

in to join their future farm who have skills that complement their own? Do they even want to farm, or is it too stressful? These are questions that can only be answered with sufficient experience--borne through practice.

There's so much more I could say on this topic, and perhaps I will some day, but for today, just know that one **can** make a decent living farming, and on balance-- it is a wonderful life. So **encourage** your children to become farmers, so we can heal this world, heal our relationships with each other and with food. Just make sure they know that they are not out for a walk in the park, but rather embarking on an exciting expedition! One they must prepare for, one that will require extensive personal growth and the acquisition of new skills and equipment.

—Farmer Dave

******From Fresh Food Nation Cookbook******

Best-Ever Roasted Tomato Sauce - Makes about 3 cups

The sauce makes a great base for tomato soup, too. Just thin it out with some vegetable or chicken broth and add a touch of cream.

Ingredients

- 4 pounds ripe tomatoes, cored and cut in half
- 1/2 sweet onion (such as Walla Walla or Vidalia), chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar; more as needed
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt; more as needed
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh herbs (basil, oregano, rosemary, or a combination)
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Directions

1. Heat the oven to 375°F. Arrange the tomatoes cut side down in a large glass baking dish in a single layer (you may need to use two). Scatter the onions, garlic, sugar, salt, and herbs on top of the tomatoes and drizzle with the olive oil.
2. Roast until the tomatoes shrivel and collapse and their juices start pooling in the bottom of the baking dish, about 2 hours, though the time can vary greatly depending on the size and consistency of the tomatoes.
3. Let the roasted tomatoes cool slightly, and then scrape everything into a blender or food processor and process until smooth. If you want to remove the skins and seeds (which is unnecessary, though it makes for a prettier, smoother sauce), run the sauce through a food mill. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more salt or sugar.



Sisters Hill Farm

127 Sisters Hill Road, PO Box 22, Stanfordville, NY

August 16, 2014
August 19, 2014

<http://sistershillfarm.org>
845-868-7048

Edited by: Bob & Joan Cohen
cohenrd98@comcast.net
845-724-3518

Potluck Picnic August 30th, 5PM! Bob and the Boys will be playing again! Join the fun!

Let Your Children Grow Up To Be Farmers

There was an article in the New York Times this week that caused quite a stir in the farming world. It was entitled "Don't let your children grow up to be farmers" and it was written by Bren Smith a shellfish and sea weed farmer on Long Island Sound. In case you missed it, the gist of the article was that farmers are getting the short end of the stick with the local food movement and none of them are making any money. Bren blames everyone from non-profit farms, to wealthy landowners, to chefs, to policy makers for her languishing business. She advocates farmers banding together to create start their own organizations to rally the government for among other things; student loan forgiveness for young farmers, subsidies for smaller farms, and grants.

I was flummoxed when I read the article, because it just doesn't hold true to my understanding and appreciation of what is at play here. Sisters Hill Farm, while being a non-profit, is financially viable and many of the farmers I have trained are very successful financially. Are any of them rich? No. But they are making decent livings, they are living vibrant and full lives, they are starting families, and they are generally thriving. So, why is this in such sharp contrast to Bren and her peer's experience? Without knowing the author, I'll have to make my best guess.

I'd say the heart of the problem is farmer education, or lack thereof. Many young people start farms today without a business plan, without sufficient knowledge of how to grow crops on a commercial scale, and without enough expertise or practice managing themselves and others. Finally and just as importantly, many have no real regard for the importance of developing systems.

Several years back I presented a workshop at the Northeast Organic Farming Association Conference on CSA growing. Before beginning my presentation I surveyed the audience about their farming experience. The majority of the attendees had exceptionally small CSA's with most in the range of 12 to 20 members. While it is true that every journey begins with one small step, many of those in the audience had taken that first small step with no real knowledge or plan for their journey. It's like beginning a through hike of the Appalachian Trail without a backpack or even sturdy shoes... The first few hours might be pleasant but you'll never make it down to Georgia. That's what it's like starting a farm and treating it like a garden.

I'll give you an example from this week on the farm. On Thursday we had to pick a bed of beans for this Saturday's harvest. We grow our beans in 200' beds, 2 rows to the bed 30" apart. When we are picking we kneel between the two rows harvesting into a 5 gallon bucket placed immediately in front of us. Our basic technique goes like this; we maneuver the plants so we can quickly access as many beans as possible with our non dominant hand while we grasp beans in our dominant hand with our thumb, index and middle finger. As beans are ripped off the plant we palm them holding them in our dominant hand folded beneath our remaining two fingers. When the hand is full, we drop them in the bucket. We had a lot of beans to pick that day, and I noticed that the crew was doing quite well at developing their speed so we decided to keep track of how fast we could pick. Over the next hour the 4 of us picked 100 pounds of beans averaging 25pounds/labor hour. Organic beans retail for \$3 to \$5/pound, so we are able to create a theoretical value of \$75 to \$125/hour picking beans! On our farm growing beans requires almost no work at all before harvest; maybe a half hour for the whole 200 foot bed since we can cultivate them mechanically with the Cub tractor and therefore eliminate hand weeding.

Now let's contrast that with an excerpt for a farming memoir written by a novice (I would venture a typical) farmer who just simply jumped into farming without the proper knowledge and without a business plan. The book is called "The Wisdom of the Radish" by Lynda Hopkins and she too laments her struggle to make a modest living. "An hour later, sticky with sweat, I stepped back to see what we'd accomplished. Between the two of us, we had managed to (mostly) harvest (a bit less than) one half of one row... We had harvested probably a thousand beans—which added up to a mere bin..." Next she compares the weights of tomatoes and

beans—"In contrast, a person must pick close to one hundred beans to add up to one pound. Instead of thirty seconds of work, it's more like ten minutes." Now granted, she's estimating here and she may be off by quite a bit, but if her hundred beans equal 1 pound and she and her partner picked a thousand, that's 10 pounds of beans between the two of them in one hour. Their grand total is 5 pounds/labor hour. She sells these beans at market for \$4/pound. So, assuming she sells them all (which she doesn't) she'd be earning \$10/hour for her picking labor. That doesn't even account for all the time she spent planting and weeding which I can assure you were not efficient or timely.

As you can see from my example, the simplest of systems can help a farm become dramatically more productive regardless of scale. Each year I do a workshop for apprentices who are part of the CRAFT program (a collaborative group of farmers who all want to give their apprentices a broad exposure to other farms). Here's a brief excerpt from my tour description. "If you want to make a living farming, systems are what it is all about. Very few of us become farmers because we are psyched about developing systems. But if we don't address this issue we quickly become overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the workload and daily decisions. If you don't take the time to develop good systems, all farm work goes slower, you make less money, work more hours, or both."

Another common reason many farms don't make a profit is because small scale farming demands such a well rounded skill set. A new farmer must wear many hats, and wear them with style and panache'. A farmer has to be a CEO, a CFO, a human resource director, a salesman, a foreman, a general contractor, a mechanic, a welder, an author-- the list goes on and on. Many very intelligent people enter this line of work having excelled at everything they have tried before, only to be humbled by the challenges of the farming life.

So what's the answer? Practice. Our apprenticeship here at Sisters Hill Farm gives new, wanna-be-farmers a real sense of what it is to run a farm. Many apprenticeships do not. We train apprentices to drive all the tractors. Many do not. We train them to manage others, culminating in periods of practice where they are "in charge" of the farm for a week at a time. Most do not. During this time they can see if they have what it takes to juggle an extensive "to do list", managing a variety of tasks, people and priorities. Are there areas they need to work on? Will they need to bring other people