



# FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



## **EPISODE 150**

**150: John Good of The Good Farm on Finally Farming on Their Own Land, a Maniacal Focus on Weed Control, and a Legacy of Efficiency**

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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast episode 150. Holy cow! That feels like a kind of milestone. Anyway, this is your host, Chris Blanchard. My guest today, John Good, farms with his wife, Amy, at the Good Farm in Germansville, Pennsylvania.

Chris Blanchard: 10 acres of vegetables serve 200 CSA members, plus a farmers market, and some wholesale sales. 2017 was their first year farming on this land under this name, after 11 years of renting ground at the Rodale Institute, where they operated their private farm business Quiet Creek Farm.

Chris Blanchard: John and Amy took a very strategic and long term approach to getting their own land. John shares how they developed their farm business on their rented land at Rodale, including how they prioritized their investment, and how they built the markets and off-farmed equity that helped them make the transition to their own land.

Chris Blanchard: We talk about how they developed their new infrastructure on blank ground. How they financed their land purchase, and how they found a piece of property that



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met their needs. And before they started Quiet Creek Farm, John and Amy worked at Food Bank Farm in Hadley, Massachusetts. Food Bank Farm ran an incredibly efficient, intense vegetable operation for a long time, and John shares how he and Amy have adapted the systems they learned there for crew management and operational efficiency, but without the same intensity. And John shares how he has carried that farm's maniacal focus on weed control forward into his own farming operations without a bunch of fancy tools.

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Chris Blanchard: John Good, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

John Good: Hi. Thanks for having me.

Chris Blanchard: Thanks for joining us.

Chris Blanchard: I'd like to start off today by having you tell us about the Good Farm, where you guys are located, how much you're doing, and where you're taking your produce to market.

John Good: Sure.

John Good: The Good Farm is in Germansville, Pennsylvania. That's in the southeastern part of the state. We're a certified organic vegetable farm. We grow 10 acres of organic vegetables for primarily a CSA community of 200 members. We do a little bit of wholesale and one farmers market in addition to that, but we are now and kind of always been primarily CSA farmers. And this is our first year working at The Good Farm.

John Good: My wife, Amy, and I have previously ran Quiet Creek Farm, which we operated on leased land at the Rodale Institute for the previous 11 years. We bought this property that we're at now, about 4 years ago, and we've been building infrastructure here. This season was our first year actually farming on our own land, and operating under the new name, The Good Farm.

Chris Blanchard: So when you say you were leasing farmland at the Rodale Institute, you weren't part of the Rodale Institute then. You guys were running your own business there.

John Good: Correct.



John Good: We ran our own business at Rodale. I always called it kind of like a mutually beneficial relationship. We got a chance to farm on land that wasn't our own. That was great, certified organic soil, obviously, being at Rodale. We kind of provided Rodale with a working model of a CSA farm on their property, to demonstrate to visitors and other people in the area ... We were a nice way for them to demonstrate how a smaller farm could operate within their larger farm and be successful.

John Good: It was a great situation for us. It was kind of like our stepping point between managing a farm, then we were able to own our own business and run it at Rodale. Even though we were on their land, we were independent from them. And then eventually build the capital to buy our own property, and finally, at 40 years of age, realize the dream of buying our land, and farming at our own home.

Chris Blanchard: How long were you farming at Quiet Creek Farm, at Rodale?

John Good: We were at Rodale for 11 years. We had a one year lease, and then two successive five year leases there.

Chris Blanchard: Great.

Chris Blanchard: You really had a long time to build your business in that location then?

John Good: We did.

John Good: We started there, I think it was around 2006, I believe, or 2005. We had a lot of time to start our business there. It was also sort of that time period where CSA shares were really easy to sell. There weren't as many CSA farms in the area at that time, so it was really a good place for us to be a proving ground for our business, and our growing skills.

John Good: We had managed another farm for four years prior to that, in Chester County, Pennsylvania, so we definitely had some of the growing chops by that point, but at Rodale we were really able to build our business up. We originally started there at around 185 CSA members, and our last 2 or 3 years, they were up around 275.

Chris Blanchard: Was the land the only thing that you were using that belonged to Rodale? Did you have your own tractors, and your own packing shed, and things like that? Or were you cooperating with them, with that stuff?

John Good: We leased other spaces from Rodale. They had a small greenhouse on their property. And when I say small, like 48' by 24'. It wasn't tiny, but it was small for their uses. We leased a barn space from them, that we used as our packing shed. It had a small walk-in cooler, and an area where we could setup our wash pack station.

John Good: We borrowed, well we didn't borrow much equipment. I bought a cultivating tractor as soon as we moved there, because I knew cultivating was going to be our primary labor expenditure on the farm, so we put a lot of money into vegetable cultivation right away. In our first year, two, or maybe three, we hired Rodale to do a lot of our tillage, because they had really big equipment. They could do tillage really fast ... Like they could do it faster, custom for me, than I could doing it myself. It was more expensive for me to do my tillage than to hire Rodale to do that.



John Good: So we did that our first couple years, and then as our business grew, we eventually bought a tillage tractor, a spading machine. And slowly, we took over all the things that we used to hire them to do. Again, it was really helpful that we were able to do those things slowly. Like invested all our money, equipment wise, into weed control, right off the start. From there, we sort of went backwards from the way everybody else goes, and put our money into tillage and planting. But originally, we put our money into weeding, and Rodale did all our tillage for us. They also, we would hire them, pay them by the hour to plant our cover crops for us, and a lot of that bigger field work that they were really well equipped to do, more so than we were in the early years.

Chris Blanchard: Actually, it makes a lot of sense. I think about the investments that we made in our farm when we were getting started, and in some ways I think we would have been a lot better off had we invested in mechanical weed control equipment right from the start, and spent less money and effort on some of the other elements of the operation, because that is just such a critical factor, especially in a beginning farm situation.

John Good: Yeah, definitely.

John Good: If you can control those weeds right from the start, you have a better chance. Again, tillage is an easy thing to hire. It doesn't really require a lot of your time and effort. I spend way more time out on the cultivating track than we do doing tillage, so we really wanted to focus on that in the early years. We had learned that, sort of from managing a farm before, and the farms we worked at when we were apprentice. We really have been focused on weed control first and foremost, and then we built our other systems out from there, when we designed our farm, and that, for the most part, worked pretty well for us.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned four years of managing production at another farm before you started your own farm, Quiet Creek, at Rodale, but then you were apprenticing and interning on other farms before you had your other management experience, right?

John Good: Yeah.

John Good: We apprenticed for two years. I went to school at UMASS, which is in Amherst, Massachusetts, so that's sort of where we became exposed to farming. We apprenticed for one year there, at the Food Bank Farm in Hadley, Massachusetts. And the second year, we apprenticed at Caretaker Farm in Williamstown, Massachusetts. And with both those farms, we were a part of the CRAFT program, which in the Pioneer Valley area of Massachusetts, they called the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training. That's a mouthful of an acronym, but that was what it was named.

John Good: We also got exposure to a lot of other really good farms in that area. Brookfield Farm was in that group. Jean-Paul Courtens' Farm, Roxbury was in there. Homestead farm was in there at this time, Hawthorn Valley, so some really great, and also really pioneering farms in CSA, and just organic farming ... The rebirth of organic farming through the late '80s and early '90s were from that region, and we got to learn from those folks when we were getting started.



Chris Blanchard: We'd actually had Dons Zasada and Bridget Spann of Caretaker farm, have been on the show in the past, and of course Dan Kaplan at Brookfield, and Jean-Paul Courtens have all been part of the show, so interesting closing of some loops there.

Chris Blanchard: But you mentioned Food Bank Farm in Massachusetts, and I remember going, it must have been 1995, or 1996, sitting down with Richard de Wilde at Harmony Valley Farm, and watching videos from Food Bank Farm about how they efficiently ran their operation. And when I think about a big farm that really just knew how to crank out produce ... Well can you tell us a little bit more about Food Bank Farm?

John Good: Sure.

John Good: What the farmers did at the Food Bank Farm was amazing. We were growing 40 acres of vegetables, and that's 40 acres in production. That wasn't a 40 acre farm, there were 40 acres of vegetable fields. I always think that's a key differentiation when people are talking about farms. So they actually had 40 acres in vegetable production, and were managing that with 2 farmers and 4 apprentices, primarily. That was the work force. So you can imagine now, people I think with similar sized farms have crews of like 15, 20 people. The amount that they were cranking out with a really bare-bones crew, and really bare-bones equipment too. They just didn't have that much infrastructure at that time.

John Good: And also, part of the arrangement there with the farmers at that time, was they had a lease. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts actually owned the property on which the Food Bank Farm operated. And the lease payment, the Food Bank Farm business paid to the food bank was 50% of the produce they grew, by weight, was donated to the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts.

John Good: I think your audience probably understands how hard it is to grow produce profitably in any way shape or form. But then imagine giving half of it away, by weight, as your lease for your land. The food bank had developed really, really efficient systems.

John Good: And yeah, I remember those videos. They were VHS tapes, I think that were circulated at that time, showing you the harvest techniques on the Food Bank ... And I don't think people even really know anymore that so much of what they do has come down through second hand, through those VHS tapes in the, you said, "The mid to late '90s." And lots of things that Linda Hildebrand, the one farmer there, lots of people space their crops based on the information that she laid out on those early years at the Food Bank Farm, just sort of laying the groundwork with a foundation that so much has been on since then.

Chris Blanchard: So for the people that weren't plugging in those VHS tapes back in 1995, and '96, and I sometimes thought it would be really interesting to resurrect those, and get those back out in circulation again, because there was just such an abundance of, like 100 different ways you could make your farm 5% or 10% more efficient in every element of its operation, and they have just really figured out, just how to really just nail every little thing that they were doing.

Chris Blanchard: I would think it must have been a little intimidating to go from a farm like that, and go start working on your own?



John Good: What we learned from working at the Food Bank, was these great systems. We really liked their systems. Things were really efficient there. When we had moved to Caretaker after that, it was a much smaller farm, we were working the same amount of hours, with the same sized crew, to get less work done, really. We always thought that the small farm model hadn't really learned the efficiency that the Food Bank was forced to learn, because of the size it was, and the production demands it had.

John Good: But we also saw at the Food Bank farm that the pace, it was really frenetic. That was part of what made it work, was really just endless drive, and really, real big focus on speed. We liked working fast, don't get me wrong, but we also knew that we didn't think we'd be able to keep that up our whole careers.

John Good: So when we moved to our own farm, we thought, if we were to take some of these techniques and principals from the Food Bank, which is this really big, really efficient farm, and apply them to a much smaller scale. I never really wanted to do, say more maybe than 10 to 15, 20 acres. If I could apply some of those same techniques to a smaller scale, we could have sort of the same results, but maybe not have to work quite so hard. Have some time in our life for other interests, and to do more than just farm.

John Good: So we weren't so much intimidated as almost excited, or curious to see what we could do with what we learned at the Food Bank, on a smaller scale, and maybe free ourselves up to pursue some other interests, or just maybe to farm at a pace that would let us keep farming over the long term. I often think of farming as, it's like being a professional athlete. And it's not so much in the sense that we're required to have high performance, but in terms of wear and tear on your body. The advantage a professional athlete has, is that they make 10s of millions of dollars, and get to retire when they're 35 or 40, and farmers are just really starting to, hopefully get halfway decent at what they're doing at 35 or 40. So your body's got to hold up over the long term, and that's where we wanted to use these really efficient production systems on hopefully a smaller scale, and maybe not have so much wear and tear, both on our bodies and psychologically, because farming is a very psychologically impacting job too.

John Good: We really were appreciative of the experience we had at the Food Bank, and we still talk about it, and I talk about it with my apprentices. They probably get sick of hearing the term, "The Food Bank Farm." Or, "The way we did this on the Food Bank Farm." But here it is, almost 20 years later, and I still think of all the things I learned there, that at the time, I think most of them I didn't even realize the importance of what I was learning, but we've carried it with us ever since. It's always been a benefit we've just sort of had in our back pocket out of working there our first year ever farming.

Chris Blanchard: Right there, that's something too. To have that be the first experience that you had farming, rather than coming on to that three or four years in.

Chris Blanchard: So when you talk about bringing some of what you learned at Food Bank Farm to your operation at Quiet Creek, and I assume now at The Good Farm, what sorts of things did you bring? What are some concrete examples of systems that you brought over and scaled down?



John Good: The biggest systems we learned at The Food Bank, let's say there's two. But the first big thing, was just a really almost maniacal focus on weed control. We were either harvesting or controlling weeds, and that was either mechanically or by hand. We did a lot of hand work there too. We sort of learned that's the premise of keeping your farm as free of weeds as you can. Over the long term, trying to deplete the weed seed bank right from the start, and it was just sort of drilled into us that it's just an element of, almost your face at some point, that you just know that weeds need to be controlled.

John Good: So bringing that with us right off the bat. In any land we worked, it was sort of our immediate focus was weeds, weeds. If you can keep weeds under control, or at least stay ahead of them a little bit, you have a chance to do everything else that matters on your farm. That was a big thing.

John Good: The mechanical systems themselves maybe aren't the most crucial thing in the world, but just to know that you need a mechanical system. I didn't necessarily use all the same tools and equipment that The Food Bank used, but I used the same principles in terms of controlling weeds early, controlling them often, stale seed bed preparation. Those sort of treatments, to really keep things under control. The other thing that we took a lot from The Food Bank was, I think in harvest efficiency. We did everything at The Food Bank as a crew. Everybody on the crew did every job together. There's something about that kind of cohesiveness of a team unit, and everybody knows how to do everything, it was really valuable. And again, we still farm that way. It's not even almost a conscious decision. It's just because that's how we started, and we kind of felt like, that's how you do it, because we learned it there. So at The Food Bank we did all harvesting as a crew. Washing was mostly done as a crew, and washing was really fast. There was a sense there, or sort of a pressure there, because we were doing so much with so few people. Things were really quick and dirty. Maybe not really dirty, but really quick. And we sort of always learned that kind of, again, just pushing the pace as fast as you can do something. An expression I use with my employees when they're taking too long to, maybe wash something is, "Don't make love to it, just wash it. Get it in the water. Get it back out, and keep going." And we, again, you had to do that on that scale, but after a season of doing that, that becomes the way you just kind of do things for the rest of your life.

John Good: Those are the two things, sort of broad topics, I think that we got from The Food Bank was that weed control piece, and the working as a crew, and a lot of good harvest techniques. The Food Bank did things very efficiently, harvest wise, with again, really no equipment. We dug all our carrots with a fork at The Food Bank Farm. And we digging ... I don't remember the amounts, but I'm sure it was 500 to 1,000 pounds of carrots every picking, and we would do that with a fork. But it was just in terms of pacing, and movement, and a lot of it was just really in flow kind of things. Just making sure there was always somebody ... Everybody knew what was next, and was always getting setup for that. I think those two areas were really important for us. And like I said, we still tell our apprentices about it all the time. It was such a valuable experience, working there.

Chris Blanchard: And you mentioned something like even the harvesting the carrots with the forks, but they kind of turned the carrot harvest on their head. And this was a technique that I learned from them, that we used on our farm was, they would strip the tops from the carrots while the carrots were still in the ground, so that you





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weren't sitting there, holding the carrot, and snapping it. You were kind of pushing your hand along the row, and just pulling all the greens off and throwing them in the wheel track.

John Good: Yeah, we would top all the carrots first.

John Good: I actually don't do that as much anymore, because I sometimes have bunching carrots for other markets, and other uses. But at The Food Bank, all carrots went out topped and laid. Yeah, and people still think that's crazy when you tell them that. But it's quicker to, like you said, just go down the row. We would crawl down the row on our hands and knees, and do a sort of push and pull motion. The tops would break off. Somebody else was coming right behind you with a fork, and somebody else was coming right behind them. The carrots just go right from the ground into your ... In the case of the food bank, it was 5 gallon buckets, is what we would harvest into. Like you said, it sounds backwards, but it's actually a quicker, more efficient way to move down the row.

Chris Blanchard: You talk about how you talk to your crew about Food Bank Farm until their sick of it. But I do remember one of the things that Michael Doctor, one of the farmers there, told me when I got to meet him 1997, was just how important the whole crew attitude was, and kind of creating a culture around working the way that you work, and just how critical of a part of the operation that was.

John Good: Yeah. That's something that we definitely felt there, because at The Food Bank when we worked there, you worked really hard. It was referred to in the circle of apprentices up there, as the boot camp of organic farms, because of the pace we were required to work at. You were supposed to run from one job to the other. It's not walk if you didn't have a vehicle. So there was some really intense stuff like that, but we did have this crew mentality. That you felt like you were members of a team.

John Good: A lot of that was because Michael, and Linda too, were always working with you. You didn't have sort of these, absentee farm managers. I mean they had other jobs to do as well, and they would go do them, but you knew, when push come to shove, they would always be there alongside you, and generally outworking us 20 year olds. So even though you worked hard, you felt respected and valued, and that sort of led to this culture. That we were The Food Bank Farm. We were a team. That always sort of just contributed to a good attitude among the crew. And when the crew has a good attitude, things get done, and tough work can become something that's fun, and you can gain a sense of ... I'm not sure what the word I'm looking for, but tough tasks become easier when you work on it with a lot of people who are committed to it.

John Good: I think that's something you see more in farms now. A lot of people have sort of more dived tasks up, and have separate managers for separate areas of the farm. We just never really moved that way. We've always appreciated working as a crew, and we still instill that sort of culture on our farm. I don't know if it's because of that or not, but we've always had, I think good crews, and we generally have people who are happy. We have a lot of people come back to our crew as apprentices for second or third years over the years. We've had some people work for us, like for 10 years. I think part of that is because you don't feel that you're just working for a farmer. You feel like you're working together to accomplish this goal of the farm. We learned that at The Food Bank, and still sort of apply that on our own farm here.



Chris Blanchard: When you started Quiet Creek Farm at Rodale, how did you make that arrangement happen? Did you go to Rodale and say, "We need 10 acres to start a vegetable farm"?

John Good: We were managing another farm at that point in Chester County, the Charlestown Cooperative Farm, for the Anderson family down there. At that point, my wife and I wanted to move closer to our home, which was about an hour north of there, around Lehigh or Berks County, Pennsylvania. Both our parents lived two miles from each other, so we were always trying to get closer to our family.

John Good: We were thinking about sort of the next step of starting our own business. I saw an ad, I believe it was in PASA Newsletter, which is a Pennsylvania association of sustainable agriculture, their newsletter, that they were looking for a farmer to start a CSA on the Rodale Institute. They had had someone there previously who had moved onto another position, and they were looking for someone. That was about 15 minutes from my wife, Amy, and I, our home town. So we called up Jeff Moyer, who's now the director at Rodale, and went in and talked to him about it.

John Good: We hit it off right away with Jeff. One of the greatest people I've ever met, a good friend of mine. We talked to him, and we could tell right away that we clicked. He liked us. We liked him. And at that point, we actually continued farming at the farm we were at for another year, where Rodale sort of laid some of the groundwork for us to come. They got some of the fields that we wanted ready, plowed, and planted the cover crops. They actually put the walk-in cooler that they had in their warehouse, collecting dust at that time, but they put that into the barn. That was going to be our CSA pickup site. They got the greenhouse cleaned out, so it would be ready for us the next year. We were able to come down that October and plant garlic seed on the new land, so we'd have garlic right away, the following year.

John Good: That was how we got in there, was sort of through an ad in the newsletter, and then meeting with Jeff. Then took a year of prep work, and then the following year, we bought a house about five miles from Rodale, and started farming there, and were there a decade more.

Chris Blanchard: What a great way to start a farm, and something that I feel like is really an unusual opportunity for somebody to have. That full year of really, preparation time, and well yeah, just getting things ready.

John Good: Yeah. It was an unbelievable experience, and a great opportunity. And it's definitely hard to find out there, but we happened to luck upon it. It happened to be in our backyards. Sometimes things just work out if you just kind of keep making the right, or hopefully making the right choices in life. Opportunities arise is how I have lived my life, and it's so far worked okay. We were just presented with this great opportunity to farm on great land at the Rodale Institute, this great name in organic agriculture. Those opportunities are definitely hard for young farmers.

John Good: Although, I think through that model at Rodale and some other, you're seeing more of these non-profit, kind of incubator farms pop up around the country. I think there are more of those opportunities than there were, but we just happened to luck into a great one at that time.



Chris Blanchard: When you started farming at Quiet Creek Farm, at Rodale, did you jump right in with 10 acres of production? Or did you guys do what I think is maybe a more common model, and start with a couple, and gradually scale up?

John Good: We started with, it wasn't quite 10, but I think we started with 7 or 8 there, our first year. I know Jeff was nervous about that, because he wanted to make sure we'd be able to handle that much land, but we assured him that's what we had been doing in Chester County. We knew how to do it. We were starting our own business, and we had a mortgage to pay now, and we needed to produce. We knew the land there was good land, and was going to be able to produce for us, and we felt confident in our own skills.

John Good: We had an experience in our previous farm at Charlestown, where we started out with 2 or 3 acres, progressed to about 8 acres while we were there, so we sort of had our growing period at that farm. When we moved to Rodale, we were like, "Okay. We're going to start right off." I think we did about 150 shares that first year and a farmers market. We did 2 markets actually.

John Good: We weren't worried about production at that point. We knew that we could pretty much do that. Our main concerns were operating our own business from scratch now. We knew what we needed to do in terms of getting the crops in the ground and out of the ground. Now we were just looking to really make enough money to make a living, and like I said, pay a mortgage, and support ourselves full time.

Chris Blanchard: It does seem like a pretty bold move when you're starting your own business, to buy a house that same year.

John Good: Yeah.

John Good: We've done a couple of those that have been a little bit scary, but you have to ... I would say that I am very methodical, like I'm not a risk taker by nature by any means. I wouldn't have made that jump unless I felt really secure that I could do it. Our house was also kind of run down. I'm a carpenter on the side, so I was working on that too. I felt, "If this falls through, I'm going to have a renovated house to sell at the same time." There was a plan behind what we were doing, in both ways.

John Good: But, at some point, I guess you just have to take the leap one way or another, somewhere along the road, and that was just the time for us. That was when we decided to make that leap, and see if we could do it. If we failed, we would have failed, and lived, and moved on. But it just so happened that, I think given the opportunity and the support that Rodale gave us ... At that point we had apprenticed for two years, and we had managed a farm for four years, so we were pretty experienced. It wasn't as scary as almost this past year was, moving to our own farm. It was even more scary, but maybe I'm older and harder now, and know enough to be scared, but so far it's all worked out.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, when you start pushing 40 that whole risk thing takes on an entirely different meaning.



- John Good:                Yep. We have two kids now, and risk takes on a whole new meaning when you have people besides just you who are dependent on you, then your risk's working out, so.
- Chris Blanchard:        When you started the business at Quiet Creek Farm, at Rodale, you said that you were confident in your growing, but the challenge was having your own business. What was different for you about having your own business, relative to just managing somebody else's operation?
- John Good:                The biggest differences were in the administrative side. At our previous business we had a payroll company. We had the owners of the business that took care of marketing, and advertising, and the website. We still handled most customer communications there, with our CSA members, so that wasn't really different, and we still did sort of day to day banking and book keeping, but we had a lot more when we moved to the new property, and sort of learning legal structures, doing our own payroll, doing liability insurance, all sort of those aspects, kind of the un-fun parts of farming that we hadn't had to focus on as much.
- John Good:                We had to learn that a lot more on the fly when we ran our own business. I think was when we first had to run QuickBooks ourself, and do all our own book keeping. We had those challenges to learn in the background while we were farming. Again, we managed to, but those are the things that go along with running your own business, especially running your own farm business, that most of us don't love, but you have to find out one way or another.
- John Good:                At that time, it was paper brochures. We still think about sitting on the floor at night, and folding tri-fold brochures, 100s of brochures. And then putting them in envelopes, and using a sponge, and getting your stamps and envelopes all licked with the sponge. It was kind of a different time at that time. It's not that long ago, but it was. Doing all that kind of stuff, which we hadn't had to do when we were managing a farm for someone else.
- Chris Blanchard:        I'm just having some flashbacks to tri-fold brochures, and working with Microsoft Publisher, and trying to pretend like we knew what we were doing as graphic design. It's kind of funny.
- Chris Blanchard:        So then, you guys farmed at Quiet Creek Farm for, if I'm doing the math right, about six years before you decide to buy the land that you're currently on?
- John Good:                Yeah. It was probably even a little more than that. It was kind of like seven or eight years. I can't remember exactly what year we bought the farm, but it was maybe four years ago, or three years ago. I'm not sure which, but yeah.
- John Good:                We had decided. We had been at Rodale. We had done a one year lease. We'd done a five year lease, and then we did another five year lease. In the middle of that second five year lease, our daughter was born by that point, and we were just thinking about, "Do we really?" It was really getting hard psychologically to farm from five year lease to five year lease. Even though we had a good working relationship with Rodale, with any organization maybe leadership changes, or maybe their vision would change. We never had super long-term security there, and we wanted to have



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long-term security. I think everybody who gets into farming kind of dreams of owning the farm.

John Good: So at that point we kind of decided to start looking a little bit. We looked around at farms in our same area that we had lived in. We wanted something that was still, hopefully in our same school district, maybe close to our same customer base, and most importantly for us, close to our family. We knew it was going to be kind of a lengthy search. We probably started looking about five years ago, and then probably bought the land, maybe three and a half, four years ago. But again, it was a very calculated decision, a very slow decision.

John Good: We looked for land with infrastructure first, and really couldn't find anything that we liked. Maybe you'd find a decent house, and a terrible barn and field, or you'd find good fields, nice land, but just terrible dwelling that basically needed to be raised to be razed to be worthwhile. Then, about halfway through our search, I told my wife, Amy, that, "We just need to look for raw land, because that's the only way we're going to get what we wanted." And so then our search shifted, and eventually that's what we did. We bought a piece of completely undeveloped farmland.

John Good: And then, again, step by step, we put a driveway on it. We put a septic system on it next. We built the pole barn next. We built our house last. The way a farmer would do it, you build your barns first, and then your house. The year before we started farming here, we were building a greenhouse in the winter, and finalizing all the infrastructure so that it would actually work as a working vegetable farm. It's been a slow, I don't want to say arduous, but maybe a little bit arduous process to get here, but we'll be living here now, and had our first season here, and it was a good one. So, so far, so good.

Chris Blanchard: Were you able to retain the CSA customers that you already had? Was that something that you were able to take with you?

John Good: We did, quite a bit. Some of our CSA members, our new location was actually closer. We're only really about 15 miles from the Rodale Institute, so for maybe a third of our members or so, they were excited. They're like, "Oh that farm's even closer than where it is now." And another two thirds or so, we added some delivery sites near our own farm, so we could keep those people as members, who couldn't make the drive out to our new location, so we had some delivery sites in that area. And some of those we had even started the year, or the year before we left Rodale, sort of get back into deliveries again, and have a customer base built up.

John Good: And the last thing we did, was our final couple of years at Rodale, when we were at Quiet Creek Farm, I think I mentioned we were around 275 CSA members. So we knew when we moved, we sort of built that number up with that when we moved, it would drop back down to around 200, both to accommodate any customer attrition, because of moving to a new location and having to build up a new customer base, and also to give us a little bit of wiggle room with growing on a new piece of land, making sure it was going to produce or yield up to what we were accustomed to. We left a little bit of extra space in there, and sort of filled that up by doing a farmers market, some wholesale avenues that were a little less ... There was a little less pressure on producing, like there is with the TSA and those bottles. But again, the land ended up being really productive, so it wasn't a problem, but we wanted to have that wiggle room built in.



Chris Blanchard: With multiple years to get that land ready for vegetable farming, let me ask, what was the land in when you bought it? Was it in conventional corn and beans?

John Good: It was in conventional crops. This area, kind of luckily, a lot of it was in conventional alfalfa, which is a popular crop in my immediate vicinity. The rest was grown, up here it's a kind of a beans, wheat, oat, and potato rotation. There are some guys that do corn, but on this particular farm, which is common in my area, is farmers use potatoes as a replacement for corn. So we had conventional potatoes here, and hay was basically what the land was in.

John Good: When we bought it, we had the farmer who was custom farming it, transition to at least organic management at that point. So at that point he put it all in organic orchard grass and alfalfa. He hayed it for, I think it was three years before he moved here, or two years. And then the third year that the farmer was here, we hired him to put in cover crops, so the following spring the ground would be ready for vegetable production, or at least, we had him put a third of it into cover crops that year. The following year, we were actually certified organic. The first crop we ever pulled off this piece of property was able to be certified organic, because we managed it organically for those couple seasons before growing vegetables here.

Chris Blanchard: So how many acres are you actually farming in vegetables now?

John Good: We have about 10 acres in vegetables here.

Chris Blanchard: How many acres of tillable ground are you working with to get that 10 acres of vegetables?

John Good: The whole farm is about 18 acres, and then there's about 3 to 4 acres of woods. There's about 14 acres of ground, gives us about 10 acres of ... It might just be probably a little less, maybe like 9, 9 and a half acres of tillable vegetable ground, not counting grass roadways, the pads around the barn and the greenhouses. There's a lot of acreage gets eaten up in roadways, and being able to move around the farm efficiently.

Chris Blanchard: So when you went about developing the infrastructure on the new farm property, what were some of your priorities there, based on the experience that you'd had on multiple other operations with a lot of different packing houses, and a lot of different greenhouses, what were you guys looking at, and saying, "This is what we've got to get right here"?

John Good: That's a great question.

John Good: The biggest thing, I think, right off the bat, was the packing house. I've never had a really good packing setup. So I would say the biggest thing, right away, was getting a concrete floor in our packing house, building it big enough, so we could big coolers that were bigger than we needed. And then our CSA pickup room and shop is in the same space too, and we also want to make that big enough, so that customers could move around it and feel comfortable, not feel cramped. And luckily, I'm a claustrophobic person. I don't like people being right on my shoulder, so I try to make everything too big. I think that was a big step, was to give ourselves room to move, and room to grow.



- John Good: And a huge one, which we had never had before, was insulating the concrete pad under our walk-in coolers, and then that way everything can roll in and out of our walk-in coolers on a concrete floor. That's just been life changing for me. It was something I always knew I needed to do, but never had the setup to do it. So being able to sort of stack everything on rolling pallets, and move it in and out of the walk-in efficiently is life changing in terms of body wear and tear, and efficiency.
- John Good: So the packing house, its concrete floor, designing things so there was a good flow. I was thinking about where we were going to park the harvest truck, or the harvest wagon when it came back to the barn, and how we could get from there, through our wash/pack line into the barn efficiently. These were all things we were never able to design intentionally, really at the farms we worked at before, or at least not very much, and this time we had the chance to do that, at least as best as our property shape and size would let us. That was a big thing, making things flow efficiently was the biggest thing, in the barn and the pack shed. I'd say was the thing that we were most able to really get right this time, and have it work.
- John Good: Greenhouses and high tunnel siting, probably aren't as efficient as we would like them to be, but we tried to put those things in the corners of the property, where we don't have vegetable ground, or at least our greenhouse. But even that is at this point, really close to the back of the barn, where we have access then to storing greenhouse trays, and seeds, and again have things sort of close at hand, and handy.
- John Good: At Rodale, to go from the barn to the greenhouse, we'd probably be getting in a truck and driving there. Where now, I can walk out the back door of my barn and be at the greenhouse, so that's really handy in terms of proximity there.
- John Good: And another great thing we did on the barn, that I learned on the two previous farms I worked on, was just sort of covered bays. The sort of core of our barn is a 30' by 80' shed, it's the roof of the pole barn. But then on each side of the pole barn is a 15 foot roofed bay, or like a shed roof coming off, and that's a 15 foot deep by 80 foot long forebay on the front side of the barn, and on the backside of the barn. And those covered spaces, it's just a roof, there's no walls on it. That roof is great on the back side of the barn for storing equipment. That's out of the rain, out of the weather, and can be kind of messy, but still out of the elements. And that front side structure is great for wash/pack and getting things into the barn, and for providing a nice entrance way for our customers when they come to do CSA pickup.
- John Good: So I love those covered forebays, and I love having a concrete floor into the cooler, and that's where we've really been able to get things right, on this, our third shot at starting the farm from scratch.
- Chris Blanchard: Well, and of course different. And you say, "Start from scratch." But you know, at Rodale you had a building that you were fitting into, which is a lot different than being able to design something from the ground up.
- John Good: It's true. As hard as it is, and daunting as it is to start from the ground up, it really is an opportunity to be able to do things, finally the way that you actually think they should be done. And you're still going to mess things up. There's still things you can't foresee, that you get there and you're like, "Oh no. This is not right." But at least you got a lot of things that hopefully are more suited to your needs.



Chris Blanchard: I remember, Dan Guenther, from Common Harvest Farm, here in Wisconsin, told me that when I was having a lot of angst over developing things when we started Rock Spring Farm. He said, "Chris, you're not going to get it all right. At some point you've just got to move ahead and do it."

John Good: Yeah, it's true.

John Good: We live by the slogan here that ... I don't know coined the term, but it's, "Ideas are a dime a dozen, but give me a deadline." That's a valuable aphorism to keep in your pocket when you're farming.

Chris Blanchard: How did you guys finance the new farming operation?

John Good: That's a good question, and it's many layers to it.

John Good: The biggest one was our house. So as I mentioned, we had bought a house when we started Quiet Creek Farm. I renovated that entire house, like the whole house was basically stripped down to studs and rebuilt. So even though the sort of real estate crash happened while we were doing that, we still had a fair amount of equity in our house. That was going to be our first big chunk of cash to put into buying a new property and building another house, so we had that to start with.

John Good: We did have some savings built up from our time at Quiet Creek Farm. We were always putting money away for different needs in our personal life and our farm life, so we had some savings built up. And the other thing that we did, was we sold memberships in our CSA. I think there was like 3 or 5 year memberships, to sort of a group of about 15 core members, where they could pre-purchase a share for 3 to 5 years at a set rate. We raised, I think it was around \$15,000 that way. We used that money to drill our irrigation wells. We used that money to do some early infrastructure work, right off the bat. So that was great, we sort of did a loan from our members that way.

John Good: And we did that, I think that was two or three years ago. Most of those memberships are now up. Those people are now back and joining yearly. We did that before we left Quiet Creek, so we were able to get some infrastructure built before we ever moved here. That includes drilling the wells, and I think the driveway we built that way.

John Good: We had our equity in our house that we had built up. And then the last one was an FSA microloan to do some of the final infrastructure improvements. We built our pole barn with one loan. We paid that off, and then we took out a final loan to sort of put the concrete in our pole barn, build two brand new walk-in coolers in our pole barn, and build our greenhouse.

John Good: So those are sort of the three main ways we financed getting here. We had all our equipment and supplies that we had already accumulated at Quiet Creek Farm, that we were able to move here. And the rest were fairly small ... I say fairly small, but they were expenses we were able to fit under our budget for the year. It definitely meant we made less money than we normally would our first year farming here, because we definitely spent a lot more on small infrastructure projects, but with those different avenues, we were able to get here, and get started.





Chris Blanchard: And I really love what you said about building the pole barn, and then taking out another loan to turn that pole barn into a packing shed, because once you build the pole barn, now you've got something that has some equity, right? You have an asset on the farm already. It seems to me like it would be easier to get the financing to then come in and pour a slab, than to kind of get somebody to understand what's needed all at once.

John Good: And do everything all at once.

John Good: With the Farm Service Agency's microloans, they're small loans. I don't know if we could have got everything in that loan, all at once. We did one loan to build the barn, I think that was like three years ago, and then we paid it off, ahead of time. Of course that looks good then to your creditor, like, "Sure. We'll give you another loan to finish it up. You guys have been reliable." So that definitely helped, both those things. Having the building, and showing that you were paying your debts to begin with.

Chris Blanchard: You said, of course being a farmer, you put in the driveway, and you built the barn first, and dug the well, but you were leaving behind the house that was five miles from Rodale. What did you do about that?

John Good: This was one of those crazy parts of the story that only a farmer would do.

John Good: So we were selling our house to help build a brand new house, again, from the ground up at our new farm. We were going to build a house here. Our bank was willing to give us a loan to build the house, but not until we sold our old house. So now we had to figure out, "Well if we sell our house, where do we live while we're building the house?" So this was challenge number 400 in this whole process.

John Good: We sold our house. We sold our house, for sale by owner to make some extra money that way. We accomplished that pretty quickly, which was great. But now we had to move out in, it was like October, so we were farming at that time. Luckily, we had our pole barn built here at the new farm, so that became our storage unit to move all of our worldly belongings into, as well as our relatives basements and attics, and anywhere else we could fit stuff.

John Good: And then we moved to my wife's parent's house in the town of Emmaus, and she and I lived in the attic for a year, and our kids, our two children lived in a like, 8' by 10' bedroom in bunk beds. We lived there for one year, where we built our house. We started building our house. We broke ground around December 15th. We built most of our house over the winter. But then once the farming season came, we were building a house and farming. I was living in my in-law's attic, driving to the farm, to Quiet Creek Farm at Rodale, and doing my farming job there whenever I could, and then driving to Germansville and working on building the house here, because I was working with a general contractor who was a close personal friend, and for the most part he and I built the house with the assistance of subcontractors. So we were sort of balancing that craziness, while still running a farm business, while living in our in-law's attic. So that was just another crazy year.

John Good: But again, like I keep saying, we got through it, and moved here in July of two years ago, again during the farm season. We moved in here during the middle of the



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summer. We got here. We love being here now. It's so great to finally live where you farm. After leasing land for 11 years and having to commute to water our greenhouse, or to roll up the sides on the high tunnels umpteen times a day. To be able to do that stuff on location, despite sort of the craziness we had to go through to get here, in the end we feel has been worth it.

Chris Blanchard: Congratulations. I mean especially on surviving a year of living with your in-laws.

John Good: Yeah. Luckily, my in-laws, I still get along with them well. We went through that process okay. It was a close space at times, but we were grateful that they gave us that opportunity, and I think they were grateful to get to live with their grandkids for a year. There was tough things, but there were benefits for all of them.

Chris Blanchard: And I think good job for all of you there. It speaks well of everybody that was involved, to make that kind of an arrangement work.

John Good: Definitely.

Chris Blanchard: With that, we're going to stop here. Get a quick word from a couple of sponsors, and then we'll be right back with John Good from The Good Farm in Germansville, Pennsylvania.

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- Chris Blanchard: Contact them via their website, LocalFoodMarketplace.com, to schedule a free consultation on how Local Food Marketplace can help you efficiently manage customer orders, from pack house to your customer's doorstep.
- Chris Blanchard: All right. And we're back with John Good from The Good Farm in Germansville, Pennsylvania.
- Chris Blanchard: John, you said earlier that you learned to have a maniacal focus on weed control. Can you tell us about how you're doing weed control there at The Good Farm?
- John Good: Sure.
- John Good: Like I said sort of before, we built our whole farm system around weed control. The primary parts of that are: 1, we grow on a 3 row system. We have 5 foot beds, center to center of tire track with 3 rows on 15 inch centers. 3 rows is not the worlds most efficient spacing. We could definitely do 4, maybe 5 rows on that same sized bed, but 3 rows is easy to cultivate. 1, it's easy because you're not trying to watch as much. And 2, it's easy because 3 rows, whether you're cultivating 1 row, 2 row, or 3 rows, your basic setups don't have to change. Your center row never moves. Your outer 2 rows never move, never change spacing, whether you're doing 1, 2, or 3 rows. So that makes it pretty easy to cultivate, again I said sort of in terms of watching what you're doing, but also, like the tools that are on my belly of my tractor, don't have to move much, because I use that same system.
- John Good: I should mention that, sort of the center piece of our cultivation system, which is just one tractor, because we're only 10 acres, is a Kubota 245 offset. That was that first tractor I bought. I bought at an auction, I guess our first year, so that was like 12 years ago. We got it for \$7,000 at auction. It had a little under 1,000 hours on it.
- John Good: I remember buying it. I was really nervous, and I went a little bit over. I think I wanted to spend \$6,000 at the auction, but the auctioneer got in my face, and really pressured me to buy it at \$7,000, and I'm so glad he did, because it's been a great tractor for us, and because it's worth more money now than it was when I bought it 10 years ago. But we sort of center our cultivation system on that tractor. We put tools on the belly because it's an offset tractor.
- John Good: Most of my tools aren't fancy. I use sweeps a lot on the belly. The sort of fancier thing we've done on the belly of our tractor, is we've modified Bezzeries rolling cultivators to sort of make our own basket weeders. I've used basket weeders in the past, and they're great depending on your soil and soil conditions. We had trouble, especially at Rodale a lot, with crusting after heavy rain, where a basket weeder just really wouldn't do anything but roll on top of the ground. It didn't penetrate well enough for us when we'd get crust.
- John Good: So we now have gangs of Bezzeries, that basically look like basket weeders in terms of their width. We have two gangs on the belly of the tractor that go between our middle and outside two rows. And on the outside, on the shoulders of the bed, it's just a single Bezzeries rolling spider. And those gangs, basically in the middle it's just three Bezzeries joined together. We just build those with a friend, and put a shank on them.



- John Good: They sort of take the place of where a wide basket would be on a basket weeder. They're really good at penetrating the crust, sort of breaking through the ground. They're definitely more aggressive than a basket weeder was, but they still don't really throw soil, so I'm able to still cultivate at a high rate of speed, through a crop that you can barely see, but really sort of penetrate the ground. We only use those on like really baby crops, just greens and roots.
- John Good: And on the back of the tractor, we carry a Williams system, a Williams weeder from Market Farm Implement, which the Williams weeder is really just a nice tine weeder, and I love a tine weeder. It's just such a great tool. And what's nice about the Williams tine weeder, is that it's very adjustable. You can make times more aggressive, or less aggressive per the individual tine, and that can be really useful. I can be more aggressive between the row, and with my in-row tines I can sort of take them back a notch, so they're not hitting the plant so hard.
- John Good: And the other nice thing on the Williams, is it has a double toolbar, and then you can just throw on whatever you want. We use all kinds of different configurations of sweeps and knives, depending on whether we're doing one, two, or three rows. I compare the Williams weeder to like a Swiss army knife for a cultivating tractor, and like a Swiss army knife, it can kind of do everything. It doesn't do anything really well, like the can opener on a Swiss army knife is not as good as a can opener, but it will open a can for you, and that's kind of how the Williams works. Although the tine weeder on it, I think is better than a regular tine weeder, because of the adjustability on it.
- John Good: But for the most part, it's just kind of a great tool carrier. I can put hilling disks on there, sweeps. We cut our plastic with it. We put a coulter in the middle to cut our plastic, and then use sweeps to lift it up, so it becomes kind of a cheapo plastic mulch lifter. I really like that tool. It's not great if you're on sloped land, but if you're on nice flat ground, it works pretty well for us.
- Chris Blanchard: Are you using the guidance system on that?
- John Good: We don't use the guidance system. It's just a tow behind cultivator. Anything I need to do really close and finicky, I do on the belly. The back of it for me is basically just the tine weeder. And like I said, if I put sweeps, or something on it, they're usually in like the larger spaces where they're covering the ground that the belly might be missing. If it's a one row crop, or if it's a two row crop, they can cover the ground that I'm not going to hit with my belly, but I'm not like right up on the plants with it. And the tines, as far as the tine weeder are fairly forgiving, whether you're in the row, or without the row anyway, but for the most part, it's just a tool carrier for us, and we haven't used the guidance system.
- John Good: But I've heard people use, particularly, although they've adapted the Bezzerides guiding system to that tool, and have really good success. I just, I've never quite gone that far with it.
- Chris Blanchard: And I do want to back up, and just ask a question about the Bezzerides rolling cultivators that you're using underneath. Are those the spider gangs, or I always thought of those as being a Lilliston, where you've got ... it's a wheel, but it's got a



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whole bunch of tines on it, and it's spinning. I've always thought of those as being something that really moved the dirt, or is it something different than that?

John Good: It basically is that, and they do ... They move dirt, but only in a function of if you twist them. But if they run kind of straight, they really just sort of cut through the crust, and pulverize it. But they don't throw dirt, unless you sort of angle them. So they'll aggressively cultivate the area in between the row, but they don't really throw, the way I'm setup, throw any dirt to the left or the right.

John Good: I kind of compare them to those gardening tools that your grandmother might have had. Those spiky wheels that you would spin in the bed, in between her flowers when you were a kid. I kind of compare it to that. It's aggressive, but without really throwing soil. We had, a friend made those up a couple years ago, and they've really worked well for us.

Chris Blanchard: Nice, nice.

Chris Blanchard: And I think that crust breaking function can be so important. I mean if you have any issues with crusting, it really makes a difference even in the growth of the crops, to get in there and break up that crust. But that crust can also provide kind of a home for a small weed to hold on in the soil, if its roots are just in the crust, and if the situation's right, you can just not kill them if you're only going through with the sweeps.

John Good: Yeah. It just gives them one more way to ... In general with cultivators, none of them by themselves are really that good. It's a variety, I think is important when you're cultivating, using different tools at different times. Because like you said, certain weeds and certain things just have a good tact for swimming through what you're using. And over time you probably will eventually select for weeds, to keep using the same tools all the time, that can survive your tools.

John Good: And that's another thing I like about having the Williams weeder on the back, is that tine weeder is sort of your second line of weeding. I'll drag that through the ground that I'm doing with the belly, maybe using a sweep on the belly is just sort of loosening the weed. That tine weeder comes along, and it's kind of like you're ripping it out by its head, and knocking the dirt off of it.

John Good: I think multiple layers of cultivation, and using different tools ... And your tools are going to change over time, because your weed species change over your time. You get better at using them. I don't think I've ever really ... At one point I think I thought I was going to get a set in stone system, and it would work perfectly, and I'd be able to use that forever and ever. And now I realize that the worst thing you could ever do, is have a set in stone system. It's good to have a bunch of different tools, or a bunch of different ideas at least in your back pocket, and be willing to evolve as conditions change, maybe it's a really wet year, a really dry year, and also as weed species change. There's a million different factors that are always kind of evolving on the farm, and there are different challenges you get presented with.

Chris Blanchard: I do think that's one of the great things too, about that Kubota L245, the offset tractor, is that it, relative to a lot of the other offset tractors out there, I think its got two big advantages. One is that it can go really, really slow. And it's hard to slow a 140, or a Super A down enough to do really close cultivation. And then it's got that



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three point hitch on the back, which gives you just a whole, an infinite array of tools that you can put back there.

John Good: You can throw on almost whatever. You can throw a tiller on in a pinch, if you need to. Or you can pull a transplanter with a three point draw bar if you need to.

John Good: So we had a 140, or we actually leased a 140 when we first got to Rodale, in addition to the Kubota. And after a year, sort of the challenges of not having the three point hitch, the gas engine, which is giving you trouble all the time. In my perspective, the little whatever it is, three cylinder diesel in the Kubota is just indomitable. It just starts and runs. And the three point hitch is just so key. But that, and the diesel engine are two things I just love about that newer generation of cultivating tractors. I don't know if there's much difference between that and the 1710, and the 265, then you're just kind of getting into preferences, but I love that tractor. I'll just say that. I love that little orange tractor. It's like a pet almost at this point. It's like a dog, or something like that.

Chris Blanchard: I ended up with mine when my Kubota dealer actually came and dropped it off one day while I wasn't at the farm and said, "Here, just keep this for a couple of weeks." "Yeah right."

John Good: That's a great sales pitch.

Chris Blanchard: "Thanks, Gary." And yeah, it was a great investment.

Chris Blanchard: And I think one of the really interesting things. You talk about learning about business, but we had that same experience, where that tractor was worth more when I sold it than it was when I bought it. It becomes an interesting exercise in talking about depreciation and cost ownership, and things like that when you have that situation.

John Good: Yeah. I mean I've always sort of thought about that. If I ever decide to retire, or if I'm forced to retire, I can sell my equipment and live for a year or two. You do build up some equity in some of that stuff as time goes on.

Chris Blanchard: I mean it sounds like really for your cultivation, you're relying a lot on, I guess attitude and approach. Farm more than having specialized tools. A lot of people now talk about having the finger weeders, and all of these other \$12,000 implements. How do you make time to cultivate? Because I think that's one of the hardest things on the farm, when you're the guy that runs the cultivator, but you've also got to manage the farm operation. How do you balance that out?

John Good: That's a good question.

John Good: It's one of those things, that if I'm cultivating, or an employee is cultivating, because I have apprentices do it as well. But when you're on the cultivator, you're kind of free to do whatever you want. You go get that job done, because whatever you're doing is going to save everybody else hours of time and struggle later, if you get your job done well in a timely manner.

John Good: If it's been rainy for a while, and we haven't had a window to sort of keep up on cultivating piecemeal, either maybe I'll go out, or somebody else will just go out first



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thing in the morning, and just go all day, and maybe the next day too. But just to make sure that every week to 10 days, I like to cultivate everything on the farm, and that's just sort of something we built into the system, because it saves you the time that you spend on it. In kind of a chicken and egg sort of cycle, if you can spend the time cultivating things when you really need to do it, you won't have a crew out there hand weeding it, or trying to hoe it. Or maybe they will be, but it will take them half as long, because you cultivated at the right time.

John Good: I know this fall we had a day where I went out with the crew to cultivate some fall greens in early September or something like that. I had them all pulling row covers off, so I could go through and tine weed baby greens. It was kind of the end of the day. We were all tired. Nobody really wanted to do it, but when we got done with it, I was like ... It only took us maybe 45 minutes or an hour to get through these beds that needed to get done. And even the crew who helped with the covers at the end was like, "I'm so glad we did that." You could just see the conditions were perfect. We had basically hand weeded the crops with the tine weeder that day, and they were going to require minimal investment from us, from now til the end of the season. Even though it can be hard to get it in, you just have to.

John Good: And speaking about finger weeders too, I've seen them a lot, and I'm definitely interested, but like you said, I just don't really see the need. I've always felt that a tine weeder does pretty good in-row weed control for me, if I use it at the right time, and it doesn't require a lot of extra cash, and a lot of tinkering to get setup just the right ... So up til now anyway, I haven't really seen the need to go that route, because I get good control with a tine weeder in the row, and I'm happy with that.

Chris Blanchard: Now the CSA, you've really talked about as being the cornerstone of your operation. About roughly, when you look at how your market breaks out now, how much is in CSA, and how much in farmers market and wholesale?

John Good: The CSA is probably, for many years it was really like %100 almost. And even now, it's still probably 85% to 90%. We still do primarily CSA. That's the type of growing we learned to do. We learned at The Food Bank Farm, like I said, which was just solely a CSA, and Caretaker Farm, which were solely CSAs. There wasn't so much ... The idea at that time, in the beginning of CSA, was that this was your marketing avenue to best support you while doing your job, and we weren't trying to do so many other things as well, and we kind of stuck to that. I guess we're kind of an anomaly now, and we may have to change as the future goes. It seems like maybe right now the popularity of CSA has been kind of waning, but we're still doing all right that way, but it's still most of our market for our produce. And it's what we like to do. We like getting our produce to people.

John Good: Now I'm more of a grower, but my wife really likes ... Not that she's not a great farmer in her own right, but she really likes the community aspect, and getting to know the people that we're producing for. It gives her, and me too, kind of a higher degree of satisfaction in seeing the families that eat our food, and sometimes those great emails and feedback you get from CSA customers. You occasionally get the bad ones too, but 10 or 20 to 1, it's people who just say ... I've been brought to tears by the nice things CSA members have said to me, more times than I've been angry of somebody complaining about something. So in that respect, that sort of reinforcement of your work, when you get it here and there, is really one of the reasons we like still doing CSA growing.



- Chris Blanchard: And how do you do your CSA distribution?
- John Good: We do our CSA, primarily market style farm pickup.
- John Good: When we were at Quiet Creek Farm at Rodale, when we were really close to our market and had been there for a really long time, we did 270 members, all on farm with no delivery. Since we moved, we're in a more rural location, so now ... This past year anyway, we did about 100 CSA shares on farm, and 100 at a delivery site. Just two sizes, we called it a small and a regular share.
- John Good: On farm, we really like, one, it gets the customers to the farm, so they get to see you, and see what you're doing. It makes adding choice to the share really easy, on farm. You can do that just sort of by table, by crop grouping. We often have mix and match tables at the farm, where members can pick whatever they want out of this table, up to a set amount. So that gives members a lot more choice and freedom in their share, without us having to pack it, or have a software system that does it for them.
- John Good: And the other big thing we really like about on farm pickup, is we've always done a pretty large you-pick garden, about an acre, three quarters of an acre. We can do a lot of crops that I wouldn't be able to pick weekly for deliveries, our members can pick weekly for themselves. We do a little bit of annual herbs, a pretty good amount of cut flowers. All our cherry tomatoes are in that you-pick garden. We have beans there, peas. Our strawberries are in the you-pick. Hot peppers are in there. All these difficult to pick, really time consuming crops for box shares, or for market, our CSA customers pick themselves, and they love that experience, and we love the experience of not having to do it for them.
- John Good: It's like another one of those kind of mutually beneficial or synergistic activities, where it's good for us and good for them. I feel like I don't even really charge my CSA members to come to the farm for the you-pick, because we probably, if we were charging them for it, our share would be significantly more expensive. But it contributes so much to member happiness and member retention, that we'll kind of always keep it as part at least of our farm pickup.
- Chris Blanchard: I think it's one of those funny things too, where even if people don't take the time to go out and pick the beans, you've created the potential. There's a perceived value in the opportunity to go out and pick the beans.
- John Good: Definitely.
- John Good: Even if it's just taking a walk through the rows around the you-pick, and taking pictures of the butterflies and flowers. That gives people that farm experience. That tangible experience that I think a lot of people are really looking for.
- Chris Blanchard: We haven't talked a lot about your wife, Amy, and her role on the farm. I want to make sure that we at least create an opportunity to give a shout out.
- John Good: Definitely.





John Good: Amy is the heart and soul of our farm, I would describe her as, and the backbone of the farm community, I would think of her. She's a very loving, laughing person. People love to be around her, and she's a great worker. I kind of didn't get the chance to work with Amy a whole lot for maybe the last six or eight years, when our kids were babies. She really took on raising them, and I really took on doing the farm work. I had to learn to be a manager, actually, when we had our first child. We realized that, "Oh, Amy, you had been the manager, and I was the field worker." So I had to learn how to manage people, because she was always really good at that, and I sort of learned that while she was away. Doing more of just the administrative work, which she did for several years while our kids were young. But now that they're getting older and off to school, Amy is back in the field again, working for us a lot.

John Good: This was our first summer really back on tractors again, on a big scale. She's a great worker, and just a great person. She is our farm ambassador. We get her in the share room when people are coming to pick up their produce, because Amy is just always laughing, always talking with people. They really like getting a chance to see her, and talk with her. And I'm more quiet and reticent, so I prefer being in the background, out in the field. I did that role a little bit while she was raising our kids, but I'm glad to get more in the background.

John Good: The other thing that Amy brings to the farm, that has always been sort of her specialty, is that she's a phenomenal cook. She could be a chef at a fancy restaurant. She's always been a really good cook, and always really resourceful. She really knows how to use farm produce. And so she's been great throughout the years in sort of managing our member communications, and then providing recipes, and cooking, and encouragement to members, that are really tasty. But she's also a farmer, so they're doable. They're not these sort of ridiculous ensemble pieces of meals that she's creating. They're quick, dirty, delicious farm meals, and she's great on getting that information out to the members on a weekly basis, throughout the season.

John Good: She does our weekly farm member update, telling you what's going to be available this week, roughly what amount, "Here's one or two recipes, and here's how to store, and use what's in the crop." And in addition, she usually tells a brief farm story. It can be anything from, this summer we were finding baby tree frogs all over the farm to what the heck are row covers for? She covers that kind of stuff on a weekly basis. Members love that information, and it's great to have somebody who can communicate it to them, who really knows how it's done.

Chris Blanchard: One more thing that I want to touch on before we turn to the lightning round, is that you're on the board of directors at the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, at PASA. Can you tell me a little bit more about the work that you're doing with them, and the work that PASA does?

John Good: Sure.

John Good: I just joined PASA's board a little over a year ago. That was my first experience working on PASA, which is the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture. PASA's been one of these great symbols of the sustainable agriculture movement in the country, really since inception.



John Good: My wife and I went to our first PASA conference, I think it was in 2001. When we were at Caretaker Farm actually, when we were interviewing there, Elizabeth Smith, her and her husband, Sam, originally ran Caretaker Farm. They told us about this PASA conference down in Pennsylvania. They said, "Oh, you've got to go down there. Everybody says it's the greatest." We had never heard of it before, because we were from Pennsylvania, but had been farming in Massachusetts. So that winter, when we were back home in Pennsylvania, we went to the PASA conference at State College, Pennsylvania.

John Good: And for listeners who haven't been to a PASA conference, it's like this amazing event. There's 2,000 sustainable or organic growers there of all shapes and sizes, food activists, and it's just this really sort of rallying point for the sustainable agriculture community. You just feel this palpable energy of these people who are working tirelessly to change our food system, to make it more economically just, and environmentally sustainable.

John Good: So we fell in love with PASA. It was actually going to that first conference when we thought, "We're going to move back to Pennsylvania to farm, because look at this community and this institution that's there." So I can kind of credit the conference for us making it back to Pennsylvania to live and farm, because we probably would have ended up in New England, western Massachusetts was this Shangri-La of organic farming at the time too. But when we saw PASA for the first time, we knew we wanted to come back home, and we've been members ever since that, 15 years or so.

John Good: I was approached once to serve on the board of directors when we were Quiet Creek Farm. I think it was the winter our first child was going to be born, so I turned down the opportunity at that time, knowing I'd just be too busy. But I was approached about running again two years ago, and I thought, "I've always respected this organization, and they've offered us so much in terms of community, and information, and inspiration over the years." I thought, "Well, now's the chance to." It was like I could always find an excuse not to do it, but I was maybe in a place now where I could offer something back to the community and to the organization a little bit.

John Good: So I decided to join the board, and I'm working in that work now, trying to help PASA continue to grow and change. It's a new era, I think, kind of, in sustainable agriculture, and organic agriculture in general, and we're trying to see where we're going to go next, and how to best accomplish that. We have this great board of directors at PASA. There's so many great growers and activists on that board. I went to the first meeting, and I sat down, and I thought, "Boy, I'm proud to be a member of this group of people." And also excited for hopefully what we can still accomplish out there.

John Good: I think the sustainable food movement, driven by PASA and organizations like it, and the farmers has accomplished so much. We've kind of got to this ... I think it was almost like a bubble over the last 15 years or so, it's kind of slowing down right now, and I think it's to the point where we have to get to the next level, and really push this movement, hopefully more and more beyond the fringe of society, and get people really invested in eating good food, and hopefully learning about soil, is something we're kind of excited about. Getting the idea of soil health into the public



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discourse, I think is something for maybe our next 20 years or so to work on here, for PASA and like minded organizations.

Chris Blanchard: I'd probably be remiss here, and I don't want to sound like I ask that question just to have the opportunity to talk myself up, but I am going to be doing one of the keynote speeches at the conference this year, so I'm really excited that I get the opportunity to come back to PASA. Last time I was there, I really did have a great time, and I'm really looking forward to being there again.

John Good: Yeah. It's just an event you go to, and just feel good when you leave. And it's right in the beginning of February, and you like go home and start eating onions, so you're always ... It gives you that little bit of juice to get the season going. It's always a great thing to have at that time of year.

Chris Blanchard: With that, John, we're going to turn to our lightning round, but first, we're going to get a quick word from one more sponsor.

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

John Good: My favorite tool on the farm is kind of a funny one I think, from a vegetable grower's perspective, but I love my grain drill. I have a little Massey Ferguson 33 rope lift grain drill that I bought about five years ago for planting cover crops. It's like 8 or 10 feet wide. It's a real simple, old machine. I bought it for like \$700. It's one of those machines that I went out and planted, in like half an hour or whatever. I went out the first time and planted an acre of cover crop, and I said to myself, "It paid for itself already."

John Good: I still love using it. It's just a fun machine to run, because it's really simple, but really well engineered. Like I said, I don't even have the hydraulic cylinder on it. I still use the old rope lift. And it works so well, like you plant a cover crop, and it looks like basically every seed comes up. You get like 100% germination, at least to my eye. And it turned what was like an arduous job with a spinner seeder and a disk, into something where I can go out and seed several acres in a couple hours. It doesn't matter if it rains or not, they're all going to germinate a couple days later. But I'm so satisfied. I love that little grain drill. It was a great investment, and it's fun to go out and run it.



Chris Blanchard: And what's your favorite crop to grow?

John Good: My favorite crop to grow, I think would probably be high tunnel tomatoes. We do grass and tomatoes in the tunnel. They're just a lot of fun. They kind of let you to be a little bit more of, like that geeky plant grower, a little more hands on with the pruning and everything, but then they're also ... They grow like magically, like Jack and the Beanstalk. They get so huge. They develop this perfect, delicious fruit that's easy to pick, which is great compared to field tomatoes, which you're humping down the road with your back bent over and struggling. With a high tunnel, it's just sort of like you walk down, and they're just hanging there for you, all of these beautiful fruits. So that's probably my favorite one to grow. Eating wise, I love muskmelon. I call them Pennsylvania mangoes. I love muskmelons in terms of eating them, but they're maybe not as easy to grow and pick. But those are two of my most favorite crops.

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

John Good: That's a tough one.

John Good: But I think the biggest thing would be ... It's hard to say it in one word, but would be to maybe not take yourself so seriously, and not get so worked up when things go wrong. I've learned since ... I think I mentioned it maybe before, that I always thought I'd develop this beautiful system where everything would work perfectly, and I'd be able to do things the same way, and just move them around, and it would work so great. One, I realized more and more that natural systems don't like human imposed systems imposed on them that much. They're always going to find a way to mess it up a little bit for you. And weather, and the elements of diseases are always going to change what you do. I've learned a lot from that. In retrospect, it's sort of the disasters that I've learned from.

John Good: Now, I'm big on the ... Another slogan on our farm is that obstacles are stepping stones. But when I was young, and maybe more hotheaded, and obstacle was an obstacle, and I was going to get mad about it, and be really frustrated. Where now, I realize that an obstacle, it isn't personal. It's just something that happens, and it's hopefully an opportunity to get better. In the long run, looking back on it, it is true. All those things that have gone wrong, in the long run have been where we got better. So now, after that maybe initial shock of maybe a disaster, or something going wrong, I get over it more quickly and realize that, "Okay, well what am I going to do to maybe get better, so the next time this happens, I can handle it better, or it doesn't even happen again?" I think that's one thing I didn't have when I was young, was the longer view, and learning from the disasters. That's pretty much what farming is, I realize.

Chris Blanchard: John, thank you so much for being part of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast today.

John Good: Thanks. It's always kind of fun to get to talk to somebody, and hopefully more people who actually understand this weird world that we operate in.

Chris Blanchard: All right. So wrapping things up here. I'll say again, that this is episode 150 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, and you can find the notes for this show at



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Chris Blanchard: 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.

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



