

Kagen Dewey ([00:00:09](#)):

I am Kagen Dewey.

Elise Magnant ([00:00:10](#)):

I'm Elise Magnant.

Kagen Dewey ([00:00:11](#)):

And we own and operate Blackbird Organics. It's a certified organic vegetable farm in Plainfield, Vermont. We started off in 2018 leasing land at Littlewood Farm. And then in 2023, with the help of the Vermont Land Trust, we were able to buy our own property. Also in Plainfield, just two miles up the road. And so we are here today looking at how far we've come with building this up as a vegetable farm.

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

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

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

Today's episode comes to you from Plainfield, Vermont, where we visit with Kagen and Elise from Blackbird Organics. They've been farming since 2018 and have set their roots on their own farm with high tunnels and field production. We start off the visit with a tour of their greenhouses, walk around the fields and circle back into a tunnel to hear how they're building their farming career.

Kagen Dewey ([00:01:57](#)):

We grow certified organic vegetables in Plainfield, Vermont. And that's Tara, our shepherd dog. And we are walking around our farm. And so it's a 74 acre property. About 50 of that, maybe a little more, is the Woodlot which is mostly softwoods, a lot of cedar. But then all the open land is pretty consistently buckling loam. Or at least that's what the soil map says, there's a lot of spots where it seems a little lighter. Yeah, we've got three tunnels now and we actually have this one as a dedicated utility and seating space, which is really nice.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:02:38](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:02:39](#)):

I think our first two years here we had the one tunnel. And so we were seating in it, but then kind of also trying to get beds ready underneath the benches so that as soon as those things could move outside, we could clear up that space and plant a tomato right in them. And that's always a mess, so it's nice to just have this space. This is our first spring of this is the seating greenhouse, and that's all that we're doing in it right now.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:05](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:03:09](#)):

Sure. We set up this partition.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:16](#)):

Will save a little heat.

Kagen Dewey ([00:03:17](#)):

Yeah. And then I've just been kind of slowly walking it back as we needed more space.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:21](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:03:22](#)):

And then I think tomorrow we're actually going to drop it because I think with tomorrow's seating, we'll have to move into using the whole space. But things are coming along quite well.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:35](#)):

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:03:37](#)):

We've tempered our water for in here this year for the first time, and I think it's made a huge difference.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:43](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:03:43](#)):

We saw a lot of damping off last year in our cherry tomatoes and some evidence of phosphorus deficiency right from the get-go, and so we've been running a little bit hotter nighttime temperatures. We're keeping it at 60 in here right now, ever since we potted up peppers and eggplants and tomatoes. And then we got a watering set up here, it's got a float valve in it and then a stock tank heater.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:15](#)):

Yep. Oh, that's a good idea.

Kagen Dewey ([00:04:17](#)):

And then it runs off of a half horsepower sub pump from the hardware store for better pressure than we'd get from the well anyways.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:25](#)):

Oh, that's a smart idea too.

Kagen Dewey ([00:04:27](#)):

And we even had-

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

Now you're still using the hose, but it's warm. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:04:34](#)):

We've got it all on a light switch now too.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:36](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:04:36](#)):

Which is just one of those little things that for me is just making life a lot better because we've always used the sump pump, then you just hear unplugging and plugging and unplugging, and it's really nice to just have on-demand warm water on the light switch.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:51](#)):

It's the little thing sometimes.

Elise Magnant ([00:04:52](#)):

It is, yeah. I mean, you save a couple minutes here and there and it adds up.

Kagen Dewey ([00:04:56](#)):

Yeah. Well, it all adds up. But I've been also thinking about how if a lot of their nutrients aren't available until the soil's 60 degrees or something. And so often you water with well water first thing in the morning, and you cool the soil of all of your trays right down to 50 right when the sun's coming out and they could actually get to work as opposed to hitting them with 70, 75 degree water to start the day. You're just kind of taking more advantage of daylight, I think.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:27](#)):

Yeah, that's a good idea.

Elise Magnant ([00:05:30](#)):

Yes. This is probably the one that was up last time you were here. Got some early season spinach.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:38](#)):

No longer sharing seating in here pretty much.

Kagen Dewey ([00:05:40](#)):

Yep.

Elise Magnant ([00:05:40](#)):

Nope.

Kagen Dewey ([00:05:43](#)):

And this is a ledge wood.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:44](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:05:45](#)):

And then we've got a rim all there. And this we believe is an atlas.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:49](#)):

Okay.

Elise Magnant ([00:05:50](#)):

Yeah, we got it used.

Kagen Dewey ([00:05:52](#)):

This one we paid for out-of-pocket. That one we got on NRCS grant. And that one we got used from Bill Hath at Harvest Hill Farm. And so we saying we want to get more tunnels, but the next one's got to be a Harnois.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:05](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:06:06](#)):

Because we've got to just keep building the full lineup of brands here.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:12](#)):

Well, that's the way it goes.

Kagen Dewey ([00:06:16](#)):

Yeah. I mean, we're doing pretty standard stuff this time of year in all these tunnels. This is all spinach that was seeded October 15th, I want to say.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:24](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:06:27](#)):

And we've been harvesting for a few weeks now.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:31](#)):

Some inner seeded onions in there?

Kagen Dewey ([00:06:33](#)):

Yeah. We were playing around with different dates for overwintered scallions, and this seems to be a good one. Which I think was just seeded at the same time as the spinach.

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

Yep.

This transcript was exported on Apr 28, 2025 - view latest version [here](#).

Kagen Dewey ([00:06:46](#)):

This will all be cherry tomatoes in a couple weeks.

Elise Magnant ([00:06:49](#)):

Yeah. Definitely looking forward to having more greenhouse space to have the early season variety.

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

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:06:55](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:06:57](#)):

More and more. We've got our early season CSA and farmer's market starting in May. And the farmer's market, just anything you have in May you can sell pretty much because gardeners are just getting into it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:10](#)):

People are antsy for fresh vegetables. How big is your CSA?

Kagen Dewey ([00:07:18](#)):

We're trying to grow it to 40 people this year.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:20](#)):

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:07:20](#)):

Last year was 20. So we're still kind of climbing up there. We're in the 20s now.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:26](#)):

That's a big jump.

Elise Magnant ([00:07:27](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:07:28](#)):

There seems to be demand for it.

Elise Magnant ([00:07:30](#)):

It's been really nice. Most of our members are people who live right on this road.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:35](#)):

Nice.

Elise Magnant ([00:07:35](#)):

Which has been really sweet. A good way to get the neighbors over.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:07:39](#)):

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:07:40](#)):

Yeah. It genuinely feels like the traditional idea of it's very much community supported. Just looking from here, it's like there's three people in that house right there that are part of the CSA. Two houses down is part of the CSA. The house right down there helps us pick the CSA.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:01](#)):

There you go. That's nice. Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:08:05](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:08:07](#)):

You're feeding the neighbors and the neighbors get to-

Elise Magnant ([00:08:12](#)):

Yeah, participate.

Kagen Dewey ([00:08:13](#)):

... eat right next door. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:14](#)):

Yeah. Let's go look at the other one.

Kagen Dewey ([00:08:18](#)):

This one went up last July. And we knew we weren't going to have time, so this one was fully contracted out as far as we had somebody come do the pad for us and then we had Vine Ripe come put it up, did the whole thing. And I will say it was really nice. I've skinned a lot of greenhouses. I kind of like doing it. We did all the site work on that one.

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

Yeah.

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

And we did all the site work and the construction on that one. And it was pretty nice to just keep doing what we were doing and then two days later, have a new greenhouse ready to plant.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:55](#)):

Ta-da. Here you go.

Elise Magnant ([00:08:57](#)):

Super nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:08:59](#)):

And the drainage has been really nice.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:09:01](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:09:02](#)):

Alex Hunkins was our excavator and he did an amazing job just swaling around, which we got almost an immediate test of last July. But no issues in here.

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

Worked it right in. Yeah, put it to use.

Kagen Dewey ([00:09:19](#)):

Yeah. Site drainage is really key for high-tunnels for sure, and something it's best to do up front.

Elise Magnant ([00:09:27](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I feel like it's always a little bit of a work in progress.

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

How do you feel it worked out financially having somebody else put it up for you?

Kagen Dewey ([00:09:39](#)):

Well, we had the NRCS grant for this one, so it worked out wonderfully.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:09:42](#)):

Okay, so that was enough to cover their install costs?

Kagen Dewey ([00:09:46](#)):

It was.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:09:46](#)):

Nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:09:48](#)):

Yeah. I think we went just a little bit over-

Elise Magnant ([00:09:49](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:09:50](#)):

... because we got the extended ground posts and because we had Alex do the site work and the site work was not insignificant on this one. I mean, you can see the drop-off there and how much he dug in there. But yeah, pretty much it was covered by that NRCS grant.

Andy Chamberlain (00:10:09):

Yeah. That's awesome. Then it doesn't hurt the wallet so much to out of pocket invest in the upgrades, like upgraded ground posts.

Kagen Dewey (00:10:18):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant (00:10:18):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain (00:10:18):

And that's not a big deal.

Kagen Dewey (00:10:19):

No. Though I will say the extra height is nice, but now we've got the added problem of figuring out how we're going to hang a trellis from it.

Elise Magnant (00:10:28):

Yeah. We've got to drop a frame to put the trellis wires on because they're going to be too high to reach.

Kagen Dewey (00:10:35):

The standard height seems like you just the right height to hang tomatoes and stuff from.

Andy Chamberlain (00:10:40):

From a regular ladder or something. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey (00:10:44):

I can just about reach in our ledge wood up if they're hanging.

Andy Chamberlain (00:10:51):

I watched the guys at Nifty Hoops put up a high-tunnel over at Bread and Butter Farm. They're out of Michigan, I think. And they set it up real fast. But what I took away from them is most of their crew was wearing stilts like a drywall crew would-

Kagen Dewey (00:11:08):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain (00:11:09):

... to attach all the overhead piping. So they were just walking along.

Kagen Dewey (00:11:14):

It's amazing.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:11:15](#)):

I'm like, "There you go."

Kagen Dewey ([00:11:17](#)):

I've often thought about it. I mean, I have been on drywall stilts before, my dad was a contractor and-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:11:25](#)):

If you got the balance.

Kagen Dewey ([00:11:26](#)):

Yeah. It's cool. Once you get the hang of it it's pretty natural. I don't know if this is real or not, but my dad used to say that he worked on this bigger construction crew and there was a bunch of guys that would do races on him.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:11:43](#)):

Whoa.

Kagen Dewey ([00:11:43](#)):

Like sprinting. And he's like, if you can actually get a stride going with a six-foot stilt on-

Elise Magnant ([00:11:48](#)):

Oh man, you could probably go so fast.

Kagen Dewey ([00:11:52](#)):

Well, we might as well go do the loop and see the view-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:11:55](#)):

Sure.

Kagen Dewey ([00:11:56](#)):

... because that's kind of the best part of the farm.

Elise Magnant ([00:11:59](#)):

I think it's time to do tissue samples.

Kagen Dewey ([00:12:01](#)):

Yeah?

Elise Magnant ([00:12:01](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:12:03](#)):

For the listeners, Elise is over there checking our strawberries under the remay right now.

Elise Magnant ([00:12:09](#)):

Yeah. We went to the VVGA conference and learned a little bit about the importance of tissue samples. We're going to play with that a little bit this year with our strawberries and our cherry tomatoes as well.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:12:23](#)):

How many strawberries do you have in there?

Elise Magnant ([00:12:26](#)):

It's four beds, two row. A lot for us.

Kagen Dewey ([00:12:32](#)):

400 feet.

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

Yeah. Time's a long row.

Elise Magnant ([00:12:36](#)):

Yeah. We're really excited. The plants overwintered really well under all the snow.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:12:40](#)):

That's good.

Kagen Dewey ([00:12:41](#)):

Yeah. We had a good blanket all the way through the winter this year.

Elise Magnant ([00:12:43](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:12:44](#)):

We sourced some really good straw this year.

Elise Magnant ([00:12:47](#)):

Yeah. The last two or three years have been pretty bad strawberry years for us.

Kagen Dewey ([00:12:53](#)):

Two years ago, we lost pretty much the whole crop to that really late freeze where it was supposed to be 27, and we were kind of prepared for that, and it ended up being 17 or something. That was a pretty disheartening morning.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:13:09](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:13:10](#)):

And then the year after that, we had an issue with sourcing our plugs.

Elise Magnant (00:13:16):

Yeah. We got them super late. So they-

Kagen Dewey (00:13:16):

They didn't even go in the ground until September 15th, I think.

Elise Magnant (00:13:20):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey (00:13:20):

And they just didn't do much.

Elise Magnant (00:13:22):

Yep.

Kagen Dewey (00:13:22):

So we went back to bare roots, planted in late June last year and just kind of went back to bare soil. I guess that's kind of one of the fun parts about being a strawberry grower that's also a diverse vegetable farm is we have all the equipment to do all the different cultivation practices for strawberries. So we don't have to stick with just one, and I don't know if that's been a good thing or bad thing. But for better or worse, we haven't settled on what our favorite way to do them is yet.

Andy Chamberlain (00:13:53):

So this year you're going matted row?

Kagen Dewey (00:13:55):

Yep.

Elise Magnant (00:13:55):

Matted row, yep.

Kagen Dewey (00:14:00):

And then, yeah, who knows? Depending on how this goes, when the next year's come in the mail, maybe we'll end up laying some plastic for them.

Elise Magnant (00:14:06):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain (00:14:06):

Right.

Elise Magnant (00:14:08):

Yeah. We're talking about maybe doing plastic for the first year. Rip up the plastic, transition to matted row.

Kagen Dewey ([00:14:16](#)):

Let pick your owners come out for the second year fruiting of matted row where it gets a little bit higher, labor costs.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:14:25](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:14:26](#)):

So far, we haven't gone pick your own with them at all. We've been able to sell every berry we can pick at the farmer's market and to wholesale accounts at the Co-ops. But as our other parts of our business are getting bigger, I don't know how many labor hours we're going to be willing to dedicate to crawling those strawberry beds this June.

Elise Magnant ([00:14:48](#)):

Yeah. Although his brother keeps threatening to build us a row hand, so I'm kind of hoping that happens.

Kagen Dewey ([00:14:54](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:14:58](#)):

Have you heard about anybody's experiences with this?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:15:02](#)):

Well, I got to use a picking assistant back in 2012 era. My grandpa had one. And it's a sister unit to the row hand, and I will say it's a game changer.

Kagen Dewey ([00:15:18](#)):

It is? Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:15:19](#)):

I mean, you can pick almost twice as fast because you're using both hands. You're not using one hand to carry the basket or you're not using one hand to push yourself up off the ground. You can just almost swim through the plants, so you're picking with two hands so it goes really quick.

Kagen Dewey ([00:15:38](#)):

What you're saying is all the things that I dreamt it would be are real?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:15:41](#)):

Yeah. I mean, yeah, we almost invested in a second one-

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

Wow, cool.

Andy Chamberlain (00:15:49):

... because it works so well. And then because you're not as tired because you're not bent over, you can pick twice as long. So you're picking faster and longer so it's kind of a win-win. The only downside now, I think, is they're just really expensive, but so is labor if you calculate it.

Kagen Dewey (00:16:09):

Right over how many years.

Andy Chamberlain (00:16:10):

So I'm about ready to fill out a grant application to try to get another one myself because-

Elise Magnant (00:16:15):

Oh, yeah.

Andy Chamberlain (00:16:15):

... that one got sold.

Elise Magnant (00:16:18):

Cool.

Andy Chamberlain (00:16:19):

But it's great for hand planting or weeding too, so it's not just picking.

Elise Magnant (00:16:27):

Yeah. I want it for the carrot, the carrot weeding would probably really benefit from that.

Andy Chamberlain (00:16:30):

Yes. Yep.

Kagen Dewey (00:16:31):

When we moved on to this farm, this field here had been in hay production for as long as anyone alive could remember. It was really nice. We actually already knew the guy who had been hanging it for the past 30 years, so he was able to give us a little bit of intel. But nobody really knew about plowing it. And so I just remember there was this moment we had already signed a purchase and sale. We were going forward. We had taken some soil tests and bought our tractor and got it here and had a plow, and we're just like, "All right, first pass. Fingers crossed." Because at this point we had committed, it was like I hope we don't just trip the plow like two feet in. And so we started right there and went for about 600 feet before-

Elise Magnant (00:17:26):

Before we hit the rock.

Kagen Dewey (00:17:26):

... we pulled it up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:17:27](#)):

Nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:17:28](#)):

And that was one of the best feelings I think I'll ever experience in my life. It's like, yep, this is going to work.

Elise Magnant ([00:17:35](#)):

Not too many rocks.

Kagen Dewey ([00:17:40](#)):

There's still plenty of rocks, right?

Elise Magnant ([00:17:41](#)):

They're mostly big rocks though. And I'd rather pull out big rocks than have to crawl through a bunch of small rocks.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:17:45](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:17:46](#)):

Yeah. They're good wall building rocks. So we can maintain that historical feature there.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:17:52](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:17:53](#)):

We've been kind of chopping it up over time and just figuring out what areas of it... Some people look at this and they've told us they would just plow the whole thing as one big field and just kind of go up through the ups and downs. I don't really want to manage 600 foot long beds.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:18:15](#)):

Nope.

Kagen Dewey ([00:18:15](#)):

It's just disheartening when you're weeding carrots, 400 feet in and you still can't see the end.

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

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:18:24](#)):

So all these front fields are about 350 or 400 feet long.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:18:27](#)):

That's still a long row.

Kagen Dewey ([00:18:28](#)):

It is. Yeah. We've been working through with the equipment we have figuring out what our best sequence of tillage tools is for converting this thick sod into field space.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:18:45](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:18:47](#)):

So this field's been worked now for two years and it's pretty good. This one we just started working last fall, and so we ran a Fred Kane ripper through that just to kind of try and get some things fluffed up. But honestly, I feel like the quickest turnover from sod to plantable we've gotten is just rototilling a lot.

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:19:14](#)):

It seems kind of harsh on the soil, but at the same time you're trying to kill the grass so it's what you need to do.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:19:25](#)):

So how many acres do you have worked up here?

Kagen Dewey ([00:19:30](#)):

I swear every time I paste it or Google map it, it's different.

Elise Magnant ([00:19:35](#)):

Yeah. Between six or eight maybe.

Kagen Dewey ([00:19:37](#)):

Yeah. I think six is probably safe for us to say. I think by the time we're done and have-

Elise Magnant ([00:19:44](#)):

Pushed out the margins.

Kagen Dewey ([00:19:45](#)):

... pushed things to where we really want, it'll be closer to eight. And we're planning on cropping about five this year.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:19:53](#)):

Okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:19:54](#)):

So that feels like a good balance.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:19:57](#)):

That's good.

Kagen Dewey ([00:20:01](#)):

Yeah. This will be where we're thinking two more 30 by 96 this year.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:20:05](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:20:06](#)):

And then we'll have five acres of outdoor field production, four 30 by 90 sixes of protected culture, and that seems like a nice operation for our scale and what our markets and what we want to do is.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:20:26](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:20:26](#)):

Then there's fields down there as well. We got the cottage there, which we rent out as an apartment. And then the old farmhouse is already set up as a duplex-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:20:38](#)):

Oh, nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:20:38](#)):

... so we rent out the west half of it. And while everybody who lives on the property has lot of experience vegetable farming, none of them are our employees.

Elise Magnant ([00:20:51](#)):

Right. So they work at other farms.

Kagen Dewey ([00:20:57](#)):

So yeah. When you were here last, we were just starting to imagine a wash pack house. And this was pretty much filled with trash, I think.

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

Yeah, stuff.

Elise Magnant ([00:21:05](#)):

Stuff, yeah.

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

So we're sitting in a barn that is a mix of very, very old construction and new construction from 2005, I think-

Elise Magnant ([00:21:17](#)):

Yeah, around then.

Kagen Dewey ([00:21:19](#)):

... that was built after the previous owner... They had a big hay barn off the end of that side of it that burnt down in the early 2000s, and then she built this as an addition on what was left of that barn for her art studio.

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

Okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:21:38](#)):

And so we are kind of doing this in stages as we can afford to, but we needed a place to wash our produce.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:21:51](#)):

Right.

Kagen Dewey ([00:21:53](#)):

Last spring we were doing the behind the greenhouse mud pit and hose system, which was getting tiresome pretty quickly. So we've got a draining concrete floor here and some of our basic stuff, and then we're working on dismantling that section of floor so that eventually we can bring that space all down to level.

Elise Magnant ([00:22:12](#)):

Move into the greater space.

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

Yeah, that'll be a nice size space once that's usable.

Elise Magnant ([00:22:17](#)):

I think so, yeah. But this will be on casters in a minute and we'll be able to wheel it outside.

Kagen Dewey ([00:22:22](#)):

Oh, yeah. Yep, in progress.

Elise Magnant ([00:22:22](#)):

Which will be nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:22:27](#)):

We got this project. We got the big green spinner that has been really, really nice.

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

Ah, I haven't seen one of these yet.

Kagen Dewey ([00:22:34](#)):

Oh yeah?

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

I've heard of them.

Elise Magnant ([00:22:36](#)):

Yeah, it's great.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:22:37](#)):

So it's the big never sink?

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

Yep. My only complaint is that the spinning time is too long.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:22:45](#)):

Okay.

Elise Magnant ([00:22:45](#)):

The minimum spinning time is well over a minute.

Kagen Dewey ([00:22:50](#)):

When I'm using it is I just-

Elise Magnant ([00:22:52](#)):

I just emergency stop it.

Kagen Dewey ([00:22:53](#)):

Yeah. I just set it for five minutes and just emergency stop and that seems to work fine.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:22:59](#)):

What's your average cycle time that you like to do?

Elise Magnant ([00:23:03](#)):

I like 30 to 45 seconds.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:05](#)):

Okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:23:06](#)):

Seems to do well as long as you shake them out a little bit as you're-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:09](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:23:10](#)):

Yeah. You don't get too beat up.

Kagen Dewey ([00:23:12](#)):

But it is pretty easy to clean.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:14](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:23:14](#)):

Yeah. You just spray it out.

Kagen Dewey ([00:23:16](#)):

It seems to do a quiet, nice job. And I mean, we were using a five gallon hand spinner from Johnny's before-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:27](#)):

Okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:23:28](#)):

... and we were having some days where we were doing 100 pounds of greens, and that was just out of hand.

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

That's a lot by hand, yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:23:35](#)):

So this was a nice upgrade last year. And then we got the barrel washer from grindstone, which I don't even bother with the lock.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:45](#)):

Yeah. Just the fact that it has a lid is nice. Do you regularly have it strapped at the dolly or is that-

Elise Magnant ([00:23:55](#)):

No.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:56](#)):

... just a temporary?

Elise Magnant ([00:23:57](#)):

No, we've been washing in the greenhouse up until yesterday.

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

Yep.

Elise Magnant ([00:24:01](#)):

But it's time to move in here. But we had to do some washing and it was still below freezing.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:24:08](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:24:08](#)):

The barrel washer has been such a great investment. We're doing a lot more carrots, more than ever, so it's been really helpful and fun.

Kagen Dewey ([00:24:19](#)):

Grindstone's selling them standard now with the variable speed DC motor in it.

Elise Magnant ([00:24:26](#)):

Which is awesome. You can just get it set to the right processing speed-

Kagen Dewey ([00:24:31](#)):

With the right tilt.

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

... you never have to turn it off.

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:24:34](#)):

Yeah. I mean, all last fall you were pretty much running this as a solo job to go through carrots.

Elise Magnant ([00:24:41](#)):

Yeah. I think the best time was we did the final pick of carrots, and we picked and washed 900 pounds of carrots all after 12 noon before the end of the day.

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

Nice.

Elise Magnant ([00:24:55](#)):

Which felt like a good accomplishment.

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:24:59](#)):

This has kind of been our biggest bottleneck on our farm at this point.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:25:04](#)):

Wash pack?

Kagen Dewey ([00:25:05](#)):

Yeah. We've got our field systems, I think, in a pretty good place. And we've pretty much bought all the toys we want for cultivation. There's a couple things that are on the list, but not crucial.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:25:19](#)):

What's next on the dream list here?

Kagen Dewey ([00:25:21](#)):

I mean, we'll join the club and say we want a stone barrier. I feel like the more we learn about it, the more it sounds awesome. But I think maybe even before that would be a ditch bank flail mower.

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

Yeah.

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

Partially for mowing down cover crops without having your wheel tracks in front of your mower so that everything gets evenly mowed. And then also just because we've got a lot of little hillsides and swales on the farm that it would be kind of nice to be able to mow and manage with that.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:25:52](#)):

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:25:54](#)):

So that's on the dream list. The stone barrier is on the dream list just for quicker turnovers and better incorporation of cover crops. I think I'm happy with our cultivation equipment. I used to say we need-

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

Yeah, we got a lot of stuff.

Kagen Dewey ([00:26:05](#)):

... weeder.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:06](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:26:07](#)):

But I feel like we're doing fine without it.

Elise Magnant ([00:26:09](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:26:09](#)):

We bought a Kubota L245H last year-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:14](#)):

Nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:26:15](#)):

... with baskets on it. And then we got a Williams toolbar tine rake for the back of it, and that's just such a great tool for us.

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

Okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:26:27](#)):

We've got the Gandy spreader too.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:29](#)):

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:26:30](#)):

So just in a single pass, if you throw the spiders on the back or just a toolbar, we're side dressing, basket weeding, and getting the walkways in a single pass with it, and that feels really good.

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

Yeah, I think that's a fairly common setup that people have been doing.

Kagen Dewey ([00:26:52](#)):

So that's a pretty sweet addition. So we've got the Massey out there that's doing our primary tillage and all of our fork and bucket work.

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

How many horsepower is that one?

Kagen Dewey ([00:27:01](#)):

It's a 65 horse.

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

Okay. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:27:04](#)):

It's the 2606H. We bought it from Texas.

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

Whoa.

Kagen Dewey ([00:27:11](#)):

This is actually a little bit of a funny story. So I guess the abbreviated version without any drama that I don't want to talk about on the air would be like, we already had this operating loan in place and we were going to buy a bunch of equipment with it, but then that equipment sale fell through and we'd already had the loan in our bank account for a few months because it took a while for that to all precipitate. And our loan officer, I talked to her and was like, "Hey, so remember that loan? We actually didn't end up buying all of the equipment," and she was like, "I need to make a few phone calls." And she called me back. She's like, "It would be a lot easier for me if you could keep the loan and buy a bunch of similar equipment." And I'm like, "Yeah, that's what we want too. We still want to buy a lot of equipment." And she's like, "Do you think you can get it done in the next two months?"

Andy Chamberlain ([00:28:12](#)):

Oh, jeez.

Kagen Dewey ([00:28:13](#)):

Can you spend this \$50,000? And it was kind of perfect because we were moving quickly on buying this farm and knew we wanted to do tillage as soon as possible. This was in September, and we were kind of hoping to get a fall tillage pass in. And so we started shopping. We had some friends looking at auctions for us and keeping an eye out. And we found this Massey. I think it had 400 hours on it. It was a 2019. We liked the look of it and the specs fit what we were looking for, and it was in Texas. And we called the guy and we just had this back and forth with him that was really funny, where he was just going on about how he goes to auctions. He's like, "I'm a John Deere guy through and through." He was like, "But this Massey, it just seemed like a good tractor to me."

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

And I'm like, "Well, I mean, that's kind of a good point. If this particular tractor got you to switch allegiances from one to another."

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

Yeah, got his attention.

Kagen Dewey ([00:29:17](#)):

So we finally decided we were going to do it, and I go to the bank and I'm like, "Hey, I'd like to wire transfer \$30,000 to this guy." And they're like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm buying a tractor." They're like, "Are you?" Because we were kind of rushing at this point. It hadn't really occurred to me at this point. I'm like-

Elise Magnant ([00:29:36](#)):

"Are we buying a tractor?"

Kagen Dewey ([00:29:38](#)):

Yeah. I haven't really vetted this guy who's on tractorhouse.com. But we were just like, this has got to happen. Let's go for it. And so we did the wire transfer and a minute later I get a phone call from this guy. He's like, "Well, I just got your transfer. Thank you very much. And I'm loading it up right now and I'm on my way."

Elise Magnant ([00:29:55](#)):

And it was here 22 hours later.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:29:58](#)):

No way.

Elise Magnant ([00:29:59](#)):

They drove it straight here. They did not stop.

Kagen Dewey ([00:30:02](#)):

We got a phone call, it was-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:30:05](#)):

I'll see you tomorrow.

Kagen Dewey ([00:30:07](#)):

... 10 o'clock at night.

Elise Magnant ([00:30:08](#)):

They're like, "Yeah, we're going to be there an hour." So we had to wake up in the middle of the night.

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

Holy crap.

Kagen Dewey ([00:30:13](#)):

And he was like, "Yeah, I'm going to be there. If you guys could be there to unload it, I'd really like to get back on the road to get home."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:30:18](#)):

Oh my goodness.

Elise Magnant ([00:30:21](#)):

Yes. That was great.

Kagen Dewey ([00:30:22](#)):

Yeah. We fired it up and the first moments of driving our new tractor were backing it off of a trailer on a hill in the middle of the night.

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

Of course. Of course.

Kagen Dewey ([00:30:33](#)):

But it was fine, and it's served us well ever since. The only issue we've had with it was after the first winter, the fuel lines got a little clogged. Which I mean could have just been like there was some left in it from when it was in Texas and it was, I don't know.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:30:51](#)):

Oh, yeah. Maybe down south they run different fuels-

Kagen Dewey ([00:30:54](#)):

And it was already starting to freeze at night when we got it. But, yeah, that was not too bad to fix and it served us really well since.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:31:04](#)):

Yeah, it's nervous working with people far away like that with big ticket items, but that's good you had a good interaction there.

Kagen Dewey ([00:31:12](#)):

Yeah. And then we just kind of went on tour filling out the rest of our equipment lineup.

Elise Magnant ([00:31:18](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:31:18](#)):

We had a really good visit to Jericho Settlers Farm to buy some disc harrows. And then Mark was there and he was just like, "What are you doing?" And we kind of told him, he is like, "Well, let's take a look around."

Elise Magnant ([00:31:32](#)):

Throw some more stuff in your cart.

Kagen Dewey ([00:31:33](#)):

We were filling a trailer with-

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

Oh, nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:31:37](#)):

... tool bars and cultivating parts and all sorts of stuff.

Elise Magnant ([00:31:40](#)):

Yeah. And then Amanda helped us at the very end at Tamarack Hollow. We had a very specific amount of money left. We were like, "Well, throw in is that."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:31:49](#)):

I need to round up to...

Kagen Dewey ([00:31:52](#)):

And then this knife for \$13.42.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:31:56](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:31:59](#)):

Perfect. So that's how that all came together. Maxed out a loan. So lesson there, if you take out a loan, make sure you use it, right?

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:32:07](#)):

I guess with the farm service agency at least.

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

Good to know.

Kagen Dewey ([00:32:11](#)):

So, yeah, that's how we financed all the equipment we needed to get started. I guess, then we did get a CAE loan for the Kubota because that came later. We went without a cultivating tractor and-

Elise Magnant ([00:32:27](#)):

We used the 8N a little bit.

Kagen Dewey ([00:32:30](#)):

We used an 8N a little bit. We tried also running cultivation equipment behind the Massey because we're like, it's kind of overkill, but we can do it.

Elise Magnant ([00:32:36](#)):

This is what you have, yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:32:38](#)):

But it was kind of awkward just to get close when you're up high on a higher tractor with a bucket in front of you and all this stuff.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:45](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:32:47](#)):

Yeah. It's been really nice too, got a good network of other farmers we know and a lot of them are either scaling up or scaling down. But either way they're going there, getting rid of some of their equipment.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:58](#)):

Changing up practices all the time.

Kagen Dewey ([00:33:00](#)):

And it's coming from people we trust have taken good care of it, and so I feel like that's pretty key when you're going to buy a 40 year old piece of equipment for a lot of money.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:14](#)):

What else is there to see here?

Kagen Dewey ([00:33:15](#)):

We've got a pretty standard walk-in cooler set up over there for slapping together a cheap walk-in cooler when you-

Elise Magnant ([00:33:22](#)):

Yeah, it was a wood shed.

Kagen Dewey ([00:33:23](#)):

... [inaudible] together.

Elise Magnant ([00:33:23](#)):

Yeah. It's a walk-in cooler.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:25](#)):

Blends right in with the house.

Kagen Dewey ([00:33:29](#)):

We have some siding and we want to really-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:31](#)):

No, you definitely should.

Kagen Dewey ([00:33:33](#)):

... doll it up and make it really look like it's part of the house.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:36](#)):

Yeah.

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

We definitely need more cooler space, but for now it allows us to at least pick for farmer's market the night before.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:46](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:33:47](#)):

A lot of our wholesale we're still doing the morning of. But we just took this wood shed, put a ton of foam board in it and a cool box and away we go.

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:33:58](#)):

Still want-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:59](#)):

Six by eight or something?

Kagen Dewey ([00:34:01](#)):

Yep. Yeah, exactly.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:34:04](#)):

Pretty close.

Kagen Dewey ([00:34:05](#)):

So we're going to try and put in 10 by 14 walk-in this year.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:34:09](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:34:11](#)):

Either just get something that's outdoor ready and put it at the end of our pad here. Or depending on how quickly we get through that part of the barn's demolition-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:34:21](#)):

One end or the other, yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:34:22](#)):

Yeah. I think eventually we want it in there, but just if we can move it in now or later. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:34:30](#)):

You want to walk through the lower fields?

Elise Magnant ([00:34:32](#)):

Yeah, we can check out the lower fields.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:34:36](#)):

Do one more little loop.

Kagen Dewey ([00:34:37](#)):

I feel like when you asked us to be on the podcast, Andy, one of the things I thought of was just wanting to give shout-outs to how many of our farm mentors who have been on the show already-

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:34:59](#)):

... we should credit for anything of our success.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:03](#)):

Absolutely. Well, that's usually one of my questions is who are your mentors?

Kagen Dewey ([00:35:07](#)):

So Elise and I met at Footbrook Farm.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:10](#)):

Okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:35:11](#)):

Working for the Lehouilliers.

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

Yeah. Just chatted with them this winter.

Kagen Dewey ([00:35:17](#)):

Yep. Caught that episode.

Elise Magnant ([00:35:19](#)):

Wait, Kagan, did you take down some of this fence or did it just fall down over the winter?

Kagen Dewey ([00:35:23](#)):

It just fell down.

Elise Magnant ([00:35:23](#)):

Perfect.

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

Which is great, yeah. Yeah. We've been mean to take down that fence, but we just ignored that project long enough that it-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:30](#)):

Took care of itself.

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

Took itself down.

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

Yeah. It is the Kubota.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:34](#)):

And it does look like it's in pretty good shape.

Kagen Dewey ([00:35:36](#)):

I'm trying to remember who, so this came from Bill Half who he got it from another grower that I don't know, but I guess was one of his mentors. So it just kind of keeps getting passed down.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:53](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:35:53](#)):

It has this one thing that the starter just doesn't work one out of 10 times. You just turn the key and it just won't do anything, and you tap on the solenoid or whatever for a while. And it doesn't seem to matter what you do, it's just not in the mood yet. You walk away, you come back five minutes later and it's no problem, fires right up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:36:15](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:36:16](#)):

And it always scares me a little bit that it might actually be a real problem someday. I'm actually going to really need it and it just won't start. Bill said it's been that way for 20 years.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:36:26](#)):

Oh, geez.

Kagen Dewey ([00:36:27](#)):

And he's completely rebuilt the starter before, he's completely rebuilt the electronics to it and nothing changed. But it's also never been so stubborn that it didn't start within 10 minutes.

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

That's a future pond site, hopefully.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:36:46](#)):

Pond?

Elise Magnant ([00:36:47](#)):

Yeah. We are digging water lines and found a water line that actually goes to this area.

Kagen Dewey ([00:36:55](#)):

An old pond that kind of filled itself in maybe.

Elise Magnant ([00:36:58](#)):

I think it was the well overflow pipe which is clogged. So I think one project this year is to try and unclog that and see if we can have a pond again.

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:37:06](#)):

We have a really, really productive artesian well here. It was drilled and tested at 30 gallons a minute.

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

Okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:37:13](#)):

And every spring it just is overflowing out of the top, out of the cap. So it would be nice to just have all that overflow going to this pond and have it for irrigation. Out in the woods there though is our actual irrigation pond, which is spring-fed. And we've been impressed with so far, it seems to have a recharge rate of 40 gallons a minute. And so we're just pumping out of that with a pond to pump into a mega net system in drips, and we've been able to irrigate an acre at a time, and that's adequate for us at this point. So we're going to keep pushing that way until the cedars start to shade us out.

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

And then this field over here, we're going to start exploring but it's got some really bizarre wet spots in it. The guy who hayed here said in 30 years, he never has seen that little spot down there dry out completely, even through drought periods. It's just a little bubbling out of the ground spring or something. That's kind of a characteristic of Maple Hill it seems. You can see that concrete structure over there is actually a storage structure for a spring that is the town of Plainfields water supply. So there's a lot of water here.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:38:43](#)):

Yeah. I guess so.

Kagen Dewey ([00:38:46](#)):

A lot of water and draining soils.

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

Nice combo.

Elise Magnant ([00:38:49](#)):

It is really nice combo, yeah. This is really drying out today.

Kagen Dewey ([00:38:52](#)):

Sloping fields, but it doesn't feel like you're hiking up a hill.

Elise Magnant ([00:38:55](#)):

Nope.

Kagen Dewey ([00:38:58](#)):

And it seems to be sloped enough that things don't pool but not so sloped that they erode, at least so far.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:05](#)):

Sweet spot.

Kagen Dewey ([00:39:06](#)):

Yeah. Oh, yeah, this is really drying out today. It's always breezy here, which is kind of nice because it keeps the mosquitoes off of you. Yeah, we could definitely get into this now. This was all of our tail last year.

Elise Magnant ([00:39:19](#)):

Oh, this is very nice.

Kagen Dewey ([00:39:20](#)):

This will be all of our peppers and eggplant this year over here. You can see our future wood supply. We are kind of this mentality of trying to use pallets for as many things as possible. We never farmed with pallet forks until we bought our Massey-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:38](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:39:39](#)):

... and now I just want everything in my life to be palletized. That was some of the advice Mark gave me actually when I was there and he was loading everything and he told me the best advice he could give a young farmer was to build your systems and farm now like you're in your 50s.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:59](#)):

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:40:00](#)):

He's like, "And then when you're in your 50s-"

Elise Magnant ([00:40:00](#)):

You're already ready.

Kagen Dewey ([00:40:02](#)):

... "You're through all that."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:03](#)):

You can still keep going, yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:40:05](#)):

So we just got some toolbars, those discs came from Mark. The flame leader and the Willistons up there all came from Mark.

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

Nice.

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

And then the water reel transplanter came from Bob Hill in Jericho. That came off marketplace. Just kind of build it as we could find things that we wanted. But yeah, I feel like another person, we only met him the one time and-

Elise Magnant ([00:40:33](#)):

Oh, the excavator. That's probably been the most helpful tool as far as making a new farm happen.

Kagen Dewey ([00:40:40](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:41](#)):

An excavator?

Elise Magnant ([00:40:41](#)):

Yeah.

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

That's, in your case, a friend with one, right? Or do you have one?

Elise Magnant ([00:40:46](#)):

Well, there's that one there that we have.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:49](#)):

Oh.

Kagen Dewey ([00:40:50](#)):

That's my dad's excavator.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:51](#)):

Oh, nice.

Elise Magnant ([00:40:51](#)):

Yeah, he came and left it here and he hasn't come back for it in a couple years, which has been really perfect.

Kagen Dewey ([00:40:59](#)):

That fall where we were kind of scrambling to try and get a functional farm in place.

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:41:05](#)):

Because we had been running the business on leased land and then we were going to be switching here the following spring. So we kind of wanted to get as much in place so we didn't need to shrink our business in transition. So we put this greenhouse up in November of that year and we needed to build the pad. And fortunately my dad had that excavator and he brought it up.

Elise Magnant ([00:41:30](#)):

Yeah, you've been able to dig all the line.

Kagen Dewey ([00:41:33](#)):

It is kind of funny. Because he brought it here and then it stayed here for the winter and then he keeps needing it for projects that he's doing and he is like, "Well, I only need a half day's worth of excavation, and it's actually more expensive for me to rent a big enough trailer for it-"

Andy Chamberlain ([00:41:52](#)):

Of course.

Kagen Dewey ([00:41:52](#)):

"...and bring it all the way home and spend two days doing it than it is for me to just rent an excavator down here." And we're like, "If you say so."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:42:02](#)):

Yeah, whatever.

Kagen Dewey ([00:42:03](#)):

I feel like I should bring it to you at this point.

Elise Magnant ([00:42:06](#)):

The kale really perked up. It looks fine.

Kagen Dewey ([00:42:08](#)):

That's great. I'm going to try and put that out tomorrow. Oh, I was just saying that I've loved buying all this tools from other farmers and I feel like you get a little tidbit from everybody.

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:42:18](#)):

And I mean Bob, when we were buying that water reel, he was just telling us about his systems and stuff and he kept saying to us, he's like, "But you guys are smart. You'll figure it out." And the way he said it though was just really stuck with us.

Elise Magnant ([00:42:35](#)):

Yeah, that's something we just say to each other all the time. You're a smart kid, you'll figure it out.

Kagen Dewey ([00:42:42](#)):

But I think really the biggest mentors for us definitely got to give the Lehouilliers credit. We were there for years and Tony was just so generous with his knowledge.

Elise Magnant ([00:42:57](#)):

Yeah. I think it was where we both learned to love farming.

Kagen Dewey ([00:42:59](#)):

Yeah. And I feel like I got to give a shout-out also to Heather from Footbrook who's been their manager forever. And we both got a lot of time working one-on-one with her, and she just has such a mind for systems and organization and I'm just really grateful to her. And then when we were releasing at Littlewood, I mean, Joey and Betsy were really good mentors for us. I feel like Joey really helped us expand from being pretty good growers to understanding mechanization and scaling things up a lot. I think one of my favorite Joey stories was I was trying to put an implement on and I was kind of trying to muscle it and he was coming out and I was a young strong guy trying to do it and he was moving slower and he just goes and grabs this really big stone bar and places it just so with one hand and levers it into place.

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

He told me, he's like, "A move place to stand in a long enough lever, I'll move the world." He's like, "Have you read your archimedes?" "No, I haven't." He like, "You should get on that." But I think it was a pretty good moment of introducing us to tractor work and using tools. Because, I mean, it's a classic quote about using a lever. But I feel like all of the tools we use are the same idea, right?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:44:40](#)):

Yeah. And until you are shown, you might just think to brute your way through it because you're young and you're strong. But to seeing somebody who's older take a lever like, oh, right, yeah, that's kind of nice. And now a few years later you're like, "Yeah, my back thanks me for using levers now."

Kagen Dewey ([00:45:01](#)):

Right.

Elise Magnant ([00:45:01](#)):

It will hopefully.

Kagen Dewey ([00:45:03](#)):

Hopefully it will. And with everything we do, we brute forced our way through wash pack for years.

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

Yeah. Wash pack, weeding, everything.

Kagen Dewey ([00:45:16](#)):

All these things. It's an important lesson.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:45:16](#)):

Propagating.

Kagen Dewey ([00:45:19](#)):

This transcript was exported on Apr 28, 2025 - view latest version [here](#).

So that's kind of where we're at right now is just trying as much as possible as we build our farm to think long term about it and buy the right tools.

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

So it's been, let's say it's 2025 now, so you started in '18?

Kagen Dewey ([00:45:35](#)):

Yep.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:45:36](#)):

So you're about seven years in? And it feels like the flywheel is spinning now.

Elise Magnant ([00:45:46](#)):

Yeah, it does. I mean, we're not in our final form yet, but we're getting there.

Kagen Dewey ([00:45:49](#)):

Yeah. I mean, we have a viable business that is supporting us. It's supporting itself. And I feel like we're refining our systems in a way, even though we're still scaling up, I feel like we're finding what's working and what's not. We've been working with farm viability and getting support on that kind of stuff.

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

Yep. Are you both full-time on the farm?

Elise Magnant ([00:46:11](#)):

In the summer, yeah. We both work off farm in the winter.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:14](#)):

Okay.

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

But we kind of shut down operations for the winter anyway.

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

Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([00:46:19](#)):

Yep. It'd be nice eventually if we had the storage to grow enough to keep going through the winter. But quite frankly, it doesn't seem to me like there's enough acreage for us here to have a farm that would really benefit from going farther into the winter.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:37](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:46:39](#)):

Even if we maxed out and did eight acres of production, you could do eight acres of production that all sells out by November 1st.

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

Right.

Kagen Dewey ([00:46:52](#)):

Unless we covered it in greenhouses. And I know there are plenty of people who are doing full season on less acreage and making it work, but I don't know. My brain, it just isn't. I guess I like skiing.

Elise Magnant ([00:47:02](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:47:05](#)):

Yeah. That's fair enough too. Yeah. Take some time off and enjoy the winter time.

Elise Magnant ([00:47:09](#)):

Yeah, definitely.

Kagen Dewey ([00:47:11](#)):

So it's the two of us, and then we have one full-time employee May through October, one part-time employee about the same May through October. And then our neighbor Ellen, she's going to help out whether we like it or not. Fortunately, we really do like it.

Elise Magnant ([00:47:30](#)):

Yeah, we like it a lot. She's been volunteering with us since we started here at Littlewood for the last seven years. And then we just so happened to buy the farm right next to her house, so she can walk here now.

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

Perfect.

Kagen Dewey ([00:47:45](#)):

Yeah. So she's just excited to help out and get her hands in the dirt. Her original thing was that she was just like, I'm getting older and the only way I am going to like stable body is by working hard.

Elise Magnant ([00:47:57](#)):

Yeah. And I guess she is actually increased her bone density in the last few years.

Kagen Dewey ([00:48:00](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:48:00](#)):

She's 74.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:48:02](#)):

Well, there you go.

Elise Magnant ([00:48:03](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:48:04](#)):

It takes a little getting used to have your 74-year-old neighbor insist on being the one who picks up the heavy box.

Elise Magnant ([00:48:10](#)):

Yeah. She's like, "I want to lift it with my back." I'm like, "Okay, Ellen."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:48:15](#)):

Go figure.

Kagen Dewey ([00:48:15](#)):

But yeah, she's strong for it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:48:17](#)):

Hey, found somebody with a good work ethic. That's-

Kagen Dewey ([00:48:22](#)):

For sure.

Elise Magnant ([00:48:22](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:48:22](#)):

... that's hard to come by.

Kagen Dewey ([00:48:23](#)):

No, she's just been such an emotional, I mean, just a holistic support to us all these years. Just a good friend, encouragement.

Elise Magnant ([00:48:34](#)):

There's some exciting new market developments. The Plainfield Co-op has been an account for us from the beginning when they used to be in the village, but now they bought a Route two location, so this will be their first year there.

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

Good opportunity for growth there then.

Elise Magnant ([00:48:50](#)):

Good opportunity for growth. Also, they do a big seedling sale, or the hardware store has always done a big seedling sale, and we've always done a seedling sale here or on-farm, which never really enjoyed very much. So we're really excited for the opportunity to maybe just sell our seedlings wholesale there instead.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:49:14](#)):

There you go.

Kagen Dewey ([00:49:14](#)):

Don't say we didn't enjoy it. I enjoyed it.

Elise Magnant ([00:49:16](#)):

Well, you enjoyed it.

Kagen Dewey ([00:49:20](#)):

But it can be disruptive because no matter how much you want to have open hours and closed hours-

Elise Magnant ([00:49:26](#)):

You just have hours.

Kagen Dewey ([00:49:28](#)):

... once word's out that we're there and they see you in the field, they're like, "I can go flag them down."

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

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:49:35](#)):

I have had a person come out into the field while I was actively harrowing and get in front of the tractor to wave me down-

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

Oh, geez.

Kagen Dewey ([00:49:43](#)):

... because they wanted to buy a four-pack. And I appreciated their desire to support our farm.

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

You were a little busy.

Kagen Dewey ([00:49:59](#)):

I was a little busy, yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:49:59](#)):

Yeah. But it was good.

Kagen Dewey ([00:50:03](#)):

But the Plainfield Co-op thing is I think interesting because it took them a long time to make that move for various reasons. But now they've made the move, it seems like it's really working. They've combined with our local general store in Deli, and so it's pretty cool to have a place that's open from seven to seven that you can buy groceries and your hardware needs and a sandwich and based basically everything you could need, and their sales are up. I don't know if we're going to be able to provide all the vegetables that they need on our farm. It seems like there's room for there to be more farms.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:50:42](#)):

That's good.

Elise Magnant ([00:50:44](#)):

Which is great.

Kagen Dewey ([00:50:44](#)):

Which is something that is good, but also I want to encourage people to go for it and make it happen more. Because I feel like we need more farms.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:50:57](#)):

Yeah. There's other farms around. What are you excited about in your next year of farming life?

Elise Magnant ([00:51:04](#)):

I'm excited to, if we can get to it, finishing that wash pack project build out. Also excited for Lake House weekend. Last year as a crew, we all decided to take a trip and we did a weekend in September and we went to the Adirondacks and stayed on lake.

Kagen Dewey ([00:51:24](#)):

Yeah, stayed in the lake house. And it was nice to do that as a crew.

Elise Magnant ([00:51:26](#)):

It was really nice. The crew really loved it. Really want to do that again.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:51:31](#)):

That's cool.

Kagen Dewey ([00:51:32](#)):

But, yeah, wash house is pretty exciting. Just to have a nice space and be able to have systems and that are working.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:51:41](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:51:44](#)):

What am I the most excited about if it's not the wash pack house?

Elise Magnant ([00:51:49](#)):

I'm excited to barrel wash more carrots.

Kagen Dewey ([00:51:53](#)):

Yeah. I feel like every year there's a different crop that I'm most excited about. I think last year it was carrots and I think this year it's probably our sweet corn.

Elise Magnant ([00:52:05](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:52:05](#)):

We started experimenting with some under sowing methods that went really well last year, and I'm excited to see if they continue to work or if it was just a one-off went really well because the conditions are right. And I'm pretty excited about that because I see the sweet corn as being a pretty key player in our rotation in our fertility program. And it's also just another one of those crops that people lose their mind for, which is always fun.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:52:33](#)):

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. People love sweet corn.

Kagen Dewey ([00:52:37](#)):

Last year we were the only organic sweet corn at the farmer's market, and that was kind of wild. We had to borrow the neighbor's truck to bring all of our regular farmer's market supplies in our truck and then a truck of just sweet corn. So ,yeah, we're under sowing it with buckwheat at last cultivation now.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:52:58](#)):

Oh, okay.

Kagen Dewey ([00:52:59](#)):

And then just letting the buckwheat do its thing. And we were letting it flower because we couldn't get in there to do much after. And so the whole thing's humming. Which I think we've had very little pest pressure in it, and I think that the biodiversity the buckwheat brings.

Elise Magnant ([00:53:19](#)):

Yeah. I don't know if it was the buckwheat or not. But, yeah, very little corn earworm last year.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:22](#)):

Oh, interesting.

Elise Magnant ([00:53:23](#)):

And the buckwheat was, by the time they were doing silts and stuff, it was about as tall as the ears, so it was kind of hiding them.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:32](#)):

Was that a challenge picking it?

Kagen Dewey ([00:53:34](#)):

Not at all, no.

Elise Magnant (00:53:34):

Not really. Because buckwheat, it's like you step on it and it falls right over.

Kagen Dewey (00:53:38):

Yeah. It's a weak plant, but it grows quickly. I love buckwheat because of that. You throw it out there and it just pops right up.

Elise Magnant (00:53:45):

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we still have a great seed bank of it from growing it our first year.

Kagen Dewey (00:53:50):

Actually, yeah, I don't even think we seeded-

Elise Magnant (00:53:51):

We never even seeded the buckwheat, it was just already coming up and we were like... Which was actually kind of great. We just hoed everything, got everything clean, and then a nice stand of buckwheat just came up all by itself.

Kagen Dewey (00:54:06):

I didn't feel like it competed with the corn at all, because the corn roots by that point are deeper than the buckwheat's ever going to root.

Andy Chamberlain (00:54:12):

Right.

Kagen Dewey (00:54:14):

And then, yeah, so first time you walk through to pick, you just kind of mad it down and then it's-

Elise Magnant (00:54:20):

A nice mulch.

Kagen Dewey (00:54:21):

... it's just a nice mulch. And then we mowed down that sweet corn crop and harrowed it in last fall with some winter rye. And I assume there's a seed bank of buckwheat now that's going to come up whenever we mow that rye down. But I think that's kind of cool because then our post sweet corn cover crop, we will have done an act of tillage in the fall, and then we'll get all of our spring cover crop in the rye, and then we'll mow that down. I don't think we'll have to do any more tillage to get now a summer buckwheat out of it.

Andy Chamberlain (00:55:00):

Yeah, maybe not.

Kagen Dewey (00:55:01):

And then we'll mow that in the fall and we'll get a full year of cover on that field without having to do too much field work. Which for us, with us using the pretty basic tillage tools, I feel like a lot of times for us to get a field clean enough to feel like then we have a clean cover crop, we're doing a lot of discing. And it kind of makes you question, am I really coming out net positive in my organic matter here if I have to disc it three times on either side of my cover crop?

Andy Chamberlain (00:55:32):

Right.

Kagen Dewey (00:55:34):

So I think that's one of the things I'm most excited about is some of the under sowing stuff that we're playing with. Cover crops are fun because it doesn't really matter.

Andy Chamberlain (00:55:44):

What do you mean?

Elise Magnant (00:55:44):

You're not making money on them.

Kagen Dewey (00:55:46):

It matters obviously for soil health purposes. But if the cover crop fails or the timing isn't right, it doesn't really matter. I could have put in a little more seed or I way over seeded it. It doesn't matter because it's just a cover crop. You're not relying on that from an economics standpoint other than long-term soil health. But that's kind of the long game. I do feel like it is a place where you get to farm with your mind on a more macro scale as a vegetable farmer. That the row crop farmers get to work in that sort of a mindset all the time but we get to play around with it in a low stress, low stakes way-

Andy Chamberlain (00:56:30):

Right. Exactly.

Kagen Dewey (00:56:30):

... which is kind of fun. To see if we can get this whole field to behave in the same way for a little bit.

Andy Chamberlain (00:56:38):

What's the tenure outlook look like for this farm?

Kagen Dewey (00:56:45):

In terms of?

Andy Chamberlain (00:56:49):

Planning to keep it about this size? You mentioned adding a high-tunnel, you're planning to make any big changes or just keep rolling.

Kagen Dewey (00:56:57):

I think that probably the next few years we'd like to hit a stable scale of production. Our farm has grown in scale every year since 2018. So we've never had a year where we're like, yeah, we're just doing what

we did last year and trying to do it better. I think two more tunnels seems right for the farm. And then having about seven or eight acres of tillage areas that are in either cover or production, and then be using maybe five of them in any given year. And I think hopefully we can hit that level of production in a stable way in the next few years. And then we've talked about adding layers to the operation just because we love eggs, the world needs more eggs, and there's zero phosphorus in this soil.

Elise Magnant ([00:57:59](#)):

Weirdly enough.

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

So you could use a little extra manure.

Kagen Dewey ([00:58:02](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:58:04](#)):

Yeah. I'd love the opportunity to kind of play around with chickens as a fertility and pest management engine.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:58:10](#)):

Yeah. Roll them out as part of the rotation.

Elise Magnant ([00:58:15](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:58:16](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([00:58:16](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:58:17](#)):

When we were leasing at Littlewood, Tamarack Hollow was also leasing field space there and they were running their mobile layer coop. And I think it was pretty inspiring for us, again, not having to do any of the chores because it was somebody else operation, but just seeing... What did they have 350 birds or something?

Elise Magnant ([00:58:35](#)):

Yeah. They kept them on that field for two years and then moved them off. And then we got to do sweet corn in that field. And it was good.

Kagen Dewey ([00:58:44](#)):

We did some winter squash in that field too.

Elise Magnant ([00:58:46](#)):

That was the year after.

Kagen Dewey ([00:58:46](#)):

That was the year we had massive butternuts.

Elise Magnant ([00:58:46](#)):

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:58:52](#)):

Yeah. I think we'd like to add that. And then, I mean, I've really liked this to be at a scale where we can have our full-time employees working here full-time and have it be a viable long-term thing for them.

Elise Magnant ([00:59:10](#)):

Yeah. We've been really lucky. The employees we have, this will be their fourth and fifth year.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:59:15](#)):

Wow.

Elise Magnant ([00:59:15](#)):

So figuring out how we can keep making that happen.

Kagen Dewey ([00:59:20](#)):

Yeah. Keep making sure that it makes sense for them is a big part of the business planning. I'd like working on farms to be a viable life for people.

Elise Magnant ([00:59:29](#)):

Yeah, for sure. And also now it just seems so sad to think about hiring somebody new.

Kagen Dewey ([00:59:36](#)):

Yeah. I mean, it doesn't seem sad to me to think about hiring someone new, but it seems sad to not have Zoe and Becca coming back. They're our best friends as well as our employees at this point. You spend 40 hours weeding carrots together and there's a special bond there that can't really be achieved with anything else, I don't think.

Elise Magnant ([00:59:58](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([00:59:59](#)):

So, yeah, I'd say that. I don't know, does that cover 10 years you think? I feel like we could kill 10 years doing that.

Elise Magnant ([01:00:05](#)):

Yeah. Plenty. Probably ride that out.

Kagen Dewey ([01:00:08](#)):

And then beyond that, we'd love to see, this is a land trust conserved farm with the OPATH on it. And for the listeners that might not be familiar with the OPATH, it's a clever mechanism that the Land Trust uses that I think is really effective in ensuring that we had a good deal to buy this farm, and it allowed us to have land access as farmers. And that comes with sort of a pay it forward promise to it that someday if we sell this farm, it's got to go to a qualified farmer. And I'd like to have the farm be in a place in 30 years where it would make sense for somebody who's a farmer to, they'd be like, yeah, that's a great farm I want to buy because it's still going to be a productive farm and work. So I think that's kind of a target for the longer term that I try to keep in mind.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:01:08](#)):

Keeping the place viable and operative.

Kagen Dewey ([01:01:12](#)):

Yeah. More viable.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:01:13](#)):

Yeah, ideally. What does sustainable farming mean to you, and what are you doing to achieve it?

Kagen Dewey ([01:01:21](#)):

I mean, I'm a subscriber to the triple bottom line philosophy. Probably comes first is the financial viability so that we can afford to do the things that we want to do to be able to achieve the other two. And then the planet viability. There's the macro and there's the micro. And micro being the sustainability of our farm and just having our practices be such that we're not losing our soil to erosion and we're not completely depleting the fertility. Wouldn't be fair if we're starting on a pretty low fertility baseline here.

Elise Magnant ([01:02:07](#)):

Yeah. We also get the organic matter boost of new fields.

Kagen Dewey ([01:02:10](#)):

That's true. And then kind of like we mentioned before, having it translate into us having a business and a farm condition here that can support us retiring someday and the people who work here being able to work here as a viable career. And then I think what happens at our retirement, in my mind, is the test of its sustainability. If when we are ready to retire, it's plausible for us to sell the farm or transition it in some other way to the next generation of farmers and we come out of it okay. And the farms coming out of it okay. And they're entering into a situation that's going to be okay and work for everybody involved. Then that means it passed the test of one generation of viability and that's sustainable.

([01:03:11](#)):

So that's kind of the macro scale of what's sustainability for our farm. But then there is the macro question, which is how much are we needing to bring onto the farm to keep that viability in how much plastic and other things are leaving the farm. And I'm not sure I have a great answer for that.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:36](#)):

It's ever evolving.

Elise Magnant ([01:03:37](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:37](#)):

Just do the best you can.

Kagen Dewey ([01:03:43](#)):

Yeah. I don't know. Do you want to add anything to that, Elise?

Elise Magnant ([01:03:43](#)):

No, I don't think so.

Kagen Dewey ([01:03:44](#)):

Okay.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:48](#)):

How do you disconnect from a farm with a never-ending to-do list?

Elise Magnant ([01:03:52](#)):

Well, the winter's nice. The winter's a great break. We both work at a ski resort, and so for me at least, that's sort of a time to be in a different role in a different identity space almost outside of just being a farmer. Which I think is kind of helpful. I'm also an EMT, I work on ambulance in East Montpelier. And I do that one night a week, and that's also kind of a nice world to be in. I take a break that way.

Kagen Dewey ([01:04:25](#)):

Yeah. I think that works. If you're able to put on a different hat and not be in your farmer identity for a moment, then it doesn't matter how long the to-do list is. It's not-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:04:39](#)):

It's in the other pocket on you.

Kagen Dewey ([01:04:43](#)):

And I definitely get that in the winter too. I teach skiing part-time in the winter, and that's a different hat to wear and a totally different world that doesn't really always care about what's going on on my farm. And that's probably a good thing for me.

Elise Magnant ([01:05:03](#)):

I think over time too, just realizing through experience that if everything doesn't get done, it'll all work out somehow. Little things that need to get done.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:18](#)):

Most of the time.

Kagen Dewey ([01:05:21](#)):

But it is true, as a vegetable farm that's not doing really much with perennials at this point. We're not doing much with livestock.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:29](#)):

Right.

Kagen Dewey ([01:05:29](#)):

We have this advantage of at the end of the year, frost and snow are going to come and whatever's going on out there is coming to an end. Whether it's clean or failing or was successful, it's going to die and then winter's going to happen and you'll start over again. I think it's good for my mental health and relationship with my to-do list that there's a reset button to that to some extent every year. But it's not easy, I don't think, because there's also projects that don't go away, that are still there on the to-do list the next year. But sometimes the wind just takes down that fence you never got to anyways. Half the job gets done for you.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:06:19](#)):

It's kind of fun when that happens.

Kagen Dewey ([01:06:21](#)):

I love it when that happens.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:06:23](#)):

Well it waited so long, I don't need to address that anymore.

Kagen Dewey ([01:06:26](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([01:06:27](#)):

Yeah. I mean, we left a few pieces of rime out in the field last year that weren't actually that ripped up, and they were right there to use the spring.

Kagen Dewey ([01:06:35](#)):

Yeah. We didn't clean up all the irrigation lines, and they seem to just have been fine. And it's like, wow, we've been wasting our time by cleaning this up every fall.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:06:44](#)):

Yep. Yep.

Kagen Dewey ([01:06:45](#)):

I'm sure there's going to be some hard-learned lessons from that too.

Elise Magnant ([01:06:48](#)):

There already is. Oh, wow, we just wasted a few hundred dollars.

Kagen Dewey ([01:06:57](#)):

Yeah. I'd like to give it some credit to Bill though, for-

Elise Magnant ([01:07:00](#)):

Being a very chill farmer.

Kagen Dewey ([01:07:03](#)):

... being a very, very Zen farmer. I can't count how many times I've heard him say like, "Huh, we'll get what we get." And I hope someday I can say that with as much sincerity as he does sometimes.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:07:17](#)):

Yeah. Any other mantras or sayings you find yourself repeating? You've rattled off a few of them today already.

Kagen Dewey ([01:07:27](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([01:07:28](#)):

What was last year's slogan?

Kagen Dewey ([01:07:29](#)):

What was last year's slogan? I'm trying to remember. I feel like every year sometime around June, we as a crew settle into what our mantra for the year is. I know one year was-

Elise Magnant ([01:07:40](#)):

One year was keep moving forward.

Kagen Dewey ([01:07:43](#)):

Keep moving forward was a really good one-

Elise Magnant ([01:07:44](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([01:07:45](#)):

... that I think sticks around.

Elise Magnant ([01:07:46](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([01:07:47](#)):

And it was just like-

Elise Magnant ([01:07:50](#)):

It was just whenever there was a decision that needed to be made, whatever, just kept the ball rolling the fastest.

Kagen Dewey ([01:07:57](#)):

Right. Maybe the most tangible example was us wondering if it was time to pull the spinach out or give it another week to maybe get a little bit more before we transplant. And it was just keep moving forward, pull it out, keep going. Onto the next thing.

Elise Magnant ([01:08:10](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([01:08:11](#)):

There was say yes to every opportunity. That was a year.

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

Yikes.

Elise Magnant ([01:08:16](#)):

Yeah. Now we need to start saying no.

Kagen Dewey ([01:08:21](#)):

Yeah. We had an over-complicated wholesale route that year.

Elise Magnant ([01:08:24](#)):

Yeah, but it's good because then you were fine.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:08:28](#)):

Yeah. Now you know.

Kagen Dewey ([01:08:30](#)):

Well, and it was kind of in the plan that we knew we would swell up our wholesale route too much and then-

Elise Magnant ([01:08:40](#)):

Figure out where.

Kagen Dewey ([01:08:40](#)):

... figure out what we wanted to keep out of that. And I think some good market relationships came out that. That was the first year we were selling to Fox Market, which is another awesome local Plainfield business if you haven't been to Fox Market.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:08:52](#)):

No.

Elise Magnant ([01:08:54](#)):

Yeah. East Montpelier, but yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([01:08:55](#)):

Right. They're part of the playing field in-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:08:58](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([01:08:58](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

Kagen Dewey ([01:09:01](#)):

... the area. Yeah. I can't remember what last year's mantra was. I think it was something about systems and we kind of didn't end up doing it because it got too hectic.

Elise Magnant ([01:09:14](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([01:09:16](#)):

Desire for systems.

Elise Magnant ([01:09:19](#)):

Don't get cultivated.

Kagen Dewey ([01:09:24](#)):

Don't get cultivated.

Elise Magnant ([01:09:25](#)):

That was kind of a joke one.

Kagen Dewey ([01:09:27](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Don't get cultivated. It started off with just like I was getting on the cultivating tractor and I wasn't slowing down, and I think the rest of the crew was transplanting or something and trying to make sure they got out of the way before I cultivated them right into things.

Elise Magnant ([01:09:44](#)):

But then we just referred to anytime we would get hurt as getting cultivated. So maybe it was a safety-focused year.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:09:53](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. If you were restarting now, is there anything you would've done differently?

Elise Magnant ([01:10:02](#)):

Probably less used equipment.

Kagen Dewey ([01:10:05](#)):

Yeah.

Elise Magnant ([01:10:06](#)):

We wasted a lot of money on a few used things that didn't pan out.

Kagen Dewey ([01:10:12](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain (01:10:13):

Because it was the wrong tool or because it was old?

Elise Magnant (01:10:16):

Because it was not in good condition.

Kagen Dewey (01:10:19):

Yeah. We bought an Aiden that seemed really nice-

Elise Magnant (01:10:23):

Though the Aiden might be fine. We just got to pull it out here and look at it.

Kagen Dewey (01:10:26):

Yeah. But it did have, I mean, it was-

Elise Magnant (01:10:29):

Oh, that leak

Kagen Dewey (01:10:30):

... hemorrhaging oil.

Elise Magnant (01:10:31):

Yeah, that was pretty bad actually. Oh, yeah, right. We bought it. We drove it to Littlewood, and then it was stranded down there for the entire season.

Kagen Dewey (01:10:40):

Yeah. And took a lot of gas concealer, which is not necessarily a great long-term solution for it. And then we bought a pickup truck that seemed like... We had set a pretty low bar for quality on it because it was to be just a farm truck just for harvesting stuff. But actually we set the bar too low and it started making some horrible noises.

Elise Magnant (01:11:15):

Yeah. It's kind of too big of a project to do here, but it's like, is it worth the cost of trailering it to a shop?

Kagen Dewey (01:11:16):

So yeah, I think that's one lesson I would do differently is being a little bit more picky about the used equipment we buy and being a little bit more patient, or I guess just selective of where you're buying from. Everything I've bought from another farmer has panned out wonderfully.

Elise Magnant (01:11:34):

That's true.

Kagen Dewey (01:11:34):

The only things we bought that didn't pan out wonderfully were from buying off of marketplace from non-farming sellers.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:11:42](#)):

Interesting little tidbit there. Makes sense.

Kagen Dewey ([01:11:49](#)):

Other things that we would do differently. If we were starting off from the beginning from the beginning, I feel like maybe we would've started off with CSA rather than wholesale.

Elise Magnant ([01:12:00](#)):

The very beginning?

Kagen Dewey ([01:12:02](#)):

If we were starting from the very beginning.

Elise Magnant ([01:12:05](#)):

Maybe. I like doing wholesale though.

Kagen Dewey ([01:12:09](#)):

Yeah.

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

Anything else?

Kagen Dewey ([01:12:12](#)):

I think generally, maybe to the same point as the equipment, I think if we were starting over again, or I could go back and talk to myself again, it would be like to not be as afraid of spending money on things that are really going to help your crop.

Elise Magnant ([01:12:31](#)):

Yeah. That was something we found with just being stingy, was never really paid off.

Kagen Dewey ([01:12:34](#)):

The amount of hours of my life wasted on trying to make an irrigation system out of only parts that I could find around the farm, rather than just calling Brookdale and saying, "I need to irrigate this field. Send me everything I need," are hours that I will never get back and were not worth the amount of money I saved because I eventually came to my senses and did just that. And now we have a Meganets system and a drip tape system, and it works beautifully, and the crops do so much better.

Elise Magnant ([01:13:06](#)):

Yeah. And not being stingy with the propane and the electricity to keep it like 60 or 70 in here all the time has really paid off as far as plant health.

Kagen Dewey ([01:13:16](#)):

Go down to 40 at night in the greenhouse, maybe-

Elise Magnant ([01:13:17](#)):

Yeah, I know.

Kagen Dewey ([01:13:18](#)):

... just to try and save a little bit on propane, things like that.

Elise Magnant ([01:13:21](#)):

Never worth it.

Kagen Dewey ([01:13:22](#)):

Our peppers were two weeks behind. I was just thinking, oh, and just when we were leasing and we were paying hourly rental on tractor equipment. So much that should have been at cultivation scale, but we were doing by hand because we were like, ah, it's not worth the \$40 to rent the basket weeder for an hour to just go do it with a basket weeder. It's like, no, it was so worth it to just start using equipment. I think those are even, it just hurt a little more because you knew the dollar value every time you turn the key versus not thinking about it and just hopping on and going.

Elise Magnant ([01:14:04](#)):

Yeah.

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

Right.

Kagen Dewey ([01:14:05](#)):

Now I can just pretend the more I use the tractor, wear and tear isn't real.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:10](#)):

Yeah.

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

Yeah. I think that's probably...

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:17](#)):

Those are some good tips and lessons learned for sure.

Kagen Dewey ([01:14:21](#)):

Hard truths, I don't know.

Elise Magnant ([01:14:22](#)):

Yeah. There's so many good lessons to learn in farming. This morning I was just thinking about how the perfect and the enemy of the good, that one. Using the paper pot transplanter. The paper pot transplanter teaches me that every time I use it. Because I'm like I love to hate this tool because it's clunky and it doesn't always go well. But I'm like, I know I'm still saving a ton of time, even if it doesn't feel like it.

Kagen Dewey ([01:14:48](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:49](#)):

Yeah. It may not be ideal, but it's still way faster than the alternative.

Elise Magnant ([01:14:53](#)):

Yeah.

Kagen Dewey ([01:14:54](#)):

Yeah. I'd say that's a mantra around this farm is don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Elise Magnant ([01:14:58](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:59](#)):

Yep. Those are good. Those are good. And that was The Farmer's Share. I hope you enjoyed this episode with Kagan and Elise at Blackbird Organics. 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 recurring 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.

([01:16:04](#)):

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

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

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

This transcript was exported on Apr 28, 2025 - view latest version [here](#).

one comes out. The Farmers 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.

[\(01:18:20\)](#):

Lastly, if you're enjoying the show, I'd love it if you could write a review. In Apple Podcasts just click on the show, scroll down to the bottom, and there you can leave five stars and a comment to help encourage new listeners to tune in. I'd also encourage you to share this episode with other grower friends or crew who you think would be inspiring for them. Thanks for listening.