



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



EPISODE 153

Ryan Thiessen of Creek Shore Farms on Going Full Time, Small Scale Mechanization, and Winter CSA

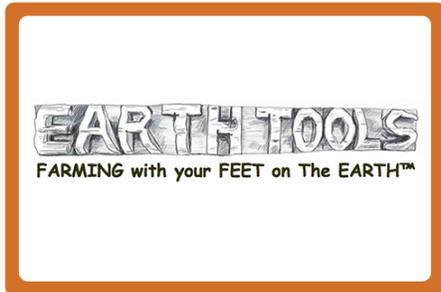
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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast episode one hundred and fifty-three and this is your host Chris Blanchard.

Chris Blanchard: Ryan Theissen farms four acres of vegetables in two locations at Creek Shore Farms in St. Catharine's Ontario. With one hundred and ten CSA members in the summer and seventy-two in the winter, as well as farmer's market sales, Creek Shore Farms provides a modest living for Ryan and his wife Amanda.

Chris Blanchard: While Amanda has been full time on the farm since it started in 2010, 2017 was Ryan's first year with farming as his only job. We talk about the challenges he encountered while making the transition and what he plans to do differently in 2018.

Chris Blanchard: Creek Shore Farms is highly mechanized for a farm of its scale and Ryan shares where and how he's made choices about mechanizing, and how he's taking advantage of two properties as a way to organize what crops are raised using what methods.



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Chris Blanchard: Ryan shares his adventures with two-wheeled Planet Jr. cultivating tractors and how they revolutionized weed control at Creek Shore Farms.

Chris Blanchard: We also dig into Creek Shore Farms focus on winter vegetables including cropping practices, hoop house adventures and their storage, washing and packing facility.

Chris Blanchard: The Farmer to Farmer Podcast is generously supported by Vermont Compost Company, founded by organic crop growing professionals, committed to meeting the need for high quality compost and compost based living soil mixes for certified organic plant production. VermontCompost.com.

Chris Blanchard: And by BCS America. BCS two-wheeled tractors are versatile, maneuverable in tight spaces, lightweight for less compaction and easy to maintain or repair on the farm. Year driven and built to last for decades of dependable service. BCSamerica.com.

Chris Blanchard: And by High Mowing Organic Seeds, the first and independently owned farm based seed company, proudly serving professional organic growers for the full line of 100% organic and non-GMO project verified vegetable, herb, flower and cover crop seeds. HighMowingSeeds.com/FarmertoFarmer Ryan Thiessen welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

Ryan Thiessen: Thanks Chris. Glad to be here.

Chris Blanchard: So glad you could join us today. I'll just make a note that you are here with me on the shortest day of the year. Even though this won't come out for a couple of weeks after that.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, it's funny I was doing home deliveries this morning thinking about that it's the shortest day of the year and looking forward to the days getting longer and doing some sun catalog planting.

Chris Blanchard: Kind of interesting on a day length piece and I'm going to ask you to tell us where you're located and you're going to say " Oh we're in St. Catharine's, Ontario" but it's worth noting that you are on exactly the same latitude as I am here in Madison, Wisconsin.

Ryan Thiessen: Okay, no I didn't know that and I just didn't pay attention to it. Yes, St. Catharine's, Ontario. We're right in the heart of the Niagara Fruit Belt surrounded by mostly orchards and vineyards.

Chris Blanchard: How much are you growing and where are you selling that product?

Ryan Thiessen: We own our farms two and half acres and ran into an additional 2.8 acres of rent land. About four of it is in cultivation. This year we ran a hundred and ten member summer CSA program. Seventy two winter member program and we went to the Wellon Farmer's Market. We're changing that as we go forward, we're dropping the Wellon Farmer's Market. We're going to be directing all of our sales to here at our farm. We are in the middle of building a store on the farm. And rather than take our product offsite to a market where ... We're going to do everything in house here.



Ryan Thiessen: We'll grow pretty well every vegetable that you can name, although I'm guessing most of your listeners can name a few that we don't grow. Our specialty in the area is doing winter vegetables. There's a number of CSAs that grow for summers. We do a big summer CSA but we also do a very robust winter that runs from about the fourth week of November right through to the end of February.

Chris Blanchard: Wow! And that's a weekly delivery during that time, right?

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, so we used to do a regular called it the full share and then a basic share and that was always tricky to manage. So, starting this year we do a weekly share all winter and we also do for, people that wanted the smaller box, a bi-weekly share as well. That's had a very good response rate, especially since winter tends to be more storage crops. People can definitely eat for two weeks between getting boxes.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, but our full share members get a box every week all the way until the end of February and I've always been keen to go further. Ideally, I'd like to go year-round but March and April being the two hardest months of the year for us to grow.

Chris Blanchard: When you say that you are in the Niagara Fruit Belt, you're on the south shore of Lake Ontario, just to the west of Niagara Falls, right?

Ryan Thiessen: Right, we are about twenty minutes west of Niagara Falls. We're on the western edge of St. Catharine's. I can see the lake. The property across the road from me is a lakefront property. One interesting thing that does is for our home farm property it makes the fall ... I usually get about a degree or two warmer in the fall, compared to about five to eight kilometers away. It also a degree or two cooler in the spring, so when we're trying to pull our squash out of the fields at the rental farm, it's only a five minute drive, but shuttling back and forth I can see the temperature on the van is swinging one or two degrees. I've always found that interesting.

Chris Blanchard: What kind of winter conditions are you farming in there? Does it get cold on the south shore of Lake Ontario?

Ryan Thiessen: Probably not Wisconsin cold. Our typical winter might see, I'm going to take some guesses here. Averages of minus ten celsius. I'm going to have to speak in celsius here. The coolest we usually get is about minus twenty celsius, which gets pretty cold. About zero to the low one to five degrees is probably about as warm as we get in a warm spell in December through February. It's gets cold enough, but it's not too bad. The last few years have been a bit different, a lot less snow and we've had some really mild winters. Although they're telling us that this one's gonna be more of a normal winter. That's made some changes in insect pressures, things like that. Especially in the frozen zones where those insects aren't dying as much.

Chris Blanchard: Are you guys also doing fruit crops? Or are you strictly vegetables?

Ryan Thiessen: For the most part we are strictly vegetables. We've dabbled in a little bit of strawberries, it's never done well so we pretty well took that off the plate. We do some melons just to give something extra to our CSA customers. We call ourselves strictly a vegetable farm, and we will raise five pigs twice a year and we have some chickens. That's just there for our on farm manure program.



Chris Blanchard: The region that you're in, is it primarily a vegetable producing region? I mean, you called it the Niagara region fruit belt. Is that what's dominating that area? Or is it different kinds of agriculture there?

Ryan Thiessen: There's a lot of variety. It's very dominated by grapes and it is tending to lean more towards grapes as time goes on. Farmers are pulling tree fruits. Arbor good soil, I would say, is mostly dominated by vineyards, orchards, some nursery's and then there's a scattering of cash crop farms here and there. Further south of us, ten, fifteen minutes the soil gets more clay-based, so that's a lot more cash crop farms, and then the odd vegetable farm like us. There's not a lot of really big ones, those are all more towards Simcoe way. So, an hour and half or two away from here.

Ryan Thiessen: I think probably land is typically too expensive here for larger vegetable operations.

Chris Blanchard: With the four acres or so in production and the hundred CSA members and the farmer's market, are you guys making a living on the farm?

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, I would say we are. This is my first year being full-time farming, before this I worked as a machinist for a local university building scientific equipment for the professors. So, now is our time to sort of get the farm going, off the ground.

Ryan Thiessen: I made the decision this spring to farm full time and we're not making a middle class income or at least on paper we're not. But we are making a comfortable income for us. There's been a lot of discussions I've seen before where people quack about, "You can't just base farming income off of pure numbers." There's a lot of other benefits that aren't written down on paper. We've certainly realized those as well.

Ryan Thiessen: To answer that question simply, I would say "Yes." We are making a living at it.

Chris Blanchard: Your wife, Amanda. Is she full time on the farm as well?

Ryan Thiessen: Yes, so she's been ... She started technically in 2010 and she's been the full time farmer since then. She's always been the one on the farm full time, over time my roles have sort of gone to where she handles harvesting, packing, going to market and dealing with the CSA customers. My role has really become field planning, field prep, planting and weeding. So, I get the things from concept to harvesting and she takes it from harvest to market, that just naturally happened. With us, it also worked well because that was the type of work I could also do in the evenings or weekends or here and there as opposed to having to be the regular guy all the time.

Chris Blanchard: Right.

Ryan Thiessen: Those are both our strengths in those areas and we both enjoy them, so in terms of the partnership and the farm between my wife and I, that break down has worked really well for us.

Chris Blanchard: Four acres is an interesting scale to be farming at. I'd say that not a lot of the guests that I've had on the show are doing four acres. There's a lot of people doing two or less, and there's a lot of people doing ten or more, why are you guys farming four acres and how does that work for you?



Ryan Thiessen: I've always wanted to farm, in the back of my mind, ten to twenty acres, it seemed fun. So, one reason is land in Niagara is hard to come by, especially where I am there's a lot of pressures from nurseries and other growers for rental land. It's very expensive to buy, which is why we only own a very small home farm. Another reason is it seems to be to scale, with the right love of mechanization, where my wife and I can pretty well handle it. With very minimal assistance from employees or things like that. We've used some apprentices in the past few years often one, maybe two in the summer we are moving away from that, I think a little bit, more towards having a single paid student employee in the summer. But at four acres, using mechanical cultivation, you can provide a wide range of vegetables so a lot of people who grow on one acre, they don't produce things like squash, potatoes, sweet potatoes, because they just take too much room. Especially because we run a winter CSA, those are the kinds of crops that our customers want. Now I need to be at that four acre scale.

Ryan Thiessen: So what I like to think about is when we are on our home farm in a very intensive system. We still use row cropping at fifteen to centers. We farm like a guest of Jason Weston. In fact, a year ago I saw a picture of his farm and wondered how he did it and that inspired me to wander down the Planet Jr. Road.

Ryan Thiessen: We farm our home farm very intensively.. That's where we grow our lettuce, onions, tomatoes, those kind of things. And then, our rental farm, because it's far away, you tend to farm there with much bigger row cropping stuff. That's our potatoes, our squash, our sweet potatoes. And everything from planting to harvesting on a lot of those crops is as mechanized as we can.

Ryan Thiessen: We just bring in groups of volunteers or people when we need the extra work for harvesting. If we file for our potatoes and sweet potatoes we have two Saturdays and we do a big group of volunteers out who look forward to it every year. Some of them can't have Thanksgiving without it, but during harvesting we do big potatoes and big sweet potato harvests and have a big lunch feast. It's really turned into a mini community event for us.

Chris Blanchard: I'm interested in when you say, "Get on the harvester." Are you actually mechanically harvesting your potatoes?

Ryan Thiessen: Yes, I wouldn't do potatoes without mechanically harvesting them. Not at ... If I was growing a few of them, that would be one thing. We'll harvest about five ton of potatoes and another five ton of sweet potatoes. I would go more if I have more land, but we plant them with a mechanical transplantor or Holland planter and you can get the bed planting shoes for those, the carousel part planters.

Chris Blanchard: Okay.

Ryan Thiessen: Then we cultivate with a FarmAll A and we harvest with the tractor and a mechanized harvester and specifically one that people can ride on. I don't like the idea of harvesting potatoes, spitting them out of the back of the machine, and then having to wander around, bending over and picking up potatoes. We have this where people can be standing and it's much quicker, better on the back, and makes for one enjoyable time.



Chris Blanchard: It's fascinating to me that you are doing that kind of mechanical harvester on the scale of production that you're talking about. I think that's pretty unusual. Is that something where you've actually sat down and penciled that out for return on investment for that piece of equipment? Or is this just something where you're just going off of your preferences.

Ryan Thiessen: A little bit of both. I've done cost of production on potatoes. It's one of the few crop I have done cost of production on. I find it hard to do it on some things. Especially when it's mostly my wife and I doing most of the work and we don't have time-management software for the two of us. But owning the harvester I thought normally wouldn't be fully supported by cost of production for over say, 5,000 pounds.

Ryan Thiessen: Two things that make it happen are one I'm handy with urban equipment and they are opt to make that stuff cheaper. I also really like equipment so even if I don't have a full time use for it, I really like doing things as mechanized as possible. One of the problems we had for years with just Amanda working on the farm was that everything had to be done quicker because it was mostly just her, sometimes her and an employee and anything I needed to do had to happen on a Saturday or in an evening. So, going very mechanized seemed like the right decision for us.

Chris Blanchard: So specifically Ryan, how did that potato harvester make sense on your operation, besides just the fun part. The fact that you like having equipment and like having the mechanization.

Ryan Thiessen: The potato harvester made sense for us because we wanted to grow as much potatoes that we could supply our farmers market as well as our whole CSA almost all winter. We could have had bed-broomer, used the one were they pick them up off the ground but that would have taken a really long time. And, for us having the kind of harvester where we could harvest 10,000 pounds in about four to six hours really made sense for us. At the time also, we were considering scaling up to almost a full acre of potatoes and then that kind of equipment really starts to make sense.

Ryan Thiessen: I find that mechanically harvesting potatoes makes it an enjoyable experience and it doesn't take too much out of me.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned that you were an engineer building stuff for professors at the university and I've seen a lot of pictures of you working in your shop as I've followed you on Facebook and other places. Tell me a little bit more about that, what a fantastic skill set to have for a farmer!

Ryan Thiessen: I worked for the local university, Brock University we had a machine shop at the university there, our job was to take ideas that professors had, sometimes it really mapped you, and turning that into a scientific apparatus that would function.

Ryan Thiessen: So, I'm a machinist by trade and I have some background in mechanical design. I don't have an engineering degree, per se it's all been self-taught. And I really like building stuff.

Ryan Thiessen: So as long as I can remember from the farm, I've always been custom building my own farm equipment before I had even heard of Jean-Martin I had built my own raised bed maker. So, we used to grow on raised beds, we moved away from that about



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a year ago. I have found it to be both a blessing and a curse at times, because I can build things. I find sometimes I spend too much time building things on the farm and not enough time actually farming out in the field, although I've made a promise to myself for 2018 that will change. It's put me in the unique position where I'm able to, very cost effectively, build and trial farm equipment for myself, we used to speed up the processes, improvements are also designed and built farm equipment for other small farms in the area. I've done some under-cutters, things like that and I really enjoy doing that, it's a nice side hobby thing for me in winter.

Ryan Thiessen: What it means for me is that I can fairly risk free build these and try equipment as opposed to being on the other side of the fence where if I'm looking at buying a potato harvester like that, I did buy this one used from another farmer but I'm building a brand new one this winter. Instead of having to spend, probably for something like that, for five to ten thousand I can build if for probably a quarter to a half of that.

Ryan Thiessen: What makes it very cost effective to own some of the things that I do. Although I am always looking for ways where I can build these for other farmers and also be cost effective, because I know the struggles.

Chris Blanchard: So you mention the under-cutter and of course the potato harvester. What are some of your other favorite tools that you've built on the farm? Or things that you feel are really different than what you might have been able to go and buy off the shelf?

Ryan Thiessen: A big one that you can't buy off the shelf anymore are those Planet Jr. Cultivators. Which Jason Weston invested initially the two wheeled cultivating tractor and being able to build the tubing for them that no longer exists. I don't have my systems dialed in like he would, but I can see how they would completely change the farming landscape for us. Especially in the staffing position wherein as most farms our size would have multiple employees, we effectively do it with maybe one. So there's that.

Ryan Thiessen: I also built my own flame leader. I used purchased components, but I designed the system as a tractor mounted unit. I used liquid propane, that was fun. I've done a lot of reading on a technique called false cultivating or stay SC bed cultivating with very shallow, precision controlled cultivation. I see a lot of benefits to that, over flame leading even. And soon to be one of my pet projects is building that system.

Ryan Thiessen: The one nice thing that I can do is I can experiment, if something doesn't work I can tweak it, if I don't like it I can turn it into something different. So I build the false cultivator for our farm all this summer and it didn't work that good. But now I can turn it into a three point mount type of implement and keep moving forward.

Chris Blanchard: Kind of repurpose the mistakes that you've made and ...

Ryan Thiessen: Well, we don't like to call them mistakes.

Chris Blanchard: Repurpose the learning opportunities that you've had.

Ryan Thiessen: There you go.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned that you had gone from raised beds to not raised beds this year. Could you tell us a little bit more about how you're actually getting the work done with



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the tractors on your farm? How are you getting the tillage done? How are you getting those fields and rows and beds laid out?

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, for sure. We're still in the figuring out, learning stage there. Typically, in the past both of our farms were set up for tractor access and I had a raised bed maker I had built, and on the back of it was a big wheel with spikes. We called it the wheel of doom. That was all made to raise the beds, it made all the dimples. It marked out a six by six grid on the bed then we could pick whatever we wanted to hand plant. That worked okay.

Ryan Thiessen: We did try a really nice ... I think that's called a carousel planter, where it spins with the cups that open. We had one of those, didn't work for us. We grow so few of any one thing, it needed to be setup all fancy every time for everything. This year we switched to a paper pot transplant and a standard plant and then start seed drill. So, we always had the raised beds. I didn't like the raised beds. There's an awful lot of hand work for us, a lot of hoeing. The shoulders on the raised beds, if you tried to be too mechanized, they'd disappear and fall to the ground. We are in very sandy soil. I realized that it has some really good drainage advantages over heavy soils. Our soil actually made it even drier, which was always a problem.

Ryan Thiessen: I'm on always on the hunt for different weed control solutions, looking for ideas and came across pictures of Jason Weston's farm and his claims of flame leading and I was pretty impressed. So mid-winter last year we re-jigged the entire farm, re-planned everything. Went from a bed system to a rail system, which didn't really decrease our yields. The problem we were always having with the raised be system was because it was so much hand labor for us to try to reach the carrots. There was enough room in the bed, just didn't have enough time but with row cropping, even though the density is down a little bit our yields are up. Because we can really control those weeds.

Ryan Thiessen: Now our home farm is setup, not for tractors anymore. We made the head rams very small. In between every section we put a row perpendicular and our goal is to put flowers and other beneficials to attract beneficial insects or berries, that kind of stuff.

Ryan Thiessen: We did have a BCS rototiller and typically we've always prepared the fields by disc-ing cultivation, rototilling, spading. It all depended on what it needed. Now we are trying to get away from the rototiller, it's something we should use. I just makes that beautiful seedbed, but I'm just not happy with what it does to the soil. So, I'm trying to build and scale equipment where we can prepare the soil with more of a false cultivator that makes a very nice seed bed in the top one or two inches. Then we'll go through and either hand transplant with the stand transplant or with the paper pot transplant or the seed drills. Then we can get in with our Planet Jr. Cultivators and finger weeders, and really keep those weeds under control from there.

Chris Blanchard: And again, being able to use that Planet Jr. Cultivator and the system you are talking about, really being a function of not doing those raised beds anymore because that's what really gives you the ability to get in there with that Planet Jr.?

Ryan Thiessen: I wouldn't be able to use those in a raised bed. It would fall of on the one side and it wouldn't track straight. I have since forgotten some of the reasons why we moved away from raised beds, but I do remember they were more, I just was not happy with the system in our own situations. Lots of people make really great use of them, but in our own situation at the scale we are trying to operate on we just don't have the



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workforce for that kind of thing. Crops like potatoes and sweet potatoes really don't work well on a permanent raised bed system, they need so much soil disturbance to do it at the scale that we're at.

Ryan Thiessen: Our rental farm, it's all three and four foot row spacing, things that full sized tractors can fit in. I'm very heavy on the tractors for the size I am. I think at one point I had six or seven.

Chris Blanchard: Oh really?

Ryan Thiessen: I grew up with tractors. My dad's a farm equipment mechanic. I really love tractors. We've changed the preclean this year. We're scaling down in the numbers, but it will always be something that I really like having. Plus for the rental farm, I'm a big believer in having cultivation tractors set up and left that way. So we have two, we've had three, now we are down to two Farm-all super eight tractors. The goal is to have them both set up differently. I just bought and ISG this year and we're going to see if we could set that up for carrots and beets, that kind of stuff. Then I have the motor two Ford tractors from the eighties. We have a new Kubota tractor and a Farm-All H. Maybe some other tractor kicking around somewhere.

Chris Blanchard: Interesting to me that've you got a whole fleet of older tractors and then the new Kubota. What made you jump in on the new Kubota instead of going just going for another used tractor?

Ryan Thiessen: Back in 2013 we were still using Massey 135 for most of our farming, it was a really great tractor but hard to steer, no power steering and it didn't have a loader, that kind of stuff. So looking at tractors, disadvantage of the used tractor market is I can go buy a brand new Kubota for probably four or five thousand more than a used one that has the full warranty, and you talk about on farm debt. But they are giving 0% financing. It's free money in a way. You just have to pay it back, it gave us the rotor tractor it gave us the movability that we needed. It had a nice modern roll bar setup. The Massey 135 one we had a solid sway and you couldn't do much with it. So we had that.

Ryan Thiessen: Then we got our Ford 1710 to match up with the Kubota, they are the same size tractors. So now we use those two and just a couple months ago maybe a month ago now, I noticed our tractors were a little bit small sometimes for the kind of stuff we were doing with potatoes. The 1710 was working pretty hard on that potato harvest on wet ground, it couldn't quite pull it. With winter coming I needed a tractor I could lift the skid of harvested carrots and only have an under-cutter on the back. I needed more rear weight. So, I actually sold our 2012, or 13, Kubota. We're selling the 1710 and we bought another slightly larger 40 horse Kubota.

Ryan Thiessen: We're sort of now ... This winter's all about fine tuning all of our equipment, making changes so that we can farm exclusively with that as our main tractor. We have a really small 1310 to do little things and then our Freedom Cultivation tractors.

Ryan Thiessen: And a little bit of that Ben Hartman Lean Farming thing where maybe it's good to have a couple less tractors, but more ... Make sure everything fits together. A little bit hard for me to give up tractors, but it seems like it's going to be the right decision.

Chris Blanchard: Painful but okay in the end.



Ryan Thiessen: Yeah.

Chris Blanchard: I think when you talk about trading up those tractors and doing a little bit of horse trading there, and moving things around, and getting rid of stuff, it's something that I always think is so important to keep in mind when you're buying something like a tractor, whether you're paying cash for it or financing, is that it is an asset. It retains its value. And I'm willing to bet that when you sold that 2013 Kubota, you probably didn't get a whole lot less for that than what you paid for it.

Ryan Thiessen: No, I didn't. And that's the thing. Not to make this a sales pitch for Kubota or anything, but I bought a Kubota because I knew it was going to be a good tractor and that if I ever needed to sell it, and I assumed I would own it for 30 years, but clearly that didn't happen. It retains a lot of value. I sold it to somebody, I think, for a fair price. But it didn't cost me that much to own it for the five years. And now, upgrading to a newer, much more expensive Kubota, probably going to be the same thing I would suspect.

Ryan Thiessen: They really hold their value and I think it's one thing we often get scared to do, is to take a little bit of a financial risk. It's costing me more to buy this new Kubota, but what it's costing me is going to be more than offset by the benefits it's going to bring, and that's a very important lesson to remember in spending money. A little bit of debt is okay if it's well thought out and placed in the right spot. And I've never been afraid to make investments that I know are going to typically make a good return on the investment in a short term or long term. Once in a while you make a mistake, but you try not to make ones that are too big. And I'd say at this point in the game we sort of have a pretty good idea of the benefits that an investment like the Kubota is going to make.

Ryan Thiessen: We'll ask my other top tether farmers about winter farming, and the big complaint is, "Well, I don't have anyway to store vegetables. We just can't store that much." Well, we made the decision a few years ago to, again, risk more money to build a brand new not too big, about 24 by 48 barn. And it's a two story barn and they have now in here the capacity for vegetable storage all winter. We have a store front we're building. We have a wash-back space in there. And without investments like that, I wouldn't have been able to operate what I think is a very successful winter vegetable program. Those decisions obviously need to be weighed, and you need to work and sort of pay that back. But, I think if we're to be successful at what we're doing, we need to make sure we're constantly making these investments, always upgrading, trying to improve ourselves just a bit here and there, and hopefully in the end that pans out into something.

Ryan Thiessen: But, I've never been afraid to invest in infrastructure, in capital, because I know what it will pay off in the long run.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me a little bit more about the structure that you put up for doing the winter wash and packing, and the storage.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, so we built it ourselves, my dad and I. And it's 24 feet wide, 48 feet long, like I said. It's a stick-frame structure. 16 foot tall walls. At the time when we built it, I had assumed it would always be big enough. I assumed it would be too big. I've since realized that's not true. But, we're kind of stuck with how many buildings we can put where we are. The main floor now is divided into sort of two or three sections. We're



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building a 16 by 12 store for vegetable sales that can be expanded into a 16 by 24 if we ever need. And the L ... The other ability of the L shape is it's not really concrete that's used for it, but part of it is for our wash/pack area, part of it is for our potato and sweet potato storage.

Ryan Thiessen: We typically harvest those into 700 pound bins, and they need a pretty sturdy floor to be able to move around the stocking floor hard. And then we store all the other stuff in ... We have a cold storage we built and then they have room upstairs for things like squash, that kind of stuff.

Ryan Thiessen: One thing I did, when we spec'ed this building was to make sure the floor upstairs was spec'ed heavier than they normally would so that we could actually run a pallet truck up there and move pallets around. So, that was a big benefit doing that. Didn't really cost that much more to do when you really think about where all the expenses go in building a barn, to upgrade your floor is something that could take a lot more weight is actually quite minimal in the long run, and makes it very convenient now when you need extra space.

Chris Blanchard: And how do you get the squash up there?

Ryan Thiessen: We have a big door, well ... Not big. It's 5 by 7 at the back, and we managed to find ourselves a forklift that just about runs, and it ... We put the squash on greenhouse carts. We have a lot of greenhouses around us. We have a four wheeled cart, usually about two feet wide, five feet long with shelves you can adjust the height on, galvanized. So I laid foam down on each shelf where the squash sit, then we forklift them upstairs. Makes our job really easy so we don't have to carry it all up there.

Chris Blanchard: Nice.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, it's really, really slick way that that works.

Chris Blanchard: I think vertical space is something that is really easy to ignore the value of. I was actually just talking to a friend of mine today about packing shed design. That's something we were discussing is if you go into most commercial warehouse spaces, they're really tall. And those guys are making use of sometimes five or six macro-bins stacked on top of each other. If you're in a vegetable warehouse or if you're looking at even just the shelving in a conventional warehouse, or even in a Costco. Often times, 20, 24 feet tall. And I think it's something we often times ignore is how inexpensive it can be to put stuff up high.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah. In our case the ceiling downstairs is only say nine feet, something like that. But, often people, when they build a barn, will just stop there and put the roof on. But I'm a big believer in, obviously if the building code will allow it, I always put a second story on there, because it costs almost not that much more to build another layer, to put a floor in and you've suddenly doubled your space. I mean, we built a ... Was it last year or the year before? We built an 8 by 12 cold storage with a CoolBot. On top of that I built a second floor. It's a really tall building for how big it is. But, that gave me the ability to put even more storage space above it, and I stored a lot of winter vegetables. In the past we always, with carrots and things like that, we covered them with straw, you know that Eliot Coleman method, for winter. And that worked okay, but it was a little bit ridiculous digging, especially for my poor wife, digging through all that straw and snow in winter to dig up carrots.



Ryan Thiessen: And now, we're trying to move towards storing the carrots pre-bed, digging with the under-cutter, and really speeding that up. So we'll need to make sure we have enough storage for that. It's nice to have the storage on the farm, and to control it. And it's always there when you need it. Another option would be, for people, is to ... Maybe this is specific to my region, but there's a lot of cold storages from fruit farms that aren't used in winter. That's always been sort of an option to store things. You just need to make sure you have the ability to transport it back and forth. But that might be something that people aren't thinking about and utilizing. For other people that might be in areas that have bigger farms that shut down through winter.

Chris Blanchard: We actually utilize some off site storage on my vegetable farm at Rock Spring Farm that was two hours away, but it was on our delivery route, and so we were able to take it all up there. We actually hired somebody to haul all of the bins of carrots up there and then we were able to stop on the way home from the Twin Cities and pick up a couple of bins of carrots at a time, bring those home, wash them up, ship them out. Again, taking our delivery truck up and shipping them out, then pick up some more on the way home to clean for the next week. It worked out really well for us.

Chris Blanchard: With the winter share, you're also doing greens and stuff like that out of your high-tunnels?

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, this year we didn't have quite as many as we had hoped to. But, typically we have four hoop houses that are 20 by 100, 20 foot wide by 100 foot long. They're unheated. And yeah, we'll typically do things like lettuce, salad greens, spinach, and there's maybe some swiss-chard. The kind of green stuff that just won't make it past December. That's a big boost for winter is to be able to have those greens. I mean, baskets can get pretty brown and orange looking, but you just throw one thing on top that adds some green in it and it totally changes the way a basket looks.

Ryan Thiessen: So, we put them in a fair amount. We had much smaller ones before that, maybe a couple of them. One of them still needs to be skinned. That's going to be a big benefit and a big change to us. We grew cucumbers in the one this summer. It was our first foray into protected culture. And that was not a good experience. We made a lot of mistakes. But, despite that those cucumbers tasted better than any cucumber we'd ever had.

Ryan Thiessen: And so, for this next year we're probably moving all of our pepper, cucumber, tomato, and melon cropping to being exclusively under protected culture. Just given the benefits that we saw.

Chris Blanchard: I think especially with the amount of land that you have available, it sure makes sense to make use out of that protected culture and the kinds of increased yields that you really can realize there.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, for sure. And, I mean, our rent farm here, we probably have 1.2 acres roughly in usable land. And we try not to farm the other farm in winter just so we don't have to go everywhere. Having that 8, 000 square feet of hoop house space, you know, that can produce ... I'm not maybe saying almost as much as the rest of the farm is an exaggeration, but it's amazing what we can cram in there and how much faster and better it grows. You know, we're still really trying to figure out our hoop house systems.



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We haven't nailed those down yet. But, I mean, ideally the idea would be starting soon. We might start planting more stuff into them and get a really good spin crops.

Ryan Thiessen: I'm always trying to find that way to get vegetables in March and April, and those hoop houses I think are going to be one of our tickets. And then, parting it in such a way that it's easy just to transition as best as we can into the tomatoes and other things. And then right from there, transition into the sort of winter leafy greens. So, typically, in our climate, with tomatoes, being off that ground wherever you plant the tomatoes is tied up all season, that's all you'll grow there. But using protected culture, I can essentially get three crops, if not more, out of the same amount of space.

Chris Blanchard: All right, with that Ryan I think this is a good spot for us to stop, take a break, get a word from a couple of sponsors, and then we'll be right back with Ryan Thiessen of Creek Shore Farms in St. Catherine's, Ontario.

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Chris Blanchard: All right, and we're back with Ryan Thiessen from Creek Shore Farms in St. Catherine's, Ontario. So, Ryan with your CSA, something I thought was interesting was that you guys do on farm pick-up, but you also do home delivery of the CSA boxes.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, so when we started our CSA in 2010, or 2011, I think we only did farm pick-up. Then somebody had the idea, probably me, to start offering home delivery and especially for winter. I think, maybe, winter was what spurred that on. A lot of people don't like to drive in winter. Offering home delivery opened up a huge market for us. There were a few things it did for our CSA that really helped boost our numbers. One of them definitely was adding home delivery.



Ryan Thiessen: So, until now we've always charged 3.75 a week, which is pretty cheap. And I get that number just because it's 60 dollars for a 16 week home delivery. We're upping that next year. We've always done it in plastic bags. We're moving now to cardboard boxes. We just started doing that and the response has been really good from our customers. Just making that change, even building it into the price, it just gives you that much more of a professional looking product. I've run the numbers on the home delivery at that price, and it's enough to pay for the fuel and to pay say 15 bucks an hour, which is just above minimum wage here. And so it seems like it might be sustainable. But, we'll see. One of the justifications for it is that if we have to stand around for two, three hours while people pick up their CSA baskets, what's the big difference if we're spending that time driving?

Ryan Thiessen: The part that's probably not sustainable for us, and it only works because I'm still fairly young, is that say for instance this morning I did 34 home deliveries. So, I was awake at 2:30 in the morning and I deliver from 3 a.m. to 8 a.m. over to the Niagara Peninsula. And in summer I do nearly 40 something home deliveries, but in about the same amount of time. Increasing deliveries doesn't increase time that much. All you're doing is increasing your delivery density typically. We have a map that we deliver to. And so, the 2 a.m. mornings are probably the part that's not sustainable, so we'll ... I'm seeing some contemplating in the next year or two, looking at hiring that out to somebody who can do it in the evening. I don't want to make anyone else do that in the morning.

Chris Blanchard: Right.

Ryan Thiessen: I know when I deliver the box, it is there, it's delivered. I need to learn sometimes to let go of things and let other people ... They'll do all right.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah. All though home delivery is something I've seen a lot of farms struggle with when they've tried to delegate that to somebody other than the farmer. I mean, it really does change things.

Ryan Thiessen: The home delivery has worked great for us. It accounts for probably 40 to almost 50% of our CSA sales depending on the time. It's a lot of people who like getting it. The time of day I do it at means I don't get to see the customers usually. There's that face-to-face connection we talked about. So, I don't know if attrition rates are higher with that. I'm not as good always at remembering to run those numbers. But, we have a lot of people who return year, after year, after year and I don't think they've ever met me. They just really like that their baskets are there when they wake up. Their kids get excited, you know? Every Thursday morning there's a box at the door with all these new, exciting, fresh vegetables.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, it's worked well for us. It's one of our niches. There's a couple other farms in the area that might do home delivery. They do it a little bit differently. We've purposely tried to keep that price low to make it affordable to people.

Chris Blanchard: What kind of a delivery vehicle are you using for that?

Ryan Thiessen: 2014 Dodge Caravan.

Chris Blanchard: Okay.



- Ryan Thiessen: Grand Caravan. I couldn't think of honestly a better vehicle. It happens to be also the vehicle we use for everything else. But, we have that and then we have a big, like a gram and parcel van that we use for heavier hauling if we need to. But, that's not so good for home deliveries. It's a little slow.
- Chris Blanchard: And I suppose ... So, doing those deliveries in the middle of the night also makes sure that that product's as cool as it's going to be coming out of your coolers and then going to your customers.
- Ryan Thiessen: Right, in summer, certainly it helps keep it cooler. In the winter you get the opposite where it's maybe too cold sometimes. I mean, you'll be at -15. You've delivered that box at 4 a.m. when the person doesn't get it till seven. You're going to start wondering what it looks like after three hours. Never had any ... I always just did that with plastic bags. The stuff was exposed. That is another reason we switched to the cardboard boxes. I think it will give us just that little bit of extra insulation against the elements.
- Ryan Thiessen: Plus, we're always looking at those companies like now there's Blue Apron, things like that, and how they're doing their packaging. And while I wouldn't say they're direct competition with us, they're definitely spending the marketing dollars and so we've actually tried a couple of the boxes just to see what it is they're doing and trying to sort of capitalize on the money they spent. And certainly having a really professional looking cardboard box ... It's just a cardboard box, but it's about the perception people have when they get it. It's not just this bag on their porch anymore. Now it's a packaged up cardboard box. And we're going to get a nice stamp for it and brand those boxes.
- Ryan Thiessen: We had one customer email us this morning. It was their first time getting a box and they absolutely loved. It was easier to pick up and it just had that professional look to it. And that's really important for us is that what we're doing comes across professionally.
- Chris Blanchard: Yeah, I mean you're trying to ... I don't know. We used to call it just being in it to win it, even when we were just getting started on our farm. We worked really hard to develop perception that we had been around for a long time and we were going to be around for a long time. And that we cared enough to develop the image of a professional farming operation.
- Ryan Thiessen: We worked really hard to brand ourselves as a professional farm. It worked good for us for a while, actually, that we were a new farm. People were really excited to support a young, new farm. That is one angle. But after a while, you're not that young and new farm anymore, and you really need to work at letting people know you're established, you're here to stay, and that you have this really professional appearance that people want to be a part of. That your stuff looks clean. That's one thing we started with is always making sure our product is clean enough, and looks clean.
- Ryan Thiessen: I mean, people know that they're buying farm-fresh organic food from us, but there's still that perception that we've all grown up with that that pepper has to look a certain way, and things have to be a certain amount of clean. Sumac terrible for that. There's just no way to clean that.



Ryan Thiessen: I seem to be forgetting ... We used to give out ... We used to brush the dirt off the potatoes as best we could. We didn't have a way of cleaning them. And I had one customer, he's a friend of mine, and he ... I don't know what he was thinking. He didn't realize that he needed to wash the potatoes and he ate them like that.

Chris Blanchard: Ugh.

Ryan Thiessen: With the ... Yeah. I don't know. But, so we're trying to get now to the point where we don't have incidences like that. That's the only incidence I know of and he's my friend so it was funny. But we want to have that professional look. So, at the start of our building, it's not just a roadside stand. When they come in it's going to be a really professional looking store. And people are going to, I'm hoping, are going to want to come to it. It's small, but we really put our efforts into it and the store is ... We're actually changing our CSA and farm tidbit completely around because of this store.

Chris Blanchard: How are you going to be changing that.

Ryan Thiessen: So, we've typically done the CSA style, where I call it you get what I give you. We'll have nine items that week and that's what you get. You might have a swap box. But, because we're doing the store, we're going to stop going to the Wellon Farmer's Market, so that's ... But we, at the same time, thought, " Hey, wouldn't it be cool if we used a gift card style ..." These are the names for that. So a square is a credit card payment process. We have really nice gift cards you can get. And so, it's still a CSA in the sense that people have prepaid for a discount to support our farm in the time when we're having all these expenses.

Ryan Thiessen: But then, they're now going to come to the farm, and instead of the two hour window once a week, we're going to be open four days a week for probably five hours at a time. And they can come in and buy whatever they want. Going to be a learning curve for us for sure, but I know for a fact we lost CSA customers over the years who do want to support us, but it just doesn't work for them having to take what we give them. And we tried really hard to balance it, but you'll get the customers who two pounds of potatoes a month is too much, and you see the next customer who two pounds a week isn't enough. And this way we'll be able to customize that for all of our customers, and certainly that pick up window increasing to four days or not having to worry about missing a box. We sort of informally pooled a lot of our customers and every single one of them is really excited about this.

Ryan Thiessen: Our home delivery will still be you get what I give you. We're just not set up to customization there. But, we're really excited about this change.

Chris Blanchard: Right on the about us page of your website, you talk about donating a significant portion of your production to a local food bank.

Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, that's something we've always tried to do. We don't always get to the ... I think we list 15% and we try really hard to get there. It's ... We've had terribly, sort of, crazy weather in using the roads, so we don't always do that but ... What spurred that on is before we started farming in 2009 we were youth leaders of our youth group at church, and we had a big garden at the house we were renting. And we filled our whole garden with the youth group for the food bank. And that sort of ... When we wrote up



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our first business plan, we purposely put in there that we were going to donate 15% of everything we grew to the food bank.

Ryan Thiessen: And I say that's really been more of a goal, or a target that we'd like to do than as a hardened fact. It can be ... There's times when it can be really hard to hit that. We're going to make ... I like to make a really strong effort in 2018 to get a lot closer to that. And as we refine our equipment and things like that, it gets easier to get there. But, that's always been an undercurrent in our business is that we realize that, and it's becoming less true, but that veg is more expensive often in the grocery store. And I think that's changing, especially in organic food. But there are always people who for whatever reason couldn't always afford to eat, or where they're going, and we wanted to, in the best way we could, make that accessible to people. We also early on took some tours to the local food bank and they were showing us some stuff that they often got donated in terms of fresh fruit and vegetables. And often it looked pretty sad. So, that's one of our important things that we decided was that we weren't going to just donate seconds and ugly vegetables. These people are going to get the same quality of vegetables that we are giving our CSA customers. And, if we had lots of seconds, I'm not above sending that there too, but certainly making sure that we're sending some of that really good stuff along as well. I need to make a living but I'm still a big believer that eating good, healthy food is super important and more people need access to it.

Chris Blanchard: And is that something where you're working closely with the food bank to coordinate on what kinds of products they need or what their customers might prefer? Or is it really you guys working with your own farm plan to come up with that?

Ryan Thiessen: I think in the past it's been working with our own farm plan to come up with that. We've heard back from them a few times about things they didn't like or wouldn't like. We don't ... We don't have a really close working relationship with them yet. That's something I'd probably like to work on. I know I'd like a system where they would come once a week, and maybe we've had a big volunteer work crew harvest all the extra stuff, and there'd be a really good system for that. And we've been working to try and develop a system like that. There was an organization here in Niagara called Garden of Eating, and they were ... What they did is they would go to people's homes, and if you had an apple tree in your front yard, and you weren't going to harvest it, they would come harvest it. They would take a third, you would take a third, and a third would go to the food bank.

Ryan Thiessen: And they were working with us on the farm too, to come and harvest some of our stuff. And we were trying to figure out how to ... There were going to be some benefits to us absorbing that. But, we've also found some difficulties with insurance.

Chris Blanchard: Right.

Ryan Thiessen: The insurance being the one thing that seems to kill some good ideas sometimes. Often we have these really great ideas and it just doesn't work out. So, for 2018 I think ... 2018 is really a year for us where we're taking a look at what we're doing. We're staying really focused. I had some problems with staying focused on farming in 2017. That made some things difficult. So, one of the things with the food bank, with that, is instead of trying to absorb Garden of Eating, what I want to do is, because our current farm insurance allows us to have volunteers on our own farm and the rental farm, is we're going to cultivate that volunteer thing happening here. And while I've been trying to manage offsite places, we'll just use the talents that we're good at, which



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is growing vegetables to grow more, and hopefully develop systems that allow us to donate more using volunteer help.

Ryan Thiessen: That one is really important. The volunteer help. We don't always have the time to harvest the extras, things like ... Especially with the small crew that we are. But there's a really good group of volunteers who we've worked with who are really excited to come out and harvest. They've even come out ... If we need help and if they know that a good chunk of this is going to the food bank, then they're more than happy to come and help. They're vision is aligned with ours.

Chris Blanchard: Have the donations to the food bank been an important part of marketing? Do people come to you, or are they attracted to your farm because you're doing that?

Ryan Thiessen: Well, we never thought about doing it for the marketing thing. Obviously, in the back of your mind you're thinking, "Well, I mean, we're trying really hard to help the community. People will really like this." And we've had a couple people who have helped us with volunteering or that kind of thing because we donate. But, in terms of the marketing strategy, there's nothing there, if I can put it that way. I think the majority of my customers don't even know that part or we don't really advertise it much beyond that spot on our website. I think we used to, but people mostly care about the quality of their food and maybe in the back of their mind they're happy we do that. But I think if we didn't do it, it wouldn't make a huge difference.

Chris Blanchard: In addition to you, and Amanda, and your employees, you've got a smaller member of the team as well.

Ryan Thiessen: We do, yes. Sydney. She's five and a half years old.

Chris Blanchard: As you talked about Amanda working full time on the farm over those years while you were working off the farm, I had to think how does Sydney fit into your farming operation?

Ryan Thiessen: I don't know why, as you were saying that I got emotional. But, Sydney, she's a great kid. She wants to always be part of the farm. We've tried to raise her, but helping on the farm is just what she does. I mean, Amanda is ... She's an amazing woman. I can't believe what she does sometimes. She harvested the entire winter CSA and everything by herself and often Sydney's cruising around with her. Now Sydney goes to school. But she's with us in the summer and stays home maybe a day a week on Saturdays. With her we've just really tried to make it an important part of her life that we ... For us, farming isn't a career. It's who we are. We are farmers. That's a distinction I sometimes make. And maybe sometimes I'm too much down that road. But, with her we are farmers and this is what you do. And she's always excited to help, at least 95% of the time.

Ryan Thiessen: So, when she was born, she was born in May right at the cusp of the season. I was lucky enough to take nine months parental leave. It was still a bit of a struggle. Especially since I'm not that good at harvesting. But, we made it through that and my parents have been a help with that too. My mom would watch Sydney sometimes. But, I mean I've got to put a big kudos out there to Amanda. Amanda did all that, you're making me really think about this now.

Chris Blanchard: It's a good thing for us guys to keep in mind.



Ryan Thiessen: Yeah, I mean I work at Sydney ... I mentioned much earlier that we've used apprentices in the past or interns, whatever you want to call them. We call them apprentices. And I look at Sydney as someone who's on a really long term apprenticeship. And it's been kind of funny because there were times when she was maybe four and she would see one of our other apprentices doing something and she'd be sort of saying, "No, you're doing that wrong. You're supposed to do it this way." And they always took it really well of course. But, so far she claims she wants to be a farmer. So I feel really proud about that. But, I mean she still is only five and a half. So, we'll see where it takes her. In a way I couldn't imagine doing this without her now. I get to see a whole different side of farming with her around. It slows you down sometimes, but that's probably a good thing, to not always be running at full throttle. Sometimes you've got to see things through kids eyes.

Chris Blanchard: Your farm name, Creek Shore Farms, makes it sound like you're on a creek and I've looked at the Google Maps and there's no creek.

Ryan Thiessen: No, there's a ditch at the back. And we actually picked that name at our old rental farm. We used to rent a farm before we bought this place in 2012. But, there is no creek there either. Back when we were looking for a farm name, that's always a tricky one, picking a name. And what was really important to us at the time, and it's still important, was local food and sort of being really hardcore local. That's maybe a bit extreme, but that kind of thing. So, since we're in a wine growing region, that's a really popular thing. We'd be Niagara, Appalachian they call it. And the thing with Niagara, there are sub-operations, or sub-regions within Niagara, and apparently every region has it's own terrior, which is a wine word that connects the wine you're drinking with the land.

Ryan Thiessen: And we really wanted to sort of draw on that. And so, our land at the time, and luckily we still are, happens to be in the Creek Shore sub-operation of the Niagara region. One of our dreams was always to work with a restaurant, maybe a meat supplier and have this really super local meal, and that dream ... I think it's happened, but it's not something that we've pursued. But that's where the name came from is really trying to emphasize that we're local. I don't know that the branding has carried us that way. I don't know that most people would associate our area with Creek Shore. It's a really quirky wine term. But it meant something to us. At this point, people know who Creek Shore Farms is, and that we are local and do produce local food. So, I guess maybe it's worked. But that's where the name came from. No creeks, just a ditch that I probably can't ride a sailboat, ride a paper sailboat in.

Chris Blanchard: I've always wished that we could get the kind of clique-y-ness around how carrots taste different in Southern Ontario versus Northeast Iowa versus Central California, that we get around wine, you know? I always thought that'd be nice.

Ryan Thiessen: I think that's what we were going for, and I certainly see it as a big difference there between Southern Ontario and California. I'm usually not very ... I don't know, toot the farms trumpet, but with the one thing I will do is I always tell people how good our winter carrots are. That freeze time cycle that converts the starches into sugars just blows peoples minds away when they eat them. And that's a really important marketing tool is those carrots, in a way. Especially if you can keep them around a long time in winter, because they remind people how good you are and that they don't have to go to the grocery store to get firewood.



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Chris Blanchard: That was really mean.

Ryan Thiessen: I'm sorry.

Chris Blanchard: Accurate but mean.

Chris Blanchard: Okay, so with that we're going to turn to our lightning round. First we're going to get a quick word from one more sponsor. This lightning round in this episode of the Farmer to Farmer podcast is brought to you by High Mowing Organic Seeds. When your livelihood depends on the quality of seeds, be confident in your investment. When you grow organically, you need to know that your seeds were selected to perform in organic conditions. High Mowing offers professional quality seeds grown by organic farmers for organic farmers. Visit High Mowing online to request a free copy of their 2018 seed catalog. Read about the companies mission and browse over 700 organic varieties including tried and true market standards, all new high performance hybrids, and beloved heirlooms. Use the code F2FSeeds when you purchase online or mention the code when you call to receive a 10% discount on purchases of 100 dollars or more. Visit HighMowingSeeds.com/farmertofarmer. Or call 866-735-4454 to get started.

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

Ryan Thiessen: My favorite tool has to be the Planet Jr. Cultivator with the [inaudible 01:10:29] specifically, of all the tools, just for the time it saves in weeding is incredible.

Chris Blanchard: And you already had cultivating tractors on the farm with the Super-A's, and you bought a G. Where do the two wheeled cultivating tractors fit in to your operation and why are they such a boon for you?

Ryan Thiessen: They set you up ... The FarmAll A's are really set up for the large scale crops with wide spacing like potatoes and things like that. They're still used, a little on the sloppy side. It's hard to control them in fine areas. The G is about just the summer, mostly for fun. And yeah, for all the smaller crops, like the carrots, and the lettuce, and that kind of stuff having those Planet Jr's, we could cultivate all those crops that are so packed together that the only thing you had before that was a little hoe, a hoe, or your hands. It opened up a whole new world waiting for us. And I can't emphasize enough the difference it has made. When you stay on top of it, and I wasn't always that good at it this summer, but when you stay on top of it with [fingerlators 01:11:39] and inner cultivation it goes from wondering how to cope with all the weeds to a really enjoyable experience.

Chris Blanchard: What's your favorite crop to grow?

Ryan Thiessen: Potatoes. I love growing potatoes. Maybe it's because I do it all mechanized and I love equipment. I just, beyond a doubt ... They're a lot of fun and I love eating them.

Chris Blanchard: Now, when you're growing potatoes, are you focused on just pushing out a whole bunch of whites and yellows? Or do you do a bunch of off type varieties as well?

Ryan Thiessen: In our first garden we grew 15 different kinds. We had no idea what we were doing. Some of them were awful. So, we've really switched to growing mostly Yukon Golds. That's just what people want. Then some red potatoes, and then a few Russets. I



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will probably branch out. I'm part of a ... Participatory Potato Breeding Program in Ontario with the Garden Seen Initiative. We're growing potatoes adapted to everyone's individual climate. That's kind of fun. I may bring in other potatoes as it goes. We don't grow big potatoes. Our potatoes are typically smaller than other peoples potatoes. We don't irrigate and that's part of ... That's on purpose. We find it tastes better un-irrigated.

Ryan Thiessen: I just really like growing potatoes. I would grow 20 acres of potatoes if I thought I'd make a living at it.

Chris Blanchard: What's the farm mistake that you've learned the most from?

Ryan Thiessen: The biggest mistake I've made on the farm has probably been taking on too many side projects. I usually like building things and building farm equipment. And sometimes I spend way too much time doing that and not enough time actually in the fields engaged in the act of farming. And that was a really hard lesson to learn in 2017 after I had left my day job I assumed I'd have all the time in the world for every project imaginable. And that just slapped me in the face. And I learned. But, that's what we're here for. We get to learn and try again.

Chris Blanchard: And finally, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?

Ryan Thiessen: If I could go back in time and tell my beginning farmer I would tell myself to anchor hoop houses better.

Chris Blanchard: There's a good one.

Ryan Thiessen: I mean, back in the early days, we lost a a lot of 16 by 50 hoop houses. And I'm excited about the whole movable hoop house idea. And I thought I had got the anchoring down right, but I did not have the right fasteners, and we had four of them blow away in one fall. And that was devastating. Lost those winter crops. I remember the one, it was flapping around. I took the tractor out there to anchor it. I hooked it on with straps. And then I ran all the way back to the barn to get the other tractor and save the other one. Pull the other tractor around the corner and the other tractor was just sitting in the middle of the field by itself and the hoop house had blown away into the pig pen. There were no pigs at the time. But it had sacrificed itself upon the pig pen. Hoop house anchoring. Man, I can't stress that enough. I had some rough incidences there.

Chris Blanchard: A poorly anchored hoop house will definitely give you more sleepless nights than just about anything else on a vegetable farm.

Ryan Thiessen: Oh, for sure. I had to ... For the longest time after that I couldn't sleep on windy nights. But, I mean, you learn lessons the hard way sometimes when you're young. But now these ones, they're not going anywhere.

Chris Blanchard: Ryan, thank you so much for being part of the Farmer to Farmer podcast today.

Ryan Thiessen: Well thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me.



SHOW NOTES: <http://www.farmertoFarmerpodcast.com/episodes/thiessen>

Chris Blanchard: All right, to wrap things up here I'll say again that this is episode 153 of the Farmer to Farmer podcast. You can find the notes for this show at FarmertoFarmerpodcast.com by looking on the episodes page or just searching for Thiessen. That's T-H-I-E-S-S-E-N. The transcript for this episode is brought to you by Earth Tools. Offering the most complete selection of walk behind farming equipment and high quality garden tools in North America. And by Osborn Quality Seeds, a dedicated partner for growers. Visit Osbornseed.com for high quality seed and extreme leading customer service and fast order fulfillment. Additional funding for transcripts is provided by North Central SARE, providing grants and education to advance innovations in sustainable agriculture. You can get the show notes for every Farmer to Farmer podcast right in your inbox by signing up for my email newsletter at FarmertoFarmerpodcast.com.

Chris Blanchard: If you enjoyed the show, please head on to Itunes, leave us a review, talk to us in the show notes, tell your friends on Facebook. We're at Purple Pitchfork on Facebook. And hey, when you talk to our sponsors, please let them know how much you appreciate their support of this resource that you value. You can support the show directly by going to FarmertoFarmerpodcast.com/donate. I am working to make the best farming podcast in the world, and you can help.

Chris Blanchard: Finally, please let me know who you would like to hear from on the show through the suggestions form at FarmertoFarmerpodcast.com and I will do my best to get them on the show. Thank you for listening. Be safe out there. And keep the tractor running.

