



# FARMER TO FARMER

podcast

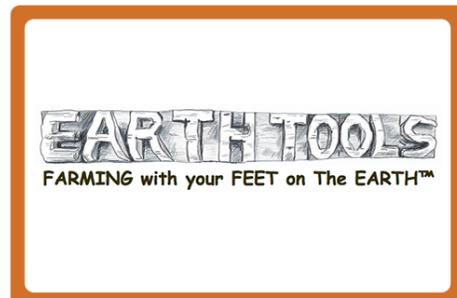


## EPISODE 097

097: Eva Rehak and Rebekah Frazer Chiasson on Cooperative Marketing and Farm Families in New Brunswick

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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast Episode 97 and this is your host Chris Blanchard.

Eva Rehak and Rebekah Frazer Chiasson are members of Coin Bio, that's Organic Corner in English, a small marketing co-up at the Dieppe farmers market in Dieppe, New Brunswick. With a total of 4 farms, the Organic Corner Co-op allows these farmers to show up at market with the greatest diversity of produce in Southeastern New Brunswick.

Eva and Rebekah share the details of how they make the co-op work, how they decide who sells what, and how to structure the finances to keep the cooperative operating and vital. We also dig into how they resolve conflict and avoid conflict within the venture and the attitude and approach that make Organic Corner a positive experience for farmers and customers alike. We also discuss the realities of raising families on the farm and the political activism they participated in around child care subsidies for New Brunswick. I really enjoyed talking to Eva and Rebekah. I hope you enjoy this episode too.

Before we dive into our sponsor messages, I want to make a comment about last week's episode with Diane Szukovathy. Several people have made comments to me about the poor quality of the audio in that episode. I had a recording that I thought was okay, and it wasn't. I want you to know that I'm doing everything in my power to not have that happen again. Thank you for your support.

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Eva Rehak and Rebekah Frazer Chiasson, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer podcast.

Eva Rehak: Hello.



Rebekah Frazer-Chiasson: Hi Chris.

Chris Blanchard: I'm sorry about my lack of decent French, even passable French pronunciation. It's an embarrassment to everybody with the last name Blanchard so sorry about that.

Rebekah Frazer-: No worries.

Chris Blanchard: Most of the time when I've had two people on the podcast before it's been two people from the same farm but this is actually a little bit different because you guys do some cooperative marketing and I wanted to spend a fair amount of time talking about that today, but Eva could you start out by telling us about your farm.

Eva Rehak: Sure, of course I can Chris. We are situated in Saint Maurice, New Brunswick. It is about a half an hour to 45 minutes north of Moncton. We are just finishing up our seventh year. We purchased the farm back in November 2009 and our first year was in 2010. It's just me and my partner. We are now growing on two acres with two greenhouses. We do the CSA as our primary farm income and production and then we also grow to the Dieppe markets under the Organic Corner.

Chris Blanchard: How big is your farm?

Eva Rehak: We own 126 acres but the farm itself we grow on about 2.5 acres including our greenhouses.

Chris Blanchard: Is your CSA associated with the marketing co-op or is that something you do just on your own?

Eva Rehak: The CSA is just each farm has their own CSA and partners. The co-op is really just for, first it was just our surplus but now we basically grow for the market as well.

Chris Blanchard: Eva, you should tell us the name of your farm too because I was going to do that but I knew I'd bollocks it up so I'm going to let you have a shot at that.

Eva Rehak: No problem. Our farm name is Ferme Alva and just a quick thing, Alva comes from my partner Alain and myself Eva but a little quick fact, apparently Thomas Edison's middle name is Alva as well. I found that out this morning.

Chris Blanchard: Nice. Nice. Rebekah can you tell us a little bit about your farm?

Eva Rehak: Yeah our farm is called Ferme Terre Partagée and in English that means Shared Land. It has multiple meanings or multiple reasons why we called it that but one is because it's been passed through generations so I'm the sixth generation on these lands. When our ancestors came to Nova Scotia from



Great Britain they came to this town that is now called Rogersville in New Brunswick. It's about an hour north of Moncton. We hope that it's going to be passed on to many generations but not necessarily all through our own lineage. We hope to open up the farm and bring new partners and enthusiasm to this region. We do mostly, our main activity right now is vegetable production. We also have CSA and market through the Organic Corner at the Dieppe market but we also have a market in Miramichi which is a small city about 50 kilometers north of us. We also have strawberries so we have an organic strawberry you pick of a few acres and we do some livestock because my father is still farming and has been for 45 years. He does beef and cattle and pork and also grains and hay. When I say we, I mean my partner Kevin and I, we raise chickens and turkeys that we sell sort of on the direct market so directly to the consumers.

Chris Blanchard: Both of your farms are located in New Brunswick which I have to admit I don't know a whole lot about New Brunswick, but when I hear it it doesn't strike me as being the sort of place where you'd find a lot of organic vegetable farms.

Eva Rehak: In the time when we started there wasn't that many but it is starting to develop I find and it was actually a really good location for us because we didn't come from farming backgrounds. My family is all in Ontario so we quickly looked in Ontario/Quebec for land as well to be kind of in between but it just wasn't affordable so that's why we chose New Brunswick and they're starting to pop up around here I find.

Chris Blanchard: A lot of times affordable farmland goes along side of good farm land. Were you able to find good land in New Brunswick?

Eva Rehak: Well yes. We lucked out. The land that we took, all around us there is somebody that comes and cuts the hay for themselves but our land was just, in French it's [note from Chris: I'm not even going to try to spell this bit of French, my pronunciation is bad enough!], but it's basically that it was just let go. Nobody was cutting it so even little trees and saplings started growing so it just kept building up matters because about 15 years they haven't been working that land so it just grows and dies and grows so we have a good ten inches or a good foot and a half that's deep of top soil.

Chris Blanchard: Wonderful. Eva, you had an educational background in agriculture right?

Eva Rehak: Yeah, that's where I met my partner Alain. At the time it was part of the University of Wales. College De Le Cred which became part of the University of Guelph and now isn't anymore but it still exists and in that school, that's where I took technique agriculture so basically it is agricultural technician.

Chris Blanchard: Rebekah your family has been farming for, well you said since 1886 there. You grew up on the farm and grew up around the sort of activity you're doing now.



- Rebekah Frazer-: I did. I grew up on the farm. From the time that I can remember my dad has been doing mostly pigs and although there is a long history of vegetable production in this town and in my family that kind of ended when they lost a bunch of contracts and the co-op went down in the early 90s. What we're doing now, vegetable production being our main activity was now what I was exposed to other than in our own family garden growing up.
- Chris Blanchard: What prompted you to get into vegetable production?
- Rebekah Frazer-: When I decided to come back to the farm it was actually just with doing a little project, what I considered to be doing a little project of planting 2.5 acres of strawberries. It was not a little project.
- Chris Blanchard: Not little.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Much too big to handle but that's how I started and I've been doing strawberries ever since. Just for the simple reason that strawberries are I think the most delicious fruit that we can produce and a good way to bring people to the farm and to generate interest and sort of a joi de vu, like a renewal because this farm, everyone knows it. It's here but there wasn't an opportunity for people to come to the farm and to buy directly from us. I think people were just interested in more vegetables. I started going to the market with a little bit and then there was interest for a CSA so I was getting asked by people at the market for a CSA so just sort of going with where the requests were coming from but also with what I saw other people like Eva and Alain doing elsewhere in New Brunswick.
- Chris Blanchard: Now you both came to my attention because Tara at Acorn Organic, which is the Atlantic/Canadian regional network and I have done some work with Tara off and on for the last couple of years but she said, "You should get in touch with these guys to talk with them about their marketing co-op." Can you tell us a little bit about the marketing co-op and how that works?
- Eva Rehak: The Organic Corner started 5 years ago and it started with three farms that decided the year before we were talking and we'd see each other and early in the day we'd have full tables and by midway it started dwindling and by like 11, and the market finishes at 1:30, we always saw that we had less traffic so we decided to talk that winter and we got together. Two of the farms were CSA's and usually when you do a CSA you have about 40 to 50 different vegetables, herbs, and a few fruits. We got together and then slowly Rebekah joined us with her strawberries. After that we had the fourth farm that joined us and now we're four farms and a potential fifth farm will probably join us in another year or so. We just offer this diversity of vegetables, fruits, herbs, all local organic and freshly picked.
- Rebekah Frazer-: The idea is that together we can offer what we think is the greatest diversity of organic produce in eastern New Brunswick. We have 40 different



vegetables plus, but we also have for every vegetable two or three or more varieties so when we decide what we're bringing to market we always consider okay well you're bringing beans, well what kind of beans and we make sure there is every color of beans on the table.

Chris Blanchard: Now the only place that the Organic Corner cooperative is selling right now is at the farmers market. Is that right?

Eva Rehak: At the Dieppe farmers market, yes.

Chris Blanchard: Okay.

Eva Rehak: There are two... in Moncton there are two farmers markets so there's the Dieppe market and the Moncton. Right now we're at the Dieppe market.

Chris Blanchard: I'm always interested in co-ops because I tend to be a do it myself, I do it my own way kind of a guy. I've always looked at people who can dig in and cooperate with a certain amount of envy. I'm curious how you guys make decisions about who's going to bring what to farmers market because there must be situations where you've both got green green beans or maybe all four of you have green green beans but you're not going to sell everybody's beans at the market, or maybe you are.

Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah that's definitely the case and it does require more organization. We go to two markets so we go to Miramichi and to Dieppe and it's more organization around the Dieppe market and the Organic Corner, more communication, but in the end very worth it we think. The way that it works right now and some of the big decisions around the co-op are taken during the winter because that's when we have time to sit down and really hash things out.

We have our AGM usually in January and we have a few other meetings before or after but then the sort of week to week decisions are sort of taken by email. Alva Farms and Windy Hill Farms which are the two we call Primary Farms I guess because it's the Grandfather Clause as we like to call it in a way. They were two of the founding members of the co-op before it was even a co-op. They take turns being the priority farm. Let's say Evah on Wednesday sends out an email with what she's bringing to market and she's very specific about if she's bringing cherry tomatoes, how many pints she thinks. Obviously it's an estimate and it's a rough estimate or if she's bringing carrots are they orange or are they purple or are they red or whatever. Then the next farm will, and it's already established who that is, will say okay to compliment or to supplement I can bring another 50 pints of cherry tomatoes because we have an idea of how many we can sell just from experience. We always try to push the envelope too. Well we know we can sell 100 but we're going to try -

Eva Rehak: 125 this week.



- Rebekah Frazer-: We're going to bring 125 and take that little risk for potential long term gain. Then the third farm comes in and usually we're the third farm and we have another market too so we have a little bit more flexibility on that end. It's a smaller market in a smaller city and then we, during strawberry season bring strawberries so we have the priority on strawberries so if another farm has a few extra pints or whatever that they want to sell ours gets sold first and if they're available the fourth farms Jardins Vert l'Avenir, they have priority on greens so it doesn't matter if Alva farms is the priority farm. Jardins Vert l'Avenir, if they're bringing spinach or if they're bringing asian mix or whatever it is, they have priority on those sales but if they don't have enough for that market then someone else can jump in.
- Chris Blanchard: How do you go about setting prices in that kind of an environment?
- Eva Rehak: Prices, again that's one thing that we talk about over winter and there's I guess two to three factors that we look at. One is looking at the different prices already at the Dieppe market so we don't compete with them. There are two other organic farms so we check what their prices are and we try to stay about the same and then whatever the conventionals are we try to go a little bit higher since we're organic. We also check the organic price tracker so we check if we're also in line with that. Then we also just go into the grocery stores and see what their prices are and try to be I guess, I wouldn't say higher than them but we're not being undercut either because we are fresher and local as well so we try to emphasize on that.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Usually our prices, as Eva was saying, are established during the winter but then if you're the only farm that has celery root and we haven't established a price then it's up to that farm just to decide for how much they want to sell it and we change prices too if something is not selling.
- Eva Rehak: If it's early in the season and we're the first one to have cherry tomatoes we might sell them for a bit more, for the last ones as well. I know for one example is watermelons too. Ours can sometimes get really big and we either one year sell them by the fruit or we'll sell them for \$1 to \$1.25 a pound. We also see the customers reactions. If you see that half the people are reacting that it's too high of a price then we might change it. Usually it's the high price that they'll react to but yeah, there's all these little little details that we look at to make sure we come out on top.
- Chris Blanchard: For those kinds of decisions that are being made at the market, which in my experience working farmer's markets it's important to have that kind of flexibility and to be able to react to what you see going on there. Who makes those decisions? Obviously you're not going to stand at the farmer's market and Eva isn't going to email Rebekah and say, "What do you think we should do about the leftover celeriac?"



- Eva Rehak: We have also, I guess I don't know if it's the right word to say incorporated the cooperative so as of last year we also have a President, Vice President, and a Secretary so these three people we need to ... I think we're going to have four calls or six calls in the whole year so we'll talk about that. We've also made a marketing committee so we talk about also the prices or how to display things so that's another group that we talk with. Then I go to the market every other week myself because that's the other thing that we included into the cooperative so you do have the primary farm that sends a list. Well that primary farm also, if it's my week then I will be the market manager as we say. I will be at the market then there's Alison from Windy Hill farms so we alternate back and forth. Kevin he's the president. We're usually all three of us there and so we can see and talk. Emails are quite quick too, so if it was my Saturday at the end of the day I might email and be like "We outsold carrots so we should send more or this price we could put a little bit more." It's a lot of communicating.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah. A lot happens like Eva was saying, because it's a small co-op there's a good chance that the three or four members could be at the market at the same time dropping off stuff but the other thing is that there is a market manager and that person, it's their responsibility and we have entrusted them with making those decisions, like on the spot decisions and we can talk about them afterwards and if it wasn't the best for the co-op then we'll have a conversation via email or in person and say let's try not doing that or something else next week but it's their call I guess, the market manager.
- One thing that maybe we didn't explain is that we sell as the Organic Corner but we pay our market manager to be at the market as well as market assistant if it's a market that needs two people. We do that by taking a percentage of our sales and putting it back into the co-op. Let's say we sell for ... Well I'm not going to try and do math. The easiest way to explain it is what you sent to the market so if we send \$1,000 and we sell \$900. The \$900 is ours minus the percentage that goes to the Organic Corner. If Windy Hill farms sends for \$1,500 and sells only \$1,400, she gives a percentage from that. The rest goes to her.
- Eva Rehak: Of what she sells.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Exactly. Terre Partagée sends theirs, again percentage.
- Chris Blanchard: Does that require a lot of detailed record keeping at the market or is that something that's come along pretty naturally for you?
- Eva Rehak: I guess we've developed it over the years. We've made a paper where everybody writes so each farm has their own sheet of paper written what they send and then we've made it that it's written quite easily the amount that they sent and they calculate. If it's my week I'll calculate everybody's amounts that are returned and then the third line is I do the subtraction and then I



multiply it by the price so every farm has basically these three columns after their total. The money gets split amongst ourselves and the rest stays with Coin Bio.

Chris Blanchard: What percentage does the Organic Corner, Coin Bio, take out of what you sell?

Eva Rehak: We started if I may say so, we started with 20% and then last AGM we kind of re-talked about it, that it was a high number. Right now we're in the midst of necessarily purchasing any big items whether it was a cooling truck or more infrastructure so we put it down to 17% with the agreement that Terre Partagée is at 16% because they are the furthest one to market.

Rebekah Frazer-: The reason we were at 20% at that time was we were also covering the cost of transporting your produce to the market so when we reduced it we said it's the farms responsibility to get their stuff to the market so we'll take this 3% or in our case 4% off and the 16% or the 17% will only go towards the market manager position, the market assistant position, anything that we have to buy, marketing equipment for the stand and of course any future projects of the co-op as well.

Eva Rehak: The stall as well.

Chris Blanchard: Right the stall rental fee.

Eva Rehak: Yes.

Chris Blanchard: Future expenses for the co-op. I think this is something, it's true in a lot of small businesses but I've also seen a lot of small joint marketing efforts really suffer from this is they don't end up with any reserve funds. Do you guys have any savings for the co-op? At the end of the year do you have money left over that you can say, wow next year we really want to upgrade the containers we are using at the farmers' market or we're going to get a new tent with brighter colors. Is it really something where you're having to raise the money as you go along?

Eva Rehak: Raising, no. I think we may even drop it a little if I may say that now. Right now our reserve is good. So far we've always calculated how much money we need for a Saturday. We mention it includes stalls, the salaries, and those are the main ones I guess. Once that has been covered anything extra stays with Coin Bio or the Organic Corner and right now we are at the opposite.

Rebekah Frazer-: Surplus.

Eva Rehak: There we go. At a surplus. I know the only thing is we kind of look into do we want to spend the money a little before the end of year, before the year's end? We do have in the back of our minds that we need to keep something because we need to start the year as well, the first market, so we can pay off the salaries and the stall fees and things like that. We do have a surplus.



- Chris Blanchard: I'm interested that you said you used to do transportation of the product to market but then you decided to stop doing that. To me that seems like one of the big values that doing cooperative market offers is on that logistic side of things. Can you talk a little bit about the decision to have growers bring their own stuff to the market?
- Rebekah Frazer-: People are bringing their own stuff no matter what - so The Organic Corner didn't have a vehicle. It was just covering the cost of transporting.
- Chris Blanchard: Oh, okay.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah. It ended up that especially in the main part of the season everyone was having to bring it themselves where sometimes Alva farms and Windy Hill are close to each other so they could sometimes coordinate and just have one vehicle go but that's really just at the beginning of the season. All of the rest of the time they have to send two trucks anyways and we're the furthest away. We're about a bit more than 100 kilometers away from the market. It was also just logistically more difficult figuring out how to make it cooperative and fair I guess. We're always going to have to bring our stuff and it's actually further for us to go bring it to one of the other farms than just to bring it to market. It was just easier I guess. Last year we took the decision to take a little bit, reduce the percentage that the Organic Corner was taking and just let everyone figure out their own transportation and if it makes sense for two farms to collaborate they can do that sort of outside of the Organic Corner.
- Eva Rehak: The percentage that we took down going from 20% to 17%, one of our members calculated that that's what basically it cost for the season, that it was the 3% and for Terre Partagée's case it was 4% that we took off.
- Chris Blanchard: Like I mentioned, for me it's hard to imagine working this closely with a group of people and making these kinds of decisions and really trusting other people in a group to be looking out for my own interests as part of everybody else's interest. Can you talk a little bit about the advantages and why you guys decided to go this way?
- Eva Rehak: Sure. I can start. The reason we kind of created this cooperative was the co-operative was there to help each farm get to their potential to start building up the clientele as well. Again when we started we did Dieppe market by ourselves as Alva farms and we had a full table at 7. We had our lettuces, carrots, celery at the time; but then by 10 or 11 because we were right at the door so we did get the people going through, by 10 we had maybe 5 salad bags, 3 bunches of carrots and our 2 pints of cherry tomatoes, there was less traffic. We started noticing that and then across on the other side of the building was Windy Hill farm which they saw the same kind of problem or the same phenomenon so we started talking and that winter we got together, again like I say with the third farm that's not with us anymore but we got together and we decided why don't we pool our resources together and



basically that's how it started. The third farm did only herbs so that was a nice bonne au jour, a nice -

Rebekah Frazer-: Complement.

Eva Rehak: Complement if that's the word.

Chris Blanchard: I like that.

Eva Rehak: Is that the right word?

Chris Blanchard: Yes that's the right word.

Eva Rehak: Okay, it was a nice complement to the rest of the vegetables so both the two other farms, myself and Windy Hill, we did the CSA so we did the alternating but it just worked out fine. We were still in our first years of farming because me and Alain, we don't come from farming backgrounds and we just started on our land so Alison, she had 10 years back in BC so her and her partner they did have a bit more experience so it helped us, like our farm, get to where we are now and then I can talk about I guess the challenges later but that's the reason we joined, I guess we created the cooperative and why we're still in it. It helps us continue to bring all of our veggies every week and to have a fantastic table with everybody else.

Rebekah Frazer-: For us, one of the advantages is we would never have access to the Dieppe market as just our own farm. We could never have a big enough table, I say never, at this point we certainly couldn't fill a table and sustain it for the biggest, I think Dieppe is the biggest market in New Brunswick if not the second biggest, maybe after Fredricton. We have access to this really amazing market through the Organic Corner. We also have access to these really amazing mentors so we're the newest farmers and unlike Eva and Alain, Kevin and I didn't go to agricultural college so we have access to their expertise - to Alison, and to this very supportive community of farmers that for us just that is invaluable. I think it's with the idea that our farms are only as strong as the local and organic food movement is strong. It's not just about building up our farm but about building a movement and it felt very important and welcoming when at an AGM maybe last year, Eva and Alain said our role as a co-op is to help Ferme Terre Partagée reach their full potential. That was like wow. You can't do anything but trust these people if that's really one of this co-ops goals.

Chris Blanchard: Maybe that's a thing that I've seen so often in co-ops is that often it doesn't seem like everyone is looking out for each other and helping each other to reach their potential as individual farms. Can you talk about a way that the other farms in the co-op, besides just serving as a marketing outlet, have helped you guys reach your potential?



Rebekah Frazer:- Well certainly acting like beyond the marketing is just acting as mentors. We've gone to both Windy Hill and Alva in person just to see how they run their CSA's. They've opened up their computers and paperwork and everything to us. They're always just a call away or an email. That's on top of when you have a really nice batch of broccoli but there's already a farm that's bringing a lot of broccoli well just yeah, send it and maybe if the heads are a little bit bigger or smaller or there's any difference at all we'll put it on the table and we'll let the customers choose what they want instead of saying no, it's broccoli. It's the same thing. We're selling ours first. In that way we've really benefited.

Chris Blanchard: What have some of the challenges been with the co-op?

Eva Rehak: One of the challenges that I'm starting to notice is again our farm has been there and has grown so we are starting to reach our potential or I guess our limits for the Dieppe market. We are seeing that we could still sell a few more, whether it's broccoli or kohlrabi, have more consistency in that sense because there are some things that only come sporadically since again our primary sales are for CSA's. We could always adjust that and get better in that sense to have more of a flow of broccoli every week, kohlrabi, green onions.

I do notice that at the end each farm needs to start diversifying. I'm talking more about my farm I guess because when we go to the market when it's not our week we are getting into the, how do I say, into the storage crop so every farm has onions. Every farm has leeks and carrots and shallots. Some broccoli and cabbage. We need to go kind of out, I know Windy Hill farm is doing a lot of Asian kind of greens so they do some of the tatsoi or kind of a leafy Asian green. They do artichoke, they tried ginger this year.

It's trying to figure out little things that the two other farms are not doing so we can bring that and kind of diversity or differentiate ourselves from other farms. That's the challenge - is that we do have a lot of the same veggies. That's what I'm finding.

Chris Blanchard: You guys make those decisions as a group as far as who's going to pick up a new crop and run with it or is that something that each farm is really in charge of figuring out on their own?

Eva Rehak: That will be actually this, in December we talked; Me, Alison, and Kevin. We're the board basically and we decided that we'll have an earlier meeting to kind of talk about how this year has been and do the, I'm calling it the "seed meeting" because we'll talk about what crops basically do we want to include.

Do we want to have more of a continuous consistency at the market? If that is the case for broccoli which farm wants to take it on or do we split it amongst the three farms? That will be something we'll be talking about in about a month or so. We'll talk about who is going to do what.



- Rebekah Frazer-: At the same time every farm still has their own vegetables because again, again I'm emphasizing but we do all have the CSA's first so that is first and then market is second so everyone is going to have carrots and cucumbers and red tomato and broccoli but it's all the extra stuff that we're going to talk about.
- Chris Blanchard: Relative to the CSA, how much of each farm's produce is going to the co-op at the farmers market? Is it a 50/50 split or is it 80% CSA and 20% farmers market?
- Eva Rehak: I'd say almost, from mine, Rebekah may tell you differently but I'd say it's more 80/20 or 70/30 I guess. We do have, how many do we have, 80 shares about this year and so that roughly equivocates that we have to do 80 bunches of carrots and when it's our Saturday for the market we only have to do 50 bunches. There are also veggies, I do talk about carrots a lot, there are some veggies that we know to have constantly at the market such as carrots, beans, tomatoes.
- Those ones we do know that we will add an extra 5 beds of carrots, beans we plant every two weeks anyways. There are some things that we already calculate into it. Then other things, for example right now, yes again broccoli, we do only do our two beds or three beds and then we'll do another plot but it is mainly, I calculated for the market but we always add an extra 30% into our calculations anyways for losses whether it's bad germination, transplant like a bad transplant, or seasons not going well. That's why there's always that 30% but that 30% usually will, we never have a 30% loss so that 30% goes to the market afterwards.
- Chris Blanchard: It's really using, I might almost say using up a planned buffer at farmers market. It's not a dumping ground for your extras. It is something you expect to sell to and plan to sell to but it's also in that buffer where you have a little bit more flexibility than maybe you do with the CSA.
- Rebekah Frazer-: I would say yes, in the early years it was as you say the dumping, or I don't know, but it was the extra so the extra goes to the market. Throughout the years though now we plan for the market as well.
- Chris Blanchard: With that in mind how do you determine quality standards for the co-op? I know that when I was doing farmers markets we would bring stuff to market that was cleaner, it was fresher, it lasted longer, than a lot of the other farms. They are, you mentioned the importance of quality to your group. How do you guys create and then enforce those quality standards.
- Rebekah Frazer-: I think that's another of the challenges. Maybe not so much quality as just standardizing so even bunch sizes at this point and that's something that we have to work on this year and into the future is how do we standardize. Maybe going through each crop and what is a bunch and what quality do we



expect from that vegetable or from that bunch. I think so far it's just sort of been, and again the market manager's decision but every farm has pretty high standards for themselves and also when you know you're working with other people and you know you're going to be judged by other farmers maybe your standards are even higher. Then it will be up to the market manager to decide if that is not going on the table or if one farm brought whatever bunch of salad turnips and they're just not moving and you have this other farm's bunch that are way cleaner and shinier and better looking and you just decide to put them out and they start moving and that's okay. That's the market manager's decision.

Eva Rehak: I will also add that it is an education that we do to the consumer as well. We will sometimes bring our kale and our arugula that has bite marks in it so we do educate the people that we are organic so we do not spray anything so the insects will come and have a bite before we actually bring it to the market but again like Rebekah says, we do have our high standards that we will have the nice carrots but at the same time we'll wash it nicely and we can have a twisted carrot in our bunch as well. Again, it's just educating and if not we also do edge carrots which will be for as we call it our number 2 carrots so sometimes if they're too crooked or if they're a bit smaller or if they're too big we'll bag them as well. We do try to push as much vegetables to the market as we tend. We don't try to discard because it's a little ugly.

Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah and that's a good point. It's up to the farm if you want to take the risk that it won't sell because it's not as nice but it still fits with that value of education and avoiding food waste then yeah, send it. It doesn't hurt the co-op at all.

Eva Rehak: Just more variety.

Chris Blanchard: I wonder if you've had any pushback from farmers at the farmers market about the fact that you guys are selling as a group and therefore have what some people might perceive as being an unfair advantage?

Eva Rehak: None at all that I've seen. Most people are congratulating us, seeing that it's a good thing. People love us at the market.

Rebekah Frazer-: Eva is really good at going around and trading stuff at the end of the market and so she knows everyone and talks to everyone and gets all kinds of other goodies from people too.

Chris Blanchard: She makes friends with the strawberries right?

Eva Rehak: I'm the market gypsy basically but the strawberries, I can never trade them because they sell all out. There's no trade with strawberries.

Chris Blanchard: All right. With that we're going to take a break, get a word from our sponsors and then we'll be right back with Eva and Rebecca.



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

The Farmer to Farmer podcast is made possible with the generous support of Vermont Compost Company, makers of Fort V and Fort Lite body mixes for certified organic transplant production. While it may seem early to be thinking about next year's greenhouse season you don't want to miss participating in Vermont compost companies fall pre-buy program. When you order Vermont Compost potting soil for next years growing season you can save significantly on the finest potting soil that I personally have ever used. There are many great options for significant savings. Vermont Compost company organizes shared truckload weeks where they organize and group orders by state or region. When you place your order to ship on one of these shared truckloads they offer discounts on the purchase of your potting soil, plus they consolidate the orders so growers also save on shipping fees.

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All right and we're back with Eva Rehak and Rebekah Frazer- Chiasson, and again my apologies for butchering the French, from up in New Brunswick. We were talking just a little bit over the break and Rebekah and Eva were telling me about some work Eva has done with the National Farmers Union there in Canada and particularly in New Brunswick regarding the child care subsidy that's available to employees in that area.



Eva Rehak: Yes, when we first had our first child back in 2009, in our second year she was 16 months and we had her from March to August and at the end of when we took her out somebody said that there's a subsidy that we can be allowed to have two days paid per week that I should give it a try. I gave the government a call and basically they started asking me questions and as soon as I said that I was self employed they said I was not eligible. After that it was in 2013 that we started tackling this with the NFU, the National Farmers Union. Basically we did change it that if you are self employed you are eligible but in our case we we're in a partnership so that kind of nullified our access.

Then this year Rebekah had her child go in January so she kind of went to look if she was accessible and was allowed so I gave it a shot just to see where we were at. I called and asked if we'd be able to access it. Last year we incorporated our farm and because we have a third partner on the board or in our corporation we weren't again eligible. That was kind of our outcome - that would be the word. That would be where we're at basically.

Chris Blanchard: Okay. In the meantime what have you done for child care arrangements?

Eva Rehak: Well, like we say, the first one is in grade 2. The second one has started kindergarten and the third one kind of tags along still. We've always managed where Alain was usually the one outside. I helped out as much as I could when I could. I either took the kids with me. Sometimes we switched that he stayed inside or took care of the kids and I went out but we just always worked around it. My family comes down at least once a summer, my mom for about 2 to 3 weeks so that always helped out. Last year and this year we finally had an employee on our farm so that helped out alot.

Rebekah Frazer-: In our case which is totally different. We only have one child and I can't imagine juggling the three. I mean Eva is an incredible human being.

Eva Rehak: Blush.

Rebekah Frazer-: In an effort, partly in an effort to bring attention to the fact that New Brunswick offers this subsidy for low income New Brunswickers which is great. Better access to daycare yet it's unavailable for New Brunswickers that are self employed and that are providing employment in their community so in an effort to shed light on that situation but also to see if there was interest in our community in an alternative economy kind of exchange. We offered vegetables in exchange for someone to care for Hugo over the summer. Not in any sort of commitment kind of way. We were really just expecting like hey I can drop by today and take him out for a walk in his stroller for an hour and yeah that's great come by and we'll give you some of our seconds or some vegetables that we pick out of our garden in exchange.

What ended up happening is that a neighbor of my grandparents saw that, because we had posted this on Facebook and she wrote me and said, hey I



could take him three days a week. I was like, whoah. Do you know how many vegetables you would be getting in exchange for that? She was like don't worry I'm on leave from work. I think this would be good for me. It was just like an arrangement that we couldn't have dreamed of a better arrangement and we gave her a share of our CSA, so every week I would drop off a basket of vegetables and Hugo was so happy there. We had some other people who did the more like drop in once or twice here and there so that was just amazing for us. The fact that we could both have this awesome exchange without the exchange of money, just vegetables and somebody caring for our child was really awesome for us.

Chris Blanchard: On your farms, I think it was Rebekah that was talking about how really your husband ended up doing most of the farming and you did the inside work is that right?

Eva Rehak: I said that, Eva.

Chris Blanchard: Okay. I'm sorry. Eva.

Eva Rehak: That's okay. Yes so I mean I still worked.

Chris Blanchard: Right. I mean clearly.

Eva Rehak: I do more of the planning. You can ask Alain if you need confirmation but no, when it comes to planning usually it's me for the seeds or what's coming to be sold that week I would always make the schedule. Ordering seeds and things like that we still do together but the big plan of when to seed, what to seed, how much, Alain made a format but usually I worked on that and emails to our partners I took care of that. Facebook he was more the one doing it but office stuff came down to me yes.

Rebekah Frazer-: I think what's important and anyone who runs a CSA or small farm will know is that that it is just as much farming as being out on the BCS because you can be running the BCS as long as you want. Nothing is going to happen if you don't know what needs to be planted and when and in what quantities and what needs to be harvested.

Chris Blanchard: I think Simon Huntley said just a couple of weeks ago on the show that farming without marketing is basically just running a compost pile. Eva, you've described your role. Rebekah is yours similar on your farm?

Rebekah Frazer-: It is. I do like Eva was saying, I do most of the communication with CSA members. I do the harvest list and a lot of the planning and variety selection.

Eva Rehak: We still get our hands dirty.

Chris Blanchard: Well yeah.



- Eva Rehak: We'll still go out and harvest. I don't know if it's right to say, you can probably edit it but sometimes I'll put them in front of the tv and I'll sneak out for a few minutes and it will be me and Alain pulling out the carrots or washing them, benching them, or we'll have a late night once the kids are asleep we'll bring in our crates of again carrots or salad mix and we'll be bunching together and bagging and stuff like that. Again, we still get our hands dirty. It's just you do see the men a little more outside but sometimes we'll switch it up.
- Rebekah Frazer-: It's something that I'm struggling with as having a first child which changes your life obviously but also your life as a farmer and for everyone involved. More laundry and more planning around food and more everything else but yeah, if you have one and they go for a nap and you put the baby monitor out and you're on the tractor and you kind of forget for an hour that you actually have another human you're responsible for, not just plants and animals.
- Chris Blanchard: You're not going to get in trouble with child protective services for saying that on the podcast are you?
- Eva Rehak: No but I mean it's just like when you hear all the stories of before I guess, we're leaving theirs in their crib or at home but I mean you always hear the stories of the moms that take them when they go milk the cows or they'll put them in the hay loft or something like that to keep them occupied. It all comes down to you try to work around kids and family and for me I always thought that family and farm, it goes together. I'm not saying that with kids you're farm is not going to grow or continue but I see it as the next generation. For me it touches me that I want my kids to not necessarily follow in my footsteps because I didn't follow in my parents but just have this life and to see and to have that option, to have that opportunity so for me it's just a big part.
- As I've heard, we started our farm and it doesn't happen often but our first year we had child and farm so it was like two babies at once but we just kind of plowed through it and as stressful as it was my big motto for myself is no one else is going to do this for me. This is what I want and I'm just going to keep pushing. We're in our seventh year as Rebekah mentioned, three kids later, we're still standing. We are sometimes sweating but we're still standing and another year is coming.
- Rebekah Frazer-: I'm sure there are so many listeners that probably have so many tricks of carriers like thank gosh for baby carriers.
- Chris Blanchard: No kidding.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Thank gosh for adaptable babies and I think in part he's adaptable and in part he has no choice. He's been in a front or back carrier through every season and every job on the farm whether it's on a tractor or weeding or harvesting and what do you call those exer-saucers you know? He doesn't really like it that much but you plop him in there and you can do a job for 15 min and then



if you leave them in the middle of a field at least it takes them a long to cross it.

Chris Blanchard: To get to anything dangerous.

Rebekah Frazer-: To get into trouble. All these tricks I'm sure we'll be learning them all our lives too at different stages.

Eva Rehak: Also I'd like to add that Rebekah does it with Hugo now but with our first one we took her to the markets too. We started at a smaller one. I don't think I'd take a child to Dieppe because it's very big but we started at a small one and she would take naps at the market. She would smile at everyone whether it made more sales I don't know but -

Rebekah Frazer-: Oh yeah, Hugo is definitely our biggest marketing advantage.

Chris Blanchard: You may as well get some value out of him right?

Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah. Get a lot of likes on Facebook at least.

Chris Blanchard: That's funny.

Eva Rehak: I mean, I do. I don't use my children in that sense but if people ask, is this any good? Like pea shoots I'll say you know my three year old will eat a whole bag of pea shoots and ask for more. My children sell the vegetables. As soon as I say that my kids eat it and it's not because they live on a farm but they genuinely like it. It's amazing.

Chris Blanchard: On that marketing note when you guys are doing, to take a little bit of a pivot and talk about your work with your farms rather than just talking about your kids - When you guys are marketing your farms on Facebook, are you also marketing the co-op or do you tend to focus that energy just down on your CSA program?

Eva Rehak: We try to make it clear that the Organic Corner, because one year just walking through the Dieppe market you just see the sign. You might think, if you don't know us, that's just a farm that's called the Organic Corner. We try to make it clear to people that these are four family farms that have families that have faces and that have stories so part of the way we can share those stories is through Facebook. We can share whatever each farm posts through the Organic Corner and partly we've been talking about using some of our surplus money to make funds of the Organic Corner but underneath who are the farms of the Organic Corner and pictures and you know, one or two lines of a story so that people can get a sense of who it is that they're buying from.

Rebekah Frazer-: When we also do use Facebook, Coin Bio or the Organic Corner has it's own page as well as each of our farms so sometimes we'll directly put on Organic Corner. I know that when Kevin, he's great with Instagram so he does little



videos or pictures and he'll post that either directly on their farm and then share it through Coin Bio or sometimes straight through Coin Bio and then tag Partagée or Alva farm and we'll share that post. We do our own individual posts when it comes to CSA saying hey this is what you'll have in your shares and then later on in the week, hey this is what's going to the market. Find us at the Coin Bio with also cooperation ... sorry. Find us at the Dieppe market under the Organic Corner with the cooperation of the three other farms that we mentioned. We do make the distinction that we are our own family farms with our own families but we are also the Organic Corner trying to work together.

- Eva Rehak: That way we can harness the power of each other's followers too.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Yes.
- Chris Blanchard: Now for your CSA, markets Rebekah you mentioned that you're located 100 kilometers away and Eva is located on the other side of town it sounds like. Are you guys competing for the same customers in the CSA?
- Rebekah Frazer-: We're further from Alva farms than we are from Dieppe so we're about 150 maybe kilometers from each other. We focused our CSA energies in the north of the Province, well more specifically near Miramichi at this point. One of our values I guess or things that we see as being pretty important is providing organic food to the northern part of New Brunswick because there's a growing movement. There's not hundreds by any means of organic farmers in the south of New Brunswick, South Eastern New Brunswick but there's many more than in the North Eastern part of New Brunswick and we consider ourselves just at the edge of the North East. We focused our energies CSA wise and market, because we have a market in Miramichi as well on that part of the Province. We have a few people, mostly friends, who pick up our CSA in Dieppe.
- Eva Rehak: I will add that from my point of view, I do not see a competition with the CSA customer base. We did increase from last year 30% and I think we will increase again next year. If Terre Partagée wants to come get customers or we get to say partners because they do take a part of the share and if it's a bad year then they will also not benefit, that's why we call them partners. They can also get some. There are always farms popping up around Moncton and we have not seen a decrease in our numbers. I don't see a competition.
- If anything we work together because I know that Kevin and Rebekah, they weren't going into Dieppe and people were asking about shares and then they just passed along our names to those people. We still help each other out even if it is CSA and not Organic Corner.
- Rebekah Frazer-: It doesn't mean that we, even if we were in the same geographic location like Eva was saying, we wouldn't see it as competing. We're only as strong as the movement is strong and there's still lot's of opportunity for growth. Some



people will only come to a CSA because they know me or they know Kevin or they know Eva and Alain and that is what's going to bring them into this world of local food and of Dieppe market and of the Organic Corner and nothing else other than the fact that they know us will bring them to a CSA.

Eva Rehak: Also there are some people that still are learning about CSA. Moncton I think the population is 125,000 roughly and there are still people that don't know what it is so there are still more people discovering it and there's still more.

Chris Blanchard: It is something that is always surprising to our little world. Sometimes it seems like CSA is everything but you go out and say that word sometimes and I've even been in groups of vegetable growers where people have said, Can you stop and tell me what that means?

Eva Rehak: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Blanchard: I'm like woah. It's always surprising. It's easy to think that the world is about local food and about organics and sometimes realizing how much bigger that world really is can be a little bit of a shock. What do you guys see for the Organic Corner going into the future?

Eva Rehak: There's quite a few options and quite a few routes we can take. The main thing is at the Dieppe market we are starting to hit a peak. We aren't there yet. Again we can diversify or have things at more of a constant week to week but we do see the expansion of the Organic Corner. We are looking into either diversifying, going into another market, the Moncton market and if not maybe doing selling, I wouldn't go to grocery store but there is this Dolma foods which I guess Rebekah can you explain?

Rebekah Frazer-: It's like a local grocery store. They carry local and organic and specialty foods.

Eva Rehak: Then other than that restaurants maybe we can supply with Organic Corner. Then definitely like if it starts becoming a big brand we're always thinking if we want to start doing t-shirts and bags or getting a big truck for basically the transportation and keeping everything cold. Right now that's I guess what we're seeing.

Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah. Another market would then allow for more priority farms. Then you could have two farms. There's many ways that it could work but because there's three farms right now that have a lot of the same fruits and vegetables so you could have two priority farms, one at each market and then one sort of complementing both of them. I think that would be an interesting formula especially if it's Moncton and Dieppe because nothing would change transportation wise. The two markets are maybe 15 minutes apart from each other. Another option, and logistically would be a bit more complicated but like I was saying the north eastern part of the province is kind of wide open right now for organic farms, organic food. Clearly it's a smaller population, more scattered but there's a lot of hunger.



We have gone to Caraquet which is almost as north east as you can go. It's maybe 200 kilometers north of us to sell meat, poultry and sausage and ground beef. People just go crazy because there's really no place to buy local and organic so yeah logistically it would be more complicated because it's much further away from all of us but especially from the three farms that are closer to Moncton but that might be something worth looking at as well, how we could facilitate that and maybe our farm could take on sort of a different role because at this point when either Alva farms or Windy Hill is often the center of bringing our produce and coordinating for the market but it could be the other way around.

Eva Rehak: Another thing that we are kind of looking into but again our criteria is that they need to be certified, is trying to find different produce to add to already to our table. We do have the vegetables, some of the fruit but we can always get more berries. Look at some maple syrup producers or again the meat as well if we find some certified organic. That's another thing that we're also looking into is trying to see who we would like to add and what else we would like to add to the table.

Rebekah Frazer-: And a way for each existing farm to diversify or find how their uniqueness in the co-op. That's something that we're interested in is livestock and eggs. If we could have certified organic eggs at the Dieppe market I think that would be a huge bonus for the Coin Bio. Same with chicken or turkey or other meats. Obviously we'd have to look at refrigeration which would be an investment but that's something that we can be considering for the amount of money we're accumulating.

Eva Rehak: Basically stay tuned. Our AGM is in the winter.

Chris Blanchard: All right. One last question, really specifically about the co-op, I've mentioned earlier I've seen a lot of these come and go. It seems like what you guys have is working. Why do you think it's working? What is it? What's your magic sauce?

Eva Rehak: Well tell us. I don't know. I guess one of the really big things is we started small and we're still staying small without really going big so there's not much investment that went into it. We're all kind of friends too. We don't want the friendship to get in the way but I think that's also something that helps with the communication, just if we have ideas we bounce them off each other. We're not really too shy to be like you know this isn't really working, maybe we should talk about it. I think that, yeah, we just have that openness and that we communicate. Communication is a big key.

Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah, I would say definitely, I'm not sure what the magic is but communication has a lot to do with it and that's a rule that in this case the three or four women have taken on. Honesty and trust -



- Eva Rehak: Trust. We trust each other, yeah.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Trusting that people have each other's best interest in mind and at heart. Sometimes some of the things that we've found challenging like quality control, standardization; it's easy to get frustrated if there's a farm you think isn't following in line but when you really remember who that person is and what they're contributing to the co-op and what they've already given you, it's like okay yeah clearly this isn't them being, I don't know what the word is ...
- Chris Blanchard: Negligent or irresponsible.
- Eva Rehak: Yeah it's just something that has to be -
- Rebekah Frazer-: They're not doing it purposefully.
- Eva Rehak: It's just something that has to be addressed and it's nothing more than that.
- Rebekah Frazer-: It's usually if we see something on a Saturday we'll address it right away and then it will change for next week. If we bring in a new item and we're like agh. This year I tried dehydrating, selling dehydrated produce so cherry tomatoes, leeks, and sweet peppers and stuff and I had no idea for how much so I just kind of introduced it and I ask everybody what their opinion is and so it's really working as a team. You're not an individual in this thing.
- Eva Rehak: I think you know you say you've seen ventures come and go and I think we will only continue with the Organic Corner as long as it's beneficial to each farm and to us as a co-op.
- Rebekah Frazer-: That's the main thing that you said and as Alain has said that the cooperative is there to, I forgot how Alain said it, to bring the best out of that farm, to push them to get to their best. I think that's what the cooperative is here to do. As long as we keep pushing. Does that make sense?
- Chris Blanchard: That makes sense. All right. With that I'd like to turn to our Lightning Round here at the end of the show. Eva what's your favorite tool on the farm?
- Eva Rehak: Oh geez, my favorite too? Really my hands. They can weed, sow, chop. Yeah, no it's my hands and not wearing gloves. I need to touch the earth.
- Chris Blanchard: Rebekah how about you?
- Rebekah Frazer-: I wish I knew the name for this so you'll have to explain but it's a transplanter. It's very old so it attaches behind the tractor and it has two wheels that have these clamps so it's for bare root so we use it for planting strawberries and it's my favorite tool because it has so much history and Rogersville used to be the Canadian capital of brussel sprouts and this is what they were using to plant brussel sprouts so you're planting strawberries in May and people are literally



stopping on the side of the road and coming out and telling you about how they used to plant and who their planting partner was and how good they were and how fast they were. It brings out so many stories.

Chris Blanchard: I love that. That's so rich. I love that. As you guys have been going through setting up the co-op and growing the co-op where have you turned for information? What are your favorite resources for doing the work that you've done in the co-op?

Eva Rehak: Each other for sure.

Rebekah Frazer-: Alison.

Eva Rehak: Alison our Windy Hill farm has lots and lots of not only farming experience but co-op experience. She was a member of a co-op in British Columbia for 12 years and a bunch of other co-ops. As well we're all of us members of a larger cooperative called Really Local Harvest that's also a marketing co-op. As far as the structure of a co-op there's lots of resources in New Brunswick that are specific to New Brunswick that have been really awesome. There's the co-op council that's been very helpful.

Rebekah Frazer-: There's also, I'm going to add ACORN as well. They always have workshops and things like that. Podcasts, I don't know if I've ever listened to one but webinars as well. I've seen a few of those.

Chris Blanchard: Great. Rebekah what's your favorite crop to grow besides strawberries?

Rebekah Frazer-: Oh shucks, that's the easy answer. I think it changes year to year. I think one that you can follow throughout a whole season. Tomatoes, I just pulled our tomatoes out of the greenhouse. Our last row was last week and just like pulling on this huge stalk thinking whoa this was a seed in my hand in March or April. It's pretty amazing. Any crop that you can follow throughout a season like that I think is very cool.

Chris Blanchard: Eva, your favorite crop to grow?

Eva Rehak: I'm going to have to steal Rebekah's answer saying that it changes season to season. I do also like the tomatoes because they just have a fantastic flavor. Celery, I like celery. We didn't do it this year but that's the thing I like celery and other veggies in that sense that are different; that are hard to grow and that people are amazed to see that you can do that here. And watermelons. Were you going to say -

Rebekah Frazer-: Yeah I was going to say that's why Alva farms is so well known for melon.

Eva Rehak: Yes. I love our melons too. It's hard to choose one when you do 40 to 50 different varieties. It's hard. They're just all so tasty.



- Chris Blanchard: They're all so good. I like that you pick the one that really just proves that you're a badass.
- Eva Rehak: Ground cherries. I didn't even mention ground cherries. You just opened a whole can of worms now.
- Chris Blanchard: A whole can of worms - yeah. Once you get into ground cherries then pretty much everything is fair game after that.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Dehydrated. So tasty too.
- Chris Blanchard: Well you mentioned the dehydrated cherry tomatoes. There's almost nothing better.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Those are like candy. I don't even cook with them. I just eat them like that.
- Chris Blanchard: Eva if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing what would it be?
- Eva Rehak: Oh geez, plan more I guess and I don't know just keep at it. Don't give up.
- Chris Blanchard: Rebekah same question for you.
- Rebekah Frazer-: I still consider myself a very beginning farmer, so whatever I tell myself every day, just plant more so Eva said plan more. I say plant more also.
- Eva Rehak: Yup. That more. Plan and plant. It goes hand in hand.
- Chris Blanchard: Eva and Rebekah thank you so much for being a part of the Farmer to Farmer podcast today.
- Rebekah Frazer-: Thank you Chris. It was fun.
- Eva Rehak: It was my pleasure yeah.
- Chris Blanchard: All right so wrapping things up here I'll say again that this is episode 97 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 Coin Bio. That's C-O-I-N B-I-O.

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