



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



EPISODE 131

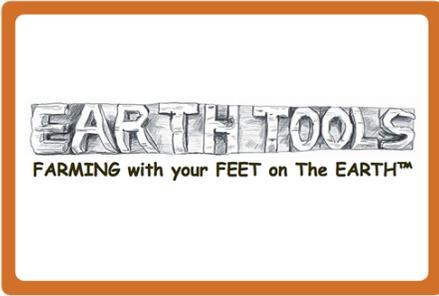
Anne Cure of Cure Organic Farm on Passion, Profits, and Growing into Diversity

August 10, 2017



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Chris Blanchard:

It's the "Farmer to Farmer" podcast, episode 131 and this is your host Chris Blanchard. My guest today, Anne Cure has farmed at Cure Organic Farm with her husband Paul since 2005. Six miles east of Boulder, Colorado, Cure Organic Farms, 15 acres of vegetables, 85 pigs and eggs from 300 laying hens are sold through a CSA, restaurants, farmers markets and an on-farm store. Anne tells the story of how she and Paul started as full time farmers with four acres of vegetables, how they gained expertise, built infrastructure as they expanded their vegetable production and expanded the diversity of their enterprises. We talk about how she and Paul financed their startup operation and the keys that helped them convince a lender to believe in them, as well as how they found a land tenure situation that allowed them to start farming on the outskirts of booming Boulder.

We also dig into how Anne trains and manages the interns, crew leaders and additional employees on her farm to take responsibility and the realities of delegating to interns and crew. Anne reflects on how having kids has changed how Anne relates to the farm and the changes she's made to bring more



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balance between farm and family and the ways the farm's demands have changed since its early days.

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[00:02:00] Anne Cure, welcome to the "Farmer to Farmer" podcast.

Anne Cure: Hi, Chris. Thanks so much for having me today.

Chris Blanchard: So glad that you could join us here. I'd like to start off today by having you tell us about your organic farm. Where are you guys located? What are you guys producing? How are you selling it?

Anne Cure: Right, yeah. We are really fortunate to farm in beautiful Boulder, Colorado. We are right at the base of the foothills so the mile-high city so to speak. We are located six miles east of Boulder, Colorado and that kind of gives us ... let's see. It gives us the flexibility of being close to the marketplace, with Boulder being only six months away and Denver just 25 miles away, and it also really allows us to have a longer growing season here still at our elevation where we have food that we're harvesting from March all the way usually through November, some of our storage crops.

Our farm is kind of interesting in that we don't own any land that we farm on. We actually lease all the land from both private owners and the City of Boulder Open Space Department. That allows us to take care of about 35 acres at this point, which we have 15 of it in certified organic vegetable production and then we also raise pigs for the fresh market. We keep about eight sows so we're butchering about 85 pigs a year. We raise chickens for eggs. We keep about a flock of 300 birds that we sell through a CSA program and at a farm store on site.

We take care of about 25 restaurants between Boulder and Denver from April through November again. Then we do farmers markets as well each week. We're at the Boulder Farmers Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays and then down in Denver at a market there as well. Our CSA program is 20 weeks. It's our main program from June through October and we take care of 200 families. Then we have an additional fall share, like a winter keeper share that continues on into December for about 100 families. That's kind of the demographic of our farm and how we market all of our product and where everything goes.

Chris Blanchard: That's a really large and diverse operation. Have you always been doing vegetables and pigs and CSA and farmers market?



Anne Cure: No, not at all. We started in 2005. My husband and I started the farm in 2005 on four acres. We had about 50 chickens and about 20 ducks for eggs and we raised, like I said, four acres of vegetables and so we've grown slowly over the time. This is our 13th growing season here and we've been really fortunate to put a lot of good programs and infrastructure and systems into place and grow slowly, which has allowed us to be successful in one enterprise before we add another enterprise and it seems like, as we've added new enterprises on, our risk management gets better and better each year, too, which is really nice to have that diversity to feel like we've always got something to fall back on. If one of our crops isn't working, maybe it's going to be a stellar honey producing year or pork producing year or something like that.

Chris Blanchard: In your experience, that hasn't resulted in you guys being too scattered and having too many different things that you're trying to keep an eye on.

Anne Cure: Right, yeah. I think, again, the main reason why is because we didn't try to do it all at once. When we got started in 2005 my husband Paul and I, we came into knowing that this was what we needed to do as a career and we needed to make a profit and every year we didn't have off-farm income. We had a lot of experience coming into starting our farm but we didn't have a lot of capital. Focusing on a couple of different enterprises when we came in really allowed us to build strong infrastructure there, allowed us to create a really great succession plan in our crop planning so that the goal is to never send our customers looking for carrots. Once carrot season starts for us in June we want to have carrots all the way to November. Really honing in on doing one enterprise well before we added something else allowed us to grow and kind of get something a little bit on autopilot before we added something new that we knew was going to take extra care and time and attention, like adding in the chickens.

Livestock is very different than vegetable farming, very different needs there and so to kind of marry the two creates an absolute lovely ecosystem on the farm but they require a lot of different attention. If we could have one that was almost on autopilot or was starting to become a little bit predictable, that allowed us to give more attention to developing the next enterprise that would come onto the farm in order to create a more balanced system.

Chris Blanchard: When you talk about putting an enterprise on autopilot, are you doing that by having the management systems in place and still being involved in that yourself or are you largely turning over management to your employees?

Anne Cure: Yeah. I'm so glad you asked that question. Our employees, they're the heart of our farm and every year they're different so when Paul and I started the farm we knew that growing food for a community was exactly what we wanted to do but beyond that, there was this piece of wanting to create a place where people could connect to where food comes from because, as we all know, that skipped a generation and in some places more generations than others and some of our demographics. Creating an opportunity for young families to come and reconnect with where food's grown was something that was really important to us because we wanted people to have their feet on the ground of where their food came from.



Likewise, advocacy was important. Who are these people growing food and how are we going to get the next lot of small farmers trained and thriving in the small agriculture world? Again, with agriculture skipping a generation, there's not a lot of people in their 20s or 30s wanting to farm who come from farming families. There's just not as many of them out there. It's a new group of farmers nowadays. We were really excited about creating an opportunity for an internship program on the farm to show people how we farm and to hopefully raise some new farmers, new small farmers. Back in 2005 we started our internship program.

One of the things that we super important for my career as a farmer is I did an internship in Washington State at Full Circle Farms and that was really my introduction to commercial agriculture, commercial diversified vegetable farming. I learned everything there from what a profit and loss sheet was and a balance sheet to doing restaurant orders to all the post-harvest handling as well as building cultivation equipment and working with different feeders, greenhouse management. Such a full spectrum perspective is really, I think, one of the things that allowed us to be successful in starting our farm the first year.

I continued to farm for other people for a number of years, for seven years, before we started our own farm but working for other people really got us on the right track. Our hope is to give that gift to other people who think they want to be commercial farmers. We run an internship program on our farm and a lot of people, we have six interns each year. They come and join us from April through November. They start out when the greenhouses are still full and we haven't started transplanting yet and then we walk them through everything from planting and feeding and using all the different types of equipment, marketing, tracking sales with all of our restaurant sales and farmers market and CSA, organizing and database management, to just bunching kale. Some days you just have to go out and bunch 400 bunches of kale and then what's next on the harvest list and what's next?

The education of what the lifestyle is like as a farmer, a commercial market farmer as well as a lot of the know-how tools so they can have some access to it before they jump in on their own is really what the heart of our employee situation is. Just about every year we have a new group of people come and join us. We'll have a crew leader or two crew leaders stay on from one year to the next of a couple of years just to continue their education. They want to learn some of the management pieces of it as well.

To get back to the original question of what's your management style like, are you still pretty hands-on or do you turn it over to your employees? I'm pretty hands-on but the goal is for my employees to know why I make the calls I do and to help them learn to think in the whole system of the farm about should I pick these beets? It's just not that simple of a question, right?

Chris Blanchard:

Right.

Anne Cure:

I don't know, should you pick those beets? Getting people to get the background thinking behind it is the hands-on management part and then my



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goal was to help them learn the systems well enough that they can get creative with them and add to them and make them better each year.

Chris Blanchard: The six interns, are those all of the employees that you have or do you have additional people on the farm as well?

Anne Cure: Right. We have six interns. This year we have two crew leaders which is wonderful. We hire some additional stuff to help us at market and to help us part time washing and packing vegetables and there's a group of women who have worked with us for the last 10 years. There's four of them who work part time. That's about three days a week, eight hours a day, and they help us do hand-weeding and pick the labor intensive things like peas and favas and cherry tomatoes, things like that.

Chris Blanchard: With 15 acres of vegetable production, I assume that you guys are kind of running on a standard tractor-based farming system.

Anne Cure: Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that I learned on in farming is that I learned pretty quickly what I'm not good at and a lot of that has to do with mechanics and I don't want to be a great mechanic but I like to use a wide variety of tractors in order to get our job done so a natural resource on the farm is our mechanic. He's been with us for 13 years here and we're a great rapport and he builds cultivation stuff for us and keeps all of our equipment running. Even more than that, it's hard to even say everything he does because he sees the whole picture of the farm. He knows the seasons in and out and whatnot so we do use a lot of equipment on the farm and a mechanic keeps it all running and helps us build things in order to be more efficient out there.

We do all of our own primary and secondary tillage at this point. Over the years I've slowly added things to our collection of equipment and tractors but we do our own plowing now. We've got a two-bottom hydraulic plow that we pull behind the International 574. We have a 12-foot disk that we disk with. We have a field cultivator that we loosen a lot of soil with, drag a lot of debris, those types of things with. We use both a Falk spader and a Land Pride rototiller in order to create our bed surfaces. We have a Kubota, like a 50-horse Kubota that we use for a lot of our tilling and general four-wheel drive implements and whatnot in order to get around the farm. We also have an International Super A that we do a lot of tine weeding with and field cultivating with. Then we have two Allis Chalmer Gs that we seed with and do a lot of weeding with tines and sweeps and shovels and disks and Bezzerides spiders and things like that.

We're definitely still push wheel hoes. There's always a couple of crops that we have to run wheel hoes through. We do some hand weeding. We don't do any cultivation on plastic. We grow everything just in the soil with the exception of some hoop house production. We have four hoop houses on our property in which we grow specialty cut flowers and also early season crops and I get a jump on some of the summer sweet peppers, things like that. While there's plenty of work, we definitely are on our tractors three, four days out of the week as well.

Chris Blanchard: When you say you're on those tractors three or four days a week, is that you? Is that your interns? Is that your mechanic or is that a combination of all of you?



Anne Cure: That's all of us, yeah. I just came in to talk with you. About 10 minutes before the phone rang I was just out sitting on a G cultivating dry beans, specialty dry beans out there. Another girl was getting on the other G to go cultivate winter squash and then one of our crew leaders was just getting ready to put the tiller on the Kubota to go turn some beds over and get ready to plant fall kale and broccolini and other Brassicas. There's a pretty good rotation. We get everybody out there using equipment and, first and foremost, teaching people how to be safe with it because for a lot of people this is the first time they've used equipment so there's a lot of education and safety training around that.

Then what the goal is to say, "Would you please go cultivate the winter squash with the G?" And that's pretty much all you have to say and they're able to go to that field and set up the tractor the way they need to set it up and do the job. That's my goal as a manager is to empower people, to give them enough education and experience around it, support around it so that they can go be independent and take some initiative out there and really take the pride in seeing what their work does.

Chris Blanchard: It's a huge amount of responsibility and trust to give somebody, especially somebody like an intern who's only going to be there for a year, doesn't have a long term commitment to the operation to say, "Here, go run this piece of equipment," that it sounds like is oftentimes not brand new. It might not be the easiest stuff to operate. I certainly had my experiences on my farm with broken equipment and diesel fuel being put in the radiator and oil not being checked and all of that. How do you go about making sure those kinds of things aren't a daily occurrence on your farm with so many people engaged in the machinery operation?

Anne Cure: [00:18:30] Right, yeah. No, that's such a great question and those things happen. I mean, on just about all of the radiator caps it says radiator we have written with a Sharpie marker over and over and over again. It's great to hear your story, Chris, too, so I know it's not just me out here when somebody calls in and says, "Which kind of fuel does this tractor take again?" It does. It does take that but, again, early on I learned I can't run a farm by myself and I don't want to run this farm by myself. I don't think there's anything that's sustainable and I don't think that's good business management for our business is to have 100% of everything having to be on my shoulders because if, for whatever reason, I'm not available to do something somebody else needs to step in and so I want to create the kind of team out there each season that can step in and make the farm happen, whether I'm there or not. I kind of like to be the conductor and the orchestrator of it all.

I farm because I love farming. I love harvesting. I love those mornings out there when the mist is settling in from the morning dew and your hands and your pants are just soaked when you're walking through your bunch greens or your baby greens. I love all that. I love all the troubleshooting. I also realize that the reason that I love some of it so much is because I really got to see the whole picture of what it means to run a farm on other people's farms. I didn't just go out with a scuffle hoe and weed for 10 hours. I had those days but that wasn't my day every day and I didn't just wash salad mix for eight or 10 hours a day as a farm job. I was really fortunate in order to have the experiences where I got to



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see the whole picture of the farm. I think that that's one of the things that helps really get people excited about farming is seeing the whole business side of it. If you really want to run a farm one day, having the opportunity to know what it's really like, the lifestyle of it, the sacrifices you make for the lifestyle of it, the rewards of the lifestyle of it as well as just the day in, day out work is really important.

You're right, there is a lot of the trust in things that things happen. I've worked for many, many years to become less reactionary when they happen and say, "Oh yeah, that's a bummer. Let's learn how to fix that." With that said, it takes a special person to be the right fit for our farm, too. Things break and they will continue to break but knowing how to fix them and move forward with them makes all the difference and having Mark, our mechanic, here on site who can navigate some of that stuff and get us going again allows it to be possible.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned learning some patience and tolerance. I forget the exact word that you used but how did you go about doing that? I know from experience that losing your temper or responding poorly to something that happens on the farm, that can be something that comes back to haunt you for years and years and years. What did you do to not have that be a constant ongoing issue on your farm? How have you changed in yourself?

Anne Cure: [00:22:00] I guess part of it's just looking at the whole system of why we farm the way we do and realizing that part of the center to our farm is training new people to be farmers and we all make mistakes. If I want to teach people and ask them to care about this place as if it was their own, I have to trust them to do so. Really, for me and for my part, it's a big time commitment. I can go get on a G and go cultivate a couple acres in three hours and that's fine and get off and go do something else. If I have to go teach somebody else to do that, that's probably going to be another hour of investment in my time and then they're probably going to take at least 15% longer to 20% longer to do the job, right?

For me, the added benefit is the education that comes with it, the independence that's going to come with it from them and the experience of just doing it over time. That's really valuable to me, knowing that we can send a lot of boxes of food off of this farm and we certainly do but if we can send that knowledge of what it's like firsthand to be behind the scenes and making food production happen, we can get that leaving this farm, too, then that's the true measure of success for us. That feels really good. I guess that that's kind of realizing what our goal was in having people do jobs that maybe they had done before and accepting that they're going to make mistakes was pivotal to kind of not being quite so reactionary. The first priority, one, is that people are safe and then from there on we just need to accept and do our best to teach people to see and safety measures when using equipment.

Chris Blanchard: I really like that emphasis on safety. I actually remember having a farmer come on my farm. I had been there for 10 years and it was one of my neighbors who was a corn and bean and dairy farmer. I was walking too close to the wrong side of the manure spreader and he actually hollered at me: "Dammit Chris you've got kids. Don't go that close to that spinny thing."

Anne Cure: Exactly.



- Chris Blanchard: [00:24:30] What kinds of things do you focus on when you're teaching about farm safety?
- Anne Cure: How things work. Right now, a lot of people who come and are interested in farming with us for seasons and seeing if commercial agriculture is what they want to do for a living, they haven't really had that experience before so they don't know how things work. They don't know what a PTO does, how to engage or how to disengage it. Why is the PTO turning the tiller tines or the manure spreader? Why does it do that? Why and how? We focus a lot on that. I think that helps with safety. If people can understand how a piece of equipment works, they can understand hopefully where not to put your hand and I also tease that out. I'll pull out the details of this right here is where it'll rip your arm off of your body.
- We have a lot of safety measures. My husband and I also have kids and there's a lot of children around our farm with classes and camps and things that we do as well. Not just teaching people with their own tunnel vision but also the larger perspective around you, have a peripheral view of what's happening around you because you're required to make sure that you're operating safely within that periphery. For instance, if you're jumping off the tractor to grab something, is the machine off or is the break on? Is the bucket down? Is the implement down? It's just repetition with people over and over and over again to have it become second nature.
- I practice all the things that I ask other people to do as well. We're moving things with a skid steer or feeding with a skid steer. Somebody's helping me or somebody's coming over, the break is instantly on. I stop what I'm doing to refocus the attention on the person who's there so I really try to be intentional in my actions, in practices in the same regard as what we ask of our employees, how we ask them to utilize and operate all the equipment and machinery here as well.
- Chris Blanchard: When you're watching for all of those little things on the farm, you mentioned a bunch of stuff, putting the break on, putting the bucket down, making sure that the tractor's turned off. I know from experience that's a lot of small corrections to make and-
- Anne Cure: All the time, all day long.
- Chris Blanchard: Okay. One of the things that everybody complains about about millennials right now is that they can't handle correction. How do you do that in a way that doesn't alienate people by the end of the first day of being told to put down the bucket, turn the tractor off and set the break?
- Anne Cure: You know, great question. The first few months, the April and May when interns come, I talk nonstop. I ask somebody to hook a hose up and I'm like, "Okay, you're going to hook a hose up. This is the female end of the hose. It goes onto the nozzle like this." I just assume that they need to hear the entire thing because I want them to do it the way that I do it. Now my way isn't the only way to do it out there in the world but here on the farm, in our systems, this is the way you're going to do it so we teach our way of doing things. They can take it



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with them. They can say, "Wow, she's crazy. I'm not going to do it that way," and that's great information, too, learning what you don't like and what you don't want to do is great information as well. It's just matter of fact. it's nothing personal. I just say it. Nothing personal. I'm kind. I'm respectful but I'll let you know right away if something needs to change.

[00:28:00] Again, that's part of the commitment of working with new people every year is that you're teaching your systems over and over and over again. With that, you're always examining your system, trying to make them safer and more efficient, more profitable. In a sense, you're always examining. You always have your systems under a microscope that you're teaching them and sometimes you have these great ideas that you think, "Why did that take me four years to figure out to do this one little simple thing that saves us seven steps?" Those are little epiphany moments, you know.

Chris Blanchard: I know you've got something in mind about that, that took you four years to figure out to save those seven steps. What's an example?

Anne Cure: For sure. One of them would be we wash and pick all of our food that comes out of the field right here on the farm in our little packing shed and we generate all of our lists and invoicing through QuickBooks. By the time I generate a harvest list for our morning meeting at 6:00am all the food that we're harvesting that day already has a destination. It's been sold or it's going to the CSA or it's going to the farm store. It's going to market and on these lists it'll say like, "pound sign, slicing cucumber," and so that's by the pound, slicing cucumbers and then how much of it is going to each different location and it teases each item out.

This is one of those things where it's like one year we grow eight different varieties of cucumbers out there and so they're all over the list but they all come in at the same time in the field because when we're out harvesting, we're in cucumbers, we do them all at once. They're all one crop at once. Instead of having all the prompts be by the actual name, lemon cucumber, slicing cucumber, Armenian cucumber. It's like what if we stick them all under cucumber and just do the order where you've got this whole page of cucumbers instead of 12 different pages to find cucumbers on.

This sounds like a very trivial matter but something like that ends up saving mistakes and time on the back end of washing and packing because I always tell everybody the most important place on the farm isn't the field. The most important place on the farm is our packing shed because it's the last place we see our food before it goes to our customer, whoever our customer is, and we want to make sure that it's our best work leaving every time. If we make a mistake in the wash station, chances are people aren't going to buy that product or buy our food for some reason, again. If we can minimize the mistakes that are made in our wash station we can grow as much beautiful food as we have and have a great market but if we continue to make mistakes and be disorganized in our wash station, our packing shed, things like that, with our deliveries, then we can grow the most beautiful food anybody's ever seen but we won't be here next year because nobody's buying it.

Little things like that, those little epiphany moments of how can I make our systems more efficient and better and make more sense and minimize the



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chance of mistakes? Sometimes the best way to figure all that out is by using them for a long time and seeing where the mistakes come and then doing something as simple as alphabetizing and changing a prompt.

Chris Blanchard: Now, you said the packing shed's the most important place on the farm. You also mentioned the importance of developing your infrastructure for the vegetable program before you expanded into the livestock. Tell me about your packing shed.

Anne Cure: Our packing shed, again, we lease on the property where our main home farm, where we keep all of our equipment, where our packing house, kind of central operations and there's just a small lean-to barn on it that we finished off. We added a walk-in cooler to it with two doors, one to enter directly from the packing shed, one to enter from the exterior of the packing shed so somebody loading deliveries can have access in different locations. We have a series of tanks that we soak vegetables in. We of course harvest based on what's the most heat sensitive and work through our days that way. We do a lot of baby greens on our farm, salad mix and spicy greens, arugula, endives, escaroles, braising mixes, kale, lots of different bulk greens.

Figuring out a way to wash those efficiently was pretty paramount in our first few years just because we didn't have a ton of labor and it was just one of those time warp kind of jobs, right? We soak everything in tanks, pull them out of tanks, put them in mesh bags and then they go into washing machines that we've taken agitators out of. From the washing machines, they come out and get sorted on stainless steel tables then go in to get packed per order. All of our restaurant accounts, they can order. They don't have to order full cases of things. They can order three pounds of arugula or 45 pounds of arugula. Makes no difference to me. I'll pack them three pounds, I'll pack them 12, 45, whatever they want because we harvest to order. We do all of our packing.

Coming up with a great labeling and tracking system was really important, like lot numbers which we just used the date for and whatnot. All of this is really inexpensive, low intensity kind of stuff. These are some of the systems that we created our first couple of years that we still use. I know with food safety and GAPs certifications and things like that, there's a lot more sophisticated software and things you can do out there but when you're first getting started just having a system that's accurate and usable is really important. You don't want it to be cost prohibitive to be able to have good quality and track where your food goes for safety reasons and things like that. We just adapted them over time.

Chris Blanchard: I'll just chime in on that and say really when you're talking about tracking food for food safety purposes, the simpler the system the better. I really think for a lot of people getting into computerized tracking is actually a level of complication that you just don't need. Really, doing it with paperwork and a date-based lock code actually makes the most sense.

Anne Cure: [00:34:30] Yeah, that's how we were and, again, it works for us because it's something that we can do. We can manage it. I can teach everybody to manage it. We don't need special printer paper. And for some farms the computerized lot system and with bar codes and things, that's really great. That's wonderful.



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For us, it's just not happening but I guarantee you we can have the same level of accuracy. I can track where that box went so putting that kind of stuff together and teaching people about the systems makes it successful.

You asked earlier, you asked me about how do you get all the information to everybody and keep them safe. One of the other things we did actually just last year and I've been trying to do it for years, but just last year we created a handbook, like an actual employee handbook, like a 60-page information about how we do everything on the farm. I just hand this to our employees their first week they're here and then essentially I'm kind of like, "This is the inside of my mind that created these systems and I hope it's helpful for you and this is just a great reference for you to revisit on how all of our different lists and sheets and things work."

There's everything on that from how to let the chickens out in the morning and do chicken chores to which tractor gets which type of fuel and to how do we track our CSA income from week to week to make sure CSA members are getting what they paid for? Not too much over, not too much under, et cetera. That was something that's been really great and helpful as a resource for our employees, too.

Chris Blanchard: I've worked with a couple of farms that have done that, that have documented everything on the farm, and I've found a lot of times that book just ends up being something that gets stuck on the shelf and left there.

Anne Cure: Yeah, it might.

Chris Blanchard: Is it something that your people are using?

Anne Cure: You know, I don't know. Right now I think everybody's tired and is farming. They're in the farm season. They're waking up. They're farming for 12 hours and then they're going home, rejuvenating and coming back. One of the things that I love the most about having interns is they call me after they leave and they're working on another farm or they've taken on a crew leader job or they're in a community garden. They're doing something and they call and they say, "Hey, do you remember, how did we make that list that tracked X, Y and Z?" I love those calls because that tells me, hey, their time here was valuable. They're taking something away from here, taking it into their next job. They're staying in the growing community.

My thought was if we can put this handbook together with all this information in it that they use day in, day out, maybe it'll be a reference while they're here but who knows? They'll have this stuff when they leave here to pick up and it can be a reference for them to get creative and create their own systems in whatever job they're in, as it pertains to agriculture. It'd be a good reference for them, a good starting point for them if they want to use some of the tools that they had access to while they were here.

Chris Blanchard: From everything you've said I assume that you haven't used that book this year as a substitute for actual elbow to elbow training.



Anne Cure: No, it's not a substitute and that was never the intention of it. The intention of it was it's a reference tool for them during the season and beyond. You know what I mean? It's got our crop plan in it so if they want to follow along and see what we should be planting when, what we're behind on, what we're ahead on, what worked, what didn't work, they can do that. If they don't want to look at that for two years until they're ready to write their own crop plan or garden plan or whatnot, there it is for them as well. They can see how it's teased out. It's just an addition to, it's definitely not a substitute for the hands-on, one on one management.

Chris Blanchard: Awesome. With that, Anne, I'd like to stop here, take a break, get quick word from our sponsor and then we'll be right back with Anne Cure from Cure Organic Farm in Boulder, Colorado.

Anne Cure: Perfect.

Chris Blanchard: Perennial support for the "Farmer to Farmer" podcast is provided by Vermont Compost Company, makers of living potting soils for organic growers since 1992. In the transplant greenhouse, all of your investment in plant materials, heath, labor and overhead depends completely on the performance of the media where you expect your plants to grow and that media has a really hard job to do. It's got to product a healthy plant in just a few cubic centimeters of soil. When I started farming I focused on getting the cheapest ingredients I could to make my own potting soil and later I focused on finding cheap potting soil already put together but what I found out was what so many farmers have, that saving money on inputs doesn't always result in increased profits. Jennifer of Vermont Compost Company can tell story after story of customers who switched to less expensive options but who have come back to Vermont Compost for the consistency and the quality of their potting soils. VermontCompost.com.

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All right. We're back with Anne Cure from Cure Organic Farm in Boulder, Colorado. Anne, you mentioned your land tenure situation at the beginning of our interview. You said that you guys don't actually own any of the land that you're farming on.

Anne Cure: Right, that's correct. After working in Washington State for four years, my husband and I had the opportunity to come back to the Boulder area, which we



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just loved and kind of knew that this was where we wanted to be for the long term. I worked for a farm in the area that unfortunately isn't here anymore. The owners sold the property and closed the farm and as that was transpiring, I remember Paul and I talking, "What are we going to do? What do we want to do here?" Paul said, "Well, I guess you just start another farm, Anne." I was like, "Ugh, I guess we do. How do we do that?" Boulder is a really popular place to live at this point. There's a lot of technology, medical, sciences, a lot of different positions and jobs available through universities and whatnot. It's a pretty popular place to live which definitely drives land prices up so it can be quite cost prohibitive to think about, oh, I want to start a farm and it's going to cost 70,000 an acre to get into that, to buy that.

[00:42:00] We started to get creative and think about, well, we're not going to buy anything because we don't have any money. We're not coming into this in any way so where can we lease? How can we lease farm? I started getting in touch with the larger community here in Boulder and was really ... welcomed by people who had been farming here for a long time, both the people who have had family who homesteaded here, starting in the 1850s, to people who had had farming businesses here for 25, 30 years. Really the agriculture community welcomed us with open arms to have new farmers come in. We started leasing some land from a farmer who grew up right here on our main farm. He grew up in this house and it was his parents' home.

There was about three acres here that we could farm on and then another farmer in the area came up one day and said, "Oh, you know, I hear you're leasing the Ellis place and I lease some land just across the street from that but I don't really need it. It's a little far for me to come and I've got plenty on another parcel. Would you like to take that lease on, too? It might help you be a little bit more well-rounded and have a little goof room, if you will," and so we started leasing that two acres that year as well. We just put it together slowly. That's how we got going. Really was working with two other farmers in the area that had some availability.

Then just starting the business, I started looking around like, "Where's the money for farming? Banks aren't going to lend to me. I'm 27 years old and I don't have any money to my name and I've been farming for the last seven years and I don't have any out farm income and I've got some great numbers that show we can do in this area." I wasn't really well received at both community banks and national banks. They really couldn't do a whole lot for me and so I started looking to farming programs, the Building Farmers program. The New and Beginning Farmers Program that's run through Colorado Department of Agriculture and then the Farm Service Agency, which is kind of known as a lender of last resort mostly for commodity crops, commodity growers.

I put my paperwork together, which I got to say was probably the only reason I was asked back into these meetings for a second meeting was that I showed up with a file, with a budget and a business plan and profit and loss sheets from previous years on similar acreages with similar marketplaces. I really showed up with my business in a folder ready to show to people what we could do, what we wanted to do and why they should believe in us as much as we believed in us. Brian Cook, the Farm Service Agency lender, took a look at our numbers and he was like, "This is a breath for fresh air," and he's like, "This is really exciting.



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We need to get the Farm Service Agency excited and behind smaller farms, diversified organic farms even. That was a bit of a stretch for them in 2005, in my area anyway. Organics wasn't something that was showing up in the Farm Service Agency office, let alone a small little diversified farm.

Nonetheless, I showed up with my paperwork, my business plan, my profit and loss sheets from previous years and I showed up with an ask saying, "I can do this. I need to get this started but I need a capital loan and I need a line of credit." We worked the numbers and we got approved that year. I'm doing all this in November for the year that I want to start farming in January and I secured the lease to start in January. We finally got all of our funding and everything to deliver, I want to say February 1st was the first time. That was when funding became available to us to do pay for our seed orders, et cetera. Our funding came through and first thing I did when we came here was our mechanic Mark and I, we built a green house. Then while we were building the green house I put our seed order in. The seeds show up the end of January. First part of February we start planting seeds in the greenhouse.

That's done now we need to build a hoop house. We get our hoop house built. Right before the end of February we put our first round of baby greens in there and then by April 1st we're harvesting greens for the first market. Really it was just kind of like it wasn't going to be an option for us not to make this work because this was what our plan was. This was our only plan and we were, with the combination of having previous years of farming experience behind us and working for other people, being fortunate to see the inner workings of the business side of running a farm, really set me up to walk into those offices so that we were able to be lend to. We had our things together and we were prepared. That really allowed us to be successful from the very first season on. In hindsight, that was the best thing we ever could've done for ourselves was the homework in the office before we planted our first seed.

Since then, over time, we've been able to be our own funding, create our own funding since our first year. We've paid back our term loan which was a seven-year term loan and we paid that back in six years. We took 60,000 out to buy tractors, walk-in coolers, housing for our interns. We built a kitchen for our interns, things like that, long term things in order to make the whole business go. We paid our line of credit back that year and we haven't taken a line of credit yet. We use our CSA payments as a line of credit for us to start the season.

Then we've saved over the years. Each year we put money away to allow ourselves a kind of fund to fund whatever we need to fund next. We can go and easily get loans at this point, too, in order to fund things. You know, sometimes if that box truck comes up you're always going to have an opportunity before you're ready for it, right? It's nice to have that money in the bank, in our savings so we can go and buy that box truck when it shows up and we need it today instead of needing to turn around 15 days later to get the loan approval and all those things. It's nice to have some put away for a rainy day.

The other thing that was really instrumental in us starting our business that first year that not Brian Cook, the Farm Service Agency lender, said to me, he looked at me and he said my favorite quote and I use it all the time is, "Profits preserve



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passion." Profits preserve passion. Essentially what he was telling me was, "Anne, you love farming but you know what's going to make you love farming? Making a living from it." I guess we try to make sure that one of the things we're always teaching people is you don't have to have dollar signs for eyeballs but you definitely need to make money from being a farmer. What other occupation out there in the world is it okay to not make a living from? If you don't think you quite can pull it off yet maybe you're not quite ready to be the same size or scale that you're thinking but what a way to get into it. How can you creatively get into it in a different way so that you can minimize the personal risk there?

That kind of goes with our land tenure. Some of those principles we carry year after year as we go on with our business, As time kind of went on we knew that we needed to expand, one, just to keep the fertility of our land going. We do winter cover crop. We rotate our animals through, graze them on our cover crops but we didn't really have any piece of land that we could leave shallow for any given season. Everything was getting planted two, if not three times within a growing calendar for us and so the sustainability of that and allowing the land to rejuvenate and maintain fertility there and also have a little goof room was always something that was on my mind.

[00:51:00] In Boulder County here, we have a really interesting land use system where in the late '80s Boulder County citizens and City of Boulder citizens, we decided to tax ourselves in order to purchase some of the land in order to keep it into open space, not allow it to be developed. A lot of the old farms and ranches, original homesteads out here, are publicly owned land at this point. The best way to manage publicly owned lands is to rent it back to the citizens in order for them to care for it. Boulder County has over 40,000 acres in public lands, ranch lands, farming and ranch lands. 15,000 of those are irrigated and then in 2010 we became the first certified organic grower on City of Boulder open space land to expand our farming enterprises in our near vicinity. Then in 2014 we took on an additional 12 acres with a homestead of city land. Again, right here in our vicinity.

It's allowed us to manage our land in a lot different way, not have to use it as intensively. I'll put one crop in. We always have something in summer cover crop now as well as fall, winter cover crop. We've increased the amount of animals we have on the property in order to bring that diversity both not only for the marketplace but also in adding fertility and diversity to the ecosystem that we're creating here. Having the public lands that we've been able to get onto has been instrumental, I think, in the long term health of our farm surviving both fertility wise as well as for the marketplace.

Chris Blanchard: You said you were the first certified organic grower and the first vegetable grower to get onto those Boulder public lands.

Anne Cure: Just the City of Boulder, yes. The Boulder County, which is a different organization, has a robust organic program on that but the city hadn't ventured into that yet. Most of it was commodity crops and/or a cash cow operation, hay operation.

Chris Blanchard: What was it about Cure Organic Farm that made them want to make that leap with you?



- Anne Cure: Great question. I like to think that some of it was stewardship. I also think that some of the parcels that became available were a bit of a natural fit for where our farm is located and the proximity of it. We work a lot with the city of Boulder to host volunteer days out here as well and one more outreach potential to allow people to have an experience here on the farm where they can connect directly with where and how their food is grown. I think some of the education that we were already currently doing kind of fit with a mission that they have and do as well with their programs and keeping public lands accessible to all and using it for educational opportunity. I think there was a natural fit and a partnership level for lots of reasons in that way.
- Chris Blanchard: [00:54:30] That sort of public outreach, and you've talked about this with regards to the internships as being a cornerstone of your farm. You talked about these volunteer opportunities. You guys offer classes in things like fermentation and natural fibers dyeing and you guys do a kids summer camp. Can you talk to me about how you make all of that stuff work? Also I guess I'm curious, because I know this is part of how this works when you talk about how profits preserve passion, are those a source of direct profits for the farm or does that just fit in the fuzzy outreach that maybe gets people to buy more carrots?
- Anne Cure: Great question. Some of both. Let me explain. We do. We have a lot of different outreach programs and my husband Paul, really his focus on the farm is connecting people with this place, the larger agricultural environment of Boulder County but also with our little corner here on 75th and Valmont. Paul leads all of our school tours. We host tours. We host tours for everyone, the youngest preschoolers all the way up to PhD students and quite honestly it's just about the same tour of the farm and how a diversified, certified organic farms work. We slip in a lot of environmental ed. We slip in a lot of agro-ecology and we also slip in a lot of history about the place here in Boulder County and our watershed and so forth.
- We do charge for our tours and have minimums for that because time is everybody's best commodity in life so we need to be reimbursed for not only the impact that it has on the farm but also the time that it has. Our tours are profitable. They're \$5 a person for school groups and we have a minimum there. They take about an hour and a half. They also have a ripple effect in life. That ripple effect is of value to Paul and I. We can't put a monetary value on it necessary but it's a ripple effect that maybe sending all these kids on tours, maybe they will have go and grow some tomatoes in pots. Maybe some of our kids can't and whatnot and I'll talk more about that in a minute. Maybe they will have their own garden or their own chickens but, again, you get them on the farms to have this experience because eats.
- One of the most important and intimate things we do every day is we sit down and we share a meal with people. Where the origins of that come from, if people can have that thought just a little bit in their minds, that's going to be great for farmers everywhere that they realize there's people attached to this and an ecosystem attached to this. They have a ripple effect, yes. They are part of the warm fuzzy and they'll stop by and buy carrots from us at farmers market but that's great, too, because that's just how the community extends.



Our kids camp, we run a kids camp for children ages six to nine for 10 weeks out of the summer. Kids are here Monday through Thursday from nine to three. We hire a director and an assistant to run that program. We have between 10 and 12 kids each week so it's a fairly intimate camp. The kids have their own garden they work in. They also are out in the fields doing all sorts of things as well. They take care of all of our animals, collect eggs. They're with the chickens each day. They do a ton of different farm arts and crafts. They cook. They harvest. They learn about integrated pest management and they put plays and skits on about things like that. Really they just kind of get to be a farm kid for a day. They get to feel how hot it is and then run through the sprinkler after they've been picking strawberries. They come clean and they go home dirty every day and that's that experience that they get to have here on the farm.

That is definitely something that we profit from, again. I'm always thinking about risk management in the farm. If something happens out there out of my control, which it's really what is in our control out there. Maybe a hailstorm will run through tomorrow afternoon. You know your weather patterns, you make the best calls you can on your land but it's really nice to have some risk management ideas, strategies in place to carry you should something come through and wipe out some of your crops so you can't make all your money from a harvest or so that you've got cash flow when you need it. Our kids camp definitely allows for that.

Farm classes. The farm classes are a tricky one. I wouldn't say they're necessarily profitable. We break even on them but the focus of our farm classes, a couple that you mentioned are the most recent ones we just had on the class. We also do things like how to make pickles and green beans, jam making classes, things like that. Rescaling, quite honestly, to get people using seasonal vegetables and fruit and learning how to preserve and put away again and giving them the tools to do it and the recipes to do it so they can go home and hopefully continue to carry the traditions on. Those are the tricky ones because those don't make a huge profit margin but those end up creating lifelong customers that always come back and buy their cases of tomatoes from us each year or their cases of peaches that we bring over from the western slope of Colorado so it creates the relationship and that's, I think, really important in the business that we have here of not just growing food but also creating a place where people can connect with where their food's grown and want to be a part of it.

Chris Blanchard: For the classes and the summer camp, that's something that's in Paul's court, right? You're not trying to manage that yourself in addition to all of the production activities on the farm.

Anne Cure: Yeah, no. Paul does a lot of that, organizes that. He hires the staff for it but we're both intertwined in a little bit of all of it, as you do. It's a big rubber band ball, right? You get intertwined in everything but, yeah. Paul's really kind of the go-to for that.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned you've got kids of your own now.

Anne Cure: We do. Paul and I, we have two daughters, one who's nine and the other who's four.



Chris Blanchard: [01:01:30] I'm always curious about this. Was there something in the development of Cure Organic Farm that said, "Oh, we're ready to have a kid now?"

Anne Cure: I wish I could say we were that organized but sometimes, like I mentioned before, sometimes opportunity, great opportunities present themselves before you even realize you're ready for them. We wanted to have kids but it wasn't like, "Okay, this date we're going to have kids." Fortunately both our girls have fall birthdays so that worked out well. You know, it was part of what we wanted to create a family in our life and quite honestly having kids was probably the best thing for me to realize that they come first. That irrigation out there, that hole in the irrigation that I'm thinking about nonstop and I'm looking at right now and I want to go fix, I'm going to have to go make lunch first. My kids have really helped teach me priority and that, let's just put this into perspective. What is happening here?

You're always managing a living system and one of the things I think that's common in a lot of the podcasts that you'll hear here on the "Farmer to Farmer" is how each farm talks about once they get started, just how much you do those first few years and how you give everything and then another 50% on top of everything. You give all you have and it's just nonstop. It is what you have to do in order to get going, get the farms going. I was still in that mode before we had our first daughter. I could just work and work and work and work and go and go and I'd see this and that needed done. She taught me some temperance and that was wonderful. Still now, when she needs something, needs me, when it's five o'clock I need to go make dinner. I turn into full time mom at that time and it's really wonderful to have that. That's the best blessing, to be able to cook, put your family first, put your kids first and actually take action to that. I think it's really tricky for a farmer to do that, to put anything first, because the nature of farming is there's always something else to do and there's always another emergency that needs your attention right now.

Chris Blanchard: I remember back in the '80s there was an essay that came out during the farm crisis about who's going to sit up with the corporate sow and it was this idea behind, you know, on corporate farms, who's going to be the person that is there are two o'clock in the morning making sure that the sow's doing okay when she's giving birth? I think it is such a challenge on the farm because the farm, it does, it needs that. It needs that level of attention and love but of course your kids do, too.

Anne Cure: Yeah, absolutely. For us, we take care of our kids and our family first. I think honestly that making that conscious decision, it sounds silly when you even talk about it out loud because it sounds like it shouldn't be a hard decision to make at all but really, are you taking care of your kids first? Are you taking them to school? Just these things, these are personal questions for me that I was asking myself. I was like, "You know, I'm not taking my kids to school." My youngest just started school last year and I can remember thinking, I can remember I was out cutting salad and I was thinking like, "I don't know who her teacher is really. I don't know these kids in her classroom," and just being like, "You know, this salad mix is still going to be here." Yeah. It's going to be an hour later when I get back but this salad mix is still going to be here and I'm going to have to get



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creative and run management so that I can go and take her to school every morning.

For me, that was a huge and important decision and exactly what I wanted to do. I think when I have things in my life that enrich me off the farm it actually makes me a better farmer. Makes more creative, makes me see things in a new way. That's just been such a gift.

Chris Blanchard: I think that's so important and it's something you read a lot about now in time management literature is this idea that you can give 12 or 15 hours a day to your job but then when you come back the next day or when you come back on Monday morning, you're not refreshed. There's no time to do ... Steven Covey called it sharpening the saw. You need time to sharpen the saw and then you need time when you're actually using the saw.

Anne Cure: Right, exactly.

Chris Blanchard: Even though it's not like taking your kids to school actually directly makes you a better farm but it gives you that something outside so that when you come back you've got that fresh perspective.

Anne Cure: 100%. 100%, that's exactly what it's about. The fresh perspective and one of the things that I could see myself doing, especially giving everything I had to the farm. You get lost and I can easily get lost in the farm. It's what I do 100% all the time but I actually have a lot of other things I really love and enjoy in life and engaging in those do make me actually a better farmer when I'm here. I'm a lot more efficient and whatnot. Actually, this has been a personal goal the last couple of years to get my head out of the sand, not take the ostrich approach to farming, put my tunnel vision on, still be on it. I'm here a lot. I'm available all the time. I have these other little things that kind of filter in in order to just help life keep expanding and keep it new.

Chris Blanchard: Do you and your family live there on the farm even though it's leased land?

Anne Cure: Yes, we do. Yep. We lease a farm house right here on the farm as well.

Chris Blanchard: Do you have ambitions of buying land and securing that land tenure-ship for the long term?

Anne Cure: Yes. Yeah, we certainly do. It's great that you asked that question. This is one of the things that I've been working on for the last couple of months actually is going through yet an FFA loan yet again, a partnership loan where they do a guarantee with an agricultural bank or whichever. We chose another ag bank but we're in the progress of trying to purchase a 10.5-acre property just down the road from us and our closing date is very close so we'll see what happens. That's, again, just for the longevity of being here in the area and keeping all the current infrastructure we have onsite but just adding some acreage to it and creating a place for our family that's two tenths of a mile removed.

Chris Blanchard: That'd be really nice. You have a lot of different marketing outlets, the CSA, restaurants, food stores, farmers markets and a farm store on the property ... then all of your other stuff, right? The group tours, classes, the summer camps.



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On a percentage basis, how much is coming from each of those different outlets?

Anne Cure:

Yeah, great question. Our first priority on our farm is our community supported agriculture program, our CSA with our 200 families. That makes up about 40% of our annual income, both the regular season CSA and then our extended CSA. We keep our CSA at about 200 families at this time because we like to know who everybody is and we just haven't gotten to the place where we want to add multiple days for distribution and multiple days for delivery. One of my goals is to stay on the farm as much as possible instead of being out driving, delivering, distributing, et cetera. That's about 40%. Our restaurant accounts are next and they come in at about 30% of our annual sales. We harvest from March. Out of the hoop houses we can start harvesting in mid-March through November into December. It depends on how mild the season is for December but then we have a lot of storage groups.

Last year we sold 50 weeks out of the year in 2016. We were doing restaurant sales and, again, our diversity with our pork, our honey, our eggs as well as all of our storage crops in the winter and hoop houses for the addition of some of those fall greens and early spring greens really allow us to extend our seasons to have those relationships with our restaurants and keep the cashflow coming in from them. I don't want them to forget about us, you know. I don't want the restaurants just to think of us when it's heirloom tomato season. I want them to get their horseradish and their sorrel and their spinach and their turnips and their rutabagas and everything all winter long from us. The more availability sheets I can send out to them, the more we are on the forefront of them wanting to order from us and whatnot.

That's about 70% and then our markets and our farm store comprise the rest with markets bringing in more income than our farm store does each year. That's how it's spread out on our farm anyway and really how I'd like to grow, I'm thinking where do I want to be five years from now? I probably would like to increase our CSA more and take more time out of markets and being on the road delivering to more restaurants. I'd like to keep the restaurants we have relationships with but maybe not really go out seeking for a whole lot more. I don't really want to go looking to engage in new markets, farmers markets but we just want to keep the ones we have, the customer base we have but really maybe try to increase our CSA. That kind of goes along with the overall goals, values and missions just of creating a place where people can connect to and to meet the people who grow their food.

Chris Blanchard:

Your CSA members pick up on the farm or are you delivering to the drop sites for them?

Anne Cure:

Yeah, nope. We have two distributions. One is the majority of our members, we have about 150 families who pick up here at the farm. We set it up farmers market style. We write up on a big chalkboard how much of each item each size share receives. We offer three size shares with our CSA. Folks go through, they grab their vegetables. We have an exchange table. If they don't care for something that week they exchange it out on the exchange table, which we populate, and then pull something off the exchange table that they prefer. We also bring fruit over from the Western Slope. They'll offer fruit shares with



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partner certified organic farms on the Western Slope of Colorado where predominantly all of our stone fruits come from in the state. Then the remaining 50 shares pick up at a farmers market in town that we go to in Boulder. For the rules and regulations of the market, we have to distribute our share as a pre-boxed share so we pack about 50 boxes each week and people who have indicated they want to pick up at market do so because it's more convenient for them there.

Chris Blanchard: When you look at expanding, say, your CSA in the Boulder areas, it seems like there's a lot of organic farms there. You must have some pretty intense competition. What do you guys do to stand out?

Anne Cure: Yeah, great question. The first thing I want to comment on is the competition. The competition, I feel like here in Boulder County, the competition is about all of us becoming better growers. Anybody can pick up the phone and call one another. There's a really great rapport with all the farmers here in Boulder County and help each other out, ask questions. We go on tours of each other's farms with our staff. It's a really wonderful farming community to be part of, both the organic community and the nonorganic community, quite honestly, both of them. We all get up and put our boots on. Just the details of what we do in the day are a little different but there's a lot of respect for all the different types of farms here and the community is large in that sense.

Really, our competition as farmers here, our competition are the natural food stores and Whole Foods. Why are people shopping at Whole Foods and buying produce and fruit on a Saturday when there's such a stellar market that's a growers only market two miles away from it. Really I look at my competition as the natural food stores. We have Whole Foods and Sprouts and you name it, it's here probably, Trader Joe's and so on. In the sense of competing for the same dollar where that's not quite as cooperative of a competition, that's where that lays.

With the other farmers we all are distinct. Every farm has a personality and what's really great with our marketplace here with the Boulder County farmers market is in its 30th year as a growers only market. The farmers own the market. It's run by a board, which the farmers elect. It's a percentage based market so if you're a farmer you pay 7% of your daily sales to be there so when you have a good day you pay more, when you have a lousy day or you get rained out you pay less. Makes it a lot more affordable for people to be there. Really the competition there, it varies because we all have different seasonality. There's some farms that come from a little bit further away, a little bit further out east where their summer crops always come in early and their spring crops go out of early. They're out of spinach by the second week of April when everybody in closer to the mountains is coming in so the ecosystem here provides a nice opportunity for there to be kind of a rolling succession of product.

I want to say every farm does kind of differentiate themselves a bit and I think really how we differentiate ourselves is that community outreach. That's really one of the big distinctions with our farm is community involvement and community outreach.



Chris Blanchard: Anne, I think this is a great spot for us to turn to our lightning round and we'll be right back after we get a word from one more sponsor.

This lightning round is brought to you by Store It Cold's Coolbot. Way back in 2000, the year I started Rock Spring Farm, the manager of the local food co-op complained that the lettuce from local producers lasted for days in her cool while the lettuce from California lasted for weeks. What was all that about 2,000 miles fresher? I later found out that none of the local growers had a walk-in cooler. 17 years later, the number one complaint I still hear from produce buyers is that their produce isn't cold. You've got to get your produce cold before you take it to the customer. The difference between now and then is that now there's Coolbot. You can build an affordable walk-in cooler powered by a Coolbot and a window air conditioning unit, saving up to 83% in upfront costs and up to 42% on monthly electricity bills compared to conventional cooling units. Use the code FTF at checkout to double your Coolbot warranty at no charge. StoreItCold.com.

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

Anne Cure: My favorite tool right now is the tine weeder. We have a Lely tine weeder which we picked up from Market Farm Implement and I love that. In conjunction with that we've also started going to varied drip and Mark, our mechanic, built a varied drip system for us that we pull behind our Super A so that we can still use drip tape and our tine weeder and it's really a life saver and has cut down tremendously on the amount of hand-weeding that we do.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about how you use that varied drip applicator. I'm sorry to focus on, you said your favorite tool being the tine weeder, but I'm really interested because, like you said, being able to bury that drip makes it possible all of the sudden to use tools like a tine weeder effectively. How does that tool work? Is it something where you're burying the drip after you have the crop established? Is it something you're putting in before you're seeding and transplanting?

Anne Cure: Yeah. We go through and we bury the drip before we seed and transplant so we go through with our Super A on. It's attached, we have a homemade bed shaper and/or dibbler as well, all modeled off of anything you Google and you want to look at one from Buckeye or wherever. We model them but we had some stuff onsite that we could just make our own with. I should clarify, Mark could make our own with. The varied drip, we can do one row or two rows and it goes through a shovel. The drip applicator is on a three-point on the back of our Super A and we secure it to the ground with a landscaping stake, the drip tape, and then it just runs through a small little pulley system underneath a sweep or a shovel that's a one-inch steel shank in order to create a furrow for it, buries it and then we put a small disk on the back of it to just cover the drip up and then we can go through and direct seed or transplant directly into it. We've done both and both just work phenomenally.

What we found using the tine weeder was we'd plant our head lettuce, our carrots would get germinated up with drip tape, that kind of thing and then you'd want to go through with the tine weeder again and it's just maddening to move the drip tape out of the way of the tine weeder. You're catching it all the



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time and so the other opportunity was to go to overhead which we definitely have been making more of a switch to overhead irrigation but we lose so much here to evaporation with our high temperatures, our high elevation and our really dry air that when your water's coming from snow melt up on the mountains that you're looking at, you want to make sure that you're using that water as efficiently as you can and it's actually getting to the ground. Using the drip is a nice alternative for us to smart water management out here anyway. Getting it underground allows us to use those tools which make us that much more efficient.

Chris Blanchard: Especially things like that, that tine weeder is such a fantastic tool just to be able to jump on and go do. You can get a lot done in such a short amount of time and if you got to drag drip out of the way in order to do the job ...

Anne Cure: Yeah, it's maddening. You know, what's funny about that tine weeder is when I called Market Farm I was ready to buy a basket weeder and I was talking to the guys on the phone. He said, "No, you don't want the basket weeder. You want the tine weeder." I was like, "I don't know if I do." He's like, "Lady, let me tell you, you want the tine weeder." I went and did a bunch of research on it and I came back and called him two or three days later with my order for the tine weeder and I'm glad I did it. I don't currently own a basket weeder but that would be my next. I still think that there's a place for that here on our farm but I don't have one yet. That's on the wishlist.

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

Anne Cure: Oh man. What would our interns say is my farming superpower? My farming superpower is to ... get their mind off of bunching and make them more efficient with great conversation.

Chris Blanchard: Wow.

Anne Cure: There you go.

Chris Blanchard: That's good. Your workers, are they able to bunch and talk at the same time?

Anne Cure: Absolutely. Absolutely. The whole key is to just keep moving next to them. You got to set the pace and they'll keep up, especially if the conversation's good. You got to ask the questions no one is asking because then everybody wants to hear the answer to them and if you're moving down the bed bunching two bunches of carrots a minute they're going to try to follow behind bunching at least one a minute so it works well.

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

Anne Cure: My favorite crop to grow? I have a new favorite crop to grow. This season my favorite crop to grow is broccolini. I love it. You can direct seed it. It's easy to weed with that tine weeder. It's a 40-day crop. You're harvesting it. People love it. You can do multiple successions of it so you don't run out of it, great for CSA members. Restaurants like it. Market, it stands up. It's a lot more profitable than broccoli production so that's my new favorite crop. I do have an affliction for heirloom tomatoes. We grow about 65 different varieties of heirlooms and then



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we grow another 12 varieties of cherry tomatoes so growing tomatoes, we put about 4,000 tomato plants in the ground which is a fair amount for our size I feel like farm. That would be a close second at this point but I think broccolini beat it this year.

Chris Blanchard: Awesome. If you could go back in time and tell your beginning farm yourself one thing, what would it be?

Anne Cure: Pace yourself. Just pace yourself. It doesn't all have to happen today. Pay attention. There's lots of things out there. I can remember in the beginning, I have no idea to do this and you can get really discouraged because you wouldn't have seen it before. I think that's the beauty of being involved in a living system year after year is you see the patterns kind of emerge but just pace yourself. Trust. Trust that it's all going to come together.

[01:24:00] One of the girls who works at our farm store, she bikes out here from town and she said on her way home the other day there was a man holding a sign and she was riding by him and he said, "Hey. Pace yourself. Being awesome is tiring." I think that's really important for all of us to remember, especially if you're just getting into farming. Being awesome is tiring so just pace yourself. You're doing a phenomenal job already.

Chris Blanchard: Beautiful. Anne, thank you so much for being part of the "Farmer to Farmer" podcast today.

Anne Cure: My pleasure, Chris. Such an honor. Thanks so much for having me.

Chris Blanchard: All right. Wrapping things up here, I'll say again that this episode 131 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 Cure. That's C-U-R-E.

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