



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast

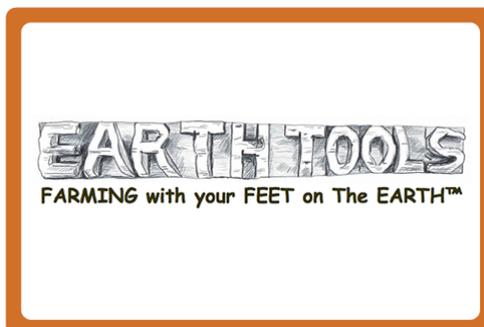


EPISODE 107

Hans and Katie Bishop of PrairiErth Farm on Connecting with Customers and Bringing a Spouse into the Farming Operation

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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer podcast, episode 107, and this is your host, Chris Blanchard. My guests today, Hans and Katie Bishop, raise 15 acres of certified organic vegetables at PrairiErth Farm in central Illinois. Marketing about \$250k worth of produce through a farmers market, CSA, and wholesale outlets. With about 50% of their sales going through one farmers market in a mid-size city, Katie and Hans had a lot to say about how they make that work from the details in their display and market stand set up, their digital checkout system and the value its data brings to their farming operation, and their farmers market magic sauce; the passion that Katie has to connect with their customers.

Katie digs into the nuts and bolts about how she connects with customers at farmers market, and through social media. Hans started growing vegetables at his family's operation in 2009, while he and Katie both lived in the city. Over several years, Hans made the transition to full time farming, and then Katie followed. Then they moved out to the farm. Hans and Katie share how they knew it was time to make the various transitions, how they prepared to make those changes, and how they divided up the responsibilities on the farm. Hans and Katie also provide an honest look at the challenges of farming together, and at bringing a spouse into an ongoing operation.

We also dig into the shipping relationships that help PrairiErth Farm dig into the Chicagoland market, how they've mechanized their operation to retain and attract good help, and how they've changed and continued to improve their employee management practices. I'm also excited to share that Hans and Katie were selected as the 2017 Moses Organic Farmers of the Year. An award that recognizes organic farmers who practice outstanding land stewardship, innovation, and outreach.

Before we get started today, I'd also like to share that by the time this episode goes live, the Farmer to Farmer podcast will have been downloaded over 1 million times. That's something I simply could not have imagined two years ago from the day this episode goes live, when I was recording intros to the show in the middle of the night at a hotel across the street from the Moses Organic Farming conference.

Thank you so much to all of you listeners, all of my guests, and all of our sponsors for the show. Every one of you has added tremendous meaning to my life and my work. Every one of you has made this show possible, made it what it is today. Especially thank you to my family. Mainly my wife, Angie, who's put up



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with late nights, technical problems, and my stubbornness when it comes to getting episodes out on time, even when it makes no sense at all. Your love and support through this and everything else we've been through baby, means the world to me. To my daughter Isabelle, who's been through at least a thousand sound checks and who periodically ends up making me dinner while I'm editing. Also to my assistant Karli, who makes everything go live week after week. Okay, I'm done. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

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Hans and Katie Bishop, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer podcast.

Hans Bishop: Thanks Chris.

Katie Bishop: Hey Chris.

Hans Bishop: It's great to be here.

Chris Blanchard: Glad you could join us today. I would like to start off, as we usually do, by having you give us the lay of the land there at PrairiErth Farm in Atlanta, Illinois. How many acres are you guys farming? Where exactly is Atlanta, Illinois? How are you guys marketing your produce?

Hans Bishop: The farm itself is 300 acres. We own about 50 of it, and the rest is rented. It's been rented since before my time, and staying in the family as far as renting agreement is concerned. There's a foreseeable future. We do 15 acres of vegetable and my dad does about 200 acres of organic corn and soybeans, and the vegetables are certified organic as well. The rest of the land is not tillable and pasture, which we have cows or we make hay on. By we, I mean my dad does that.

Yeah, he's been farming since the late '70s, when he purchased the owned land and it's the farm that I grew up on, so I've got a lot of history here. Atlanta is located in the heart of central Illinois, pretty much right in the middle between



Bloomington and Springfield, so we've got a pretty good area to market. We do sell wholesale in Bloomington, Champaign or Banner, and Springfield. We have 150 member CSA, mainly in Bloomington and a few members in a small town of Lincoln, which is the county seat of the county that we're in. Then we do a farmers market in Bloomington as well. We also sell to a few distributors in Chicago. We're spread out, as far as our marketing as well.

Chris Blanchard: How does that marketing divide up, when you're looking at your markets? How much CSA? How much wholesale? How much is going into farmers market?

Katie Bishop: We are about 50% farmers market, about 25% CSA, and 25% wholesale. It's a really clean even divide.

Chris Blanchard: I feel like a lot of farms that have CSAs, that that tends to be the major portion of their operation, and then the other pieces fill in around that. Even if it is a 50%, 25%, 25% split, but to have that 50% in farmers market, that's a pretty heavy emphasis on the farmers market side of things.

Katie Bishop: Yeah it is. We have a great, great farmers market in Bloomington and a really strong following and support there. We're also able to charge a pretty fair price for our produce at the market, which helps obviously. We continue to put a lot of effort into that market, just because it brings in so much business.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me a little bit about Bloomington. How big of a town is that?

Hans Bishop: Bloomington is about 120,000, I guess with normal Illinois, the smaller version of the twin cities. At least that's what they're called around here, the twin cities, but it's about that. Katie and I actually both worked at State Farm, which is where we met. The corporate headquarters is there in Bloomington. They employ about what? 12,000, 13,000 people, that's a pretty significant chunk. There's also Illinois State University there, and I don't know how many people they employ, but that certainly I think helps with awareness of the importance of organic food and organic agriculture in our community.

Chris Blanchard: With those three outlets, farmers market, wholesale, CSA, do you mind sharing about how much your grossing every year?

Hans Bishop: We gross \$250,000 across the board with all of those things, with all of those outlets combined.

Chris Blanchard: You have the farmers market going out on Saturday, what are you guys doing for the CSA? Is that a straight box plan?

Hans Bishop: We do a market style pickup. Basically Katie and I always do the CSA pickup. It gives the CSA customers a chance to interact and talk with us. We basically set things up just like we would at farmers market. Instead of prices or whatever that are on our boxes it'll say, "Take a bunch of carrots or a bunch of beets," and folks can pick which specific bunch of carrots they want or a bunch of beets that



they want. We also, at the end of the line, offer in exchange tables. We'll bring six or eight different things, and they may or may not be in the share that week, and then somebody if they don't like beets they can swap them out for something else that's never a guarantee as far as what's on there, but it's also a good barometer to see if everybody's getting tired of kale if there's a table full of kale.

- Katie Bishop: Yeah, but it's usually fennel or collards that always end up on our exchange table, and kohlrabi, that one's always on there too.
- Hans Bishop: Well, and rightfully so.
- Katie Bishop: It is a good way to see what people are interested in or what things they're taking first. We're really excited, actually just yesterday we found and purchased a refrigerated truck. A real refrigerated box truck and that goes towards our goal of offering some home delivery options for our CSA members this year. We're pretty stoked about that one.
- Chris Blanchard: How many CSA members do you guys have?
- Katie Bishop: During the regular season, we do 150 for our summer share. Then we have two winter CSA programs that each have between 40 and 60 members.
- Chris Blanchard: With the winter CSA, are you guys doing a lot of season extension or is that mostly root crops?
- Hans Bishop: It's mainly root crops. Although, we do have about 10k square feet of high tunnels, and usually we try to sell out for market all of those through the first CSA extension early in the year or late in the year I guess it actually is. We try to be done with season extension by Christmas time. That way we're not out there covering and uncovering things in the green house, or trying to baby stuff along so it makes it through a really cold snap.
- Chris Blanchard: I want to pivot back to the farmers market a little bit because I know Katie, you've been doing a lot of work on outreach to other farmers about your guys' farmers market set up lately and how you make that work. With it being such a big part of a pretty big operation, if I'm doing the math right, that'd be about \$125,000 a year that you guys are making at a farmers market in not a giant city. What's your magic sauce?
- Katie Bishop: I think a lot of it just comes from a real strong passion to connect with all my customers. That's the message that I share with all of my members. There's so many attempts from major corporations and grocery stores to try and make it seem like they're providing local food. The only way as small farmers that we can combat that is to really exemplify the relationships that we can build with our customers. I don't know, I think my secret sauce as you put it, is just I know my customers' names. I identify my core group of customers, and then I make sure and connect with them in lots of different ways.



I'll have a customer come up that I know really likes heirloom tomatoes, and so I'll give them an heirloom tomato that's new for us and ask them to tell me what they think about it. I know their dogs' names and their kids' names, and I connect with them on Facebook. I just build relationships with people and they're genuine relationships. I'm really grateful for them supporting our farm and being enthusiastic. I'm not forcing it, but I pay attention to them. I think that's really important to building a real loyal following.

- Chris Blanchard: At the Bloomington market, you and Hans are there every weekend?
- Katie Bishop: Yes. Hans doesn't really want to be, but I love it. I do, I love it, it's a great way for me to get to see the immediate payback when customers are totally excited about what you're bringing them. Yeah, we're definitely there and we're engaging with them constantly. I always make sure I'm either checking out or I'm available to answer questions about the produce. When one of us aren't there, if we have something going on and we can't be there, which is only about once a year, but when that happens our customers ask, "Where's Hans at?" They're looking for him, and the same for me. I know they're looking for me too.
- Chris Blanchard: Does Hans sit there with a grubby look on his face like, "I don't want to be here?" Does he actually get up and engage?
- Katie Bishop: [00:13:00] No, he doesn't. He just has that look that's Hans. He's there. He's better. He's getting better, he is. He's engaging with the customers a lot more. They know he's a lot more introverted than I am, and they appreciate Hans for Hans.
- Hans Bishop: It's definitely a step outside of my comfort zone to be around that many people and usually by the end of the day, I'm pretty drained because it just sucks the energy right out of me, but it's funny because I can come home after the farmers market and still be able to do field work that needs to get done that maybe didn't get done during the week or something. I've got an unlimited amount of energy to do that.
- Chris Blanchard: Yeah, it's a different kind of energy flow I think.
- Hans Bishop: Right.
- Chris Blanchard: What else? Katie you talk about building relationships and obviously, a farmers market, I think that's a little bit different than CSA because you don't have the same people showing up every week and they haven't made the same kinds of commitments. It also is something that takes time and energy. It takes work. How do you find the time and energy to do that, and does it fit into a system? Is it just more on a, because you're extroverted and you're a sensitive person, you just get in the groove with it?
- Katie Bishop: I think it's a little bit of both. Hans jokes that I'm always on my phone, but the



truth is, I do make a lot of time for that connection. Whether it's email or Facebook or Instagram or whatever. That is something that's just natural for me. I enjoy connecting with people that way. I found something that I really like to do but I have to make time for, is to hand write thank you cards. I think it's really powerful for a customer to receive a hand written, personalized thank you card from us. I have to make a point to do that every week, and identify the people I want to connect with and write that out. That's something that's scheduled into my week. Otherwise, I think everything else is just really natural for me.

- Chris Blanchard: When you talk about connecting with people through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, are those your personal accounts or have you set up a separate community for PrairiErth Farm?
- Katie Bishop: I have a separate community for PrairiErth Farm. I've got multiple different communities. I have the standard business page for the farm and then I have private groups that I've created for my customers. I also had found that a lot of my customers want to connect on my personal pages too, so it's become an extension of that.
- Chris Blanchard: Have you found any challenges with that? With that dividing line between your personal and your professional stuff?
- Katie Bishop: Oh yeah, especially this year with politics. I've wanted to be a lot more opinionated than I actually have been, so just trying to be aware of my customers' perception of me. I actually created a separate Instagram account that isn't really public, so that I can have my own identity, separate from the farm. That's helped a little bit, but it doesn't hurt, but I'm not sharing political stuff. It's probably helped me stay just a little bit more sane anyway. I definitely have to be aware of it.
- Chris Blanchard: One of the things that I've seen, noticed on your social media is that you guys do a lot of graphics. You take a picture, and then you've got words pasted over that in various fonts, you've got little, "Make it a local Thanksgiving," graphics that you've put together. It goes beyond just adding words to pictures, and I really like that. What are using to get that work done?
- Katie Bishop: [00:17:00] It's really important because they say you have less than half a second of your audience's attention on social media. You got to use a photograph and a lot of times people don't read the text in the actual message, so putting it on the photograph helps. I use an app on my phone. It's a free app called, Pronto [The app is actually called Phonto – Chris], I believe. I don't know if it's available for Android, but I know it is for iPhone, the best one right? Then on my computer, I use a program called PicMonkey. It's P-I-C Monkey, and I believe it's \$30 a year and you can create graphics or edit photos.
- Chris Blanchard: Yeah that seems like, that kind of an investment's nothing for what you guys are getting out of it. Clearly, you're using that really good effect.



- Katie Bishop: Yes. You could obviously use Photoshop or similar programs like that, it's just there's a really high learning curve and PicMonkey's really really easy to use. That's why we went that way.
- Chris Blanchard: Great, really appreciate that suggestion Katie. Hans, do you participate in that online community or is that really something that's in Katie's bailiwick.
- Hans Bishop: That's really something that Katie has worked on and gotten really good at. It's cool to take pictures of equipment and share them with maybe a small farming group or something that I'm a part of on Facebook, but I'm not the one that's connecting with customers. I don't think that's my forte, and it's just a lot better coming from Katie because she knows how to connect with the people that are buying our produce.
- Chris Blanchard: Connections and relationships are good and they're important, but of course you have to back that up with produce, right? Are you guys doing anything special with your displays or with your actual set up of your market stand?
- Katie Bishop: Yeah, we're very thoughtful about what we do at the market. There's a lot of different things, but I create my farmers market stand like a store. Everything has to be very clean and tidy and it looks abundant, and unique. I don't want my stand to look like everybody else's stand because our stand becomes our personal brand, it's our trademark. I want people, when they come into my stand and they purchase a bunch of kale, I want them to go home and then they're going to really love that kale and I want them to remember to come back to me and but it again. I can't look like everybody else. I have to look different.
- Chris Blanchard: What do you do to look different? How do you make your farm stand look unique?
- Katie Bishop: Our stand, we definitely use color, a lot. Our vegetables are displayed with some thought about how we're staging them. We're not going to have just a wall of green. We're going to fill in some scarlet turnips and some purple kohlrabi and just we use color a lot in how we display things. We also keep it vertical, so we use double stacked wooden crates so that people can see it from across the street. I really, really hate displaying produce in the harvest that you're using out in the field. Especially if they're just laying flat on the table, because people can't see them when they're walking by, so why would they want to stop?
- We cover our tables, because our tables are really funky and dirty, and I don't want my customers to see that. We cover them with burlap tablecloths. Then the farm has got so many cool aesthetics to it, old enamelware pans and egg baskets, and all kinds of stuff. We use that to create that farmers market vibe at our stand.
- Chris Blanchard: Do you guys use a linear set up? Are all your tables lined up in a row? Do you



guys have something where people are invited in and under the tent? How do you have that arranged?

Katie Bishop: Yeah, we put our tables towards the back of the tent, so people can walk in. Again, create it like a store front. We're not standing in the way of our produce or our checkout area's not blocking the produce, because again, we want people to see it from across the street. We have it set up so people can come in and shop like they would at a store. We also take up a lot of space. We invest in extra market space so that we can spread out, and people don't feel cramped in our spot.

In the early spring, when we don't have a ton of produce, that means we can do extra things. We've brought a tractor, we brought Hans' [Allis Chalmers] G in one time on a trailer. Let kids climb on it, and get their picture taken. We use that extra space as much as we can.

Chris Blanchard: I really like that. I see a lot of times on the online groups, people will be complaining about how much the fees are at farmers market, and I'm guessing that you guys just don't care that much about that if you're buying extra space you don't need every week of the year?

Katie Bishop: Oh, it's so cheap. Again, this is my store. If I was going to rent space in an actual working mortar store to sell my produce, it would be way more expensive than what I'm paying in my fees for the market. I think it's a steal for us, personally. Plus, you just factor that into your budget, right? I make sure that I make that back. What I'm paying in my market fees, I make back over the next, the first two or three markets actually.

Hans Bishop: One other thing that we did Chris was, we went through a pretty extensive branding project last year. We developed a new logo that stands out. Nobody else at the farmers market has that. There was also some pressure to come up with customized twist ties, if we were selling into grocery stores. We've just brought that along with us to the farmers market as well. When somebody stops at every stand and maybe buys a little something from everybody, and they really like our kale, they can see right there that it's a PrairiErth Farm twist tie and they can remember exactly where that came from. We're just finding other ways to try to stay in our customers' minds throughout the week as well.

Chris Blanchard: Are there a lot of other certified organic vegetable farms at the farmers market?

Hans Bishop: There's one other certified organic farm at the farmers market selling produce. I don't think there's anybody else who is certified organic selling meats or other products.

Chris Blanchard: Have you found that to be an important distinction at market?

Katie Bishop: Yeah, we actually just got an email today asking about our CSA program and she wanted to make sure that we were certified organic. She said that she was just



diagnosed with stage four breast cancer, and she was changing her eating habits. That was really important to her. That was a pretty powerful email to receive and really solidifies our why. Why are we doing this? I was excited to be able to respond back and say, "Yup, we definitely are organic, and here's our certification to prove it."

- Chris Blanchard: Yeah, I know that that stamp of legitimacy can be a really important part of certification. It may not matter to everybody, but for those people that it matters to, it clears things up and it answers all the questions.
- Katie Bishop: Right.
- Hans Bishop: The more that we've sold into wholesale markets, certainly been a benefit to us to have that because Katie and I aren't there to back up our product when it gets dropped off. Because we use somebody else to take our products to Chicago for us, or even in the store and Champaign or Banner or Bloomington. When somebody's picking up a product of ours, we're not there to say, "Yeah, this is how we grew it." Having that certified organic or having the organic certification has really helped us more quickly move into that wholesale marketplace.
- Katie Bishop: Yeah, but I will say, our chefs that we work with, they don't really seem that interested in a certification. I think they want it to be grown to sustainably or organically, but they definitely don't appreciate the price increase because it's certified organic.
- Chris Blanchard: I think for restaurants, it's a lot harder to have that label carry through to the final customer. At a grocery store, it's right there. It says, "Hey, I'm certified organic." It's much more difficult in a menu to be like, "Oh, we've got certified organic carrots from PrairiErth Farm and then we've got beets from someplace else."
- Katie Bishop: Yeah, I think it says, "Certified Organic," part doesn't tell the story necessarily that the chefs need it to. As much as it does, "Local farmer from down the road beets."
- Chris Blanchard: I want to come back to the wholesale marketing in just a second, but I got one more question about the farmers market. Which is, with the amount of money that you guys are putting through there in a year, do you have a checkout system or are you guys working out of aprons like we always did at my farmers market stand?
- Katie Bishop: Oh god no. We are terrible at math and making change. No. We use the Square system. We have iPad system, older iPads that we had loaded on with the Square software that allows us to take credit cards. They have a free program, it actually has pictures of the items, so you don't even have to type in kale. There's a picture of kale and you press the kale button, and it rings it up for \$3, and it makes the change which is nice. Most importantly for us, it provides excellent



records. I can see how much of what I'm selling and when. I can see how many transactions, what my average transaction amount is at any given time during the market.

It provides receipts for my customers, but if they use their credit card it also allows me to have record of them, so I can contact them over email or text. It has marketing features, and then it also allows you to use gift cards. Which we use for another CSA program that we have, a market buck style CSA program. We can't live without that software. It's really really important to us doing business at the market.

Chris Blanchard: When you talk about all of the data that it collects, especially the sales data, is that information that you've turned around and used? Things like, how many transactions you're doing per hour at the farmers market? Is that something that actually has had some practical manifestations in your operation?

Katie Bishop: Definitely for staffing the market. We can tell when our busier times are. For the average amount per transaction is a really big number for us because I can gauge based on the items that we're bringing how successful it is. For instance, if I make a little soup kit and it costs \$7, my average amount for transactions going to go up when people are buying that versus just buying a couple pounds of potatoes and maybe a carrot. It's increasing that average amount per transaction up. If I put garlic by the checkout stand, those are the types of things where I can watch and see how they're changing that average amount per transaction.

Chris Blanchard: Rather than just using your impressions, you're actually able to look and review the data on that?

Katie Bishop: Right.

Chris Blanchard: Nice, really nice.

Hans Bishop: It works good too for harvesting for the market in such so we can see, after Labor Day that friends are going down and we go from selling 200 bunches of carrots to market to 150 towards the middle of September, to 100 towards the first part of October. Then we can plan those trends, or plan for those trends and we can see when certain things usually come in from the field of when we have our first zucchini or whatever of the season and try to tweak some production to maybe get it a week earlier than we had it the week before. Not week before, but the year before. It's also good from the production side of things too.

Katie Bishop: Oh yeah, I think in the middle of the season, there's produce going in so many different directions. Wholesale, CSA, market, it's hard to keep track of where it's all going. I think this year, we looked back and we realized we're really not selling very much eggplant at the market. I don't know that we would've known that if we weren't keeping really good records about what we were bringing and



what we were selling. We're going through as much eggplant as we are because we keep forcing it on our family members, and I think we're selling a little bit of it wholesale, but without having that information we wouldn't know that we really need to scale back on how much eggplant we're growing.

Chris Blanchard: Is having people go through that checkout process, does that slow you down? I know one of the things that I really liked about the farmers ... I know that one of the things that I really like about just using the money belt, right? Is that I can just sit there and we can make transactions just as fast as I can go. I didn't have to wait. I wasn't limited by the number of iPads that I had on my stand. Everybody who was there could check somebody out. Does it end up being a bottleneck for you guys or is it just fit smoothly into your workflow?

Katie Bishop: [00:31:00] It can be a bottleneck, definitely, but it's more about how many items need to be weighed and less about how long it takes to use the iPad. That is actually really quick just entering the amounts. They make the system so efficient to use. What slows us down is when we have 10 different things that have to be weighed and they all have a different price per pound. You can't just pile them all up on the scale at \$2 a pound a have the total. That actually slows us down a lot. We're trying to do more pre-bagged items, like three pounds of potatoes and a quart of carrots, instead of doing it just single by the pound.

Hans Bishop: I feel sometimes it was more of a bottleneck when we had other people helping us check out and they were trying to figure out what the price was for things, because when somebody works one market a week or something and they're not making the prices like Katie and I are, they had a hard time remembering. Maybe somebody isn't quite as good with math, so they can't make the change as fast, but having the iPad there if somebody pays with a \$20 and it's \$17.77 is their total, then it automatically shoots back a number for the change and I think we're actually in some instances save time.

Chris Blanchard: Do you guys have just one or two people who are working the iPads like a checkout at a grocery store, or is it just whoever it is that's interacting with customers grabs the iPad and does the transaction?

Hans Bishop: We set up a table at one of the ends of our stand, and usually it's three to four people that are checking, three to four employees that are checking customers out. Sometimes I'm going through the line, if somebody just has bunched or bagged items, I can pick people out and say, "All right, you don't have anything that needs to be weighed. That's \$12," and I've got an apron with me, I can make change and make the line move a little bit faster. Not everybody has an iPad. It does take a little bit of time to train someone on an iPad or have somebody walking around with a list of prices, or having a scale out in the stand somewhere to be able to use an iPad away from that designated table.

Katie Bishop: Yeah, we have designated people that their job is just to talk to customers. I don't want them doing any stocking or cleaning up. I don't want them ringing people up, I just want them greeting customers, answering questions, offering



them bags, those types of things. Then we have people that job is to stock and obviously help customers, they're not going to ignore people, but the checkout is its own function away from everything else.

Chris Blanchard: The pivot back to talking about the wholesale marketing, I'm really interested in how you guys have reached out to the Chicago market. Because Chicago's how many hours away from you guys?

Hans Bishop: About two and a half to three hours, depending upon the traffic.

Chris Blanchard: Of course, you're talking about traffic in Chicago and Chicago's not this nice compact little city where you can go do your deliveries and be done. That's a lot of ground to cover, so it sounded like from what you said earlier that you guys have actually set up and arrangement where you've got somebody else who's actually managing getting your product up into Chicago?

Hans Bishop: Right. Because we deliver to Champagne, there is a company there that basically brings produce down from Chicago to central Illinois. They're driving up there with limited items, so they've got almost an empty truck going up. We've arranged with them to take our product up. It's been pretty economical for us to do that, and we don't have to mess with driving a vehicle around in the city. Some of our customers up there I haven't even met. I just talk to them over the phone. Depending upon who it is, most folks are just calling me or sending me an email or sending our pack shed lead an email with what we have available, placing an order that way.

Because sometimes, depending upon who the client is, there might be a little bit different pricing than what we're selling kale at the co-op, or kale to the co-op for. Anyway, we also have a commerce space online ordering system where somebody can just go on and see in real time what we have available for that week. It's updated at least once a week to reflect what they could potentially order.

Chris Blanchard: Okay, so the folks that are trucking stuff up to Chicago for you, are they distributing the product? Do they actually take possession of it and market it out from there, or are you the one maintaining all those relationships? I guess a lot of questions all rolled into one about how this whole thing works from a logistical standpoint.

Hans Bishop: Right. We're maintaining the relationships with our customers. Our customers are contacting us or we're contacting them to get orders and basically, I'm just telling Central Illinois Produce that, "Hey, I need you to stop here, here, and here for me this week." When we drop things off, we put those three orders on separate palettes and put the invoices in, shrink wrap them on the palette, and then they handle the delivery to those places. Sometimes they're going there anyway to maybe drop something else off from another location, but it's not Central Illinois products, it's PrairieErth Farm products and Central Illinois Produce is just the company that's handling the delivery for us.



- Chris Blanchard: Right, you're essentially cross stocking through that operation?
- Hans Bishop: Exactly. Because we have other wholesale customers in Champaign or Banner, we're going there anyway and before we developed this relationship with Central Illinois Produce, we were using another farm who was stopping at our farm on their way to St. Louis. Then they would backhaul our product back to their farm, drop it off at the end of their route, and their coolers store it overnight. Then reload it in the morning when they went to Chicago. There was a higher expense for us because of the convenience of them just coming to the farm. It's really worked out well to further this relationship with Central Illinois Produce to have a more economical way to get our products to Chicago, since they're already going up there not full.
- Chris Blanchard: How did you develop your relationship with Central Illinois Produce? Because it seems like somebody here in the Madison area or up in the twin cities, in Minnesota, that there's a lot of local foods activity going on. You guys are down in central Illinois, not exactly the organic and local hot bed of the universe. How did you guys go about reaching out to these folks and getting them on board with what you needed to have happen?
- Hans Bishop: The relationship with Central Illinois Produce stemmed off of trying to get product up to another potential customer, but the bottleneck was the price of handling things on a case by case basis. This customer provided me with the contact information for Central Illinois Produce, and we did a three way call and basically introduced ourselves. From there, I just communicated directly with Central Illinois Produce. They one time, were able to come to the farm directly and pick things up, but that was a little bit too big of a hassle. We just continued to work at it and communicate about how we could make it easier for both of us. That was when we actually started talking about where their location was and it was just down the street from the co-op that we were going to once a week anyway, so that's how we started bringing things directly to them instead of having them come directly to the farm or trying to work something out where we'd meet somewhere along their route to exchange things.
- Chris Blanchard: It was really, I might just say, it sounds like it's a win-win for everybody right? You had a customer who said, "I'm already getting stuff, I already have a pre-existing relationship with this operator," and so that operator had an interest in keeping that customer happy and you just worked that relationship?
- Hans Bishop: Exactly.
- Chris Blanchard: When you're delivering stuff then to Central Illinois Produce to put on their truck, are you guys breaking up the orders ahead of time so that they know what boxes are going where? How exactly does that work?
- Hans Bishop: Obviously each box has a label on it with where the box is from, so it's got our farm name on it and then it says where it's going to. When we deliver things, we



break stuff up by stop. The co-op's in one stack, Central Illinois Produce is in another stack, and there might be two or three different orders in the Central Illinois Produce stack. When John is doing the deliveries, he just separates it if things are going three different directions, that's three different palettes, and separates them out. At Central Illinois Produce, puts them on the palette, shrink wraps them with the invoice in there, and makes sure that whoever is there at the receiving dock is aware of where they need to be going, and passes the invoice off to them.

Chris Blanchard: Right, so you're setting up the orders for Central Illinois Produce. They're not doing any sorting and having to go, "Well I need to take two beets off of this stack to take to restaurant A, and one beet off of the stack to take to restaurant B?" That sorting is already taken care of for them?

Hans Bishop: Correct.

Chris Blanchard: I'm curious what kind of volume you're doing through that route. If you're talking about separating orders out onto palettes, are we talking three boxes or are we talking 20 boxes on a palette?

Hans Bishop: Yes. Sometimes there may only be three boxes on a palette, but that's how they load things onto their truck. That just shows how well this relationship in my opinion is working. Because they're empty going up to Chicago or relatively, so they do have room to do things like that.

Chris Blanchard: With that, we're going to stop here. Take a quick break. Get a word from our sponsors and then we'll be right back with Hans and Katie Bishop from PrairiErth Farm in Atlanta, Illinois.

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We're back with Hans and Katie Bishop from PrairiErth Farm in Atlanta, Illinois. You mentioned you guys are farming on family land and that you're part of a larger farm or Hans' dad is growing real crops and some livestock. Tell us a little bit about coming back and starting up the vegetable side of the operation. When did you guys come back and start making that happen?

Hans Bishop:

2009 was when we planted our first seeds. We had been interested in local food and organics and stuff like that for maybe a year or so before. We had, like I said, before we were working at State Farm. We worked there for, or I worked there for about 10 years, Katie was about 15 years. Over the last couple years that we both worked there, we were spending a little bit more time coming out to the farm, and just seeing what was going on. Because when I left, when I graduated high school, it was for the most part still a conventional farm. We always had livestock on the farm, so we always had cows and chickens and stuff like that, but my dad was still doing it conventionally at that point.

It was right around that time that he began to transition. It was just new again and it was a whole lot different than what I remembered it as a kid. We really fit right in there. My dad had a lot of patience with me. He taught me a lot of things that maybe I didn't remember from when I worked on the farm as a kid. He's definitely been a big mentor in my life. It really made the transition coming back really easy, and having vegetables on the farm was something that he always wanted. He actually was sick, sometime in the summer of I think '09, and that was when I got a little bit of time off of work to help take care of him. I had to do some of the chores that needed to be done while he was seeing doctors and stuff like that.

At that point I was really just like, "Katie, I know this is what I want to do and I really think we should give it a shot." The following year was when we started doing the farmers market in Bloomington, while we still worked full time at State Farm.

Chris Blanchard:

Hans, when did you come onto the farm full time? When were you able to leave your State Farm job?

Hans Bishop:

I quit in 2011, about this time I believe, in the season. That was also when we started our CSA, so the reason why I was able to quit in the first place was really because we were able to recruit 30 very willing to take a risk, CSA members on someone who had a full season under their belt but not necessarily full time or on a huge scale. Like I said, I think because I've been able to have mentorship



from my dad and also a lot of other local farmers who were willing to share their ideas as well with me, we're able to really take off very quickly.

Chris Blanchard: When Hans came back and started farming in 2009, was this something that you guys decided that you were going to do together? That this was a direction that you were both going to go and wanted it to be a full time gig for both of you?

Katie Bishop: I think it was just a natural choice that Hans would go first. He had the production knowledge to get us started. I stayed back and worked full time, so that we could have health insurance and save back some money and just know that we could do it and not risk our health and everything like that.

Chris Blanchard: At this time, you guys were not living out at the farm?

Katie Bishop: Right. We had a condo in Bloomington, and we would commute.

Chris Blanchard: How was that? In some ways that feels like that would be nice, but in other ways I can imagine that being off the farm was hard.

Katie Bishop: [00:48:00] In retrospect, I don't know, at the time when we were living in town and commuting to the farm, it seemed like it was the cause for all the stress and drama. It was the worst possible thing, we couldn't wait to get out to the farm. It would make our lives so much easier once we got out to the farm. To be honest, that is true, except there were some really nice parts about being able to just leave it behind and go home. Living in town, a lot of us feel a lot more social because when we're working out here, it's just us. It's just and our employees and we're not super social.

Once we live out in the country now, our free time is spent watching Netflix. Because it's harder, we're tired, we don't want to drive back into town to hang out with friends. There needs to be a balance between living out in the country and being so isolated and being surrounded by your work 24/7, but it is a lot easier to have it so accessible too.

Chris Blanchard: Katie, when did you come onto the farm full time?

Katie Bishop: It's two years ago, this week two years ago. It's the best day of my life.

Chris Blanchard: You're supposed to say that about your getting married.

Katie Bishop: Oh shoot, yes that was too. They're equally good. I've been wanting this for a really long time.

Chris Blanchard: Two years ago would've put us in February 2015. How did you guys know that it was time to bring Katie into the farm operation full time?

Katie Bishop: It was two things. When the Affordable HealthCare act was passed, it allowed us to have access to affordable health care. That made a huge difference in being



able to leave my job. Because at that time, we were really just holding onto my health insurance benefits. We had also know that this was coming. I had been preparing and pushing for it for a really long time. Was really really unhappy at my job, and so we spent the last six months taking my paycheck and putting into the bank. We wanted to make sure that what we were making at the farm could pay our bills.

We did not live very extravagantly during that time, but we wanted to have that safety net. Once we built up about six months of my income, plus we had access to insurance, we felt like that was the time to take the leap.

Chris Blanchard: [00:50:30] How did that change go? Was that a smooth transition for you?

Katie Bishop: Financially it was extremely smooth. I think we were scared about what would happen, but the truth is, we made it work. That's one of the great things about farming. If we need to sell a little bit of extra eggs or we need to make up the difference somewhere, we can. That was wonderful. That wasn't that scary, but it was very difficult to go from Hans and I spending eight, nine hours apart and then coming together in the evening to talk about our day, to spending 12, 14 hours together constantly and determining who was "the boss." We're still trying to figure that out actually.

That part was very challenging. It still is, actually. Finding my role on the farm and how I fit in has been difficult, but it's getting easier. The first year, I thought it was never going to get better. Last year, I could tell it was getting easier. I'm pretty hopeful that it will be even more smooth in 2017.

Chris Blanchard: What have you guys done to smooth things out? The help you find, your role on the farm, and to figure out how this new facet of your relationship worked?

Hans Bishop: I guess always trying to-

Katie Bishop: Therapy.

Hans Bishop: I was going to say, communicate. Sorry, I'm kidding. Really, the therapy helps with that, so it's intertwined. We really try to communicate and we had no idea even how difficult that was going to be in the first season that Katie was here. This past year we started working with a therapist that really helped us develop some good ways to communicate more effectively with each other, because that's really what a lot of it was about. Trying to figure out where my jurisdiction stops and Katie was responsible, or how to work through a problem if somebody doesn't bunch the beets correctly, where is each person responsible, or is it just one person that's responsible? Just working through things like that, and having somebody else who's neutral, and discussing those problems helped out alot.

Chris Blanchard: Really, I would imagine focusing on strategies rather than resolving individual situations?



Hans Bishop: Right.

Katie Bishop: Also just a way to get your emotions out. I remember the first year, I was so frustrated with employee management or I was so frustrated with the rain. It wouldn't stop raining and when you work in a corporate environment, every procedure, every system is beta tested. You're set up so it's really hard to fail. At the farm, that's not the case. We were failing left and right, it felt like. There's so much stress, and I couldn't express that in the moment to my employees. If I was really really frustrated that the beets were still dirty at the market, or if they weren't bunched correctly, or something was coming into the market really dirty, or the count for the CSA was off, I couldn't throw a tantrum and scream and yell in front of my employees.

That's how I was feeling inside, and so I would take it out on Hans, because Hans was safe to me. I don't think I really understood the stress that he was dealing with out in the field, on his own, and then to have to shoulder mine as well. Just having someone who has nothing to do with the farm, just listen to me talk about how stressful it is and be able to vent about those things, creates that safe place that we needed.

Chris Blanchard: We haven't really talked about this, up to this point, but I've been working with both of you in a consulting capacity for, I think it's three years now. I think it was actually before Katie came onto the farm full time. It's so long that I can't exactly remember, but one of the things that we've spent a lot of time working on is employee management and relationships with employees. Katie, you were just talking about how that can be a challenge especially when things aren't going right. When you've got dirty beets at farmers market or the count's off at your CSA packing time. What have you guys done? I guess I'd be interested to hear you talk about your growth in that area and how you guys are managing employees better now, than you were three years ago or five years ago?

Hans Bishop: Well, a lot of it has come through the use of your forms that you introduced to us. Five years ago, it was a verbal, "We need to get 24 bunches of green kale, 15 Lacinato kale, and whatever else." I was expecting people to remember that, and it's no wonder that count was off when we got to the CSA. Now, our packing manager John takes care of coordinating the wholesale orders. We communicate as far as what we need to bring to the farmers market, and then he compiles all that information together. Because he's packing all those things, he knows where things need to be going, and that helps that he's also got it written down and he can effectively delegate somebody to go pack the kale.

We try to teach our employees how to read a harvest log or a post-harvest log, so they can figure out where everything needs to go or how many bunches of kale that they need to pick. It doesn't always have to result in a phone call or to me, to say, "How many bunches was that again?," or we're sending people back out because they didn't get five bunches of kale. Those things we've, as far as harvesting and what not, have really helped in that realm.



In the field, we've also tried to use some of your tips that I believe are really effective. One of those is the check in after 15 minutes and 30 minutes, because if it really is true that if you leave somebody alone for 15 minutes, you don't really have too much time to screw something up but you can definitely see how things are progressing. Maybe I should back track a little bit to even before that, I try to do the task for a little bit to show them what weeding the carrots actually looks like and to show them why it needs to be done this way when we're going out to weed carrots.

With the greenhouse, we got a new transplanter and it's really important that all the plugs are completely filled to the bottom, so the plants will be effectively transplanted the way we need them to be. I will fill a few trays, show them what it should look like when you fill a flat, and then maybe I work somewhere else in the greenhouse for a little bit, but then I come back 15 minutes later or so and check in. Maybe it's a little bit longer if they've been doing it for a while, but just trying to keep tabs on people at crucial time increments is important I believe. There's time to correct it before something really goes awry.

Chris Blanchard: Thanks for the plug there Hans.

Hans Bishop: Anytime.

Chris Blanchard: I know that one of the other things that you guys have worked on is, and you talked about this earlier, is this dividing up of areas of responsibility. In particular, between you and Katie, how have you gone about that? How have things ended up being split up on your farm?

Katie Bishop: Originally, there was no division. I just was part of the team, but I didn't really like that. I wanted to have some type of control over my work. Then it was going to be that I was going to manage the greenhouse, but then that didn't really pan out. Now, what I oversee is the pack shed. I work with our pack shed lead to make sure things are coming in and being handled in the right way, and stored in the right way. I'm working with the customers, but I'm also doing a lot of the backend work in the office. That's pretty much all me. Whether it's bookkeeping and taxes, and payroll, and all the marketing, I handle as well.

Managing employees, it's a little bit tricky because I'm not always out there with them. I don't know exactly what's always going on out in the field. Sometimes my staff knows more about what's going on in the fields than I do, but we work through that. Hans, he definitely is handling all the production side of things and he oversees our crew leader and pretty much all the staff.

Chris Blanchard: Katie, you mentioned that things didn't work out for you managing the transplant production. Why not?

Katie Bishop: Because Hans and I were both working in there together. That was a task that we had to work side by side with, with our team and I didn't know a lot about



what I was doing. I had just started working on the farm full time and Hans had systems in place already, and he knew exactly how things should be done. I just let him take it on, because he was valuable in that position, more so than I was.

Chris Blanchard: Just last weekend, as we're recording this, not of course as it goes live, but when I was at the Wisconsin organic vegetable growers conference here in Madison, and I was talking about farm life balance. I actually had a couple of people come up to me and want to talk about the issue of farmer's wife syndrome, I think was the label they put on it. As being, this idea that somehow the work that the woman does on the farm is often times less valued, even though it's as critical for getting the operation done as what the man's doing, have you found that to be an issue on your farm? Do you feel like people view you as Katie a full partner and farmer at PrairiErth Farm?

Katie Bishop: No, I don't. I think it's a work in progress, and Hans and Hans' dad they try really hard to make sure that I feel like I am part of it. It's definitely a challenge with the employees. They don't necessarily know what I'm doing in the office. I don't think they always understand my contribution, and I don't sit there and list them all out. On Monday morning meeting, I'm not sitting there telling them the 100 things I'm doing in the office. Sometimes it's hard because I don't think people understand the hours that we work. Just because I'm not out there in the field every single day, doesn't mean that I'm not working until 11:00 at night typing the CSA newsletter or returning emails. That's challenging.

I always joke around. I wrote a blog, I had a blog when we first started farming called, The Farmer's Wife, because that's how I was introduced. It was never, "This is Hans and Katie. They're farmers." "This is Hans, and this is his wife Katie. This is Hans, he farms and this is his wife Katie." That happens all the time. To a certain degree, that was true at the beginning because Hans did do almost all the farming and I was still working full time, but now that's not the case at all. I resent it, but I think people's minds are being changed when they actually see how much work goes on out at the farm. It's also just reminding myself of the value that I'm bringing and trying not to worry about what other people think. Because I know I'm working my butt off. I know I'm exhausted at the end of the day, not because I haven't been doing anything but because I've been making contributions to the farm. Sometimes I just have to worry about how satisfied I am and not worry about what everybody else is thinking.

Hans Bishop: [01:03:00] We certainly couldn't grow 15 acres of vegetables without Katie's contributions. Things wouldn't be as organized as they are on the other side of things in the office if it was me running the show, and that's not my strong point. That's what makes us such a good team, is because I'm able to do what I'm good at and Katie's able to connect with customers and do what she's good at and work with me on things. Not necessarily together but work with me and we're both using our strengths and making the farm a better place.

Chris Blanchard: To turn and talk just a little bit about production. You guys have expanded and grown a lot during the time that I've known you. I don't remember the exact



acres, but you've made a lot of changes on the farm during that time. I'd like to hear just a little bit about how you've gone about growing the farm over the last couple of years? Especially bringing on another person full time, does mean that you generally are going to be expanding your production in order to accommodate and create the income to support that person's wages or that person's needs for living expenses from the farm operation. How have you gone about doing that?

Hans Bishop:

Yeah, a lot of it has been through mechanization and obviously growing up on a corn and soybean farm, things are pretty much completely mechanized. Nobody's out there shoveling grain by hand. At any rate, I guess I've always felt comfortable around machinery and stuff, and trying to find ways to make things more efficient that way. Both for profitability standpoint, but also from our employee standpoint of not being on their hands and knees all day transplanting lettuce or onions or something like that, has been important I believe in order to retain and attract good help. That's one strategy.

This past season was the first time we used the Scott Viner Carrot Harvester, and I think that's probably one of the most valuable tools that helps contribute to our growth over the last few years. Truth story, there's one way that we tried to add on some additional revenue, was selling produce year round. At the end of the year, we wound up with this huge push two days before it's going to be 15 degrees in first part of November trying to get all these carrots, beets, radishes, you name it out. This past year, it was such a relief to have less time invested in more crops and happier people because they weren't out there pulling carrots up, ripping tops off, putting them in bags, lugging the bags around and stuff like that. I guess that's one way that we have approached that aspect.

Chris Blanchard:

How will you decided where you're going to make those investments in automation? There's lots of things you can automate on the farm. Starting this week with seeding onions, you could be automating flat filling, you could be automating seeding, all the way like you just described through harvest, really putting in the money and the effort on getting at FMC, that Scott Viner root digger working. How have you picked and chosen where to make those investments?

Hans Bishop:

I guess just trying to keep track of where people had been unhappy doing jobs in the past, or where jobs seemed to be little bit too tedious. You mentioned seeding, this past year was our first year of doing complete plug flat system. Before we were doing a few flats and soil blocks and was really difficult to manage it. I guess, streamlining things a little bit more so we don't have two systems going on in the greenhouse simultaneously, was one way to help that out a little bit. We have a vacuum seeder from Carolina Greenhouses that basically seeds a whole flat at a time. I think we did 20k onions last year in about a day with three people working on it.

I think that's pretty good. We've tried to make things little bit more routine or



develop systems for things. After the flat is seeded, one person's putting vermiculite on it, then they're giving it a water, putting a at the germination chamber. We're not trying to rearrange the greenhouse five different times to find enough space on heat mats to put things and having good equipment has really helped us streamline those things. Once we get to the field, we take as many transplants out on a hayrack as we can. Use the mechanical 5k to put them in, and then we also ... I purchased a Hydroweeder a couple years ago which has helped control weeds if they get a little bit out of hand. Somebody can be riding on that. Definitely really easy to weed a 300 foot row of brassicas that are planted about 18 inches apart in about three minutes.

Things like have just really helped making and boosting employee morale, getting people interested and staying on for multiple seasons. Which has really been key, because we're not wasting time retraining everybody at the beginning of the season.

Chris Blanchard: I like how you tie all that together. It's not just a matter of making the investment or saving the labor. It's about making the investment and putting together the systems, figuring out where you can use some automation to make that work. Then using that actually as a lever point with your employees to increase their job satisfactions so that they're more likely to come back that second year. I like that.

Hans Bishop: I want to say one more thing too, because I know I've heard you talk about how when you ran the Moses Conference, people would complain about how expensive that it was, but you always say, "If you get one single tip from that, it can really pay for the conference admissions," plus to me the networking is invaluable. To be really specific about that, last year I took an organic university course with Steve Pincus from Tipi Produce, and Adam Cullip from Loon Organics and one little thing that I saw that I felt could really change things, specifically pertaining to transplant production was the way Adam put two ¾-inch metal conduit pipes together in a small 2x2 square piece of wood.

Put a tek screw through and you've got this 10 foot-long contraption of two parallel EMT conduit pipes that can hold 10 flat of plants. You put one person on each end and two people can carry 10 flats out of the greenhouse at a time. You can get things out of the greenhouse a lot faster, you can move things from greenhouse to greenhouse if you have to and put them straight onto a bench. Instead of trying to carry two flats at a time, from greenhouse to greenhouse, or to a hayrack. If you're lucky you won't drop one. Just a little tip like that I think is a fantastic way to really tie pieces of a system together.

Chris Blanchard: Of course, one thing like that, if it saves you five hours at \$10 an hour, you've made \$50 extra right? Now you get to use that again and again, so you use that a couple of times and you've paid for your organic university course over a period of years. Because it's not like that knowledge gets used up and goes away. I just think that's so important.



Hans Bishop: Right.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, I'm going to try and get a picture of that just so that we can give a visual on that. That idea of creating those transplant racks for carrying stuff out of the greenhouse. I love that idea, because that's such a bottleneck. The other thing, when you talk about just those quality of life things, and Katie talked about the frustration factor earlier, watching people carry flats out of the greenhouse, I don't think there was anything that made me more upset on the farm. Because it was always being done under pressure. It's always transplant time, there's always the pressure's on, time's a wasting, and you're watching people do this fumbling job of getting stuff out there. You look at it and go, "There has to be a better way to get this thing done."

For us, we put in a trolley in the greenhouse, but I love this low tech, low expense solution that you've come up with that I think again, it's just takes away ... It's not only something that speeds things up, but it makes it feel like PrairiErth Farm has its act together. It makes it feel like a place that people want to be. I think that's really important.

Hans Bishop: Yeah.

Chris Blanchard: All right. With that, we're going to turn to our lightning round, but first we're going to get a quick word from one more sponsor and then we'll be right back.

This lightening round and perennial support for the Farmer to Farmer podcast is provided by BCS America. BCS two wheel tractors are real farming equipment for real farmers. With PTO-driven attachments like rototillers, flail mowers, rotary plows, power harrows, log splitters, snow throwers, even in a utility trailer, and a new water transfer pod. You've got the tools you need to get the jobs done, across the farm and the homestead. On my own farm, we went through a number of so called solutions for mowing and tilling before we finally got smart and bought a BCS. Even though we owned a four-wheel tractor to manage our 20 acres of vegetables, that BCS tackled jobs that we simply couldn't do with a larger machine. From mowing steep slopes and around trees, to working in our high tunnels. Plus, they're geared driven for years of dependable service. Check out BCSAmerica.com to see the full line of tractors and attachments, plus videos BSC in action.

All right, and we're back and it's time for the lightening round. Katie, I'm going to start with you. What's your favorite tool on the farm?

Katie Bishop: Oh this one is easy and probably pretty predictable, but it's my phone. I use it obviously to take pictures, I'm on Facebook, Instagram, and basically every single moment of my life I spend on my phone. Definitely my phone.

Chris Blanchard: Hans, what's your favorite tool on the farm?



- Hans Bishop: I guess, if I had to pick one thing it would be the CoolBot, because that's what we use in all of our refrigeration. We've insulated the front half of our market trailer, so we can take trailer to market, keep things cold, and we're able to pull out things at 11:00 just as fresh as they were at 7:00 in the morning. We've been able to outfit shipping containers with two 24,000 BTU air conditioners, able to keep things cold. It's really helped a lot in the summertime when we have to pull a ton of lettuce for a really hot spell, it's going to bolt. We're able to hold lettuce over, just as an example I guess, but we're able to hold lettuce over longer than we were before and without our refrigeration and CoolBot specifically I guess, we would not be able to do what we do.
- Chris Blanchard: Right, it makes it so you're not having to harvest all of your lettuce for farmers market on Friday morning and ship it out on Saturday. It gets you some more flexibility in how you manage your harvest, and your inventory.
- Hans Bishop: Exactly, yeah.
- Chris Blanchard: Katie, what one thing do you think that most farmers should do to improve their farmers market stands?
- Katie Bishop: Get off your phone and don't eat. Be ready to talk to your customers, and this is all one thing. I know it sounds like it's more than one, but just be accessible to your customers at your market. If you're on your phone, you're giving off a message that you're not interested in connecting with your customer I see a lot who still make this mistake. Smile and be excited to be there and don't be on your phone.
- Chris Blanchard: Hans, what's your favorite crop to grow?
- Hans Bishop: I really like to grow carrots. Really like to get into the rhythm of planting them every three weeks during the season and it's exciting to harvest them, especially when we got the FMC Scott Viner working this fall. Very rewarding after a challenging year of growing things, to be able to see the carrots roll up the belt, get topped, and come out the back ready to go in the cooler.
- Chris Blanchard: Katie, I know you're not so involved in the growing side of things, but what's your favorite crop to wash back and sell?
- Katie Bishop: Tomatoes, I think, heirloom tomatoes specifically. Definitely not cherry tomatoes. Heirloom tomatoes because I personally find them to be absolutely delicious, and we don't eat tomatoes at all over the winter. Not fresh tomatoes, so when the first ones come, I'm ready to just eat them all and I don't want to share them. I really love to sell them because our customers just completely freak out when the first tomatoes come, and we'll have lines of people, 30 people deep just to get tomatoes. It's really fun to see that much enthusiasm for something that you worked really hard for. That's my answer, tomatoes.



- Hans Bishop: The tomatoes are a great conversation starter too.
- Chris Blanchard: Really?
- Hans Bishop: Well people ask, "Hey, what's the difference between this tomato and this tomato?" You've got an opportunity to talk to your customer if you've got so many different varieties of tomatoes, and then you can say, "Oh, these are great with a bunch of basil and some cilantro." Then you have an opportunity to sell a little bit more at the market.
- Katie Bishop: Right, the difference between a ripe. "Is a green Cherokee tomato, is it ripe?" The biggest two questions are, "Did you grow these?" "Why are they so expensive?"
- Chris Blanchard: We know that you grew them. You guys do grow everything that you sell, but why are they so expensive? Is there ... Maybe that's a dumb question. I think that anybody who grows them knows.
- Katie Bishop: No, I am not afraid to describe the growing processes and what it takes to bring those tomatoes to market. The investment in the hoophouse and the hand picking tomato hormones off, and that they each have to be trellised every week, and all of that. Everything that goes in from starting it, through seed, and to what it takes to get there. Then when we're talking about heirloom tomatoes, I can tell them how many get thrown in the compost pile because it's cracked that I can't even bring. I don't know if it makes them feel any better, but I feel better telling them that.
- Chris Blanchard: Well in some ways, when you're faced with that question, that's really the important part.
- Katie Bishop: Right.
- Chris Blanchard: Hans, what are you going to be doing differently on the farm this year?
- Hans Bishop: I think one thing that we're going to be a lot more intentional about, another I guess suggestion from you, is meeting with our management team on a more regular basis and not just meeting or discussing problems that arise, but also trying to just discuss, "How are you feeling? How are things going?" Like I said, not making a meeting a negative thing. Because in the past, we haven't been super good at that. Usually, when we have a meeting it's because there's a problem with the beet bunches or the kale bunches, or there's a problem that's already there. At that point, it gets to be a little bit difficult to have a positive resolution in that situation.
- Chris Blanchard: A way for being able to head things off at the past, rather than waiting until they've swelled into a bigger problem.



- Hans Bishop: Exactly.
- Chris Blanchard: Mixing my metaphors there, so sorry about that. Katie, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?
- Katie Bishop: I think that I would tell myself not to be so afraid. To leave State Farm sooner. That I have everything it takes to do this and not wait so long to have left my job at State Farm. That's one. The other one, is that I think when I got into this, I didn't really understand the commitment that the farm was going to take. I didn't understand that I wouldn't get fourth of July off, or that I wouldn't be taking vacations in the summer when everybody else was. I didn't understand how the farm always comes first in so many instances, and that was really hard for me to accept.
- I think if I could go back and just tell myself that it wasn't going to be growing flower and sitting under the tree, and just this really hippie ideal of what organic farming was. I didn't realize how much work and commitment it was. I don't know that it would've changed my mind, but I think I would've had my expectations set at the beginning, and it wouldn't have been such a struggle to try and adjust.
- Chris Blanchard: Hans, how about you?
- Hans Bishop: Don't be afraid to try a different way of doing things. The way your first taught may not be the way that you wind up doing a specific task in the future. Just be open to new ideas of how to do something. I always approach a situation with a pretty open mind now, and I'm always interested to see or hear how somebody does something and maybe try to take a little something away from that and learn from that experience.
- Chris Blanchard: Hans and Katie, just one more thing that I haven't said directly to you. I did mention it in the introduction to the podcast, but congratulations on your selection as the Moses Organic Farmers of the year. That's a really big deal.
- Hans Bishop: Thanks Chris.
- Chris Blanchard: I think it's awesome.
- Hans Bishop: [01:22:00] Thanks.
- Katie Bishop: Yeah, I see the dream come true. Very much.
- Chris Blanchard: Thank you so much for being part of the Farmer to Farmer podcast today.
- Hans Bishop: My pleasure.
- Katie Bishop: Thank you for asking us. It was so much fun.



SHOW NOTES: www.farmertofarmerpodcast.com/episodes/bishop

Chris Blanchard: All right, so wrapping things up here, I'll say again that this is episode 107 of the Farmer to Farmer podcast. You can find the notes for this show at FarmertoFarmerpodcast.com, or looking on the episodes page, or just searching for Bishop. That's B-I-S-H-O-P. The transcript for this episode brought to you by Earth Tools, offering the most complete selection of walk behind farming equipment and high quality garden tools in North America, and by Rolling for Market. Where you can get 20% off your subscription with the code: PODCAST at checkout.

You can get the show notes for every Farmer to Farmer podcast right in your inbox, by signing up for my email newsletter at FarmertoFarmerpodcast.com. I'm not going to do this for everything that comes along, but the National Young Farmers Coalition is asking farmers all across the country to weigh in on the issues that matter the most to them, so that we can advocate for policy solutions in the next farm bill. They're 2011 survey was essential to sustainable agricultural victories in the 2014 farm bill, and it's time for up to date data on the needs of young and beginning farmers in the U.S. Go to Youngfarmers.org/survey to weigh in. Your voice matters.

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