



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



EPISODE 165

Olivia Hubert of Brother Nature Produce on Raising Salad Greens in Detroit, World War II Gardening, and Farm Yoga

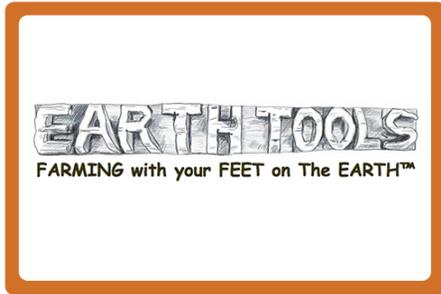
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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer to Farmer podcast episode 165 and this is your host, Chris Blanchard.

Chris Blanchard: Olivia Hubert farms with her husband, Greg Willer, at Brother Nature Produce in Detroit, Michigan as well as at a farm an hour north of the city. Specializing in salad mix and fresh herbs sold to farmers markets, grocers, and restaurants, Brother Nature provides a living for both Greg and Olivia.

Chris Blanchard: Olivia grew up in Detroit where she fell in love with agriculture as a high school student and after studying at the Royal Horticulture Society of London, Olivia returned to Detroit where she met Greg and joined him on his upstart urban farm. Olivia shares her experience farming with both sides of Detroit's environment where gun shots and extreme poverty are never far from health nuts and concentrated wealth. She digs in to what she learned about urban gardening from World War II gardening ethos in England. How they learned to manage flea beetles and how she and Greg grow fresh salad greens in the city without active refrigeration.



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- Chris Blanchard: Olivia Hubert, welcome to the Farmer to Farmer podcast!
- Olivia Hubert: Hello! Good to be here.
- Chris Blanchard: Thank you so much for making time to join us today. Olivia, I'd like to start off by having you give us the lay on the land there at Brother Nature Produce. Where you guys are located, how much farming you're doing, what kinds of crops you're growing, where you're selling them?
- Olivia Hubert: We started out, my husband and I, Greg, started out with a farm in the city of Detroit. We are in North Corktown. From here you can see the train station. You can see the lights from the new hockey stadium and whatever other stadiums they put down there, the football stadium, the baseball, whatever. We're right on the edge of downtown and we have a one acre farm here and we specialize in salad mix. Getting land in the city, getting land so close to downtown has been difficult for us, so we were able to purchase some of the lot that we were farming and in the meantime, we decided to buy some land in the country.
- Olivia Hubert: Our farm in the country is in a little teeny tiny town, Riley, Michigan and up there we are slowly, very slowly developing it because it's 6.9 acres. That's a big jump from one acre, all the way up to 6 acres. Up there right now we just have salad up there too, and where do we sell?
- Olivia Hubert: We specialize in salad mix. Where do we sell to? We sell to lots of different places. The biggest place we sell at is the Eastern Market. Eastern Market is maybe the oldest, continuously running farmer market, produce terminal in America. They get, last estimate, I remember they were getting upwards of 40,000 people on a Saturday, so that's a big ... Lots of farmers ever market they see thousands and thousands of people. That's where we sell most of our salad mix. We also do herbs there and we do other seasonal things like we do those walking onions, Egyptian walking onions, when they come up in season because they're easy thing that we have already and they don't need as much attention as the salad is very needy, but based on square footage, you make the most money off of salad compared to any other crop unless you're really intense about the spin farming and the rotations and stuff like that. That's why we choose salad and also because my husband likes them.
- Olivia Hubert: So he likes the salad because the salad, unlike other crops, is very needy. Like tomatoes, man you have to cinch them and stuff like that, but they're not as needy as the salad. The salad, you know, we do salad all season long, so every



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week we're ripping out seven rows and then planting so he likes that because it keeps him busy and we make lots of compost so he likes that he's always out there on the tractor. That tractor love. I said don't let me stay. I said let me get out of the way of this tractor because he's gonna knock me down to get to this tractor and turn this compost. Sometimes I wonder. I look at this tractor and I think, does he love you more than he loves me?

Chris Blanchard: I mean, it is a tractor, Olivia.

Olivia Hubert: It's a, I know. I can't quite compare to the tractor. I can't lift things like all he does. I always tell people that I'm strong like bull. Yeah right. That's a joke about how I can pick up the other end of something heavy. She strong like bull.

Olivia Hubert: We also sell to restaurants. We try to sell to restaurants that are in a three mile radius of the farm because part of our marketing is to have salad that's less than 12 hours old. So we like to harvest the salad. We don't do refrigeration like ... I think most of the farmers do some type of refrigeration, cold box. We try to harvest it and then get it to the markets. That's one of the benefits of being in the city, of having an urban farm which you are so close to markets and restaurants and a lot of times restaurants don't have that much space to store produce.

Olivia Hubert: They're calling and you can't just drop a delivery once a week. They need sometimes three deliveries a week and you find something very tied to the restaurants and constantly having to stop what you're doing otherwise unless you're so close, but for us it's not that much of an inconvenience because we are so close anyway, and it's just right in the neighborhood. A lot of the people who own these restaurants are our neighbors too, so sometimes on their way to work they'll stop by. It's all very nice and convenient.

Olivia Hubert: We sell to about, my husband said 13 restaurants but there's several restaurants that we were supplying pretty much their full demand of salad this past growing season like sell to Supino's and Craft Work and Lady of the House is a new restaurant that everybody loves and that's busy. We also sell to a small local grocery store, The Farmer's Hand. They've just expanded to add a café section, and we sell through Business Street Local. That's another local favorite of people. People love that place. So we sell to restaurants.

Olivia Hubert: We also sell to people who do private catering. There's a big thing in Detroit for people wanting to take control of their health and I'm sure people have heard the horrible statistics about how unhealthy people are in Michigan and Detroit especially, but people are really trying to change that. There's a lot of people becoming vegetarians and vegans. Those people are obsessed with the salad. I remember a couple years ago was a drought and we just didn't have that much salad. We had to pull back on the markets and some of our customers came to our house looking for us to make sure we were okay. They're like, "We haven't seen you. Where is the salad?" It's like, "Okay, you're fine. Give me some salad."

Olivia Hubert: Sometimes, even when it's a drought, we don't have enough salad to come to the market, but we always have some salad, so the real die hard fans come to the farm. They go directly to the source.



- Chris Blanchard: They know how to find you.
- Olivia Hubert: Yes, I think that's part of some people's healthy living routine. On Friday's they're ride their bikes around and see us harvesting. Then they'll buy salad from us on Saturday if the Eastern Market is kind of flooded.
- Chris Blanchard: Are you guys selling to Whole Foods because I know Whole Foods recently opened up a store in downtown Detroit. That was supposed to be this whole urban renewal, Detroit's back on the map kind of a thing. Have you guys dipped into that marketplace as well?
- Olivia Hubert: No, we don't sell to Whole Foods because honestly we don't want to be a slave to that corporation. My husband used to be a teacher and I am a horticulturalist and I used to work for the City of Detroit. We want to be our own boss. These contracts that people get with Wal-Mart and Meyer and even Whole Foods, Uh-uh. We like to be lean and mean and flexible and be able to do whatever we need to do. Make changes and even though a lot of people in Detroit love that Whole Foods and they stay up in there. Man, it's like it's a party going on in there. People are coming in and out of there like, what was that movie, The Naked Gun and The 24 Hour Wicker Shop? My husband, you know...
- Chris Blanchard: I don't know. I'm actually laughing because you're making a movie reference and my wife watches a lot of movies. Her question is always, "Have you seen?" Then her answer is always like, "Of course not."
- Olivia Hubert: Oh, I like your wife then. Doug always talks about, you remember that movie. People look at you like, what? I was like, come on. Obviously...and you don't know what I'm talking about, but yes. It's along with like Making Butter or one of those. The 24 Hour Wicker Shop and people are running in and out of there constantly like, "Oh my God, I gotta get in here."
- Olivia Hubert: We were asked, we were approached by somebody who worked at Whole Foods. It was before they opened, but we prefer to do our own thing.
- Chris Blanchard: When you talk about a farmer's marketing getting 40,000 people through there on a Saturday, talk about all these restaurants and grocery stores and now this Whole Foods, it kind of runs in the face of the narrative that I hear about Detroit. I don't know anything about Detroit personally. I fly through there all the time, but I've never actually left the airport, but what you hear about Detroit are things like post apocalyptic and war zone and that doesn't sound like that's your experience there.
- Olivia Hubert: You know, I grew up in Detroit and Detroit is weird because it is like that. I always say that everything that heard about Detroit is true and then some. On the one hand, yeah, you'll have people riding their bikes past and they're gonna be healthy now and they wanna stop and buy some salad. Then on the next block away you will hear gun shots. It's like, "Huh, should we go in the house now? Well, they weren't that close. We'll stay outside." It is, it's both those things. It's weird and it clashes all the time. It clashes all the time.



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- Olivia Hubert: Just the people wearing \$5,000 Shinola watch, stepping over the homeless guy downtown who might not make it through this next blizzard because there's not enough shelters. You know what I'm saying? It's all happening at the same time. It's changing, but some things never change. It's strange.
- Chris Blanchard: You said you grew up in Detroit. Is that how you ended up farming there?
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, back in the day before the education system took a nosedive they had vocational school. They had several vocational schools in Detroit and one of them had advertised. The classes were on Bell Isle. You would go and get bused to Bell Isle. There were greenhouses. Bell Isle Conservatory has some services greenhouses. The classroom Agriscience class had a little building out there. We did floral design and we did FFA competitions and all that kind of stuff. We would go to class to plant stuff. We would start the seeds. We would do plant service work plants. We would do all kinds of stuff. That's one of the ways that I got my start, but even before that I was mentored by a retired biology teacher who lived in my neighborhood. I helped in her garden and she taught me about stuff.
- Olivia Hubert: Like I said before, Detroit's one of those strange places, like if you want to get into trouble, several blocks away there is getting into trouble, car jacking, and all the crazy stuff you hear about. Yeah, but three blocks away I'm sitting in this nice backyard drinking tea and talking about cell walls and tomatoes.
- Chris Blanchard: I'm glad there's a place to talk about cell walls and tomatoes.
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah.
- Chris Blanchard: You got some training in horticulture in Detroit and then you left and spent some time at the Royal Horticulture Society of London managing gardens over there, right?
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, that was a wonderful opportunity. I got, actually, because of the dreaded affirmative action. Oh no, the time people are going to leave the hood. No, don't let them go. I went to Michigan State. I got a scholarship because the so few minorities in agriculture. I majored, I have a Bachelor of Science in Horticulture. That's under the College of Horticulture and that's resources. I got a scholarship because of that and I did well in horticulture, of course, because there are stereo types left over to you, a black woman. It's true.
- Olivia Hubert: I took some of that money to go on a study abroad to the UK because I knew that if I went to the UK, I would learn a system of growing plants that was almost full safe back during the war, which if you ever have gardened in the UK you'll hear people, "During the war..." They still talk about that even though those generations, I think they're pretty much all passed away now, but they had to feed themselves. They didn't have a choice so they developed a way of growing food and growing plants that, if you do this method you won't starve. The plant will grow.
- Olivia Hubert: That's why I wanted to go there and see for myself. When I went there we went to Wrigley Garden Special Action Garden of the Royal Horticulture Society and



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we actually tracked down one of their trainees, horticulture trainees because they get lots of visitors there. They'll get 7,000 visitors on a weekend or a Saturday or something. To get work done sometimes people will hide from the visitors and just kind of dip around the bushes because if you talk to every single person who asks you a question, you can't get your work done. They're very serious about horticulture at the RHS.

Olivia Hubert: When I learned that they had a trainee program I said, "Okay, I'm gonna do this when I graduate from Michigan State and that's what I did. I stayed there for a year. We had some wonderful experiences. We had a work weekend at Great Dixter. When I started people were like, "why is this woman saying this vulgar stuff?" I'm like, "No, Great Dixter. British word with an X. Not, okay." People think they're funny, but yeah. Great Dixter Gardens and we got to stay in the manor house over night, and learn about that sort of thing. I did another special weekend there just on my own, just you know, because a lot of people are interested in Detroit too. Fergus Garrett, the head gardener there, he like Detroit for some reason. They were excited to meet somebody from Detroit.

Olivia Hubert: I came back for another weekend, I was still living in the UK, and learned about topiarist. How they make the squirrel shapes and the pigeon shapes and the sea hawk and all this other stuff like that. I had to go back home eventually. I didn't, but I thought I did. I felt I should still go back home and get a job. After 16, 17 years pretty much of going to school full-time you get sick of just learning things and talking about what you're gonna do when you get finished learning things. I was ready for my life to start back.

Olivia Hubert: I came back to America in 2009 and that's when the stock market crashed and I could not find a job, of course. It had become a, you're over qualified, situation. "Wow, your resume, wow", but we don't have the time for you, but that was okay because I had worked doing private landscaping since I was 14 years old, so I just picked that back up until I was able to get a job with the City of Detroit, which also was a mess at the time.

Olivia Hubert: I wish I just realized, I met my husband then and we just need to do our own thing and be our own boss. We're both very solution oriented people and when you work for other people, there are solutions to problems. There's always solutions, but are you able to implement them? Are you able to implement them fully and effectively. That can only really happen when you are self-employed.

Chris Blanchard: You talk about this war-time gardening style in England. What's the core of that? What did you learn about growing things when you don't have any resources?

Olivia Hubert: It's an extreme attention to detail. I mean, these people were still gardening in button up shirts, ties, and slacks. They were serious. You can't leave things to chance. Attention to details, we would have tests - practicums they called them, where you would be given seeds or, you know, cuttings and you would have to take the cuttings and put them in the slats and the judges would come around and they would rip all the cuttings out and they would poke their fingers into the corners of the slats and make sure that you filled the tray up proper.



- Olivia Hubert: There's a proper way to do everything. There's a proper way to fill a tray, to take a cutting, water the tray afterwards. It's all about attention to detail. You can't just throw seeds out and some of them might grow, but some of them won't. Obviously, a lot of them won't grow. Birds will get them, they'll dry out, the wind will blow it around, they'll fall between the cracks of the floor. It's got to be attention to detail. There's even a proper way to hold a rake. A hard rake, if you're gonna rake the dirt to a fine silt based on the size of the seeds. So lots of attention to detail.
- Chris Blanchard: Is that something that you brought to Brother Nature Produce when you came back and started farming there?
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, it's a joke. Me and my husband say we're gonna, in the winter time, do a farmer husband and wife comedy team and go around because when I met him, he was still teaching and he was just throwing seeds out on top of the ground. He wasn't covering them up. He wasn't putting compost on top of them. He wasn't watering them in right after he covered them up. It's special growing. He's one of those lucky people, so he didn't think anything of it, but I'm like, "What are you doing?" So yeah, we got him on the right track.
- Chris Blanchard: You've been farming there since 2009. How long was Greg farming at that spot before you came along?
- Olivia Hubert: He started in the backyard growing stuff in 2006.
- Chris Blanchard: You guys are making a living at Brother Nature Produce, right?
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, we're making a living, but we have wisely, and I would recommend and I heard other farmers mention it kinda/sorta, but then they just push back against it. Yes, diversify your income. We diversified our income because even though you can do salad really successfully quite easily in the spring and in the fall. In the summer, and sometimes there's a really harsh winter like this one we just had. Even in the hoop houses, salad didn't make it or in our case, when we got that foot of snow and then it started raining afterwards, our hoop house, the snow was melting, but didn't melt off fast enough to last our hoop house. We had to take it apart and fix it so the salad that was in there, you know, didn't make it.
- Olivia Hubert: We diversify our income. One of the first things we did was we started doing 'for hire' work. One of the benefits of also being in the city is people are actually fixing up their houses and they're fixing up their lives and stuff. Simple stuff with the tractor like putting in fence posts, you know, with a post hole digger attachment and leveling the soil with a bucket. My husband is really good with maneuvering the tractor. He said that he should've been an Air Force pilot every time because people watch him and the way he maneuvers and people close their eyes, oh my God, he's about to crash into the side of my house, oh my God.
- Olivia Hubert: They can't watch, but he never does because he maneuvers. Then he always smiles, he's got a dimple. Every time he smiles it's like, ding. Just a star comes out of his dimple. He wows everybody with the starlight and he's like, "I shoulda



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been a Air Force pilot." So that's the first thing we diversified in doing. Then we also ... we have his and her chainsaws, so we'll do chainsawing work for people. Taking down small trees. Nothing big, we're not climbing up in a tree or any of that kind of stuff. We do that stuff and that's good for in the spring.

Olivia Hubert: In the fall and the in between times and then we also, we got a big ugly truck. It's three colors. One time we came across some, when we were at the Eastern market a truck was parked in the vendor parking lot at the Eastern Market and so a family of Russians, because they were speaking Russian, were all looking and taking pictures of the truck. I don't think they could believe that this truck was actually still working and functioning, but we were like, "Hey." So we decided, the truck is like it is, but we could get some more use out of this truck and we attached a snow plow to the front of it and we plow snow in the wintertime because even though it hadn't been in our part of the Great Lakes snowing that much, this year snowed a lot. It isn't snowing enough to bring in some money because that's a lame time in the wintertime for a lot of farmers that rely on their savings. If you have a not so good year, then you could be in trouble. Yeah, we plow snow. We do this 'for hire' work, the plowing, the filling, the post holes. We do tree removal.

Olivia Hubert: Then we've also bought a second house. So he had the house. He owned it, the house when we first met. We call it the white house because the house is white. Then when the house next to us on the corner came up, it didn't come up for sale, but the woman who lived here, it was a family of hoarders. The woman's mother died and she didn't want to be in here by herself so she left the house up for a year.

Olivia Hubert: People were trying to break into the house and all kinds of stuff. We're like, we can't have this. So we just talked to her and we said, "Look, you gonna let this house just sit here." She was a hoarder. You know how hoarders are. They are happy to have stuff and just not do anything with it. In their mind it's theirs and they could do what they want with it, but I guess needed the money. We bought our second house, fixing that up. We're AirBnb'ing the white house and we hope to turn that into more of a place to experience urban farming and less just a seed planting, safe place to stay on your way to and from Canada.

Olivia Hubert: That's where most of our people come from. They're coming from Toronto or they're traveling because we're close to Canada over here. In fact, we're a few blocks away from the Detroit River. It's interesting the people, there's push back from the City of Detroit against urban farming because they would rather have the highest use of the land and have it be a private building or something like that and we laugh because the city, the population isn't even 700,000 anymore. There's hundreds, thousands and thousands of vacant lots. Don't lose money in the meantime waiting for a meal ticket. That's like if you have debts to pay and you have things you're not using, you don't want to sell them because I could get a lot of money from them. Yeah, but you need money now. People want it now, but originally all of this was farm.

Olivia Hubert: In fact, when we got the deeds of the house that we're living in now and fixing up, it says that it was part bought from Thompson Farm. In other words, this was probably one of those river farms that stretched from the river, a river farm. You know about river farms?



- Chris Blanchard: No.
- Olivia Hubert: Ah, river farm, some history. Greg did a major in history, so he learned from getting started. He said through him, through me lecture about the history of Detroit. Anyway, Detroit was always a place where people would come to trade. The native people would come and trade with the fur trappers, the French Canadians, before I guess the name is French Fur Trappers. The farmers worried about being attacked by the native people. They made, instead of having a bunch of wide farms, and there's other reasons too, but this was generally said. They made really long, narrow farms that way they would have enough farm land to be worth farming, to be able to sustain themselves, but then the farms would be close together. That way if they needed help, they wouldn't have to run across 20 acres to get help. They could just run next door, basically.
- Olivia Hubert: This house, I guess was probably one of the oldest houses in the neighborhood. The first map of the City of Detroit was made in 1885 and we went looking around downtown for stuff and paperwork, that paperwork. Our house was sitting here. There was nothing else. It was like this house and prairie pretty much. I'm saying all this to say that really us farming and other people farming in the City of Detroit is returning the land to what it was a long time ago. It was farms. People farming, were hunting and trading along these streets that have been paved over and things. People should be more respecting of it because that's what it always was. Obviously, that's what it's returned to again, so maybe we should just go with that?
- Chris Blanchard: When you say that the city is wanting that land that you're using as farm land to go to some other higher invest use, you know? I'm seeing as I look at the map of Detroit, I'm seeing things like a couple of different casinos and you mentioned all of the sports stadiums and all of that, which to me, as a farmer, doesn't really strike me as the highest, best use.
- Olivia Hubert: Right.
- Chris Blanchard: Has the city made it difficult for you guys to have an urban farm. Are there things that they do that stand in the way of your success there?
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, the city really doesn't have a policy around urban farming. People are urban farming, and they're forging ahead because people in Detroit have been through a lot. Growing food and growing flowers and building a community that way is what has kept Detroit alive. It's what has kept people going and kept people from just losing their minds to just packing up and just, we're gone. I just can't take it anymore.
- Olivia Hubert: The city is having it both ways. On the one hand, they don't have any policy about urban farming or to help you purchase land, or giving any sort of priority around land, but then they go to our, I guess we have sister cities in Europe. There's one in France and one in Italy, that talk about urban farming and how wonderful it is and stuff. Even though you can't go to the city and say, "You know, I would like to buy these lots to farm." They'd say, you'll hear all kinds of stuff. It's not that they come right out and say, "No." It's just that there is no way, there's no direct way for you to actually get the land specifically to farm



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because now there's another pseudo government entity, the Land Bank, that the city has so much land. It decided to turn land over to the Land Bank and let them be bothered with selling it or doing something with it, even though the city still pays independent contractors to maintain the lots.

Chris Blanchard: When you're talking about wanting to farm a piece of land, it's my understanding that there's a lot of simply abandoned lots, abandoned parcels of land in Detroit.

Olivia Hubert: Yeah, our neighborhood, we always laugh because we have the same amount of neighbors in the city as we do out in the country. In the country we can see six houses and the houses are like a couple of acres away. They're within hollering distance. Like, hey, hey. You can see the person. You can't make out their face, but you can see enough. Here, on the block we live on we have, there's six houses on this block too. It's like, hmm. It's very strange to be so close to downtown.

Olivia Hubert: I just saw two big, male pheasants run past. I guess they just saw some females, it's that time of year to be keeping us up at night. Going back and forth crowing or honking. That's the sound like crowing, eh, eh, eh, you know? So yeah, there's so much of it. What I've always said and I've written about it on our website brothernatureproduce.com, is that there's plenty of land for everybody to have most of what they want, but it would just require people to be organized. It would require the city, the Land Bank or whoever's in charge, to be organized.

Olivia Hubert: For whatever reason, it does benefit people to not have any hard and fast rules about things because then you can pick and choose who gets to do what and when and where and how and stuff like that, but it just, overall it's not ... The city, because it makes people not want to be bothered with the city. You know what I'm saying? You want to revitalize the city. We want businesses to come and people to come move here and have families and stuff like that, but nobody wants to move to someplace where there's rules, but you don't find out what they are unless you break them. Or people opening businesses, hire people to do the paperwork for them because it's so intense.

Olivia Hubert: They can't start a business on their own. They can't figure it out. They have to hire somebody to do the paperwork for them.

Chris Blanchard: Is that part of why you bought some land in the country as well as having the farm in the city?

Olivia Hubert: Yeah, that's exactly why because here, left teaching and was full-time farming and I was still full-time working in the conservatory on the land. I didn't want to full-time farm because I'm like, you know, it's a sticky situation. What if something happens? I said, "Okay, let's buy some land in the country because then we can own something and we can just hedge our bets. Now we're still in the process of trying to purchase more lots that we're farming from the Land Bank. We hope it goes well and we're getting letters of support from our neighborhood association and the business association of the neighborhood and stuff like that.



Olivia Hubert: Yeah, okay farming in the city has ... Pretty much the only benefit of farming in the city is being close to your market. Being close to people you sell to. Other than that, farming in the country is easier because you can have a huge compost pile and you don't have to worry about it offending anybody. There's more space to grow things so it's easier to have a well rounded farm.

Olivia Hubert: I feel like, especially for such a hungry crop like salad, you have to replenish the soil constantly with nutrients and the best way to do that is animals and animal manure and using animals to plow and till. It's difficult in the city because you still have all the same predators for your animals that they do in the country because there's coyotes in the city and there's foxes in the city and hawks and all this other stuff. Plus, there's people's dogs, which are the worst because they have absolutely no fear of humans and they're out all day and all night. People are like, "Oh my God, I just let him off the leash for a second." It's like, your dog is a killer and my chickens were just doing their thing and you're the one at fault, but my chickens are still dead. Foxy is still gone, Foxy! That was my favorite chicken. I even wrote a song about him. I won't sing it, but he had a song.

Olivia Hubert: What do you do when you're out there weeding the salad rows? You make up songs about your favorite animals.

Chris Blanchard: I made up plenty of songs while I was riding on the tractor, but like you said, it's better not to sing them to other people if you want them to keep listening to you.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about farming in the country because now you guys are managing two pieces of land that are an hour apart, right?

Olivia Hubert: Right, right. They're an hour apart, but you know, it's a nice drive. When we were looking for land in the country, we looked up straight north like La Pierre area, but that was a horrible drive. All the people who worked downtown lived north of the city in the suburbs, drive. They don't care if they get home dead or alive. We're like, "Oh no, we can't do this stressful drive." Driving the other way along the coast, I guess, I feel funny saying it because it's a peninsula in the Great Lakes and not the ocean, not the real east coast or something, but the coast. Driving up the coast, the thumb of Michigan is a nice drive. It's not too many cars and it gives us a chance to really think and talk about stuff because it's hard, husband and wife team to actually, then we have a four year old, to actually talk about anything, the farm, whatever. It gives us a chance to talk and what went well, what didn't go so well. There's three ice cream shops along the way, so that's another, like, "Yeah, let's get out there and we'll get some ice cream, yeah."

Olivia Hubert: The farm in the country is in a low spot. You could see there's a creek that runs through it. You can see clearly the contours of it sloping down to the creek and some people would say that this is a disadvantage because of the wetness and the heavy place, but it really is an advantage to growing salad because the soil holds that moisture. When there's a drought, you don't have to water as much and it holds its moisture nicely. It's easier to direct water away that way. We're planning to do a bunch of earthworks this year to direct the water where we



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want it to go. To put in some more ponds and Greg wants to do catfish out there so you could actually catch something when he goes fishing. We can manage the facility.

Olivia Hubert: Like I said, we learned a lot from our career farmer friends and scooping out the muck from the bottom of the pond and putting that back on the rows and stuff like that, but it does take a long time to get the soil conditioned enough to where there's actually some topsoil because right now it's light brown clay. Then underneath it is gray clay. It's like, where's the topsoil? Building up the topsoil is taking us a long time especially because it's just the two of us. This year we have an intern coming so we think we'll be able to be ... our farm manager, she's got lots of experience working on the farms and stuff like that, so that we can because we have the farm.

Olivia Hubert: We realize we needed to get the farm in the city to the point where we had bled enough of the weeds out to where it would be systematic. We've got the rows to plant, the compost, all that sort of stuff so it will be easier. To have things set up, have our market set up because we're launching new things. We're always launching new things. We'll be able to get it to the point where someone else could run the stuff for us and we could spend half our time in the country and then half our time in the city. At least, I mean it would be good to get away from the city. The city is intense.

Olivia Hubert: Like I said before, it's nice to be out in the country. There's sticks out there.

Chris Blanchard: Right.

Olivia Hubert: When we first got out there I was like, what the heck is it? Ah, it's sticks. Every year, when I have my little tick nightmare then I'm okay to deal with them for that year, but every year I have my little tick nightmare where they're in the clothes and I'm like, okay. I think I can deal with it. It's a for real action. If you've ever see them in the grass waiting with their arms outreached like, come on walk past, walk past. I'm waiting. It's like, oh get off me, get off me! Sorry.

Chris Blanchard: Are you guys eventually planning to move the farm out to the country or is Brother Nature Produce gonna be a split operation in the future?

Olivia Hubert: We thought of it a lot and I think we'll be a split operation because the idea in life really is to have as many options as possible. It is easier to farm on the country because people are also farming on the country, but there's not as many markets. It's like, where are we gonna sell to? We specialize in salad and a lot of, there's not as many restaurants and things out there and the ones that are, a lot of them seem to be happy to just get their produce as cheap as possible from whoever.

Olivia Hubert: If we moved out to the country, we would be still coming down here constantly to sell stuff, so it doesn't make sense to move out there, but it doesn't make sense to give up out in the country either because it has its advantages. It's 10 degrees cooler up there, so in the spring, when the salad starts to bolt up here, the salad up there is just now getting big enough. You give the rows down here a chance to have a break and you can part them, or mulch them, or let the chickens have their way with them for a while.



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- Olivia Hubert: We're not the only farmers in Detroit who are doing the split farm thing. Our friends, wholove your show, Andy and Amy of Fisheye Farm, they have a place outside the city too. I think more people will be doing that.
- Chris Blanchard: It certainly seems like something that makes sense and especially when you talk about this idea of diversification of, it's diversification enterprise, diversification landscapes that really does give you some strength and some resilience.
- Olivia Hubert: Especially out in the country. Also, you know it's really flat here in Michigan anyway. It is in Wisconsin, flat out in the country and so with the weather becoming more destabilized and having more wind storms and more tornadoes and them being stronger and bigger than they were before, the country is vulnerable to that more than the city. That's another advantage of farming in both places, but the logistics. That's when you have to learn your time management style and really be on top of things and be organized and keep to your schedule and stuff like that because if you forget a tool or something in Detroit and you're halfway to Riley, I don't know what you're gonna do. You don't turn around and go back like you wasted the day. So it requires being more organized to have two different places.
- Chris Blanchard: Olivia, with that, we're gonna stop here, take a quick break, get a word from a couple of sponsors and then we'll be right back with Olivia Hubert from Brother Nature Produce in Detroit, Michigan.
- Chris Blanchard: The Farmer to Farmer podcast is generously supported by Farmers Web, software for your farm. Farmers Web makes it easy to work with your buyers, saving you time, increasing efficiency, reducing mistakes and streamlining order management. Farmers web helps you manage orders from buyers who place them online and also those that order by phone, or email. Use Farmers Web to generate a product catalog for buyers, allow buyers to review your realtime availability online and create harvest lists and packing slips for your orders. Farmers Web helps you inform your buyers of delivery routes, pick up locations, lead times and more, while helping you keep track of special pricing and customer information. You could also download detailed financial reports. Farmers Web offers a free account type and a flat monthly fee on paid plans. You can pause, cancel or switch plan types at any time. Check out a demo video and Farmers Web guide to working with wholesale buyers at farmersweb.com.
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many variables as market farming, it's nice to have something you can count on, vermontcompost.com.

- Chris Blanchard: All right, and we're back with Olivia Hubert from Brother Nature Produce in Detroit, Michigan. Olivia, you mentioned your friends in Korea and some of the research that you've done about growing brassicas better. Can you tell me a little bit more about how you've made those connections and what you've learned?
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, one of the interesting things also about farming in the city is there's a strong activist community in Detroit and I know a lot of farmers who are in more rural places, see the news about the activists and they're crazy and they just wanna destroy everything, but really it's just another kind of community. We have lots of friends in the activist community who are fighting for environmental justice and all sorts of things like that and one of those ladies does yoga. I think lyengar, I'm probably not pronouncing that correctly, Yoga. She's Korean. We stock AKA: Peggy, everybody knows her. She's, as they say, she's a bad ass yoga nun...and cute.
- Olivia Hubert: She goes back to Korea in places and we gonna ask her to find us some Korean farmers to be friends with who can answer our questions because it was a really bad flea beetle year. You know when it doesn't get that cold, the flea beetles, they'll come out. They're supposed to be that they come out when there's a week of consecutive 50 degree temperatures and above, but sometimes if it hasn't been that cold they'll come out sooner.
- Olivia Hubert: We had a really bad flea beetle year. A lot of people just stopped with the brassicas in the spring. A lot of the other urban farmers and gardeners in the city they just gave up on brassicas in the spring because it was so bad, but we're like, you know? My husband he's like, "Yeah, why, why? Come on, let's figure it out." She connected us with some farmers. I don't even know their names, but that's who we talked through, we talked. She gave me a long list of stuff that we should be doing. Strategies to deal with the flea beetles because, of course, a lot of the vegetables that Korean people and a lot of other Asian people eat are basically just brassicas. Sometimes it's legumes, broccoli relatives with long names and all different Asian people call the same thing. Some they're different and the main thing they said, which really struck me was that you're gonna have to expect some flea beetle damage.
- Olivia Hubert: After a while, yes, you can grow your brassicas in under a row cover, but if you leave that row cover off in the late spring one time, or the wind blows it off or whatever and they get in the soil, they're in there. Once they're in there and sometimes if they're under the row cover and you don't know it, they will be living it up in flea beetle Heaven unbeknownst to you. Expect that there's going to be some flea beetle damage. Another thing that they recommended was to, we didn't try this, was tobacco. Apparently they don't like the smell of tobacco, so planting things from the tobacco family around your brassicas and around the edge of your farm. Then other strategies that you have that you got priority familiar with like trap crops. Plant some brassicas someplace away from your main crop and don't do anything to it because a lot of flea beetles come out of bushes and hedge rows. Plant it on the edge of the bushes so that they don't bother to come out.



- Olivia Hubert: Of course, there's row cover and that seems to be the best strategy, but like I said, if you ever have a mishap with the row cover and they get in there, then they're in there. Then there's also crop rotation period where you can have another farm, say out in the country, where you haven't been growing that many brassicas, but even out in the country we do have some flea beetles. We also find that if we can get the salad to grow faster than the flea beetles bite it, then they will outgrow the flea bite. Making the soil, making sure the soil is a really nice silt and it's easy for the roots to get down there and then that there's plenty of nutritious compost for the plants to suck up so that they can grow fast. Sometimes you'll see in the spring if there's a cold snap or something, the plants will kind of like stop. They'll be in suspended animation and that's when the flea beetles really go in like, yeah, bam, bam, bam. Try to keep the plants growing.
- Olivia Hubert: Then I have another strategy and this is the first time I'm sharing this with the public.
- Chris Blanchard: All right.
- Olivia Hubert: I'm just gonna laugh after everybody hears this later. I was looking at some old timey book about hopper dozers. That's a hopper dozer, that's a real old timey, the grasshoppers who basically attract things to get grasshoppers because we also have grasshopper problems in the summertime. When they're big it's easier to do, but when they're little they're hard to catch and do something with and they were talking about tangle foot, which is something that mainly people who have orchards buy tangle foot and they either buy the paper with the tangle foot already on it, or they'll buy some paper and put the tangle foot on it.
- Olivia Hubert: I was noticing that the flea beetle was really active in the middle of the day. They would hop. We would be out there harvesting when the sun started to get high and they would actually jump on my head and I grossed out. How dare you touch me? You're eating my salad. Then you had the nerve to jump on me. I noticed that they were active during the day and I noticed that when they first bred the flea beetles, when they first hatched, they would be the size of dust in that first phase. You know after they get finished pupating because they have a really interesting life cycle. Kind of like fleas have an interesting life cycle and ticks have an interesting life cycle, but anyway.
- Olivia Hubert: They would be really tiny, like dust, and there would be a cloud of dust and they would be hopping around and stuff like that. I decided to get some paper, like some thick paper. I just found some, like a roll of paper. It's got to be fairly thick otherwise it'll rip when you're painting the tangle foot on there. You get your brush that's dedicated to the tangle foot container only because you don't want it to get rocks and stuff in the tangle foot. Otherwise, it'll rip the paper when you paint it on there and it'll just make it messy. If you get rocks in there you won't be able to tell if you caught flea beetles or not because they're gonna be the size of teeny tiny pebbles.
- Olivia Hubert: So you paint a strip on the bottom. You leave an inch unpainted because that bottom end to the paper you're going to brush directly over the tops for the leaves of the plant. Then you paint a three inch wide band above the empty strip. Then on the back you paint from directly, starting at the bottom of the



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paper, you paint another two inch wide strip across the paper. The paper should be as wide as your average row. Most people who are farming are very particular about the size of their rows and our rows are not all the same size because Greg made them before I came along and made him make things uniform. So they're slowly becoming more uniform.

Olivia Hubert: You take that and you take a bamboo cane or something, go back around the top of the paper so that you can hold it because you have to be able to do this by yourself. If you need someone else to hold the side of the paper, you're not gonna do it as often as you need to do it because you need to do it when the flea beetles first start coming out. You need to do it, I would say every day. People are like, I don't have that kind of time, but it's not gonna take that long and it's worth it. If you can get the newborn flea beetles, the first generation of that year from the parents that over winter, then you can drastically cut down on your flea beetle damage. You got to get that first generation.

Olivia Hubert: If you let that first generation go, I don't know what you're gonna do. You gotta catch them as soon as possible. In the midst of all your other stuff and this is something that a kid can do too. For people who have older kids and they wanna help out on the farm or they need to help out on the farm, this is something that they can do. It will be interesting to them because after you swipe across the row, and I have all different kinds of techniques, I won't go into the really boring details of it's gotta swipe, you know? It's almost like curling or like grab on your guy, like has your technique.

Olivia Hubert: You gotta swerve this way and then go back the other way. I didn't get to all those details, but you drag it gently over the tops of the brassicas and it disturbs the plants and they jump up on the paper. Then it gives you so much that it's like you can see them sticking on the paper like, ah, sticky on the paper. Then it lets you count them. Then you can see how many you're catching, how big they are and something you'll see that you have different kinds of flea beetles. You'll catch other insects too.

Olivia Hubert: We had this weird moth problem. I could never figure out the name of the moth, but it would be in the salad and we couldn't quite figure out. It wasn't the big, average white moth. It was a small brown moth and it was kind of short. We couldn't tell if it was ... It was a pest. We knew it was a pest, but we couldn't quite figure it out, but they also fly up on the paper and that works good too for the dreaded leaf miner adult. It'll work on them at night. That's my second strategy because the leaf miners are a problem for brassicas too, but it's hard to get them because they jump and they hop. They have a hard body, the adult leaf miners because the leaf miners, of course, are just the larvae.

Olivia Hubert: They are attracted to light at night. I have one of those solar lanterns and I would make a paper cuff to go around the lantern. Or I would use the solar lantern because if you use a real lantern with fire it's gonna catch on fire. Don't do that. Don't catch your farm on fire at night when you can't see. Don't do that.

Olivia Hubert: Get your solar lantern and make a paper cuff and then paint the tangle foot on that and then turn the light on and especially if out in the country or if there's no full moon. You know, mold the light to distract the insects. This one I really get the impressions by my wanna be Korean side, so attack a pole. Put the



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lantern on the end of a cane with a hook or something because you want to be able to hold it without bending over because that'll save your back on that farm work. You hover that over the salad.

Olivia Hubert: They're attracted to the light and when they jump up towards the light they get stuck on the paper. It's got all the same advantages as for the flea beetle and you can get other insects that hang around at night too. While you're going out there with the light, you can see if you have slugs, which is another brassica problem, especially if you happen to irrigate a lot or if it's been a particularly wet year.

Olivia Hubert: It does so many things so it's worth it, but people will still be like, oh she crazy. That's my advice to go out there with lanterns and sticks and sticky paper, but it's worth it. Even if it's just at the beginning of the season just to get yourself off to a good start because if you don't make that money in the spring, it sets the tone for the rest of the year.

Chris Blanchard: Well, and showing up to market with flea beetle free crops in the spring, sets people up to go, "Oh yeah, this is the high value producer. These are the ..." Because people don't like ... No matter how hard you try to convince them that the whole arugula is okay, they don't like it.

Olivia Hubert: Right. A few bites in there, okay because I like what we were told. You're always gonna have a few here and there and the bigger bite here or there is okay, but those little teeny tiny looks like somethings been shot with a teeny tiny shot gun it's like, yo, buckshot. We say that's our signature bug bites. That's what we say if the rattlesnake coils.

Olivia Hubert: A friend's restaurants we're like, oh that's just our signature bug bite. They go for it. They go for it as long as it's not too many. Of course, my husband's dimple helps. It helps.

Chris Blanchard: I think dimples are probably a really good marketing tool.

Olivia Hubert: They are.

Chris Blanchard: You mentioned that along with your salad mix production, of course, it's a high input production system. It needs a lot of fertility added into the system. You talked about Greg's, and I'm putting, I'm gonna say "Greg's" with finger quotes here, but Greg's compost operation.

Olivia Hubert: His obsession. Yeah, he helps the start a company called Detroit Dirt, but it got to be too much. He was taken away from the farm too much, so he stopped doing that, but now he's gone up with another. I forget the name of the company, but Tim. Shout out to Tim. A young man who, he collects compost from I guess like after restaurants and other things. He might do some hospitals I think. We get the scraps and that leads to yet another thing.

Olivia Hubert: You get the scraps and our neighbors who have birds, who have ducks, come and get some of the scraps and the other scraps go in the compost pile. We get leaves from our landscaper friends and we get wood chips from our tree surgeon friends and then we get brew grain from the lock microbrewery and



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mix it all together and make compost. That's one of the things, one of his passions is making compost because we realized, which is a disadvantage of having a super small farm, the super small farms, even our farm in the country is only six acres and part of that is the creek.

Olivia Hubert: Obviously, we're not about to farm ... I guess we could farm in the creek, but we still don't have that much land to farm so that means you have to maximize every square inch and it's hard to do a crop rotation because you literally can't afford to take that row out of production. The way around that is to keep the soil fertility high by constantly top dressing, adding compost and to try not to till as much as possible.

Olivia Hubert: That's where the chickens come in and that's where tarps come in, but even then you still can't take out half your rows and put it under tarp because you need it for production. That's why we're so obsessed with making compost and top dressing.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about how your salad mix production actually works at the nuts and bolts level. You mentioned the tarps. You mentioned pulling plants out. Are you guys set up on a bed system or are you doing individual rows, or solid seeding? Just kinda dig into that for me a bit.

Olivia Hubert: Yeah, we have rows. I think we have about 30 rows. Most of them run east, west. It's kind of hard to orient it, but then we have some north, south rows. They're in a little micro climate between some trees and that's for in the summertime we got about 30 something rows. We have two hoop houses. One of our hoop houses got a tree fell on it, so we have to fix it. The other one collapsed under snow so we really don't have anything in our hoop houses, but we do have hoop houses and we usually have stuff in there.

Olivia Hubert: We have the beds and the beds are built up two feet above level. You could see where the sidewalk is because the rows go up to the sidewalk and so it's built up two feet. We got the soil tested when we first started farming to make sure that the level wasn't too high, which is very important. Somethings that I think even people in the country should do because it's not like there were some kind of sanction on lead and gas, and it's not like people in the country weren't also tinkering with the cars and lead spills and stuff and leaving things to rot. I think everybody could just have the soil tested for heavy metals because we live in a toxic world. That's just the way things are.

Olivia Hubert: We made sure that the lead levels and the heavy metal levels were not high and they weren't because there's houses there, but we put down a barrier of cardboard and wood chips and built the soil up over that over time. We have a six row seeder. That's the way we plant most of our salad because most of our Asian greens we put about ... Sometimes we have 12 different things in the salad mix and it changes with the season. Our customers like that. They just accept that it's gonna be good.

Olivia Hubert: I'm in charge of quality control and making sure that the salad has the right balance of flavors because ... I mean, there's no secret. If you're a real farmer you look at our salad you can tell what's in there. We have squirrel, whatever french squirrel in there for the lemony flavor and then we had the brassicas for



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the sometimes bitter, sometimes spicy flavor. Then we'll do bland stuff, lettuces, and then things that just taste sweet and clean like Tokyo bekana, a Chinese cabbage, but other people who aren't Chinese be like, that's not Chinese! They're bad, but we also put other things in there like purslane. That's a nice, if you want to see that juicy flavor in the summertime. It goes well in the summertime and you know? It conditions that full flavor, nice texture.

Olivia Hubert: So we put lots of different stuff in our salad mix and it changes based on the temperature. Of course, the salad changes by the season too based on the age of the salad. The older you get the spicier you get. That's one of my jokes with some of my middle age women customers. They're some of our happiest customers, the older ladies. About the salad as, oh this is spicy. I say, well you know the older you get the spicier you get. I give them the nudge nudge because that makes them laugh. They feel good about themselves and have a chuckle because it's true. Like, it's true girl, yes. So we have a giggle at the market.

Olivia Hubert: For the salad, so we're constantly ripping out salad and replanting because you don't want to let the salad start to mold. You want to get to it before that. It's a delicate balance because you want to get as many cuts because we cut it. We don't cut it all the way down to the ground. We cut it so that it'll grow back. We also use one of those firehouses, the machines, you know? The ones with the drill. Greg's the machine person, not me, but it's with the drill and it's got the blades that go back and forth. We use that.

Chris Blanchard: The one from Farmers Friend.

Olivia Hubert: We use that to harvest, but we also do harvest some things by hand because some things it's just too rough on.

Chris Blanchard: How many times, you talk about cutting high so that you can come back and harvest again. How many times are you harvesting a typical patch?

Olivia Hubert: It depends on the year. One year we had a really good year with, it was warm, but not too cold and moist, but not too wet. We got 23 cuttings out of some rows, but usually we get, I would say we get about seven, seven cuttings. I think that's a good number because we're constantly top dressing. We also weed. I know a lot of farmers don't take time to weed. They just rip the whole row out. When you do that it's going to take 20 something days to get that salad to be big enough to cut even as a baby. When you rip that out, can you afford to rip it out? Sometimes its worth it if the salads looking good, it's growing well, to just do some weeding. That's also where the top dressing comes in because that helps keep the weed seeds covered up.

Olivia Hubert: Ideally and what we're working towards is weeding enough weeds out of the soil that we can just let the salad reseed itself. Go to seed in that row and then just keep going like that, but that's gonna take some time.

Chris Blanchard: Are you using other sources of fertility with the salad mix beyond just the compost?



- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, we'll do foliar feeds from seaweed. We get the seaweed and do foliar feeds with that. We do compost too, but we usually do that in between cutting so we're not gonna do that and then go and harvest the salad. We don't make anybody stink, but we'll do foliar feed.
- Chris Blanchard: Then when you talk about doing the weed control, is that all just done by hand?
- Olivia Hubert: It's mostly done by hand and that's also a benefit of ripping the rows out is when you rip the weeds out too. So we weed by hand. I'm really fast at weeding. It's about getting to the weeds before they get too big. It depends on what kind of weed. When you're dealing with thistle, that's mostly the reason why we plow is because the thistle is just ... Salad, don't plow, just pull it out, but no. Sometimes it's just that bad, but for other things like bind weed or for chickweed or henbit those things that come in a spray, you can get them before they sprawl out. It doesn't take that long. You spend ... it also gives you a chance to talk. Again, I'm looking for chances to talk. While you're weeding, Greg will be on one side of the row, and I'll be on the other, and we'll be weeding and sometimes he gets a little competitive. Most of the time we're just weeding and talking. Our daughter, even though she's four, she knows about weeds too, so she helps a little bit.
- Chris Blanchard: Farm kids know about weeds.
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah. She helps a little bit. It's worth it to us if we can keep the row going if it's not starting to break. If it's starting to bolt then a lot of times we'll just rip the whole row out, but we're hoping to employ a chicken tractor type thing. I got three bantam hens. I got three little bantam hens and a mobile coop and we're hoping to throw that out over the rows and instead of ripping them out ourselves, put the hens on it and then let them do the ripping and the tilling and the pooping in the row. Then just move them several times in a day. I'm sure the three of them would do one row, at least one row in a day. Sometimes more than that, so we're hoping to employ the chickens to help too. Ideally we would be able to just cut the salad back hard and then tarp it and let the salad decompose into the top layer and then top dress and put some more seeds on top of that, but they can lay you out of production. That would take a while, uh.
- Chris Blanchard: That's interesting to me that you guys, from what you're describing, you've been in more or less continual production in most of these beds for six, seven, eight years. Where you're not ... it's a small plot so crop rotation isn't even really all that effective in a small space and then you're adding the fact that you're growing and growing and growing and not even taking time to do things like the tarping because you want to get stuff back into production right away.
- Chris Blanchard: Have you noticed a change or any kind of an impact on the soil quality over the years?
- Olivia Hubert: Yeah, our soil quality is actually ... It's hard to explain, but it's actually improved over the years because we did have a time thereafter when we first started that we were so obsessed with making compost that we did have a problem with soil fertility, but it has improved. I laugh because Detroit, when they say the studies talk about how most American cities are sitting on the prime, the best. The top



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soil are the best soil. America, it's so true. We had to dig down to maybe our shore line and I had never seen soil so fertile. It was just black. It was perfect. I'm like, what in the world? Let's move our house and farm this, but you know nobody likes to do that.

Olivia Hubert: The soil was already pretty good, but the soil tilth has improved and fertility has improved, but only because we're constantly adding more compost and doing stuff to it. We've also bled more weeds out. It's just a different strategy. I think crop rotation, if we had more land, we would definitely do it, but since we don't then adding the fertility ourselves has been our strategy.

Chris Blanchard: What are you using for tillage operations? Do the tractors actually fit in there or you have other tools that you're using for that?

Olivia Hubert: Yeah, we have a compact tractor and it's funny because our land in the country, we need a full size tractor. So we kind of go back and forth about that. I'm like, you're not gonna ... Can't you overwork the compact tractor. You just tear it up, so we've had three farm mechanics. We have two in the city and one out in the country just to keep the tractor and the truck going because we need the bigger size vehicle, but the bigger size vehicle means you need an equipment trailer. Means you need a bigger truck, a bigger this, a bigger that. My husband would like that to go to the bigger size, so he just keep tearing that little tractor up out there, poor thing.

Olivia Hubert: We have a compact tractor that fits over the rows. Like I said before, he should've been a fighter pilot the way he maneuvers that thing. We do have a small little walk behind tiller, but we always are letting people borrow it and we don't really know where it is right now, but we do use it when we know where it is. We do a lot of stuff by hand. My husband calls it farm yoga. A lot of our friends teach yoga and meditation and stuff. We have a lot of massage therapist friends, they put us back together and help us keep going because of course, the salad, you know? You're so close to the ground and you do have to get down there sometimes. He calls this farm yoga, stretching over these rows and harvesting or weeding and then going down on the other leg and all this other stuff.

Olivia Hubert: We probably do a video about it on our website sometime to explain all the stuff we're doing out there to space it and to make our work as much as possible, something that will benefit us. Instead of thinking about the times when we have to harvest the salad by hand with a knife or scissors as, oh no my back. Flexing a bit as an opportunity to stretch yourself. Stretch out and it could be a benefit to you. It doesn't have to be something horrible that you don't wanna do. It could be a benefit.

Chris Blanchard: Tell me about the harvesting and post harvest handling with salad mix. You're using the spinning harvester with the osculating blades on it to do a lot of the harvest. Then sometimes you're out there with knives, but once you get the crop picked, what happens next? Since you aren't doing refrigeration?

Olivia Hubert: Right, so we have a salad washing station. We have a really big three basin sink. Also, one of the benefits of being in the city is their restaurants come and go and they upgrade their equipment. They're like, oh I don't want this \$2000 sink



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anymore. Just come and get it. We're like, yeah, yeah, yes. So we go over there and get it so we have a really nice three basin sink and we'll dump the salad from the basket of the harvester machines into a tub. Just like a Rubbermaid tub, the ones that are always on sale at this time of year and unwash.

Olivia Hubert: Then if its really hot outside we'll have oscillators. It's not, because we try to harvest before it gets hot outside. Of course, after it gets hot outside, that's not gonna work. If we do have to harvest when it's hot outside we'll water the salad first. That way we got some water in it and it can hold up better to being cut.

Olivia Hubert: Anyway, we harvest it, we put it in the tubs. We take it back through the backyard where we have a washing station and there cold water in there. Of course, I just went through this because we're gonna be selling... so a shout out to the Michigan Department of Agriculture who helped us get our license for the salads to go.

Olivia Hubert: Anyway, I'm mentioning him because I went through with him to make sure if he thought I was doing enough stuff. Am I being sanitary enough and stuff like that? We went over things like that. We're not GAP Certified, but I still like, what Rick says, it's good enough.

Olivia Hubert: We clean the tubs and everything beforehand, the scissors and everything. We want it to be extra clean because unlike a bigger farm, if we have a health scare we probably wouldn't recover from it. We can't just be like, you know, change the name of our farm and just bounce back like, oh hell, you know? If something happens to somebody gets sick. Although we do have marketing tricks, but still that's not point, I don't wanna make people sick.

Olivia Hubert: Yes, everything's been cleaned in the proper bleach water solution, all the salad washing sinks and the knives, the scissors. I'm the only one that harvests with a knife. He just uses scissors because everybody else is too clumsy. Greg is too clumsy. Otherwise, they would have to wear gloves because people cut themselves. Yeah, that happens a lot with those knives because they're small and sharp.

Olivia Hubert: After that we have bags. We get those gel lined gel bags because they keep things nice and cold. The gel bags, and they lay flat, which is what I really like because then it doesn't take up as much space in the tub. We put those in the bottom of the tubs and we cut this and say, okay we have that row. We put that salad in the water. We let it, I like to let it free float because it lets rocks or any bugs ... it lets rocks drop to the bottom or any insects crawl out of the salad.

Olivia Hubert: Sometimes when you just dip in and pull it out that doesn't give them enough time. You sure don't wanna be opening up your salad tub and all these critters starts flying out. It's a mark of where the restaurant, oh my goodness. They're looking at you like, oh boy.

Chris Blanchard: Generally not appreciated, yeah.

Olivia Hubert: Yeah, they're not really feeling that. Although it has happened to us before, but again, the dimples.



- Olivia Hubert: We put it in the tubs and we leave it, the salad, we free float it and we scoop it out with a basket. We usually scoop it out with a basket or by hand. Something that will let the water out. I think that's a waste of water although the water does go through our little pond so that makes them happy. Then we just keep the salad in the shade. We keep the salad in the shade and somewhere along the line while we're harvesting, one of us stops harvesting and delivers salad to restaurants.
- Olivia Hubert: So this is our big, this will be on our big harvest day on Friday and then we take it to restaurants and then we're having the salad for the Eastern Market. We do have the markets too, like the west end market, but yeah for the gardening market day and we leave it in the shade. It's in the shade all day. This shed was built specifically for this and the shed is open so there's usually a nice breeze under there and it keeps the salad cold.
- Olivia Hubert: We monitor the temperature of the salad with thermometers. If it is going to be warm we will put the salad in the basement. Our basement is cold all year around with the ice and that's actually enough to keep it cold. Maybe it doesn't seem like that, but the deep old basement and on the north side of the basement.
- Chris Blanchard: You're really talking about keeping it for a very short period of time. It's not like you're trying to store it for days.
- Olivia Hubert: Right, the salad is going out that same day or the next morning. The salad that we harvest that day is sold by noon on Saturday. Greg will come back to the farm and harvest more salad for the later part of the market days. Then we set up at the market with the salad on the night before and then he'll go home and harvest more salad. That's the salad that we'll sell after noon until we leave, until we sell out to make sure that it's fresh.
- Olivia Hubert: So that's how we do that.
- Chris Blanchard: Wow, so that's no joke about fresh and really not having any time between the harvest and when the product is sold.
- Olivia Hubert: Right, and it makes so much a difference. That's one of the complaints people have about salad. They will eat more salad and they will eat healthy except when they buy the salad it rots immediately. I'm like, yeah that's because the salad that you're buying is actually not fresh. It gets refrigerated immediately, but refrigerated immediately a week ago, two weeks ago? This is less than 12 hours old. It lasts people so much longer and gives them the confidence to really step out there on that limb into the land of vegetables because a lot of people don't do vegetables just because they don't know how to take care of them. It's really disheartening when they buy something and it just rots on them. It makes them not want to try things again and it makes them pull back.
- Olivia Hubert: The restaurants really love it even though the salad never hangs around in the restaurants for very long. Our salad lasts seven to 10 days in a refrigerator because it's so fresh. We do all this stuff around making sure that the water we wash the salad in is 40 degrees to bring it down to temperature right away and



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putting it in ice in between the field and the washing. Then putting it in ice again and storing it in a cool, breezy place. Yeah, those are our main strategies for our post harvest handling.

Chris Blanchard: Even though you're farming without refrigeration, you're not farming without cooling?

Olivia Hubert: Right, you gotta do that because you'll open the tub and be like, oh that smell, that heat oh. It's starting to rot already. You're like, no. Yeah.

Chris Blanchard: Olivia, with that I think this is a good spot for us to stop, get one more word from one more sponsor and then we're gonna come back and do our lightning round.

Chris Blanchard: This lightning round is brought to you by BCS America. BCS two wheel tractors are real farming equipment for real farmers. With PTO driven attachments like rototillers, flail mowers, rotary plows, power heroes, log splitter, 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 BCS tackled jobs that we simply couldn't do with a larger machine. From mowing steep slopes and around trees, to working in our high tunnels. Plus, they're gear driven for years of dependable service. Check out BCSamerica.com to see the full line of tractors and attachments plus videos of BCS in action.

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

Olivia Hubert: My favorite tool is a hoe. I'm cracking up because Greg sees it and he's like, oh that's what happens when you listen to the Carolina Chocolate Drops and you're listening to those negro spirituals. She wants to be out there with the hoe. I really do like it for its versatility and I've kinda cool like if I see a mouse out there or something and Greg is not around and I'll like get it with the hoe and then I can move stuff with the hoe. I really like the hoe for some reason.

Chris Blanchard: Is there a particular hoe that you like, a particular style of hoe or something in particular that you're looking for in a hoe?

Olivia Hubert: Yeah, I'm looking for a hoe with a lightweight handle. That way when you're lifting, you're lifting the weight of the hoe and not just the handle. One of those railer square edge hoes, but not a big square because you don't want to take ... when you're using it you don't wanna slice a big chunk of soil. You just wanna slice a small chunk because then you can go longer with the hoe than if you have a big heavy hoe or one that's really wide.

Chris Blanchard: If you really love a hoe, how do you keep your hoe sharp?

Olivia Hubert: We have all these files. We have a bench grinder and I'm always down there or Greg is, grinding the edge with that and then we have files and wet stone.



- Chris Blanchard: What's your favorite crop to grow? Out of all of the things that you're doing for the salad, if you had to stick with just one, what would it be?
- Olivia Hubert: Actually, the salad kind of gets on my nerves because it's so needy. My husband really, he decided to grow salad for the reasons, you know, good reasons and I don't want to change the salad because we are successful with the salad, but I'd really like to grow fresh beans. Crowder peas I just did things of crowder peas, which I guess technically, I don't know some people get into it, right? Especially down south they get bad. You know it's a pea. You know? Yeah, crowder peas, that's my favorite because they're delicious. I think that's why because I like to eat them and also for the biodiversity of insects.
- Olivia Hubert: All these different moths and native bees and things that drink the nectar from the flowers during ... you know, like in the beginning. Well, really throughout the whole season. It's interesting especially for doing things with children and keeping children interested and farming and getting them into nature. Going out there with a magnifying glass and a nice insect book or even going out there and taking a picture of it and then looking it up on google or whatever. They just offer so much so I really like growing crowder peas. That's my favorite thing to grow.
- Chris Blanchard: Is that a crop that you guys take to market or is that just something that is just strictly for the family?
- Olivia Hubert: It's just for the family and I use it to bribe our neighbors.
- Chris Blanchard: Nice, nice.
- Olivia Hubert: They think I'm sweet.
- Chris Blanchard: Finally, Olivia, if you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing, what would it be?
- Olivia Hubert: If I could tell my beginner farmer self one thing I would say ... I would just say hold on to the knowledge that you gained so far just because you're not able to implement some of the things and put some of the systems in place and organization and things that you want doesn't mean that you'll never be able to do them. Just stick with them, keep trying and eventually you'll be able to do them.
- Chris Blanchard: Olivia, thank you so much for being on the Farmer to Farmer podcast today.
- Olivia Hubert: You're welcome.
- Chris Blanchard: All right, so wrapping things up here I'll say again that this is episode 165 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 Hubert. That H-U-B-E-R-T.
- Chris Blanchard: 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



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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.

