



FARMER TO FARMER podcast

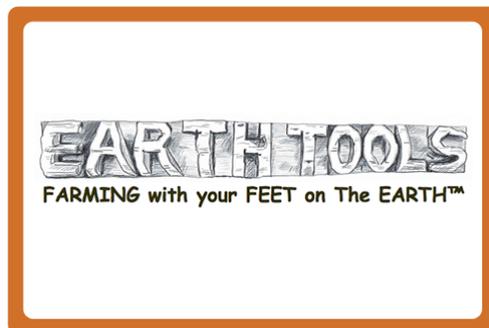


EPISODE 100

Chris Blanchard on Lessons Learned from the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, Consulting, and His Own Farm

JANUARY 5, 2017

TRANSCRIPT SPONSORS





This transcript brought to you by:

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

[Growing for Market](#): Get 20% off your subscription with the code “**podcast**” at checkout.

Chris Blanchard: It’s the Farmer to Farmer podcast episode 100 and this is your host, Chris Blanchard, and this is your guest, Chris Blanchard. For episode 100 several listeners requested that I either do an interview for myself or get somebody to interview me, so I invited my good friend Liz Graznak to do the job. Liz was also the first guest on the podcast, so it seemed to me like that would have some nice symmetry.

Liz reached out to many of the previous guests on the show to get their input on what to ask me and we dig into what I’ve learned from interviewing over 100 farmers since the show’s beginning during a drive to a Field Day in Minnesota. We explore how I came to farming in Iowa from an urban childhood in the Pacific Northwest, and Liz gives me a chance to share how my farm grew, the challenges we faced, and what led me to leave the farm behind to pursue my current work as a farm educator. It was a lot of fun to sit on the other side of the microphone from Liz and I hope you enjoy the show.

The Farmer to Farmer podcast is made possible through the support of [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 [BCS America](#). BCS’ two-wheel tractors are versatile, maneuverable in tight spaces, lightweight for less compaction, and easy to maintain and repair on the farm. Gear-driven, built to last for decades of dependable service, bcsamerica.com.

And by [Farm Commons](#). Strong, resilient sustainable farm businesses are built on strong legal foundations. Farm Commons provides practical legal resources to help farmers understand and respond to how the law affects them. Free guides and tutorials available at farmcommons.org.

Liz Graznak: Chris Blanchard, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer podcast.

Chris Blanchard: Well that’s kind of a weird thing.

Liz Graznak: We are so delighted to have you this morning.

Chris Blanchard: Liz, thank you so much for being willing to do this side of the interview.



Liz Graznak: It is my real honor. Thank you. I'm just going to dive in. I want to start off by thanking you for all of your hard work and dedication to advancing the farming movement that is taking place across our country. Beginning small farmers now have a voice and an educator providing them with practical skills and knowledge through the internet and through your podcasts. We are all acutely aware of the need for thousands of more small farms and if we are going to rebuild a resilient and viable food system. You are playing a very significant role in that effort. So thank you.

Chris Blanchard: Liz, it's really an honor to be able to kind of put a cap on my farming career by doing something like this. Just the reception that I've had is beyond anything I could have imagined. Of course you were there to kick it off.

Liz Graznak: Oh yes. Yes, I do remember that very fondly. Two years ago, almost just a month ago. I mean we did the recording in early 2015, right at the beginning of the year, so two years ago.

Chris Blanchard: Yep, yep. It's been a wild two years.

Liz Graznak: Wild, yes. I did want you to know that I reached out to a number of your past interviewees to get their input and feedback for this morning's interview and so we're going to ... I'm going to pull from a lot of their questions that they were wanting to ask you.

Chris Blanchard: Wow. That's awesome Liz.

Liz Graznak: We're recording the 100th episode of the Farmer to Farmer podcast which is absolutely incredible. You have covered an amazing amount of ground and dug into the lives of 100 successful farmers, innovators, and educators around the country. I'm going to ask you some of their questions and some of my own. The very first one is have you had any surprises or learned something unexpected in the conversations that you've had with these successful farmers?

Chris Blanchard: I think the biggest surprise that I've had was the number of people that have succeeded at setting boundaries around their farming work world. That wasn't something that I really had any modeling for and it's certainly not something that I ever did. It's something I've struggled with even after I gotten out of farming to kind of have not just be working all of the time and to put some limits on that. Yeah, I don't know. That was something the first time I heard it where somebody like, "Yeah, we work from eight to five," and it just, it stopped me in my tracks. I didn't know what to say next.

Liz Graznak: That does lead into a sort of theme around a bunch of questions that I have, so I'm just going to hang on for a second to ask you those questions. Would you say that setting boundaries then is a theme maybe that you've heard



and had these conversations throughout all of the podcast, or is there another, some other theme that you think maybe has resonated sort of through all of your interviews?

Chris Blanchard: I don't know that there's actually been a theme that have resonated through all of the interviews. I think that's one that's come up a lot and it's certainly the one that I've kind of fixated on. We've done such a diversity of people. I've had folks on the show that have been farming for 30 or 40 years, and I've had folks on the show that have been farming for three, and at all kinds of different scales. I mean if nothing else it's that people are so willing to share information.

I remember one time talking to my mom about giving a workshop at a conference on a topic that had to do with farming. She was like, "Okay, so you're going to go to a farming conference and you're going to give away the information about how you run your farm?" It's funny because being in the organic farming movement, that was the first time I'd ever encountered the idea that anybody would be skeptical about that. Because it is such a sharing movement. I think that's certainly something that's come out everywhere. I mean the idea that I've gotten people on the show in June in Wisconsin, and they're like "Yeah, I can make time to make that happen," is a real testament to the importance of sharing knowledge in our community and the importance that everybody places on it.

Liz Graznak: I think everybody wants anybody that is trying to do what we're doing, we want people to succeed, and so we're willing to share.

Chris Blanchard: Senator Paul Wellstone from Minnesota he had this saying that we all do better when we all do better. Again, I want to emphasize, 100 episodes in now, we get anywhere between 8 and 15,000 downloads per episode which to me is just insane.

Liz Graznak: It's awesome.

Chris Blanchard: But when I started this show, I mean if you rewind back to ... We started the show in February of 2015. It was the last weekend of February because I actually timed it to start at the MOSES Organic Farming Conference with three episodes in the bag. Throughout that spring it just wasn't that big of a deal. People didn't really know about it. Yet, when I was calling, people that didn't even know me were willing to be on a show even before it had a reputation. A lot of times now when I call especially beginning farmers and say, "Are you willing to be on the podcast," and they're like, "Oh, that'd be great, such an honor." I mean that's really cool. It kind of makes sense when you have a big distribution that it would be a big deal to be on the show. But even when the show was nothing, people were willing to throw in an hour and a half of their time and help make sure that we're all doing better, because we all do better when we all do better when we all do better.



Liz Graznak: Exactly. Who is on your bucket list for future interviewees?

Chris Blanchard: Gosh, Jean-Paul Cortens is somebody that I've wanted to get on the show, and I'm still trying to convince Richard de Wilde at Harmony Valley Farm to get on the show. I think those would be my two big ones. I mean once you hit Eliot Coleman, I mean what else? There's a couple of others. I'm always interested in the challenges so I want to try to get like, I'd love to get Wendell Berry on the show. Even though he doesn't do screens. The same thing with Anne and Eric Nordell on Pennsylvania, the horse farmers. They don't do email. So I think just ... I love those kinds of challenges. We've figured out how to get people on the phone and I think we're still working out some of the quality issues with all of that.

It's funny in the podcasting world, when most of the conversation is how you get other people on air who have Skype accounts and headsets. The idea that I'm talking to farmers who oftentimes, first of all, getting them to sit still for 90 minutes is pretty hard. I've had interviews where people were out weeding while they were on the phone. But then also just dealing with the technological barriers has been really interesting.

Liz Graznak: I'm not the only one. I feel like you are in a super unique position, given your history, your history farming, as an educator doing these podcasts. I think that you just have a very unique perspective on the world of small scale sustainable agriculture. I guess one thing is how has the podcast maybe has it changed your view of what farmers are doing and how we're doing it?

Chris Blanchard: For me, I guess I've been surprised by the diversity of farm models that seemed to be working. I mean when you read an Eliot Coleman book or you read a book by JM Fortier and you go, "Oh yeah, that's ... There's a thing. There's a way to make the farm work." But I've talked to people who were doing three acres with no employees and are succeeding very well. That was Emily Oakley out in Oklahoma. Somebody like Zoe Bradbury in California who's doing this ... Her whole house. She's got the land shared and how her family has actually three different businesses but they're all marketing things together.

I think it's really easy to go, "Oh, there's one model that works." There's 100 models that work or 1000 models that work. All of them come with the things that work great and the things that don't work great and the things that could be better. But I guess that to me has been the most surprising thing, that there's just how many different farms are actually making it work in different ways in different places. Oklahoma, really?

Liz Graznak: New Brunswick.

Chris Blanchard: New Brunswick, yeah.

Liz Graznak: [inaudible 00:12:08] Oh my gosh.



Chris Blanchard: I know if New Brunswick up on the map.

Liz Graznak: It's freaking cold up there.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, and people are making it work. I don't know if that's a testament to the will of farmers, if that's a testament to organic growing or a testament to the local food movements. But somehow I think it speaks to something that's really real about food and food as a tool for communicating with people, that I think no matter where you go there are people that want to engage at that. The trick being then to find how do you engage those people in the right way to make it work in your operation.

Liz Graznak: At BCSA or a farmers market or a co-op or any number of these different models that people are making work.

Chris Blanchard: Or choosing to take your produce three and a half hours to market, or choosing to farm part time because that's what's going to work in your situation.

Liz Graznak: But making those connections with the community.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah. And that seems ... Again, when we talk about themes with the podcast, you should've sent me that question in advance. I probably would've come up with something eloquent to say. But I think that's one too for me around CSA especially that's come out, is how important that community aspect really is. It's something that I've thought about for a long time and I know I've kind of hinted at this as we've had those conversations about CSA, but this idea of connection and community, it really, Dan Zasada and Bridget Spann which I did I think after I actually talked to Dan Kaplan of Brookfield Farm which to me was one, again, that was ... I walked away from that episode almost in tears because it was so ... I was like, "This is what I want to do. This is the conversation that I wanted to be having." It really, it hit me at a really deep level and I know it had ... I think that was maybe the first episode where people were like, "You've got ... There's something here you that you need to hear."

But anyway, so when we talked to Dan and Bridget they talked about bringing people to the farm. It wasn't so much about having a personal relationship, but like creating a space where people could come and find a peace, and find some peace in their lives and really experience what farmers get to experience all the time. I don't know. To me that kind of combined what Dan Kaplan talked about, about the relationship and the controlled experience of loss and what other folks have talked about, about knowing your CSA members. I think this would be something that if we go back to one of the very first, very early episodes, it was episode five with Patty



Wright talking about their farm up in Prairie Farm Wisconsin and how they bring those people to work on the farm and that was a requirement.

All of those things to me kind of come together around CSA and say, it's got to be something more than just vegetables and boxes. I think that's a message that really kind of percolates throughout the other marketing outlets too, whether it's a farmers market or whether you're selling wholesale. Somehow your food, if you're going to play the small market farmer game, somehow your food has to resonate at a deeper level with people. It has to be a tool for connection in some way.

Liz Graznak: Yeah, because it's just, you could just go to the grocery store. Right?

Chris Blanchard: That's right. That's right. It's an interesting line to walk because I think there is some need for us to emulate what the grocery stores are doing. If we really want to scale up the food system, we got to get food into grocery stores. Brian Bates talked about that. I happen to agree with him. That's where people buy their food. People don't buy food at farmers market. They don't buy food through a CSA. Unless you live in a place like Madison, Wisconsin. But for the most part people are buying their food at the grocery store, so we've got to get it there for them and it's got to meet certain standards and look a certain way to be able to fit in that slot on the shelf. But at the same time there's that question of how do we make it real for folks and how do we maintain that, that thing that's special about the local food movement.

Liz Graznak: I want to just jump back just a little bit and I think it is a good place to segue into talking a little bit about your history and your history farming and farming for other people and then farming for yourself and owning your own business and your family and then your transition out of farming and ... Your podcasts are full of success stories. But we obviously are very aware that there's a lot of small scale of farmers out there that have real challenges and that end up not making it. I guess I was hoping you could speak to some of the struggles and the failures and the sacrifices that it takes to do what we're doing and to be successful.

Chris Blanchard: I think it's hard to say that the sacrifices are the same for everybody. Farming it's more than a job. It is a lifestyle choice. I think that always has to be balanced with the fact that it's also a job. You've got to show up and you've got to do the work and you've got to be smart about it. You have to be in, you have to find markets where people want your food. You have to do a good job of growing it. You have to do a good job of doing the post harvest handling. You're making investments.

One of the things that strikes me again and again, and this I would say is less from the podcast than it is for some of the consulting work that I've done, is



how many farms I've gone to that where people have, I mean people have obviously sunk their life savings into this, everything they've got. That's what I did on my farm, everything I had, and working 60, 70, 80 hours or more a week to try to make the farm give back in some way. It just, it doesn't always work. I think that's something that's hard any time you're presenting something like a podcast or workshops at a conference.

Most people don't want to talk about what went wrong on their farm. Most people I think don't really want to hear about what went wrong on the farm. I think there's something to that. There's certainly something to be said for focusing on success that we tend to, we move towards the things that we pay attention to. I think it is, there's a lot of good to be had in holding up the successful farms. But I think there is certainly, there is something to be learned from the farms that don't make it from the farms that are struggling. I think it's one of the saddest things that I see, is farms that are beating their heads against the wall year after year after year. It's not always farms at the same scale. I mean, I've seen this on farms that were, that are over 100 acres doing millions of dollars in sales, and I've seen it on farms that are struggling to break 50,000, that they're just, it's again and again and again and the same issues and never really being able to get ahead.

I haven't really parsed out what the difference is in those operations and I wish I had a grand theory about it. A lot of times people come to me and say, "Well, you should write a book Chris," and it's like that's the thing, that's the thing I feel like if I was going to write a book, that would be the question that I wanted to answer, is what is it that makes farms work and what is it that makes them not work. I don't necessarily have an answer for that.

Liz Graznak: That's another question that I got from one of our, one of your podcastees. That's one of the questions that I got.

Chris Blanchard: It's vexing. It's a vexing question because, well, as a consultant I'd love to be able to answer that question. I'd be rich, and so would all my clients. But ...

Liz Graznak: I will say that from just trying to start to like parse it out you would absolutely be able to give let's say recommendations on what should all new beginning farmers, what should be on their reading list. That's one of the questions. Okay?

Chris Blanchard: You want me to hit on that?

Liz Graznak: Let's go onto that, yeah. Because we can tackle it from small questions and then maybe the answers to all of these small questions might give us some insight into your, what makes a farm work.



Chris Blanchard: Great. Okay, so we were going to ask about the reading list. I would say, and I don't want to just sit here and plug my own book, but I'm going to go Fearless Farm Finances which I helped to coauthor. I would say it might even be the first book that you should read if you're interested in farming. For me one of the revelations that happened in my business was when I switched from reading Wendell Berry books and Eliot Coleman books to reading books that came out of the business section at Barnes & Noble. Because that's really the point at which I said, I ... And this, the entree to this was through employees and my abysmal failure as an employee manager and the way that that almost wrecked my farm.

I had to go and learn how to do that. Eliot Coleman doesn't talk about that. JM doesn't talk about it. Wendell Berry doesn't talk about it. These are business skills and there's a ton of stuff to be learned from the business world. The Fearless Farm Finances book, I think the part about that book that I think is so exciting as somebody who works with farms, is that it gives you the tools to measure the thing that lets you farm next year. The thing that lets you farm next year is having enough money to farm next year. Most farms, most market farms don't have a good sense of whether they're making money, and how much money they're making if they are, which actually this podcast can come out at a good time of the year because we're going to go live with this right after the first of the year. That's a great time to be running your balance sheet, your accrual adjusted income statement. I don't want to spend a lot of time on that but I think that's a really important piece.

The accrual adjusted income statement basically means that you take the dollars and cents that float into and out of your farm, and then you make some adjustments based on the changes in your assets and liabilities. How much money you owe or how many vegetables you owe and how many vegetables you have, and as well as changes to tractors and box numbers and all that stuff, because those are things that I think on businesses our size, if you buy a couple thousand dollars worth of boxes in December, that has a big effect on how your numbers look compared to just buying a couple thousand dollars worth of boxes in January. I've seen, and I guess this is where I go, like people, this is where I see people get on the rat race.

Liz and I are doing the show. We've got the camera on. Even though you guys don't get to see it. I'm waving my hands around in front of me, making the gerbil wheel. A typical example of what I would see as a CSA, somebody decides they're going to start a CSA. They don't do a very good job with it because they aren't very good at growing vegetables. They get to the end of the year, they don't have enough money to start for next year, so they sell CSA shares in November and December, and it actually makes look like they had a really good year. But they owe a ton of vegetables to people.

What you've done then, if you don't have a good way of measuring that, is you've created an unrealistic expectation, because now you've sold CSA



shares twice in the same year. You're never going to be able to do that again. You're always going to be behind the eight ball on that hamster wheel. I think that's something that that way of measuring, and it's not all about the money, but money is what makes it possible to do what we want to do.

Liz Graznak: Absolutely.

Chris Blanchard: I think just the measurement of that and so I'd ... If I had one farming book that I could say to every client, "Read this and do what it says to do," that would be it.

Liz Graznak: That would be it. Okay. What skill set other than that, other than read this book, read maybe another book and be prepared that way, what skill set should all beginning farmers have in their tool belts?

Chris Blanchard: Wow. You basically need to know how to do everything and do it all really fast. I think employee management is a huge one. I would even go a step further than that and say relationship management, as actually looking that as a skill. I don't want to sit here and claim that I'm a pro at it. I'm good at talking about it. I know a good one when I see it and I know how to describe it. I know some ways to get there. But I think farming is, I mean it is all about relationships.

Liz, you and I talked about this actually on your episode, about your relationship with your neighboring farmers who, solid red staters and how you created a relationship with them that has actually really benefited your operation. The same principles go into that, I think go into managing employees. They go into managing children. They go into managing your relationship with suppliers and with buyers. Really I think learning about, learning those skills of relationship management, and particularly as they relate, I think employee management is a great avenue to enter that realm and to kind of systematize things around how you do that.

Liz Graznak: What about in your first, let's say two to three years of farming, what was one of the most important things that you learned in your very first couple of years? Because I think you're tackling of employees happened later on.

Chris Blanchard: Actually that was something that happen ... It depends on how we talk about my farming career, because I spent 10 years working for other farming operations including a couple of years managing operations before I started my own business, Rock Spring Farm. I guess I would say at Rock Spring Farm that employee management issue was one of the biggest lessons. But since I already talked about that, the other thing was weed control.



Again, you want to talk about things that wreck farms. It's drowning in weeds. Again, episode 13 we had Bob Cannard on, Bob at Green String Farm out in California. He's kind of famous for not ... Everybody goes, "Oh, he's famous for not controlling weeds." Well what's actually really interesting is that he does manage those weeds. He just doesn't eliminate all of the weeds, which I think again very cool idea if you can make it work. But managing your weeds is something where when you do that everything else gets easier. Not just a little bit easier. We're talking twice as easy, 10 times as easy sometimes.

I think making sure that you're staying on top of those weeds, that was the ... Our first year at Rock Spring Farm we planted way too many vegetables, which meant that ... Because planting is really easy, tilling things up with a tractor, planting them, that was easy. Then we were out there with our wheel hose trying to do the weed control. Then the harvest started coming in and then we were drowning in pigweed and lambsquarters and thistles and quackgrass and everything else. The worst is picking beans when you've got ragweed in the beans. Like I got hay fever. You got your nose right down in there.

When you do a good job of the weed control, your plants grow better, you've got less disease. That means there's less [inaudible 00:29:49]. Means there's more productivity on the plant because they aren't competing with the weeds for nutrients, light, water, which means you've got higher yields, which makes the harvest go faster. Plus, you're not having to search through the thistles to find the beans. All of that stuff coming together.

One of those lessons, and sometimes I can be a pretty slow learner. I had to get hit with again and again and again on how critically important weed control is. The thing that I want to say before I went back to Northeast Iowa to start Rock Spring Farm, that was in 1999, I spent a couple of years managing a farm on the coast of Maine, Beech Hill Farm that had been ... It had been managed by somebody else for the previous 10 or 15 years. I forget exactly how old it was. Kevin had done a really great job of weed control. I didn't realize what a gift that was to the farmer who followed him, that was me, because it made things really easy. It was easy to succeed in that.

I think if you can keep your weeds under control in years one, two, and three of your business, you're really giving a huge gift to your future farmer self, because when all of the other things on your farm start to get more difficult, which I think they do around year three, year four, then that's where ... Then, if you've done a good job of weed control prior to that and you've actually reduced the weed seed bank in your soil, and you don't have a bunch of perennial weeds and you've got the systems in place, wow, it just, it, life's better.



- Liz Graznak: Why is it that you think that things get more difficult in years three and four?
- Chris Blanchard: Maybe I'm biased because of my own situation. Year three was certainly when everything went to hell in a hand basket for us. We pulled it out of a hand basket and made some big changes that I think were really valuable. We learned a lot of good lessons. There's a joke. I mean, I tell a joke about the ... I don't get to do that very often on the podcast because I'm always on the other side of this conversation. Here's my joke. Liz, do you know why it takes three years to become a certified organic farmer?
- Liz Graznak: No.
- Chris Blanchard: Because that's how long it takes to grow a pony tail. Okay, you were a little late on the laugh there Liz.
- Liz Graznak: But I was laughing. You just couldn't hear me.
- Chris Blanchard: But I also think part of why we take that three years is that that's when the chemical crutch starts to fall apart. If you're not taking care of your soils, if you're not doing the right things by your farm, after three years those mistakes start to catch up to you. If you're not, especially on a vegetable farm, if you're not putting the nutrients back into the soil, the compost, but then also the absolute nutrients in there, you're doing a lot of heavy tillage. That doesn't ruin things in one year, but in three years, man, you can make a mess of things. Perennial weeds are relatively easy to keep under control the first time they crop up in your fields, but if you don't do it the next year they're bad and the third year they're a nightmare.
- I think that three years is also that point when relationships get hard. It's if you're not taking good care of your relationship, you can coast a certain distance on adrenalin, but you're going to run into a situation where it's those relationships become less sustainable at that three year point. It's where the penny falls. The shine comes off the penny at that point.
- Liz Graznak: Yeah, absolutely.
- Chris Blanchard: It's like
- Liz Graznak: It's not new and exciting anymore.
- Chris Blanchard: It's like it's the same old fucking thing day after day after day after day.
- Liz Graznak: And you have to figure out why you're doing it. If you're not making any money at it.



Chris Blanchard: That's right. That's right.

Liz Graznak: Do you have an opinion about what size or scale you think offers the best profitability quality of life for long term sustainability in our world?

Chris Blanchard: No. I guess the place where I do have an opinion about that is that there is no right answer. It depends on your personality. It depends on your goals. It depends on the price of land in your area and how much capital you've got to invest. Depends on the availability of credit for raising capital. It depends on your marketplace. It probably depends a lot on your soils and your season. I don't-

Liz Graznak: So many variables.

Chris Blanchard: ... think there is. So many variables. I just got done editing. It's going to be episode 98 with Mike Nolan who's making a living with \$80,000 of gross sales tractor scale five acres growing root crops, doing what everybody else is not doing right now. To me that really points to the fact that yeah, I think any ... There's room at any scale to be dramatically successful and there's room at any scale to fail dramatically.

Liz Graznak: I'm very anxious to listen to that, number 98.

Chris Blanchard: Mike was a lot of fun to talk to.

Liz Graznak: Would you say that ... Maybe you would notice this maybe mostly from your consulting services and you're just being on lots of different farms. Are there characteristics that you see from farm to farm that you think differentiate a struggling farm from a farm that is successful?

Chris Blanchard: Does the equipment work. In other words, when you go to turn on the tractor, does the tractor start? Is the rototiller ready to go in the field, and what does the weed control situation look like? It's not 100% on those, but I'd say it's 98% on those. You can look at how that farm's dealing with their weeds and dealing with their tractors and you know it's a really good indicator of everything else that's going on on the farm.

Liz Graznak: I would agree. Okay. Do you have a personal mission statement, and if so, would you share it with us? This comes from one of the interviewees.

This is something that I would tell everybody that they ought to have. You should have a written goal. I really like the holistic management three part goal that talks about quality of life and means of production and the future resource base that you're going to need to be able to do the means of production so that you have the quality of life that you want to have. I don't. I'll be honest about that. I just, I haven't put something like that together. I



guess where ... Without being eloquent the thing that I know in the back of my head is that I want to be involved in agriculture, I want to be involved in helping farms and farmers to succeed in whatever way they define that.

I mean obviously as long as we're on the organic and local side of things, I don't think it all has to be strictly organic or strictly local, but as long as we're kind of looking at those kinds of relationships, and just to be having an impact in that world. I'd say that's really, it's where, again I think I said this before, I feel like it's such a blessing to have a venue like the podcast that has been so well received and that so many people have told me is making a difference in their lives. I'd like to make the world a better place.

Liz Graznak: Just is the podcast going to continue? I mean, you're moving forward in many more interviews planned on the dock?

Chris Blanchard: Oh yeah, yeah, there's no ... I don't have an end in sight for the podcast. As long as we have the financial support that we've gotten from our sponsors to date and from individuals through our Patreon program and three individual donations on PayPal. Those, as long as I can make it work financially for me, for the amount of time that I have to put into it, yeah, I'll continue to do it.

Liz Graznak: You've been doing the Farmer to Farmer podcast and you've been doing some consulting for the last few years, which many of my friends have benefited from your fabulous knowledge and service. I know you've been kind of pulling back in your consulting recently. I was just wondering kind of why and what's going to be going on, what's happening in the future?

Chris Blanchard: I got some bad health last March and it's taken a lot of my time and energy and it's actually resulted to me being very fatigued a lot of the time. In the productivity world everybody would say, "Oh, there's 24 hours in a day, just like everybody else." It's like, "No, there's not anymore." I've just got less to work with. Because of that I've really decided to pull back on the consulting, pull back on the speaking, and really try to focus my energies here at home.

Liz Graznak: You just got recently married.

Chris Blanchard: I'm recently married, last spring. I've got a 15 year old daughter at home. I want to be around those people in my life and not spend so much time on the road. That's hard on everybody, including myself. We're looking at doing some online courses if I can ... When I get those together. I keep thinking that's going to come sooner than later and it keeps not happening. Then, yeah, and hopefully getting back into the writing and making some more resources available as we move forward here.

The one thing that I've decided that's really important to me is to continue to do the podcast. It is something where I felt really lucky to have the podcast because it is something that I was able to keep going. I had some



good help from my first assistant [Kristy Wates 00:40:27] and now my new assistant Karli Miller-Hornick. They've been really important in getting the episodes out once I get them recorded and edited. They're the ones that take care to get all that stuff online so that you guys can listen to it, and that's made a really critical difference for me. I think that if I want to have an impact on, again on, if I go back to my mission statement, it's not really a mission statement. I'm trying to think there's a good Jerry Maguire line about that, my favorite movie, but I can't remember what it is.

Liz Graznak: I love that movie.

Chris Blanchard: Anyways. I'm not going to go down that road. When I look at it and I say, "Well, how can I have the biggest impact," I think it is really by making things available through the power of the internet. It really is such a great resource for people and it does make it so easy for so many people to access the information in a way that it's a lot of fun to go and do a talk at a conference. It's a lot of fun to go and do the consulting. But I think that I can have a bigger impact by kind of [schooling 00:41:28] in here and developing the resources here at home.

Liz Graznak: So hey Chris, I think that this is probably a good time to take a little break, and we could get a word in from your sponsors.

Chris Blanchard: Awesome. Thanks Liz.

Liz Graznak: Absolutely.

Chris Blanchard: Perennial support for the Farmer to Farmer podcast is provided by Vermont Compost Company, helping plants make sugar from sunshine since 1992. Through 23 years of producing the best potting soils you can buy, Vermont Compost Company founder and owner Karl Hammer has stayed intimately involved in the company, working with a small staff of committed individuals to provide compost based potting soils chock full of microbial partners and humus bound nutrients.

[Vermont Compost](http://vermontcompost.com) is the real thing, built on consistency instead of glitz. Like the donkey on their logo, Vermont Compost potting soils aren't glitzy or glamorous, they're steadfast and consistent. Stubbornly making certain that your transplants can get everything they need from a few cubic centimeters of soil. Oh, and the donkeys are the real thing. You get a little bit of donkey manure in every batch of Vermont Compost potting soil. Feed your plants the very best, vermontcompost.com.

Perennial support is also provided by [BCS America](http://BCSAmerica.com). A BCS two wheel tractor is the only powered equipment a market gardener will need with PTO driven attachments like the rototiller, flail mower, power harrow, rotary plow, snow thrower, log splitter and more. You name it. You can probably want it



with a versatile BCS two wheel tractor. The first time I used a rototiller way back in 1991 it was mounted to a BCS two wheel tractor that spoiled me for life. When you get behind a BCS you can tell that it's built to the same commercial standards as four wheel farm tractors and has many of the same features. I've used other tillers and mowers and spent most of the time thinking about how much easier it would be with a BCS. Check out bcsamerica.com to see the full line up of tractors and attachments plus videos of BCS in action.

Liz Graznak: And we are back with Chris Blanchard and the Farmer to Farmer podcast. So excited to be here today with you Chris. I am interested in turning the wheels back just a little bit and I'd like to know how you came, what led you to start Rock Spring Farm?

Chris Blanchard: Well it wasn't a very straight path. I can tell you that. I'll go back to the beginning. I grew up in Seattle, Washington, and in high school I read a lot of Edward Abbey. For those of you who don't know Ed Abbey, he was a radical environmentalist. He was kind of one of the founders of the Earth First movement and he wrote a lot of books, were very lyrical as well as well as some books that were pretty rambunctious like The Monkey Wrench Gang about blowing up dams and stuff, which as a teenage boy that was really appealing to me.

Liz Graznak: And very exciting.

Chris Blanchard: But the thing that I liked about what Ed Abbey talked about was a lot of it was having real impact on the environment, on the state of caring for the environment in this country. I mean, obviously blowing up a dam is a pretty radical way of having a direct impact on things. I was interested in that. I had some things happen on my senior year of high school that kind of threw me off the track. I was supposed to go be a doctor or a lawyer or something like that and had a friend that passed away who was also in high school with me that year, and it really, it really threw me for a loop. I just like, I didn't know what to do with the information. I was like, I didn't know how to process it. I kind of, I went off of my path and took this sharp fear. I went fishing in Alaska, went and lived in Aspen, Colorado for a couple of years.

When I was in Aspen I found I decided that I did want to go back and get back into college and try to figure out a way forward. At this point I hadn't really had any thoughts about farming at all. I'd made some jokes about it. I was always known as kind of the ... I think I got voted the most liberal in my senior high school class or something. So I do remember making some sketches of notes of being an organic hippie farmer, but it was never anything I took very seriously. In Aspen, while I was in Aspen I found out about this place called Deep Springs College, which is this weird little liberal art school out on the California Nevada state line. It's 24 students out in the middle of the desert and it's, it happens to be an all male school. It's been-



Liz Graznak: All male-

Chris Blanchard: ... all male, yeah, and it's actually been around since 1917. One of the things that distinguishes Deep Springs is that it's all of the students, you go to school in the morning, you got class in the morning. Then everybody works on the working beef and alfalfa ranch in the afternoon. I thought I'm like, "Oh great. I'm going to go to Deep Springs College." I was like all about it. I'm like, "I'm going to go and I'm going to be a cowboy, and I'm going to read a lot of books and it's going to be awesome." I went and instead of being a cowboy they stuck me in the garden. So I was kind of disappointed. It was a let down. Because you want to be a cowboy or do you want to be a gardener?

Liz Graznak: A gardener.

Chris Blanchard: When I got there though the garden was actually about two acres in size. It was a big garden. We certainly didn't, we weren't JM40-ing it or anything like that, but we ... Well, we weren't doing anything close to that. I got a shovel and a collinear hoe. Those were my tools. I was like I did this and I just, I dove into it and I sang, "Inch by inch row by row going to make this garden grow," all day long every day, and at about three months in I woke up one morning and I said, "Oh, I got all the answers. This is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life."

For me like the garden answered all these questions for me about life and death and about the cycle of things. Things live, things die, it's just part of what happens. I found a real peace in engaging with living things in a way that I just hadn't before. I decided that's what I was going to do. Micheal Ableman at Fairview Garden was kind enough to give me an internship or an apprenticeship in the fall of 1991. That was out in Santa Barbara.

Liz Graznak: This was after you graduated?

Chris Blanchard: This was actually in my term off from this. Not everybody left during the summer at Deep Springs, so it was during my term off which happened to be in the fall of 1991. I went and worked with Michael Ableman at Fairview Gardens as an apprentice for two months. That was over in Santa Barbara. Came back, decided that I was going to go out to the University of Wisconsin to finish up my horticulture degree. Michael actually probably gave me some of the best advice I ever got. That I never took either. He said, "So you want to be a farmer, right?" I'm like, "Yeah." He says, "Well, why in the world are you going to go get a college degree?"

Good point. Although it certainly did help with getting some of the jobs. It got me to being a farmer. I don't know that it did actually make me a better farmer. I went to the University of Wisconsin. I worked on a potato research farm up in northern Wisconsin in Rhinelander. Did the hurry up course and got out of school in a year and a half at the UW, and in the meantime met



up with Richard de Wilde and Linda Halley who was then at Harmony Valley Farm in Viroqua, Wisconsin and worked there for the summer.

Really I think that's where I got a vision of what a farm, a vegetable farm could actually look like. Richard at that point was farming about 30 acres of produce. Now he's doing 100 and some odd, so it's a much larger operation. But it was for me, it really set the tone for very clean produce, working fast, working hard. I was so lucky to be a part of a very small team because it was Richard and Linda. For a lot of the summer it was just me. Then a whole crew of [inaudible 00:49:49] workers, but in terms of the people that were making decisions about what was going on on the day to day basis, I was just right there. I managed the packing shed.

While I was at school I met my first wife. I went back to Seattle. I worked in a nursery. I came back to Wisconsin. I worked in the care and improvement project at the University of Wisconsin and somehow managed to parlay that thanks to John Navazio into a job managing the gardens at Seed Savers Exchange into Decorah, Iowa. So we did and there I was raising seeds and heirlooms and all of that.

Left that job under less than auspicious circumstances, went out to Seattle where I was from, lived with my folks. If you ever want things not to do in your life, if you could possibly avoid it, is to live in your parents' basement with your two kids. Then that didn't work so well so we ended up moving up to Bellingham. I did some consulting work for Cascadian Farm when they had ... This was something that I think was really influential for me. They had just gone east of the mountains. They had said they'd given up on trying to get all of the growers west of the mountains to give them the consistent quantity and quality of produce that they needed, and they went out to conventional growers in eastern Washington and they said, "If you'll grow this produce organically, we'll teach you how to do it. But you guys fundamentally know how to grow vegetables for processing. All we need to do is make it organic."

It was really cool working with them. I got a job out in Maine. Again, thank you John Navazio at Beech Hill Farm on Mount Desert Island. I mentioned that earlier. I managed that farm for a couple of years and finally had scraped together enough savings through a little bit of luck to come back to Decorah, Iowa in 1999 and start Rock Spring Farm. We found this beautiful, beautiful piece of land. I think anybody who's ever seen the picture of it. Northeast Iowa is not like the rest of Iowa. It's hilly. It's actually valley country. It's the driftless region. It didn't get glaciated the last time the glaciers came south. We had five acres of really beautiful ground there. We bought a ... The farm was completely run down. The house, when you buy farm land, they value the house and the rest of the farm separately. The house was actually appraised at \$14,000 and the realtor said, "Oh, you guys can't live there." We're like, "Oh yes, we can."



Liz Graznak: Oh yeah we can. This is so familiar to me Chris.

Chris Blanchard: Typical farmer story, right?

Liz Graznak: Yeah.

Chris Blanchard: We bought the land in July, end of July in 1999 and by the end of August we were building greenhouses and it just, it ran from there.

Liz Graznak: And for how long?

Chris Blanchard: Rock Spring Farm, so we started August, 1999. I think I have ... Always, I get a little bit confused about the years on this, but I think I formally stopped selling product in the summer of 2014.

Liz Graznak: Like how many acres and then grouped to what?

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, let's start there. We started, we had five acres of really good bottom land at the farm. Kind of in the classic what you get in the driftless region, is you have these river valleys. At some point there was a beaver dam across it and all the soils silted in in there, and that made, that was the basis of our farm ground. We grew up to eventually we were growing up to about 20 acres of vegetables. We had about 30 acres at that point, about 30 acres under cultivation, so we were doing a pretty intensive cover crop rotation on that. But a lot of was very clay hillsides, really brought home to me how important good land is to farming and how easy it is to farm on flat ground.

The other thing about that funny, that five acres, that was five acres of tillable ground in the bottoms. Well what that meant by the time we took out the field roads and the ends to turn around in, and we actually had much closer to about four acres which actually made a big difference in our crop planning and really brought home to me the importance of actually measuring and really not just going on like, "Oh, we have five acres to fill up." But actually getting out there and going how many beds and how long is each of the beds and how are we going to fill those up, where the field road is going to go. We did ...

This was back again in 1999. We built some mobile high tunnels because one of the really neat things when I was at Beech Hill Farm in Maine is we were maybe an hour and a half away from Eliot Coleman. I'm not going to go so far as to say like Eliot, Eliot certainly wasn't like a mentor to me because I just wasn't in that situation at that time, but he let me come over and help him harvest spinach. We helped to move his greenhouses. He came over and visited our farm. That kind of, again, this very personal care for somebody who was young and getting started in the business was just, I mean it was so cool. I called Eliot on the phone and he's like, "Yeah, come on over." I'm like, "Whoa, this is crazy." Eliot also happens to live in the



same neighborhood where if anybody knows the book Blueberries with Sal, the common children's book, actually as you're driving over there from Mount Desert Island, you actually drive past these all these land marks from those books. It's kind of funny.

Liz Graznak: So that's how.

Chris Blanchard: Anyways sidebar. We built mobile high tunnels right off the bat. We were doing four season production that first winter, 1999, 2000. We started off. Decorah, Iowa was about 8,000 people in the middle of nowhere. It's like the economic center for where it is. It's an hour and a half from La Crosse. It's an hour and a half from Rochester, Minnesota. It's an hour and a half from Cedar Rapids in Iowa. Then it's about three hours south of the Twin Cities in Minnesota.

We started off our first year in 2000 we were marketing to at a farmers market in Rochester. We had a small CSA. We were doing the farmers market in Decorah. Really became disenchanted with the farmers in Decorah because we could take the same tomatoes. We could take to Rochester. We could sell them for \$2 or 2.50 a pound. If we took them to Decorah, we were selling them for 0.75 or else they wouldn't move. We were like, "Oh, this makes no sense at all whatsoever." So we just we moved our whole business up to Rochester, and in fact, had an opportunity where another CSA had gone out of business in the Twin Cities and they offered to market our CSA shares up there, to kind of help us get a toehold. This was in 2001. We made that leap up in the Twin Cities and really scaled up our operation.

Then established the CSA, picked up one food co-op, picked up another food co-op. This is where we started having like a lot of pressure on our land and we were going, "Oh, now we're going to have to start growing things on the ridge," and that was a mess, because it was in hay fields and it was this heavy clay icky soil and not suitable for vegetables very much. But we made it work. Then gradually just kept growing the operation not out of any, not going like there was a number that we were going to. Was just like every year we'd just get a little bit bigger and we'd grow a little bit more food, and get a little bit bigger and grow a little bit more food. Eventually rented some ground down the road. That's kind of how that worked in 2006.

Well, I would say the other thing we did in ... Well, in 2000 we built our first packing shed which was a slab of concrete with high tunnel over it and a little eight food by eight food walk-in cooler, which we actually, I think we did at our most about a quarter of a million dollars out of that little eight by eight walk-in cooler, which was a lot of cramming stuff in and rotating stuff. It really brought home to me the importance of having some excess capacity when you're doing stuff. Eventually we because of my experience at Harmony Valley Farm, we did a lot of work with root crops, a lot of work with salad greens in those early years. Eventually that led us into the



clamshell herb business which became very important to us starting in 2005, 2006. It was a real cornerstone of the operation for the rest of the time we were in business.

Liz Graznak: You then, you stopped farming 2010?

Chris Blanchard: I think it was 2014 that I actually started farming. I got a divorce in 2009. Divorce is really hard on farms. This is one of those reasons why I mean as a business decision, as a business decision putting an emphasis on your relationships is really important. Divorce is devastating financially. It came on the heels of a major infrastructure investment. We'd build a new packing shed. We built a new house on the farm Liz. Literally the house that we were in was falling down around us.

Really by 2013-14 it was becoming pretty apparent that I couldn't balance the demands of the farm and the demands of the rest of my life. I had a woman that I loved who wasn't part of the farm, Angie who, I got married to last spring. My daughter Isabelle, I had primary custody of her. Her mom moved away. I also had this other thing that was kind of developing to use an overused word organically. In 2008 I was approached by Margaret Smith at Iowa State University extension to work on a project about scaling up and about packing houses. That was what kind of launched my consulting business. All of a sudden I was just juggling all of these things. Oh, and then the other thing that was in all this, is that I was doing the ... I was also organizing a fair portion of the MOSES Organic Farming Conference.

Liz Graznak: Exactly. And going and speaking at other conferences, which is where I met you for the first time down here in Great Plains Vegetable Growers Conference.

Chris Blanchard: That's right.

Liz Graznak: Way back.

Chris Blanchard: Way back in the way back. It was just this kind of process of looking around and going, "Is this really where I'm going to live my best life?" The answer came back, "No." I just, I decided we were going to close down the farm. We closed it down, sold it, moved to town. That was in Decorah and then moved over here a year and a half ago to Madison, Wisconsin.

Liz Graznak: So you were really integrally involved in MOSES for a number of years. Now maybe not so much because the podcast is really taking a lot of time.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, and it's just, MOSES wasn't a good fit for me anymore. I think that was 2012, 2013. It was I think kind of like the farm. It was something I had done,



what I could do with it, with the energy that I was able to put into it. When I ... I actually got involved with the conference because in 1999 we traveled back from Maine. In the spring we traveled back and went to the conference and organized our whole trip out here to look for land kind of around the time of the conference. And I was really disappointed because there were all these workshops. I'd remembered this being this great conference. There were workshops on things like hemp production and building greenhouses where the presenter got up and talked about the greenhouses he was building out of wood and how they'd fallen down. I was like, "Wait, wait, wait. This is not right."

I somehow, I mean of course, I got the squeaky wheel and what ha ... Squeaky wheel gets the grease but the squeaky wheel also gets put to work. I got drafted basically into being on the workshop committee and then ended up heading up the workshop committee which eventually turned into me being the workshop coordinator for the conference, which is what I did there, so organizing all of the workshops at the show. Yeah, so there was I mean all of those different things kind of just went into ...

Liz Graznak: Where did the idea for the podcast, when did that start, kind of back in the fine line?

Chris Blanchard: Somewhere around the time I mean with smartphones, iPhone came out I think in 2008. I got my first Android phone in 2011 I think. No, 2009. That's the point at which I started kind of just plugging into podcasts. Angie and I actually took a trip one weekend. We were going up to Gardens of Eggen from which is kind of up towards the Twin Cities from Decorah. We had a couple hour drive and we were listening to podcasts. She's like, she says, "You should do a podcast." I'm like, "No, no, no, no." She's like, "Yeah, you should really do a podcast." We ended up sitting down after the Field Day having a beer in Northfield and kind of sketched out a rough business plan for the podcast. That was in August. Then I just started, I started pulling together the equipment and trying to learn about how to do it.

I had actually volunteered at a radio station in Aspen, Colorado when I lived there. It was ... Let me just think. KAJX public radio for the Roaring Fort Valley. I would do the news. Sometimes I would actually get really lucky and I would be able to ... The person who came in after the news was supposed to do the jazz show, and every now and then she just wouldn't show up and so I would end up. You couldn't leave the station unmanned before midnight when we turned it over to another station in Wyoming. I'd end up staying and doing the jazz show. I knew nothing about jazz but I just, I loved it.

So I really enjoyed doing, I enjoyed being on radio. I really liked that. It was always something I kind of held onto. In fact at Deep Springs which was super isolated, we didn't get any radio there. We actually set up during the time that I was there we set up a transmitter to get across the White



Mountains. We'd pick up the signal from Santa Cruz on the west side of the mountains and we had wires that ran over to the east side of the mountain and broadcast and then and transmitted that down to the college where we had a little tiny illegal FM transmitter down there. So we had public radio for the Deep Springs Valley. That was kind of cool.

I also, this is where I also at Deep Springs have to give a little bit of a shout out to one of my first mentors, Dave [Stydel 01:05:16] who was the farm manager while I was there. Really he and Jane just taught me so much about life and about farming and growing things and kind of being in touch with the world, again, in that very active getting your hands dirty sort of a way. Dave was a radio guy from San Francisco before he became a farm manager. Kind of all of that.

I had all of this, this kind of this romantic notion about what was going to happen. Then I had people who were willing to humor me and do the interviews. We gradually pieced it together until I got, finally got the thing launched. In fact I said I launched it at the MOSES conference but, and I always, I like to have this image where I'm all like organized and have my act together and everything. I wanted to go live at the MOSES conference because I was doing a workshop at the conference. I was actually doing two. I wanted to be able to say at the workshop that I had this podcast, because I figured that would be a nice way to just get people interested, a nice audience to say that to.

I ended up staying up until like 4:00 in the morning on Friday morning doing the last of the edits on the podcast. I was sitting there, trying to find the right tractor sounds for the intro and the outro and editing your episode, try to get that together and then, and sitting there in the hotel room while I my wife Angie was sleeping in the next ... We had a suite, so she was in the next room. I'm sitting there going, "Welcome to the Farmer to Farmer podcast. It's the Farmer to Farmer," trying to figure out how I was going to say all that stuff. It was kind of crazy. Yeah, we got it. That's the kind of the story of getting the podcast started.

Liz Graznak:

And what a huge success it has been, what a huge success it has been.

Chris Blanchard:

Again, something like this ... I don't want to come off as like falsely modest or anything like that, but something like this doesn't happen without people being willing to be on the show, be willing to take a chance at listening to the show. I mean what we do here shouldn't work. A 90 minute long form podcast is almost unheard of. Nobody does this. Yet, somehow it seems to work. Again, I think there's a magic there with the organic farming community and maybe the farming community in general that we're, we're good people. There's a lot of interesting stories out there and people are willing to open up and share about what goes on very realistically on their farms. I just, I love that. It wouldn't happen without that and it wouldn't



happen without people being willing to download the episode and basically on faith say, “Sure, Chris, be in my ear for the next 90 minutes.” So thanks.

Liz Graznak: No, thank you. Thank you Chris, really. I think I can absolutely say for the 8,000 people out there that ... How many did you say have downloaded, 8,000 and some?

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, it depends on the episode but we run between 8 and 15,000 per episode.

Liz Graznak: So for all of those 15,000 folks out there that are farming and listening to your podcasts, thank you, thank you so much.

Chris Blanchard: You’re welcome. It’s my pleasure. It really is. One of the things I think it’s going to be hard about leaving a farm and ... Linda Halley actually told me this when I ... Linda Halley who used to be a partner at Harmony Valley Farm eventually managed Gardens of Eggen, was a guest on the show. I can’t remember what episode. Has been a good friend of mine for a very long time. She said to me when I was getting my divorce. She said, “You know Chris. You need to figure out who you are beyond the farm.” It was really scary because for me I was the farm. Chris Blanchard, Rock Spring Farm. My kids all answered the phone. “Hello, Rock Spring Farm.” Because this was back, remember land lines?

Liz Graznak: Yeah. I still have one.

Chris Blanchard: And this was, it was so much a part of my identity, and leaving the farm was kind of ripping a piece of out me. I was kind of scared about what was going to come next and who was I going to be without the farm. I just, I feel so fortunate to have fallen into this role.

Liz Graznak: We are also very lucky that you have fallen into this role, because you have filled a huge void I think and are providing a voice to an immense amount of information and resource and knowledge that all of us small farmers, we’re so spread across the country. There’s no way that I could have the opportunity to say meet Amigo Bob and hear his story except through the podcast. The same thing for all of the different guests that you’ve had on the show. Again, thank you very much. We’re going to do the lightning round because I’ve got a bunch of quick questions to ask you.

Chris Blanchard: I would like to thank [Farm Commons](#) for their support of the show. Strong, resilient sustainable farm businesses are built on a solid legal foundation. Geared for the direct to consumer and organic producer Farm Commons free legal guides and tutorials provide a practical and realistic resource for farmers. In my consultant work I often need to deepen my understanding of the ins and outs of the legal side of things and Farm Commons is always, and that’s not an exaggeration, always the first place I turn. Whether I’m looking



for information on building a legally resilient CSA program, the ins and outs of paying in-kind wages or just trying to get a better general understanding of how to work with regulators, Farm Commons boils that information down to the nuts and bolts of what you really need to know, without not having to wade through the regulations. Visit farmcommons.org to access a wealth of information about this important part of your farm business.

Liz Graznak: And we are back with Chris Blanchard. Thank you very much for this fabulous interview so far. I have some lightning round questions for you. Are you ready?

Chris Blanchard: I'm ready.

Liz Graznak: Again, these are submitted from many of your previous podcast interviewees.

Chris Blanchard: Should we say previous victims?

Liz Graznak: Previous victims. Absolutely. I would like to know do you think that all farmers should have a business plan? Coming at you from Paul Arnold.

Chris Blanchard: No, I don't.

Liz Graznak: All right. What is your favorite Farmer to Farmer episode?

Chris Blanchard: That's as bad as what's my favorite tool on the farm. I'm looking here. Yeah, hold on. Liz, this is like asking me what's my favorite child, okay? I think my favorite, I mean, if I had to pick one it would be Dan Kaplan on shared risk and shared loss at Brookfield Farm.

Liz Graznak: That's a great episode.

Chris Blanchard: I guess for a couple of reasons. One, that was the first one that I felt like really resonated with a wide spectrum of the community. I think it was the one that kind of took the podcast and made it into something that was a topic of conversation among farmers and really kick started that. I mean it's kind of like carrots were for Rock Spring Farm. It wasn't necessarily my favorite crop to grow but it was, man, they were the thing that people would come to our stand to get.

Liz Graznak: What is your favorite tool on the farm?

Chris Blanchard: My favorite tool on the farm is and I'm not going to take one of these, I'm not going to go in one of these ways say like a computer or a spreadsheets, because there's a lot of good tools out there. The tool that I enjoy using the most is the collinear hoe. It was the first garden tool that I learned how to



use actually at Deep Springs. The guy who was the garden manager before me, we had two weeks where we overlapped before he left because he was graduating for Deep Springs. He taught me how to use that and it's always felt like just something magical. It always takes me back. It's so precise, that thin little blade and that angle, and you get to ... You stand up and you get to kind of throw your shoulders back and down and you're holding that with the thumbs up, and sort of just grooming the soil, sweeping right underneath it. When the conditions are right, it's just, it's such a light and beautiful tool.

Liz Graznak: And you have great memories using it?

Chris Blanchard: I love. Yeah, great memories using it. It also makes me feel like Eliot Coleman. I feel like I know what I'm doing.

Liz Graznak: Yeah. Coming at you from Claire Coleman, what's one superpower you would like to have on the farm?

Chris Blanchard: It's the same one that everybody else wants. It would be weed control. It would be the ability to shoot little blasters out of my eyes and take care of the Canada thistle.

Liz Graznak: All right. Why do you love kohlrabi so much? From dear Steve Tomlinson.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah. I don't. I don't know, to me kohlrabi is kind of like, well I say like the epitome of CSA share gone wrong. It's like this weird little vegetable that you put into a CSA share because you need to fill up the space, or because you can grow it. It comes on early in the spring, but nobody really knows what to do with it, and it's really not anything special. I mean I don't know like the flavor doesn't, of kohlrabi doesn't make you go like, "Oh, wow, kohlrabi, all right." It this weird ugly looking thing. I don't know. I guess that's why. It just ... You know what? It's also kind of fun to pick on Steve.

Liz Graznak: Absolutely, all the time. What was the last book that you read?

Chris Blanchard: I'm not going to go with the last book that I read but the last story that I read because it's part of a book, is Stories of Your Life by Ted Chiang. It's the story that movie Arrival was based on and it's ... I don't know, the movie Arrival, I watched that and I cried and it really touched me. I just, yeah, I loved it. I was like I have to go read that, so I pulled that out. Just finished that one last night.

Liz Graznak: Well, I haven't read that book. Nor have I seen that movie, so I have to do that.

Chris Blanchard: Highly recommend it. Highly recommend it.



Liz Graznak: I'm going to end with the last question of, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?

Chris Blanchard: Liz, I'd tell myself to ... I don't know how exactly I'd put it, but don't take yourself so seriously, don't ... It's going to be okay and you don't have to have such tight control over things. I think along with that would be learn to manage your emotions and don't be ruled by the things around you. But figure out a way to have a little bit of detachment because life's hard enough as it is. I mean being married, having kids, having to go grocery shopping, driving to town. I mean all of those things are rough. Then you add in the vegetable farm and the weather and employees and markets and produce managers and ... It's easy to get upset. It's easy to get, to worry a lot and to ... I don't know, to worry all the fun away.

If I could go back in time and say one thing it would be, "Hey, you got to figure out a way to enjoy this." And you don't get to do that by just saying I'm going to enjoy this. You actually have to ... For me, the thing I did nine years too late and I'm still working on it, is learning how to manage my emotions, learning how to not ... Well, to be blunt, learning how not to be an asshole, especially to the people that it matters the most to.

Liz Graznak: Okay. All right. Again, Chris, thank you so much on behalf of all of the listeners out there. Thank you so much for the Farmer to Farmer podcast. Thank you for all of your hard work and for being for me such a wonderful friend and mentor. I'm wishing you much health and prosperity and a wonderful next few years.

Chris Blanchard: Thank you Liz.

Liz Graznak: Thank you.

Chris Blanchard: All right, so wrapping things up here, I'll say again that this is episode 100 of the Farmer to Farmer podcast, and that you can find the notes for this show at farmertofarmerpodcast.com by looking on the episodes page or just searching for Blanchard. That' B-L-A-N-C-H-A-R-D.

The transcript for this episode is brought to you by [Growing for Market](#). Get 20% off your subscription with the code **podcast** at checkout, and by [Earth Tools](#), offering the most complete selection of walk behind farming equipment and high quality garden tools in North America. Earthtools.com.

You can get the show notes for every Farmer to Farmer podcast in your inbox by signing up for my email newsletter at farmertofarmerpodcast.com.



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

Also, if you liked the show, I'd ask you to head on over to iTunes, 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.

Hey, when you talk to our sponsors, please let them know how much you appreciate their support of a resource that you value. You can support the show directly by going to farmertofarmerpodcast.com/donate. I'm 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. I'll do my best to get them on the show. Thank you for listening. Be safe out there and keep the tractor running.