



Nuffield  **Canada**
AGRICULTURAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Farm to Table

A Modern Take

Ingrid Johnston

August 2025

NUFFIELD CANADA

Farm to Table

A MODERN TAKE

NUFFIELD CANADA AGRICULTURAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Nuffield Canada offers scholarships to agricultural leaders to expand their knowledge and network with top individuals around the world, to promote advancement and leadership in agriculture.

As part of the larger international Nuffield community which includes the United Kingdom, The Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands and Zimbabwe, scholarship recipients become a member of the over 1,700 strong Nuffield alumni which interact to aid the latest scholars and continue the development of past scholars.

Scholarships are available to anyone between the ages of 25 and 50 involved in agriculture in any capacity of primary production, industry or governance.

The scholarship provides individuals with the unique opportunity to:

1. Access the world's best in food and farming;
2. Stand back from their day-to-day occupation and study a topic of real interest;
3. Achieve personal development through travel and study; and
4. Deliver long-term benefits to Canadian farmers and growers, and to the industry as a whole.

Applications are due annually. Visit [Nuffield.ca](https://nuffield.ca) for more information.



INGRID JOHNSTON
NUFFIELD CANADA

Scholar Profile

In my life, the number one continuous thread has been agriculture. I care deeply about food systems, quality, and sustainability. As a youngster, we had a cow-calf operation that my dad started, with his first purchase of land at the age of 18. He excelled at building a beautiful herd of Black Angus cattle, building a business selling dairy quality hay, and managing his own forestry enterprises. We did things traditionally on the landscape. My mother supplemented the endless supply of beef with a massive garden, chicken and duck eggs, and a couple hogs each year. She used her background with plants (she had a PhD in Ecology and was the first to study the biological control of knapweed) to bring the family greenhouse to the next level through her experimentation. My dad had a smokehouse and would milk the family cow every morning. My mother made cheese and fermented things and did more kitchen mom-my PhD-ish “experiments” that horrified us kids. We would often sit down to whole meals that were genuinely homegrown. We didn’t realize, at that time, the luxury that our parents provided.

My husband Ty and I have extremely humble beginnings in the cattle industry and in life. We met in an agriculture class within the Natural Resource Science Degree program at Thompson Rivers University. From there we began the remote ranching era of our lives for 11 years. We lived off grid, with no running water or electricity; partnered with nature. We leaned on each other to get through difficult times, building a cow herd, buying land, and working many outside jobs before forming our own environmental consulting company. This was a harsh location, but it let us get our start in agriculture, get our foot in the door with land purchases, and build from the ground up.

Fast forward, and my life is still dominated by the production of food. We own and manage the historic Onward Ranch. We have a cow-calf enterprise that focuses on grazing the abundant grasslands in the Cariboo Region of British Columbia Canada. We finish a select group of cattle on 100% grass, and ship boxes of frozen beef from the ranch to doorsteps across the province via onwardranch.ca. The beef is premium 100% grass finished, dry aged, and hand cut and wrapped one animal at a time. Our environmental consulting business offers services in biology, agriculture and forestry. Co-teaching beef production and nutrition at Thompson Rivers University for the Regenerative Agriculture program is fulfilling. Hosting many agriculture students through the years has been another way to pay it forward—and pass on all that we have been taught by others. Nurturing, showing and teaching is a big part of our lives. I also enjoy community building through the arts—particularly fiddle. As musical director for many years, I’ve planned dances in the old Onward barn, musical productions with costumes, narrations, fiddle and dancing. I’ve led groups of teens across Canada and Ireland and am recognized in the Canadian Fiddle Hall of Honour as a teacher working with music and Youth.

We are raising our children on the landscape, with the animals, with dirt on their boots. Of all our pursuits, this has been the most enriching.

Thank-You to my Sponsors



Acknowledgments

Being a Nuffield Scholar has changed my life enormously. It launched me out of the Cariboo region where I live and work. It opened my eyes beyond a Canadian food system and propelled me into thinking globally. The people I met in my travels have resonated deeply with me in my everyday life, and decision-making. With each conversation while touring the farm, with each invitation inside to talk more around the kitchen table, and invitation to stay the night so we can learn more the next day—I could feel myself getting stronger. The knowledge and wisdom were seeping in. The result was clearer decision-making back home. There can never be enough thanks for the farming folks who have opened their doors and hearts! Your generosity will never be forgotten!

The Nuffield experience has changed the life of my whole family. On the first interview I conducted with my family present, my 17-year-old daughter stood beside me with her little clipboard while I asked questions, making her own notes; she soaked everything in. I realized that I needed to include my family whenever possible. I noticed the kids arriving back home after accompanying me, and roaring into life full of ideas and energy. It was a good thing for our whole family.

And my beloved husband Ty, he was keenly interested in the exceptional people we met along the way. It was just as much a once-in-a-lifetime experience for him as well. A massive thank-you to him for the gentle encouragement along the way—the extra slack he picked

up on the farm, with the other businesses and with the kids. There would be no way to do this to the depth and degree that I was able to, without him by my side. “The Love of My life” and partner in every way: on the farm challenging ourselves to do better and in the business pushing ourselves to make better decisions daily.

I spoke with an Australian Nuffield alumni committee member, and asked, “how do you choose and narrow candidates down?” He answered, “the hardest part about it is that I know that with one decision I am changing their life forever—I want to change all their lives.” I understand his turmoil, because my life was changed immensely from this experience. Yes, the particular topic that I studied had a lot to teach me—but every other little detail that I picked up along the way is impacting me and enriching me. For the one topic that I studied, there are hundreds of other topics that I learned about just by chance. It is rippling out to those around me. I’ll be able to share and help others better.

I have massive appreciation for the Nuffield Alumni that have taught me the most so far and include: Blake Vince, Kelvin and Shelley Meadows and Barb and John Cote. Sarah Rose Megans put her heart into helping edit this paper, and I will always be grateful for her volunteer hours. Steven Wolfgram, Lauren Park, Emily Ford, and Steve Laroque also offered support and their precious gift of time with suggestions. I know that in years to come I’ll be learning from the rest of the scholars both in Canada and internationally.



You can find more information at our website www.onwardranch.ca

“Don’t go chasing unicorns and rainbows.”
A QUOTE BY AN OLD RANCHER

Disclaimer

PERSONAL AND NUFFIELD

Personal Disclaimer:

When I first started this learning journey, my dad, bless his common sense, rancher heart, said, “now Ingrid...don’t go chasing unicorns and rainbows.” So, with that warning, the last thing this report is designed to do, is to mislead you that this is an easy path and contains a silver bullet. There are several flow charts and brainstorm charts to help with decision-making. Again, don’t leap into decision-making without talking with your accountant and banker and without thinking deeply about things. Make spreadsheets and run the numbers and search your heart to see if this is really what you want to do. My mother always said “perserverance above all else.” Grit, determination and resilience go a long ways. The quote from Kelvin Meadows in my Nuffield orientation comes to mind when starting a new venture, “Do you have the time, the money and the expertise? If you only have any combination of two out of three—you won’t be successful.”

Nuffield disclaimer:

This report has been prepared in good faith, but is not intended to be a scientific study or an academic paper. It is a collection of my current thoughts and findings on discussions, research and visits undertaken during my Nuffield Farming Scholarship.

It illustrates my thought process and my quest for improvements to my knowledge base. It is not a manual with step-by-step instructions to implement procedures.

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Executive Summary

This report was written from the perspective of a ranching family wishing to direct market their grass-fed beef products through e-commerce but, is beneficial to any family farm that is interested in getting friendlier with the consumer with any product. While some key points are unique to the beef industry, there are many principles that easily transition into other agriculture foodstuffs, and in fact, the valuable information presented is from many types of direct-to-consumer enterprises.

This information is useful to farmers through all stages of their direct marketing path: to those that are just considering experimenting in that direction and are involved in commodity agriculture, to those that are in their first few years, or to those that have partnered with consumers for quite a while, but would like to refine their business. It also contains useful information for a future farmer who wants to make decisions wisely, initiating the purchase of land or beginning an enterprise, with direct marketing as a possible part of their business plan.

To find answers to these questions, and to glean out the nuggets that will be the biggest catalyst for positive change, I visited nine countries and spent time with farmers in: England, Scotland, Ireland, Zimbabwe, Spain, Italy, Australia (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania), New Zealand, Canada and the USA (Montana, Washington, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, and Hawaii). I travelled for 24 weeks over a period of 24 months. It was important to learn right there with the farm families. Looking at their livestock, watching what they grow, observing their farm, seeing their shipping space, and examining their farm stores were all important research. Also significant was getting a strong sense of the essence of the farmer on the farm, with their family, in the community, and in their country. Conducting zoom interviews could never give the depth of understanding as going right to the source. In many cases, larger farms gave access to farm managers and different departments. Sometimes the information was gathered with a formal interview, and often the conversation would continue and deepen over a meal, and even overnight farm stays. What I found, as I traveled, was multifaceted, and changed between regions and countries.

PART ONE

Should you, as a farmer, be stepping closer to the consumer, and is a direct-to-consumer strategy a good fit for your farm? How can farmers make this decision with confidence and certainty?

The results of the first part of the report can be summarized in that there are sound reasons to embrace a closer relationship with the consumer and lean away from commodity markets only. There are also reasons to reject direct marketing as a business model for your farm, such as lack of: time, manpower, expertise, capital, access to population, and willingness to interact with a larger cross-section of personalities. If there is a population that you have access to, if you have the energy and time to move forward, and the capacity to build more infrastructure, if you can learn and execute different techniques for marketing, then your farm might be a good candidate for direct-to-consumer marketing. Among the many potential benefits are increased profit, stability and family legacy. Those new to farming might find that they can start on a smaller scale by selling directly to the consumer. The regenerative space is a natural fit as well. For larger, more established farms involved in commodity production, channeling a small portion of their product to direct marketing, is a better way to start.

PART TWO

What kind of direct to consumer enterprise should be considered? This resource will help you decide if a farm store, farmer's markets, or direct to door with delivery via e-commerce, is a good fit for your farm. A toolkit for shipping frozen via online sales is also included.

The second part of this report shows that factors such as proximity to consumers, and distance to a major urban area, all help when making the decision on what type of forward facing direct to consumer business to build. The culture of an area, the affluence, and a careful study of the population and the parameters of your market are critical. There is no wrong and right answer on what to choose as a connection to urban consumers, it just takes thought and careful decision-making to find the best choice. There are many types of **farm stores**, **frozen shipping operations**, or **farmers' markets** to direct market your products. Increasingly **E-commerce** plays a role, and the boundaries are blurring between different marketing strategies. Included in the appendix is a **Frozen Shipping Toolkit**.

PART THREE

What are the pieces of the puzzle that are needed to strive for excellence, in a direct marketing enterprise? This is a collection of gems to encourage farmers to step forward in excellence and to be vibrant and successful with best practices.

The last part of the report is a collection of valuable insights and best practices that form an integrated approach. There is no one simple thing that you can do to be successful at marketing your farm products directly to consumers. Instead, it is a collection of many tools and strategies that over time, build on a good foundation. Most farms can attain mediocre success quite quickly, just following a recipe of what to do. This won't be enough to ensure a thriving and long term business. The many smaller and more subtle pieces of the puzzle are what will build financial resiliency and accomplishment. Things are always changing and adapting, and you need to be able to pivot quickly. Telling an excellent story, narrowing in on a niche market, or broadening your offerings, are just some of the marketing strategies. Looking ahead to the future is also important

TO SUM UP WHAT YOU WILL FIND, AS YOU FOLLOW ALONG ON THIS JOURNEY THAT UNFOLDS IN THIS PAPER, IT IS THAT TO BE FRUITFUL WITH FARM-TO-TABLE, A FARMER MUST USE MANY SMALL PIECES OF INFORMATION AND COME AT IT LIKE A PUZZLE, FROM MANY ANGLES. SOUND DECISION MAKING AND A GOOD FOUNDATION STRUCTURE AT THE BEGINNING IS CRITICAL BEFORE ADDING THE MORE NUANCED TOUCHES.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

If you are considering direct marketing and farm to table, start at the beginning with PART ONE.

If you are just starting out with Farm to Table read PARTS ONE and TWO to get a good foundation and then study PART THREE.

If you are just launching into frozen shipping, focus on PART TWO SHIPPING and also the FROZEN SHIPPING INSERT in the appendix

If you already have participated with direct marketing for sometime and would like to focus on excellence, jump to PART THREE.

Examples on farms are often highlighted in blue, you can choose to read these if it is of interest.



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Introduction

BACKGROUND ON WHY I APPLIED
FOR A NUFFIELD SCHOLARSHIP

Doubt crept in. Here we are, fully committed to a ranch that hasn't been in the family, so we have a massive mortgage--do the numbers calculate out for longevity? What about legacy for our children? Will they still be able to be involved in some sort of family agriculture business as adults? If we are in this position, others must be too!

The average size cow-calf operation is 156 in Canada (Statistics Canada 2021). That isn't enough to make a living with commodity pricing. Only 5% of cow calf farms were above 250 head (Statistics Canada 2021). While we fit in the over 250 head category, 61% of farms in Canada have fewer than 47 head of cattle (Statistics Canada 2021).

An hour glass industry with a steep pinch point in the middle, is the most dangerous business structure to be in. I had read about the cocoa industry, and after reading the descriptions of how volatile it was, I thought to myself, we are in an industry like this, yet we don't acknowledge that fully. It was a defining moment in my farm to table journey. You know how ranchers are—they hide their financial woes, and try to act like nothing is wrong—they just keep pushing and working hard.

The traditional cow-calf operation sells their calves in the fall. They might go to a backgrounder and then to a finishing feedlot. At this point, there are two plants that process 70% of all beef in Canada. Three plants process 85%. This opens up vulnerabilities with trade, weakness during pandemics, and control of the industry.

Cattle auctions are a system of bidding on a free market for a commodity that is produced. At one sale, my husband and I just looked at each other with alarm. We must be the change, so we decided to experiment. We knew we might not succeed, but at the very least we

had to try something different.

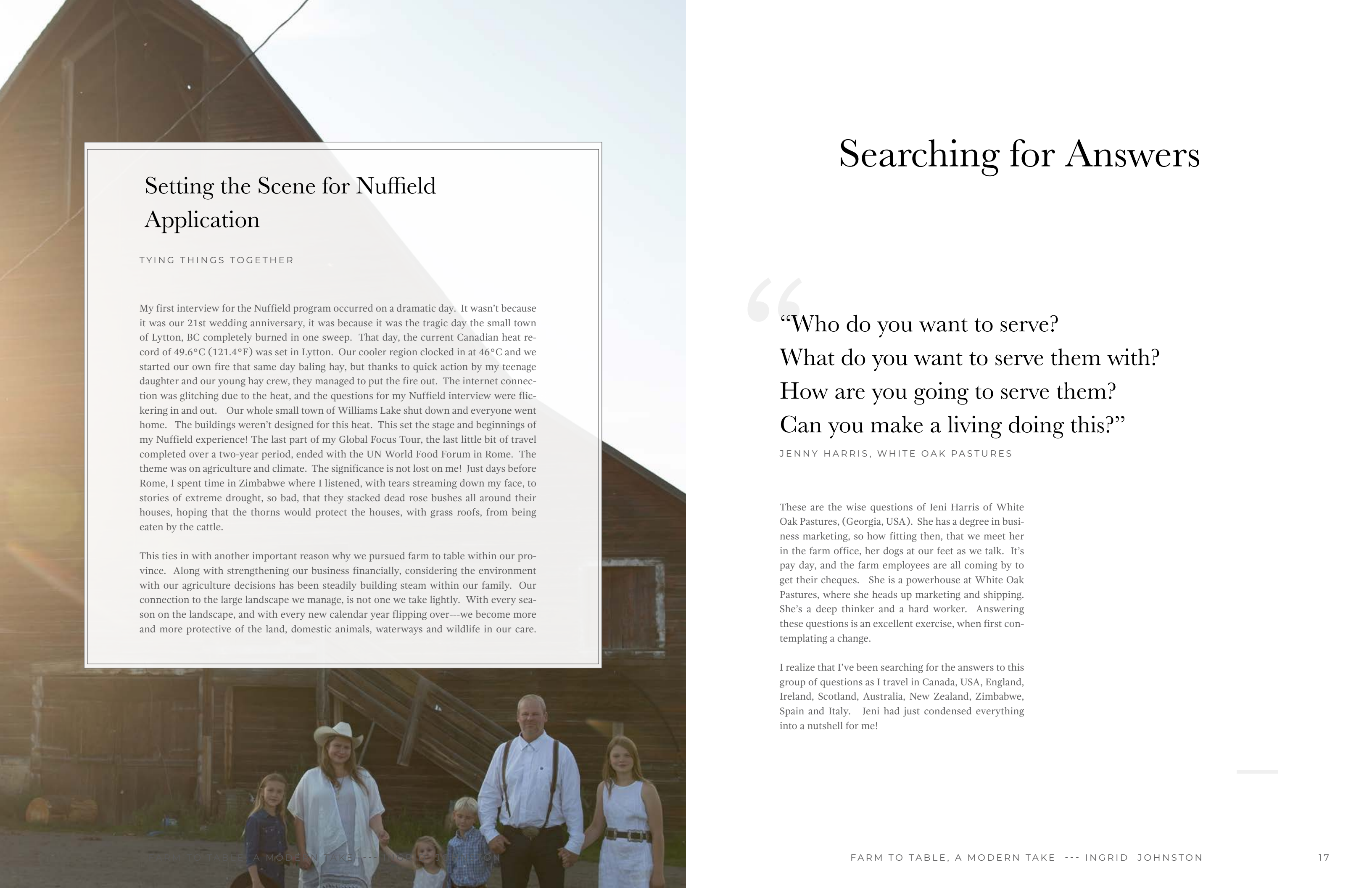
So, we set off on a business strategy premised on moving closer to the consumer. We had been interested in shipping a frozen product to doorsteps for some time. We knew many people, even in rural small towns, that ordered food and meal kits right to their doors. We felt confident in 2019 that we could try this too, in a different way, with a high-quality product. The pandemic sped up food deliveries in North America and the grocery delivery market in Canada is forecast for 5.95 Billion US in 2024 and set to rise 9.5% annually until 2029 (Statista.com). According to the American frozen institute, frozen food sales increased by 19.2 billion between 2018 and 2022 (affi.org). Nearly 30% of consumers have increased their freezer capacity and are staying engaged with their investment.

We did a SWOT analysis, only to find something that shocked us amidst the details. In our province of BC, yes you could order meat to your door, but it was always through a distributor, or another large company masquerading as a small farm. There were no family ranches shipping beef right from their farms to doorsteps throughout all of BC, perhaps only hand delivering near the farm. Yes, that's right, absolutely no other ranches, and we even checked with a business consultant who did her own thorough search. We had no one to learn from and we were stuck. I next got the courage to travel down to California, to take a course in shipping with dry ice. This unlocked a whole world of marketing opportunities and pointed out our inadequacies as a small farm geared towards a direct-to-consumer business.

One Small Taste

AND I KNEW I NEEDED TO LEARN MORE

I know how much I learned from my mentor Mary Heffernan of Five Mary's from California. As we packed our first boxes of frozen beef in our 1800's general store on the ranch, fumbling to tape and label everything, her helpful words echoed in my head. As we encountered problems more of her words reverberated for me. Things like "Tape every single box seam thoroughly", or the wisdom that "not all boxes reach the customer no matter what you do, and a certain percent loss and replacement is to be expected". Through one small taste on how to ship frozen meat with a course with Mary—I knew I had to learn more—a quest for knowledge was important, not only for us, but also others in the industry. The chance to interview and spend time with people all around the world was a major draw in applying for the Nuffield scholarship. There weren't the resources in my province to help me. Canada was clearly way behind, (as evident when we did a thorough search looking within BC for even one ranch shipping beef from onsite), when compared to other countries and the farmer's ability to direct market. It was obvious we needed to catch up! **It was also clear after launching our own business, that learning the nuts and bolts of cold storage, liners, labels, dry ice and shipping---might just be the easy part---the hard part was forging a connection with the consumer, as it was so much more of an art form—and so much more challenging for rural producers.**



Setting the Scene for Nuffield Application

TYING THINGS TOGETHER

My first interview for the Nuffield program occurred on a dramatic day. It wasn't because it was our 21st wedding anniversary, it was because it was the tragic day the small town of Lytton, BC completely burned in one sweep. That day, the current Canadian heat record of 49.6°C (121.4°F) was set in Lytton. Our cooler region clocked in at 46°C and we started our own fire that same day baling hay, but thanks to quick action by my teenage daughter and our young hay crew, they managed to put the fire out. The internet connection was glitching due to the heat, and the questions for my Nuffield interview were flickering in and out. Our whole small town of Williams Lake shut down and everyone went home. The buildings weren't designed for this heat. This set the stage and beginnings of my Nuffield experience! The last part of my Global Focus Tour, the last little bit of travel completed over a two-year period, ended with the UN World Food Forum in Rome. The theme was on agriculture and climate. The significance is not lost on me! Just days before Rome, I spent time in Zimbabwe where I listened, with tears streaming down my face, to stories of extreme drought, so bad, that they stacked dead rose bushes all around their houses, hoping that the thorns would protect the houses, with grass roofs, from being eaten by the cattle.

This ties in with another important reason why we pursued farm to table within our province. Along with strengthening our business financially, considering the environment with our agriculture decisions has been steadily building steam within our family. Our connection to the large landscape we manage, is not one we take lightly. With every season on the landscape, and with every new calendar year flipping over---we become more and more protective of the land, domestic animals, waterways and wildlife in our care.

Searching for Answers

“Who do you want to serve?
What do you want to serve them with?
How are you going to serve them?
Can you make a living doing this?”

JENNY HARRIS, WHITE OAK PASTURES

These are the wise questions of Jeni Harris of White Oak Pastures, (Georgia, USA). She has a degree in business marketing, so how fitting then, that we meet her in the farm office, her dogs at our feet as we talk. It's pay day, and the farm employees are all coming by to get their cheques. She is a powerhouse at White Oak Pastures, where she heads up marketing and shipping. She's a deep thinker and a hard worker. Answering these questions is an excellent exercise, when first contemplating a change.

I realize that I've been searching for the answers to this group of questions as I travel in Canada, USA, England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Spain and Italy. Jeni had just condensed everything into a nutshell for me!

Part ONE

CLOSER TO THE CONSUMER

Every family farm that has started direct marketing has had a different path to start the journey. Some began because commodity markets were unpredictable, some out of stubbornness, and for some, direct marketing was the only way their business would pencil out. Some began that way from day one as a way to start their farming journey; with a smaller land base or smaller amount of livestock, they needed to maximize profit. Some pivoted that way. Many are doing both commodity and direct to consumer; some because their beliefs on the landscape and how to interact with the soil and regenerative practices make it the only way to be profitable. Some, out of a deep satisfaction interacting with those eating what they grow and raise.

There are people doing it really well—there are people that I met along the way that are struggling with it or just finding their way, kind of experimenting with it. And yes, there are people that have stepped away from the consumer as a valid and logical decision. It's important to lay a solid foundation out with decision making for a farm to table business.

The Pandemic changed many things for farm to table marketing. Some farms that only sold at markets or in farm stores also had to find a different way to reach their clients. They had to pivot to online sales and shipping.

Joel Salatin shared on his webpage that he struggled with making the decision to ship frozen boxes at first. “The market has changed so dramatically in my lifetime I hardly recognize it anymore. Anyone opposed to this change, let me ask one question: How many Amazon boxes arrive at your doorstep each week? If your business was making buggy whips in 1915, what would you have done? You see, nostalgia is real cool until it becomes obsolete. Business leaders know that they must re-invent their business about every 8-10 years. Because what got you here won't get you there.” (Joel Salatin, polyfacefarms.com, Guiding Principals, 2023)

“The market has changed so dramatically in my lifetime I hardly recognize it anymore”.-- “You see, nostalgia is real cool until it becomes obsolete”.

A QUOTE BY JOEL SALATIN, POLYFACE FARMS

“Many farmers don't make changes until they are really REALLY in pain”

A QUOTE BY DEVRY BOUGHNER VORWERK, AGRICULTURE BUSINESS CONSULTANT



JOANNA NOBRIGA & DAUGHTER FROM DOUBLE D RANCH, LAUPAHOEHOE, HAWAII, USA

Born out of Desperation

A lot of farmers had a catalyst event that made the direct marketing path necessary. “Many farmers don't make changes until they are really REALLY in pain,” explained Devry Boughner Vorwerk, an agriculture business consultant from the USA. I met her in New Zealand where she was speaking at “Forefront” a Rural Leader's Agribusiness Summit.

Through my travels, I saw some farmers turn to the direct-to-consumer business model, out of desperation. The cause included wildfires, markets and drought.

“If more people eat local, more people will grow local.

DARCY & JOANNA NOBRIGA, DOUBLE D RANCH

DOUBLE D RANCH, HAWAII

Double D Ranch in Laupahoehoe, Big Island, Hawaii is a good example of this. We first met the Portuguese family in their blue trailer at the Waimea Farmers' Market as they sold pork, beef, lamb and goat. Their daughter was sweet as she helped her mama Joanna Nobriga with each order at the window. We tried their beautiful island raised meats, and then were invited to visit their mobile slaughterhouse. When the Kilauea volcano erupted, hundreds of their cattle perished. Their back was completely against the wall financially, and their solution, was to dive into the direct to consumer and abattoir business. The existing local abattoir couldn't accommodate them even though they had customers. They got pretty chippy. Joanna did all the paperwork for licensing and Darcy put together all of the designs that included used equipment. Joanna shared that it was extremely stressful to step forward like this. She remembers being nauseous from the stress. However scary it felt to go through the steps to design, build, finance and jump through all hoops of the regulations for the USDA, to launch—they don't have any regrets. They believe that “if more people eat local, more people will grow local.” Hard work, determination, can't be denied—people who want the product push hard and make it happen.



BIANCA TARRANT, OUR COW, CASINO, AUSTRALIA

CASINO, AUSTRALIA

Another young family that started direct to consumer out of necessity, is Our Cow in New South Wales, Australia. We rolled into the town of Casino and went straight to the shipping warehouse. Bianca Tarrant, co-owner, welcomed us with her signature green half-button work shirt, and “can-do” attitude. This was clearly a hopping business. We were able to see the shipping boxes being strapped, hundreds upon hundreds a day. We poked into the cutting and wrapping room and spent time in the office. Bianca, even with a massive team and a lot on her plate, took special time to teach us, and show us a very different business model. Historic droughts and horrible wildfires put them over the edge financially as new land and livestock owners. “We need to do something different” is how their story starts, on their webpage. Their solution in 2019: buy a

cut and wrap facility and market their own beef. They were one of the first in western Australia to scale up their business. Soon they began working with other farms and selling products that they didn’t raise themselves and needed to hire a livestock manager, to set up all those contracts. It was important to make sure the high standards for raising the animals were met. Now they’ve partnered with seafood companies. This all happened because they were devastated by bush fires and drought, and were looking for a better way for their family. They ship one-off orders and subscription packages set for every 2, 4, or 6 weeks. They are in a “win-win” situation. They are the hero to the customer for providing, pasture raised, grass-fed and organic meats—and they are a hero to the other producers who they purchase from.



ACORN FINISHED PORK, POLY FACE FARM, VIRGINIA USA

Direct by Design

There is another group of farmers that have a link to consumers right from the beginning. They are growing their farm right from the start and direct marketing everything. They only increase their livestock as they can sell it and grow a larger clientele. Joel Salatin in Virginia is an example of this with his “forest-fed” pork in the Appalachian Forest. If more families in the USA decide to order his famous bacon and pork chops, he’s already got the next acorn finishing areas picked out on his land, to start more woodland pork. This is a model that is give and take—expand, hold, find more customers—repeat! The clients dictate the size of the business.

I had never experienced pork production quite like this. It was fall, and the colourful leaves created a cathedral effect both in the sky and the thick carpet on the ground. My little boy Jeremiah was draped over a pig and looked like he was ready to stay the day. The

pigs were so content, basking in the leaves—rooting around for the acorns, which are quite nutty, rich and fat. This gives the meat incredible flavour. It’s sweeter and somehow earthier. Joel calls it Olive Oil Pork because of the health benefits (oleic acid and unsaturated fatty acids).

SPAIN

I didn’t quite understand how rare and special it was, that I was seeing this in North America at Polyface Farms, until I had a chance to visit Spain and the legendary jamon Iberico de bellota (Iberian acorn-finished ham)—which is considered the finest pork in the world. For generations, these pigs have roamed the oak forests (called dehasa), fattening up on acorns. I was able to get really close to these Iberian pigs on a farm that raised Spanish fighting bulls and the famous pork. I could understand why Joel had a growing customer base in the USA and had already scouted more acorn glens!



JEMIMA, DAN AND BONNIE PENFOLD, FOUR DAUGHTERS BEEF OF BOMBADINE/OLD MARAMIE RANCH, AUSTRALIA

Time Commitment

It all comes down to man power ---Is there someone that will take this new project on with all of their energy? Is there a partner in the farming business that is interested in this, while one person focuses on the agriculture aspect of it? We stumbled upon a pecan farm in South Carolina. A young farmer was manning the red barn, just off the freeway. He assured us (with a sheepish grin), that he usually didn't spend time in the roadside store, that his mother was the one involved in the marketing, selling and shipping of the pecans. His job was growing the trees, the hands-on harvesting, pruning, planting and irrigating. With deep humility, he told us that his mother has the bigger job and that more hours are spent on what she does. "I just couldn't do it all he says". They have clearly defined rolls. This was an unplanned chat; we were just wanting to purchase fresh pecans. The little exchange taught us so much----It taught us that a direct marketing side of a farm business, might become larger, take more time, thought, and planning, than the original farming business

Test Run

AN EXAMPLE FROM AN AUSTRALIAN STATION

Sometimes, a family might try out direct marketing then decide, after a time, that it isn't a good fit. Bombadine / Old Maramie Ranch is a good example of this. We left at 3:00am and drove for 6 hours into the interior of Australia, to arrive early enough in the morning to catch Dan Penfold before he took off in his helicopter to muster 700 yearlings off grass and into his feedlot. I connected with him over the phone, just the day before, and was surprised to find out that all the time we had been chatting he had been moving cattle by helicopter and not quad (like we do in Canada, so clearly his operation was vast). We must show up early if we'd like an interview—he was extremely busy! And what a fantastic opportunity to see this incredible business minded and extremely hardworking family in action.

They were in full swing with a delivery business that once a month saw the daughters (Jemima, Bonnie, Molly and Matilda) load up the truck and head towards the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane with orders. The customers absolutely loved interacting with the girls, both in person and on social media. Their story was that they had a pen of prime grain-fed cattle ready for the luxury Chinese market right when Covid hit. They had been on grain longer than the Australia standard, to create a desirable Chinese eating experience. The family had travelled to Wuhan just a couple months before the pandemic, to make business arrangements that had fallen through due to the pandemic. The animals were ready to butcher, but with no longer any clients.

So was born "Four Daughter's Beef", named after the four, feisty strawberry blonde- and red-haired women, (in their twenties), in the family. They used the colour pink as their theme and they were successful immediately! Their trademark was that each girl wore the same coloured shirt all the time. Because so much work was done by helicopter, the dad could always tell his little

girls apart from the air, just by the bright colour of their shirt. The tradition continued as they grew older.

Their mother, Karen, took on the marketing and logistics of Four Daughter's Beef as a project that she could do with the girls. We spent the whole day with the family, having the thrill of going up in the chopper ourselves, looking at livestock, looking at the new feedlot, one of the first that is covered over, and eventually making supper together and staying the night.

As the sun crept low on the horizon, and the coolness finally set in, we sat in the back yard, as the windmill creaked away. We talked a lot about marketing, about the new smaller box they were launching called "Mini Pink". We kept in touch, and sometime after returning to Canada, there were some things that caused them to rethink the time spent on marketing and on the road making deliveries. If they were spending time on Four Daughters Beef, they were spending less time on the larger farm. They had thousands of head of cattle both grazing and in the feedlot, and they also had thousands of head of goats. When it came down to it, the logistics and the large area that the orders had to travel, proved to be too much. In Australia, it is customary to order your meat fresh, even if it is a larger amount; they leave something out for the next days' supper then freeze the rest. Four Daughters thought that if the custom was to buy frozen meat, the business would be easier to manage. It just wasn't the right fit at this time. Awareness of the market is very important for any farm. They left the door open to start up again, knew they had learned a lot, but decided to focus on other things. The important part of this story is that by making a decision like this early, it saved a lot of investment dollars put into infrastructure and years of development.



VIEWS FROM, FOUR DAUGHTERS BEEF AT BOMBADINE/OLD MARAMIE RANCH, AUSTRALIA



VIEWS FROM MOUNT NICHOLAS STATION, JACK & KATE COCKS, NEW ZEALAND



FARM TO TABLE, A MODERN TAKE --- INGRID JOHNSTON



FARM TO TABLE, A MODERN TAKE --- INGRID JOHNSTON

Hold

We visited a beautiful, old, massive 36,000 acre sheep station Mt Nicholas in southern New Zealand as part of the Nuffield Triennial conference. The land was vast, wild and beautiful with vistas that made you cry with their beauty. The potential for something direct-to-consumer seemed obvious, with their proximity to a major tourist hub. The beautiful lake front seemed like a good fit, complete with all the historic buildings in place. After listening to owners Kate and Jack in their shearing shed, (where they had set out afternoon tea), we found out that one of them had a sudden onset of a major health issue. Their philosophy at the time was to “Hold.” Hold on to what they had—maintain the status quo, and not rock the boat. Everything made sense after that in their talk. It’s worth noting that every family situation is different. The amount of energy expended when launching a new enterprise is substantial and not always possible. Health, age, energy, succession planning, all come to play. Fast forward several years, and they’ve freshly launched a merino wool line of clothing and housewares.



YEW TREE FARM, LAKES DISTRICT ENGLAND

Population

I never used to think about the population of an area or city. The first thing I do now when I arrive at a new place, is study the population and stats of a city, region, and country. I learned that this is one of the most important factors when deciding on what type of direct-to-consumer business to pursue, or if to pursue it at all.

Farms in England showed me that a robust population can support farmers directly. All of the UK fits into British Columbia four times, but with 67 million people vs BC’s 5 million. Farm to table is common in the UK. Shipping is affordable, quick and efficient throughout the UK. Here I found some of the oldest farm to door enterprises, which had been shipping for over 20 years.

YEW TREE FARM, ENGLAND

I arrived on Yew Tree Farm in the Lake District and sat in the spring sunshine in the farmyard, admiring the little farmhouse from the 1600s. It’s just perfect, with the little creek, garden and belted Galloway cattle spread over the steep hillsides. Jon Watson, the farmer, swept into the yard, sorry to be late, but how could we mind

sitting in the most breathtaking scenery. He took us to see the livestock first, who were better suited to the harsher climate and steep mountains than the breeds in the south of England’s flat and gently rolling lands. After that he showed us where he hangs the sides of beef until they are ready to be cut and wrapped. It is a section of the barn retrofitted for this. Also in the barn, is a place to package and ship orders. The most shocking part of the visit was to hear that he had been shipping boxes for 20 years, as part of Heritage Meats, his direct-to-consumer side of the business. Cattle and sheep were butchered, cut, and wrapped on site by Jon and then shipped in boxes by Jon, to clients that liked the idea of partnering with a farm that was keeping these breeds on this particular landscape alive. Jon had been wearing many hats and doing all these roles for many years. He had been direct marketing for a very long time and shipping frozen meat, the most years that I had ever heard. His customers were from a densely-populated country that was miles ahead of North American for shipping logistics and transportation systems. The population of his country had shaped his farm and business decades ago.

PINE VIEW FARMS, SASKATCHEWAN

It was during a visit to Saskatoon Saskatchewan that made me aware of the implications of population differences across Canada. Driving into the farmyard just as the store was closing for the day, I was able to chat with Melanie and Kevin Boldt of Pine View Farms near Saskatoon. They process chicken and turkey on site, and also have a red meat cut and wrap section. They quickly mentioned that they were envious of the 5 million people in BC compared to the 1.1 million people in Saskatchewan. I had five times the chance to sell my product in BC. They even went as far as to say, “if you know that you’d like a direct-to-consumer business, consider population before you even buy land or consider moving your enterprise to another province”. Besides their welcoming country store, they also ship boxes as part of a subscription program only within a couple select cities in Saskatchewan.

DALROSE FARM, AUSTRALIA

A couple hours’ drive from Melbourne in Southern Australia, we had a similar talk about population with Dalrose Farm, whom we met at a construction site that was stacked with pallets of antique bricks. The family was taking a very old farmhouse that was in ruins with just the brick chimney standing and building a brand-new house around it, so that they could launch into the vacation rental space. The Dalrose family put down their power tools long enough to engage in farmers’ market shop talk. The Dalroses go twice a month to a very particular farmer’s market. They completely sell out of all the beef that they bring each time. The kicker, Melbourne has a population over 5 million and holds almost 20% of all of Australia’s people in one spot. The two-hour drive is worth it! The Dalrose family explained that shipping beef in boxes wasn’t necessary because of their proximity to Melbourne. They believe that their ideal client makes up only 1% of the population. One percent of 5 million is still 50,000 potential customers in one city. If they had a farmer’s market in a small town, they don’t think this would be the best option to connect with consumers.

This is because farmers’ markets are a lot of work and can take a toll on a farming family. If it has a large population, and a fantastic market, it can be worth it. If it is a small market in a small town, it can become a chore that isn’t worth the early mornings, stress and colossal effort packing and unpacking. Young families with children often find that markets cut into precious weekend time when the kids aren’t in school.

“If you know that you’d like a direct-to-consumer business, consider population before you even buy land or, consider moving your enterprise to another province”.

MELANIE AND KEVIN BOLT, PINE VIEW FARMS



JAKE FEDDES, BOZEMAN MONTANA

I drove all the way to Montana, to visit Susie at Felton Angus Beef. She has possibly been shipping beef the longest in the USA. Susie’s lively personality was a joy to be around. I wanted to spend the day as she shipped, and watch the process. I was interested in the mechanics of it. She challenged me though, and encouraged me to visit others in Bozeman and said, “It is very important to sell as local as possible first—then branch out further and further”. It was definitely an important moment in my journey and understanding.

Obviously, food is important for all people, but the **affluence of an area** can also be an indicator, when deciding about direct marketing. Bozeman, Montana, is experiencing a population boom. Expensive houses are flying up and it has become a playground for the wealthy. Bozeman only has 54,000 population but it is the fastest growing micropolitan in the USA. Suddenly farmland out of town is just on the city edge and farm stores make sense. Feddes Meats and Amsterdam Meat shop had a tiny farm store, but is now putting in a coffee shop, a restaurant, and is becoming a destination when picking up meat right on site. I managed to catch up, the week before the grand opening, and sit in one of the new booths and chat with the owner Jake Feddes. The final touches were being put on the new farm store all around us. Using recipes from their Dutch heritage in the coffee shop and restaurant, gave it personality and referenced the family roots.

Also in Bozeman, I was able to interview a ranching family that drives several hours south to participate in the largest farmers’ market there, that is well attended with eager shoppers. The booth at the farmers’ market was incredibly western, it even had a cow skull wired onto the back of their vehicle. They had a partner right in town that would fill local orders through the week and then the family would come down every weekend with full western authentic attire as a presence at the market. There was wisdom in Susie Felton’s challenge about researching local opportunities before focusing solely on shipping. Population and affluence really matter.

Every farm office that direct shipped that I visited, in USA, UK and Australia, had maps on the wall showing shipping zones with rates. Shipping across a country is rarely a good business move. Working really hard on local orders if shipping—really helps. Build local clientele first. In the USA, shipping to all states including Hawaii, is not always profitable. The word local can refer to the community nearest to you, but often, when farmers talk about local, they are talking about their state or province and at least their region. Many of the farms I visited also considered the states bordering their state to be local. Ground shipping rates were critical when deciding a local area to ship within. States that were less densely populated had farmers pushing into bigger neighbouring states.



Cultural Connection

A LESSON FROM TASMANIA

What connection does agriculture have to the arts? It turns out more than you would ever imagine! Jane Bennett sat with me in her lush Tasmanian garden where the roses were in full bloom. I came for a one-hour interview and ended up staying three days—learning for three days, and having Jane direct me to many businesses in Tasmania. Each night we would discuss the places I had visited throughout the day. In her 20’s she learned the art of cheese making in England, came back to the family farm and built a cheese making facility, opened a store, launched a brand, and started connecting with customers. Ashgrove Cheese was a hit across Australia as a Tasmanian brand, it was a smash success with tourists—and widely supported by locals. When she first bravely stepped forward it was a scary endeavour. Trade between other countries and Australia was making the dairy economic climate shaky. Making cheese from the dairy, and becoming friendlier to the consumer, was a way to mitigate that.

Jane taught me that **the culture of an area has a significant impact on the success of a direct-to-consumer farm business.** She shared that she could tell a lot about a small town’s potential to support a local farm by looking at a few things. Does that town have an arts presence? Art galleries in a town bring vibrancy. Do artists come to the area to live, to work, to visit? Is there a theatre group that adds to the town’s aura? Are there musicians that live in the town? These are all signs that a town is thriving and alive according to Jane

Similarly, the cafes and coffee shops in a town are a strong hint on its vitality. “Is there even one good coffee shop with an excellent espresso maker,” Jane asks?

These are all signs that a community will choose to buy from the surrounding farmers. Jane says you can tell just by driving through a town. And in fact, we did drive through several small Tasmanian towns so that we could see this effect in person. “What do you notice about this town?”, Jane would challenge me to articulate. The town’s vibrancy carries through to its food buying decisions. The food in an area is connected to the culture.

Monoculture towns are boom-bust. They have one industry, one mine, one mill, or only one agriculture commodity produced, and are a closed community. Jane says that through various jobs she has had travelling throughout Australia, she could tell very quickly which town could support local agriculture products and which towns a direct-to-consumer business might thrive.

It turns out it is even more complicated than that. If the arts, food and coffee in a town are excellent, people will stop in that town and tourism will thrive. The region can become branded in itself. Customers will seek out agriculture products from that region even when they are miles away, back in their own towns and homes. It’s a complicated circle. An investment into the arts is an investment into the whole economy. This is the difference between a thriving or dying small town. This also tells me it is important to include other aspects of culture into a direct-to-consumer business. **You are feeding not only food to the belly but food to the soul of a person! When interacting with customers, culture matters; art, theatre, music, fabulous food and coffee!**



FIDDLE CONCERT IN FRONT OF THE BARN AT ONWARD RANCH--EBONY GROUP LED BY INGRID JOHNSTON



JANE BENNETT AND HER FATHER,
ASHGROVE CHEESE, TASMANIA

The Regenerative Link

“If you are regenerative, “people live and die on those hills...of market access... you can’t dump into commodity.”

A QUOTE BY WILL HARRIS, WHITE OAK PASTURES

A strong trend with regenerative farm products is to focus on direct to consumer. It can capture more revenue and justify more of a cost to produce the product. Will Harris of White Oak Pastures says that if you are regenerative, “people live and die on those hills...of market access... you can’t dump into commodity.” Basically, if you have focussed on regenerative practices on a landscape with animals, although you probably have strong integrity and beliefs that way, your business model won’t pencil out if you don’t have a way to capture those extra dollars that consumers might pay. An environmental focus doesn’t equal more revenue unless you find a market for your product that pays premium. A focus on a healthy product does not guarantee a premium price unless you can find the market for it. In many cases, diving into direct to consumer is an answer for these farms, but one they feel ill equipped to start at first. Often farms start a journey of regenerative or sustainable and then come up against a wall “Oh no! What do we do now with our products?” Sometimes it’s not a catalyst event that has a farmer’s back up against a wall, its decision to change practices on the farm. Joel Salatin told us that “the beauty of commodity is that it accepts all comers”. However, that price might be lower than your regenerative farming business can sustain. The bright side to this conversation, is the regenerative and sustainable products resonate with consumers and are natural fit for direct to consumer sales.

A REGENERATIVE LESSON FROM IRELAND

Let me tell you about a farm in Ireland to illustrate this. Jump in the car with me, there’s a spot left for you---we are going to drive to Ballymote, Co Sligo home of Rare Ruminare. We walked around the whole farm, it seemed, with owner Clive Bright. Farms in this area of Ireland are in rectangles that always take in the top of a south facing hill, run down into the hollow, then back up the side of a north facing hill. You get a little bit of every kind of land that way. First lets go down to some lowlands to see where Clive was working on rebalancing mineral and water cycles, and where he has planted trees to suck up the excess moisture. It was once bog, but now there is grazeable forage between the trees. You see, at one time Ireland was actually forested, I was told. Next let’s look at the difference in hardpan clay that has formed on all the neighbour’s sloped fields. Certain plants shouldn’t be in healthy pasture, and their presence indicates a hardpan layer from centuries of continuous grazing. Clive has worked on grazing systems that have naturally broken up the hardpan. Then, we spring into action as we moved a group of yearlings across the country road, past the old barn that was also a house in the upstairs (animals below the family above), and up to the top of the hill, where mob grazing is in full swing. What’s this Clive? ---These red Irish cattle? We were excited to learn about one of the rarest breeds in the world, the Red Irish Moiled cattle. The animation and the heart that Clive put into his farm is infectious. Direct sales to consumers isn’t his passion to begin with, he shares, but it is the only way he can justify all that he is doing to transform the land, that has been overgrazed for centuries. The calves are raised up to be yearlings, finished on grass, then sold directly to the public. Capturing these extra dollars is the way he can make the finances work out. His clients are excited also to try the Irish moiled cattle ---and stay true to their heritage, (as opposed to the Scottish Aberdeen Angus and English Hereford). **So, the skills that Clive has learned to regenerate his land, have broadened to also include how to market, sell, and interact with the Irish public.**



CLIVE BRIGHT, RARE RUMINAIRE, CO SLIGO, BALLYMOTE IRELAND



CLIVE'S ANCESTORS HAD THIS FARM FOR CENTURIES. THE TOP OF THIS BUILDING WAS THE HOUSE, THE BOTTOM THE BARN. CLIVE DOES THINGS DIFFERENTLY NOW AND FOCUSES ON REGNEE-RATIVE--PLANTING TREES FOR EXAMPLE AND NO CONTINUOUS GRAZING. HE IS HOWEVER COMMITTED TO IRISH BREEDS LIKE HIS ANCESTORS.

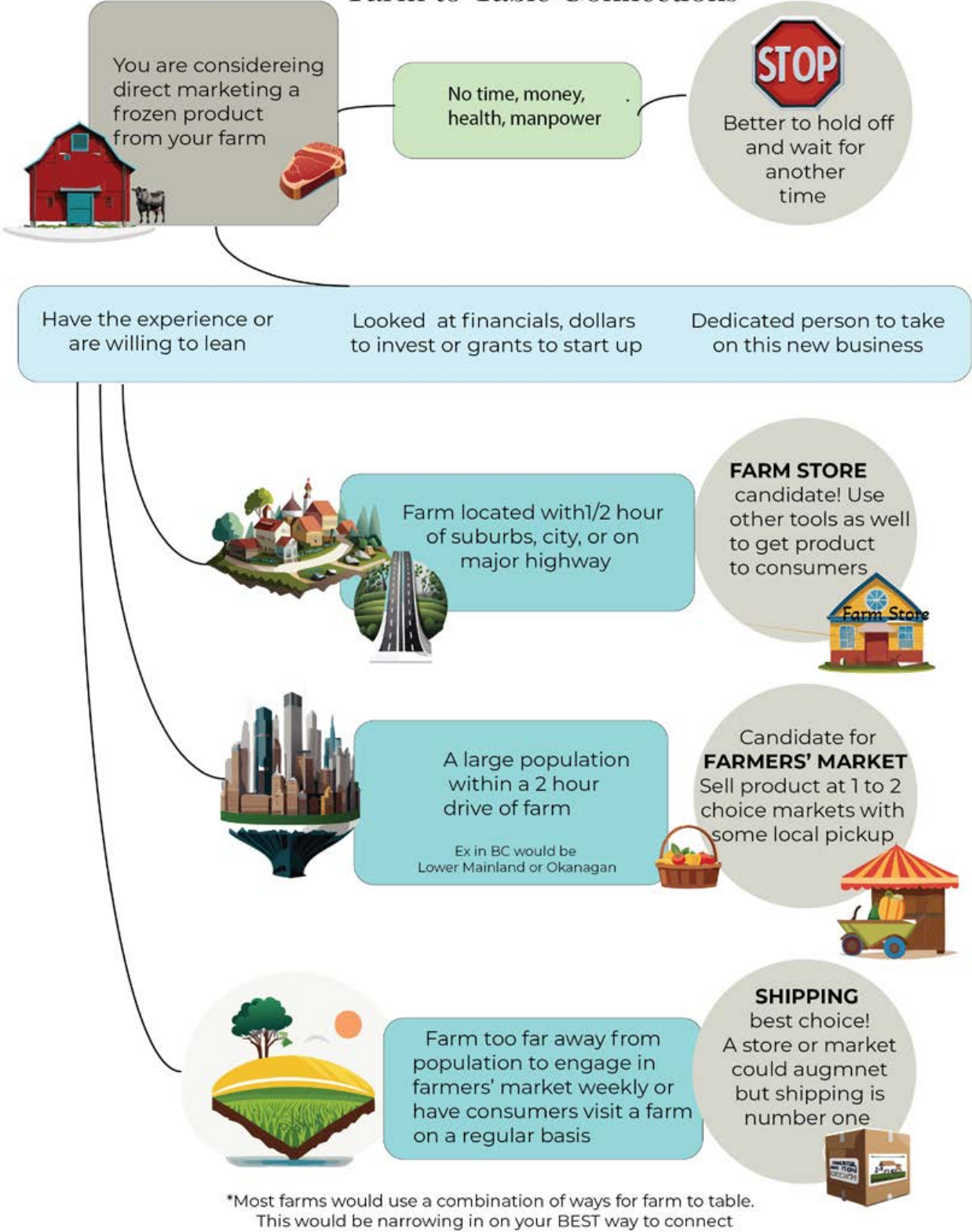
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DIRECT TO THE CONSUMER

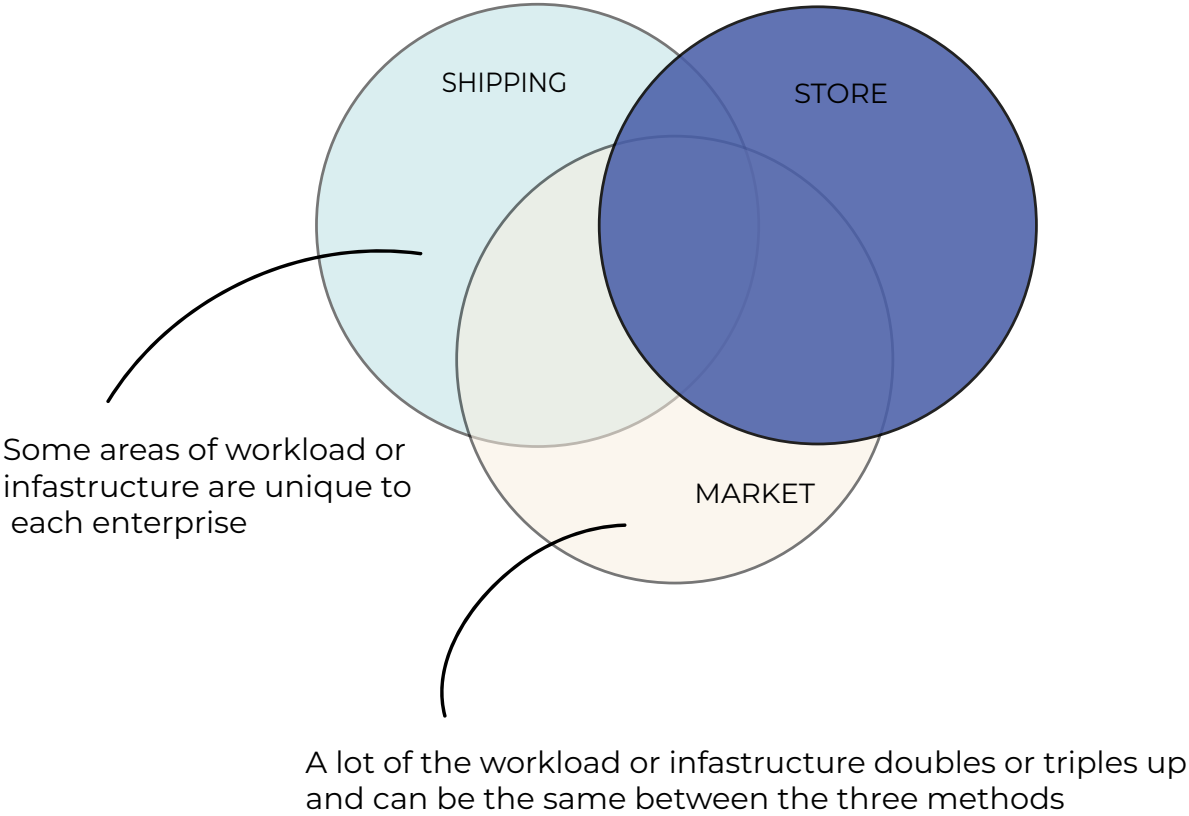
25,917 farms in Canada reported direct sales in 2021. 13,000 were through direct deliveries to consumers. 4,137 used Farmers' Markets and 15,647 used onsite farm sales through a store or kiosk (Census of Agriculture 2021).



Decision Making Farm to Table Connections

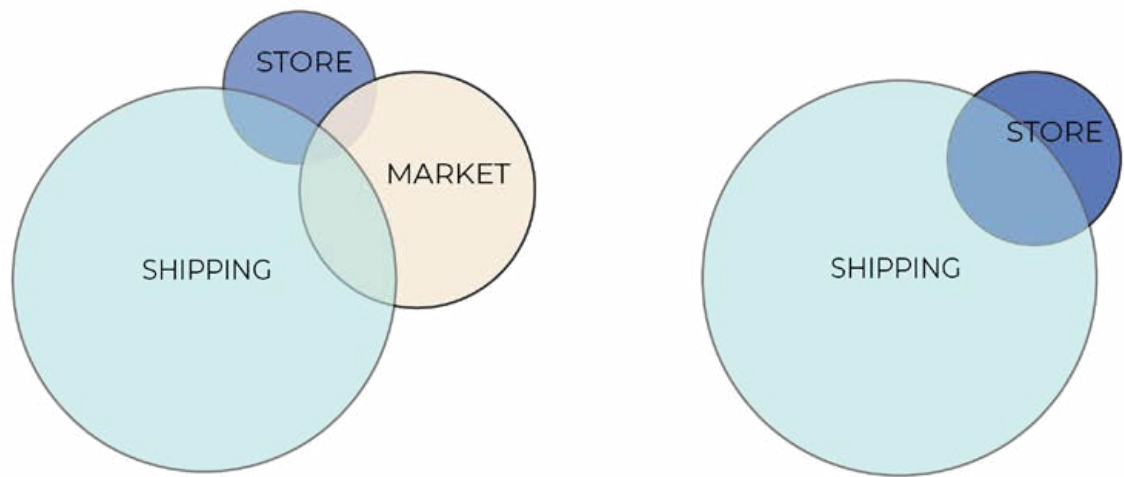


Shipping, Markets and a Farm Store can work together to suit a modern Farm to Table Enterprise

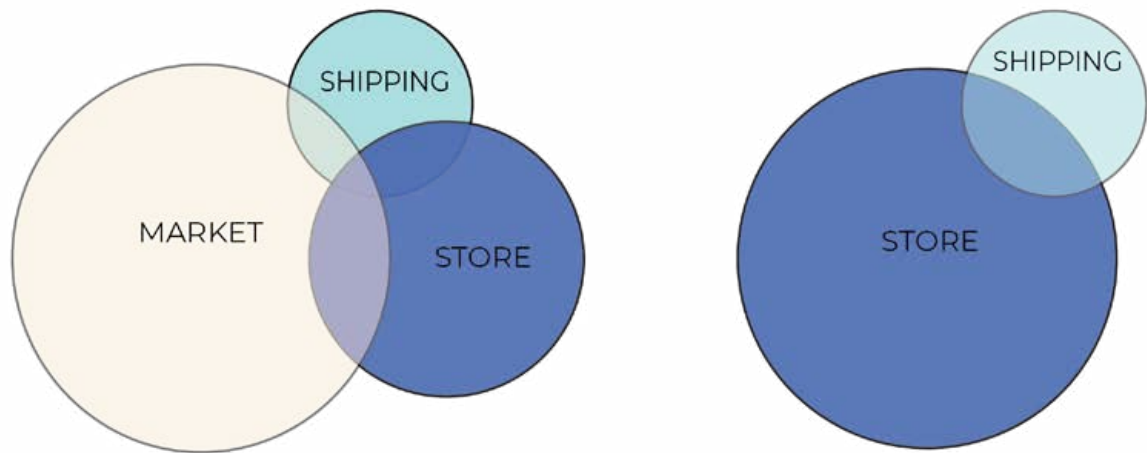


Examples of Unique
Enterprises Working Together on One Farm

Farm is Located Far Away from an Urban Population



Farm is Located Closer to an Urban Population



Farmer’s Market

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

We’ve learned that if you are near enough to a major population and there is affluence in the area and the culture aligns, then attending a farmer’s market could be a good choice.

I want to mention 4 points that I observed visiting many markets and talking with farmers.

- The appearance of your stand, and how your items are presented are critical. Your goal is to have the most welcoming stand on the street. Fresh flowers, a tablecloth, baskets, chalkboards, glass display freezer for meats—do whatever you can do to be visually appealing.
- An open demeanor and interaction is one of the most important things. Dalrose farm near Melbourne Australia, told us that they work hard to memorize their clients’ names—even though they see hundreds of people come through their booth at a time. They say that interaction, which is common in a small town, is what many crave. In cities, people might walk down the streets and not acknowledge others, but rurally, we smile and greet each other. Even though you are in a city at a market, act like you are in a small farming town and shower your clients with warmth and friendliness. Joyce Holmes of Empire Valley Ranch, Canada, says that people at the farmer’s market want to “believe in me—have a relationship with me—trust in me.”
- It used to be enough to just show up at the market and sell everything there. Now you need to still have an e-commerce presence. Let people order online and pick-up at the market. Using point of sale technology that ties in with e-commerce and inventory is also encouraged for some products.
- You need a webpage, email newsletter and social media presence. Reminding people that you will be at the market a couple days before, explaining what specials you have or what is in season, or giving regular clients first chance to buy online before the market rush on scarce items, are all part of the job.

“People want to believe in me--have a relationship with me--trust me.”

JOYCE HOLMES, EMPIRE VALLEY RANCH

- Best looking booth
- Open demeanor and small town friendliness
- Farmer's Market newsletter, webpage, social media
- E-commerce



ADAM NEILSON, WILD VENISON, SUNSHINE COAST AUSTRALIA



A LESSON IN SERVICE AT A SUNSHINE COAST FARMERS' MARKET

At a market on the Sunshine Coast of Australia, we watched Wild Venison (a market vendor), interacting with a client. He was out of pet food and a lady was adamant that her dog preferred his wild venison blend. He offered to sell her other cuts of venison for human consumption at a discount---he suggested the organic chicken at another booth. But she was distressed and only wanted the wild blend dogfood. The vendor called his wife, got her to look in their personal freezer, where they had a couple packs for their own dog, and he arranged for the client to get those packages that day. We later went back to his small abattoir and talked over his business. Wild Venison is the only company in Australia that harvests, processes and sells Wild Venison. He doesn't farm anything, he hunts an introduced nuisance species of deer and supplies wild meat that he cuts and wraps himself. It was his sole income at farmer's markets! We mentioned what we saw with the lady and the dog food. He said that going above and beyond for service was essential at a farmer's market.

Farm Stores



COUNTRY STORE WHITE OAK PASTURES, BLUFFTON, GEORGIA

CLASSIC FARM STORE BLUFFTON, GEORGIA

The nostalgic White Oak Pastures general store in Bluffton Georgia, is 175-years-old. Pulling up to meet Will Harris, and walking through the big old front doors, is like being welcomed with a warm hug. We visited in November, and the farm was hosting a traditional southern Thanksgiving dinner for the local community, complete with collards and cornbread alongside their own turkeys. The patina on the store was left as it was from years ago—with peeling paint on the doors, siding and window shutters. The main part of the store was very traditional with a low wrap around counter on all sides. The walls were lined with shelves filled with the products from the farm and from all around Georgia.

All your physical needs were met and coffee was always on. White Oaks meats are offered there, along with veggies from the garden. Beverages and snacks to go are plentiful, beside a quick cafeteria style line, (for employees and guests). Clean public bathrooms were available and a more traditional sit-down restaurant; gifts for everyone, wants for everyone. There is a welcome place outside to sit and eat at tables. There were horses to pet and lawn games for all ages.

A farm store can be a home base on the farm for your business; All your needs are met—bathroom, food, and entertainment. The store is also a great place to pick up orders for locals.

TRADITIONAL STORE IN A NON-TRADITIONAL LOCATION

Sometimes a farm store can be non-traditional. In England, Tebay Services sprung up on a motorway in the 70's and then was followed by its sister location, Gloucester Services. A farming family in Cumbria was faced with a new motorway (to replace rail services) that would cut right through the farm. After absorbing that shock, John Dunning said that he and his wife Barbara knew they had to embrace change. They started a service station with gas, food and lodgings. They stayed true to their farming heritage and eventually there was a world class farm shop on site, with an abundance of cheese, meats, fruits, and bread. I wasn't expecting the most beautiful collection of farm made products I saw in all of England, at a gas station! This store was less traditional in looks and location, but extremely authentic with the contents. Their goal: "We champion the small-scale, the handmade and the traditional. We want products that are made with integrity using simple non-artificial ingredients". The message with this story, is that sometimes you must do things a little differently to be successful. John Dunning said that in his thirties, he had the energy and bravery to move forward with a new idea. Now his daughter, also in her thirties, manages one of the service stations, and is an advocate for only the best quality farm products. John says that he believes your thirties is a time when you have the most to contribute, and that the older generations need to hand that decision making over sooner.

“We champion the small-scale, the handmade and the traditional. We want products that are made with integrity using simple, non-artificial ingredients”. ”.

A QUOTE BY JOHN DUNNING, TEBAY SERVICE STATION



OLLIE WHITE, FARM 2 FORK
SOMMERSET, ENGLAND



AUTOMATED SELF CHECKOUT, FARM2FORK, ENGLAND

After taking the train from London, England towards Cornwall, we stopped at an interesting farm in Somerset. Ollie White, owner of Farm2Fork, met us in the farm yard, gumboots on, because of the grey wet day, and ready to tour us around. Ollie spends his days working the farm and has set up his farm shop to be fully automated. That's right, no one staffs it! The hours were 7:00am to 11:00pm. The first thing he does in the morning when he wakes up is unlock the shop, the last things before bed is to lock up the shop. The walls were covered in bright posters that explained his regenerative farming practices and pictures of the farm. He raises, cattle, sheep, chickens ---and his specialty---geese for the Christmas season! There were step-by-step directions on how to check out, and a phone number (Ollie's cell) should you run into problems. In case you are wondering, theft is zero, and there has only been the odd tiny discrepancy or mistake at the till. Even though the farm is extremely traditional, with a little rock house, (it's on a land trust), the store has a bright modern vibe. There are freezers lining the walls with clear signs directing you to what you want. Each item was bar coded and you swiped the items before paying with card, or exact cash. There is a security camera in the store and signage explaining that you were on camera.

There are three ways to shop at the store

- traditional browsing
- **click and collect** (Place the order the day before and its ready by noon the day after to stop in and grab if you are in a hurry)
- Order online and it's shipped anywhere in the nation

After going out with Oli to look at the animals, it's very clear that his heart is with the livestock, and that the store is there, but not somewhere he spends his days. He has figured out a way to actively farm and still direct market with less manpower! He hires help to pack the boxes that get shipped out. This frees him up to be out on the land with the animals.

HONOUR STORE

In Gippsland Australia, we visited a farm store called the “Chook House” that also ran an honour system and was open 365 days a year. What surprised me about it was all of the ready-made food in this unassuming tin covered building. Yes, there were frozen cuts of meat, there were fresh seasonal veggies and different jarred jellies and relishes. While we were there, many people swung in just to grab sandwiches, butter tarts and beverages. It was sort of like a quick drive through service. In and out and food to eat immediately. The items were bar coded, and you checked out in the blink of an eye. Our host Margareta Osborn (an Australian author that writes stories from the outback) brought us there and explained the evolution of the tiny store. First the meat and veggies, then came all the ready-made tasty things. Another trend was ready made frozen items like soups and stews. Margareta Osborn was in the process of beginning her own journey into direct marketing their Speckle Park beef. We stayed up late making plans and chatting about their own business ideas, they liked the model of having something like this right on the farm. Home Farm ---they’d call it! It had been in the family for generations and Margareta was in the process of taking over the Home Farm from her uncle.



CHOOK HOUSE HONOUR STAND
GIPPSLAND, VICTORIA AUSTRALIA

FEARN FARM & EDIVALE FARM
SCOTLAND

It’s important to be a devil’s advocate when thinking of self-serve stores. I found that opinion in Scotland with John and Fiona at Fearn Farm. John has a speciality focusing on the mental health of farmers throughout his career. He goes out of his way to check in with farmers, to give them tips on how to stay on top of their worries and fears. He doesn’t like using the term mental health—he said it’s better to just ask farmers how they are doing, talk about prices, and weather and worries. He also understands the mental health of customers. While leaning on the fence and talking about farm stores, John said that he believes a real, living human being, interacting with you is very important. The warmth of conversation makes all the difference in a customer’s routine. I had been asking him about his thoughts about online shopping and I mentioned self-serve stores. “Especially coming out of the COVID pandemic, personal interactions are like gold,” he said. Later that day we headed towards the highlands and we stopped in at the honour stand that John recommended at the end of a farm driveway. The family had a butcher shop in town called Macbeth’s, but they found that their farming area had no access to groceries. A little freezer for meat, some baking, a couple chocolate bars and sodas---and it’s a store! This worked brilliantly!



JOHN AND FIONA, FEARN FARM

FARM STORE LIMITED HOURS

While some farm stores we visited were open seven days a week, others were only open for one morning a week. This tended to be on smaller farms where the actual owners were in the store, the same folk that are out caring for the animals daily and involved in primary agriculture. During that three-hour window, customers could come and browse, but it was also an excellent time for local people to pick up their orders. Weekends are precious and this seemed to add to the farmer’s sanity. Having set hours for pick-up was important. Many farmers told me that they wished they did this sooner. When you first start out, you want to let people drop in whenever. After you build a clientele, you need to narrow down those times.

MILK ON TAP

In rural Northern Ireland, not too far from the Giant’s Causeway, we stumbled upon a very interesting way that a dairy was able to sell milk. It was a spring day and the vibrant green countryside was also bursting with daffodils. It’s self-serve milk is on tap and the milk just flows—easy and simple. You can use your own existing container or purchase a reusable glass bottle. You can add fun flavour shots afterwards. It’s less like a store and more like a tiny open shed. There was a little picnic table and a little pen of petting animals—a calf, some chickens. We didn’t see a soul, we just followed the signs on the country lane, bought some milk and then carried on our way. I bring this example into our conversation so that you can see there are many creative ways to connect.



MILK ON TAP, NORTHERN IRELAND

FARM STORE IMAGES AND THE
DIGITAL SHELF

One of the most important notes about farm stores, is that even if 90% of your business is online and being shipped, a farm store is still extremely useful for marketing and sharing. Even though people are shopping on-line, they want to feel like they are at a country store, but they just never leave their home. They want to see photographs of the store. They want to see shelves with items all lined up with little pots of honey, jam and spice rubs. They imagine themselves there, not in the cubicle at work where they might be shopping from. It’s part of the fantasy. Mary Heffernan of Five Mary’s Ranch in California, told me that if you don’t have a farm store, you should set up a bookshelf or shoe rack, or something similar, and photograph an arrangement of products to use on social media and your webpage. It is very much part of the connection and the interaction with your customers. The *digital shelf* extends across many experiences, and you have to stand back and look at all the ways your product is viewed including on social media. These farm store images are very important.



FARM SHELVES, WHITE OAK PASTURES,
BLUFFTON GEORGIA

Shipping Frozen

So, you’ve made the decision to ship your farm products! Don’t panic, just divide your thought process into the two main parts to shipping: first are all the physical things that you need to organize such as freezer space, boxes and liners, shipping supplies, packaging, labels etc. Next there are the less tangible things but even more important, that need to be set up, like web page design, e-commerce, and e-mail lists and order fulfilment. I’ve taken all that I’ve learned, from many different farms, and put together a shipping toolkit to follow. After shipping ourselves for 2 years, I spent two years travelling. I visited many farms around the world that ship frozen and saw the unique ways they solved problems. I consolidated the basic tips and steps to getting started into a Shipping Toolkit located in the appendix, however every situation is unique, and no two farms are alike.

Besides the shipping tool kit, I wanted to bring up three unique challenges to address when shipping frozen vs selling direct to consumers in a more traditional way.

- Delivery Headaches
- Injecting Warmth and Friendliness into a digital interaction
- Packaging Challenges

DELIVERY HEADACHES

FARM2FORK ENGLAND

The biggest shipping conundrum is whether to include a separate shipping fee, or include the shipping fee into the cost of the product? Ollie from Farm2Fork in England comments on this, “In my experience, if you try showing the customer the true cost of shipping ---after they fill their basket and see a high shipping fee-- It’s a like a wall that they don’t want to climb over, but if you make your meat really expensive—they just say—look—it must be really good---and its free shipping”! Ollie has tried separating out shipping but customers haven’t resonated with that. If the shipping cost is built into the cost of the product, your product will appear more expensive. If it is charged on top of the product, some people will not move forward on their order because they refuse to pay for shipping. Psychologically for some people, it is better to raise the price and have free shipping. A happy median would be to have free shipping over a certain price.

Setting up your shipping parameters takes thought. Will there be more local deliveries within a defined radius? Will you ship within your state or province? Will you ship nationwide?

Many places that I interviewed had colourful maps on their office walls that showed shipping zones for different areas of the UK or USA or Australia. For those that ship nationally, the shipping rate changed based on how far the package goes. In the USA that could change from \$15 to \$100. In our province, British Columbia, the price climbs if any ferry is needed such as to Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast or the Gulf Islands. You could charge your clients more if you are shipping further or you could just have one flat rate. This is why growing a closer client base is advantageous even when shipping! Focus on as local as possible and then expand your business to a greater radius. Encouraging clients to do less frequent but bigger orders is also a solution. Couriers usually have hidden business rates and offer discounts even up to 60% off from the posted rate. Different courier companies are also sometimes used for different areas because of the cost or the speed in which boxes arrive. A shipping network is built on a low-cost model, but you spend years growing an agriculture product, nurturing it and packaging it carefully. At the end of the story, a courier could drop the ball with the package, and it may need replacing. One bobbie in the system and perishable items can be damaged. Working a replacement percent, however small, into your pricing is suggested.

“In my experience, if you try showing the customer the true cost of shipping ---after they fill their basket and see a high shipping fee-- It’s a like a wall that they don’t want to climb over, but if you make your meat really expensive—they just say—look—it must be really good---and its free shipping”!

OLLIE, FARM2FORK ENGLAND

INJECTING WARMTH AND FRIENDLINESS INTO A DIGITAL INTERACTION

People visit farmers markets and farm stores, partly for the friendly faces, the ambiance and the human connection. The interaction when selling online and shipping to doorsteps, is much different then chatting with a client in person and it can be a challenge to connect.

A webpage isn't something you can hold in your hand, it's not physical, but it is equally as important as other infrastructure. The customers may not have met you, so you need to inject your personality onto a screen, and you only have seconds to capture someone's attention. There are two parts to your web presence. It can be a place for information about your farm, about you, your family, your animals, the environment and perhaps a blog. You can use videos, photographs, your voice, music, the voice of others through reviews. Secondly a place for shopping, a "digital shelf" so to speak. Mentor Mary Heffernan of Five Mary's Ranch explains that purchasing must not take more than three clicks. It must be simple and easy. You want your product to look as amazing as possible. This shopping space also encompasses e-commerce, the nuts and bolts of paying. So, think of it in two bite sized portions to tackle.

The single biggest investment you could make for your web presence is a professional photographer. A friend that works on webpages of all kinds once told me she doesn't even want to take on clients who don't have good photos. She was only half joking when she told me that she feels like inspecting their photos first before agreeing to the job. It doesn't matter what design she delivers; the photos make or break the webpage. Capturing photos of the actual farming family that show the landscape are important. Photographs of recipes, and of farming through the seasons, are also essential.

A LESSON FROM LAUNCESTON AUSTRALIA

Come sit at Harvest Launceston with me, a farmer's market in Tasmania, and enjoy the ambiance—here are some cherries to munch on! Stone fruits are in peak season, flowers are plentiful, the cheese stand is busy, and people are picking up fresh lamb for the weekend! We are meeting resident chef, creative consultant and market manager Rhys Hannan.

At the market we talk at great length about how the magic of a farmer's market is difficult to convey on a web page. We brainstorm how to bottle up a farmer's market and inject it onto a webpage. We talk about the baskets brimming with veggies and fruit, colours of a flower stand, the aromas of the food trucks, the atmosphere of the live music and a cup of great coffee. **Freshness, regionality, culture, beauty and friendliness are all themes.** These key words can then be used when designing a webpage. Including pictures of your product alongside other farm fresh items is recommended. Showing the culture of your area or family is also beneficial. Conveying warmth at each touch point is critical.

Thanks for coming along to the market! This brainstorming exercise was very helpful when tasked with thinking about themes for a webpage.

A strong phenomenon I noticed when looking at hundreds of farming direct to consumer webpages, is that they followed trends within their countries and areas. USA farm webpages tended to be attention grabbing and quite beautiful with lots of photos. UK Webpages tended to focus on trust in the product and presenting itself as a solid choice for food purchases. They were less flamboyant and flashy, but more classic and steadfast in feel, than their North American counterparts. Australian farm pages seemed down to earth, and less formal, like you were sitting and chatting right with the farmer in their kitchen.



RHYS HANNAN, LAUNCESTON, TASMANIA

PACKAGING CHALLENGES

Practically speaking, the materials that you use to get your products to customers have two functions. Number one they have to do a physical job and deliver a frozen or chilled product depending on your strategy. Number two, they must look good and represent your farm. Another consideration as a bonus after that, is environmental footprint. Increasingly there is a demand for fully recyclable boxes and liners.

A simple box, a box liner, dry ice, and tape are all needed and are discussed in the Shipping Toolkit in the Appendix. The box is simple in design and has a very nominal cost. The liner is the challenge with different ratings for in-transit, for 1-3 days. Liners can be Styrofoam and man-made or plant based or even animal based. In the UK, at Yew Tree Farm, I was able to look at wool liners, used to ship their lamb products. This was a way to tell a circular theme and story! This was the most unique liner I came across.

With the surge in food shipments during Covid, it became difficult to secure your first choice in box liners because there was an incredible demand and manufacturing hadn't caught up. Some companies would only ship by the semi truck load as a result. It was not uncommon to see businesses change liner suppliers' multiple times. Our family farm tested several liners and found that the environmental choices didn't perform quite as well. However, consumers prefer the environmental choice and so do many farmers. The cost of a liner is the biggest price tag for your shipping packaging. Shopping around, buying in bulk by the semi load or at least a pallet will save you money. If your liner is rated for three days but you are consistently seeing your boxes arrive in one day, then you might be able to buy a more cost-effective liner. Shipping in a Canadian summer might need a liner that is rated for more days just because of the extreme heat. Changing liners with the seasons could save you money.

THINK SPEED

At OurCow in Australia, the speed it took to box a shipment was important due to the scale of shipments being sent out every day. A banding machine was used instead of tape and literally in under 5 seconds the box was ready to go. They could do this because they were shipping fresh and not frozen and taping to seal airflow wasn't critical. The crux of what we saw there was decisions were made for speed, which is something usually neglected.

JUMP THROUGH HOOPS

Sometimes in the shipping and packaging world, you must jump through hoops that don't make sense. You try hard to solve a problem, but you just must go with it. In Hawaii we were able to chat to tuna fishers Melissa and Ritchie Mitchell, who fished for high grade cuts, and then sent the meat to the mainland where they had a food truck that served island meals. They couldn't understand why if the fish was in large coolers they had to then put the whole cooler in a waxed box. But the shipping regulations off-island specified all food items must be placed in a waxed box (which is more suited to produce). It isn't worth fighting regulations that don't make sense I learned from them, just go with the flow and adjust accordingly. Don't fight a shipping system already in place

Part THREE

MEDIOCRE TO MAGNIFICENT
AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

With the hundreds of farms visited, it was clear that many farm to table businesses had launched, but were struggling to execute with excellence. Part three is all about the secret sauce. The things to focus on as your business grows.



ONWARD RANCH BOX OF BEEF. THE BARN WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE LABEL

Strong Connection

“In some ways it is easier to meet people emotionally with healthy living and eating, recipes & meal suggestions. You can meet them where they are at with their passions. Meeting people at a certain price point is out of your control.”

JENNI HARRIS, WHITE OAK PASTURES

You have to meet people on two levels in order to form a farmer to consumer relationship. You have to meet them emotionally and you have to meet them logistically (this includes geographic barriers and price barriers).

Jenni Harris of White Oaks, Georgia says that, “in some ways it is easier to meet people emotionally with healthy living and eating, recipes & meal suggestions. You can meet them where they are at with their passions. Meeting people at a certain price point is out of your control.”

“I know what questions my clients will ask before they even say anything ---because they were questions I had too! Patience, is key, and answering the same questions over and over with a smile, are all part of a farmer’s job.”

BRIANNA WIDEN, WIDNOR FARMS

Widnor farms in Washington state shared some advice, as we sat and talked under the weeping willow—the same willow that she hosts long table farm dinners under. Widnor farms has a neighbourhood farm store and also ships nation-wide in the USA. Brianna used to be a vegetarian and is a nutritionist. She explained that “I know what questions my clients will ask before they even say anything ---because they were questions I had too! Patience is key, and answering the same questions over and over with a smile, are all part of a farmer’s job.” Breana currently offers chicken, lamb, beef and eggs. It seems that first generation farmers with an urban background do a better job at connecting to those who are also urban, and are wanting the direct relationship. First generation farmers seem to bring innovative ideas to rural areas. I noticed a strong pattern in my travels of them connecting much easier. There is a lot to be learned from this; the message is that **rural folks should do all they can to learn about their city friends, and understand them better.**

Along this same train of thought, I decided I should challenge myself into more urban situations. I decided to attend a women’s business owner conference in the Okanagan region. In the name of urban connection and research, I thought this would be a great experience. People came from all over the country. The first afternoon I realized how different I was. I arrived at the hotel with hay stuck to my pick-up truck underneath, because I had been driving over windrows in the field. I realized, in the welcome yoga class, that I didn’t know what the poses were, and I realized I was the only one without a manicure. I felt a bit small, and tried to blend in and be unnoticeable. But then the second day—we went out to a beautiful flower farm, full of inspirational speaking. I realized that everyone was extremely interested in what I was doing. Interacting with business owners in the medical, clothing, food, candle, honey and many other industries was fascinating. I was able to have a short conversation with our host Jillian Harris, about direct marketing. She was incredibly encouraging and said, “people want real, they want gritty, they love farmers. They are done with fake”. I came away from the experience very enriched and built up. I also realized that it is my job as a farmer to bridge the gap. It is necessary for farmers to go into urban settings both physically and digitally; to understand and reach the people we are growing food for.

“People want real, they want gritty, they love farmers. They are done with fake.”

JILLIAN HARRIS

Story Telling

Telling a really good story in an authentic way, is one of the best ways to compete against a massive business that might be masquerading as a small farm. But it can’t just be any story. We hear it everywhere---“tell your story—just tell your story, it’s so easy”. It takes a little more thought than that. Your story must be excellent.

Four aspects that I noticed that helped set farm stories apart were:

1. **Share your childhood in the story**
2. **Bring the senses into your story especially smell and taste**
3. **Highlight the history of the farm or product**
4. **Show how you’ve overcome a difficulty**

Let me share 2 farm stories, out of the hundreds I visited, that I think have a lot to learn from.

Senses



History



STORY # 1

DR TROUBLE HOT SAUCE, ZIMBABWE

Hop in with me as we bump along to northern Zimbabwe near the Zambezi escarpment. We are going to an isolated farm that has all the ingredients of an exceptional story. This tobacco farm, besides preserving local wildlife in a game park, also produces a world class hot sauce called Dr. Trouble. Rob Fletcher started out by showing us the original traversing tools his great grandpa used in the 1800's, in what was then Rhodesia, to map out the landscape. He then told us the story of his international hot sauce business. It all started when he was a little boy. Political unrest in the Mugabe era and violent land reform, caused their family to stay at home for a period of weeks. They were only 3 of 47 farmers in the area that managed to hang onto their farms during this time. Rob vividly remembers spending the time with his dad, looking at old photos, letters and papers. They found a recipe scrawled down—a very special 125-year-old recipe from his great grandpa's journals. King Lobengula, (Of the Ndebele people), had gifted the great grandpa some bird's eye chili seeds. Rob and his father made a trip out to the garden to gather what they needed (yes, they had bird's eye chili and a lemon tree growing in the garden) and cooked up a batch of

the most magical hot sauce. It tasted amazing. The family continued making it through Rob's childhood and developed it further, experimenting with double smoking and roasting the chilies. At the insistence of friends, as an adult, Rob made a batch to sell in Harare. A bottle made it back to California in someone's suitcase, where it was consumer tested with an astonishing score. Eventually they launched the product on an international scale. "Every single part of my product is me," says Rob. Each batch is a special vintage and slightly different with "the same notes but different nuance to them". Each bottle reflects the seasonality, the rainfall and mother nature. There are three lemons per bottle; no vinegar, no preservatives—just birds eye chilies, lemon and secret spices. The packaging is premium with a beautiful design. Small subsistence villages are supported and able to earn more income. A Little Peppers School Program for 125 kids, is sponsored, and an anti-poaching program is another spin-off, giving back to the surrounding areas. I was able to tour the EU standard commercial kitchen.

“Every single part of my product is me.”
ROB FLETCHER



ROB FLETCHER ON HIS GAME FARM WITH HIS ANIMALS, ZIMBABWE



Conclusion

STORY # 2

KULEANA RUM SHACK, USA

For the next excellent example of storytelling, come with me to the “Kuleana Rum Shack” where the conversation jumped alive with manager Chelsea Yagong. We are on the Big Island of Hawaii, along the Kohala Coast. Although she wasn’t the farm owner, Chelsea passionately brought herself into the story of sugarcane and rum. You see, she was raised on one of the last Sugarcane plantations on the Hamakua Coast and had a father and grandpa work in the fields. She told us the story of the 40 varieties of heirloom sugarcane that are used on the Kuleana rum farm. Sugarcane or Ko, was one of the original “Canoe plants” that the Polynesians brought to Hawaii over a 1000 years ago in boats. With the collapse of the sugar industry, there had been no more sugarcane plantations for quite a few years. The

launch of this rum is keeping an ancient heritage alive. “Which rum should we buy?” we asked her. She advised us with a story, as she picked up a bottle of Agricole (made from fresh sugarcane juice), and explained that it reminded her of the green grassy smell that hung in the air when the cane fields were being cut. She shared how it felt as a child in the “last of an era”---how the local school she attended closed down for the day and brought them out to the edge of the field to watch the very last field cut before shutting down the business for good. This bottle she said, “tastes like the smell in the air as a child when the sugar cane fields were being cut”. Chelsea used her childhood, nostalgia, history and the senses with her story. Hook line and sinker—that bottle came home with us.

“This rum reminds me of the grassy smell of a fresh cut sugarcane fields when I was a kid,”

CHELSEA YAGONG, KULEANA RUM SHACK



ONOMEA BAY, HAMAKUA COAST HAWAII, LOCATION OF OLD SUGARCANE PORT. CHELSEA YAGONG, 40 HEIRLOOM SUGARCANE VARIETIES GO INTO THE RUM OLD FASHIONED KULEANA BOTTLES



EDUARDO SOUSA,
ETHICAL FOI GRAS,
WILD GEESSE CHOOSE TO
EAT OLIVES AND ACORNS
ON THE FARM LANDSCAPE

Story Telling in Spain & Italy

The next illustration of good story telling isn't an example of one story on one farm, it's more of a story about two countries, and the culture and landscape and foods. And how they tell a collective story that is woven together.

I was able to visit quite a few farms in Spain and Italy as part of my Global Focus Tour.

I realized right away, that each meal, each farm visit, and each restaurant experience, had a lot of storytelling. Every bite of food had a lead up, anticipation, and a detailed description. In Italy, they say "slow food and fast cars". We were passed by Porsches and Lamborghinis like we were standing still on our way to a farm—and then had a half an hour of story and discussion on the full history of every dish before sampling. In Spain, we met master story tellers who had us on the edge of our seats. Slow down, listen, then try. Pretty much every story in these two countries had the aspects listed above.

This is not how we handle food in Canada, we don't ever say that we have the best. We are quite humble as farmers about what we put on plates for others. We need to think about our story, craft our story, in our own Canadian way, as a country, or even as regions.



DON FERNANDO SAMPEDRO,
LA CEPERA, SPAIN,
FIGHTING BULLS AND IBERIAN PORK BREEDER



LUQUE OLIVE OIL COURTYARD
AND BOTTLES



DR. LORENZO LEON,
SCIENTIST, OLIVE BREEDING



Spain

GENERATIONS TO CRAFT A STORY

In Spain we tried ethical foie gras, with fifth generation owner Eduarado Sousa. Eduardo used his son to interpret the farm story, mixed in with Roman, Jewish, and Catholic history of the area. While we walked through ancient acorn groves and looked at the Roman aqueduct system, we learned how migrating wild geese land in the fall to eat the olives, nuts and fruits and then end up hanging around the farm. While Eduardo fed his tame geese corn from a basket, he told us how the wild geese are harvested once a year to make the little \$200 jars of Foie Gras. We ate a meal of farm produce in a 1000-year-old cave built by the Romans and the story never ended all evening.

On another seventh-generation farm in Spain called Luque, we had an olive oil tasting and a beautiful lazy lunch in the courtyard that had hundred-year-old olives trees growing in it. Our family host, Rafael, let the story of their olive oil and other regional foods unfold over an afternoon, and their webpage talks of culture, traditions and secrets. The organic farm is modern in every way, but the family story goes back to the 1200s in that area and the Reconquista era. That's an 800 year old story!

On La Cerpa, owner Don Fernando Sampedro, brought us by tractor and wagon through the pen of famopus fighting bulls, to see the Iberico black pork that is raised under the acorn trees. He brought us into the farm house, and showed us where the bull fighters pray before a fight for protection, After a meal of spanish omlette, we were shown the bull ring. Our whole learning session of Iberian ham, fighting bulls and food was fiery and passionate. Don Fernando Sampedro was an excellent story teller, weaving a master tale!

Italy

SLOW FOOD & FAST CARS

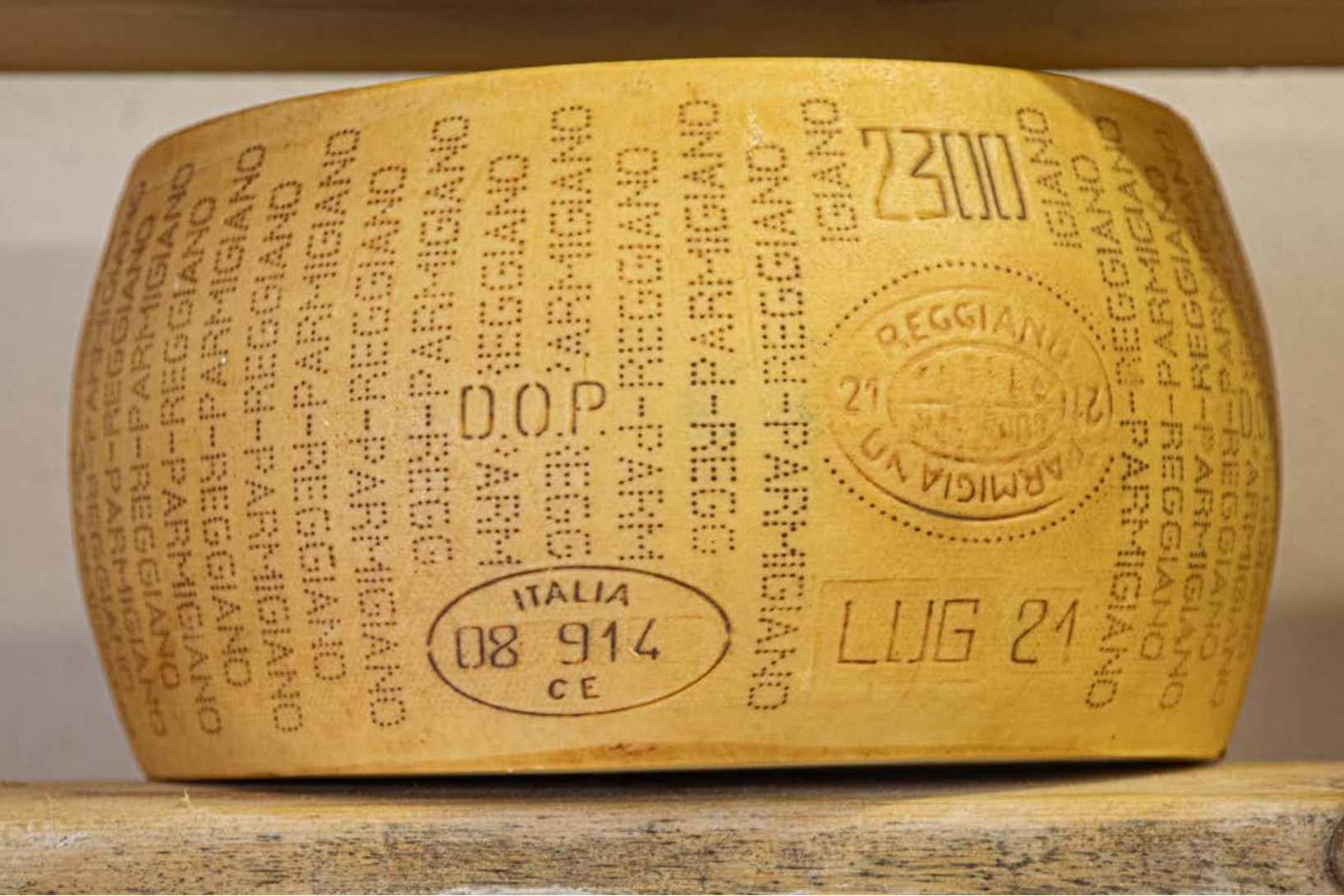
“You don’t have our soil, our grass, our animals—you can’t make it like us”.

PARMIGIANA REGIANO CHEESE MAKER

In Italy, we visited a Parmigiana Regiano facility, learning in great detail about the process, and everything unique to that area. When we asked for some tips on making the delicious Ricotta (twice cooked it means and is made from the Parmesan whey), we were advised that there was no way that we could replicate it, because every step along the way is unique. “You don’t have our soil, our grass, our animals—you can’t make it like us”. It got me thinking that the farm products that we all produce all over the world are unique in the same way—we just don’t explain that properly to our customers. We don’t shout it out to the universe in the same way. **We need to be so proud of what we produce and not shy away from celebrating the unique elements that go into it---just like the Italians!**

Our guide at Parma (where prosciutto is made) talked of a time when just walking through the village, on a crisp fall day, you could smell the legs of pork, strung up in the rafters of every house. You see again—it was childhood and a sense. This was a time when there was no refrigeration, and curing these hams was a way to preserve meat. It wasn’t luxury, it was necessity.

Italy seemed full of stories. The lead up and telling of something before eating was important. Truffle hunting was no exception. We went out with Mario to look for black truffles with his truffle hunting dog, one crisp misty morning. “I talk to my dog with a certain Italian dialect found only in this village---why---because as a child I listened as my dad talk to his dog in that dialect and I want to keep the tradition”. Does this make the truffles found, taste any different—nope—but it really adds to the story.



PARMIGIANO REGGIANO FACILITY PRODUCTION



MARIO RAIMONDO
HAZELNUT FARM
TRUFFLE HUNTING WITH
TRUFFLE DOG

TORRESINA, CUENO, ITALY



The last example of storytelling to show you in Italy is in the highest mountains at Abruzzo. This was a sheep farm with shepherds, and sheep dogs living with the herds. I asked owner Manuella Cozzi what products they sell. She answered with a story. Instead of just listing everything, she said, “We sell all what the mountain gives us.” I thought this was a fascinating way to answer, and I’ve thought about it since visiting and how in our family’s own case it is the valley that provides. She explained that the shepherds that are up in the mountains with the sheep, pick herbs and other wild crafted plants that are then used in the cheese making. Meats, wool, and clothing, are also given from the mountain. Other trends that I saw in Italy sprinkled through stories, were the environment and giving back to a wider community.

“We sell all what the mountain gives us.”

MANUELLA COZZI, ABRUZZO



Social Media

IS LIKE A FARM

Every single direct marketing farm that we visited, participated in social media. Susie Felton from Montana says there are two types of farming social media folks. The first are rare and what she calls unicorns (those that take to it naturally and thrive). The second type need to focus on consistency. They need to show up every day, they need to plan things out and work very hard. I saw hundreds of different styles and ways of sharing. At first, I started a list with 100s of social media tips, but that's for someone else to do a whole study on its own! **I'm going to touch lightly on 4 broader tips instead.**

I did question direct marketing farmers as I visited about their presence on socials. The time spent truthfully, is much more than you'd think. Half an hour a day would be the lowest---an hour would not be uncommon. Facebook can be better at connecting locally to your nearest town. Instagram has a wider reach. YouTube and LinkedIn can also be useful for some. The trend I noticed as I travelled, was that farmers generally focussed on one, at the most two, platforms.

My mentor Mary used to say, show the good, the bad...but no the ugly. Jillian Harris told me that people are craving something real—they are ready for authentic farming life. They don't want to see everything sugar coated. Social media cannot be hired out to be done correctly according to Kim Seagram. It must be done by the farmer themselves in their own voice. It was one of the biggest tools that can be like a double-edged sword. It can show transparency and authenticity. Remember these are two things that combat greenwashing the best.

01. SOCIAL MEDIA IS LIKE A FARM

#1 Social media is like a farm. Think of social media as something that you water and it grows. Sometimes there is a drought, sometimes things take off. Think of planting seeds, some are eaten by birds, some are choked out by weeds and yes, some thrive. You must get out there and plant lots of seeds though. Social media is also like a farm in that it takes time. It's a job that is after hours and it's unpredictable. Social media can swallow up large amounts of time and you sometimes feel like you aren't getting ahead. Then suddenly, everything lines up.

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02. SOCIAL MEDIA IS LIKE AN OLD WINDOW OR A KALEIDOSCOPE

#2 Social media isn't like telling your story all at once, but a story that unfolds and evolves over time. Use social media to tell your authentic story the best that you can! Social media isn't a story like reading a novel, it's little snippets, and little peaks through a window at your farm. Imagine an old wooden window with each mullion framed image being part of a story book. You tell a story that unfolds day by day and builds. Sometimes there is frost on the window and the story is fleeting and sometimes they can see clearly. People must piece together your story. You want there to be a plot line, obstacles and overcoming problems. You want to see the seasons unfold. The little details and the big details all matter and create a tapestry. Think of what the public sees as little glimpses through a kaleidoscope of what you choose to show them. Together these tiny glimpses make a story that doesn't end, it keeps on unravelling and building and is intriguing!



03. SOCIAL MEDIA ENTERTAINS

#3 Social media is entertainment first and it isn't a flyer to share what you have for sale. People want to laugh; they want to be inspired. They want to live vicariously through you. They don't want to see perfection. They are curious by nature.

04. SOCIAL MEDIA IS ABOUT EMOTION

#4 Human emotion is what the secret spice is for social media. Pretty isn't enough. Always choose the image, the video or the story that shows emotion. This can make you feel vulnerable, but it is how we as humans connect. Joy, sadness, determination, grit, elation. There is also a lot of emotion surrounding food, it's so cultural, and so many family traditions are intertwined with recipes. Farms, foods, families—3 F's-- remember that you have all the ingredients! Farming includes new life, sometimes death. It's as real as it gets!

Green Washing

“Green washing is the hardest thing to overcome for a small farm.”

WILL HARRIS, WHITE OAKS PASTURES

When asked what the biggest obstacle is for a farm wanting to share their products directly, Will Harris of White Oak Pastures explained that “green washing is the hardest thing to overcome for a small farm”. Large conglomerates have teams for marketing and are quick to jump on a trend. When you trace a brand back to its roots, it can be surprising to find out, that it doesn’t originate from a one family-sized farm. He shared that the way to fight this is to be authentic. To share the small details of life as a family on a farm. Big corporations can try to do this, but it comes off as hollow. Transparency is your friend.

Perception of Farmers

“Oh there’s the big house and the big tractor.”

ANNA JONES, AUTHOR

I asked successful direct marketers about tone when communicating. It’s easy to hear trumpets sounding as a farmer when you go about your year: extreme weather, unforeseen breakdowns, emergency lifesaving livestock twin deliveries. A boastful attitude, one that complains or brags about the hard work is very off-putting. There are many hard jobs in life, being a nurse, a teacher, a janitor, a bus driver or construction work. Many people dream about living on the land and being a farmer. It’s offensive to complain. You might see yourself as living a peaceful small little life. What you might not know, according to Anna Jones, is that someone might be driving by and thinking, “oh there’s the big house and the big tractor”. Anna wrote a book called “Divide.” There are some humorous moments as she discusses the differences between rural and urban.

“The simple fact that farms in rural areas produce food and people in urban areas eat food is not, on its own, enough to bridge the gap”.

ANNA JONES, AUTHOR

Symbiosis with Farm & Marketing

There were two farms that left me speechless after visiting. They both showed an intricacy in the products grown and offered. It was a symbiotic cycle with everything in balance. Both examples have direct marketing as a cornerstone of the intricate circles of symbiosis. If you took direct marketing out of the equation, they both wouldn't work. It takes many years to form farms like this and integrate direct marketing into them. When you first start out, you can't be expected to be so complex and successful the first year both on farm and with direct marketing. The multifaceted layers take time and in some cases generations to come to fruition. Be encouraged and don't measure a new entrepreneurial venture beside one that has been functioning for years.

FARM # 1

CORK ROOF-TOP GARDEN, IRELAND

First, I want to bring you to a roof top farm in Cork--- What? Yes! My jaw literally dropped when I arrived at the top of a 100-year-old building, in Ireland, that rises and falls with the ocean tide that comes up the river. Cork has a population of about 225,000 and is a major centre in southern Ireland. The roof top had flowers, bees, chickens, sprouts, microgreens, lettuce and other greens. This was the brainchild of Brian McCarthy, and he was a great tour guide. Downstairs there was a farm shop, with smoothies, juices, tea, coffee, and then all the groceries grown on the rooftop and the separate farm offsite in the country. Customers could sign up for subscription boxes. They could also take different learning classes on site. Their farm in the country also included horticulture, so there were plenty of cut flowers, and seasonal plants, both for indoors and for out-

doors. Just outside the building was a town square that hosted a farmer's market, and on market days, the store would throw its doors open to the shoppers. The roof top was a public space with tables. It was to encourage urban people to grab something to drink, grab a bite to eat, and relax, with the plants, chickens and bees. Agriculture therapy in the city. They come, they see, they experience; it's unique and beautiful. The real heavy lifting is done off site on the other farm, where things didn't have to look as pretty. This rooftop oasis was a brilliant way to show the cycle of everything all in one spot. The most interesting thing about this system was the integration of very urban people into a farm-like setting without leaving the city. They could enjoy, and buy, in one spot without leaving town.

FARM # 2

POLY FACE FARM, USA

Polyface Farm, (Shenandoah Valley Virginia), was another very intricate farm system. Farms have an ecosystem of nature: soil, plants, trees, insects, mycorrhizae fungi, and earthworms. This land was beautifully and holistically managed with complicated relationships. We jumped in the old Ford Bronco, side windows all removed and bush bumper attached, to ride with Joel Salatin, and looked at the equally complicated farming enterprises all intertwined and layered together. Everything worked together thoughtfully with a complex design. It had taken years to study this and achieve the web of interaction.

Cows use wood chips as bedding in the winter, eating hay, soaking the chips with urine and manure. Pigs are put into the same chips next, to aerate and overturn everything into a rich compost that was next spread onto the pastures and hay meadows. The cattle and sheep were grazed across the landscape that was fertilized by the compost. Hay was made on the land that was fertilized which was eaten again by the animals.

The chickens in "eggmobiles", were rolled across the land to pick apart the manure and eat the worms and larvae to keep the pastures "clean", but at the same time spreading more nutrients. The insects from the manure provided substantial food for the chickens. The pigs were moved along in the woods, until they came to the acorn glens to do their final fattening. These were the woods where the selective logging took place to harvest trees for lumber for projects on the farm and to make the chips that were used as bedding in the winter—and the cycle starts again. Everything depended on each other, and everything was a big circle. Humans entered the circle in different ways. Interns came to work and learn on the farm. Joel writes books to help other farmers, that also come to the farm to learn and grow, (underneath the shed event space that is built from the trees from the forests). Customers also come to the farm to enjoy farm days, they buy products from the farm store, and they order products online to be shipped to them.

“A healthy ecology is the basis for a healthy economy,”

A QUOTE BY JOEL SALATIN, POLYFACE FARM

Striving for Excellence

Service Plus One

In Tasmania, I was able to learn from Kim Seagram, connected to Seagram’s Whisky! We went onsite to one of her restaurants Still Water in an 1830’s heritage flour mill. She nurtured eight consumer facing businesses through the Pandemic. She was instrumental in starting an award winning farmers market and was on the successful team that applied for Launceston being designated an UNESCO World Heritage Food site. She next toured me the luxury accommodations, Seven Rooms, set into giant scarred timbers on the water. She explained that “it isn’t enough to give your clients exactly what they have paid for. You must provide an element of surprise”. She gave examples in her industry--- if someone orders a croissant—also bring them, a newspaper or magazine. If they order a car to the door, place some apples and water bottles inside for them to enjoy. When they book their room, find out their taste in music and books—and have that ready in the room. She cautioned, not to just provide more of the same thing---“so when talking about beef—don’t just upsize a roast ---you must provide something different---recipe cards, spice rubs, other local products etc.” This is a very impactful idea and one to try out.

“It isn’t enough to give your clients exactly what they have paid for. You must provide an element of surprise.”

KIM SEAGRAM, TASMANIA

Correspondance is like Gold

Kim Seagram also encouraged me to treat each correspondence with a client like gold—treat them amazingly. Be warm and friendly and real with your responses. Be consistent with your social media, and newsletters. The person who is handling social media and newsletters should also handle correspondence for continuity sake. “You have a premium product so have a premium conversation,” she said.

It is farmers job to meet the client where they are at. It is the farmer’s job to learn about the urban habits and bridge ground that way.

“You have a premium product so have a premium conversation,”

KIM SEAGRAM, TASMANIA

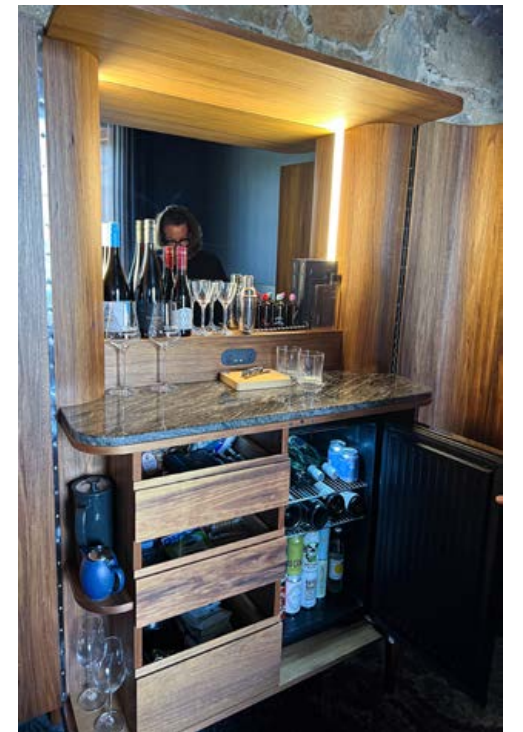
Premium Everything

If our goal in direct marketing isn’t to be the cheapest product, it also isn’t our job to be the middle ground and mediocre product. We want to be a premium product which equals:

Premium Correspondence
Premium Web Page
Premium Label
Premium Box
Premium Taste
Premium Packaging
Premium Experience

A lesson in this is flying with a good airline. I studied this when I flew Air New Zealand for the first time but with an economy ticket. It wasn’t one thing that made the trip phenomenal. It was the many small touch points that added up. There was wallpaper in the bathroom, and nicer soap. There was a little kitchen area with a nice counter, with snacks and water set out in homey big bowls, for the flight that you could access whenever you wanted. A mint tea was brought to me in a ceramic mug after, because they only had black tea at the regular service. Pillows, blankets, all just slightly nicer than the competitor. I walked off the red eye flight, thinking this was the best experience! I’ll never forget that, and it was a lesson well learned for any product. Focus on making each touch point listed above as premium as you can make it.

A business marketing Consultant once told me that having something differentiated in your name is another good strategy for your business. Too many farms use names like Something Hill Farm, something Creek Farm, or their cattle brand. She said that using a name that nobody can copy and that stands out from the crowd is best. She thought that the name Five Mary’s Ranch was perfect. It’s about a mother and 4 daughters all named Mary and it has a story behind it. And no one else will ever use that name!



Differentiation

On the Sunshine Coast of Australia, we learned a valuable lesson about standing out in a crowd. We were combing online for beef producers selling directly to customers. We also went to practically every single farmers' market. People kept telling us, "did you run into the mushroom beef guy" ---or "find that guy with the beef who also grows mushrooms". Eastwell farms had done a wonderful job of adding a spin on their beef business and practically everyone knew of them. We finally connected right on the farm with Bryant, and spent an enjoyable morning, half time out with the livestock, and half the time in the mushroom facility. We were in awe of the many colourful varieties sold fresh and dried. He also had many beef products such as burgers and sausages that had a shitake mushroom version or oyster combo. Another way he differentiated, was by choosing a distinctive African breed of cattle called Nguni, that did not need all the chemical drenching that other breeds in Australia needed in his region. He was able to also market this to his clients. The cattle were looked spectacular with spots and horns.



EASTWELL FARMS,
SUNSHINE COAST
AUSTRALIA,

NGUNI CATTLE
MUSHROOMS
GROWN IN
SHIPPING CONTAINERS

What is unique about your product?
What justifies a price higher than the supermarket?
What makes it stand out?
Is there a noticeable difference in quality?
Will it make the consumer feel healthier?





LEFT: GYNAYA & PAUL GATTERAS QUEENSLAND, LYCHEE FARMERS
ABOVE: LYCHEES JUST ABOUT RIPE

Extending the Seasonality of the product.

It's January in Queensland and Lychees are almost ready. We pull up to the farm and get a warm down to earth welcome from Gynaya and Paul Gatteras. We walk out into the orchard to see the trees all under nets. They first offer ripe lychees, and it's an intense season. About 1/3 of what they grow can be locally sold at the farm store. What they found was that the other 2/3 that hit the commodity market, were not financially viable. After several years, they built infrastructure and shifted into also offering frozen lychees. Just in the last year, they offer freeze dried lychees, which they can't seem to keep in stock. Lastly, they've come up with a recipe for Lychee ice-cream, that is offered at the store. They extended the season and the window of availability. This was farmers adapting and looking at creative ways to stretch their season and add value! Because Lychees are ready all at one time, in one big bumper crop, it took thought to figure out a way to do this and the business was built over several years. This will let them sell more of their product directly and less of their product wholesale, thereby maximizing profit. This is a very good lesson for cattle ranchers direct marketing! It takes more time, thought, and planning, than the original farming business in some cases.

Narrowing In

Some business models narrow down on one item instead of offering many. I met Fiona Aveyard in Vancouver, who was making lamb sausage rolls only, and selling those as a special product from her Australia farm. She is a fifth-generation wheat and sheep farmer who knows what resiliency is—having farmed through droughts and floods. When looking at options to diversify, she wanted to pick something that could easily be served to large conventions, and she wanted a meal that was quintessentially Australian and screamed Australia. Lamb sausage rolls fit that description for her and have been a successful enterprise. In the future, she'd like to add one or two more products. She has already been in talks with airlines about carrying her product.



COFFEE BERRIES HAMUKUA COAST OF HAWAII

Extremely Close to the consumer.

We wined up the side of the dormant volcano on the Hamakua Coast up to Pahale farms. Donelle Rodriguez sat with us on her deck, with the chickens jumping up to say hi and the dogs at our feet. We learned how she makes kiawe honey, looked at the papaya orchard, and we walked through the coffee plantation. We learned a big lesson from her. Although selling small amounts of honey and coffee right to consumers was why we connected, we learned that she doesn't even like to sell the little bags of Kona Coffee, even though they are priced quite expensively. She makes more money at the farmer's market selling hot steaming coffee with a little taste of her own honey and organic cream. That's how we first met her, buying a cup of coffee at the farmer's market. We made a friend, and before we knew it, we were staying a night in the little cabin on the farm, gathering eggs, enjoying the banana shower (the Potassium from the soap is good for the banana trees planted around it). So, niching right down to the most expensive way to sell her product, enabled her to make a living off a small acreage completely direct-to-consumer. The coffee is a limited resource, and tended by her very hands---she can only produce so much ---so she needs to maximize the dollars made.



DONNELLE RODRIGUEZ IN HER HAMAKUA COAST COFFEE PLANTATION

Tuna Fishers in Hawaii, Melissa and Ritchie Mitchell also showed this close to the consumer model. Their fish is never sold commodity. It is sent to their own food truck off island, it is dried and sold in finished dishes through social media and word of mouth. It is sold when they cater weddings, or other large events. Sometimes it is sold to families in slabs, but this would be the most wholesale route they pursue.



Small but Mighty

MELI GARDENS, HAWAII

We saw this at Meli Gardens (a husband / wife beekeeping team). The couple had worked in the bee industry on a massive scale, always working for others. They wanted to go into business for themselves, but they knew they could never sustain the amount of bee hives to have honey as their primary income. By taking small amounts of their honey and steeping it in different dried botanicals (all from Hawaii, and in mixes like chamomile, rose hibiscus, chai spices from the Island, turmeric ginger) they were able to highly monetize tiny little jars. They sold them locally, but then also made the products available through an Etsy shop. Selling through a channel that you never even thought about, such as an edible product through Etsy, was interesting. Shipping was a big part of their business and a skin care line with honey products was another way to maximize profit on a limited resource. First contact for their business might also be tourists that come to the island and see them at the farmer’s market. They buy little things to tuck away in their suitcase. They use it up and want more. It reminds them of a beautiful time in their life. They order more online and become a repeat customer!

These examples are important to keep in mind for small beef producers who might need to maximize profit. Perhaps land size is an issue, and finances aren’t allowing a commodity business to grow. How can a business uber maximize profit on a limited amount of product?

LITTLE CREEK, MONTANA

I was able to catch up with Caroline Nelson (Big Sky Caroline) while in Montana. The quote I’ll never forget from her was “to be a rancher, you don’t need a ranch”. She is renting and direct marketing every step of the way to build a business from scratch. Starting out as an entrepreneur, took ingenuity and creativity. She has a flock of Icelandic sheep and a herd of cattle. Through selling small amounts of her meats online, and marketing other artisanal products, she can make a living. The herd is expanding, but currently, selling every bit of the animal, even the sheepskins, and maximizing profit, is very important. Dipping into education with Shepherd School experiences has also been significant! She has recently added a feed store that has feed for animals, and with a play on words, also offers “feed” for people, with all her own meats and a selection of other high quality

Set Up for Success

“I naively thought, that because I was cutting out the middleman, that I could do things cheaper than the supermarket. Not so”!

OLLIE WHITE, FARM2FORK

Right Price

This is a very tricky topic. It requires running spreadsheets and adjusting as necessary.

One must accept that matching the supermarket price is not a viable goal. This business model will fail. There isn’t a way for you to raise a product and have it slaughtered and be able to beat the massive multinational corporations in the food supply chain. Premium product equals a premium price.

Will Harris said, “that if it costs me \$800 to cut and wrap an animal, but it costs a mega conglomerate

perhaps \$100 through economies of scale, then there is no way that the price I can set can be cheaper than the super market.” Ollie of Farm2Fork, said first, “I naively thought, that because I was cutting out the middleman, that I could do things cheaper than the supermarket. Not so!”

Your prices will also need adjusting along the way. Jenni Harris said, “use price to establish balance.” If you are selling out, then increase the price. If something isn’t moving, then decrease the price.

“Use price to establish balance.”

JENNI HARRIS, WHITE OAK PASTURES

Selling the whole animal

“If you raise one more thing then you can sell, it is wasted”.

JOEL SALATIN, POLYFACE FARM

Over and over, it has been stressed that you need to sell the whole animal to be profitable. A modern way to say this is “Nose to Tail”. Joel Salatin, says, “if you raise one more thing then you can sell, it is wasted”. Offal is on trend right now, so that really helps. Celebrity chefs have also been beneficial for selling things like short ribs, oxtail, beef cheeks. It takes ingenuity to sell these cuts and recipes provided in some cases or tutorials. Suzy Felton really warned about stockpiling things like ground beef, she has watched people go out of business doing this. Jenni Harris echoed that, “selling the steaks is not enough, and this girl right here,” she said pointing to herself, “almost messed that up.” It

was one of her learning curves when they first started direct to consumer. You must sell the steaks along with everything else. Other things to sell include hides (if they are unusual), and broth (made from bones) . “Ancestral ground” is on trend, which is ground beef with a certain percent offal mixed in. Value added products can also help use the whole animal, such as patties and sausages. Ollie White, from Farm2Fork, shared that by offering chicken feet, which are really hard to source and used in some cultural recipes, he would show up on google searches, and actually gain more long-term customers for all other cuts.

“Selling the steaks is not enough.”

JENNI HARRIS, WHITE OAK PASTURES



JOEL SALATIN, POLYFACE FARM, SWOOPE VIRGINIA. SHENANDOAH VALLEY THE HOUSE AND FARMSTORE





ZANGA SCHUTTE ROPING CALVES WAIMEA AREA OF HAWAII ISLAND

Consistency is King

Zanga Shutte of Z-Bar Ranch and owner of an abattoir on the Big Island Hawaii, teaches us lessons in consistency, as we tag along while he moves grazing herds on the abundant Waimea grass. Several farms sell their meat products under one label. The cattle must have similar genetics to be in the program and Zanga has even tried using the same bull genetics (half-brothers) as the other ranches in the program. Although the cattle are all eating the same Hawaiian grasses, if they are supplemented during droughts or during finishing seasons, they are given the same supplements free fed, along with the grass. Zanga believes that offering a consistent product is a major key to success when direct marketing. In a feedlot setting, it is easier to control this but grassfed beef suppliers must watch this very carefully as the seasons change. An animal that is finishing must never lose weight and it must steadily gain until the fat cover is reached and the intra-muscular fat is achieved. It only takes one bad eating experience to lose a client.

Building an Abattoir

LESSONS ON SCALE

I was able to tour many abattoirs in many countries during my two-year research period. Large, industrial plants, medium sized ones, tiny ones in shipping containers and one in the back of a truck. There was even an off-grid abattoir run on solar and batteries! Part of every conversation with every meat producer, also included that of local abattoir space or lack of, plus the question of developing one yourself. Sometimes it was a stressful conversation about finding space. Sometimes running an abattoir was also a stressful discussion, especially staffing and regulations. Should ranches branch into the slaughter plant business? It's a big expensive decision that puts your farm and land on the line. The gist of what I learned all around the world was, if you have a good reliable place to take your animals—use that—treat that family business as a valued partner and be thankful for their family business. Don't expect perfection, mistakes will happen, be patient with your butcher.

If you grow to a size, that no one can handle the amount you are butchering, or if there are no facilities within a reasonable half day drive... If the workmanship is of bad quality or the values of both of you aren't lining up, then proceed with building your own facilities. If building your own, there is a sweet spot that will be different for everyone. Economies of scale really matter. If the numbers aren't working out nicely, running more animals through the facility and ramping up production, can often fix that.

Labeling Aesthetically

Labeling seems like a small task but is huge. You generally have options at the butcher for labeling. Date, weight, abattoir, your farm name. This label tends to be quite ugly. On the other side of the package is where you might apply a prettier label with a stellar graphic design. Premium products should have a premium label. Frozen meat looks like frozen meat. The label including, (colour, design, graphic, font) is very critical to success. Different size products should have different size labels. A suite of complementary labels would be your eventual goal.

Freezer Solutions

NEVER ENOUGH SPACE

Through my travels, I saw a range of freezer solutions. On one hand, there was a no-nonsense industrial warehouse freezer space, and on the other, a couple chest freezers with a 5 foot counter under a shed outside. I saw spaces that prioritized the comfort of the packing staff with ergonomic design and consideration for the cold by having staff reaching into stand-up freezers. I saw other spaces that had just launched and had just enough freezer space for one or two animals cut and wrapped. I spent a day in a rented space in Montana where quite a few farmers were sharing a rented space and driving an hour or two just to get there. Some farms slaughtered, hung, cut and wrapped, then froze then shipped out of one building. There is no right or wrong answer when getting started, but if there is once piece of advice when it comes to permanent infrastructure, every single farm that had put in a walk-in freezer, wished they had built bigger.

TASMANIA

Jane Bennet from Tasmania taught that a label that exudes quality, a touch of nostalgia, and has a nice feel to it, matters in the cheese industry. She used something that looked like it was from bygone days. We stood in Ashgrove Cheese and she showed the different labels targeted for different customers. I also learned a lesson from a separate company that provides organic milk. They couldn't use glass bottles because there was no return system. But they designed a plastic bottle that looked identical to an "antique bottle from years ago". It was part of the look.

Jane next brought me to a successful winery where we also studied labels. Owner Rob Nichols of Eastford Creek Vineyard said, "I'm not just selling wine, I'm selling an emotional connection--love, joy, happiness." The label is all part of this, and every detail has so much weight because there is only a tiny bit of room. Jane also had me stand in front of the wall of wine labels at Eastford Creek Vineyard. She went over different textures and fonts and colours. Shiny can be seen as low class in the food industry whereas matte and textured, references bygone eras and is more luxurious. I asked her what she thought of the colour yellow in branding. She gave me a horrified look... "Absolutely not." Yellow is used on many cheap products in Australia. I found that out after noticing that the most awful brand of the cheapest tea had a bright yellow packet and was placed in the cheapest hotels and gas stations. Colour choice can be very cultural. It takes study and intention and can change depending on your country or region. White space is incredibly important as is one strong element to catch your eye. Careful consideration should be given as to whether the font is footed or sans-serif.

QUEENSLAND

At Kenilworth Dairies on the Sunshine Coast of Australia Queensland, I had another lesson in labelling from Donna Dodson. The logo had a story behind it, as it was just a little doodle that she created as a child. Our host decided as a young girl at age 13, to start her own milking business, where she gave dairies weekend reprieve. She had a schedule and rotated through 12 or so dairies. Using this moel, the owner-operator could have one weekend off every 3 months. Now she is the manager of a cheese making facility producing millions of packages of milk, yogurt, cheese, ice-cream, and mousse each year, that all have that little doodle on it! She is the creative energy behind all of the labels and the design processes. We also had a lesson on all the different environmental labels and such, that consumers look at when shopping. Colour coding different products is wise she shared—that way people can then pick up what they want quickly and easily when they run out. They don't have to read—they just choose the colour they are used to.

“I’m not just selling wine, I’m selling an emotional connection--love, joy, happiness.”

ROB NICHOLS OF EASTFORD CREEK VINEYARD

Labeling by Food Production Claims

- Grass-fed
- Grass-fed and Grass-Finished
- Grain fed
- Corn Fed
- Organic
- Animal Welfare certified
- No Vaccines
- No GMO
- Natural
- Sustainable

The further a customer is away from knowing who is raising or growing their food—the more the label matters. The closer a customer is to the farmer—the less the label matters. For example, if a customer is buying a pound of ground beef at Costco, the organic label might be very important to them. This beef might be from another country, never mind from a farmer that they don’t know. If they are buying a pound of ground beef from someone that they might have gotten to know in person or on social media—if they can see the face of the person who raised it, this trumps labeling. According to Jane Bennett, and connected to the culture of an area---If the area has ties to the agriculture community, (such as Launceston) has agriculture in and around the town, it will support local food without labels. If the food is being sold in a large city, such as Sydney at 5 million population, then they are too far removed from agriculture to buy local or to want to support local farmers. Metropolis cities have a trend to support “Fair Trade Goods” from other countries that they might feel generous towards. They will support a cause they believe in. They might be distrustful of agriculture folks from their own country.



TIMBERLAND BOOTS MADE WITH REGENERATIVE GRASSFED LEATHER FROM WHITEOAKS PASTURE CATTLE

Adding Complimentary Product

When looking at successful online farms selling direct, branching out to multiple species of livestock is a logical choice (offering, pork, chicken, beef, lamb, turkey etc.). Very rarely did we just see a business offering just one species. Becoming a one stop shop, and offering things like local creamery butter, frozen baking, spice rubs, aprons, utensils, coffee blends and t-shirts was also common. In conversation with some farmers, I have heard that offering hats and t-shirts mostly falls into advertising and isn’t necessarily an economic choice. Carrying sizes can be difficult and expensive. Bulky items such as hoodies, take a lot of storage. Small items that can be slipped into a box are preferable. Also, something to remember, is that if you are shipping frozen—then you can’t add fresh items...if shipping chilled—then no frozen items.

At White Oak pastures, we stepped into a leather shop, and a magical little world. It seemed even more surreal because it was being decorated for Christmas while we visited ---so it had an extra “Santa’s Workshop” vibe. There was a laser engraving machine, and several traditional leather sewing machines. I had never heard of leather being marketed as grass-fed and regenerative. It was an exhilarating moment to purchase a bracelet and slip it on my wrist! Large companies such as Ugg and Timberland boots had partnered with them to do limited edition runs of footwear. Onsite they were crafting purses, belts, wallets, hat patches and there were also rug hides for sale.

The tallow kitchen was around back. It was a candle making day, and wicks were being arranged and candles poured while we watched. There were different essential oils and scents on a shelf. The creams, balms, dish soaps, bar soaps and foaming soaps, were also extremely interesting. They were offered in shipped boxes and in the general store. Some products were also offered through Whole Foods.

Pet Industry

DESIGNED AROUND THE HUMAN

Many places I visited were branching into pet foods and chews and in fact, some businesses were focusing directly on that. One of the interesting businesses selling pet supplements, was in Hawaii and named “Pawniola Pets” (a spin on the traditional island “Paniola” cowboy). Let’s go to the farmer’s market as we chat with Miki, who is married to Nick, a third-generation rancher on the island. Their goal is to keep more of the livestock on the Island and support Hawaiian ranchers. Their message is, “waste nothing”, and “nose to tail” as it is the highest honour to the animal and the ‘aina. They had a particular pet food topper supplement called Furry Kake, (a spin on the Japanese umami seaweed seasoning called, Furikake). There were several flavours with different beef organs. It was designed to sprinkle on a pets’ regular meal, as a tasty treat and nutrition boost. There are rave reviews! They offer many other treats, chews. The “Spaw” section has lickable tallow balms, calming sprays and flea and tick sprays. The playfulness in the name and advertising, with humour, were enjoyable. The products are available online and at the market.



BOTH PHOTOS WHITE OAKS PASTURES PET CHEWS

Kristelle Harper, a grass-fed Manitoba rancher, who makes and sells pet treats, says she regularly watches customers park their car, by-pass all the other stands at the farmer’s market, and walk up to her booth, make the purchases for their pet, and then immediately leave. She believes that people will sometimes spend more on their pet than themselves.

Another lesson learned was at Pine View Farms in Saskatchewan. They had beautiful smoked bones on a rope, on display by the counter. They looked good and they smelled good. They explained that the smoking was for the owner’s sake. If a bone is lying around the house for a week or two, the owner cares that it smells nice. The gem of a lesson here, is that much of the pet industry is designed around the owner not the pet.



Offering More on the Farm

Accommodation

Almost every single farm in the UK, offered on farm accommodation, and many of the other farms I visited in other countries did as well. This definitely helps with income. It also works hand in hand with a direct to consumer business. I stumbled on this link by chance as it was certainly not something I was studying, but now I see a really strong correlation. The consumer feels like there is transparency with the farm. They build closer ties to the farm and become invested after staying there.

The Vacation rental has to be as premium as the products you are offering. While rustic is certainly OK, a rustic glam style is better. Some designer elements are necessary. What sets vacation rentals on a farm apart: privacy, beauty, history, nature, food, animals, outdoor bathing experience; I wanted to briefly show a couple examples to you:

Offering Farm products as part of the vacation rental at places such as Fearn Farm in Scotland. We had a great afternoon out the with cattle and sheep pulling stuck baby twin lambs. This would be a hopping place to stay! Many of the farm stays have small stores but Fearn Farm in Scotland built a beautiful vacation rental with two sides to it; The Mill end and the Wee end. **They took it a step further by stocking the freezer, right in the rental, with their own lamb and beef to use while there. This made it easy for guests to purchase meats and they could also stock up for home. What they used would be added on their bill.**

Farm Products Right in the House is what an Australian vacation rental, a couple hours outside of Melbourne had the idea to do. The owners told us a story on how when they travel, they’ll spend a lot of money on food. “Honey in the comb--\$10, and only enough to slather on one piece of toast, no problem! I was so happy to pay and eat the honeycomb,” said Lauren Daly! “And that got me thinking that we need to offer farm products both from our farm and others, right in the rental. This might be a good time to offer luxury farm products”.

Privacy and Beauty was what a lot of clients on a farm were coming for. The “Apple Orchard” small houses at Cotswold Beef, fit that criteria. The trees offered seclusion, and the season when the blossoms arrived would be heavenly.

History such as at Tin Roof vacation stay in Australia—remade everything in the shepherd’s hut except kept the rusty tin roof.

Dalrose Beef’s Retreat near Melbourne, was built around two big old chimneys from one of the original old houses in the area that was in ruins, all except those chimneys.

Outdoor Bathing Experience might be the biggest tip that I could give you to set yourself apart. Emily Padfield, on a farm in Warwickshire England, was in her farm coveralls as she showed us around all of the livestock. Just before leaving, she mentioned, the almost completed small home as an afterthought. She was just installing an outdoor bath tub for her guests—so she wanted me to see that. She explained that she put the bathtub in to have something special and different from all the neighbouring farm rentals. At this moment, I realized how big of a deal rentals are in the UK.

Pet friendly seems to also set you apart. Big Bluff rentals on a farm in Northern New South Wales, Australia is an example of this. Jodie and Wayne Redcliffe said that pet owners are desperate to find accommodations that they can take their dogs to. “You can charge another fee and extra for a damage deposit, and make people really happy that they found you,” says Jodie. Pet owners also still want luxurious spaces. They charge \$500 a night for their rental, for two people and optional pets.

“Honey in the comb--\$10, and only enough to slather on one sandwich, no problem! I was so happy to pay and eat the honeycomb,--And that got me thinking that we need to offer farm products both from our farm and others, right in the rental.

LAUREN DALY, DALROSE FARM



DALROSE FARM VACATION RENTAL BUILT AROUND 150 YEAR OLD CHIMNEYS



LAMB SCHOOL CLASSROOM TUCKED UNDER EAVE OF BARN AT YEW TREE FARM

Education

Teaching seemed to be a next step in a direct-to-consumer business. Some farms taught how to cook their products, or about their farming practices, or offered authentic tours. Some brought in other experts to run classes. Here are three stories to illustrate-- first an experience-based lamb school, then a butchery class, and lastly children's farm education.

FARM #1 LAMB SCHOOL

A farm in the Lake District of England, had a great on-farm educational example for adults and children that is more of an experience. Jo McGrath has a seasonal 'Lamb School'. We pulled in just as lambing season was beginning, so there were only a couple little lambs about. It was sunny and the crocuses were peaking up, a batch of new farm dog puppies was also there to greet us. We admired the beautiful old barn. There was a multi-purpose space tucked under the eaves of the rock and timber barn (once owned by Beatrix potter and featured in a movie about her). There were samples of wool and wool products and many posters that showed how wool is processed. They educated that they use Herdwick sheep, because of the rocky terrain and steep hills. Although there are other better wool breeds, they can't survive the rugged fell lands. There were posters and wool samples of many different sheep breeds to compare. People can hold lambs and do the rounds with the owners. They can sit right on the ground in the grass, and let the curious sheep come all around them. There was also a space for art prints and cards along with hand knit Herdwick wool blankets—they might be scratchy—but you are preserving heritage by purchasing one! And yes, the girls and I curled up on the flight home with a rustic natural blanket, a bit rough but authentic to the area. This education fit right in with the farm to table business. Along with the Herdwicks, there was a herd of belted Galloways, also suited to the landscape. Animals were slaughtered on site, cut and wrapped and sold throughout the UK. Packaging for shipping frozen products was included in the education display. A wool box liner, that keeps meat frozen when shipped, was showcased, bringing the education full circle to the diner plate. Coupons were given out to the local restaurant that serves their meat. Coupons were also given out for the meat boxes shipped around the UK.

SUGAR HILL FARM
KIAVE SMOKED
BACON,
BRITTANNY
ANDERSON



FARM #2 HOW TO PRODUCE FOOD

Another example of education working hand in hand with direct marketing is a “teaching how to produce your own food focus”, and can be found on the Big Island. We spent an afternoon with Brittany Anderson at Sugar Hill Farm. Brittany offers farm boxes stuffed with veggies, pastured beef, pork and chicken. She has a long waiting list to be included. She routinely writes a column for a publication in Hilo on local food, and it’s a very important topic for island people. We were met at the gate by a farmer and butcher by trade and wound up a driveway lined with banana trees, which we later sampled dried, and ready for customers. We visited the pigs, who were just so darn happy, in grass three times as high as their backs! And the bacon, well, that made us very happy. It was smoked with a local wood with an unbeatable fragrance. Brittany explained that she simply ran out of capacity to grow any more livestock on their lush green oasis. Rather than turn people away, Brittany launched butchery classes. She teaches people how to raise a pig in the back yard, which Hawaii is very suited to. Then she teaches how to slaughter, cut and wrap for the freezer. Her passion for local residents and eating local, leads her to teach others what she already does. She is feeding people in a different way than a farmer usually does, by encouraging them to feed themselves.

FARM #3 TEACHING KIDS ABOUT FARM SYSTEMS

The last illustration of education working hand in hand with direct to consumer, involves teaching children about farms and food systems. At certain times of year, Brianna at Widnor Farms in Washington, opens up the farm for a series of Saturday Farm Schools for different ages. They actually learn fairly hands on skills in small groups right with Brianna, such as birthing a lamb, bottle feeding a calf, all about chickens with eggs. What Brianna found was that her students were so excited to run home and tell their families about what they’d learn, that the families would then focus on eating all the healthy products that they raised. Instead of just visiting the grocery store—they would come to the farm store. Mary Heffernan also filled a void in children’s education. She created an online teaching platform, during the pandemic (and beyond) that served kids at home. They could learn about the many different types of food grown in the USA. There were work sheets, colouring pages and videos. It was comprehensive and served several ages

Farm dinners

The beautiful photos, the drool worthy dishes of food, the flowers and the long table. So here is the secret about farm dinners that I learned around the world, was to do them and not expect a direct monetary gain. The goal at first is to break even. The reward is advertising, social media awareness, and making a hype about the products you offer. Farm dinners equal more sales in food, more exposure, more word of mouth.

I was able to catch up with Danielle Firlle, founder of Secret Supper through a small group video chat in Eva Kosmas Flores Food Photography classes. If anyone would understand the finer points of a rustic on location dinner, it would be Danielle, who has made it an art form and the centre of her business, to do pop-up dinners on farms, beaches, vineyards, and barns, all around the USA. She has also recently started offering food experiences in France and Italy. I asked her some detailed questions about farm dinners. She gave good advice:

- Never have more than 50 people
- People want to talk to the host, so free yourself up for the evening
- Always ALWAYS have a backup plan for the weather
- At first call on friends for favours with music, food, and serving.
- As your dinners become established, you might be able to pay for that and charge a higher rate.
- It’s not necessary to have a top chef....a cook will do just fine
- Showcase the season in food, decorations and location

I toured a series of wineries, restaurants and a wedding venue in Tasmania. This helped me identify the positive or negative feelings when you walk into a venue that serves food and drink—the vibe is everything. Again, it is, hard to put your finger on it and it is subtle, but it makes or breaks the experience. My host, Jane Bennett, challenged me to try and verbalize the differences in atmosphere and staff. Subtle but noticeable variances made an impact as to how many guests were on site (we could see a direct correlation). Excellence in décor and the right mix of heritage but not too shabby, quality in staff demeanor and how they interacted, presence of an owner or other family member, beauty of landscaping; were all part of the equation.

LUCIA JOHNSTON,
ONWARD RANCH





PARTICIPATING REGIONAL FARMERS' PRODUCTION
PARTICIPATING REGIONAL FARMERS' PRODUCTION

WILL HARRIS, WHITE OAK PASTURES WITH ONWARD RANCH FAMILY

Rural Revival

“This land and these animals are our heritage and our legacy. There’s 1,000,000 beating hearts on this farm plus 120 of us employees keeping it going.”

So, starts the now famous video from White Oak Pastures. Travel with us down to the deep south USA, let’s go to Bluffton Georgia, close to the Alabama border. Will Harris and his two daughters, work together on a farm that has challenged the status quo in the USA. They have taken depleted tobacco and cotton fields and put animals back on the landscape. The focus is on grazing and moving animals across the land, chicken hooped houses, pigs in a wagon wheel design, and cattle in grazing groups. The soil is improving in measurable quantities. Will has appeared on Joe Rogan, and Fox News and has done numerous interviews. Jump in the jeep with our family and Will Harris, as we take a tour of those 100,000 beating hearts. We met the team of people that run the red meat slaughter plant, the chicken slaughter plant, and the herdsmen that take care of all the animals. There is a boss or manager for each species and

we spent time with them all. There are employees running the store, making meals, working in the office, and packing up boxes in the distribution center. There is staff making pet food, working in the tallow kitchen, and making leather products.

He shared how a once dying community turned around once he started his direct-to-consumer business. He used to have employees to count on one hand. Now with many diverse employees, the small town has a buzz and an excitement. People have moved back into the houses; the store and accommodations attract both local and far away customers. Local schools, sports teams and other businesses all benefit from the Direct-to-Consumer business in the town, the environment and giving back to a wider community.

“The rural revival of Bluffton has been one of the most rewarding things about our transition from a commodity farm to a regenerative one.”

WILL HARRIS, WHITE OAK PASTURES

Family Revival

A direct marketing business leaves room for more family members when succession planning. Everywhere I have travelled, there is sadness and confusion surrounding succession planning. Often one child is slated to inherit an agriculture business and there is no room for other children. Will Harris also shared about how enriching it is, to have two of his daughters on the farm working side by side with him. Jodi Harris Benoit heads up hospitality (Director of Farm Experience), taking care of the store, the accommodations, and special events. Jennie Harris is part of shipping and is Director of Marketing. She handles social media, the office staff and the shipping staff. Both of their spouses also manage a department on the farm. He said in the past, never mind having more daughters involved on the farm—there wasn't room for sons to come home either due to finances. Direct to consumer business make more room for more family members to be involved and making a living on a farm that they love. Traditionally an oldest son might take over the farm and daughters are pushed aside causing hard feelings. Direct to consumer businesses make room for more family to stay on the farm. Will says that there used to be a big line every morning waiting to talk to him on the farm (trouble shooting etc), this is not sustainable. Having other family members or hired managers is necessary once things grow and expand with a direct marketing business structure.

I also saw the generational layers on Whittington Lodge Farm working together at Cotswold beef. The Boyd family was involved together in several enterprises. The mother Cathy and daughter Steph were at the horse races with their textile design work, while the dad Ian, toured me around his pastures and beautiful Hereford cattle. My two girls hopped in the back of the land rover with the dogs, and we were off! We looked at organic grain fields for a German beer company that were on rotation with perennial herbal ley mixes. We got down low to the ground so we could identify the different species. He showed me the accommodations on site that were new and rented for the very first time that weekend in the apple orchard. A little farm store and educational shed were just being renovated. This was a farm steeped in tradition but currently in transition! I loved seeing the works in progress. These new enterprises would help another family and generation live and work on the farm. Three generations were now on the farm all at one time, and there was room for everyone!

ONWARD RANCH
FAMILY

FARM TO TABLE, A MODERN TAKE --- INGRID JOHNSTON

Looking Beyond Start Up

FORWARD IDEAS

When you begin a new enterprise, it's hard to look past the first few years. Here are three things to keep in mind.

- **Ecosystem and cross pollination with other businesses is important as it strengthens a wider community.** Both Jane Bennett and Kim Seagram coached me that creating an ecosystem of small business as you grow, is the ethical thing to do. Bring others along on your journey. Cross pollinate with complimentary small business. Create a network and brand your area. Become a destination.
- Think of the **longevity of the business as you age** —handling boxes, staff, ergonomics. All of this can quickly become overwhelming. Think about when to start hiring others to help. A pioneer in the industry Suzy Felton, taught me how, as time goes, you need to think about longevity and being able to scale and pack that many boxes. Things need to be done ergonomically and what is possible at 25 may not be possible at 55.
- Susie Felton also taught me that **different people resonate with different clients.** She said she really tried to sell to a female consumer ---but ended up lining up with the BBQ guys and pit masters. They loved what she sold and how she sold it “as their personal rancher.” She explained to not fight what comes naturally but embrace what makes you different as a human and who you naturally resonate with as clients.

FARM TO TABLE, A MODERN TAKE --- INGRID JOHNSTON

Conclusion

I couldn't help turning a yearly visit from our bankers into an interview—It comes natural to me now. They were supposed to be going over our financials—but I was just so interested in all that they see from their business perspective. I asked them what the biggest trends in agriculture are that they see this year. The answer, “getting closer to the consumer,” said just like that. Yup, that pretty much sums up my research---and yup, it's a massive topic that will evolve and change in the years to come. While there are many ways to achieve this, it's critical to mention that it takes an integrated approach to succeed. It takes working on many small aspects of your business simultaneously. There is no one answer. It takes striving for excellence every step of the way. It also takes just as much care and attention as you put into the act of agriculture (animals, the soil, the crops, the machinery, the water systems), but put into the direct to consumer side of the business (design, webpages, ecommerce, newsletters, advertising, product development, recipes), but maybe more so! It takes warmth, kindness and patience when interacting with customers.

In conclusion, I offer you with the words of a Hawaiian ranching Native man Kimo Hoopai. As we sat and chatted into the warmth of the night, the scent of the jasmine flowered trellis wafting in on the salty ocean breeze ----the answer to questions about a farm to table enterprise “Do what fills your heart, follow your heart's passion ---Life will unfold”. So, my friends, it also takes heart! I listened to his beautiful life story—earlier we had stood at the top of the Kohala mountain, on the ranch that he was born on, where several generations before had worked---and his son now managed, (keeping Paniola heritage alive). Kimo had explained how there was a slaughterhouse on the Big island when he was direct marketing, but no one to grade the carcasses. He taught himself how to do that. Faithfully, he would go into the abattoir on the appropriate day and grade his own beef sides as they hung to dry age. He didn't know how to connect with customers, but he taught himself that too. He was on quest for excellence for his customers. You can learn how to direct market your products and you can succeed! We held hands in a circle with a 360 degree circle view of north Kohala, the ocean. And he prayed over us—I couldn't stop the tears from streaming. Aloha 'Aina (LOVE OF THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE).

“Do what fills your heart, follow your heart's passion.
Life will unfold”

KIMO HOOPAI, KOHALA MOUNTAIN RANCHER



KIMO HOOPAI, HAWAII ISLAND, KOHALA MOUNTAIN

Recommendations

FOR THE FARMER WANTING TO CONNECT
WITH THE CONSUMER

- Authentically share your unique farm story using childhood memories, the senses, history, and overcoming adversity on:
 - webpages both info and e-commerce
 - social media
 - in person
 - publications
- Launch into excellence and steer clear of mediocrity, with an integrated approach to techniques such as “Service Plus One”, “Differentiation”, “Premium Everything.”
- Focus as local as possible first and then work your way out provincially and possibly nationally with direct marketing. Distance adds shipping dollars. Consider using e-commerce whether it be a Farmers’ Market, Farm Store, or Shipping, that you chose to connect to consumers with.
- Approach frozen shipping in bite size manageable pieces, separating the physical requirements from the digital requirements to avoid being overwhelmed. Inject warmth and friendliness and the farmer’s market experience into digital interactions
- Cross-pollinate and bring other businesses along on your journey and work to brand your region and nurture the revival of your rural community and family.

FOR CANADIANS AS A WHOLE

- Shipping systems could use more development in Canada with both speed, price and dependability. Group shipping rates as offered in the USA by Pirate Ship should be explored.
- Canadians need to be proud about their agriculture products and shout about them much like the Italians and other European countries and celebrate and support the farms in Canada that already offer farm to table.

Glossary

Cow-calf operation

-a method of rearing beef cattle in which a permanent herd of cows is kept by a farmer or rancher to produce calves for later sale.

E-commerce

-(electronic commerce) is the exchange of goods and services and the transmission of funds and data over the internet. E-commerce relies on technology and digital platforms, including websites, mobile apps and social media to make buying and selling possible.

Grass-fed beef

-Grass-fed cattle are also called grass finished. These cattle eat grass and dried hay, including alfalfa and clover for their entire lives. Since grazing can be challenging in some climates, grass-fed cattle may be given dried hay for feed.

Commodity Market

-is a market that trades in the primary economic sector rather than manufactured products, such as cocoa, fruit and sugar. Trades in the primary economic sector rather than manufactured or value-added products.

Direct Marketing

-Farm direct marketing allows the producer to assume the accountability and rewards of delivering quality agri-food products directly to the consumer through a variety of marketing channels such as farmers' markets and farm gate sales.

Regenerative Farm

-is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems. It focuses on topsoil regeneration, increasing biodiversity,[1] improving the water cycle,[2] enhancing ecosystem services, supporting biosequestration,[3] increasing resilience to climate change, and strengthening the health and vitality of farm soil.

Backgrounder

- is a beef production system that involves maximal use of pasture and forages from the time calves are weaned until they are placed in a feedlot.

Finishing feedlot

-The finishing phase includes the 100 days after backgrounding. It focuses on feeding high-grain-low-forage rations to backgrounded calves or yearlings until they reach a prescribed finish (fat cover) before marketing for slaughter.

Glossary Continued

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a technique used to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for your business or even a specific project.

Abattoir

-is a slaughterhouse, or a place where animals are killed.

Mobile slaughterhouse

-self-contained slaughterhouses—in a mobile or modular format—that can be transported to your farm or ranch. Built in trailers that can be easily transported to farms.

USDA

USDA is an executive department of the United States federal government that aims to meet the needs of commercial farming and livestock food production

Farm to Table

At its heart, farm-to-table means that the food on the table came directly from a specific farm, without going through a store, market, or distributor along the way.

Click and Collect

- commonly referred to as “curbside pickup” or “buy online pick up in store”— refers to any shopping trip where products are purchased online and picked up by the consumer at a designated location, either in store or curbside outside the store.

Pick and Pack

- is the process of selecting and packaging products in a warehouse. This includes 'picking' the right type and number of products from inventory and 'packing' them for shipment.

Digital Shelf

-is the online environment a product appears in. It's the online counterpart to a shelf in a physical store.

Canoe Plants

-are the 24 original plants the Polynesian voyagers brought to Hawaii.

‘Aina

The land

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Farm to Table

Appendix with Frozen Shipping Insert

A MODERN TAKE

Tool Kit

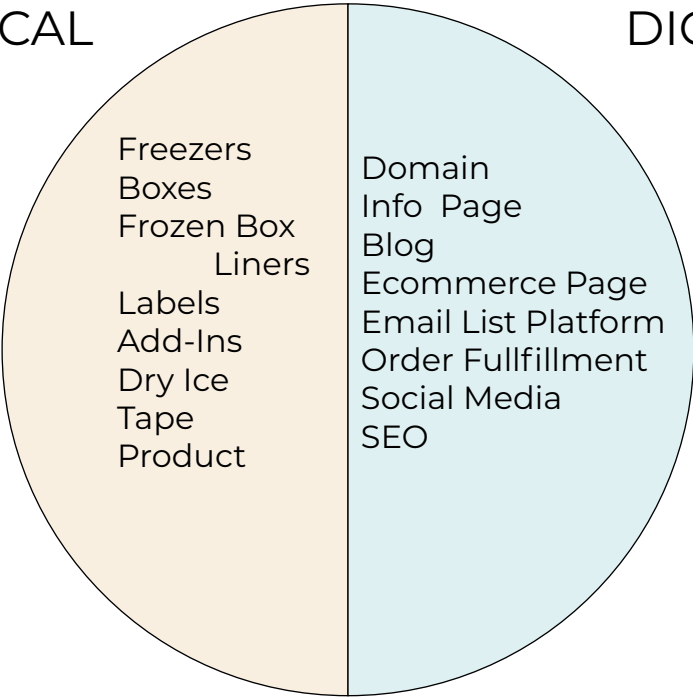
DIGITAL

Getting Organized for Shipping Frozen

Divide up what is tangible and physical from that which is digital when planning for launching into a frozen shipping enterprise. This helps organize your planning and thought process.

PHYSICAL

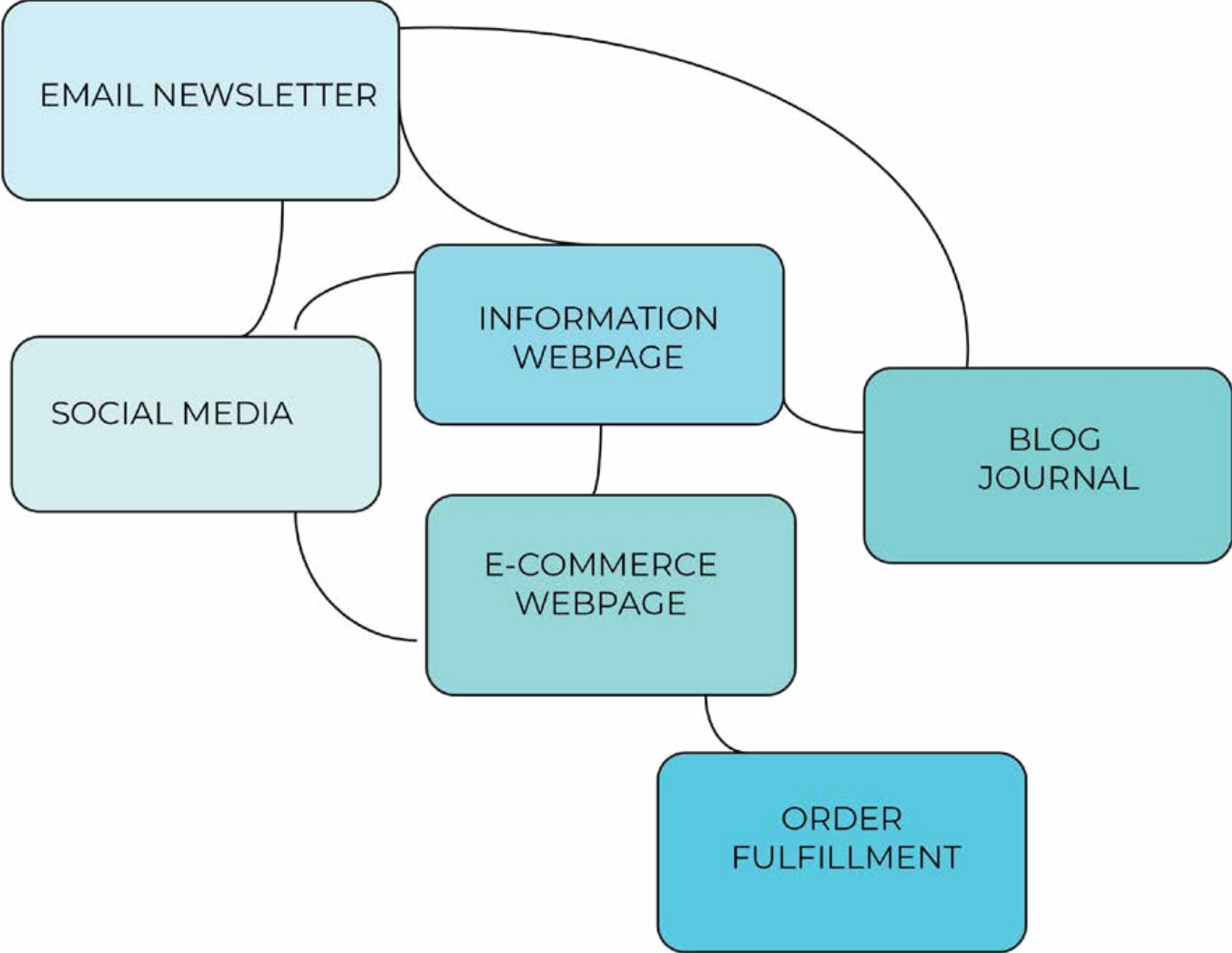
DIGITAL



Tool Kit

DIGITAL

Digital Platform Integration



Tool Kit

DIGITAL

Ecommerce and Information Webpages

Come to Learn.....

INFORMATION WEBSITE

- About your product
- About the farm
- About the people
- About the animals, crops, garden
- How the consumer gets product
- Engaging Story
- Frequently asked questions

**PRO TIP—Beautiful Imagery is crucial! Invest in the best photos you possibly can. Have everyday farm photos, have some formal, food, preparing food, family eating, animals, wildlife, history, Can tell stories that would take hundreds of words with one image.*

Come to Buy....

ECOMMERCE WEBSITE

- Facilitates transaction between buyer and seller
- Online Store
- Digital Storefront
- Subscriptions
- Inventory
- Items A la Carte
- Curated boxes
- Paying for purchase: Major credit cards, Paypal
- Can set how often you are paid to your account out biweekly, weekly, monthly

SEO & Social Media

SEO

- Search Engine Optimization
- Strategy to make sure when your product is searched, your website can be found
- Improves quality and quantity of web site traffic
- There are many things that help SEO
 - links to your webpage from other quality webpages
 - Keyword Research
 - Speed up webpage loading
 - Keeping webpage always changing slightly through blogging updates, customer reviews etc. Stagnancy is detrimental
 - Show experience, authority, expertise and trustworthiness about your topic

PRO TIP

Hiring someone to help with SEO could be worth it as most people stay on the first or second page of a google search

Social Media

- Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Youtube, TikTok
- Pick one or two to focus on
- Connect social platforms to your information and ecommerce webpages and also your e-mail platform.
 - Social media can be a powerful engaging tool
 - There is a lot to learn and things are changing all the time
 - The public is genuinely interested in agriculture and this is a way to share your story in an engaging way
 - Add value and try to teach or show what people are interested in
 - This is one way to connect with people but can't be totally relied upon as it is a platform you don't own and can be deleted or removed, whereas a webpage gives you more control
 - Social media can take a lot of experimenting and if you aren't easily connecting, change things and try again.

Domain & Newsletter Platform

DOMAIN

- This is the text that is typed in a browser to reach a particular webpage
- Think of it like a home address but for an online version or web address
- Consider buying other domains such as .com and .ca so no one else uses
- Never search the domain before you apply –just go for it! By searching for it, you alert bots that this might be a domain name that should be snatched up—and then sold back to you at a higher price

PRO TIP

Use a different Domain provider than ecommerce webpage provider. A one-stop-shop experience sounds easy, but if you change ecommerce or information sites, it's hard to untangle the domain name and can result in page outages and down time and sometimes even a new domain name.

NEWSLETTER PLATFORM

- Collects emails but has many other functions
- Connected to information site, ecommerce site, social media
- Can sort into groups such as hyper local vs provincial vs national and international. Can sort many other ways too
- Can be free up to a certain amount of subscribers, then you pay for the service
- An email list is like cash in the bank and is one of the most effective ways to reach customers that want to hear from you
- Sequences, funnels, test batches, segmentation and tracking interests, clicks and behaviors are all part of what is possible with advanced email practices

EXAMPLES

MailerLite
MailChimp
Flodesk

Tool Kit

DIGITAL

Couriers & Order Fulfillment

COURIERS

*Canada Post doesn't allow dry ice in boxes so this is not an option
Other options for couriers in Canada might include:

- Purolator
- Fed Ex
- Ace Courier
- DHL
- UPS
- Canpar
- Clark's Shipping

Smaller localized couriers unique to each province can be useful

*Local orders can be offered as free delivery within a certain radius of farm.

PROVINCIAL BORDERS

Provincially inspected meats are not able to be shipped out of province

Federally inspected meats can be shipped nationwide but there are very few abattoirs available that meet the criteria

ORDER FULFILLMENT

- Involves physical and digital side of pick & pack boxes
- Also encompasses courier
- Inventory changes tracked
- Address population of shipping label
- Courier choice made
- Organizing flow of shipping line
- Ergonomics

There are two shipping software platforms that consolidates multiple shipping carriers and offers group discounts:

- Pirate Ship (only available in USA...offers deep discounts in shipping rates)
- Ship Station (available in USA and Canada)

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Packaging for Frozen Meat

BROWN PAPER WRAP

- A nostalgic look for some consumers who prefer it as a symbol of bygone days.
- Not completely air tight
- Easier to freezer burn
- When Shipping has a glitch, products starting to thaw, can leak meat juices into the box
- Brown paper can survive bumps or dings easier than vacuum sealed

Vs

VACCU PACKED

- Meat is completely sealed and will last longer frozen and stand up better to freezer burn
- Doesn't have the nostalgic brown paper look but brown paper still contains plastic in the inner coating
- More expensive option with most butchers
- There are several thicknesses of plastic-choose thicker

PRO TIP

Choose Vacuum packed meat as it is the preferred choice for shipping. Then use old fashioned brown paper (not plastic lined) that is custom branded with your farm, to wrap premium steaks on top of vacuum packing. This is the best of all worlds as it adds nostalgia while also helping with any dings that might occur during shipping.

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Labels

FROZEN LABELS

The butcher generally applies a small label to every package of meat. This is not meant for beauty and usually includes weight, date, abattoir number etc. Another branded label is needed for marketing. This needs to be a freezer label that can stand up to the rigours of freezing temperatures, condensation, bumps along the way, while still looking great. There are matte, gloss and pearl options. Compatibility with vacuum packaging is important. Always try a test label and apply before committing to thousands of labels!

NON FROZEN LABELS

Labels on the outside of box do not need to be freezer labels and will be cheaper if sourced otherwise and include branding labels for your farm, perishable stickers, etc.

PRO TIP

Design Labels of different sizes for different products. For example a tenderloin steak needs a small label whereas a roast or pound of ground looks better with a large label. Wrapping labels around the side of a product never look decent. Centered labels look the best. Alternatively, a suite of labels with complementary branding, and in different shapes for certain products would bring it to another level.



Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

DRY ICE

SOURCES

- Dry ice manufacturer in big centers
 - Dry ice distributors in smaller centers
 - Welding shop in most towns
 - Make small amount dry ice- attachment to CO2 tank and block forms
 - Balance of buying exact amount on shipping day vs ordering bulk amount
 - More per pound vs less per pound but some not used
- *Cost 80 cents to \$3.00 per pound

SAFETY

- Don't touch dry ice with skin, will burn.
- Have designated gloves
- Always have ventilation in a vehicle if driving with boxes that contain dry ice (cooler is fine but CO2 can dissipate through cardboard box)
- Never ingest dry ice

STORAGE

- Some coolers will self-destruct when in contact with dry ice so use older cooler picking up or storing dry ice
- There are special containers built for holding dry ice
- Some coolers are rated for dry ice such as Yeti Tundra or Roadie
- Never put dry ice in any freezer or fridge.
- It will destroy as it is many times colder than what can be handled
- Dry Ice gives off three times the freezing power of regular ice.

PACKING DRY ICE

- Min 5 pounds needed per box but more for more pounds meat over 10 pounds or summer temperatures.
- You can choose to put dry ice in a paper bag and label, but dry ice is almost always dissipated by the time a package arrives at a doorstep, so most people don't bother
- It's been said that having the bag with the label on it, is showing your customer that it was once there.
- Pack box no empty air pockets, keeps dry ice from dissipating faster.
- Forms:
 - Block
 - pellets
- Can use:
 - In bag
 - Loose

PRO TIP

use a combination of pellets and blocks. Blocks for longevity and pellets to get between the cracks.

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Freezers

Residential Chest Freezer

- -18c or less so warmer then a commercial option
- Akward to reach in and organize
- Only hold a small amount
- Can be an easy and inexpensive way to launch a business right away
- Easy to find used residential chest freezers

Walk-In Freezer

- Prolongs food freshness, often set below -22c
- Industrial
- Expensive
- Store large amounts
- Easier to store pallets and big boxes
- Can use shelves to have product at eye height
- Can stockpile product - have larger butcher amounts at one time.
- Can butcher with seasons and optimize certain times of year
- Can have a custom built-in size
- Commercial Freezers need professional tradesmen to troubleshoot

PRO TIP

With extra storage can offer more choices or bring in other complimentary farm products at wholesale from other farms such as: other meats, baking seafood, dairy (butter or icecream).

Reach-In Commercial Freezer

- Easier for people to work when packing boxes as mostly at room temp - just reaching in freezer to get items.
- "Pick and Pack" days are easier
- Can double as "shop the freezer" onsite farm store frozen storage for customers
- Con is it's a smaller size and will need several units
- Expensive
- If only using reach in Freezer, more abattoir dates to keep freezers full so take distance to abbatoir and slaughter date availability into account.

PRO TIP

Use both walk-in Freezer and Stand up professional reach in Freezer to cover both needs. Alternatively, Have one wall of a walk-in freezer with glass doors that can be reached in or have customers reach in. Think of ergonomics with your design.

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Freezers Continued

Shipping Container Freezer

- Portable and moveable as needs change
- Possibly build cement pad for it or a gravel spot
- Separate building so more steps to pack boxes
- Can situate under an overhang or hayshed for coverage from elements
- Possible to rent and bring onsite or possible to buy

PRO TIP

Mobile slaughterhouses often use a shipping container as freezer space

Off Farm Frozen Storage

- Some towns have frozen storage to rent
- Pros:
 - good way to launch without investment
 - helps handle seasonal influx of product
 - instantly up and running
- Cons:
 - involves travel time from farm
 - there might not be a space to pack orders
 - not available in all centers or near rural areas

PRO TIP

Consider sharing space when just starting out

Freezer Trailer

Can use to transport from meat from abbatoir to ranch
Is mandatory when using a federally inspected abbatoir in Canada but not manadatory for most provincially inspected abbatoirs

PRO TIP

A freezer trailer can also be used for overflow freezing during busy times of slaughter for a short time

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Selling Methods

SELLING A LA CARTE

- A customer picks one item at a time and puts in the cart
- Other way to say this is Build a Box
- Be careful to have a minimum weight or price if you are doing this
- Has the potential to earn the most dollars for your business
- Can be the trickiest to sell inventory evenly

A customer might buy every single cut of premium steak in one swoop so sometimes you need to set limits or release so much inventory weekly. Pork producers sometimes do this with bacon and beef producers with tenderloins

SUBSCRIPTION

- Can be every two weeks
 - once a month
 - once every two months
 - once every three months
 - Advised that customer can cancel or skip boxes any time so they don't feel pressured
 - can be a set box each time
 - Can be ranchers choice each time with flexibility just like a vegetable CSA
 - Subscriptions can go out spread through the month--or all on one day
- As more subscriptions started, its can be easier to spread them out

COUPONS

- You can use coupon codes for special events and pricing, shipping
- Be careful that they have an end date
- Also be careful that there isn't a way to combine curated box specials and coupons unless that was your intention.

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Selling Methods Continued

CURATED BOXES

- Can be themed-- like items with each other
- Can have deluxe boxes or more affordable boxes
- Can have sample packs
- Stock up with ground beef packs
- Can include other special items like spice rubs or merchandise
- Help sell your product evenly so you aren't left with one cut
- Taco Tuesday with seasoning, steak boxes, back to school boxes
- Christmas boxes

PRO TIP

Have some curated boxes always available and also put up seasonal boxes to keep things fresh

WHOLE-HALVES-QUARTERS-EIGHTHS

- This is a traditional way of selling meat
- Some urban clients would never have room for this in their freezer or understand this way of selling (only have above fridge space)
- You usually can't ship this higher amount to doorsteps except possibly an eighth of a beef
- Picking up at a depot or hand delivering or picking up on farm would be recommended
- People expect deal when ordering bulk so often clients shop around
- This can be a way to move more product but doesn't maximize dollars for a small producer

SELLING TWO WAYS

Actual amount from one animal, down payment and then amount of meat and cost is adjusted after animal is butchered
Some customers might want to talk directly with butcher and have their own cutting and wrapping instructions. Some butchers won't do this

Set amount that never waivers or changes
customer knows exactly what they are getting
pay for it and it is shipped right away might be from a couple animals but is very consistent each time with amount of meat

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Boxes - Frozen Liners - Tape

BOXES

- Need to be sized to accommodate frozen liners perfectly
- May have several sized combinations for different order sizes such as 10 - 40 pound orders
- Empty sections of box encourage dry ice dissipation. Size box accordingly or fill spaces with scrunched up paper
- Better sized as square as there is less surface area and frozen product stays cold longer (Some farms prefer to go for looks over frozen optimization and do rectangle box options)
- don't need to be expensive
- Can be printed with custom branding

FROZEN BOX LINERS

- Very important part of packaging as they keep things frozen
- Rated for different days or hours
- Consider the environment
 - Styrofoam - plant based -wool -paper -plastic -fabric
- Sometimes environmental options perform less but many clients prefer to think of green solutions --many farmers do too.
- Some clients prefer curbside recycling packaging

PRO TIP

- Consider two different packaging options
 - summer—plus 42 degrees Celsius outside
 - Winter —minus 35 degrees Celsius
 - Everything in between
- Different packaging needs for different seasons.
- Different days on route also needs a different frozen liner rating.

STORAGE

- Consider storage space for boxes and—especially liners
- They take lots of room—some shipped by the pallet
- No access to moisture and rodents
- Barns and haysheds can be inappropriate to store in
- Garage, warehouse, designated shipping space are better options

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Boxes - Frozen Liners - Tape Continued

TAPE

- A box sent without being taped properly does not perform
- Tape box closed with packing tape and then tape all seams to stop airflow into the box helps dry ice last longer
- Lots of tape is needed on hand and you must not run out on big shipping days

SHIPPING BOX LINERS

Liners that compress can be cheaper to ship—when package opens they spring up to many sizes bigger than the original shipping—sort of big bales. When choosing liners, weigh out shipping costs vs cost of liner

Tool Kit

PHYSICAL

Other Small Touches to Include in Shipping Box

OTHER INCLUSIONS IN THE BOX

- Postcard thank-you
- Handwritten note
- Edible magazine if you advertise in one regularly
- Recipe Card
- Business Card
- Drawing by child
- Surprise gift related to product (more of what you produce)
- Surprise gift unrelated to product (another local product)
- Coupon
- Gift certificate