

Elizabeth Keen: We have a like 250 member CSA. We grow for the Great Barrington Farmer's Market, which is very, very lucky to be there. It's a really great market. And then we do a little wholesaling to a few stores and restaurants.

Andy Chamberlin: I'm your host, Andy Chamberlin, and I take you behind the scenes with growers who share their strategy for achieving the triple bottom line of sustainability. These interviews unravel how they're building their business to balance success across people, profits, and our planet.

Today's episode comes to you from the farm where CSA started, right here in the Northeast, in the town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Elizabeth Keen and her husband Al have been farming at Indian Line Farm in Great Barrington, Mass for over 25 years. After taking a sabbatical in 2016, they had the realization that after 10 to 15 years of just running the farm, it was time that some things needed to change to make the farm more sustainable in their next phase of life.

The upgrades to the farm included purchasing of a delivery van, a 30 by 96 hoop house, and replacing the six wire high-tensile electric fence with an eight-foot deer fence to keep them out. Additionally, Elizabeth decided it was time to make some improvements to the post-harvest area of the farm. This podcast gives a tour of the barn upgrades, and the conversation is mostly led by my colleague Chris Callahan of the University of Vermont extension. This story is also shared as a full post-harvest case study on our blog. So if you want to see photos or a video from this visit, make sure to see the blog post at go.uvm.edu/indianline. Now let's turn back to Elizabeth because this is The Farmer's Share.

Elizabeth Keen: So I'm Elizabeth Keen from Indian Line Farm, and this is our 25th year here at this particular farm. And I got my start... Well, we ended up here at this farm actually because someone died. Robyn Van En, who most people know her as one of the founders of Community Supported Agriculture. And so this farm is the birthplace of CSA. I have minutes from meetings that they used to have in terms of when they made the name, right in our living room. So we've been very honored to carry on that legacy. There was a period of when, well before Robyn died, where the farm wasn't operational, so we didn't walk into a working farm. We actually had to start this from scratch. And very... Yeah, initially we just did a few markets and has grown ever since. We have a 250 member CSA. We grow for the Great Barrington Farmers Market, which is very, very lucky to be there. It's a really great market.

And then we do a little wholesaling to a few stores and restaurants. And my entree into farming was really having worked with subsistence farmers in Guatemala and Southern Mexico and thought that I would go back to have a more technical skill. I was doing more like accompaniment work and very generalist kind of things, but thought that if I could have a more concrete skill, that I could go back to Central America and be more helpful in horticulture. They were really encouraging these populations to grow a little bit more than

corn and beans and to expand their nutritional intake. But after being an apprentice at a local CSA, which is now no longer operational, I met my husband and realized I know nothing about farming or horticulture and six months was not going to give me the amount of knowledge that I felt I needed in terms of going back to assist a population that had been essentially growing their entire lives.

And my situation just changed. So we ended up here through the help of a couple friends and family of Robyn, and they really just encouraged us to try to rent the farm from her son. And it was through that process we also made connections with two local organizations, the Nature Conservancy and the Community Land Trusts in the Southern Berkshires. And they really approached us and said, we want to see this farm, a farm in perpetuity. So would you be interested in this model where you all bought the buildings and the improvements? And they essentially bought the land. So there's now a conservation restriction on the property, particularly because of the endangered species that are next door in the wetland. And then the Land trust's contribution essentially was just helping pay for the land. So we have a 99 year lease, which is now taken off by 20 something years. And we can sell the farm, we can lease the farm to someone else, but essentially the land will never be commodified again. It will be the, purchase price will be very much just related to the investments that Al and I have made here.

Speaker 3: Great story.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, it is a fun story. It's great. It is. Yeah.

Speaker 3: Is it helpful to look back on that?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. I mean, I feel like I do have enough, several times a year I get asked the question, so it's very fresh in my mind, so to speak. And I do like it. It's a very non-traditional path, I think, in terms of how some people ended up into farming. I had no farming experience, no horticultural experience, no biology, no anything. I was a political science history major. And I came at this one partly with the idea of essentially interest in community organizing and working and bringing people together. And then I realized I really love hard work. I really love being outside. I didn't want to go back to working in an office. Having worked with Amnesty International for a year and this, we immediately fell in love with this place. So I do like telling the story.

Andy Chamberlin: That's great. That's great.

Speaker 3: So roughly how many acres are you growing on and grow?

Elizabeth Keen: Great. So we grow intensively on about five acres. And then the farm is surveyed at about 20 acres. And so there's some wetland areas in there. And

then of course the homestead area. And our sort of rule of thumb is that we grow veggies for two years, and then we have a year off.

Speaker 3: And that year off is cover cropped?

Elizabeth Keen: The year off is a sequence of fall planted rye veg, and then some shallow in the summer, and then planted back to oats and peas. And then we would plant on that the following spring. Initially, this was the entrance to the barn, downstairs. It was really the only real, yeah, it was the downstairs entrance to the barn. And when we walked in this, first of all, the barn was about two feet.

Speaker 3: Oh, I see that.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, you can see the line. So

Speaker 3: [inaudible] seven foot barn.

Elizabeth Keen: Exactly. So my husband, who's six five would often, and then sometimes some of the light fixtures were actually just hanging down. So I have had some folks hit their head on light bulbs, which was horrible.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So we used to wash all the vegetables essentially from this area to about right here. And then we had some storage over here. So because this was an old dairy barn, there were long troughs that ran through, and we actually cemented all of those in except when about right here. And so we put our own drains in. So there were two drains, and then they connected there, and then it went out. And we have a pipe.

Speaker 3: Yep.

Elizabeth Keen: Then kind of just day lights outside.

Yeah, it was rudimentary. I mean, we had a spray table, two dunking tubs. All of our bins were stored over there. And there were also, there was a wall here.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: There was a little wall and a big clump of cement that we had to walk over. And then it was essentially open from here, but where now there are three posts along the expanse, there used to be four.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Elizabeth Keen: So we were always navigating the entire barn with four posts where in the line where there are now three. And again, we made this work for a really long time,

and every time we started thinking about how to make the barn better, we just kept coming up against the height and how do we re-cement? We did re-cement the floor once when we initially got here just to smooth it out. And there was chunky and things, but it just was beating your head against the wall. How do we actually make this work and to really make an improvement? And it was hard. And so we just didn't do it. It was just the last project on the farm that we tried to address. And then with the, just in terms of who I am, I'm a little bit thrifty. And so there were, I have two children, one's 18, one's 15. We went a good 10 years where we really were just running the farm. And it really, thinking about these larger investments was just kind of beyond me.

But I took a sabbatical in 2016, and when I came back, I realized if I'm going to keep doing this for the next 15 or 20 years, I have to make some serious improvements because one, I want the farm to be amazing when I want to sell it. And two, I want the last number of years to be, I want them to be easier. So simple. Some things. We actually put an eight-foot deer fence up during COVID. That was one, the deer are horrible here. And our six wire high tinsel electric fence just was not cutting it anymore.

Speaker 3: Wow.

Elizabeth Keen: So that, yeah, we did that ourselves. And then I bought a van with some of that PPP money.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: You know, we'd just been using a pickup truck. We put up another, a third hoop house, 30 by 96 hoop house. So anyway, some of that was with grant funding. Some of it was just like, we're good. We got to do this. And certainly COVID helped financially in lots of capacities.

Speaker 3: Can you say a little bit more about the 2016 sabbatical? That sounds like an amazing idea.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: That I haven't heard many other people do.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, no, I know. I've only known one other person to do it. So because of my experience in Central America, and I had always said that I would do it. It was just in my brain, I will do this. And I think I thought about it, doing it at 10 years and then 20 years, I don't know. It just, so I realized it wasn't happening. And I mean, we all get burned out.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And so yeah, about 2014, I was like, I just started really saying it out loud. How can I make this work? And I really was hoping that I would've had an employee who would be willing to take it on for a year. In the end, I said, you know what? I'm just shutting down. And we were going to rent out our house. We were going to just draw from some savings. And in the end, my husband, who does not have the same Central American experience that I had, he decided he didn't want to go. And so that was like, oh my gosh, how is this going to work?

Speaker 3: So was the plan to go to Central America for a year?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Oh, yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, I wanted to be open to where he also might be interested in going because he didn't have that. But I realized I was really tied to going there. So when we essentially made, I have lots of connections there, so we ended up going to an indigenous village, and I was a middle school English teacher. My kids went to school. This is no running water.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: No, lots of stuff. And it was amazing. But because he ended up not going, we didn't rent out our house, but he tore down a mobile home that was sitting between our house and the neighbor's house, which had essentially been some of our apprentice housing. And he built a cottage that now we rent out. So it worked out.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And for me, I mean, it was super hard to tell my community I'm not going to grow anymore. But I realized, who cares?

Speaker 3: It's a year.

Elizabeth Keen: It's one year.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And it's not like I'm serving a community that can't buy their food somewhere else. I mean, really, that's what it came down to for me. I realized I'm going to be letting myself down if I don't do this. It was just like this, I just knew I needed a year of not working so intensely, and it's just something completely different.

Speaker 3: And for you is, it sounds like there's a clear line, pardon the pun.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Clear line between Indian line before that, and Indian line after that. You've made some pretty significant changes.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. I mean, yeah, definitely thinking, yes. Yes. It just kind of opened my eyes up to this is where I want to be. I couldn't really see where I wanted to be. And again, because there's this super thrifty nature, Al and I's, we called it's like through the holistic resource management thing, we had this four sentence phrase of our goals were to bring the land to bear, laugh, pay off the debt, and eat responsibly. So the thing about going into debt was like, oh my gosh, how could we afford this? Or how can we afford that? But we're so, anyway, it's fine. We've figured it out.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think that's an important message.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: For lots of people. I don't know, especially the past two years. I think that will really resonate with a lot of people.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3: You can take a break and make it work.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. And in the end, it worked out that he worked on the farm three days a week, and then, no, he worked on the farm two days a week. And then he has his own surveying and engineering business, just he's a sole. It's essentially just him. So then he started working full-time, and then he worked on this project, and he had a ball. My husband was so happy building this thing. And even though it was hard, obviously to be apart, we knew it was temporary.

Speaker 4: Right.

Elizabeth Keen: And it was, anyway.

Speaker 3: Well, that's a great, thank you for sharing.

Andy Chamberlin: So was the farm still running that year?

Elizabeth Keen: No, it completely took off.

Andy Chamberlin: Completely shut down.

Elizabeth Keen: So I had a coworker who was local. He kind of managed the cover crops. We essentially tried to cover crop the whole thing.

Andy Chamberlin: Good opportunity to rest everything.

Elizabeth Keen: And then I was just, the way the timing worked, I ended up coming back in July and then had the whole end of summer, fall, to just kind of be here. And I ended up doing some catering jobs.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: I was doing stuff, but to not have the pressure really just allowed my brain to open up and think about.

Speaker 3: That's amazing.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: And so what, one thing that came out of that was a renewed commitment to wash/pack barn renovation, right?

Elizabeth Keen: Yes, yes, exactly. Yeah. And just some capitalizing that's going to make this farm a little bit more productive, efficient, and sustainable.

Speaker 3: And was part of that also, thinking about, I think you alluded to this before, thinking about what's it like for Elizabeth and Al to run this 10 years from now?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3: So yeah, walk us through.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So this was kind of the bonus that we got this out of the project. So the first thing they did was tear down the ceiling, but it meant that we had to clear out an entire 20 years worth of stuff upstairs.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So yeah, I found a very generous neighbor who had an open barn. So we moved all that. We got rid of a ton of stuff. We essentially put a bunch of stuff out in the front and people took stuff, and it was great. I put the word out and people came and got stuff, which was terrific.

Speaker 3: Good scrap rates right now too.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes, I know. And so the main thrust of this, of course, is the building of this structure in here.

Speaker 3: Whoa.

Elizabeth Keen: So the thing, yeah. So we essentially divided the barn into thirds, and we had had these other convoluted plans, and the builder actually had those plans. And then I walked out here one day, and I realized, I actually taped it off, what it was going to look like. And I realized we'd made a mistake. I was like, this is not going to work. Because we'd actually put the cooler over, a square out of the CSA room. We'd actually put a wall. We wanted to have a lesser of a heated space. And so there was actually going to be a wall here. And then we were going to have these eight foot doors in here. And I realized, that is so stupid.

Speaker 3: You just, yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Why would I do that? Let's just make, use the posts as barriers and walls. And we built a bathroom. We now have a farm bathroom, which is amazing. There's one little thing that has to be hooked up at the septic pump down there, so it's not quite on. And then we did have to the concession, I think, which wasn't really a concession, and that is that we put the cooler over here. And which in thinking about the flow, it was like, ah. But anyway, that's what we had to do. We just...

Speaker 3: That's awesome.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. So we got this nice, big...

Speaker 3: That's a great cooler.

Elizabeth Keen: Cooler.

Speaker 3: Wow.

Elizabeth Keen: This was our old cooler.

Speaker 3: I hope those hinges hold up. Oh my goodness.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: It's like bank vault hinges.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Right, right, right. So it's actually not on yet, but we're about to epoxy the floor, and we had to insulate it because, I don't know no one, you know how projects are one, no one said you should absolutely make sure that the floor's level.

Speaker 3: Level.

Elizabeth Keen: So it was not quite level. And because we had thought it was going to be over there, we sort of forgot when it got moved to insulate the floor.

Speaker 3: Oh.

Elizabeth Keen: So anyway, that's an oversight. But yeah.

Speaker 3: So this is all new within the past nine months?

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: This just went in in September. Yeah. I mean, there's still the electrician still has to come back and do one thing. I can just show you where.

Speaker 3: This is, I mean, one thing that I'm just picking up on here.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: This is a really nice, wide door.

Elizabeth Keen: It is a nice wide, yes. I was really, yeah, we wanted to be able to use a pallet jack and move it in there. And again, it's not, I've never used a pallet jack, but...

Speaker 3: Oh, fun.

Elizabeth Keen: I thought I should be able to have a door that was pallet jack worthy. So why we made it wide, we do have those Hannay, Hannay reels? So...

Speaker 3: Oh, Hannay. Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Hannay. Yep. So we bought two of those used. So they're waiting...

Speaker 3: Oh, cool.

Elizabeth Keen: To be put up.

Speaker 3: Post reels. Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: They will be put on the ceiling. The other thing that, we're getting rid of these concrete blocks for some, I noticed ULINE has a stand that seemed very familiar to a stand that I saw someone else have in a video I saw.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And I'm like, where did they get that stand? And then I...

Speaker 3: Oh, no kidding?

Elizabeth Keen: Saw it.

Speaker 3: From Uline, huh?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3: That's good to know. We didn't know that, did we?

Speaker 4: No. Most, the couple farms that I do know had them custom welded.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. I mean, it seemed...

Speaker 4: So if you found one that'll work.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes. Well, so...

Speaker 4: By all means.

Elizabeth Keen: The weight capacity was like over a thousand pounds.

Speaker 3: Oh, great.

Elizabeth Keen: I'm like, well, that'll work.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So just for cleaning purposes and all that, I wanted to get rid of those blocks.

Speaker 3: So I don't know if it's in that case study video, but the other nice thing about those stands is with that weight limit pallet jack underneath them, if you need to move.

Elizabeth Keen: Right? Yeah. Yeah. Right. So, yes.

Speaker 3: And also for drying, you know, same, this what you have going on here with the blocks.

So one nice thing is wide open space.

Elizabeth Keen: It is.

Speaker 3: Central drain. You've got flexibility for layout.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: And one thought that comes to mind, is there a flow from the door? Everything gets sort of landed. And is there a possibility of certainly barrel washer, greens, or spray kind of coming in this direction to then go in the cooler...

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: I don't know about...

Elizabeth Keen: Like a drop-off.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So can I just say something? We've never had the barrel washer inside. It's never been inside. It has always been right outside. Right....

Speaker 3: Oh, wow.

Elizabeth Keen: Here, there used to be a years ago, there used to be a, here, I don't know what they did. They had something here, and it was dirt, and then they had this concrete pad for whatever reason. So anyway, that we had to take that down. It wasn't safe. But we've literally only ever used the barrel washer right there.

Speaker 3: Great. Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So my thought is that we might actually, yeah, I don't know.

Speaker 4: You could drag it out and use it there.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes, right.

Speaker 4: If the day is nice.

Elizabeth Keen: Right, and then in the wintertime, if I'm, we've never, again, we have never washed veggies in the middle of the winter. So all of my roots get washed and stored in 40 pound bags.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And I've never really had a problem with rotting or anything. So for me to have the option to harvest more and then wash later.

Speaker 3: Yeah. So that's kind of a game changer, just in terms of...

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: Moving stuff.

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, to be as far away from where the vegetables need to be.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. This used to be a whole root cellar like this. There was a wall all the way. It was a big enclosed area that they had built long before we got here. And then we just, the easiest thing for us to do was just to put a cooler in this insulated kind of area.

Speaker 3: So this will remain unheated?

Elizabeth Keen: Yes. Right.

Speaker 3: This central wash/pack area. You have the heat pump for heat.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. So...

Speaker 3: That's a nice looking heat pump.

Elizabeth Keen: It's a very nice one. I mean, we literally, in our plan, it was just like a small propane heater. So the builder was kind of insistent that we do electric because of the solar panel, so that somehow we could net-zero that way. But I'm like, that is a nicer heater than I have in my house. But it's been great. I mean, all winter long, I would just come out here an hour before I turned it on this morning just for a bit. And washing veggies this winter was so amazing.

Speaker 3: Oh, so that's right. So you've had a winter in here?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, so we did. We washed, we have three greenhouses that were full of greens. So we...

Speaker 3: So greens all winter. And is this the first, not the first winter you've done that, but the first winter...

Elizabeth Keen: It's the first winter that we did as much as we did. And it was the first winter where it was fun. And I didn't have to be so strategic about the day. Cause as long as I could harvest them, it didn't really matter what the temperature was outside.

Speaker 3: And are you doing anything for, to sort of temper the water that you use?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, so this, again, I sort of feel like it was over all done. But this is a hot water heater that we can turn the hot water on. I mean, I've never done that before, but I've heard that it's good to warm it up. I mean, one, just for personal...

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Comfort. But.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So one of the things, we bought new casters for these so that they wouldn't roll. So we just did that. And then

Speaker 3: Do they tend to walk? Have you found these?

Elizabeth Keen: They definitely walk. In fact, I'm not even super psyched with how, I mean, again, if there's any slope whatsoever. So having it right here, it just wants to walk that way. If it's completely, I think, level, it doesn't walk.

Speaker 3: I'm wondering if a triangle of just two by four triangle that is sized just for those that fit in?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

Speaker 3: So there'd be an initial lift into that.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: But you might even be able to make it in such a way that when these are...

Elizabeth Keen: Unlocked.

Speaker 3: Unlocked.

Elizabeth Keen: You could just slot.

Speaker 3: It's above. Yeah. So with these down, it'll just clear this, but with them up, it can sit on there and roll with it.

Elizabeth Keen: Ah, okay. Ooh, nice. Okay. Yeah. So in terms of the barrel washer, we know that we could get casters for it.

Speaker 3: Totally. Yeah. Are you imagining that you will still wash before storage, root crops? Or are you going to...

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, I would imagine I might do that this year again, but then maybe in future years that I wouldn't, and then I guess in the wintertime, it doesn't really matter. I mean, I'll just put it right over the drain.

Speaker 3: Yeah. But having, I think casters with an option to get it against the wall will definitely make this a much more comfortable path.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3: The other thing to possibly consider is seeing about getting a tray.

Elizabeth Keen: We have it.

Speaker 3: You do?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. I like this. Right.

Speaker 3: So for feeding, yes. But also for collecting water.

Elizabeth Keen: Oh, okay.

Speaker 3: So if you collect the water and send it to a single drain, it's going to make your...

Elizabeth Keen: Yes. Okay.

Speaker 3: Your floor clean up a lot.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay.

Speaker 3: A lot better. It makes this clean up a little bit more.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Involved. But...

Elizabeth Keen: Do you have pictures of any of that?

Speaker 3: Yeah, I would think Jericho Settlers is a good example of that. But in my mind, I'm imagining heavier soil, root washer crops coming this way, sort of mid, mid-level soil crops going to the spray table somewhere over here.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay.

Speaker 3: And greens kind of having the shortest path to the cooler, sort of uphill?

Elizabeth Keen: Okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. So I know one of the things that I've been, I have been thinking about, and that is saw a lot of folks having different places for clean bins, different bins for dirty bins, and then different bins for different purposes. And so maybe after I see your little map, I mean...

Speaker 3: Yeah, you got it.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. I mean, those just...

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, yeah. But I know also with food safety, they're not supposed to be on the ground, which I'm not that great about. I'm horrible about it, because the floors. Yeah. Anyway.

Speaker 3: So what a lot of people do is just take one sacrificial bin, upside down.

Elizabeth Keen: Upside down.

Speaker 3: And then stack the others on it. Or even just one like this.

Elizabeth Keen: Right, right, right.

Speaker 3: And this one is never used.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay.

Speaker 3: It just receives the next one.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3: Also, you're getting into pallet mode.

Elizabeth Keen: Right.

Speaker 3: So, you know, you can get some pallets that just stay in here, just for that purpose.

Elizabeth Keen: Right.

Speaker 3: Just for putting bins on.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Okay.

Speaker 3: Well, the good news is you've got an amazing dance floor here.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes. Right.

Speaker 3: So you know, can really do a lot with this.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 4: And you can experiment because nothing's tied down.

Elizabeth Keen: Right. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. So one of the things, we of course use a ton of five gallon buckets to harvest tomatoes and peppers and eggplants and all that kind of stuff. And one, I haven't quite figured out where I should store those, or if I should just keep them outside. That's sort of what I'm thinking.

Speaker 3: What's your appetite for more concrete?

Elizabeth Keen: I have no problem with more concrete.

Speaker 3: Well, I'm wondering if you might find some good value in a concrete apron out here.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay. Yeah.

Speaker 3: And maybe a shed roof.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: Open, but covered.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 3: And that becomes a hugely useful space. Again, mid-season, barrel washer could be out there.

Elizabeth Keen: Right. Yeah.

Speaker 3: Any of your harvest bins could be stored out there.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Yeah. We noticed that again, you know, you do one thing, and then you find another problem.

Speaker 3: Right, of course.

Elizabeth Keen: And one, and that is the drainage. In this winter, it was not.

Speaker 3: Oh, right up against...

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, it was coming up right up, if not in. We did, the engineer who engineered this whole thing, he's like, if you don't put a drain outside, I'm not going to do this for you. So we did put a drain. Oh, no, sorry, a gutter. We put a gutter, and that alone was the first time we've never seen water in the barn.

Speaker 3: Speaking of which, rough dimensions of the, so the cooler is roughly?

Elizabeth Keen: The cooler is like 13 by 13.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Elizabeth Keen: Yep.

Speaker 3: And you've got maybe another 13 by 20 of space here.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. So the barn is, it's 30 feet wide.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Elizabeth Keen: And so if that's 13.

Speaker 3: Yep. And the main wash/pack room then is 30 by?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, it's 30 by 60? Wait, if each of these, I think each, these are about 13 feet, actually. 13 or 14 feet between posts.

Speaker 3: Okay. So...

Elizabeth Keen: Is that right? So.

Speaker 3: 30 by 30.

Elizabeth Keen: It's almost a square.

Speaker 3: Yeah, yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: 30 by 30, got a bathroom, which is maybe...

Elizabeth Keen: I think it's eight by eight.

Speaker 3: Yep.

Elizabeth Keen: Yep.

Speaker 3: And these are, the ceilings are now eight?

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 4: Pretty close to [inaudible].

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: And that one, is that taller?

Elizabeth Keen: Well, this one, yeah. This one has insulation and all that stuff.

Speaker 3: Yeah. And CSA, this is what you call the CSA room?

Elizabeth Keen: Yes. Yeah.

Speaker 3: And so this is, again, maybe 30 by 30?

Elizabeth Keen: Yep.

Speaker 3: Okay. And how's that feel?

Elizabeth Keen: It feels amazing.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. I mean, again, we're still, it's interesting. So we inherited all these tables. We've never done any table improvement at all.

Speaker 3: These are the original CSA tables?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. I mean, this has been here since we got here. All the saw horses were here.

Speaker 3: Those saw horses look amazing.

Speaker 4: Well now they look all antequy on the new floor.

Elizabeth Keen: Right, exactly. Yeah. They're all of a sudden. And because it's so light in here, I feel like.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Oh my gosh. You can see everything. So yeah. I mean, the flow that we've had last year was people came in, sign in, and then they did a little loop around the room and out.

Speaker 3: Cool.

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, I feel like other CSAs rooms that I've seen, they really push stuff up against the wall. But then back stock is under the table. We've always had back stock behind the table so that my farm folks can do the work from behind. But again, the space is huge.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Lots of flexibility. And we're in the process of going to make chalkboards up on the walls.

Speaker 3: That's so cool.

Elizabeth Keen: But the lighting and the height, it just, it's been night and day.

Speaker 3: Yeah, I can imagine.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And I mean, I would be remiss in not being clear. I'll tell you how much the cost. So the state actually gave us \$219,000. And then the project cost, we did the final total about 260, 240? I can look that up actually.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And give you an exact number.

Speaker 3: And what's in that?

Elizabeth Keen: So what we paid for. So it's all, cement, I mean, everything.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, it's the new floor, all the demo, the new ceiling, all the insulation, all of the septic work. We had to put a new septic line in the bathroom.

Speaker 3: Heat pump.

Elizabeth Keen: Outside work, yeah.

Speaker 3: Cooler.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. It's everything.

Speaker 3: It's really everything. And then you mentioned solar. Do you have solar, not on the roof here...

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Solar is upstairs. That was from 2008.

Speaker 3: Okay. That was preexisting. Okay, great. Yeah.

Speaker 4: This is might be the best wash/pack barn, CSA room, set up I've seen.

Speaker 3: Certainly dairy barn renovation.

Speaker 4: For sure.

Speaker 3: Yeah. This is, next level, Elizabeth. This is beautiful.

Speaker 4: Without building a completely whole new structure, like working within a barn.
[inaudible]

Elizabeth Keen: And actually, when we put the bid in, that's what we did, is we put a bid in. And maybe we told you that, because that's one of the reasons...

Speaker 3: For new construction?

Elizabeth Keen: Why we were talking to you.

Speaker 3: I do remember that.

Elizabeth Keen: We're going to build a 20 by 40 out there.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And then it was actually Al's dad, who's into architecture. And he was like, why are you doing that? You already have a building. And it just was so overwhelming to think about the jack hammering of the floor.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Because that's the only thing we could see. And then another builder came and he's like, you know what? Let's look at this. What would happen if you just got rid of...

Speaker 4: For 260? Man, I wouldn't think you could build something.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 4: You know, with all these features for that.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Well, there you go.

Speaker 3: So that process, the thought process of, because everybody runs into this. Build new, how big? Renovate what I have. Can you just walk us through that?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Those gymnastics.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: And the different opinions and the, you know.

Elizabeth Keen: Right.

Speaker 3: Management.

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, honestly. And maybe if we had done more consultation with some other folks, we might have come to the conclusion that we could have really used this space without building a new building. But, we knew that we couldn't dig down. That was pretty clear because of the foundation of the building and losing integrity. So that's where we went to the outside building. And we wouldn't have, it wouldn't have been an elaborate, it wouldn't have, I mean, we still would've had to put a bathroom inside. So that was part of the plan was the bathroom inside and the cooler was inside, but the washing/packing was outside.

Speaker 3: So you were, Okay. You would've had a bathroom in this build, existing building.

Elizabeth Keen: We would've tried.

Speaker 3: Yeah. And then moving between two buildings.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: And the idea of the new building was not to be connected to this.

Elizabeth Keen: Well, it would've been. It, let's see. Gosh, now it seems like so long ago.

Speaker 3: Sorry.

Elizabeth Keen: No, no, no, that's fine. I mean, we're not ridiculously stupid. So there must have been some flow. And maybe actually the cooler was outside. Again, we would've made it work, and it would've been definitely better.

Speaker 3: What was the, I mean, the state funding had to have helped make the decision.

Elizabeth Keen: Oh, absolutely.

Speaker 3: I mean, and what was the source of that, is that MDAR?

Elizabeth Keen: So, no. Well, the Farm Security Infrastructure Grant. So that was mainly, I think those are mainly federal monies.

Speaker 3: Great. Wow.

Elizabeth Keen: I mean that were funneled through maybe the CARES money, some of it, the Massachusetts dedicated it to ag and food businesses.

Speaker 3: And are you...

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, so much money.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: I mean, it was like \$56 million.

Speaker 3: Yeah, and are you part of Mass. Certified Quality?

Elizabeth Keen: We're not.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Elizabeth Keen: So we're still under the threshold.

Speaker 3: Yep. Okay.

Elizabeth Keen: We're hitting that threshold very quickly.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: But I had Kate Bailey come out.

Speaker 3: Yep.

Elizabeth Keen: Several years ago. And so she really helped me think about...

Speaker 3: That's great.

Elizabeth Keen: Some things that I wasn't thinking about. So we haven't had to do that yet.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So I'll just show you. So this is a farm break room that we have that has been...

Speaker 3: So this probably is where the bulk tank was, right?

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. So then we used to just have, it was maybe a five step entrance into the barn right here. And so because we elevated the ceiling we had to build.

Speaker 3: Had to get, yep. But now you have a nice cover for the heat pump.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: Equipment.

Elizabeth Keen: There's no storage other places on the farm. So we end up storing stuff, but of course up here, which is terrific.

Speaker 3: Love the racking though.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Gosh.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Craigslist.

Speaker 3: This is a huge barn.

Elizabeth Keen: It is huge.

Speaker 3: So what would you say are your favorite things about the project?

Elizabeth Keen: I think just the rolling of everything down there.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: We are in the process of getting a couple other sort of U-boats.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Rolling. Even up here, just being able to roll stuff from here.

Speaker 3: Right. Because this is new too, right?

Elizabeth Keen: Totally new.

Speaker 3: It was all.

Elizabeth Keen: There was a staircase. We had to walk up three stairs to get out the barn. So being able to roll heavier stuff back and forth, using a dolly, that's been amazing. The whole idea of just the ease of movement of materials, even just whether we keep doing this, but unloading the veggies out of the truck, being able to put them several bins on a dolly and then roll them rather than everyone carry one bin at a time. The ease of movement has been amazing.

The lighting, I mean, we were literally working in the dark.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: That's what it felt like. So being able to just feel like, oh gosh, this is what a clean space feels like, because you can get all the nooks and crannies and clean it. And then I would say, again, I'm just doing a lot more, just really boosting my winter sales. And that's just been increasing every year and being able to be a little bit warm.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: In the washing in the winter was stellar.

Speaker 3: You've mentioned several times, just frankly, the space and the light, having some room and having some light.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Is there anything that you'd avoid in doing it next time? Or anything you wish you did differently?

Elizabeth Keen: One, I wish we had insulated the cooler underneath.

Speaker 3: Where it is. Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Just remembered. Yeah. Remembered to do that.

Speaker 3: So quick aside on that, it's not the end of the world.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Okay.

Speaker 3: And in my opinion, the soil under that cooler is going to stay probably 45 to 50 degrees even in the winter where it is. And that's going to be freeze protection. So I have seen coolers actually freeze up because they were insulated slabs.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay.

Speaker 3: Especially in bank barns.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay. Well, there you go.

Speaker 3: Because the cold air comes in, and water falls down.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay.

Speaker 3: I think it's just fine.

Elizabeth Keen: Perfect. Great.

Speaker 3: You can tell me I'm wrong later.

Elizabeth Keen: Okay, great. Let's see. Any other, I mean, it was the worst drag in the world to do it in the middle of the summer.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Oh, right. I forgot about that.

Elizabeth Keen: We had a circus tent set up out there, that was for CSA pickup, so that was under that. And then all the washing and packing happened under a 20 by 20 tent under that cement block that I told you outside. And we had to dig trenches so the water could leave.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Yep.

Elizabeth Keen: It felt horribly unsafe. It's like, I'm so surprised no one's sprained an ankle. And it was so rainy last year that in addition to just wash water, it was just dealing with rainwater.

Speaker 3: Yep. Yep. Do you see, anticipate, or have you seen any labor savings or other cost savings as a result of the project?

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, I think I definitely will this year. I mean, again, we didn't really start using it until September.

Speaker 3: Right.

Elizabeth Keen: But immediately when we moved the CSA in September, just rolling, being able to put six bins on a U-boat.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: And carrying them into CSA room was like, this is amazing.

Speaker 3: And you've alluded, I think, to your potential for more winter...

Elizabeth Keen: Right.

Speaker 3: Sales.

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: Kind of as a result of having a place to work.

Elizabeth Keen: Exactly. And the easy access in and out of the cooler, even with just a few things, because we, there wasn't, even though it was cement, the floor was not smooth.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: So it was really hard to use and put a lot of stuff on any wheel.

Speaker 3: So sort of a self-serving question.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: What was your experience working with UVM Extension and other technical service providers?

Elizabeth Keen: Yes.

Speaker 3: How'd that all go?

Elizabeth Keen: Great. Well, so I feel like when we had that, the video chat with you all last, whenever that was, that Al and I, it was almost premature. I mean, it was great because you guys really gave us, you were looking at the farm, having never seen it and had us really think about stuff. So I realized that we were so at the early stages and everything was all unsure in terms of how we could utilize that service. But that particular meeting, yeah, it did give us a lot of food for thought. I have thoroughly enjoyed all those scrub workshops, and then I've watched every single one of the eight part series on washing and packing. That was just really amazing. So yeah, I can't say enough.

Speaker 3: That's great. That's great. Thank you.

Elizabeth Keen: Working with you.

Speaker 3: That's just great to hear.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Thanks. I'm excited for you all. This is an amazing setup you have.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Thank you, thank you.

Speaker 3: I think, yeah, really above and beyond what I was envisioning.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah. Oh, great. Well, thank you.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: I'll tell my builder.

Speaker 3: Yeah. And I'll shoot you an email with a sketch tonight about what I was thinking in terms of the flow.

Elizabeth Keen: Sure, yeah. Okay, great. I mean, no rush.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Looks great.

Elizabeth Keen: Thank you so much.

Speaker 3: Thanks for having us.

Elizabeth Keen: Yeah, my pleasure.

Speaker 4: Incredible.

Andy Chamberlin: This podcast is supported by the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers' Association and the Ag Engineering program of the University of Vermont Extension. If you want to see videos, photos, or any relevant notes from this episode or others, check out the website, thefarmersshare.com. Be sure to subscribe to our YouTube channel and follow us on Instagram as well, so you don't miss any content. Thanks for listening.