



FARMER TO FARMER

podcast



EPISODE 167

Genesis McKiernan-Allen and Eli Robb of Full Hand Farm on Four-Season Farming for Restaurants and Farmers Markets in Indiana

June 28, 2018



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Chris Blanchard: It's the Farmer To Farmer podcast. Episode 167, and this is your host Chris Blanchard.

Chris Blanchard: And before we get started today, I want to say how happy I am to be back, and how grateful I am for all of the support and all of the love that everybody out there gave me during my illness, and my ongoing recuperation. It means the world to me, and it's been the source of so much comfort and peace for me as I took the time to heal.

Chris Blanchard: I know that all of you farmers out there know just how hard it was to make the decision to take that first week off, and even while I was in the hospital, and even harder to make the additional time that I needed to really get myself to the point where I can put out consistent content again.

Chris Blanchard: Thank you so much for your patience, and your love, and your support. While I, and those around me put me back together again. Love you all. My guest today Genesis McKiernan-Allen, and Eli Rob raise vegetables year round at Full Hand Farm. 45 minutes northeast of Indianapolis. Going into year seven of their operation. Genesis and Eli have between four, and five acres of produce



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production. With half of their sales going to farmers market, and the other half going to restaurants in Indianapolis. Eli and Genesis dig into how they've managed a black rot infestation in their brassica crops, as well as how they weathered an urban side drift incident by marketing with honesty and integrity. And we take a deep look at the details of the winter production and their operation. Including the highs and the lows of mobile tunnels. Their design for caterpillar tunnels, and how those fit into their rotation. And how four season production has fit into their business and marketing plans.

Chris Blanchard: We also take an honest evaluation, of starting a farm where the food scene was not fully developed, and how that's worked for them. And we take a similarly honest look at starting a family on the farm, and how they've made that work. The Farmer To Farmer podcast is generously supported by Vermont Compost Company. Founded by organic crop growing professionals committed to meeting the need for high quality compost, and compost based living soil mixes for certified organic plant production. VermontCompost.com. And by Hoss Tools. And Hoss Tools is a complete solution for all your market farming tools, and supplies.

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Chris Blanchard: Genesis McKiernan-Allen, and Eli Rob. Welcome to the Farmer To Farmer podcast.

Genesis: Hey Chris. Thanks. We're happy to be here.

Eli: Hey Chris, thanks for having us.

Chris Blanchard: So glad you could join us today. I'd like to start off by having you tell us about Full Hand Farm. Where are you guys located? How much are you farming? And where are you guys selling your produce? And how are you selling it?

Genesis: Sure. Yeah, we're in Indiana. We are about 45 minutes northeast of downtown Indianapolis. Right on a county line. And we are pretty much serving Indianapolis, with our produce. That's where it's all going. We grow about ... Between four and five acres, of vegetables. Kind of when you count in all the double cropping, and the rotations, and things like that. And we do grow year round.

Genesis: We're selling to restaurants, and farmers markets. Those are our two avenues. It's about 50-50 split between those two. We do pretty high volume summer market. One at this point. And then we also do a winter farmers market, all year. So we're at market maybe ... I don't know? I would say 45 to 48 weeks out of the year. And we do take a few off. Just for our sanity.



- Genesis: And then restaurant sales is about the other 50% of our revenue. And that's going to about ... I don't know? 15 to 20 restaurants in Indianapolis. Weekly from ... Usually May until just after Christmas. Is how long we're offering restaurant deliveries. I think that covers the bases.
- Chris Blanchard: Indianapolis, and Indiana in general. I don't tend to think of as local food hotspots, but when you're talking about selling to 20 restaurants, there's clearly some stuff going on there.
- Genesis: Yeah. There definitely is. I mean I think Indianapolis is ... In the last ... I mean really since we've been farming, but especially in the last five years. There's been a real ... I would say cultural renaissance in Indianapolis itself. As far as people being really excited about the city. Investing in the city. Kind of arts, and culture, and all kinds of people putting in a lot of sort of creative energy. Into the city. That didn't necessarily exist there in the 80s and 90s when we were growing up. And food is definitely a big part of that.
- Genesis: The chef scene in Indianapolis is pretty wonderful. It's a lot of young chefs, who are really invested in this city, and have just been able to really I think carve out a niche in Indianapolis as a place for really creative ... Not necessarily only fine dining, but just creative dining that is chef owned and operated, and yeah. It's a really thriving food culture right now. And our farm really started right when the restaurant scene was really starting to take off.
- Genesis: So we feel pretty lucky that we moved back when we did, and started our farm when we did. Because, I think we were really able to kind of rise with the culinary scene. Kind of along with it. And I think the growth of our farm has really ... It's been in coordination with the growth of the restaurant scene in Indianapolis. Which has been really fun. It's been really cool.
- Chris Blanchard: When did you guys start farming?
- Genesis: We're going into year seven of Full Hand Farm, on our own. We did do two years of an apprenticeship on a really wonderful CSA farm in North Central Iowa. Our first year ... We were in Portland, Oregon, before that, for about eight years. And we moved to Iowa ... I think in 2010. We did 2010, and 2011 as apprentices on a CSA farm in really rural North Central Iowa. And then we started ... We moved home to Indiana in 2012. Well late 2011. Put up a couple hoop houses. And started selling in 2012. In Indie. And we've been here ever since.
- Chris Blanchard: Are you still on the same land that you started farming on?
- Genesis: We are not. We actually came home to Indiana at the encouragement of ... Well for a lot of reasons. But one of the reasons was because Eli's dad had just bought about ten acres. Just outside of the city, and offered us an acre or two to get started on, if we were really serious about doing our own thing. And so when we moved back, that was what we knew we had. We were like, "Okay. We have an acre, or two. About 30 minutes outside of the city. And we know we can get started there, and we'll kind of figure out the rest of the pieces later."



- Genesis: And so we did that for two years. 2012 and 2013 we were farming one acre the first year, two acres the second year. On Eli's dad's property. And then it was in that 2013 year, that we found our current property. Via Craigslist. Of all places.
- Chris Blanchard: Oh really?
- Genesis: Yeah. Yeah, that's kind of a bizarre story, but yeah. We found our current place, and leased it with an intent to purchase. Then we moved to our current property, and leased for ... Do you remember? I want to say two years.
- Eli: I think it was three years.
- Genesis: Basically until we got pregnant and were like, "Oh, guess we better buy this place. Or figure out how to hurry up and get this property locked in." I guess our first year at our current property was 2014. We've been now on this ground 14, 15, 16, 17 so this'll be our fifth year. On this ground. And we have purchased this property. We did buy this property with the help of an FSA Beginning farmer 50-50 loan.
- Chris Blanchard: You guys are farming four to five acres of vegetables. How much land do you guys actually own?
- Eli: We have about 25 acres here. Just under. It's a little rolling, which helped to make it affordable. And so really there's maybe seven acres flat tillable. That's opened up, and we like to try and set aside at least a third of that. To rest. We did actually just take over a neighbor's five acre corn field down the road who's got five acres of kind of sandy bottom land right along a creek. And he was wanting to get that out of corn, and we took that over, which will let us expand a little bit and allow us to really open up our rotation.
- Genesis: Yeah. I'll piggy back on that just really quickly. To talk about the rotation. Because five years here, one of the things that we're learning. Being a beginning farmer I feel like never ends, or it feels like it's never going to end. Because now that we've been on the same ground you know four or five years pest and insects, and disease were really ... We got hit with some disease a couple years ago. We got black rot of crucifers, that wiped out a lot of our fall brassicas, which as you know is, almost ... I mean it's like 50% of the crops that we grow. Especially in the fall.
- Genesis: And so we weren't really interested in scaling our operation per se, but we were really interested in trying to open up some opportunity for rotation. To figure out how to better manage disease. And pests.
- Chris Blanchard: When you say black rot, that's something that sticks around. For quite some time in the soil. Doesn't it?
- Eli: Yep.
- Genesis: Yeah. They say three years. Three years. I mean, you need to have a clean field of ... Yeah, basically as long as the residue is in the field. That black rot can hang



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onto it, and it spreads so quickly. Our goal now, is to stay out of those fields that had any sign of black rot. For three years. Which is a tall order.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah, when you say stay out of those fields. Are you talking about just staying out with brassicas? Or are you talking about staying out with tractors?

Eli: Just staying out with the brassica's.

Chris Blanchard: Okay.

Eli: And then you know, you did mention equipment, and that is something in the last few years that I've been really careful of. You know, and I go in those fields with any equipment. When I come out, there's a special spot at the far end of the farm. Where I pressure wash the equipment off, and I have a backpack sprayer that I have a bleach solution in, and sanitize things before I move to other fields.

Chris Blanchard: What a pain in the ass.

Eli: Yeah, big time. But more of a pain in the ass to not have a storage crop of cabbage.

Chris Blanchard: Right.

Eli: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Blanchard: How did you guys diagnose, the black rot? What was it that happened? And then what did you do for control that year?

Eli: It actually, it moved in on our spring brassica's, and we started noticing some symptoms. It's kind of like the season's crazy. Just keep moving forward. Keep moving forward. Oh wait, the cabbage is melting. And then we sent off a sample to Perdue, our university up here. And they diagnosed it for us. Meanwhile, we had already put in our fall brassica's, and that disease had moved around. Whether it was the dog, or the flea beetles, or what moved it around.

Genesis: Or our boots.

Eli: [crosstalk 00:11:10].

Genesis: And our pant legs. It spreads really easily on water molecules, and I mean I honestly think ... I think our dog was the one that did the initial spreading around of, she's just out there hunting around you know? In and out of fields. She's a good farm dog. Keeping rabbits away. But I think going through those plants early in the morning, when they're dewy, and went. And then going to a new field. When they're dewy and wet. And I'm pretty sure that's how it got spread so broadly. So quickly.

Genesis: The other thing is, we just didn't know what we were looking for. Right? This was I think year four for us, maybe? That we got the black rot, and there's so much other stuff going on. There's so much other stuff that we're trying to handle. Our son was maybe a year and a half, that year. We're learning how to



juggle having a small child. I wasn't on the farm as much. We had employees. It's easy, when those symptoms show up. I think when you're early in your farming career, and you haven't yet had a catastrophic event like that. To just think, "Oh, it'll pull through," or, "Oh, I'm too tired to look it up, or find out." Until it was too late, and it really was a devastating loss for us. But taught some good lessons too.

Genesis: Right? I mean now, I think we're ... That really launched us into sort of identifying disease issues, being better about scouting. Building relationships with the plant pathologist at Perdue, and the vegetable specialist at Perdue, and sort of building relationships with people that I can now ping a text message, or an email to and say, "Hey, what does this look like? Should I be concerned?" Basically.

Chris Blanchard: When you say something like getting better at scouting. What does that actually look like?

Eli: That's a good question which, we're still getting better at. We're trying to implement. Carve out a specific time in the week for a field walk, which actually ties into ... We have a full time, year round employee that's been with us for ...

Genesis: Three years.

Eli: Three years I think. And just trying to tie her into the bigger picture. And then just trying to pay attention to what we're seeing, when we're out there harvesting. You know? And not discounting it.

Genesis: Which lead into ... Last year ... We had black rot a couple years ago. I mean we've had a lot of success farming. I feel like all of a sudden we're just like talking about the bad stuff, but sometimes that's what maybe you learn the most from. Or the most quickly.

Chris Blanchard: I think that's it, right? The most quickly. It's not necessarily the most fun but, the way those lessons tend to come fast and hard.

Eli: Yeah.

Genesis: Yeah. Right. Yeah exactly.

Eli: Yep.

Genesis: Part of that scouting I would say that from the black rot, this past year. 2017. We did end up having an incident where Eli was out on a Sunday. Doing a field walk, changing out some irrigation, checking stuff out. Started to notice some funny spots all over everything. In our first maybe, an acre and a half. Two acres of production. It's on a road that's across the field from a ... Or across the road from a conventional farm, and he kind of checked it out, it was really bizarre.

Genesis: There were spots across crop families, and everything from carrots that had just put their first true leaves on to the kale and chard that had been in for six weeks, and was just getting ready to bunch. And turns out that we had been



drifted. We had herbicide drift. That had come across the road. From the conventional field across the way.

- Genesis: He did notice that really early, and we were able to jump on that really quickly. Get the state chemist called you know? Get somebody out very quickly. To take samples, and check it out, and to start to move forward right? Start to figure out like, "Okay. Here's our problem." Instead of just wondering what's the problem? What's the problem? What's the problem? Why is this stuff ... Why are we having failure to thrive? You know? Being like, "Okay, this is it. Now how do we move forward? What do we do now?"
- Chris Blanchard: Okay. I mean not to dwell on all the bad stuff. Black rot, and herbicide drift.
- Genesis: I know.
- Chris Blanchard: Okay. You discover that you got herbicide drift. What next? What do you do about that?
- Eli: You make sure that the tequila bottle's relatively full.
- Genesis: Especially because, I will jump in and say that our daughter was three weeks old when this happened we had a three week old baby as well.
- Chris Blanchard: Okay.
- Genesis: Keep that. I mean nothing like early June, a three week old baby, and drift.
- Chris Blanchard: Yeah. Having done the three week old baby thing, although not in the middle of the summer. That's pretty hardcore.
- Genesis: No, it's pretty talented is what I'll say. Anyway. Yeah.
- Chris Blanchard: It's making my stomach twist up to think about that. What did you do? You guys called the state ... You said the state chemist?
- Eli: Yeah. I mean first thing I did ... We live in a corn and bean producing state. I think you lived in Iowa for a long time, so you know how it is. I mean it's all over the place. That's kind of the culture, right?
- Chris Blanchard: Right.
- Eli: First thing I did was, I knew who's field it was. I knew the family. Or I knew the name of the people who owned the field. You know, we've only been in the neighborhood for five years, and I always say, "We don't go to church or the bar so how do we meet anybody?" Because, we're just working all the time.
- Chris Blanchard: Right.
- Eli: So I didn't have a relationship with these guys. So I Googled around. Found some phone numbers. Called. Left some messages, and you know no call back within 24 hours. I figured had to protect ourselves, and called the state chemist, which is really the only recourse. In this state. You call the state chemist. They



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come out. They take samples, sort of in a gradient back from the field where the suspected drift came from. So they can for sure identify that the drift came from there, right? The samples will be higher, closer to the field. And then they also take samples ... I think he took it off of a sycamore tree leaf. A little way's back. To find out ... Kind of a scary term.

Genesis: Acceptable atmospheric levels.

Eli: Yeah. That's what it was. Acceptable atmospheric levels. So apparently this stuff's just floating around everywhere. He came out, took samples, and then told us, "Well it could be six weeks before you hear anything from us." And six weeks is, you know? Life or death in some of these crops. And so we sent samples out ourself, because this was our early spring block. All the radish, and turnip, and bunched greens, and actually our garlic, and onions, and it was a mixed bag, up there that got thriftd. And we didn't know what it was. If it was safe to consume. Or not, you know? So we shut restaurants off. Kind of told them what happened. And didn't harvest any of that stuff for market.

Eli: Meanwhile, had sent it off to a lab. I think out in Oregon. Just really pricey. I mean testing for this stuff is pricey, these chemical companies. That produce these sprays. Hold onto those compositions pretty tightly. And you have to have the compositions to be able to test for it Anyway. We sent out to test for a couple things to see if it was safe for consumption, and it ended up coming back safe for consumption. But well above organic standards.

Genesis: Which we are not certified organic. And so then we had a real moral dilemma. Right? We are organic practices. We are sustainable farm. You know, we don't ... But we're not certified. And if we were certified it would've been cut and dry like, "No, we can't sell any of these crops." But we're not certified.

Chris Blanchard: What'd you do?

Genesis: Oh man. We had heartache about it for weeks. And what we ended up deciding to do was to just fully disclose it. You know, we were not ... I mean, yeah we were below the EPA standards for consumption. We were about midway through. You know? But above the organic standards for consumption. And so we ended up deciding to just fully disclose. I put it on my Instagram. We put it on our Facebook page. We printed off big signs, and took them to market. That showed a graph actually of EPA standard for consumption, organic standard for consumption, and then the bar in the middle that showed the level of contamination that was on our crops, and we fully outlined what crops were affected at our stand. And we posted it at our stand. And kind of let people make the choice for themselves. As far as if they were comfortable buying that, because you just don't know. You know? If people are having health issues, you know? They might be needing to be really, really strict about what contaminates that we were dealing with. But some people maybe it's just like, "Oh it's just a preference." And so they are willing to ... You know, they figure they're getting it other places.

Genesis: We just opted for full disclosure. And decided to just let our customers decide for themselves.



- Chris Blanchard: What kind of an impact did that have on sales? I mean, I'm thinking about my experience at farmers market in Rochester Minnesota where I would hear every week people walking through the farmer's market with 80 vendors saying, "Oh, everybody here is organic." And of course [crosstalk 00:20:14] certified organic at the market.
- Genesis: Sure.
- Chris Blanchard: I mean with those kinds of biases there. I mean I'm sure that lots of people at the market have much higher pesticide residues, on their product than you guys do, and aren't advertising it. But, there's all those underlying assumptions. That customers had. What kind of an impact did that have on your sales?
- Eli: You know, I don't think it had too much of a negative impact. I think I remember two customers saying you know, "Thanks for disclosing that." And walking away. Mostly it was very positive feedback. They really appreciated our kind of forthcomingness with it, and you know maybe it did kind of open some minds up to what you're talking about. How there is the assumption that maybe everybody at market is organic. And that could put some question in their mind about that.
- Eli: It didn't necessarily ... Yeah, I don't think it really had negative impacts of sales. At market.
- Genesis: I would actually say that I don't think it had negative impacts of sales at market, because that there was herbicide residue on our crops. I think that it could've potentially had negative sales though, because we lost our first planting of carrots. We lost our first planting of beets, you know?
- Genesis: Our bunching greens struggled for the whole season, and so we missed some of that first to market. Market share, that you strive for. In the spring, to kind of be you know, early with the big piles of carrots and beets. To set people's buying habits. Really I don't think it had negative sales effects. Like I said, in the concern for the pesticide, but I do think that we lost a market share in the season.
- Chris Blanchard: Oh sure.
- Genesis: As far as you know, our piles being quite a bit smaller. We really struggled to get healthy, vigorous crops. You know, replace the bunching greens, and the onions. So, the yield loss on the onions, and the garlic, and the peppers, and all that kind of stuff. I will say you know, the silver lining of that. And this is like, you always want to have something positive to tell people at market too right? Because you don't want to be like, "Oh, my life is so hard." Even though your life is so hard, or it feels so hard.
- Genesis: But you know, you tell people, "Hey, this is why we're a diverse farm." You know? "This is why we don't grow only one thing." "You know, we plant things every single week. You know, yes this is a bummer, but you know, we'll come through it. And it's teaching us some lessons, and we'll figure out how to bounce back and thanks for bearing with us."



- Chris Blanchard: Did you guys make any changes, or do anything differently as a result, of the drift incident?
- Eli: Actually, when I came home that Sunday, and stopped by the front field, change up some irrigation. In the back of my truck was about 30 spruce trees. To be planted, as a wind break. Right there on that road.
- Chris Blanchard: Of course.
- Eli: You know of course, yeah 15 years to late. You know, so that's something. For sure. Is getting that wind break up. As soon as possible. Because it's not like these guys maliciously are doing it, you know? It's how they've been raised. It's how they know how to ... Raise corn and beans. That's how they've been taught, and that's the only way they know.
- Eli: As far as ... What else we've changed. I'm not sure? We should probably put some signs up. Of course, you know my wife was right. Genesis was right. When we moved in, she wanted to put signs up and I thought, "Oh you know, let's not be the crazy hippies on a corner and put everybody off. Right up front." But we probably should have you know? I mean we're registered with DriftWatch, it's a website that is supposed to facilitate communication between specialty crop producers, and commodity crop producers so they kind of know ... So the applicators know where you are. But we didn't have signs up. I mean you know, not that it should matter.
- Chris Blanchard: But it does. You know again the reality is, if you drift a little bit of herbicide on your neighbors herbicide resistant corn crop. It doesn't really matter you know?
- Eli: Sure.
- Chris Blanchard: And so I think it ... But it is such a hard line to walk. Between you know, we're the new hippies on the block, and everybody's expecting you to have naked Friday on the farm, and if you put up the signs. You know, you're just going to increase traffic on Friday's that way.
- Eli: Yeah.
- Genesis: Yeah.
- Chris Blanchard: There is a need to say it too. You know?
- Eli: There is.
- Chris Blanchard: "We're here, and please be considerate of what we're doing."
- Eli: Mm-hmm (affirmative). There is. There is. And I will just ... Couple more things on this drift thing, we can move on, but you know one more thing that we did, right after it happened. You know called state chemist. Figured out about you know, getting it identified, was start new transplants. Immediately. Reseed, you know? And just try and move forward. This hadn't happened to us before, but it's fairly commonplace in this state. Sadly enough. And so we had known some



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people it had happened to, and we know that you know, things can move slowly, and meanwhile you know the bills don't stop coming.

Eli: First thing you do is, move forward. Replant. Recede. Get new transplants coming.

Chris Blanchard: Will you guys be thinking about becoming certified organic? So that you have some sort of recourse in the future? Or some sort of official standing?

Eli: Yeah, I don't know if necessarily for that recourse. I guess I hadn't thought about it like that. I mean we have thought about it just as far as you know, marketing ourselves better. And also just being counted you know? I mean we get that ag census every year, and if we're not certified. Then we're not counted as organic. And so then our little number doesn't count when the USDA looks at the overall picture of nationwide agriculture. So we've been talking about maybe feeling a little responsibility to that bigger picture. To add that certification.

Chris Blanchard: Let's swing and talk about some successes. Now, because I think that'll be a lot more fun. Yu guys are doing four season production.

Eli: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Blanchard: On your farm. Can you tell me a little bit more about the systems that you're using, to do that.

Eli: So we have about half an acre under plastic, and ... Let's see. How many square foot? We do a lot of moveable hoop houses. We actually, we started exclusively with moveables. We now have a permanent greenhouse, and then another bigger permanent 30 by 96, but then we have four 20 by 50 moveables, and three 12 by 100 cat tunnels that I made. That we also move.

Genesis: That was the goal from the beginning. From starting our farm. We knew that we were going to be a four season ... That was part of our business plan. Kind of our strategy going into farming. Like when we decided that this was something that we wanted to do, as our living. We knew from the very beginning that we were going to need you know, that year round production, and that year round income. And so we really started the farm you know, as part of our starting tool set. That we year one, we hit the ground with. Was two of these 20 by 48 moveable tunnels. I mean it's something that was from the very beginning, was our goal. I just wanted to say that.

Chris Blanchard: And when you talk about moveable tunnels. Are these the ones that slide back and forth kind of on that ... What I think of as the Elliot Coleman model?

Eli: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah. These ones are ... They're kind of the cheapy models. They're not on tracks. They're just on skids. On a two-by-two. Square tubing.

Chris Blanchard: And how do you guys have that rotation set up?

Eli: Yeah, so we have three slots.

Genesis: Per tunnel.



- Eli: Yeah, for each hoop house, and two moves. A year. And so it's basically you know, a summer crop, and a winter crop.
- Genesis: And a cover crop.
- Eli: And a cover crop.
- Genesis: Is the third slot.
- Chris Blanchard: Okay.
- Genesis: Sorry. Sorry. Go ahead. Carry on.
- Eli: Yeah, so that third slot then rests for a year for us. This ground that we're on, it was a horse farm for about ten years before we got it, and so that's a big boost over just getting a corn field. But it was farmed corn and beans. For decades, before that. And it is kind of roly, so a lot of the top soil is you know, down at the bottoms. And we're farming the tops. So the organic matter's low, and when you're starting a farm you don't have a huge financial pool to pull from. So the cover crop in that third slot for a year, is a cheaper way to bump the organic matter. And it stretches out our rotation, right? I think it's five years before the same crop is back on the same slot.
- Chris Blanchard: That's a nice ...
- Eli: Oh, it's a big one. And I mean we went that direction, Genesis mentioned that we worked on a farm in Iowa for a couple years. North Central Iowa. And so we were visiting farms in, you know Wisconsin, Minnesota. Going to the Moses conference, talking to some older time growers. Growers who've been growing for a while in permanent houses, and hearing about the problems that develop. That was kind of the impetus for just going moveable from the start. To try, and forego running into those problems.
- Genesis: That being said about the moveable tunnels. So those are 20 by 48. They're single layer of plastic. We're limited on the crops that we can grow in those. So in the last couple of years, we have added bigger, permanent houses. Actually two of them. One that we're kind of splitting as a prothouse, but then we are doing some deep winter production in it. It's our only heated house, and then we actually got two equip grants last year. And so we put up one 30 by 96, with a double layer of poly. Let's see, I guess last November. And we need to put another one up this year. So that being said, in order to maximize our winter production, the moveables are really great for the rotation. In the summer, and kind of keeping the soils flushed of salts, and keeping a nice rotation in there. But they really don't afford us the kind of growing environment that we need for the crop variety. To meet the demand of the deep winter farmers market. In our climate.
- Genesis: And so we are kind of looking at a hybrid. So we are sort of using both styles of hoop houses now. The bigger, double poly inflated roof to do our less cold hearty crops. Lettuces, radishes, turnips. And the moveable tunnels, which are



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great for you know the rotation, but also your more cold hearty crops. Kale, and spinach. Etc.

Chris Blanchard: And when you talk about the production limitations of those moveable high tunnels. That's really what you're talking about, is the fact that it's a single layer tunnel. That they're smaller, and therefore a little bit more susceptible to the cold.

Genesis: Exactly.

Chris Blanchard: How cold does it get down around Indianapolis? I mean I know it's not ... I mean you talk about North Central Iowa is pretty much the same as South Central Minnesota.

Genesis: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Blanchard: Indiana's quite a bit different than that, but how different?

Eli: Indiana's kind of a long state, and so we have a lot you know, the bottom half of the state touches Kentucky, and the top half of the state touches Michigan. So we have a wide range. Within our state. I think they moved us to a six-a ... For a second, but I mean I think we're back into a five zone here. Five-b. You know this winter we got down, we saw a negative 14. Negative 15. Something like that. For our lowest low that we saw. The climate's doing weird things.

Genesis: Yeah, that's not dependable. It's not dependable that we get down that low every winter. It seems like in our experience it's sort of every three, or four winters. We'll see those really extreme lows, and then in the in between, it could be really mild. So it's a little bit of a gamble. It feels like it's a little bit of a gamble. On what kind of weather we'll get.

Chris Blanchard: Hard to plan for.

Eli: Yeah, you just plan for the worst. You know? And when it doesn't come then, the stuff thrives.

Chris Blanchard: With the mobile high tunnels then, tell me a little bit more about how the rotation actually goes? Throughout the course of the year?

Eli: I guess we could start right now. And then kind of come back around into winter.

Chris Blanchard: And right now being about the third week of March?

Eli: Sure.

Chris Blanchard: Just want to benchmark that, because we're not going to publish this tomorrow. So I just want to say that for the listening audience.

Eli: Gotcha. Yeah. Yeah, we're right at the end of March. Going into April. You know springtime is here-ish. Right around the corner. So, when you bring crops through the winter. A lot of crops want to go to seed, when it starts to warm up.



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You get these big temperature fluctuations between your cool nights, and the sun comes out during the day, and warms up. So, your asian greens are all going to bolt. Any turnips, or anything that's over wintered. Your kale starts to bolt. Chard bolts a little later than the brassicas do, but the collards are bolting.

Eli: And so you kind of look at where those crops are at. Are they starting to stretch? And as soon as they start to stretch, we start ripping them out, and replanting. And so in that winter slot space, we actually get two crops out of that. We double crop that. So we've been reseeding some cut greens. Radishes. Early snap peas. First rounds of carrots and beets, are up right now with the first true leaves. And as soon as those replants ... Spring replants are up. The hoop house gets moved off of that slot. We pull it off, and pull it on top of what will then be summer production. And kind of like those moved couple weeks before we want to plant.

Eli: We have been doing some tarping the last few years, which is actually accelerating the time that we need between moving the hoop house, and replanting. Or in planting the summer crop. But we move it on, close it up, hopefully get some sunny days. To really warm it up, try and bring that soil temp up to those mid 50s. That your summer crop's prefer. And then you know, get those summer crops in. Sometimes late March. First, second week of April. Kind of depending on the weather, and ... Then those ... You know, we ride those summer crops all the way until ... Frost kills them off, which would be maybe mid October. Meanwhile, we have the winter slot that would have a spring cover crop on it, and then that gets mowed off, worked in, and stale bedded.

Eli: You know, we'll make beds, and then either do a shallow cultivation, or flame them off, and be ready to seed our winter crops, in a timely fashion. I know that, that can be kind of hard in a permanent hoop house. Deciding when to take the summer crops out, in order to plant the winter crops, but with these moveables I can keep the summer crops going as long as I want, and put my winter crops in. Late August, early September. And have those ready to go. For that deep winter production.

Chris Blanchard: Right.

Eli: The other nice thing about having the moveables, is that I do like to let those winter crops get hardened off. Before I move the house on top of them, so they're out there in the wind. I like to let them get a pretty heavy frost on them. I won't cover them. Because I know that there's a potential for a 14 below night, in the winter. And when they spend their whole life protected. They never really get that hardening off. And I feel like that really helps them thrive, or I guess maybe not thrive, but be able to take those cold temperatures. So once they've gotten that heavy frost, then I'll go ahead and move a hoop house on top of them. And a lot of times that ends up being early November. By the time we're making that move.

Chris Blanchard: And with a 20 by 50 house. On two-by-two metal skids. How are you moving that? From one space to the next?

Eli: So I have a winch, mounted on my truck. And this time of year, when I'm moving onto a slot that has no crop it's a lot easier. I have a I-beam, a metal I-beam that



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I strap across the front of it. And two attachment points on that, for a couple tow straps that kind of come into one pull point, so it's kind of triangulated there. So, it's pulling each side evenly from one attachment point.

Eli: And those I can move in a couple hours that way. In the fall it's a little more complicated because you're pulling on top off full sized kale. And spinach that you've been harvesting off of, and so on those skids, I'll tie a rope off to each skid. To each side of the hoop house. And the rope runs up along the side of the slot that I'm pulling on. And on each corner of the slot that I want to pull onto, I put in a t-post. Well I started with one, and now I figured out two t-post holds a lot better, because it's a fair amount of weight pulling on those. So I'll put in two t-post back to back, and tie those together. And then there's a pulley attached on each corner. And that rope comes in, wraps around on those pulleys. It's just one rope that is attached to each skid. Comes around on those pulleys, and then I attach up to that with the winch. And can pull from one point. So, that way it's pulling on each side of the house equally. That's the key.

Chris Blanchard: Keeping everything running straight. That way.

Eli: Exactly. Yeah, not twisting. I mean you could hook up a truck, or a tractor to each side and pull it that way. But that's kind of the way. That's the way I've come about it. A lot of this stuff has been developed for minimal labor. To do it. That's something that I could do on my own.

Chris Blanchard: Were the mobile tunnels something that you guys had experience with before you started doing that on your own farm?

Genesis: I wish.

Eli: Yeah. Nope, not at all.

Genesis: No.

Eli: Yeah, and that's something we've talked about is you know, the farm that we worked on in Iowa. Was not a four season farm. It was a three season farm. But is coming in. Coming back, starting up the business. Knowing that we just wanted to make a living off of it. Knowing that we needed that year round income. We just had to figure it out. You know and, there's a lot of information out there. I feel like even more so now. I mean, we spent you know five years figuring out ... Well starting to figure out plant dates. You know and then, was it last year all of a sudden I'm on Johnny's website, and they have a nifty little calculator for putting in ...

Genesis: Your zip code and ...

Eli: Yeah. Your zip code, and it spits out all these plant dates that low and behold, mostly line up with what we trialed and errored.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah you know that's ... Right, that's like you guys were too early to the game.

Eli: Sort of. I mean I would argue that we've had a lot of resources. That make it a lot easier for us than people twice our age.



- Chris Blanchard: Yeah there is that. I'm not twice your age, but you know a little bit older.
- Genesis: I will add onto that really quickly. Just going back to kind of ... Indianapolis, and the developing food scene, and so partly we started the farm with the four season ... having a four season production goal, because of the income. The sustained income. But also, when we were moving back. There was a winter farmer's market, that had been going ... I think at that point for two or three seasons. And actually Eli's dad was involved with that, as he was managing another farm and had been sort of helping to build that winter market. And he did really, really encourage us. He was like, "Hey. There's this winter market. There's an established outlet. You know, you guys should really ..." He did really encourage us to kind of pursue that four season production, because there was a growing outlet. To be able to move the produce that we were going to grow in the winter.
- Genesis: And so now I think we've been at that market seven, or eight years. That winter market.
- Chris Blanchard: Do you feel like having the winter production has helped you, to market your produce the rest of the year, because you have that consistent presence?
- Eli: Yeah. I would say it does. And we started out ... Our summer market that we started with, was kind of in a ... Suburb. Of Indianapolis. And so the winter market was right downtown. And that was really our only ... Face-to-face interaction with customers, in Indianapolis. At that point. You know, we were selling to restaurants, maybe some people saw our names on menus here and there. But that winter market really let us interact with the buyers there.
- Genesis: There's a flagship market here, and what Eli is talking about is, we were pretty calculated I think when we came back. Or when we were starting our farm, trying to choose our outlets wisely. So having the presence at the winter market was a goal, because we knew that eventually, we would want to apply for kind of the flagship market that is in central Indianapolis. But when we first moved back, that's a high enough volume market, that we were really nervous to try and apply to that market. We probably wouldn't have even gotten in if we had applied in our first year. But that was kind of our goal, and so we opted for our summer market, we kind of poked around and visited markets, and chose to apply to a market.
- Genesis: A smaller market. Still fairly close to the city, but in a suburb, but a smaller volume market. To kind of cut our teeth. And to get in, and get going, and figure out our production strategies. Get our succession plantings down. When we started our farm, we knew enough to know that we didn't know very much. And so we are both fairly risk-a verse. So farming is a funny career to be in. For being fairly risk-a verse people. But we really just wanted to kind of cut our teeth slowly, and start at that smaller market. Develop our production techniques. Before we moved into that flagship summer market. Or before we applied to.
- Genesis: And so the winter market presence, I mean we were going to winter market Chris, with like \$200 worth of stuff, but we were dogged. We were like, "We are going every single week. Even if it's \$200 worth of stuff. And I mean we're going



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to sell out in 45 minutes, or whatever. We're going. Our faces are going to be there." And so I feel like we really did pound the pavement in that way. In the beginning, with the long game of getting into this bigger, high volume summer market. To be able ... Once we kind of cut our teeth, and once we felt like we could meet the demand that we knew existed there.

Eli: And it does. I mean that customer base does carry over you know? You end up with your hardcore farmers market shoppers. I mean some of these people we see more than our family. You know? More than our family that lives close by. I mean we see them every week. So it does help you know? It carries over like you're saying.

Chris Blanchard: Now you said though that you don't market that winter produce, to your restaurant accounts?

Eli: Yeah, I mean the supply gets low right? I mean we do ... We do pack the coolers as full as we can, in the late fall with storage crops. We do storage roots, and brassica's. And then half an acre under plastic. It just doesn't meet the volume that both market, and restaurants could take. And we so far have just stayed at market. And we've tossed around the idea of cutting off market early, and just continuing on with restaurants. But we kind of built our winter plan, our growing plan for the winter. Around what the market will eat, and what people eat at the winter market. And so you know after seven years, of planning. You got a pretty good grip on how much people are eating every week, which really lets you dial in your productions so there's almost zero waste you know? That you're selling every bit of everything that you grow.

Eli: Whereas the restaurants can be a little more volatile. As to what they're taking every week.

Genesis: And it's also a lifestyle decision. I mean I can remember the farm that we worked at in Iowa. You know one of the sayings that I heard one of the farmers say was, "You know, I don't want to build an empire. Like I probably could have built this vegetable empire, but I just don't want to, it's not what I want to do." And we've really ... I mean that's an ongoing conversation between Eli and myself as well. At what scale do we want to be at? Because I think to be able to meet those restaurants year round, and meet that market year round. I mean we would have to scale pretty seriously. And that means a lot of infrastructure changes. That would mean some equipment changes.

Genesis: More importantly that would mean employee ... Like having way more employees, and it's just not something that we are sure we have wanted to do you know? It kind of protects our winter. A little bit. I mean we do go to market all year, but you know it's just market, and a lot of stuff is in storage, and it feels like it can be a little bit more ... Autopilot, and it gives us just a smidgen of a rest time in the winter. To not be ... You know, having coolers packed with fifty thousand pounds of storage crops, and you know trying to find windows through the winter to cut greens. To meet two different delivery days.

Genesis: So I think it's been a little bit of a conscious choice as well. To just stay at market. We get a retail dollar. Like Eli said, we've pretty well nailed down like



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what that market can eat, and can plan you know, plan around that. And it also protects. It protects our winter. A little bit.

Chris Blanchard: I think it is one of the hardest things about winter production is, balancing that production, because the demand ... I mean if you start servicing wholesale accounts, especially. But even at farmers market. The demand can just so far outstrip ... Your production. And it's a lot harder to scale up the winter production, than it is the summer production.

Eli: Oh yeah.

Chris Blanchard: Which I suppose probably gives you guys kind of a niche too. Are there a lot of people doing winter production in your area?

Eli: Not a whole lot. No.

Genesis: Not the full year. And not at market.

Eli: Right.

Genesis: We have pretty stiff competition at that market. Actually that winter market is actually ... The first like ... The November and December markets. Are actually some of our lowest grossing markets of the whole year, because the competition ... Because we kind of funnel all of the growers into this one market, right? There's like a few different summer markets, but then there's this one winter market, and so lots of people still have stuff in November and December. And so lots of people apply to come to the market. And so we actually do see a pretty big sales drop, in November and December at that market. But we know, because we've been there for enough years now. That if we just hang on, I mean we see a skyrocket in January, February, and March. Basically until we sell out of stuff.

Genesis: Because there's not ... There's not much competition. So we definitely have kind of built ... That is a niche that we have filled, is to kind of ... Like what I think of as the deep winter production. That January, February, and March.

Eli: And it depends on the year. I mean this year we had a really, really hard, cold spat. That can be hard to manage. In unheated tunnels. I mean you know, you got to be ready to uncover stuff on sunny days. You know, and recover everything. To be able to make it through those real cold times, and I think some people ... Just didn't make it through those cold ... That cold snap.

Chris Blanchard: Alright. With that, I think we're going to stop here. Take a quick break. Get a word from a couple of sponsors, and then we'll be right back with Genesis and Eli. From Full Hand Farm. In Noblesville Indiana. Perennial support for the Farmer To Farmer podcast is provided by Vermont Compost Company. Helping plants make sugar from sunshine since 1992. In the wild, where our crop plants ancestors evolved their microbial partnerships, plants are provided with nutrients from the soil through the work of partner microbes that work with the plants. Wide ranging roots reach an abundant supply of nutrients, and microbes. Even in less than ideal conditions. And now you've gone and stuck that seed in a



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Chris Blanchard: And we're back with Genesis and Eli. From Full Hand Farm in Noblesville Indiana. Before we went on break, we were talking about winter production, and your mobile high tunnels, and you had mentioned the stationary high tunnels that you've got. But you've also got these caterpillar type tunnels. Can you tell us a little bit more about those?

Eli: Yeah, sure. So that was something ... I think in our second winter, I put one up. Started playing around with it. What it was, was it was cheap covered space for us. I mean the 20 by 50s that we put up, single layer were fairly cheap as far as hoop houses go. But for about a third of the cost, I could put up the same square footage. The same covered square footage, in a caterpillar tunnel. So how they're built is, it's a ... it's 20 foot PVC. Inch and a half schedule 40 PVC. And those have enough flex in them that, that 20 foot length will bend on it's own.

Eli: Then I do about 12 feet wide. 11, to 12 feet wide, which gives about a eight inch ... Or a eight foot highth. At the center. And did a bow spacing. Every four feet. And those pipes just sit down on a rebar, so then I cut rebar. Two foot long rebar. Hammer it in the ground til there's six, or eight inches above ground. And you know, insert one end of the pipe on that rebar, and bend it over, and put it on the other rebar.

Eli: And then I did end up ... That first year, i didn't have a purlin, and that's a little hard to keep ... It's almost impossible to have your bows stay in place that way, and so I put a purlin on, which really turned it into a four season structure for us.



- Eli: And then to hold it all together, is literally bailing twine. So in between each bow, is another piece of rebar. It's the ... what is it? Half inch, three eights. Three eights rebar, that then I bent a hook into. And you put those in at an angle, in between each bow. And then just run bailing twine back and forth. Kind of like a shoelace. All the way up and down that thing, and that tightens the plastic down, and holds it together. And those we also move. So instead of moving the kit houses that we move. They have three slots in a line, and then these caterpillar tunnels we move laterally. So there's three slots for those as well. But when you get ready to move, you cut the twine. Pull the plastic down. Pull one side of the hoop up. Take rebar off of one side. Move it over, and then you just swing the hoops around, to cover the slot next to it.
- Eli: Yeah, and that's worked out really, really well for us. I mean it's a fair amount of management, and because they are only twelve feet wide, by eight feet tall. That's a lot of edge space. They don't hold a lot of heat. But they serve perfectly well in our climate for a few different crops. Spinach will do well in there. Leeks, over winter no problem in there. And you know it's great to start out with. Like I said, cheap. I mean the first one we put up I think was ... It cost about ... Between eight and nine hundred bucks. Materials have gone up quite a bit since then, but you know you're talking under a dollar square foot for four season production space.
- Chris Blanchard: Wow.
- Eli: I think now, maybe I'm not sure. There's some companies that are putting together metal frames, caterpillar tunnels for probably about the same cost. As I could source these materials now. But, you know PVC what, has a half life of whatever, a million years.
- Chris Blanchard: Right.
- Eli: Now I'm stuck with them.
- Chris Blanchard: I'm a little bit surprised that these are sturdy enough to put up with the snow, because you guys have had quite a bit of snow down there this year haven't you?
- Eli: Yeah. Yep. Yep, and we've had a lot I mean ... was it three winters ago ... You know, there was four feet. That running down the sides of these caterpillar tunnels, and I haven't ever removed it from the side. I think that part of the way that they stand up to snow, and then big wind, storms like that. Is almost like the difference between a big old oak tree, and a willow tree. That they have that flex built in, and they can you know, I mean I've been in there when it feels like that thing's going to blow over. But then it's almost like that flex in the pipe allows it to take those heavy weather events. And kind of pop back up into place.
- Chris Blanchard: How are you ventilating those?



- Eli: Yeah, so that's manual. That's raising and lowering sides. And I put a clamp on a PVC ... On the pipe, on the bow. To hold the plastic up. And again, it's kind of picking crops that can take it in there. Spinach, leeks ...
- Genesis: Kale.
- Eli: Yeah kale can take it in there. And we are kind of moving away, because of all the edge space. They don't hold heat real well. And we're putting up some bigger tunnels for this winter production. We are kind of moving towards using those, more as like a early winter ... pull it out, clean it out, and then reseed for the early spring. So we're not necessarily carrying over through the deep winter, in there.
- Eli: The other thing that I've done with those ... That can be kind of hard is, getting in and out of them. A lot of the designs you see are just what they call like a bread basket at the end. To secure the plastic, which is a t-post at an angle. Maybe eight or ten feet off the end. And you kind of bring all that plastic down to a bunch, and ... Wrap a ratchet strap around it, and ratchet strap it tight.
- Eli: And then at our door end what I've done was, put again, t-posts door width you know, couple three feet apart. And strapped two by four to it. Put wiggle wire on there, and just wiggle wired in an end wall. And then those two by fours are strapped to the bows, with some metal strapping. And so that let's me get in and out of the end easy.
- Chris Blanchard: Low tech, but giving you the access that makes it so you can actually get in, and do the work.
- Eli: Yep. Yep.
- Chris Blanchard: You, or Genesis mentioned earlier that you have had a full time employee on the farm for the last three years. [crosstalk 00:56:55].
- Eli: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Chris Blanchard: How many employees do you guys have? Over the course of the year?
- Genesis: So currently we have one full time, year round employee. Who like we said, she's entering her third full season with us. And she has been really critical. To our success, in the last couple years. So we're really grateful to have had her with us consistently, and ... For another year, and potentially more. Hopefully. And then we also have one more full time, seasonal person. Who will come actually I think in about two weeks. We bring on our next full time person, who will be with us from early April, until Christmas.
- Genesis: And then we are also going to have one part-time person.
- Eli: Year round.
- Genesis: Year round. Yeah. I guess now starting year round. Yeah. So we have Andrea, who's been with us, she's our full time, full season. And then we have another



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person whose going to be returning. She was full time with us last year. Full time, seasonal, and she's going to be moving to part-time, year round. And then we'll bring on one more full time, seasonal. Like April, to December. For this year. And then, also hopefully some childcare, which will free up my labor. So Eli and I kind of like to think of ourselves as like one and a half. People. One and a half farmers, on the farm. Between the farm, and kids.

- Genesis: So then a babysitter I guess ... I feel like that kind of counts in the employee, section. Is childcare.
- Chris Blanchard: Yeah.
- Genesis: To free up one of us, or to free up ... Yeah, to free up that extra labor from us.
- Chris Blanchard: And do you guys live on the farm?
- Genesis: We do. Yeah, we live on the farm.
- Eli: Which is great, because you know work's right out the back door. But it's also hard because work's right out the back door.
- Chris Blanchard: Right. Right. But I think in some ways it certainly makes the childcare easier.
- Eli: Oh, big time.
- Genesis: Big time.
- Eli: Yeah, I mean our boy's three, three and a half. And he spends a lot of time out with us, and out with the crew. And you know we're set back from the road. He has a lot of freedom. He can come and find us, where we're at. So we get a lot of work done with the kid.
- Chris Blanchard: And it is nice the way that you guys are. Looking at a map of your farm, set back from the road so far, that the kid ... You really can let a kid roam, in that sort of situation.
- Eli: We can yeah. And it wasn't necessarily something we thought. When we found this place, actually one of the main things we thought was, protection from drift.
- Genesis: Ha, ha.
- Chris Blanchard: Ha, ha, ha. Yeah.
- Eli: You know, and then of course it found it's way through the one hole. In the property.
- Chris Blanchard: Getting a year round employee, and keeping somebody like that employed, is a pretty big step. For any business. And I'm curious how you guys made that leap so early in the development of your farm? If she's been with you for three years now. You know, you guys did that when you were still a pretty young farming operation.



- Eli: We did. I was going to say, and it's mostly a credit to Andrea.
- Genesis: So we did move to employing people on the farm, much faster than we anticipated that we would. Mostly because we got pregnant. Faster than we thought that we might. And so once it became clear, that we were not both going to be able to be fully committing ourselves 100% of the time to the farm. We realized that we needed to get help, and we needed to scale, and all of that. So I would say that the growth of our family has definitely dictated the growth of the business. Just ... By necessity of you know, children needing their basic needs met. Every single day. I mean who knew?
- Eli: Well, and I'll jump in and say not wanting to miss them growing up.
- Genesis: Sure.
- Eli: As well, right? So I mean, when you start hiring people your net goes down. But we quit at five. You know? We have family ... Or we have dinner together as a family. Every night. We have lunch together. We have breakfast together. I mean it's not ... The farm is not ... We're not letting the farm eat up all our time. We're not missing this window. With the kids. Which has spurred the hiring. You know?
- Genesis: And I think is all due to having a really excellent full time person with us. Who is able to really shoulder a lot of the responsibility, she knows a lot about the farm, and she can really carry ... She can really carry a lot of the responsibility, and be a crew leader. Be a harvest leader. Be a pack shed leader. I mean she really is able to kind of dip in and out, and change her hats of management. On the farm. Almost as well as Eli or myself. And we just knew from the ... We just knew as soon as soon as ... That we we're going to have to figure out ... Have to figure out how to do that.
- Genesis: And I think we built slowly you know? It's not like we started ... She's gotten a raise every year, and we've kind of always worked with her, to figure out like, "How's it going? What do you want to be learning about more this year?" And trying to just keep the deal as sweet as possible.
- Genesis: And I guess you know financially yeah, that is a big responsibility, but so far we've figured out how to make it work.
- Chris Blanchard: I feel like one of the biggest advantages of doing winter production, or anything that you can do to seriously extend the season, is that ability to keep somebody employed year round. Or close to year round. So that you don't lose them. From year to year.
- Eli: Yeah. Big time. Big time. Yeah, and you know hiring can be a little bit of a struggle, and we're kind of running into that. We're a little rural. We're 45 minutes north of ... Indianapolis, where a lot of the labor ... Some of the labor that we've hired has come from, which is a lot of you know, that's a big drive. Depending where they live. And so you know, keeping somebody year round is key. I will say Andrea now lives on farm. She owns a house, in a town ... Maybe half an hour from here. And that drive started feeling like a lot for her, and she



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now rents that house out. When we bought the property there was an old trailer. On site. No vin, no plates, no nothing. No story. And we gave that to her, and she built a little tiny house on it. And is now living on site as well.

- Chris Blanchard: So one of the disadvantages of having somebody who sticks around for three years, and works for you, year round. Is that they do have a tendency at some point to move on.
- Eli: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Chris Blanchard: Have you guys thought about how you're going to manage that, when that transition comes?
- Eli: That's good question. You know that'll be hard. We'll be okay though. I mean she's been with us, and it's pretty critical having her. Through kind of the fog of ... Early parenthood.
- Genesis: Babies.
- Eli: Yes. You know, and as you come out of that fog you start to have the capacity for a little more. And jut starting to look forward to that as far as how to bring in talent. I mean we lucked out on having such a talented person kind of find us, and come onto our farm.
- Eli: And like I said, living rurally. I'm not sure that we might not have to advertise ... Nationally. To try and find somebody as committed ... As we've found. So yeah, I'm not sure. You know, it's hard to think about replacing that.
- Chris Blanchard: I think it's really interesting that you guys, when you started your farm, didn't jump in, and start a CSA, because that seems to be what most young vegetable farmers do, these days. When they're getting a farm off the ground. Why didn't you start a CSA?
- Genesis: Yeah, I mean that is a good question. And we worked on a CSA farm. I mean that was where we got trained up. Was on a farm that was you know, 95% CSA. And when we were moving back to Indianapolis. I mean just to farm you know? Knowing that Indianapolis was going to be our market. We heard pretty quickly, like you know visiting around to farmers markets, and kind of introducing ourselves, and talking to growers who are here.
- Genesis: Indianapolis is a challenging CSA climate. We don't have the culture of CSA in Indiana, the way that a lot of other states do. And I'm not sure why that is? But it just doesn't exist here you know? We don't have that sort of deep history of CSA like New York, or Wisconsin, or you know? A lot of other places have.
- Genesis: In addition, so I think culturally in Indianapolis, which is a big city. It's just that people don't know about it, and you know if they do, then maybe they just don't care. Just for whatever reason. But another factor of that is that, the home delivery services. We had a local grocery home delivery service that had started up. Maybe the year that we moved back, or the year before.



- Genesis: And so we were talking to one or two of the growers that did have a CSA at that time, and they were really saying how hard it was. Like how much that competition was hurting their CSA. And so we had that kind of in the back of our minds. We thought that we would kind of get our growing chops under us, and add a CSA eventually. I mean I think initially in the first year, we decided not to do a CSA because we were so nervous. About being able to supply ... A full, rich experience. To a shareholder.
- Eli: Yeah.
- Genesis: As we were learning how to be farmers.
- Eli: And I'll tag onto that is that, you know working in Iowa on that farm, and visiting some other farms, and talking to other young growers, or growers who'd been at it for decades. You know one thing we'd heard was, "Yeah, a lot of young growers start out in CSA. And drop the ball. And put a bad taste in peoples mouth." And we didn't want to be part of that. And we didn't want to commit to something, that we weren't going to be able to follow through on.
- Eli: And so the CSA was maybe in our business plan for three to four years down the road, but we didn't want to make the commitment. Before we had at least one leg underneath us.
- Genesis: But then by the time we got three or four years down the road. I mean the CSA climate I think is still a little bit challenging here. And the restaurant demand was way higher than we thought it was going to be. We kind of figured we would do farmers market, and that would be an important avenue of revenue for us. But I think we really underestimated in writing our business plan, and kind of imagining how we were going to make a living. We really underestimated what kind of ... Yeah, just what kind of business we were going to be able to do with restaurants.
- Genesis: And that just picked up you know, that just took off. And so by the time we had been growing for three or four years, you know? And we had established market. And we were starting to have restaurants that we'd worked with every year. I started ... I mean I've actually never called a restaurant to see if they want my produce. We field calls. I mean every year, about this year. You know, they call me. And it's been like that since the beginning, so we've just kind of gone with it. Which is partly why I don't have a website.
- Genesis: I mean we were talking about that before we started recording. You were like, "You guys don't even have a website." And it's because we haven't really had to work very hard at marketing. You know for better or for worse. That's not a skill set that we've really had to put a lot of energy into. So far. I'm not saying that, that couldn't change. I mean that could very well change. But so far, we haven't needed to.
- Chris Blanchard: So tell me a little bit more about how you do your restaurant sales? On a weekly basis, how are you managing ... Getting the information out to your customers, about what you have available, and getting those orders back in, and then getting that stuff packed up and delivered?



- Genesis: Sure. So usually about ... Well early May is when we start picking up. I usually send out a price sheet for the year, and kind of a welcome, hello, it's a new season email. To the chefs that we have worked with in the past. Coming up now. Mid April, I'll try and send that email. And so that goes out mid April, and I kind of make sure everybody's cellphone numbers are still the same. Let them know sort of how things are looking to get started in the spring. And once we're up ... And that's pretty much the only email that I send.
- Genesis: Once we get up and going. For the season. Everything is by text message. So we do a field walk on you know, Sunday afternoon, or early Monday morning. And we kind of make our, I guess fresh sheet, is what you would call it. Get our list of what we have available. And so Monday morning, by ... you know, I like to have the list out no later than 10 am. I'm sending chefs ... I'm sending them a text message that says, "Hey, here's what we have for the week." You know, I'll try and include a little something about the farm. Just so that there's a little bit of a ... They understand what's going on, or you know crops that are coming on, or whatever. But just you know, a nice friendly hello, and then a list of what we have available.
- Genesis: And I like for chefs to get back to me by Monday night. I usually say like Tuesday midday, is the absolute deadline, but ideally we'd like to have our orders in by Monday evening. Those get compiled. We have a big white board in our pack shed. That down the left side has ... It's like a magnetic white board, and so you know, you can get this little magnetic tape. And you can use a dry erase marker, and write the name of the restaurant on it. Because it changes from week to week. Who's ordering. And so it's just a big grid. And so along the left hand side, we have our restaurants that have ordered. I put them up there in the order in which the order's come in. So that if we end up running shy on something, we start from the top and work down to the bottom.
- Genesis: And then across the top of the grid, is the crops that were included on the list. And so on that board, in the grid. You know, you just line up. You have like, "Okay, blue beard ordered five pounds of spinach, and twenty pounds of carrots, and the box of heirloom tomatoes." And so their specific order goes in that grid mark, and then down at the bottom we just do a tally of the total harvest quantities.
- Genesis: So that's all ready to go. On Tuesday morning. When we have our full crew here. And so that list gets translated to a harvest list, another white board. That's got each field. Where the crop is located. And the total harvest quantity that we need. And so the crew comes in, they see that total harvest list. You know, they're off to the races. Getting our total quantities. All that stuff comes back in. Tuesday morning. Mostly.
- Genesis: And then we spend Tuesday afternoon washing and packing. And so once the total crop is ... Or the total harvest is washed. Then there's somebody on the crew who's looking at that board, and breaking things down. By specific order. Going into crates that are labeled, and like each restaurant has a stack of crates in the cooler. And those get organized in the cooler. In the order ... Like in the delivery order. If that makes sense? So that then when we're loading the van ... For deliveries on Wednesday afternoon. Things can ... You know, you're not



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shuffling a bunch of stuff around. It's like okay, the last restaurant delivery is going in the van first. And then you just work your way around clockwise, or counter clockwise, or however it is organized.

Genesis: So it's Tuesday, and then Wednesday morning too, is also usually a little bit of ... I mean late orders always come in. So there's also Wednesday morning to kind of finish up, or get little bits of this or that. And then restaurants go out the door Wednesday afternoon. And we feel pretty lucky. We're trying to leave the farm by noon, or one o' clock. And I mean, we're sometimes doing eight, or twenty drops. And we can be door-to-door, like leaving the farm and home to the farm, in about four our four and a half hours.

Chris Blanchard: Oh wow.

Genesis: Which feels pretty efficient.

Chris Blanchard: Yeah. That's really great.

Genesis: Yeah.

Chris Blanchard: I mean that's one of those real advantages of being 45 minutes from your marketplace.

Genesis: Exactly.

Eli: Yeah. When we were looking for property, I mean we had drawn ... We started off ... We drew a 50 mile circle around Indianapolis. Knowing that Indy was going to be our market. And then we drove 50 miles out, and realized that, that can be really far. And we tightened that circle up. And it matters, you know the size of the road that you're close to. I mean you can be 20 miles from town, but 20 miles from the interstate, and it take twice as long as being 40 miles from town, but 10 minutes from the interstate. I mean that was something that we looked at when we were looking for property. Was how close can we be? Without competing with development prices.

Genesis: I will say. Also to tag onto ... Because it kind of ties into the restaurant stuff. I mean I've worked in restaurants since I was 16. And that was ... That was also part of needing a property that was close enough to town, because I kept my restaurant job. Until, actually the eminent ... Yeah, I kept my restaurant job until my son was born. And so farm work by day, restaurant by night. But that also really helped ... I think that has helped us develop our restaurant business as well. So I was working in a high end restaurant. In Indianapolis. As we were getting the farm off the ground. That's what capitalized a lot of it. Was tip money. From working at a fine dining restaurant. But what that also did, was really ... You know, it introduced us, it introduced me to the chef community, in Indianapolis. Which is really similar to the farm community in Indiana. In that, it's very small, but very high quality.

Genesis: And birds of a feather, find each other very easily. In these states that ... Where what we're doing is maybe more common in other places, but I think it can be easier to connect with your people. In a place where there's not as much of it going on. And so that's the same case in the restaurant scene where, once we



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kind of got started. We first started selling to the restaurant that I was working at. And then word just kind of started getting out, and people were like, "Oh, you wait tables here, but you also have a farm. Cool. Can I get on your list?" You know? And that was really helpful to building our ... That was an unintended consequence of having the night job, to fund the startup of the farm.

Eli: And that also gave ... It gave us a different kind of relationship with the chefs that Genesis was working for. He was ... Very candid. In telling us ... How he liked our crops, or did not like the crop. And it kind of gave us an idea, of how this stuff was getting used. Which is really important. And I'll ask that sometimes of chefs. You know, they say they want something, it's like okay well, how is this being cooked? Which will directly relate to how we're harvesting it. And, or processing it. Really having an understanding of that finished product. Lets you know a good place to start.

Chris Blanchard: When you were talking about the deliveries. You mentioned that you were organizing things in crates. In the cooler. For those deliveries.

Eli: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Chris Blanchard: Are you delivering in crates?

Eli: No, it's bagged up. Mostly just in plastic bags. We've stayed away from the wax boxes. I guess mostly as a cost thing. You know? To try to keep the cost down.

Genesis: And because our restaurants ... Sorry to interrupt, but our restaurants, they won't save them for us. They're too busy. They don't want to save our wax boxes.

Eli: Yeah. It's all bagged up, and then put in crates. Just to keep anything from getting smushed and keep it organized. It is a little bit of a pain. You know, it would be nice to just wheel a dolly load of wax boxes in, and drop. But so far it's worked for us.

Chris Blanchard: So are you guys doing standard packs for the restaurants? I mean, do you offer carrots in like ... You know you can order five pounds, ten pounds, or fifteen pounds? Or is it more just like ... You know, how many carrots do you guys want this week?

Genesis: Yeah, it's the latter. It's like how many carrots do you want this week? And actually, just this year, which can be ... It's both nice, and annoying. It's nice because we don't always have the production ... It doesn't always feel like we just have endless supply of our weekly list. To offer these restaurants. So if somebody wants three pounds of carrots, you know? Then that might mean that somebody who wants twenty pounds of carrots, might actually get their full order. Some of these orders are getting filled very tightly. Or we're pinching pounds here and there. To give everybody most of what they want, but not the full order of what they want, and then it's a flurry of text messages to let everybody know.

Genesis: It can be ... Managing the details of that can be a little bit hectic, on delivery day. But it works for us. And I think it works for our chefs. I mean I think our



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chefs like having that kind of flexibility. We may ... And we haven't really had a big problem with teeny, tiny orders. Just this last year it kind of popped up enough times. That we were like, "I don't really think a \$10 order is really worth it to make a stop." So part of this year's email, kind of welcome to the season email I think is going to be instituting a minimum order. Which we haven't ever done before. But I do think that makes sense moving forward.

Chris Blanchard: And how many times a week are you taking orders, and delivering to your restaurants?

Eli: Once. We did ... and you know take orders Monday. Deliver Wednesday. Because then the rest of our week is focused on getting market harvested, packed up, and out the door. We did ... A twice a week delivery ... For one season, and maybe four years ago. And it was just too much to try and get market out the door as well. And I mean there's a lot of interest in a twice week delivery, right? Because then they don't have to have the storage. They get that bump later in the week for the weekend rush. But we've just stuck at the once a week. Because we don't want to cut market off, right? We don't want to put ... Or we don't want to compromise our market. We want to serve both outlets, equally well. We don't want to put all our eggs in one basket.

Chris Blanchard: Right. Right. And then do you ... you mentioned that you're not reaching out to restaurants, to market to them. That you have restaurants coming to you. Are you screening those restaurants? And deciding which ones you're going to take on? Or is it pretty much anybody that calls? Can order product from Full Hand Farm?

Genesis: Um almost, but not really. I mean I guess we screen in the sense that we have ... Right now we have a really streamline delivery route. I mean it's just that kind of the nature of how the city has set up, and how these restaurants have ... How these restaurants are distributed throughout the city. In that right now, you know we head into town. We start in a little neighborhood just south of downtown, and then there's a main artery, that we're taking five miles, you know? It's probably, no eight miles. It's probably eight miles from downtown, up to our last stop. But we're not veering more than four blocks. In either direction. From that main artery, right now.

Genesis: And so we have been picky in the sense of, if somebody's calling, and they're twenty minutes on the other side of town. On the beltway. We're probably not going to add that delivery. Just because it's so far outside of our very streamline delivery route right now. Just by the graces of how these restaurants have peppered themselves throughout the city.

Genesis: So that's really the only screening that we're doing right now, is that we're hesitant to take on anything that's going to add 40 minutes to our route for you know, a minimal ... Bump in revenue.

Chris Blanchard: Alright. With that, we're going to turn here to our lighting round, but first we're going to get a quick word from one more sponsor.

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

Eli: That is a good question. There's a lot. You know, we kind of knew this lightning round was coming. Being listeners of the show. I thought you know, maybe our moveable tunnels ... Kind of being able to play with those. You know, and we brought a flame weeder in. On the farm. That was kind of a game changer. But probably the most useful to me, is our crop plan. We've done a really good job over the years of keeping pretty meticulous records. On plant dates, harvest dates, quantities, and it's all in an Excel spreadsheet. And so we do all our thinking, you know around Christmas, New Years ... Early January, and kind of plan out the whole season, and get that all mapped out, and dealt with. So then you know as spring hits, and the season starts. Then we have it all right there in front of us. To change when it rains. You know? But I'd say that's probably our most ... My most useful tool. On the farm.

Chris Blanchard: Genesis, do you have a favorite tool on the farm?

Genesis: Um yes. Before I had kids, I think it was the wheel hoe. I love just the rhythm of it, and you know the efficiency of it. But since I've had kids, I think that my favorite tool on the farm is the long range baby monitor.

Eli: And that's actually how we've vetted monitors, you know? You pour over the megahertz.

Genesis: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Eli: Of the antenna.

Chris Blanchard: That's the primary feature for you guys. I like that.

Genesis: And I've still gone through like five of them, because I've put them in my back pocket, and snapped the antenna. But, it's a useful tool.

Chris Blanchard: And worth the replacement cost.

Genesis: Exactly. Exactly. And I figure it's a business expense.

Chris Blanchard: That's right. That's right. Genesis, what would surprise people about you?



- Genesis: What do you think Eli?
- Eli: Oh ... I don't know? Your ... Your ability to throw down on whatever. You know? Whether it be um ... pulling a rear tire off the tractor, or you know cold calling ... markets, or farmers. Different farms to go visit. I don't know? I don't know if that's a good answer?
- Chris Blanchard: I actually love that answer. And it's funny, because you say that, that's what would surprise people, but it's also like ... You know when I met you guys, I don't know how many years ago. In Indianapolis. At the Indiana Small Farms Conference. That was totally the impression that I had.
- Eli: Sweet.
- Chris Blanchard: Genesis, what's Eli's farming superpower?
- Genesis: I think Eli's farming superpower is um ... His ability to be good naturedly steadfast. Eli is steady. He is focused. And he is in a good mood, all the while. I think it's ... it's a really wonderful quality, that keeps our farm humming along. Given ... Lots of surprises that get thrown our way season in, and season out.
- Chris Blanchard: Genesis, if you could go back in time, and tell your beginning farmer self one thing. What would it be?
- Genesis: You know, knowing what I know now. I think I would go back in time, and tell my beginning farmer self to work on a four season farm. Before we started a four season farm. There's a lot of value in learning all the lessons yourself. But I think in another sense there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Yeah, I think I would tell my beginning farmer self to work on another four season farm, or maybe just work on at least one other farming operation. Before we started our own.
- Chris Blanchard: And Eli, how about you? If you could go back in time and tell your beginning farmer self one thing. What would it be?
- Eli: You know, I've put some thought into this one as well, and it's ... I might have to say something that was told to my beginning farmer self. In that, I continually do still tell myself ... We visited a farm in Iowa. I can't remember the guys name. Small Potatoes Farm was the name of it. And he said, "You know, if you can't manage one acre well. How are you going to manage two? Or three? Or twenty three?" And so that's kind of how ... we've metered our growth, right? You manage one acre. Figure it out. Bump up a little bit. You only bump up as much as you're comfortable right? You stretch yourself just as far as you think you can. And I still have to listen. I still have to listen to that. In the back of my head.
- Chris Blanchard: Eli and Genesis thank you so much for being part of the Farmer To Farmer podcast today.
- Eli: Sure. Thanks for reaching out. And thanks for all the work you've done Chris. I mean .. Like I said, we've heard you talk a lot throughout the years. And you're a great resource. For all of us.



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- Chris Blanchard: Thank you Eli.
- Genesis: Yeah, thank you. We really appreciate the invitation.
- Chris Blanchard: Alright, so wrapping things up here. I'll say again, that this is episode 167 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 search for Full Hand. That's f-u-l-l h-a-n-d. The transcript for this episode is brought to you by earth tools, offering the most complete selection of walk behind farming equipment, and high quality garden tools in North America.
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