

Joie Lehouillier ([00:00:11](#)):

I am Joie Lehouillier. We are the Foote Brook Farm in Johnson, Vermont, and we grow about 135 different varieties of vegetables, and we have a non-organic sod farm, and we have a farm stand, and we sell the Hunger Mountain Co-op Farmers to you, and of course, Deep Root Organic Co-op.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:00:30](#)):

Today's episode comes to you from Johnson, Vermont, where we visit with Tony and Joie LeHouillier of Foote Brook Farm. They grow sod and 35 acres of vegetables for both wholesale markets and their own farm store.

([00:00:43](#)):

We start off the episode seeing what's growing in one of the greenhouses in early December, take a look in their farm stand, and then we talk about how they cleaned up from the flooding that buried their entire farm. With over four feet of water in their barn, they lost crops, equipment, supplies, you name it. It was destroyed or at least severely damaged. Vermont has been hit three times over the last two seasons with major flooding events, and this is one of the farms that received the blow from each one of these.

([00:01:13](#)):

They're right on a major river and at the foot of nearby mountains, a familiar location for many farmers across our region.

([00:01:22](#)):

I'm your host, Andy Chamberlain, 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.

([00:01:37](#)):

If this show has impacted you, I'd love to hear it via email or publicly as a review in the podcast app. One of the latest reviews reads, "I've been listening to so many podcasts about farming and I keep turning back to this one. Great show and good questions." Thanks Michael Lang for leaving that review for others to consider who are checking out the show. You can write a review right in the podcast app or there's a new feature enabled right now called fan mail, so you can text the podcast right from a link in the description. These come through as anonymous, so if you want to be known or would like me to reply, let me know who you are in the message. Give it a whirl. It's quick, easy, and free, and I'd love to hear from you.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:02:21](#)):

I'm Tony Lehouillier. My wife and I are the owners of the farm, and we started in 1995, and it has evolved over the years. We were up to 62 acres of production at one point, and then we kind of decided to scale back some, and now we're running around 30 acres of vegetables, some maybe 35. We're located right here in Johnson, Vermont on Route 15. We have a really nice farm stand that's a post-and-beam structure. We enjoy the lifestyle of being out there, growing the vegetables. We also deal with lots of landscapers for sod, which has been super tough for the last few years just due to flooding and the quality that has reduced down, I guess, or fallen apart down there in that area of our farm.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:03:41](#)):

So obviously it's a farm stand. This gold house right here has a long-term tenant on the bottom, but then our H-to-A staff from Jamaica lives upstairs in the summer. That's our house. We own the little yellow house over here too. That is a rental that we've had some long-term tenants in. And then the white farmhouse, Tony's dad still lives in.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:03](#)):

Oh, wow.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:04:04](#)):

He's 80. He's going to be 87, and he probably could use to live somewhere smaller, but at 87 you don't want to move.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:13](#)):

Nope, nope. It's best not to change things.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:04:17](#)):

Exactly. So he's pretty happy. My sister-in-law lives across the street, so it's one big happy family. Camille still owns 200 something acres over there.

([00:04:29](#)):

He was a very smart businessman, and anytime anything came up for sale, he tried to buy it. And Tony's mom who inspired a lot of the vegetable part of our business, passed away a couple of years ago. We miss her a lot. It's going to be music in here.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:49](#)):

Okay. Got to keep the energy up.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:04:51](#)):

Yeah. That's probably why he couldn't hear my phone. Yeah. Hi.

Speaker 1 ([00:05:02](#)):

Hi.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:05:05](#)):

Yeah, so this is trying to take the cucumbers.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:19](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Speaker 1 ([00:05:19](#)):

[inaudible 00:05:19] Hours. We'll have them done.

[NEW\_PARAGRAPH]Takes so long, man.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:19](#)):

It's nice and warm in there today.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:05:22](#)):

At least we're down to 35 foot strings now. The first cucumbers were 50. There are two strings.

([00:05:29](#)):

It's still lush and warm in here.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:31](#)):

Yeah, it is.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:05:33](#)):

We just picked cherry tomatoes and there's some eggplant in there. We could probably get cherry tomatoes.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:05:40](#)):

It smells good in here.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:05:41](#)):

More cherry tomatoes, Swiss chard down that side, and it's December.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:46](#)):

That's nuts.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:05:47](#)):

And there's some crazy radishes past there. Those might not be as good as you want anymore.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:54](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:05:55](#)):

But yeah, we still have some little celery we're going to have to harvest out tomorrow. Try to keep putting these things to bed, get the water all blown out, because I mean, I got those two greenhouses over there. I have water running right now inside them on the ground so it will freeze so. Anyway, it's a battle right now, just so you don't have everything blow up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:25](#)):

Right. Well, the temps are dropping quickly this week too so.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:06:30](#)):

And suppose this week weekend, we're supposed to be single digits, so it's going to be brutal. I don't know if my watering system can handle single digits. I got a little box by my cold frame where I have a piece of foam over it. That's not going to hold out much longer.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:06:48](#)):

That eggplant looks amazing.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:50](#)):

Yeah, it does.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:06:51](#)):

This is global warming at its finest.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:54](#)):

Yeah.

([00:06:54](#)):

It's that reflective plastic, I guess is just keeping the rays to it, huh?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:07:00](#)):

Yeah. I mean, you have to wear sunglasses in here in the summertime.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:06](#)):

Really?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:07:07](#)):

You do. It is so bright, but it helps with the aphids and stuff.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:15](#)):

Okay.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:07:15](#)):

It's a little bit harder for them to find a place to relax. You can tell the temperatures are down. You can see the powdery mildews coming in here and.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:27](#)):

Crazy to see the growth this time of year.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:07:30](#)):

Yeah. I mean, if we wouldn't have turned the heat down to 60 in these, these would be all perfect still.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:36](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:07:37](#)):

I mean, having the Arisha system is a huge thing.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:42](#)):

What system?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:07:43](#)):

It's called Arisha. It's right over here. It's got a sensor down there, but this is for the roll-up, this is just the box of the roll-up. So if I want it to roll it up, right now, it's just on. I only have it set in manual because we had it running in auto. I don't know exactly what happened, but we had crazy solar flare, and then two days later it decided it wasn't going to behave anymore, and it rolled and tore the piece of plastic that was on there.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:18](#)):

Because it was frozen?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:08:20](#)):

No, it wasn't frozen. It was in July it happened. So from July on, I was like, "Oh my God." Every edge, because it pushes up. You know how they wind up more on the edge, so they tore on the edges...

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:34](#)):

Went too far.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:08:34](#)):

... before it gave up. By the time we saw, I was like, "Wat? Why is it way up there?" I'm like, "Oh my God, what is happening?"

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:41](#)):

Stop.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:08:42](#)):

"Stop. Shut it off."

([00:08:45](#)):

But that system, it uses that sensor that's right over here. You can see it right here. There's one in each one. You see that black cord?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:58](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:08:58](#)):

I can just pull it out for you. But it's the temperature and humidity sensor. It uses the greenhouse information, and then it opens, vents, heats, does whatever it needs to keep it in a good growing range. One of the greenhouses, it failed because we had some kind of weird electrical thing, and you could tell the plants were just in terrible shape, but where it didn't fail, it was doing quite well. And these would look even better right now if it wasn't for us turning it down to 60 about five, six days ago. Because I'm just like, "No, we're not letting it do what it should do. Cost too much. We're not getting anything out of it really." I mean, we sold a few cherry tomatoes this morning. We'll probably by tomorrow we'll pick a

few more off just before we give up, but there's literally a few cherries on there, but we're not going to be able to get this one gutted today. And then of course, we're going to have to cut all the celery out.

[\(00:10:10\)](#):

And we sold a few to Hunger Mountain today, so maybe we'll get lucky and sell the rest of this. We just pray.

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:10:19\)](#):

You never know.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:10:20\)](#):

Yeah, we'll probably pick it just because why not, right?

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:10:27\)](#):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:10:28\)](#):

But it's just-

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:10:28\)](#):

You can't sell it if you don't pick it, right.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:10:30\)](#):

That's true. And this is just a different way of doing celery where you don't grow it to just cut it. I mean, we're cutting it now because it's just easier.

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:10:41\)](#):

It's the end the season.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:10:42\)](#):

But as the season went, we just stripped it. I don't know if you've ever done that down at your place.

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:10:48\)](#):

Nope.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:10:49\)](#):

I got the idea a couple of years ago when I went to the New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference in New Hampshire. There was a guy there who was, instead of, because we'd always do celery in three, four weeks, we're done.

[\(00:11:05\)](#):

Can't grow it outside effectively. You just have that insect pressure and then the water sits on them, and you end up with a lot of times, even in the celery root, you'll see be the crown will die, or there's this, I'm not even sure what the insect is, but it looks like an awful mean little warrior down in there. And he decimates all the new growth. And that's usually about the time that you have to stop selling celery with

tops because he'll eat all the tender foliage. So he starts eating it or burrows through the stem just a little bit. So some of it will start turning yellow here and there, and you're like, "Oh, boy. Now to get that back to green, it's a lot of picking dead stuff out." And that's when you're like, "All right, I'm done fooling around with that." But you'll do whatever you can, depending on what nature will allow you to do.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:12:04](#)):

Yeah. Well, this is looking good at the moment.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:12:07](#)):

Yeah. Oh, yeah. I think the celery we sent to Hunger Mountain today was as good as it looked all year, so I mean, that's a good thing.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:12:17](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:12:19](#)):

Yeah. I think the way it's going with the weather, we may have to have more and more and more greenhouses, because I don't know if we can count on what that excessive rain does to all the plants outside.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:12:32](#)):

When was that celery planted, roughly?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:12:35](#)):

I would say beginning of June maybe.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:12:37](#)):

Okay.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:12:38](#)):

This was the first bed that we put in, so it would've been end of May, beginning of June. Because I mean, we started the first tray really early just so we could get the ball rolling. And then we actually in one of the greenhouses on the other side, we had one row over there too, but we did get that all picked up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:12:59](#)):

Cool.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:13:00](#)):

Yeah.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:13:00](#)):

You want to walk over to the barn?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:13:03](#)):

We've got our little retail greenhouse over here where we're able to do some plant starts, and we're still kind of rookies at that. We've gotten bigger in the last couple of years, but we're still trying to figure out what our market can handle.

[\(00:13:22\)](#):

So this year we're going to do more flowers and the farm stand is, I don't know if you've taken pictures in there, but that's kind of our coolest spot. We put probably the most money into this building and time, and it took years to get this building up. So we did a lot of the work ourselves. We cut some of the wood. We stained it all, we urethaned all the boards inside. I thought I had ruined some of the wood because I left the logs in a pile for an extra maybe two years, and they really should have been cut and milled right away. And when we looked at them, I'm like, "Ooh man, this stuff is probably no good. What are we going to do with it?" My builder was like, "Oh no, you don't understand. That's what they want it to look like. People want to see old barn board."

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:14:24\)](#):

Little bit of weather and color.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:14:26\)](#):

So you can see how it's got the knots in it.

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:14:29\)](#):

Oh, yeah.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:14:29\)](#):

But it also has... See right there has the worm tracks right through it.

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:14:34\)](#):

Yeah, yeah. Bug holes.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:14:35\)](#):

Yeah, exactly. So they're like, "Oh, that's what makes it look cool." I'm like, "All right, if you guys say so."

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:14:43\)](#):

If you're thinking too nice for a farm stand.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:14:45\)](#):

Yeah. But I mean, it took...

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:14:47\)](#):

This is beautiful.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:14:49\)](#):

... forever to urethane and to do all of the prep work. Even every board along the walls here, we had them all in the barn. We'd lay them out on wooden bins, we'd stain them. We would urethane them twice, give a sand and bring them over and throw them up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:15:09](#)):

So much square footage it takes up to do it all.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:15:15](#)):

Oh, we had literally our barn, a hundred and something feet long the whole thing was just boards. Multiple, multiple rounds. Round after round after round of it. It took us years.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:15:32](#)):

I know we started, remember the date says 2010. We didn't actually open until 2013. It was our first summer.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:15:40](#)):

So I mean, we were working on it from then on.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:15:46](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:15:46](#)):

It's a lot. But it's done. It's nice. This little island that we built here is a nice little show-place for tomatoes and specialty things that we put out. You still have a general idea of what it looks like, but not really having anything left in here except for a couple of things that we haven't cleaned up yet. And we also have had a couple of friends that will make jellies and jams and stuff like that. So they're not totally organic or anything because they're not certified organic, but we've used a lot of our products in those jams.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:16:29](#)):

Oh, nice.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:16:30](#)):

It's just something that people can find. They find something that they really enjoy. They made quite a few different types of products. That's kind of cool.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:16:46](#)):

I look for everything local first, and if it's organic, great. But really just the local cheese, local, anything I can get. And then I also get some things from New England special Kombucha and other types of cheese and whatever anybody likes that I can get that's easily accessible, I can order.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:17:13](#)):

We've got our honey guy. Does honey here on the farm.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:17:20](#)):

Yeah. He has bees here. So we carry his honey nice.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:17:21](#)):

But in the winter, he is taken them all the way to Georgia. So not Georgia in this state, but Georgia the state.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:17:28](#)):  
Georgia State.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:17:29](#)):  
It's Georgia State.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:17:29](#)):  
State of Georgia.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:17:29](#)):  
He has taken bees down there?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:17:30](#)):  
Yep.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:17:31](#)):  
He brings them up here in the summertime?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:17:33](#)):  
Because the mites just kill them in the wintertime up here. The amount of loss that he has. He loses entire hives and most of the hives are really diminished by spring. So he just started, he's got a tractor-trailer truck, and he'll just drive it all the way down.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:17:51](#)):  
Interesting.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:17:53](#)):  
And in the spring, there was one year, he's like, "I can't get to any of my places. Roads are real bad." He goes, "Is there any way I can leave all the hives on the farm somewhere?" So whole tractor trailer load of them. And we had them, we just took them toward the river and we just left them. So I mean, the bees were still flying in and out and doing their thing, but.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:18:14](#)):  
You had to drive up there in a truck and just sit in the truck. And it was like a scary movie.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:18:19](#)):  
I bet.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:18:20](#)):  
But it was really cool.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:18:21](#)):

With hundreds and hundreds of hives on there. It's a lot of bees.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:18:26](#)):

And I was working in here one day and a swarm had formed, and they all came here to the farm stand.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:18:35](#)):

[inaudible 00:18:35] house, and it landed on a picnic table that was outside, and it just started, the swarm was on the table.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:18:42](#)):

That was a crazy day.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:18:43](#)):

And then we had other people are like, "Oh, well, you can just have someone come and get them."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:18:48](#)):

Just scoop them up. Yes.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:18:50](#)):

Just scoop them up. Well then come on down, scoop them up, get them out of here. Right where they are is not working for us. It's about 15 feet from a door at the farm stand. We're not very sure about what they're going to do, and we don't want them coming in. So it's like, yeah. And to see a few thousand bees taking, huge mass of them underneath the table, kind of on top and under, just making this huge ball, protecting the queen or whatever they're doing. Oh, my word. I mean, it's never a dull moment being a farmer.

([00:19:33](#)):

I grew up here and it was a dairy farm when I was a kid, and my dad was the second generation, and his dad came from Canada and bought the farm from my dad's brother who had come down. And then he decided, "Well, we got to here, but we're going all the way to Massachusetts because even more opportunities down there." So they took off. And then my father's dad, Armand, he had this dairy farm here and one where the farming garden is right now. So he had two farms. And then over time, my dad bought little pieces of this land that farm didn't go with. So just started absorbing some of the land from other little mini farmers back in the whatever, '20s, '30s, '40s, whenever they were doing their thing. And I think there might've been another two or three farms. And then the last one goes right by my house and the hillsides, and that was the Thompson's. Anyway, that was their name.

([00:20:52](#)):

So I mean, we use all the fields, all the hills. At least some of the time we're using them for something. We're cover cropping them or something so.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:21:01](#)):

How many acres are tillable?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:21:04](#)):

It's around a hundred tillable, but we are not pushing it. We can't even consider it tillable anymore, a lot of it. I mean, they haven't taken the island out of the river. There's just no way that you can trust the river.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:21:20](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:21:21](#)):

I mean, it's just one of the things that the state has to deal with. And it's not just this river. It's every river.

([00:21:32](#)):

Anyway, getting a little off subject. But if you fix the back roads, you're going to speed the water up. You're going to send all the water down, not part of the water down. The wetlands are now less of them. Not to mention that a landowner might've got rid of some beaver dams up there or something. So now you're just going to get more and more water, thus you're going to have more and more erosion on those tributaries. And our tributary right here, that goes by being that we're the Foote Brook farm. It's the Foote Brook that is totally decimating the landscape down below. So we have two hillsides that are about 75 feet high, and about 150 feet of them in two places is gone. All the trees, all the dirt. Where is it? Well, it filled in every single hole, created an enormous island that got about 50 feet longer after that big flood.

([00:22:40](#)):

I mean, the one thing it did do was the island was four or five feet tall before the flood. So obviously water can't go through that. But by the time it was over, half the island was then made... It made the island like 50 feet longer, and it dropped it maybe two and a half feet or something. So at least there's more room for the water to go through. And so in the last two floods, it hasn't been as bad because at least the water's got a place to go, where when you have 70, 75% of the channel that has this four foot shelf in it, and it's got trees all the way above the river. Above it. So there's no way that the water can go through there until you snap those trees. And you're talking about dense shrubs, Birch trees.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:34](#)):

Yeah, hardwood trees.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:23:35](#)):

Yeah. So they're not going anywhere. You know what I mean. It took many, many hours to erode them away at a high speed so I mean.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:23:48](#)):

Of course we're talking about the flood in 23, and then of course it flooded again last year, but we were...

Tony Lehouillier ([00:23:55](#)):

Last year's flood, because at least part of the island's gone, it's letting more water flow freely.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:24:03](#)):

So you got to touch it for-

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:24:04]

Tony Lehouillier (00:24:00):

Water flow freely.

Andy Chamberlain (00:24:03):

So you got a touch of relief.

Joie Lehouillier (00:24:04):

It wasn't as bad as that.

Tony Lehouillier (00:24:04):

Yes. It's touch of relief. So the flood didn't come all the way back to here again, but it was-

Joie Lehouillier (00:24:10):

It was close.

Andy Chamberlain (00:24:12):

Right. Last year's flood came almost all the way up to the farmstead, right?

Joie Lehouillier (00:24:17):

The '23 flood did.

Tony Lehouillier (00:24:18):

The '23 flood was really close. I mean it would have a few more, it would have a few feet to go to get in here, but in our house it was like maybe another foot 18 inches. So that was scary. And because the island was there and they dropped the bridge six feet, the bridge was now stopping the water. The island was stopping the water. The channel stopped flowing and the channel came across here so it could fill in the foot brook floodplain. So we had like a 25-foot river shooting, like three and a half feet deep. I mean it was impressive. It was coming right across my back lawn and shooting down into our wood turtle habitat, trying to obviously kill that freaking guy down in there.

Joie Lehouillier (00:25:16):

They didn't though. We saw him.

Tony Lehouillier (00:25:16):

Yes, we saw him.

Joie Lehouillier (00:25:17):

It was here. We were so happy.

Andy Chamberlain (00:25:17):

He survived, somehow.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:25:21](#)):

He's resilient. But yeah, being on the farm, it's always got something going on for sure. Lots of wildlife, lots of all kinds of things going on.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:25:34](#)):

So you grew up here?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:25:35](#)):

I did. I grew up in the White House, right next to the barn over here.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:25:40](#)):

Yeah. So you know this land well. You've seen it year after year.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:25:44](#)):

Yeah. And so most of my life it never flooded.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:25:48](#)):

Right.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:25:49](#)):

This piece of land just didn't flood. It never would get that high. It would come up in the drainage ditch, but that's insignificant. But the last three floods have been, it's like wow. Even the winter flood, I wasn't sure if it was going in the barn or not.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:26:08](#)):

They came really close.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:26:09](#)):

There's only been two floods in history to make it into the barn. So you have to have nine inches of rain to get into the barn, and both those other floods had nine inches. So when you have that and the '23 flood must have been...

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:32](#)):

So you had July '23, December '23, and then July '24?

Joie Lehouillier ([00:26:32](#)):

Yep.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:26:36](#)):

Yep.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:37](#)):

Those were the last three that you're talking about?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:26:39](#)):

Yep. So July 24th was the least of a flood. I mean that one was smaller, but then the December one, I was sandbagging the barn in the middle of the night. I was like-

Joie Lehouillier ([00:26:55](#)):

Yeah, we didn't go to bed that time.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:26:57](#)):

Oh my God. It was 10 and a half inches away from coming in.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:59](#)):

I feel like the December storm came on quick.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:27:03](#)):

23rd. Yeah, it warmed up. It rained and then of course, so the ground was frozen, so-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:27:08](#)):

There was probably six feet of snow on the mountains when that happened.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:27:11](#)):

So yeah, we had snow melt added to it.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:27:12](#)):

There was so much snow.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:27:14](#)):

Yes.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:27:15](#)):

I mean, I skied at Stowe and I skied at the top of the mountain, the steepest, hardest trail they had. So there was so much snow up there, but then you'd just go down like a thousand feet and then it was not very friendly snow because there was so much water mixing into the actual snow because of the temperatures and stuff like that. So yeah, it was crazy how much snow we were getting, almost two feet per storm on the top of the mountains every storm. I'm like, wow, we never got two feet ever before.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:27:55](#)):

If you get him talking about skiing, you'll be [inaudible 00:27:59].

Tony Lehouillier ([00:27:58](#)):

Yeah, that's true.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:27:59](#)):

Skiing and storms.

Tony Lehouillier (00:28:00):

Yeah. Let's take a walk over to the barn.

Andy Chamberlain (00:28:02):

Sure. So you've got about a hundred acres tillable. How much are you generally trying to use on a yearly basis? Most of that?

Tony Lehouillier (00:28:11):

No, I mean we don't count the roads and when I'd calculate it for the USDA-

Andy Chamberlain (00:28:19):

Right.

Tony Lehouillier (00:28:20):

There's maybe 35 acres that we use.

Andy Chamberlain (00:28:23):

Okay.

Tony Lehouillier (00:28:24):

Plus we have the sod fields.

Andy Chamberlain (00:28:27):

Oh, yeah.

Tony Lehouillier (00:28:27):

Which you can't tell where they are, but it's nice and flat right down there. It's all white. That's where they are. And that's on about 30 of the hundred acres.

Andy Chamberlain (00:28:38):

Okay.

Tony Lehouillier (00:28:39):

So if you look at it-

Andy Chamberlain (00:28:41):

So like 30 and [inaudible 00:28:41]. 30 and-

Tony Lehouillier (00:28:41):

It's probably 35 and you're trying to do it on 70 to 85 acres. The patch right next to us is Laraway School. That cut up field right over there, and that's around another 25 acres, 20, 25 acres over there that we

use, we rent from them. And that's a little bit higher up. So without that piece, it's getting really scary to do anything because in my lifetime, if you look straight down the field, so there's this field that goes to where that greenhouse is right there.

(00:29:18):

Then there's another, there's a whole nother field that goes past that greenhouse and then there's a road. You can almost imagine where the road is before that green, before those turnips, because I didn't pick all my turnips down there. That nice green, that is main field three. So this is main field one, and we have main field two below it, and then we have main field three, and then over that way because the land drops down where we will never grow anything again except for maybe a sunflower patch, which is what we did this year. It's all brown down there right now, but you can almost see the white heads of the sunflowers maybe. My eyesight's not top-notch or anything.

Andy Chamberlain (00:30:04):

Oh, yeah. I can see the little specks down there.

Joie Lehouillier (00:30:05):

There's tons of birds in there. It's just so cool.

Andy Chamberlain (00:30:09):

Yeah.

Joie Lehouillier (00:30:09):

We weren't sure if we were going to do, we did the sunflower maze.

Tony Lehouillier (00:30:13):

I don't trust main field three. I can't. Main field three flooded and it wasn't even that big of a flood, but because... I just don't trust it, there's too much water coming too fast. I mean that's what absolutely decimated places where they were getting those six to eight inches of rain, like Hardwick and Berry, they got the six to eight inches.

Andy Chamberlain (00:30:41):

Yeah, Plainfield and Burke got just wiped out. Do you have any warning or gauge of when the waters are coming? I know some places on the river they're like, okay, if Montpelier gets it's 12 hours before it gets to me. Do you have any warning or does it come on fast? Because it's right here, close to the mountains.

Tony Lehouillier (00:31:02):

We have Bruce Kaufman in Hardwick to tell us. If it floods at his house, it's flooding here.

Joie Lehouillier (00:31:07):

He's Riverside Farm.

Tony Lehouillier (00:31:08):

That's a guarantee.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:31:09](#)):

Okay.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:31:10](#)):

So yeah. Bruce is like, his health is going downhill right now, but he's my mentor. He was my mentor in the co-op to get me up to speed to become or be able to become a good enough grower that my product wouldn't be rejected in the wholesale. You can look at this greenhouse too if you want. This one's still running. Since we're just going by. It's pretty lush.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:31:47](#)):

Nice.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:31:48](#)):

It's warmer in here too. Come on in, honey. Don't freeze. Anyway, there's a few cucumbers that are starting to go bad and still basil still going. It's getting a little rough though. It was getting rough a long time ago.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:03](#)):

Yeah, I'd imagine.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:32:05](#)):

Yeah. Anyway.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:32:06](#)):

It does look good though.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:07](#)):

It smells good.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:32:09](#)):

I mean, there's endless amounts of pesto here. Just-

Joie Lehouillier ([00:32:12](#)):

Look at all the giant tomatoes, too.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:32:13](#)):

If you don't care about a couple little brown spots, it's perfect. But it's all going to be gone a couple of days hopefully if it needs to be. If it's not gone, I'm just going to turn the greenhouses off and then it's going to be gone no matter what.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:28](#)):

Yeah, move on.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:32:30](#)):

We had wicked late blight in here, so it's a miracle that this is still going.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:36](#)):

What'd you do when the late blight hit?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:32:39](#)):

We just picked it out. Sprayed it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:42](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:32:43](#)):

Got rid of it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:44](#)):

So took out the infected portions that you could see and the rest kept growing.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:32:50](#)):

And then we had to be pretty on top of it for the next week or so to just make sure that we didn't miss any pieces that started flaring back up again. And I mean, we haven't done a thing in over probably five weeks, we haven't sprayed or did anything, so it should all be dead in theory by now, but it's still going.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:21](#)):

Right.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:33:23](#)):

Yeah, the growth, you can see the suckers are doing quite well. Yeah, this will be a lot of fun taking out, I'm sure.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:33](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:33:36](#)):

But we'd never run our greenhouse until Thanksgiving ever before. But just financially with all this, it's been tough. So decided we'd just-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:49](#)):

Milk as much out of it.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:33:50](#)):

Yeah. And the weather wasn't too cold. We just took the plastic off this one. See, I connected two little greenhouses into one. That little structure I built there.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:34:06](#)):

Tony got a phone call. Good news. The truck passed inspection, so we kept on our way over to the barn and started talking more about flooding and the damage it caused.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:34:15](#)):  
Right there.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:34:15](#)):  
We left the sandbags.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:34:18](#)):  
Oh, well that was from the winter storm.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:34:18](#)):  
I know. Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:34:20](#)):  
I was like, no freaking way am I moving those too far. And in fact, I have a bin of them right inside the door ready to go. I mean, I've still got PTSD like it's going out of style.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:34:31](#)):  
Well, yeah, when you get hit three times in two years, it changes your viewpoint on that.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:34:38](#)):  
Well, there's never been anything like that. In 2014... 2011? Was it 2011 with Irene? Something like that.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:34:48](#)):  
Yeah, I think so.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:34:51](#)):  
2011, it was in this dock area and it was like, this is where I gauge how much water there is, when I'm standing right there on the dock.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:01](#)):  
That's your depth gauge?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:35:02](#)):  
That's the depth gauge.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:35:03](#)):  
It is. We know when it hits a certain thing, we know where else it's going to go.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:07](#)):  
Yeah. Right.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:35:09](#)):

If it comes in this barn, my dad's house is done. That means that it went over the rise and it filled that whole thing in over on that side because the driveway, once it can get past that around the corner of the barn past that driveway, then it's going in. But yeah, the December storm was 10 and a half inches from going in and I was like, I am so tired, dude. I was here in the middle of the night. Every 45 minutes I'd come over and check. I'm like, oh my God, man, it's getting close. Let me show you where it was on the big flood. It's mind-boggling, man. Mind-boggling. You'd think, oh, a little water came in here. How bad could that be?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:58](#)):

Right.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:35:59](#)):

Everything was lost. That box right there, that electric box, that was not totally under, but it was under. This is the water level right here, right about here on my shoulder. That is some water. I've even got a line in the electric box so you can see it. I'm like, oh my God, all these breakers in electric box can't be any good. Took them all out, changed the sub panel. I'm like, oh gosh.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:36:27](#)):

Those ice machines were flipped upside down and jammed into the corner there.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:36:33](#)):

And we're lucky we were able to just change the computer and stuff in those because if not-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:36:40](#)):

Pressure wash them, replace the electronics and hope for the best?

Joie Lehouillier ([00:36:45](#)):

We did that with so many things.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:36:46](#)):

It took me a full day just to clean one of those. One whole day. And the next day I came back and I looked in the box and I was like, I didn't do anything yet. It's still just smeared on there. Then I had to get in and just scrub it clean off the stainless, which is on the inside, so wow, what a battle. I mean, we literally had nothing. That heater was destroyed. It was a 350,000. We had to buy a new heater and see, I put concrete under it to hopefully get it high enough this time, but it's not going to be high enough.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:37:27](#)):

It's not under that water line.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:37:29](#)):

No, it's not. Like if that happens again, but once again, if the state starts to realize what they've done, because they've done this to us and that's just the way it is.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:37:43](#)):

You lost a lot in the flood. I'm just trying for the listeners, how much of your growing space plus barns plus your dad's house, what all did you lose?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:37:55](#)):

We lost every material, every vegetable, every box, every fertilizer except for three pallets. We had three pallets of fertilizer that I had because when you buy 22 pallets, because that's how you have to buy your fertilizer, you have to buy a whole tractor trailer load. I got it the week before. We probably put one pallet out on the field or somewhere in that range because-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:38:23](#)):

Like it mattered at that point.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:38:24](#)):

Yeah. I mean we needed it and we were about ready to use a lot more because we had our potatoes in and we just hadn't had time to get to it yet. But I had three pallets stacked on top of another pallet. If it wasn't for that, I would've had no fertilizer to try to continue farming after the flood. And then I was really fortunate because Dwayne at Krayers, he got me some fertilizer when I had literally not a pot to piss in, as they say. Which it's just one of those things where if you would've come in here, you couldn't walk in here. There was no way to walk in here. Everything had floated to a new place. So every single cardboard box, imagine how that looked.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:22](#)):

Yeah, right. Just a mess.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:39:23](#)):

I just found a bundle of them last week right out by the drainage tips. So a 15 block of half bushels had floated out the door-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:35](#)):

Every which direction.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:39:36](#)):

And it got stuck in the weeds over there by the-

Joie Lehouillier ([00:39:40](#)):

I think this box cost, what? \$3? \$3 and 50 cents now?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:39:45](#)):

Well, no, it's the one and two thirds boxes are \$3 and 50 something cents. That box is around \$2.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:39:53](#)):

Okay.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:39:55](#)):

We threw away pallets of boxes.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:39:58](#)):

So we figured-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:39:59](#)):

When I just looked at how much money it took to just get the muck off the walls, and-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:07](#)):

Right. Like you said, you spent a whole day just cleaning the inside of one ice machine.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:40:11](#)):

One thing, it took me all weekend to clean both boxes and try to wash out the electrical components.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:19](#)):

In July when you should be farming, you don't even have one thing running, let alone a field to touch or a barn to enter, everything.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:40:19](#)):

But I think-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:40:30](#)):

We had two, we had a couple four wheelers that didn't go under. We had one forklift that didn't go under, and my John Deere 2020. All the other tractors were completely submerged. And when I mean completely submerged, the alternator, everything. We're talking in the shed out there, the ground drops down. As you cross where we just walked-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:58](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:40:58](#)):

It's high there. So as it came across there, it filled that all in. And then where the road is in the back of the barn, you might be four feet lower, so you only need a couple inches of water going across and you're already at four feet, three and a half, four feet out there.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:41:19](#)):

So we originally estimated we lost about \$500,000 worth of supplies and crops. And I would say now that we're a year and a half out of it, I'd say it's probably closer to 700,000. Just the tractors or [inaudible 00:41:38]-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:41:38](#)):

From the first flood.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:41:39](#)):

From the first flood. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:41:39](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:41:40](#)):

So some people would never be able to come back from something like that. And honestly, I-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:41:45](#)):

We wouldn't have been able to come back without the state of Vermont.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:41:47](#)):

I didn't think we were going to.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:41:48](#)):

Absolutely no way.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:41:49](#)):

The [inaudible 00:41:50] loans.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:41:50](#)):

And all the people that supported us with our GoFundMe. I mean, we spent another 250,000 to just try to clean the place up. That had nothing to do with, you haven't gained any ground. You're just trying to find the stuff you have, a lot of it just washed away. And some of it you're just like, no, we just have to take this to the dump. And we tried to clean motors and we tried and we tried and we tried to do as many things, to save as many things as we could, but basically if it's electrical, you might as well just throw it into the trash. It's gone. I mean, yeah, that fan still works somehow. It doesn't sound good. It might not work for 10 more minutes, but it still works. So it was so devastating every time you needed something. 29 years of accumulating materials. Every time I'd ordered-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:42:56](#)):

Investing in materials,

Tony Lehouillier ([00:42:57](#)):

Too much potassium sulfate. I've got some for next year. I've got this pallet of Sul-Po-Mag over here.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:43:04](#)):

You've built up inventory. Yep.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:43:05](#)):

A pallet of this. Yep. And so I had every micronutrient in here. I had soluble forms, I had granular forms. I had nothing. One bag is like \$200 of some of that stuff. One bag. And we had hundreds and hundreds of bags in here, and all last winter was if I thought we could get it back to granular, then we dumped it on

the floor out there. We ran fans, and every day or two, we would shovel it to try to dry it out. So that was all winter, that whole area in the back. And all we saved was sulfur, potassium sulfate, and gypsum. Those are only three products that we were able to save.

[\(00:43:55\)](#):

Sul-Po-Mag turns into a rock. And Vern Grubinger was like, "Yeah, you need to find someone who has a pulverizer." I'm like, "Where would I find one?" Because no one's even heard of that. You'd have to be a corporation that's grinding rock.

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:44:14\)](#):

Right.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:44:15\)](#):

If I could just have the truck come and I'll just send it to you and you can take it home for free and you grind it, you do whatever you want with it, because now-

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:44:15\)](#):

Because you can use it. Great.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:44:24\)](#):

It's gone. Get it out of my hair.

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:44:28\)](#):

One last thing for you to dump, so.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:44:30\)](#):

Well, I mean that's what I was saying to him. I can't put that stuff outside. It's just like toxic waste. You can't have zinc sulfate just sitting in a pile outside and expect anything good to ever happen near there again. You're going-

Andy Chamberlain [\(00:44:47\)](#):

To too much of any one thing is not a good thing.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:44:50\)](#):

Yeah. So it's so-

Joie Lehouillier [\(00:44:53\)](#):

We're trying to stay positive and figure out how we move forward. And we did move forward. I mean, this year it was good, except for the construction traffic.

Tony Lehouillier [\(00:45:06\)](#):

It was more than that.

Joie Lehouillier [\(00:45:07\)](#):

It was a lot of different things, but trying to stay positive.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:45:09](#)):

It wasn't very good. We lost, what, \$70,000 this year. I don't think it was that good.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:45:15](#)):

No, but we're-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:45:17](#)):

We couldn't sell sod. It flooded three times. There's silt on it. The roots are almost unable to breathe through all the clay and the silt. Not that you see that much on the sod, but the plant itself has been weak-

Joie Lehouillier ([00:45:35](#)):

It's not healthy.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:45:35](#)):

Into the point where you can cut underneath it and it just will not hold together. Where it was holding together before that flood and then the number of chemicals that we had to use, I mean we probably lost at least another \$5,000 just in sod. And we did pick some, but between trying to get it clean enough for the customer, which meant sometimes hand weeding, and we had to hand weed-

Joie Lehouillier ([00:45:35](#)):

A sod field.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:46:08](#)):

The whole beginning of the season. We still had large grasses like foxtail and stuff like that, that had taken over in there.

([00:46:18](#)):

So even though the chemicals were going on, weakening the sod every single time, because you're killing roots. You're trying to kill these invasive things. It's weakening your product. And then to not really have enough air in the sod is what it probably comes down to. So I mean, all the calcium sulfate I did have left is now on that field. And I would say that I need to buy a few more tons by spring and put more on as soon as I can get back out there, go out, put another 150 to 200 pounds to the acre, and hope that I can finally get that soil structure to break apart enough so that my sod will be thick enough and strong enough to finally actually sell it. Because when I'm talking to people on the phone, I just can't be like, yeah, yeah, yeah, get 10 more pallets. I'm like, dude, I think you should seed as much as you can and just-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:47:18](#)):

Grow your own sod this year.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:47:20](#)):

Get a couple pallets to make the customer happy, because it looks nice, but it's going to kill you to actually lay it.

Andy Chamberlain (00:47:27):

Is sod an annual crop?

Tony Lehouillier (00:47:30):

It's a perennial.

Andy Chamberlain (00:47:32):

I know, but are you harvesting it annually or is it like a three-year thing?

Tony Lehouillier (00:47:37):

It takes a couple of years before it's ready, generally.

Andy Chamberlain (00:47:40):

Okay. I know nothing about growing sod.

Tony Lehouillier (00:47:42):

I mean, you might be able to grow it one year and still pull it out of there if you do everything right.

Andy Chamberlain (00:47:49):

Right. So it's just generally-

Tony Lehouillier (00:47:50):

If the weather's working with you, you've got good moisture, you're not putting too many chemicals on it, you might be able to get a crop in one year, but a lot of times-

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:48:04]

Tony Lehouillier (00:48:00):

... be able to get a crop in one year, but a lot of times our sod is two years old generally when we sell it two, two and a half years old. But now this sod field with the flood, the flood, the flood, we're going to be working on four years in on this patch. We just can't sell it. We have another patch ready to go that is in the same boat. So it's still there, but the quality is just terrible right now.

Andy Chamberlain (00:48:28):

It's not going to be strong over there either.

Tony Lehouillier (00:48:30):

Right.

Andy Chamberlain (00:48:30):

And we got that cleaned up. For the most part.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:48:35](#)):

We're hoping. It's an important piece of-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:48:37](#)):

But that's like-

Joie Lehouillier ([00:48:38](#)):

... being sustainable is having that early season.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:48:41](#)):

We lost a lot of money because of the road construction because no one could come to the farm stand. You wouldn't want to come. Even if you lived in town, you're talking about an hour drive to get here from town and back. That's a long way, right?

Joie Lehouillier ([00:48:41](#)):

Oh, it's fun.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:48:57](#)):

You can go to Burlington.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:48:59](#)):

Yeah. I'm half an hour from here and yeah, everybody I talked to was like, "Yeah, don't go up Johnson Way. It's at least a half hour wait."

Tony Lehouillier ([00:49:06](#)):

Yep. It was 20 minutes to get through one line, one line. And if you get screwed and you had to go through multiple lines, oh my gosh. Yeah. It was just a tough year. And if you add up... Didn't have enough materials because we really didn't have the money after the first flood came and there's four more inches of rain. What fertilizer you did have, you got to consider it virtually gone. So now you've got to go reapply. If you had to put two passes on, you need two more passes. But we didn't have the money to just... We couldn't keep getting more and more and more and more when we're just so inept already we were just hanging on.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:49:57](#)):

But how do we want to... We should switch this to now. Positive stuff.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:50:02](#)):

I know, now we got to do positive stuff, but that is, I mean-

Joie Lehouillier ([00:50:07](#)):

Yeah, it was-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:50:08](#)):

... I would understand if no one could survive what we went through. Just because I don't care. No matter what, I just keep going. It's every day until it's dark. That's what I did all summer, 10, 12 hours every day, seven days a week. Get up at the same time, check your emails, get a plan together, drink your coffee, go see the guys. Here we go again. This is what we got to get done for 10:00. This is what we got to get done by 3:00, our other goals by 8:00. And we worked right until dark every night.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:50:49](#)):

So you said you've been growing for 29 years. Did I catch that? Right?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:50:52](#)):

Yep. 29 years.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:50:54](#)):

So setting the flood information aside before that, let's talk a little bit about what kept you going. What meant sustainable farming to you? Sounds like a strict routine, get up and go. What time are you getting up?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:51:13](#)):

I usually, if I have to spray, I'll get up at 5:00, but if I'm not spraying, I like to relax being that I worked until 8:00 or 9:00 night every night. So we don't get up when it's cold because we have Jamaicans. They don't want to be out there. They're not going to be productive at 50 degrees, but by 8:00-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:51:37](#)):

They'll be fine working in the evenings, yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:51:39](#)):

From 8:00 to whenever you say, "All right guys, we can't see anymore. It's time to go home." Because there's so many jobs. We might be working on weeding, planting, or picking something. Well, but then there's a lot of farm stand stuff that we have. We have five 300-foot rows of blueberries that we really need to make sure the stand has those blueberries all the time. We don't want to run out.

([00:52:08](#)):

So we'll be up there till dark for two reasons. We have netting because of the spotted wing drosophila. And if you go in that netting and the sun's blazing, that's where they'll probably find your body because it's way too hot in there. Like it just holds that heat in. And that's the last thing you need to do on an 85 degree day, go where it's 95.

([00:52:36](#)):

So we have to kind of think about what we can do, when we can do it. So it's always a juggling act. But normally that's when I get my long days or when I have to get up at 5:00. I probably already have the sprayer filled from the night before. I'll just go and put down one thing on one crop. I do brassicas. So I'm trying to keep the population of the swede midge down. And half of it's luck, but if you aren't spraying your brassicas almost weekly anyway, you still got your white butterflies, your cabbage worm, your cabbage looper, your flea beetles, you got all that guaranteed already, but now you've got something that will kill the plant.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:53:30](#)):

So honey, why do you do it? What drives you every day? I think was sort of his question.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:53:37](#)):

I think it's the fact that a lot of it has to do with my mom. My mother would never quit when she was doing the same thing. She has always been my inspiration, I guess. Like in my family, my mother outworked my dad, I mean to the point where it would make him look bad. I mean, when he was younger, of course he did a lot of things. He did a lot of good things. But my mother was working when she was running... We used to have the farm stand in front of this barn, and she would get up around 7:00, she'd go out, see what she needs to do. Then she'd have breakfast ready for my dad. And then she would go out, she'd go pick something, peas, tomatoes, cucumbers, whatever's the crop at the time, and then get her farm stand ready, open, and then she would be at the farm stand most of the day on and off. And once in a while she'd get my grandmother or the neighbor to watch the stand while she went and picked more stuff. And next thing you know, it's 6:00 at night, we're shutting the stand down, making dinner. She's making dinner.

([00:55:03](#)):

She took care of us. She was an amazing mom. But then she would do her book work until midnight. So that was every day. That's seven days a week. Finally, she decided, "I'm done doing Sundays," is what she said. I said, "All right, well we'll take over your farm stand on Sundays." We already had a farm stand that I rented in Stowe at that point, which I think I was at that place maybe 12, 15 years. It was quite a long time from the mid-'90s until, oh, probably around 2008, 10, something like that. So until the lady decided she was selling it, maybe [inaudible 00:55:49]

Andy Chamberlain ([00:55:49](#)):

Growing your family's veggies or were you doing your own thing separate from your mom?

Tony Lehouillier ([00:55:53](#)):

Oh, from '95 on, I had my own farm. I started selling to Deep Root Cooperative, did a couple farmer's markets, sold to a few restaurants, had the farm stand in Stowe, and that was what we did. And then when winter came, we didn't really have storage early on. Eventually we built this washroom so we could heat it, the cooler over here. When I first was in this barn, we called it tent city because we literally put some 2x10s up, threw old greenhouse plastic over it so we could heat it enough in the winter. We sometimes would have to run heat for three or four hours just to thaw out the brush washer when we first started.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:56:52](#)):

I remember something about we've had a couple of people, well Heather's been here for 29 years. She's like-

Tony Lehouillier ([00:56:59](#)):

28 years.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:57:00](#)):

28 years. She's partially retired, but we keep begging her to come back, but she has her own art business too. But she's told me stories about how their feet would be frozen on the floor back in the day.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:57:16](#)):

There was one year... So when I was a kid, you see right here where this little piece of concrete is?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:57:24](#)):

Yeah.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:57:24](#)):

This is where we'd feed the animals. So there was a bunker here, and there was even the silos right out here next to the barn, and there was an unloader coming in here, and sometimes it would go into this trough. But we took this out, our first cooler was right next to this. It was right here to that wall with these type of panels, leaking air, freezing up, you name it. It was challenging to say the least.

([00:57:58](#)):

And you used to be able to drive in that big door and drive right out this way. Because that's how the flow would work for the mixer wagon when it was [inaudible 00:58:10] So we had left that and eventually I had to put more money into this place and I insulated the roof here. We put a false roof in, built that cooler, where the milking parlor was we filled it in, we put concrete over it, just did all the little things. So we ended up with that cooler becoming two coolers. So we've got that cooler right there is like a 30 by 32 or something. And then there's a little 18 by 30-something foot room where the milking parlor was.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:58:47](#)):

And we got another one.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:58:48](#)):

Yep. And then later on we built another one. We started growing more potatoes and I wanted to have another room, which I still have not even fixed that compressor over there. I'm sure, I am sure you're looking at another \$5,000 right there, easily.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:59:05](#)):

We got married in here too.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:59:08](#)):

Oh, nice.

Joie Lehouillier ([00:59:08](#)):

Yeah, it was nice. We did a lot of improvements.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:59:08](#)):

Yep, we put another false ceiling in and we put Remy, new Remy and we draped the Remy so it looked like this really cool ceiling from basically where that wall is that way. So anyway...

Joie Lehouillier ([00:59:23](#)):

It actually looked really nice. The caterer was back here.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:59:25](#)):

Yep.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:59:26](#)):

Nice.

Tony Lehouillier ([00:59:30](#)):

It's quite a trip through time. As a farmer, you shouldn't expect that you're going to be the rich guy in town. So all you really want is just to be able to go to work, work hard, try to be efficient, look at what you're doing from time to time to make sure you are efficient, make enough money to pay everybody, pay your bills and just survive. You don't have to be doing anything crazy, but-

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:08](#)):

Maybe a vacation in the winter. We won't be doing that for a little while, but that's the goal. Got a couple of kids that want to go to college.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:18](#)):

Did you get to escape a few times before flooding?

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:20](#)):

Yes.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:21](#)):

Good.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:23](#)):

Yeah, we like going to tropical places. Jamaica.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:28](#)):

Catch a little more sunshine?

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:29](#)):

Yeah, we don't-

Tony Lehouillier ([01:00:31](#)):

We visited Jamaica. It was-

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:32](#)):

... we don't see the beach in the winter.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:34](#)):

That's cool.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:35](#)):

In the summer, so...

Tony Lehouillier ([01:00:35](#)):

So we got to see more than what most people would ever see.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:39](#)):

Yeah. Right.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:40](#)):

Yeah, because we saw the real.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:00:41](#)):

Right, because we were at their houses.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:43](#)):

Yeah, that's amazing.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:00:44](#)):

Hanging out with their family in their community. It's a different world.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:51](#)):

Getting the culture from the other direction.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:00:53](#)):

Yeah. We really want to go back.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:00:53](#)):

I bet.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:00:56](#)):

If you're going to be a farmer, you have to have a really thick skin. Little things can't bother you. I mean eventually they may bother you no matter how thick your skin is and how much you can take disappointment because there's going to be a lot of disappointment when you talk about the weather, employees not coming to work, or whatever the level of disappointment is that pushes your buttons let's just say. Where we had got to the point where the H-2A workers, we all like hanging out. It's fun. We get more work done with a few people than we could have ever done with the folks that lived around here.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:01:45](#)):

We had one summer we had 50 people come and try it out. We cycled through 50 people.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:01:54](#)):

Holy cow.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:01:55](#)):

Which back then, I guess we were lucky that people even wanted to try it out.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:02:02](#)):

And then now we couldn't find 50 people if we wanted to. But that was really hitting the college up. Everybody knew we needed workers. You have somebody that needs a job, send them down. It's just that most people don't want to feel uncomfortable.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:02:23](#)):

That's a great way to say it.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:02:26](#)):

You're in the wrong place because there's no time that you're going to feel comfortable working an outdoor job. Outdoor job means it's going to rain on you, it's going to get too hot-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:02:37](#)):

Yeah, those days are few and far between. It's only an hour or two that's nice.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:02:40](#)):

Yeah, and it's beautiful out and it's 65, well good for you. This is one of the glory days. But generally you're going to be sweating because if you're not sweating, you're probably just not getting much done. You just start in on whatever the project is, you put your head down, and you go.

([01:02:58](#)):

And you're trying to be efficient. And with us, it's more fun to make it a game where, "Who's the fastest?" It can be fun when you're playing around like that. And I can tell you right now, you're not going to get the Jamaican workers to come in last. There's no way that they're going to let you-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:26](#)):

They're competitive?

Joie Lehouillier ([01:03:27](#)):

Very.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:03:27](#)):

... beat you. You're not. If I beat a couple of them, and they know it, they're not going to say a word. There was one time that I outpicked them in kale, one time because it was so cold and they just couldn't do it. And I'm out there, I show up, I go-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:44](#)):

That's your advantage.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:03:44](#)):

... "We got 10 more to go." I'm like, "All right!" And they were like, "We're dying out here freezing to death." And I picked four or five cases quick, and then I'm like, "All right, let's get in the truck because I can't feel my fingers either." But you get through the job.

[\(01:04:05\)](#):

When you're around good workers and you know you're going to have to be goal oriented, you just got to get the order picked, right? We don't have all day to go pick 10 cases. That should be an hour for a couple people.

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:04:21\)](#):

I think it's safe to say that having the H-2A program has made a huge difference in our lives as far as farming, and I don't think we could do it without them anymore.

Andy Chamberlain [\(01:04:37\)](#):

How many of them do you have?

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:04:37\)](#):

Four.

Andy Chamberlain [\(01:04:37\)](#):

Four. How many local crew do you have?

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:04:38\)](#):

So we usually have-

Tony Lehouillier [\(01:04:40\)](#):

We have Dave.

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:04:41\)](#):

Dave and Heather.

Tony Lehouillier [\(01:04:42\)](#):

But Heather's not-

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:04:43\)](#):

She's kind of part time.

Tony Lehouillier [\(01:04:46\)](#):

She has a small business on the side. She's been doing it for 28 years or something. So we can't expect... And you know, her body's breaking down. She can't handle-

Andy Chamberlain [\(01:04:57\)](#):

Understood.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:04:58](#)):

... picking up heavy things and-

Joie Lehouillier ([01:04:59](#)):

We usually tell her we really want her more for her-

Tony Lehouillier ([01:04:59](#)):

Management.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:05:04](#)):

... her brain and her management than her physical work.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:07](#)):

You've learned how to use her strengths and whatnot to your advantage. You're running 30 acres of veg plus sod on a crew of eight people?

Joie Lehouillier ([01:05:21](#)):

Usually we have 14 to 15, not all full time, but 14 or 15 on payroll because that includes the farm stand.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:30](#)):

How much of your production do you not trust now?

Tony Lehouillier ([01:05:34](#)):

Most of it, unfortunately for this farm, we've got the first two fields, I hope it doesn't get into the first two fields. That's going to be the most valuable stuff is in those fields. Because you have to have different soil types for different vegetables, so as you go up on the hills and they become sandier, you can't grow things up there.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:05:57](#)):

Everybody asks us-

Tony Lehouillier ([01:06:00](#)):

Unless I'm going to take clay-

Joie Lehouillier ([01:06:01](#)):

Just move it all.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:06:01](#)):

... literally, I'm going to have to go down into the heavy part of the fields with the excavator, get a dump wagon or something one of these days and hook it to a tractor and just take the muck, throw it in the wagon, bring it to the upper fields, dump it, spread it. That's what I feel like. If I'm going to keep going, I'm going to have to improve the soils and change the soils so that farming can keep continuing because I don't have enough crops that can grow in a sandy silt and not get damaged. You can't grow root crops up there. It's just not even... Every time I do, I just end up with no yield.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:06:42](#)):

So it takes a lifetime to really change the soil profile.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:06:46](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:06:46](#)):

I mean, I was out here taking soil samples right after, I guess, last year's flood and yeah, you had a bulldozer up there just to push some of the debris and the silt to level it.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:06:58](#)):

Yeah, well I had that 50- foot hole, seven feet deep where my whole water line was sitting. It just dropped right into the hole because once the water got to there, it just eroded it. It allowed the water to speed up by the pipe and just ate right down through.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:07:19](#)):

So you had everything destroyed except your house and your family basically. What did you do or how did you cope, aside from thick skin, to put your foot forward again and just what'd you do to keep going?

Tony Lehouillier ([01:07:36](#)):

Just stay positive. Just go and the first thing you come to, just start working on it. Everything's going to have to be changed. Everything's going to have to be replaced. I mean, we first began working on the tractors. The first seven days were changing about 300 gallons of oil out of those. I mean we literally lost 300 gallons of oil to the river. And then we had to take all the watery oil that was in the tractors out. So the hydraulic, the engine oil, sometimes the radiators had to be flushed and dumped. That was my first concern was if I don't have any tractors left, then I've got nothing.

([01:08:31](#)):

And my cousin Rick, who works on people's heavy equipment, he's got a diesel mechanic degree from maybe Wyoming or something like that. He used to go to school out there. He worked on some of the oil rigs in Texas for a while. So I mean, he's an amazing mechanic, and he got me going in the right direction those first five days. And it probably took us two months by the time we actually got into here and we finally got the forklift that sits in here cleaned up and replaced, like I said, lots of electrical parts. So you'll go to start something and it won't start, and then you got to go get your voltage meter and you got to figure out what died. Why doesn't the electricity get over to there anymore?

Joie Lehouillier ([01:09:26](#)):

He's a very goal-oriented person. He just gets up every day and he keeps going.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:09:30](#)):

You can't worry about how long you're doing something. You just try to get something done.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:09:37](#)):

Do you have a good way of strategizing your priorities? Like did you take an hour and think about okay, what should I clean up first? Like focus on the tractors and then the barn? Or did you just throw back your coffee and just get to work, just pick something.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:09:55](#)):

Well, I was lucky because when I walked out the door that morning, it wasn't long before my cousin Rick was there, and he was like, "We've got to do something about these tractors before they're done." Because having that water in there and that rust and corrosion that's going to occur. So we were lucky on a few of them where only a few drops of water came out for whatever reason.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:10:21](#)):

Lots of lists. He had lists and lists and lists and he-

Tony Lehouillier ([01:10:24](#)):

Yeah, I mean you have to make a list every single week because it's so many things. And I'm the multitasker guy, so if I know there's like 20 things on here and maybe I can knock off three or four of them today while I'm... I got to go to the river and open a couple valves or do this, do this, do whatever it is, tighten something that I saw was loose last time and I didn't have the tool when I went by.

([01:10:55](#)):

You just have to keep picking away at it. And after the flood, it was so overwhelming just thinking about how many of these tractors can we get going? What do we do to get there? And without that diesel mechanic here, we probably would've failed there too, but we didn't. So we got the tractors cleaned up, we changed the oil filters, the hydraulic filters, we changed everything. We then took those tractors and we let them run for eight hours. We just let them sit there, just run-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:11:32](#)):

Just burn out any moisture.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:11:34](#)):

Yep, heat it right up. And if it's still running after eight hours, well maybe it'll be okay. But what you found was you hadn't changed the starter and the alternator yet so it was only a matter of a little while before that-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:11:53](#)):

A couple more starts.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:11:55](#)):

... corrosion was going to get in there. And by the end of the fall I had changed all 11 starters. I think almost all the alternators-

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:12:04]

Tony Lehouillier ([01:12:00](#)):

11 starters, I think almost all the alternators and by the next spring I think I had changed all the alternators. And some things it's just one wire that got corroded, and you're cutting wires back, putting new connectors on.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:12:23](#)):

Chasing electrical isn't easy.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:12:26](#)):

And you've got to chase it. And that's why we had to quit on the excavator. We couldn't fix the excavator because the computer itself, I don't even know how many thousands of dollars that would be. Only problem is the excavator that my dad bought, which is the one that we had, the handles were electric where most excavators are hydraulic in the handle. You couldn't move the boom or anything.

([01:12:57](#)):

Track was still working, engine was running fine, didn't have much water in it. It's still a really good parts excavator, but it's not going to ever run. You're never going to do this and dig. You can go back in that type of machine and there's some relays that they put them in a row and you just have to energize the relay. Then the bucket goes up, you're like, "Hey, that's the bucket. That's the whatever, the boom, that's the bucket."

([01:13:27](#)):

You figure out from those relays what it is. We're able to move it out of the way for the winter because at one point we literally dragged it with the dozer right up here, we were like, "This thing isn't going to work." There was only a tiny bit of the boom sticking out and I brought it up from the river thinking, "There's no way it's going to flood." And then the whole thing was still underwater except for the triangle of the mast, was the only thing sticking out at the top. I was just like, "What is going on, man? This is just so unbelievable for it to be this bad." I'm still completely tweaked out over the flooding and every time it rains I can't even hardly function.

([01:14:15](#)):

I'm just like, "Oh my God, what are we going to lose today?" I started in 1995 and that's when the biggest flood in the history of my life occurred. There was not even quite a foot of water in there in 1995. You think about that, four more feet of water came this time with the same amount of rainfall within whatever, half an inch.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:54](#)):

Do you feel like you have your feet underneath you and you're ready to go next season, or are you really just still unburying?

Tony Lehouillier ([01:15:06](#)):

I think once we can get our financial stuff figured out so we can get another loan, we got to get a loan and we can't pay our line of credit off.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:15:19](#)):

Have you always had a loan?

Tony Lehouillier ([01:15:21](#)):

We've always had hundred thousand dollars line of credit to start each season, and that 29 years went by and we had gotten to the point where we didn't totally rely on it, but now we are relying on it 110% again. And like I said, last year we couldn't do it with a hundred thousand because we are already 30,000 into our line of credit before the season began.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:15:50](#)):

You're operating budgets a lot more than that. That's just the very startup.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:15:56](#)):

There's flipping the fertilizer in the barn every day with a fan blowing on it. There's fertilizer right there, right by the excavator, that's just pallets and we're trying to find uses for it.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:16:12](#)):

Working with FarmFirst to help us with how do we negotiate, what's the best way to move forward? Financially, we've paid all, we pay our bills. We are still economically sound.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:16:30](#)):

Minus the line of credit.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:16:34](#)):

We have a great credit rating, all that stuff, but we need the next couple, next two or three years, five years to go well, no more floods. And we'd like to do more agritourism. We started it this year. We'll keep trying to focus on doing that. People want to come on the farm, they want to walk it. And we want to give them an opportunity to do that safely, if you know all of... I can't think of all the different things that we have to do now, but our food safety and all of that, I'm going to keep trying. Some day, I want to get to Farmstand and Sod. That's it. Just the Farmstand and just the Sod.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:17:21](#)):

There are so many challenges to just be a farmer and the first five years you're just running by the seat of your pants. You think you know something, but guess what? You don't know much of anything. You have to go do it. Have you used that spreader before? Do you know for sure it's putting out that much fertilizer? Did the crop grow really well because you did it perfectly or was there some ups and downs this year? Then you're trying to improve the next year, and that's what you do as a farmer. You have to continuously improve, continuously understand what's going on. You can't do enough soil tests. You can't have enough paperwork done because without a record, you will not figure it out. And that's the one good thing about NOFA that I've probably complained about a few times is the fact that you have a lot of record-keeping because at least it gives you a record of your failures and your successes. You could say, "I guess we didn't do that much that year."

Andy Chamberlain ([01:18:35](#)):

Just a few more numbers to reflect back on.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:18:40](#)):

Just figuring things out and understanding your soil and your soil is changing all the time. When I was buying chicken compost early on in those first years, and then Heather Darby said, "You can't do that.

That's too much phosphorus going on the land for the amount that your crops taking up." And I was like, "And my yields are going down. I'm putting too much fertilizer on. My yields are going down because my organic matter is dropping 0.1 every two years with 10 tons of compost going on. You're going to have to figure out a new way of stabilizing your soil, covercropping more, intercropping something. You got to come up with something."

Andy Chamberlain ([01:19:32](#)):

Out of your 29 years of wisdom, what's some key advice you'd give to a new grower just starting out now?

Tony Lehouillier ([01:19:44](#)):

First thing I would do is go work on that farm for about three years. That's usually about the time when I could say that an employee that really wants to do it is starting to grasp the concepts and starting to become a bit more efficient because you're going to fail if you don't even know how to deal with picking and planting. You got to go to the farm and you've got to learn a few of the basics.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:20:17](#)):

Careful.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:20:18](#)):

And then the whole science of it could take you the rest of your life to figure out, but you then have at least a beginning. When I first started, I only had the knowledge of my partner who worked at David Marchand's.

([01:20:36](#)):

And I was learning through his experience at the farm down there. There's so many things for that person to have to learn. First, it's just going through the motions, being an employee, understanding how to be a good employee, also be capable. Don't be rigid in your thinking. Work with people, use different people's ideas. Keep an open mind. See different systems and learn to work with different ideas too, because we all think we know a lot and we do know quite a bit, but there's always another idea out there that should be considered and you can run through it with people and say, "That's a great idea. We should have been doing that before," or, "We're forgetting that we have two other steps that we have to do before we could do this that way."

Joie Lehouillier ([01:21:50](#)):

Take lots of notes. I'm really grateful when I look back on photos, when we look back on photos and I see that in 2012 we were charging \$ 2 a bunch for beats and then like, "Wow, we went up 50 cents in the last 10 years." Keeping good records it's helpful.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:22:11](#)):

Photos too.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:22:12](#)):

Yeah. Lots of photos. They do help.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:22:16](#)):

Also, helpful to reflect back on how far you've come.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:22:16](#)):

Exactly.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:22:18](#)):

I was looking at some photos of our farm just from 2018 and I was like, "Wow, not only did we move this around and that around, but that tree's gone," or, "This barn's improved," or, "That equipment is new," and it's like, "Things are moving." Life goes forward and it's always fun to reflect on and feel good about that too.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:22:41](#)):

New farmers, they should go to the tech center. Before they want to be a farmer, they should make sure that they understand mechanical skills, carpentry skills, plumbing, electrical, everything that they can learn. You can't know enough. If you're going to run a farm if you can't afford to have the mechanic over at your place every week.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:23:07](#)):

But most people have to have that.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:23:09](#)):

You've got to know how to weld. You've got to know how to do so many things.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:23:15](#)):

It takes a long time to learn all those skills.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:23:19](#)):

It does.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:23:19](#)):

And not everybody's going to be at the scale that we are at. I hear that all the time, "We don't want to be at the scale you're at." I'm like, "I understand."

Tony Lehouillier ([01:23:27](#)):

But if you have a tractor, you have to understand what to do. You can't just let it completely fall apart because you don't want to do the maintenance. You have to keep understanding what you're doing. And if you're going to get to a scale where you have tractors or you have greenhouses, soon as you have a greenhouse, you needed carpentry skills, electrical skills, plumbing skills. You can't put the greenhouse up. If you understand triangles, you can probably set the frame up, but if you don't understand triangles and you don't understand how to lay out your greenhouse, you can't even put your greenhouse up.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:23:27](#)):

Take geometry.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:23:27](#)):

Pay attention in school, kids.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:24:10](#)):

You'll be out there going, "Why does it look like a parallelogram now that we put this up?" Because you didn't get your hypotenuse right or whatever. There's so many things that you might just take for granted depending on the person and how many people have gone and put the house foundation in. I had never put a house foundation in, but I learned with help from people that were in carpentry, and that's how you are able to continuously understand it better and hopefully make the right decision at the right time to be capable of succeeding. I'll say a lot of times, they're like, "I don't know if this is good enough." And I'll just throw out that old saying, "Can't see it from my house." And if it doesn't really matter, it doesn't really matter. We don't care if you put some paint onto the red paint, the white paint's on the red paint, we couldn't care less. At least there's paint up there.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:25:25](#)):

It's a greenhouse or an old barn, and it doesn't matter if it's your Farmstand, you'll take the time to stay in the edges of every board.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:25:33](#)):

But there's just things that make sense and don't make sense, and there's so much to teach a person that I am scared that someone has to learn all this to just succeed in farming.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:25:53](#)):

We're glad that we're still able to do it and we're looking forward to making some adjustments so we can continue on.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:26:03](#)):

What are some of the pivots or changes that you might be considering now?

Tony Lehouillier ([01:26:09](#)):

Those are a lot of the things that I think about are-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:26:09](#)):

Infrastructure wise.

Tony Lehouillier ([01:26:13](#)):

How do I make sure my equipment continues working and my materials don't get ruined? Because that's where I lost 29 years of my life right there, all that extra work for all those hundreds and hundreds of dollars per bag on some of these things that we could look at it and say, "We don't have anything." But then if we went into the barn and I had eight pallets, even half pallets of fertilizer in there, you're like, "What?" This all costs quite a bit of money. It's not like you don't have anything.

Joie Lehouillier ([01:26:53](#)):

We're pivoting. We do want to do more agritourism. We want to do more. I'd love to do pick your own flowers in this field that's in between here and there, and we're going to do the sunflower field again. Just trying to do things that maybe are a little less, if you lose a sunflower field to the water, it's better than a couple acres of onions.

[\(01:27:21\)](#):

We're going to pivot that way. And then hopefully Tony's 56 and I'm 52, will be 53, want to spend the next few years just trying to figure out how to get more towards how it's going to be in the next 10 years. But right now, we're still going to be in recovery mode for a while, that's what we'll concentrate on.

Tony Lehouillier [\(01:27:49\)](#):

I feel like farming is in a really bad place right now. That's just how I feel. I just don't see, when you can't find a worker that can make it through 40 hours, they're never running a farm. They can't. You have to be mentally tough. You have to be willing to say, "I'm going to fail, but failing a little bit is just part of the game. I'm going to succeed a lot of places, but I'm not going to succeed everywhere all the time." And not everybody can handle having 50% of their widgets float down the river. They need to know that they can actually do this. Anyway, I'm not going to quit.

Andy Chamberlain [\(01:28:50\)](#):

Thank you. We need farmers like you. We need farmers that have done it for 20, 30 years and know the basics and the not so basics to get food into the wholesale markets.

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:29:07\)](#):

And he's mentored a bunch of them that are doing great, Angus and Holly. Angus, what farm did he start at?

Tony Lehouillier [\(01:29:17\)](#):

Bill Cleland's.

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:29:17\)](#):

But then he was here with us for 10 years before we went off and started our own. And those guys are great and they're doing a great job, and that's something to be really proud of, and Kagan and Elise.

Tony Lehouillier [\(01:29:29\)](#):

Because they've bought another piece of land that we helped. We told the owner that we loved Kagan and Elise and that they would be great stewards of the land, and this lady lost her partner and they needed to sell it, and I was like, "You're selling it to people that are going to work as hard as any person could possibly work, they're not going to give up. They're really athletic people. They're smart. They're going to make it. If anybody can make it, they're going to make it."

Joie Lehouillier [\(01:30:09\)](#):

You've done a great job at teaching those guys and they're both doing great. There's hope. There's definitely hope for the next generation of farmers.

Tony Lehouillier [\(01:30:23\)](#):

We appreciate you doing all this work to help farmers. There's no question that farmers are feeling some stress, it's a beautiful thing to do to get more of the word out, this stuff doesn't just jump into the box by itself. There's so much work. The pricing changes due to the fact that labor costs are constantly going up, if you can find labor at all.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:30:59](#)):

And that was The Farmers Share, I hope you enjoyed this episode hearing from Tony and Joie Lehouillier of Foote Brook Farm. The Farmers Share is supported by a grant offered by the USDA Specialty Crop Block Program from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets. This funding helps to cover some of my time and travel in order to produce this podcast until March of 2026. The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service supports projects that address the needs of US specialty crop growers and strengthens local and regional food systems. I have no doubt that this podcast will meet those needs and help educate growers to support the industry. If you enjoy this show and want to help support its programming, you can make a one-time or reoccurring donation on our website by visiting [thefarmersshare.com/support](http://thefarmersshare.com/support). The show is also supported by the Ag Engineering Program of the University of Vermont Extension.

([01:31:54](#)):

We also receive funding from the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association. The VVBGA is a nonprofit organization funded in 1976 to promote the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of vegetable and berry farming in Vermont. Their membership includes over 400 farms across Vermont and beyond, as well as about 50 businesses and organizations that provide products and services of all types to their members. Benefits to members include access to the VVBGA Listserv to buy, sell plants and equipment, share farming information, and tap the vast experience of our growers, access the community accreditation for produce safety, also known as CAPS. This program is designed for growers by growers to help you easily meet market and regulatory food safety expectations. You can access the VVBGA Soil Health Platform where you can organize all the soil tests and create and store your soil amendment plans and records, access to webinars for growers in the VVBGA Annual meeting, an email subscription to the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Newsletter, camaraderie, enhanced communication and fellowship among commercial.

([01:33:11](#)):

Memberships are on a per farm per calendar year basis, and annual dues this year are \$80. These funds pay for the organization's operating costs and support educational programs and research projects. These funds also support projects that address grower needs around ag engineering, high tunnel production, pest management, pollinators, produce safety, and soil health. Become a member today to be a part of and further support the veg and berry industry.

([01:33:42](#)):

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PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:34:49]