



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



EPISODE 174

Jack Algieri of the Stone Barns Center on a Diversified Farm, a Close Partnership with a Restaurant, and Innovative Production

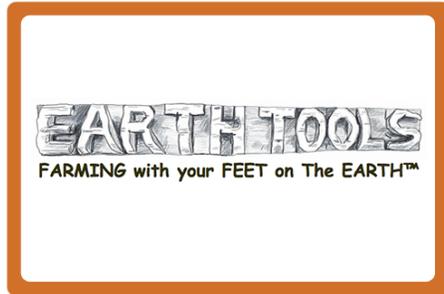
August 16, 2018



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

TRANSCRIPT SPONSORS

The transcript for this episode is brought to you by:



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



[North Central SARE](#), providing grants and education to advance innovations in Sustainable Agriculture.



[Osborne Quality Seeds](#): Founded by seed professionals and dedicated to serving professional growers of all scales, Osborne Seed provides quality seeds, excellent customer service, and a fantastic selection.v

Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, episode 174, and this is your host, Chris Blanchard. Jack Algieri is the farm director for Stone Barns Center in the New York's lower Hudson Valley. Actively farming since the early 1990's, Jack has been the director at Stone Barns since its inception 15 years ago. Jack oversees the extensive and diversified farm operations, including indoor and outdoor vegetable production, small grains, and a diverse array of livestock. Most of the farm's produce and meat is sold to the partner restaurant, Blue Hill, and we dig into how this relationship has benefited both the farm and the restaurant.

Chris Blanchard: We also take a look at how the vegetables are integrated into the livestock and pasture operation. We talk about the half acre gutter connect greenhouse, and how that differs from high tunnel production. And we take a look at the compost heating system for the propagation operation in the context of coming up with cool new ideas for how to use tools and resources on the farm. The Farmer to Farmer Podcast is generously supported by BCS America. BCS two-wheel tractors are versatile, maneuverable in tight spaces, lightweight for less compaction, and easy to maintain or repair on the farm. Gear driven and built to last for decades dependable service, bcsamerica.com.



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

- Chris Blanchard: And 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. And by FarmersWeb, software for your farm. FarmersWeb makes it easier to work with your buyers, saving time, reducing errors, and increasing your capacity to work with more buyers overall, farmersweb.com. Jack Algieri, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.
- Jack Algieri: Thank you, Chris, glad to be here.
- Chris Blanchard: So glad you could join me here at the last day of July when we're recording this. I really appreciate your taking the time. I know it's farming season, and so I'm especially appreciative.
- Jack Algieri: Of course, it's my pleasure. And you know, it's always farming season I suppose, so to get to talk to like-minded people always make me feel good and feel recognized, so thank you for the invitation.
- Chris Blanchard: Well, and always farming season, that's what you get for building a 22,000 square foot greenhouse, Jack.
- Jack Algieri: This is true. That's true, I thought it was a good idea at the time. And then when we started not getting to go to Costa Rica in the middle of winter, that sort of changed my focus.
- Chris Blanchard: Yeah, the good news is that you can farm all winter, and the bad news is that you can farm all winter, right?
- Jack Algieri: Exactly. Yeah, I mean it's such an oasis. I think it's still our proudest space, as complex as this farm has gotten, that greenhouse is, you struck it right away, it's sort of our epicenter.
- Chris Blanchard: So Jack, I'd like to just zoom out a little bit and have you tell us about Stone Barns Center and what's going on there, both at the larger level and then on the farm.
- Jack Algieri: Well, I'll tell you, this is our 15th growing season here at Stone Barns. For those of our listeners that don't know us or where we are, we're hailing here from the lower Hudson Valley. We're about 30 miles north of New York City, so still within the suburban pockets of Westchester County. The non-profit sits on about 88 acres of ground within about 1,500 acres of park preserve land that has been in preserve for the past 150 years. So it's quite an anomaly of a space, first off, and Stone Barns is a non-profit. We incorporated as a non-profit in 2001 originally, but then we opened our doors in 2004, after building out the farm and restoring these stone barns we're named after.
- Jack Algieri: Really this place is a functioning non-profit to help improve the way people think about farming and eating, and building culture. We have a very diversified farm operation. As we mentioned a minute ago, four season greenhouse production, a lot of season extension, several acres of outdoor field crop production, small grains, and then a pasture management program that's mixed



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

species that covers about 350 acres of preserve land. That's the farm operation, and that essentially is designed to stay as revenue neutral as it can be while providing the best possible content for training farmers, for public visitors to get a sense of what a good generative farming system can look like in a modern world. We have all sorts of different programmatic activities. We have professionals coming here to do retreat work. We have a fellowship program, a pretty extensive high school program. In fact, we just recently released a national curriculum called Food Ed that is for junior and high school students to be used across the country that sort of helps people understand food system issues in relationship to farming. We have a few enterprises on the property otherwise, we have a store and a café.

Jack Algieri: And a for profit partner in Blue Hill at Stone Barns, Dan Barber, David Barber, and Laureen's restaurant, that is our kind of for profit companion in this adventure. So yeah, it's a beautiful mixed environment that is open to the public all the time. We always say that the only time there's really nobody here is between about 3:00 and 5:00 AM, and then the guard kind of kicks right back up again.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned the restaurant that's there at the farm, Blue Hill at Stone Barns. You guys have kind of a unique partnership with them.

Jack Algieri: To say the least, it is an extraordinary partnership that I think, honestly it's been what has catalyzed a lot of the change at this place. You know, the value of agricultural non-profits for education I think is really critical right now because there are so few farmers out there. And the public really needs to be able to see the interface and the connection again, so that all the farmers that are trying to make it in the world that are coming on your show can get some attention and be recognized. So the non-profit has a great value in that way, but what I think catalyzes it mostly is that we have this for profit entity that is driving a fair market value exchange.

Jack Algieri: So even though we consider ourselves a training facility essentially, an institute, we're working at full production speed all the time for one of the highest quality rated restaurants in the world. And also we hold that to all the rest of the communities and people that we serve. So the restaurant, especially Dan and I in particular, have had a lot of creative exchange over the years, and we've built so much together. A lot of the things that have happened creatively in the breeding and development work that we've done on the farm has reflected itself in the amazing dining experience that he's been able to create.

Jack Algieri: And obviously all the literary work that he's done around our exchanges, the things that we've done all these years, and the innovations, and creative exercises that happen just to try to new things, break the box. So that's been fun and challenging, and we've learned a lot from the things that we've failed at. And it really doesn't matter one way or the other, fail or succeed I suppose, it's more that we're learning from it. And trying to unravel this kind of narrow minded food system we've put ourselves in.

Chris Blanchard: When you talk about breaking the box when you're working with Blue Hill, and experimentation, and successes and failures, tell me a little bit more about that. What does that actually look like on a day-to-day level.



- Jack Algieri: What it looks like is it's sort of heightened, there's enough trust and confidence in the design of this little community that we have here to a certain extent, partially because everybody is so curious and is self-educating and educating each other. We set a little bit a higher bar for ourselves in some ways, in that because it's a non-profit, because it's this very successful restaurant, we can get out of the safe zone that most of us as farmers feel a little bit strapped to. Like it's hard to take a risk when you're really feeling threatened about a margin, or if you only have a couple of minutes to explain everything about your farm while you're off of it at a market.
- Jack Algieri: Which of course farmers markets are a huge value, but part of this is kind of getting everybody to think even a little bit deeper beyond that farm to table design of, the farmers are there, and they're being asked to come into the cities, and come into the communities to sell again. But really the loyalty of people coming back again, are they going to show up in the rain, will this chef just decide that he's going to take all of one thing and leave the rest? The beauty in this thing is trying to really design a more responsible relationship between the consumer and the farmer.
- Jack Algieri: I like the terminology of considering this idea of cuisine, is that cuisine is the product of this ebb and flow, or call and response that happens. Where we're caring for the ecology of this place, we're taking care of this land base that we have. And it's putting out so much product and in the process we can grow all kinds of things. And the more the better I suppose, diversity and all this quality. On the other side, we want a customer who is able to really change with that season, and they've done some cool things. Like in order for us to meet some of these ecological goals that we've set for ourselves, the restaurant had to a certain degree dissolve their menu.
- Jack Algieri: They don't have a standard menu, the menu is constantly changing. There's dishes that are changing all the time in that way. What that allows us to do is really try to cater toward that creative dish, that maybe we want to pick this product smaller. These carrots are better served for the way that you're trying to get the story perceived on the plate. Why don't we grow them to suit that? Grow them smaller, change the method to suit that cuisine. And then the response is maybe, oh that was really great, but what about color, what about a flavor, what about the story? How deep is the story?
- Jack Algieri: So we return that by trying different things. And the fact that we can take a risk because we know that on the other side it's actually going to be greeted with great interest I think is a really important part of catalyzing change in the food system. When the customer is kind of expecting the same thing all the time, it puts us a little bit in a supermarket kind of mentality, and I think is restricting.
- Chris Blanchard: One of the things that I noted on your website was you have a section of it called "Cover crops: it's what's for dinner."
- Jack Algieri: Yeah, there are some examples here of things that we've fooled around with in the past that were really just, the cover crop piece is actually one of those things that kind of breaks the mold. For years, we were working out in the fields, and you know, a cover crop is a major part of the way we manage our systems and



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

long rotations, and all sorts of different crops and cover crop. And I would always get this pushback that it was, well, can't we just eat that? Why do you need the cover crop? And our story about that, and all good farmers who are using cover crops see it as a rest period, as a soil stabilizing moment, as a re-nitrification of the soil.

Jack Algieri: And this rest period is so valuable, and the choice for those cover crops is all for the soil. And we're happy to see that value, we're not going to put a huge amount of effort in it, so we don't expect a lot back financially. But what we look forward to in a return from a cover crop is obviously the soil condition, the potential of fertility that's there by growing this set of crops just for the soil. And that's all good, and that's a very important and true story. But on top of it, that story can actually be told, rather than it being the back story, it can actually be represented on the table. Clover leaves can be used, and greens, and milk oats that were to be cut essentially just as a nurse crop can be dried and made to tea. And there's all kinds of products that can be drawn off the cover crop that, maybe it's only a small percentage of what's out there in the field, but using it and sharing that with the community in some way, and getting them to find that there is alternate uses for things, it actually ends up, there's a little bit of financial return for that. But most importantly there's awareness, because people realize that what was otherwise just sort of a back of house operation is now really up in front of them.

Jack Algieri: They're like, oh, interesting, clovers, or why do you plant oats when you try to get your clover set? Oh, that's really interesting that you can eat these young shoots, or buckwheat leaves, or buckwheat flowers, or things like that. So we get this great benefit for people, we get the great benefit for the pollinators and everything, and we get still the benefit for the soils. So that's why that piece of it, using the cover crops to show that it's feeding the soil, it's feeding the habitat, it's feeding people too. And it's given us a lot of cool ideas about ways we grow grain, actually, because I wasn't growing grain at all really.

Jack Algieri: I was interested in doing it, but I couldn't see the economics, until I saw grain in the way that I looked at growing grains as nurse crops for cover crops. Like oats to get a good stand of clover, or barley to get a good stand for alfalfa, or something that will grow them up. In our soils here, we had a lot of cattle. It was an old dairy, and then a breeding facility for some cattle. So there's a lot of manure and high phosphorus in our fields from a previous management. Actually the grains help us to sort of soak up some of the phosphorus too.

Jack Algieri: So we ended up actually allowing the grains to go the full head with under-sown clovers, and we're getting our grain crops essentially off a cover crop block. To me, it means a lot to the system to rationalize why we need these things. What the service of a grain is to system, and how you could then in the end use that as part of the meal, and tell that story, and it's not just by itself. Wheat is for making bread, but wheat and all these grains are for building habitats. We're improving soils and essentially another piece of soil health.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned the livestock on the farm, that the farm has a history of livestock that predates the time that you've been there. But then you guys also do a fair amount of livestock production, right?



Jack Algieri: We do, yeah, and that's grown over the years as we've taken on management of other state lands and worked on helping to manage some other properties and that sort of thing, our flocks and herds have grown a bit. Just to put it all out there, we have a grassland program that's on about 350 acres of park preserve land. That is essentially managed with a herd of Devon and Angus cattle. We have about 35 animals there. And we have a flock of sheep, about 100 ewes, so they're all lambed out. So there's probably close to 300 animals out there. And we raise goats to do trail maintenance and brush removal, so we have 30 Kikos.

Jack Algieri: That's the grazing program, and then we raise pasture raised waste-fed pigs, a small number. We raise between 60 and 80 a year to do some forest remediation. We raise hens, it's about 1,000 hens right now on pasture and moving egg mobiles. And we raise ducks also on pasture and sliding coop houses. We also have bees, I'm sitting here next to some fresh comb that just got harvested today. We have about 22 hives of bees. So yeah, we have a sort of a mix of animals for different purposes on the landscape here. Most importantly, the farm team as a whole is kind of a big integrated group.

Jack Algieri: So to sort of bring them both together, we also have a fairly significant compost operation, and we do a lot of waste fed and composting through all of the facility we have here. A lot of the food waste is for the animals, and whatever's not for animals goes to compost. We manage here and sell a lot of compost offsite for other farms, and landscapers, and home gardeners and that kind of thing.

Chris Blanchard: Is the livestock operation integrated with the vegetables other than as a waste management tool?

Jack Algieri: It does integrate in, and there are a lot of things that restrict that. Obviously GAP rules restrict a lot of the mixing. So there are some rotations that we have. One in particular, there's a rotation that I've been working on for several years. We call it a four course rotation, sort of an old style of what they call the lay rotation, that takes marginal pastures and takes them out, puts them into grain and clover, and then into an annual production the following year. So it's a year of annual grains and clovers, and into the next year grow crop vegetables, potatoes and winter squash and garlic. And then it gets put back into mixed forage pasture. That system is actually pretty brilliant.

Jack Algieri: I think that we've learned so much about how to get the best out of the fertility of some of the better grounds that we have, grounds that can take vegetable production. We'll rotate those pastures into a year of grain and into a year of vegetables. And in the end, we obviously make some money off of the vegetables that grow in that because they're really exploiting a lot of that nutrition that was in the pasture. But then at the end of the day, without any additions outside of what the animals are working on the grasses, or post-cover crop, or post-grain crop, it's only in animal manures and seed that gives us the fertility to get back into the pastures again.

Jack Algieri: We've been really surprised to see the great quality of pasture that's coming after two years of annuals, and then back into this perennial system again. I think it's a great way to mix livestock and crop production. It's hard to do it in a



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

mixed vegetable field because everything is so close. What we've done in the past is we may take a small group of animals and put them on one of the cover crop blocks. But they have to be really well fenced, there's really not tolerance for crossover. And we do that sometimes, but generally our flocks are on a larger scale, so using them in these more row crop type systems for us has been kind of enlightening.

Chris Blanchard: That's really an interesting way to use them, and different I think than what we usually think of when we talk about integrating livestock into a market gardening system.

Jack Algieri: It's more like integrating the market garden into the livestock program.

Chris Blanchard: I like that.

Jack Algieri: Yeah, it's a little bit on its head. And you know, I think the importance about that is just really because we have to take our cues from the nature that's around us. One of the beauties of being a farmer is that we get to actually experience nature on a daily basis, and all of the lessons it teaches us. So the best thing we can do is try to mimic what we see. What I think is happening is we have these primary environments, like grasslands and woodlands and wetland areas, and then we have vegetables. And vegetables don't fit into any one of those categories. They're mostly just a disturbance in between any one of those. So it's gotten on my mind more and more that the longer I stay in this vegetable field, the less it wants to be a vegetable field.

Jack Algieri: It's very productive, and it functions, and we keep adding minor inputs and things like that, and we're raising it chemical free. And it's a beautiful vegetable garden that has years to grow. But I also see the glitch in that, in that in the rest of nature things don't like to stay annual for a long time. They want to go back to something perennial because they need to restructure. That's been a dilemma for me as a vegetable farmer, since most of my early practice is all in vegetable production. And the more I look at it, the more I see the flaw in that, and ways of trying to adapt those ideas and use the entire landscape to the advantage of a productive conservation effort.

Chris Blanchard: Now the market for the livestock, and I assume the small grains, is the same as for the vegetables? Is most of those going to Blue Hill?

Jack Algieri: Maybe just to explain our market a little bit. Stone Barns has thousands of members to the organization, and we have over a hundred thousand visitors to the site a year just to visit the farm, to participate in activities, to be here for workshops, or for retreats or whatever they're coming for. The restaurant is a primary sales outlet for us to sell there, and Blue Hill in the city off of Washington Square Park. But we also have the other half of our sales go to a 150 member CSA and to our farm store production. So we sell frozen meats to the farm store, we sell fresh meat. Our grain, because we're not growing a lot of it, generally goes to its experimentation.

Jack Algieri: So we do a lot of seed varietal trials across the board for vegetables and grains. We have a number of varieties from the bread lab, from WSU growing now that are just harvested. We've also been working pretty closely with North Dakota,



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

who is doing some really extraordinary stuff, North Dakota State, for grains and also particularly barley. So we've been really excited about that stuff. And those projects definitely focus toward the restaurant, because in the end it's a small amount of material, and they have a great mill in the kitchen, and an incredible bread lab of their own to be fussing with the stuff.

Jack Algieri:

So we're testing to see how some of these more modern west coast wheats work over here. Some of these new versions of malting barleys that are just super exciting how they work. So yes, the grain generally goes toward the restaurant because that's more of an innovative project. The animals though, probably about half and half we sell through restaurants as whole animal, and we also have an abattoir and a butchery onsite. So we do all of our own butchering and packing, and run a poultry processing facility too. That's sort of part of our livestock operations. We have a great group of people working that space for poultry but also the livestock team. We have a handful of butchers on that team that really love their work.

Chris Blanchard:

That's really great to have that, what a resource.

Jack Algieri:

Yeah, we got lucky with that. I mean, the abattoir we built for poultry early on, it's a New York state processing facility, and that we invested in to deal with chickens originally. We've sort of shifted from broiler chickens to ducks and turkeys, which I failed to mention before. We raise about 500 turkeys. This keeps us going through the summer. We harvest pretty much every week for about 26 weeks in that space. And then we spend our winter mostly butchering the sheep, the cattle, and pigs, and goats. But we did get lucky that the livestock team that I have right now just actually got interested in working on the farm mostly because they were butchers before.

Jack Algieri:

We have Phil, who is a great livestock farmer and is really great working with pigs, and he kind of runs the show in that space. Sam is a young man that came to us from New York City through a butcher. He is just really interested in learning more about that. And then we have a chef who came out of the kitchen who was working on the meat line, and a great butcher in his own right, and he decided to join the livestock team. That sort of mixing back and forth, it's great to have people that really care about the quality in the end just as much as they care about the nature and wellbeing of the animal. I couldn't ask for a better team really, my whole team.

Chris Blanchard:

Tell me about how that works at Stone Barns, because you talk about having a livestock team. You've also got the vegetable operation, and you also have a pretty strong beginning farmer training program there. How does all of that mesh together?

Jack Algieri:

It is a holistic design. It's been an evolution here, as all farms, we're not just changing our methods on the farm as everything is evolving, but the world is changing around us. So lots of different people want to learn how to do this. I'm sort of pleasantly surprised, I guess, at just how many people are still wanting to get into growing. People that didn't grow up with it that really recognize the need for change, and so many talented people that I know that have just decided that this was the path in their life. It was a difficult choice, and they just went for it.



Jack Algieri: So I'd say that the growing farmer initiative piece that we have, we do an annual conference and we've had apprentices for many years, it really kind of started from the fact that my wife Shannon and I came here to start the farm. We had a lot of young people that wanted to work with us that were just naturally interested, and over the years, and we recognized that everybody is interested, that we should start a real program we could focus on that. So we applied for a USDA beginning farmer and rancher grant. And we have had that grant now for the past six years, and it's helped us to really develop the program.

Jack Algieri: We generally have about nine students a year. We tried a number of different constellations of this group, but essentially there have been livestock apprentices, and field apprentices, and greenhouse apprentices, and flower apprentices, and compost apprentices. We've kind of gone back to more of a model of holistic, but some people really do focus and prefer to focus on some areas. But the reality is that what we're teaching is mixed systems. So we really want this group of farmers, the apprentices that are with us, to get a sense of the efficiency of work and the mixed systems that are in place.

Jack Algieri: What complementary systems are, rather than solely an egg production, that enterprises kind of work together and share resources. The more we recognize that from a need to train farmers to be more diverse, we recognize that in ourselves. I'd say that the biggest shift over the years has been that we've consolidated our management. So my management team, the farmers that work with me, I basically do the job of coordinating and kind of conducting this group of enterprises. And I have a great team of people that are specialized in the grazing animals, or the poultry, or vegetable fields, or markets, or greenhouse.

Jack Algieri: But essentially we all sit at the same table, and we share resources. And we try to find creative ideas of ways to work with each other or close loops, buying together. It's sort of a conglomerate of enterprises that works as one farm. And that's how we manage it. So the apprentices just file into that on a daily basis, but we also with the grant money have developed ways to bring in all kinds of great speakers. And we do workshops every week that are here for these apprentices, but also open to the rest of the apprentices in the Hudson Valley or New York City, whoever can make it up here.

Jack Algieri: So we kind of offer just this ongoing track of specialists in the fields, whether those are people like Sarah Flack, who is a grazer, or Richard Wiswall, who will come in and do a class on farm economy, or teaching about marketing, or teaching about plant anatomy and physiology, or talking about pathology and plant breeding, and poultry raising. And those are kind of mixed with our team. So when I'm looking for farmers, I obviously want people who know and care about what they're doing, but I really especially need people who can translate, that are willing to share what they're learning, and to be okay with the fact that our mistakes are the things that we're really learning from best.

Jack Algieri: That's hard, I think, it's hard for a farmer to swallow their pride and share mistakes with the people that are learning from them. But it's one of the things that we feel is a really important part of this is that we have a strong system, we're confident in our work. We have a set of principles that we're farming



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

toward, and we make a lot of mistakes, and nature does what it needs to do, and we work with that.

Chris Blanchard: You talk about having a management team. Do you have permanent staff as well, or is it really the management team and then the farmer trainees?

Jack Algieri: To get into that, we have the growing farmer initiative area of the farm, maybe I'll back out of that a little bit and say what Stone Barns is as a center. It is a working community, there's a lot of people here, it's like a village. My directorship of the farm, I'm one member of an executive team, sort of a team of people that is in this organization. We have a CEO that is working to work across the programmatic and development and agricultural spaces. Then we have directors of program, and development, and media, and finance. From that, we manage this estate, so we have obviously the facilities of this big building and manage all of the kind of contract, everything from conferences and corporate groups to weddings and all these things that happen here.

Jack Algieri: We have a staff of administration and development, and a programmatic staff that's training, teaching people here all the time. The growing farmer initiative piece has a couple of people in it that oversee that management, Shannon my wife, and also Laurie Freyer, are the two that kind of oversee designing the conference, organizing the process with the farmers in terms of applications and mentoring, and organizing these weekly classes, and making sure that the group is working as a cohort. So that aspect of it is organized by the GFI team, and it's pretty integrated.

Jack Algieri: Our conversations and decision making happen in both directions, from production and also from the educational stance. So it's pretty worked out. It's really important that everything has really got all of these grounds covered because the program keeps getting more complex every year. So it definitely requires somebody to be a solid owner of each of those pieces. I hope that answers your question.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, that does. Then do you actually have then, once you drill down to the production side of things, do you have staff who are permanently on as part of the production crew?

Jack Algieri: Oh yeah, yeah. I mean the apprentices file in. They connect as our kind of first year workforce, and they engage and learn from this team. We're running a production speed though, so obviously I need my perennial team and I rely on them. I would say, you know, that it's sort of the goal to have professional development for everybody who's on my team. Education is just for the apprentices themselves, but I have some two and three year farmers with me that have learned so much and are so talented. I believe that they're the ones that are really in the end going to keep going at this.

Jack Algieri: I mean, the longer you stick with something for a while, and get a method and practice, the more you get your legs underneath yourself and have the confidence to go out there and do this. So I think our apprenticeship is great, and often if the apprentices stay longer there's a pretty good chance that they'll keep going. We have a pretty good percentage of people that come through the program that continue on farming, whether are doing some assistant managing



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

work or they're apprenticing at another farm and sort of continuing on their track. My management team are all seasoned farmers.

Jack Algieri: I basically have, I'm kind of flanked, the way it's organized is Shane Hardy is my manager of the grasslands as a whole, and his job is really to oversee the grass, the soils, and all the monitoring, and all of the sort of interaction that happens on that group. He also is in charge of all the composting and nutrient flow. And with him on that team is Mike Peterson, who is a great livestock manager, and oversees the cattle and sheep and goats, and Phil, who looks over all the poultry, the processing facility, and the pigs.

Jack Algieri: On the vegetable side, Jason Grauer is my field manager. He also oversees all the marketing, so he's sort of in Blue Hill on a regular basis every week, pitching new ideas. He oversees a lot of the plant breeding work and seed trials that we do, which are pretty extensive. And he coordinates and assistant field manager and our greenhouse manager, and basically just keeps us all on the same page in terms of production, because there's product coming from a lot of different places and it all has to be coordinated for CSA, for market stands, for multiple outside restaurants, for Blue Hill, for event ABC. So that's kind of the core group of us. Then we also oversee the landscape and everything too, so we have an obligation for an edible landscape and formal gardens and that kind of stuff.

Chris Blanchard: All right. With that, we're going to stop here, take a quick break, and then we'll be right back with Jack Algieri from Stone Barns Center.

Chris Blanchard: The Farmer to Farmer Podcast is brought to you by BCS America. BCS two-wheel tractors are real farming equipment for real farmers. And with PTO driven attachments like rototillers, flail mowers, rotary plows, power harrows, log splitters, snow throwers, and even a utility trailer and a new water transfer pump, you've got the tools you need to get jobs done across the farm and the homestead. On my own farm, we went through a number of so-called solutions for mowing and tilling before we finally got smart and bought a BCS. Even though we owned a four-wheel tractor to manage our 20 acres of vegetables, that BCS tackled jobs that we simply couldn't do with a larger machine, from moving steep slopes and around trees, to working in our high tunnels. Plus, they're gear driven for years of dependable service. Check out bscamerica.com to see the full lineup of tractors and attachments, plus videos of BCS in action.

Chris Blanchard: Perennial support is provided by Vermont Compost Company, makers of Fort Vee and Fort Light potting mixes. When you're growing transplants, all of the investment you've made in plant materials, heat, labor, and overhead depend utterly on the performance of the media where you expect your plants to grow. If you're an organic grower, you're probably using a media based on compost, and you should be looking for the best compost. Most organic potting soils have two basic parts, the compost and everything else. At Vermont Compost Company, Karl Hammer and his company are very intentional about the inputs they use in their compost. While they're making use of waste products, waste disposal is not their primary goal.

Chris Blanchard: Ingredients are sourced consciously and with the end in mind. And the same goes for everything else part. Like the best in art, everything in Vermont Compost potting soils has a purpose, whether it's the chips of ocean blue



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

granite or the kelp that provides micro nutrients and a little smell of the ocean. Fully composted compost, top quality ingredients, and a real sense for the art and the science of plant production, combined with a real commitment to organic growing professionals to create a consistent product year after year. And in something that is subject to as many variables as market farming, it's nice to have something you can count on, vermontcompost.com.

- Chris Blanchard: And we're back with Jack Algieri from Stone Barns Center. Jack, I'd like to dig in just a little bit more into the vegetable operation, since that's what the Farmer to Farmer podcast is really focused on. How many acres of vegetables are you actually looking at there?
- Jack Algieri: We have about eight acres of mixed vegetables, and a half acre of greenhouse crop that I would just look at as slightly different. The field veg is sort of broken up into a few different spots on the farm. You have a five acre parcel in one field, and then as I mentioned before we have this lay rotation that has two acre blocks. And we have a terrace garden that is focused on sliding hoop houses for cucumbers, tomatoes, flowers and more season extension stuff.
- Chris Blanchard: So the sliding greenhouses are in addition to that 22,000 square foot greenhouse, right?
- Jack Algieri: Yes. We have a couple of small sliders that over the ground. So maybe I'll start with the greenhouse. All the greenhouse production is in soil, and it's a compost based, non-fertilizer based program. We've been operating year round in these spaces for the past 15 years with no spray regimen, and great production honestly. So it's really a special place. When we first were building the greenhouse, the choice to build this very large gutter connect house and put soil in it I think was a little bit revolutionary, and a great step.
- Jack Algieri: As you had mentioned Eliot Coleman, who really early on was a great mentor and advisor for me. He still continues to be that. It was really Eliot's suggestion to put this house up, which was a bold move because he's been working in sliding houses and small houses for a long time. Many of us, a lot of your listeners probably too, have had a lot of experiences in hoop houses and gothic type hoop houses, sliding houses, things like that. Relatively inexpensive spaces that can be paid back quickly with one spinach crop or something like that.
- Jack Algieri: But when you go ahead and build some large gutter connect house that was really designed for bedding plants, or hydroponic or something like that, where there is like this really huge infrastructural upfront cost, but a fast return, it was definitely a risk for us to take this on. I had enough skepticism myself to really dig in and try to make this work, and try to figure out some economics around how to run a very efficient healthy soil based greenhouse. I think we've continued to do that.
- Jack Algieri: We've learned so much about how to grow, how to make it efficient for the farmers that are in there, how to design a complex long-term crop rotation in an indoor environment, and how to get the best out of the structure, while really reducing our energy load and improving the fertility and health of the environment. I think that's what makes it really special is that soil greenhouses are very different than anything else because of the biotic relationship inside



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

that house that functions like a terrarium. It's not just a warehouse with plants. It's a living environment, and the rules are different.

Jack Algieri: I grew up in greenhouse environments, and went to school for plant science and greenhouse systems. And I really was jaded by what was happening inside greenhouse systems, and felt after working with some biodynamic farmers in Rhode Island where I'm from, I thought, you know what, we could definitely do this. We can definitely take some of these ideas we have and trust that this environment doesn't need to be some sort of sterile environment, but rather quite the opposite, a living growing environment. So that was that.

Jack Algieri: However, in the first years, I felt like it was going to be really important that we put up these sliding hoop houses just to show the sort of juxtaposition in cost and productivity and potential, which they are very all of those things. So those houses, I built two pretty much right away. There's a 21 by 64, and a 21 by 48 that basically rotate across five different spaces. Generally speaking, each time the house moves, it has a new, we use one specifically for sun gold tomatoes on trellis, and then the other house moves and we do cucumbers and then late alliums, and spinach in the winter in those houses, and purple sprouted broccoli and things like that for winter production. Those are not heated at all.

Jack Algieri: The large greenhouse actually is heated, but only to freezing temperature. So our winter rotation is a selection of plants that can all handle the frost, all handle the freeze, but generally we keep it from freezing. That keeps the pathogen pressures down, and it also greatly improves the quality of the crop.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned a long-term crop rotation that you've put in place in that large gutter connect facility. That's a hard thing to do with greenhouse crops, because there aren't nearly as many greenhouse crops as there are outdoor crops for most people, for most farmers in the way they're doing it.

Jack Algieri: That's true, you can get stuck in the mustard and lettuce trap all day. It seems like that's what you want to do, but if you stick with growing mustards inside a hoop house, you'll definitely continue to fight flea beetles and white flies, and everything else that's going to come at you. And it sort of forces you to enter some kind of a chemical regimen of even an organic pathway. If you keep rotating the same things, you're just perpetuating the same problems. So the crop rotation in that space is critical. That's not to say that still the brassicas to a large degree are one of the most profitable and functional families for greenhouse systems, but they're certainly not the only.

Jack Algieri: There's enough variety in that family in particular and in other families that allow us to split rotations. So maybe brassica rapa is not in the same rotation as the early brassicas, that the radish crop grows here with the lettuce, but we grow this Asian tsai tsai in this other place for winter, and they skip. So the rotation is 10 years, and it's split basically into three groups seasonally. To give you an idea what's happening now, in our summer season the challenges of a summer greenhouse are that it can get hot, so growing certain things in there, probably better off to be outside.

Jack Algieri: The house itself is physically expensive, it has its overhead, so the crop that's in there has to be able to pay its rent essentially, it's a square foot per day rent,



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

and the crop has to be able to cover that. So growing something like squash or something inside that house will probably never make it. In some cases, if you're growing like really baby specialty squash or something like that, it could eke by. Cucumbers make it, tomatoes make it, flowers, lettuces, mustards, and I think there's a pretty good selection of stuff that's in there. Also, this time of year we have one bay full of ginger and tumeric. That's been a great addition. All the crops that we grow in the space are basically non-competitive with our field crops.

Chris Blanchard: When you say non-competitive with your field crops, there are things that do better inside than they do outside.

Jack Algieri: Yes and no, a couple things. I would say if we grow carrots inside and carrots outside, we have to sell two different kinds of carrots. So they better be really different from each other, because the carrots from the greenhouses are going to cost twice as much easily than the carrots we could grow outdoors. So it really doesn't make sense at certain seasons if we have this crop in another place for us to grow it. So of course the value of season extension is there, so starting something really early or having it go late into the fall, or have it for the winter, is really valuable.

Jack Algieri: But if we can grow it outside, we grow it outside. The first thing is grow it outdoors totally exposed, then put a cover on it, then put a house on it, then heat that house. Whatever it is, the sort of steps of value and competition. So the non-competitive is really that if we do have a crop in the field and in the greenhouse, we can distinguish the difference between them as two separate products even though they may be a similar vegetable.

Chris Blanchard: Got it, that makes sense. So that gutter connect house, does that have the ability to be open to the environment?

Jack Algieri: Yeah, it's a fully convertible house, so it opens up to the outside. And essentially in the summertime it's open all the time. We allow the house to open at 60 degrees. So it's getting full sun, it's for 44 roofs on it, so you can imagine, it's a large range. And having full sun does a great thing for the climate itself, obviously, because one of the big differences between a hoop house and a gutter connect at any size is that you have the capacity to allow the air out the top. And even if you have vent fans on a hoop house, you still can't cool it down enough because the heat gets trapped up in the top.

Jack Algieri: A house like this, the large gutter connect is actually at the same outdoor temperature, if not below because there's a slight bit of shade from the infrastructure. So in the end, it's a superior growing environment to a hoop house in many ways. And in winter it's the same way, because you have the cubic area, the physics for greenhouse systems is that when you have more cubic area, height and area around you, then the plant and the atmosphere has more time to cool off and warm up. And the plant likes time. That differential in temperature puts a lot of strain on a plant if it's too quick.

Jack Algieri: So the quality of the crops, the quality of the soil, the pressure for pest issues or things like that can really be mitigated by the atmosphere just as much as it can be by the soil. Within that same house, we have a 2,000 square foot



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

propagation space that's sort of cordoned off from the rest of the house that is sort of a nursery for all crop spaces.

Chris Blanchard: And what kind of techniques are you using for propagation? Are you cell trays or soil blocks, or something totally off the wall?

Jack Algieri: We use a combination of things for the propagation, it depends on the crop. We are growing in the prop house pretty much all year long because we have greenhouse and field crops, and there's a lot of extension stuff. I'll start with this. One of the mediums we use to do a lot of seed starting, especially more difficult seeds, is sand sphagnum, which is just sort of an even blend of milled sphagnum moss and coarse sand. That's a material that I think is really critical to a lot of the transplanting work that we do because it's our first selection. This was a method that I learned from Heinz Gracke from Meadowbrook Farms in Rhode Island, where we were working with a lot of herbs and starting more difficult seeds, flowers, and herbs.

Jack Algieri: What we found is that mix is actually critical for some things. The potential for speeding up germination and the quality of germination for a lot of plants starts with that mix. And then we'll go from there to, sometimes cells, we use deep 50's and things like that. But we do use a fair amount of soil blocks. We actually designed a soil block specifically for yourself, because the ones that we were using were just using too much soil for ourselves. So we decided to design a smaller one that allowed for more in a tray, and one that actually fits into a 1020 tray so that we can use the sort of standard tray for the soil blocks also.

Jack Algieri: And that we use for all of the two and three week transplants. So basically all the brassicas and all the lettuces and thing like that, very early beets sometimes we'll do that for a quick start. And then otherwise, we're doing different techniques for every crop. Timing wise generally speaking, all of our planting and operations follow moon cycle for our timing, so a lot of this the plan year is pretty regimented in terms of when our start dates are, the lots. One person oversees propagation, and he just sticks to the program. He's very organized, and I think it's one of the most critical positions on the whole farm, and it takes a person who is really focused on detail. Because it will make the quality for the rest of the farm for the rest of the year.

Jack Algieri: So it's definitely an area we put a lot of energy into making it right. Maybe another mention is that we have a lot of thermal zones, different temperature zones in that space, mostly facilitated by radiant systems. And the radiant system is actually heated by a compost system, so kind of a cool energy saving program that we have and a little bit of an experiment that turned into a great energy conservation for us. And allows us to heat beds to basically four different temperatures so that we can kind of keep the crops moving and eventually get them outside or in the greenhouse, wherever they're destined.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me a little bit more about that system, you talk about heating it with compost. I'm curious how that works.

Jack Algieri: We have a pretty solid compost, sort of a turned aerated compost, physical area compost that ran for many years. And the more we started dealing with the slaughter waste and food waste in particular, the more we started to get into



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

using forced air systems. We worked with a company call O2Compost in Oregon, Peter Moon is his name there. And Peter sort of helped us in the early days, maybe 12, 13 years ago to build this first forced air system. And it's good because it pushes air from the bottom, we have four 10 yard bins that we manage food waste every weekend year round. There's a pipe underneath the bin with a perforated wood floor, and the air gets pushed up through for a minute every 20 minutes or so.

Jack Algieri: And what it does is it replicates the turning process, and you end up with a 170 degree temperature from that pile constantly for 28 days. And it's clockwork, really. It doesn't matter what week of the year it is, a 165 to 175 degree temperature consistently for 28 days. And after 28 days, it drops off. And some of that has to do with how we're blending, making the actual material that goes in there. But every week, every Tuesday, we reset, take one out, put one in. And it goes for four weeks in that bin. So we've been doing this for years, and there was all this interest in how we could extract some of the temperature.

Jack Algieri: So we started building other vessels and trying to find ways to put copper tubing inside it, and run water through that system. There have been many iterations of this. And we eventually went to learning more about the thermodynamics of this thing, partially because we have a group that we call Slow Tools, that is a group of engineers and manufacturers and farmers that kind of get together to discuss engineering processes and tool design. One of the years, we brought on a young intern from Purdue University, who was working on the Formula One team there.

Jack Algieri: And she came and got interested in that project, so I gave that to her to really look at the math and try to figure out the physics of what was some of these designs that we are kind of just hacking at, just guessing that this pipe would pull this temperature off. So she did a bunch of probing, and from there we realized that we could actually build this modular bin. It's basically a double high picking bin, and we use a coiled copper cylinder that we built in-house that has like a rebar skeleton. And we can drop that right into the center of the mixed material compost, it doesn't have to be food waste, it can be leaves and grass, and can be all vegetable based.

Jack Algieri: But the key is that you run, you force air from underneath, and in that vessel that you're setting up this coil that's really extracting as much heat from inside the core of that compost as can be. And then we just ended up using hydraulic quick connects and connect it to a pressurized radiant system that usually have a water heater that's keeping that water hot to run through the system. We essentially bypassed the water heater with this compost system, so that a water heater just never fires, it just acts as a vessel for retention. As long as the compost bin is switched out once every two to four weeks, it maintains that temperature. And you can plug it into a greenhouse radiant system, you can plug it into a sous-vide bath, you can plug it into a hot tub, kind of anything you want to do.

Chris Blanchard: Wow, that's pretty cool. Tell me more about the Slow Tools group, because that's something I feel like has gotten a lot of attention over the last couple of years.



- Jack Algieri: That's good to hear. Yeah, well I think at its heart, the idea of getting the empowerment back into the farmers and engineers in a mixed group again. This came as really around the table there, again Eliot has a lot to do with this. And Barry Griffin, who is an engineer out of Boston, and Johnny's, who sort of played also another big role in this. This is a range of different people in the first meetings as we started to reach out to guys like Josh Volk out on the west coast there, running all his bicycle stuff, and Ron Khosla, who you probably know, who worked on electric G conversions and CoolBot, and all that stuff.
- Jack Algieri: And Adam Lemieux, who is doing brilliant work for tool design and sourcing for Johnny's, along with a bunch of other folks that just, Michael McGowan, who does carts and tools in Oregon. Just some of these first meetings were all just about an open design process. How do you get an engineer to come in and listen to the needs of a farmer, and then hear what a manufacturer might say about how important it is to have a supply chain in place for repair and things like that. So it just becomes this really rich conversation, and takes what I think has been brilliantly executed through farm hack, and helping to maybe engage these engineers in the R&D world.
- Jack Algieri: In fact, where I think this is all going is really more towards driving the young group of engineers that are out there to think about intimate relationship with their tools and technology. Which I think is like probably the biggest obstacle for us to get over in agriculture is that a lot of the technology that's been developed over the past 75 years has been designed to extricate us, to take us away from relation to the farm, put us up on a seat above the space, inside a cab, or on a computer. And while that's brilliant technology, we really can't be separated like that.
- Jack Algieri: The role of farmers is as stewards and caretakers to the land. It's great if we could make that job more precise and less painful on our bodies, but not at the cost of removing us from the relationship to the plant, or the soil, or the birds, or whatever it is that it's sort of a distraction to. Be our agriculture system kind of depends on the mastery of the people who are doing it. So equipping them with really new, modern, innovative things that are out there that can both improve the efficiency of the farmer and increase their intimacy to the work they're doing I think is good for all of us.
- Jack Algieri: If we could get there, and also if we could really turn on this new generation of young engineers to touch the soil again, to trust the natural systems and to learn some lessons, we might see stuff like we saw from Bell Labs, or something like that. The majority of those guys were all farmers. That's why that was such a successful design circle. So we're trying to stimulate that, and get more people at the table instead of just the clunking around we're doing in the sheds.
- Jack Algieri: We're pretty good welders, we have a pretty good sense of with what we're doing in the shop, we know how to source things. But I still think there's a lot more room for development. So that's what Slow Tools really has been. And hopefully everybody will see it keep growing and become more of a forum for conversation, and at best really start to see some really good technology applied to small farms.



- Chris Blanchard: Can you maybe talk about one or two things that are your favorites that have come out of the Slow Tools project?
- Jack Algieri: The best thing has been thinking about it as a design process. So there are really cool things that have come on. Some of the things from the meetings is that we get to meet everybody who's out there in the world designing these things. I mentioned Michael McGowan before. Michael is in Oregon, he's got this great company, Carson Tools. He was working at Los Alamos. He's a brilliant engineer, retired from that kind of work, and just made this effort to take some other technologies and put them together. So what he did was got the idea of using hub motors from bicycle technology, and applying them to these hand tools, the same way that using drill batteries, connecting them to like the tilther and some of the harvesters and things.
- Jack Algieri: Using lithium ion drills as power sources for different tools. It's pretty brilliant. So I love these ideas of adapting stuff from other industries. Just imagine this, since the 1950's, small agricultural products have gone to the side and all the energy has gone to big ag stuff. But at the same time, from a scale model, there's been massive advances in things like zero turn electric lawn mowers, electric wheelchair technology, motocross, forklifts, bicycles, you name it. And all these things are really in the same scale realm as we could use on the small farm, just none of them are adapted.
- Jack Algieri: Oh, and for that matter, electric power drill technology, like DeWalt or Milwaukee or someone, that has been working on construction. But those concepts could be easily applied to a small thresher, or a seeder, or a weeder. So it's interesting that we haven't applied those same kind of rules to a small agricultural system. So that's why I love these ideas, that are like adapting a hub motor to a cultivating machine. Oggun is a good example. Horace Clemmons has done this great work down in Alabama, and basically built a decentralized open source tractor, like a G, and has a number of different people working on this and adapting it, and sending.
- Jack Algieri: I know for us, we've chopped this thing in a bunch of different ways, and each time we do it, we send them back new pictures. And he keeps improving his design. What I really like about that model is the thought process to come out of this is that, well, if you want to decentralize manufacturing, all the parts can be ubiquitous. There can be things you can get off the shelf whether you're in Guatemala or in Nigeria or in New York.
- Jack Algieri: That the same actuators you can find, the same basic parts, steel, and put these things together so that they're easy to repair, they could be built in a standard local welding shop, and sold just like that local guy sells a snowplow. To me, it's just part of the infrastructural development of small farming getting better is that we have tools and systems of tools that are easy to get ahold of, that are efficient, that are not that expensive, and that are easy to repair.
- Chris Blanchard: It seems like something that's related to what we're talking about in the tool world here is the work that you guys have done with seeding trials and breeding projects as well.



- Jack Algieri: Yeah, similar, in a more living way, right? I think that in the same way, just the curiosity of what's out there in the world has been what's driven that. It's great to have a customer who is always asking for something different, which provokes me to search. I have my own particular interest in seed saving, and have been doing that for most of my life. So there's some things that I'm just personally curious about. The way I look at it is, every crop that we have out there growing in the field is being challenged, and can potentially be replaced when we find that one thing about it from something new that can resolve that problem.
- Jack Algieri: And we could do that potentially by saving it. We breed some of our own things, we save very old corn variety and old soy. We have some new varieties of peas, a number of different things that are sort of house. These winter Chinese wa wa gui choy, some very interesting vegetables that are exclusively bred here. What's really interesting is that there is these layers of going to a seed company, and looking through that catalog, and seeing what's there, and just sort of based on a couple of sentences choosing that crop that you're going to grow. So it felt like it was that much more important just to do some investigative reporting as a farmer.
- Jack Algieri: I want to know about what I'm dealing with. Where did this come from? Why was this bred in this way? Why would you as a seed company be selling this to me rather than something else? It doesn't always say that in the description, so we felt like we should start, it kind of snowballed from there, where we just started calling up seed companies and asking them if we could participate in trials for new things, and we'd be glad to give them an evaluation. We grow them out, we do field trials, and we see how they compete in the field and production standards.
- Jack Algieri: And then we give them a full evaluation with chefs, with children, with whoever will fill out an evaluation card essentially. And then we share that publicly and back with the company. What we thought was just kind of more for yourself to learn about it turned out to be fairly interesting to the seed companies because they weren't getting a lot of clear direct response from consumers. They were getting a lot of sort of industrial response, but not so much from the small scale direct market grower. So then we found that was just another potential to get into that. Now we work with several dozen seed companies and a handful of open source breeders from universities to help do some participatory breeding and stuff like that.
- Chris Blanchard: Very cool. 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. This lightening round is brought to you by FarmersWeb, software for your farm. FarmersWeb makes it easy to work with your buyers, saving you time, increasing efficiency, reducing mistakes, and streamlining order management. FarmersWeb helps you manage orders from buyers who place them online, but also those that order by phone or email. Use FarmersWeb to generate a product catalog for buyers, allow buyers to view your real-time availability online, and create harvest lists and packing slips for your orders.



Chris Blanchard: FarmersWeb helps you inform your buyers of delivery routes, pickup locations, lead times, and more, while helping you keep track of special pricing and customer information. You can also download detailed financial reports. FarmersWeb offers a free account type, and a flat monthly fee on paid plans. You can pause, cancel, or switch plans at any time. Check a demo video and FarmersWeb guide to working with wholesale buyers at farmersweb.com.

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

Jack Algieri: My favorite tool on the farm I think is my hand, I have to say. I was thinking about this. You pitched this question, and I thought, you know what, I have a lot of tools. I have sheds full of tools, and tractors, and I really think they all have such specific functions. But when I start thinking about it, I just keep thinking simpler and simpler. And back to that slow tool idea, I think the thing that we're all trying to replicate is our hand. It's like the best, when you get around a plant and you're moving around it, you have all the dexterity, you have all the mind to hand connection, that's 100%.

Jack Algieri: And as soon as you put a tool in between you and that, it starts to bring that down a little bit. So I love all the precision weeding tools. I think that a hand weeding tool with good posture is what it looks like to be a good modern upright farmer, is to care for your health in this process. And good precision tools like wire weeders and things like that I think are honestly probably my favorite thing when I'm tired of using my hand.

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

Jack Algieri: This question reminds me of Monty Python a little bit. It's hard to pick a color here. But I'll say that I think my favorite crop is fennel. I think it is that because it's such a satisfying crop to do well. Have you ever grown fennel?

Chris Blanchard: Oh yeah.

Jack Algieri: Yeah, there's something about it when it really bulbs up nice, and you get the right variety at the right moment. And in all these trial varieties, I always feel like it's so rare that people can tell the difference between fennels. If you want to have a season of fennel production, you have to change varieties like every two weeks. The customer will never notice that you changed variety unless you tell them. But it's so much work on this end to really align them all. We could grow seven or eight different varieties through the course of the summer so that we have them available.

Jack Algieri: And it's such a wonderful challenging vegetable, and it's delicious, and versatile and everything else too in the end. But I think it's a misunderstood, or less than completely understood for a lot of growers that have tried this. And certainly for customers to recognize what some of the complexities of that crop are. So I really do like that one, and I just like to eat it. At this time of year, I think a fennel salad with a little bit of lemon and olive oil is just about heaven.

Chris Blanchard: Hard to beat, definitely hard to beat.



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

- Jack Algieri: Yeah.
- Chris Blanchard: And finally, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?
- Jack Algieri: I think really if I were to go back, I would just tell myself to trust myself, make a mistake, make a mistake because that's the thing that's going to give you the inspiration for what's next. And that the sooner I do that, the more inspired I am, and the more curious I am to keep going.
- Chris Blanchard: All right Jack Algieri, thank you so much for being part of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast today.
- Jack Algieri: It's really my pleasure. Thank you for taking the time.
- Chris Blanchard: All right, so wrapping things up here, I'll say again that this is episode 174 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast. You can find the notes for this show at farmertofarmerpodcast.com by looking on the episodes page, or just searching for Algieri, that's A-L-G-I-E-R-E. 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 for high quality seed, industry leading customer service, and fast order fulfillment. Additional funding for transcripts is provided by North Central SARE, providing grants and education to advance innovations in sustainable agriculture. You can get the notes for every Farmer to Farmer Podcast right in your inbox by signing up for my email newsletter at farmertofarmerpodcast.com. And if you like us, please head on over to iTunes and leave us a review, or talk to us in the show notes, or tell your friends on Facebook. We're at Purple Pitchfork on Facebook.
- Chris Blanchard: And hey, when you talk to our sponsors, please let them know how much you appreciate their support of a resource you value. You can support the show directly by going to farmertofarmerpodcast.com/donate. I am working to make the best farming podcast in the world, and you can help. Finally, please let me know who you would like to hear from on the show through the suggestions form at farmertofarmerpodcast.com. That's why Jack's on the show. I'll do my best to get your suggestions on the show. Thank you for listening, be safe out there, and keep the tractor running.



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