



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



EPISODE 155

Howard Prussack of High Meadows Farm on a Happy Farm, Business Development, and Transplant Production

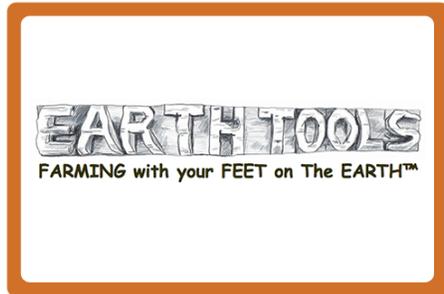
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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer Podcast, episode 155. This is your host, Chris Blanchard. Howard Prussack of High Meadows Farm raises crops, potted herbs, and vegetable starts with his wife Lisa in 30,000 square feet of greenhouses as well as out in the field in Putney, Vermont. Howard has been farming since 1971. High Meadows Farm was the first certified organic farm in Vermont. We dig into Howard's history and the growth of the farm, Howard's early off-farm job and how that helped him learn the business, and the logistics of marketing to retailers. Howard also shares his tips about transplant production, training employees to water plants in the greenhouse. Wow! I know that's a hard one, and the overseas education work that he has done.

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Chris Blanchard: Howard Prussack, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer Podcast.

Howard Prussack: Thank you. Good morning. Hello, America and all the ships at sea.

Chris Blanchard: You were just telling me how beautiful it is there in Vermont this morning.

Howard Prussack: It is. It's like living in a Currier and Ives painting. We just had a nice, fresh eight-inch snowfall overnight. Really nice, white, fluffy stuff. The sun's up and the sky is blue and the snow is bright and all the trees are covered with snow. Yeah. It really is like living in a postcard. We joke that we get paid in scenery here but we try to balance it out with real money.

Chris Blanchard: High Meadows farm is located near Putney, Vermont. Where in the great state of Vermont is Putney?

Howard Prussack: Okay. It's Southern Vermont. Actually live in Westminster but my mailing address is Putney. It's easier to say Putney than it is actually live in Westminster West and it's too long but we actually do live in Westminster but we call it Putney because we're closer to Putney. It's exit 4 on the highway coming into Putney. It's on the corner of three states, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont. It's southeast corner if you look on the map. Brattleboro's the big town, all of 10,000 people just south of us. We're about 20 minutes north in the hills.

Howard Prussack: We're 900-foot elevation, which isn't a lot for Vermont but it's not sea level either. We've rolling hills. This isn't a river farm. We have some flat fields. Most of the fields roll and tilt in one way and the other. Sometimes it's challenging and I've learned to deal with it after 40 something years. We have rocks and stones. I've spent a long time pulling all the boulders out but every once in a while, there's one pops up. They reproduce themselves, we think. That's always a fun, fun job we do every year. We're always doing that.

Howard Prussack: I started farming in 1971, started working just up the road an eighth of a mile from here. I came up for the summer. I started working on one of the first commercial organic farms, was called Nature Farms, not pretentious at all, right?

Chris Blanchard: Right.

Howard Prussack: I just never left. Two years later, that farm went out of business. I took over the lease arrangements. I started working it.

Howard Prussack: Then, about eight years after that, the farm next door came up for sale. I was able to buy it. I got a mortgage from Farmers Home, as it used to be called then under new



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policy that President Jimmy Carter initiated, limited resource program for new farmers. It was specifically for new farmers to be able to get onto the land because then as now, it was very expensive and almost impossible for new farmers to get credit and to buy land and the necessary equipment.

Howard Prussack: I was turned down by Sears for a credit card, just to give you an idea of how hard it was back in the 70s. They said my income wasn't reliable. It was like, "Duh!" Okay, but no one ever said I never paid my bills but anyway, that's what it was like. I was the first organic farm in the nation to get a mortgage through FHA, through the program. I'll have a mortgage burning come this summer. I'll be done ...

Chris Blanchard: Congratulations!

Howard Prussack: ... after 40 years. Yeah. I made it to the end. Maybe they'll give me a gold watch, right?

Chris Blanchard: That's right.

Howard Prussack: I don't know what I get. I'll probably get a thing stamped paid and that'll be it. But that'll be exciting. 40 years of mortgage payments and I'll be done. Then, all my equipment will actually be paid off about the same time or maybe during the following fall. I'll be essentially outside of my taxes clear of external debt pretty much.

Howard Prussack: Yeah. It's all worked out. Nothing is easy but if they were always setbacks. There was no market for organic produce back in some periods in the 70s and early 80s. Lots of times, I just had to sell my produce as produce, commercial stuff and get the regular price but I started doing farmers' markets. I helped start our Brattleboro farmers' market in 1974. We started doing retail. Then, I opened up my own farm stand in Brattleboro. The following year, I rented a used car lot and the carport and I set up a little farm stand there right on the major road, U.S. Route 5. I did that for quite a few years.

Howard Prussack: I eventually bought real estate on Putney Road, Route 5. I built quite a progressive, modern farm market with an attached greenhouse, slate floors. It was pretty fancy. It was way ahead of its time. Had a wine and beer license, open every day of the year. We sold Christmas trees and plants and flowers and produce and all that stuff. It was quite an interesting business.

Howard Prussack: I sold that eventually, went back to farming. I spent eight years while I was farming as a sales rep for New England for a bunch of natural food companies, mostly organic, Lundberg Farms, Traditional Tea Company, bunch of companies that I'm sure everybody has heard of. Amy's Frozen Foods. I learnt a lot. I learnt a lot about marketing. I got to travel to California, visit these companies where they make the food and where they grew the food. I learnt how to deal with Whole Foods because they were one of my prime accounts. I learned the ins and outs of dealing with them.

Howard Prussack: Gradually, I started making sales to them from my own produce. I was able to segue out of that job back into full-time farming. I had a ready-to-go market base. From there, we expanded and started putting up more greenhouses. Now, we have 10 greenhouses, 30,000 square feet of heated greenhouse space. Number one crop is



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potted herbs, followed by vegetable starts and we run ... That's our business for about half of the year are all these plants. We have our own trucks. We do all of our own deliveries into the four different states. We have two drivers, a crew here running transplanting and seeding and all that stuff. We actually had 19 employees last year, not including myself and my wife. It was a pretty big business. We make a living from it. We pay people. We've got two people who are actually going on a year-round salary starting when we get back from our vacation in Costa Rica. Taking care of our staff has always been a priority. Paying a living wage. We do pay more than most farms in the area. We only employ local people. We're proud of that. I don't make a big deal out of it but I always felt farms, one of the things we're always telling our customers and stores. "Oh, buy local. You need to buy local and sustainable farms."

Howard Prussack: Then, I find out, well, these people who say that but they're not hiring local. They might be bringing in temporary workers from out of the country. I say, "Well, how sustainable is that and how is that being local, and you can't talk the talk. You really got to walk the walk." One of the things I [inaudible 00:10:26], we hire local people. In turn, I tell my local customers, "Buy from us because we're hiring your sons and daughters to work here."

Howard Prussack: I think it's a valid argument. It's a good argument. That's what I have so I go with it, which segues into another thing of, you got to have a story. A farmer has to know his story. It's like, "Why should I buy zucchini from you and not Jake down the road?" "Well, here's my story." I like telling my story. I'm enthusiastic about the story. We were Vermont's first organic farm, which makes us one of the early ones in New England and one of the earliest in the county. Not the earliest but we're there. No for Vermont started on our farm. I've had a lot of people who've worked here who went on, moved around the country and started various farms of their own, businesses in the produce business. One of the largest organic produce distribution firms in San Francisco, the woman used to work for me.

Howard Prussack: I'm proud of the history and the different things that we've learned, the different methods because when we started, there was no manual or book or hardly any of how to do what we were doing. How do you do this stuff organically? Well, we had the Encyclopedia of Organic Farming and Gardening from Rodale. That pretty much constituted 90% of what anybody knew about organics back then but we had a network of other friends and farmer throughout Vermont and New England. We would talk and get together. That's how NOFA started actually through meetings.

Howard Prussack: We also started a coop movement because we needed the things that we needed and there was no way to get it economically or even get it. We were cooking natural foods in the 70s for a lot of people. We need a source of soy sauce in five gallon cans and honey. Hey, brown rice! Where do you buy brown rice? It wasn't available. We were bringing it in and contracting wheat from organic wheat farms. We put together these contacts all over the country. That's how Northeast Co-op got off the ground there, which was eventually bought by United Natural Foods, UNFI, which is the largest organic natural food distributor in the world now.

Howard Prussack: Anyway, everything started somewhere. That's my point but farmers need to know their story, know their roots and know what they're selling. It's not about the zucchini or about the onion. It's really about you. It's about the farmer. It's about the soil. It's about what you do.



Howard Prussack: I see these people. They're pricing and they try to underprice the next person and the other farm. I call it a race to the bottom. It's a race I don't want to win. Cheap is a state of mind and do you really want cheap food or do you want good food? What does that really mean? What about the term of value? Does cheap food have a value or does good food have a unique value of its own?

Howard Prussack: This is part of my story and it should be part of every farmer's toolkit of marketing ideas. Some people get it and some people don't. I see some people constantly wringing their hands. Now, someone else is selling it cheaper and so I got to beat him or I'm not selling stuff. Here's a tip. Don't grow what doesn't sell. I know it may sound radical but one thing I was taught. I was lucky when I started back in the 70s, there was still a lot of old farmers around. Some had recently retired. A lot of old vegetable farmers. We used to joke. "We're not going to make a living until all these old guys finally die off so we could have the market to ourselves."

Howard Prussack: But we learned so much from these guys and women. One of the early things that one of the smartest old timers, market gardeners told me. You know what they says? "Grow the stuff that sells." It's as radical now as it was when he told me that in 1973. It was like, "Oh, okay. Grow what sells. I like that idea." I started growing a lot of tomatoes because people seemed to be buying tomatoes. You go where the customers lead you. Things evolve. You can have the best, most detailed business plan in the world. I say by day two, half of that's in the garbage.

Howard Prussack: Business takes a life of its own. It evolves in the way that it just evolves if you're paying attention. What you should always do is pay attention to the standard business practices of maintaining the financial integrity of basically more money needs to be coming in than going out. There's rule one. If you nail that down, you're going to do all right.

Howard Prussack: Those are the simple things that I learned early, early on. Hard work will have its own rewards. Growing good produce. If you grow really good produce or good fruit or anything, it will find a market. We've learnt to prepare the market. When I got back into this full time, one of the rules I told myself. I don't want to take away business from any other existing farmer. That wasn't what I wanted to do. I really wanted to chart a new path. What I saw that I could offer to the retail stores that we were going to be selling to is we weren't going to be cannibalizing other sales. It wasn't like we were making bread and here's our bread and we're going to steal sales from this other guy's bread. We had a new product. We had potted, organic herb plants that we were going to deliver weekly. They'll be fresh. All they had to do was water them. We would remove the dead ones, credit them. It was a whole new ballgame.

Howard Prussack: Much to their surprise, these stores starting making money in a whole new category that they never even had before. Some stores didn't have a floral department or anything. All of a sudden, they were selling racks and racks of potted herbs weekly because we knew that market. I understood the market. I knew what people were going to be looking for. It clicked right away. We kept on having to add greenhouses. Stores would call us and ask if we could start supplying them. We got to the point where we had to have certain criteria of stores and creditworthiness and what volume and it had to be on our route.



- Howard Prussack: We slowly charted out a route to make these stops pay. Actually, we do something that very few farms, they don't understand. We charge for delivery. If my truck stops and sells you something, I charge you for that service. We offer service. We're delivering produce. Guess what. All the big wholesalers do the same thing. They charge you for a stop. It's a nominal amount that we charge. We don't do it in immediate sales area if you're within 15 miles of the farm but once we get beyond that, we start charging money.
- Howard Prussack: It pays for the fuel. It pays for the truck. It pays for the driver over time. The more stops we were plugging in because they became more profitable just from all the add-on charges but it was a break-even thing. Sometimes, we actually do make money. The years the fuel prices go down, we do well because we don't change the rate. When they go up, it's more of a break-even proposition but when I tell farmers that we charge for delivery, they look at me with the deer in the headlight look.
- Chris Blanchard: I just had that expression on my face. You just couldn't see it, Howard.
- Howard Prussack: Oh, okay. I thought we were Skyping this. Aren't we? Yeah. I did that because that was one of the things that I learnt being in business. At the bottom of an invoice, I would see, it started out as fuel surcharge. Now, it's just a delivery charge. It's a bottom line of every incoming invoice for goods that I used to get. I still get deliveries from some of my suppliers. If I don't meet certain minimums, I say, "Yeah. That's \$25 to drop off whatever I'm getting." I push back on it. We charge if somebody orders \$300 or they order \$3,000. I still charge for the delivery. I've never had one person ...
- Howard Prussack: Actually, I had one person in all the years complain. Guess what. We finally dropped him because I was tired of him trying to weasel me constantly for a nominal stop charge but everybody else, because what they do, they don't even ... You got to understand. They don't put this in as the cost of the goods. Most stores have a separate category. They call it shipping and receiving. It's a different category. They enter it there because they know they have to pay for shipping.
- Howard Prussack: It doesn't go in even to the price structure of how they do the markup. They're just doing the regular markup because they markup all their products the same way. All those other companies are charging in deliveries. Farms that don't charge for deliveries are basically walking away from a helpful fee.
- Howard Prussack: If it's all just local, then you're not going to charge but we have a route and a truck could go out and it could drive 300, 400 miles in a day. It does add up. It's worked out good. I maintain a really good, modern fleet of trucks. We've never missed a delivery. Dependability is paramount to retail stores. They know every Wednesday we show up with a delivery. They know it's going to come. It's vital so we bring in the trucks regularly. We've replaced trucks and got newer trucks and brand new trucks.
- Howard Prussack: I've never regretted buying brand new equipment, never, either for the farm or for on the road. You're paying for dependability but there's a value in that. I always say, "What is the value? What are you trying to do as a business? If you're trying to be reliable, dependable and this is what you need to do. You have to have reliable, dependable trucks and vehicles to get the goods to ..." It's our lifeline. It's our blood.



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Getting our goods to the store. That's our blood. That's our lifeline. We try to maintain good blood lines.

Howard Prussack: I look at it. It's all one big living unit. The farm as a whole. The customer's a part of it. I like to think that we're partnering with our retail accounts. We do demos. We work with them. We email out our availability. We let them know the quality and what they're going to get. It's always true to what we represent. We rarely have a complaint about anything. There's no misrepresentation of what I do.

Howard Prussack: We tell people, "Say what you're going to do and do what say." That's what we do. We try to live up to our standards. We're known as a premium arm. We have premium produce, premium plants. We're not trying to fill the cheap slot. That's not our position.

Howard Prussack: I'm happy when people say, "Wow! You guys are expensive." I always say, "Compared to what?" We might be slightly pricey but on the other hand, we're competitive for the level of product that we offer. For some people, where actually it seems like we're low price. We're under the competition because some stuff gets trucked in from far away. We're not the far-away guys. We're the local people. There's a value in that. There's no shrinkage in our product because it's fresh and we're delivering it with our own trucks so there's no accidents along the way. The box didn't get turned upside down. There's no surprises for the retailers. That's been key. We respect the retailers' business goals, which is to make money. We try to help them make money. We're happy that they make money on our stuff. If they double the price of what they buy from us, it thrills me because I know that's a store that knows how to make margins and make profit. They're going to be in business and their checks won't bounce.

Howard Prussack: If you're selling to somebody who's selling the stuff real cheap, it's like, "Okay. Well, let me know how that goes." It's something of a double-edged sword. Being a farmer means wearing many hats. We're being a business person, being a retailer, being a marketer, being a grower, being HR to your staff. All the normal things. Being the weatherman, being the soil scientist, not that I'm good at all of those things but I've managed to be good enough in a bunch of those things to make it work and getting well-rounded education to become a farmer, I think, has always been important to me, learning business and doing various jobs over the years that I've done. You all bring that forward. All that experience comes forward with you and to how you run your operation.

Howard Prussack: Attending seminars has always been important. Early on my local extension agent dragged me to various fruit and vegetable conventions and shows. That was when I used to go back, in the 70s, I used to be like the youngest guy there. I look at all these old guys. It's like, "Wow! All these old farmers!" Now, me and my buddies, we're the old guys in the room. We look at all these young kids and go, "Wow! Who are those young kids. There definitely seems to be more young people."

Howard Prussack: But back to the point of seminars and education. It never ends. I've never went to a seminar or a workshop that I didn't learn at least one good thing that was valuable to me, one tip, one trick or pick up a catalog that sold things that I thought were really going to be helpful or met somebody that knew something. Everything you go to, it's an education. Education never ends. You always wind up paying for your education or lack of an education. I feel paying for seminar, there's a value in it. It's



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ongoing professional growth. It's a value. Every business budgets for professional growth and so should a farm. You should always have an allotment for attending seminars or traveling or doing an overnight if you have to or paying for online courses.

Howard Prussack: I see some people complain about the cost of ... I see various people making businesses of doing seminars, on farm seminars, and video chats and all this thing. If you don't want to pay, don't pay. Don't go but for those who do, I've never met anybody who regretted attending or paying for something that they got a lot of value out of. I have no problem with anybody doing that at all.

Chris Blanchard: That educational stuff, that doesn't rust, rot, or depreciate. That retains its value. Once you learn that skill or learn those concepts, that's something you get to use for the next 40 years on your farm. It's not going to wear out.

Howard Prussack: No, it doesn't. It's lightweight luggage. You take it with you wherever you go. As I know, I think I've explained, too. I do some international travel and education around the world. What's cool is that I could take that knowledge and a few tools with me. It's opened up a whole world to me. I've traveled all over the world doing what I do. It's exciting.

Howard Prussack: When I started of course, I never thought I ... If I left the state of Vermont, it was a big deal but now I'll jump on a jet. I'll be 13 hours in the air and I wind up on the other side of the world. This is all an opportunity that presented itself because I'm farming. I guess that earlier, things evolved. You don't know what's going to happen. It's always good to keep an open mind.

Chris Blanchard: Pivot back a little bit to the business side of things. You were talking about this idea that you need to grow stuff that sells but you've also got to grow stuff that sells at a price that you can make money at. I'm curious, in all of these different marketplaces that you're in, how do you go about setting your prices because you talk about supplying things at a premium price. I don't know. There's such a balancing act there. You've been at it for well over 40 years now. When it comes down to how much to charge for a potted rosemary plant, how do you put those numbers together?

Howard Prussack: Sometimes you do head into these things slightly blind with a bit of a gut. Then, you backtrack. You see at the end of the year how you did. Then, you extrapolate your margins. Then, you parse out your costs. It's hard to sometimes go forward to project everything. When they originally started in my plant business, I had a general idea of what I've seen other plants in other areas go for. I use that as a target. I can say that I actually costed out each pot in the beginning. I eventually did know my costs better. Once you establish your costs and by costs, there's potting soil, there's pots, there's trays, there's heat, there's utilities, there's gas for deliveries. All the costs involved, labor. You categorize the item and if you tracked your hours, you could actually figure out your costs per hour per item. You could figure out your production per hour per work or we actually do it per work or to figure out which workers actually have higher levels of production. This way, we could guide them into where we want.

Howard Prussack: But then we set standards. Okay. Here's the average. Average worker could do 25 trays an hour. That's the standard. That's what you got to meet. That's how that



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works but going back to the cost and how we figured out the margins. Again, in the beginning, I really didn't know, to be truthful, Chris. At the end of the year, it's like, "Oh, I got money left. I guess I did okay." But then we got more sophisticated at it. We actually do run very complicated spreadsheets now to track all the different items and all the different customers but you do the best you can when you start. There has to be the end result where, if you're going to a retail store, it's got to be priced attractively enough so that the end customer, the end user will purchase it from the store. All right. There's got to be a margin there. You work backwards from there. "Okay. If they're selling it for 3.99 but they're paying me 2.50 or whatever, can I make money from that per unit?" You figure it out. But very early on, I realized, even in 1974, when I started selling bedding plants. You would grow a head of lettuce in the field, which mean starting in the tray and I would transplant it and weed it and then cut it and wash it and bring it to the farmers' market and to a store. I was getting back then maybe 50 cents, 75 cents for a head of lettuce but then realized, "Wait a minute. I could sell a six pack or four pack of lettuce plants and I'm selling it for \$2. I'm getting 50 cents for the plant in a pack." I didn't have to do any of that work. I just had to water it, transplant it in the pack, water it and then I sold it. I cut out all the transplanting in the field and the weeding.

Howard Prussack: Early on, I realized the difference in margins was a factor of 10. I estimated each 3,000 square foot greenhouse replaced at least an acre, if not several acres of profit, of cash to me. That's why I focused really early on. Back in the 70s, I started selling plants and produce. I was able to finance my business just from my early spring plants. I was no longer borrowing money from the bank to finance the operation to buy what I needed to do, the fertilizer or the compost, whatever it is I was buying. I didn't need that money anymore. I had enough cash flow just to generate and go forward.

Howard Prussack: I built my first greenhouse. Back in the day, there weren't a lot of good greenhouses up in this area. Most of them were made out of wood or they were funky and this and that. I put up the first steel-framed greenhouse, one of the first is 30 by 100. Other farmers would come and look and, "Wow!" Now, of course, it's one of my smallest greenhouses but I still use it but I made money from that. Most successful vegetable farms that I know have a combination. They're doing plants. They're doing produce. It's a balance that works financially for me.

Howard Prussack: Did that answer the question, Chris? I don't know.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah. It did in a sideways sort of fashion.

Chris Blanchard: With the transplant business, what kind of season are you running on that? Because just following your Instagram feed, it looks like you had stuff started back in December in those greenhouses.

Howard Prussack: Yeah. Certain things we keep year round. We do our own stock plants because one of the things we have is unique varieties. In this business, the nursery or greenhouse business, you find out that certain things get discontinued from the source. You can't get them anymore, certain varieties of creeping lemon thyme or scented geraniums or certain things that we really liked. We learned to keep our own stock plants, so we could produce our own varieties and keep those lines going.



- Howard Prussack: We do keep our stock plants of scented geraniums over the winter and some of the herbs as stock plants. You might have seen, we were doing tomatoes. I seeded tomatoes in December but I did that for training, for staff because we do grafting. I'm training some new staff on how to successfully do tomato grafts. That's why we did that. We're into our third now training session of grafting. We just did a batch yesterday. We just seeded the main crop of actual graft tomatoes. Yesterday, we seeded about 1,000 Maxifort at a buck a seed. These are expensive things. That's why training is crucial because we want to get a high percentage of success. We've had 99% success rate. We call it take rate of successful grafts, which is really high. Some farms, if they get 75, 80%, they think that's usually, that's normal. We really push because at a buck a seed, you've really got to nail this to make it worthwhile. Then, the early grafting of tomatoes is a pretty nice chunk of change for us. We supply other farmers as well as our own needs.
- Howard Prussack: We do keep one of the greenhouses going year round but basically the season really starts in February for us where we're seeding herbs and get into the whole thing. I've got strawberries that I seeded. They just sprouted just today. Some things we start really early but the greenhouse is going anyway. It just folded into ... We've had some expensive weeks propane-wise. Our worst week, I think I spend \$900 about a month ago for the week between heating the barn and heating one and a half greenhouses but now it's down. It's down a lot. The weather's changed. The days are getting longer. The season averages out.
- Howard Prussack: All I know, for the last five years, Chris, are energy use by the end of the year's actually gone down every year for the last five years because the cost of fuel's gone down. We've gotten more efficient. It's one of the things that have actually gone down in price. Some people just panic over energy use. I never made a big deal out of it. I do the best I can but I don't let it stop the business because energy use is not that big a percentage of my business at all. It's a pretty small chunk of change compared to almost anything else we buy. It's not a big problem. Labor's our big problem, not energy use.
- Howard Prussack: Yeah. The season starts, it kicks in in February. We start with a small crew. Then, March, we're really starting to kick in and April, we're full tilt. I've got a flat filling machine that's pretty automated. Thought, it's a mix. We do a mix of hand and equipment usage here. We're not totally automated. I've seen a lot more advanced greenhouse businesses that just totally automated. I'm super impressed with that but the way our layout is here, we don't have one huge greenhouse. We've got 10 individual greenhouses and spread out in a bit of an area here. It just doesn't lend itself to huge automation. We still water by hand though drips in the field, we do some drips in the greenhouses for our hanging baskets and things.
- Howard Prussack: It's a combination of handwork and machinery. We transplant by hand. We have equipment to do seeding, vacuum seeders. That's a huge thing we could just really knock out the trays of lettuce and Brassicas and whatever with the vacuum seeders. That was a big step forward. It's a mix. We just get good and focused on what we do. Focus is what the key is. We don't try to be everything to everybody. We're really focused on certain lines of goods. We discontinued a lot of baskets of hanging flowers that we used to do. It's just too much problems with insects. It was taking away too much light from my herbs and my tomato plants. We got rid of most of the



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hanging baskets now. We do strawberry baskets. We do early strawberries that we start picking in end of April out of hanging baskets for the farmers' market.

Howard Prussack: Like I said earlier, things evolve. The business goes certain ways. At the peak, there's 19 people working here transplanting, moving plants, watering plants, delivering plants. It's all about the plants. The plants, for us, make well over half the amount of income. I tell people by the middle of June, if I stop farming, I'm fine financially. We've already made our money. We grow vegetables because we love growing vegetables and people here like to work outside. I like to do it personally but financially, the margins just start shrinking as soon as we've shipped out our last flat of plants somewhere in July.

Chris Blanchard: You talk about focusing on certain crops. I know that you're not a grow everything vegetable farm. what sorts of things have you ended up focusing on out in the field?

Howard Prussack: We're not a market gardener. If I had a full-time retail stand, it would be a little different. Then, we would be growing lettuce and things but when I got into this, I realized certain things I didn't want to do because I used to do everything back in the 70s and 80s. We did A to Z. I grew everything. Before people were growing everything, we were growing everything. I learned I didn't want to do that again. I didn't want to be picking, say, cucumbers off of the ground every day. I didn't want to be cutting lettuce. I didn't want to grow things that wilted or had to be picked every day where I had to bend down very much to pick them. I didn't want to pick peas again. I figured, "You know, let other people do that." There's just no margins in it for me. I didn't want to do it.

Howard Prussack: We focused on communities that were stable commodities that were good for the fall when I would start shipping mums. We used to have a big fall potted mum business. We would fill truckloads of that. I would start, "Okay. Well, we're already going to these stores so let's put in bags of onions and winter squash." Those were the first two key commodity crops that we grew. We got into the onion business and then the garlic business, which I always did all along when I expanded that radically.

Howard Prussack: These are all stable crops that didn't wilt. You could pick them when they were ready and when you had the time. The was the other thing was the amount of time because of the growth of the greenhouse business, I really didn't have the crew ready in the spring to go out and plant all these other early season crops because we're busy making money with our plants in the greenhouses. Winter squash, we could do. Set those out the end of May. Onions was the only radical shift. We'd try to get those out early but I have transplanters have equipment that do it pretty efficiently. Once the weather is right and I get the field ready correctly, within two or three days, we could set out a couple hundred thousand onions. Then, that's done.

Howard Prussack: We're into the commodities, stable crops. Onions, winter squash. People say, "Oh, there's not a lot of money in winter squash." It's like, "Well, you know, sometimes quantity has a quality all of its own." We grow a lot of winter squash. We get a decent enough price, and our yields are outstanding so we make money on winter squash. Labor-wise for us, it fits our bill. Same thing with onions. It's a high-value crop for us. Anytime you're getting 50, \$75 for a bushel of anything out a field, that's a good crop. For us, that's what we get. Some things we're getting \$200 a bushel for out of the field. Some of the specialty onions, garlic, of course, is a whole different



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animal. A bushel of properly cured, premium-sized garlic is worth five, six, \$700. Talk to other vegetable farmers and you tell them, "Oh, I got a bushel of something here and I get \$700." They look at you like their eyes bug out. "Is that legal?" I say, "Yeah. It's all legal."

Chris Blanchard: It's a lot of fun to put that kind of stuff on the truck, too. I remember doing that with shallots. \$100 for a half-bushel of shallots and ...

Howard Prussack: Absolutely. I love writing up invoices where the single line entry says \$560 and you're doing that multiple times. After a while, the tail was wagging the dog. We decided to drop the mums, even though that was a bit of a heartbreaker. One flat field where we grew the mums, we put up another greenhouse. As a memory, we called that house because we named all the houses. That's mum house. That's as close to we get as growing mums now is the name is still there but now we just fill up the truck with onions, winter squash, bags of carrots or bunch of carrots. That's about the only fresh- ish item we do is bunch carrots.

Howard Prussack: But we do a few other things. We're doing strawberries. We got into that. That's been nice. We do greenhouses cucumbers. That been a nice addition. We don't do a lot of high tunnel vegetables crops, like I see a lot of people do. We don't do greens. I didn't want to get involved in building and maintaining the sanitation necessary to pass ... We are GAP-certified but I just didn't want to deal with it. I didn't want to deal with fresh greens again. It violated my wilting clause. I didn't want to grow things that were going to wilt and had to get rid of that day. It didn't meet my shipping schedules but we have walk-in coolers. We grow raspberries in the greenhouses to maturity. We have two tunnels that we grow fall raspberries in. We start picking those third week of July. That's been a nice item for us but the interesting thing about that, we also grow bedding plants in those greenhouses before the raspberries comes up and we actually ...

Chris Blanchard: Oh, really?

Howard Prussack: Oh, yeah. Because the raspberries aren't up yet. We cut them all down to the ground. These are Florabunda raspberries. We cut them down to the ground. We have this empty greenhouses space so we installed heaters and we fill it with bedding plant. We make a lot more money on the bedding plants. Before the raspberries come up, we've already made our money in that raspberry house and the raspberries are a bonus but what's nice about raspberries in the tunnel, we don't have very much SWD. There's very little mold because they're not getting rained on. On a rainy day, we could pick raspberries and bring them to the farmers' market when other grower can't. The size of them because we're controlling the fertility well and they're on drip. They're huge.

Howard Prussack: People pick raspberries. I don't know how they're making money on raspberries when I see these vast pints of raspberries. They're tiny. I know how long it takes to pick raspberries and I see what they're selling them for. I just like, "You're not making money on that raspberry. How could you make money picking raspberries if you're paying people to pick them or even for yourself, your times got to be worth something and how many pints you can pick in an hour?"

Howard Prussack: But our raspberries, they're the size of nickels. Some the size of quarters. You could pick and actually make some money out of it and they're huge and they're delicious



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and clean because they're inside. There's the kind of things we've done along the way is focus and grow unique things.

Chris Blanchard: With those raspberries, is that something you're also selling wholesale or is that strictly a farmers' market crop for you?

Howard Prussack: We were wholesaling it because we expanded a bunch on it and because the farmers' market is only one day a week. Then, we had a small roadside stand. We were exceeding the production. We do wholesale some of it but when we're really pushing the pencils, actually just this last winter, we realized that we're losing money on every pint of raspberries that we wholesaled. We're going to be cutting back. Actually, we're ripping out one of the raspberry houses and I'm going to be converting that to more tomatoes and cucumbers just to limit it, only do raspberries. The only money you can make on raspberries for us is to direct sell them for the best possible price. That's what we're going to do. I'm not going to wholesale them any longer. That's the power of picking ours, yield per person and the pricing. That's where the spreadsheets become valuable.

Chris Blanchard: Just to get down into the weeds, when you're doing that kind of tracking, how do you actually get that job done when you're looking at somebody's per hour productivity on raspberries, for example?

Howard Prussack: They pick every day. They fill out a form. There's several forms. Drives people crazy. People punch in and out. We have a time clock but we have daily sheets and then specific crop sheets. There'll be, "Okay. There's a raspberry sheet. I started picking at 9:30 and I picked 36 or 48 or whatever it is, half pints of berries," so we have that data.

Howard Prussack: That data has to get inputted into a spreadsheet. We haven't been able to mechanize that part of the data input and I'm going to be working on that this year. That's been a bit of a log jam. You have to fight people's inclination of not wanting to write down stuff but once they learn the importance of it, they understand and they get into it but then entering the data, it just becomes a tsunami of information. This is true but once you get your baseline of how many pints per hour somebody should be able to pick, it makes it easier to set the guidelines for new pickers. It's like, "Okay. This is what you got to do." Just run the numbers because we have the invoices. We track the invoices. We enter the sale. It's not that hard to do for any particular crop.

Chris Blanchard: It's really just a matter of taking the time to stand back and do that management work of figuring out ...

Howard Prussack: It is. You can't do this on the fly. My gut's telling me we're making money on this. Lots of times, your gut lying to you. Maybe you only have gas. It's not really the truth. The value of really doing the books is a value all of its own. I'm not great at it. My wife has done 99% of it. I got dragged into bookkeeping. I got dragged into it screaming and kicking to be honest. If farmers loved bookkeeping, they would be bookkeepers. They would be doing something else. They wouldn't be farming. What do we like to do? We like to sit on a tractor. Who doesn't? That's fun. Sitting at the desk, doing a spreadsheet and typing stuff in and making sure it's in the right column and the formula's set and drop and drag and click and... Who loves that



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stuff? You really just have to be zoned into it. Understand what the outcome is going to be. It's going to be valuable.

Howard Prussack: You make more money doing bookkeeping than you do farming because you learn the mistakes. You learn what makes money. That's where good decisions are going to come from. It's just doing what you like could put you out of business quickly. Sometimes you got to do what you don't like. It's like eating your spinach. I like spinach. Bad analogy but maybe broccoli. If you don't like a particular vegetable, sometimes you got to eat that vegetables because it really is going to be good for you.

Chris Blanchard: With that, we're going to stop here, take a quick break. Get a quick word from a couple of sponsors. Then, we'll be right back with Howard Prussack from High Meadows Farm in Putney, Vermont.

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Chris Blanchard: One thing I have always appreciated about Vermont compost is their ability to put out a consistent product year after year. In something that's subject to as many variables as market farming, it's nice to have something you can count on. Vermontcompost.com.

Chris Blanchard: All right. We're back with Howard Prussack from High Meadows Farm in Putney, Vermont. Howard, I'd like to dig in because you're obviously somewhat of an expert on transplant production. It's that time of year now. What's the magic sauce? What



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are the secrets? What is it that you do better than anybody else to make money growing potted plants on your farm?

- Howard Prussack: I don't know if they do it better than anybody else? There are a lot of good growers in this business. Obviously there are. What we do, what any successful grower should do is pay attention to the fundamentals and the details. We use a sterile mix for germination for the most part. It depends on especially herbs, vegetables. It's not as important. We use a well-prepared compost potting soil for most of the vegetables like many of the Brassicas and spinach. Those things are no-brainers. They're like weeds. They're like planting pigweed to germinate.
- Howard Prussack: The key is heat. Having good bottom heat and adequate moisture to get the seed to germinate because I had to do it a germination chamber or we have heated propagation tables that we built using micro rubber tubing running to hot water boiler. We heat these benches to the mid 70s degrees to keep the soil warm. That's key. You want things to germinate properly and quickly.
- Howard Prussack: Then, we use plugs. We either do plugs or open trays in 20-row trays, depending on what it is we're growing, if it has to be pricked out individually or for maximum speed, we do plugs. We have plug poppers. We're just popping these things out and banging them into trays for vegetables starts.
- Howard Prussack: Using good potted soil. We've tried making our own. It's very hard because you can't get consistency of product. We don't have the right mixers to really blend the peat and the limestone, whatever it is you're blending to make your own potted soil. It's really hard. I've seen people try it. They'll lose everything. They'll put too much or unfinished compost in with heat. They mix it and the stuff gets too hot because it's still cooking or it not sterile and everything gets moldy.
- Howard Prussack: There's a lot of ways to kill plants. That's the bottom line. I've seen people start stuff in cold frames or hot frames because they don't have greenhouses yet or they don't want to build a greenhouse or heat a greenhouse. Then, they don't realize the sun comes up and that these things will fry.
- Howard Prussack: More people lose plants from too much heat than freezing, Chris. It's an amateur mistake that I've seen time and time again. They'll build a greenhouse but they won't put a vent fan in because, "Well, why would you do that, you know? You don't need a vent fan." You don't have to reinvent the wheels. There are books and magazines and catalogs that show you well-built greenhouses and how to do them. Don't reinvent the wheel is always a mantra of mine. I always figure someone smarter than me has already had to deal with this. I'll find that person. I'll find how they did it. That's how I learned, almost everything that I do was from ... A good idea is worth stealing and that's what we do.
- Howard Prussack: The fundamentals. Give them heat. Give them moisture. Don't let things dry out. Don't let them get too hot. Some things don't need to be covered with soil. We don't use soil to cover our seeds. We, for the most part, use vermiculite. Some people have a problem with vermiculite. You can make that decision. I don't have a problem with it. Been using it for 40 years. It's a sterile, nice even covering. It's easy to apply. It prevents mold on top of the soil structure. The plants, the seedlings come up through it really easy. You could control the amount, the depth of the



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vermiculite you do over the seedling. That's why we use vermiculite. We use a medium to coarse grain, not the fine grain vermiculite. That's what we use primarily.

Howard Prussack: Sterile potting mix, it's a commercial compost-base potting mix we get from New York State called McEnroe. Vermont Compost Company makes an excellent mix. I'm old friends with Carl Hammer, who owns a company up there that we get McEnroe because it's convenient for where it's on our distribution route so we could pick it up but they're both good products. Carl, I know, ships out west truckloads of his product but there's other equivalent ones.

Howard Prussack: Then, we use sterile organic just peat-based mixes for our more sensitive herbs that don't want compost. Some herbs just don't like compost. You've got to learn which ones those are. That's how we do it. The tiny seeds, we're careful you don't plant too thick. We keep an eye on fungal diseases. We use RootShield at transplant time but keeping an air ventilation and air circulation in greenhouses is crucial. We use HAF fans throughout all the greenhouses that are constantly moving some air around. That's really important and looking at the plants daily. We're always checking on ... The crucial area of the propagation house is where I spend most of my time in the spring watching my babies, I call them, on the heated propagation tables, watering them when they need it. We use automatic misters on tables where we're doing cuttings and some seeds that don't need to be covered but want to be kept moist. That helps a lot. You got to keep an eye on everything.

Howard Prussack: It's a business that takes just a lot of babysitting, constantly. It's not for the faint-hearted being in this business but it can be a nice home-based business. Has been for me. I walk out my door and I'm at work. Some people may not like that but it works for me.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about teaching people to water because obviously with 30,000 square feet of heated greenhouses, where you're doing potted production, you're not doing all of the watering yourself but I always found that was one of the hardest things to teach people how to get right.

Howard Prussack: It is, and some people are just no good at it. You got to watch them. I've had to pull people off and say, "You know, let's find something better for you to do." You got to be careful with that.

Howard Prussack: How do you do it? You've got to work with them. They got to follow you around for a half hour. You got to watch them for a half hour. You've got to go back with them over what they watered and pull up some plants, pull up some pots and look and teach them because it is tricky. You can't overwater. You can't underwater. Underwatering is definitely safer than overwatering.

Howard Prussack: There's two types of growers, Chris. I don't know if you've heard this term of being, "Are you a dry grower or are you a wet grower?" It doesn't refer to somebody that has a drinking problem. I know. When I first heard it, I'm thinking, "Huh?" But then you get it, you learn some growers, it's do you like to keep things on the dry side or are you a wet grower and like to keep things wet? It depends on your facility and the plants.

Howard Prussack: Myself, I try to be on the dry side, for the most part. I find there's less trouble. If you're on the wet side and if your greenhouse isn't heated enough, you get various



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root diseases or fungal problems but you don't get so much if you're a dry waterer, especially being organic. It's more important. You got to work with them to teach them the watering. You have to have the right hose and the right spray pattern. Gentle but it's putting out enough water so that you're actually getting a job done. Got to have a good water source, good hoses. We have, for the most part, in most of the houses are all high hoses so they're off the floor, so you're not dragging hoses around. It's not easy teaching somebody to water.

Howard Prussack: You're right. It's a hard job. A friend of mine joked, "If you want to find the owner of a greenhouse, follow the hose and at the end of it, you'll find the owner." This is true. You get these really hot weeks or days in May. It's like basically by the time you're done watering a various range, you almost have to start over again or at least do some spot watering.

Howard Prussack: It's a high labor part of the job. I'm going to be installing in one or two of the houses an overhead ... Now, that I got rid of the hanging baskets, I'm going to be able to install a better watering system to take away ... I won't do a perfect job overhead watering but what it does, it's a safety valve for you. It at least take care of some of the watering and that's a big deal.

Howard Prussack: Yeah, every year, finding enough good people to water and training. It's one of the problems. That's why I'm putting people on salary now to maintain more year-round steady employers, though I have people coming back. One person been here 17 years now. Another one, six years. Keeping good employees is really crucial for me. Watering, you're right, is hard. Seeding is hard, though I found that's even easier than teaching watering, teaching proper seeding rates and how to do it. That's not as hard as getting a good waterer. You are correct. Some people automate and have bottom watering. I don't have that system. I envy people with that. We have rolling benches on most of my greenhouses to give us maximum space. Very little space is wasted in empty aisles. That's one of the ways we've got our production way higher than most. Average greenhouses, we're getting a third more amount of plants in it than if we didn't have rolling benches. We turn our benches at least twice each greenhouse. An average greenhouses can produce \$50,000 worth of plants for us in three months in 3,500 or 4,000 square feet. You can't do that on 4,000 square feet of vegetables. Not legally.

Chris Blanchard: That's right. How are you ventilating your greenhouses? How are you controlling that temperature? You mentioned earlier that you got propane. I think forced air heat for keeping things warm but when it turns into cooling, how are you getting that job done?

Howard Prussack: Some of the older houses have a thermostatically-controlled exhaust fans and air intakes on the opposite end of the greenhouse. I always used engineered specs for what size fans and how many fans to get in those greenhouses. You want to be able to turn the cubic footage of a greenhouse as quickly as possible when you want to vent. You can only get the temperature down within five degrees of the outside temperature no matter how you vent the greenhouse because it's just going to be warmer in there. When it gets really hot, we do shading.

Howard Prussack: But the older houses have fans. I don't do that anymore. On any of the newer houses, we do overhead venting. We have either single butterfly openings on the top and roll up sides to take care of the venting needs. On one of the bigger house,



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we have a double butterfly that opens on both sides on the top of the greenhouse. When that's open fully and you roll up the sides, you're pretty well vented at a really nice rate and gentle uplift in air. We do those manually. I have a thermostat to install on a couple of the bigger houses. I just haven't gotten around to doing that but I have a thermal alarm so it lets me know about the heat. Staff is trained of how to open and close these things. That's how we vent it.

Howard Prussack: I don't use any fans of any of the newer houses anymore for venting. It's all through openings in the top of the greenhouse, which takes a little more complicated structure. It's hard to redo the older structures but luckily most of my houses are fairly new now, so we'd have the top venting. I like that a real lot, just quieter, too. The exhaust fans, it's like you hear those suckers and it's not ... The greenhouses act as giant dehydrators though we do use that to actually dry down our garlic crop in one of those houses. It works great but we like natural ventilation.

Chris Blanchard: Then, before we turn to our lightning round, I did want to ask you about the overseas work that you did. You alluded to that earlier. Could you tell us a little bit more about that because that seems to be a really important part of your world right now.

Howard Prussack: It means a lot to me. I've made friends overseas and around the world. It's given me amazing memories but a decade or so ago, I got contacted by an organization that does international aid work, a training of low-income people throughout the world in various countries. I was offered a chance to go to Nepal with my wife for a two-week stint of training, working with family that had a small greenhouse nursery in Hetauda, Nepal, which is almost near the Indian border. I knew nothing about Nepal. I didn't even know where it was. I was like, "Huh? What?" But they talked me into it. It really was a life changer for me to visit and work with these people and the reception that we received.

Howard Prussack: Basically everything's paid for. They arranged everything. It was really easy. I just had to show up at the airport and we were whisked away, half a world away. It took 24 hours of traveling to get there and landing in Japan and landing in Bangkok and then, winding up in Kathmandu. Even with the airline check in, they look at your ticket and they look. "Kathmandu? Wow! That's a long trip." It is. It's hard to go much further than Kathmandu from Vermont.

Howard Prussack: The people are wonderful. We work with a bunch of people. They were walking every day, hours a day to get to our classes that we were holding. Some of them were barefoot. I had one woman, they referred to her as the forest woman. She had a little garden at the edge of the forest that she would walk two hours to get to the class every morning they were holding at this little nursery at Hetauda. They just rapt at attention to learn more modern methods of germination and sterile mix and different things than what they were using. We showed them grafting and transplanting. We talked a lot about organics and seed varieties and things like that. It worked so well that a year later, the nursery reported back to us that he had tripled his profits from where he was when, before we got there using our methods. He was so successful that the son, Bari, he was able to find a wife because they do arranged marriages there. They couldn't find him a wife until he was successful enough. He was so proud and he showed me pictures of his wife. You get moments like that in your heart and to make real warm friendships is beyond words.



Howard Prussack: Since then, I've gone back to Nepal a couple more times, worked in different parts in Nepal with other growers. Got to ride an elephant through the rainforest. I've been to South America, been to El Salvador. I was one of the first Americans to go into Myanmar. I was there a week after President Obama opened up the country. I went way out into the countryside where I was the first westerner they literally had seen in 20 years. It was like almost otherworldly experience to be holding classes inside of Buddhist temples in Myanmar. It was really amazing.

Howard Prussack: My first day there, I had to give a talk to 1,000 people. It was insane. I didn't know I was going to be doing that and all of a sudden, I land and said, "Oh, yeah. By the way, you're going to give a talk on preparing for climate change." I said, "What?" It's like, "I'm not Bill Nye, you know, the Science Guy here." I put together a slide presentation and a talk. I had a translator and handler, they call him. It was pretty amazing. I'm going back to Nepal this summer. I can't wait for the experience. I've said I've made lifelong friends and we talked and exchanged emails and to see the progress people were making and the enthusiasm. Just to see another world take you out of your experience.

Howard Prussack: I tell people in Vermont, the poorest Vermont farmer I know would be considered a really rich, successful farm in most of these places that I go. People don't realize how well off we have it, how easy it is we have it. We could pick up a catalog, pick up a phone and order ... "You want a new seeder?" Okay I'll call up and Johnny's "I'll have it two days." You can't do that in these places. They don't have the supply chains and the wherewithal and the markets development and all these things that we just take for granted. They're looked out in awe in these other places. It's nice to get out of our own bubble and see how the rest of the world lives.

Howard Prussack: When I was there, the average income in Nepal was about \$300 a year, a year.

Chris Blanchard: Wow!

Howard Prussack: Okay? We would visit some gardens. I find out, I was told, "No, this is actually their farm." It's like a garden. You find out that 70% of their income was coming from this little garden that the wife basically ran. In Nepal, women are doing most of the gardening and farming. Now, the men are getting into it because the women are making money. Originally, they were very skeptical of these programs that were training women to earn money. Now, they became very proud that their wives were making money. Now, it's the men folk are understanding that there's money to be made growing vegetables. It's been big cultural change of ... The program originally was aimed, at least in Nepal and was training low-income women of a way to make an income and controlling the money was a big problem that the men were making some money but the money wasn't coming home to the family for various reasons. I'm sure you could project as to why. They realized to change poverty, the women in the family had the money. They'll spend it on things that the family really needs. They'll spend it on better food and things like that, medicine. It's really helped a lot. We're really proud of the work that we're doing there and various countries.

Howard Prussack: El Salvador, I loved. Had a great time down there and still have really good friends that I met in El Salvador. I can't wait to go back there. Good coffee. Just imagine. For an American to go visit a coffee plantation. It's just like wow! You see the commercials and they see the beans but to actually be there and see ... The first



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time to visit a coffee plant- It's different than what you even imagined. We're walking through the woods. I'm going, "So, where's the coffee plantation?" They go, "Well, you're standing in it." You realize that these little bushes that are randomly all around you, those are the coffee bushes. They're growing them in the forest with tree cover for shade. It just looks like you're walking through. They're not in rows. It's not like a farm that we know it. It's pretty random. On the steep hillsides or rolling hills. Most of these places don't lend themselves to automated agriculture. You can't get your tractors in these places to spray and this and that. Organic farming is really important to a lot of these coffee plantations.

Howard Prussack: But I visited a 1,000-acre coffee plantation. I was working with them on how to grow vegetables because a lot of them lost skill set of how to feed themselves. You wouldn't think but we all know these stories of banana republics but they're basically growing coffee for export and the people are hungry. How can this be? They lost their land. They lost the skill set. They don't have the means of growing food. We're having to re-educate them and building gardens. Look, hey, you can grow vegetables. It's a big reveal- It's amazing. You just don't think of these things from where we sit up here drinking your cup of Starbucks or your Coda cup of coffee of what the end result. The work that went into this stuff is just mind-boggling when you visit, see the women picking out the beans on the assembly line and the bad beans and the socializing and yackety-yaking and looks like so much but they're doing that for eight hours a day sitting on a chair watching beans go by on a conveyor belt. Average person isn't going to do that.

Howard Prussack: A lot of it, it's just fascinating stuff to see how the other parts of the world live. All of America lives in a bubble. I'm in my own bubble in Vermont, trust me. I leave Vermont and I feel like I'm in a foreign country but to actually go to a foreign country, it's like whoa. It's like being on another planet. To be riding on an elephant in the rainforest in Nepal is otherworldly as you can get from Vermont. I recommend it to anybody. Get out of your bubble. Get out of your way. Go anywhere in the world. Don't say you've been going to other countries but you're going to an inclusive resort in Jamaica and don't tell me you've been to the third world country. You haven't. Got to get outside of yourself. Get outside of the resorts. Rent an Airbnb in a small village somewhere and walk around and meet people. It's not scary. They're friendly. Just smile. Smile gets you anywhere. I smile all over the world and you get a smile back. Works for everybody.

Chris Blanchard: Howard, with that we're going to turn to our lightning round. First we have a quick word from one more sponsor.

Chris Blanchard: This lightning round is brought to you by BCS America. BCS two wheel tractors are real farming equipment for real farmer. With PTO-driven attachments like rototillers, [wailmores 01:19:36], rotary plows, power harrows, log splitters, snow throwers, even a utility trailer and a new water transfer pump, you've got the tools you need to get jobs done across the farm and across the homestead.

Chris Blanchard: On my own farm, we went through a number of so-called solutions for mowing and tilling before we finally got smart and bought a BCS. Even though we owned a four-wheel tractor to manage our 20 acres of vegetables, that BSC tackled jobs that we simply couldn't do with the larger machine for mowing steep slopes and around trees to working in our high tunnels. Plus, they're gear driven for years of



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

Howard Prussack: My cell phone. The Porta Potti. It's a gotcha moment. Tractor operator to manual. I loved my Planet Jr. 300A seeder. I've been using it, the same one for 40 something years. I love it. I love my Rain-Flo mulch layer, bed maker, drip tape installer, mulch layer. I love my Rain-Flo transplanter. Give me a hoe. Give me a hoe and a Rota to weed and I'm happy.

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

Howard Prussack: I like winter squash. I like potatoes. I love digging potatoes. I love carrots. It's hard to have, is like which one's my favorite kid.

Chris Blanchard: I know. I know.

Howard Prussack: If I can eat it, I love it.

Chris Blanchard: You're in a place where squash really means something there in the northeast in a way that it just doesn't here in the Midwest. Do you have a favorite winter squash variety?

Howard Prussack: My favorite squash variety is the one I make the most money on. That changes yearly. No. I love them all. Butternut, standard butternut's great. I love Sunshine squash. I love some of the more exotic squashes. Delicata, I guess if I had to pick one. We all seem to love that. I've been growing that one for almost 40 years. I grew that when it first came out. It was sold as sweet potato squash. Did you know that?

Chris Blanchard: Yes. I remember that.

Howard Prussack: Yeah. I got my first seed was from Stokes. I used to use the Stokes catalog way back in the day. It was sweet potato squash. Spaghetti squash was one of the early big money makers back in the 70s. I got out of the Stokes catalog. I used to truck that down to New York City. The New York Times wrote it up in an article and it was like printing money for me.

Chris Blanchard: On spaghetti squash? I love that. Talk about a different world. That's definitely a different world.

Howard Prussack: Yeah. People were calling me up from Manhattan. "When you coming back down? We need more of that spaghetti squash?" It grew like a weed for me. The stuff was incredibly prolific. There it was. They were big. Big money back then. I think I was getting 75 cents a pound down there or maybe not even, be 50 cents a pound but that was big money back in 1974. I made out like a bandit loading up my little Datsun pickup and driving that downloaded with produce. Come back with \$600 cash. That was big money.

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



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Howard Prussack: Buy Google stock. Yeah. I don't know. Yeah. Get rich quicker, I guess. It would be the words to the wise.

Howard Prussack: I did all right. I didn't make too many mistakes. My only bit of wisdom I tell people is be friendly to everyone. You meet the same people on the way up as you do on the way down. Make a lot of friends. Don't try to make enemies.

Chris Blanchard: Howard, thank you so much for being on the Farmer to Farmer Podcast today.

Howard Prussack: You're welcome, Chris. I enjoyed it. Good luck to everybody and hope you have a great growing season.

Chris Blanchard: All right. Wrapping things up here, I'll say again, that this is episode 155 of the Farmer to Farmer Podcast. You could find the notes for the show at farmertofarmerpodcast.com by looking on the episodes page or just searching for Prussack. That's P-R-U-S-S-A-C-K. The transcript of 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 Osborne Quality Seed, a dedicated partner for growers. Visit Osborneseed.com for high quality seed, industry-leading customer service and fast order fulfillment.

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