



# FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



## EPISODE 172

### Jean-Martin Fortier of La Ferme de Quatre Temps on Intensive Production on More Acres

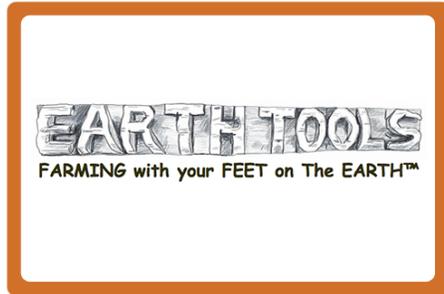
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Chris Blanchard: ... It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, Episode 173, and this is your host, Chris Blanchard. Jean-Martin Fortier is most famous for his book, *The Market Gardener*, based on the high-output systems he developed at Quebec's Les Jardins de la Grelinette, where his wife, Maude-Hélène, currently produces over \$150,000 of produce on an acre and a half of production ground. Jean-Martin currently farms at La Ferme de Quatre Temps, an enlarged version of the same model on six acres of production ground, where he's been farming now for three years.

Chris Blanchard: We dig into the foundations of JM's production model from high fertility to an emphasis on weed prevention, and how that model has translated to more acres on his new project. JM reflects on the changed constraints with his new farm, and we discuss the lessons that JM has learned about personnel with a much larger crew and a different role for himself within it.

Chris Blanchard: The Farmer to Farmer Podcast is generously supported by Vermont Compost Company, founded by organic crop-growing professionals committed to meeting the need for high-quality compost and compost-based living soil mixes for certified organic plant production, [vermontcompost.com](http://vermontcompost.com); and by Local Food Marketplace, helping farms and food hubs around North America implement



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Chris Blanchard: JM Fortier, welcome back to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

JM Fortier: Hey, Chris. I'm really happy to be back on the podcast.

Chris Blanchard: Thanks so much for joining me today. I want to start off now, the last time you were on the show was back Episode 36, which was in the fall of 2015. Here we are in August, well, by the time this goes live, it'll be August 2018, so it's been quite a while. You've been up to quite a bit of stuff, but can you give me the background of the two different farms that you're involved in right now?

JM Fortier: Yeah, the story goes that I've been farming at my own farm since 2004 at La Grelinette, so that's where we have an acre and a half under cultivation, my wife and I. In 2015 I was approached to start another project here in the province of Quebec. This farm is a farm that I'm working out now full-time. It's a really big farm. There's animals, there's chickens for eggs, there's pigs in the forest, there's cows, and there's a six-acre market garden, which is really designed pretty much the way my home farm was, but it's just bigger. I've been running this farm here for the last four years, so this is already my fourth season running this project.

JM Fortier: This farm was initiated by a very wealthy business person that wanted to create a farm that would be an alternative to what farming is today here in Quebec. He wanted to create a farm that was more holistic and that was more ecological. He wanted me to be behind that project and I decided to jump on board. It allowed me to develop my skills and work on design of an experimental farm, so a lot of interesting stuff and training more people to be successful farmers, so that's what I've been doing the last four seasons.

Chris Blanchard: Your model for farming, can we talk a little bit about your set-up on the one and a half acres on the home farm, Les Jardins de la Grelinette. Excuse me for butchering the French, but it's the only way I can deal with the French.

JM Fortier: No, it's actually well said.

Chris Blanchard: Can you tell us a little bit about the model that you used at the home farm, because that's the same model that you took to the new farm and applied on a much larger scale.

JM Fortier: Yeah, the home farm, La Grelinette, what it is, is really it's a market garden. On small acreage we work on permanent raised beds and we don't have a tractor on that farm. We have a walk-behind tractor and all the beds are laid out in 100-foot beds and they're all divided in field blocks. We use hand tools, but really tight spacing. On 30-inch bed systems we'll have three, four, five, six, 12 rows per bed, so everything is really close.



JM Fortier: We're doing multiple crops on one bed on a given field, so one crop is harvested and replaced by another, and then replaced by another, so we're multi-cropping each bed. That's the model that we've been working with for quite a long time and that's pretty much what I described in my book, *The Market Gardener*. All the tools and the strategies and the methods that were used on that piece of land was really determined by the fact that, that's the amount of land that we had available. Really the land constraints drove us to look at alternative ways of growing more veggies.

JM Fortier: In the end, we were lucky. We found some really neat ways to do things, to get really efficient. Our farm became quite successful really fast. Yeah, in a nutshell, that's pretty much what we do on that home farm. The farm hasn't grown in size through all these years, so it's almost 14 years now, but our production has gone up and our sales have gone up all these years. We've really been working from a different perspective, which is different from most farms to always grow more land to grow more produce, but because of the land constraint, looking at ways to grow more produce, but on not more land. That's pretty much where all the innovation comes from.

Chris Blanchard: Then, when you were presented with an opportunity to grow on more land, to move up to a six-acre scale in farming, you mentioned that that land constraint on your one-and-a-half-acre farm had been very important in the development of that model that you were using there. Why take that model and impose it on six acres of produce?

JM Fortier: That's a great question. There's two answers to that. The first one is, I don't know how to do any better even if I wanted to mechanize and fully change the system in the way I farm it. I don't really know how to do that well, so I'm stuck with my framework, but the other reason and that's just aside, is really because that piece of ground, the reason why I wanted to do this project here is because it allows me to train more people, because I've always been interested in that from the start of my home farm. I think four or five years after our debut to already having interns on the farm. A lot of them went on to start successful market gardens on their own, but it's only two people per year.

JM Fortier: I thought, "You know what? If I could do eight or 10 people per year, teaching them the same methods growing on small acreage," but then I needed to have a bigger canvas. Instead of just changing the system, we just multiplied the number of blocks. All the beds are standardized the same, 100-foot beds, we're using the same tools, strategies, spacing, but we're just producing a lot more and we're a bigger team.

JM Fortier: We've scaled up but we haven't really changed model and it's also interesting to just see how that model would do, considering that we're not cultivating with tractors and we're not doing bed prep with tractors. We're still using hand tools and BCS in part. I can say that so far, so good. I think this experiment here that we're running is again proving the point that, on this farm again, the tractor is not an essential component of the success of this farm, even though we're producing a lot of veggies per week.



- Chris Blanchard: Really the choice not to go with the tractor, because I can see where a tractor would make a lot of things a little bit easier on the new farm, I mean, just with the sheer amount of ground that you have to cover, doing it on four wheels and a tractor seat, I think undoubtedly would be a little bit easier than doing it with a two-wheeled walk-behind tractor. That choice not to do that is really more of a training choice than it is a choice of the ideal model to follow at six acres of vegetables. Is that fair to say?
- JM Fortier: Well, that's where it gets interesting. That's where there's room for discussions and I wouldn't say debate, because that's not the right word, but explorations of different ways of doing things, because I think that the way we're running things here, it's the same thing. I think it's the fact that we don't have a tractor that makes this farm so productive and efficient. It's hard for people to understand, but just the fact that our beds, instead of going in lines, like you would on a tractor, you want to go as far as possible because you're set up and once the tractor is geared for one row, you just keep going that row.
- JM Fortier: We use a lot of tarps here to prepare the beds. These tarps, they don't work on 3-400, 500 feet. They work on 100-foot. Instead of working with lines, we work with squares or rectangles. It's a different pattern. In the end we'll go 100-foot with the BCS and then come back and then we'll do 1,000 feet of bed, but we're not doing it in one line. There's also a sort of thing that makes this interesting. It's less discouraging for the crew, because they finish their row faster, so they're always starting new.
- JM Fortier: It's a lot easier on the irrigation system. It's a lot easier to do to put tarps, and landscape fabric, and insect netting, because you don't need to be three people holding it. There's all these little things that I found that on my home farm were making my farm efficient and productive and we're getting the same efficiencies just by spreading out that model. We have an electrical cart that runs around when we do the harvest, and we have a tractor when we're hauling compost. That's really when, for us, it makes a lot of sense, but besides that, we don't need it.
- Chris Blanchard: Your comment about farming in squares or in rectangles rather than in lines is really interesting to me, because that harkens back to what I always think of as the John Jeavons style, that How to Grow More Vegetables than you can imagine in less space than you thought possible, or whatever the title of that book was. I think it was the 1980s that that came out, which really focused on this bio-intensive spacing. Again, same idea that you weren't putting things in rows, you were more spacing things out in ... He used a hexagonal pattern in his garden.
- Chris Blanchard: I'm curious how that works at a functional level, because laying things out in rows is what makes it really easy to use tools like wheel hoes or Planet Jr. style two-wheel tractors for cultivating that have gotten so much attention lately, but how do you tread that line, because it seems clear to me that you're probably not out there, hand-pulling every weed. You need to have things lined up in such a way that you can use some wheeled implements to get through and do some weed control.



- JM Fortier: That was one thing that I needed to take on here when I took this ... We designed the farm and then we learned how to ... It was like I'm building a big ship and then learning how to navigate it, but efficiency is really what I had to deal with, especially with weed prevention. There's a few tools that came out the last few years. One of them is a double wheel hoe that has two wheels straddling over a row. Then we use discs in the back of that, so we use a lot of that tool to cultivate between each of these rows.
- JM Fortier: I'll have six rows, let's say, of carrots on 30-inch, and there's going to be two and a quarter inch between each of these rows. That's just enough room for me to come with my wheel hoe and disc between and on the row also. That's one example where we're really going fast. We also use a flex-tine weeder that is 30-inch, so we use that regularly. We'll come in 10 days after transplant or 15 days after direct sowing and then we scratch the surface and all the germinating weeds.
- JM Fortier: Some of them don't make it because of the scratching, but we do it a couple of times and we use a black tarp to get rid of some of the weeds. We seed onto compost to get rid of the weeds sometimes. We do that with carrots also, and the intensive spacing. You talk about John Jeavons and the pattern, but a big part of the bio-intensive strategy is to have the canopy of the crop shade out the weeds. You cultivate once, perhaps twice, but then you have the crop really taking care of the weeds.
- JM Fortier: All of these things put together, this year is a tough year for weeds, because it's been really, really warm and humid, 100% humidity for the last three weeks, and this germinates weeds day and night, but we've been managing pretty well. In contrast, when you're using tractors, your row spacing gets determined by the cultivating tractor, so you tend to spread out more and to give more room for the tractor and the tools. Then you need more space to cover the same amount of ground.
- JM Fortier: The example I give all the time about this is when you're using row covers, if I'm using row cover on carrot beds that have six rows per 30-inch, and somebody else is using six rows on four or five feet, then you need four or five times the amount of row cover to do the same thing. Long-winded answer, but we figure out ways here on this farm because of the urgency and it becomes interesting for the smaller grower, because these are tools that we test and experiment with that these people can use on their smaller gardens. In the end it works out.
- Chris Blanchard: One of the things that I found on my farm, now we farmed with tractors and always cultivated with tractors from the get-go, and we started with fairly tight spacings. We had four rows 10 inches apart, and over the years we gradually kept stretching that spacing out. We went to three rows at 15, and eventually ended up planting almost everything two rows at 30 inches, primarily for disease control issues, because it got us more airflow around the plants. I'm curious, with the humidity issues that you've had, and then closing up that canopy so quickly, what does that do for plant disease?
- JM Fortier: Chris, this is a great question, because I get asked that a lot. Diseases in the garden, this is going to be my 15th year growing this way and they've never



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been an issue. Is this a magical way of farming or is this magical land? I doubt it. I think that one of the answers that I've been getting a lot is that, the fact that we have close spacings is also connected to the fact that we don't work the soil, so we don't till and we add a lot of compost. We're really enhancing the biological activity in the soil for the root systems to shoot down and just to have soil that is really good.

JM Fortier: I think that some of that plays into the fact that we're less susceptible to having some diseases, according to pretty much all the literature that I'll read about that. Since for us it's not an issue, and it's never really been, I would say beets are perhaps the only crop that I went from four rows to three rows because of ... I don't know how to say that in English, but the little brown-

Chris Blanchard: The Cercospora, yeah, the little brown spots.

JM Fortier: We were getting some of that. I didn't like it because it didn't look good on the leaf so we spread it out a little bit and that helped, but if I counterweight all the efficiencies that I'm getting from the close spacings and the diseases that I'm not having, for me it's a no-brainer to keep those close spaces.

Chris Blanchard: Now you talk about not tilling the soil, but you are doing some soil disturbance, right?

JM Fortier: Yeah, we're just not tilling. What we do here is cyclical. The beds are permanent, so that's the first thing. Once we want to clear a bed, if it's there as a cover crop or a crop residue, or it's really messy, we'll probably mow it down using a foil mower and then put a black tarp over it for one, two, three weeks. Then the tarps, they just by the absence of light and by the fact that you're mulching what's there, you just create clean slates, and then we remove the tarps and then we start again.

JM Fortier: We'll put our amendments, we'll broad fork when we're doing deep root systems, so that's disturbance if you want, but a broad fork is really gentle with the soil. It doesn't invert the layers. It doesn't kill the earthworms. Then we will use a rotary power harrow to only cultivate the first inch or the first two inches of soil and make a really neat bed that way. We're surface cultivating but we're never inverting the layers, we're never really disturbing the bottom of the soil.

JM Fortier: I think, from all the literature that I've been gathering for years, there's something of value with that, with regards to soil ecology. What I've seen on my home farm, not yet on this farm that I'm at now, but after all these years of being really gentle with the soil, we have soil that's really, really loose and really beautiful, and it gives beautiful crops. It's also amended with a lot of compost over the years.

Chris Blanchard: Karl Hammer from Vermont Compost Company made a comment to me, that he can tell when somebody who's buying compost from them is following your methods, because of just how much compost they're buying. How much compost are you putting on per acre or per bed?

JM Fortier: Yeah, he should send me perks or something. He's a great guy and I wish I could use his compost, but I'm in Canada and there's an issue there. I don't give out



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recommendations to people because I don't want to be responsible, but the way we've done things here is, on a 100-foot bed, when we started we were doing from six to eight wheelbarrows per bed, which is about 40 to 60 tons per acre, but then that compost is not applied everywhere all the time. On my home farm we have a crop rotation where we have 10 field blocks and five field blocks out of 10 get compost.

JM Fortier: Each bed gets a lot of compost, but every two years. It's a lot but on the overall of the farm, it's not that much. What I've observed is that when you put a lot for the first few years it helps, because then you're building the biology, you're building soil structure, you're putting a lot of nutrients into the soil, that it's going to be there for a few years. What we've done is, at one point we've put less and less, and for a couple of years we went without putting compost.

JM Fortier: Then we went back to putting worm castings and at my home farm now, we're back to putting compost again, in bigger doses, because we see that it does make a nice impact on the quality of the soil and the veggies. There's no right or wrong about that. I think there's value in putting down a lot of organic matter into the soil, especially if you're doing intensive spacing. If we're doing four or five times more production per acre, then it's a lot of extraction of organic matter out of the garden, so you need to replace that with a lot of organic matter that you're putting in. That's the way I look at it.

Chris Blanchard: Are you making your own compost or are you buying that in?

JM Fortier: We're buying it. We don't even have a loader at the farm and we don't have manure. Just the cost of having somebody deliver manure at the farm is the same cost as delivering compost and then we need to make it. I investigated because on this farm here I'm just about to do compost. It takes a lot of manure and from my research, if you want to really do it well, you need to have a compost turner, which is a big machine that needs a big tractor, and at the end there's a lot of up-front cost to getting your composting area organized to have prime compost.

JM Fortier: For me, it's just been a lot simpler to call a compost geek and say, "You're excited about what you're doing," like Karl Hammer, he's the best example. This guy's a total geek on compost and I like that. Just bring it on, I'll use it. I just think that works in synergy. On this farm, the new farm that I'm working on now, we have animals and so we're about to start a composting program.

Chris Blanchard: Then are using other soil amendments in addition to the compost or is that really the only thing that you're using to beef up your soil?

JM Fortier: No, I think we're definitely feeding the soil with compost but we're also feeding the plants using chicken manure mainly. It's a 5-3-1, 30-day, quick release, has a lot of nitrogen, some calcium. We use that and we use alfalfa meal. I'll use the alfalfa meal when we're not putting on compost, but this combination is pretty much what we've been doing on both my farms since the beginning and it all came out of a fertility program that we've designed with the agronomist people when we started, trying to make sure that, for the different crops that we have, we're getting enough NPK to these crops with the chicken manure and the residue of the compost.



- JM Fortier: I always thought that it's a good combination, because when you put a quick-acting nitrogen base, most crops will develop their leaf systems, like a broccoli, let's say, as it develops the broccoli because it has a lot of good nitrogen. Then it's equipped because it has a lot of solar gain because of this big canopy. Then it can go down with its roots and get what the broccoli wants from the compost. It pretty much has been how we've done things. I think adding fertility to the soil, I'm realizing how this is important, building the soil with organic matter but making sure that you're putting enough fertility so that your crops will really thrive.
- JM Fortier: It's the 101 of farming, but it's funny because I visit a lot of farms. Especially in France, there's a big movement towards living soils, which I really like. I really hate the fact that in North America we call it the no-till farming. It's really ridiculous because what does no-till mean? What we want is living soils, but anyway, these guys are really big on that. They're talking about farming without using any fertilizers and transplanting in rye grasses that's been roller-crimped and not putting any fertility down and letting the biology do everything.
- JM Fortier: It's really cool when you read that and it gets me inspired, but every time I visit one of these farms, the vegetables are all yellow and you can really see that something's lacking there.
- Chris Blanchard: Well, it's something I've seen a lot of times on beginning farms when I've gone and visited those, people in their first couple of years, is just the vegetables oftentimes, just the crops, have a failure to thrive. It's clear that they aren't getting what they need, whether that's nutrients or water or what have you, but that things are stunted. Then, of course, once you don't have enough to optimize the performance of the plants that you want, your crop plants, then everything else just goes to hell in a handbasket, because they can't compete against the weeds.
- Chris Blanchard: Then your harvest takes longer because you're picking substandard crops and trying to get the yellow leaves out of the cilantro. It was actually one of the really important lessons that I learned really late in my farming career was, I was talking to a guy who does a lot of cilantro here. Cilantro was always a slow crop for us because we would harvest it and then we would have to shake out the yellow leaves and shake out the yellow cotyledons.
- Chris Blanchard: I was talking to this guy about how fast his crew was harvesting cilantro and he was talking about averages up over 100 bunches an hour per person. He said that the secret to it really was that he had enough fertility that the cotyledons never turned yellow. They never had to shake anything out of the plant. It was just grab a bundle of cilantro, put a twist tie on it. Grab another bundle of cilantro, put a twist tie on it. They really were able to optimize their performance in other areas of the farm by having really great fertility in the fields.
- JM Fortier: Isn't that wonderful when a grower shares a piece of advice that changes the reality of your farm?
- Chris Blanchard: Yes, it really is.



- JM Fortier: That's really, really wonderful. I can imagine how this changes the whole game.
- Chris Blanchard: JM, you should talk a little bit about the crop mix on the new farm at La Ferme de Quatre Temps because back at the home farm you're doing a CSA and a farmer's market, so you've really got a broad diversity of crops, whereas here on the new farm you've really focused on a much smaller subset, and really a subset that I think does require that high fertility, high quality to be able to turn that into a profitable product.
- JM Fortier: You're right. On my home farm it's really a typical CSA. We have 100 members and we do two farmer's markets. We want to have as much diversity as possible. On this farm there's a couple of things that happened. First of all, we say that the white card, like *carte blanche*, we say in French. I could pretty much do what I wanted here, but I got locked in, into some financial objectives that I needed to reach at year two, three, five and they were quite high, so we designed the whole thing for the big goals of production.
- JM Fortier: There was some pressure there to quickly produce. Also, because this farm is funded by somebody that's not a small-scale farmer and does have a lot of money, I wanted to make sure that I wasn't competing with other growers with regards to CSA here in Montreal. I really wanted to use this farm to open up new avenues, new sales channels that weren't exploited yet, to really open up the trail for others to follow. Restaurants, I don't know, for some reason in Montreal, there wasn't that many small growers that were catering to restaurants, so I really focused on that the first two years.
- JM Fortier: I just developed a program where I thought, "You know what? I'll have the same produce week after week, after week so that it's easy for them to know that we're reliable. La Ferme de Quatre Temps will always have Hakurei turnips, French radishes, mesclun, mini gems, we'll always have specific crops. These were all crops that are high turnover, so you plant them and in 50 days, boom, you're planting again. These are crops that are somewhat cold-hardy, so I can start them really early on and finish them really late in December.
- JM Fortier: These are all crops that, when you calculate the yield per square foot, they're all in the top, so I really focused on that. Perhaps I was also hanging out a lot with the YouTube guy, Curtis Stone, you've perhaps heard about him. He preaches that, so I threw up his message listening to it so many times. We went to New Zealand together and he convinced me about that, so I tried it. It worked so we focused on 12 of these crops for the restaurants and then we added other crops that we do a lot of. Our carrot program is reseeding every week, radishes reseeding every week, mesclun transplanting every three weeks so there's a program for all these crops.
- JM Fortier: Then we're supplementing with also a lot of greenhouse production. We do a lot of heirloom tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers and eggplants in heated greenhouses. That's another big core of the farm here, makes a lot of money, too.
- Chris Blanchard: Talk to me about that, because that's a constraint that you guys had on your home farm, was that you didn't do radical season extension on your home farm.



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You weren't into four-season production because, as you told me the last time we talked, you wanted to take the winters off and go surfing. Now you've really changed that up and you've got a large greenhouse range there, right, at the new place?

JM Fortier: Yeah. I don't want to say that I regret those years, but man, it used to be fun, Chris. Our last CSA was November 1st and then we would bring salad mix to the grocery store for a couple more weeks. Then mid-November we were done and then we'd start again in March. That left us four or five months every year so the first few years I built my house in the winter. One year we took the whole time to go to Mexico and surf with the kids. Then I wrote a book and then that was good because the winter months were filled with that. Then I promoted the book and I filled the winters with that, too.

JM Fortier: When this came along, it started to be more of a serious job. Now there's value in exploring the limits of winter production, so we're doing that here. My years are not as loose and fun as before, but I guess I'm a bit more serious. I'm going to come back to the winters off at one point. This is temporary gig in terms of me working year round, but it's really fun. If I had the chance between not farming in the winter and farming in the winter, I'd prefer not to farm because it's really cold when it's low frost and you're out there harvesting, but I have to say that we've pulled off a lot of cool things on this farm.

JM Fortier: It's all been filmed and documented. It's really interesting what we've come up with and it's been inspiring a lot of people in Quebec of just realizing that okay, the season doesn't stop in October, it stops in December. We're picking in the fields in December and it's below frost, using caterpillar tunnels and then mini-tunnels, crops that freeze, then they unthaw and then they're good to go. Pretty much all the same thing that Eliot and other growers have been doing in Vermont and Maine and upstate New York, but here it's a different thing because it's just a bit cooler still in Quebec.

JM Fortier: We've been playing around and it's fun. It allows my crew to be onboard more. We take a lot of the teaching and the more philosophical, more technical aspects of farming during the winter months. Then when it's summertime, the trainees that are out here, they're just working full on in the market garden doing 50 hours a week of planting, transplanting, cultivating, whatever. We're filling the winter months with harvests and with some prep for the next few years. In the end it balances out pretty well.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about your winter production. Is it different than the summer production? Is the model any different inside of the greenhouses than it is outside of the greenhouses?

JM Fortier: Well, first of all, we have really good light here in Quebec in January, February and March so if it wasn't for the cold, things will grow. We have some bigger greenhouses. We have one multi-bay greenhouse which is 90 by 110. This one has a big volume of air and it doesn't freeze, even if it's not heated. We don't heat those greenhouses in the winter, but we plant it in spinach and then radishes, turnips, all the Asian greens, Salanovas, and they grow. They grow slower but they grow.



- JM Fortier: Then our strategy is to have crops harvested late February, start of March. Then we go on till December with pretty much these crops. There's three months out of the year that we don't have them and so we start in the big greenhouses before the tomatoes get in. Then we go to smaller cold houses that, again, are not heated, but they're protected. We seed in there in early March. Then we go in caterpillar tunnels that are in our fields and then from the caterpillar tunnels we go to low tunnels, which are mini-tunnels.
- JM Fortier: Then we go to the fields, and in the fall it's the reverse cycle. We go from field to mini-tunnels to caterpillar tunnels to cold tunnels to big house, and that's how we manage to have produce eight, nine months out of the year. It's a lot of moving things around. That's why those short-cycle crops are so ... They're frost-hardy for the main part, but also we can establish them pretty fast and go from one succession to the other. I couldn't grow beans or peas like that, or other crops that are longer to take, because they just it wouldn't work out in my cycle.
- JM Fortier: All these houses get replaced at one point with nightshades and crops that will appreciate having the extra heat in the late spring or in the summer, or crops like melons that will be happy not to have rain on them, and cucumbers.
- Chris Blanchard: Then I take it, with things like the nightshades and the cucurbits that you're doing in the greenhouses and the tunnels, that those are trellised crops and pruned and really managed for maximum production.
- JM Fortier: Yeah, they're managed like professional greenhouse suppliers would do, growers would do. That was also for me it was a learning curve because I was okay in greenhouses, but I really needed to step up my game. I learned a lot the last few years and it's really incredible, just having the system, yes, but it's just learning the techniques of how to really crank it with tomatoes and cucumbers. We have eggplants that are about ten feet high.
- Chris Blanchard: Whoa! That's incredible.
- JM Fortier: Yeah. It's like a forest. We visited some professional greenhouses and just saw what that was like and then took some of their production plans and started to work the pattern. We're figuring out how to do that. It's pretty interesting.
- Chris Blanchard: Just give us a little bit of information about what you figured out, because again, this is something I know from my own experience, it's one thing to put some tomatoes in a greenhouse and just grow the tomatoes. It's another thing to really focus on, " How do I maximize production and maximize the quality of what I'm getting out of here?" What have you done to really maximize the quality and the quantity of what you're getting out of your greenhouses. What kinds of changes have you made?
- JM Fortier: Well, let's say tomatoes, okay? Tomatoes, they will be grafted, first of all, so that they're resistant to soil-borne disease, so we can plant them year after year, after year in the same space. Then we're growing them on two heads, so there's two leaders and there's just one plant. That saves a lot of space in the nursery when we start them, and also saves on seeds. These have been hybridized so



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that they're resistant to diseases. They're really the top end of the cultivars that you can get.

JM Fortier: Okay, they're grafted, they're on two leaders, and then they're really closely spaced. Then every week they will be trimmed and they're on a wire that's eight feet high. Then eventually they'll be lowered and leaned and we're making sure that they're well pollinated. We're making sure that the temperatures are optimal as much as we can, adjusting night-time, lowering or highering the night-time according to where the phase of the plant is. Is it growing fruits or is it growing more leaves? Is it that stage?

JM Fortier: The watering is also really well supervised in regards to outside temperatures. Is it sunny? Is it cloudy? All these variables, they're really taken seriously and we're following procedures and guidelines. It's just making a big, big difference with regards to yields, but it's a lot of time. On this farm the greenhouse is 90 by 110 and we're growing heirloom tomatoes on two heads. The crew here, we're 11 and we're putting about, I would say, 100 hours per week in that house alone for the tomatoes. It's a big return, but it's a big investment in terms of time, but early on we have tomatoes at market in early May and we'll have tomatoes until we rip them out in mid-November. In the end it's really worth it.

Chris Blanchard: JM, with that we're going to stop here, take a quick break, get a word from a couple of sponsors. Then we'll be right back with JM Fortier from La Ferme de Quatre Temps and Les Jardins de la Grelinette up in Quebec. Then we'll be right back.

Chris Blanchard: Perennial support for the Farmer to Farmer Podcast is provided by Vermont Compost Company, helping plants make sugar from sunshine since 1992. In the wild, where our crop plants ancestors evolved their microbial partnerships, plants are provided with nutrients from the soil through the work of partner microbes in their employ. Wide-ranging roots reach an abundant supply of nutrients and microbes even in less than ideal conditions. Now, you've gone and stuck that seed in a little, tiny container and it has to get everything it needs right there in a few cubic centimeters of soil.

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Chris Blanchard: The platform also offers lot number traceability and an option to collaboratively sell products with other producers. Contact them via their website [localfoodmarketplace.com](http://localfoodmarketplace.com) to schedule a free consultation on how Local Food Marketplace can help you efficiently manage customer orders from pack-house to your customers' doorstep.

Chris Blanchard: We're back with JM Fortier and I'm not going to try to say the names again, because I'm not feeling up to that right now. JM, one of the things that you mentioned just before we went on break is, you've got an 11-person crew now. I said I wasn't going to say it and I'm going to be stuck saying it, at La Ferme de Quatre Temps. That's a lot different than what you had at your home farm where it was you and Maude-Hélène and two other people working there. That's a big change.

JM Fortier: I would say that the biggest learning curve from going from one farm to the other, I would say besides the design stage, which was the big undertaking that went on here, the whole farm is designed with a lot of permaculture principles surrounding the market garden. We can talk about it later on if you want, but the crew, running a crew, learning how to deal with roles and responsibilities and making sure that everybody's onboard and getting good teamwork, good team spirit, I've put a lot of my time figuring out this and trying out innovative ways to deal with working with groups.

JM Fortier: The first thing that I decided for this project was, this is a big farm. A typical week is about \$20,000 in sales of vegetables per week. That's the outcome of what we do during a week. It's a lot of vegetables, just so that people understand that there's 11 of us, 12 plus me, but this is over the top. We're really producing a lot and we're doing a lot in a week. It's a lot to manage. The first thing that I knew that I wanted was to have somewhat of a cohesion and I wanted to have everybody chip in with their skills and their talents even if they're less experienced and they are here to learn.

JM Fortier: For me, learning is doing, and doing full on with your full attention. I wanted to create a system where everybody here has a role and a responsibility and everybody's accountable. I've divided the crew in two, so there's the first year and the second year. The second year there's five key roles on the farm. One of them is dealing with the nursery, the plant propagation, handling the calendars, making sure that everything is seeded on time. There's another role here on the farm where it's doing all the bed prep and moving tarp and direct- seeding the crops every week.

JM Fortier: There's another role that is taking care of the greenhouses, so tomatoes that are in the house, the cukes that are in the houses, dealing with that. There's someone that's in charge of the harvest, which is two days a week. It's two full days where the whole crew is harvesting, so there's one person managing that. There's one person managing all of the phyto-protection, dealing with insects, pollen shots on which crop needs to be cultivated, where, when, insect pressures. These are my five key staff that deal with that. These guys, they're in charge when we're doing that.



- JM Fortier: When we're in the nursery everybody works for Alice, which is the woman in charge of the nursery. Let's say we're doing Wednesday afternoon in the nursery, she runs the crew, she tells everybody what to do, and she's the lead on that. Then Alice, when we're doing the tomato house, she will work for Natalie, who is in charge of the tomato house. When we're doing that on Monday, Natalie is running the crew, she's deciding what everybody's going to do, where, when. She's calling the shots.
- JM Fortier: It's been really, really cool to have everybody on board that way and for me, it allows me to not have all the pressure of thinking about everything all the time and dealing with all of these variables. There's so much complexity. Then we get together every week on Monday morning, five of them and me, and we pre-determine everything that needs to be done on the week. We write it on the board and then we bring the other crew after lunch on Monday and then together we revisit all of these things.
- JM Fortier: It's all laid out, the week's work, and then people chip in with their opinions. We're making sure that everybody understands what needs to happen and then twice a day, morning and afternoon, we dispatch who's doing what and who's in control. That's where I do some of that. It's been a very interesting way of running a farm. I'm the boss, I have the last word, but this is year three of running the crew and I've pretty much reached that objective where the crew is self-running. It's really cool. Another long answer.
- Chris Blanchard: No, that's good. I mean, I want to dig into this because getting people to do that kind of work is not always easy, trying to get people to operate at that higher level. How are you getting people to engage that way?
- JM Fortier: What I see here and I have a feeling that it's pretty universal, is that when you empower people really, and you really give them the keys to the car, they'll go for a drive, because they're here to learn how to farm and they want to have their own farm. What I tell them is that, "Okay, this is the guideline." I have standard operating procedures for everything we do here on the farm. That was my role. Then we have a certain way of how we do things. I show it to them when they come to the first year.
- JM Fortier: Then I tell them, "My expectation is that you're in charge and then you'll make mistakes and I'll be there with you to make sure that they're not too big mistakes." Then they go off and Chris, I'll tell you, the people that I've worked with so far, they're younger than me, in many instances they're a lot more intelligent than me and they're passionate, so it's just perfect. I feel that I'm benefiting from their talents. I'm a hockey fan because in Quebec we all follow the Montreal Canadiens. I just feel that I'm more of a coach on this project here.
- JM Fortier: That's how I'm running the crew. I'm not going to really put my stakes into trying to make a difference that way. I'm going to help you become a better player. That's the role I wanted to take and it's really been wonderful what the outcome has been.
- Chris Blanchard: You said the standard operating procedures was something that you had developed before you got your crew in place. It seems like that's something



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that's really important. It's not so much that you're empowering people to say, "Go figure out how to do transplant production." It's that you're saying, "Here's how we do transplant production at this farm, and I'm empowering you to do it in the way that we've already lined out."

JM Fortier: Yeah, exactly. It's very clear, and I tell them that, "If you want to change this, check with me first. Don't change it on the fly," because my role here on this farm and on this project is figuring out the best practices of how to do all the little things on the farm. That's what I do. I study and I look at how we do things. I have some time to think about, "Okay, is this the optimal way?" I have the chance to visit a lot of farms around the world so I see a lot of stuff.

JM Fortier: Then I come and when there's an operating procedure and I can come and look at the procedure and say, "Is this the optimal? Can I change this or that?" That's how we figure out the optimal way of doing things. Yeah, I need to give you credit for that, because you came to this farm the first year I was designing it and imagining it, and you were telling me about having procedures, how that was important, because you were running bigger crews than I had been so I paid attention to that.

JM Fortier: I think it's really, really important and now that I have the style down, all the things that we do, they're written. I can't imagine how big farms can operate without something like that. Everybody improvises, how can that work?

Chris Blanchard: It gets pretty ugly. I've been there.

JM Fortier: Yeah, and I want to say, there's another thing, Chris, another great piece of advice that you gave me that I would say has been the number one thing that has made working with the crew of this project fun and successful is that, when I went to one of your workshops, you stressed out the importance of calling out workers when they're doing something right and making sure that you're enforcing that, not when people are doing something wrong. It's just been so powerful how this has been working here on this farm.

JM Fortier: I will walk the field just like a foreman does, and I'm looking for when they're doing things right. It's fun and when I go to them and I walk silently, and I say, "Hey, Leo, what you're doing there is exactly how I want you to do it. Keep on doing it." He feels happy. Anyway, everybody should try that. Jeez, I wish I would have known that when I was raising my kids, when they were younger. It would have been better, a better outcome, I don't know. To all the listeners out there, this works, man. You empower people by telling them when they're doing things right and you're clear with your expectations and it's so much more positive.

Chris Blanchard: How did you go about documenting procedures and getting clear with your expectations, because that's something that takes no small amount of time to do?

JM Fortier: The last four years I was dedicated 150% to this project. Before coming to this farm, and funny story, it was hanging out again with ... I've been pretty much following what Eliot Coleman was doing forever and I'm a big fan of his work and of him personally. We became friends over the years and he's the one that



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introduced me to the owner of this farm. He was working with Eliot and he didn't want to commute eight hours to come to a farm and do this project.

JM Fortier: He connected me, and I was hesitant at first, but when I met the owner of this farm, we really had a vision that was common, even if we came from very different backgrounds. He wanted to make a social impact and he wanted to change agriculture. I was like, "Man, I'm all about that," so we connected that way, but all of the touring and all of the promoting of my book and my work and my teaching, my message of "You don't need to have a big acreage to start a farm," that I was really passionate about, I needed to put that aside for a little while and focus on this project.

JM Fortier: I really put my complete attention to this and my mind and my imagination, and researched a lot. Then eventually we did a first season and I had some notes of how I wanted to do it. I was pretty much following what's written in *The Market Gardener* and it works, so I was following that. These were my experiences of the past, but now I've improved a lot of that. In the second season in the winter I put all of that on paper. Then we worked with these protocols, making sure that they were working.

JM Fortier: Then we changed them then for the better. Then, year number three, we're pretty much set with all of these protocols. I know they work because we repeat the same things week after week after week. It's a lot of researching and taking the time. Again, these winter months, they're good for that.

Chris Blanchard: Now, are you still involved in the home farm at all?

JM Fortier: My wife runs it without me, and she says it's the best thing ever, because she keeps it simple and I'm not there to mess everything up, because I'm always trying to do experiments, trying new tools and doing this and that. She keeps it really simple. I think also she likes the fact that now people will recognize her work through the farm, because before, because of the book and because of the popularity that I have, we would be together and people would come up and say, "Oh, man, the garden's awesome and your work is amazing."

JM Fortier: She'd just say, "What about me? I'm doing all ... He's on a tour talking. I'm picking the peas and the beans." I think that when I left the farm, a lot of that also followed me here. She never really liked the hype around the book and all of that, so she does what she wants, she keeps it simple and she gets all the credit for the success of that farm because the farm is really successful still. This year her sales are \$170,000 and she's keeping half of that as her salary, so it's pretty amazing.

Chris Blanchard: That's really great. Has it been weird for you to make that change from being so involved? I mean, in a four-person crew, you're really doing a lot of the work. You're picking the beans and bunching the kale and running the broad fork. I imagine that's fairly different for you now in this larger operation with the larger crew and the role that you've described for yourself. Has that been a difficult transition for you?

JM Fortier: Well, I would say that not picking beans has not been so difficult.



- Chris Blanchard: I agree, yeah.
- JM Fortier: I've never been a success at picking beans. Now, if I can find a way to not pick them, perhaps I will. I want to also be with the crew, but I would say that there was a lot of changes. I commute from my farm to this farm. It's a 45 to an hour drive. There's no traffic, but still, that was very new to me. When I started farming, I was 22 and now I'm 40, so pretty much my whole adult life has been on my farm or on a farm when I'm there. Now I'm commuting and then there's a lot of pressure on this project because it needed to happen really fast. There was no model for what we've created. I had to really be intense and then, the fact that I'm working for a super wealthy business person, a lot of different growers in my community here didn't see that with a good eye. There was a lot of gossip about that. That affected me a lot the first year. Anybody that transitions from one situation to another, there's growing pains, but it was really stretching my comfort level, because I was an expert at what I was doing on my home farm, and now it was like I needed to restart something totally new.
- JM Fortier: I felt like a beginner again, but I took on the challenge and I went through those pains and I've learned so much. I'm such a better grower now. I feel I have so many more assets and skill sets I didn't have before. Then these were growing pains and I'm not totally done with them because there's still some challenges. This year, year number three, I'm running the farm. I was aiming to have the crew be self-sufficient at year three or four, and I've achieved that this year. I don't need to physically be with the crew all the time. They can self-manage.
- JM Fortier: Now that I've achieved that and that was the goal and it was a big process, a lot of my work went into that, I realize that I want to be in the crew. Actually I want to be picking the beans with the crew, so funny how sometimes you need to do something to realize that what you have ... I don't know. Next year I'm thinking about starting to run in the crew again, because I like being outside and doing the work and finishing at 5:00, 5:30, feeling great because I've just had a nice day. I prefer that to having meetings and working with contractors and excavation guys and making phone calls, yeah. Picking beans is not my favorite, but I'll pick the carrots.
- Chris Blanchard: You mentioned that when you were designing the farm, that that was a real challenge for you and something that really pushed your limits, and that you were trying to follow some permaculture principles when you were putting together the farm design. Can you talk to us a little bit more about the design of this new farm?
- JM Fortier: Yeah, I would say for three or four years I traveled a lot, presenting my work and my book around the world. A lot of the people that would come out to these workshops were people that were interested in permaculture, so I've met a lot of people from the permaculture community and a lot of great teachers and a lot of great presentations about permaculture and design. When I had the opportunity to start this project, I really wanted to integrate some of that into how the farm was built.



- JM Fortier: Long story short, one of the things that we did was, we're working with field blocks and all the field blocks are standardized in length, so they're all 40 by 100. There's 40 of these field blocks on the farm, but all the field blocks are surrounded by flowering hedgerows that are attracting beneficial insects. There's a lot of bird houses in those hedgerows. These hedgerows are also acting as windbreaks. We've created a lot of these in enclaves where the crops are belted by a lot of natural habitat, created a lot of dry creeks for the water run-off that goes into ponds.
- JM Fortier: These create habitats for toads and for snakes, non-venomous snakes that eat the mice here. We've created a lot of little habitats. It was all designed on paper with all of these landscaping features included in The Market Garden. It's really beautiful. If people look up, they go on your website and they'll see the website of this farm, and they'll see pictures, it's really, really beautiful, but it was also trying to see if we could get an ecosystemic approach to pest management. By building all of this biodiversity on this farm, could it be that we wouldn't need to rely on insect net or on pesticides?
- JM Fortier: Because this is an experimental farm and I had the means to do what I wanted, we went full on with that. I was inspired by how farms were in France before. I have a lot of old books of how farms were in market gardens in France and there was always these hedgerows, these flowering hedgerows. I wanted to re-establish those. So far, this is year number four of when these were planted, really beautiful, I'm looking at this now. We have the agronomist from the governments that are there measuring every week.
- JM Fortier: They come and measure the insect pressures and it's really funny. They have vacuums, they're sucking the bugs in, and they're doing all this research to see if this makes a difference or not, but I'm still using the nets so far because I'm always scared. I haven't made the jump yet.
- Chris Blanchard: I think it's one of the really hard things with doing ecological pest control in a market garden situation is that the tolerances for damage in the crops is really low, because it's such a visual marketplace. If you're growing corn, right, and you take a 10% yield hit, but you save on pesticides or you save on pest control activities, then that's good and it's easy, because nobody's judging the quality of your corn plant. What you're really looking at as a yield situation, whereas for you, if you've got a worm in your broccoli, one worm is really unacceptable. It's not a whole lot different than having 100 worms.
- JM Fortier: Yeah, flea beetles, they're really hard to keep in check, but I think there's a lot of value in that and the fact that we're trying this. I think there's a bright future for this. It's about figuring out how. It's hard to discuss this with the, perhaps people listening to this not having seen this farm, what hedgerows look like. I have a feeling that we're going to touch on something in the next few years. Just takes time for the ecology to re-establish. Just the bird houses in the spring, it's just so wonderful to have.
- JM Fortier: We have hundreds of birds humming over our heads. Yeah, the fact that we don't work the tractors also, it's like we're listening to birds, and it's a pleasant environment, it's beautiful. I think all of this in the end creates an experience



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that is of relevance to farming. It is our working space, it's our working conditions. It's like if you're in a factory and there's AC or there's not AC, or the walls are nicely painted and there's nice music, or not, this makes a difference in factories and on farms.

- JM Fortier: We rarely look at our farms in terms of "Is it beautiful? Is it interesting to be in it? How's my washing station? Is it ergonomic? Is it efficient?" All of this I've really put a lot of my time into that here, and I think it makes a difference.
- Chris Blanchard: With these perennial, beneficial insect hedgerows that you've put in, and you've got them, there's a lot of them on your farm, how are you managing weed control in those?
- JM Fortier: I'm not.
- Chris Blanchard: You're not, okay. Tell me about that, because don't you end up with thistle seeds?
- JM Fortier: Yeah, they do come up but I leave them. I trim them using a weed whacker, so I'll just come and [buzzing noise like a string trimmer] like a wall of weed-whacking. I'll just trim everything down to cut the edge to make sure that they're straight. When we did those, there's some extra soil that was added for the berming, and then there was cardboard. Then the plants were planted through the cardboard and the soil was weed-free soil. It was landscaping soil, then the cardboard, and then they put granular wood chip or wood chips over that. Then they seeded clover over that.
- JM Fortier: There's a pretty good space and then they're taking all the space. There's not that many weeds that are popping through them, but the ones that there are, I just leave them. I can't deal with that. It would be too much, and I don't think it's a problem.
- Chris Blanchard: You used permaculture principles in designing the farm. Would you advertise La Ferme de Quatre Temps as being a permaculture operation?
- JM Fortier: No, because first of all, it would attract a lot of people that would have a different understanding of what we're doing. This is a production farm, it's really a farm. I studied permaculture ever since I got interested in farming. For me a book like Bill Mollison's two big books, Permaculture One and Two, they're awesome books because they talk about design and they talk about pattern, talk about how to organize from a bird's eye view. Pretty much all my interest in farm design is really strong when I read these books.
- JM Fortier: When we're talking about permaculture in farming, usually this is a market garden and we're working for profit, we're working for production, we're interested in having high yields and there's a high level of energy that goes into the garden. With permaculture, usually when you're talking about production and farming, it's usually for self-sufficiency or for things that are less energy-intensive. This is not what we're doing, so I would never call it that. I call it a market garden but I was strongly influenced at the design stage by permaculture principles. I think that's a clear and simple way to just state what this is.



- Chris Blanchard: JM, before we turn to the lightning round, you've been working on a really big project, this Market Gardener's Master Class. I'd like you to tell us a little bit about that project, because that's been, I think, a pretty big focus for you over the last couple of years.
- JM Fortier: Well, yeah, that's the other thing, the other part. When I wrote The Market Gardener, I was thinking, and I think I was right about that, that people that are starting out, it's better if they have a guideline, if they have a role model, if they have at least one way of doing things throughout that they can follow, one way that works. That's how I wrote my book and that was my intention, because farms and farmers and context were all different and there's many, different ways to skin a cat. You'll hear that all the time, but actually it's a lot easier to just find one person that will teach you how to do things from start to finish and that's a method.
- JM Fortier: That's what I was doing with my book. Then people would read it, and people still read it and they like it, but when they see what we do, I've always felt that it was clearer. We've started to really document all the things that we do on the farm from start to finish, how we do carrots from direct seeding to how we pull them off the ground, how we store them and how we sell them, so that there's a method that you can follow.
- JM Fortier: I've been documenting that for all the veggies and explaining in videos and in text all of the different strategies that we use on the farm and how to grow things. I feel that I have some workers here that I'm teaching these methods. There's 10 of them. It used to be two, so it's better, but why not 1,000? That's my intention there. The course is doing really well. There's 800 students from 45 different countries. It's a really nice ecosystem, there's a lot of people interacting, there's peer groups.
- JM Fortier: For me it's a great way to keep on passing down what I know and how I think things can be done to help others, and I can change and edit. It's the big difference with books. Once the book is out there, boom, it's the static way, but with video imaging you can come back and edit in that. "There's a new trick here. This is how we've figured out how best to do that now," so it's very dynamic. It's been an exciting project and if people want to check it out, they can look on your website. I want to give you guys, the listeners, a discount and a promo code for the cost so they can check that out.
- Chris Blanchard: All right. That promo code is farmertofarmerpodcast. It's all one word. It's my understanding JM that right now, enrollment is not open, but it's going to reopen at the end of September, right?
- JM Fortier: Yeah, because we want to keep this at a level where people can connect, we have cohorts. There's going to be four cohorts per year. You sign up. It's like when you go to university, you register at X date and then your class starts at that date. That's how we've set it up. It's going to open in September. People can subscribe to the newsletter, and they'll get an email that tells them when that's open. Yeah, that's another thing. I wanted to create not just a space where I can give some of the methodology that I've learned and that I'm doing here, but also to create an ecosystem.



- JM Fortier: When I say there's growers from 45 different countries, it's really cool because when you read the threads let's say we have a Facebook-like group, it's not Facebook, but it's another internal thing, it's really interesting to read the perspectives and the different things from people growing in Croatia, people growing in France, people growing in Patagonia. It creates a really dynamic circle of market gardeners. I would say of all the things that I've done the last four or five, that piece of the puzzle for me is one of the most rewarding, because I see and I read that people, it's impacting their farming, which is what I wanted to do.
- JM Fortier: I think The Market Gardener, when I wrote it, my interest was to help aspiring farmers start on the right track, but this is taking them to the next level, teaching best practice on each of the crops.
- Chris Blanchard: JM, with that, we're going to turn to our lightning round, but first we're going to get a quick word from one more sponsor.
- Chris Blanchard: This lightning round is brought to you by High Mowing Organic Seeds. When your livelihood depends on the quality of your seeds, be confident in your investment. When you grow organically, you need to know that your seeds were selected to perform in organic conditions. High Mowing offers professional quality seeds grown by organic farmers for organic farmers. Visit High Mowing online to request a free copy of their 2018 seed catalog, read about the company's mission, and browse over 700 organic varieties, including tried and true market standards, all-new, high performance hybrids and beloved heirlooms. Use the code F2FSeeds when you purchase online, or mention the code when you call to receive a 10% discount on purchases of \$100 or more. Visit [highmowingseeds.com/farmertofarmer](http://highmowingseeds.com/farmertofarmer) or call 866-735-4454 to get started.
- Chris Blanchard: JM, what's the best advice you've ever gotten?
- JM Fortier: The best advice, there's a couple, okay. Can I have more than one?
- Chris Blanchard: You bet.
- JM Fortier: I think my wife really keeps me in line. She always says, "Stay humble and stay grounded." I really like that, because every time I've stepped out of that it didn't work out for me and I didn't feel good, so I like to follow her advice about that. I think the best advice came from my father. My father taught me at a really young age to always make action lists, and that's what I've always done. Any time I feel overwhelmed or anything, I just sit down and I write everything that needs to happen, all the list of everything that needs to be done, and when I do that it just calms me and it gets me focused and organized, and I think that allows me to be successful also, because I'm organized.
- Chris Blanchard: What is your wife, Maude-Hélène's, superpower?
- JM Fortier: Oh, man, she's so patient, she's so loving. Yeah, she's very loving, she's very patient with me especially. We're very different. I'm more outspoken, she's more inward, but when she talks, you listen because there's something that's



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deep. I think that she's just awesome. She is a superwoman, so she has a lot of superpowers.

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

JM Fortier: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Read *The Market Gardener*, yeah. For real, because man, there's so many ways you can start wrong. Just follow something that works and then you can get your groove later on. One of the best farming advice that I got when I started was "Read Eliot Coleman's *Organic Grower*," which I did probably 45 times, because I was trying to figure that out. That's the advice that I would give to young farmers.

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

JM Fortier: Chris, it's a real pleasure. I'm sure you know this, Chris, but a lot of people listen to the podcast. It's really important for them and I want to thank you for taking the time to do this. It's really, really appreciated by a lot of people in the farming community, so thank you.

Chris Blanchard: Thank you so much, JM. All right, wrapping things up here I'll say again, this is Episode 173 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast. You can find the notes for this show at [farmertofarmerpodcast.com](http://farmertofarmerpodcast.com) by looking on the Episodes page or just searching for JMF, that's J-M-F. The transcript for this episode is brought to you by Earth Tools, offering the most complete selection of walk-behind farming equipment and high-quality garden tools in North America; and by Osborne Quality Seeds, a dedicated partner for growers. Visit [osborneseed.com](http://osborneseed.com) for high-quality seed, industry-leading customer service and fast order fulfillment.

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