

Bob Gray ([00:00:08](#)):

Yeah, my name's Bob Gray. I'm here at 4 Corners Farm in Newbury, Vermont. As I said, the name of the farm came from Hartland Four Corners where we started farming. But we moved here 40-some years ago and it's been wonderful. And yeah, I'm just glad to be here.

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

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. 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.

([00:01:04](#)):

Give it a whirl. It's quick, easy, and free, and I'd love to hear from you. Today's episode comes to you from Newbury, Vermont, where we visit with Bob Gray of 4 Corners Farm. He and his wife Kim, purchased this farm back in the late 1970s after finding success, selling their abundance of vegetables at a farmer's market. Over time, they built a highly diversified farm that supports both them and their children. Bob shares about the importance of cow manure, greenhouses and having an attention to detail while he reflects on his career as a farmer in Vermont.

Bob Gray ([00:01:45](#)):

Okay. Well, my name is Bob Gray. I farm here at Newbury, Vermont now. Our farm is called 4 Corners Farm, and I'll get into that story as we go along. Really, my farming started back in the, I know, when was it? Let's see, yeah, I guess late '70s. I know folks remember the back-to-the-land movement when all the hippies came out of the city and lived in communes and started growing stuff to sell. And they started a local farmer's market in Brattleboro, and I had a fairly large garden and my father had even a larger garden because he promised my mother, both of whom went through the Depression, that if they got a piece of land, they'd never go hungry again. So I said, "Dad, these hippies, they had this farmer's market down in Brattleboro. How about we take some of leftover produce and I go down there and see what I can do?"

([00:02:45](#)):

Well, I did and came back with \$200, which about then was about a week's salary or pretty close. And so I said, "Wow, I kind of like this." And the next week I went again, the same farmer's market, picked up \$200, went to a flea market the following Sunday, picked up some more money and picked up two restaurants. So I haven't worked for anybody else since. And I love doing it and it's developed and gotten bigger and bigger. So yeah, that's my background.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:03:15](#)):

That's pretty nice that you were able to just go to a market and get your foot in the door, it sounds like pretty quickly.

Bob Gray ([00:03:21](#)):

Yeah, well that was the thing. Thanks, all these communes, they had started to... [inaudible], you said you'd spoken with him at one point. He got started sort the same way, he was in the commune over there in New Hampshire. We all started farming about the same time, and so I was just off the US ski team for 14 years and pretty much just in survival mode, doing the best I could get through the summers. I had a wife and children and working on construction in the winter I'd be off skiing, so I was pretty much dead

broke when I got off the US ski team and this, all of a sudden I had a job that meant not working for anybody else but working for myself. And when you're working for yourself, you put a lot more effort into it. So yeah, I really enjoy farming and love doing it and growing food for people to eat.

(00:04:12):

So as it developed, my wife and I where, well, not my wife, my girlfriend Kim, we're running a ski training center in Randolph something we stumbled into. And one winter we put up a little tiny classified ad in a local weekly periodical called Vermont Farm, I think it was called. And this gentleman came back from wintering in California. He had a place in Hartland Four Corners, Vermont, saw our classified ad in the back of this periodical, how he even saw it beyond me, I mean just a whole pile of junk mail. And wrote us a letter, said, "You can come farm on my property." And that's where 4 Corners Farm got started. We went down and actually lived in the house with him the first year and the second year.

(00:05:06):

And then he realized that well, he'd be in there trying to cook us dinner at six o'clock at night. We were supposed to be there, sort of take care of him. That was the idea. And he'd let us build a shed in a sort of summer residence on his property with one end had a upstairs bedroom and a downstairs had a dining room, and we started, and it was actually going quite well. We were going to the Norwich Farmers Market then and managed to save a little money. And then he passed away and the family didn't know what they wanted to do at that point. We wanted to buy it, but in reality it was a bedroom coming into Woodstock and we never could afford to buy it, it was a beautiful spot. So we started looking around again, found an ad in a paper for 15 acres of land in Bradford, Vermont, just down the road from us. And we met the real estate agent here or there, and he said, "Well, I got something better than that."

(00:06:08):

And we came up and looked at this place and it was just perfect. And old farmhouse barn land for at that time would seemed like a lot of money, but now it seemed very reasonable. So we bought it, got a government low interest loan and bought the farm literally. And it's grown since then. And yeah, right now my sons are here working with us with their wives, and it's become a pretty large establishment.

Andy Chamberlin (00:06:41):

So how big was the farm when you bought it? Was it all open like this or?

Bob Gray (00:06:45):

Well, it was 115 acres, so no, 125 acres, I guess. And we paid 115,000 for it, which I said seemed like a lot of money. The river bottom land you see toward the Connecticut River that was all open. But up behind had grown up pasture, it was very stony and rocky. We managed to clear a lot of that and we at one point decided my wife wanted to milk cows. So we have a Jersey herd, which is questionable as far as finances go. But cows keep the land open. Without cows it grows up to brush and everything else. And even though it really costs us a lot of money to run this farm, I think it's worthwhile venture. And we may be one of the only real original farmstead left in Vermont, the way things are going. But people come to see what cows grazing the field, keeping the land open, and providing us with manure, which makes an excellent source of fertilizer.

Andy Chamberlin (00:07:46):

Yeah. And there's not too many that are truly diversified with animals and lives and vegetables.

Bob Gray (00:07:51):

Yeah, we are terribly diversified, too much so. But I don't want to give it up because it's pretty special. And we do sell raw milk here at the farm, make our own cheese and grow it wide variety of vegetables.

Right now where it's just end of March, we already have tomatoes up in the greenhouse almost in blossom. We're going to plant cucumbers in a few more days and we have, I don't know, 10 or 12 greenhouses or tunnels, whatever, and we grow an awful lot of produce. So we can start opening to sell stuff by the middle of May. We'll have tomatoes by the middle of May with lettuce and spinach and beet greens and cucumbers, and then we're on a roll.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:08:36](#)):

The whole gamut.

Bob Gray ([00:08:37](#)):

The whole gamut, yes.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:08:39](#)):

So I take it when you bought the farm, it wasn't a large vegetable operation, so what led you in this direction?

Bob Gray ([00:08:50](#)):

Well, I was already doing it on my own as I started selling at farmer's market, and I realized the potential and something I love to do and my wife felt the same way I did. So with the two of us as a team, we just, yeah vegetables. And we used to go to the farmer's market, excuse me, in Norwich and we still do now, but back then that was, we thought that was our main source of income, so pretty soon we were selling more right at the farm than we were at the farmer's market. So we really began to focus on on-farm sales and it's worked very well for us. I mean, why not? I mean, we're in the right place, doing the right thing at the right time.

([00:09:25](#)):

People want to buy local, why do you need to get it from California, Florida and Mexico or South America? We can grow it right here. And if people would change their thinking a little bit and start putting away more food, freezing and canning it, and even putting in storage, I mean, it's hard to put a root cellar in somewhere, dig a hole in the ground, and then you have carrots and beets and cabbage and potatoes all winter long.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:09:55](#)):

It's amazing how just a little bit of a cool space, how long you can actually store produce.

Bob Gray ([00:09:59](#)):

Yeah, we can store potatoes right about next month. We have them down cellar in a house in a cold spot, but all of a sudden they'll start to sprout. So then, but now we have walk-in cooler, so we just move them quickly out to the walk-in cooler and they'll stay right through till summertime.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:10:16](#)):

Were you one to do a lot of things with hand tools or were you pretty quickly to scale into tractors and equipment?

Bob Gray ([00:10:22](#)):

Well, I started small, just a rototiller, walk behind rototiller. Yeah. And that for a long time, a lot of trips up and down the field. And then my dad had an old Ford tractor I borrowed and used that to harrow and

do things, but as soon as we got enough income, well, that goes to a side story. There's a number of years that Kim and I, we weren't married then. We were running a ski touring center in Randolph and did the whole thing, skiing, gas, meals, the whole deal, ski lessons.

(00:10:52):

And all of a sudden I saw some money, and so that spring we went to an auction up in Champlain Islands of Randy Fournier's and bought, I think three tractors in a pickup truck in one day auction, just running through and bidding, and we got rid of some of the tractors, but yeah, all of a sudden we had a tractor and then we bought a used rototiller and away we went. Now we have, I don't know, 30 tractors or 20 tractors, all of which need to be greased and maintained. So now we need a mechanic, a full-time mechanic.

Andy Chamberlin (00:11:28):

Little tractors to big tractors, you got them all.

Bob Gray (00:11:30):

Got them all, yes. But they're necessary evil.

Andy Chamberlin (00:11:36):

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

Bob Gray (00:11:41):

Well, because we're now supporting three families, my two sons and their wives and children, we're supporting three families. Used to be just my wife and I, and we had no putting money aside. Now it all seems to find a place to go, so I think we need to get more efficient and tighten up our expenditures, and that's a real challenge to get everybody moving in the same direction, understanding what it takes to make a farm go. People think, oh, no farming. That's a 24/7 job in summertime. Yeah, you work long hours, but in our business, basically the farm shuts down in the winter. There are odds and ends. You've got to feed some dairy cattle, well, the dairy cattle, that's a whole other story, and some beef cattle and plow some driveways, but basically have the winter off at least December, January, and most of February.

(00:12:31):

How many other people have the winter off? I can ski and enjoy the winter, but be ready to work your tail off. You start in March and you're pretty busy, and then April you get very busy and then May, you are unbelievably busy. And we have a calendar we started years ago, a big wall calendar that has every day on it, and you start writing down things to do that day, and it's really important, I'm trying to get my sons to really look at that, because if you make the same mistake twice in a row, you shouldn't be farming. You come in with red letters and say, "Don't do this again." And you don't do it again, or you do this a little earlier, it's really helpful because there's so much going on. If you don't have a calendar to guide you, you kind of get lost in the mix. What am I going to do today? Well, look at the calendar, do that first. And it's been really important to us.

Andy Chamberlin (00:13:22):

Sorry, are you building next year's calendar as you go along like, "Oh, we should have done this a little sooner." Or?

Bob Gray (00:13:26):

Over the years, we sort of developed it and just make modifications. But I finally talked my sons into having their own calendar on their own. Yeah, you can look at your cell phone, but it's right there in front

of the calendar. In one glance you say, "Oh, oh, I didn't do that yesterday and I got to do that tomorrow." And you better get it done because it's all about timing. Yeah, it's all about timing, exactly.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:13:49](#)):

That's a creative way to stack the to-do list on the calendar. I kind of do that myself. It makes a lot of sense.

Bob Gray ([00:13:57](#)):

I mean, but now it's pretty much a habit. But even then you can get lost. You get, oh, you get tied up in something. "Oh, no, no, no, you've got to do this today." Come hell or high water because it's so important. Farming is all about timing.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:14:09](#)):

It's pretty easy to get backed up too.

Bob Gray ([00:14:10](#)):

Yeah, very easy.

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

So do you use pencil so you can keep kicking projects down the list?

Bob Gray ([00:14:18](#)):

No, we try not. No. Yeah.

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

Let's see. So going back again, when you bought this farm, was it in operation or was it-

Bob Gray ([00:14:27](#)):

No.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:14:27](#)):

No?

Bob Gray ([00:14:28](#)):

No. A gentleman, he lived up in the village, I think. He bought it for he and his wife, this sort of retirement place because that's what he did, he tend to buy up places. But no, the barn's beautiful. I mean for us, because it's our storage, it's place now it's underneath this barn is where our farm stand is, but as a dairy farm, it was way, way too far gone. It's an 1800 dairy barn. Yeah, but it's a beautiful barn. We've done a lot of repair work on. It was with the foundation, everything, because it was beginning to get fall down in some places. No. God, I hate to think what would happen if we lost a barn. We'd have no place to store stuff or anything else.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:15:08](#)):

And you bought it in the '70s?

Bob Gray ([00:15:10](#)):

Oh, let's see. No, I was just thinking today, probably the very late '70s, almost 1980. Because we were running the ski touring center in '76, '77, '79. Then we moved here, I guess, yeah, '80, '81, something like that. I can't remember exact dates how the years fly by.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:15:30](#)):

So yeah, your primary infrastructure, your house, your barn was already a hundred years old at that point.

Bob Gray ([00:15:35](#)):

Yeah, no, 200 years old. Yeah. This house was built in 1800. It's now 225 years old. It's still a great old house, not insulated very well, it takes a lot of wood to heat it, but no matter, plenty of fresh air coming through the cracks.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:15:53](#)):

Yeah. Good ventilation that way.

Bob Gray ([00:15:55](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:15:58](#)):

So you are highly diversified. What's your favorite crop?

Bob Gray ([00:16:06](#)):

Well, simply rhubarb. And I'll tell you why, because it's an old heirloom variety we picked up a few years ago. It's a wonderful variety, and every fall we get some good juicy cow manure and put on a thick layer. In the spring, it bursts up through and just takes off and grows four feet tall, doesn't need weeding, doesn't need spraying, has no insect problems. And we pick it because it's such a wonderful variety without and the way we treat it with manure that we pick it all summer long. Okay, crop number two, I'll have to say lettuce. Because income-wise, we transplant all our lettuce through black plastic now or through white plastic rather. And never have to weed it, don't have to wash it because they got any dirt sprayed on it and our workers doesn't go down and lettuce almost few dollars head down and less than an hour they come back with hundreds and hundreds of dollars of lettuce all packed, ready to go in the farm stand. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:17:08](#)):

And it's a pretty short timeline too.

Bob Gray ([00:17:10](#)):

And we can replant two or three times through the same plastic. We used to grow it in the dirt, but I don't know, through the plastic is only way. And we have drip on it so we can control how it grows and everything. It's a wonderful crop.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:17:21](#)):

If you're using the same plastic, are you hand transplanting or water wheeling that?

Bob Gray ([00:17:26](#)):

Hand transplant. We have migrant Mexicans who are just fantastic. They can plant stuff so fast. They can bend over and go down a row, never even straighten up.

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

Do-do-do-do-do-do.

Bob Gray ([00:17:38](#)):

Yep. It's really fun. I've done the videos. How can anybody even lay out the plants that fast? Yeah, fantastic. And we have the same ones come year after year. We love them, they're like family and for them it's excellent because they're making more money than they ever dreamed of. We pay their way here, a place to live, all the food they want, my car to use for transportation. So we love them and we just couldn't farm without them. Could not farm without them, could not replace that labor. Nobody local can even keep up with them. I don't care how fit they are, how hard they think they work, they can't keep up. It's just a fact. They've been bending over since they were 10 years old, picking strawberries or whatever. It doesn't bother them a bit.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:18:20](#)):

How big of a crew do you have?

Bob Gray ([00:18:21](#)):

We have 10 people, plus 10 local people working in the stand and making deliveries and everything. It's a big payroll.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:18:29](#)):

Yeah, that's quite a few people.

Bob Gray ([00:18:30](#)):

It gets scary and unfortunately, the government or whatever keeps increasing the wage for these people to think, well, maybe you'll hire a local. There's nobody local who wants to do it. So yeah, our labor bills is getting tremendous, so it's a balancing act now. We have to have them because they make the money, every day they make money for us. Nobody else is going to go out and pick all that lettuce and do it that fast.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:18:56](#)):

Right. Yeah. You start thinking of the list and all the things you need to do and then you can throw 10 to 20 people at it, yeah, you can get a lot done in a day.

Bob Gray ([00:19:06](#)):

You better believe it. But as a grower, you have to focus on being a good grower so you aren't spending that labor for them out weeding a crop that shouldn't have had been weeded, it should have been cultivated or planted in such a way on good clean ground, so you aren't spending that much money per hour just to weed a crop that probably wouldn't give you money back the time you spend all \$20 an hour weeding. So that's very important. It's management. Huge, huge management issue.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:19:36](#)):

How many acres do you have in cultivation annually here?

Bob Gray ([00:19:38](#)):

Well, we've grown quite a bit, unfortunately. Excuse my voice, but down on the flat here, when we bought this, we didn't know, but that used to flood annually. Last couple of years haven't been so bad because of climate change and lack of much snow. So we bought a piece of land just down the road 30 years ago, eight acres or something. And then we also rent a lot of land now up the road here, there, everywhere. We probably have at least, we probably farm at least 50 acres a year of good land, good river bottom land, fantastic land, nothing like it. No stones, drains well, not clay like the Champlain Valley.

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

And the last couple of years we have had some pretty good flooding. How much of that production was underwater? I know it was down by the river.

Bob Gray ([00:20:27](#)):

None for us because we know where to plant and we're not over around Burlington where they have these floodplains they plant in every year. So we don't plant in floodplains. And we're fortunate some of the land we rent even up on the Oxbow in north of Newbury, it's pretty flood prone for river bottom. We got caught occasionally just one spot here and there, tail end of the field. But no, that couldn't wipe you out.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:20:55](#)):

That's great. Obviously, you've scaled a lot in the last 40 or so years. What did you envision the farm would look like when you started? Did you have goals of getting to this size or did you just kind of-

Bob Gray ([00:21:10](#)):

No, we just started in one piece at a time and found the crops that we like to grow. And we find, as I said earlier, greenhouses are really important because it extends the growing season tremendously. We'll sell, let's say we'll start here by, I said middle of May, and we'll have full range of produce right up until our workers go home the 1st of November. And we could continue after that, but they have to go home and they only can stay here for six months. Besides, they want to go home and see their families.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:37](#)):

Yeah, understood.

Bob Gray ([00:21:38](#)):

And it's getting cold.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:21:42](#)):

Yeah. You've probably about had enough by then too. Start winding down?

Bob Gray ([00:21:46](#)):

Oh yes. Yeah, it's hard. Yeah, we need to wind down quickly because when they leave, who's going to do all the work? All these greenhouses need to be cleaned out and composted and get ready with plastic over the winter to, until the last two or three weeks get pretty frantic, like, "Oh yoi yoi."

Andy Chamberlin ([00:22:02](#)):

Just trying to wrap my head around...

Bob Gray ([00:22:04](#)):

I don't want to spend my winter cleaning up greenhouses when it's cold and freezing out. So yes.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:22:13](#)):

What are some techniques or lessons learned that you maybe have incorporated to manage a crew of people like that?

Bob Gray ([00:22:22](#)):

Very interesting question, not quite sure how to answer that. More and more as we have some of the same workers back, I think what we need to do is to, and we're starting to do that more and more, have one of our more experienced workers from Mexico, be more of a manager. So we aren't trying to manage 10 people every day. We have to go out there every morning so that they can say, "Okay, he takes this crew and does that." Because as they say, the labor bill is huge and it has to be efficient. It can't have them doing too many people on one job and not enough on a job. So it's just labor management, but they're really good at that.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:23:03](#)):

That's good. Who's been an inspiration or mentor or influence for you?

Bob Gray ([00:23:12](#)):

Probably way back, that'd be my father. Because as I said, he promised my mother when they finally got together and as I said, they went to the depression times were tough. And when he finally managed to buy a place of his own and we had a huge garden and we put all kinds of stuff away and I sort of copied him in a small scale when I was working at the Putney schools, I said I had to have a garden too. And I found I really enjoyed doing that. So I think once I got through my skiing career, I was on the US ski team for 14 years and as I said, just struggling to get by. Once I got on my own, I said, "What the heck, I can grow a lot of my own food." And really enjoy doing it. Put the same energy I put into skiing, into farming.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:23:57](#)):

Skiing has obviously been a constant throughout your entire life. You did it-

Bob Gray ([00:24:03](#)):

Absolutely, yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:24:04](#)):

... all the way through, still are. You said you just got back from Switzerland. So talk a little bit about your skiing career. Let's hear some of those accolades, what you did in that realm?

Bob Gray ([00:24:15](#)):

Well, I started skiing in high school at the Putney school, John Colwell, who just come back from the '52 Olympics, showed up as a math teacher and a ski coach. And I was, "Oh my God, Olympian, whatever you say I'll do." And so I started skiing and did very well in high school. That managed to get me a scholarship to University of Colorado, which paid for a big part of my college education. And then in 1962 I tried out for the world championship team and made it and went to Finland, first trip to Europe. Spent two months over there, love Finland, and I continued. I tried out in '64 for the Olympics. I missed that because back then we had draft and I was in the Marine Corps. I wasn't quite fit enough to make the team, but I tried out again in '66 and made that.

([00:25:09](#)):

'68, I made the Olympic team, went to Grenoble, France. '72, I made the Olympic team and went to Japan. And '74, I finally called it quits because I realized I had other things in my life I need to focus on and immediately jumped into farming. Skiing has been good to me. Keeps me physically fit and gives me something to focus on every year. Pretty easy to sit in a chair and do nothing in the wintertime. But I love skiing and it goes way back to actually when I was in the Marine Corps, I was still skiing and instead of sending me to Vietnam, because my skiing background, I ended up in Sierra Nevada mountains taking wintertime tactics and military mountain warfare training center, [inaudible 00:26:00].

(00:25:59):

Had a three-year paid vacation in Sierra Nevada mountains instead of the jungles of Vietnam. And I probably wouldn't be here had I gone to Vietnam. So I owe skiing a lot. And I'm still doing it because yeah, it's something I do every year and get me motivated to keep exercising. And skiing, if you can walk, you can ski, so you can ski until you're 90 years old. I'm getting close to that now.

Andy Chamberlin (00:26:30):

Let's keep pushing that.

Bob Gray (00:26:31):

Yeah. And it's a wonderful experience to go. This last year I went to Switzerland and competed with athletes from at least 20 other countries. Have a big banquet at the end, get to see everybody and yeah, and a lot of good friends over the years.

Andy Chamberlin (00:26:48):

I was going to say, if you've been doing that, you said you were skiing with your age group so that you must have friends over there.

Bob Gray (00:26:53):

Oh yes. Yeah, exactly.

Andy Chamberlin (00:26:55):

Sounds cool.

Bob Gray (00:26:56):

And the age group's really important and to, not to digress, but because we don't get faster, we only get slower. And I just moved to a new age group last year and the one, Finn who was unbelievable, I cannot beat, was still three years behind me. So I managed to win my age group.

Andy Chamberlin (00:27:17):

Front of the back again.

Bob Gray (00:27:19):

In front of the back again, yeah.

Andy Chamberlin (00:27:21):

Nice. So how many ski trails do you have here around the farm?

Bob Gray (00:27:23):

Well, in the past I had quite a few, and also because we're a little lower elevation up in West Newbury, it's three miles up in the hill, there's a nice field, pretty high elevation hayfield that you can mow closely in the falls, so you can ski on almost no snow. So mostly I skied up there for myself and for, I coached the Oxbow High School team with a woman down there who was a music teacher and she had a skiing background, so we worked together and coached there for four or five, six years, had a good local team. So I've been grooming for skiing forever. I still have a snow machine with a groomer. I go out, but mostly I do it, but now I also go mainly on the railroad bed up in Croton, the buckaroos [inaudible], they do a really good job and the railroad bed's fairly flat and easy to ski on with minimal snow. So this year when we had little snow early, I just skied up back and forth there, did my training there.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:28:21](#)):

That's an incredible trail. I snowmobile. So that-

Bob Gray ([00:28:25](#)):

They do a phenomenal job.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:28:26](#)):

... those trails around that area-

Bob Gray ([00:28:27](#)):

They do a phenomenal job.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:28:31](#)):

... amazing. And rail beds are nice and flat. Like you said, you can get away with minimal snow and that's often a question I ask towards the end of the conversation, is what do you do to kind of relax your brain or get away from farming?

Bob Gray ([00:28:47](#)):

Skiing is an-

Andy Chamberlin ([00:28:48](#)):

Skiing is that answer.

Bob Gray ([00:28:48](#)):

Yes, I've done it every winter. It's all part of who I am. And as I said, if I didn't have it, who knows. I think my health would be as good because as I say, you can do it at any age. If you can walk, you can ski, cross-country skiing, I'm not talking about alpine, that's a whole other story. Don't want any part of it.

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

No.

Bob Gray ([00:29:07](#)):

I'd rather ski uphill than down.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:29:10](#)):

Like I said, is a little slower, a little safer.

Bob Gray ([00:29:12](#)):

Yes. Not so likely to break something.

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

Yeah. What tool or equipment could you not live without?

Bob Gray ([00:29:23](#)):

Well, I suppose basically you need to have a rototiller. We plow and harrow, turn the sod over. They say rototilling is bad for the soil, but only if you overdo it. You can wear the soil out pretty quickly, but rotation is really important. You can only use a piece of land long before we just wear it out. And then it needs to go back into a permanent crop like sod, and that's where the dairy cows come in. We can seed it back down to hay ground and give it a rest for a little while. There's nothing like new soil. Any grower, Jake will tell you the same thing. New soil's like heaven, that's like pioneers when they finally went to the West, right after a few years they say, "Ma, we need to go west again. And our soul isn't as good as it was." New ground just in rotation.

([00:30:12](#)):

Strawberries love new ground, especially if we try after four or five, six years, you have trouble growing good strawberries. A weed will come in, you can't control or something. So yes, I'm really big on cultivation, and we have some really small Allis-Chalmers G tractors that may made them back in the 1940, 1949. Really small engine in the back, all kind and sees exactly what's going on. So we have two or three of those. I try to get those set up with just the right set of cultivators or basket weeders or whatever, and just jumping on when the weather's right, when the sun's shining so you can kill the weeds, not just move them around. It's really, really helpful. I think cultivation is absolutely essential.

([00:30:55](#)):

We have, and we also have a big basket weeder so it covers the ground really quickly. It doesn't like tilling, it just cuffs up the top layer to kill weeds and level things out. If you catch the weeds when they're small before they have much root growth or stem growth, once they get big, you can pull them out and the ground they're going to root again, because they get all the strength from the stem and the root, but when they're just a couple inches long, you can kill them in an hour in the sunshine. So it's all timing.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:31:22](#)):

Smaller the better.

Bob Gray ([00:31:23](#)):

Smaller the better, yes. Weeds are big. As you farm, as you say, your end develop some weeds you can't control and not sure how to get rid of them. I guess, one of the really bad fields, we'd now put them down to plastic and plant through the plastic. Otherwise, you just... And once you get weed seeds in the soil, there they are, they're almost forever. I mean, unless you're going to field cultivate once a week for two years, maybe you get rid of most of them, but they're still down below. You bring them up to the right level, they germinate and away they go again. So we pollute a lot of fields and I feel bad that we do it. It shouldn't happen them. Hopefully maybe in the future I can get my family better not letting weeds ever go to seed.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:32:04](#)):

Pollute them with weed seeds is what you're saying?

Bob Gray ([00:32:06](#)):

Oh yes, exactly. Yeah, it's terrible. Terrible, yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:32:09](#)):

I imagine it's hard when you've got so much going on.

Bob Gray ([00:32:13](#)):

So much going on. That's right. But it's a challenge, and I'd like to hopefully step up the challenge, but it's matter of education, how important it is to do it right.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:32:25](#)):

Do you have a standard rotation that you try to live by or does it...

Bob Gray ([00:32:30](#)):

Well, yes. My son's pretty much taken over that, so I'm no longer in control, but hopefully he's got a good program going. As I get older, they push me more to the back seat and it has to happen sometime. We have a difference of opinion, but whatever, hopefully they learn.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:32:49](#)):

What are some of those differences that you think are... What varies between you two as far as how you want to farm?

Bob Gray ([00:32:57](#)):

Well, to me, I think it's all keeping things in order and attention to detail. Details will get you every time. You just can't... It's a matter of how when you finish a field, it needs to be really smooth. You can't be rough and bumpy and whatever, it has to be really done just right. So it's pretty easy to control the weeds if you do it timely and just right.

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

How has the farm succession been? How's that process been and its transition over the years?

Bob Gray ([00:33:28](#)):

Well, it's a work in progress. And we're about in the middle of it, I guess, and maybe toward the ends of it. Hopefully they can take over and keep it going, because as I said, we're in the right place doing the right thing at the right time. And it's really heartwarming to produce local food for people to eat good healthy food, which is what this country needs desperately, desperately.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:33:50](#)):

So you say right place right time in the aspect that there's still a market for fresh veggies.

Bob Gray ([00:33:55](#)):

Of course.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:33:56](#)):

That's where they're coming from?

Bob Gray ([00:33:57](#)):

Oh yes, absolutely. I mean, this Connecticut Valley is sad, but right now one dairy farmer down here with, I don't know how many thousand herd of cows, planting just corn for cows, there should be growing vegetables, food for people to eat. Is such a perfect, and we're very close to markets. Yeah, this land is fantastic, but that's a whole other thing. Someone had to step in and start growing wholesale produce. That's a tough market to get into. But locally, yes. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:34:31](#)):

What started off the farm succession discussions?

Bob Gray ([00:34:37](#)):

Probably haven't had enough discussions. It sort of happened. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:34:45](#)):

So they showed a little more interest and you kind of-

Bob Gray ([00:34:47](#)):

Oh yes. Well, frankly, it is a good life. You have to work your tail off in the summer, but you are right here, your kids can grow up in a farm. You can get up every day and go to work, sometimes they can go with you or they can come help you sometimes or set it on a tractor seat or yeah. I mean, yeah, rather than having to go to work for somebody else at seven or eight o'clock in the morning every day and come home at night, you're right here with them. Perfect place to bring up our family. It's a beautiful location, fresh air, sunshine, and hopefully the children will learn how to work, so they can also, that's our thing, is to keep this farm, our farm forever. We're really big on, my wife and I are really, really big on that. Nobody can sell it, it can't be sold.

([00:35:31](#)):

If you don't want a farm, we'll find somebody that does want a farm and they can stay here until their time is done and then they pass it on to somebody else. And if you farm well and plan right, you should be able to end up a little money in your pocket when you get done and actually retire here on the farm if you want. There's plenty of houses. I'm going to pass on pretty soon. You got a little house here something can live in. I think it's really a worthwhile gold. We keep this farm for the next 200 years, just growing produce for people to eat. The future of the farm is real, really important to myself and my wife, and I think they're feeling it now, they're really feeling it.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:36:08](#)):

Feeling what?

Bob Gray ([00:36:09](#)):

My sons, two sons and their family, begin to feel this is an important thing to do.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:36:13](#)):

Oh, yes.

Bob Gray ([00:36:16](#)):

Yeah. You don't make a lot of money, but you got a place to live, you got food to eat, your taxes are paid, you don't pay rent. You don't need a lot of money unless you want to do some crazy thing.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:36:31](#)):

You get to enjoy the most beautiful days of the year.

Bob Gray ([00:36:33](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

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

So you mentioned your sons are doing a lot of it now. What's your role? How much are you doing on the daily basis?

Bob Gray ([00:36:44](#)):

Well, because I'm no longer really the manager, so I have to find my own little niche where I don't ruffle any feathers. Right now this happening, I'm going to go out and cut up some firewood that was left in a big messy pile that needs to be cleaned up and neaten up. And we burn wood in all our greenhouses, have for years. It isn't a sole source of heat, it used to be way, way back when we first had our greenhouse, but it's a secondary source. But propane stoves are notorious for quitting all of a sudden in the middle of a tenth above night, and you have about an hour maximum before you freeze all your plants. So every night the sun goes down I built some big stoves, oil drum stoves, with a whole lot of wood in all the greenhouses. And I have some barrel stoves too in the small houses.

([00:37:33](#)):

And when the sun goes down and every night this time year, you go out and you start a fire. As soon the sun goes down, the propane heat comes on, save your money. And then on an average night you have to go out again at 10 o'clock, fill all the stoves up full and shut them down tight. So if the propane quits, there's enough residual heat in that wood stove to keep things from freezing. And it means you got chance to go down and sort of communicate with your plants at 10 o'clock every night.

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

And maybe you see somebody left the door open or a wind blew a door open or a vent left open. And plants, especially tomato plants love wood heat. It's a much drier heat than propane, so you have less disease issues because the wood stove really dries everything out. And I think they even thank you when you get out at night. It's nice to get that feeling with your plants. You just say every year there's some girl that just has propane. "Oh, my stove, I lost all my plants." Well, how are you going to get tomato plants again? They were grown two months ago somewhere.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:37](#)):

Right.

Bob Gray ([00:38:37](#)):

And you can't just order them up. There are no plants available. So yeah, and then you don't get to plant tomato plants until August and that doesn't work.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:46](#)):

So you're still burning wood in-

Bob Gray ([00:38:47](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:48](#)):

... greenhouses?

Bob Gray ([00:38:49](#)):

We burn at least 50 cord a year.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:50](#)):

Whoa.

Bob Gray ([00:38:52](#)):

Yeah.

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

Wow.

Bob Gray ([00:38:54](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:38:55](#)):

So are you working with a logger or do you have forests to cut through?

Bob Gray ([00:38:57](#)):

We don't have forests, but we have a really good logger that brings us log loads. This year he brought some beautiful stuff, just to right diameter, 16 feet long, no knots, bumps. And our workers come over and line them up, it's so efficient. They roll it forward, cut it, split it, pile it right behind them. And in a week they'll do the whole 50 cord and have them all ready to go.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:18](#)):

So you don't have a firewood processor?

Bob Gray ([00:39:20](#)):

Nope. Don't need to, this is in a way more efficient.

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

Oh, wow.

Bob Gray ([00:39:23](#)):

Yeah, because I went one log, one piece at a time, these guys can cut three or four pieces, turn right around, have two splitters going.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:39:30](#)):

Chainsaws. Then what kind of splitters are you running?

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

Well, one smaller one. Also, one goes to the back of a tractor. So they're set up, turn around, split it, pile it. Don't move more than four or five feet. The big pile of unsplit, uncut wood is right there. So they move it just enough so that they keep the pile keeps up, they have to take more than two steps to turn around and pile it. It's very efficient. They may cover it with clear plastic two and maybe like a four-foot wide pile, two lengths of wood. And so that dries over the summer and we usually cut enough one year to last for two years. We also heat all our houses with wood.

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

Right. Yeah. So are you cutting wood every spring and keeping-

Bob Gray ([00:40:12](#)):

Try to.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:13](#)):

... keeping up with it?

Bob Gray ([00:40:14](#)):

Last year we had enough for two years, but now we're all out. So I didn't order quite as much this year because it's getting expensive and we had to cut back on some of our spring expenses. But yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:24](#)):

Yeah, that's a lot of fire wood.

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

And Vermont's loaded with wood. Everywhere we looked is wood, everywhere.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:31](#)):

Yeah, it's not-

Bob Gray ([00:40:32](#)):

And more of it growing every day.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:40:33](#)):

Not like a hundred years ago. Yeah, we're mostly wooded.

Bob Gray ([00:40:36](#)):

That's right. And most of it's trash wood too, which isn't good for firewood because it takes time to cut up, but we can send up to power plant and make power out of it. I just got back from Switzerland. There was not a crooked tree in Switzerland, not a crooked tree. And there's no trash in the woods. On banks so steep you can't even stand on them, it's amazing. Because over the years they've just developed for such a small country, they have plenty of wood. Every single open spot that doesn't grow hay it grows trees. No, it was pretty impressive.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:05](#)):

Farming trees.

Bob Gray ([00:41:07](#)):

Farming trees.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:07](#)):

Yeah. Not just forest.

Bob Gray ([00:41:09](#)):

There is no trash. There is no junk. Maybe isn't good for the birds and whatever and dead nests, but whatever, they're not too worried about it.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:18](#)):

So that's a lot of wood to move around. I take it your wood cutting area and greenhouses are probably not in the same spot.

Bob Gray ([00:41:25](#)):

Yeah, well, they just, because it's all piled neatly, in the fall, they'll all of a sudden say, "Okay, it's wood time." And we get two or three flat bed trucks and they do it pretty quickly. These guys know how to work. And they fill our cellar full of 10 cord of wood. I used to do it myself, but let them do it now. So yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:44](#)):

It's a lot of wood. But 10 cord of wood with a crew of 10 people all of a sudden goes pretty quick.

Bob Gray ([00:41:53](#)):

Exactly.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:41:53](#)):

Yep. Yeah, I do three or four cord a year myself, so that's enough, but...

Bob Gray ([00:41:59](#)):

Well, it's good. It's good exercise.

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

Absolutely.

Bob Gray ([00:42:01](#)):

You have to bend over and pick it up. I have this furnace, I have to go downstairs three or four times a day in the winter. That's all exercise.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:08](#)):

Yes, it's great exercise, especially this time of year. Get your arms back into shape for hay season.

Bob Gray ([00:42:14](#)):

That's right. Yeah, I used to split it all by hand way back when, but not anymore.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:19](#)):

Yeah. I'm a fan of the hydraulic splitters.

Bob Gray ([00:42:22](#)):

They're amazing.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:23](#)):

Yeah. What's a time when you felt really successful farming?

Bob Gray ([00:42:30](#)):

Well, I think probably after being here the first 10 years we really began to come into it. We were growing crops and managing well, picking lots of strawberries, everything was under control and we actually were saving money, putting money away, which isn't happening nowadays, but hopefully we can at least maintain what we're doing. But as I said, we were only supporting one family, it made a tremendous difference.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:42:58](#)):

Right.

Bob Gray ([00:42:59](#)):

Family with children and expenses and everything else. So yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:43:02](#)):

The money you're putting away is going to three households.

Bob Gray ([00:43:05](#)):

Yes, that's right. But I think if we managed, you just have to be managed really well. Understand. Don't just spend money if you don't have to. Do you really need this item? Can you get along without it?

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

What's a nice to have? What's a need to have.

Bob Gray ([00:43:19](#)):

Exactly.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:43:21](#)):

That's interesting that you said it took about 10 years before you felt like the flywheel was spinning.

Bob Gray ([00:43:26](#)):

Well, confident enough, yes, we can make this work.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:43:28](#)):

Yeah. Because I had talked to young farmers now and business planners now, and they're saying about the same as seven to 10 years before you really have the infrastructure you need and your systems in place. On the contrary, what's a time when you felt really challenged farming?

Bob Gray ([00:43:47](#)):

Now. To do the transition. Because everybody has their own ideas. And sometimes my ideas aren't taken into account anymore, but it has to happen. People have to do it themselves and figure it out.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:02](#)):

And it's frustrating.

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

Very frustrating, frankly. Very frustrating. But we'll see what happens.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:12](#)):

Is that a difference of opinion or just because you've done things for a certain way for a while or?

Bob Gray ([00:44:18](#)):

A little bit of both.

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

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([00:44:19](#)):

Yeah. I've seen what happens when you do it right. And maybe they'll have to be convinced by themselves some days, maybe the old man knew what he's talking about.

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

Do you think a lot of that comes from because you've already made those mistakes?

Bob Gray ([00:44:38](#)):

Yeah. And as I said on the calendar, you shouldn't make the same mistake twice, so you shouldn't be farming. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:44:46](#)):

You mentioned weeds are tough to handle, but what's a mistake that you really don't want to make again, or something you wish you hadn't done?

Bob Gray ([00:44:59](#)):

Well, that was a long time ago. Haven't made too many major mistakes. We've had some, we had a major, excuse me, again, issue with strawberries for a while, but it wasn't our fault, we were getting some bad plants from Canada, it was all everywhere and nobody would say anything about it, nurses weren't saying anything about it. Finally, the truth came out, and so we had two or three bad strawberry years. We lost crops because they all died. But that wasn't our fault, that's just, we went to a struggle there for a while. But strawberries are tricky crop. They really are. But it's also a major crop for us because of the pick your own and people come just for our strawberries, so some major source of income for us. But they have to be growing properly so you can really make money on, there's a potentially make really good money on, but if you grow a halfway crop, you just break even.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:45:47](#)):

Yeah, strawberries just seem like a high-risk, high-reward sort of crop.

Bob Gray ([00:45:51](#)):

YEAH. But we have the knowledge. Or I have the knowledge on how to grow them properly. And I think that my son's gaining on that way.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:46:01](#)):

Yeah. I mean, you're farm-

Bob Gray ([00:46:03](#)):

Actually, we grow the day-neutral strawberries as well, which are the California type. They're a whole different animal. It's a long story. They're called day-light neutral because they don't care what the day light is. Regular strawberries are June crop, depends on day lights, decide where they're going to make blossoms or fruit or whatever. But anyway, we grow them a little differently here. We let them ripen fully. And last year we started picking day-neutral strawberries, and we had to struggle with the crop in the beginning. We had some problem with disease and not good plants, but finally got it straightened out by mid-August, and we picked strawberries up until the 1st of November.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:46:38](#)):

Wow.

Bob Gray ([00:46:38](#)):

The 1st of November we're picking strawberries, beautiful strawberries. And normally you pick strawberries for three weeks.

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

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([00:46:47](#)):

About three months. And they're delicious.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:46:51](#)):

And nothing is better than a fresh berry in the late fall-

Bob Gray ([00:46:54](#)):

And nobody else is doing that around here. Canada does it. Canada does a really good job, and they bring them in down here to the co-ops and stuff. We used to have a market there. We sort of lost it, but maybe we can get back into it again. But yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:47:07](#)):

Yeah, that's not the norm. And do you think it's because harder to grow or? Why do you think that they're not as-

Bob Gray ([00:47:14](#)):

It's whole different mindset.

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

Okay.

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

Yeah. That's what it's. And you have to have good plants, treated properly, fertilized properly. And sometimes it's really minor issues with an insect you didn't know was even there. [inaudible] "Oh, what's ... oh, I see. Oh, yeah. Oh, that den. That's what's doing the den?" So you have to live and breathe them. You have to be out there every day looking at them to find out what they need.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:47:42](#)):

There's several different systems of growing berries. I know you guys have done them all. What's your favorite?

Bob Gray ([00:47:50](#)):

Well, I really like growing them through plastic now for the weed issue. But you can only, plastic berries maximum is almost two years. You might squeak a third year because strawberry plants grow up, and on the old system, the bare ground system, every year you have to throw more dirt over the plant so we can put out new roots. The roots come higher on the stem every year. And so with plastic, you can plant them as deep as you can in the plastic, but after two years it's trying to put out roots on top of the plastic, so then they lose all their vigor. But no matter, you can really end with... Anyway. I'm just listen to the phone now. I'm sorry.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:48:32](#)):

That's all right.

Bob Gray ([00:48:33](#)):

Yeah, so yeah, you can really, first of all, we can get them earlier because with the black plastic, they won't [inaudible] but it will cover over them so we can extend the growing season and renovation with bare ground strawberries is quite a struggle, it's really you have to go in and mow them off and thin them down, put fertilize them and throw dirt up on top. If you don't do exactly right, maybe you don't get the irrigation in soon enough for some reason, and then pretty soon the plants aren't growing back where they should. So more and more, I think plastic's a way to grow them. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:49:06](#)):

What's the renovation look like in a plastic culture system?

Bob Gray ([00:49:09](#)):

Pull the plastic, they're all done. Yeah. You just mow them, mow them off and away you go.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:49:17](#)):

So if you're trying to squeeze a second year out of them?

Bob Gray ([00:49:21](#)):

Second year's not a problem. Second year is good. Third year can be painful... And what we have done is pull the plastic up and maybe try to throw some dirt over them. It's okay, but I'm not sure it's worth the effort. It's kind of hard to get an even layer of dirt over a three-foot wide bed. So I think just two years can

be done with it. I think you may even get higher yields on a bare ground system that's done perfectly, but it's really hard to do it perfectly.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:49:48](#)):

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([00:49:49](#)):

We've had some incredible yields way back when the cords were actually touching each other, touching each other in, as you pick. Yeah. 10,000 cords per acre, then you're making money.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:50:01](#)):

Yeah. I guess maybe

Bob Gray ([00:50:01](#)):

Instead of five, which about we're struggling with now, so yeah.

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

Why do you think that is?

Bob Gray ([00:50:06](#)):

Management.

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

Okay. What do you think the struggle is now? Is it spray schedules or weed management or?

Bob Gray ([00:50:19](#)):

Well, in bare ground, it's weed management, but if you start with good clean ground and keep it clean, don't let the weeds get in there, probably way back in the beginning when I've had strawberry plants for eight and nine years, same plants and no weed issues, the only problem was by then you get so many sub-crowns, each plant has 10 crowns instead of two or three that berries get small. And yeah, nobody wants to pick small berries, they all want big berries.

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

Well, it takes forever to pick.

Bob Gray ([00:50:52](#)):

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

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

What advice would you give to your beginning self, knowing what you know now, what would you wish you could tell yourself when you were getting started?

Bob Gray ([00:51:06](#)):

Well, back then we had so much to learn. University of Vermont Extension, they had bus tours going to other farms, Canada, everywhere. We went to every single one when they could and you accumulate

knowledge from... And way back when we first started, even in Hartland, we were lucky enough to get connected with a consultant who had probably 40 or 50 at least growers around the country that he consulted with. And he would drive around his van, camp on their farm and give them advice. And he was fantastic. He got us on the right track right away. That's when we really, really started. And we got to visit all the other growers. And if he said, "Bob, this is what you need to do." This is what you need to do. Because he just consulted, seen 30 to 40 to 50 other growers. He knew exactly how to do it. That's when we were really on a roll, because we had-

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

From a growing perspective?

Bob Gray ([00:52:09](#)):

From a growing perspective, yeah. What varieties to grow, how to grow them, how to put dirt over them, when to fertilize them if you get winter killed. You can cut your crowns every spring, if they look little brown, then you give a little fertilizer at this date, not too soon, not too late, peep til too late they've become vegetative, too soon doesn't amount to anything. Little tricks like that. And I had a whole notebook. I hope my son Charlie's got that notebook somewhere because he was invaluable advice. Other than that, no. We just learned by growing and you learn. And pretty soon we pretty much knew what we were doing, but only by visiting other growers and tweaking our system a little bit. We used to go to Canada all the time and visit the Canadian growers up there because they're really good. Up around Quebec City. They're really, really good.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:52:55](#)):

How did you connect with growers that you didn't know?

Bob Gray ([00:52:58](#)):

Through the consultant.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:52:59](#)):

Oh, okay.

Bob Gray ([00:53:01](#)):

Yeah. We visit all his farm, his farm people. Unfortunately, he passed away some years ago, so we lost, he was fantastic.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:53:10](#)):

What advice would you give to a beginning farmer now?

Bob Gray ([00:53:17](#)):

I would say just jump in with both feet and start small. Find out what works and develop markets. People are looking for growers all the time, and you can start small in a little valley and it's just one family you're trying to support. If you really do a good job, and I think greenhouses are absolutely essential in this climate. We're lucky in the valley because just one ridge over, it's a whole different climate. And look here, it's bare ground, grass is starting to grow.

([00:53:50](#)):

Up in the hills they still have snow. So yeah, try to farm on the north side of a hill, find a good warm pocket and watch out for frost, because cold air is like water, it runs downhill. If you're in a little pocket in the valley, you're going to have frost forever. Better go up on the hillside somewhere that faces south, and you can avoid those frosts. We're a pretty good frost pocket here because not too bad, but because it sloped here to the west and on the other side of the river it slopes a little bit the other way. Further up toward beyond just north of the village that's really wide open there. And this one piece of ground, we're lending there, renting there now, the cold has come down across the river once, across the piece of flag ground, across the river again, and it's the same thing other side.

(00:54:40):

So by the time it gets to our field. It's not terribly frost prone compared to here. Yeah, frost is the killer. Although lately, it hasn't nearly as bad. I can remember in May, kind of frost takes strawberries because they're in blossom and it's down to 14 degrees in May. You are out there trying to beat on sprinklers to get water on, everything's freezing, and we haven't had those. I mean, climate change is real. It's unbelievable. Like I said, we picked strawberries until the 1st of November last year. Didn't even have a frost, killing frost in October. That's unheard of when he first came, we did get a killing frost here the last week of September.

Andy Chamberlin (00:55:22):

You probably used to be putting straw on the berries in early November.

Bob Gray (00:55:25):

Yes. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin (00:55:27):

Not still picking them.

Bob Gray (00:55:28):

Exactly. Yeah. Now we have to wait sometime till Christmas in order to, you want your berries to go to sleep before you cover them up, otherwise you smother them. And then hopefully we had pretty good snow this year, it went so fast. I wish it'd last another two weeks because you want to keep the strawberries asleep until April. Then they can wake up. "Oh, sunshine." They grow too soon. Then you got to worry about blossoms coming too early.

Andy Chamberlin (00:55:51):

I was wondering about that. Because yeah, two weeks ago it was warm, and like you said, the snow went away real fast. It felt like April. It felt like we skipped March and then this week was cold and...

Bob Gray (00:56:02):

But that's what the straw does. I went yesterday, I was over there and I jump off out of my truck and take my jackknife and I'm go cut a crown because that's how you tell how much winter [inaudible] you have. And I actually cut my jackknife down. It's still frozen because they had the straws keeping, which is good. Keeps it cool. But I cut just one crown, I should cut more, and actually it was creamy white, so I, "Whew. That was your one car. Need to cut some more." That's what you want to see. If you have brown, damn, you have winter kill in there, it can really slow your yield down.

Andy Chamberlin (00:56:31):

What does sustainable farming mean to you and what are you doing to achieve it?

Bob Gray ([00:56:36](#)):

Well, it's certainly important. As I said, you can wear the ground out, so you have to really be aware of that. Don't beat it to death and give it a chance to recover. As I said, we have a dairy farm, certainly not a money maker, but we have really good manure. And manure is fantastic. If it's the only fertilizer you use, you should be just fine, especially if your cows are fed good food and they get the minerals they need in their feed, it'll pass us through the manure. And the important thing my dad always said, it's not just the manure, it's the bacteria in the manure. A lot of these large dairy farm down here, they're spreading liquid stuff all over the place. It's so full of chemical from their wash water and everything else. I don't think there's any bacteria.

([00:57:33](#)):

Yeah. So anyway, sustainable. Yeah, I think don't beat the ground to death, use lots of manure and rotate crops, keep the soil healthy. In our greenhouses, as I told you, we grow greenhouse tomatoes. In some houses right now, maybe one or two a year interruption once in a while, but we've been growing tomatoes in the same house for 40 years. Say it can be done, but you can. We have beds and we put not finished compost, fairly half finished compost because the bacteria and the worms like to eat something

([00:58:12](#)):

And they're earthworms in there that eat all it and fill the bed full of worm castings. You can dig down, it's just beautiful and the soil's so crumbly. And of course, we use grafted plants now because they're soil diseased tomato plants that make tremendous difference. But no, they grow, our tomato plants grow beautifully in the same soil in the same house for up to 40 years.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:58:34](#)):

And cow manure and compost is really the ticket for you?

Bob Gray ([00:58:38](#)):

Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. Good manure. Good manure, yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:58:43](#)):

How thick of that are you putting in those houses?

Bob Gray ([00:58:45](#)):

Not an awful lot. Probably go down with wheelbarrows and dump it in and scatter, maybe a one or two inch layer. But every year the soil's built up, so we have to make raised beds. Now some beds are on hemlock boards, are 12 inches high now. We said they're too big. So now that soil's so valuable, what are we going to do? We may actually have to go in and take some of it out, because we can't go to 14 and 15 inch beds. Ridiculous. So we're going to take some of that and put it somewhere in another greenhouse, because it's so good.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:59:14](#)):

Share the wealth a little bit.

Bob Gray ([00:59:15](#)):

Share the wealth, yes. We love the bed system. I think that to me is absolutely essential.

Andy Chamberlin ([00:59:23](#)):

So built raised beds like in plywood and boards-

Bob Gray ([00:59:23](#)):

With boards. Board, yes, with boards. And then in the wintertime we put black plastic over it. Because there are some weeds. I forgot the name of one of them that loves to grow all winter long. You can go down there and, "Oh my God, what happened?" You got a whole bed full of weeds growing in the wintertime, so you put plastic over so the weeds can't grow and the worms come up and crawl around those things. In the spring, the first thing we take the black plastic off, put clear plastic on. This is a raised bed, right?

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

Way back in the beginning, we didn't have raised beds, it was hard to get the ground temperature up. And we used to put hot water pipes on all the beds, following some of our Canadian grower friends. That's what they did. But they were also planning the 1st of February, we now plant the 1st of March or thereabouts, I mean, excuse me, the 1st of March versus we used to plant the 1st of March, now we plant the 1st of April, last week of March. And there's clear plastic over there and those raised beds, the ground temperature's up to 60 degrees when you're at the plant with no underground heat or anything, yeah.

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

Just using the sun.

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

Just using the sun. And then we put between the beds, we put ground fabric, whatever, so there's no weeds as you put white, actually we put white plastic. It reflects the light. It's a beautiful system. Yeah. Our tomato plants come back in middle of October and see how tall they grow. I mean, the plants are literally 30 feet long. We lower them down that much over the summer

Andy Chamberlin ([01:00:50](#)):

You're lowering and leaning?

Bob Gray ([01:00:52](#)):

Lower and leaning, lower and leaning and then-

Andy Chamberlin ([01:00:54](#)):

Keeping them going.

Bob Gray ([01:00:54](#)):

... the root system's way down the middle of the greenhouse and the top's up there.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:00:58](#)):

Just keep threading them back and forth a little bit.

Bob Gray ([01:01:00](#)):

Yeah, our workers do that. They're amazing. When they get the corner of the end of the row, they just turn around and bring them back there. Yeah, it's a beautiful thing.

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

Vine. It's a big vine.

Bob Gray ([01:01:08](#)):

Yeah. So we get tremendous yields. We don't grow just one, some people just grow it four or five feet tall and stop. No, we lower them down. They're all strung up with a spool that holds a thread, the string, you lower them down. It's a really good system. I'm not sure tomatoes are our most profitable crop, but it certainly draws people in. Because there's a lot of labor, tremendous amount of labor to string them in heat. This time of year we run, propane's running every night. From now, we'll actually run propane almost all summer to make sure we can keep the temperature up to 70 degrees at night.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:01:43](#)):

So you're holding 70 degrees overnight?

Bob Gray ([01:01:45](#)):

Yes.

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

Starting in March?

Bob Gray ([01:01:48](#)):

Starting in March, yeah.

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

That's toasty. But-

Bob Gray ([01:01:53](#)):

They love it. They grow like hell.

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

And yeah, you have them in market in May, which is great. Gets that cash flow, which you've mentioned is challenging-

Bob Gray ([01:02:04](#)):

Challenging, yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:02:05](#)):

... coming in sooner. Do you do any bedding plants and things like that too?

Bob Gray ([01:02:08](#)):

Oh yes.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:02:09](#)):

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([01:02:09](#)):

That has been in my department. My wife is doing it now. My son Peter's wife, Marie is doing it, doing a great job. She just said now they're going to how many? A hundred hanging baskets they're going to

make. I think it's too many, but they all sell, so somebody's got to water them every day. But no, it's important. And we do a few tomato plants and broccoli, cauliflower plants and lettuce plants. But big thing, the flowers.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:02:34](#)):

What do you think has been your greatest achievement in your farming career?

Bob Gray ([01:02:38](#)):

Well, just to make a living farming and feel comfortable with it and confident that it can be done. Yeah. I mean if I went sold, I'd start in tomorrow, do the same thing, just to show that it can be done. Just start from scratch. Little garden somewhere with some available land and start in again.

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

If you were starting over now, do you think you'd basically do the same thing?

Bob Gray ([01:03:05](#)):

Exactly. And modify a little bit. I think greenhouses, et cetera are absolutely important. You've got the extent the season, because we have stuff to offer, not tomatoes wouldn't come until the end of July and now we have in May with lettuce and anything you want, salad, salad, you can hardly wait until summer, have a salad every single night. Huge salad, lettuce and cucumbers and tomatoes and so good for you.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:03:29](#)):

Nothing beats fresh vegetables.

Bob Gray ([01:03:32](#)):

No, absolutely.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:03:34](#)):

What made you almost quit and why didn't you?

Bob Gray ([01:03:38](#)):

Never came close to quitting.

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

No?

Bob Gray ([01:03:40](#)):

No. Never.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:03:41](#)):

Never even a consideration?

Bob Gray ([01:03:42](#)):

Never even considered it. No. Even when I was by myself, way back down in Putney, before I met my wife and we got together, I was growing vegetables, selling the farmer's market. I said, "This works. This

works. No question." And that's it. Even better than we having to work with somebody else, which I did for years. Get up every the morning, show up in the job and home at night. This was the one walk behind rototiller, my hoe and cultivator, a push cultivator. And it was working. I could see it would work.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:04:14](#)):

Well, I know not every day is a great day. So what kept you going and what gave you hope?

Bob Gray ([01:04:23](#)):

Well, just see that it works.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:04:24](#)):

You just have faith that things are going to keep coming?

Bob Gray ([01:04:27](#)):

There was never a question. There was never a bad time because it just worked. It worked really well and really quickly too. We were expanding like crazy, growing more crops and people were coming. Yeah, there were a few mistakes, but nothing major.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:04:40](#)):

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([01:04:42](#)):

That's why I'm so confident I could do it again.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:04:44](#)):

And I think you were diversified enough that if something struggled, something else carried the way. Right?

Bob Gray ([01:04:50](#)):

Yeah, I think diversity is really important. It's also a pain in the neck, because you got too many things to keep track of. But it means if you've got a crop failure, you've got something else to back you up. Monocropping could be a disaster.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:05:02](#)):

How many cows do you have now?

Bob Gray ([01:05:04](#)):

Well, the dairy, they're milking about high 20s, maybe 30, I guess. It's very small, but we have this young man that seems to enjoy doing it. It's hard to find someone who wants to milk cows anymore. Even though he has a nice place to live and we aren't pushing too much else on him, all he's got to do is milk the cows night and morning. But we also have a huge herd of highland cattle that we got years and years ago because I clear cut the back 40 up here where all the rocks and stones and things were, and want to see it grow back up. And so we got eight, I think highland cattle. Some guy had some, didn't want to deal with them anymore, and now we've had them forever and ever. Little inbred, we need a new [inaudible 01:05:51]. And last year I think we had almost 50, which is way too many. We need 20.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:05:54](#)):

50?

Bob Gray ([01:05:55](#)):

Yeah. We need 20. My son's working on it, but we're down to like 35 now, but we need to get rid of them, it's just too many, too much hay to feed them in the winter and we have to buy hay to feed them. But they keep that part up there absolutely open. They don't eat pine trees. And where we cleared was all pine trees, but any hardwood, they just chew it right down. If it's two inches diameter, they want it. They just ride it down and eat the tops off. But mostly it's the pine.

([01:06:22](#)):

So once in a while we have to go up there with our workers, our Mexicans, and clip out the pine trees because in 10 years you'd be right back in the forest. But they go, it's just small, they clip through them every two or three years. We go up, put the clippers and clip the pine trees out. And it's a beautiful spot. I mean, it's almost 50 acres up here, it looks at the White Mountains and they go in the forest and make it look like a park. They don't pine trees. Young pine trees are coming in our pine forest, so it's a good forestry project. And they eat all the grass around the trees and stuff, so it's really nice.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:06:56](#)):

And you sell the beef at the farm store, farm stand?

Bob Gray ([01:06:58](#)):

Yeah, we sell the beef at the farm stand, yeah. But we have too many, I just keep harping my son, "You've got to get rid of more." And he doesn't spend all his time all winter feeding them.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:07:06](#)):

Yeah, right.

Bob Gray ([01:07:07](#)):

We feed them round bales, you'd go up and kick off a couple round bales and I used to roll them down the hill so they spread out. So they got all eat one and then they spread the manure more evenly in the field.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:07:18](#)):

That's a benefit of hillside farming.

Bob Gray ([01:07:19](#)):

Yes it is.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:07:21](#)):

Drop the bale facing down.

Bob Gray ([01:07:23](#)):

And they get all excited, starts bouncing down, they kick up their heels and go chasing after. It's kind of fun to watch. We also feed them in a shed too, to get the manure, but the manure is not quite as good as the dairy manure because there's more bedding and they probably aren't getting the same nutrients that cows are getting green every day to keep all the mineral balance and everything up.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:07:44](#)):

Yeah. You're in a hard spot this day and age. It seems like either people have two cows for their homestead or 200.

Bob Gray ([01:07:52](#)):

Or 2000. Yeah.

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

Yeah. The 20 to 50 cow herds or-

Bob Gray ([01:07:57](#)):

If you look around here now and just look out the window, it's all open. Looks like a park. That's because the cows graze it. They graze stuff. You can't put a tractor on, you can't put a tractor over a stone wall to get the vegetation that comes up and the cows can eat the brush that comes in. And in the summertime they go out, they harvest their own feed and they spread their own manure. That's the way nature intended. And the pastures maintain fertility because they spread [inaudible].

([01:08:25](#)):

And occasionally you may go out with a little thing. My dad used to call it turd knocker, but just a chain drag and spread the manure around the spring. And that can go on forever and ever, a hundred years just maintaining a pasture for the cows to eat and then spreading manure and fertilizer. You ever see a dried cow turd in the field? You kick it over, it's crawling with worms and albeit kind of bug you can think of consuming it and putting it back in the soil. It's just a beautiful thing.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:08:55](#)):

Yeah, and all those bugs are loosening up the soil as well.

Bob Gray ([01:08:59](#)):

Yep. I just get back from Switzerland also, we flew over back to Germany. There's not a blade of grass out of place in there. Everything, little tiny hill farms everywhere. They farm things you can't even walk on because they care. And they're all small farms, no big farms, all small farms. And they're supported by the government because the skiers, the mountains, if farmers weren't there, it would grow up to be brush and nobody'd go to Switzerland to see the views. And so the farms farmers in the valleys high up in the valleys make the same amount of money that people who live in the city do. So everybody's happy. I mean, yeah, these small farms and ranch should have been subsized years ago, we'd have a national park. The only place left was real farms. You could put a gate at each end of the valley and charge people admission to go see a real farm. I'm not joking. I'm serious.

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

Yeah, that would've been...

Bob Gray ([01:09:53](#)):

It could be done.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:09:55](#)):

Yeah. Talk about agritourism there.

Bob Gray ([01:09:57](#)):

Yeah, exactly. No, exactly. I've traveled enough-

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

Yeah, you've seen it.

Bob Gray ([01:10:02](#)):

... by my skiing career to see how it can be done.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:10:05](#)):

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([01:10:06](#)):

Some years ago I went over to a meeting with a bunch of farmers and they just looked at me and laughed. Now those farms aren't even there. They could have ended up with \$10,000 in their pocket, they'd have farmed forever, but they couldn't afford to lose \$10,000 a year anymore.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:10:20](#)):

Right.

Bob Gray ([01:10:22](#)):

And \$10,000 we'd drop in the bucket in the overall budget.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:10:25](#)):

Yeah. It doesn't take a lot to make a big difference on a little farm.

Bob Gray ([01:10:29](#)):

No, exactly. They're happy and they're raising a family, but no, but it's just a mentality.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:10:34](#)):

How has the marketplace changed over your farming career and where do you think it might go?

Bob Gray ([01:10:41](#)):

Well, it's not getting nothing but better here. We have a customer base comes and we get a lot of tourists come because they come up here and they come one time they come again. But I mean, customer base is local, but that goes 30, 40 miles in either direction, especially on a weekend when people want to take a drive and see the beautiful dairy farm with cows grazing.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:11:04](#)):

The park.

Bob Gray ([01:11:04](#)):

The park. No, I'm serious.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:11:06](#)):

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([01:11:07](#)):

Yeah. No. "Oh, we got to get rid of dairy." "No, we can't get rid of the dairy cows." Any big-

Andy Chamberlin ([01:11:12](#)):

They're an attraction.

Bob Gray ([01:11:12](#)):

They're attraction and people come. They love to take pictures of them. They see the dry cows out there, but the fans begging for attention, so they got to pet the dry cows who are no longer in the barn. They're kind of lonely, they want somebody to talk to.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:11:27](#)):

What was hard when you started, but maybe easy now?

Bob Gray ([01:11:32](#)):

Well, financials. Financially was hard, I guess. But we just did it. Because we had to borrow money from the government to buy this place, and back then they had a government low interest loan, back then was 5%. Unfortunately, when we were asking for the money, and we had it all allotted and then all of a sudden, some farmer in Iowa got part of it. So we were short. But my wife Kim, had some family friends who lived next to us in Hartland Four Corners where we started and they loaned us some money, \$50,000 to cover the balance at a low interest loan. So after two years, they came every year and they looked at all this and that, "Oh, you're doing really well. We're going to bump you up to 10%."

Andy Chamberlin ([01:12:22](#)):

Oh gee, thanks.

Bob Gray ([01:12:22](#)):

Oh gee, thanks. We got a 40 year mortgage, right? We said, "Screw you." Went to a local bank at 10%, made it 20 years. And then we bought the neighboring farm and the dairy. So we had two mortgages, but as I said, my wife and I were doing it and didn't have a lot of expenses. We managed to pay the mortgages. They're both paid off, and now we've got another one because we bought the house over here, but one of my sons. But no matter, yeah, that was a struggle, but we managed to do it. And we were pleased be here, but the first thing we did was pay off that mortgage and then whatever. But the money was coming in and just got better and better. It's possible. I think, as I said, I'd start tomorrow. I would probably have to get one Mexican to help me because I can't do all I used to do.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:13:17](#)):

Not quite as-

Bob Gray ([01:13:18](#)):

No, can't cover the same ground.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:13:20](#)):

Yeah. Not quite the same amount of stamina as you used to have. Yeah.

Bob Gray ([01:13:23](#)):

Well, it's just a wonderful way to make a living. I wouldn't do anything else. Like I said, I'd do it again tomorrow. And to see things grow every year, it's just wonderful, especially if you can do a nice, neat job of it. Get pleasure of just walking on the field and, "Oh, look at that. Look what's come up today." Isn't that nice all weed free? Instead of "Oh, look at this mess." Yeah, weeds are a major problem. We got to figure out how to get on top of them. Some really planning.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:13:52](#)):

I love that aspect of, I think Vermont in particular, it really wears its seasons well. The winter comes in and then the first flowers of spring, it's like, "Oh, hello, daffodils."

Bob Gray ([01:14:02](#)):

One of my favorite times of year, just happened for my birthday as well, so the last week of April, things are just booming.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:14:08](#)):

Yeah, grass is turning green, and-

Bob Gray ([01:14:10](#)):

I'm a Robert Frost fan. One of his poems I like, well, "Nature's first green is gold, the hardest hue to hold." That's when the leaves first come out, they're yellow. You think they're blossoming with the young leaves, growing, curling, and then, but boom, a week they're gone. And then they're all out. It's green. It's beautiful, memorable time here. The hope. Look at this. Everything's booming better. Get up earlier, work later.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:14:38](#)):

Yeah, let's go. Let's go.

Bob Gray ([01:14:39](#)):

Let's go. That's why they leave you all behind if you're not careful.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:14:43](#)):

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([01:14:46](#)):

Yeah. I guess, it's just a seasonality out, it's just, yeah. Come November when the leaves are all off the trees and you can see the ridges again and the trees, it's just a beautiful time of year, just beautiful. Yeah. Hopefully you got everything all done. Things have put to bed, tucked in, you can sit back a little bit and we used to make notes that time of year on the calendar, whatever. Kind of recap the whole thing.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:15:13](#)):

Yeah. Reflect while it's still in your brain.

Bob Gray ([01:15:15](#)):

Whilst in your mind, exactly. It's very important. And just be happy that you're doing it and that you've done a good job. And if you've messed up, then it, you shouldn't do it again next year. You do a better job next year because there's no excuse. It can all be managed, you just have to do it right.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:15:33](#)):

Check and adjust and-

Bob Gray ([01:15:34](#)):

Exactly. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:15:35](#)):

... make note of timings.

Bob Gray ([01:15:38](#)):

Anyway, we always make some little mistakes, but our struggle for me, I was just telling my son, he sort of manages the planning now where we plant things, that I've got to find a piece of ground where I can plant green peas, peas, sweet peas. Because this one weed called galinsoga has taken over the farm. And I cultivate and cultivate until I can't cultivate anymore because the plants begin to fall over and that weed will come in so fast, by the time we go to harvest it's just a mess of weeds I can't even pick them. So I got to have some clean ground for peas. Unfortunately, you can't plant peas through black plastic, at least I haven't figured out a way yet.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:16:17](#)):

They have a hard time finding their way.

Bob Gray ([01:16:18](#)):

Yeah. I guess, one seed at a time through a finger hole might work.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:16:23](#)):

Yeah. But normally they're in a row, right?

Bob Gray ([01:16:25](#)):

That's right. Yeah. Yeah. I have found that maybe we always plant this one variety, it's called sugar snap. It's just low-growing because it's easy and you pick it once or twice and you're done with it. I thought some maybe trellising peas, but that's a lot more labor, and you got to pick up the trellis afterwards, and as it is now, when we get done, we just take our flail mower in and everything's flail mowed down in the weeds and everything get tilled under back into soil for fertilizer and weed seeds, of course.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:16:55](#)):

Yeah. Well, I think that was all of my questions. Is there anything else that you'd like to share or talk about today?

Bob Gray ([01:17:05](#)):

No, not really. I pretty much spread it all out there, how I feel about it, and I love doing it. It's just a wonderful way to make a living, growing good food for people to eat, and they really appreciate it. We have a wonderful customer base, just wonderful, and they're happy and I'm happy. Just got to

management, at this point, it's really serious management because as I say we have three families. We really got to pull together. And I think we're on the right track. Marie's, my wife, she's used to all the greenhouse stuff, but she's an invalid now, so she's out there in the greenhouse every day with her newly born baby and just getting sunlight in the crib and them just loving it.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:17:50](#)):

Hitting the ground running.

Bob Gray ([01:17:51](#)):

Yeah. Getting plenty of sunlight, healthy sunlight, and she feeds him in the greenhouse and puts him back in his bed and it's her [inaudible] back in her bed. So yeah, that's the way, that's the way to do it.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:18:04](#)):

I can tell you really love farming in all aspects, but is there one particular activity that you're just like, this is the best day of the year?

Bob Gray ([01:18:13](#)):

Nope. I like it all. I like it all. Yeah. I try to do a good job so you avoid most of the frustrations, that's all.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:18:21](#)):

Yeah.

Bob Gray ([01:18:21](#)):

Yeah. Because it's all about, as I said, detail. It's about attention to detail. If you've missed the detail, it's going to jump up and bite you, especially when it comes to weeds.

Andy Chamberlin ([01:18:31](#)):

And that was the Farmer's Share. I hope you enjoyed this episode with Bob Gray of 4 Corners 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. 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.

([01:19:33](#)):

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 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 and email subscription to the Vermont Vegetable and Berry newsletter.

[\(01:20:45\)](#):

Camaraderie, enhanced communication and fellowship among commercial growers. 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.

[\(01:21:37\)](#):

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 Podcast, just click on the show, scroll down to the bottom, and there you can leave five stars in 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.