



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast

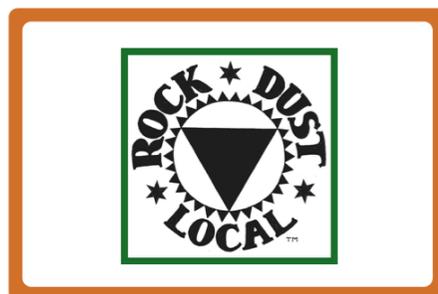


EPISODE 117

Jason Weston of Joe's Gardens on Two-Wheel Tractor Cultivation, the End of Hand Weeding, and Farming for 120 Years

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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast Episode Number 117, and this is your host, Chris Blanchard. My guest today, Jason Weston, is a co-owner of Joe's Gardens in Bellingham, Washington, a five-acre urban farm started in the 1890s. I didn't say that wrong. I said the 1890s. One of the last of the original truck farms in the Bellingham area, Joe's Gardens sells almost all of its produce retail onsite now.

Jason has become well-known for his innovations with the Planet Junior two-wheel cultivating tractors that he uses for weed control on his farm. He provides an introductory tutorial into their features and uses and how they changed everything for Joe's Gardens. We dig into how the two-wheel tractor support his intensive no-bed production and into the modern weed control tools that he has used to almost eliminate hand-weeding on his farm.

We discussed how Joe's Garden is laid out, maximize space utilization and the tillage and production practices that support that layout. Jason also shares how he and his forebears have managed fertility in a continuous special rotation for over 120 years and the long-term approach that Jason takes to managing soil health.

We also discussed the changes in Joe's Gardens marketing over the years, as the wholesale and retail marketplaces have shifted in product demand and consumer attitudes. Joe talks about the challenges they faced in shifting to a retail operation, and the family dynamics that helped make that shift successful.

The Farmer to Farmer Podcast is generously supported by Vermont Compost Company, founded by organic crop growing professionals committed to meeting the need for high-quality compost and compost based living soil mixes for certified organic production: vermontcompost.com And by BCS America. BCS two-wheel tractors are versatile, maneuverable in tight spaces, lightweight for less compaction, and easy to maintain and repair on the farm. Year driven and built to last for decades of dependable service: bcsamerica.com, And by CoolBot, by Store it Cold. You can build an affordable walk-in cooler powered by a CoolBot and a window air conditioning unit. Save up to 83% on upfront costs and up to 42% on monthly electrical bills compared to conventional cooling systems. Jason Weston, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.



- Jason Weston: Hi. Thank you for having me on. I've always wanted to be on this show.
- Chris Blanchard: That's great because ever since I saw you first sharing some of the videos of what you were doing with the two-wheel tractors that we're going to talk about a little bit later, I said, "Wow, I've got to talk to that guy." I'm glad that you're glad to be here. Thank you.
- Jason Weston: This is fun. Exciting.
- Chris Blanchard: Jason, could you start off by setting the stage for us there at Joe's Gardens. Where are you guys located? How many acres are you farming? How are you selling your vegetables? All of those details.
- Jason Weston: I'm in Bellingham, Washington. The name of the farm is Joe's Gardens. We are farming, under cultivation we have five acres with about another acre of buildings, greenhouses, storage, what have you. Total we have about six acres that we farm on, mostly just mixed vegetable crops, more than I can even think of right now. Then we also do a big nursery production for wholesale and retail. Nowadays we're a retail store for our vegetables, more so than wholesale like we used to do years back.
- Chris Blanchard: Most of your stuff is being sold right there onsite.
- Jason Weston: Yeah. With the vegetables, probably 99.9% of it is all sold onsite. We do have a few wholesale grocery stores still just to keep our foot in the door because you never know what the future's going to bring. You've got to make sure you stay in contact with everybody. Then we have restaurants that we sell to, but we don't deliver to them. They have to come and pick it up. There's just not a volume to make it worth our time anymore like we used to do back 10, 15 years ago.
- Chris Blanchard: When you say that you're in Bellingham, Washington, you guys really are in Bellingham, Washington. I lived in Bellingham for about five months back in 1997, and I remember distinctly walking by your farm there in the middle of the city. It's not your typical urban farm. You guys are, you're right there. With five acres, you guys are real, no disparaging to other urban farms, but you guys look like a farm. You didn't look like a big garden.
- Jason Weston: We're definitely in the middle of the city now. On one side is all apartment buildings and across the street is all housing and Interstate 5. On the other side is a big housing development, and we're only two minutes from our shopping mall. Up behind the house is a high school. We're surrounded. We're definitely surrounded.
- Back in the day, the farm itself was started originally in the 1890s, somewhere in there, we're not exactly sure on the exact date, by the Robertson family. They farmed it all the way up into the mid-30s and that's when Joe bought it. There's



a whole history with Joe and him too for the farm. It was still pretty much county, even back in the '40s in this area, but then it slowly started to urbanize and be built up all around here. Now we're definitely in the city, which is great for business. I'm not going to complain about that at all.

Chris Blanchard: Joe buys it in 1933, but you're not actually related to Joe, are you?

Jason Weston: No. Joe had no kids, him and his wife, Ann. The way it worked, Joe was born in San Francisco. His parents, right after he was born, his mother got sick, and they went back to Italy. They lived in the Genoa area. He stayed there until he was 17-years-old working on the family farm there, which had been there, from what he said, for hundreds of years, passed on from generation to generation. When he turned 17, either he had to join the Italian military, this was back in 1921, I think, or he had to come back to America so he didn't lose his citizenship.

He had an uncle that was already farming here in Bellingham, so he hopped on the boat, came back to the United States and started working on his uncle's farm down on Iowa Street, which is just a few miles from here. They had a 15-acre farm down there. He just took it over from his uncle at that point. They farmed there for a lot, a lot of years.

Back then, that whole area used to flood every spring, so they were never sure how their spring crops were going to make it, if there was going to be a huge flood and they lose everything or if they were going to be able to make it through the spring. He started looking for another farm. That's when he found this place over here that we're at now. For a lot of years he farmed this five acres plus the 15 acres down there. That was mostly with horseback; in those days, horse and plow. They'd just run equipment back and forth.

The way it came from there is in 1958, my father came down here and started working for Joe, and he loved it. He absolutely loved this business. He kept working here on and off for at least another 20 years or 10 years, somewhere in there, until the mid-'70s. During that time, my father also got married to my mother. He went into the boat building industry and we also had other nurseries when I was growing up. This is all stuff that's hard for me to remember because I'm too young at this point. I was born in '72.

Long story short, in 1983, Joe called up my dad and said, "I'm ready to sell." This is when Joe 76. He was still running the farm. My dad sold his boat company and we moved to a farm. It was funny because when we bought the farm, I was only 11-years-old. I had no idea that we bought the farm. I didn't even know where we were in Bellingham because at this point, I was growing up out at the Ferndale area. We took this over.

I started working here at 11, and just really fell in love with it. Luckily for me, I'd been gardening most of my life at that point, not commercially or professionally, but my dad always had huge gardens, but I got to work with Joe until he was 96.



He worked here for another 20 years. Two days before he died, he was still working out in the field. One day he didn't come to work, he was sick, and the next day he was gone.

I was really, really fortunate to have all those years of learning from someone who did truck farming and commercial agriculture on a small scale his whole life and teach me the skills that are lost over the years. We're one of the last original truck farms in our area.

Chris Blanchard: When you say truck farm, you guys really are the model of doing that, that five acres of vegetables on the edge of the city.

Jason Weston: We still are, but it's always about production, production, production. The amount of product we can put out of this five acres is mind blowing. That's just the way it was always done. Back in the day, we were doing 12,000 heads of ... we always used lettuce as a major around here, but we do 12,000 heads of lettuce every two weeks. Back then, it was mostly using manure for fertilizer. You'd spread your chicken manure, rototill it under, plant your lettuce, and as soon as that crop was finished, it was tilled under, manured and planted again. The ground basically never sat empty. It just was work, work, work. It's been that way for the last 120 years about. Just never stopped.

Chris Blanchard: That must create some interesting challenges for you when you talk about doing that for 120 years of straight vegetables. When I think about market farms, most of the people that I've had on the show, their land hasn't been in a vegetable rotation for 120 years. What are you guys doing to maintain fertility?

Jason Weston: We had issues about 25 years ago from all the years of using just basically manure. Eventually the phosphate levels started to get so high it started to kill stuff. We had to quit using manure for a long time. We were adding stuff we didn't need to get the stuff that we did need. We started doing soil tests 20, 25 years ago and brought in soil scientists to help us work it through. Basically, it's taken us 20 years to bring our phosphate levels down. We had to do that by using commercial fertilizer because we can't use the manure because that will keep on bringing up my phosphate levels.

We just started using the nitrogen. We found out we were completely depleted on iron. The testing's just completely revolutionized our farming and our production, I wouldn't say to increase, but the quality increased so much. That many years without testing and just adding compost and manure, you can start getting a lot of imbalances that you just don't know are happening, but over that grand a scale of time, you start seeing issues. To me, short-term is 10, 20 years. That's short-term. The long game is 50, 60 years. Any time I'm thinking about how to change my soil or improve my soil, I'm thinking I've got 20 years to get this done, it takes really, at least in my area, to get a good balance and stable soil.

Chris Blanchard: In your advertising materials online it says that you guys don't use any



pesticides on your farm.

Jason Weston: In our fields, we haven't had any form of pesticides, synthetic or organic, in over 30 years. That's just by choice. We just don't want to do it; one, we don't like it. Two, you're in the middle of a city. It just doesn't fly. Even if you wanted to, you don't really have a choice. We just made the decision. We started off with using, 25, 30 years ago is when we started using that. The main bug issues we had eventually got under control. Now it's just really not much of any issues anymore. We don't have to use Remain anymore.

We don't have too much of a bug issue although we started getting flea beetle a couple years back when we started getting drier weather here. We found a solution for that by putting our salad greens, which are the only thing they're really attacking, inside cold frames that have walls on them. Flea beetles just don't get into it so we found a solution for that that was really easy for us. Just through keeping the soil tested, balanced and with irrigation is a huge thing, everything is really balanced out. I like to say we did it, but who knows. It could just be luck. I'm not going to take credit for luck.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned irrigation. It actually reminds me that just a couple days ago you posted an article on your Facebook page saying that Bellingham is the place in the United States that actually gets the least sunshine during the year.

Jason Weston: I wasn't fully aware of that because it seemed sunny enough here to me. That's a surprise, they say we only get sunshine 35% of the time. The summertime, last year, we didn't have rain from mid-April until the end of September. If we did have rain, it was a tenth of an inch here, a tenth of an inch there, but nothing that does any good in agriculture. For us, irrigation is extremely important. We've switched over in the past 10, 15 years to using irrigation reels that self-wind up. I've got four of those. When it comes to irrigating, I can just go set my four reels up, turn them on. They'll come in at whatever speed I set them for and then shut themselves off, which frees up a lot of time for me from having to move irrigation. It takes 10, 15 minutes to move an irrigation reel and I'm done.

I was really surprised by the cloudy thing too. Like I say, I've never lived anywhere else so, it just seems normal. It's just surprising what would everybody else be doing with all this extra sunshine. You lose your sense of urgency to get out there and get working on stuff.

Chris Blanchard: Do you guys end up with extra disease and fungal issues because of the wet weather?

Jason Weston: No, no. There are very few diseases or anything like that, at least that I experienced. When you get into September, October, you can start seeing powdery mildew on your squash, like the zucchini, stuff like that. By then you don't really care because the season's at an end. You're slowing down and you're ready to kill it anyway and take your vacation. It's not a big deal.



Other than that, when I joined these Facebook groups and started learning about what everybody else goes through in this country, we're really, really blessed with the healthy diseases and insects we have over here on the west coast. It makes farming pretty simple compared to what I've read what other people are having to go through.

Chris Blanchard: I grew up in Seattle. It's a magical place over there west of the Cascades. If they just got a little bit more sunshine, and you could get rid of some of the people, it'd be a great place to live.

Jason Weston: Exactly. It's a double edged sword. You love having all the people for customers because it makes your business successful and it allows you to continue doing what you love, but at the same time, it's a lot of people compared to what I grew up with. I'm not really used to that and just being a farm kid living in a city, it's still getting used to it even after all these years. I'm just not really big into cities. I rarely even leave Whatcom County that I live in. Going to Seattle might be a once a year or every other year I'll make it that far down south. I don't like the big cities. I just like to stay in my little corner of the world over here and hide and farm and have fun.

Chris Blanchard: How big of a town is Bellingham now?

Jason Weston: That's funny you asked that. My wife and I were just looking that up after we read that article. It's now, they say, 85,000 people. I think back in the 1950s, it was 50,000. It took us quite a few years to grow to this size. Most of the people now have moved out to the county. They said total county population is somewhere close to 150,000.

Chris Blanchard: Your five acres, tell me about how that land is situated. Is it a nice flat piece of ground? I remember that it's got a rise up on one end of it. It's funny how much this farm stuck in my head back in 1997 that I can still see it in my mind. Tell me a little bit about how that land lays and how you guys are farming it.

Jason Weston: We're right in the bottom of a valley. We have the low point down the center. It goes up an elevation probably 10 feet, 15 feet on either side from the center. We have upper fields that are probably a good 15, 25 feet higher than the lower fields. All the fields are pointed in an east-west direction, for the most part. Some are pointed north-south just because of the lay of the land, that have no real choice because it's farming more on hillsides.

We just do everything in rows. Our main standard row is a 15 inch. We do some 30s. We do 30 inch rows, 48 inch rows and 60 inch rows, just depending on the crop. Our main standard is 15, just what Joe always did, and so that's what I do. That's what my dad did. It just so happened it's just a standard row crop measurement, to find out later on.

Chris Blanchard: When you say you're doing everything in rows, are those rows on bed tops or is



that just row after row of vegetables across the field?

Jason Weston: For the most part, it's just row after row. I try to reduce any walkways or anything. Our goal for most crops is everything come up perfectly even and then we can just go out and clear cut. Now, on crops like beets, leeks, chard, that are more selective harvest, you've got to pick and choose what you're getting, we'll leave a 30 inch walkway for wheelbarrows and stuff to get through and just for any debris, ugly leaves and stuff that we just dump on the side. Most other crops I like to... just one continuous field, the whole way across and just not waste the space. The other big areas I'd leave open would just be about a 40 inch path for irrigation. Once I get those set, they pretty much stay in the same spot all season long.

Chris Blanchard: What kind of soils do you guys have there?

Jason Weston: We have a clay loam soil here, glacial till. It's a mix. You go to the bottom of our garden, the low spot, it's top soil that goes five, six feet deep. You go up towards the end, you'll have top soil that's 12 to 18 inches deep. It can vary because the way it works is you take 120 years ago, the ground wasn't flat. It had little hills and hollows and that. Over the last 120 years of plowing and rototilling and disking, it's flattened it out, but you still have those layers of clay from the original elevation. You can go into the middle of the garden and you'll be on five feet of top soil and all of a sudden, you'll be 12 inches down in this clay. You go another 15 or 20 feet and you're back to three or four feet of top soil. It's all over the place.

When we get to our upper fields, which are our newest field, we've only been farming them for probably 25 years, those are almost a gravel. They're not very nice. They're getting nicer and nicer over the years. I suspect in probably another 30, 40 years they'll be beautiful. It takes time. For the most part, it's just the glacial till and clay loam.

Most of our fields are between 10 and 18% organic matter in the original farm area. The newer fields, we are six to eight percent organic matter, but that's going to take 20, 30 more years to get stable organic matter up into the teens up here. Again, we don't want to put too much of anything on it at one time because then you're going to slowly start throwing your stuff out of balance. You've got to just take your time and just do it right. Aim for the long game, not the short game.

Chris Blanchard: With your five acres, are you guys doing tillage operations with four-wheel tractors or are you guys using two-wheel tractors for that?

Jason Weston: Both. For the main tillage, we plow every spring. We have an old 1955 Farmall 100 that we use for our plow tractor. That's all it's used for these days. Back years ago, Joe used it for everything with disc and harrow too. I don't know really how to use that because no one ever taught me how to use those tools.



Then after that, we just go through with a rototiller and just till the soil as needed. Now, you definitely don't want to over-till, but do it enough years, you get a pretty good idea of what needs to be done. Cultivating is all done by two-wheel tractors. We're using little Planet Juniors for that.

Chris Blanchard: This is something that I want to spend some time on because I think these two-wheel tractors that you're using for cultivation are just fascinating to me. For somebody who hasn't seen the videos, and keeping in mind that we're on radio, can you describe these tools for me?

Jason Weston: Yeah. The little two-wheel tractors I'm using are a Planet Junior variety. It's something that was very popular from the '20 through, I think, the late '60s, they were very popular. Basically, it is ... imagine a BCS tractor, everyone's familiar with that, but strip all the gear boxes out for the most part. There are some with gear boxes, don't get me wrong. I'll just describe the Planet Juniors for now. Strip out all the gear boxes, just put a lightweight engine on a lightweight frame that's just belt driven. No power take-offs or anything like that as far as a PTO on the back end of it. They're a really light tractor, the ones that I use.

On the back of that they have what are just like a toolbar, like any three-point, but these are just a single point with a king pin that hold them on. You can choose a huge variety of different tooling to suit your needs for cultivating. Once you figure it out, if you can think it up, you can build it and you can use it. They're really incredible machines. The best part about them is they're fast, they're lightweight, and extremely controllable. You can get right up next to stuff and do perfectly straight rows with them. They're incredible. That's all I could say.

Chris Blanchard: [00:25:30] It's basically a one row cultivator, right?

Jason Weston: You can do one row to multiple rows, up through five, six rows, depending on the size of cultivator you want to build for it and what type of cultivation you're doing. I just built a three row finger weeder set-up to cultivate three rows of crops at one time.

Chris Blanchard: Why a walking tractor instead of something like an Allis-Chalmers G?

Jason Weston: For me, I'm too small. An Allis-Chalmers G is a fairly big tractor. If I want to use something like that, I have to give up productive farmland to have turnaround space for it. It's too much. I don't want to give up the farmland just so I can turn a tractor around. There's also the issue with the amount of time it takes to switch between one implement to another. Allis-Chalmers, you're going to be unbolting stuff and re-bolting it and then realigning it. The Planet Junior has a single pin. You pull that pin out, you move the tractor over to your next toolbar. Total time, if you're really slow at it, might take you one minute to switch between your implement.



I'm not knocking Allis-Chalmers' tractors. Gs are incredible tractors. If I had land, I'd love to play with one. For my situation, for my set-up, the Planet Juniors are the only way to go.

Chris Blanchard: These little two-wheeled tractors, are you only using them for weed control or do you use them for other situations as well?

Jason Weston: I pretty much use them only for weed control and cultivating between rows, though let's say I have a small area that I just finished a few rows of radishes and I want to get right back in there and seed it. My tractor is too big to fit in there and I don't really want to take a walk behind rototiller through it. I'll just throw on a deeper cultivating system and go out there and just prep that little anywhere from 18 inches wide to however wide you want, just go run through it, get it ready for re-seeding and just go seed again.

It can be used for any primary tillage depending on your operation and how you have it set up. For me, it's mostly a weed control tool. Weeding, for us, is a huge, huge, huge expense. Even before we started using the Planet Junior cultivators, we were using the hand cultivators, just a normal wheel hoe, the old Planet Junior style. We'd have five, six guys out there all working in the rows. We have hundreds and hundreds of rows to cultivate. You'd be out there for days doing that, then you'd still have to come back in, hand weed all the rows.

To use the Planet Junior power cultivator, basically we don't have to do any of that anymore. I just go out there by myself and I can to a beet hoes set up, I can do three rows at a time. To do 300 feet of rows are equivalent of 900 foot rows, a row foot deep, it takes basically a minute, 20 seconds to do it. You start doing that over your whole garden and before you know it, the wheel hoes is a thing of the past and you're just primarily using the two-wheel tractors. The time savings and labor savings are just unbelievable.

Chris Blanchard: You said that it's pretty easy to steer these. It feels to me, when I imagine you using something like this, it feels to me like it would be hard to keep it going straight.

Jason Weston: No. There's different ways to set them up. Planet Junior really figured it out well. The way they have it set up is you have your main tractor with the hitch pin area that's more right in the center, right between the wheels. Then that hitch area goes back to your main toolbar, your draw bar and then all your tooling either hooks to that or to trailing arms that come off of it.

Then behind those they have what's called a gauge wheel that's hooked to a coulter or a disc blade rather than a wheel. Those discs dig into the ground a little bit and they act like a rudder keeping that cultivator tracking straight. All you're doing is basically looking ahead down your rows and just driving that tractor straight. If your row veers off to the left or to the right, you just follow it. Because you have those gauge wheels in the back that are acting like a rudder



tracking that cultivator, it just follows that row perfectly. It keeps it really, really easy. The secret to them is the gauge wheel or that coulter set-up they have on the back. Without it, the cultivator's completely uncontrollable and you just make a huge mess out of everything.

That was a huge leap for me to learn how to use these. My original Planet Junior tractor, my dad used it when he was a kid back in the '50s. He loved it. He used that every day for everything. By the time I came around to farming in the '80s, we still had it but I didn't understand how it worked and the engine by then was old and it was a nightmare to get started. Joe and my dad had me go out there and use it and I was like, all these gauge wheel things were always in the way, so I'd lift them all the way up out of the ground and just have them hanging there. I'd just start driving it down to the rows once I did get it started a half an hour later. The cultivator would just be swinging all over the place. I was just like, this is stupid. I'd abandon it and go get one of our just walk-behind rototillers instead and use that.

Part of it is when you're a little kid the new cool tool is always a lot more fun to use to go out there and play on that than it is this old rickety 1950s, '40s thing. Later on, this was probably five, six years ago when I started using my irrigation reels more, I had little riding lawn-mower tractors to start pulling the irrigation around with.

One day I was like, I'm going to try hooking that little Planet Junior cultivator set-up to the back of that thing. I put it on and started dragging it through with this little lawn tractor through the field and I was like, wow, this thing is really incredible. My dad finally came out and goes, "Look, you've got to use your gauge wheels to keep it tracking straight." He goes, "Why don't you go put it on the other tractor." I was like, "Because I hate trying to get the tractor going." He was talking about the Planet Junior. He goes, "Why don't you take it up to the mower shop and have them put a brand new engine on it." I was like, "That's a waste of money." He goes, "Trust me."

I threw it in the back of our delivery truck, hauled it up to Bellingham Mower. They put a new engine on it, I brought it back and now it starts every single time. It was amazing. I started using it and I was just like, holy cow. I figured out the gauge wheels. I started getting everything making sense on how this whole system worked. From that point on, I was hooked.

Then I found a Planet Junior catalog from the '50s. It had pictures of the toolbar set-ups and what else you can do with this thing. I went and hired a welder to start building me toolbars for this. Then the whole thing exploded to there where it I became obsessed with them. I went out and bought a welder to learn to weld so I could build my own things. It was ... what's the words for it ... it changed everything on the way we farm. It's huge, huge. We figured now in the summertime, we're saving 500 bucks a week just from labor from just having to weed alone. I don't know. All I can say is it's the most incredible thing that's ever happened to me in small agriculture in my 34 years of doing this.



Chris Blanchard: That's a pretty big statement.

Jason Weston: It is. It was ... I can't figure the word for it, but it changed everything for us. It made vegetable farming so much easier. It gave me the ability to put rows closer. I can grow stuff cheap now because we also started hooking finger weeders onto them, with the ability not having to actually pretty much do any hand weeding anymore because of the finger weeders behind these little tractors.

Let's say I have a few extra seeds and I want to try a new test crop. I can just go out there, seed it, throw it in and if it doesn't work out, that's okay because I have, what, 10 minutes to get the soil ready with the tractor, 10 minutes to take the Planet Junior 300 feeder out there and feed two rows, then I might have 30 minutes of cultivating time just as far as going through between the rows and finger weeding the rows for weeding. I might have an hour of my actual time invested into this little teeny spot that would have been sitting empty otherwise and I can test it. If it doesn't work, I'm out 20 bucks. I don't care. I'll just rototill it under and move onto the next thing. It's the ability to test crops like that and plant stuff more efficiently. It's allowed us to expand the amount of stuff we grow because the risk isn't there and the cost isn't there anymore.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about those finger weeders. Between the row weed control, no matter how you're doing it is ... That's the easy part, right? It doesn't always end up being easy, but that's the easiest part. It's the in-the-row stuff that really gets hard.

Jason Weston: Yeah, exactly. The finger weeders were beyond the tractors. It's what made the tractors the super machine beyond anything. Originally we still had the tractors. We still had to go back through and hand weed. On our farm groups on the Facebook pages, we've been discussing it but no one could find finger weeders. None of us really wanted to spend the money to test them.

Then I found a company called Sutton Ag down in California. They had a website where I could just buy finger weeders right off a web page. I didn't have to try and go through all these companies that didn't want to listen to me or hear from me because I was too small to buy a \$30,000 cultivating unit. I took a risk and paid the \$400 and got my first set of little finger weeders. I still didn't know what to think about them too much. They're going to be a test. If they failed, well, they failed. If they worked like they say it's supposed to work, it's a game changer. That spring which was last year, I took them out for the first time. They're scary to use at first. You have these little fingers that are spinning at really high speed. They look really fast when you're using them.

Chris Blanchard: You've got a standard that comes down off of the toolbar and then it bends at maybe a 45 degree angle, and then you've got a hub and then a wheel with all of these rubber fingers on it. That's what we're talking about, right?



Jason Weston: Yup, that's exactly what we're talking about. The little rubber fingers, they have brushes you put on them. You have these little metal teeth that dig down into the soil that spin the rubber fingers that are poking out from the sides of it in a star shape. You go down right over the top of your rows and these fingers go right into the root zones of the plants. The idea is, when you have your little weeds in there that are in the thread stage, they disturb the soil enough that these little weeds just die. It works. It works incredibly well.

It took me a long time to build up the confidence to set them up right where the fingers are almost touching each other and you just go right down that row. Once I figured it out and once I learned how to use them, it was the most incredible development on our farm in decades. It was basically the end of hand weeding for us. It was just that incredible.

I started off with my little nine inch ones, I was so impressed with them. I was like, I've got to get the 13 inch too. I bought the 13 inch and they were even more incredible. I got the brushes for doing small crops and then I can go over little teeny seeded things like carrots and beets, spinach, without pulling them out. It's just unbelievable and just really lucky that we had a company like Sutton Ag that was willing to deal with the little farmers like us and help us out and teach us how to use them and answer any questions because there really wasn't anybody around to help us with that.

Chris Blanchard: Sutton Ag's a pretty special company. They've been somebody that I've dealt with off and on for 20 years. They're great.

Jason Weston: I'm very, very impressed with their customer service and just their taking the time to ... I'm not spending thousands of dollars. They sell huge equipment down there and stuff and here I'm just going to go and say I want some brushes for my finger weeder. I'm going to spend a hundred and some bucks and he's going to be able to sit there on the phone with me for 20, 30 minutes and tell me how to set them up, how they work. That's incredible. Here they're dealing with huge, huge farms and yet they're willing to take time and talk to my little teeny place. I respect a company like that. I love a company like that.

Chris Blanchard: What kinds of tips and tricks do you have for using those finger weeders?

Jason Weston: I can only speak for my soil at this point. I don't know what sort of tips and tricks are going to be needed on sand and other crops or other types of soil. For me, the one thing that just ... be bold with them. Just put them as close so the fingers are just about touching and get out there and just go for it. It's scary and it's going to take a while before you build up that confidence to actually just go out there and just say, "This works. It's not going to hurt anything."

Chris Blanchard: My sphincter is clenching as you say this. That's got to take some guts.

Jason Weston: It's like anything. I was going through the beets for the first few times. I was



seeing a beet here and there get thrown out. I was going, “God, is this worth it? Is this worth it?” Now I’m thinking, if I was weeding these by hand, heck, you’d be throwing out tons of them too. You go to pull a weed, the beet comes with it. I started thinking, I’m losing a lot less beets like this than I am by doing it by hand. Ended up the same thing with carrots. At first, because it’s something new, you’re like oh my god, this isn’t working right. Then you start thinking, the other way was doing a heck of a lot more damage. Then you start realizing, I just went and finger weeded 40,000 carrots and I killed 30 of them. Not a big deal. I would have killed probably four or five hundred of them hand weeding.

If you’re worried about it, if you’re really concerned about loss of your soil and stuff like that, just feed a little extra. You can always kill them later. They do surprising little damage. They’re magical in a way. Certain crops like radishes and some of the salad mixes, they don’t work on. They’re too shallow rooted. The plants have to have a deep root.

Transplants, they work beautifully on. You just go out and transplant, we do lettuce, go out and transplant lettuce. Six, seven days later, I can go through and start finger weeding and killing any of the thread weeds that are starting to come up. Whatever it does miss, let’s say I have 1200 row feet of spinach. Whatever the finger weeders are missing, it might take me 20 to 30 minutes to go pull a few weeds that were missed, tops.

Chris Blanchard: Even if you’re not eliminating the hand weeding labor, you’re dramatically reducing it.

Jason Weston: Yeah. You’re talking, let’s say carrots. Hand weeding carrots for us used to take, let’s say, a four-man crew to do a 1200 row feet of carrots, probably would have taken by the group of four people, it would have taken an easy 15 hours. Now you’re taking that down to one person after the finger weeding’s done, one time during the whole planting, might take 30 minutes. It’s a huge difference.

Chris Blanchard: It makes it a no-brainer to invest in that kind of equipment then, even if it’s a couple hundred dollars apiece.

Jason Weston: It’s like my parents and my brother and my dad, when I first started getting into this Planet Junior stuff and the walk behind tractors, at first they didn’t like me spending so much money on these unknowns. I was buying all this different tooling, anything I could find I could imagine that might work, I had to test it. I had to take a chance. They’d get so upset because they’d get this bill for three or \$400 off of eBay for me buying different tools that I found on eBay. I’d say, “It’s worth it. It’s worth it. Trust me.”

Soon enough I’d get them running. Maybe half of them were worth the money and the other half basically I gave away to somebody else to play with. Over the long game, now we have this system that is just incredible. I am still buying tools to this day, testing out stuff. It doesn’t have to be Planet Junior. I just go through eBay, craigslist looking for any small scale old school tools that I can use that



might be able to work that do something for somebody. It doesn't necessarily have to work on my farm, but if I can find something that's cool, post a video about it, maybe somebody else will see it and go, "Wow, that'll work for what I'm growing." It's a community movement too.

Back to the original story, now my parents nor my brother, none of them say anything about me buying stuff for the Planet Junior. They're just like, "Okay. It's probably a really good idea."

Chris Blanchard: You're talking about this old equipment. This is one of these things that happens periodically on the show. I'm like, "Where was this when I was farming?" I also think for me, the idea of buying an old piece of equipment and rehabilitating it, wasn't exactly in my skillset. Is this something that's available? Are there newer versions of the power units available for these?

Jason Weston: Yeah, there was hundreds of different walk behind tractors made for 50, 60 years. Most of them are pretty good for what they do. I can only speak for the Planet Junior because that's what I use. There's the Midland's, Simplicity's, David Bradley's and umpteenth tons of other ones out there that will work and that can do the job. I stick with Planet Junior because it's what I know. It's simple. I can go find an old Planet Junior tractor. Most of the wear parts on those old tractors were double-sided. If one side ever wore out, you can flip it over and it's brand new. These things were made to last over 100 years of use. They're incredible and super simple.

As far as power, the new Briggs and Stratton motors actually have the same bolt pattern as the original Briggs and Stratton motors from the 40s and 50s and 60s. Literally, you pull off four bolts, put your new motor on it, put them right in the exact same holes, they have a six to one gear ratio, gear reduction on the side of it. That lines up with all the original pulleys and drive system. You put your old pulley back on it, hook a throttle cable up to it, put a new belt on it, add some gas and oil and you're working. It's just really that simple.

There's other tractors out there like that that are simple too. I'm just not a professional. There's guys and groups online that can really help out with that. That can make the choosing of what tractors to use and how to set them up a lot easier.

Chris Blanchard: Are there other tools that you found besides the spider weeders that are really valuable?

Jason Weston: Yeah. Every tool is valuable in its own way. It's just a matter of what works good on your farm. Hoss makes a hoe, the stirrup hoe. It's a cheap easy solution to getting a multi-row cultivator on these tractors. They bolt right on the clamps and you're right out there working in the field in no time. It's available. It's new. You're not searching on eBay for weeks, months, years looking for this one specific diamond in the rough tool sitting out there someplace.



Hoss, they have their tool set-ups. They have beet hoes you can use on a tractor. That's really nice. There's a company now that's making clamps and gauge wheels for them. We're starting to get a whole set of different parts available for these tractors that make putting them together and getting them running simpler versus the old days when you were checking eBay 10 times a day looking for that one piece that you need so desperately. Now you can just go online or make a phone call and say, "I need this-and-that clamps." Within a few days they're shipped. "I need gauge wheels," and they're shipped, and finger weeders. You can call up Hoss, "I need this type of hoe, this type of replacement part."

As the groups and the amount of people using these tractors grows, it's becoming easier and easier within the community for everybody to find what they need to get their tractors going. Back when we originally started when there was only three or four of us that were testing these out and figuring how to go, it could be really hard to find those parts that you needed. Now it's pretty much a cake walk. Everyone's having a great time just being able to order what they need, build their cultivating set-ups and get right out there and start working.

Chris Blanchard:

Awesome. With that Jason, we're going to stop here, get a quick word from our sponsors and then we'll be right back with Jason Weston from Joe's Garden in Bellingham, Washington.

The Farmer to Farmer Podcast is brought to you by Store-It Cold's CoolBot. Way back in the year 2000, the year that I started Rock Spring Farm, the manager of the local food co-op complained that the lettuce from the local producers lasted for days in her cooler while the lettuce from California lasted for weeks. What's that about 2,000 miles fresher?

I later found out that none of the local growers had a walk-in cooler at that time. Seventeen years later, this is still the number one complaint I hear from produce buyers. You have to get your produce cold. The difference between then and now is that now there's CoolBot. You can build an affordable walk-in cooler powered by a CoolBot and a window air conditioning unit, saving up to 83% in upfront costs and up to 42% on monthly electricity bills compared to conventional cooling units. Use the code FTF at checkout to double your CoolBot warranty at no charge: storeitcold.com

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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, the BCS tackles jobs that we simply couldn't do with the larger machine, for mowing steep slopes and around trees, for working in our high tunnels, plus, they're gear driven for years of dependable service. Check out bcsamerica.com to see the full line of tractors and attachments plus videos of BCS in action.

We're back with Jason Weston from Joe's Garden in Bellingham, Washington. Jason, how are you getting your seeding done then? Are you actually putting the seeders on the back of these two-wheel tractors as well?

Jason Weston: I haven't tried that yet. I have all of the equipment for the multi-row seeder that can go on the back of them. They were available and they were very popular back in the day, but I haven't taken the time to get mine up and running yet. I use just the push version, the Planet Junior 300 single row seeder. I love that. It's just something that I grew up with. The ones we have down here have been down on the farm since the '30s. They're going on 80-years-old and they still work perfectly every day. Those things have literally seeded hundreds and hundreds of millions of seeds and still have yet to miss a beat after all these years.

When I seed, to make cultivating work properly on multi-row cultivating with tractors, you want your rows to be spaced properly. When one row curves, you want all of your rows to curve. I use what we've always used which is these row markers that are basically, you could say, it's like a giant rake that's six, seven, eight feet wide with just wooden spikes that come down to say if I want a 15 inch row, every 15 inches would be a wood stake that comes down.

Then I just lay a string out in the field from one end to the other and then I just go out and pull the rows all six at a time. If I'm doing more rows than that, I just turn around and follow the sixth row back down with the marker and just will mark out all our rows that way so everything comes out the same distance apart, so when I go out there to my tractors, everything is set right and I don't have to worry about rows going in or out or back or forth. I just have the same distance every single time.

Chris Blanchard: How are you doing your transplanting? Obviously, for the kind of system you've got ... I say obviously, but it doesn't seem like you'd be using a transplanter for that.

Jason Weston: No, we do all our transplanting by hand. It's easy. The transplanting tractors and automatic transplanters, they're too big and take up too much space for us. We'll have some people dropping plants in front of us on the rows. Then we'll have people just bent over with hoes, including me, just sitting there planting away. A five, six man crew, we can do, say, 6,000 heads of lettuce in 45 minutes. It doesn't take that long.

For us, it's not always about what's the easiest way to do it. It's generally always



about what's the fastest way to do it. There's a fine line there between ease and speed. If trying to make something easier takes you longer when you're a small truck farm, that doesn't pay. You've got to go for speed over ease any day.

Chris Blanchard: Who do you guys get for labor on the farm?

Jason Weston: For labor we have my wife and I, my brother and his wife and my mom and dad. Then we'll have, depending on the season, about 13 to 15 other employees beyond that. Our field work, it's a three-man crew. Ninety-nine percent of the time it's me and Laurie and Wilbur, which are a husband and wife team that have been working for us for years. The three of us can take care of the field and everybody else during the summertime is store crew and wash crew.

At times like when we go out and transplant a whole bunch of lettuce, then I'll grab some of the store crew, bring them out for an hour or two, and we'll get projects like that done really fast. Then my parents are here during the springtime during the nursery season because that's just one of the most hectic times of the year. That's the hard part. The garden part's the easy, fun part. During the summertime, they take off on their sailboat and go out sail out on the San Juan Islands all summer. We pretty much don't see them. Mostly, you could say tops we'll have 20 people down here in the springtime and it'll drop down to more like 15 during the summertime when we're just doing crops and store work.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me a little bit about how your year goes there at Joe's Garden. Bellingham, Washington, it's not exactly mild in the wintertime. You guys, you're way north, and it is pretty mild.

Jason Weston: The way we start is December 15th is our first day of spring. That's when we're down in the greenhouses and we will start planting for nursery crops like pansies, herbs, different onions, parsleys and crops like that. We'll also be starting to seed our leeks and onions for out in the field.

Then when you start getting into January, that's when we'll start seeding lettuces and different peas and miscellaneous wholesale crops. We'll do a few things for the garden too. Usually in January, February, typically we'll always get a week of nice weather that's northeastern flowing that'll dry the ground out. We'll get out there and we'll get our garlic planted. We always plant garlic in the spring, and then we'll get out there in January, February at the same time and try and get some carrots and beets seeded out in the field.

Then it's on hold for a little bit until March as far as field work. The greenhouse work just continues on. We do hundreds of thousands of pots and millions of seeds a year on the nursery part. That's an entirely different business from the garden part. March 1st, typically, depending on the weather, it can vary back and forth a few weeks, we'll get out there and start planting our first field lettuce and seed some more beets, more carrots, some spinach, and usually, depending on the weather too, we'll go ahead and transplant our leeks and



shallots and green onions and a few miscellaneous other crops here and there and peas. We do lots of peas.

Then we go back into being focused on the greenhouse operations and the store operation because that's the big business. After that, after March, it becomes an every two weeks we will have lettuces we have to plant. Other crops will be weekly having to reseed. It just becomes the beast that it is for the rest of the season.

The nursery part goes until about May 15th as far as seeding inside the greenhouses and planting then. Right then and there it's pretty much done with for the season and then we're primarily focused by June is all garden. Everything is about the farm itself. We just keep that going all season long until October. Usually the second week of October we just shut her down. Any crops left in the field will typically go to the food bank if they don't sell. We plant all our cover crops, close the doors and go home for the season.

Chris Blanchard: You guys aren't doing any winter production.

Jason Weston: No, no. It's too hard on the soil to be doing winter production in this area, especially with our soil. You're going out there making a mud pit out of everything. It's just not worth it anymore. We used to. Back in the day when we were more of a wholesale farm, it was a 365-day operation. Back then our store was teeny. We had six parking spots. If we saw six cars in the parking area, we'd have the whole field crew and everybody running in to help inside the store.

Now, we have 50 parking spots and 15 people working in the store over the week. Field crew don't even work in the store anymore. Back when we were doing the wholesale, that's just where the money was. That's where we focused on everything.

Chris Blanchard: How did that change for you guys? How did you move from being primarily a wholesale operation into being almost exclusively retail?

Jason Weston: It was just as the market changed. For a long time, grocery stores didn't have the bag lettuce. They didn't have the organic lettuce. You just had produce in the grocery store. If you were a local supplier, we were shipping out hundreds of cases every other day of product. One grocery store might order as much as 100 cases of lettuce every other day.

As the produce industry changed, the produce department got divided, first of all, into organic and non-organic. Then it got divided again to your pre-made salads and your non-organic and your organic. Basically you're taking that same produce space and divide it into three different areas. You go from selling hundreds of cases to where it literally went down to 10 cases every other day to the same store that use to buy 100 cases every other day.

Even though the prices of all the products went up, the volume dropped so



much that it just no longer became worth our time anymore to do it. We just quit focusing on the wholesale and just switched over to focusing on to our retail business instead.

Chris Blanchard: How did you do that? You've been located in the middle of the city for 120 years. I would think that a retail operation would have been a no-brainer from the get-go.

Jason Weston: You would think it would be, but it took that whole local movement. The buy local movement is really what gave us the ability to change. The farm tourism gave us the ability to change our structure of how we did stuff. Before people weren't really that interested in coming to the garden. It's just a farm. They're just a different generation of people. They grew up with farms all over the place. As a younger generation started coming on and started taking over buying groceries, you had this movement where they wanted their kids to see a farm. By now, there's just none left around. This became more of an experience for people.

Everything in the timing just worked out great. As the wholesale businesses started to die out, the local movement started to catch on. We're just like, "We're cutting down from growing 12,000 heads of lettuce every other week to 4,000 heads of lettuce to 6,000 every other week, depending on the season. Then we started diversifying into a lot more salad mixes and mustards and miscellaneous other crops just for fun just to see how we did with those. We were able to offer a larger diversity of stuff inside the store which made it more attractive to people. We started opening up seven days a week. With the community support and with us being able to offer more stuff and not being so focused on the wholesale, it worked out. Just lucky timing. If it were 10 years earlier, it probably wouldn't have worked.

Chris Blanchard: You farm with your brother, right, as well as your parents. You said your parents are off of the farm for a large portion of the summer now, but you've got family around you all the time.

Jason Weston: Yeah.

Chris Blanchard: How does that work?

Jason Weston: It's awesome. Growing up, my brother worked at the garden for five years when he was a kid then left the farm to go do other things. He moved to Seattle for about 20 years. I really liked it, enjoyed it and stayed on. Working for your parents, as anyone that has ever worked with family knows is a nightmare, but you can learn to make it work. My dad and I always had a really good thing. So does my mom and I.

We could argue and fight like hell at the garden, but when 6:00 came around, and we were done for the day, you left it behind. You just didn't even think about it. You have to be able to forgive, forget, and never hold a grudge.



Grudges will get you nowhere in a family business. You just let it roll off your back. It's not a big deal. We all had that same mentality. We just allowed it to work. There wasn't that frustration. There wasn't that, oh is he going to bring that up today type mentality. Just forgive and forget. No biggy. It's just business, as they say. That's really what made it work very well for us.

When my brother came back in 2007, I think, no, 2006, somewhere back in there, when he came back, when I was finally taking over the farm from my parents, the farm was too big of an operation for my wife and I to operate on our own. We had the wholesale plant business, which is a beast. We have the garden, which takes a lot of knowledge to do and then there's the retail store, which is a heck of a lot to do, and then there's the running the day-to-day business, which is a heck of a lot to do.

When the time came, I just was like, I need somebody to help me and there's only one person that I know that's like my dad, and is the ultimate businessman ever, was my brother. My dad and I called my brother and said, "Do you want to quit your high-paying job in Seattle and come take over here?" He was like, "Heck, yeah." He was just having a kid, but he wanted to get to a simpler life. He was a salesman and traveled all over the US and was gone for long periods of time.

It ended up working out wonderfully. Nathan and his wife, Peg, both work here. My wife and I both work here. The way we set it up, I farm. I grow everything. I maintain almost everything. I am your basic general farmer.

My brother, he runs the store. He concentrates on selling everything, making sure all the wholesale business runs smoothly and he does all the background work, all the advertising and dealing with taxes; the day-to-day not fun playing with tractors business part of it. It ended up working really good.

At first when my brother came down here and started working in the store, my dad, mom and I were just like, "What the heck are you doing? That's not how you do it." We were set in our ways on how we set up that store, how everything was in its place. It'd drive me nuts. But when sales went up, productivity went up, I had to shut up. It worked really good. Now he runs all that. I get to go out and play in my fields all day and be Mr. Farmer. He can be Mr. Businessman/farmer-salesman. It was a win-win for everybody.

Chris Blanchard: What kind of changes did he make in the store?

Jason Weston: Mostly it was he started to; one, he set up displays different. We were always very particular in how the displays were set up. He made sure there was always customer service available. Before, when my dad, my mom and I and my wife ran it, customers were a side note. We were more of a wholesale operation. We just left it, when you're ready, just come find us. We'll be out in the greenhouse or we're out in the field during the springtime. In the summertime there was a little bit more attention to detail. He just made it more a professional operation.



He made sure there's always someone there to help, that they were well-trained and knowledgeable about the product.

He also started bringing in other products, more product than we did from other farms. We've always brought in stuff like berries from berry farms and apples and stuff from apple farms. He started bringing in the honeys, jams. He got bread companies, all local companies to bring stuff in. He made it more of a, I shouldn't say a one-stop-shop, but made it worth people's time to be able to come down there two or three, four days a week and shop rather than just that novelty stop place.

This year we're going to try and see if we can start carrying milk and eggs. It's not about the profit of it. It's about making it easier for the customer. When you start getting into retail, the customer is king. If you don't do what the customer wants, you're not going to be in business long.

Chris Blanchard: I think that's one of those things that it's so obvious that you almost feel like it shouldn't have to be said. I think whether you're looking at farmer's market or CSAs or doing it wholesale or doing it at your farm stand, it's really easy to forget where you have to put your customer, and what it really means to put your customer first.

Jason Weston: They're the ones buying from you. If you're growing some magical thing that nobody else in the world grows or produces, sure, you can do whatever you want and treat people every once in awhile if they want it. When you're doing and selling the same stuff that everybody else is selling, you've got to make sure that they are happy and they are number one and they're your number one concern. If you don't do that, you're not going to be in business long.

That's the thing too; you've got to remember farming is a business above anything else. If you go on this as it's a back to nature this, that, you could be successful, but you can have a hard time on it. You've got to have the business mentality on it to be truly successful at it for most times.

Our focus too is we try and provide produce that everyone can afford. It's always been very important to the farm when Joe owned it. It's always been important for him to provide produce that's affordable to everybody. They grew up dirt poor, literally starving to death at times when they were younger. Having food for everybody was always very important for them. Same with my parents. Back in the '50s and '60s, money wasn't as plentiful as it is today. It was always very important for them to provide affordable product.

With our style of farm we're doing where we learned to farm to do wholesale, you could say mass production on a small scale, but that's how we do it with a focus on maintaining the soil health and everything. We know how to produce large quantities efficiently, which keeps our prices down, which is good for the customer. It makes them happy. I'm still making plenty of money. They're not having to pay an arm and a leg. It's a win-win for everybody.



Having that experience of being a wholesale farmer working to, back in the day, you're talking a case of lettuce was four and a half dollars a dozen, and you made good money selling 12 heads for four and a half bucks. Back in the '80s we were only getting \$6 for a case of 24. We still made a really good living at it. With just that knowledge and that skillset to be able to produce stuff at a higher volume efficiently, transfers into savings for our customers, so it's a win-win for everybody.

Chris Blanchard: We talked about one specific tool that you're using, the two-wheel tractors and the weeders on those to help you meet that efficiency, to keep your prices down.

Jason Weston: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Blanchard: Is there a key to producing a large volume of produce on a small acreage? What is your magic sauce?

Jason Weston: Motivation. Just motivation. I was trained to do everything fast. Everything, you could say, is almost a race. I truly believe in working with your employees. You don't go sit up in an office or go do something else. You are the one that sets the pace. You're the one that has the knowledge, the speed to teach them. You should be there as much as you possibly can working side by side to set that pace until they learn it and appreciate the reasons behind it. I really think that's one of the most important things is always be on site with them.

That's what helps us having my brother to do the store and me to do the farm is we can separate those duties, where by myself, I'd be in the store and out in the field at the same time setting paces and teaching people constantly. I guess it's just not dilly-dallying. You're at your farm. You're there to work. You've got to treat it as your job. It's just a business to me. It's more to me deep inside. I love farming. I love growing stuff. I love everything, but it's a business first. I have to treat it that way. Everything has to be efficient. We've got to be constantly looking for ways to make things more efficient.

For us, when we're planting this five acres, typically the whole farm, on average, gets planted three times a year. We can produce as much off of these five acres to, say, 15 acres of land would. It's just about when one crop's done, that next crop is in there within a day or two, if not the same day. We're just turn over, turn over, turn over, speed, speed, speed. It goes back to what I was saying originally about it's not what's easy. It's what's fast that makes the difference. I could go get a transplanter and sit on the tractor and do those two rows or I can bend over and just get those plants in there so fast it's blinding.

Chris Blanchard: I think with that, Jason, we're in a good spot here to stop and turn to our lightning round, which we're going to do right after we get a quick word from one more sponsor.



Perennial support from the Farmer to Farmer Podcast and this lightening round is brought to you by Vermont Compost Company, makers of living potting soils for organic growers since 1992. In the transplant greenhouse, all of your investment in plant materials, labor, heat, and overhead, depend absolutely on the performance of the media where you expect your plants to grow. That media has a really hard job to do; produce a healthy plant in just a few cubic centimeters of soil.

When I started farming, I focused on getting the cheapest ingredients I could to make my own potting soil, and later on finding cheap potting soil that was already put together. I found out what so many farmers have, that saving money on inputs doesn't always result in increased profits.

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Joe, what's your favorite tool on the farm besides the Planet Junior weeders?

Jason Weston: It'd have to be my Kubota tractor. I know it's modern and all that, but I love tractors. I love pushing dirt. I love everything about the soil. It's been a passion of mine since I was a little kid.

Chris Blanchard: What kind of Kubota tractor do you have?

Jason Weston: Right now, my main tractor is a Kubota B-3030 and then I have an old B-7100 that Joe bought back in the '70s, we use now for our carrot digger. Then I have a little Kubota G-4200 I use for pulling irrigation around.

Chris Blanchard: As we've had our conversation today, it sounds like you've been on the farm forever. Did you ever leave the farm, and if you did, why did you come back?

Jason Weston: I left the farm when I was 17 because I was smarter than everybody else on the planet at that point. I had to go out and stick my stake in the ground and show what I could do in the world. I left and I worked in construction at a few different places. I did restaurant work. I did all types of different things.

I left the farm in May of that year. By, I think, July I was back at the farm and I asked my dad, "I want my job back." He just looked at me and smiled. He said, "You can apply for work next year." I had an epiphany that moment. I was like, "Oh my god, I guess my dad's a dang good teacher. He's teaching me that you stick with something or you just face the consequences."

It was at that point, I did reapply the next year and got my job back, but I knew from then on that I wanted to be a farmer. I love it, everything about farming I love. I love the challenges. I like even the repetitive parts of it. It's just all around



my passion, my every waking moment. Everything I think about is farming and something to do with farming.

Even when I was 20-years-old, I gave up mountain biking, I gave up skiing. I gave up every sport that I thought that I could hurt my body on because I knew I was doing this until the day I die, and just focused on low-impact sports like fishing and hunting, just to save my body for the next 70, 80 years of work ahead of me.

It's interesting, an old guy that comes down here all the time, he goes to me the other day, he goes, "Young people have got to stop and realize they've got to save something for when they're older." I think I was really lucky to learn that lesson early from Joe and my dad about saving your body for what you really want to do in life, especially if you're going to be a farmer and you love it, you'd better have something left over when you're in your 60s and 70s.

Chris Blanchard: What's your favorite crop to grow?

Jason Weston: Lettuce. Absolutely love lettuce. It's something I've always been passionate about. It's an easy crop to grow for the most part, at least over here it is. At the same time, it can be very challenging. I like to get it so every head comes up perfectly even with the next one, which isn't as easy as it sounds, but it's definitely my favorite.

Chris Blanchard: What would your brother say is your farming superpower?

Jason Weston: I think he would just definitely have to say probably my farming superpower just creating new tools to make the jobs easier, endlessly just figuring out something different or a new way to do something, or just the fact that I have years of experience and know how to do things the old ways too if we need to.

Chris Blanchard: Finally, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?

Jason Weston: Figure out how to use that dang Planet Junior Walk Behind. It will save you years and years of heartache and extra work. Listen to your dad. Listen to Joe when they say it's a great tool. Screw playing around with the little Troy-Bilt and BCSs and all the other little walk behind rototillers. Get that dang tractor running and learn to weld. Go and learn to weld. That's exactly what I'd say.

Chris Blanchard: Jason, thank you so much for a really informative and fun conversation today. Really glad that we could get together.

Jason Weston: Thank you. I had a great time. This was fun. We could probably go on another two or three hours, the more I think about stuff to talk about, but maybe another day.

Chris Blanchard: All right. Wrapping things up here, I'll say again, that this is Episode 117 of the



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Thank you for listening. Be safe out there, and keep the tractor running.