



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



EPISODE 105

Mimo Davis and Miranda Duschak of Urban Bud Flowers on Balancing Off-Farm Jobs While Growing a Farming Business, Season Extension, and Growing for the Wedding Market

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Chris: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast Episode 105. This is your host, Chris Blanchard.

Mimo Davis and Miranda Duschack farm at Urban Buds City Grown Flowers, an acre of flowers in a working class neighborhood in St. Louis, Missouri. Urban Buds is located on property that was an operating flower farm in the city for three generations but it had fallen into poor condition when Mimo and Miranda purchased it in 2012. We talk about how Miranda and Mimo rehabilitated the property and made the journey from startup to turning a profit while they financed the farm with paychecks from their day jobs. We discuss the challenges of running a farm while working an outside job as well as adding a child to the mix this past year.

Plus Mimo and Miranda talk about the challenges they've encountered on an urban farm and how they've overcome them. Miranda and Mimo share their strategies for season extension, which they consider key to their business model in order to maximize profits from a limited land base. Urban Buds uses a variety of techniques inside and outside of a variety of structures. We also get into the nuts and bolts to achieving a long base life with their cut flowers.

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Mimo Davis and Miranda Duschack, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

Mimo: Hey Chris. Thank you so much for having us. We're so excited to be on the podcast. Thank you.

Miranda: Yeah, awesome.



Chris: It's really great that you guys could join me today. I'd like to start off because as I was researching, you guys, wow. I mean what a great story from so many different angles, but can you guys give us the lay of the land there at Urban Buds City Grown Flowers in St. Louis, Missouri? Where you guys are located, and the history of the farm and whatever else you feel like going to help people to understand where the rest of the conversation is coming from.

Mimo: We're in the heart of St. Louis. I mean we are in a very urban neighborhood. We sit on .6th of an acre. In production total, we have about an acre, but our main oh little compound farm is right in the city, and in a very residential working class neighborhood. If anybody's familiar with St. Louis, we're about two blocks from Ted Drewes, which is a really famous custard shop in the city of St. Louis. On that property, we actually have a glass greenhouse, which was part of the property and the reason why we bought it. The greenhouse dates back to the 50s and the property actually dates back to, what is it, 1870 Miranda?

Miranda: Yes. We are in the Dutchtown neighborhood of St. Louis, as Mimo said, highly residential working class neighborhood. We're seven miles south of the Gateway Arc as the crow flies. Easterly, closer to the river than not, and the Urban Buds property was always a farm. The farm itself dates from 1870, so what we're doing, being farmer florists, is so old it looks new. This property was owned by farmer florists. They grew flowers in the greenhouse and in the field space and had a design studio and sold to florists and restaurants and did weddings and events. That property was held in the same family for three generations, and the neighborhood changed a lot and grew up around the farm property. We purchased it five years ago and it's been a labor of love to rehab the vandalized, condemned and derelict buildings, including that glass greenhouse and get the field space back into production.

Chris: Wow, the place was actually condemned when you guys bought it?

Mimo: Yes, it was. It was condemned. Basically Miranda got a phone call one day and said, "Hey, we've been trying to sell this greenhouse for years. It's right in the city of St. Louis," and she said, "Mimo, let's go take a look at it." We walked in and felt it was love at first sight. It was condemned. It had multiple problems, but over the five years we have rehabbed it. I want you to really understand, this city literally grew up around the property. We had bought the remainder of the farm, and it originally was a cut flower farm in 1970. We're just restoring it back to what it was originally, it's original intent.

Miranda: As we purchased the farm and realized we were going to be here most of our days and most of our nights, we wanted to buy the house next door. We were doing the rehab on the farm and then we purchased the vandalized, uninhabited, 900 square foot brick bungalow directly adjacent to the property to the south. We rehabbed that as our house, and now the farm, total with our house, is five continuous city lots, or as Mimo said, 0.6 of an acre.

Chris: I'm actually looking at Google Earth right now and looking at your farm, and I mean it



really is, you guys are right in the middle of a residential neighborhood. You guys got houses chock a block right next to you.

Mimo: It's actually really wonderful Chris because like we said earlier, it's a working class neighborhood. We live in a neighborhood where people don't get to see agriculture right in the heart of the city. Kids don't get exposure to how a plant grows or what's growing in the field. Everyone from our garbage man when I'm out working or the neighbors, they're like, "Oh it looks so beautiful." We're actually able to share with them a little bit of what agriculture really is.

Chris: I think that's so great. It's interesting that you guys are doing that with flowers instead of food. A lot of times when we think of urban farming, the first thing that comes to mind is lettuce and tomatoes, not ranunculus.

Mimo: Right. It really gives us a vantage point. We just has a baby this past year. I normally do deliveries. When you have a newborn it's really hard to make the deliveries. Our florist basically said, "Hey, we'll come get the flowers," because they're so close. My longest delivery is like 30 miles away. Everything is very compact. It's really an advantage for the urban farmer for us to be right in the city because our florist could just pick up the products. They're more willing to come get it.

Miranda: Our Farmer's Market is two and a half miles away from our farm, so that's great. We can wake up later than we would if we were out in the counties to get to Farmer's Market on time.

Chris: That's not a small thing when it comes to quality of life, not having to get up at the crack of dawn or before the crack of dawn.

Mimo: We're still waking up pretty early, but my gosh, it isn't like getting up at three in the morning. That's quite the advantage too.

Chris: You guys do the Farmer's Markets, you do wholesale and you also do weddings and events, right?

Mimo: Correct. Yes.

Chris: Mimo, you were a flower farmer for a number of years before you came and started Urban Buds with Miranda, right?

Mimo: That's correct. I had Wild Thing Farms, which was two hours outside of St. Louis in Ashland, Missouri right outside of Columbia, Missouri. Yeah, I ran a five acre farm there of just cut flowers, and I would drive them into St. Louis.

Chris: What made you decide to make the switch?

Mimo: Well I made the switch long before we started Urban Buds. I basically was running five acres of flowers in business as a single person really running that business. I had four to five employees. Basically Chris, I just really, it wasn't sustainable. I was driving



three times a week into St. Louis for the Farmer's Market and then my delivery route, and by the time I finished doing that, I did it for like five years, it could have been vacuum cleaners I was selling. Really burnt out on doing it on that sale without a farming partner. Basically when Miranda and I met, and she was like, "I want a farm." I was like, "Wow, I want a farm too." We found this little bit of land, and thought we'd try ... we still own the farm out in Ashland, and we still have that farm and we haven't decided what to do with that yet, but we're really enjoying our urban farm for sure.

Chris: Miranda, what were you doing before Urban Buds got started?

Miranda: My background is in vegetable production. I've done some poultry. I've worked at a goat farm making cheese at Prairie Foods Farm in Champagne, Illinois. I was involved with the Catholic Worker Movement and was living in intentional communities with folks who we would live with some homeless people and do service that way. Then during the day I would go be a farmhand on farms. I moved to St. Louis in 2010 after Dubuque, Iowa where I was the gardener at a convent there for three years. My friend said, "Come on down to St. Louis. You're not happy anymore." It was time for me to transition to a different Catholic Worker, the Catholic Worker here in St. Louis. I came down here and applied for a job at Cooperative Extension, Lincoln University Cooperative Extension. I was lucky enough to get hired in 2010 during the great recession, and then I met Mimo Davis. We both instantly perked up when we saw each other, a really sweet friendship and then romance developed.

As Mimo said, I wanted to farm. I knew my partner, whoever that was going to be, was going to be a farmer. We just said, "Let's go for it. Let's try farming together," and here we are.

Chris: How did you guys find the piece of property that became Urban Buds?

Miranda: I got a call from the owner, well one of the owner's staff persons. I got a call in my capacity as an extension educator. Like Mimo said, the owner said, "Do you know of anyone who would be interested in starting an urban farm?" In 2011, there was I think more energy around urban farming, and so it seemed like I would have contacts in that community. I looked around the property with Mimo and we kind of shot it out there to other people, "Would anyone be interested in this property?" People were pretty scared of this property. There was the original farmhouse was standing there, that was coming down. The owners were getting fines on the falling down house. Again, the greenhouse and floral studio were a rehab. The field space, the large backyard or what we call field space was just full of Bermuda grass.

People were reluctant to take on this property, but Mimo and I decided let's give it a try. Because our relationship was so new, we didn't want to stress it by going out to Wild Thing and being in the rural community, being away from our friends in the city, having to drive into St. Louis. We just said, "You know what, if we're going to give our farming partnership and our romantic partnership a fair chance, we should try a smaller piece of property around our community and close to our market." That sealed the deal for us.



Chris: You get on this farm that's full of Bermuda grass, that's got a greenhouse that, I mean I'm thinking that, I'm imagining this greenhouse has a lot of broken panes of glass. The farmhouse is falling down. What did you guys do? How did you turn this into a productive property?

Mimo: Well when I first saw the property, I didn't even see the falling down house. I saw the open space, I saw a huge open space, beautiful glass greenhouse, that really Chris, it didn't have a lot of broken panes. It had a few. I forget, what was it like 50 broken panes, Miranda?

Miranda: Yes.

Mimo: I thought all is doable. I didn't even see that falling down house that the city was fining people for. That house wasn't a concern to me. I knew it had to come down. I didn't know how it was going to come down, but I actually was going for the glass greenhouse, the old Lord & Burnham glass greenhouses that they just don't build anymore. I was like, "We got to save this thing." We took it on, and I immediately envisioned beds. We grow basically on raised beds. Yeah, we just went in where we first tilled the property and did a soil test, we had eight percent organic matter in the city. That was crazy. It was just really, really wonderful to see that just come into fruition.

Over the years, we've been able to eradicate the Bermuda grass a little at a time, and buying wheat is a little bit of a problem now, but the farm has really just developed over the last five years to a thriving little cut flower farm.

Miranda: Mimo Davis is a force of nature. She just looked at this property and said, "Let's do it," and we did. I'm a hard worker, she's a hard worker. We work seven days a week for four and a half years just trying to build this business and making it work and putting out money in. We didn't take out any loans. We just kept putting in our paychecks into the property. We said we're going to do it and we're going to give it five years and then reassess, and then another five years and reassess. We're at our first five years, and we're moving forward for the next five years.

Mimo: The farm is a labor of love for sure. I guess in year three was when we actually, or four, when we actually turned a profit. The business became actually self-sufficient, which is amazing for a farm business to become self-sufficient.

Miranda: Right, in year four the business paid for itself. That's without us taking out labor. We do have one employee that we have to pay labor on, but the property is supporting itself and paying for labor, and in this year we hope to transition to bringing Mimo home and the property then paying her. One thing I would say about an advantage of our property, because it was always a cut flower farm, there was a big open area that never had a house on it. We could actually till in the ground and urban farming usually you have to truck in top soil, but we didn't do that. We took a Grillo in and with the walk behind plow and plowed it ourselves, dug out the raised beds, raked out all the Bermuda grass, and that's how we created the field space.



- Chris: Right, so you were already working to large degree with an agricultural site.
- Mimo: Oh yes, absolutely.
- Miranda: Oh yes.
- Chris: I suppose because you're working with flowers, you don't have to be as concerned with some of the soil contamination issues that you might otherwise end up with in an urban environment.
- Miranda: Correct.
- Mimo: Yes, that is true. That is true.
- Chris: Especially when I look at something like a glass greenhouse and I think about the nursery industry or even a conventional cut flower business, that can be a pretty heavy pesticide load. Have you guys had any challenges with that?
- Mimo: It was a pretty heavy duty pesticide load. We're trying to bring it back into balance right now. We're using, because it was way over the top with potassium and some other things, and we're trying to bring it back now. We're using Kinsey, the Albrecht method and trying to do the soil balance especially in the glass greenhouse right now and bringing that soil back into balance. The outdoor field space is really good space. Like I said, it had eight percent organic matter when we first tilled. The greenhouse space we are trying to improve that soil.
- Chris: Are you actually growing in the ground in the greenhouse?
- Mimo: Yes, we grow in the ground in the greenhouse. We have the field space. We put up a low cost hoop house made out of PVC, and then we put a high tunnel. We have a 30 by 60 high tunnel with eight foot sidewalls and a ridge vent. We have multiple growing zones. In those areas, there are issues with aphids, white flies, kind of just normal stuff and we treat that using organic sprays.
- Chris: Are you guys certified organic?
- Miranda: No.
- Mimo: We are not.
- Chris: Is there something that keeps you from doing that or is that just a marketing decision that you guys just don't need it?
- Mimo: Yeah, we just don't need it. Our florists, everybody that we sell to knows that we definitely use sustainable practices, and for our marketplace, we just between the paperwork and all the hoops that we had to jump through, it just didn't work out. The numbers just didn't crunch out for us for that to be a real advantage for us and



flowers.

- Miranda: When we survey our customers, whether they're our florist customers, our bridal customers or our Farmer's Market customers, the first reason that they say they purchase our product is because it's fresh. The second reason is because it lasts a long time, and when we asked them about is it important to you that it's organic, that doesn't really come up with them. They like to know how we're farming. We have open houses so people can come and see. They know that we have our baby around the flowers. We're around our flowers. Our animals are around the flowers, so they know, but being certified organic has not, no one has ever asked us if we're certified organic or really indicated that that would affect their purchasing of our product.
- Chris: I guess I'd ask the question why farm with just organic sprays? Do you guys do anything that would keep you from being certified organic? Is there a motivation for following a certain set of practices?
- Mimo: Well when you then accept the certified organic, it limits your seed sourcing, it limits ... we just found it limiting. I know there's certain seeds that you can only buy. Then you have to do further searches to find that organic seed product. When I see a product, flower seeds, bulb or formed, I want to buy it. I just want to take it, I want to grow it. I don't want to have to search around. There's some things you can't even get, you can't even grow if you're certified organic in the flower world because you can't get that organic seed.
- Chris: Right, or even untreated seed.
- Mimo: It actually would be limiting for us in some ways. We grow about 70 varieties of cut flowers, and that's a lot. In the course of our season, our season starts about February 1 and goes straight through Thanksgiving. We have a really long season growing 70 different varieties of cut flowers. When I'm doing my shopping for seed ordering, I want to be able to have as little limits as my shopping as possible.
- Chris: Especially given the industry that you're in, which doesn't have an emphasis on organic seeds.
- Mimo: Right.
- Chris: It sounds like you guys aren't on the farm ... well it's always funny when you say you're not on the farm full time, but you guys have jobs that keep you from being on the farm 24/7. Can you talk a little bit about how you guys make that work?
- Mimo: Yes Chris, it's really difficult but it goes to our commitment to farming. My day usually starts early in the morning. About 5:00 I might go over to the farm, do some things before I go to work, and then I come home from work and I go right back to the farm. I might end my day about 11 PM. That's just part of doing, it's part of our long term plan. We did not want to take out loans to start our farm, and we use our paychecks to invest in the farm. In year four, the farm actually became self-sufficient. It was really important for us to keep our job, to be able to invest in the farm because that is



where we want to be. This year and next month I will be coming home to the farm full time, and that was part of our strategic plan to have that happen. Not to go into debt, the farm was just really important for us. I can't stress to you enough the whole debt thing and then all that pressure to pay off that debt, we did not want to have that type of pressure.

Keeping our jobs a little bit longer and making the farm work, and we needed to see if it will work too, although I had another farm years ago, we needed to see if this would work right here in the urban area, and that's why I think. What do you think Miranda?

Miranda: I think that we've seen the rewards of sacrifice. When we started this project, as Mimo said, we were debt averse. We knew we were going to have to keep our jobs and farm until it came to a point when it seemed like the business would be sustainable and then profitable. We both have this innate understanding of right work or you could call it vocation. We wanted to do work that would be good for the world, good for us, good for the environment and using organic farming practices to grow flowers in a semi distressed neighborhood of St. Louis City seems to be a good use of our life's energy.

Working full time enabled us to build this business, and I'm grateful that we had and still have the opportunity to get income that way as we developed this business. We work a lot. Our family members give us talking to about how much we work, but at the year four and a half work we started taking Sundays off, and that was a big deal. We're getting there slowly but surely, and when Mimo comes home we will have more time I am sure. We just kept our eyes on the prize and the long game.

Chris: I think it's really important, because it's not always possible for people to start off on a farm or even in any other business and quit their day job at the same time. It does provide an important buffer and it provides I think ... well it's a buffer and it's also a risk-mitigator because what if you guys had started and everything hadn't worked out? If the flower market wasn't what you hoped it was?

Mimo: Right. Exactly. Quite frankly I don't know anybody who starts a business, a brand new business and doesn't have another income, no matter farming, whatever it is, Google. Hey, he had a side job when he started that. Everybody has a job when they start a new business because you don't know what's going to happen with the new business and you still have to eat and you still have to support your family. That's just a stress reliever to have that extra income, that real extra income.

Miranda: For me, I would say that I had tried getting my farm. I knew when I was 19 I wanted to be a farmer, and we bought this farm when I was 30. I tried by joining intentional communities or working with a group of friends, "Okay, we're going to buy a farm together," and personalities would happen or life would happen or something would fall out, it didn't work out. In some ways it was really freeing to say with Urban Buds we need cash. We don't need to try to make this grand community experiment work. Mimo and I need to work and we need cash. That was freeing in a way for me, instead of trying to get our community to work together to create this project. Usually those communities were underfunded and there was stressors that way. In some ways just



having to worry about the money, this dream will happen if we have money and we have dedication, was freeing for me.

Chris: When Mimo comes back to the farm, I'm looking at this overhead picture of your farm on Google Maps and you're not going to make up her income by expanding. How is that going to change? Where are you going to pull that extra net from?

Mimo: Well actually what you're looking at, Google Maps, that's our main farm. We have another lot that we're in the process of buying and we have two other lots, very large lots that we also work out of. We'll be upping our wedding business for sure. That's already begun happening. We have more weddings scheduled this year than we ever have had. I don't know the number, but they're rolling in. That wedding business is really going to be a focal point because in cut flowers, weddings is really the bread and butter. Not the wholesale, not the Farmer's Market, but the wedding flowers are really the bread and butter of the farm.

Chris: Last year you guys introduced a new wrinkle into this whole farming and working off the farm and being a couple. You guys added another member of the family.

Mimo: Yeah, our precious little August. Absolutely. We did. We had a baby, a little baby boy. He'll be six months old next week. That has definitely added a challenge. I'm going to be straight up with you. Listen, when you're up all night with the baby, you move a lot slower on the farm, for sure, the next day. We wouldn't change a thing. It's really added to our lives, it's really added a new dimension to why we even want a farm, why I want to be home on the farm, because I want to be able to be there with him and watch him grow. Right now when I'm working at my full time job, I leave just as he's waking up and I come home just as he's falling asleep, and quite frankly, that's the same quality of life my dad gave me. He was gone all day and then it was when he came home I was headed to bed.

That's not the life I want to have with my son. I want us to have a full life where we're actually experiencing things together on a daily basis. That's driving me home to the farm even harder and faster.

Miranda: My position, I work from home. I'm with August quite a bit and I'm available to the farm somewhat, much less now that I have a six month old son. I can be with him and we do have a babysitter come in to help and things like that. It got to be to the point of why are we working so hard? Why are we working just so hard all the time? What's the end goal here? Of course initially that end goal was so we could be together farming. Then it felt like, man, I knew I wanted to have a child and Mimo wanted to have a child, and so it just seemed like we're doing it for him as well. Maybe this will be something he wants to do. Who knows? It just felt like it was time to make this project even more meaningful by having a son.

Neither of us were getting any younger, so we just took the leap and went for it, and he's been the joy of our lives.

Mimo: I couldn't agree more. He's been completely the joy of our life. Really I feel like he



adds to our farming, our desire to farm and just to give him that exposure and that type of experience and to be with him is just really, really important to me.

Chris: You guys do a lot of work with providing flowers for weddings. One of the things I found really that struck me on your website was a statement that you guys have that in June of 2014 that you guys were actually one of the first four same sex couples who successfully challenged Missouri's gay marriage ban. I have a couple of questions about that. I mean one, how in the world working full time, having a farm did you guys find time to engage in that kind of activism? I want to ask that question, and then I also want to put this one out there, as what kind of an effect does that have on your business? It's not an easy thing to do to know where to draw that line between the political activist side of things and the need to make money and to have people that represent diverse political views and diverse religious views who are still wanting to engage with your business.

Miranda: The way that worked was pretty interesting. The mayor Francis Slay, so the city has been pretty supportive of us and our projects. We're close with our 25th ward alderman, Shane Cohn. In St. Louis we have alder persons, alders, like city council people. He was really supportive of us buying this property and rehabbing it. He became a personal friend, and he knew that the mayor and the recorder of deeds were going to commit this act of civil disobedience by issuing marriage licenses to same sex couples. They were looking at same sex couples who would be good candidates, who would accept the publicity, who were in committed relationships. Our alderman approached us and he said, "Hey, this thing is going to happen. It's going to happen really soon. You can't tell anyone. We need a decision in eight hours."

Mimo and I just sat down and looked at our lives and thought what was important for us. At this point we had already had our spiritual ceremony, so we were married on September 2, 2012. We knew we were going to stay together. I knew and Mimo knew that we wanted to have a child, but we wanted Mimo to be protected, to have rights with that child. We talked it over, and we contacted our attorney and we contacted the attorneys that the city provided us names and numbers for, and we thought about our plan, everything from if we are threatened here's the number for the FBI and call them or this is how you handle the media, this is how you handle your family. We just said this is too important not to do.

Mimo: Yeah, Chris. We didn't have to do a lot because the city provided us a lot of support. The city provided us all the attorneys, the city provided us everything we needed. We just needed to walk through the door, which is not a small decision. That's a huge decision. No, we had a huge team of support, like people talking to us about, "Hey, listen, you might want to take down your Facebook page for a while, you might want to do this." Then what happens is people camp on your front door. There's all kinds of meetings like that, but none of that happened. The complete opposite, but we had a lot of support. Just amazing outpouring of support from our customers, from our Farmer's Market customers, from our rural people, from our florists. We just had all kinds of outpouring of support.

Now that we did that, here we are years later with a new administration, and we're



out. We have tons of friends, other people in the floral industry, other flower farmers who are losing face with people because of what they're preaching about, the Women's March or they're losing Instagram followers. We've only lost six because of our postings regarding the Women's March and the new administration. We've only lost six because we were already out there. It provided us an opportunity to be really authentic in our business. Political is personal and we just happen to be farmers too.

We figure out ways of blending it in. Our wedding business, we have a particular type of wedding client that we look for, one. Our wedding people don't choose us, we choose them. We're very, very particular about the weddings that we take on. Most of the people who are coming to us about weddings know our work already because they see us at Farmer's Markets, they've bought bouquets for us and they just know what we do. We don't just take anybody who walks through the door as a wedding client. We actually discriminate. Well not discriminate, but we really, what's the word I'm looking for?

Miranda: Discerning.

Mimo: Conscious. Discerning and conscious on who we take on as a wedding client.

Chris: What do you look for in a wedding client?

Mimo: One, I look for someone who has actually done their research and understand, have studied our web page or have already bought flowers from us at Farmer's Markets or through a florist and they understand that we're a seasonal, local, uber-local, seasonal flower farm. If you want peonies in July, we're not the farm for you. We're not the wedding people for you. If you want roses ever, we're not the wedding people for you. We look for people who are conscious about sustainability, who are looking for local, sustainable, non-toxic flowers and who look to support the local economy. That's a really growing population. People are really becoming conscious of not only where their food comes from, but where their flowers come from also.

That's the little niche market. We also work with people in a color palette. If you come to me and say, "I want hydrangeas and this and that," we'll give you a beautiful wedding experience, but we're going to work within your color palette opposed to specific flowers. Does that make sense?

Chris: I think in a lot of ways businesses all over the place have to do a good job of choosing their customers, and I know this is something we talk about a lot in the CSA movement is you've got to choose people who are going to fit with your business. It doesn't do any good to buy boxes of vegetables to people who don't cook at home.

Mimo: Exactly. We really do look for people who fit with our ethic of the farm. Whenever we go outside of that, it just doesn't work well. We stress out, they stress out and why do that? It just makes real sense for social conscious people is usually who find us. The people who are really conscious about their food choices.

Miranda: Right, we also in addition to we don't ship in flowers, like Mimo said, we won't offer



peonies in July. We also avoid as much as possible using flower foam. We try to educate our customers about the toxicity of flower foam, how it's bad for the earth and it's bad for designers. We need to make sure that the people we're working with are okay with more of a base arrangement as opposed to a low roundy, moundy flower stuck in floral foam. We weed out or the conversation process is maybe a little too long with our potential couples we work with, but as Mimo said, in the end it's really worth it to figure out who's going to be a good fit with us.

Chris: Have you guys found a niche with same sex couples because of your orientation and because of being out in that community?

Mimo: I don't think so. As crazy as it sounds, we haven't really marketed it. We haven't really done that. I think we've done maybe two gay weddings. We haven't really marketed. We just open, it's not a marketing strategy of ours. The political is personal but that is personal, and we just don't take it over into the farming world. I don't know why we haven't marketed it, but we don't. We don't.

Miranda: The reason is Mimo because we're both so busy all the time.

Mimo: Right.

Miranda: I think once Mimo comes home and can dedicate her time to the farm, I think we could try to reach out to those communities more. People find us for sure. We have a pretty okay Instagram following and we have a pretty okay Facebook following, and we find people who are maybe living on the coast and do internet searches about florists in St. Louis and they find us, they're going to be married in St. Louis. Then we also have folks who are at Farmer's Markets. I thought we would just sort of organically have more of the same sex companies find us, but I think it call takes advertising, and Chris, that is one thing we have not done is advertise.

Chris: It doesn't sound like it's been a need for you to date.

Mimo: We need to focus on it. We do need to focus on it. It hasn't really been a need, but we do need to focus on it, and once I'm home on the farm full time, that will be one of my goals is how to promote the business more. People seem to find us and we are doing okay definitely, but we could always up that game.

Miranda: When you look at the difference between how much you make selling flowers wholesale to florists and how much we would make doing weddings, doing the value added, it's pretty substantial difference in the quantity of flowers that you use and the amount people are willing to pay for design. That is something we need to focus on and we need to start advertising, and that's our goal as we move forward. We will be doing a bridal show the end of February here in St. Louis, that'll be our first bridal show. We have to get that out there more as we look to the farm to pay Mimo in income, not just reinvest back into the farm. Now it's time to extract money out.

Chris: Great. I think that's a nice spot for us to stop, take a break, get a word from a couple of sponsors, and then we'll be right back with Mimo Davis and Miranda Duschack from



Urban Buds City Grown Flowers in St. Louis, Missouri.

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We're back with Mimo Davis and Miranda Duschack from Urban Buds in St. Louis, Missouri. Just from looking at your website, following your Instagram feed, it's clear that you guys are doing a whole lot of work with season extension. Can you tell me about what that looks on your small scale flower farm?

Mimo: Yeah Chris. That's the most exciting part of our business for me. When you really think about the floral industry in general, you start to think about well when are the floral holidays. You know when they are Chris? What's the first floral holiday you can think of?

Chris: Well the first floral holiday I can think of is Valentine's Day, because that's coming up.

Mimo: Right. That is when? February.

Chris: February.

Mimo: Right?

Chris: I know what February looks like here in Wisconsin.



Mimo: Right, in most of the country, you know what it looks like too. In Missouri, for me, it is vitally important as a flower farmer for me to be in that marketplace. February is ... and you just go down that list Chris. February is Valentine's. Then you start running into St. Patty's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, graduations, prom, and then May/June are wedding months, right?

Chris: Right.

Mimo: Would you agree with that?

Chris: Yeah.

Mimo: Then you have the flower farmer who then, if you're not in season extensions, your first product was coming out of the field in what, end of June, beginning of July? You just field grow it. You have missed half of a marketplace, especially if you're doing wholesaling like we are. Our florists and our Farmer's Market customers, first day of market or first time we do a delivery, then they just are craving the locally grown fresh cut flowers. It's really important for us to be in that marketplace from the start of the flower season, which for us is Valentine's Day, and then around June and July, people take vacations. Our florist sales drop, our Farmer's Market revenues drop because people leave. Then it picks up again in September/October when school starts back up and then there's fall weddings and then you go right into Thanksgiving and then into Christmas.

It's really important for us to be in the marketplace during those holiday times.

Chris: What does season extension look like at Urban Buds? How are you guys accomplishing that? I know what we do with vegetables and I know that vegetables are plants and flowers are plants, but tell me how you guys are actually going about that.

Mimo: A lot of our production for season extensions this year especially is going to start in June. We start sowing our fall crops that we're going to put out in the greenhouse in June and July, we sow those seeds or order those bulbs or order those corms depending on what we're doing. We get it going. It starts for us really in June. We have flowers blooming in February, March and early April. It really starts early. Our corms are planted a little bit later. We succession sow a bunch of our corms. We grow freesia, ranunculus, anemones, stalk, and these are all types of flowers, over the winter. I really strongly believe in growing, it's my favorite thing to do. I call it growing on the other side of the calendar.

You have less insect pressure on the flowers, and the heat is obviously not around. There's nothing like being in a greenhouse. When it's 30 degrees out, it's 70 in the greenhouse. It's just a wonderful place to be in the middle of winter. Wintertime growing is my absolute favorite time of year to grow flowers.

Chris: When you talk about wintertime growing in the greenhouse, are you actually harvesting flowers in the wintertime or is this really growing the plants so that as the



spring heats up and the days get longer, you're starting to get flowers at that point?

Mimo: Right. In February ... well this year we got a grant that we will be implementing for next year. We haven't started it yet. Right now we're growing flowers in the fall to grow early cut on for early spring. Right now for Valentine's day, I can see our anemones are starting to bud up. We have a few ranunculus that were already starting to cut on. We actually want to be growing, cutting flowers December through March, that time period. Are you following what I'm saying?

Chris: Yeah.

Mimo: Cutting in the winter with a minimally heated greenhouse. We collaborated with two other farms in the state of Missouri, two other farmers, and we went in on a three person grant and were all in different parts of the state of Missouri. We're doing a minimally heated experiment with actually growing flowers in the winter. That means cutting flowers after Thanksgiving and through the beginning of the New Year, in that time period, which we've never been able to accomplish before. The earliest we've been able to cut our anemones and ranunculus, which are starting to bloom now. We really want to be able to cut December through February. That's a real time period that we want to cut. If I could cut thin, really it would be better for my marketplace. In the summer, I could take off when it's the hottest period of the season, I would love to have the winter months be our high dollar months and then we could take off like August, go on a little vacation in August and not worry about the bugs, the other flower competitors.

You don't have any of those worries, any of those concerns growing in the winter.

Chris: I think one of the interesting things about a lot of the flowers is that they're plants that you harvest over a period of time. It's not like a head of lettuce that you put in and take the whole thing out. You're actually cutting individual stems. Taking a break from the flower production doesn't necessarily mean having to start all over again.

Mimo: Right.

Chris: Tell me about what you guys are doing at a practical level with the season extension. Nuts and bolts, how are you guys actually accomplishing that?

Miranda: We have various technologies that we've put in place at the farm. Just to give you a run through, we have a heated germination chamber, which has really helped with germinating seeds in the winter. It was so cold that we were having lower germination, so we have a heated germination chamber that has a water pan with a heating element in it, and then it heats up in that insulated box. It stays around 70 degrees Fahrenheit. That helps just get those seedlings up from the germination chamber. The flats are taken out to banks of light that have heat mats under the lights, if the seedlings need more heat for them to continue growing. They're on heat mats under low fluorescent lights. From there we can take them out to the propagation glass greenhouse.



We have the larger glass greenhouse, Lord & Burnham glass greenhouse where we grow in the ground, but we have one adjoining to it that's our propagation house. After they grow some and they're doing well, they come out of those banks of light just onto tables in the glass greenhouse and then they're moved to be planted out either in the larger glass greenhouse or the high tunnel or the hoop house or the field, depending on the type of year. We heat the glass greenhouse and we heat those spaces to 45 degrees where in this city we're a natural gas, we have Modine heaters and a furnace that heats our propagation glass greenhouse and the larger glass greenhouse. It still gets cold. We also put on, Reemay blankets, heavier gage Reemay blanket that we put on at night and take off during the day. We do that also in the high tunnel.

Our high tunnel has double poly with blowers blowing air in between the two layers of plastic on the roof of the greenhouse, on the top, on the arc of the greenhouse. Then we have the plants growing, but we also put hoops and Reemay that we take on and off each day. The poppies, they even have another layer of plastic, then a layer of Reemay. Depending on the temperature, if it gets over 30 degrees in the high tunnel, we'll take off the Reemay and then put it back on at night. Those are ways in which we keep the plants going as long as possible.

Chris: Just having been on your Instagram feed for some time now, you have some pictures of the Reemay inside of your high tunnel houses. It looks like you're doing something really interesting with the hoops where you've got a double hoop there and the Reemay sandwiched between it?

Mimo: Yeah, it makes like a curtain then. When you lift up the Reemay it just can stay up. It helps to really control the Reemay so the Reemay's not blowing all over the greenhouse, you just have much more control. It's like a curtain that has a guide. The burrows serve as kind of a guide for the Reemay.

Chris: That's brilliant. It's just kind of trapped in there. I imagine that also just makes it easier to put it on and take it off again, if you're doing that multiple times a day.

Mimo: Yeah, it's like a curtain. It's not a big deal, exactly. It's like closing a shutter or something, yes. It's kind of on a track. We make like a little track for it.

Chris: I love that. That's really slick. I've never seen that before, so I really like that. How cold does it get in St. Louis in the wintertime?

Miranda: Well St. Louis, we're in zone 6b/7a, 7a/6b. It can down to zero here. Rarely it will get into the negatives, but sometimes. Most of the time we're around the 30s above freezing at night, kind of in the 40s during the day. That's what this winter has been like, although there have been some cold snaps where we've been in the 10s during the day. Generally St. Louis is pretty hot in the summer, but it still gets cold in the winter too.

Chris: Now when we're talking about season extension, what do you do about the heat in



the summertime?

Mimo: On the high tunnel, we have eight foot side walls and we also have a ridge vent on our high tunnel. That really can move air in and out of there pretty quickly. Hopefully we've got some wind flow cooling down some of that air on the crops. In the glass greenhouse, we really plant heat tolerant. It can get to 120, 140 in that glass greenhouse. We use a shade cloth, fans, and we plant heat tolerant. Greens tend to work really well. Greens, like this year I plant geranium is in there, rosemary will be in there this year. The greens that can really take a lot of heat go in the glass. We've also been experimenting with planting in white plastic so that the cool season crops will stay cooler longer instead of being planted in black plastic.

Most of the field crops are planted into black landscape fabric, but for the high tunnel and the greenhouse, we're trying a white plastic to have that to try to keep everything cooler. We'll see how it goes.

Chris: With the 70 different types of flowers that you're growing, how many of those are perennials versus annuals?

Mimo: Because we're on 0.6 of an acre, we don't grow a lot of perennials because they take so long to come on and then they're usually one cut and you're done. Peony season has, what, a two week period and then it sits there for the rest of the year. We can't afford to use that kind of land space or to commit to that. We're doing mostly annuals. We do a few perennials, but they're really on the borders of the property and not really that much.

Chris: You mentioned that you're using a lot of landscape fabric or season extension, that obviously has some weed control effects as well. I'm thinking that you guys probably aren't doing a lot with cover crops.

Mimo: We do use cover crops actually. We do use landscape fabric for weed protection for sure. Remember, we have full time jobs and we want to do other things on the farm other than weeds. We do use quite a bit of landscape fabric. The cover crops, we do a lot of annuals. I'm always trying to keep the beds full, but I do take beds out in between crops. I do use buckwheat. Over the winter, we use tiller radishes. I want to use some mustards with some tiller radishes as well. Buckwheat and tiller radishes and mustards are about it Chris because I really worry we don't have a lot of big equipment here. You couldn't even get big equipment onto our farm. I really don't want to create a problem of having a cover crop that I can't get rid of.

Chris: One of the things that you guys feature on your website is a claim that you got the highest quality flowers in the St. Louis area. How are you guys accomplishing? Obviously freshness is an important part of that, but what else are you doing to ensure that you have the highest quality flowers available?

Miranda: The process of keeping our flowers fresh is really important. We guarantee pretty much on most every flower, except for some varieties, a seven day vase life. With other flowers, it lasts even longer. The way we do that is by harvesting at the correct



stage. A sunflower should not be blown open. Ranunculus or a peony should still be in bud but feel soft and squishy like a marshmallow. We really know the crop and know when to cut it, how much florists are open, things like that. We make sure we have sharp, clean tools. We have water that is put into clean buckets. We spend a lot of time washing buckets, or I don't know a lot of time, but it's really important that our buckets get washed and are clean. Then we use floral preservatives, depending on what type of flower needs what sort of floral preservative, we use that.

Then we have the cooler where we don't keep anything except flowers in our cooler. We don't have a lot of ethylene damage. Then we just move our flowers on quickly out the door, whether to the florist or the Farmer's Market customers. Most of the flowers are Farmer's Market are cut the day before or maybe two days before they hit the market, and at the market we educate our customers about how to take care of those flowers, re-cutting the stems, they live with their flowers wrapped in a moist paper towel and a baggy and they're given a packet of floral food and are encouraged to use it. We tend to just keep that whole harvest chain starting with clean tools, clean buckets, clean water, harvesting at the correct time is very key, and then keeping them in the cooler and moving them out the door is the way we do that.

Chris: I always ask flower farmers this question, and I still haven't gotten a great answer for it, but we'll see if maybe you guys have a great solution for washing buckets. I know on my farm that was one of the jobs, washing the harvest totes, washing the harvest buckets, was something that always took longer than I wish it did and never felt like I got as good a result as I wanted to get. For you guys, that's a really critical step.

Mimo: It is a very critical step. Everyone on the farm washes buckets. There's not a bucket washer because that would just be a horrible job. Everyone on the farm washes buckets. They've got to be clean. I say the buckets should be as clean as the drinking glass, so I should be able to walk in and pick up a bucket and drink out of it. I've never done that but I should be able to. That's the idea.

Chris: What's your method for getting your buckets clean? Are you guys just using a scrub brush and a sink full of water?

Mimo: Yeah.

Chris: Okay.

Miranda: Soapy water and rinsing. My dream Chris, my dream is the bucket washer. The cut flower farmer, Janet Foss out in Chehalis, Washington, we visited her farm this past spring and she had a mechanized bucket washer with the big brush that rotates and has soap and water squirting out of the end of a hose while the big brush is turning. Mimo put that on my birthday list. That would be great.

Chris: Now Miranda, before we turn to our lightning round, I did want to ask you, I know you're a fourth generation beekeeper. One of the things that I was curious about, you guys talk about how the honey comes from the farm, and I actually saw a quote from food critic Jane Stern of the Splendid Table that said this is the best honey that she's



ever tasted. I'm curious, because on a flower farm, most of what you harvest is cut before the buds open, where are your bees getting their honey?

Miranda: In a perfect world, they would be cut before the buds are open. Some flowers do of course open and the bees are on the flowers, and beekeepers tend to have heavier harvests, urban beekeepers have heavier harvests than rural beekeepers because of the different type of blooming flora around in the city. Our bees are on our flowers. They're on our cover crop. We let the buckwheat sour so the bees can collect nectar and pollen from them. Then they're just getting it from the trees. I don't know, but it's a delicious unique floral blend that we're quite proud of. That quote from Jane Stern where really made my heart sing. That was quite the honor.

Chris: That is pretty darn cool. Mimo, it's my understanding that you're very involved with the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers?

Mimo: Yes, I'm the Regional Director for the Midwest region here. I've been part of that association for many, many years now. It's a network of cut flower farmers who's got to have a national conference every other year and have regional meetings every year. They get together and just share ideas and talk about how to develop their cut flower farms. People want more information, it's Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers, and it's a wonderful, it's the best organization I've ever been a part of in terms of actually farmers sharing information. It's just really great.

Chris: I know that anytime I talk to a cut flower grower, they insist on talking about the American Specialty Cut Flower Growers Association just because it is such a great organization and has been around for a long time and I think has been very important in the industry. Thanks for bringing that up and thanks for being involved with that.

Mimo: Thank you.

Chris: All right, with that, we're going to turn to our lightning round here at the end of the show, but first we're going to get a quick word from a sponsor and then we'll be right back.

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And we're back with the lightening round. We've got both of you on the show here, so I'm going to take some turns here. Mimo, what's your favorite tool on the farm?

Mimo: Broadfork.

Chris: Really? Is that something that you guys are using all over the farm every year?

Mimo: Yes. We use it frequently.

Miranda: I was going to say broadfork too. Hey, we're so connected.

Chris: I like that. That's so cute. I hope you guys have different answers for what's your favorite crop to grow?

Mimo: Mine would be ranunculus. I have several favorites. I always tell people that my favorite crop is the one that I'm making the most money on at the time that they ask. I really have to say somewhere between ranunculus and freesia.

Chris: What is it about the ranunculus? Maybe for those of us that aren't in the cut flower business, you can give us an idea of what a ranunculus is and how it grows.

Mimo: Yeah. Ranunculus is just an amazing, beautiful flower. It doesn't have a scent. It doesn't have a fragrance. It's called the poor man's rose in that it opens up and actually it's multi layered so it looks like a rose only it's round. Comes in multiple, multitude of colors. It grows about 18 inches tall, and it's one of the first flowers that bloom in the spring. When I say spring, my spring is kind of warped. For me spring is like February/March. It's one of the first flowers that really bloom, and I know the season is getting started. The last flower that blooms in the season for us is Salvia Leucantha, which is a tall, purple, bushy flower, and it always makes me depressed because I think the season has ended. Ranunculus is really special because I know that we're about to ... the flowers are going to be coming on full force any minute, and that just makes my heart sing.

Chris: How about you Miranda?

Miranda: I love lisianthus. It's long lasting. It hits right in the hot, hot heat of summer when you're just tired and sweating and scratching mosquito bites, and lisianthus comes. It's beautiful. It's long lasting, and it always cheers me when we hit July, which is I think our hardest time on the farm.

Chris: What's the weirdest thing that's happened on your farm?

Mimo: The weirdest thing that happened on the farm was that we had a car chase run onto some of our beds. The police were chasing. Inner city, right? The police were chasing a car and they drove through some of our farm beds.

Chris: Wow.



- Miranda: In the alley.
- Mimo: Yeah, that was pretty crazy.
- Miranda: In the alley. That was scary too.
- Mimo: Yeah, because one of us could have been out there working, we would have gotten hit. That was the weirdest thing I've ever seen happen on our farm is that they drove through our beds. That only happened that one time.
- Chris: That's good. I'm glad that only happened the one time.
- Miranda: I moved all these pavers to protect the beds now. If cars drive on them, it takes out their undercarriage.
- Chris: Nice. Miranda, what was the last purely recreational activity you guys did?
- Miranda: Together?
- Chris: Yeah.
- Miranda: Probably the Women's March.
- Chris: I'll ask each of you this question, but Mimo, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?
- Mimo: It would be to start small. To do exactly what I'm doing now would be to start small, keep my day job, make a plan. Those are more than one thing. Make a plan I guess.
- Chris: Miranda, how about you?
- Miranda: Oh I would tell myself dreams come true. You're going to have your farm. You're going to buy your farm. At the time you're 30 even, so stick with it kiddo. You can do it.
- Chris: I love it. Mimo Davis and Miranda Duschack, thank you so much for being on the Farmer to Farmer Podcast today.
- Mimo: We really enjoyed it. We listen to your show and just really, really love it.
- Miranda: Thanks for all you're doing out there Chris. It's so important what you're doing for small farmers, so thank you. Thank you for having us.
- Chris: All right, so wrapping things up here, I'll say again that this is episode 105 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast. You can find the notes for this show at FarmertoFarmerPodcast.com by looking on the episode's page or just searching for Urban Buds. That U-R-B-A-N, B-U-D-S.



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