



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast

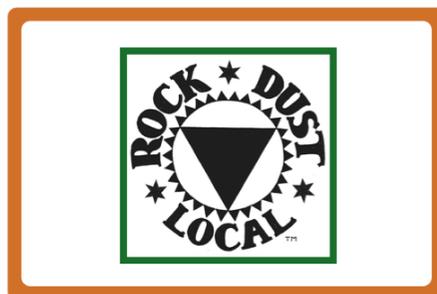
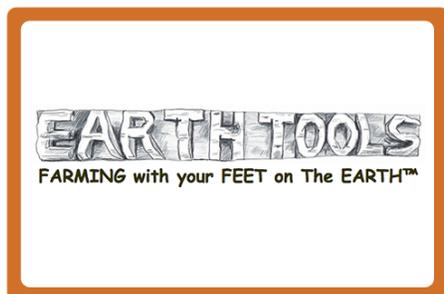


EPISODE 122

Danny Percich of Full Plate Farm on Winter Farming in the Pacific Northwest and Taking it Easy

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Chris: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, Episode 122. This is your host, Chris Blanchard. Danny Percich raises vegetables at Full Plate Farm in Ridgefield, Washington for a 90-member winter only CSA. With three acres of mostly outdoors production, Danny has decided to focus on an under-served niche in the marketplace, enabling him to make a living on a small acreage.

We get muddy discussing the challenges of winter production in a climate where it rains literally all winter. Danny gives us the lowdown on how they manage deer predation and vole populations, as well as how he dresses to stay warm and dry no matter the weather. Danny also provides insights into how he has minimized capital and labor inputs on his farm how that influences his farming schedule as well as his cropping and production strategies.

I really got a lot out of this, and I don't think it's just because I'm from the Pacific Northwest. It was a lot of fun to talk to Danny and hear he's got an interesting approach to this whole farming thing. It was enlightening. I hope you enjoy this show as much as I did producing it.

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Danny Percich, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

Danny: Thanks, Chris. I'm happy to be here.



- Chris: So glad you could make this work on an almost-June day.
- Danny: Almost. We finally have some nice weather here in the Northwest for the last few weeks. It's been quite a wet spring. We've been racing around trying to get things in the ground.
- Chris: Danny, tell me about that and about your farm, the Full Plate Farm in Ridgefield, Washington. Where's Ridgefield? How many acres are you farming, and how are you guys selling your produce?
- Danny: Ridgefield is roughly about 15, 20 miles just north of Portland, Oregon. We're on a 10-acre piece of property, five acres of forest and five acres are field. About three of those acres are what we're growing vegetables on. We have a 90-member CSA, and we just do a winter only CSA. If we have extra produce, sometimes we'll sell a little bit wholesale to some restaurants, but mostly, everything we grow is just strictly for our CSA. It's just me and I'll hire an employee a couple days a week in the midst of the summer and a couple days in the winter to help with some harvests. That's the gist of it.
- Chris: Danny, I'm just going to ask right off the bat, with three acres of produce and a 90-member CSA, are you making a living doing this?
- Danny: We are, yes. I'm not working quite full-time. I'm helping take care of the kids a day a week and also going on family vacations and things like that. Yes, I'm making a living doing it. It's great. It's just me. My wife wouldn't choose the farm, I don't think. She's an artist and an educator. She's happy doing what she's doing and I'm happy doing what I'm doing. We're making it work.
- Chris: Is your primary market in Portland, Oregon, or are you selling on the north side of the river as well?
- Danny: We are. We are selling on both sides. We are selling here in Ridgefield. People come to the farm to pick up produce here and then we have a pickup site in Vancouver and five pickup sites around the Portland area. Everything's within 30 miles, is probably the furthest that we go. That's even, my mom watches the kids a couple days a week and she takes produce back to her house for people to pick up around the west side of Portland.
- Chris: You said that you're doing a winter only CSA program.
- Danny: Yes, yes. Winter only. Our season, our harvest season, our delivery season, pickup season, is from, it goes usually right around the first of November to about the last day of March. We have 11 pickups over that time. It's an every other week harvest and pickup schedule for our members and ourselves. It's one week on of harvesting and then a week off to do odds and ends.
- Chris: [00:05:00] You said that you're planting now.



Danny: We are, yes. We don't have the mad rush to get in in the spring. Part of the reason why we chose the winter model is because our fields here on our property are pretty wet in the spring. We have pretty great soil, about 12 to 18 inches down, about 18 times two feet in some areas and then pretty much a lot of clay. Our water level can get really high, especially in the spring and fall and the winter. In the spring it's really hard to get in.

We were planning on doing the summer CSA and then just couldn't really get in. I said we'll do winter again. Right now we have our winter squash in, just finished getting our leeks in, got our onions in the other week; a later of set of things this year because it's just been such a wet spring.

[00:06:00] Then in the next few months, I'd say probably about 85% of our fields or 90 are all planted by the end of July. Then there's the odds and ends of some fall and winter greens, quick growing greens. They'll just hold over the winter that we're planting. Probably the last planting is probably in September for the first week of September for those, and a few things, some turnips and rutabagas and things in August. The majority of all the brassicas are planted right around mid-July. Our carrots around mid-July and then in mid to late June our parsnips and parsley root and other things like that.

Chris: I'm familiar with the climate out there because I grew up in Seattle and actually lived for a couple years in Astoria, Oregon, which would be off to the west of you there. For the rest of our listeners, tell me about the climate in southwest Washington State.

Danny: We have basically, you could say from right after the 4th of July until probably mid-September, there's no rain at all. It's really rare to get some rain. We have a drought for those months, and then from the rest of the time, it's rainy on and off. Then especially from November into March, it's just slow drizzly rain. Not huge downpours but just wet, it's pretty moist and wet during that time with some very nice sunny days and breaks here and there. It also really wouldn't be that fun. The sun has to come out every once in a while. That's the gist of it. Is that ...

Chris: Yeah. How cold does it get there in the wintertime?

Danny: Usually around into the teens and 20s, is the low most of the time. This last year, we were right around 10 degrees for a couple days, a couple nights. I guess a couple nights. Back in 2013, we were about the same. Those have been extremes in our area. Usually. There are definitely records that we've been setting the last five years. We've had a couple winters that have definitely set some records and definitely pushed us to hone our techniques.

Back in 2013, I was talking about it was down for about a week or so, we were really down in the 10s and the people in the valley were down to zero. We definitely learned a lot that year. That year was a learning year of what we are growing and the varieties we're growing that were working and some that weren't. This last year, I felt like we actually handled everything really well, even though we had some really extreme winter



weather.

Chris: Now, when it gets down into the 10s at night, what's happening the following day? Is it getting back up above freezing or does it stay cold for days or weeks at a time?

Danny: Usually not, but it's rare to get back above freezing if it's down that cold. We're really looking at the weather. We can look at the long-range forecast, and if I see that there's something like that coming our way, then we'll harvest what we need to harvest to make sure that the CSA, the schedule stays on time. I found that going off schedule, our harvest schedule and delivery schedule, can really mess things up because if you go off once, then you're trying to make up, but then the weather gets crazy again, and it's just a big old mess trying to mess around. We really just try to stay on our schedule of our delivery schedule. If we see that coming, then let's go dig roots now and get those out and let's go harvest these greens and put them in the walk-in.

It really worked out this last year. I was pleasantly surprised that we had some mad rushes, and I had to do a little more harvestings a little earlier than I like to harvest them. We really like to harvest things a day or two before we deliver them. Sometimes the same day, too, in the winter. We really watch the weather in the winter, I guess. That's a big thing.

We definitely were pulling snow off the roots and digging roots, digging parsnips and things, trying to find the lines and the rows. It's always an adventure when the plants are covered with snow and you're just trying to search around for them and trying to make sure you're digging in straight lines and not diving into the middle of the bed, staying on the outside of the bed. It gets a little messy, you could say that, when the weather gets a little unpredictable.

Chris: It's really interesting to me that you're talking about digging roots for your CSA, which runs from November through March. Now, here in the upper Midwest where I have most of my farming experience, we, of course, would harvest those roots and put them into a root cellar or a walk-in cooler over the winter. It doesn't sound like you're doing that.

Danny: No, we're not doing that. There's such amazing flavor that you can get in the winter with the roots when you're pulling them right out of the ground and letting them freeze and thaw. They start to turn to sugar. You really get this sweetness that you don't get the same way that I found when you do put them in the walk-in and store them.

Our carrots, I've had people tell me that I've ruined them about carrots for the rest of their life so they won't look at carrots the same way again. You just get this incredible flavor. Parsnips, the same thing, carrots, the beets. When you're harvesting these roots throughout the winter, you get a whole other complexity of flavors. People really appreciate that.

With that said, we've also over the last couple winters, definitely had some, with carrots specifically, had bigger losses in January and February of those. Right now I think we're going to this year, we're planning on probably putting up about a third to half of our



carrots into our walk-in and storing those for the second half of our season and then digging stuff fresh, probably up to about January or so. I figure it's better. Do people want to have carrots that don't taste as good or not have any carrots at all in March? I figure people still want to have carrots.

Chris: When you're talking about putting up enough carrots for a 90-member CSA, or putting up half of the carrots for a 90-member CSA, how many carrots are we talking?

Danny: Let's see. In a full share, we try to get around two and a half to three pounds every two weeks. That's about three, what, 300 pounds, so about 1500 pounds of carrots, I guess, would be about half, do that math.

Chris: A not insignificant amount of carrots.

Danny: No, definitely not insignificant. We're definitely going to have to get another cooler probably to accommodate doing that. That's right where we're at. For our cooler, we have the back of a reefer truck, refrigerated truck. You can just buy the box of those already insulated. You can find them on Craigslist, and we found ... That's what we have right now. The great thing about that that I really like is that it's already waterproof, weather-tight. It doesn't have to go inside a certain area. You can have it out. Right now, it's just under our trees of our forest, back in there. It's modular. You can move it around pretty easily too, rather than the panels, you put all the panels together, and you can add insulation. We'll probably get another one of those just for some root storage.

Chris: Are you running the refrigeration unit that came on that box, or have you installed a regular refrigeration unit inside of the box?

Danny: We installed a CoolBot on the one that we have right now. That's a, say, I think it's an eight by 12 unit. You can get them in all different sizes. The CoolBot works great. Also, with using the CoolBot in the wintertime, we're not swinging the temperature from 90 outside down to 36 or 40. We don't have to drop the temperature as much. I feel like I haven't done the math or the specs on this, but we could get a larger box and still cool it without running into issues of size with the CoolBot, if that makes sense.

Chris: That totally makes sense because when you're harvesting roots at the end of October or bringing in greens in February to store in there, those things are going to be 30 degrees, 40 degrees as far as core temperature, not 60 or 70 degrees in a core temperature that you're trying to pull out of it.

Danny: Exactly. Most of the time the temperature is probably at night is in the 30s and in the day is probably in the high 40s, low 50s sometimes, but between mid-30s and mid-40s is the average temperature of the Northwest wintertime. We're only really dropping things 10 degrees, 15 degrees sometimes. It's not as big of a swing there.

Chris: What other infrastructure do you have for winter farming? You mentioned the walk-in cooler, the truck box and plans to get another one. Do you have a packing shed in addition?



Danny: Yes, we have a packing shed. It's a ... What is it? It's a 20 by 24 foot carport with some wash tables, some packing benches in the middle. I have a root washer there and then just some other shelving. We have a tractor shed next to that. That's a larger shed for our '73 International and our '49 Allis Chalmers C, and then just other tools also.

My wife's parents live on the same property. They live back in the forested part of the property. I'm able to store winter squash up in their garage and then also Russ, who's my father-in-law, he owns and runs a transmission shop. He has a lot of tools that I'm able to use or borrow or ask for help if I need some help with some fabrication or anything. If I break something and I can't fix it, he can just about fix anything. It's pretty amazing to have his help. He loves helping too.

Chris: That's an awesome resource to have.

Danny: It's an amazing resource. If I blow up an engine, he can help me rebuild it. It's pretty great. With him being a small business owner, he's always encouraged me to build slowly and don't go in debt too much, just use the resources available and what's around. That's what we've been trying to do here.

Chris: Tell me about that. You've been farming since, I think, 2010 on Michelle's family land.

Danny: Yes.

Chris: Are you still growing your farm or are you where you intend to settle out?

Danny: I would like to grow it some more but we'd need to expand and rent some more land nearby. We're pretty much at capacity of where we want to be with the land here. I've always said when all the kids are in school, then we'll may take another step in another direction or at least assess it at that point. We have a five and a half-year-old and two and a half-year-old twins right now. Things are pretty busy around the house. Once everybody's in school and there's a little more time on the ends of days and insides of the days, we'll think about ... I'd like to think about renting some more land.

There's a market for winter vegetables. It seems like there's more and more people doing it in the area. There's a few good winter markets in the Portland area and there's a handful of people that have winter CSAs, but there's still a growing needs for local food during the winter.

Chris: You haven't had any trouble selling what you're producing.

Danny: No. There's always a little push just at the end sometimes, the last couple of weeks. We still have a few CSA spots. We'll send out a little email blast to just tell a couple of friends. They'll put stuff on their Facebooks and things. Not really, I guess to answer your question, no.

Chris: Last week we were talking to the Cunningham's. They're down in Humboldt County. They farm with oxen. I asked them, why take something like market farming and make it



harder. It's hard enough already. Why crazy winter farming?

Danny: [00:19:30] That's a good question. I love the heartiness of winter vegetables, but there's some benefits of it too. The toughest thing is definitely the quality and potential loss of vegetables is definitely there, dealing with that side of things. We can also charge more, which makes up for a lot of that, but also one great thing is we have less weed pressure in general when we're planting.

We don't have the slow spring slog of the slow-growing weeds and chick weed getting in everything and all that. We just have more of an annual quick-growing weeds that we can take care of. We know when we're planting stuff in mid-July, there's just not same weed pressure. That's a nice benefit.

One of the biggest reasons we've chosen to farm in the wintertime is it really has evened out the schedule for us. In the summer, we're planting, watering and weeding. In the winter, we're harvesting, washing, packing and delivering. Instead of doing all of that just in the summer, we can divide that over the whole year.

It's really important to me to have ... I worked in different CSAs and done lots of regular season farm work. It's crazy in the summer. It's great and I love it and I thrive on that and I love long days, but once we had a family, I've really come to appreciate having time for them. I start work at eight and I end around four. Then we take vacations and follow the school schedule, do stuff during spring break and winter break and take off during the summer.

There's a lot of flexibility as long I have somebody to help be around to just make sure the irrigation's going when I'm gone, then I can take off in the summer, and it's amazing. It's so great. It's so great to be able to play with the kids and be with the kids and just have some sanity during the summer. When you're in the midst of a regular season farm, you're working long hard days and you're bone tired at the end of the day most of the time or pretty close to in the middle of the summer. There's lots more logistics to try to work out with harvesting, packing, delivering and all that and marketing. It distributes everything over the whole year. Instead of having so much down time in the winter, we have plenty of work to do in the winter. I really like that about it a lot.

Chris: When you started in 2010, was the winter CSA your business plan or was this something that developed more organically?

Danny: It developed a little more organically. When Josh Volk started Slow Hand Farm that first year, I was talking to him and I was back east and I was coming back. I ended up working with him that year on that. We'd always talk. He'd always talk about it'd be cool to just grow just for the winter and always stuck in my head.

The first year we moved out here, we moved out and we bought a mobile home and put it on the land out here, Michelle's family land, but we wanted to remodel it, so I knew I'd be doing that that summer. I was also managing a farm in Portland at the time too. There wasn't time enough that I grow and market and sell in the summer. I was like, I can grow food in the summertime and sell it in the winter. I was really inspired by all the



chicories we were growing at Slow Hand Farm.

We did that that winter and it worked. It was good. We just started with 12 members. It doubled every year for the first four years and settled here around 90 members. On the next spring, I was planning on growing or doing a regular season CSA. It was just still wet. I just really couldn't get in early enough like I wanted to. I was like, why don't we just do this again?

At that time, I was still managing a farm in Portland. Those first couple years at the farm I was doing that while we were settling in up here and getting things going. Then the next year, just being here full-time, or full-ish time, you could say. Then we just haven't really looked back. There's the market. People love it. I've really just forced chicories down everybody's throats and told them that's what they get to eat a lot of the time. That's one of the learning curves of the winter CSA, but it's been good.

Chris: You talk about having to force people into chicories. That happens to be just about my favorite vegetable.

Danny: Mine too.

Chris: And really hard to get here in the upper Midwest in the wintertime to get anything other than just radicchio and the occasional escarole. Are most of your customers coming to you from other CSAs or are they doing your CSA in the wintertime and then something else for their food supply from April through October?

Danny: That's a good question. It's a mix. I definitely find that I am able to hit the market in between things. There's some people who love going to the farmer's market and love during the summertime and walking around and doing that in the summer as an activity. Those people don't have a CSA in the summer. They still want to eat locally but maybe not want to go to the farmer's market in the winter.

There's some people that love having a home gardens and growing a lot of their own food in the summer as well, and so aren't interested in the CSA, or some people that travel in the summer and can't be around to actually get a regular season CSA. There are some people also that will do a CSA and then come over our way and sometimes have a little overlap where they're up to their ears in just about everything in the fall.

It's worked out really good. It's definitely a way that I've marketed our CSA. When I tell people about it, is that there's a little more flexibility with the winter CSA. The crops, the vegetables store longer in people's refrigerators. They don't have to pick up vegetables every week. It's every other week. For their convenience sake, I guess, they're not having to go every week necessarily to pick up veggies. We can get lots of different people. There's lots of different people that are interested in it.

Chris: In terms of volume, how big is your typical share?

Danny: A full-size share is probably ... When we pack shares and deliver those, we do them in 14-gallon Rubbermaid tubs. That's usually around 18 to 28 pounds depending on the



share. There's some variability, but depending on what squash might be in the box or what's the root heavy share.

We like to have around 10 to 13 different vegetables in each share. The half size share is just pretty much halved, basically almost exactly, with an occasional maybe not a half a head of cabbage, maybe a smaller ... We're able to use the small heads of cabbage to put in the half size shares. It's been a nice way to use some of the smaller produce too to put in for their half size shares.

Chris: With something like the winter crops, it's such a different mix of product, I think, than what most people are probably eating all summer long or all winter long if they're not part of a CSA. You're giving folks things like salsify and rutabagas and celery root and root parsley, in addition to the endives and the escaroles. In most CSAs, there's already a challenge in getting people to eat their produce, to actually use everything that's in the box. Have you found that that's more so with your winter CSA, or do the people that sign up come in expecting a little bit more adventure?

Danny: I think some people don't know what to expect necessarily and some people are ... It's kind of mixed, I guess. It's been honed over the last few years. I feel like we've gotten better at the ... or learned what people really don't like, like turnips. Some people really love them, but most people only want them made a couple times during the winter. They don't want to have turnips, don't want to eat turnips with every share.

It's definitely been things like that. Say, parsley root, some people really like and find it novel maybe in some way. We plan on giving that out once, maybe twice. The same with salsify. There's some things that we plan on just giving out one time during the season rather than overwhelming people. I feel like we've definitely, over the last few years, we'll do a survey at the end of the year and not everybody obviously responds to the survey. The people that do, I get a little feedback and just from talking to people too, finding out what they like and what they don't like.

A lot of our members are friends or friends of friends. We get some good feedback that way of what people have trouble with, what people want to eat. There's the whole other side of cooking for a winter crop. Chicories is probably one of our more difficult ones. Once people figure it out, and there's people that never really liked it and would send me that they get too much of it. Then they hit a point and they're like, "I've learned how to use this." That always makes my day when people start getting excited about chicories because that's such a wonderful, wonderful plant to eat and grow.

Chris: [00:30:00] What do people figure out to do with chicories? I know all of the things that I like to do with them, but that doesn't necessarily match up with the rest of the population.

Danny: One thing some people do is they'll cut a little bit of bitterness out of it by soaking the chicories in ice water for about 15 minutes and then drying them off and then eating them that way. A lot of people have found they like to pair a sweeter maybe dressing or some, you could say, pomegranates or oranges or some sweeter fruit-type dressing mixed in there with the bitterness and just try to contrast that.



There's some people who've really found that they love chopping it up and throwing it in their scrambled eggs. Sugarloafs are one of our favorite chicories to grow. They're one of the more sweeter chicories. People really like cutting those in half long-ways, drizzling some olive oil and sprinkling some salt and roasting those in the oven at 400 degrees or 450 for about 15 minutes. Then you get the crispy leaves, the little tender sweetness inside. It's lots of different textures and flavors happening at the same time. Those are the, I guess, probably three more popular ways that I found that people really have learned to eating the chicory.

Chris: [00:31:30] Since you're harvesting your crops from outdoors during the winter, are you growing anything actually under cover in a hoop house?

Danny: When we started that, I didn't want to have to rely on row cover or tons of plastic to cover everything and grow everything. I wanted to select different varieties that grow well here in the Northwest that can handle the weather and not to have to necessarily rely on everything being in a hoop house.

That's the way that we've worked. Our greenhouse serves as our greenhouse in the summer and in the fall we'll take out most of our benches and our ground cloths, and then open that up and plant in there. Then we have a 70 by 30 high tunnel that we'll plant into also. We usually plant spinach and cilantro. We'll also put some parsley in there and then lots of different brassica greens. In that high tunnel in the summer we've grown sweet potatoes in the summer as a crop that we'll hand out in the winter.

We're pretty lucky here in the Northwest and I guess in our country. There's a lot of some really great seed companies here that grow a lot of seeds and plants that really work well in the wintertime with Wild Garden Seeds just down in the valley and Adaptive Seeds and Uprising Seeds and Siskiyou. Those are all here in the Northwest. They've all selected things specific for this area. Obviously, you can grow them anywhere. There's some really interesting variety of greens and herbs to buy from them to grow out here in the Northwest.

Chris: Those four companies that you mentioned, are those the places that you're getting most of your seeds from, or you getting normal stuff from other companies as well?

Danny: If I can get anything from those guys, whatever they have, those are places that I look to first and then fill in the gaps from everybody else, from Johnny's and Osborne and Territorial. Those seed companies fill in the gaps for me. There's the specialized seed or a hybrid that I'm looking for that outperforms or meets my needs in other ways. I'd say those four companies are the majority of where I like to get most of my seeds.

Chris: Would something as specialized as winter growing, and especially winter growing outside in the Pacific Northwest, how do you decide what varieties you're going to grow?

Danny: I guess a lot of it's been trial and error. Of course, you look in the seed catalogs and see what they might have to say about it, and then you ask other farmers what they've been



growing and some experience of what I've grown in the past. It was the first few, probably three or four years, we really did a lot of trials and a lot of things failed. We grew a little bit more than we needed, especially those first few years just making sure that we could deliver enough produce to everybody, but then over the last few years really honed it. A lot of it's just been experience of different varieties that have done well.

We used to cover a lot of stuff, a lot of our greens like our tatsoi and Yukina Savoy and sorrel and other things like that. We used to cover a lot of that with row cover, one ounce row cover. I found we were actually getting a lot of ... and even a lot of our radishes and turnips and things too, but we were getting a lot of disease pressure underneath some of that sometimes because there wasn't enough airflow and things were just wet.

[00:35:30] By accident, we ... or by neglect, I guess I should say, some of the row cover blew off and never covered it back up the rest of the season. I don't know if it was after one of the kids was born or whatever, I just never really got around to it. We saw. We were like this stuff did great. It got down to 15 degrees and here's this tatsoi still looking great. Why cover it? Why do an extra step and why cover it if we don't need to?

We've really gone to a lot of those greens, those braising greens that we harvest a lot in February and March just to leave those completely uncovered. We'll plant those usually around the first week of September or so. They grow up to and just hang out and between February or I guess January and March we're harvesting those. That was really a huge revelation was to go ... When we started covering everything, we started covering our chicories with row cover. We covered a lot of things early on.

That was me just wanting to make sure that ... obviously you don't want lose all this hard work and these great beautiful vegetables. You don't want to lose them due to the weather. Just with experience and talking to other people has really let go of trying to cover things all the time. Somethings, obviously if we have a huge freeze coming, I'll run out and I have stuff on hand to cover stuff if we really need to. Usually things, they might get hit but then they'll bounce back in February and March. Nothing ever really truly dies.

Chris: I don't know if that's true. Maybe not on your farm.

Danny: Like the chicories, the chicories, if they get hit really hard, they'll just look really slimy. It's one of those amazing things about chicories is that they can get hit and get slimed on the outside, but you peel off a few layers and you have a beautiful radicchio, it's like a treasure hunt. There's definitely more labor on that side of things too because of that, but you also still are able to freshly harvest chicories and have some amazing flavors to share with everybody. It's special in that way.

Chris: I suppose with something like the chicories, you talk about it being a little bit more labor when you leave them uncovered, but I suppose if you cover them and you get some foliar disease, you've got the same issues of its leaves to pull off either way.



Danny: Yes, exactly. I just think if you can make do without having to cover everything and uncover it and watch the wind blow it or the deer step through it or all those things, there's a lot just there. The last couple years leaving them uncovered have worked out fine.

Chris: You said deer. I'm curious about that because, again in my experience, when we had even the garlic coming up in the spring, when it's that first green thing that's available, the deer were just on it like hippies on hummus. How are you dealing with that on your farm?

Danny: The last few years, we'll have a couple deer that just walk through. We don't have a ton of pressure. We're right on the edge of Ridgefield, which is a very fast-growing community. It used to just be a thousand folks and now it's, I don't know, it's probably six or seven. It keeps growing at a very rapid rate. They're putting in a lot of houses right now about a half mile away from us. The deer are definitely being pushed out and away of where they used to be.

This last year was the most deer pressure that we've had in the last seven years I've been here. This year we're going to have to address that a little bit. In the past what we've done is cover a lot of things with bird netting. Our first year here, I was going to build a fence on the cheap to try to keep the deer out, out of bird netting that I got from a blueberry grower out here; a big 17 foot roll by, I don't know, 5,000 feet and never got around to putting it up so I just draped it on top of some of the crops. It worked fine. I've been doing that for the last, I don't know, five or six years. That's worked really well.

We drape that bird netting on our carrots and our chicories. We'll put that on there and that keeps the deer ... they don't like getting tangled in there. They can't eat it so they're not interested and they just walk away. We used to drape a little bit of that on the edges of our brassicas to keep them out, but it seemed fine. This last year, the deer ... and it was a really harsh winter too, so they were pretty happy to have something to eat. We definitely had some losses this year, more from deer than we had in past years.

That's something that I need to think about and figure out what we're going to do this coming season, if it's getting a dog, if it's getting the sprinklers that spray deer when they walk by, if it's the coyote pee or wolf pee or whatever everywhere. I don't know. What worked for you guys or didn't.

Chris: The thing that worked the best for us was this 3-D electric fence from Premier Fence Supply. I don't know if they still sell it, but the idea was that you had two strands on the inside, so towards the vegetables. One was at about 32 inches and the other one was at about 48 inches, I think. Then you had another strand and that was maybe two feet on the outside. That was placed about halfway between those two. Then that was electrified. We baited the fence. That was the real key.

We actually took that fence down in the wintertime because it was too difficult ... In the Midwest where the ground freezes or when you get snow cover, it really messes with the conductivity of the ground. You couldn't close the loop on the electric fence in the



wintertime. We found that it was better to take it down and not have the deer be trained. You leave the posts up but you just take those three wires down. Then the deer don't get trained to the idea that that fence isn't hot. When it goes up, it's hot.

Like I say, we baited it with, Premier sells these great little bottle caps. It seems like a crazy thing to buy, but if you try to put them together, I'm sure it would take quite a bit of time. It's a bottle cap with a piece of wire through it and then a cotton ball stuffed in it. You wrap that onto the fence and nice little aluminum bottle caps so again very conductive. Then you put apple scent on the cotton balls and that encourages the deer to come up with their nice wet little noses and make really good contact with the fence.

They stop because of the 3-D aspect. They look at it. They don't have good depth perception. They go, "What's going on here, we're confused." Then they smell the apple scent. Then they get to the apples and then, wham! Which when they've eaten enough of your radicchio, it's a pretty satisfying thing to have happen.

Danny: Totally. You've got to keep them out. I've seen some of those 3-D fences around. I think that was one thing we always thought about. What we had was working, but I feel like we definitely need to address that this year, make a better plan like that.

Chris: When you're draping that bird netting over the crops, because that's a really interesting approach to me, are you just putting it directly on the crop or is it going on hoops over the crop or ...

Danny: No, it's just getting draped on the crops. It just sits there. We're not harvesting all the beds at once, so it's easier than uncovering the row cover, especially wet row cover in the winter, allows airflow and also it's pretty lightweight. There can be some damage though to some of the crops. The carrots tops don't really matter because they're going to freeze or get knocked down, knocked back from just regular freezes no matter what. There's going to be some damage on the top of the leaves on some of the chicories with that with a really hard freeze. We could probably put some hoops up and do that. I haven't done that.

Chris: With that, Danny, we're going to stop here, take a break, get a word from a couple of the sponsors, and then we'll be right back with Danny Percich from Full Plate Farm in Ridgefield, Washington.

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We're back with Danny Percich from Full Plate Farm in Ridgefield, Washington. That's about 30 minutes north of Portland, Oregon. Danny, before we went on break, we were talking about avoiding deer predation. Do you guys run into issues with field mice and other rodents in the wintertime?

Danny: We do. Voles are our small predator, I guess you could say. They love ... what do they love? They can really like the chicories, the beets, and what else? Some other of the radishes. Not the turnips so much or rutabagas, but those are definitely one of our pests. We have built those Eliot Coleman style vole boxes that I think are in that winter harvest handbook, there's some pictures of those. It's just a, what is it, it's probably eight by eight by six inch box with a lid on top. You put two mouse traps inside there. What's the name of the mousetrap? It's the gray ones where you don't have to touch them, it's the squeeze kind, they just open up. We have two of those in there.

As long as you're on top of checking those often, they work great. I've even found when I haven't gotten around to checking them though, they end up making a home in there. They make a little nice house for a vole to live in. That's worked really well. It's just checking those often seemed to work. It's definitely a pressure and a huge bummer.

When we had a lot of snow, we got about a foot of snow this year, that hung around for a week or two. During that time, I definitely had some voles just tunnel all the way through a couple rows of beets. We definitely lost about one of beet harvests for the ... we were hoping to give out to the CSA. We were one shy of what we were hoping to do, which really just sucks. They're definitely one of our bigger pests. I've always talked about doing that. I should one of these years. We should put up some more owl boxes and raptor poles and things like that to encourage a little more predation from the skies and also doing the boxes.



Chris: Those boxes, are you baiting the traps inside?

Danny: No. The voles are just looking for a dark place to go. They just like just running in there. They're just checking it out and usually just run on in. There's no bait involved and those traps ... A Better Mousetrap, that's the name of it. I think they're about a buck or two apiece. You can find them online and order a lot of them. I think they will even give you a break if you order a ton of them.

Those have worked really well. You can bait them. One of our in-laws, if there's mice around up here, they'll rub salami on them. That might be for regular mice too. My understanding is just the voles are just looking for a place, a nice dark place, a nice little quiet place to see what's in or they'll run into. They just run in and run right into the trap. It works pretty well in the field.

The great thing about those too, they can be under row cover, if you do have row cover. They can be under netting. You can put those anywhere and the traps aren't going to go off because they're inside a box. They're great. You just use any scrap wood you have laying around and throw them together.

Chris: Any tricks for positioning those particularly well? Do you just set them out in the middle of your field and the voles wander along and find them?

Danny: Usually I just look. I just see which crops the voles have been attracted to, which in our case has been in the beets and the chicories and what else. Sometimes they'll get into the carrots a little bit. Then I'm just putting them where I see them. Sometimes if I see a little a path they've started to make, I'll put them right in the middle of that and put it pretty flush to where they're running.

It's always easier to put more on the ends of the rows into the beds because that's where you're walking by, which is nice. You can put them out there. It's just where you see them, I guess. It's just easier when you're walking around your field and not having to go into the middle of the beds. It's a lot easier just to open them up and grab them right there and empty them.

Chris: On three acres of winter vegetables, how many of these vole boxes do you have?

Danny: I think we had about 20 and then we built about another 20 more, so we have about 40, I think. I'd even put more out. I don't think you can really have too many. They don't take too long to check though I am guilty of not checking them often enough. In the ideal situation, you just, as part of a field walk once a day or every other day, you could probably spend a half hour checking and emptying and resetting them. That would totally be worth it. I feel like that's one thing I could get so much better at is actually ... I'll set them and leave them there but then I'll get distracted, do something else and then I should check those. Of course, there's some decomposing.

Chris: How often are you checking those, or maybe I should say how often do you feel like you should be checking those?



- Danny: I think you could check them every day or two or three days, anything in that ... and you're going to find they're there. They're out in the fields and running around. In the spring is when they can get even more active because they're starting to look for more food or I think having some babies too and all that. You can definitely every couple of days.
- Chris: When you're walking along checking those vole traps, are you carrying something to put the dead mice in or are you just tossing them in the field roads?
- Danny: I toss them on the edges of the field on the borders usually, either back in the woods or back at the bottom of our field we have sill. We're on a south facing slope, so down by an oak tree. We just toss them as our approach, and let them either decompose down on the edges of things or other animals find them and eat them up.
- Chris: You were talking about placing them on the field edges instead of down further in the rows. I was having this vision of checking those fields in the wintertime and basically sinking up to your knees in mud. Tell me about harvesting in the wintertime and I guess the challenges you've got and the gear that you're using to do that.
- Danny: One thing that we've done, one of the farms up here, Pumpkin Ridge Farm just outside of Portland, when I was on a tour there, they showed me their, I think it was their cabbage they were growing because they have a year-round CSA there. I think they were growing Deacon. I think it was Deacon. They had two weeks after they transplanted out their cabbage, they under-sow those with crimson clover. I was like, that's awesome. It looked great. That's what I've been doing since then. It's a great way to get some cover crop in between the rows but also help with erosion control and fix the nitrogen.
- One of the biggest benefits is actually having something green to walk on, so you're not logging through the mud as much, but you have a little something underfoot, which is a little more efficient and also helps with just the water. That's been one thing that we've been doing in all the winter brassicas is under two weeks after we transplant those out is under sowing those. That's been awesome. Sometimes definitely you can be a little rough on it and you'll wear out some of the crimson clover. Usually in the spring it comes back and puts a nice little plush of crimson clover. We've been doing that. That seemed to help a lot.
- It definitely slows you down in certain areas where some areas can be a little muddier than others. You step into the beds, you're going to sink because it's loosened up soil. If you can stay on the path, it's a little easier. We're wearing muck boots for boots. Just about everybody that comes and helps harvest, they'll be wearing those.
- One thing from years ago, my wife got, kind of as a joke but her own rain gear. She got some insulated overalls, like fishing waders basically, but cut off at the seat. It's like a neoprene fishing waders and they're camouflage. I made fun of her because they're pretty silly looking.



I tried them on one day and I was like these are amazing. You don't have a little swish, swish, swish of walking in rain gear, which is slowing you down, for one. You have this resistance between your legs. You're making that sound every time you walk, and they're insulated and more or less waterproof too. You can just wear those over some long johns and be warm and dry and walk a little easier also. Those have definitely been one of my favorite things for harvesting in the winter.

That and then just any old rain jacket. I have old Carhartt ones, which are great that I've had for way too long. Some buttons don't really snap. I have one button that kind of snaps and kind of holds it together. I'm probably due to get a new one. I just look at garage sales, too, if something that looks like is made of some real material that's not going to flake off. I love to go to garage sales, take my kids to garage sale. If we find some rain gear, we'll stock up on it and use whatever. Definitely the Carhartt and what is it the Grundy's?

Chris: Grundens. Yeah, Grundens

Danny: Those last a long time too. Any of those jackets, especially with the neoprene cuffs are amazing. Both the Carhartts and the Grundens both have that neoprene cuff. That's so key for when you're washing vegetables or harvesting stuff and you lift your hands up at all, not to have water completely run down your arm, it's nice to have it be a little bit restrained right there and not have the free flow of cold water down your arm in the winter.

We'll layer up a lot. Sometimes we'll have two or three layers of long underwear on and that's fine by me. I'd rather have that than get cold. Just really layer up. That's the biggest thing is just lots of layers. If you're doing something stationary like, say, cleaning up the chicory, you're not really moving around too much in the field, that you're warm. That's nice.

Neoprene boots, one or two pairs of socks, up to three layers and long johns if it's really cold out. Lots of wool. Wool is definitely a big thing. Wool pants are great because wool is insulative even when it's wet and it's a little bit water-resistant too. I just get these thick wool pants. Some of my friends will use the old Army surplus wool pants that you can find. Those are great. Those are just great in between, as long as it's not pouring, you're not having to kneel too much in the mud. I still, even if it's muddy and wet, I'll still wear those.

It's just nice because it's an insulative layer. Wool's just great. I love wool. I can't get enough of it. Lots of wool, and then what else. I have a wool hat also with the ear flaps that flap down. I wear that a lot. I think it's a Filson one that has the ear flaps, the woolen ear flaps that fold down if it's really cold. Other stocking hats. We've gone to disposable plastic gloves like ...

Chris: Those thin examination gloves?

Danny: Yeah, like that except for the automotive kind that are a little sturdier so they don't rip



every time that you've got to do anything. I ended up using some that my father-in-law had had that he uses at his shop. I was like, these are great. You can get lots of uses out of them. You can wear them a bit. We'll wear those and then a lot of times if it's really cold or we're doing something cold, then we can put neoprene over that, neoprene gloves over that sometimes, or sometimes there's ... oh man, I can't think of the brand right now, but basically there's completely plastic gloves. Just like your regular garden gloves but they're all plastic all the way around, so they're not breathable on top like the cotton on top. There's some that are like that. There's some that will go up to your elbows. There's lots of different options.

When it's really cold, the neoprene with the plastic underneath are huge ... Just having that plastic underneath, that plastic auto glove or examination glove, having that underneath any glove is great because you're keeping the physical wet off your hand. Just that in itself is amazing, keeping your hands just from being dry at least. Even those gloves also don't really breathe, so you're trapping some heat in there even though it's a really thin membrane. Those have worked really well the last couple of years.

Chris: At the beginning of the show, you indicated that you are mostly working by yourself. You've got one part-time helper for part of the year?

Danny: Yes. Usually we have somebody that comes out and works two days a week probably from May until September. October's he's usually off. This last year we hired, I probably had three days hired out during the winter for harvest. Then we have some people that do work trades in the wintertime also. A Monday of a harvest week I'll have two paid people and four work trade people. They work for their vegetables basically. They work for their share.

[01:01:30] I've been super lucky to have people who have at least just managed farms or have their own farm or worked on farms, who live in Portland and do other work now but still want to farm. I have people that are skilled and experienced and know what's up and how things work, and also don't mind bundling up and working. We've been really pretty lucky to have the people that either work or do the work trade on the farm to help with things.

Chris: With a fairly minimal or in the case of people doing work trades, maybe a somewhat inexperienced workforce, what kinds of equipment do you guys use to support you doing so much of your work alone?

Danny: We have a G. We have an Allis-Chalmers G for a lot of cultivation. We'll use that with tine weeders and sweeps. We have some hilling discs for the leeks, dig trenches and then plant our leeks and then hill our leeks, try to get nice long shanks that way.

We have automatic irrigation in our greenhouses. We still walk through and check, but everything's on timers. We adjust accordingly to what the weather's going to be like that week or within a couple of days. If I go away for the weekend, things are still getting watered. I can leave. Sometimes I'll do a little over-watering on the weekends just to ensure that things don't dry out. That's been really helpful having the automatic irrigation.



We recently motorized a root washer that we had. Josh Volk and I were hanging out and, “Josh, can you help me build a root washer?” He was like, sure. We got some old bicycle rims and parts and he built a prototype with some cedar fencing and some bicycle rims and some casters. We put all that together and then I motorized that this last year. That’s been huge to actually have a root washer. You can set it and forget it to some extent and then go around, wash some bins, do some other stuff, write some stuff, write some notes down on the whiteboard and then get back to it and unload it and do the next batch of whatever, roots. That’s definitely been a huge time-saver in the winter.

We have a couple garden carts, but we’re on a hill. We’ve talked about, I don’t know if this will ever happen, is basically getting an electric assist like they have for bicycles these days, for a garden cart, maybe using a wheelchair motor or something that’s versatile that can be outdoor in the elements. One of our next ideas to try to make.

We also talked about putting up a wench at the top of the hill to pull carts up. It’s a good workout walking up the hill with a cart loaded down with muddy roots. It’s huffing and puffing at the top no matter what. You do it often enough, but it’s still a lot of work. That’s probably one of our next things that we’re going to try to ... Who knows what’ll happen this year or next. Something like that would be pretty great. I don’t know what else.

We have a backpack sprayer for our foliar feeding we do in the summer every week or two. I also have a big tank. I have a second G that I can use for parts and actually has a foliar tank or a tank on there for the previous use for foliar spraying. I just need to change that over. I feel like that would be a nice thing that would save a lot of time in the summertime. I haven’t got that up and going.

Also, for irrigation, we use these Windfighter sprinkler head on these little bases, sprinkler bases, garden sprinkler bases, little sleds I guess, is what you could them. We’ll drag those across from one field to the next. We have three fields in a row. Say our beds are about 175 feet, I guess. We can drag that from one field across to the next and water the next one fairly easily. It’s a pretty easy way instead of moving hand lines and having to disconnect everything. You leave these. It’s three-quarter inch poly in between each sled with probably an 18 inch riser and then the Nelson Windfighter sprinkler head on top.

One person can drag those easily from one field to the next. They’re pretty lightweight. I don’t break them too much. Sometimes the sprinkler bases can break a little bit. They’re not perfect. It’s made it definitely fairly easy for one person to move irrigation around and not ... I’ve moved lots of hand lines. That’s fun. It can be an Olympic sport of its own jumping over beds with hand lines.

Chris: Yes, very much so.

Danny: It’s been pretty easy, especially on our scale with just the three acres, having to move those lines that way.



Chris: With the large amount of root crops that you're growing for your farm, are you doing anything special for tillage for those?

Danny: We use a chisel plow in the spring. We'll usually do rip down the hill. We would put, depending on when I get in and what the soil's like, it's either two or three shanks between two and four feet apart behind the ... we have about a 50 horsepower tractor, the International that we have. We'll rip down the hill to try to increase some drainage that way. Sometimes we'll go crossways and make a checkerboard. We're just ripping that way down the field. That's about it. That's just for all the plants just to promote some better drainage and water flow for the whole farm.

Chris: In addition to the chisel plow, what are you following that with? You just using a rototiller for your secondary tillage?

Danny: Secondary tillage is a disc. Right when we started, all we had was a ... I think we just had a mower and a ... The first year we just had a mower and a tiller and that was about it. Then to the plow and the mower and the tiller. Probably two or three years back, we finally got the disc. I love the disc. You can drive a lot faster. It's aggressive but not too aggressive. We usually do a couple passes with the disc depending on what we need to do next, where we're at time-wise, if we're in a time crunch or whatever, we can do one pass and let that sit a little while and then get back to it in a few weeks or do a couple passes to really break it up and then the next week or two, follow that with the tiller for final bedding up.

We have on the back of our tiller, I have welded three spots where I have rebar that can basically mark rows. As we're tilling, we have this rebar that's basically welded to the back of the tiller that marks three rows. You can take the rebar in or out if you just want to have one row or two rows or three rows according. That's been a really nice way just to not have to mark beds, but have straight lines, especially for following it with the G and have that spacing consistent. That's been great.

Then we just eyeball when we're transplanting, which isn't perfect all the time but it saves time. Usually I err on a little more room than less room for the crops. I feel it evens out. That's definitely one area we might change at some point. Definitely marking the rows as we till has been a huge time-saver and worked with all our systems too, with the G and everything.

Chris: What are using for a seeder for getting in crops like the carrots and the beets.

Danny: Right now I still have the Earthway. Last year I was going to buy Jang. Actually, I saw a talk at the Small Farms Conference in Oregon not this last spring but the spring before. I was like, I should buy the Jang. I just need to buy a Jang and get good consistent spacing between turnips and rutabagas and other things, and I have gaps in things. Maybe today, maybe after I talk to you, I'll go buy the Jang.

The last few years, I've talked myself into it and then all of a sudden it's time to plant to direct seed things. I was like, I forgot, I've just got to get stuff in. I don't buy them. I just



work with what I have. What I've done, and it's worked reasonably well, is I've put electrical tape on the plates of the Earthway and I've figured out ways to make the Earthway work and just modifying the plates.

I remember when I talked to the guy at Sutton Ag, and they sell seeders there, he said that they sell plates that are actually custom, but that he said you can just basically Super Glue the holes. Once you find your right seeding rate, you can Super Glue the holes on the Earthway to make custom seed plates for the Earthway. I never got around to it. I just use electrical tape and it works good enough to cover up the holes. We'll use that.

The parsnips is definitely my hardest one because I probably just used the carrot plate and I think I do three to four passes on each row depending on the size of the parsnip seed. I get a pretty good stand. Definitely, that's the biggest one that I feel like could really use some precision. I'd like to get the Jang, get some pelletized parsnip seed and just not fuss around with it as much.

Chris: Parsnip's hard no matter what you do.

Danny: Everything about it is a little bit finicky.

Chris: Are you doing any flame weeding?

Danny: I have in the past and then the last few years I haven't. I used to with the beets and carrots. What I was saying I guess earlier is the weed pressure that we have isn't that intense in the middle of July when we're doing those seedings. I could probably do it but I don't. We end up doing one hoeing of the ... Once they're up, once the carrots are up, we'll hoe about one time and then they'll be large enough. The next time I'll use the G and then use the G probably one more time.

I don't ever really need to do any hand weeding with the carrots or the beets. I think it's the timing that we're planting things, everything's really wanting to grow, the carrots and. Just that one hoeing works really well to get the first round of weeds. Then the G can do the next couple of times. Then they're pretty much good to go.

Chris: For doing the winter harvest, are you succession cropping? Do you put in multiple crops of carrots or is it just one that matures at the right time in the fall and then just holds over the winter?

Danny: It's just one. We've just done one. This year we might do two so we can harvest some a little bit earlier and then store those in the walk-in, is what we were thinking. Usually it's right around mid-July is when we're planting most of our carrots for harvest in the fall. I do a little succession with some of my braising greens. Sometimes with parsnips, I'll do it just to do some trial dates, just have a couple different sizes. I can harvest some stuff a little bit more in the fall and then some stuff will grow a little bit more in the late winter, I guess. Their size won't be quite as large. Most everything's a one-time date like that. It's a one-time shop.



All those brassicas are about mid-July, we're transplanting all of those. We've gone to direct seeding all our chicories, is one thing we've done also, where we're direct seeding chicories and I felt like we get a pretty good stand that way. It seemed like it's a lot less transplanting.

That number I still need to look at a little bit, but I feel like the direct seed should also just do ... I imagine they're really settled in a little bit more than transplanting those guys out.

Chris: Have you found that it makes a difference for over-wintering them?

Danny: I haven't because I haven't done a side by side necessarily. I know Josh has talked about that in the past, but he thought it might. I haven't. One of the farmers around here, Anthony Boutard of Ayers Creek Farm, that's how he does all of his chicories is usually that first week of July he'll ... I was emailing with him or talking with him that he direct seeds all his chicories the first week of July, right around the first week of July. That's usually where I shoot, sometimes around there, sometimes a little bit earlier. That usually seem to work pretty well.

Also, one really nice thing about direct seeding things in June and July is out here the weather is usually not too hot, it's not too cold. Things want to germinate. You're not fighting the weeds necessarily and all those small things that are germinating a little bit more slowly.

Chris: Tell me a little bit about your work schedule. If I understood right, you said that you're pretty much doing four days a week, eight hours a day?

Danny: Yup. That's about right, sometimes even less. I'll take my daughter to school a couple days a week. I won't start sometimes during the school year, at least until about 8:45 or 9. Wednesdays I always take my daughter to school so I won't really start until 9, and then work. I usually have a half hour, 45-minute lunch. Sometimes if it's just me working, sometimes I'll do office work and eat at the same time. If somebody else is working here, then we'll sit down for a half hour, 45 minutes, then cut out around 4:00 and start making dinner and hang with the family. That's the rough of it.

Chris: That's pretty laid back for a vegetable farmer.

Danny: It's true. It's totally true. It's good. There's not the same pressure to harvest stuff early in the morning as there would be if you were harvesting. Some days I'll work later or some nights I'll ending up disc-ing or something like that, depending on what's happening. It is. It definitely is a little more laid back and it's definitely is not working crazy hours all the time and not working until you burn yourself out.

I feel like we've definitely figured out a thing that really works out well for our family. It's always been a number one, especially since we've had kids, just a big priority is to not work too much to make sure that we have enough time to enjoy each other and be around. Sometimes my wife, she'll end up working late. I'll have to get dinner going and



get everything going. I'll be in charge of things on that side.

Chris: That's awesome. Congratulations.

Danny: Thanks. I feel like we have a good rhythm going right now.

Chris: With that, we're going to stop here, get a word from one more sponsor, and then when we come back, we'll do our lightening round.

Danny: Sounds good.

Chris: [01:18:00] This lightning round and perennial support for pretty much every lightening round we've ever done is brought to you by Vermont Compost Company, makers of Fort Vee and Fort Light potting mixes. When you're growing transplants, all of the investments that you've made in plant materials, heat, labor and overhead depend utterly on the performance of the media where you expect your plants to grow. If you're an organic grower, you're probably using a media based on compost. You should be looking for the best compost.

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Danny, what's your favorite tool on the farm?

Danny: The tractor might be one of my favorites and the root washer, I'd probably say. When I was working with Josh at Slow Hand Farm, we were digging all our beds by hand. I was like, when I move out, I'm going to get a tractor. It sure is nice. I've been tilling everything with the tractor, using the tractor. Saves a lot of time.

The root washer has been a huge time-saver. Just the ability to put the roots in there. In the wintertime we're not dealing with tops or anything like this. In the fall I guess we have some carrot tops that we'll keep on, but the rest of the winter, the tops usually, the quality is not good enough to leave on a lot of the roots. Being able to throw those in there and let them spin around for a while and do some other things, it just saves so much time and does a good job. That's been a huge one.



- Chris: What were you doing before you were using a root washer?
- Danny: Spraying them down, flipping them around, just spraying them by hand and roughing them up. Just as you've probably done just on a table spraying them. We have a table I made with a lath top and just spraying them and putting them in bins.
- Chris: It's hardcore.
- Danny: Yes, definitely in the winter it's also wet and cold and you're standing around spraying carrots. It's not that fun. People would rather be doing other things than that.
- Chris: Something that we didn't talk about earlier that I just want to touch on is you mentioned a couple times working for Josh at Slow Hand Farm, but you've also spent some time working on other farms before you finally started your own in 2010, right?
- Danny: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes.
- Chris: Could you just tell us a little bit about that?
- Danny: Yeah. Back in 2000, I worked at a farm in Wisconsin. A friend was out there working on a farm. He was willing to split his stipend with me. I think he was getting either a hundred bucks or two hundred bucks a month and room and board. I got half of that and we worked from dusk until dawn and had a great time. We milked goats and sold to farmer's markets and helped run a CSA up there.
- I worked in Portland because we wanted to live closer to my family and moved back here and worked on a couple of different CSA farms; Savannah Organics and the 47th Avenue Farm. Definitely honed some skills there. That was fantastic. Did that for a few years. Then I took a little break. I wanted to learn how to do some carpentry work or just building work. I did some residential remodeling, started learning how to build things.
- While we were doing that, I had a little half acre with a friend who rented some land and grew some garlic and sold some farmer's markets just to keep our hands in the soil, in the earth. We did that for a little bit. Then I helped some friends build some houses. Eventually, just decided this is really where my heart was was back growing vegetables. I had learned some skills that I needed to learn. We were able to come out here to Michelle's land, which isn't the best soil in the world, but we've been making it work and plants have been growing. People seem to like the vegetables we grow. It's been working out.
- Chris: [01:23:00] What's your favorite crop to grow?
- Danny: I love chicories because they're beautiful, first off, and then they have this sweet and bitter. Once the winter comes around, it helps sweeten them up. I think it's a really special crop. I don't think it gets enough attention as it deserves. One great thing about it too is you can't grow lettuce outdoors in the wintertime. Even in hoops and things it



still takes a lot of effort. Chicory is a really nice green to eat in the wintertime, that also has a whole other nutrient value than brassicas. It's a nice to switch it up from just a brassica heavy diet also. It's nice to really have the chicories to shape your diet that way too.

Chris: Is there a particular chicory that would stand out? If you were going to a desert island and could only take one chicory with you, which one would it be?

Danny: I love the sugarloaf and I love the Castelfranco. Those are probably my two favorites. It's a pretty close tie. They're both on the milder side. The sugarloaf, it's like a romaine almost in its own way. It's really crunchy and crispy. It's one of the sweeter chicories out there. You can do a lot with that. The Castelfranco is just beautiful and a pretty thin leafed chicory. It's speckled green and red. It's a beauty. It's really delicious too.

Chris: Danny, what's your farmer superpower?

Danny: Superpower? I guess just rolling with everything. If it's going to be crazy weather, I guess it's the ability to not get too down. Not to get too up, not get too down. Just roll with what comes. I don't know if that's a superpower.

Chris: We'll take it. Rolling with the punches sounds like a superpower to me.

Danny: Rolling with the punches, there you go. Rolling with the punches.

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

Danny: I guess, it would be a few things. I would say work with you have. Just work with what's around you and don't be afraid to ask for help. There's tons of people that know so much more stuff than you do, so don't be afraid to ask questions and ask for help.

I guess the other thing would be not to take everything too seriously. Before I started farming, I'd do a lot more backpacking and I did a lot more summer play, I guess, or had more flexibility in the summer. That's the blessing and the curse of farming is you get to work outside every day and you get to be outside. It's amazing, and work with the soil and work with the plants, but you don't necessarily have the same flexibility of, say, taking off the backpack for a week and/or jump outside of things for a little bit. I'd say that to make sure you keep doing some of those things in the summertime that sometimes farming, when you're doing farm work, it's hard to keep doing.

Chris: Awesome. Danny, thank you so much for being my guest today on the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

Danny: [01:26:30] It's really been a pleasure, Chris. Thanks for having me on.

Chris: Wrapping things up here, I'm going to say again, this is Episode 122 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast and that you can find the notes for this show at farmertofarmerpodcast.com by looking on the episodes page or just searching for



SHOW NOTES: <http://www.farmertofarmerpodcast.com/episodes/percich>

Percich, that's P-E-R-C-I-C-H.

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