

Andrew Knafel ([00:00:09](#)):

My name's Andrew Knafel, and I'm own Clear Brook farm. We're in Shaftsbury, Vermont, which is the southwest corner of the state. I started farming here, our first season was in 1995, and this was our 30th season this year. We grow about 30 acres of mixed veg and small fruit. Sell most of our stuff through our farm stand in the summer, and also in the fall and winter we have CSAs, and we also do a bedding plant business in the spring. We probably have maybe 11 greenhouses of different sizes and shapes, and for different purposes.

([00:00:53](#)):

Yeah, we have a crew of about 25 people in the mid season and half a dozen to a little bit more through the fall, our winter part, that's our size and what we do. And we're certified organic as well.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:01:11](#)):

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.

([00:01:26](#)):

One ask I have for you is if you can leave a comment or write a review. There's a feature enabled right now called fan mail, so you can send a message via text to the podcast right from the 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.

([00:01:47](#)):

One of the latest emails I have received reads, "Now that I'm back at the greenhouse bench, I have been delving into The Farmer's Share. A lot of interesting revelations from the old guard buddies, but also being exposed to a lot of new folks who really seem to have a leg up. That Harrison Bardwell from Western Mass, he is one smart-beyond-his-years dude. Anyways, thanks for doing this. All the best, Pooh."

([00:02:12](#)):

Today's episode comes to you from Shaftsbury, Vermont, where we visit with Andrew Knafel of Clear Brook farm. As he just farmed for his 30th season we reflect on how he grows on about 30 acres and in 11 greenhouses. He markets mixed vegetables and bedding plants, mostly all sold from his retail farm stand. We start off the episode with a look inside a couple of his high tunnels, talk about a large cooler build, and then hang out in the greenhouse during the December rain to reflect on how he got started and learn what sustainable farming means to him through the lens of his farming career.

Andrew Knafel ([00:02:50](#)):

Do you want to go out and look at some winter growing greens?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:02:54](#)):

Sure. Yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:02:54](#)):

Okay. Yeah, let's head out that way.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:02:56](#)):

Yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:02:56](#)):

Yeah, we just had a little bit of snow here, but it's going to be all gone in another day or two, so just like we were supposed to get all this rain.

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

Did you get your berries covered up last week?

Andrew Knafel ([00:03:09](#)):

I did.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:03:09](#)):

Good.

Andrew Knafel ([00:03:09](#)):

I just got them. Yeah, we do round bales, and so it's just one person can do the field. But it's a slow chopper, so it just takes... I mean, this time of year you work four hours, it feels like a full day.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:03:25](#)):

Yeah. Well, when it gets dark at 6:00.

Andrew Knafel ([00:03:29](#)):

Yeah, dark at 4:00.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:03:30](#)):

Yeah, dark in six hours [inaudible 00:03:32].

Andrew Knafel ([00:03:30](#)):

Yeah, right, exactly.

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

No, yeah, you don't have a lot of daylight.

Andrew Knafel ([00:03:33](#)):

Yeah, so it takes over four days to do. I mean, we space our berries far apart, our rows, so it's probably less acreage on some people's place, but we do an acre and a quarter. But it's only eight to 9,000 crowns, but it takes a while. It's slow chopping, and sometimes the chopper will chop a bail really efficiently, and other times it seems like the bail;s sitting in there in a weird way, and it's just forever to get the bail done. Yeah. So it's a good November... Well, later and later now, it's December job.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:04:21](#)):

So you switched round from using one of-

Andrew Knafel ([00:04:24](#)):

Oh, someone gave me that WIC chopper years ago and it's been sitting in the bushes, because that thing was really slow and it was totally inefficient. I know that they have other ones that drop it out the bottom, and their shoot's at the side-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:04:39](#)):

They're similar, yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:04:40](#)):

... and that thing takes forever. But yeah, we used to do it by hand, so it's a lot better than that, I think.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:04:50](#)):

Still like an acre by hand?

Andrew Knafel ([00:04:52](#)):

Yeah, back then we were probably doing three-quarters of an acre.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:04:55](#)):

Yeah, that's a lot.

Andrew Knafel ([00:04:57](#)):

But once we started doing pick your own, we upped our production a little bit, so we're just keeping us... It's a great June crop. Deer fence everywhere.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:05:14](#)):

That's nice.

Andrew Knafel ([00:05:15](#)):

Yeah, nice and not nice.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:05:17](#)):

Yeah?

Andrew Knafel ([00:05:20](#)):

It keeps the deer out and the coyotes in.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:05:25](#)):

Oh.

Andrew Knafel ([00:05:25](#)):

Well, no, the coyotes get in and out too, but coyotes love sweet corn.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:05:32](#)):

Really?

Andrew Knafel ([00:05:32](#)):

Yeah. They're like our worst sweet corn pest.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:05:37](#)):

I've not heard of coyotes being an issue.

Andrew Knafel ([00:05:39](#)):

Oh yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:05:40](#)):

Coons and bears get into ours.

Andrew Knafel ([00:05:42](#)):

Oh, no. Coyotes are, they're the worst. And we have raccoons, but when the coyotes discover a block, they'll just shred it. The only thing about them is you'll have lots of blocks in one field. They'll find one block and they'll just sit in that whole block the entire time. So even though you've moved on, they're still stuck back there, which is good, but yeah, they can do a lot of damage. But we had a bear last year get in the deer fence that did some damage, and there's always raccoons and skunks. There's always a lot of stuff.

([00:06:21](#)):

So this house, we're doing a winter CSA like most people, or not most, but a lot of people. So this house, this year was so nice outside we haven't really been in here. We just picked some beet greens and I think some arugula out of here. But starting this week, we'll get into this house pretty much and start using some of these crops. But it was such an amazing fall that there wasn't much need of this house.

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

Yeah. Boy, this is nice.

Andrew Knafel ([00:06:57](#)):

Yeah, I love this red mustard. The customers don't love it, but I love to eat it, so I grow more than we need. I can eat some.

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

Well, I think, yeah, you've got plenty for your own plate.

Andrew Knafel ([00:07:12](#)):

Yeah. I don't know. I eat a lot of red mustard. This house we put up 10 or 11 years ago, it's a really nice house, and I like the larger size, it holds its temperature. Everything is very slow to change, so it's very consistent environment.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:07:31](#)):

How big is this one?

Andrew Knafel ([00:07:35](#)):

It's 42 by 200.

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

Okay, [inaudible 00:07:37] hard wall?

Andrew Knafel ([00:07:39](#)):

Yeah, it's a hard wall. Yep. Yeah, now the same price, I can get one that's 42 by 96. I priced one out...

Andy Chamberlin ([00:07:50](#)):

If only you knew that 10 years ago.

Andrew Knafel ([00:07:51](#)):

Yeah, exactly. But one thing I really liked about, so our house that we did was we put that polycarbonate in the middle bay between the two ends so that when we're skinning it, we're not skinning with a 200 foot piece of plastic. So we just do hundred footers-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:08:10](#)):

An intentional scene.

Andrew Knafel ([00:08:11](#)):

... and you can climb up on the polycarbonate and we attach a ladder to it, and so it's like a middle... It just makes it so much easier to skin because those really heavy rolls of plastic, that can be... So we could do half the house at a time. Really we do a quarter. But that was a really nice thing we did.

([00:08:35](#)):

And what else? I don't know. We've gone to to the clipper system, and been doing that for maybe 10 years. Well, basically since we started growing in this house, we've been using the clippers and it's good. It's quick to take down. And we probably are not using it the efficient way that it's supposed to be used, but we do what works for us to some degree.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:09:11](#)):

Some people really like that system and some don't.

Andrew Knafel ([00:09:14](#)):

Yeah. We're in the middle.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:09:16](#)):

Yeah. You've got it and it's part of your system.

Andrew Knafel ([00:09:21](#)):

Yeah. I mean, it's great. In many ways it's really great because you get on the wire. And now they make a really long wire, like those there. Those are almost six feet, and so you get your tomatoes or cucumbers on that wire right away, and then it's just really so much easier to use. And instead of using two clips, we'll use three so often, sometimes, and we'll keep one at the bottom once it hits the wire, and then we use the other two to climb. And then sometimes we'll lower it down. We started really lowering a lot of cherry tomatoes this year, and that was great. It made picking so much easier because our wires, when they're up at 11 feet, it's hard for people to reach that. And we don't have a cart and stuff.

[\(00:10:06\)](#):

But the other thing, in here, we used to grow, this would all be geronimo buffalo back in the day. Buffalo, but geronimos and maxifort. But now we do just a couple rows of geronimos and everything's cherry tomatoes, and high looms, but we sell so many cherry tomatoes. We grow rows only halfway, so they're a hundred footers and we have 14 beds in the house, and I'd say seven of those are cherries and two to three are regular reds, and three or four are high looms, but the cherries... And then we have two more plantings of cherries in other houses. So we've really gone to growing a lot of cherry tomatoes. We sell so many.

[\(00:11:04\)](#):

I always think we'll never sell all these. We'll be flats and flats in the tomato room, and then I'll go in there one day, like, "What did people do with the cherry go tomatoes?"

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:11:13\)](#):

Where'd they go?

Andrew Knafel [\(00:11:13\)](#):

And like, "Oh, they sold." I'm like, "Oh."

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:11:15\)](#):

That's phenomenal.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:11:16\)](#):

Yeah, but regular tomatoes, we won't even sell three flats a day, sometimes, which is just like... It used to be that was... Especially when we first started and we grew buffaloes, the tomato tasted so good that people, they were just fanatical about those tomatoes.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:11:37\)](#):

Are you all retail?

Andrew Knafel [\(00:11:39\)](#):

Yeah, we're pretty much all... I mean, we do a tiny bit of wholesale, tiny, and we do a little bit like CSA and food programs to people taking English as a second language class in Manchester. There's a 27, 30 share CSA up there, so people who are here working in a lot of the hotels and restaurants in Manchester, who don't speak English. And so they're taking English as a second language, but they're not getting really good food. So we're, through the Vermont Food Bank partnership, we've been supplying a weekly share for some folks in that class. But basically it's through our farm stand. Yeah, pretty much everything.

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

Wow.

Andrew Knafel ([00:12:40](#)):

Which, it took a while, but our farm stand's pretty busy in the summer. And then we also do a winter CSA. Or a fall. We close it Columbus Day, and then our CSA runs till Christmas, and then we have another one in January and February. Then we start with plants and bedding plants and all that stuff.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:03](#)):

Off and rolling again.

Andrew Knafel ([00:13:04](#)):

Used to be, we'd be done at Halloween, but that was a long time ago. Yeah. Any questions or anything that you have?

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:16](#)):

No, there's a nice tunnel.

Andrew Knafel ([00:13:18](#)):

It's really nice. Yeah. It really grows great crops. I mean, it's amazing the difference. You could start stuff here later than all the little houses we grow in, because it just grows so much faster. And I think because it just keeps a more constant temperature. I think, I don't know why it seems to be, but yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:43](#)):

Are you hand planting everything in here?

Andrew Knafel ([00:13:45](#)):

We direct seed a few things, but we're really pretty much using the paper pot transplanter, which we started three or four years ago. And I love the paper pot. It's one person, Rosie, she seeds them all. And don't take this... This is the bad looking spinach, but because it's over in this edge, I think it got flooded a little. We had a rainstorm come in with the side up.

([00:14:13](#)):

But anyways, yeah, we pretty much do all our greenhouse stuff from transplants. I mean, certain things that are planted further apart, like cucumbers are with a bigger plug, we don't use paper pot. But in the fall, all our greens are pretty much transplanted with it, so we really love that thing.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:14:37](#)):

Nice.

Andrew Knafel ([00:14:41](#)):

But we did, like these mustard, I think I direct seeded those, and there's some cilantro down... No, that cilantro was transplanted, but the arugula was direct seeded also. But pretty much we try and grow as much from transplants now as we can, even in the field. We don't use the paper pot in the field, but we grow mostly transplants. I mean, obviously carrots and some lettuce mix. We do [inaudible 00:15:10].

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

You transplant the commonly transplanted plants.

Andrew Knafel ([00:15:11](#)):

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. You got it. I can show you some other things we've got. We have a couple fields of blueberries, the one over there is our second planting. We planted one in 2009 behind this house, south of here. I would say it's doing okay, but it's just a weed... I didn't manage it well, so it's always just like, it's tough.

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

But this field, the second field, I was really very careful about how we prepared the field for a couple of years, and then on the south field, we were using weed mat and it just didn't work so well for us. But this, we're using mulch and I probably have the crew go through once a month and they'll just weed it, and all the little weeds, and really we're keeping ahead of it. It takes maybe four people go through for an hour and a half, and they'll weed the 10 rows. And then we do that a few times a season and it's just really clean.

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

Manageable.

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

It's really amazing. I'm sure-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:16:30](#)):

Just wood mulch?

Andrew Knafel ([00:16:31](#)):

Just yeah, wood chips. Which yeah, so we rent that mulcher from Owasco, and it cost us four or 500 bucks to rent it and to mulch, what's that? Three quarters of an acre and the other field's three quarters of an acre, so it's like nothing, really. It's so easy and it's such a nice machine. And then we spend a few minutes smoothing it out. Over the old field we're switching back to mulch, to using wood chips. It just seems like it grows better. For us it grows better.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:17:09](#)):

I've found trying to remove old landscape fabric is a terrible chore.

Andrew Knafel ([00:17:13](#)):

It's horrible. Yeah. That's why we only do three beds a spring. Because I couldn't torture them more than three rows and then they wouldn't work for the rest of the year. But luckily I got an awesome crew.

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

That's good.

Andrew Knafel ([00:17:35](#)):

They're gung ho, but I still like to be kind.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:17:38](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Andrew Knafel ([00:17:40](#)):

Yeah, the old landscape mulch, I hate that stuff. We have other houses with stuff growing in them, but this house is the most interesting.

([00:17:51](#)):

We farm this field. This is our home farm, and we started here in 1995 was our first summer growing, and we grew maybe an acre and we had one greenhouse for bedding plants. But now we have a bunch more greenhouses, of course, and we lease a field up the roads, north, that's 15 acres. And we bought another farm that was land-trusted, with a deal with the historical society, I've bought this building and we've got the farmland, and we have about another 30, 35 croppable acres there. We have a total of 45 to 50, but I'd say we only do 28, 30 in veggies every year. And the rest are fallow/cover crops. They all have deer fence because the deer are really bad around here.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:18:44](#)):

Wow, that's a lot of fencing.

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

It was a lot of fencing. But I mean, we couldn't grow past August. There was a couple years I just had to do it because the deer were so... Between the two mountain ranges, so the onyx there. And the Green Mountains are there, and the deer would come down to the valleys and just... I mean, I literally, one night I counted-

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

[inaudible 00:19:05].

Andrew Knafel ([00:19:05](#)):

... 40 deer in this field alone, this three-acre field, and I was just like, "Okay, I'm done."

Andy Chamberlin ([00:19:10](#)):

Yeah, that'll decimate some crops.

Andrew Knafel ([00:19:13](#)):

And they were in... We had electric fence with peanut butter and staggered. No, it didn't work.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:19:18](#)):

Yeah. There's something to be said about solid, permanent fencing.

Andrew Knafel ([00:19:22](#)):

My only comment on that would be leave enough room on the back side outside the fence to mow. We didn't do that on this field, and so it's a real pain because there's definitely a lot of fence maintenance in terms of, well, down here we have a real problem with bittersweet is taking over everything. It's a wicked vine and super invasive, and so probably the crew spends two or three weeks every fall, starting

now in December, we just go through and try and clean off all the fences because it just gets out of control.

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

Even with mowing, some of the fields that we can mow behind have problems. We weren't really paying attention for a year or two, and then it was like, "Oh, we got to deal with this." So now it's just a perennial problem. It's great in many ways, but it definitely isn't like maintenance free, at least for us. I mean, if you don't have bittersweet... Don't buy any bittersweet wreaths for holidays, because someone will throw it out their back door and it'll become a menace.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:20:33\)](#):

What's the downside of having your fence rows get all covered with vines? Just that it creeps into the fields?

Andrew Knafel [\(00:20:40\)](#):

No, well, it can tear the fence down.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:20:41\)](#):

Oh, oh.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:20:42\)](#):

It's so thick, if you're not careful it'll...

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:20:42\)](#):

I see.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:20:45\)](#):

Yeah, it'll just tear... It just adds so much weight. It doesn't-

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:20:49\)](#):

Is that a metal fence or plastic fence?

Andrew Knafel [\(00:20:50\)](#):

It's metal.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:20:51\)](#):

Oh, okay. And it'll... Wow.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:20:53\)](#):

Oh yeah, it'll pull that down.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:20:54\)](#):

Geez.

Andrew Knafel ([00:20:55](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Bittersweet's wicked. If you're not mowing up close, little trees start growing up [inaudible 00:21:04]. It's like nothing is maintenance free. Even if it doesn't move and it doesn't has an engine or anything, it still takes maintenance.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:14](#)):

And nature does take it back.

Andrew Knafel ([00:21:16](#)):

Yeah, oh, totally. Nature's like, "Hey, something to grow on."

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:19](#)):

Yeah, thanks, [inaudible 00:21:20].

Andrew Knafel ([00:21:20](#)):

Totally, exactly. Yeah, I should put hearty kiwis on there, or something. But you can see these vines don't look very much. I mean, this is actually-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:31](#)):

Yeah, not in December, but-

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

... a grapevine here. And grapevine's easy to pull off, but the bittersweet rather, it's a pain.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:44](#)):

How big is your crew?

Andrew Knafel ([00:21:46](#)):

Well, right now we're down to-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:50](#)):

Yeah, generally in the season.

Andrew Knafel ([00:21:52](#)):

But mid summer we have 25 people, because our farm stand is open seven days a week, and so there's all sorts of shifts that go on in there. But I'd say, the farm stands maybe seven or eight of them. And some people are part-time, it's not all full-time. But seven or eight of those folks are farm stand and then probably the rest are doing field. And it's seven days a week, so we need a field crew here every day. And people want two or three days off a week, of course.

([00:22:32](#)):

So between all that, we generally, every day we try and have eight or nine field people. And probably whatever it takes in the farm stands, three or four people. It can be pretty busy, so we at least have three people, once we're set up, through the day. We have chefs and things, like a real job. But for the

farm stand, just between opening and setting it up and then closing it down, it's generally a 10-hour day. We used to have one person would just do that, or two people would just... But now we don't do open to close for the crew. It's just too much. I Mean, my manager does because she's a workaholic who can't stop.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:23:25](#)):

What's a typical shift then? Morning shift and afternoon shift?

Andrew Knafel ([00:23:29](#)):

Yeah, basically, some people come into work till 1:00 or 3:00, and then other people come in around 1:00 and they work till 6:00, when it's all put away. Our farm stand closes at 5:30, and so it takes half an hour to put away. And it's a lot of stuff to move so it's nice to ideally have three people helping put away, otherwise they're here until 6:15, which is just tiring after August. And that's when all the heavy stuff's in the farm stands. Whatever, sometimes it's two people putting away, sometimes it's three.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:24:07](#)):

Mostly putting stuff back in coolers?

Andrew Knafel ([00:24:09](#)):

Yup, back in the cooler, putting all the dry goods back in bins so the mice... We don't have mice, but you never know, you might have a mouse. And so if a mouse happens to wander into the farm stand, we don't want them to see any food so we put most of the dry goods away, and it's just all that kind of stuff.

([00:24:32](#)):

I could show you though, this greenhouse is, we do bedding plants in here, but then we convert it to our fall processing, winter CSA process, instead of, we don't have a pack shed like a lot of people. So in the summer we wash all our produce on the back porch of the farm stand, and then...

Andy Chamberlin ([00:24:54](#)):

Oh yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:24:59](#)):

And then summer, we also have the table washer in here so we can wash peppers and tomatoes, and squash and stuff. But yeah, we cut our greens and we wash them in here. And yeah, it works, it has multiple uses, this greenhouse. But we'll be in here with bedding plants in the spring. This was the first greenhouse I put up, and it's still here. It got pulled out of the ground by a tornado, but got it back in and it's still functioning.

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

I mean, we're not very high-tech in our washing, but it gets it done. We've got these Samic spinners for greens instead of building our own, but they're pretty nice. They're stainless and fairly efficient.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:25:59](#)):

Samic? Samic spinners?

Andrew Knafel ([00:26:00](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, Sammics, whatever the pronounce... Yeah.

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

It always surprises me how many farms doing 30 acres of veg hardly have much wash back space. Yeah, we'll just throw some equipment in the back deck or in the end of a greenhouse and run with it.

Andrew Knafel ([00:26:21](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, for us, we're not doing wholesale. So we do all that acreage, but it's not like we're harvesting an acre a day and then turn it over. It's like, well, pretty much every day we need... We try not to pick everything every day, but...

Andy Chamberlin ([00:26:39](#)):

But you're going, you're getting a little of this and a little of that-

Andrew Knafel ([00:26:44](#)):

Yeah, so it's like-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:26:44](#)):

... and then it's going out retail, so you're not packing cases and cases.

Andrew Knafel ([00:26:47](#)):

Right. Exactly. I mean, we do have probably the... I don't know, a mixed blessing purchase was an old carrot harvester. And so we grew a few too many... I mean we did that maybe seven years ago, eight years ago. And we grow a lot of carrot, for us, a lot. It's like for anybody else... But we had a lot of carrots this year, so it's nice to have the washer. But we'll harvest, takes about five minutes to harvest a 400 foot row, and it's generally around 650 pounds. And a crew of three or four will pick it up in 20 or 30 minutes and wash it in another hour. And it's just like, that's not bad.

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

I mean, it's all manual. We've put it on a scale. We don't have a scaler or whatever those things are, but it's good enough for us. I mean, I wouldn't want to do much more than what we do, that way. But I think next year, we'll probably... This year just seemed to be a great carrot year, and the yields were great and the quality was really good. It doesn't normally turn out that way, so we have a lot, surprisingly.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:28:11](#)):

I do see a nice trolley system. How do you utilize that? With a hose, I see?

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

Right, we use the hose and then we have the cart. Because it's nice, but I'm not sure the crew... We don't always use the cart when we're moving plants, but we could when we have it, and when we remember. But I think I got it last year, so after 28 years of doing something one way, it's hard to remember, oh yeah, we don't have to carry two or three trays at a time. We could get that trolley and move whatever it is.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:28:47](#)):

[inaudible 00:28:47].

Andrew Knafel ([00:28:47](#)):

But we always figure that out after we've already done it. not to sound-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:28:54](#)):

Fair enough.

Andrew Knafel ([00:28:54](#)):

... totally inept, but that's how it rolls. I'm just trying to think what else... I could show you, we put in a nice walk-in cooler back in early Covid years, and I'll show you that, maybe.

([00:29:15](#)):

This was our 30th season, and I've had people working for me for many, many years. I think Adam's been here, this is his 24th season, and Becca and Brad have worked 20, I think. And then Rosie and Ben have worked 10 years, and Greer, my manager in the stand is I think 13. Those folks run the farm and really keep everything going.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:29:55](#)):

That's super helpful because they know what they're doing when they come back the next year.

Andrew Knafel ([00:30:00](#)):

Oh yeah, not only-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:30:01](#)):

They know the farm.

Andrew Knafel ([00:30:02](#)):

Yeah, they know the farm and they remember things that I forget. And so, "No, we do it this way, Andrew." And I'm like, "Oh, oh, okay." Or they'll develop their own way of doing things, and oftentimes better than what I would think of. And so I'm really super indebted. And there's been all these other people over the years who've worked four, five, six years, who then go on to other things, but those folks really make this place what it is.

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

I would say the thing about having a farm stand is, as most people know, even a CSA, but it becomes like a community. It's an important community resource, and our customers, just like probably most places, they come to count on you as you're the supplier of food for your area and stuff. Then they also start to know all the employees who've been here for so many years, and people don't even know I'm the owner. That's my goal. I'm grateful for all the effort that they put in and contributions that all those folks have made over the years. It's so important for us.

([00:31:16](#)):

My wife doesn't work on the farm, she's an artist. She illustrates and writes kids books. I mean, she does help with perennials and does cut flowers, and designs a new t-shirt every year and does all the art and the farm stand and stuff. But she's not part of the day-to-day operations, and so I rely on all these other folks because it's way more than I'm able to manage and keep track of.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:31:42](#)):

Almost 20 times more than what you could do.

Andrew Knafel ([00:31:45](#)):

Exactly. Yeah, I just want to put that out there. And we hopefully compensate our help well enough that they can... They're still here after all these years, so hopefully they're making enough of a living that-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:31:46](#)):

Yeah, they keep coming back.

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

... that they keep coming back and contributing as much as they do.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:32:08](#)):

Any H-2A or all local?

Andrew Knafel ([00:32:09](#)):

All local.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:32:10](#)):

Yeah, wow.

Andrew Knafel ([00:32:11](#)):

No, I've never had H-2A. And look, some years local, it's a little bit harder to find kids, but it always works out. People show up. I'm always thinking, "Oh my God, what are we going to do for strawberries?" And then five people will apply for a job. Some kids start young and I've had high schoolers.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:32:33](#)):

Right, you're keeping a significant number of your crew.

Andrew Knafel ([00:32:35](#)):

Right, like Adam. I mean, he started in high school and he went and did few other things for a couple of years, but he's like... You know? And same with Brad. They started in high school. We try and foster that vibe. Let me show you just this cooler's been great for us because I was going to do a big wash pack shed with a cooler, and then I decided not on the wash pack because we like to work on the back porch in the summer, because it's outside and it's looking over the pond and stuff.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:33:12](#)):

Still in the shade.

Andrew Knafel ([00:33:13](#)):

It's still in the shade. But the cooler part, for our storage for CSA, we used to store stuff in that little cool truck body out there that's a 10 footer or something, or 14 foot. And we still put onions in there, so then

we put this in and I have to say it was really worth the money. I think we did the whole new barn edition and the cooler for, I think it was about \$70,000. Which seemed like a deal to me. Because the cooler's... I'll show you. It's not super tall, but we can get three bins in there.

(00:33:59):

And the one thing that I really like about this cooler is that, I talked to our refrigeration people and they set it up so that it's not very dehydrating. Everything maintains moisture, and really amazing quality into March. I mean, we still have to peel some cabbage and stuff, but it really has been a great addition for us.

Andy Chamberlin (00:34:24):

This is a beautiful cooler.

Andrew Knafel (00:34:26):

Yeah. And I mean the cooler itself, with the compressors and everything, was 40. I mean it's a lot of money, but on the other hand [inaudible 00:34:36].

Andy Chamberlin (00:34:36):

Yeah. How big is this?

Andrew Knafel (00:34:38):

I think it's 20 by 24, I can't remember. Something like that.

Andy Chamberlin (00:34:42):

It's a pretty good size.

Andrew Knafel (00:34:43):

Yeah. It holds enough stuff. It was a little tight there for a while, but we've been moving a lot of stuff out.

Andy Chamberlin (00:34:52):

What made you decide to put it essentially in a barn, as opposed to just putting a rubber roof on top of the cooler box?

Andrew Knafel (00:35:00):

Just because it's nice to have this space to load into, that's dry. Well, I didn't want to get an outside... I don't know, I just liked the barn idea. It just seemed like it adds a little bit more longevity to the age of the box-

Andy Chamberlin (00:35:00):

For sure.

Andrew Knafel (00:35:17):

... since it's not going to get weathered. And in a sense, the barn is a little bit of a buffer to the outside environment. Especially if it's really cold... We really use this cooler mostly for the winter. And so if it's

really cold, it's not quite as hard to keep from freezing. I don't know, it just seemed like I just didn't... I mean pricing out, I think an outside cooler was probably not as much as putting up the barn, but this also gives us some storage space around the side for all our empty bins when we empty them of produce, we can stick the bins, stack them up around the sides.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:35:57](#)):

And it looks like a barn and not some commercial aluminum box.

Andrew Knafel ([00:36:01](#)):

Right, exactly. That too. I mean it's important. We like to have the aesthetics be nice. And so we'll stack it actually along the side here because we don't like to put the potatoes right from the field into the cold, so we'll store them down this hallway. I like the barn idea.

([00:36:24](#)):

And yeah, we just had our local refrigeration guys do this, and I was pricing one out on my own and going to do one for 28,000. I could've gotten the cooler for 28 and then had the guys put it in for four or five. But then I did some deep research into that cooler, and actually my refrigeration guy said, "Honestly, they put one of that brand of cooler up for another business," not a farm, "And they said they spent so much time on all the parts that weren't included. Ended up costing another six or seven grand for the owners." And so I just let them price out and it just seemed like-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:37:06](#)):

These are the specs you want. It needs to be the size and-

Andrew Knafel ([00:37:09](#)):

Yeah. And then I don't have to second guess anything, they know what they're doing.

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

Yeah, right. That's their day job.

Andrew Knafel ([00:37:14](#)):

There you go. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, exactly. I'm not a savant on coolers, or on anything actually. But all I do know is it was better asking them to figure it out, than me. Yeah, I love the cooler. I like the sliding door, it's nice. Yeah. For us it's enough height, we don't need to stack... I mean, three bins is about all we'd want to do.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:37:45](#)):

You just stack those with the pallet-

Andrew Knafel ([00:37:47](#)):

We have a ForkWorx. Yeah, I [inaudible 00:37:49] it with the forks that's up the road where we-

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

Yeah, like right here in front of the door [inaudible 00:37:54].

Andrew Knafel ([00:37:54](#)):

Yeah, we'll stack them here and then roll the door open and use the pallet jack and slide them in by hand.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:01](#)):

Oh has that got a scale on it?

Andrew Knafel ([00:38:03](#)):

Yeah. They have a replacement scale. Because I just bought this, because I've always... Not always, but I'm selling enough stuff by the pallet that sometimes I just decided for an extra couple hundred bucks it could have a scale. And for a couple hundred more, you can get one that prints. Actually, you just plug a printer into this one. But look, I just need to know, am I really selling 600 pounds or is it really 300 and I'm charging for 600? I just want to know if that's what I'm doing.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:03](#)):

Yeah, you want to be accurate.

Andrew Knafel ([00:38:03](#)):

Exactly. Or if I-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:34](#)):

That's the way it's always been. I always sold it by the bin.

Andrew Knafel ([00:38:37](#)):

Exactly. I mean, we have weighed out bins, but anyways. So yeah, I got the scale on there. And of course it came, the scale was cracked, and we just got this a few weeks ago and they sent us a replacement scale, we just have to pop that out.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:53](#)):

Yeah. I haven't seen too many regular pallet jacks with a scale feature. Nice little upgrade.

Andrew Knafel ([00:39:01](#)):

Yeah, it cost a little bit more money. But yeah, we've gone, of course, like a lot of people, to the plastic macro bins. I like that over the cardboard, and the wood's good if you can find them, but the plastic's nice because they fold up and we can just, like you saw, just store them up down there. Mostly, we get the ones with the drop side-

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

Drop [inaudible 00:39:25]?

Andrew Knafel ([00:39:25](#)):

Yeah, front so we can... Especially when they're stacked up three high, you don't have to pull the whole stack out, you can just drop that down. So be on a ladder... And once again, we're only getting a couple hundred cabbages out at a time, so we're not like-

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

Yeah, you don't need the whole bin.

Andrew Knafel ([00:39:42](#)):

We don't need the whole bin.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:43](#)):

You don't need to pack boxes to access a few at a time either.

Andrew Knafel ([00:39:46](#)):

Exactly.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:47](#)):

I see. Yeah, that's nice.

Andrew Knafel ([00:39:51](#)):

It's an extra 20 or 40 bucks on a bin, but this, I think we got from Nolt's, but I mean lots of people sell them.

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

Yeah. No, it's nice that you can access it without unstacking.

Andrew Knafel ([00:40:04](#)):

Oh yeah. Yeah, it's super. I mean, if you're doing wholesale stuff, it's probably not necessary. And it's nice, it folds out, so you can just... But for us, who like doing, like I said, it's just little bits of everything all the time, it's just nice to be able to have easy access.

([00:40:26](#)):

I mean, one thing, I'm taller than most of my crew, so I realize, when you're short, it's harder to get into the bin. Especially the second stack one. I can reach in [inaudible 00:40:39] near the top, but those guys, yeah, it's just nice to be able to... Little things, like if you think about ergonomic stuff, because the body starts to hurt after doing it for a while.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:55](#)):

[inaudible 00:40:55] you think about things differently when you're, what, 6'2 instead of 5'5?

Andrew Knafel ([00:40:58](#)):

Yeah, I do. Like if I build shelving, it's always like, "Why is it so high?" "Oh, it's just right."

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

It just felt right for you.

Andrew Knafel ([00:41:10](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:10](#)):

Oh wait.

Andrew Knafel ([00:41:12](#)):

Yeah, this mower you were looking at, I'm trying to find a way to mow our fence lines better. I'd say it's not the right thing. It's great. I think that mower is great if you have an electric fence and you're mowing underneath, under a wire.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:30](#)):

Yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:41:30](#)):

It's like-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:31](#)):

Does it have a metal blade or strings on the-

Andrew Knafel ([00:41:32](#)):

It's metal.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:33](#)):

Okay. yeah,

Andrew Knafel ([00:41:33](#)):

And like-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:34](#)):

It's a regular mower head, but it pivots around [inaudible 00:41:38].

Andrew Knafel ([00:41:37](#)):

Yeah, and so it has a spring on it, so it goes around posts and stuff. It just doesn't get close enough for the bittersweet.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:45](#)):

This is a cool little head house connected [inaudible 00:41:48].

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

Right, so in the spring we do a lot of bedding plants, and this is our display greenhouse. So we'll start in here and then we have that whole display area out there that we have also outside plants, but this is specialty annuals and things are in here. We just, last week we had a bulk sale, like a public... We do our CSA every week, but we also do a pre-Thanksgiving sale open to the public. And we also do, a lot of my crew are makers and crafters, and so we have a little craft market, which is really great. But one of the crew makes home greenhouse kits, and so she made that little greenhouse kit.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:29](#)):

Little demo model there.

Andrew Knafel ([00:42:29](#)):

Yeah, the demo. It's sort of a hodgepodge in here now, but we were set up for that last week, and it's pretty fun. The craft makers market thing is, this is only our second year doing it, but the crew really likes it, I think, and customers love it, and see what... Because all these folks have lives outside of here, and so they get to see what they're doing. All the folks who work here, what they do.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:30](#)):

It's like a show and tell.

Andrew Knafel ([00:43:04](#)):

Yeah, and they sell some stuff, they're artists and make jams and, I don't know, all sorts of things, whatever. That's been a new addition that's been fun.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:43:17](#)):

And they don't have a nice retail space, like a open, sunny heated-

Andrew Knafel ([00:43:22](#)):

Yeah, this is perfect.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:43:23](#)):

... display area, yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:43:24](#)):

Yeah, for November, it's great. But yeah, so we sell plants in here in the spring, and also out there, that all gets filled up with plants. We grow a lot ourselves and then we buy in perennials from a couple different suppliers. And we do a few trees and shrubs and fruit trees, but the tree and shrub thing, I just can't seem to get off the ground in this area. I don't know if we don't do a good job bringing the right stuff in, or it's too much competition, or people around here don't quite garden in that way. A lot of people are really into the vegetable and flower gardens, but trees and shrubs, we sell a few, but... So we're recalibrating.

([00:44:06](#)):

My wife, Anne, helps me with the tree and shrub order, and we're recalibrating what we're going to sell this year. Just because we end up selling most of it by the end, but we're watering it for three months and then putting it on sale and then selling it. It's like, I don't think that's really a money making endeavor right there.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:28](#)):

Maybe not the best use of time.

Andrew Knafel ([00:44:30](#)):

Totally.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:31](#)):

Yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:44:31](#)):

Yeah, yeah. But the bedding plant part of our business is doing still a major part in the spring. It's super helpful for us.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:45](#)):

How'd you get started farming? What got you into it?

Andrew Knafel ([00:44:48](#)):

Well, as a kid, I grew up in the suburbs, but I've always been an outside kid. I was always fishing when I was a kid. And then I ended up... A long story, I worked for the Green Mountain Club on the long trail and then ended up working... Thought about farming and ended up, through a circuitous route, ending up at Walker Farm and worked for Jack and Karen in the eighties and early nineties. They're amazing, they're of course, my mentors.

([00:45:24](#)):

So I worked for them for a number of seasons and they're like, "Oh, Andrew, you should really open up a farm stand over near Bennington." I don't know if they didn't want me there anymore. No, I think I ate too much of Karen's cooking and Jack was getting a little bit... He was losing weight, so he needed to get me out of the house. It was a long, circuitous route of a couple of years, but this property was the first property I looked at when I was like, "Oh, I'll drive over to Bennington's."

([00:45:56](#)):

And then I spent two years driving around all over the state and in other parts of the northeast, and I ended up back here because the location's so good. And in the summer, it's just a beautiful spot. And the only building here is our farm stand now, it was an old horse barn. So I spent the first year renovating that with a friend, and we tore the whole barn apart and we did it, had some professional folks come in and cable it together, and pour a cement sill under the... Basically lifted up and pour a small cement sill over the rubble or the stone foundation that stabilized it. And then this guy and I spent over a year really renovating it, putting the porch on, tearing out a second floor, putting a floor in.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:46:48](#)):

Turning it into a farm stand-

Andrew Knafel ([00:46:48](#)):

Turning it into a farm stand.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:46:48](#)):

... from the start, yeah.

Andrew Knafel ([00:46:50](#)):

And growing stuff at the same time, and selling through, just little bits here and there at a little table. But really Jack and Karen really inspired me to try it out. And this land was also conserved through Act

250, so there's actually 50 houses. If you went further down this road, there's I think 50 or 60 lots back here.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:47:14](#)):

Oh wow.

Andrew Knafel ([00:47:14](#)):

So this piece of land is prime ag land, so this was one of the first Act 250 conservation projects. And when they divided up this property, they made them save this field, this, and then across the road we had that field there. And I just like being outside, and I thought I knew a little bit after I left Walker Farm, but I realized I didn't know anything, so I had to start from scratch. And I'm still learning. I know maybe a little bit now.

([00:47:49](#)):

I love growing stuff. And honestly, for me, I really love the retail part of the business, and I love interacting with customers most of the time. I like that direct sale, not even financially, because I'm not sure it's actually, probably... It's probably better to do something like a CSA. But I love a farm stand and I model, similar to Walker Farm in some ways, just bringing in other things to make a one-stop farm stand, and so people can come here and really get most of what they need for a meal. That was a real important part of what I like to do.

([00:48:36](#)):

I like the aesthetics of our farm stand and make it really beautiful every day. And customers seem to respond to that well. And people have been farming for a long time. It's great when the kids and the grandkids of your original customers, are shopping here, that's always a nice sign.

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

Yeah, some consistency in the community.

Andrew Knafel ([00:49:03](#)):

Yep, totally.

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

It's funny, when I was walking around, I was having Walker Farm feelings. There was a certain, I don't know, essence that it smelled like... I don't know if it was the variety of greenhouses or the antique stoves, some of the really old table sort of things that they've got, but just-

Andrew Knafel ([00:49:23](#)):

Yup, that's funny.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:49:25](#)):

Yeah, I got that feeling.

Andrew Knafel ([00:49:27](#)):

I try and match their level, but I'm never quite there. But it's always good to have the horizon that you're heading towards. But it's always receding. It's like John and Karen, they always take it to the next step. I'm like, "Well guys, you're really making it difficult to keep up."

Andy Chamberlin ([00:49:42](#)):

Well, they just celebrated their 50th year when I visited with them last year, so that's almost a whole 'nother lifetime of yours beyond.

Andrew Knafel ([00:49:49](#)):

I know. Right. That's amazing.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:49:51](#)):

So who knows where you could be in another 20 years?

Andrew Knafel ([00:49:54](#)):

Hopefully I'm still walking, harvesting some broccoli [inaudible 00:49:59].

Andy Chamberlin ([00:49:58](#)):

Yeah. What are you excited about in your next year of farming life?

Andrew Knafel ([00:50:05](#)):

That's a good question. This year was a tough year, so I'm trying to reboot. Let's see, in the next year, I mean one thing I'm thinking about a little bit is a little bit of my transition of the farm. And because my son is not going to want to farm, he has other interests, and our son and my wife's... She doesn't farm. So I've been thinking a little bit about what that looks like. And I've been doing a little bit of networking around that, possibly, just starting... Well, I've been starting for three years, but I realized I don't want to start when I'm 65 or 70.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:50:59](#)):

It can take a while.

Andrew Knafel ([00:51:00](#)):

It can take a while, right.

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

It's complicated.

Andrew Knafel ([00:51:02](#)):

Yup, just the transition, finding the right person. Every farm has its own heartbeat and its own rhythm and vibe, and I don't expect someone to come in and do exactly what I'm doing, by any means, but there's certain basic aspects to this farm that I would love to see continue.

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

I don't know what that's going to look like, but I'm really committed to... I want to keep farming for a while, but I also, I'm looking at transitioning some stuff. I wouldn't say that's going to happen next year,

but it's part of what I've been thinking about. And I'm also, next year I'm really interested, we're going to cut back on some things and just fine tune the bottom line by not overproducing. And it's hard with a retail operation because they don't like the wholesale, and I don't have enough stuff to consistently be a wholesaler so it's like, do you want to have it? You're walking that fine line of producing enough, but not overproducing.

[\(00:52:07\)](#):

But there's certain things I could cut back on. And a few things, I really would like to increase, I'd love to get away from any outside cucumber growing, just grow in the greenhouse. And maybe except for picklers, but I've been working at it and we're getting better. But I definitely have had some aphid issues on our greenhouse cukes because we net it for keeping cucumber beetles out, and it's great on that, but I think it keeps beneficials. Out and I keep releasing beneficials, but then I think, "Oh, it's July 8th or 10th, I'm done spending 50 bucks a week on beneficials." And then I'll come in two weeks later and the aphids have exploded, or three weeks later and it's like, "Oh, you really need to keep those beneficials going in an environment like that, I think."

[\(00:52:56\)](#):

And I've done some, I did try growing some banker plants that I learned from Jack and Karen how to do that, but I wasn't as successful in my first year. But I'm going to try again next year and see if we can do that. I am excited to keep learning a little bit more about banker plants. And we've been using beneficial insects for a long time, but just fine tuning that.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:53:24\)](#):

There's always more to learn.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:53:25\)](#):

Yeah. Oh, always. And then also, I've got some other cover crop ideas and things that I'm thinking about how to rotate my crops a little differently. But like I said, it's only December, so I'm re-energizing for next year.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:53:45\)](#):

Right, you're recovering from this year and just starting to get excited for next year. I know the feeling.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:53:50\)](#):

Yeah. I'm going to try and go to the New England Vegetable Conference, give me a little kick in the butt.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:53:54\)](#):

Some inspiration. Yeah, it's a good one.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:53:56\)](#):

Yeah, and some inspiration, and at least make it for one day.

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

What was some of the challenges this last season? Just the wetness?

Andrew Knafel [\(00:54:05\)](#):

For the most part, the difficult part was definitely the weather this year. Luckily we don't flood here really, so I have nothing to complain about. Because we're at the very, like I say, it's the Continental Divide of Bennington County. The field here, all these fields drain north to the Batten Kill, and our field to the south, drains south to the Roaring Branch, or whatever. So we're lucky in that way.

(00:54:37):

I mean, when Irene happened, I went out the next morning, I was like, "Oh, that wasn't so bad." And then people were like, "Oh, turn on the news." And I realized we're fortunate. Our fields aren't super flat, a lot of them, and there's a lot of stones and gravel and stuff, but it's-

Andy Chamberlin (00:54:55):

Yeah, it's not all bad in this case.

Andrew Knafel (00:54:56):

... not all bad. So I mean, in some ways it's just, we also seem to get lots of rain that other people don't get right here because we're so high up in the mountain just to the west there, I think it just drops rain as it comes over, so we can get a little extra water. But some years it's good, but sometimes it gets to a point where... You don't have to be flooded to have effects of too much water.

Andy Chamberlin (00:55:22):

Right, right. Yeah, you'll be saturated.

Andrew Knafel (00:55:25):

Yeah, we're saturated. And this is last year too. Last year was just crazy. But we're learning some things and thinking about intercropping a little more. You saw that box cedar, that old McCormick box cedar that you took a photo of down there in the shed. I definitely seed my roadways now. I mean, I have been for years, but I'm trying to be a little more, not forgetting about it or feeling too busy to do it. Because it makes a huge difference between our blocks of crops, to have a seeded roadway. And we used-

Andy Chamberlin (00:56:00):

What do you seed on a roadway?

Andrew Knafel (00:56:02):

We just use annual rye.

Andy Chamberlin (00:56:03):

Yeah.

Andrew Knafel (00:56:04):

Yep. Just because it's quick to come up and yeah, it just seems like... I mean, we could do clover and those things, but we end up, generally if we're seeding, if we have three or four blocks, we do crops in blocks of eight beds so that my sprayer can... We have a boom sprayer. And even though we're organic, we still spray. And so we have all these roadways and I don't have permanent roadways there, for

whatever reason. Generally when we're done with that field, we'll till the whole field and put a winter cover crop over the whole field. So annual ryes, if it was clover, it would be harder to manage.

[\(00:56:59\)](#):

But we also do other cover crops when we do two or three acre fields of covers. Lately we've been really into using either Japanese millet and mixed with peas and oats to start, or we'll do sorghum, peas and oats, that seems to be our go-to summer. Then we mow off the peas and oats and the millet or the sorghum grows up, and we mow that a couple time... I mean, millet is becoming a little bit of a problem because you have to keep mowing it so it doesn't go to seed, where sorghum, you mow it once or twice and you're good. But with millet, it just seems like it's always ready to go back into seed. And once it goes to seed, it can be a little bit of a problem. It's more economical by the acre, I think, than sorghum, but I think we're going to do more sorghum and a little less millet.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:57:55\)](#):

Yeah. And you mentioned Jack and Karen a few times, do you have any other mentors or people who've been an influence for you?

Andrew Knafel [\(00:58:04\)](#):

Oh yeah. Well locally, I mean, Lisa at Mighty Food Farm and Jamie Snyder at Happenstance Farm, they're like my local go-to people, just with questions or whatever. If we need something, we'll contact each other, and so it's a nice community of local growers.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:58:04\)](#):

That's good.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:58:28\)](#):

And then John Satz, before he passed away, was a very close friend, and we would talk all the time about stuff. And then what I love about Vermont is I can contact any grower and they'll share everything they have, at least I think they will. But people are just so open in this community of growers. And thanks to you and the podcast you're doing, but also just like you can call people up and just learn so much, just amazing growers. I keep learning from so many people. But it is nice, John, Karen, but I said Lisa and Jamie locally, just to have that resource. And I'm so indebted to them for so many things, and ideas, and whatever.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:59:17\)](#):

Yeah, I find that so many farmers that... And well, you mentioned Lisa, I know she's just a few miles down the road, but you all have your own little niche.

Andrew Knafel [\(00:59:26\)](#):

Oh yeah.

Andy Chamberlin [\(00:59:27\)](#):

She's got a huge CSA, you are big on retail, so it's like even though you're neighbors, you're not necessarily competition. And everybody in Vermont is over the hill from another farm, it's just far enough away that it works out pretty good.

Andrew Knafel ([00:59:44](#)):

Yeah, it really does. I think it's one of the great things about Vermont, and I think it's the tide that lifts all boats. I had a friend who went out and started farming in New Mexico, and she was just saying everybody's so secretive out there, and she just wasn't used to it. Whereas here it just... I mean, yeah, I guess some people might still be, but for the most part it's like, I think there's a sense of community and you realize someone's going to help you out too later on. And that's not even doing it for that reason.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:00:20](#)):

Right. [inaudible 01:00:21].

Andrew Knafel ([01:00:23](#)):

And there's also partly Vermont's a great community of customers who support all types of farms. And so even though it's a small population, it really is dedicated to supporting local agriculture.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:00:44](#)):

What advice would you give to your beginning farmer self?

Andrew Knafel ([01:00:51](#)):

Oh boy, gosh. I think I would be a little bit more intentional about where I was going. Partly it's just like there was just so much to do to keep going, and the cash flow wasn't there to have as much help. But I think I would be a little bit more intentional, really like, what do I want my life to look like? And I love doing this, and the farm is the tail that wags the dog in my life, and it's great. But I think I might rethink things in that way.

([01:01:46](#)):

And also, I'd just rethink how I put my infrastructure. I mean, it's fairly good flow, and partly we're on this slight hill, so we have layers of greenhouses as you get up to the next level, so there's certain things that we can't quite control. We just have to go with what's here. But I just would've reorganized maybe a little bit our retail space, like this display house would've been where that barn is, and that barn would be back here so that all the retail space is a little more in front. And I'd rethink my parking because ends up being that we have a lot more cars than sometimes will fit in our parking lot. Which is fine, they park out on that side road, but just little things like that. What else would I say?

([01:02:32](#)):

It's interesting, early on, we tried growing crops for biodiesel because John Williamson was like the southern Vermont biodiesel guru, and then I know Heather was doing it, or what's his name was up north. But we did things like that that weren't really what we do, but it felt like, "Oh, let's try this." And it was just, I think it took away from what our main focus is. It was out of my wheelhouse, so to speak. Then when hemp came around and everybody's like, "Don't you want to grow hemp?" I was just like, "No, I already lost money and wasted my time doing... If everybody makes it on hemp, fantastic." And I was super happy not to have gotten on that boat.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:03:25](#)):

There was plenty of things to experiment with within your realm that you didn't need to go out [inaudible 01:03:32]-

Andrew Knafel ([01:03:32](#)):

Yeah. I just need to figure out how to grow melons better. And actually, what I figured out, the best way to grow melons for me, is not to grow them.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:03:40](#)):

It's to buy them in.

Andrew Knafel ([01:03:41](#)):

Yeah, it's to buy them in, and I just grow watermelons. Because my cantaloupes, I just couldn't grow consistently good tasting ones, and I'm not going to sell to our customers bland cantaloupes. Our watermelons are always good. Anyways, I just stick to what I know, but that would've been my own... Some people love to experiment and do those, and that's great. For me, it causes me too much stress, and I'm not necessarily the most... I don't know, I don't have quite the right brain for that sort of... I just want to do what I know how to do and do it a little bit better every year. I like doing some new things, but within reason.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:04:22](#)):

What did you envision your farm would look like when you started? Did you have a grand plan or did you just think, "I know I want to do some retail veg and maybe some plant starts like Jack did?"

Andrew Knafel ([01:04:33](#)):

Yeah, that's what I thought. Yep. I was 28 and so I didn't know what I know now. And so I think it was a little bit loose... That's what I mean, I wasn't really as intentional. And in '95, there wasn't necessarily the same resources there are now for beginner farmers, and ways to think about, processes to go through to get to a vision, so it was a little bit more like throwing whatever, what is it? Throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what sticks.

([01:05:09](#)):

And luckily the retail worked here, because I wouldn't want to do wholesale, that's such a stressful job. I've done a few years where I tried doing some wholesale in with our retail and I found I just couldn't manage it. I'm not that good of a manager. So I'm always amazed by people who go have a farm stand, 150 acres of vegetables, and they're doing all this stuff. It's like, "Oh my God, how do people do that?" I just don't have that capacity. I'm a little more simple.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:05:46](#)):

It's a whole different thing. It's still growing vegetables, but you're marketing in a whole different way as, like you said, a whole different mindset shift. Different systems to manage.

Andrew Knafel ([01:05:57](#)):

Yeah, exactly. And for me, that's not what rings my bell, or what I have the capacity or the ability to do, really.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:06:08](#)):

Well, that was a good little segue. What rings the bell? What excites you, or what keeps you going?

Andrew Knafel ([01:06:19](#)):

I would say for me, what I enjoy, I love interacting with the customers, and I really love that it really brings joy to people. This part of Vermont is a little different than a lot of Vermont. It may not be quite as funky or have as much going on, but so a farm stand like this I think people really appreciate. I mean they appreciate farm stands everywhere, but I it's a small but important part of our community, and I like that part. I like to provide that for people.

[\(01:07:03\)](#):

Then I also, I was just thinking this morning, recommitting myself just a little bit more to the growth of my employees here, and what they do and how they interact here, giving them more... They have a lot of responsibility, but I've just been thinking about that a little bit, really wanting to keep it dynamic for people who work here. I'm not sure what that will look like, but that's the idea. And then I have the winter to plan for it, and also talk to my-

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:07:42\)](#):

Right, yeah, being open about that.

Andrew Knafel [\(01:07:43\)](#):

And just seeing what happens. Talking also to them, people who are coming back, and what is it that they might want to do that would keep it energized for them.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:07:54\)](#):

And keep them coming back another season.

Andrew Knafel [\(01:07:56\)](#):

Yeah, keep them coming back another season, for sure. But everyone's got their life to lead, but hopefully it's here. But if not, that's okay too. I still want to make my employees' experience be a positive. And also for them to feel, I realized, the field people to really see how much joy what they do... The stand people get all the great feedback, which is great because they work extremely hard in the farms. I always say the farms, they're two different worlds, but they're both very demanding jobs. But it's nice, I just want the folks who work here to feel appreciated, and realize how appreciated they are by our community.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:08:42\)](#):

What do you do outside of farming that brings you joy, or what do you do to de-stress?

Andrew Knafel [\(01:08:50\)](#):

Well, I would say my number one hobby is bird watching. I do it while I'm farming and before I come into work to farm, I love to bird watch and list birds, and I'm pretty into it, so that's a huge part of what I do. And then my off time, of course being with my family. And I don't know that there's that much time away from farming, but I love to cross-country ski when there's snow. And we can drive to a place, but I love to, when we get snow here, I can just go out of my house. I love to read books, and also just keep up on farming stuff.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:09:49\)](#):

It's an addiction.

Andrew Knafel ([01:09:52](#)):

It's an addiction, yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:09:52](#)):

A lifestyle.

Andrew Knafel ([01:09:54](#)):

Yeah. You know Jack, I love, oh, lots of Jack Mannix's one-liners, but the last one I heard that I love so much is like, "I don't go to work, I go out to my life." And I'm not probably quite as hardcore as Jack, but I love farming. But I love bird watching. I love natural history, and just hiking and walking, and that's what I do.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:10:24](#)):

What does sustainable farming mean to you, and how are you achieving it?

Andrew Knafel ([01:10:29](#)):

I'm not sure I'm achieving it, but I'm still here.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:10:32](#)):

Exactly, you're 30 years in business, so that means something.

Andrew Knafel ([01:10:38](#)):

Oh, I was thinking about that. I'm not a deep thinker in those ways, but I would say we do... I think having long-term employees who work here for many years and are able to make a living, and live in our community, and have a life. I think in the last 10 years, the business has gotten to a point where we can afford to do that in a little more substantial way. And before it was... I think, I'm so glad those folks kept working for me, to hang on. That's one really important way, is sustainable for my employees. And of course there's the summer help, and that's a different thing, folks who just show up and want a three-month job picking whatever, that's great too. But really the commitment that I feel for my long-term employees.

([01:11:35](#)):

Also, I think having our farm, especially now as climate is less predictable and more extremes are happening, really starting to think about ways to grow stuff that is... Or we don't really have huge erosion out of the field into rivers, but there might be erosion within a field, and so really thinking about how to buffer that effect, like inter cropping, and like I was saying earlier with seeding our roadways.

([01:12:17](#)):

And then just thinking finally, I think for me personally, sustainable is just I'm getting towards 60 and just my body's... When you're six foot four and you're farming radishes that are under the ground, it's a long way down. And so just finding ways to sustain how I manage things just so I can keep doing it at a level that's not completely destroying my body as I go along. Which, when I was younger I was a little bit more cavalier about it, but so that's a personal sustainability.

([01:13:04](#)):

And then, yeah, I mean I think really just staying abreast of what... I mean I'm not a researcher and things like that, but what folks are discovering about, whether it's nutrient management or best ways to

keep your greenhouse so you're using as little fuel as possible, or whatever. All the energy use that we use, if we can reduce that even 10% over a course of a few years, that would be great, because we use a lot of energy here for sure.

[\(01:13:42\)](#):

This year I noticed we definitely cut back on our diesel use and I was really thinking about how we were using our tractors. And I think it wasn't a huge amount, but it was noticeable, and so that was a little bit of a win. I'm looking at getting some equipment that might really help reduce... Because we have fields that are half mile to a mile in each direction, and we don't farm 10 acre blocks, we're doing two acre blocks. And we're going back and forth all the time on the road, and that's a lot of fuel, so I've been looking at a stone barrier. If it really does work as well as they say, it could really reduce our road trips and passes on the field, and if there's other equipment like that. Yeah, I think those, and then also just, yeah, I mean other equipment, I guess, that would-

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:14:37\)](#):

Is there any equipment that you have invested in already that helps reduce your fuel consumption?

Andrew Knafel [\(01:14:47\)](#):

Not really.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:14:47\)](#):

No?

Andrew Knafel [\(01:14:48\)](#):

I mean, because I think I've really been thinking about this last year. Once I saw that stone barrier and what it could do, I've been like, "Oh, that would be amazing." Because we have a lot of stones. Yeah, and I mean, nothing really yet. We're like a lot of people who have Perfecta and a Disk, and a plow, and a chisel plow, and all these things, but I think, "God, we're going over the field so many times, it's ridiculous, and it would be awesome if we could find a way to reduce even 30%." Even if a stone barrier isn't the dream, if it reduces-

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:15:30\)](#):

It might not do it all, but it might do it for either a couple of crops or whatever.

Andrew Knafel [\(01:15:33\)](#):

Exactly, yeah. That's an important part of our sustainable, looking forward. And some years I'm too busy, I'm just putting out fires, it feels like and can't do that. But in the winter I like to think about those things and make plans, and then maybe we can implement one of the five that I think about. And then we get better at it the second time we try and implement it.

Andy Chamberlin [\(01:16:03\)](#):

You mentioned how the radishes were so far down. Have you implemented, what kind of things have you changed to ease that burden?

Andrew Knafel [\(01:16:11\)](#):

I hire employees to pick.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:16:12](#)):

There you go.

Andrew Knafel ([01:16:12](#)):

No. Well, I mean, some things that we've done just to, we transplant so much stuff and every week we're putting out, so we bought a three row transplanter this year. And I know people love the water wheel, but for me, I'd never seen... I mean, we love the water wheel on plastic, but on bare ground, it just, to me it's slow and I never seem to do it the right way. So we got a three row carousel transplanter. We had a two row carousel, and the jury's still out. It's like some Italian fancy thing that it is, but I always like to give it a second year on a piece of equipment, and learn stuff.

([01:16:54](#)):

But it has been really super because it just cut down on our transplanting time tremendously. And a number of people need it, so now it's just the driver and three people. And before it would be four or five people transplanting, but it would take them... We would prep the soil, dibble it, and then they would go out and transplant a thousand heads of lettuce every week, or whatever it is every 10 days. And now it's just like we can go out, and it's just more versatile for us.

([01:17:24](#)):

I think it's a worthwhile investment. I'm not a hundred percent yet. Because we had an old carousel transplanter that also was not perfect, so I have to remember that. But I'm not sure it was worth the money for this one. I'm still learning. But I'm not a great gear head, it takes me a while to figure stuff out. Some people are really adept at that, but that's not me.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:17:53](#)):

Do you have any advice for a beginning farmer, getting into it now?

Andrew Knafel ([01:17:59](#)):

Oh gosh, I'm not sure. I just think it's a tremendous amount of work. And I think everybody... But I would definitely work on other farms first, and maybe a variety of farms and see different ways to do things. And then, I mean, I don't think anyone would go cold turkey and just start without having done it, but I just mean just to get... There's so many different ways to farm. I mean, everybody does their own style and has their own techniques and systems. And there's so many amazing systems out there, I think especially now, there's just so many different ways to do it well, and to go and see what resonates with you.

([01:18:48](#)):

I also think, I mean everyone says it, but having your market first. Having an idea of how you're going to sell something is, of course always great before we start. I'm not sure I have any great advice for people. I just think it's hard work and if you love doing it, you'll find a way to make it successful, I think.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:19:12](#)):

Yeah, that's a good point right there. Is there anything else that I didn't bring up that you wanted to share?

Andrew Knafel ([01:19:19](#)):

There's so much to learn in farming, and the resources that we have. It's hard because we get so busy during the season, it's really hard to go and utilize and take advantage of farm tours and things like that, but every time I do, I'm always so, like, "I should do this every month." It's so worth the four hours to get off the farm and go to another farm, and see what they're doing. And it's so energizing too. I always find that when I do that, I come back like, "Okay, let's go. I saw this great farm and let's try and match that or do something like that," you know what I mean?

Andy Chamberlin ([01:20:04](#)):

Yeah, I totally resonate with that. And I don't know why, but just seeing somebody... Even if you didn't pick up a certain thing, it still energizes you to see somebody else just doing it too.

Andrew Knafel ([01:20:16](#)):

Right. And it's always great to talk to people who have... I mean, every farm has its own experience and its own way, but there's obviously the commonality and to have that... Just like with Jamie and Lisa, even if we just have nothing in particular, but just to pick up the phone and just chat-

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

"Hey, how's it going?"

Andrew Knafel ([01:20:38](#)):

Yeah. I find it's just uplifting to connect with people in that way. And other farmers who are doing it, for whatever reason, there's that great camaraderie. It's super. A super part of the job. I love that part.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:20:57](#)):

That was The Farmer's Share. I hope you enjoyed this episode with Andrew Knafel of Clear Brook farm. 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 this podcast until March of 2026.

([01:21:29](#)):

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 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 show is also supported by the Ag Engineering Program of the University of Vermont Extension.

([01:21:59](#)):

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.

([01:22:38](#)):

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, camaraderie, enhanced communication and fellowship among commercial growers.

[\(01:23:17\)](#):

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.

[\(01:23:47\)](#):

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. 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.

[\(01:24:15\)](#):

Lastly, if you're enjoying the show, I'd love it if you could write a review. An Apple podcast, 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.