



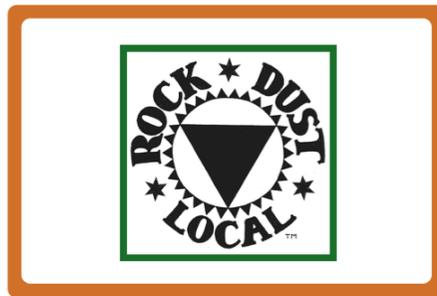
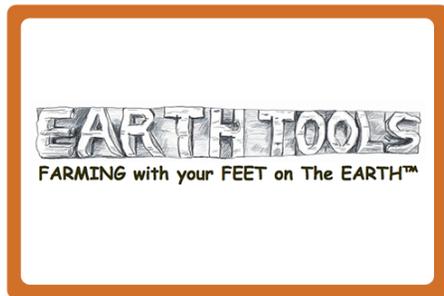
FARMER TO FARMER podcast

EPISODE 124

Chris Field of Campo Rosso Farm on the Bittersweet Life of Growing Specialty Chicory Farming

June 22, 2017

TRANSCRIPT SPONSORS





The transcript for this episode is brought to you by:

[Earth Tools](#), offering the most complete selection of walk-behind farming equipment and high-quality garden tools in North America

[Rock Dust Local](#), the first company in North America specializing in local sourcing and delivery of the BEST rock dusts and biochar for organic farming.

Additional funding for transcripts provided by [North Central SARE](#), providing grants and education to advance innovations in Sustainable Agriculture.

Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, Episode 124, and this is your host, Chris Blanchard. My guest today, Chris Field, farms 14 acres of ground with his partner, Jesse Okamoto at Campo Rosso Farm in Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania. Campo Rosso farm is what happens when two New York foodies decide to start a farm.

Chris and Jesse grow a wide variety of very high quality Italian chicories, radicchios, endives, and more as the cornerstone of their operation, and they market them through New York City's Union Square Greenmarket and wholesaled restaurants in New York City. We dig into how Chris and Jesse learned how to grow this challenging crop, and how they get compensated for the high labor input that chicories require.

While we didn't get into proprietary details of the more specialty varieties that Campo Rosso grows, Chris provides a primer on producing quality chicories for fall production, as well as insights on how they produce other high end crops bursting with flavor.

Chris also provides insights into their marketing strategy, how he and Jesse jumped from city jobs into farming, and how he and Jesse are working to solve the challenges they've had, sourcing labor for their young operation.

The Farmer to Farmer Podcast is generously supported 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.

And by Vermont Compost Company, founded by organic, crop-growing professionals, committed to meeting the need for high quality composts and compost based living soil mixes for certified organic plant production.

Vermontcompost.com.

And by CoolBot, I 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 up front costs, and up to 42% on monthly electrical bills, compared to conventional cooling system.



Chris Field, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

Chris Field: [00:02:00] Thanks, yeah. Glad to be here. I've been a long time listener, glad to be a part of it.

Chris Blanchard: I've been watching your farm on Instagram for quite some time, and in holding the title as the largest radicchio grower in the state of Iowa for a period of about 12 years, I've been really intrigued by what you're doing there at Campo Rosso Farm.

Can you give us the lay of the land there at Campo Rosso? Where are you guys located, how are you selling your products, how many acres you're growing on, and how you would describe what you're focusing on at Campo Rosso?

Chris Field: Yeah. We're in southeastern Pennsylvania in a town called Gilbertsville. It's a pretty small town and we're currently renting about a 14-acre field. We sell primarily to the Greenmarket in New York City, and we do a ton of wholesale to restaurants in New York City, as well. Kind of specialize in a lot of different specialty vegetables, chicory being our biggest crop that we grow. Yeah, we just try to do a lot of different things and keep up with our chef clientele, so it keeps us pretty busy.

Chris Blanchard: I think it would be fair to say that most of the growers that I've interviewed on the Farmer to Farmer Podcast have grown between 30 and 50 different crops on their farm. When I say, "Crops," I'm not talking about varieties, I'm talking about asparagus, zucchini, beets, all of those things. You guys have really chosen to focus, and especially on those chicories. What prompted you to do that?

Chris Field: We worked at two other farms, one in New York and one in Pennsylvania. They both had reputations for being the strawberry guy or the tomato guy. In the New York market, it's a really big market in a lot of ways. To be able to keep up with the demand of a certain product, you have to be able to produce enough to keep restaurants happy, to keep customers at the market happy.

Specializing is something that, I don't know, kind of seemed to me to be a smarter idea as far as with limited labor and limited land, to be able to produce something that we can really hook people on and be able to offer it consistently and of a high quality.

Chris Blanchard: When you talk about being like the strawberry guy, right, everybody eats strawberries.

Chris Field: Yes.

Chris Blanchard: I happen to know that that's not so true of radicchio.

Chris Field: Yeah, yeah. We've been really lucky. It started off that we were starting to get



really into growing radicchio, mainly because we were really enjoying eating it. When we worked at the farm in the Catskills for Mountain Sweet Berry Farm, he's always been a pretty big pioneer of growing specialty vegetable. He's been doing it since '85 or '86. He instilled this love of Italian products.

We started out being like, "Wow, we really like eating this radicchio," or Treviso, or any of these obscure varieties that we can find at specialty stores in New York. We kind of just went with it. We were like, "Well, we should try to grow it." Since then, it's been a long journey of a lot of research and a lot of time trying to figure that crop out for ourselves, so yeah, it's been a journey.

Chris Blanchard: How long have you been farming at Campo Rosso?

Chris Field: Campo Rosso, we have been farming, this is our fourth season in production. The other farm we worked at in Pennsylvania and the farm in the Catskills, we kind of had a sort of managerial role to where we could do whatever we wanted as far as planting crops and stuff. We've kind of been working on it, on the radicchio crop, for six to seven years now at the two different farms, as well.

Chris Blanchard: Growing radicchio is not the easiest thing to do. I mean and we talked a little about how not everybody loves radicchio, but it's also, I mean it's not like tomatoes where you can just go buy some transplants and stick them in the ground.

How did you go about learning to grow these specialty crops?

Chris Field: I would say like radicchio and Treviso are the two ones that probably most people can associate with. Those are some of the easier varieties. Really we've basically just taken some of the regional specialties of Northern Italy. Every town has its own variety, whether it's Treviso, which is a town, Chioggia, which is where the traditional round, red radicchio that everyone knows of, is from. Castelfranco, which is a very good one, and that town's a little further north.

A lot of it really is just regional specialties that these old peasant Italian farmers have developed and bred for a long time to put their town on the map in a lot of ways. It's been a long journey trying to read and research. We've been to Italy a few times and done a lot of trips there to see farms and see how people are doing it.

Chris Blanchard: In my world of radicchio growing, we basically grew the round red radicchio, the Chioggia types, and then we grew the Treviso types, and those are the ones that look kind of like a romaine lettuce, except that they're bright red and have the white ribs, but they stand up that same way. Those are both available.

When you look in the seed catalogs, you've got your Johnny's Selected Seeds catalog, turn to the page on chicories and there they are. If you're going to specialize as a chicory grower, you're going far beyond that.



I'd also note that when you buy those varieties from Johnny's, they're hybrids, they produce really well. I know that we had a lot of issues with production, primarily around stuff bolting before it headed up nicely. With those hybrid varieties, it really wasn't that bad and it didn't compare at all to the stories that we'd heard about the open pollinated stuff.

How did you go about learning to grow the different varieties that you discovered?

Chris Field: Basically, the first thing that we found out, is a lot of the different varieties, it's super climate specific. It's taken us quite a few years to find out when the right time to plant is for all the different varieties, especially some of the more obscure ones that we grow.

Like you said, the hybrid varieties are bred to resist bolting, and those are a pretty sure bet through a lot of the year. Here in Pennsylvania, we do do some chicory in the spring, but it's very difficult because our springs can be so erratic. We had 90 degrees about 10 days ago, and then today it was 62 or something.

It really doesn't like the ups and downs of spring. It's traditionally in the Veneto region of Italy. It's grown in the fall, and that's the most traditional time period for it. It really wants to go from that warm summer into a cool fall, into a slowly, slowly towards frost into the winter. That temperature fluctuation is really what triggers the heading of a lot of the varieties and stuff.

That's probably the biggest thing to figure out about all the different varieties is climate, and finding out what works. When I see farms in Texas growing radicchio in June, I'm like, "Man, it must be really hot there." I don't know what their success rate's probably going to be on that. Yeah. It's definitely climate specific.

Chris Blanchard: When you talk about figuring it out and figuring out those climate specificities, are you guys planting trials of different varieties?

Chris Field: Yeah. Basically, when we take a new variety on, we'll put it into a window that we think would make sense. A lot of times, one variety that we grow, I remember the first year we ever planted it, we had 95% loss, all to bolting. The more and more research I did, I found out like, "Oh, no, that's too early to plant it," and in any climate, pretty much.

A lot of it, the day length is a big part of it with causing things to bolt or not bolt. In the spring, if it's not a hybrid, if it's open pollinated, if it doesn't have that super bolt resistant kind of built into its genes, the longer days, it's like I'm ready to go to seeds. That's when you start to see a lot of bolting in it.

Chris Blanchard: Do you still experience a lot of bolting, even when you get the timing right?



Chris Field: Yeah. Jesse, she went through the field today when we were weeding, and she was pulling a few early Castelfrancos out of the row that were bolting. We make a joke that it's almost like bad luck. If you don't pull them out, it's going to spread. We totally joke about that, but it makes us a little discouraged by the spring production.

Chris Blanchard: It was something I always, and I don't know if this has any basis in fact or not. I always assumed that a plant that was bolting was probably sending off chemical signals to every other plant in the neighborhood that it was time to bolt, too, because you want your buddies to be coming into fertility at the same time that you are, right?

Chris Field: Yeah.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, I always got rid of anything that was bolting in the field. You mentioned discouraging for the spring production, but you guys obviously have demand for this crop throughout the growing season. I assume you can't just say to your chefs there in New York, "Only in the fall are you going to get chicories?"

Chris Field: Yeah, I mean I got an email today from a few different chefs, like, "When's the escarole going to be ready? When's the radicchio going to be ready?" Because it's been such a late spring they kind of went in a little bit late. Typically, our spring season for chicory is only about five to six weeks on a good year. Then in the summer, we transition to some other tomatoes and peppers and zucchini that are a little more on the interesting side.

Truly, fall is the biggest time, and that's like people know most of September through January is our biggest crunch for it. They kind of understand and know that there is some seasonality to it, because when it starts to get hot, that's when radicchio can be a little more bitter and not quite as palatable.

Some of my not wanting to push so hard in the spring is like unless you really love the bitter flavor, you're not really going to appreciate it as much as you would if it was in the fall. I think that's been part of our success, is growing it at the right time and the right season.

Chris Blanchard: [00:14:00] When you showed up at market, when you talk about appreciating radicchio, there's some people that do, and there's a lot of people that simply don't, especially here in the United States. When you started bringing this crop to market both at the Greenmarket and wholesale, what kind of a reception did you get?

Chris Field: It was actually pretty interesting. We were talking about it the other day. The farmers market in New York is a really interesting market. There's obviously a lot of high end customers, not restaurants, just like regular foodies or whatever you want to call it. Pretty much right away, within two or three markets, we had regulars that were coming every week and saying everything was so good. I



think that the quality was recognized and appreciated right away.

It's really just, like one variety specific, Castelfranco, which is, it's kind of almost like an escarole, but it has some mottled speckling to it. We usually put that one out front because it's a) one of the more beautiful varieties that we grow, and b) it's super approachable to someone that maybe is a little more adverse to say something that's super bitter, like Treviso.

We kind of catch them with the eye appeal of how beautiful the Castelfrancos can be. Then they ask us questions. They're like, "Oh, I don't know if I like bitter." We just convince them to try it. Then the next week they come back and they're like, "Oh, it wasn't overly bitter, it was really delicious." That's kind of like, I would say that that's our gateway drug into the chicory world, I guess you could say.

Chris Blanchard: Like so many of the chicories, it's a striking variety. I think that's one of the things that I always enjoy about cooking with this crop, is that it's got so much visual appeal.

Chris Field: It definitely does. We spend a lot of time at market making sure it looks right and looks striking. You can just harvest something and leave some green leaves on the outside, but we really try to clean things up. On Treviso, if you clean it up to where the rib is pure white and the leafy part is that deep maroon color, it's just so much more striking than if you just harvest, leave the outer leaves on, and don't really clean it up very much. That's one thing that we learned in our experience, like being in some farms in Italy, is really cleaning it up and making it look proper.

Chris Blanchard: How much time did you spend on farms in Italy?

Chris Field: We didn't spend a ton of time on farms. There was two big trips that we went on. There was one that we were there for three weeks visiting farms. That was probably the initial trip, that was early on. I think that was 2012, maybe. Yeah, I think that's when about when it was. Then we've been back another time two years ago, and seen a lot of different farms forcing setups, and that was another big learning for us.

Chris Blanchard: "Forcing setups," can you tell me about that?

Chris Field: Yeah. Some varieties, they don't fully mature in the field. You basically, you want to find another way to keep it growing. Every town in Treviso, they have ample water from the Sile River. They use the water from the river, they harvest plants and then they use the water from the river to continue growing. They divert it into these ponds. That's like one way of forcing.

Or, in Luccia, which is another town, they don't have ample water so they use sand to force, which like some people maybe are familiar with how Belgian endive is grown. Sometimes people use water, sometimes people use peat



moss, sometimes people use sand. There's many different ways that you can do it and it kind of has to do with what's available and what's around you.

Chris Blanchard: When you're talking about these different mediums, peat moss, sand, water, you're talking about a rooting substrate. You're harvesting the roots out in the field. Like with Belgian endive, you chop the tops off, and then you bring them in and store them until you're ready to have them make their crop again. Then you stick them in the sand or the peat moss and keep them dark while they're growing. Is it the same process for all of the chicories that are being forced?

Chris Field: They're all a little different. Certain ones, like Belgian endive needs that cold treatment. You're really supposed to harvest the roots and then store them, I think in the Johnny's catalog it says you're supposed to store them for three weeks or something. It's basically to like, to vernalize them, to make them think that they've kind of gone through winter.

They're all a little different, and they're all a little bit finicky in their own way. Some varieties we do, say add water, but we've also done it in sand, or we've also done it in peat moss. It's kind of, there's really subtle differences to it. You're trying to take the stored energy that's in the roots and push it into new growth, and so, yeah. There's a lot of different ways to do it.

Chris Blanchard: We did Belgian endive for a few years. It was something that I always really enjoyed. I especially loved the fact that I had an abundant supply to eat myself. It sold fairly well at farmers market. We could do some in the wholesale market, and we could do some in the CSA box, but it was so labor intensive, you know?

I mean it was insane, just how much work went into harvesting, storing, replanting, trying to get them to grow in perfect darkness. Then pulling them back out and harvesting. Has the amount of labor that's required to do these crops, especially these forced crops, been a challenge for you?

Chris Field: Yeah, it's definitely, it's definitely been a challenge. The trip we were on two years ago, we visited this really small farm. They were maybe, they were in hectares, I'm trying to think of what the, it's the, I don't know. Maybe they were farming 20 acres, 15 acres, something like that. Jesse and I both were really excited. We were like all right, we're going to go, we're going to see all these people forcing stuff, and we're going to find the key to Pandora's Box, in a lot of ways, to try to figure out what's easier.

First farm we visit, we're talking to the couple. It's a couple and her dad. I think they had one other person working with them. They had this really beautiful box of forced rosettes of this variety that they kind of have done their own breeding on. We're asking questions.

She was like, "Yeah, the clean box," it was like a one kilo box, the 2.2 pounds. She said it's about two hours of labor just in cleaning, and then I was like, "Yeah, but what do you get at the wholesale market?" I expected that maybe they



would get a good price because it's a pretty amazing product and pretty unique. Sure enough, it was like 19 Euros a kilo or something. Not really expensive at all.

I really think that it comes down to like these farms in northern Italy, it's just like it's a part of their culture and it's a part of their heritage in a lot of ways. We really are just, I guess obsessed with it enough to justify all the labor goes into it.

Chris Blanchard: Are you able to make price demands there in New York that compensate you for that?

Chris Field: Yeah. We've been really lucky that ... Actually in two ways, we've been really lucky. We've been really lucky that the price of some of the more obscure varieties coming from Italy is very high because of importing. Also, that New York, because it's a higher end market, things typically are up charged a little bit more than somewhere else.

We've been able to benefit from the fact that the stuff that's imported from Italy is very, very expensive. Then we also can get a good price because no one's growing it, and because I feel like when we tell people, especially restaurants that say, "Oh, this is X amount of dollars per pound, that's expensive." When we, we're like, "Come to the farm, come see it, come see how much work it is to clean all this stuff," then they're like, "Oh well, I guess it isn't so bad," you know, when you really break it down for them.

Chris Blanchard: I think it's really interesting that you're competing with greens that are being imported from Italy. I don't think that's a very common competitor in the United States vegetable market.

Chris Field: Yeah, definitely. It's kind of funny because one of, there's a produce company that we work with, Natoora, they're originally from London. They've recently started up in New York. I remember seeing the price list of what they were getting from Italy, what it was costing them to get it from Italy. Some things, we could beat them on price just because we were growing it here, and some things they could beat us on price. It really kind of surprised me that yeah, I could beat Castlefranco price versus a huge grower that grows 500 acres of it in Italy, just because of import costs or because that's just what they're charging, so.

Chris Blanchard: I suppose on the vice versa, when you're not able to beat their prices, it probably does have to do with being in that perfect combination of day length and climate that really make that crop grow exactly the way it's supposed to grow over there in Italy.

Chris Field: Yeah, definitely it's a part of it. All the farms that we've seen and all the advice that we've gotten from the farms there, Pennsylvania has a pretty good climate for it. Depends, some years it gets really cold come late November, December, and we can get froze out completely on varieties that we were hoping to harvest for Christmas. That's definitely a part of it. That's kind of where some of



the pricing, our pricing comes into play.

One of the varieties, Puntarelle, that we grow, which is super famous from Rome, I would say on a good year, our harvest is 40 to 50%. That's on a good year. We do kind of charge a little bit more because the demand is so high and the variability of that variety and just success rate is so low that we try to compensate for it in that way.

Chris Blanchard: How do you decide what chicories you're going to grow?

Chris Field: The more, the merrier. Yeah, I don't know. It's kind of our own research into varieties. Before I started farming, I actually was a chef in New York. I was familiar with most of the varieties that were currently growing. I just basically, I don't know, spent a lot of time on the internet looking at websites that are, seed catalogs and different things that are not American based, to find new varieties and try new things.

Periodically there will be a chef suggestion like a chef recently asked me to grow blanched dandelion, which I think in France they're called pis en lit, I think. I didn't really have much of an interest because the forcing varieties already wear us down pretty good, so I passed on that one for now.

Chris Blanchard: I know, when you and I talked before the show, you mentioned that the Greenmarket is a very competitive marketplace. You guys have put a lot of time and energy into figuring out how to grow these crops. I know we don't necessarily want to go into really specific production details about specific crops and varieties of chicories. Can you give us an overview of best practices for chicory production?

Chris Field: Yeah. For the most part, I would recommend people to try to grow it for the fall season. Shoot to harvest October, November. Basically, it really depends. If you get much below freezing by say mid-November, you should probably stay on the early side of planting. Pretty much everything gets planted mid-summer-ish on our farm and harvested October through January.

You basically, you want to put it on any normal growing path that you would, say lettuce or any leafy crop. It's not super finicky. It's more sensitive to abuse of not giving it enough water or some years we've seen October 15th we've had 88 degrees, and that's not very good.

Really just stick with it and try different planting dates. You're definitely going to have the most success with some of the more modern hybrid varieties that are available. Just like give it as much love as you can. Try to give it as much water.

[00:28:00] You don't want to go super strong on nitrogen because nitrogen sometimes can lead to more bitterness, which is something that a lot of people don't know about chicory. You don't want to go too crazy, but you also don't want to have yellowing leaves and stuff. I try to put out 80 pounds of N or so, 60



to 80 pounds of N per acre, I guess that would be a good base calculation of nitrogen use for that.

Chris Blanchard: Any pest or disease problems that are challenging for chicory?

Chris Field: Pests, some years we actually get cutworm pretty bad in Treviso, in the varieties that have more of a pronounced rib. That's more so recently we've been using BT to try to remedy that, and that seems to, it doesn't seem to be a problem every year, so it's not really that big a deal.

Some years, the late varieties, like the stuff that we harvest in November can start to get powdery mildew pretty bad, which is kind of weird for that late in the year. Typically, the powdery mildew is more superficial. You maybe just have to clean an extra one or two leaves off.

I would say that that's pretty much it. We put it in a good rotation program. We try to have it off of ground that we've had any other leafy crops for at least three years. In Italy, traditionally the wheat is harvested in I think late May, early June, and then radicchio follows that, typically, because you want that dry root culture from the wheat to be the predecessor to radicchio. That's like the traditional cycle of it.

Because we're on small acreage, we don't really have that luxury as much. We just try to not go leafy after leafy on it for at least three years.

Chris Blanchard: Do you guys have problems with deer and voles?

Chris Field: Deer are really a big problem, yes. Yeah. Pretty much it's been a battle since year one at the farm in the Catskills where that farm is in a valley and there's not a lot of other food for deer to eat. Of course, they're going to go for a vegetable field, and deer really love radicchio. If no one's around radicchio without deer fence, or if anyone's grown radicchio without a deer fence, they probably know that they get eaten pretty quickly, and they only eat the ones that are perfectly ready to pick, and they only nick just a little bit of it to ruin it.

It's been a huge challenge for us. We moved farms two years ago. We had proper deer fence at the other farm. Last year, we were doing the slanted electric fence where you do two lines of electric wire at two feet and four feet on a 45-degree angle. The first year we did it at the new farm that we're at now it worked pretty well. They weren't really messing with any of our stuff.

I don't know if last year, because we planted so much more radicchio or what, but we definitely got our shirt handed to us in one of the fields pretty good. This spring, we put up a 14-acre deer fence around the whole field and that's that. I don't have to think about it anymore, hopefully.

[00:31:30] Voles, voles not so much. I know some farms I've talked to out in the Pacific Northwest have really bad vole problems. For us, it's not a really big



problem.

Chris Blanchard: When you're putting those plants out, are you starting those from seed in the field, or are you putting them out as transplants?

Chris Field: Yeah, typically we always do transplants. We do have good weed control on our transplant production. Belgian endive, you're supposed to direct seed so you get the straight tap root. That's the only one that I really would direct seed, because you want to store it the same way you would store a carrot. If you transplant a nobby, ugly root it's a lot harder, or not harder, but it's just, it doesn't store as nicely as a perfectly cylindrical root of endive, so yeah.

I mean typically we do everything from transplant except for a few like Belgian endive or some of like little rosette varieties that we grow. Those are usually direct seeded.

Chris Blanchard: What are you using for a transplanter?

Chris Field: We use a water wheel transplanter from rain flow. We like it, but ironically enough this week we got approved for an equipment loan so we're going to be buying a Mechanical 5000 Carousel Transplanter for this year's fall production.

Chris Blanchard: Have you found any tricks for doing the transplant production itself? Anything different that you're doing for that for chicories?

Chris Field: Yeah. If you start in midsummer, your greenhouses are typically pretty hot. Really, temperature is something to really pay attention to. Some years we've been a little more lax about it and had really crappy germination on weeks where it's super-hot. Sometimes even we've put a whole pallet full of trays that have been seeded in like a barn or a different room or something to get them out of direct heat as much.

[00:33:30] Then it's a dance of trying to check them every half a day or so to make sure they're not starting to germinate. That's kind of helped us on the hot years. Otherwise, just water them two or three times a day to cool them down. Usually that works well on most years that aren't blazing hot years.

Chris Blanchard: Do you have to do anything to keep the birds out of the greenhouse? We always had a horrible problem with the starlings coming in and eating the seeds of our radicchio plantings.

Chris Field: Yeah, not too much. We don't really have bird issues with it. Sometimes, yeah, no. Not really any bird issues.

Chris Blanchard: Right. That's a nice problem not to have. How long are you usually holding those radicchio plants or those chicory plants in your greenhouse?

Chris Field: Typically, it's about a four-week cycle. We use a 128 flat for radicchio and for



most of our leafy crops, just because with Vermont potting soil, which we use, we seem to have the nicest transplants with 128. I haven't really ventured into 200s, like some people have.

A big part of it is that since we bought the finger weeder for cultivation, the bigger plant really helps because we can be more vigorous on that first and second cultivation when the plants are kind of small. The 128 in the Vermont compost soil mix, typically works the best for us.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned the finger weeder, so let's talk some about weed control on your farm. That's really important in a greens crop.

Chris Field: Yeah. We bought the Kress finger weeder, the three-point hitch steerbull kind. Basically it's three-point hitch mounted. We're on 60-inch centers is our bed, and we do three rows at 15-inch spacing. We have the finger weeder to match that spacing. Typically, we transplant the crops, water them in.

Then five to seven days after we transplant, depending on our schedule at market and depending on the weather, five to seven days later we go through the first time with the finger weeder with I'm driving the tractor, Jesse's on the finger weeder itself, and I'm just trying to steer as straight as possible and she just makes small adjustments right or left to make sure that we're not knocking plants out.

Chris Blanchard: Could you tell me a little bit more about that finger weeder tool? You know when I always think of cultivating on my farm, we did it all with belly-mounted equipment. It sounds like you're actually talking about steering something that's on the back of the tractor.

Chris Field: Yeah. Basically, it's three-point hitch mounted. There's a toolbar with these gauge wheels that kind of have this little ridge in the center of the gauge wheel that digs into the ground. Then there's this steering, it's like this steering setup.

Basically, Jesse rides on the back and has kind of like bicycle handles. She just slightly moves it right or left and then that's what'll move the whole transplanter right or left because of the gauge wheels that dig into the soil.

Chris Blanchard: Is that the only tool that you're using for weed control now?

Chris Field: For all of our bare ground crops, yes. We have really good weed control with the finger weeder, and it's kind of mind blowing how well it works. It's a really expensive tool, but I don't think I'd ever look back or think twice about it.

Chris Blanchard: All right. We'll include a link for that finger weeder on the show notes for this episode so people are looking for some more information about that, I'll make sure that there's some resources for where to find that. Something that has come so highly recommended from not just you, but several other farmers that I've interviewed.



Chris Field: Yeah, it's definitely been a game changer for us being that pretty much it's just Jesse and I and we've had a couple random employees, like Jesse's brother's currently working with us. It has allowed us to farm much more acreage on an intensive scale than we probably even should.

Last year, the only hoeing we ever did the whole entire season was some greenhouse lettuce early in the spring. Typically, the finger weeder lets us get out without ever using a hoe, so we're pretty happy with it.

Chris Blanchard: Now are you doing a lot of production undercover?

Chris Field: No, well not really. We have two high tunnels that are 25x144. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

Chris Blanchard: It's you and Jesse doing the harvest on 14 acres of vegetables?

Chris Field: Yeah. It's been, labor has been a huge challenge for us. There's a large population of farms around us like down in Lancaster County and things. We're actually surrounded by some of the biggest mushroom production houses in the country. The Spanish labor around here typically is in the nice cool mushroom houses for the summer.

We haven't really been super lucky because we don't offer, we don't have housing to offer because we rent the land. We've just had a hard time on it. The 14 acres is a recent acquisition. Last year we had about nine and then we added six more, or like five more this year. We're definitely currently looking for more help for harvest.

Chris Blanchard: You talked about this farm that you were on in Italy where they were looking at two hours of harvest for a couple of pounds of greens. What have you done to make your harvest efficient, to make it possible? Weed control is one thing but harvest is another when it comes to making it possible for two people to run a farm on their own.

Chris Field: Yeah. Tractors, as much as you can. As much as we can, we try to use the front end loader pallet forks with crates. Whether it's one person's cutting lettuce and one person's packing. Right now we were just doing, we're doing a lot of baby head production currently. Baby lettuce heads, I'll be driving the tractor through, Jesse will be cutting and her brother will be packing, or whatever.

We're basically just try to minimize the amount of time that we're wearing ourselves down by carrying one crate or two crates out of the row. We just try to just be as quick as possible and as delicate on certain crops as we can.

Chris Blanchard: Can you tell me a little bit more about what that process you just described looks like? You said that Jesse's cutting. Is she slicing the roots off of the lettuce or grabbing the head and cutting it, and then handing that to her brother? Then



is he, what's he doing with it?

Chris Field: We grow baby head lettuce on plastic. That's the only leafy crop that we grow on plastic because we like how clean it is. We have a silt loam soil, so with a little bit of clay to it. Sometimes it's a little sticky and a little harder to clean off of certain things.

Basically, we load up the front end loader with a bunch of crates on a pallet on the front end loader with a bunch of crates. Jesse would go in front, she would harvest, it really depends. She would harvest, cut the root, cut it off, clean it a little bit, and flip it over. Then typically I'm driving the tractor with Scott picking the head up and then packing it, depending on the variety, wet side up or head side up, and then just trying to go through the field as quickly as we can to get the crates packed.

Chris Blanchard: Are those being field packed, or do those go into the packing shed for further washing and processing?

Chris Field: [00:42:00] We'd bring them to the wash station. They're not packed into half bushels there. We like to dump them, just dump the whole crate kind of carefully into one of those big Rubbermaid tubs, just with another crate on top, just as like a, so it doesn't float, hold it down for a few seconds and then switch it around, just to get a little more of the dirt off that might be at the base of the lettuce. Then we actually do most of our packing at market, which is kind of crazy.

Chris Blanchard: What kind of a facility do you guys have for a packing shed?

Chris Field: Pretty much it's the lowest tech thing that you could imagine. Because we rent land, we have two shipping containers, one we use for storage, and one we kind of use more as wash pack. That's kind of limiting for us. We think about building some sort of structure, but because we rent land it's a little hard for us to think about investing in it right now. We just kind of make do where we can.

Chris Blanchard: If you're using a shipping container for a packing shed, tell me a little bit about how you've got that set up.

Chris Field: The shipping container is kind of not really well set up right now. We've been meaning to put some sort of poly liner down. We really just pack under tents or tarps or whatever we have around for shade, and then load it in the van and then get it in the lock-in.

Chris Blanchard: With that, we're going to stop here, take a break, and then we'll be right back with Chris Field from Campo Rosso Farm in Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania. Yeah, we're going to talk to you a little bit about marketing and more about the wonderful world of growing specialty chicories.

Perennial support for the Farmer to Farmer Podcast is provided by BCS America.



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

A BCS two-wheel tractor is the only power equipment that a market gardener will need with PTO driven attachments like rototiller, [00:44:00] mower, Check out BCSAmerica.com to see the full line of tractors and attachments, plus videos of BCS in action.

Perennial support is also provided by Vermont Compost Company, helping plants make sugar from sunshine since 1992. Through 23 years of producing the best potting soils that you can buy, Vermont Compost Company founder and owner Karl Hammer has stayed intimately involved in the company. Working with a small staff of committed individuals, provide compost based potting soils chock full of microbial partners in a humus bound nutrient.

The people at Vermont Compost Company all have a practical understanding of the challenges of organic grower space, and they combine that with a comprehensive understanding of soil and plant science and an intuitive comprehension of it all that often has Karl and his crew sticking their noses into a handful of compost and inhaling deeply.

Vermont Compost is the real thing, built on consistency instead of glitz. Like the donkey on their logo, Vermont Compost potting soils aren't glitzy or glamorous, they're steadfast and consistent, stubbornly making certain that your transplants get everything they need from a few cubic centimeters of soil.

By the way, donkeys, they're the real thing, I've seen them. You can get a little bit of donkey manure in every batch of Vermont Compost potting soil. Feed your plants the best. Vermontcompost.com.

We're back with Chris Field from Campo Rosso Farm in Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania. Chris, you were talking about before we went on break, you were talking about actually doing a lot of your packing things into boxes at market. Can you describe how your marketing flow works? It's my understanding that a lot of what you do is based around your presence at the Greenmarket there in New York.

Chris Field: For instance, this past week, because we have limited harvest labor, if we do the market on Fridays, Wednesday, Thursday a lot of times is harvest as much as we humanly can. Then we try to get to the market as early as we can. Typically, like this past week we got there at 5:15. We kind of set up our stand but don't start putting stuff out yet. Then we just go as hard as we can on packing until the last moment when we need to actually start setting up. That's like, you can pack a lot of vegetables in an hour and a half if you have a nice flow going.

Chris Blanchard: How far is it for you guys to get into New York City?

Chris Field: It takes us a little over two hours in the morning to get to the city. It's about 100 miles, roughly.

Chris Blanchard: You guys are going into New York instead of hitting Philadelphia, which is quite a



bit closer?

Chris Field: Yeah. Some of the reason for that is just that we know that market. The two farms that we worked on previously both are institutional farms at the Greenmarket in Union Square in New York. It's just we know that market well, we have solid relationships with a lot of different people, not only just restaurants but the folks that run the Greenmarket. We knew it and we saw an opportunity and went for it instead of something that's slightly closer.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me how the Greenmarkets work in New York City. It's something that I think those of us in the other parts of the country have heard a lot about but I don't really have a clear understanding of what the Greenmarket is.

Chris Field: Greenmarket, GrowNYC is a non for profit that basically got started because they wanted to have fresh food available to the masses in the city because upstate New York and Pennsylvania and Jersey have this rich farm land that the city was kind of lacking fresh produce. They started the farmers market and now there's, I think there's over 100 different locations in the greater New York City area.

They do a lot of community outreach and a lot of different things for like local food and for getting food places that maybe isn't in the city, more accessible to people. They're a pretty amazing organization and we're really lucky to be at the market that we're at in the position that we're at.

Chris Blanchard: Where is your market at in New York City?

Chris Field: We do the Friday market at Union Square. Union Square is a centrally located park in New York. It's on 14th Street more or less, and it's a main subway stop for four or five different subway trains that cross right there. It's just like kind of a pretty lively neighborhood with a lot of people going around. I feel like I've heard that the estimate is like on Saturday, is 20,000 people that go through there on a busy Saturday, if I'm not mistaken.

Chris Blanchard: That go through the farmers market?

Chris Field: Yes. Saturday is unreal.

Chris Blanchard: [00:49:30] Wow. Okay, and so you said you're at the Friday market at Union Square? Are you guys also there at the Saturday market?

Chris Field: No. The Union Square market itself is Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday. It's four days a week, different growers on different days. Each day has its plus and minus to it.

Chris Blanchard: Interesting. Is that where most of your wholesale sales are happening? Are people coming and making those selections and picking them up at farmers market, or are you also doing deliveries to stores and restaurants there in New



York City?

Chris Field: Yeah. It's kind of both. The Union Square market is really amazing because it has this rich culture of restaurants within a, say five to 10 block radius, and restaurants that are established and pretty well known and pretty famous for making that neighborhood great.

[00:50:30] Typically, our wholesale stuff, they do come to market, pick up at market, because then it's a really great place to go and buy a ton of different produce and then if it's walkable, a lot of the restaurants will have kind of like one of those Rubbermaid carts to bring it all back. Or, a lot of places sometimes even way out in Brooklyn come to the market and then just take a cab back to the restaurant with a van full of produce.

Chris Blanchard: Wow. That's so New York.

Chris Field: Yeah, it's pretty amazing. Even recently, some of our better customers that are far out in Brooklyn, one of their cooks was sick and the other sous-chef was out of town. I actually had to throw their order into an Uber. They requested an Uber, which I don't know if everyone knows what Uber is, but it's kind of like a ride sharing app where you hail a car service. He hailed it, went out in Brooklyn but had, as if he was in Union Square, and I just met the driver and said, "Here you go, take this," and he knew where to go and there his order went.

Chris Blanchard: When chefs are getting their product at market, have they ordered it with you in advance, or do they come and they look at it and they go, "I want a case of that Puntarelle?"

Chris Field: Yeah, so it's both. We do maintain an email list where we send out product availability and people do pre-order, for the most part. Typically, stuff that maybe didn't make it on the list of availability or if they saw something like oh, that basil does look really nice, I'll get extra basil, too. It's both that they pre-order and also pick up extra stuff while they're there. If someone, maybe someone back at the restaurant was like, "Oh, we really need more mint," or whatever.

Chris Blanchard: You guys are only four years into running your own business. How did you guys score a stall at the Friday Union Square Greenmarket?

Chris Field: That is a stroke of pure luck. No, so Rick Bishop of Mountain Sweet Berry Farm, who was the first farmer we worked for, he's been doing Greenmarket since '86 or '87 or something, I think. He's kind of the hero of the Greenmarket and our biggest mentor.

When we were getting ready, we were getting really good at growing chicories and stuff at his farm and then at the other farm here in Pennsylvania, he kind of encouraged us. He was like, "Hey man, go find some land, you know, get out there, get growing. Do this for yourself." He pretty much sent the nicest possible



email ever to Michael Horowitz, who runs GrowNYC saying, "These two young kids have put in their time and they're going to grow a really amazing product."

Initially, we basically pitched it to Greenmarket that we're growing something that there's a demand for, that not a lot of people are growing, and we kind of want to offer this amazing product that we don't think that we could sell a ton of anywhere else in the country. When we were getting ready to start the farm and we knew chicory was going to be a big part of it, we looked at a few different places. My grandmother lives in North Carolina so we went down there and checked that out.

As soon as I saw the scene there, which is much more booming now I think than it was back a few years ago, I kind of got freaked out a little bit. I was like I know this market in New York, why wouldn't I take this amazing opportunity to sell to all these great restaurants and all these high end clients? Why would I throw that out the window because I maybe wanted to not have a long commute once a week or twice a week.

Chris Blanchard: That must've been kind of an interesting decision making process. Here you are, juggling this whole issue of land and market and product, really. I do think there's something to what you just said, that New York City is probably an easier place to sell weird and freaky chicories than North Carolina. Nothing against North Carolina.

Chris Field: Yeah, no, exactly. I mean there's definitely, just like a culture of food that doesn't exist a lot of other places in the country. I would say California and New York are probably the two big places. Pacific Northwest kind of is starting to have a few different farms growing a lot of nice radicchios and things, but I think that the clientele that has spent time say in Tuscany or in Venice or these far away places, those are typically the type of people that are going to search out Chioggia radicchio or Castelfranco or someone that lived in Rome for a year and they used to eat Puntarelle all fall, that was like they want to eat it still. For them to be able to find it in New York, they're really happy.

Chris Blanchard: Have you had other growers in your marketplace look at what you're doing and want to jump on the chicory bandwagon?

Chris Field: Yeah. I think there's always been some people that grow Chioggia and Treviso and stuff. There's another farmer that I can think of that grows Treviso. Back before I knew a ton about it, I remember being like this Treviso looks different, it doesn't look right.

Now I realize that he's probably seeding it with a Planet Jr. Seeder and he bunches it, because it's like three or four little spindly plants in a bunch. I'm like, well, he doesn't quite get it, but yeah. Definitely the pressure is there, I feel like for us to stay on top as the chicory kings and queens of the city. That was a big conscious decision.



The first year that we farmed, we were working full time at the tomato farm here in Pennsylvania. We started to plant on our days off. We were like, "We have to take two days a week off from the tomato farm." That first fall, I think we grew about an acre and a half total, a bunch of different things, and about an acre of that was radicchio.

That was like I knew going into it I want to start Greenmarket, I want to do the market, I want restaurants to come on and know right away this is the chicory farm. I think a big thing for us to get out in front is to be the farm that grows this crop for this market, kind of.

Chris Blanchard: One of the interesting things as I was researching farm is that you've got a big presence on Instagram, but you don't seem to have any other web presence. It doesn't look like you've got a website, it doesn't look like you've got a presence on Facebook.

Chris Field: Yeah, I don't know, I guess it's the youth in both of us. We started Instagram and it was really fun. Instagram has this amazing community of young farmers all around the country. It's pretty amazing to see in real time what other farms are doing. It creates this amazing dialogue, like, "Oh, you're pruning tomatoes. Oh, do you do one leader or two?" Do you do this?

It's really fun and been a huge help for me and for a lot of other farms that I know to be able to bounce ideas off other people and see what like, "Oh, you do winter squash this way," or, "Oh, what's your wash station look like?" I think it definitely has jump started a lot of farms into being more productive faster because of that.

Chris Blanchard: You haven't found the lack of a website or the lack of a Facebook presence has had an impact on your marketing, at all?

Chris Field: No. Not really. Our business is so restaurant-heavy that having our name on the menu at Gramercy Tavern, which is a really well known restaurant or wherever else that might be enjoying our product and put our name on the menu, if it's a high profile place, that's a big part of marketing in and of itself.

Chris Blanchard: This is really, I would've never thought of it, for whatever that's worth.

Chris Field: Hype is everything, man, that's for sure.

Chris Blanchard: Now at market, you're putting out a lot of products that people aren't going to instantly recognize. Have you found ways of educating customers about what you're doing, or has it been more that people come to you and they know what they're looking for? They know that they're looking for a Treviso or a Puntarelle, and that's what they're going to get?

Chris Field: Yeah. To be completely honest, a lot of times, we kind of joke that so like at the



Union Square market, your 8:00 a.m. customers, the morning customers are your foodies. They typically know what they want. They're well educated in terms of food and culinary abilities. They typically, they'll see a Treviso and they'll know that they want it and they want to grill it. Or they know that they want to make a nice salad with the Castelfranco.

Then the afternoon customers are kind of more just your passer through type people. Those typically take a little more coaxing for them to understand the product that we have. A lot of times, some of the more obscure varieties we have don't really last much past nine o'clock in the morning or maybe even ten o'clock in the morning, because the restaurant presence is so high and stuff just gets packed pretty quickly and sold.

Chris Blanchard: You said I think that you're trying not to have leafy crops on the same piece of ground more than one out of every three years. What are some of the other specialty crops that you're growing?

Chris Field: We do a lot of different things throughout the year at higher volume. Right now we're doing a lot of baby head lettuce production, because it's early in the spring and we can do a lot of it. We do a fair amount of peppers, a lot of sweet peppers we're really well known for, some really obscure varieties that are kind of hard to find.

We've kind of done some more specialty zucchini. We do a couple different special tomatoes that we really like. Some of the other crops we grow, we really just try to focus on flavor and then really what we want to eat the most of, and then grow a lot of it and just move it as quickly as we can.

Chris Blanchard: When you're focusing on flavor, from a marketing perspective, I mean people buy with their eyes. How are you getting that message across?

Chris Field: I think some of it, well I guess it depends on the crop. We grow a red cherry tomato that we really like, because it's super sweet and has a good tomato flavor. That's something that's really to say, "Try one." Then people taste it and they're blown away by it.

We do use a refractometer, which maybe you're familiar with. It measures the sugar content of say a tomato or a zucchini or any crop. We do use that sometimes to kind of give ourselves a range. If we have a cherry tomato that's a 12 bricks, we know we're doing well with the cherry tomatoes at that time.

We probably could use that to market more, but I don't know. Pretty much of the demand for most of the stuff we grow is high enough that we don't really have to push super hard to get everything sold.

Chris Blanchard: For you, is growing especially flavorful varieties of crops, is that a matter of variety selection, or are you doing things with your soil or with your fertility program or other aspects in order to really pump up the flavor in your produce?



Chris Field: I think it's a combination of things. Rick Bishop, who's our biggest mentor, his big thing has always been mineralizing the soil. He's pretty much where we've learned that the majority of our focus on taste and growing things for the most palatability ... We do certain things that are really going to allow us to have a better flavored tomato, or zucchini, or pepper or anything.

One of the big things that we do is we use soft rock phosphate, which is a phosphorus source that has a fair amount of calcium in it. If you use that at a high rate, it doesn't leech the same way that a manure-based phosphorous would. You can have a high phosphorus level and it not be the same type of issue as if you were just putting on a ton of manure.

Chris Blanchard: Do you find that doing things like varying harvest time or other things like that makes a difference with the flavor of the tomatoes?

Chris Field: Yeah, like tomatoes, for instance. The field tomatoes, we typically do not irrigate. It's been kind of a whirlwind of if we get a rainy June, we'll have good fruit set. Then if it typically dries out most of July, we can have pretty good flavor.

I think a lot of people would probably say that we're stupid for taking something that needs a lot of water like a tomato, and not irrigating it. After working on the tomato farm here in Pennsylvania that grew 40,000 tomato plants, I'd rather grow 2,000 or 3,000 plants, but them taste incredible, than 40,000 and have a ton of tomatoes.

Chris Blanchard: I think about dry farming. I know folks out in California that advertise their tomatoes as being dry farmed tomatoes. Are you doing anything special in your production process to make it possible to grow them without irrigation?

Chris Field: Not really. We kind of like on the tomatoes specifically, we put down a fair amount of soft rock phosphate, some different, some other minerals that we like to use for tomatoes, specifically. Then we trellis them with the Florida weave,.

We kind of just let them go and see what they produce and kind of, in a lot of ways, abuse them by not giving them enough water or anything. Typically, we find that that results on most years in a pretty flavorful tomato.

Chris Blanchard: On my farm we've always found that it was important to keep steady moisture with the tomatoes. Otherwise, we ended up with massive problems with cracking. Has that not been your experience?

Chris Field: Yeah, so we've actually pared down really hard with certain tomatoes. We really only grow, I'm trying to think off the top of my head, now. We grow about five or six different large heirloom type tomatoes that we really like. We grow one red cherry tomato, we grow a grape, an Italian grape tomato that we harvest on



the vine. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

We basically just have found tomatoes that we really like for flavor, that do pretty well under these growing conditions. The cherry tomato that we grow, some people maybe would think it has a slightly tougher skin because of the inconsistent moisture levels. I think that's a stress response. When they eat the tomato, the flavor of it's so good that they typically don't care that it has a slightly firmer skin.

Chris Blanchard: When you're deciding on something that you like, is that a matter of you and Jesse making those decisions, or are you taking your experimental crops to market and working on getting feedback from your chefs and your retail customers?

Chris Field: A little bit of both. I think that the majority of what we grow, we wanted to grow at first because we wanted to eat it ourselves. A lot of times, we try to be selfish in certain ways of, I don't know. We feel like we should be eating what we're growing, as much as we can, and enjoying it. Then if we have extra, we'll sell it, especially like some of the trial varieties.

Say we're trying a new lettuce variety or a new zucchini or a new kale or whatever. It pretty much has to go through us before we even let anyone else try it. A lot of times it works out that it's a variety that we really like, and then we put it into full production the following year.

Chris Blanchard: Then are you guys doing any storage crops, or is everything that you're doing harvested fresh and delivered that same week?

Chris Field: We do very little storage crop. Oh we do, do some storage radish and turnip, those kind of things. We don't really do a lot of carrots. Some of it has to do with like a really good friend of ours, Tyler at ALY Farm, he grows a lot of really nice carrots.

He does the same market as us, so out of respect for him, he can grow as much carrot as he want and we'll stay out of carrot. Yeah, pretty much typically most of what we sell is harvested fresh and sold within a day or two of harvest.

Chris Blanchard: Are you marketing year round at that Union Square farmers market, or are you guys wrapping things up in the winter time?

Chris Field: The Union Square market is a 12 month farmers market that goes year round. It's some of the farmers that do it year round are pretty hardcore. We definitely, because we're limited in labor and are pushing ourselves pretty hard 10 to 11 months out of the year, we try to finish up most harvests say mid to late January, and take most of February off, and then start back up in mid-March, more or less with some early greenhouse solid mix type stuff and some greens and micro greens and stuff.



Chris Blanchard: We've spent the interview talking with you. Can you tell me a little bit about your partner, Jesse, and how she's involved in the farm and how maybe that's similar to or different than how you're involved with the farm?

Chris Field: Yeah. Jesse pretty much keeps me in line most days. Yeah. We kind of just split responsibilities a little bit. I do more of the tractor work. She does more of the greenhouse maintenance. Then we meet together and do the planting together, obviously, and harvest together.

Yeah, we pretty much work side by side, day in and day out. She definitely keeps us balanced in terms of, I don't know, I feel like I have a tendency to want to do too much and not know the limit of our scale. She definitely reins me in on that one in a positive way.

She's definitely the more behind the scenes, making it happen. I guess people would say maybe I'm a little more vocal and out front for the business.

Chris Blanchard: Are you guys both involved in marketing at the Greenmarket?

Chris Field: Yeah. Typically, a normal day at the market, it'll be Jesse, me, and then we have at least one or two people at market like currently Jesse's brother is helping us. Jesse kind of does a lot of the table customers, keeps all of them happy. I'm doing a little bit more of the restaurant side of things. We're definitely both very involved in the marketing aspect of it. We both work really well together in that respect.

Chris Blanchard: How did you guys meet and end up deciding to farm together?

Chris Field: That's a pretty, that's a crazy long story. We're actually both originally from Florida and we've known each other, we knew each other in Florida before I made the trek up north to work at restaurants in New York.

I moved to New York and she was finishing school at UF, University of Florida for political science. Now we look back and UF has a pretty good ag program so she kind of kicks herself a little bit, but not really.

Then we started dating when she was still in school, long distance. Then moved to New York and worked in New York for a while. She was doing retail and I was working in restaurants. We were kind of tired of living in Brooklyn and paying \$1,600 for a small, little apartment.

We reached out to the farms that we knew and were friendly with that market. We were like, "Hey, we want to take a break from the city." We went and worked for Rick Bishop at Mountain Sweet Berry Farm.

Chris Blanchard: Never looked back?



Chris Field: Never looked back, yeah. It's kind of nice because we're both in the city one day a week, at least. We still, we have kind of best of both worlds. We can still go to an Italian specialty store and buy nice dried pasta or whatever, and then live out in the country in the quiet and be outside all day. It's kind of been a really, a good balance for us to have both worlds.

Chris Blanchard: Are you guys pretty happy with how the economics and the quality of life are balancing out for you?

Chris Field: Quality of life, maybe not that so much. Our labor situation has been so limited. We definitely don't want to be putting so much on ourselves so hard, but because we're such a new farm, we've kind of bitten the bullet and been like, "Well, it's growing our business." Not a ton of personal time, or not a ton of time off. It's kind of secondary to this amazing opportunity that we have.

Financially, we have been very lucky to have such an amazing market and to come, I mean at the right time with the right type of specialty crops. It's done pretty well for us.

Chris Blanchard: Do you see things changing in your labor market at some point in the future, or is this going to be something that's a thorn in your side, going forward?

Chris Field: We're definitely working towards it. I think that we were just trying to find the right fit. Initially, the tomato farm we worked at here in Pennsylvania would have a crew of 26, 27 different Spanish workers. We managed that crew and we both speak a little bit of Spanish. We did well at that farm with managing that size of a crew. We didn't really know if we wanted to deal with all the interpersonal things that go along with that big of a crew and some of the drama involved.

[01:15:00] We initially, when we started the farm, we were going to try to find more people that were really into food that maybe weren't from an agricultural background that wanted to learn it and be really interested in it, as opposed to doing more of a traditional farm based around Spanish labor. Yeah, we're working towards figure that out right now.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned that you're renting land. Is that a fairly stable land tenure situation for you?

Chris Field: Yeah. Our landlords, the Swartleys, are pretty much the nicest people ever. They've been super supportive to us all along. Anytime we've needed anything and even the first year when we found the bigger property, I was initially just going to cover crop it until we could transition and move. They were like, "Oh no." They have a 75 horsepower new haul and tractor. She was like, "No, you can use whatever equipment we have. You can use it however you want."

They've been so generous to us. That first fall, we were like all right, cool. We'll



put in winter squash. We'll do some different things that are less constant eye, more going in bulk harvest in the fall or something. They've been amazing to us and we're really grateful to have the relationship with them.

Chris Blanchard: With that Chris, we're going to switch modes here and go to our lightning round. First, we're going to get a quick word from one more sponsor and then we'll be right back.

Today's lightning round is brought to you by Store it Cold's CoolBot. CoolBot has changed the way farmers think about cooling facilities for their vegetables by making it possible to cool a walk-in cooler with a window air conditioning unit with massive savings on the front end and an ongoing electricity and maintenance cost.

Now CoolBot has taken another step forward and created a turnkey refrigeration solution. An energy efficient, walk-in cooler designed for easy assembly for you in hours, not days. I know from experience how much time and energy can go into building a not so great homemade walk-in cooler, or looking for a used one that's still in good condition.

Save yourself the time, save yourself the money, and save yourself the headache. Make your soft produce stand out in the marketplace when it lasts on store shelves, in restaurant walk-ins, and in your customer's refrigerator drawers because you sold it to them whole.

If you're purchasing a CoolBot, please use the code FDF at checkout to double your CoolBot warranty at no charge, or mention Farmer to Farmer and receive an exclusive discount on your walk-in cooler solution, storeitcold.com.

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

Chris Field: If I have to pick one, it would be the finger weeder, hands down, for sure. If I had a second option, it would be a, we have a custom built reel, a three-point hitch reel to roll up roll cover onto two by fours, and that has been almost a relationship saver for Jesse and I.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about that.

Chris Field: Yeah, so here in Pennsylvania, southeastern Pennsylvania, there's a large population of Mennonite farmers, which if you're not familiar, they're kind of similar to the Amish except for they're a little more progressive. They'll use tractors but they have to use steel wheels. They're amazing neighbors, they're amazing farmers.

One day we had seen one of the, our local welder, he had made a four foot wide reel to roll up plastic. You'd use a lifter to lift the plastic up, and then you'd go through with this reel and roll it up onto a piece of two by four, and then just throw the whole thing away at the end of the season.



I was just talking with him and I was like, "Can we get you to make that, but so I can reel up seven foot roll cover, or whatever size roll cover onto an eight foot two by four?" He's like, "Yeah, no problem." It's basically just a three point hitch frame that it's actually like nine feet wide, but it has these things where you slide the two by four in on each side.

Then all it is, is a hydraulic gear that turns the two by far. I'm on the tractor controlling the hydraulics, and Jesse just gets the roll cover set on the piece of two by four, and then we just reel it in. It's the easiest thing in the world. It's really like, I hate roll cover more than maybe anything on a farm. This has made it way more manageable.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, that sounds awesome.

Chris Field: Yeah. There's a video of it on our Instagram. A lot of people have contacted us about it because it's been amazing for us to use. It was really inexpensive for him to make. I almost feel like I should talk to him about making it at some sort of scale for farms. I feel like there's probably a pretty good interest in it.

Chris Blanchard: What does, "Campo Rosso," mean?

Chris Field: Roughly translates into, "Red field." When you look out at all the radicchio, a lot of red, so there you go.

Chris Blanchard: I like that. What is your favorite chicory to grow?

Chris Field: Probably I'm going to go with Chioggia, because it's so reliable.

Chris Blanchard: [01:20:30] Unlike everything else that you're doing.

Chris Field: Yeah. Definitely, definitely that's probably my favorite to grow for reliability. For taste, the Castelfranco is pretty hard to beat. Tardivo, even though it's forced and takes a ton of labor, it's also really special. Yeah, that's that.

Chris Blanchard: Outside of the chicory family, what's your favorite crop to grow?

Chris Field: Favorite crop to grow, other than chicory. That's pretty hard. I mean I really do enjoy growing the sweet peppers that we grow. We grow 19 or 20 different varieties of specialty ones that are a little more uncommon. It's just, I don't know.

There's something about all the diversity of shapes and size and color and taste. It's just a lot of fun. When it's a hot day, like getting out there and picking peppers, I don't know. I've always really enjoyed it.

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



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

- Chris Field: Buy a finger weeder, day one.
- Chris Blanchard: There you go. I think that seems like a pretty common sentiment lately.
- Chris Field: Yeah.
- Chris Blanchard: Chris, thank you so much for being my guest today on the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.
- Chris Field: Yeah, thanks. Glad to talk with you about what we do.
- Chris Blanchard: All right. Wrapping things up here, I'll say again that this is Episode 124 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast. You can find the notes for this show at farmertofarmerpodcast.com by looking on the episodes page, or just searching for field, that's F-I-E-L-D.

The transcript for this episode is brought to you by Earth Tools, offering the most complete selection of walk behind farming equipment and high quality garden tools in North America, and by Rock Dust Local, the first company in North America specializing in local sourcing and delivery of the best rock dusts and bio char for organic farming.

Additional funding for transcripts is provided by North Central SARE, providing grants in education to advance innovations in sustainable agriculture.

You can get the show notes for every Farmer to Farmer podcast in you inbox by signing up for my email newsletter at farmertofarmerpodcast.com. You can head over to iTunes and leave us a review if you enjoy the show. You can talk to us in the show note at farmertofarmerpodcast.com.

You can tell your friends about Farmer to Farmer Podcast on Facebook. We're at Purple Pitchfork on Facebook. Hey, when you talk to our sponsors, please let them know how much you appreciate the support of a resource that you value.

Finally, please let me know who you would like to hear from on the show through the suggestions forum at farmertofarmerpodcast.com, and I will do my best to get them on the show.

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