

Jake Guest ([00:00:10](#)):

I'm Jake Guest. My name is actually David Guest, most people don't know that. But for all intents and purposes, I'm Jake Guest. My wife is Liz. We live in Ely, Vermont, which is part of Thetford. We have about 24 acres, and we are semi-retired, I guess you'd say. We only grow a few crops. We have a big garden. We grow cilantro and spinach and some fall carrots. We've been farming for over 40 years. I'm 80 years old, still farming. I'm pretty good shape. I've made it a joke before that most vegetable growers, what they'd really like to grow is grow green manure and cover crops. So, I'm trying to do a lot of that. Anyway, that's who I am.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:01:10](#)):

Today's episode comes to you from Ely, Vermont, where we visit with Jake Guest of Killdeer Farm. Like many of my interviews, we start with the tour around the farm, where we visit his perfectly rectangular fields and sandy soil where he grows carrots, cilantro, and spinach. Jake shares a bit about cover cropping, cultivation, dealing with Oak-leafed Goosefoot. After that, we get out of the 90-degree heat and sit around the kitchen table to learn a little bit more about how he got started farming and what he recommends for new or young farmers facing today's farming challenges.

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

Jake has a long history in the Vermont agricultural space. He helped craft the organic movement and is actively engaged in the Real Organic Project. We ran out of time to really discuss all the avenues his farming life has taken him, and we'll have to revisit with him to share more of this interesting history. But I hope you enjoy this episode of The Farmer's Share. Thanks for listening.

([00:02:03](#)):

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. If this show has impacted you, I'd love to hear it via email or publicly as a review in the podcast app. Just scroll down to the bottom, and that's where you can leave a review right in Apple Podcasts.

([00:02:32](#)):

The Farmer's Share is supported by the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association and the Ag Engineering Program of the University of Vermont Extension. If you enjoy the 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. This visit took place at the tail end of June on a nice 90-degree day. But before it got even hotter, we hopped on his Kubota side-by-side to take a tour of his farm. First stop, next to the cows.

Jake Guest ([00:03:07](#)):

It's really interesting. I've had cows before, but I never had like this little herd. You watch them, the interaction, and I'm getting to understand why people like to have animals. They're kind of fun. They have a whole social thing going on with each other.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:03:27](#)):

You never had animals when you farmed before?

Jake Guest ([00:03:28](#)):

No, awhile back, well, we'll get into that, because my history has some animals.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:03:29](#)):

But, yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:03:33](#)):

This field I'm doing an experiment with, because they don't bring the cows here until early May, and by then it had already grown up a lot. We have four pastures, by the time we rotate it into this pasture, it was huge. I forgot her name, not Jennifer, but there's a woman who's the pasture person in Extension and she told me not to clip the pasture, but I mowed different strips at different times.

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

Oh, yeah. Just to see what it'd do?

Jake Guest ([00:04:13](#)):

To see how it re-grew and whether... Because they like it better when it's young, you know.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:04:18](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Jake Guest ([00:04:19](#)):

Anyway, so this'll stay. I probably won't rotate. I mean, if I was a lot younger, I would rotate the pasture.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:04:19](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:04:31](#)):

But the problem is that there's a lot of... If I'm just growing spinach or anything small like that, there's a lot of grass that goes to seed. And the grass is the one thing... I have a flamer and the flamer doesn't get the grass. So all these fields here, they're fallow right now, but they were spinach.

([00:04:59](#)):

So, the irrigation, I mean, a year like this I'm so fortunate because everybody's, people are... Their ponds are going dry and stuff and we have a couple miles of this five-inch irrigation pipe. Because when we were at the other farm, we rented 11 acres, we grew sweet corn, and we needed it for sweet corn. We pumped out of a big pond. I could have sold it, and I was thinking about selling it. I said I just was too lazy, I didn't get around to it and now, these pipes, you'll see there's risers with guns on them.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:04:59](#)):

Yep.

Jake Guest ([00:05:50](#)):

And we just leave the pipe like this. Sam, my guy who works for me, he's great. He's timed it. He can move all the guns and risers from one setting to another in 45 minutes.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:06:03](#)):

Nice.

Jake Guest ([00:06:04](#)):

He's always telling me, "Yeah. I got it 40 minutes today. I got it." I mean, I wish I could pay him more. He's a sweet guy, too. So, we just have all of these, just setting up. Yesterday I ran three different runs. I mean, I burned through about \$60 of diesel fuel, but the late carrots are going here. These are all stale seed-beds. I'm going to try to get the weeds to germinate.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:06:41](#)):

With the flamer?

Jake Guest ([00:06:42](#)):

And then, flame... Well, a combination of flammers.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:06:45](#)):

Uh-huh.

Jake Guest ([00:06:46](#)):

I ran this one last night for a couple of hours. This is the cover crop of rye here.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:06:51](#)):

Yeah, that's pretty.

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

Yeah. So this is what the irrigation looks like when it's set up and running.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:07:00](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:07:01](#)):

And it'll cover, it goes all the way, way over to the grass. This was a heavy cover crop of rye and vetch, and it was a bitch to get it. I had to mow it, but it was so coarse. I mean, it was so much of it, but it should be really fertile. It had tons of vetch in it, with lots of nodules. So I'm trying to grow our own nitrogen if possible, because we really don't need other things. I also do custom work and I was at Farrell Farm near where our old farm was, and I had to bring a cultipack, I mean a Perfecta. You know what a Perfecta is, right?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:08:00](#)):

Yep.

Jake Guest ([00:08:00](#)):

Yeah. I had to bring that up here, and I figured out how to bring it up without driving it up. But when I get up here, the tractor, the batteries... I spent about an hour trying to jump the tractor to get it off the fucking trailer.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:08:16](#)):

Oh, jeez.

Jake Guest ([00:08:17](#)):

That's why everything's lined up here, trying to get it off. Originally, this strip right here, originally was a buffer strip for organic certification. You have to have a 50-foot buffer and so this was organic, but down there it was all corn. We used to grow sweet corn, so I had to wait three years. So that's why the buffer's here, but it's a nice place to put all the equipment and stuff.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:08:46](#)):

So you did the corn conventionally?

Jake Guest ([00:08:49](#)):

Yeah, yes, that's the thing. Yeah, the corn was not, I never... We were selling 30 bushels of corn a day every day, all summer long. Plus we transplanted a whole bunch of it, and a whole bunch of it was on row covers and plastic. It was on clear plastic, and so it had to have an herbicide. I was able to figure out how to spray it for worms using a combination of Entrust and DiPel. I got it figured out how to do it organically and the fertilizer was a mix. Some of it was hen manure, but there was also starter fertilizer, regular starter fertilizer.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:09:35](#)):

Yep, yep.

Jake Guest ([00:09:35](#)):

So I was able to sell the corn and tell people it didn't have any neonics in the seed. In fact, I found a source of some old tree seed laws Ag. Brad laws, you know them?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:09:53](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Jake Guest ([00:09:54](#)):

He had a stash of the old type of seed coating before they had the neonicotinoids, and I think he gave them to me. They had Thiram and things like that. So I was able to tell people, "No, this is not organic, but we don't spray the actual corn with anything that's not organic."

Andy Chamberlin ([00:10:20](#)):

Uh-huh.

Jake Guest ([00:10:21](#)):

So that was, because, I mean, you have an ear of corn and you got to spray it right before it's ready.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:10:28](#)):

Right.

Jake Guest ([00:10:30](#)):

When I was using chemicals to spray it, you could smell a fucking chemical on the corn. So I didn't feel comfortable.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:10:38](#)):

Yeah, that sounds right.

Jake Guest ([00:10:40](#)):

And people wouldn't pay. When we were selling corn, I think the highest was like 75 cents an ear. We'd have to sell for a dollar an ear. That's like we're talking six or seven years ago in order.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:10:54](#)):

Right.

Jake Guest ([00:10:54](#)):

And people wouldn't pay that.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:10:56](#)):

Right.

Jake Guest ([00:10:57](#)):

And they also, you got to spray it for the worms, because people all say, "Oh, I know. I know it has some worms in it, but we understand," and so forth, blah, blah, blah. And then you watch them and they go and they look-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:11:11](#)):

Checking them all? Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:11:12](#)):

Yeah. I mean, people, buyers are liars. So anyway, so what else do you want to see, should we keep going?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:11:22](#)):

How much are you cultivating now?

Jake Guest ([00:11:26](#)):

I would say actually under cultivation, not including pastures, is probably not much more than six or seven acres.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:11:34](#)):

Okay. Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:11:37](#)):

These are, most of them are 50 feet and they're usually eight or nine beds, and they're half an acre.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:11:45](#)):

Okay.

Jake Guest ([00:11:45](#)):

Almost exactly half an acre. They just... Another thing about this farm that, oh God, I'm so lucky. First of all, there's no stones.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:11:53](#)):

It's flat and sandy.

Jake Guest ([00:11:55](#)):

The only stones here are some dairy farmer years ago who had it in their shit when they spread it. So there's no stones. It's Hadley silt loam. What's really nice here, is that it's uniform width.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:12:13](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:12:14](#)):

So when you move pipe, we used to always have a problem back at the old farm because the fields weren't uniform. So you'd be in a panic some afternoon, you'd pick up the pipe and you'd bring it to some other place and you'd leave a few pieces where it came out of. Then have rainy weather for two weeks and next thing you know, my mother was the word-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:12:14](#)):

Scattered.

Jake Guest ([00:12:14](#)):

Somebody runs it over.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:12:14](#)):

Uh-huh.

Jake Guest ([00:12:43](#)):

So, here it's all 520 feet. Everything is uniform. I've been figuring out for Becky with her metering and stuff for water. I've been figuring out exactly how many hours and how much water because now I know how much water. We time it. I can time the run of the irrigation, count how many guns are running at a time, and figuring out how many inches we're putting. I mean, really scientifically.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:20](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:13:21](#)):

So we know exactly what we're doing. It's pretty interesting. Sam, the guy who works for me, he's terrific. He's really into this, and we're talking about him taking over the operation anyway.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:37](#)):

Yeah. How old is he?

Jake Guest ([00:13:40](#)):

Let's see, he told me the other day. He's 37.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:44](#)):

Okay. Yep.

Jake Guest ([00:13:46](#)):

How old are you?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:47](#)):

31.

Jake Guest ([00:13:48](#)):

Yeah. Well, he's more your age.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:50](#)):

Yep, yep.

Jake Guest ([00:13:52](#)):

Anyway, so the answer to the first question is, I mean, really it's six acres or something like that. They're all numbered and everything. The other thing is, if you ask any vegetable grower, what they really like to do is grow cover crops.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:53](#)):

Yes.

Jake Guest ([00:14:19](#)):

And green manure crops, right? Because the daily grind of picking vegetables and having... We used to grow, I mean, 40 or 50 different vegetables. I mean, it was ridiculous. We'd grow stuff because we had a farm stand. We'd grow stuff that was a loser money. I mean, it was a loser like scallions. It got to be pretty. And so much labor, it's just ridiculous. But if you have a farm stand, you got to have them.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:14:51](#)):

Right.

Jake Guest ([00:14:53](#)):

So this right here is vetch. Vetch and rye. And it's really, I got to mow it down. I don't care if the rye goes to seed. I mean, some of the seed is probably already viable, but I can't... I wrecked two fields because I let vetch go to seed.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:15:20](#)):

Uh-huh. I know vetch is hard to kill.

Jake Guest ([00:15:22](#)):

Well, it keeps coming back. See, because it doesn't, the seeds stay in the soil.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:15:28](#)):

Okay.

Jake Guest ([00:15:28](#)):

So every year they're turning them up. So I got to really get on it, because they're starting to make pods down there.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:15:37](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:15:38](#)):

And this is another. This was peas planted into oats. So I learned this trick that this is one of these things that other people should know about. I have a drill, a grain drill, and I found that there's a limit. When you plant rye, it doesn't make... Vetch and rye is a beautiful crop for overwintered cover crop. But if you plant vetch and rye together, you got to plant them before at the latest... I mean, nowadays with climate change, it used to be my date was the 17th, just a date that stuck out in my mind. The 17th of September. If you start planting vetch later than that, the vetch sometimes doesn't overwinter.

([00:16:35](#)):

So this field, for instance, was a very late planting of rye, and that's why it's not very tall. But I found out I can take my drill first thing in the spring and go plant peas directly into the rye. And I don't have to cultivate anything. I've got a standard drill. It's not a, what do you call it?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:17:02](#)):

A no-till.

Jake Guest ([00:17:03](#)):

It's not a no-till drill. But I set the setting as strong, the down pressure, as strong as I can. And it basically can... It puts the peas. It doesn't get them all planted and the turkeys get some of them, but it's really, really, you can see it works pretty good. So this, when you ask how many acres, some of these fields, we can get three crops out in the year.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:17:32](#)):

Yeah?

Jake Guest ([00:17:32](#)):

Or more if we plant it in the winter. So this one is a sequence of spinach.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:17:42](#)):

Okay.

Jake Guest ([00:17:46](#)):

I mean, spinach is our main crop. And we had a terrible time with damping off just losing a whole lot of spinach. So I've been planting it really thick. And you can see, just checking. You can see it's way too thick. We've been experimenting with trying to treat the seed. So we have found that we're using root shield and treating the seed with root shield. We also tried making a furrow and then spraying root shield in the furrow.

([00:18:23](#)):

Then we tried with a planter and we tried root shield. This is off-label by the way, but we tried coating the seed in copper, in new cop organic. It's allowed. And we found that apparently it works to prevent this damping off. But the problem is now it's too close together. This is more the way it should be.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:19:06](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:19:07](#)):

But this has got kind of weedy. So the worst, the weed... Boy, if I could tell people, I've been trying to tell everybody I can about this one weed. It's called Oak-leaf Goosefoot, and it is the worst weed. There's hardly any weeds on this farm now and it's the worst fucking... Excuse.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:19:30](#)):

Is it that?

Jake Guest ([00:19:31](#)):

Yeah, it's terrible. It's horrible. It's impossible. It's especially bad for small crops like seeded crops and it just, it spreads it's tiny seed and it just spreads all over. I try to tell people, "If you don't know what Oak-leaf Goosefoot is, you better find out. And if you have it on your farm and you can find it, if you see it in your farm, you should do everything you can to get rid of it, because it is absolutely murder."

([00:20:04](#)):

And flaming doesn't kill it very well. I mean, it's prostate, it's close to the ground, so it's hard to flame it, but it is almost the only weed we have. We just don't have any other weeds. I figure last year, this goosefoot, between loss of sale and the extra labor and the difficulty of picking, I figure we lost... We sold like \$40,000 or \$50,000 worth of spinach and our added expense was probably \$10,000, just because of this weed. Just because of that weed.

([00:20:58](#)):

This is over here. This is one we planted. They're all treated and the trouble is, look at them. I mean, they're way too thick, but we don't have the damping off anymore. So I mean, it's going to be really hard to pick this. I mean, it would be like baby spinach, which we don't sell. We don't, don't sell baby. So you can see some of these are damping off like this here, see? And these still, if they get to this size, they're

home free. But while they're still this size, they damp off. I don't know exactly what it is. And Anne Hazelrigg is... I should try to send her a sample, but I think... You know Charlie Gray? The Grays?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:49](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:21:49](#)):

Well, he is really into mustard as a fumigant and they use it in California. I've tried it and it seems to be... I don't know, I don't think it's worked as a fumigant, but it's a good cover crop. I use [inaudible 00:22:07] composted hen manure as a fertilizer and then I plant the mustard into that after that, and it works really good. So this is more irrigation. This is a smaller pipe, and this is all peas over here. Nice thing about peas is they break down so fast.

([00:22:35](#)):

This is where I flamed over here. And you can see the problem with this goosefoot. It doesn't kill it all. It's really difficult. It's a difficult plant. There's an awful lot of things I wish I'd figured out 20 years ago. See this, this was flamed pretty heavily, but look at this, it's still alive.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:22:54](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:22:55](#)):

And these little guys, like that's dead, but then this size right here, and I flamed. I put some heat to this. I mean, I really flamed it pretty heavy. So I'll probably run a cultivator through here just... So I move. We keep moving.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:23:17](#)):

Before planting [inaudible 00:23:18].

Jake Guest ([00:23:17](#)):

This is going to get tilled under and then planted. But see, with this pipe set up here, aside from moving it a little bit so we can mow, this pipe here will cover this field and over there.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:23:33](#)):

50 feet to each side.

Jake Guest ([00:23:34](#)):

Yeah, it gets each side. The guns, we can actually make them go specific directions. See, this is what the goosefoot looks like when it gets bigger. So it gets like this. This is-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:23:47](#)):

Oh, like a mat.

Jake Guest ([00:23:48](#)):

Yeah. The only good thing about it, it's easy. It pulls up easy. But see, this is galinsoga, but I just don't have trouble with galinsoga. Everybody hates galinsoga, but we have to find some goosefoot that looks [inaudible 00:24:04].

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

Jake Guest ([00:24:00](#)):

But we have to find some goosefoot that looks... And the other thing is grasses, like annual grasses like this, they're hard to get rid of with the flamer because they grow from down below.

([00:24:14](#)):

We also have... I mean, one, it's sort of mono cropping, it's just cilantro and spinach. So one of the things that's really important is pests of any kind in the spinach, because if we lose it, like if it gets down in mildew, we grow a variety which is resistant, but there's also... So whatever there is.

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

And there's also leaf miners, and they make it unsaleable if you get more than a few in it. Or then, Sam, when he wash, he starts having to pick out leaves and stuff. So what we have is, literally the day after he's finished picking one of these beds, we till it up and get rid of... I mean, till it up.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:25:01](#)):

Don't let anything get in there. Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:25:02](#)):

Yeah. And we've been trying to keep track of the cycles and just stay ahead of it. But this spinach, he'll be picking this tomorrow. We got a grant. Or not a grant, we got a loan to buy a little... Did you see that little cooler up there?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:25:22](#)):

No.

Jake Guest ([00:25:24](#)):

We have a little 8 x 8 cooler we bought last year. And the reason we got it was, we make deliveries twice a week, but the deliveries, one day Sam will pick spinach and the next day he'll pick cilantro. And when it's really hot, like it's been, what we had to do is, say he would pick 25 cases of spinach, then by the time he was done, it was late in the afternoon and I would go deliver it. But then the next day he picks cilantro, I have to go deliver the cilantro.

([00:26:04](#)):

Or we'd do some cilantro, some spinach for one co-op, and some for another. But we were splitting it up, so we'd all, instead of doing two a week, we were doing four a week deliveries. And we figured out how much gas we were using and everything. That was a bad...

Andy Chamberlin ([00:26:05](#)):

Wasn't adding up?

Jake Guest ([00:26:21](#)):

The only reason we got this cooler is that we can pick spinach the first day and put it in the cooler.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:26:31](#)):

Then do all deliveries at once day.

Jake Guest ([00:26:33](#)):

I'll do all the deliveries in one day. And that made a huge difference. So this is spinach, and it's got some weeds in it, but it's kind of irregular. But this over here, oh, this is tarping. This year is the first year that I've done tarping. And I'm sure you've seen that a lot.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:26:54](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:26:54](#)):

So these three beds were covered. We had the whole thing covered. And you can see, it really works. And we're going to keep doing this. The next bed, that's, all that is goosefoot.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:27:09](#)):

Oof.

Jake Guest ([00:27:10](#)):

And that's because we had to have access to put the bags on the covers. And then, all the weeds in the next... This is cilantro, but it shouldn't look like this. I mean, it's filled with goosefoot. And well, you can see.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:27:26](#)):

I mean, it's thick. Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:27:27](#)):

I mean, in my opinion, goosefoot, this Oakleaf goosefoot is an existential threat to vegetable growers. I mean, here's a bunch of it right there. But I am going to get out here with a tiller today and till this up.

([00:27:46](#)):

But you can see, if he's out here picking and he picks something like this, he just has to go along and pick it and bunch it. It's really simple. But if it's like this, then he's got to mess around and do... It's got the weeds in it. So automatically, you're adding twice the harvest time, at least, if you can't get this goosefoot under control.

([00:28:16](#)):

So some of them are under control. And some of them aren't. I mean, you can see that's... And we had poor germination too, but it's a tough one. See, here's a new seeding. And I have to cultivate. But you can see over here, I mean, this is the cilantro and here's all this goosefoot coming up. And there's a little bit of galinsoga in there, but galinsoga is not a problem. But when I call, I have baskets. You saw the tractor up there with the baskets in it? I have baskets in the back... I can get really close with the baskets. I mean, really close. And every time I do it, I get closer and closer. And I get some tricks. I go up one side in the morning when the sun is shining, is shining in this way so I can see the row. But I don't go

back the other way. So the baskets will go here, and here, and here, like that. But then that you got to come around. But then this one will be over here. But then, so I make another pass, and the basket, I can watch that side. And I'm really getting good at it.

(00:29:36):

And cilantro, it's related to carrots, so it doesn't have roots here. The roots go down. So you can literally get right next to it with a cultivator. So it's really, I'm learning how to do that. That's another thing I'd tell people is, it's better to be aggressive with cultivating and lose some crop, than it is to be conservative and have to-

Andy Chamberlin (00:30:09):

Lose it to weeds.

Jake Guest (00:30:09):

And have to deal with the weeds. So it's a trade-off. But this hasn't been flamed. It's only been flamed once, but you can see, anyway.

Andy Chamberlin (00:30:22):

Yep.

Jake Guest (00:30:23):

So this is their property right here. And I used to, when they first came here, I used to use... This, they had to build this mound because the floodplain.

(00:30:36):

So when I first came here, I used this field, this whole field here. And this is absolutely the best soil and the best location in the whole farm. And it's really too bad. They decided they wanted to have these fruit trees, and they had sheep. So they built all this, they've got a lot of money. They built a sheep fence. And now they realize it's getting too much of the [inaudible 00:31:06].

[NEW_PARAGRAPH]So this is our main line down here.

Andy Chamberlin (00:30:36):

Oh, yep, yep.

Jake Guest (00:31:10):

And I've been experimenting with the flamer, taking and, I'll show you back there, burning then when it's running. But it's full of water.

Andy Chamberlin (00:31:21):

Okay, yep.

Jake Guest (00:31:22):

So it makes sure it doesn't do any damage to the rubber seals or anything. I'm going to try to get it figured out, because I think I can just come through and just keep it flamed and keep it back. So they gave us the right of way. They have a right of way down the road through our property, and they gave us this.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:31:45](#)):

Access to the river?

Jake Guest ([00:31:47](#)):

In fact, we used to have two right-of-ways. And they didn't want us driving all the time through their backyard. So they made a deal. Actually, it was the original owners, they made a deal that they... Because I used to have access to a low place right over there for the pump. But that was my neighbor, the one that I'm not speaking very highly of. And his mother decided that, I told him he couldn't grow any more corn on our property, so I said, "Well, I'll be willing to pay, rent the space for the pump." And she said, "Well, how much is that corn worth?" So she wanted a thousand dollars, or \$1,500 a year or something. I don't know. I said, "The hell with it."

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

So anyway, long story short, these people, they wanted to figure out how to buy me out with the right of way on that side of the property, because it was on both sides like this. So they agreed to pay for the construction of this site right here. And in exchange for me giving up the right-of-way beyond when it came down to them.

([00:33:08](#)):

But this is...

Andy Chamberlin ([00:33:08](#)):

This is great.

Jake Guest ([00:33:10](#)):

Yeah, this is another thing that... I mean, this is a gift.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:33:17](#)):

It's like a loading dock almost.

Jake Guest ([00:33:20](#)):

Yeah. Well the thing about this is, this is above the dam, above the Wilder Dam. So this water never goes down. They legally can't lower it more than three, two and a half feet. So we always have water. And two years ago, and this year probably, when everybody, all the vegetable growers, everybody was hurting for water, this was... We were...

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

And oh, when it floods, it doesn't flood either, because the dam, when they have it flood, they try to let as much water as possible so that they can speed up the evacuation of water from the Connecticut River Valley. So during a flood, this is, water is screaming by here, but doesn't, it's never come. It came a couple times up to here.

([00:34:15](#)):

But if you go up to the Grays at Newberry, it came up this high, because there's friction in the bottom of the riverbed. So the water keeps trying to move, but it's got friction.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:34:29](#)):

There's a bit of a delay.

Jake Guest ([00:34:30](#)):

So this is great. We just hook this thing up and crank it up. I've been really, one of the things about that, the weeds, is it's much more important that I clean my equipment.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:34:46](#)):

From the weeds?

Jake Guest ([00:34:47](#)):

Because of the weed seed.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:34:49](#)):

Okay.

Jake Guest ([00:34:49](#)):

I mean, that goosefoot is so small that it gets on your shoes. And so this was actually a new pump just a few years ago. But it's great, I mean it's surreal. And I come down here, this afternoon I'll come down here, you can see what I got here, my soap.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:35:13](#)):

Soap.

Jake Guest ([00:35:14](#)):

I just jump in the river and go. On these hot days, I'll go in sometimes twice a day.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:35:21](#)):

Yeah, well yeah, when it's 90 out, by all means. It's nice and calm here, but it moves enough where it doesn't get all gross.

Jake Guest ([00:35:29](#)):

It's really muddy. But I had a bunch of sand brought in here for, make a little beach. But we were trying to... That palette, we put the palette down and it's stuck in the mud. But it's handy. So this is, I cleared away this little place over here. I cleared the mud away so I can walk out there and go swimming. But I mean, you can imagine on a hot day, how nice it is.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:35:59](#)):

How deep does this river get?

Jake Guest ([00:36:01](#)):

I don't know, it's probably 20 feet at the deepest. I don't know. I mean, it's not moving very fast, because it.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:36:09](#)):

No, yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:36:10](#)):

Well, if you come here at four o'clock in the afternoon-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:36:12](#)):

Yeah, not right now.

Jake Guest ([00:36:14](#)):

And the deal is that the power company, on these really hot days, they get like 10 times the rate for electricity. So they wait until the hottest part of the day, when Hartford and Boston, the whole grid is drawing really heavy for air conditioning, and then they let it out. So if you come here, you can sort of see it moving a little bit out there.

([00:36:43](#)):

If you come here this afternoon, at four o'clock, it'll be just moving really fast down here, because that's when they make the money. They literally make 10 times. It goes by hour to hour. The rate they get paid, it goes up.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:37:03](#)):

Yeah, power companies got a love hot days.

Jake Guest ([00:37:05](#)):

But the other thing about it, they made a deal with the power company to not let the water out before a certain time of day, because they want to have recreational use of the river.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:37:17](#)):

Yeah, makes sense. Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:37:21](#)):

So there's a lot of controversy about the dam. But we had this, it's got stone down here.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:37:30](#)):

Stone in here. Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:37:31](#)):

This is my retirement tractor here, but I kind of hate to use it just to run irrigation. But it's the handiest thing to use.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:37:42](#)):

Yeah, that's a great river access point.

Jake Guest ([00:37:44](#)):

Oh, Jesus. I mean, it's so nice. Just, for me, I go for a swim. It's just nice to come down here, you know?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:37:54](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:37:56](#)):

And in the winter time, oh, I love it in the winter. When it freezes, which it hasn't been doing very much lately, when it freezes, I come down here and I go for long walks on the river.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:06](#)):

Oh, cool.

Jake Guest ([00:38:07](#)):

Yeah, because the ice is this thick and you can walk on it. It's no problem. But climate change, it used to be this river always froze. By a little after Christmas it would ice over, and then until March it was solid ice. And now, it sometimes doesn't freeze at all. Or it freezes... Last year, it froze one night. Everything froze and the next day-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:38](#)):

[inaudible 00:38:38].

Jake Guest ([00:38:38](#)):

... it wasn't. So this is my main tillage thing. I don't know how much longer it's going to last. It keeps working, but if I have to replace it, I almost bought Powers' last year. He had one for sale. I almost bought it, but it was too small. It wasn't as big as that. I used to have three of these high wheels. I wish Kubota would make them again.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:06](#)):

Yeah, I know. They'd sell like hotcakes to these small farmers.

Jake Guest ([00:39:10](#)):

Yeah, well they used to use them, a lot of people got them from Maryland and stuff.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:17](#)):

I was going to say, tobacco growing?

Jake Guest ([00:39:18](#)):

Yeah, tobacco. Because apparently, they can't use herbicides on tobacco.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:24](#)):

Oh.

Jake Guest ([00:39:26](#)):

So all these tobacco farms, in Maryland and all up into Delmar Peninsula, they all had these, and they got them sitting in their barns. And that's when, as soon as people were able to go online, like Pete, Pete's Greens, he scarfs them up.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:44](#)):

Scoop them up, yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:39:44](#)):

He goes down. He went to Alabama to get one. But-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:48](#)):

I know Charlie Gray's got quite the collection too.

Jake Guest ([00:39:50](#)):

Who's that? Oh yeah-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:51](#)):

Gray's got-

Jake Guest ([00:39:51](#)):

... they got 10 of them.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:51](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:39:53](#)):

They got 10. In fact, Kim beat me out for... I was negotiating with this guy from North Carolina.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:01](#)):

Oh, geez.

Jake Guest ([00:40:02](#)):

And she fucking came in. It pissed me... I love Kim. She's been friends for years, but she snuck right in there. She said, "Well, I'll give you cash," and she bought it right out from underneath me. Anyway.

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

But they're amazing. They're so simple.

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

The 245s, I didn't even realize it had a fuel gauge, because the fuel gauge is just a plastic tube on the side. But it's all like, you can't even see it. I never paid any attention to it. And then, when it overheats, you know how you know when it's overheating?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:39](#)):

How?

Jake Guest ([00:40:40](#)):

It's got a whistle. Have you seen it?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:42](#)):

No. Nice.

Jake Guest ([00:40:44](#)):

It's got a whistle that comes out of the thing. And it's got a fucking whistle that'll go off when it's overheating. But I put fuel in that thing, I put four gallons or something like that. It runs forever. It just runs and runs. And it's just... Well, you've seen. You know how popular they are.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:45](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:41:08](#)):

I mean, you can't go to anybody's vegetable farm that doesn't have them. Or they have, at the time when they started being real popular in vegetables, John Deere and a bunch of other people contracted with the Japanese companies to make them, and they sold them. But then by then, the thing is they actually are used so lightly and so little that they last forever. And they're so simple. There's nothing, the tachometer is just straight off the PTO... Anyway. And so, they last forever. And so the market for them went to hell. And Kubota, in their wisdom, just stopped making them all together. And it's too bad, because I swear to God, if they could just get the old dyes and stuff and just make the same tractor.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:05](#)):

Oh, right, right.

Jake Guest ([00:42:06](#)):

I mean, there's no improvement. How can you improve that thing? There's no improvement. It's the only tractor I know of, it got three speeds on the PTO.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:06](#)):

Oh, yeah?

Jake Guest ([00:42:16](#)):

Got three PTO speeds. I never used them, except one and two. But it was designed for running some kind of milling machineries. I don't know what it was for.

([00:42:28](#)):

Okay, I got to show you this. Okay, so I know you guys are into, everybody has these really nice wash stations and everything. This is it.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:38](#)):

That's your wash station?

Jake Guest ([00:42:39](#)):

This is our wash station. This is our high-tech wash station, right? It's got water.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:46](#)):

Hans is really into the low tech solution. So here's an example for him.

Jake Guest ([00:42:50](#)):

Who is?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:51](#)):

Hans. Hans loves the simple stuff.

Jake Guest ([00:42:54](#)):

Well this is like, here's our oxidate, right? And then he double washes. He washes once and then he puts the oxidate, or SaniDate, rather, SaniDate in here. And then everything does right here. And drainage is right here. And the water, I mean, it's just so simple. It works. It works.

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

We did have some, one of those, the tents. But they blow away. We have at least three washing machines, because we always get them for free. I go on our local listserv and I ask if anybody's got a washing machine. This one we got, I think it's this one, they got a brand new double Maytag and they gave me this. And we have two others as backups. And so far, I don't think I've spent more than \$50 on washing machines.

([00:43:57](#)):

And if they crap out, I bring them to the landfill and go get another. We got them stored over in the woods over there. And we don't... This one doesn't have, it's not retrofitted like they have the ones with... It's just, it is what it is. And we just set it at the spin cycle. And you know how much a commercial one costs.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:20](#)):

Yeah.

Jake Guest ([00:44:21](#)):

I mean, it's like thousands of dollars.

([00:44:24](#)):

We bought this cooler from a guy in Barry, who had a little vegetable garden and he was trying to have this farm stand. And he built this, it's a homemade one. But we did the cool-bot because the cool. And the cool-bot he had was not an 8, it was a 12. So it's got a little heft to it. But look at it. I mean, it's 37 degrees in here.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:51](#)):

It's probably 85 today.

Jake Guest ([00:44:53](#)):

Yeah. I mean, sure it uses a lot of electricity, but there's 50 bucks worth of spinach in each one of those things. Although, as it turns out, we're going to be throwing it away.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:45:05](#)):

Oh, man.

Jake Guest ([00:45:05](#)):

Because we got more, but then you can see what [inaudible 00:45:10].

Andy Chamberlin ([00:45:11](#)):

Nice.

[NEW_PARAGRAPH]And that wraps up the field tour. The next segment of the podcast here, I asked Jake just to share a little bit about the real organic project, while we had the opportunity. And then, we step inside and chat around the kitchen table.

Jake Guest ([00:45:25](#)):

Recently, there have been some people who've started this whole project called the Real Organic Project. And they started it because they feel that the USDA Organic, the National Organic Program, and is not living up to the mandate that it was given way back when the organic standards were originally set.

([00:45:57](#)):

And that there's a lot of cheating. There's a lot of this... Hydroponic is considered organic. They're importing a lot of questionably certified material, crops and stuff, feedstock. And the CAFOs, the Confined Animal Feeding Operations, are just ridiculous. Then they call it organic. They're trying to call a dairy farm with 10,000 cows, or 5,000 cows, they call it an organic dairy and they have no access to pasture.

([00:46:35](#)):

So there's a whole bunch of things. And this Real Organic Project is really trying to address that, because it's talking, it's what's in its name, Real Organic Project. And we were really supportive of it. I think it's great. And they're talking about having organic be real, as very clearly, clearly stated in the original act way back in the '90s. And it's not being adhered to. So this is an alternative. And I strongly suggest that people try to get involved in it or at least learn about it.

([00:47:15](#)):

Thanks.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:47:17](#)):

If you'd like to learn more about this program, visit realorganicproject.org. The second half of the show, we learn a little bit about how Jake got started farming. What was his background? What kind of farm did he end up building? And then we get into talking about what it would take to farm, or what does it take to farm, in this day and age, and the advice that he has for new growers.

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

We got a good tour of your farm and I'd like to just learn a little bit more about your farming career. Do you consider yourself retired now?

Jake Guest ([00:47:52](#)):

It's a sensitive subject. Semi-retired.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:47:56](#)):

Okay.

Jake Guest ([00:47:57](#)):

But we grow the cilantro-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:48:00](#)):

Right, right.

Jake Guest ([00:48:01](#)):

... and spinach. But instead of-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:48:03](#)):

Use six, seven acres of-

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

Jake Guest ([00:48:00](#)):

... land row in spinach.

Jake Guest ([00:48:02](#)):

Right. Right. You do six, seven acres of-

Jake Guest ([00:48:04](#)):

But instead of 20 employees, we have one.

Jake Guest ([00:48:07](#)):

Right. How long have you been farming?

Jake Guest ([00:48:10](#)):

I would call farming from the first day that I sold... I was one of the founders of the Norwich Farmers' Market. And the first day, I would say as a commercial farmer, the first day was the day that I brought a bunch of lettuce and stuff into the farmers' market and got like \$300 of cash. That was the beginning. Because I have no farm background. I grew up on-

Speaker 1 ([00:48:41](#)):

Remember, you sold to restaurants, Peter Christian's.

Jake Guest ([00:48:44](#)):

Oh yeah, that's true. Yeah. Before that, we had sold to some restaurants. So I lived on a commune in New Hampshire, in Canaan, New Hampshire, for six years. And we grew most of our own food, and that's the first time that I had any connection to farming. And I think before that, most of my life when I was a kid, we lived near the ocean, both in the winter and the summer. We lived right on the ocean. And

I was really interested in, I thought I was going to be an ichthyologist at one point. And then I was actually, when I went to college, I was aiming to be an oceanographer.

[\(00:49:33\)](#):

So anyway, that was the beginning of... Well, before that, as I say, we sold to some restaurants and stuff. There weren't any farms around. I mean there was literally, there were really no vegetable farms. There were a couple, I call them old guys, I'm sure they were a lot younger than I am now. But there was a couple farms, there was one guy, a couple people in Enfield who had little stands. As far as our age, Paul Harlow had gone into growing because they had a dairy farm. So they went to start to do vegetables, and there was Paul and there was Howard, and there were just a few other. And the Grays, who used to be in Heartland, and then they moved up here.

[\(00:50:26\)](#):

But there were a handful in this valley, in the Upper Valley area. But then there was Mazza and all those people over there. But there wasn't... To tell you the truth, I'm glad I'm not starting now because I mean, there's a lot of competition. There's still a market. Fortunately, people are still wanting to buy fresh vegetables, and the farmer's markets are doing great. But I think there's a limit. And the other thing is, at some point, these young farmers, one of the things I've noticed about some of the younger farmers is they tend not to have kids. And when you talk to them about kids, they say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we're planning to have a family, but right now we are just too busy."

[\(00:51:18\)](#):

I've heard that, and I think there's a point at which you have to make a living doing this. And I'm not sure how much capacity there is for that market. I mean, I'm not sure. Maybe it's not a problem, but it just seems like you can't keep having young farmers starting out. I don't know.

Jake Guest [\(00:51:46\)](#):

So, did you raise a family early on in your farming career?

Jake Guest [\(00:51:50\)](#):

Yeah. Yeah, it was the same time. Yeah, we did, and that was tricky. We had a son and a daughter. And I remember it was just Liz and I pretty much for a while, and we used to have to... We hired a local girl to come over and watch our daughter, who is a baby. Yeah, we were small though. The thing is, some of the people now getting started are buying, like Eli and Valerie, they're buying up a farm that's already in existence. So we were lucky because we were small and it was kind of low-key, so we could raise a family and it worked out. It worked out okay.

Jake Guest [\(00:52:49\)](#):

Versus them who are buying a bigger business to start off with. It's just a lot more.

Jake Guest [\(00:52:53\)](#):

Yeah. Then you're stepping into this thing, this whole big machine that's a big economic machine that's got to produce tens of hundreds of thousands of dollars of money. And then all these people you got to hire and everything. So it's rough. People figure out how to do it. Some people have parents that are nearby. I know some farms where the parents live in the same area, and they spend a lot of time with the kids. Like Edgewater, Ann is pretty much stepped away from doing... Both Poo and Ann have moved. Sometimes it's an issue, but Ray has taken over. And, anyway.

Jake Guest ([00:53:48](#)):

When did you start farming and when did you start full-time farming? Did you have a career before that?

Jake Guest ([00:53:55](#)):

No. Yeah, it's very simple. I grew up in Connecticut until I was 16. I moved to Hanover. My dad was a professor at Dartmouth, and we moved up in 1961. I went to Hanover High School for a year and a half. Graduated in 1962 and then I went to Dartmouth. I got accepted to Dartmouth, and I went for a year and got kicked out because I didn't do the work. I didn't do the work. I never could write papers and stuff like that. So I got kicked out and I went in the Army.

([00:54:42](#)):

I went in the Army for three years and went to Germany, and I got out of the Army before Vietnam was really heated up. But I had a wonderful time. When I was in high school, ironically, ironically, I've had a lucky life. Anyway, ironically, I took German as my high school language. So when I got to Germany, I was in much better shape than all the other Army guys I was with. I wasn't an officer, I was an enlisted medic. I was a medic and I worked in a dispensary.

([00:55:22](#)):

And I went down, I lived in Nuremberg, Germany. It was a medium-sized city, nice social scene. Had a lovely time, spent a lot of time in the countryside, but I never looked at... It was interesting because looking back on it, I never looked at the countryside and the farms in anything like I would look at them now. I didn't see the farms. They were just green stuff and cows and people on tractors. But I never thought, "Well, what are they growing? What is that? Is that hay? How are they harvesting it? Are there potatoes? How come they're growing this tall brassica thing?" Now I would've really paid attention.

([00:56:08](#)):

So I had a great time. I came back, I went back to Dartmouth. No, I got out of the Army and I traveled. I hitchhiked overland all the way through the Near East and the Middle East to Nepal. I hitchhiked and took all kinds of strange transportation and came back and went back to Dartmouth. I'm looking at the time. I got involved in politics, the anti-war stuff, and I got kicked out again. This time was the final kick. It was still, I was in SDS and involved in anti-war stuff. And it was a pretty exciting time, and I didn't make time to study. I sort of regret it, but then I would've had another life. I don't know what that would've been like.

([00:57:02](#)):

So when I got out, we all went to jail. They threw us in jail for 27 days. And when we got out of jail, a bunch of us decided we want to keep being active, the anti-war stuff. So we rented a house and a bunch of us lived together. And we thought we would be like a retreat for people in the cities who were active in anti-war political stuff, but we ended up realizing that it was hard to live together. So we ended up, our biggest thing was to try to figure out how to have a dozen people. So we formed this commune, we bought this land. We got a loan from my parents for \$10,000, which we repaid, to buy a piece of land in Canaan, this old house and no electricity, no running water, no television, no nothing, no telephone.

([00:58:03](#)):

And we fixed it up and we all started living there. And we decided to grow our own food. So we had our own animals. That's what I said about animals. We had beef, a couple of beef cows. We had two milk cows at one point. We made cheese, we made milk and yogurt and all this stuff. We had a great time. It was great. We had a good time. We tried to grow our own food, and that was a challenge. And we found

that there were some local people, mostly people who were older, not our own age, who were actually very... We asked them, "Well, how do you grow this, or how do you grow that? Or how do you do this or that? How do you can things?"

[\(00:58:55\):](#)

And some of those, especially the older people, as soon as they got over the fact that we were these hippies and they realized we weren't such bad people, they were really interested in helping us. So they'd come over and tell us how to plant stuff, and they'd arrange to cut the hay and do some plowing. And really, that's when I got really interested in the farming. One of the people got interested in building, and we added a big part of this structure to the building we had. And he went on to be a world-famous post-and-beam guru.

[\(00:59:31\):](#)

But I got really interested in the farming. And then I made contact with, I started learning about organic farming, and I got to meet, you've heard the name Samuel Kamen before. Well, anyway, Samuel was living down in... no, down in Westminster. And there was Erewhon in Boston and there was Rob Johnson was starting his seed company. And Samuel, we didn't have any cell phones obviously or anything, but there were several communes throughout Vermont and New Hampshire, especially Vermont. And we communicated together. We would visit each other. We had this interaction and we would have these gatherings, kind of gatherings of the tribes or something or whatever, and shared a lot of knowledge.

[\(01:00:33\):](#)

And we started, I mean, it's a whole thing. We started NOFA. I was one of the founders of NOFA. We started the New England People's Co-op, which later became all the co-ops, most of the co-ops in Vermont. And then I wrote the first certification standards, the materials standards for NOFA. And I did it by lamplight at night by reading a bunch of things like Albrecht and the Encyclopedia of Organic Farming and the Rodale, various Rodale publications. And I wrote the standards, the first standards. And then I got into this bulk order of rock phosphate, of colloidal phosphate from Florida. And I organized the shipment and delivery of several, over a course of a few years of several rail car loads of rock phosphate from Florida. And it was all, we paid \$28 a ton.

[\(01:02:07\):](#)

I have these railroad cars spotted at various places all over the state, Barre and up north in Newbury, Newport. And people would come on a certain day and they would get their phosphate. And there was several, 20 tons of phosphate or something. And then we had some other bulk order stuff. We sourced some. And then the commune kind of... Liz and I tried to buy the commune, the land, because people kind of split up, but the people who owned it, there was six people who owned it and they didn't want to sell. So we started looking for land, and we looked all, this was in 1978 or so.

[\(01:03:02\):](#)

So Liz, Liz lived on another commune at the same time, but hers was much more like they had a regular house. Where I lived, we pooled all our money together and we all lived together in one place and we shared everything. And hers was a little more civilized, and she didn't want to come and live at the wooden shoe. It was a little bit much for her. So she stayed there, but she and I finally got together and we stayed... We looked all over the place for land. We looked all over Vermont, we went to Maine. We knew people in MOFGA, you know MOFGA, right? Yeah. We knew people in MOFGA, some of the founders of MOFGA. And we went over there. We looked for land and we finally found... We realized we had a choice. I had a track record of actually growing vegetables and selling them. So when I went to Farmers Home Administration to get a loan, at first, most of them, they didn't want to talk to me. I was just a hippie that had no agricultural training. I didn't have any money. I was just this hippie. And they

figured they weren't going to loan me any money. But I did find this through Farmers Home Administration. They had what they call the limited resource, a limited resource funding. And I found this one guy in Springfield, the Springfield office, who I showed him some figures. I showed him that we were able to sell things. And so we got a loan and we realized, I'll finish up here, but we realized we had a choice.

[\(01:05:11\)](#):

We had the markets already established. I was selling to three or four restaurants in the Upper Valley area. I was selling to the Hanover Co-op. And we realized with the money that we would be able to borrow, we had a choice. We could either buy a small, very modest place right near town or for the same money, we could buy a fairly sizable piece of land, but it would be further away from the area. We found this place in Norwich. And before they would give me a loan, I had leases on a bunch of fields, including the co-op field. So with those leases and with the property, we were able to borrow money to buy the farm. And the rest is... Anyway, that's how the things got started. So you got other questions?

Jake Guest [\(01:06:15\)](#):

Yeah, no.

Jake Guest [\(01:06:16\)](#):

Sorry.

Jake Guest [\(01:06:17\)](#):

No, no need to apologize. It's all interesting. Everybody has a different entry to farming. So to hear that is unique. If you could summarize your farming career, you bought the farm and you just sold it a few years ago, what would you say you did within that timeframe? Or describe the business that you built over that just about 40 years.

Jake Guest [\(01:06:17\)](#):

Oh, there? You mean before?

Jake Guest [\(01:06:17\)](#):

Yeah.

Jake Guest [\(01:06:47\)](#):

Yeah, okay. So we started out small. We started out only selling to some restaurants and to the co-op, and we didn't have any on site. We didn't do any sales on site. After a couple years, we found there was a guy who had built a whole bunch of greenhouses in Norwich, and he had a greenhouse business that didn't last very long. But he had a little building, I guess we built it, that we set up a little farm stand. And that's when we first started having a farm stand. And that was probably in 1980 or something, '81, something like that.

[\(01:07:44\)](#):

And then he went belly up, and so we had to move. We looked around town, okay. We looked around and we found a piece of property that we could rent. And so we rented it for several years and we just built up the farm stand. So we didn't have any... Then we had greenhouses. The first greenhouses were mostly to grow our own plants, plus we had, at least we started with one tomato greenhouse and then we had two. Tomatoes is such a big deal once we got that going. And then we started selling, I can't

remember, Liz would, how we decided. I guess there were other people who were doing something similar. They were selling bedding plants. And like Jack, I think by the Mannix, Jack, I think they were selling bedding plants. We were interested. And then they began to have conferences, New England conferences, and began to see there was a network of people.

[\(01:09:14\)](#):

And it turns out that we followed the model, which is very typical, as you know, of a greenhouse business with bedding plants early on, then strawberries, then sweet corn and vegetables. And that's typical. I mean most vegetable farmers, I don't know most, but you know better than I do, but enough of them have that pattern. They have greenhouse, they sell greenhouse plant, even if it's only starter, vegetable starts. There were several people at that time sort of evolving the same model. But there was this interaction and much of the interaction was facilitated through, I don't know when Vern came on, but before Vern, it was this other guy. I forgot his name, but began to have conferences in the winter.

[\(01:10:18\)](#):

It's those things. You meet somebody and say, "Oh yeah, you're doing that too. Oh yeah, that's what we do. Yeah, well, do you sell greenhouse tomatoes? Do you sell from the stand or do you have from the house? Or how do you, do you pick your own whatever and everything?" There was this people like you actually. I mean they were the prototype of what later became all the people that work with extension and stuff. But that was a way of disseminating information.

[\(01:10:54\)](#):

So we just got bigger and bigger and we got more. We started having H-2A workers. At one point, we had three H-2A workers. We hired a lot of local kids, local high school kids. I don't know, we had a good reputation. We really stressed quality. We wanted our stuff to be good. We decided early on not to try to grow organic bedding plants. I mean, what the hell? You're not going to eat a fuchsia. But, so we tried to use as much beneficials as possible and so forth. But we use standard Peters soluble fertilizers and mixes and stuff. So we never made a... The organic, we did sell organic starts, vegetable starts. We always did that. So anyways, does that give you some answer?

Jake Guest [\(01:11:54\)](#):

It does, yes. What do you wish you had done differently in your farming career?

Jake Guest [\(01:12:01\)](#):

Good question. Okay.

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

Jake Guest [\(01:12:01\)](#):

Good question. Okay. There are several things. One is I wish we had figured out... I don't know, it's hard. We did so many things by luck. It was weird. Like the configuration of our greenhouses. A lot of people that have a greenhouse that, "Oh, this is a beautiful site for a greenhouse," but then they want another greenhouse, but there's no site like it. So, they have the greenhouse over here and we had all the greenhouses lined up. They were in a line and we had enough sense when we put in the electrical system we put in, somebody told me at some point, they said, "What you're trying to do right now, 100 amp service is all you need. But you know what? It's not going to cost you much more to put 200 amp service in. So, why don't you put a big panel? And you'd be surprised how fast you'll fill it up with breakers." And sure enough, that's exactly what happened. We needed that capacity and to have that.

[\(01:13:18\)](#):

So, other things, what I would've done differently. I would've tried to spend more time with my kids and my family, I think. Fortunately, my parents, their grandparents lived in Hanover, so we had a lot of family interaction. And we would go places in the winter with my cousins and my brothers. I had three brothers. But I don't know. Sometimes, I think what would be my life if I was... I was really interested in whales when I was a kid. In fact, when I was in kindergarten, I told the teacher, "I wanted to be a paleontologist," and nobody knew what the hell a paleontologist was. And I was really into animals and outdoors. And I suppose what I really would've maybe liked to spend my life being was like a naturalist or a scientist of some kind. But who knows?

Andy Chamberlin ([01:14:24](#)):

You were just with plants.

Jake Guest ([01:14:26](#)):

Yeah. I know. Yeah. Well, the thing is, and I always thought... I never thought when I was a kid that I would ever be anywhere other than on the ocean. Because I used to go diving. We always had little boats. I went on the marshes. I went duck hunting in the fall. I just was around the water all the time and I thought I'd never be away from the water. And I really liked it. I liked all the animals. I knew about fish, I knew about all the kinds of animals. But then, I ended up doing what I'm doing. But I don't know.

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

I feel like sometimes, I missed out on some things. It seems like there were long stretches of... One thing, I think that, I worked really hard all my life, but I think a lot of times, it was because I felt I had to, because in this business, I could see that people, it's not a 9:00 to 5:00 job and it's like alarm goes off at 3:00 in the morning because the greenhouse heater crapped out. You got to get up and deal with it. But we put in so many... I figured out one time how much I probably was earning an hour. I think it was like \$4 an hour. And so, maybe that's not such a good thing. Maybe we should have been more serious about making sure we made enough money and not choosing things to do just because they were kind of interesting. But also, I don't know, just pay attention to...

Andy Chamberlin ([01:16:14](#)):

What do you think you would've changed? Would you changed up your model or your crops or?

Jake Guest ([01:16:20](#)):

I would've made sure that I had good machinery. And I think I would've paid... Justin Rich, we just visited his farm. Justin really pays attention to machinery. He's really into machinery and I don't know where the money comes from, but he spends a lot of money on machinery. And I think there's a lot to be said for trying to buy new stuff. I wish I had brought more new machinery as soon as I could afford it because it's because to have things break down, to have old, old tractors and it's just not worth it.

[\(01:17:06\)](#):

And I think we should have had figured out a way to have maybe housing for help. I don't know. I don't know. It turned out to be pretty good, but you know what I feel? I honestly feel that we were just lucky a lot. We lucky, we lucky we sold our farm before COVID. If we had had to run that place during COVID, I mean that's a marriage breaker. It would be so stressful. And I think we were so lucky to have this land to come to. This is beautiful river bottom. Look at it. It's like people would die for this.

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

If you were to draw up a farm on a piece of paper, this is what it would look like. Flat, in grids, sandy soils, close to the river that doesn't hardly flood, close to markets.

Jake Guest ([01:18:13](#)):

Yeah, yeah, true. The one we don't have, we don't have the buildings that we could have here.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:18:18](#)):

Yep. Yep. Yeah, you could use another barn.

Jake Guest ([01:18:21](#)):

Yeah. A barn. So, I just think we were lucky. We're just lucky. We're just lucky. I don't know, this is on a personal level, but I had a drinking problem. And in 1987, I stopped drinking. And I always tell people the two best things I ever did in my life was marry Liz and stop drinking. And well, I was farming while I was drinking. Actually, in a way, it made it easier because I'd go out and do stuff that was crazy late at night, doing plowing late at night, stuff like that. And I haven't had any. I don't drink alcohol. I don't mind drugs. Drugs are fine. I don't care about... I took a lot of drugs when I was younger, but alcohol was a problem. And I have seen some farmers who do have a drinking problem. And I think the stress of farming is not helping that. I think people can get in trouble with drinking.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:19:38](#)):

What advice would you give to a beginning farmer now?

Jake Guest ([01:19:43](#)):

I'll give you some advice. I would give some advice that I learned from among other people, Samuel Kaymen. People used to say, "Well, how did you learn about farming?" That's what they say. And, "Did you work on a farm when you were a kid?" "No." I said, "I read a shitload of books." I read a lot of books. I read the old books from the turn of the century, market gardeners who use hand tools, who hauled salt hay from the marsh meadows around Boston and New York and brought them in and brought manure back. And they wrote these books about all kinds of tricks to growing things and compost. And then, I read the Rodale stuff and Albrecht. And I read Soils and Civilization, the nature and property of soils. I never took any soil courses in college or anything like that. But I read a lot. And I think that people say, "Oh, you have to have hands-on experience."

([01:20:52](#)):

Yeah, sure. But there's a lot of information. Well, now, it's different because now, people just go online and get all that stuff. But we used to get all the pamphlets from the USDA had how to raise chickens, how to do this, how to do that. And I'd say this as a joke, but I'm serious about this. Somebody said, "Well, what skill, what's the best skill for a beginning farmer?" And there's no question in my mind. The best skill is how to write grants. And that, I am absolutely serious about that. Like Valerie and Eli, they know how to do that. Right now, there's a lot of money out there if you know how to write up a business plan. I think, so people going to farming should have a business plan.

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

Figure out where you're going to sell stuff. Figure out if you bought a place and have a farm, look at it and look around at people who've been here for 20 years and see what they did and ask them, "What did you do wrong?" "Well, we bought this rocky hill farm because the price was really cheap up in the

mountains. But now, boy, I'm renting a nice river bottom thing, and such and such, and I wish I had bought that land. I could have bought it for \$100 an acre a ton years ago." Look ahead and think, well, where are my kids going to go to school? That was another consideration. That's another thing that the Norwich School system was excellent. My kids had the best. They couldn't have gone to a prep school and got a better education. Because it was a wealthy neighborhood, wealthy community. People are really into education with Dartmouth and everything.

[\(01:22:53\)](#):

And my kids got an excellent education. And you got to think about that. You got this great beautiful piece of land that's way the hell out of middle of nowhere and they got a shitty school system. Well, you don't have any kids, but if you're going to have kids, where are they going to go to school? And are you going to be able to afford to do that? So, that kind of planning and thinking ahead, just really practical stuff. Like where's your water going to come from? What if you tripled your size tomorrow, what would you be missing?

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:23:31\)](#):

That's a good question to frame what it is that you need to do.

Jake Guest [\(01:23:35\)](#):

Yeah. What is it?

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:23:36\)](#):

What would you need to do, 3X?

Jake Guest [\(01:23:39\)](#):

And you should have a good, relatively new loader tractor, that you should have a tractor, which the farm is built around when you're getting started. You should have a good practical, spend the money, get a new tractor, go in debt, but get a tractor that has a loader, that's got enough power, that's a reasonable size. Look around, ask people. Ask people, ask other growers, "What would you do if you were me and you're going to buy a new tractor?" And people, I think that's important.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:24:19\)](#):

Did you go into debt when you were farming?

Jake Guest [\(01:24:21\)](#):

Oh, yeah. We went into debt big time. Oh, yeah. When we first got started, the interest rates when we got started were like 11%. And the only reason we survived is because we got Farmers home, a low interest loan. But thinking ahead. And Vern, people like Vern tell people that all the time. They say, "You've got two greenhouses. Is that enough?" "Yeah, that's enough. It's all we need." Well, what if you needed four greenhouses? Where are they going to go? Where's the electricity coming from? Are you got a place? Can the public come in here if you decide you want to sell stuff from the farm? What's your market looks like? Are you got just one market? Are you just selling to DeGroot or something? Or do you have other options or have you thought about it?

[\(01:25:19\)](#):

I'd say not get too far in debt, but not be afraid of debt. I think it's a mistake to be afraid of getting into debt. If you're going to buy a cheap tractor that's going to break down because you don't want to owe

\$30,000 on a tractor, you think you're going to pay for it with 10,000 cash, maybe that's a bad decision. Plan ahead. You're going to live longer than you think. But I don't know. I have to go back to this. I feel we've been lucky. And Vermont, being in Vermont, I mean Jesus, it's like the infrastructure for vegetable farmers here is so positive. Extension has been terrific. Vern Grubinger is like... God sent Vern Grubinger to Vermont to take care of us vegetable farmers. That's what I think. But Vermont has been terrific, and it's too bad. I had an incident recently. I just have to throw this in. I was sitting next to Anson Tebbetts and he was talking at this meeting we had, and a lot of the discussion was about the bad shape that what they're trying to do with dairy farmers and how many dairy farmers are going out of business. And they were talking about this dairy farmers and some of the maple producers and this and that, but it was all pretty grim, especially with dairy.

[\(01:27:03\)](#):

And they was talking about diversification and some people were having goats and some people were direct-selling milk direct. And for 10 minutes, he was talking and he was negative about the agriculture in Vermont. And I stood up after that and I said, "I have to say, I have some disagreement with what you just said. I'm a vegetable grower and I'm telling you, our industry is booming. We are in good shape." And I said, "You have a dairy farm that spends \$300,000, has \$300,000 worth of expenses in a year, and they're paying for it with a milk check. And most of that is grain. It's grain and veterinary. And it's like big machinery. Vegetable growers are hiring... A medium-sized vegetable farm is hiring like six or seven or 10 local people. All the money is going into the local economy and we're in really good shape. And I'm kind of discouraged that you didn't mention that." I don't know. I probably made an asshole of myself, but I was a little bit offended.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:28:25\)](#):

No, you represented in an industry that, the numbers from the veg revenue in the state is still significantly less than milk. So, everybody's still focused on dairy, but we're not a small player.

Jake Guest [\(01:28:42\)](#):

Yeah. The thing is that the question is not to ask how much money a farm is generating, it's where the money is going.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:28:51\)](#):

The impact on the local economy.

Jake Guest [\(01:28:55\)](#):

The impact. And you can't discount the fact that you're hiring six local people, paying them a reasonable wage, especially young people. And we're healthy. We're a healthy industry, and we're inherently adaptive to climate because it affects everybody. It's true. But you can grow warmer weather crops. You plant your cucumbers a month earlier than you used to in 1980, or you change your irrigation system, or we're more adaptable.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:29:37\)](#):

We've got some tools to deal with it.

Jake Guest [\(01:29:39\)](#):

Yeah, we got the tools to change things around. If you're growing 100 different crops, you kind of got the basis covered.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:29:51](#)):

Right. One other question I wouldn't mind hearing a bit of an answer. I know you could go on all day about this, but what does sustainable farming mean to you?

Jake Guest ([01:30:02](#)):

Good question. That's a tricky question. Sustainable farming means as little inputs as possible, including inputs of trying to figure out how to use the least amount of energy, how to rely on green manure crops and rotational crops for a lot of fertility as much as possible. I don't think it's realistic to eliminate all those things, but I think if you have the land available, to try to treat the soil with a lot of reverence and try to take care of it and think of it... I think of the soil as sort of taking care of animals. Because you have to try to do as much as you can to make use of what you got and not what you have to get to make it work. And oh, I think here's one thing I like to sign my emails is be well, keep busy, have fun. That's my goal. I'm not always there, but be well, keep busy, have fun.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:31:37](#)):

Perfect. That is a great closing sentence. Thanks for coming on the show. Thanks for sharing a bit of your story, and I appreciate the time you were able to give me today.

Jake Guest ([01:31:49](#)):

You're welcome. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed... It made me think about a lot of stuff that I should think about more, I guess.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:32:04](#)):

And that was The Farmer's Share. I hope you enjoyed this episode as we got to know Jake and learn a little bit more about his semi-retired farming career. The Farmer's 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 these podcasts for the next two and a half years. 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. This show also is supported by the Ag Engineering program of the University of Vermont Extension. If you enjoy the 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.

([01:33:02](#)):

We also receive funding from the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association. The VVBGA is a non-profit 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's 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, comradery, enhanced communication and fellowship among commercial growers.

[\(01:34:19\)](#):

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. You can visit thefarmersshare.com to listen to previous interviews or see photos, videos, or links discussed from the conversation. If you don't want to miss the next episode, enter your email address on our website and you'll get a note in your inbox when the next one comes out.

[\(01:35:06\)](#):

The Farmer's Share has a YouTube channel with videos from several of the farm visits. We're also on Instagram, and that's where you can be reminded about the latest episode or see photos from the visit. Lastly, if you're enjoying the show, I'd love it if you could write a review. In Apple Podcasts, just click on the show, scroll down to the bottom, and there, you can leave five stars and a comment to help encourage new listeners to tune in. I'd also encourage you to share this episode with other grower friends or crew who you think would be inspiring for them. Thanks for listening.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:35:45]