

Jon Wagner ([00:00:09](#)):

My name is Jon Wagner. We're here in Williamstown at Bear Roots Farm. We are a 350 acre vegetable farm, diverse vegetable farm. We do 20 acres of organic vegetables.

Karin Bellemere ([00:00:26](#)):

I'm Karin Bellemere and Jon and I co-own the Roots Farm Market in Middlesex, but I would call myself the manager. The store sells predominantly Bear Roots Farm vegetables during our peak season. We also sell products from tons of different producers in Vermont. It goes all the way to artisans and makers and bakers, etc. etc. I feel like I'm connected to the wide network of our food system, but beyond the food system, that's what I spend my days doing.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:01:02](#)):

I'm your host, Andy Chamberlain, and I take you behind the scenes to learn how farmers are building their business in sustainable agriculture. These farmer to farmer interviews cover a wide range of topics from cropping systems, marketing channels, lifestyle decisions, and lessons learned along the way. 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.

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

Today's episode comes to you from Williamstown, Vermont, where we visit with Jon Wagner and Karin Bellemere of Bear Roots Farm and the Roots Farm Market. Together, they've built up a 20-acre vegetable farm and a local goods store in central Vermont. Jon starts off by sharing how they got started on Long Island and how they ramped their business here in the Green Mountains. Karin joins later on to talk about how business coaching, a few times, a whole lot of grants and personal growth helped them to get to where they are today. Before we get started, I'd like to share a recent review from Apple Podcasts, which states, I love this podcast. It's super informative, clear and down to earth, very useful for farmers, backyard growers, homesteaders, or anyone that wants to know about how food is made. And with that, let's get on to the show.

Jon Wagner ([00:02:39](#)):

Can I get you anything? A glass of water?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:02:41](#)):

Sure.

Jon Wagner ([00:02:42](#)):

Okay. I'll give you one of my farm glasses. Stainless steel. How's your season been going?

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

So far so good.

Jon Wagner ([00:02:58](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:02:59](#)):

Yeah. The first planting of corn is absolutely terrible, but other than that.

Jon Wagner ([00:03:05](#)):

Yeah. We got like 10% germination on that.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:08](#)):

Yeah. Exactly.

Jon Wagner ([00:03:09](#)):

But us and everyone else,

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:11](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:03:12](#)):

I've seen a couple of ... People are always like, "Oh, you should transplant all your first round." When I saw it was a little cold, I did do like a thousand. I seeded out like a thousand in the greenhouse.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:26](#)):

Something.

Jon Wagner ([00:03:27](#)):

Just to have something and then of course nothing came up so.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:31](#)):

Well, I was talking to George at Dog River, and I think he transplanted everything. Same thing. It just floundered.

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

And even with the transplant.

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

Yeah. It was just a bad year all around.

Jon Wagner ([00:03:42](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I've talked to all the dairy guys and all terrible fermentation. Had to reorder all the seed, till it all in.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:03:52](#)):

Terrible. Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:03:53](#)):

But I guess that wouldn't be fun. We wouldn't keep doing it if it was easy.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:04:02](#)):

Meanwhile, the pumpkins look great so far.

Jon Wagner ([00:04:05](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. I've got a little woodchuck I think in there, starting to set up shop, so we're going to have to deal with that.

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

We did an experiment. We did half acre in black plastic this year on the pumpkins, and those just exploded. So I want to do a lot more of that, but then I got to get better at my edge cultivation for the row middles before those weeds take over stuff.

Jon Wagner ([00:04:24](#)):

I know. Yeah.

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

It's a learning curve.

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

I've found with the winter squash, they do such a good job of putting a canopy. They usually knock the weeds down. Yeah. We row cover them all. We do about three acres of winter squash and we're row covering them so there's, like... I try to get in there right before we row cover them. I do mainly for beetles, so I do have a slight window. We'll transplant one, sit for a minute and then cultivate and throw that over. Yeah. Weeds, that's a tough one. I've got a lot of them this year. All that rain we got, it was impossible to ...

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:09](#)):

I think a lot of people do this year especially.

Jon Wagner ([00:05:13](#)):

Yeah. I don't worry about them too much anymore. We do a lot of crop rotation and cover cropping, so it seems to balance itself out.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:24](#)):

Well, that's good.

Jon Wagner ([00:05:26](#)):

I guess. Yeah.

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

How much of your ground do you get cover cropped each year?

Jon Wagner ([00:05:31](#)):

Probably 30 to 40 acres we aim for. Our goal is 60, but ...

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

60 acres cover crop?

Jon Wagner ([00:05:41](#)):

Yeah.

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

How many are you doing? How many in cultivation?

Jon Wagner ([00:05:43](#)):

We have access to 150.

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

Whoa.

Jon Wagner ([00:05:47](#)):

And we do 20 acres and vegetables per year.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:05:51](#)):

So what's the rest?

Jon Wagner ([00:05:53](#)):

Either cover crop or multi-year cover crop. But I spend most of my time just cover cropping. My crew does the rest.

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

You have crew for the veg farm, you're just out there.

Jon Wagner ([00:06:08](#)):

Vegetable farm, I haven't run it in years. I'm pretty much getting cover crops in.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:06:15](#)):

Cover cropping is the fun part. I like that part.

Jon Wagner ([00:06:18](#)):

Yeah. That's what I realized from farming. It's like I like all the things that are not for-profit farming.

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

Of course. Yeah. So what's a little background? Who you are, where we're at and what you're farming?

Jon Wagner ([00:06:31](#)):

Yeah. So Karin and I, my wife started a farm in 2010 in eastern Long Island. My parents had a acre in the backyard. It was like some old horse farm, I think. I didn't grow up farming. I'm first generation. It's a little bit of history on my mother's side. She had a cattle station in Australia. Yeah. That's one generation removed. She grew up on it and left when she was like 16. But yeah. I guess I inherited some form of gene from that that wanted to rough it. I grew up partly in Australia, and then the Hamptons in Eastern

Long Island. It was all potato country at one point, and now it's all just mansions. The 1% of America goes out there to holiday. My dad was a college professor out there, and they had 14 acres, but one of it tillable. Karin and I graduated Green Mountain College in Vermont and moved back out there, and I was landscaping. She was working at a health food store, and we had the crazy idea to start a vegetable farm. The original idea was backyard gardens. Backyard gardens for rich people who didn't want to do the work themselves, but wanted to show it off to their friends.

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

From a landscaping perspective essentially.

Jon Wagner ([00:08:26](#)):

Exactly.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:08:27](#)):

But productive.

Jon Wagner ([00:08:28](#)):

I did four years of landscaping or six years, something like that. It's been a while now. And I was mulching yards and mowing and planting all this stuff. And these people were out there once or twice a summer, and they go around and have a little party and say, "Look what I did. Look what I did with the place," or something along those lines. But it felt somewhat meaningless. And so I was like, "Oh, well, maybe I could do these backyard gardens and then harvest them and donate the food to something, and that could be a viable alternative business to just mulching someone's shrubs."

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

But I realized I didn't know anything about farming. I didn't know anything about growing vegetables. I knew how to transplant arborvitae and do all that stuff, but no idea how to grow tomato. So I reached out to a local farm. It was an old CSA farm, Quail Hill Farm, east end of Long Island. I think they were one of the first CSA farms in the US. And they're associated with Peconic Land Trust. So nonprofit farm. They had, I think 200 CSA members. It was one of the only you pick CSAs I think I've ever seen, where people would go and harvest from the farm instead of ... I'm sure they do it around here. There's like blueberries you pick, but this is like everything. They're harvesting kale, tomatoes.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:10:11](#)):

Back in the 20 teens you're saying.

Jon Wagner ([00:10:15](#)):

They're still doing it, I think.

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

Yeah. But that was early. It's a little bit trendy. I think more people are trying that now.

Jon Wagner ([00:10:21](#)):

It makes sense. The labor costs are insane, and I think connecting people to the fruit, it's certainly important. Anyway, so we volunteered there, Karin and I, and then the next year started CSA. Did like four little farmers markets, did our one acre. I was reinventing the wheel to the max. We did one planting

of everything and had no concept of doing other plant things beyond that and succession planting. Learned a lot and I guess we're still learning a lot 15 years later. But we got the basics down now.

(00:11:15):

Yeah. So we did that for four years. We got to a point where we realized we wouldn't be able to afford any farmland out there. We were jaded by the culture of the place because there was just so much wealth and the local people were getting pushed out and relationships were limited with the community. Not to say they're not there. We had some really close friends. But we decided we wanted to move to Vermont. So we came up, visited with our friend Joe Bossen. You might know Joe. He runs Vermont Bean Crafters.

Andy Chamberlain (00:11:58):

Oh, yeah.

Jon Wagner (00:11:58):

Yeah. We went to college together.

Andy Chamberlain (00:12:00):

Nice.

Jon Wagner (00:12:02):

He said to us, he was like, "What would be your ideal farm?" And we're like, "Well, 50 acres, tillable land up here in the mountains, close to a place where we could actually sell the vegetables." So he ended up bringing us to Bragg Hill Farm, which is in Fayston, and it was a Vermont Land Trust property. And they were putting it up for applications through the farm access program. I don't know if you're familiar.

Andy Chamberlain (00:12:42):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner (00:12:46):

We put in an application and we didn't get it, but they were like, "Oh, we like you guys. We want to work with you. Let's figure something out. But if you're serious, you should probably consider moving up here and getting yourself organized." So I think six weeks later we packed the U-Haul up and-

Andy Chamberlain (00:13:12):

Can do.

Jon Wagner (00:13:12):

Yeah. Oh, I also forgot to mention, we got flooded during Sandy with salt water. So that was just like, "All right. This island's going down. We got to get out of here to higher dryer land." Little did we know that this place has flooded twice or three times since we've been here and Long Island hasn't flooded since.

Andy Chamberlain (00:13:38):

Go figure.

Jon Wagner (00:13:38):

I know. Yep. So we moved up here and then within six months we were given the opportunity to purchase 87 acres in Barre through Vermont Land Trusts farm access program. So it was quite the turnaround.

Andy Chamberlain (00:13:58):

Yeah. It was pretty quick.

Jon Wagner (00:13:59):

It was, yeah. We had all our equipment. We were ready to go. We were serious. So we moved up here. We did, I think 36 member CSA our first year. The Barre and Northfield Farmers Market. The journey a lot of young farmers have been on. We built it up until ... I think we had 200 members at one point, and we were doing Burlington and Montpelier Farmers Market, and that was a grind. We were doing the double market on a Saturday, getting up at four in the morning loading 2000 pounds of vegetables into a van, going, setting up at these markets, bring half of it back, hot and wilted. And we were like, "All right. What's the next step here?"

(00:14:58):

So we had an idea for a farm stand. Could be on the farm, could be a wagon on the side of the road somewhere. We weren't sure. We were looking around. There was a spot in Middlesex, an old general store that had been sitting vacant for three years. We had a friend of ours, Mike Beatty. He owns Hooley Flats Farm locally. And we asked him to come take a look at it with us. And we went over there and we peeked in the window and there's a bunch of water pipes that had frozen and were spraying water out all over the place. And we're like, "Perfect. This is our kind of place."

Andy Chamberlain (00:15:47):

We can afford this one.

Jon Wagner (00:15:49):

We can afford this one. This is right up a farmer's alley. So with family, we ended up borrowing money from them and then a year later purchasing from them. So we bought it right away, fixed it up in three months, opened a Bear bones market where it was pretty much our vegetables and a couple of sodas. Very limited inventory. Since then, we've been building on it every year. We put in a commercial kitchen, we're doing prepared foods with our vegetables. We added a little nursery out the side. I actually helped build an addition last year with a professional. Hired a professional to help me. The old farmer carpenter wasn't going to fly with the state. Yeah. So we added an addition or building out parking lots and going over there tomorrow to keep building the parking lot. Working on the siding still. Yeah. just keep going.

Andy Chamberlain (00:17:09):

Is that your primary outlet for your veggies now or are you still selling other places?

Jon Wagner (00:17:14):

Yeah. It's definitely our primary outlet. Yeah. That's probably 80% of what we do goes through the store, whether it's the kitchen or just the retail side. And we do a lot of wholesale through there too. Yeah. We'll just put stuff in the cooler and then somebody can come and pick it up.

Andy Chamberlain (00:17:38):

So that's your pickup spot.

Jon Wagner (00:17:39):

Yeah. It's a nice central location. It's not out here.

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

Right.

Jon Wagner ([00:17:43](#)):

Williamstown.

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

Up on the hill.

Jon Wagner ([00:17:46](#)):

Yeah. Up on the hill. And we do wholesale. We are doing a CSA through the store now, but I think it's not at the same capacity. It's just like a pre-buy card. There's been a lot of ups and downs, especially in the last five years so labor was an issue, inflation was an issue. So we've started a lot of projects that didn't work out. The CSA was a little much to run on top of the store because Karin is full-time running the store and on the farm, the farm's scaled back a little bit and simplified.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:18:34](#)):

Are those two separate businesses or one?

Jon Wagner ([00:18:36](#)):

They are. Yeah. Two separate businesses.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:18:38](#)):

So is that technically like a grocery store?

Jon Wagner ([00:18:45](#)):

Yeah. I guess you could consider it that.

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

It's not a farm because it's just retail, right?

Jon Wagner ([00:18:53](#)):

Well, yeah. It's just retail. It's not a farm. It's a hybrid model because we sell primarily our produce, but we buy in bread, cheese, beer, wine, anything local that we can get our hands on. Soap. Flowers. I would consider it like a co-op style farm.

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

That's a good way to put it.

Jon Wagner ([00:19:22](#)):

Year-round farm market. That what it resembles the most. I think is more of a co-op, even though we're just the owners. But when you go in the inventory we carry resembles a co-op.

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

Yeah. That's a good example.

Jon Wagner ([00:19:35](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:19:39](#)):

When did you open the store and say that that was up and running? I know it's been evolving.

Jon Wagner ([00:19:47](#)):

I think it was either 2019 or 2020.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:19:51](#)):

So you opened, right-

Jon Wagner ([00:19:52](#)):

It was right before-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:19:52](#)):

Right before COVID.

Jon Wagner ([00:19:53](#)):

Right before COVID. Yep. Which actually was a blessing because it gave us a year to get our bearings, but we didn't have systems in place that were so established they would've been hard to break. Because when COVID hit, everything just changed overnight and it made us a little more flexible at the time. Yeah. Not that any of us want to relive it, but we were looking at the news and seeing what was happening. And I said to Karin, I was like, "I think we need to create some kind of online store." She was like, "Absolutely not. We're not doing that." And then two days later, she was just like, "Okay. Let's do that."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:20:42](#)):

It's up.

Jon Wagner ([00:20:43](#)):

And just went for three days straight, putting inventory into the computer and creating an online store. And so we moved pretty quick on that, and it was a nightmare. It was like the people that typically work the register are trying to go around and pick up orders that have been called in over the phone or online and they'll forget something. I don't know. They weren't used to that. Nobody was trained to do that. They were just trying to wing it. Putting stuff outside. Somebody would grab the wrong bag and walk off with it. Anyways, it was interesting and we made it through. And then that was followed by employee shortages and inflation of products. It's been pretty volatile since in the farming world and in the retail world. We're now a little more aware and prepared to adjust when the next thing comes up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:21:55](#)):

What do you think has been a good aspect of, I don't know, flexibility or adaptation that has really made things keep working?

Jon Wagner ([00:22:07](#)):

I think we're pretty diverse in our business model. So we're not doing huge quantities of anything that allows us ... If something's not working, we can adjust. We don't have all our eggs in one basket. So I think that's helped us a bit. The flip side of that is you're just doing so many different things, you're going to lose some of them so there's some waste in that. You're not the best at anything because you're so spread out.

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

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:22:41](#)):

But I think as time goes on, we've gotten better at the things that we're really good at and win some, lose some.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:22:52](#)):

Yep. And when you're saying that, are you thinking diversity from your crop mix or diversity from the retail as in you've added the kitchen and the plant side of things and bought in other local stuff?

Jon Wagner ([00:23:08](#)):

Yeah. I think all of that adds into our diversity. If you're just talking about the farm, our farm is now shifting slowly towards doing as much stuff as we can that we can sell through the store in small quantities. So in the last couple of years, we're doing more raspberries, blackberries, blueberries. We're planting fruit trees and not huge quantities of any of them. And we have to manage all this stuff and keep track of it all on top of our vegetable operation. And that could also be animals. We could put in the mix.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:23:49](#)):

So you don't have any animals?

Jon Wagner ([00:23:50](#)):

I've got some beef cows, but very small herd.

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

How many is small to you?

Jon Wagner ([00:23:57](#)):

Two.

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

Okay.

Jon Wagner ([00:23:58](#)):

Two bred cows. We're always trying to get it bigger, but there's always a point in the air, I'm just like, "What am I doing? Sell."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:24:10](#)):

Too busy.

Jon Wagner ([00:24:11](#)):

I actually just use them for grazing purposes mainly. I'm more interested in that. So it's more my hobby, just helping to manage some of the farm.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:24:21](#)):

Are they part of your rotation?

Jon Wagner ([00:24:23](#)):

Yeah.

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

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:24:27](#)):

Because we're doing so many multiple years of cover cropping on fields, we're doing a fencing project and water lines for them so that we can actually grow vegetables one year and then pasture the next on the cover crop.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:24:48](#)):

Nice.

Jon Wagner ([00:24:50](#)):

We'll see.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:24:51](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:24:51](#)):

We'll see how it goes.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:24:53](#)):

Both things need water or you said you're dry land, veg farming, but if you get water there for the animals.

Jon Wagner ([00:24:58](#)):

Yeah. But one needs a lot more water. I can accommodate a couple of cows, it's the vegetables that require a lot more drinking. Yeah. But yes, there will be infrastructure in place, and then maybe someday we'll get some wells to supply it all. But right now we're running ... We've got a well down at our washroom and then a well in the house, and that is what we're doing for ... I think we've got six high tunnels here, 30 by a hundred. So we've split them. So one well does three, the other well does three and we're just running them. One house gets water every day, all day.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:25:46](#)):

Okay.

Jon Wagner ([00:25:47](#)):

That's persistent.

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

All day.

Jon Wagner ([00:25:49](#)):

Yeah. Well, I don't know. Depends on what the crop is. Yeah. We've got a system. But I think that diversity has ... I don't know. It's a personal interest to me. It keeps me engaged, keeps me excited. I've gone through years where we're like, "Okay. We're just going to do these three crops and we're going to do a good job of them." And I got bored really quick. I think farming, at least for me, it has to be not just a business, but it needs to be fulfilling.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:30](#)):

For sure.

Jon Wagner ([00:26:31](#)):

And so having all that changing and chaos and failure and success all combined-

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

Provided a challenge to strive for.

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

Yeah. Provided a challenge. Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:26:42](#)):

Do you think those years where you wanted to focus on a handful of crops helped you learn and focus on and improve those before you grew into the next phase?

Jon Wagner ([00:26:54](#)):

Yeah. I think it helped us establish good practices for all those different things and now I keep that in mind when doing anything, I'm like, "Okay. You need to establish a good system for everything you do. If you don't have a good system for it and you keep messing it up, then you just got to let it go." Strawberries has been something I would love to do and something about that timing of when you need to focus on it, I just haven't been able to do it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:27:29](#)):

It's a different system from a lot of veg production. There's some overlap, but like you said, then the timing clashes.

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

I always fail on the timing. Maybe we just need to do it in a smaller amount that seems like. I keep saying that, and then I order 5,000 plants and then it just blows to the wind. It takes a commitment that I've failed to succeed in. I don't know. But one thing that has worked out pretty well is we're growing out seedlings

and other edible plants for the store that is also in that time of year where strawberry plants are producing. That seems to be working really well for us. That seedling model.

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

Are you buying in strawberries?

Jon Wagner ([00:28:29](#)):

Yeah. To the store. The store is buying them in and they have a couple of producers that are pretty on it and whatever ones I can pull out of the weeds, the left over from my attempt of growing them, we add that.

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

What's your standard ... We'll call it standard practices or standard systems you have in place for growing veg?

Jon Wagner ([00:28:57](#)):

Standard systems.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:28:59](#)):

Like plastic culture transplanting?

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

Yeah. We've got plastic, black plastic. I've never met a farmer that's like I love black plastic, but if you're going to run a competitive commercial farm, I think that's what it is. Got its pros and cons. Obviously, pulling it as a nightmare. If you're organic and you have weeds, always trying to do a better job of that. But it protects the soil, I think. Especially now we're seeing dry and then these heavy-duty rains where you have major erosion. I think having row covers and black plastic or some natural mulch is great. So we do that. A lot of cover cropping, as I mentioned. Really trying to build up organic matter in the soil. My goal is when it's super dry, you can just dust off the top of the soil and there's so much organic matter that it's just holding that moisture.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:30:13](#)):

What are your go-to cover crops that you're-

Jon Wagner ([00:30:17](#)):

I've messed around with all kinds over the years? Oats, rye, peas seem to be the pretty straightforward ones. I'm sure there's some other ones that people have messed around with. If I'm doing rotational grazing, I'm starting to look into some alternative perennial grass type things. Haven't got there yet. Oat's, peas, rye, Austrian, winter pea are great. Good fixer of nitrogen. They overwinter well. Rye has been a bit of a pain for us in recent years because it's been so wet. Has become more of a weed. Oats, they're nice, but they lose something when they winter kill. You feel like your soil's still a little bare coming into the spring. Those are the big ones.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:31:15](#)):

Yep. Do you have a favorite crop that you like to grow?

Jon Wagner ([00:31:25](#)):

Favorite crop I like to grow. No. Probably not. I like little bits of everything. I like growing new things. I like experimenting. I usually like the first of everything.

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

Fair enough.

Jon Wagner ([00:31:43](#)):

That's my go-to. The first cherry tomato, the first eggplant, the first new potatoes, peas. The first bite of everything is always the most rewarding.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:31:55](#)):

True. Fresh and delicious.

Jon Wagner ([00:31:57](#)):

Even like a zucchini. First zucchini. I'm excited to see it again every year. That cycle keeps ... Yeah. I love that about farming. I love how there's all these different things changing and moving all the time, and I'm usually happy to see it go too.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:20](#)):

Yep. The dopamine hit. It's growing again.

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

Yep.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:32:27](#)):

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

Jon Wagner ([00:32:31](#)):

It's a tough one. I guess there's a lot of different opinions on what sustainable farming would be. I'd say perfect world, you're probably not disrupting the natural environment, but since we are a commercial farm and we need to be efficient and the price point for food is pretty low, you need to be somewhat destructive to the environment unfortunately. I think on our end, I'd love not to be able to till, which I do, but I offset that by growing the soil for multiple years. So since we're doing anywhere from two to four years of cover cropping per field. We like to think we're growing the soil and the biomass every year instead of degrading it more and more. I have degraded soil before I've seen what it looks like. It doesn't grow good food. Pests and disease are a major issue. We hardly have any pests and disease now because of all the cover cropping.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:33:44](#)):

Interesting.

Jon Wagner ([00:33:46](#)):

I don't spray. It saves me a lot of time not to spray

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

Nice.

Jon Wagner ([00:33:51](#)):

But all that goes into my cover cropping. All that time. Yeah.

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

All your time is still consumed.

Jon Wagner ([00:33:59](#)):

You can always find a way to be consumed by it. Yeah. I don't know. Just trying to leave it in better shape than how you found it. I think that's probably the most sustainable method, which is hard to do. There's black plastic, you're trying to get out sometimes. We got flooded in 2023 and we had a whole field of cabbage that went under six inches of soil. I called up NOFA and I was like, "How am I supposed to deal with this?" So we've been pulling it out ever since.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:34:42](#)):

In littler pieces

Jon Wagner ([00:34:44](#)):

And little pieces. Yeah. So do your best. There's just so many different factors, and there's the perfect world, and then there's the real reality of it all. I find doing the things that are more hobby related ... We do pollinator plantings and create native habitat for different animals and bugs. I do that on the side when I can just to see beautiful chaos in its own setting. Just let it go.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:28](#)):

Let nature happen.

Jon Wagner ([00:35:29](#)):

Yeah. Let nature happen. That to me is offsetting all the other things. To produce food at a commercial scale, it requires a lot of intensive tilling and it's not the best. I wouldn't call that sustainable.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:35:54](#)):

Well, you feel like you've been improving your soil. Are you seeing that on soil tests or just observations from growing performance?

Jon Wagner ([00:36:02](#)):

Both.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:36:02](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:36:03](#)):

Yeah. Both. As I mentioned. Pests and disease are pretty ... We've got two separate properties, so we're rotating crops. The other properties seven miles away, so potatoes are there one year and here the next. I love to see that population of beetles start to accumulate, and then I eliminate their whole food source and they come back the next year and nothing's there.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:36:29](#)):

So in every other cycle is sufficient in that case.

Jon Wagner ([00:36:32](#)):

Yeah.

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

Nice.

Jon Wagner ([00:36:34](#)):

So we do that a lot. I'd say our biggest pest pressure is the deer. We're always trying to outrun them because they can cover quite a vast area. And because they live for multiple years, they remember when it comes back, they're like, "Oh yeah, I like that thing. I'm going to go mow that row of lettuce down." For some reason, I've had them eat my onions. I've had them eat ... They get worse and worse as time goes on. How are you eating an onion over grass. All these lush pastures out here. Why are you eating my onions?

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

Spicy grass.

Jon Wagner ([00:37:17](#)):

Yeah. Sweet onions, I guess. Yeah. So that's been our biggest issue is the deer.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:37:24](#)):

Yeah. How has managing a farm spread across seven acres? It's two properties primarily, or you have lots all in between?

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

Well, technically it's three because we've got our store, and then we've got our original farm in Barre, and now we're in Williamstown, which is the primary farm. So for the Barre property, we've geared it towards larger scale crops. I'll do our fall cabbage and potatoes and onions there one year, try and outrun all those pests. Swede midge, leek moth, potato beetle. It doesn't always work, but I do notice trends like a great reduction in pressure. I never feel like, man, I lost this crop to one of those pests.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:38:18](#)):

That's good.

Jon Wagner ([00:38:19](#)):

Yeah. I was really worried when Swede midge became a thing and I started noticing our first-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:38:28](#)):

Impact.

Jon Wagner ([00:38:28](#)):

Swede midge of it. Yeah. Last couple of years it's been-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:38:33](#)):

Are you row covering a lot of that stuff?

Jon Wagner ([00:38:37](#)):

We were when we first got here, not as much now. So that is also an indicator of that being not as big of an issue. Flea beetles in the spring are killer for us.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:38:57](#)):

What do you think is driving that? Do you think it's the soil health or do you think it's the rotation, like flip-flopping crop species each year, or beneficial stuff growing nearby?

Jon Wagner ([00:39:13](#)):

Yeah. I think it's all of it. I think the combination of all these different things you can try to implement to hedge your bet. That's what I've observed.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:27](#)):

Are there other commercial farms near those properties, or are you fairly distant?

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

I think we're pretty isolated.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:33](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:39:33](#)):

When we first got up here, everyone looked at us and said, "What are you guys doing over here? What are these pieces of equipment that you're using?" It's all dairy and beef farms over here, so not a whole lot of vegetable.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:49](#)):

New kid on the block with that.

Jon Wagner ([00:39:52](#)):

There's a lot of head scratching going on.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:39:54](#)):

You're from New York, eh?

Jon Wagner ([00:39:57](#)):

Yep. Yeah. They're like, "Well, he works hard, so I guess I don't mind him."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:04](#)):

Gives it a good effort. See what he could do.

Jon Wagner ([00:40:07](#)):

I don't know what he is doing out there with those weird machines.

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

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:40:14](#)):

What are those tanks for?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:40:16](#)):

Yeah.

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

Yep. So no, not a lot of other farms in the area.

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

Well, that's good too.

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

Yeah. Yeah, I think so. Yeah. So I think we're at a phase now where we have a lot of systems. The goal is ... We've spent a lot of time pushing hard and investing money and doing projects like installing high tunnels and building out a washroom, infrastructure projects where it's not like I can afford to have someone else do it so I'm doing it all. And every time you expand one sector of the business, you have to be fully immersed in it to make sure that it's successful. We've done many years of all of that, and we're trying to take little chunks out of every week and allocate it for our personal life now. Let's stop at four and go for a swim. Karin and I play soccer three days a week now.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:41:29](#)):

Oh, wow.

Jon Wagner ([00:41:29](#)):

Yeah.

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

That's a lot of time off.

Jon Wagner ([00:41:31](#)):

We just went for a four-day vacation in August during the busiest time of the year. We're just allowing ourselves that because we took a lot of time to not do that.

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

Right. You're 15 years in now.

Jon Wagner ([00:41:49](#)):

15 years in. Just turned 40. We've been grinding. And there's still going to be ups and downs where we just have to jump back into it, but we don't want to get to a point where we're just like, "Man, we just worked our whole life and never did anything else."

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

Yeah. Absolutely. That's totally understandable. You deserve to have a little fun.

Jon Wagner ([00:42:14](#)):

So the quality of life is now a factor of the business like it needs to be. You need to enjoy yourselves a bit.

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

Yeah. No. But that's also encouraging to hear a business ... We'll call it plateau or slow down in the building phase, and actually enjoy a little bit of time too before you're 65 or older or whatever. A lot of farms seem to be that seven to 10 years to get the flywheel spinning.

Jon Wagner ([00:42:44](#)):

Yeah. That's what it feels like.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:42:48](#)):

At least.

Jon Wagner ([00:42:49](#)):

Everything's so volatile all the time. It's like you never know when you're going to have to jump back in the trenches and do it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:42:59](#)):

And yeah. You built two businesses at once. You built the farm and the market.

Jon Wagner ([00:43:02](#)):

Yeah. We're really good at concepts, and then unfortunately we work hard too.

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

So it comes together.

Jon Wagner ([00:43:12](#)):

It comes together, but it's never easy. It's never easy. Everything you think it's going to be, it's 10 times harder.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:43:20](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:43:21](#)):

And as time goes on, you're slower, you're physically slower. The pile that you've built up in your daily reality, you don't think of it, and then you have to add that to the new thing that you're doing.

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

Yeah. Right.

Jon Wagner ([00:43:39](#)):

Yeah.

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

Of course we can build a kitchen and expand the-

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

Oh, my God. Yeah. That in itself is another business. We just had no idea. We had no idea at the time. We were just like, "Oh, we need to pickle these cucumbers. Instead of growing less cucumber, we need to ... We have the surplus. We've got to pickle them. Got to do it." So we started a kitchen, and then all the people that work there are like, "Well, we don't want to pickle." I was like, "Well, what do you mean? We built this so we can pickle." "Nope. We want to make sandwiches. We want to do soups. We want to do this stuff." "All right. Fine. Do it. No more pickles." "Well, what do I do with all these pickles? Oh, let's find somebody that wants to buy pickles." So we built this kitchen. So yeah, that's how it's gone. Reality.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:44:34](#)):

Yeah. There's a certain amount of visionary push that you can do with then accepting what the employees want to do, what the market demands. If the market wants sandwiches and not pickles, I guess we'll sell sandwiches, right?

Jon Wagner ([00:44:49](#)):

Yeah. That's exactly what it is. You have this idea. Yeah. I don't know. That's where we ended up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:44:57](#)):

But we're still making at least a batch of pickles still, right?

Jon Wagner ([00:45:01](#)):

I was just on the phone with my friend Joe from college. I was like, "Joe, let's start a side business. Do you have any employees that can do it for us? Because I'm maxed out. But I'll send you the cucumbers and you can make the pickles."

Andy Chamberlain ([00:45:15](#)):

Joe, I got this great idea. You got 10 minutes?

Jon Wagner ([00:45:18](#)):

Yeah. Meanwhile, he is got the same thing going on. He's got 10 different things. He did a Bean Crafters with the veggie burgers and bean burgers and he did All Souls Tortilleria which is the tortilla-

Andy Chamberlain ([00:45:33](#)):

Oh, he's part of that too.

Jon Wagner ([00:45:34](#)):

He was. He just sold off his portion, so he had more time with his family.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:45:39](#)):

Understandable.

Jon Wagner ([00:45:41](#)):

But then he started a farm.

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

In his spare time.

Jon Wagner ([00:45:46](#)):

Serial enablers of each other.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:45:51](#)):

Yeah. It's a certain breed of us. I feel it.

Jon Wagner ([00:45:55](#)):

Yeah. I was just running through the list of all the things we've tried to do over the years with my employee. I was like, we've done sauerkraut, we've done pickles, we've done sauces, salsas, hot sauces. You name it, we've tried to do it. Powders. We've done dehydrated things. Some people have accomplished all of it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:19](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:46:19](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:21](#)):

That's what's annoying. It seems like somebody jumps on something and it works, and it's like, golly, I've tried 20 different things.

Jon Wagner ([00:46:30](#)):

Yeah. I know. But it keeps it interesting.

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

Yeah, it does.

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

I've realized I am good at growing food, I'm not so good at getting in a kitchen and processing it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:41](#)):

There's that too.

Jon Wagner ([00:46:42](#)):

Don't like that.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:43](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:46:44](#)):

Have you ever listened to How I Built This podcast?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:49](#)):

No. Not that one.

Jon Wagner ([00:46:51](#)):

It's all about people who have become very successful, their business, but they tell their story.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:46:56](#)):

Sounds like I'd like it.

Jon Wagner ([00:46:57](#)):

Yeah. I think you would. The only problem is if you are like me, every story that you hear, you're like, "Oh, I could do that. I could do that. I could do that." And they're all super inspirational, but it's like 5% of the population finds the success that they have.

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

Yes.

Jon Wagner ([00:47:19](#)):

There's a combination of things. It's luck and being in the right place at the right time. Some of them had great ideas.

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

Early on. I was into personal finance, which led me into side hustle ideas and stuff like that, and even still, I listen to Mike Rowe and other entrepreneurs. It just keeps that creative brain going, I guess.

Jon Wagner ([00:47:45](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. For sure. Yep. Have you ever heard the ... you know Tate's cookies, right?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:47:53](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:47:56](#)):

The person who started it was Kathleen King, and she started it on her parents' farm in Eastern Long Island, next town over for where I grew up. I think she was like nine or 11 years old, and she was baking cookies and selling them on the side of the road to pay for her clothes for school. She worked her ass off

until she was 50 and then sold it for \$60 million or something like that. Just never know how it's going to end up.

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

Right. Exactly.

Jon Wagner ([00:48:34](#)):

But a lot of ups and downs.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:48:37](#)):

So if you found your strength to be growing vegetables. What crew do you have? How many people do you have?

Jon Wagner ([00:48:44](#)):

I've got two guys from Jamaica through the H2A program, and Denton. This is his seventh year, and he runs the place, I don't even know. I usually ask him what we have to do, and then I make a list for him and hand it back. He tells me what to do. I write it down and then hand it back to him and say, "Okay. That sounds good. I'll see you in two days." Yep.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:49:10](#)):

Maybe try this first or whatever. Prioritize.

Jon Wagner ([00:49:13](#)):

Yeah. I've got a real things in a bit right now. We've got too many string beans, and I'm like, "Okay. What happened there? Why'd we overseed?" And that's because last year we underseeded.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:49:24](#)):

Right. Right.

Jon Wagner ([00:49:26](#)):

And it was a good growing year so that you run into that.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:49:30](#)):

And a little bit of a yo-yo effect.

Jon Wagner ([00:49:32](#)):

Yeah. So now I got to start a dilly bean business. Better open another kitchen.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:49:38](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:49:41](#)):

Yeah. No, I've got Denton and Mario who are both really good. They're just great farmers and great people. They make this place work.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:49:53](#)):

Nice.

Jon Wagner ([00:49:54](#)):

Yep. I can't do it anymore the way I used to in my younger years. But Denton, he's 65 years old, and Mario is younger. He is 33. I was happy that we had that balance, but Denton will outwork him. He takes great pride in what he does, and he's very good at it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:50:17](#)):

That's awesome. I haven't heard any negatives of anybody who's had the H2A crew with him.

Jon Wagner ([00:50:23](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. It's a little complicated. With the whole Visa program and everything. You got to hire an organization to do it. It's expensive. You got to have the infrastructure for it, housing and transportation and all that, but they show up.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:50:43](#)):

Right. Year over year.

Jon Wagner ([00:50:45](#)):

Year over year. Yeah, that's true. Everyone that we've true locally has been for the most part great. It's just like after two, three years, they usually are onto the next thing. Understandable. But that's not a good way to run a business is to having to keep train people.

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

It's a hard way. Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:51:08](#)):

Yeah. It's a hard way.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:51:10](#)):

That's insane. You're doing 20 acres of mixed veg, plus 60 acres of cover crops with you and two other guys.

Jon Wagner ([00:51:16](#)):

And I have one part-time employee who helps me in the washroom. Yep. And does my deliveries so I can cover crop.

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

Are your H2A guys ... What hours are they pushing?

Jon Wagner ([00:51:37](#)):

They're working at least six days a week.

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

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:51:40](#)):

Yeah. I basically said from day one, I was like, five days a week, nine to five is like the minimum.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:51:48](#)):

The expectation.

Jon Wagner ([00:51:49](#)):

The expectation. If you want to do more hours, then you can. If anything, I have to force them not to work because they will find every angle to do more, and I'm like, there's liability. You can't be working all the time.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:52:05](#)):

Right. Yeah. You need a little bit of-

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

If anything ever happened to you, this would look terrible for me because ... So we've limited what they're allowed to work.

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

Yeah. Like you said, their safety, your productivity.

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

But I've tried everything. I've tried to get them to be social and go out and they're like, "No. We just want a farm." They love it.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:52:32](#)):

They're here to make money.

Jon Wagner ([00:52:33](#)):

They're here to make money. Denton's putting his daughter through nursing school.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:52:39](#)):

Wow.

Jon Wagner ([00:52:41](#)):

Yeah. And he's building a ... He has his own farm in Jamaica, a yam farm, but he's also building a rental house that he can use for an Airbnb. That's his retirement plan. It's nice to feel like I'm helping to participate in that.

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

Make somebody else's dreams come true.

Jon Wagner ([00:53:01](#)):

Right. Right. Yeah. He's got a retirement plan.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:04](#)):

Hey, that's great. Yeah. That's awesome.

Jon Wagner ([00:53:07](#)):

Yep.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:08](#)):

How about in the store? How many people are helping out there?

Jon Wagner ([00:53:14](#)):

Karin has a lot. I think 21 people are working there.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:18](#)):

Whoa.

Jon Wagner ([00:53:19](#)):

Yeah. So you have us on one side that's lean and mean, and then you got this large ... Some are part-time, some are full-time, but there's a lot of activity.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:30](#)):

Wow.

Jon Wagner ([00:53:33](#)):

Yeah. They move a lot of product. They do a great job over there. I'm really impressed. I could not manage that many people.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:42](#)):

Right. Right.

Jon Wagner ([00:53:44](#)):

I need simple. She's done a good job. She's got the kitchen, she's got the store, and they're both their own unit.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:53:59](#)):

A lot of people.

Jon Wagner ([00:54:00](#)):

It's a lot of people coming and going. There's a lot of layers to it. It must work. It is working I think. So they tell me.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:54:16](#)):

You look at the numbers, they seem to ... The math, maths.

Jon Wagner ([00:54:19](#)):

Yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:54:20](#)):

For the most part.

Jon Wagner ([00:54:21](#)):

I was always more of the extroverted personality, and Karin was always the introverted, so it's ironic that I'm sitting here by myself, and then she is inundated with people all day.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:54:35](#)):

Go figure. Yeah. What's something you wish you knew when you started farming?

Jon Wagner ([00:54:43](#)):

I thought about that one. Here's Karin now. Hi, Karin.

Karin Bellemere ([00:54:47](#)):

Am I interrupting?

Jon Wagner ([00:54:48](#)):

No, you're not. You could even be in it.

Karin Bellemere ([00:54:52](#)):

No, thank you.

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

I got another mic if you want to.

Karin Bellemere ([00:54:56](#)):

I'm literally talked out.

Jon Wagner ([00:54:57](#)):

Out introvert.

Karin Bellemere ([00:54:58](#)):

Long day.

Jon Wagner ([00:55:01](#)):

We were just saying how you're the introvert.

Karin Bellemere ([00:55:02](#)):

I unfortunately am.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:55:05](#)):

Yeah. Managing 20-some-odd people he says.

Karin Bellemere ([00:55:07](#)):

Oh my God, it's like every day's a new day. I don't know. I'll try to just go somewhere. You guys can ...

Jon Wagner ([00:55:18](#)):

Oh, I've got one question for you, Karin.

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

What's up?

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

That last one. What was it again?

Andy Chamberlain ([00:55:24](#)):

What's something you wish you knew when you started?

Karin Bellemere ([00:55:29](#)):

That's a deep question. '.

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

Yeah, that's a tough one. That's a tough one.

Karin Bellemere ([00:55:37](#)):

I'm an anxious person, so to help my anxiety would've been nice to know how it ends up. Right. How to tell the future.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:55:45](#)):

To know that your vision will come-

Karin Bellemere ([00:55:46](#)):

Going to be all right. All right. What that in this world, but.

Jon Wagner ([00:55:54](#)):

Yeah, I think that's a good answer. It's all going to be okay no matter what. What's the worst that could happen? You fail, which is what farming is.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:56:03](#)):

Then you try your next.

Jon Wagner ([00:56:05](#)):

Right. Then you just pickle something else.

Karin Bellemere ([00:56:07](#)):

I honestly think that not knowing anything was just way better.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:56:12](#)):

Yeah.

Karin Bellemere ([00:56:12](#)):

That's the only way that I would've kept going is to not know honestly.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:56:17](#)):

If you knew what your future would've been, you might've been intimidated. Overwhelm.

Karin Bellemere ([00:56:21](#)):

Yeah. Because I didn't have the skills to do what I do now back then at all. It's like a child. I was 23.

Jon Wagner ([00:56:32](#)):

There's so many layers and challenges we would never have been able to do it all in one hit. Its just gradually learning over the years. Yeah. I think that sums it up. When we first started, we thought it was such a romantic concept, farming. Growing your own food's so rewarding. We had no idea what would be involved.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:57:01](#)):

What you're in for.

Jon Wagner ([00:57:03](#)):

How hard it would be, the ups and downs, the financial pressures, the emotional pressures of employees and whatever it is.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:57:16](#)):

What do you think was one of the hardest nuts to crack?

Jon Wagner ([00:57:20](#)):

Managing people probably, I think is a continually difficult thing and not one we don't embrace. We're always like, "How can we be better at managing?" Especially Karin. As I mentioned, I've chosen not to have that rap, but Karin and I talk a lot about managing people now. That's where we're at and there's so many different layers of so many personalities. Bringing different people together is complicated, so getting them to work together, creating a professional, safe environment for people. We've had every imaginable thing from stalkers at the store harassing our female employees or an employee saying something unprofessional that made somebody uncomfortable or I don't know. Yeah. There's just been so many iterations. People just not getting along because the personalities don't match and setting up boundaries for them to be able to work it out. Yeah. I don't know if that answers that question.

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

No. It does and I think it also helps this podcast. I think listeners get benefit just hearing their peers say that it's challenging. And an evolving door. You get 20 people that aren't there for seven years in a row, so you get new people, new problems. The culture keeps shifting.

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

Yeah. And if the business grows at all, that changes everything.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:59:02](#)):

You keep adding new enterprises, new layers, changing of systems like you said.

Jon Wagner ([00:59:10](#)):

Learning how not to be friends with your employees, but friendly with your employees.

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

Right. Right.

Jon Wagner ([00:59:17](#)):

Our early employees were our best friends, and then we realized, oh, it doesn't work well as the business grows because there's boundary issues.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:59:30](#)):

It's a little binding.

Jon Wagner ([00:59:32](#)):

Yeah. It can get complicated.

Andy Chamberlain ([00:59:34](#)):

Yeah.

Jon Wagner ([00:59:36](#)):

Yeah. So yeah, I think that has been the most challenging thing. It's just personal dynamics with people and growing into a more professional environment.

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

I think it's an evolving and continuous improvement thing that never stops, but is there something that you found that really did help in the people management side of things?

Jon Wagner ([01:00:06](#)):

I think like anything else, it's developing systems based on your experience with it. You run into something rather than saying, "I'm never going to deal with this," you say, "Okay. How can I make this better? How can I learn from this failure and get better at it?" And maybe you don't every time, but you can keep trying. Trying different angles. I don't know. Get a therapist

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

Outside help.

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

Yeah. Outside help. The therapist needs a therapist. Yeah. I don't know. It's ever evolving. I've even heard with the most successful people in this world, managing people is one of the harder things. I don't think that's natural to most people. I don't think it comes natural.

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

Introvert or extrovert, it's still challenging.

Karin Bellemere ([01:01:09](#)):

I was going to say about the people management thing is I did the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund coaching program and the resources that they sent to me and provided for me in that program about managing people was extremely crucial in the way that I've managed people. And I feel like the resources are out there if you seek them out. There's a lot of programs available to farmers and small business owners.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:01:38](#)):

That's a good point. You guys have had and utilized a lot of programs and help for a lot of things.

Karin Bellemere ([01:01:43](#)):

I think they're there for a reason and I think we've definitely used our resources and I think it's important to know that they're out there and they can help with a multitude of things. It's not just management of humans. Can be many different things. But they have some really great people on their staff helping with that stuff. I think managing people is something that I've done for a really long time in my ... Whatever you want to call it, a career, and it's just always evolving. And I think you're right, it never ends. The growth never ends there. I don't know. I'm just willing to work on myself through it all. I can always do better, and I learned through every single experience I have with another person. It's like, oh, here we are learning again.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:02:35](#)):

Being an introvert yet, getting yourself into managing people, is there any tricks that you've done to manage your anxiety or?

Karin Bellemere ([01:02:43](#)):

Oh, yeah. I spend a lot of time ... I have horses. I spend time with them. They're quiet, but not really. In their own way. Yeah. I'm also physically active. That's important for me, and I spend a ton of time in my garden, which specifically is flowers and not our farm vegetable business. It has to be different.

Jon Wagner ([01:03:07](#)):

We brought this up early.

Karin Bellemere ([01:03:09](#)):

What?

Jon Wagner ([01:03:10](#)):

That I'm not allowed to harvest your flowers.

Karin Bellemere ([01:03:11](#)):

No, he's not allowed near my flowers. He's trying to extract my Dahlia tubers and I'm like, those are my Dahlia tubers.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:18](#)):

Those are for the hummingbirds.

Karin Bellemere ([01:03:19](#)):

Those are for them, and for me.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:20](#)):

You've got a lot of them.

Karin Bellemere ([01:03:25](#)):

Last year I had to fight to keep them. It was the first year I have my own saved tubers. I still like growing things. It's just not doing the veggie farming anymore.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:03:35](#)):

How does that feel? You started farming and now you're running the store.

Karin Bellemere ([01:03:39](#)):

It was a move that I needed to make. I knew that farming was not ... It took the pressure off us working very closely together because that dynamic, we did it, I wouldn't say we did it great, but we did it. It just put a lot of pressure on us in a whole another category that felt like if we could take pressure off of something, it was at least we could give each other some space within our business. So that just worked for us. And my mind is much more oriented to the job that I have now, so it is a better fit for me. But we work very closely together still.

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

Right.

Karin Bellemere ([01:04:14](#)):

It's just very different.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:04:16](#)):

Right. Yeah. You're working together, but you're not side by side every day.

Karin Bellemere ([01:04:21](#)):

Yep.

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

No. I get that. Working with your spouse is incredibly rewarding and challenging.

Karin Bellemere ([01:04:28](#)):

That's honestly where a lot of the development of communication and all of this stuff started with just the two of us, and that's the start of this management thing was like, oh, how are we going to speak to each

other while ... So that's where the lesson began, and then it just has grown into this big ... There's now a lot of people involved.

Jon Wagner ([01:04:48](#)):

Yeah. It's allowed us to draw the line between our personal life I think.

Karin Bellemere ([01:04:54](#)):

Yeah. I think so.

Jon Wagner ([01:04:55](#)):

And our professional life. We really try not to at 10:00 at night say, "Hey, did you send out all those invoices?" We hit a certain time of the day and we shut it down.

Karin Bellemere ([01:05:10](#)):

That has taken 16 years of work.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:14](#)):

Yeah. I was going to say, how long did it take until you-

Karin Bellemere ([01:05:16](#)):

A lot of intentional-

Jon Wagner ([01:05:17](#)):

Still not perfect. We constantly are biting our lips. I caught myself.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:24](#)):

That's interesting.

Jon Wagner ([01:05:26](#)):

Yeah. We'll also run into something where one of us is like, "Why didn't you tell me about that? That's really important." I said, "Well, we were off the clock."

Karin Bellemere ([01:05:35](#)):

That's true. Just didn't want to ...

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:38](#)):

You were enjoying your flowers. I was eating my steak.

Jon Wagner ([01:05:41](#)):

I didn't want to bother you with that. Might stress you out.

Karin Bellemere ([01:05:49](#)):

I don't know. I feel like a lot of where we are now is because of all the resources that we've had honestly. We've literally used every program.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:05:57](#)):

What are some of those programs and things that you've utilized to build?

Karin Bellemere ([01:06:00](#)):

Well, we started with the Farm Access Program and through that we were hooked up with Farm Viability Program. We did that first iteration for a couple of years, and then we graduated, but then purchased this farm property and got re-enrolled. So we did it twice pretty much.

Jon Wagner ([01:06:16](#)):

We did it three times. We did it again with the store.

Karin Bellemere ([01:06:18](#)):

It was a half because it was so close. We started our second stint in 2018 when we purchased this, and then the next year we started the store. So it was lumped into one. So we had two stints with Farm Viability. Then we were in Farm Viability during the first couple years of the store, and then it started to become irrelevant. It was relevant, but not. It was more store-oriented rather than farm.

Jon Wagner ([01:06:44](#)):

Touching on things that weren't really related to ...

Karin Bellemere ([01:06:46](#)):

Yeah. So we paused for a minute and we were still one unit. We were still one entity at the time, and stuff was really messy as far as logistical things between the two, I guess, which ultimately became two businesses was a mess. So that's when I enrolled in the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund program because I needed assistance. I needed assistance with a lot of things, but one of the things that came out of that was the separation of the two entities and what that looked like and what we needed to do to set that all up. Through that program, I also got the best bookkeeper. Shout out. They saved us honestly. I've had several good bookkeepers. So anyways, right now the store grew a lot really quickly, so we needed different resources for the specific stages of growth that we were in. We've also used ... You work a ton with NRCS.

Jon Wagner ([01:07:49](#)):

We've done a lot of grants.

Karin Bellemere ([01:07:49](#)):

We've worked a lot with NOFA. I think through NOFA we've done-

Jon Wagner ([01:07:57](#)):

Department of Agriculture we've had grants through NRCS, FSA. Well, that was Department of Ag, the one for the store.

Karin Bellemere ([01:08:09](#)):

That was a working lands grant.

Jon Wagner ([01:08:12](#)):

Yeah.

Karin Bellemere ([01:08:12](#)):

I don't know. We've really just been out there in the world. We've done it all and we've tried our best to squeeze it all together all along the way.

Jon Wagner ([01:08:19](#)):

To be honest, every time we tried to do something without support, it was like spinning your wheels. You just couldn't get any traction.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:08:30](#)):

Because it wouldn't pencil out or?

Jon Wagner ([01:08:32](#)):

Wouldn't pencil out. When everything's just so tight in farming and to take a jump into something else requires resources we just never had. And we've borrowed money too. We've got a good amount of debt from three different properties and infrastructure, build outs.

Karin Bellemere ([01:08:58](#)):

Whatever chaos we've created in our-

Jon Wagner ([01:08:59](#)):

Yep. A lot of chaos. So next 40 years is trying to pay all that off.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:09:04](#)):

Fun.

Karin Bellemere ([01:09:06](#)):

But I feel like we entered it at a time in which things were very achievable as far as interest rates. I feel very lucky that we did enter when we did, because I feel like the landscape now is a lot more volatile and that's a lot. So much has changed since we started. Even the weather's changed in our small time of farming. So there's a lot of risk and a lot of stressors out there but I feel like every time we've used the resources and made the decisions to do something growth oriented for whatever, in some fashion, it's been successful. There's always been rough parts of those.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:09:51](#)):

Your careers now, is it anything that you imagined would be when you started?

Karin Bellemere ([01:09:59](#)):

I think it's hilarious.

Jon Wagner ([01:10:04](#)):

We had no-

Karin Bellemere ([01:10:04](#)):

Did you have an idea?

Jon Wagner ([01:10:05](#)):

I don't think we really had an idea. No.

Karin Bellemere ([01:10:06](#)):

You know what's interesting in college, we went to Green Mountain College. That's how we met. I studied business there, and in my senior year I was in an entrepreneurship class and we had to create a business plan. And I literally essentially created the business plan that is what I do now without any idea that this would be what I was doing. But it's hilarious to think back to that and be like, "Oh, you started up a little store in your senior project," and now it's like what I do.

Jon Wagner ([01:10:36](#)):

And Karin worked at a health food store when we were living-

Karin Bellemere ([01:10:38](#)):

I've worked at many.

Jon Wagner ([01:10:38](#)):

On Eastern Long Island.

Karin Bellemere ([01:10:40](#)):

Yeah. It's just funny that it just ended up that way. It's bizarre.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:10:45](#)):

Yeah. So yeah, it wasn't intentional per se. It just like that's where the opportunities-

Karin Bellemere ([01:10:50](#)):

The path led there.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:10:51](#)):

Yeah.

Karin Bellemere ([01:10:52](#)):

I just think back to that little ... I don't have the business plan still, but I definitely wrote it.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:10:58](#)):

It's familiar writing your next one.

Karin Bellemere ([01:11:00](#)):

Yep.

Jon Wagner ([01:11:00](#)):

Things really need to align a certain way for you to do it. The timing has to be good. The finances have to be right. The space-time availability needs to be right. When we moved up to Vermont, we got the Barre property. Same thing when we got this place, we were in five years, we've been farming, and I reached out to Vermont Land Trust and I was like, "Do you have five acres somewhere you know about?"

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

Could use more?

Jon Wagner ([01:11:34](#)):

We're like, "Yeah, five acres off site so we could rotate a little better." And they're like, "No, but there's a farm that's available 10 minutes down the road from you. You have any interest?" I was like, "No."

Karin Bellemere ([01:11:46](#)):

Was like a hard no on it because-

Jon Wagner ([01:11:48](#)):

"Buying another farm? What are you, crazy?" They're like, "Well, just come take a look." It's like, "All right."

Karin Bellemere ([01:11:53](#)):

So there's a dynamic that exists between the two of us here, and it's like Jon has these grand big ideas and he pushes forward, and then I'm like the logistics creature that pulls it forward with the logistics. So in that scenario, I remember thinking hard no on this. Hard, no. And here we are.

Jon Wagner ([01:12:13](#)):

Well. We took a look at it and we said, "Well, what if we just used the land and rented out this house?" And we ran the numbers and we're like, "Okay. That pays for the mortgage and the taxes." So we did that for a couple of years and then our cashflow got up enough where we could actually move in here and then turn that into worker housing in Barre and use that for the H-to-A workers.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:12:42](#)):

So this was that property to begin with. You were renting this house-

Jon Wagner ([01:12:46](#)):

We were renting this house and paying all the associated costs, and then we had access to 250 acres that's here at no additional cost. We just have to be a landlord. In the scheme of things what's another thing to deal with?

Karin Bellemere ([01:13:08](#)):

But it helped. That was the only way that we did this, and then we moved here.

Jon Wagner ([01:13:12](#)):

And then the store was the same deal. We were like, "Oh, maybe we'll do a wagon on the side of the road somewhere where it's a little more busy." I don't know. We just weren't sure. And then that place was there in Middlesex.

Karin Bellemere ([01:13:28](#)):

Jon was in ideas mode for those years.

Jon Wagner ([01:13:37](#)):

Sometimes you just know. You look at a place and you're like, "That's the one. That's it." Those pipes bursting all over the floor, I just knew.

Karin Bellemere ([01:13:41](#)):

I had that thought today while I was taking photos of every single beehive that I need to deal with on that building. There's like 15 beehives going on right now.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:13:51](#)):

Whoa.

Karin Bellemere ([01:13:51](#)):

Yeah. Anyways, that building is a living being of us. It is a-

Jon Wagner ([01:13:55](#)):

Part of the beautiful chaos.

Karin Bellemere ([01:13:57](#)):

It is a real creature, that one.

Jon Wagner ([01:13:59](#)):

It was built in 1850. Since we've had it, we've gone through every single part of it. Electrical, plumbing, fire suppression stuff. Just to get it functional we tore out all the flooring, jacked up the building, drove in with a skid steer and backfilled it, and then poured a slab and then dropped the building back down on that. The old farm hack way.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:28](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. You regret that at all?

Jon Wagner ([01:14:31](#)):

No.

Karin Bellemere ([01:14:32](#)):

No regrets on that part.

Jon Wagner ([01:14:34](#)):

That worked out.

Karin Bellemere ([01:14:35](#)):

You've been in?

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:36](#)):

Oh yeah. Yeah. Beautiful store. Inspiration for us, actually.

Karin Bellemere ([01:14:39](#)):

It's fun.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:14:45](#)):

Yeah.

Karin Bellemere ([01:14:45](#)):

It's all of our little projects. They've got life of their own, I'd say.

Jon Wagner ([01:14:54](#)):

I don't know. I think every little chapter of it, you can't put it all together and say, "I would've done this differently." You just have to learn from every step.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:15:06](#)):

Right. Because if you said, "All right. We like this intersection here. Let's just bulldoze this old building and start fresh," you probably wouldn't have wanted to take out the loan for such a building.

Karin Bellemere ([01:15:19](#)):

Also, I don't know. We're really into the old building thing.

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

Yeah. I get that too.

Karin Bellemere ([01:15:26](#)):

There's a lot of ... I don't know. There's just so much vibrancy in a building like that that's had so many different iterations and you're like, "You can't just take that down."

Jon Wagner ([01:15:35](#)):

It's hard to-

Karin Bellemere ([01:15:36](#)):

It was a rough go, but-

Jon Wagner ([01:15:37](#)):

Preserve that, yet still have a nice floor.

Karin Bellemere ([01:15:44](#)):

Yeah.

([01:15:44](#)):

Yeah. Thankfully we share the same vision in those things.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:15:48](#)):

Yeah.

Karin Bellemere ([01:15:49](#)):

I think we both really value preserving that in all of our properties. We really care about the history and honoring it. It's important.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:16:00](#)):

Yeah, it is.

Karin Bellemere ([01:16:02](#)):

We felt specifically very drawn to the Barre farm for that reason. Because it had-

Jon Wagner ([01:16:08](#)):

Because nothing about it was functional.

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

But there's potential.

Jon Wagner ([01:16:16](#)):

Old farm with lots of rocks, old farmhouse, old dairy barn from the 1900s with a six-foot ceiling. Great.

Karin Bellemere ([01:16:26](#)):

We're in.

Jon Wagner ([01:16:29](#)):

Let's do it.

Karin Bellemere ([01:16:30](#)):

It worked out.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:16:32](#)):

What advice would you give to a beginning farmer?

Jon Wagner ([01:16:39](#)):

I don't know.

Karin Bellemere ([01:16:39](#)):

That's a really hard question to ... I don't farm anymore, so Jon can answer that question. But I'm trying to put myself in the position of when I was deep in the farming thing.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:16:51](#)):

You're still in the ag space.

Karin Bellemere ([01:16:53](#)):

Take really good care of yourself. That's so important and I overlooked it for a really long time. Take care of yourself. I mean that deeply. Because farmers are working insanely with their bodies, and you're also having to use your mind in a way that is ... At the same time, you're using your body really physically, and I feel like you can lose yourself in there. So I don't know. To me that's very important. You can only go so long before things go bad. You have to take care of yourself.

Jon Wagner ([01:17:27](#)):

Yeah. I think it's easy to say.

Karin Bellemere ([01:17:30](#)):

It's so easy to say.

Jon Wagner ([01:17:30](#)):

Easy to say it now.

Karin Bellemere ([01:17:31](#)):

I wish I could have told myself when I was starting or someone had said to me, what you're about to do is going to be insane and you're going to sacrifice yourself in this, but don't lose sight of taking care of yourself. Serious. I think that's wisdom.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:17:45](#)):

Mentally. Physically.

Karin Bellemere ([01:17:46](#)):

All of it. Just be aware of it. Just be aware of it and think about it and value it.

Jon Wagner ([01:17:51](#)):

Karin's also been the one in our relationship that has always pushed for that, and I've always fought back and she's right.

Karin Bellemere ([01:18:00](#)):

I think it's important.

Jon Wagner ([01:18:01](#)):

She's right about it and has allowed me ... I talked to a farmer friend recently who is very similar to me, who just spent the last 10 years just working, working, working. And she's been in business for 17 years now. And she said she regrets that she put her personal life on hold. Even though she's super successful, she has a lot of regrets and those are the regrets that she sacrificed. Family, friends, her personal relationships, all for this business model. So I'm not saying you have to, but if you can find time in there to carve out for yourself, it's not going to be the end of the world if you don't do as much as you wanted to.

Karin Bellemere ([01:18:59](#)):

I think if I had heard me say this to myself back then, I'd be like, "Shut it." I had a really stubborn attitude about it, and I just worked myself. I worked myself into a place that I was not taking care of myself.

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

It's hard to pace yourself when you're-

Karin Bellemere ([01:19:21](#)):

Pushing for something.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:19:22](#)):

Pushing for something that you want to do.

Karin Bellemere ([01:19:23](#)):

Absolutely.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:19:24](#)):

You're motivated. You're excited.

Jon Wagner ([01:19:25](#)):

Yeah. For sure. And we pushed hard and just work, work, work for, I don't know, 10 years.

Karin Bellemere ([01:19:36](#)):

I did. And then I do now do a very different type of work that I also need to say the same thing to myself at the same time.

Jon Wagner ([01:19:45](#)):

But now we're like, I'm taking that same energy I was putting into pushing that agenda and now reversing it. I'm like, oh, I'm ending at this time of the day and I'm taking weekends and maybe I'll do a little bit here and there during those times. I'm giving myself permission to take time off. It's a weird thing to do. I feel guilty when I do it, and I have to say to myself, no, it's okay. You can just do it. Just do it.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:20:18](#)):

You guys don't have kids, right?

Jon Wagner ([01:20:19](#)):

No kids.

Karin Bellemere ([01:20:20](#)):

Also another very intentional choice, which has allowed us to be where we are. We've put all that energy into this instead of raising children so there's something to be said for that too.

Jon Wagner ([01:20:33](#)):

Some could say-

Andy Chamberlain ([01:20:34](#)):

Forces you to slow down if you go the family route.

Karin Bellemere ([01:20:39](#)):

So our lives look a little bit different than a lot of people our age just because we made that choice. Definitely makes it different for sure.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:20:50](#)):

You mentioned that you are ... I don't want to say plateauing, but maybe slowing down and enjoying your evenings a little more. Do you see the business making any major shifts in the next 10 years? Either of your businesses?

Karin Bellemere ([01:21:08](#)):

Like no one's over here.

Jon Wagner ([01:21:14](#)):

It's hard to say. As I mentioned, I always have these ideas. Yeah. Now I have a counterbalance of that telling me in one ear, don't do it, and then on the other side, well maybe let's see how it could work. I'm always on the lookout for other store locations. I think Karin is too, in a way. I think we're really enjoying having that time. Maybe in a couple of years we ...

Karin Bellemere ([01:21:56](#)):

I think for the store specifically, I am getting to ... We just turned six, and I think with that comes a little more stability as far as, I don't know. You just know what you're doing a little bit more and the business has a little more foundation. And I think as it evolves, it's just going to become even more grounded in itself. I don't have any big horizon goals right now. We just completed that big expansion. We're not even finished with all the details of it. I'm at the mode where I just need to take a breath. But I will say that the community has driven that space since the beginning, so I can't say that nothing is going to happen. I don't know. I feel like something starts churning and I can feel it. The community ... It's it's subtle, and then all of a sudden it becomes less subtle and you're like, "Oh, okay. I guess this is a shift that we'll make. Or maybe we won't. Who knows?" But I'm not opposed to it. I'm not a person that really ... I am goal-oriented, but not in a hard way. I'm not like, "This is what I want to do in five years." In five years I really would like to work less probably. Yeah. Who knows? I don't know. I personally am not taking on any major projects for the next 12 months.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:23:24](#)):

Just running with everything you've established.

Karin Bellemere ([01:23:28](#)):

Saying the 12-month mark is my goal line right now.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:23:32](#)):

It's a good goal.

Karin Bellemere ([01:23:32](#)):

Given that we just finished this big expansion.

Jon Wagner ([01:23:35](#)):

I don't know if I mentioned that in this conversation, but we doubled the size of the retail space last year.

Karin Bellemere ([01:23:43](#)):

This year. Let's be clear, it was January of this year.

Jon Wagner ([01:23:46](#)):

Yeah. I was running the farm full-time and building full-time. So I would get up early, do a bunch of things on the farm, go to the store, sling a hammer for eight hours, come home, do another three to four hours.

Karin Bellemere ([01:24:04](#)):

It wasn't a great time.

Jon Wagner ([01:24:05](#)):

We did that all summer into late winter, and it really cooked me. So I've been taking it easy this year. I've got a number of unfinished projects. I'm slowly doing them.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:24:21](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Karin Bellemere ([01:24:23](#)):

We're also in the position now where we don't always have to do everything, we can hire other people to do those things. So where we can, we've been trying to do that as well, just to free up Jon's time to farm what he actually does, which is great. We are finally able to ... The store's solid enough where it can hire someone to do some of the things.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:24:48](#)):

To fix the thing.

Karin Bellemere ([01:24:50](#)):

Yeah. And now the building is Legit. So we have a professional electrician. I don't know. We have all the things that used to be on Jon's plate. So yeah.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:25:05](#)):

That was all my questions, everything that's coming to mind. Is there anything that you guys want to share or talk about that we didn't cover?

Jon Wagner ([01:25:18](#)):

No. I think what you're doing is great though.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:25:21](#)):

Oh, thanks.

Jon Wagner ([01:25:21](#)):

Cool. I've been thinking a lot lately about how to connect the consumer to farming. It seems like there's a lot of space between the two. I'm like, how does that happen? And I think what you're doing is probably the best way to do it for people to hear the stories and understand what's going on.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:25:51](#)):

And the best way to learn is from your peers. So this enables that, and the feedback I've heard is that people enjoy it and resonate with it.

Karin Bellemere ([01:25:59](#)):

Cool.

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

Great.

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

So thanks for giving an afternoon of your time.

Karin Bellemere ([01:26:03](#)):

Thanks for letting me walk right in.

Andy Chamberlain ([01:26:05](#)):

No, thanks for being willing to sit down and join the conversation. You contributed a lot and I think it will really round out the show.

([01:26:19](#)):

And that was The Farmer's Share. I hope you enjoyed this episode with Jon and Karin of Bear Roots 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 this show and want to help support its programming, you can make a one-time or reoccurring donation on our website by visiting thefarmersshare.com/support.

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

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

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

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