



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast

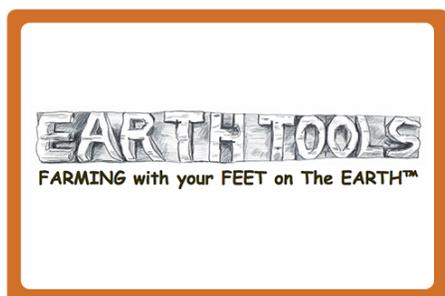


EPISODE 118

Danya Teitelbaum of Queen's Greens on Selling a Selective Crop Mix on the Wholesale Market

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Chris: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, episode 118. This is your host Chris Blanchard. Danya Teitelbaum is the co-founder and co-owner of Queen's Greens, 35 acres of fields and greenhouses in the heart of the Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts. Queen's Greens' specialty is what they call boutique wholesale, supplying restaurants, retailers, local universities and regional distributors with certified organic greens, herbs and a small selection of other vegetables. Danya digs into why they've limited their crop mix and marketing outlets and the implication that's had for their business. We take a deep dive into Queen's Greens model for putting out a reliable crop of salad mix week after week, including weed control on solid seeded beds and how they manage massive quantities of row cover to control flea beetles.

As a wholesale only operation, Queen's Greens fills only 100 orders each week during the growing season. Danya explains the systems they use to track and fulfill those orders and the administrative structure they've developed to get everything delivered, even though Queen's Greens doesn't own a delivery truck. We also discuss their conversion of a tobacco barn into a GAPs audit packing shed, as well as their winter spinach production. Just as a point of reference before we start the show, since it's spring and we do get into some timing related topics, this episode was recorded on April 19th.

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Danya Teitelbaum, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

Dayna: Thank you.



Chris: Glad that you could join us today. I'd like to start off by having you tell us about Queen's Greens there in Amherst, Massachusetts. How you guys got started and what you've grown into now and what you're growing and how your business works?

Dayna: Okay. I run Queen's Greens with my partner Matt Biskup. We are located in Amherst, Massachusetts. We farm on two separate pieces of land. One in Amherst, one the next town over in Sunderland. We grow about 35 acres of vegetables, the majority of which is baby salad greens and other baby greens, baby arugula, and baby spinach and a couple of different salad mixes. We also grow mature greens. We grow lettuce heads, bunched greens of a wide variety. We grow a wide variety of culinary herbs, and we grow tomatoes. In the winter, we have about an acre of hoopouses and we grow spinach all winter. We sell everything wholesale to a variety of outlets, and I guess that is pretty much the general story.

Chris: When you talk about your crop mix of really salad greens, herbs and tomatoes, you're not doing a bunch of root crops. You're not growing a bunch of broccoli. You talk about your sales outlets, not being at Farmer's Markets, not doing a CSA. That actually makes you a fairly unusual person in the organic market farming world.

Dayna: Absolutely. I would say, we actually do grow a small amount of bunched roots. We grow a small amount of bunched radishes, Hakurei and scallions, but it's fairly minor and certainly no storage roots and nothing like that. Yes, definitely a very unusual business model for a farm of our size and for being mixed certified, organic farm. We got to this ... We use to sell stuff exclusively at Farmer's Market, so this has been sort of a 180 shift to being exclusively direct market to exclusively wholesale. I would say that the shift happened for a variety of reasons.

First, we've only been exclusively wholesale for three years, so I don't have a huge wealth of experience to go on at this yet, but we are in the Pioneer Valley where there is a huge amount of vegetable farms. This is a very rich agricultural valley where we are also well-situated to a lot of markets. Pioneer Valley is fairly unique and that is a large agricultural valley for the north, and yet it's really not rural. There's a lot of people who live in the valley. There's a lot of colleges. We are about two hours from Boston, three hours from New York City, not far from Worcester, from Portland, Maine and from Providence, Rhode Island. There's a huge amount of sales opportunity both locally and within a reasonable drive.

Our farm is located surrounded by vegetable farms much larger than our own, so we are right in the middle of a large amount of produce trucking routes of distribution companies of all sizes. A big part of our move to wholesale is that our location suits it very well. We work with some distribution companies. We are definitely a very small farm for them to be working with, but we're right next to large farms that they pick up from anyway, so we've been able to work with customers who normally wouldn't necessarily work, go out of their way to work with a small, organic farm because it's easy for them. It adds diversity to their product line. There's also a large amount of small distribution companies that we have great partnerships with that are focused a lot of them on basically like a farm to table distribution companies.



Since we are kind of in the heart of the Pioneer Valley, they are, again, driving by our place all the time, so it's very easy for us to make those connections. Then, another big piece of kind of this spectrum, the Farmer's Market, the wholesale is, both my partner, Matt and I, really like the idea of running a more streamlined business. Growing a couple of hundred different vegetables is not as appealing to us as scaling up and kind of appropriately mechanizing a smaller groups of crops.

Chris: Why is that?

Dayna: I like having the right tools for the job. That's a big piece of it I think for me. I like being upscale enough on certain crops that we are able to invest in tools and systems to make it efficient. Our scale is kind of the, I'd say like, 30 plus acre farm if we were growing the full range of crops that we would be doing if we were doing a CSA or something. We'd be running our farm probably with a lot less equipment and lot less machination and probably a lot more labor.

Also, it was sort of a niche that we have stepped into in some ways. In the Pioneer Valley, there's a lot of large vegetable farms ranging from a couple of acres to a couple of hundred acres to a couple of thousand acres that are growing for wholesale, very mechanized, very streamlined for the most part, very large volume with farms that specialize in certain items for wholesale. There's also a large amount of smaller organic farms and because of that a lot of the traditional outlets for smaller, organic farms are very saturated here, but we started Queen's Greens in 2010.

In 2010, I believe we couldn't have started a CSA and sold enough shares without really pulling from other people's businesses. I don't know if we would have had the draw to pull from other people's businesses anyway. Our Farmer's Markets in the valley are pretty, even though we used to do some of them, we're also fairly, heavily saturated with producers. We've kind of carved out a bit of niche for ourselves that I almost think of it as borrowing some pieces from the two different agricultural communities in the valley. We are definitely in many ways a small, organic farm. We are also in many ways looking at some of our really scaled up neighbors and noticing some things that they're doing that we like and pulling that into our business.

I think we're kind of almost riding a little niche in between in some ways if that makes sense. It's a niche that has been more open to us. Doors have opened more easily than growing a diversity of vegetables.

Over the years, we've actually been becoming less diverse by the year, so back in 2014, we probably had twice the variety that we do, almost twice the variety of crops that we are growing this year, and that is just because the more we've kind of developed a niche and built a reputation and customers around that niche, the more doors have opened. I think differentiating ourselves from other businesses around us.

Chris: I'm curious. What crops have you dropped and what crops have you increased since 2014? Where have you done that focus? You said you were doing maybe half the crops now that you were in 2014?



- Dayna: Absolutely. Well, we used to grow peppers, eggplants, a lot more root vegetables, both a wider variety of young bunch roots and storage roots. We used to grow broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage. We used to grow cherry tomatoes. We used to grow more diversity of greens in the winter. Now, we just grow, we pretty much only grow spinach in the winter. Let's see, we've really scaled up spinach in the winter, lettuce heads, salad greens and other baby greens are kind of our whole baby green's aspect of our operation. Heirloom tomatoes, culinary herbs and bunched greens, especially ones that are a little bit more unusual, but not really out there, like broccoli robs, dandelion, baby bok choy, the kind of bunched greens that aren't as normal as green curly kale, but not totally out there. We've really started to grow a lot more of.
- Chris: Have those decisions to focus on those crops been based on your markets or have they been based on an analysis of the cost of production of doing greens versus root crops? How have you come to that decision?
- Dayna: A combination of factors. Certainly, some of it has been customer-driven, market driven. Some of it has been what we can grow most efficiently, and some of it has been about what we enjoy growing more. That's pretty much, those three things and if something checks all the boxes it's definitely one that we're gonna scale up.
- Chris: [00:12:30] Tell me a little bit about your production system. I'm gonna want to ask you about how you're doing production on the things that are more like row crops, things like the head lettuce, as well as, how you're doing the salad mix?
- Dayna: Sometimes I'm like, "How the hell did you get that done?" Yeah, well, another thing that I think is probably unusual about our farms compared to potentially the farms of a lot of your listeners is that we direct seed a lot of crops, so all of our baby grains crops, such as the majority of our production on the farm. We are going in to the field, we're doing basic plowing, harrowing, land prep. We're fertilizing and prepping beds at least two weeks before we're gonna feed them. We're letting all the weeds flush. We're coming in with a tractor mounted flame weeder where we're just flaming off the whole weed flush. We're coming in with a Sutton seeder. It does 17 rows on a bed, so we're getting a very dense seeding of spinach, arugula and then we grow two salad mixes. We grow like an Asian mix of brassicas and we grow a lettuce mix.
- [00:14:00] We're doing a dense bed for all of those. If it's a brassica green, we're Reemaying it, so we use a massive amount of Reemay at Queen's Greens. Then we're really just coming in, unless we need to irrigate, our next step is really we're coming in with our mechanical harvester. We have a full bed tractor-mounted harvester. It's an Ortomec 2000. About I don't know what time a year, two and a half to three and half weeks later, we're cutting the whole bed.
- Chris: You said that you seed it and then you're coming in with the harvester, so there is no weeding happening with those crops.
- Dayna: We do a tremendous amount of weeding, but it's all pre-plant. Once we plant, we do not weed. We are weeding, but it's with the flame weeder before we seed.



- Chris: Is it only with the flame weeder or are you doing other stale bedding techniques as well?
- Dayna: Once we really get rolling in the season, we only use the flame weeder. This time of year, when it's actually a little bit tricky to get weeds to flush, because it's so cold, I'm usually using a tine weeder for the first couple of weeks of the season instead of the flame weeder, just because the weeds aren't, they're kind of like just starting to germinate in the soil. They're not really emerged. We just kind of ruffle it with a tined weeder. Today, I seeded this morning and I went in with the tined weeder, instead of with the flame weeder first.
- Chris: Wow, and so you're literally, you're you said you seeded today, so you're literally going through and stale bedding and the seeds go in immediately after that?
- Dayna: Immediately after that, so, yes, it's part of the same process. The beds get, or at least within the day, but usually it's all in one morning. Beds get flamed, immediately behind it with the seeder. By the end of the day, it gets Reemay-ed
- Chris: You must not have many grasses in your field since I know flame weeding just isn't that effective against the grasses.
- Dayna: We actually don't have many grasses, so that's a big help for sure. All the lands that we farm has been in agricultural production long before us. They're really heavily worked soil so we do not have, occasionally on like the first foot of the bed on the very end, there's a little bit of grass, but that's about it.
- Chris: When you've got 30 acres of vegetables, one of the nice things I think is you've got those ends of the beds. They add up, but if you have to throw away the first foot because it's got a little grass in it, it's not like it's a make or break deal for the farm.
- Dayna: Absolutely, which we do often. If the grass, just the beds are a little messy we'll definitely start harvesting a couple of feet in or wherever we need to. This time of year though, because we can't come in with the flame weeder, so far we've been lucky in the last couple of springs that we've ended up with some pretty clean early beds in salad greens and spinach. The spring field's and a little bit extra chilly, so I'm a little nervous actually about the cleanliness of our early green beds that I'm seeding right now, but we'll find out.
- Chris: I was gonna say, I'm here in the Midwest, so I don't know exactly what you guys are dealing with in the Northeast, as far as, weather the last few years. Here, it's been really wet and the weather has been really eradicate. Yeah, for you guys, does the whole system ever just blow up in your face where you don't the stale weening done or the weeds get too big to get in there and flame them effectively? Does it ever go wrong, and then what do you do?
- Dayna: Well, I don't know if we've been doing it long enough to know the ... I feel, we've been doing this denis the stem with the flaming and the mechanical harvesting. We've got in



here in stages, so like I said, Queen's Greens started in 2010. We started growing a fair amount of kind of year round greens. 2013 was kind of our first salad greens like every week of the year like straight through the summer year. It hasn't been a huge amount of years, but we've, so far, we've harvested greens and salad greens every week of the growing season, so far it's working out. It certainly takes a huge amount of focus, you know the fact that we have a fairly streamlined crop mix lends itself to doing greens like this.

The greens are a tight schedule. We plant them twice a week, and it's a big process. We make beds two weeks out once a week. We have to harvest a full succession in the moment, so I better have had, at least the majority of it sold in time. The greens are such a tight schedule that they really set the rhythm for the farm. They take a huge amount of focus, so I think that yeah, so far we've been able to successfully make it work the majority of the time.

I think that a lot of it is due to we've made it the focus of our farm, so we can make the rest of the farm run around the rhythms that the baby greens set.

Chris: You've got the management systems, as well as, having the tools and the time resource available that you need to do that?

Dayna: Yeah, absolutely. The salad greens are, it's interesting because it's management-wise, it's the largest component of the production on our farm, yet it also in the field, until it hits the washroom, requires very little labor. The salad greens require very little labor in terms of our hired labor. The salad greens production in the field in really me, my partner, Matt, and one of our employees who's more of a tractor operator position. The three of us really do everything that has to do with the growing of the salad greens.

Then in the wash room at the harvesting of the salad greens, then obviously in the wash room it takes a fair amount of labor. We have a crew of up to ten people who are heavily involved in, a big part of their day is washing and packing greens. All the other crops we grow are all hand harvested, and so our heavy labor in terms of our crew and our employees in the field and then just, are kind of really light in a way on the washroom side.

For our farm, part of what makes the baby greens systems work and tight if that it involves the very small amount of people and we are focused on it. We hand off a lot of the other crops to dedicated people on our farm to be harvesting lettuce heads and stuff so that I am harvesting the greens, seeing how they're coming. I personally do all of the seeding on the farm, so I seed all the greens. My partner, Matt, and one of our employees does all of the bed preps since he's making sure that beds are made on-time. They're flamed on-time, and he handles all the irrigation on the farm. They're irrigated on-time.

We've really kept the greens because it has to be so tight, like a month really like me and my partner, Matt, manage the production of the greens.

Chris: You mentioned irrigation. What are you guys doing for irrigation on this scale?



- Dayna: I don't know if it makes sense to talk about it because actually we're in transition from one system to another.
- Chris: I actually, this is like this portrait in time, right? I always think one of the great things that people find out here is like, "Oh yeah, Queen's Greens, they look like they totally got their act together and they've got the system nailed and then you find out they're like-"
- Dayna: We do not.
- Chris: ... "Oh, wait they're doing something different next year than they did last year, and that means that there's always room for growth and improvement." I think that's one of the big messages of the podcast, so anyways. I'll just leave that there.
- Dayna: We do something different every year. At least one thing different every year. We used to do 50 things different every year it seemed. Yeah, well our irrigation system that we've been using since the beginning is incredibly simple. It is really just lay flat and sprinklers. The sprinkler has a pretty similar to what's normally on the on, aluminum pipe, but we're actually diffusing lay flat in between. This irrigation system is very labor intensive to get in and out of the fields, to put together, to pull apart, to be tightening pieces that lay flat around.
- We have, in the process of purchasing a new irrigation system that we hope will make irrigation a lot easier, a one-person job, which is we're moving to a system that's basically like a water reel, but instead of a gun at the end where, it have like a boom irrigation at the end.
- Chris: Okay, so you're not going to have that same problem that you have sometimes with those irrigation guns with having the really big droplets, because I think that would be a hard on your salad greens?
- Dayna: We absolutely could not use a gun on our farm. We really need like sprinkler irrigation and we also often, so it's really just like, it's the use of the reel in terms of one person can pull it out, turn it on and it wheels itself back in and then we could easily move it, but at the end it's gonna have basically like an 80-foot long boom. It's just gonna like, has a lot of sprinklers on it. We're in the process of putting this system together, so hopefully in the next month or so we'll be using it.
- Chris: We actually talked on the phone earlier today, and you said, "Oh, I'm in the middle of moving irrigation pipe."
- Dayna: Yes. I was gonna say, until last summer, we were very lucky with weather and with water until last summer we barely, we really didn't irrigate much, so having a very low-tech, labor intensive system that is hard to move and doesn't irrigate that much when it's place, which is kind of what we had, we have now. Wasn't that big of a deal because we would only, we had, we were just blessed that a couple of years of very regular rain, we just, never had to irrigate that much, and then last summer we had a



severe drought, so we were irrigating just all the time, and it really just kind of moved to develop this different irrigation system on our farm.

It's really a result of last year's drought, especially because we direct feed the majority of crops that we grow on our farm. Last summer was challenging with the drought and definitely made us realize that we really need a big irrigation system to be prepared for probably increasingly severe weather over the coming years, big move.

Chris: With the huge emphasis that you guys have on salad greens, what kind of crop rotation are you following?

Dayna: Not an extremely long one. Yeah, we don't grow a huge amount of kraut finally, so we're really doing, we are rotating crops, but we, they're not long rotations and we are using cover crops both off-season and in-season cover crop to help break up some greens. Certainly, one of the nice things about salad grains is between the time that we're making the bed to scale bed it and when we're harvesting it, we're really talking about kind of a five-week crop, but it's there.

There's a huge amount of opportunity for double-cropping, triple-cropping and cover-cropping in the height of the season, so we're trying to work a lot more with summertime cover crops because we don't have a huge amount of crop families to move around. We farm in two locations, so that helps a little bit, but our two locations are pretty windy, wide open fields so we don't have a lot of natural borders and wind breaks to help break up pest diseases, etc ... It is, one of the things that we're trying to do the best we can with, but I know our rotations are not as excellent as if we were growing more crop families. Time will tell if this is a good idea or not.

Chris: I think if you started farming in 2010, I always think of about three years is when things, in my experience, begin to fall apart if things aren't working fundamentally. Then, seven years is when the problems start to creep in if you really are abusing the soil or abusing those rotations. I don't know. We'll cross our fingers.

Dayna: Yeah, I really hope so. A lot of the large farms that were surrounded by in the valley grow, a lot of them grow like one or two crops, and they kind of an interesting thing is happening in the larger conventional farming community around us they actually have many multi-farm land swaps going on. It's very common for people to, if there's one big hill grower and a big potato grower and a big squash grower is that they will swap their land around year-to-year, so there's not enough ... I love that concept honestly. There's not enough certified organic growers doing streamlined crop mixes like we are that we could start an organic land swap. Maybe one day.

Chris: Maybe one day. That's a great idea, and I think just a nice little seed to plant there. You said that you harvest those salad greens with the Ortomec salad harvester. I know what that look like. Can you describe that on the radio?

Dayna: Absolutely. It's an implement that hooks to the three points and the PTO of a tractor. The PTO drives a bandsaw blade that cuts the salad greens and then they flop onto the salad greens like a moving belt that brings the salad greens back to a platform where we



have one to two people standing and kind of putting the green into bins behind the harvester.

The way our operation works is the salad greens harvest is, my partner, Matt, driving the tractor. I'm on the back with the salad greens, actually pulling them off the belt into the bin, shuffling bins on and off the back. Last year, that operation was just the two of us, did cut all the salad greens.

This year, we're planning to incorporate one employee into that operation also, because we feel like it would be a little bit more efficient to have a second person on the back with me. Sometimes it's a lot to be putting all the salad greens in, getting new bins ready and we think we can do it significantly faster with a three-person team. With it, we can really cut, if our transitions are smooth, in terms of, getting the bins on and off and coordinated, that's sort of where we lose some time. We can cut five, six hundred pounds of greens an hour.

Chris: Wow. When you go out to do a typical greens harvest, how many greens are you guys cutting?

Dayna: It depends. Last year, we averaged about 1,000 pounds per harvest. This year, we are planning on selling more greens. We're planting for selling more greens, and hopefully our customers are on board with that plan and we end up harvesting more than that per harvest. The whole harvest process would take us, like set up to finish, two and half to three hours.

Chris: I was working with a farm that we got set-up with one of these Ortomec's harvesters a couple of years ago and it was amazing what it did for the farm actually worked. All of the other processes flowed once you took that huge labor sync out of the salad greens. Did you guys used to harvest by hand or did you guys, when you guys got into salad greens, were you like, "Okay, we're getting an Ortomec?"

Dayna: Oh now, we've gone through the full range of up to this. We started out with knives. Then we went to the Farmer's Friend harvesters with the drill, which we actually still use those sometimes in our high tunnels. Then, we went to the Ortomec, so we have been through the full range, but definitely the Ortomec has been, yeah, it's definitely a game changer in every way for the farm. Just as you were saying like not only for the salad greens in particular, but for how the entire farm runs. It really has allowed us a typical, harvest day on our farms really is, as I noted in our crop mix, besides tomatoes, pretty much everything we grow wilts, so we have extremely full harvest mornings where everyone who works at the farm shows up and is harvesting.

As I said, me and my partner, Matt, and this year, an employee, are going to be doing the mechanical harvest while everyone else, which is at least seven-ish people are, since free up all of, getting the Ortomec has freed up all of our other labor to be harvesting lettuce heads, bunching greens, harvesting herbs, bunching radishes, like we've really just and so by the time we get to lunch time we've been able to harvest a tremendous amount of greens between all of us.



Then, a lot of the afternoon is spent processing salad greens. That's where a lot of our labor is going in the afternoon when everything on the farm is wilted anyway. It has really changed our flow and has been able to, shows you how to give us a structure around us.

Chris: Tell me what happens with the salad greens after they're harvested? I saw some pictures on Instagram of totes stacked up in the field. I'm assuming you come along and pick those up.

Dayna: Yeah, right now, on the back of the Ortomec we're harvesting just into totes and just dropping them in the field behind us. When we're done with the harvest, yeah, we're like thriving back through the field and loading them onto a truck. I have certainly seen farms with wagons and stuff, which would be pretty cool. We were taking out all the greens with you on the way out and that might be a step for the future for us, but right now we're just harvesting into totes. Picking them up in a second trip through the field. Then, they're heading to our wash room where they get put on pallets by greened hype, you know because in the field, in a normal harvest day we're harvesting four different baby greens items out of the field. Arugula, spinach, a lettuce mix and a brassica mix.

They get brought back to our wash room. They get palletized by type. They get wheeled into the cooler, so they start getting pre-chilled in the totes and then our wash, our post-harvest manager and team can pull them out of the cooler when they're done harvesting some other stuff in the mornings and start washing them. At this point, our washing is a lot more low-tech than our harvesting. We just use large, Rubbermaid, 100 gallon ...

Chris: Livestock tanks, right?

Dayna: Yes. Livestock waters and we are moving greens by hand through those, and then into pre-standard washing machine converted into spinners. We have a large packing table set up. Currently, our wash room is definitely by far the most low-tech part of our greens operation. It works for now. We're certainly interested in a little more mechanization in there in the future, but it certainly works for now.

Chris: Your farm is GAPS audited. Can you tell us about your packing shed, how it's constructed and how you got things laid out in there, as far as, water supply and electricity and all that, because it's interesting to me that you guys are using just, on a farm your scale, using something as simple as the Rubbermaid livestock tanks for doing your wash process.

Dayna: Yeah, our farm hub is in Amherst, so we have, as I said, land in the next town over in Sutherland, but all of our infrastructure and the hub of our farm is in Amherst, so our wash shed is in tobacco barn. That was on our property. There are tobacco barns all over the valley. The Pioneer Valley used to be a big tobacco growing area, so it's a very standard, very simple structure. It's 30 feet wide, 100 feet long. We've converted 60 feet of it to our wash shed, so our wash shed is 30 by 60. 15 by 40 of it is a cooler and so we kind of have a u-shaped wash area that's around our cooler, but it has a very long 60



foot, wide open stretch.

That has been really helpful for us because it just makes this linear flow of product, like product comes in on one end, and by the time it gets to the other end it goes into the cooler. That has really helped us out a lot, both in terms of GAP because they like having an in and an out of product, but also really psychologically I like having that flow of product through the space. Then the facility itself, I mean, is very simple. We have concrete floor. We've put in a concrete floor with really good drainage. The walls, have be for gas, washable, wipe-able, spray-able walls, so most of the walls are white metal roofing, and the top part of the walls and the ceiling is actually, basically like a white tarp pretty much. It's like a waterproof, white material.

Chris: Again, that works because it's up out of that main splash zone, so it's not like you're having to spray it down every single day.

Dayna: Exactly, like the first six feet all the way around is the metal roofing. We just did metal roofing because it's significantly cheaper than other materials. It's not even roofing. It's like a thinner grade of what you can put on your roof.

Chris: Right.

Dayna: It's just been very simple. I think part of the reason that it has been easy for us to get this facility to pass inspections is because ultimately there's just not that much there. It's all just bright, and clean, and wipe-able, and well-drained.

Chris: What I like that you've done there. I didn't realize it was in an old tobacco barn. You can't tell that from the inside.

Dayna: Not at all.

Chris: It's really clear that you've built an envelope inside of this older structure. You've got the structure that keeps the rain off, keeps the wind off and the weather off, but then the inside that are all of the cleanable surfaces.

Dayna: Absolutely, and it's 100% sealed off really from the other, we sealed and internal ceiling, internal walls. We operate year-round, so our wash room is also heavily insulated and it's a year-round structure. The heavy insulation, when we did it, I was thinking is it mostly for the winter? It's actually been wonderful in the summer because it stays very cool in there, even in the height of the summer.

Chris: That's really nice.

Dayna: Really nice.

Chris: Keeps the hot things hot, and the cold things cold.

Dayna: Exactly. It's worked very well for us for sure.



Chris: All right, so that brings us up to about the time that I'd like to take a break. We're gonna do that. Get a word from our sponsors, and then we'll be right back with Danya Teitelbaum from Queen's Greens in Amherst, Massachusetts.

[00:40:30] Perennial support for the Farmer to Farmer Podcast is provided by Vermont Compost Company. Karl Hammer, the founder and owner of the company likes to describe potting soil as a set of promises. A promise that it has the nutrients a plant needs, but it has the microbes the plant needs help forge those nutrients and that it's free of weed seeds.

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[00:41:30] Perennial support is also provided by BCS America. The BCS two-wheel tractor is the only power equipment a market gardener will need with PTO driven attachments, like the rototiller, the flail mower, the Power Hero, the Rotary Plow, Snow Thrower, Log Splitter and more. You name it and you can probably run 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 and it spoiled me for life. When you get behind a BCS, you can tell that it's built with the same commercial standards as four-wheel farm tractors, and it has many of the same features. I've used other tillers and mowers and most of the time when I was using them, I spent it thinking how much easier this would be with a BCS.

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Chris: We're back with Danya Teitelbaum from Green's Greens in Amherst, Massachusetts. Whenever I'm saying somebody's name, I always have to stop and make sure I'm actually getting it right. Danya was telling me, it's Teitelbaum, like a title wave. I really like that.

Dayna: Yeah.

Chris: On the break Danya, we were talking about another feature of your packing shed and how you've set up your cooler to work with your distribution system, so maybe we'll use that as a launching off point. Can you tell me a little bit about what you were saying over break about how trucks can just back right up?



- Dayna: Absolutely. We have an outdoor pretty much on our cooler. Our cooler has an indoor and an outdoor. It has an indoor kind of at the end of our product train, and then it has an outdoor, because it's back at the front of our barn. Our customers back their truck up to a large garage door. They open the garage doors to the building, the garage door into the cooler, they open that door and they self-serve their order out of the cooler, so when our customer opens the cooler door, they pretty much look for a pallet with their invoice on top and it will have their whole order. There's a pallet jack right there, and they load their own vehicle. We've really set up our cooler to facilitate our customers being able to come at all hours and get their product by themselves.
- Chris: When you say that, it sounds like you're doing most, if not all of your distribution through other people. Do you guys even own any trucks?
- Dayna: We own no road vehicles for the farm. We have a sizable suite of field vehicles. We own no refrigerated box truck. We own no farm vehicle that has to make it more than 10 miles in any direction, so we are not doing any of our own trucking. All of our production gets picked up by someone else from our farm. A large amount of that is small distribution companies who have been, amazing partners for us. We really could not be building the business that we have built without some amazing, locally-focused distribution company partners. They come and pick up their order.
- Then, there are a large amount of customers that buy directly from Queen's Greens, but we don't do our own deliveries. We basically contract out our deliveries to a friend of ours who is a trucker, who does our local delivery route twice a week around the Pioneer Valley, so stopping at local restaurants and food co-ops and grocery stores and we sell a fair amount to all the universities around here and colleges.
- Then, we also work with a few different partners to get our produce from customers who order directly from us into Rhode Island and Boston mainly.
- We do a fair amount of contract trucking with different partners.
- Chris: [00:46:00] Actually sounds like a lot of contract trucking with different partners.
- Dayna: It is. A lot. It's everything actually.
- Chris: Yeah, so I mean is that something that you and Matt are handling, or is that something where you've had to bring in additional office staff to help with that side of the operation?
- Dayna: I handle all of the sales for the business at this point. One day, maybe I'll share that responsibility, but right now I handle all of the sales, and I handle all of the logistics with our trucking partners. We have a bookkeeper who handles the receivable end of it. We do have an employee who handles basically all the customer payments and keeping track of customer accounts on that end, but I handle sales, trucking order, customer communication, that whole side of it.



I used to do it all via email, phone and Excel spreadsheets, which took a tremendous amount of time. We have started to use a database program called Local Food Marketplace. That has significantly streamlined the sales and process for us. Started the program where it's kind of like a shopping card style, I update pretty much continuously what we have available. Our customers can log in and see a shopping cart interface and place their own order online. It cuts down dramatically on phone calls and emails, in terms of collecting orders from customers. Then, in this program I can also format out of it a harvest list, a tax sheet, labels, all sorts of things that I used to make by hand. We've only been using Local Food Marketplace for about a year, so even a year ago at 11 o'clock at night in July, I'd be like making the harvest list that we needed ready for 6:00 a.m. based on going through all my emails and putting it all into an Excel spreadsheet and generating out what we needed.

Now, it's pretty much all automated. There are certainly customers who still order via email or phone or text, but even when I take their orders and just plug them into the system, I can generate on the back end all of the paperwork that we need to handle the logistics of running our operation. Everything that we harvest on the farm is harvested to order. We are not going out and really like, bulk harvesting stuff and then selling it afterwards.

In the morning, when we are harvesting, we are harvesting based on orders that came in and that are going out the next day to the customer. Our harvest list will have this many cases of green leaf lettuce, this many cases of rainbow chard and that will be going out into the field with our team and they'll be harvesting kind of exactly what is on the list. Having this database system has really enabled us to run a business where we have a couple of hundred different customers of all types.

Usually have over a hundred and, I think last summer at the height of the season we were averaging about 120 separate orders a week, which would just be at this point just extremely time-consuming without being able to use a database program.

Chris: [00:50:00] When you got off of email and started using more of a shopping cart system for the ordering, did you feel like you lost some of the personal communication that you were having with your buyers or when you were dealing with 120 people was that already out the door?

Dayna: In some ways, I don't think it has changed much because a lot of our customers would just email in their order. It was kind of the same thing if they just created a shopping cart. I wouldn't necessarily have a dialogue with them. They would really just, I would send out an availability list and they would just email in their order. In some ways, our communication hasn't changed, and I still regularly check in with customers. I regularly check in with our regular customers, and also customers who we haven't heard from in a while.

I'm very accessible, like when you call Queen's Greens, my cell phone rings in my pocket no matter where I am. If it's a customer, I stop everything I'm doing and talk to them. Our customers certainly call me all the time, email me all the time, so I think the, I don't



think our level of communication has changed much. I think it has mostly just made it a lot easier. Plus, on our end a lot of customers really like it because it's just, it's the way people are used to shopping. Very clear. They know what to expect. They can go into the program and see all of their invoices and what they've paid and what they owe. Just seems like it's been mostly a win-win on all sides. I don't feel like we've lost anything in the change.

Chris: That's great.

Dayna: I have gotten more evening time, not kind of just inputting data over and over again, so that's a big plus.

Chris: That's a big plus. I mean, that's huge.

Dayna: Another thing that's, a database program has allowed us to do, which has been truly a important piece for our business is it has allowed us to manage different customer groups at different price levels. This has been extremely important to our business because we have a wide range of customers from distribution companies that pick up at the farm in large volume of regular orders to the restaurants who order a small order that we deliver to their door occasionally.

Before switching to using this program, it was hard to manage different appropriate price levels for different types of customers. It has allowed us to really sell to distribution companies that pick up on the farm regularly at a lower price level and restaurants that we're delivering to at a higher price level and having that all be percentage-based, instead of before we were just sort of like slap on, more like arbitrary delivery fees to different customers.

That's really helped our business because ultimately we have found that customers do not like seeing a delivery fee. Restaurants are used to seeing on an availability list from a distribution company just the service that you're providing of delivering into their kitchen rolled in with the price. Honestly, we found that a lot of our customers to be honest are paying more now that it's rolled into the percentage, but they're not complaining about it.

Whereas, when we would slap on a flat delivery fee, they'd be like, "Well, I can't order. I'm just gonna order a small amount. I don't want to pay the delivery fee." It's been a weird, to be honest it's been a little weird, but it's been a huge boon to our business and being able to service and we work with and build relationships with different customers at different price levels that are kind of appropriate to their business and also good for us.

This has changed, not only our ability to work with a bigger diversity of customers, but also our thinking about the business because we used to think about whatever it is like, arugula cost this much per pound. Now, we really think about throughout the season we want to average this price on Arugula per pound. We've started to think about our businesses at our pricing and profits about juggling averages more than being fixed in the way we're thinking about it.



Chris: Are you adjusting prices for your wholesale crops throughout the season? Does the price of arugula go up and down from spring to summer to fall?

Dayna: Nope, it does not.

Chris: How do you set those price levels? How do you decide how much less to charge to a wholesale distributor who's picking up on your dock versus a restaurant that you're delivering to?

Dayna: Yeah, I think these are things that I'm learning. This is relatively new. Coming into running Queen's Greens have had a lot more experience farming than with business, and with really had how to run this stuff and almost no experience before running our business with wholesale. This is really, I'm totally learning as I go. These are things that we are always trying to learn more and make adjustments. Right now, I pretty much have larger distribution customers that pick up at the farm twice a week, every week of the year are in our lowest pricing category and that is pretty much what we have decided we need to be selling each crop for it to be profitable.

It's sort of us just being like, "This is what we feel comfortable with on this crop at this point." Then we have kind of a category that is institutions and grocery stores and independent customers who pick up on the farm, like more like caterers and stuff, more of the distribution companies. I think that's like an 8% bump, and then we have the, just across the board on everything. Then restaurants that we deliver to their door are like a 15% bump, so that's what we've done. That is also based on knowing a bit about what some distribution companies are upcharging are stuff on.

Really, when we're going to a restaurant we're just acting as our own distribution company.

Chris: It's probably important not to be in competition with your distribution companies. Not to be offering a dramatically lower or crazily higher price. I think either one of those would be bad.

Dayna: It's extremely important. We're definitely aware of that. We both, we fell, two customers directly that are in the sales radius's of distribution companies that we also work with. There's definitely like, we can't be selling to the end customer at the same price they're buying it from us at. Right?

Chris: I wanted to circle back to something that you mentioned way back at the beginning of the conversation, and that I noticed when I was looking at your farm on Google maps, which is that you guys use a lot of Reemay. I have to say, if there is one job that I hate on the organic vegetable farm it's dealing with Reemay. As much as you guys are doing, can you tell me about how that process works and why you haven't just decided to give up growing flea beetle crops altogether?

Dayna: I love that you can see the Reemay from the satellites. Yeah, I think a lot of people hate Reemay. I'll be honest, I actually don't. I really enjoy it. I have been, since day one, in



charge of the reemay on the farm and we have a lot of new employees this year and starting last week I started training a few of them on Reemay, and it's something that I will probably be personally doing at least through the end of June until they get really dialed in on it. I don't mind it at all. We use a ton of it, so I guess it's good that I don't really mind it. I actually quite enjoy it in a lot of ways, and I think, I guess part of it is I've got in a simple task that I have really done enough of it at this point.

We grow a ton of brassicas in a heavily flea beetle environment, so we plant 52 usually successions of salad greens a year. At a minimum that's like 52 separate Reemay events just for that a year. We also are growing radishes and Hakurei turnips and right now we're in the process of transplanting out all of our tails and stuff that we're gonna be Reemaying, so we do a huge amount of it and I think it's one of those things that I've done enough of it at this point. I've got the systems down, but it feels just extremely dialed. There's something about that that just feels very satisfying to do. I actually very much enjoy it.

Chris: Tell me about your Reemay system that you got dialed in. How do you get it onto the field and then how do you get it back off again?

Dayna: Yeah. We use sand bags, but they're filled with soil. They're soil bags. We kind of just go, first we go through the fields and we just drop walking by hand, bags down the isle where we're gonna need them. Then we, we do it so low tech. We have the Reemay balled up, kind of yarn ball dial. We're not doing any crazy folding or anything like that. Just big balls of yarn style. We unroll those down the beds and then we just spread them out and tack them. It's quite simple, but I think I've got in, definitely I've got in it very choreographed where I really, at this point, know how to lead a group of people through. We're putting the bag. When we get to this point, someone starts unrolling everything. Then there's a leading edge that goes out to that same square. Then, there's a following edge that tightening and squaring at, and I think part of why it's done smoothly is because our farm is the Reemay intensive that I've just gotten it down to like a choreographed dance of how we do it.

Chris: I suppose that doing it yarn ball style makes it relatively easy to get it back out of the field.

Dayna: Oh absolutely. We just gather it into an isle and roll it right up and put it on a truck. Another thing we've done that has been very important is we have no, every single piece of Reemay on the farm is 250 feet long, so we have no mystery balls of Reemay. If you're doing a 600 foot bed you know you're gonna need three pieces for the job. It's just very straightforward. We have three whiffs on the farm. We have a two bed, a three bed and five bed and they're like extremely labeled in different days in a barn. You grab however many you need from the right day. It's labeled what the width is to know quantity on the length and so you can just like go out and do it.

I definitely worked on a whole bunch of farms prior to starting Queen's Greens where there was a lot, the Reemay was less a part of the operation and it was just like a guessing game, in terms of, how much Reemay you were holding, how wide it was, how long it was, and I think we've just taken all that guessing out of it by just making it just,



there's only three options that it could be.

Chris: [01:02:30] Okay, so if you're doing a 600 foot bed, and you come out with three 250 foot pieces of Reemay. If I've got my math right, that means you've got a 150 feet of extra Reemay.

Dayna: Absolutely, just stays in the yarn ball at the end of the bed. We're never doing one bed at a time, so it's usually like you're doing, three or five, 600 foot beds.

Chris: Right, so you end up with several yarn balls at the end of the row when you do that?

Dayna: Exactly, and you just throw some bags on them. For us it has just been a million times better than having cut pieces of Reemay at every size.

Chris: Are you burying the edges of the Reemay or are you just relying on the periodic bags to keep the, to get it tight enough to keep the flea beetles out.

Dayna: We are only doing the bags. We use raised beds on our farm and actually have the raised bed really helps hold the Reemay down because the bag is down in the trench and just, it is in the tire track, which is about five inches below the bed, four to five inches, then just having that we've noticed has really helped keep the Reemay on. We're really only dropping a bag every 20 plus feet and it generally stays on pretty well.

Chris: Dayna, I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about your winter production because any time somebody is doing that, well, we used to do four season production in Northeast Iowa and it's always something that really interesting to me. Can you tell me about winter production and how that fits in at Queen's Greens?

Dayna: We have about an acre of high tunnel production. All of our high tunnels are, our winter production is extremely low tech. All of our high tunnels are off-grid, single layer plastic, pretty much as low-tech as a high tunnel can get. Everything we're growing in-ground, no heat, no light and when we started Queen's Greens in 2010 we were a, the first three years of Queen's Greens, we were pretty much a winter only operation. We were really just growing winter greens and selling them at Farmer's Market. At that point, we were growing a fair diversity of greens, spinach, lettuce, kale mainly.

The past two years, we've kind of scaled the diversity down to were pretty much just growing spinach in the winter for all of our same wholesale customers. Winter is my favorite time to grow, so the winter part of our operation is definitely my favorite part of what we do. I love farming in the winter. I love having what it does to our rhythm. Winter is definitely, we're just harvesting, washing and packing, so it's a significantly reduced schedule than the height of the season, but it's still, our employees are still showing up for work. I am getting away from the wood stove, and the computer, and harvesting greens, and getting in the wash room, and we are keeping that constant communication and sales going with our customers.

Even though the volume is lower, our customers are still picking up greens at the farm twice a week. That has just in a lot of ways really helped our business, both in terms of



employee retention, and customer retention, and having some unique in the winter. We only do fresh product, so we don't have any root vegetables or anything.

There's a fair amount of farms around that do winter production, but most of them are selling, having CSA, or they're selling at the Farmer's Market and they don't have a huge amount left over for wholesale, so the niche, I mean, we've found is pretty wide open and we've definitely, the winter has also been a time where we have got a lot of new customers who have heard that we have stuff available and they become curious, so it's actually been a great marketing tool for us.

Chris: With 30 acres of outdoor production and one acre of winter production, you must have a hard time supplying all of your customers with all of the greens that they want. How do you decide who gets what in the winter time?

Dayna: That's a great question. I would say in a lot of ways it's very self-selective. The winter product is, a lot of our customers are more like restaurants or distribution companies or the end customers, restaurants and the salad greens and the heirloom tomatoes and the herbs are really driving all of those sales. In the winter, we really just have spinach at a higher price, significantly higher price. The customers who are really staying with us and buying all winter are the customers who that local product is important. That really ends up, I guess in a lot of ways, just happens naturally. It's our local co-op becomes really big customers in the winter. A handful of distribution companies that we work with that are farm to table specific. Distribution companies are really important for us in the winter. There's plenty of spinach to go around amongst the kind of self-selected group that, paying that premium for spinach is important to their customers.

Also, the box share, the totally share box, like veggie box delivery companies that are locally-focused ... They end up being big customers in the winter, so I think our customers really select themselves around the winter. Even though it's only an acre, we produce a lot of spinach. A week and a half ago was our last winter spinach harvest and we topped out this year at 18,000 pounds of spinach sold in the winter. It's definitely not minor amount of production.

Chris: With that Dayna, it's time for us to turn to our lightning round. First, we're gonna get a word from another sponsor, and then we'll be right back.

Commerical: This lightning round and the Farmer to Farmer Podcast is brought to you by StoreItCold's CoolBot. Way back in 2000, the year that I started Rock Spring Farm, the manager of the local food co-op complained that the lettuce from local producers last for days in her cooler, while the lettuce from California last for weeks. What was that about 2000 miles fresher? I'd later found out that none of the local growers had a walk-in cooler. 17 years later this is still the number one complaint I hear from produce buyers.

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

Dayna: I don't have a great answer prepared and I knew you were gonna ask that, so because I listen to the podcast. I mean, really we've talked about the Ortomec 2000, the Green's Harvester. That has, in terms of an implement, that has definitely been the implement that has been the biggest game changer for us. It probably is my favorite tool to use. I love being on the back of Green's Harvester in the early mornings. I love the actual work on the back of it. I love how well the tool performs in our system, and another thing I truly love about the green's harvester is, the way our farm is laid out and the way our routine is, it's really like a ritual. Four mornings a week in the season. It's what I do, is you know I, 6:00 a.m., I'm on the back of the green's harvester. To me, having that kind of ritual with a tool in the early morning is really nice connection with it.

Chris: Besides your irrigation system, what change are you most excited about this year at Queen's Greens?

Dayna: I have three things. The irrigation system for sure, which we talked about. We are definitely, we're trying out a bunch of new packaging this year and I'm very excited to see what that does for our business. The biggest thing I'm most excited about is we just had a massive turnover in our employees, so everyone working on the farm this year has started this winter or hasn't started yet. We have an 100% new crew, which is incredibly scary from a management perspective and poses a lot of challenges, but I am also just incredibly excited about the team and the opportunity that is coming with having a full turnover. The opportunity to teach everything from scratch.

As I said, we've been doing things, kind of the way we're doing them now more or less for about three-ish years. Things in our business have been changing very quickly and it's sometimes hard to change the culture of how things are done with a lot of carryover people, even though there's also tremendous benefit to having many returning people. I'm excited to intentionally kind of blank slate a lot of the way that we do things on the farm this year. There's a lot of excitement for me in that both in terms of re-thinking how I want to teach jobs on the farm. Re-thinking how I want them done. Also, I just think we have a tremendous group of people lined up, and I'm excited for the team and the opportunity that is going to bring, without all the great personalities we have on the farm so far.

Chris: It really is, I've had that experience on the farm, and it's such a wonderful opportunity to reset, not just how things are done, but the whole feeling about them, the whole, the attitude, the approach people are taking. Just kind of be able to sweep all that old stuff, you know that time you lost your temper 36 months ago is now disappeared.

Dayna: Absolutely.

Chris: Instead of just being in the back of somebody's head all the time. It's really a wonderful, refreshing opportunity. What's your favorite crop to grow?



- Dayna: The winter spinach. I absolutely love winter growing.
- Chris: That was kind of no-brainer I thought.
- Dayna: It's a no-brainer, yeah.
- Chris: It's on the list, so I have to ask it.
- Dayna: There are no pests.
- Chris: Yeah, it's so nice. Do you have trouble with bowls?
- Dayna: We really don't. We're in a very wide open area. There's really not much cover for rodents. Yeah, so we really do not have ... When we started the farm and we didn't really talk about this while we were at a different location, and there we definitely had some rodent issues in the winter. Since we moved to Amherst, really not a problem at all. We just have the wind in the winter because it's so wide open, but so far that also hasn't been too much of a problem.
- Chris: We didn't talk a whole lot about your partner, Matt. Let me just ask, what would Matt say is your farming super power?
- Dayna: I don't know. Seems like you'd get him on the phone for that. I think that we really handle different aspects of running the farm. I think that one of the aspects that I really handle, I would say like the logistics of Queen's Greens. Some of the customers, to the crop plan, to the employees, kind of like how all of the pieces are fitting together and doing a lot of the communication and logistics and I usually call it like the circus performer who has all the plates spinning in the air at once. That's really my role in a lot of ways on the farm. It's to keep all of the plates spinning and to be on top of how all of the pieces are fitting together. I think that if there's some super power in that, I think that's the piece that I am able to, I'm getting better at pulling off. I am able to pull off that I believe he admires, being able to balance that many, that multi-tasking reign.
- Chris: If you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?
- Dayna: I still feel like I'm beginning. I still feel like I just have endless things to learn. Not much wisdom to pass on ... I think in the that I still feel like a beginning farmer. I'm always trying to tell myself to just keep holding the big picture and to like if one thing isn't going right, just think of all the things that are in the moment.
- Chris: Danya Teitelbaum, thank you so much for being part of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast today.
- Dayna: Thank you.
- Chris: All right, so wrapping things up here. I'll say again, that this episode 118 of the Farmer to



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Thank you for listening. Be safe out there, and keep the tractor running.