly we had a huge backlog of projects that needed to get done; more than we could possibly accomplish in the off-season. It's been a learning experience to get to a point where we can actually have the lifestyle that we set out to have.
- Chris: I think that's probably true of any small farm, or any business where the owners enter the business as a technician. I mean, I know even in my podcasting world that it's been like that. It's been a couple of years of scrambling to stay on top of episodes, and just now kind of getting to the point where, hopefully, if things go right, and kind of like your guys' planning, where I'm able to still engage in the technical work, but kind of get off the hamster wheel. I think it does take some time to even prove out that doing that management work; doing that working on the business instead of in the business part is actually going to be worth doing.



Jason: Models are really important for that. I really appreciate the people who are out there sharing their numbers, and saying that it's possible, because you can easily come to believe that how you're doing something is as well as it can be done until you see someone doing it better. Then you can say, "Oh, there's room for improvement. What is it that I'm doing?" You can do the self-analysis at that point to figure out what it is that you're doing that could be better.

Chris: With that we're going to stop, take a break, get a word from our sponsors, and then we'll be right back with Jason Roehrig and Shiloh Avery from Tumbling Shoals Farm in Miller's Creek, North Carolina.

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And we're back with Shiloh Avery and Jason Roehrig from Tumbling Shoals Farm in Miller's Creek, North Carolina. Jason, right before we went on break you were saying how important it's been that people have been willing to share their model and share their numbers, so I'm going to turn that back on you and say, tell us a little bit about your numbers.

Jason: Yeah, I'm happy to. I don't set us up as an example for other people necessarily, but I feel pleased with where we've gotten in the amount of time that we have. We're grossing on the little less than three acres this season somewhere between 160 and 165 grand. I know it's almost December 31st, and I should have that number written down exactly, but I don't know quite all the things added up. The net on that acreage



this season is about 45,000. That's what Shiloh and I are taking home to live off of. That's about where we projected in our original business plan that we would be, but we were 27 years old when we were writing that original business plan, recently returned from being Peace Corps volunteers where I had literally lived on ... You hear people in the advertisements talking about living on \$1 per day. I literally lived on \$1 per day. It was actually plenty of money there for me as a Peace Corps volunteer in Madagascar. Our perception of need was a little different than, I think, most people who are approaching a business career.

However, as we've gotten older, we've realized that some of the creature comforts that are here and available to us are things that we would really enjoy, and so we're targeting, as we've rewritten our cash flow projections, or redone our business planning. We're really shooting to make about 70,000 net. Shiloh mentioned that we were looking at two different ways to get there. One was contracting and reducing expenses, and the other is investing more in labor and infrastructure to get us to that point. Yeah, we've gone over that, but that's the ultimate goal, is to get to that 70 grand net. We think we'll be there in a couple years. That's the idea. What's it 2017? By 2018 or 2019, we expect to be at that point.

Chris: When you talk about improving from \$45,000 net to \$70,000 or \$75,000 net, what do you think that's going to require in terms of changes to your gross sales?

Jason: That's a good question. Some of it is just pruning, which is getting rid of those crops that aren't giving the ... aren't yielding the growth that we need. We have a ... Our farm is divided. The outside production is divided into 12 90 by 100 foot fields, and our crop rotation rotates through those 12 units. All our beds are 90 feet long, 32 inches wide. When we started, we thought if we made \$250 per bed, that's what we need to do. Well, we've adjusted that number, and really what we're shooting for right now is more like \$500 per bed. That means that some of the crops that aren't quite getting us there are going to have to go away. It means that some of the crops that aren't quite getting there, we need to do some research and improve how we're doing the production, or raise the prices; those are really the two strategies that we use to increase the income.

That should get us to a gross, something slightly below \$200,000. We think that's attainable with the existing market. We think that we can accomplish that as producers, and we feel like we'll have the labor force to actually move all that produce around and get it off the farm and sold.

Chris: You've actually got six 30 by 66 high tunnels on ... You've got the Haygrove tunnels which you move around the farm, and I want to come back and just ask you a little bit more about those in a couple minutes, but where are you looking at investing in additional infrastructure, because you're talking about not only increasing your gross, but also increasing your margin as you grow your overall sales.

Jason: Yeah, we've just been working a lot of numbers on those, so it's a timely question. One of the things that we're planning on doing is investing in some heated space. In addition to those unheated high tunnels that I talked about, we're right now looking at



putting in a roughly 30 by 100, maybe a little bit longer than 100 feet because we have probably 120 feet that we could fill; heated greenhouse. From what we can tell, if you do two crops of tomatoes in that space in a year, a very early season and a late season crop of tomatoes, that margin is way better than what we've been doing in the field. Then also, in the field, the way that would be increasing margin is that pruning out of the lower margin crops.

The major improvement that we're planning for the outside production; the field production, is looking at equipment for handling compost. We don't currently use any compost on the farm, and being more intentional in our cover cropping. Here in the south, we have really four full seasons of growth that we can get.

As I'm standing here right now, I'm looking out at the fields and I can see my cover crops growing out there just beautifully. It's dark-green rye and slightly less green oats out there with the crimson clover in the ; can't quite see it yet. The investment in labor ... Sometimes there's times where we have missed a cover crop; where there's crop coming out of the field, but the field's finished in June, and we have time to do a summer cover before we plant our fall and winter cover, and we get too busy and we miss that cover crop. It either stays ... The crop doesn't necessarily get disked in, or the crop gets disked in, but we just leave it fallow for the summer and don't get the cover crop in. But, having the additional labor here, that should allow us to get those jobs done, improve our soil health; soil fertility, which is going to help us move those crops that right now are like \$450 per bed, to that \$500 per bed number where we need them to be.

Chris: When you talk about labor on the farm, how many people do you have working for you?

Shiloh: Last year we had between four and five people, and the reason that number is between four and five is, we had some flux. Some people come early and leave, and we had a couple employees leave a little later in the season. Last year was not a good example. However, we had only planned to have four last year, and at one point we had five, and it was the most amazing thing ever. We were able to stay ahead of the game when we had five employees, and it made us realize that for our scale in our production, five employees is actually the right number.

In order to move Jason and myself off the farm crew a little more, and to do some of this more intentional management, we need those five people, and we need to do really good intentional training with that crew. Now, our goal for our crew this year, this is a symptom of growing in the south too, so we have a longer growing season than farmers in New York, for example, at least in the field. It's really hot, and it's really humid.

A thing that happens here is, sometime in August, we call it, we get a crew die-off. Some of that is people just not being able to take it and they leave, or all, including the managers, are all moving a lot slower, we're getting a lot less done in the same amount of hours. We're pretty strict. We only work eight hour days; well, at least the crew only works eight hour days, and we try to stick to that as well.



But, this year, we're trying to have the crew, by August, ready to run the farm without us. What's going to happen in August, this is part of our intentional ... And they're going to know that goal. We're all going to work together toward that goal, and then when we get to August, everybody, in staggered timeframes, are going to get paid vacation of at least three days plus a weekend, so hopefully someone can take a break, go someplace else for five days. That'll be staggered. Then, when everybody; all the crew is back from their paid vacation, then Jason and Shiloh get to take a vacation, for a few days anyway, so that we all ... During that crew die-off in August, we all get to renew and rejuvenate, and feel rested so we can come back. Because our energy level is pretty low in the fall.

In the fall season, which we have here, we have a whole giant fall season that we can grow here in the warm, humid south. Our energy level is so low, and typically our fall seasons have not been superb. We're not quite on it. We recognize that a very, very large part of that is our energy level, and that that energy level just seeps down into the crew, and we're all just tired and worn out for the fall season, and so we're not performing. We're trying to ... This year, our goal is to really prevent crew die-off in August by providing that vacation and that rejuvenation at a time when they need it the most, and then the goal is for them to be able to run the farm so we can leave for probably three days.

Jason: Yeah. Shiloh was 25 years old when she was working for Alex and Betsy, and they gave her, Alex and Betsy at Peregrine Farm gave her her first paid vacation ever. Which, at the time, we just thought was the coolest thing in the world. What a great perk as an employee to get a paid vacation. But, now we recognize the enlightened self-interest in that decision where they had someone coming back for the fall who had a lot of energy, who was feeling really positively about the farm. We're adopting that strategy. We've interviewed a few people for positions already this season, but we haven't really advertised that fact that we're doing paid vacations. Maybe people will hear the podcast and we'll get a lot of people interested in that.

Chris: All right. That's TumblingShoalsFarm.com, right?

Jason: You got it.

Shiloh: Right.

Chris: Okay, so there you go, folks. Tell me about your Haygroves. I think there's probably a lot of people out there who know when I say "Haygrove" what I'm talking about, and I think there's probably a lot of people that are scratching their heads. If you could start at the very basic level of like, what is a Haygrove, and then how are you using that in your operation?

Jason: It's a high tunnel, and Haygrove is a company of high tunnel manufacturers that started in England, specifically with the purpose of keeping rainwater off of strawberries so that they could grow strawberries in the grey, humid UK environment. We decided to have those structures on the farm to keep rainwater off of tomatoes,



because in the south, growing tomatoes outside, at least ripe tomatoes, is a very questionable enterprise, because we have so many tomato diseases.

Basically, our structure is 90 by 100, and they will build them to fill any amount of space that you want. They'll happily manufacture them to fit your specifications. We have four 24-foot bays that are connected ... There are five lines of posts that get screwed into the ground, so this is different than our Atlas high tunnels, for example, that just have straight pipes. These actually have a screw bit on the bottom of a post, and they screw into the ground, and then the top of that post is a Y-shaped pipe that the rows attach to. These four bays of high tunnels are sharing three lengths of posts, and then the two outside lengths of posts just have the one set of hoops attached to them. They're a little simpler than other high tunnels in terms of the amount of hardware that goes into them. These are just bows, and the three sets of hoops on each end of each high tunnel bay is well-braced with all different kinds of supports that go in there to make those three hoops at the end of the bay sturdy.

Then, the other sets of hoops the whole way down the line of the bay are just connected with some high-tensile wire, which I find really clever. Those hoops are essentially just standing on the leg posts, sticking up in the air, and then there's a strand of high-tensile wire that runs down the middle of the top to keep those bows from swaying back and forth. But, they're really not supporting a lot of weight in the sideways direction.

The plastic goes on top of that, and the thing that's really cool about is, with our Atlas high tunnels there is a wiggle-wire track down the sidewalls, crisscrossed ropes over the top of the Haygrove structure to hold the plastic on top of it. All of that stuff goes up and comes down really pretty easily. It takes us, well, we have the number somewhere, but a few days with a crew to tear it down, move it to another location, and put it back up. We're doing it just for tunnels, or, excuse me, we're doing it just for tomatoes. The structure gets rotated around those 12 units of the farm; the 12 90 by 100 units, and just moves right along with our regular crop rotation.

Shiloh: It's not a season-extension tool for us, it is a climate-altering tool. We looked at some pretty rough tomato production years out in the field versus in the high tunnel, and we thought, "Well, we can either move to California, or we can make the plants believe they're in California." Which is not totally true, because we still have humidity, but keeping the rain off tomatoes in this super ... We struggle with too much water more than not enough water in the southeast. I call it "the tomato umbrella". The only job of this structure is to keep the rain off the tomatoes; off the leaves, for disease prevention to keep us from losing tomato crops to disease.

Disease is our biggest challenge of farming in the southeast. Jason and I both read the John Jeavons How To Grow More Vegetables On So Little Land, or I can't remember the title, but this bio-intensive, really close spacing, using all surfaces of the bed. And we both gardened that way prior to our farming career. But, every year, we actually get bio-disintensive. We're widening our spacing, because disease is such a problem, and that close spacing and the hot, humid, wet environment is really just a disease paradise. Every year we increase our spacing on things and grow fewer plants and,



consequently, get higher yields.

Jason: Do you remember, Shiloh, the yield increase from the tomatoes from the last year of outside production to the first year of inside?

Shiloh: Yes, it was five-fold.

Jason: Yeah, so we switched from outdoor production on our tomatoes. We had 24 beds in that 90 by 100 foot field, and we put them under the Haygrove canopy; 16 beds, and our yields were five times the number of pounds of tomatoes in the area with fewer plants.

Shiloh: The same thing happened with strawberries. If we have strawberries, we don't feel like we can sell retail price a whole Haygrove, which is ... ours is roughly a quarter-acre, worth of strawberries, so we put them in a high tunnel, which is 66 by 30 feet. The same thing happened ... We had them out in the field in 2009, which isn't really fair, because 2009 was a complete flood disaster, but we've moved them, and that was 3,000 plants out in the field. Week two of harvesting from 900 plants in the hoop house, we surpassed the yield out in the field. Again, that's just keeping the rain off of them; those super wimpy plants like tomatoes and strawberries.

Chris: You mentioned how important quality is as a marketing niche for you guys at farmer's market. What else are you doing besides keeping the rain off, controlling the disease, to ensure that you've got quality produce?

Shiloh: We're giving a lot away. I hope our customers don't listen, because they're generally horrified by how much we throw away of, specifically crops that are really disease susceptible. We grow a lot of sweet peppers; ripe sweet peppers, and the edges of ... I know they're grown outside, probably someday we will have those in a Haygrove too, but right now they're grown outside, and the edges of our fields are very colorful.

Chris: Nice.

Shiloh: We try to cull very, very hard, and we try to do that out in the field. We don't need to be paying people to be hauling rejects in, so we try to cull heavy in the field, and then we cull again in the pack shed.

Chris: Okay.

Jason: For the things like kale, and collards; the greens, we've got a pretty good system of moving from the field into the hydro-cooling, and then rapidly into the lock-in cooler. That certainly helps with those products that can be wilted or whatever.

Shiloh: We also try ... We can push the seasons a little bit to get a little earlier or a little bit later, but we don't try to grow things out of their season. One thing I notice about all these farmers in the north, who, coincidentally, are the ones who have the time to write the books.



Chris: Right!

Shiloh: Is, you know, they're growing lettuce year round, and that is not a crop ... Or at least all summer season long. Lettuce is just not a crop that is going to thrive in July and August here. In fact, our quality ... We just don't even try it in July and August. There's no lettuce coming off this farm in July and August. The quality ... It is way too hot for that cold season crop. We also don't grow kale and collards. We struggle with getting any kind of summer green during July and August, because it's just too hot and humid for those crops to thrive. Then, when they're not thriving, then you run into insect pressure, disease pressure, and the quality suffers.

We tried one year to grow lettuce out of the lettuce season in July with a shade cloth and misters, and it was ... It tasted really okay, but it was really funny-shaped, and really took away from our main summer season crops like tomatoes. We don't do that anymore. Instead, we focus on, "Well, what thrives in the heat? Well, eggplant, and okra, and tomatoes, and peppers. Those thrive in the heat." We can do five, six sessions of tomatoes here in the southeast during the main season. We just don't try to grow those things out of season. I know it defies our customer's desire to have whatever they want whenever they want, but we have to do some education there probably. But yeah, so, another strategy for quality control is growing within the proper season.

Jason: We do periodically lose CSA customers because they don't understand the seasonality of the produce, but that's just something that happens.

Chris: I think that's true no matter where you're farming. Tell me a little bit about your outdoor production system. With three acres of vegetables, are you guys operating on a tractor scale? Are you guys running BCS 2-wheel tractors? How do you guys have that set up?

Shiloh: We have one tractor on the farm, and it's a Kubota L-3400 small-scale 34 horsepower four-wheel drive. It does not have a bucket. We use the tractor for all of the field preparation. We pull a crop out, we'll use the tractor to disc the crop residue in. We're on a pretty sandy loam soil, so we do subsoil, but we don't do it every year. It's probably more like every other year. I do track it for organic certification, but I don't know that I look at it quite as often as I should; when we subsoil.

We do everything in raised beds. All of our fields are exactly the same dimension. They're 32-inch wide beds by 90-feet long, and there are 24 beds in every field. That way, we can move trellis material. We use landscape fabric, we do not grow on black plastic. The benefits of growing on black plastic are very well-documented, but I once worked on a farm where I had to pull that stuff up at the end of the season, and it was absolutely the worst job that mankind has ever invented. We don't use the black plastic, so to get the benefits without having that horror show at the end of the year, we grow on landscape fabric, which is more expensive upfront to invest in, but we reuse it, so we have some 10 year old landscape fabric on the farm. It is much easier to pull up. Even if weeds have crept in over the edges, you can yank on it. It's sturdy,



and we reuse it.

The tractor is used to raise up those beds, and that's just with a bedder that throws the soil up kind of in a windrow-look, and then we come through behind that with a rototiller, which squares off the bed, and then we lay the landscape fabric by hand. Most of our fields and the landscape fabric, we use straw in the aisles between the landscape fabric. We recently moved to just wider fabric in tomatoes in the Haygrove, so there's actually no straw in there, it's just wider fabric. Same thing for strawberries in the tunnel. Most of our crops are grown on that system; the landscape fabric with or without straw in the aisles. Then we do a couple fields of bare ground, so our lettuce is all grown on bare ground, and we hand-transplant. We're using those lovely, popular, sought after Winstrip greenhouse trays. We have a passive solar greenhouse. Then, we hand-transplant everything. I should know the number of transplants, but we're a small farm with 90-foot beds, and we're growing in these landscape fabrics.

This is what makes the most sense for us. It's not the easiest on our back, but you get a five-person crew on it, and we can whip that our pretty quickly. Once the landscape fabric is down, everything is manual labor. We try to avoid most hand-pulling of weeds, but it would be a person with a hoe. We do some tractor aisle cultivation in those bare-ground beds; the lettuce, and beets, and carrots; the direct-seeded things. Those are also bare ground; still in those 90-foot beds, 32-inch wide, but those are ... It's just a few fields really that are still on bare ground, because as we've moved toward eliminating weeds on the farm, from firefighting we've learned that the investment in landscape fabric is really the, , it's not, because there's some labor there, but it's really been a huge problem-solver for us; to prevent the weeds rather than try to stay on top of them.

Jason: Yeah, it's actually for long-season crops like the tomatoes and peppers.

Chris: And with that, it's time for us to turn to our lightning round. First we're going to get a quick word from a sponsor, and then we'll be right back.

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And we're back with Jason Roehrig and Shiloh Avery. We're going to do the lightning round here at the end of the show. Shiloh, what's your favorite tool on the farm?



- Shiloh: My favorite tool on the farm? The smartphone.
- Chris: Really?
- Shiloh: Which is new for us in the last couple of years. Yeah. It's been ... Yeah. There's just a lot of things where you're writing it down, and then you're having to try to remember to look back at that. If we have a crop fallow on the field we can take a picture right there and email it to our extension agent. We try to do record-keeping on there, which is pretty immediate, and will eliminate ... What happened up until we had smartphones was, hopefully things got written down, and then I, in the winter, took all that writing and put it into ... We manage the farm as a database. Got a Access database management program, and now we put it all into there, and we're eliminating that office labor step with a smartphone, but there's just this immediate ... You can look things up just right there. It's pretty revolutionary for us.
- Chris: In that access database that you're using for managing the farm, is that something you guys built yourselves?
- Shiloh: It is. Access is not necessarily intuitive. Simply, we did that, and there was a lot of ... Well, not blood, but definitely tears in developing it. It's not perfect, but since we've done that, there are management programs out there that I can't attest to, because we built this one and we use it, so I haven't actually really in-depth checked out ... I know the guy came and talked to me for a long time on the farm, and I feel like that's probably developed into a really nice system, but again, I actually haven't used it. It would be nice for somebody who has used it to tell people about it.
- Jason: That database has been incredibly valuable for us to be able to actually use the numbers that we're keeping track of. We can look at any bed at the farm any time during the season in that database and see, not only what we planted, when we planted, how it was fertilized, but also how much we harvested, how much of that we sold, how much money we've made on that bed. The database, as compared to a spreadsheet, like an Excel spreadsheet, makes it really easy to use the information.
- Shiloh: The information flow is really nice.
- Chris: Jason, you said that you guys are firm believers in stealing other people's good ideas. What's the best idea that you've stolen?
- Jason: Oh my goodness. Well, the Haygrove; the tomato structure, we stole from our mentors Alex and Betsy Hitt and that has worked really well for us. We talked about the farmer's market stand. That was a good one. I'm sure that there are some individual crops that we've stolen and started growing. They're not jumping out to me right now. Shiloh, do you have any?
- Shiloh: I think the landscape fabric idea, which we also stole from Alex and Betsy.
- Jason: Yeah. Yes.



- Chris: It's always good to have somebody who's a fertile source of ideas.
- Jason: Yeah. Our local foods community is a little bit behind in its development of where the central North Carolina local foods community is. We can always readily go there and just ask, "Oh, what's new? What are the chefs interested in?" And be a year or two ahead of what's happening here. It's really a good advantage for us.
- Chris: Shiloh, what's your favorite crop to grow?
- Shiloh: Well, my favorite crop to eat is peppers, so I like the pepper crop. I noticed this funny thing about my favorite crops to eat maybe get an inordinate amount of space on the farm. We grow a lot of sweet peppers. They've expanded outside of their one field. We're growing more of those. My favorite variety of tomato maybe gets an inordinate amount of space. But, pepper's my favorite crop to eat. Also, we've been growing this Aji Dulce pepper for 10 years. It's like a habanero without the heat, and recently, a distillery picked up this pepper, and they're putting it in a vodka. That's a really cool thing to grow, because it's a really neat product that they're making, and it's kind of just fun to do cross-marketing of this little pepper that we grow.
- Jason: Yeah, it's called Flying Pepper Vodka by Faor Game Distillery. You probably have to come to North Carolina to get it, but look for it while you're here.
- Chris: Awesome. Jason, what's your favorite crop to grow?
- Jason: I would second Shiloh on the peppers. They're just so varied, and beautiful, and delicious. We have just a beautiful pepper display at farmer's market. It's abundant, and colorful. I'm right there with her. The chilies are exciting. We always add some new chilies every season. We've become known for that, so that's definitely a good one. It's also a very difficult crop to produce, and we do it well. It's given us this ... We're filling a market niche, and we are building a reputation for ourselves. When I show back up at farmer's market 1st of May, I will have customers come up and ask me when the peppers will be ready, which, here, doesn't happen until the 1st of August, so they're thinking about them all winter.
- Shiloh: Speaking of the best idea that we ever stole from Alex, that pepper roaster is a pretty good idea.
- Jason: Oh yeah, good point!
- Shiloh: Which, we take the pepper roaster ... Yeah. We take the pepper roaster to ... This comes directly from Alex. He stole it from New Mexico, but that's fine. Take it to market, and during peak pepper-season, people can buy peppers and then you roast them for them right at market so that scent ... It's theater. There's this open flame roasting peppers, and the scent wafts, and it smells delicious. That's really popular. That was one of the better ideas that we stole from Alex.
- Chris: Jason, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning-farmer self one thing, what



would it be?

Jason: I've thought about this question, and there are really two things that I would tell myself. The first is that ... to aspire to more. The income target that we set for ourselves, we could do better, and so to aim for higher I think would be something. The second, we really love where we live, and we chose this spot with a lot of thought, but I would consider looking at bigger markets for our options, because I think you referred to the Minneapolis Saint Paul market as infinite. We do not have infinite markets. Going to one of those infinite markets might have made things [01:29:30] easier to begin with.

Chris: Shiloh, same question for you. If you could go back in time and tell your beginning-farmer-self one thing, what would it be?

Shiloh: I think ... We have a phrase we say a lot on the farm, "Know thyself." And by knowing thyself, being clear about your expectations. We struggled for the first few years with getting the right people working on the farm, and then really managing those people. We found that just being very clear ... We have written expectations now; being very clear about, "This is what you can expect from us. This is what we expect from you." Has really gone a long way in people management. To avoid that trouble early on; being clear about what you expect and what people can expect from you.

Chris: Jason and Shiloh, thank you so much for being on the show today!

Jason: Well thank you!

Shiloh: Thank you! We were honored to be here!

Chris: All right! Wrapping things up here, I'll say again that this is episode 102 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, and you can find the notes for this show at FarmerToFarmerPodcast.com by looking on the episodes page, or just searching for Tumbling; that's T-U-M-B-L-I-N-G.

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