

Workshop Title: Holistic Business/Life: Our Journey with Strategic Farm Planning

Speaker(s) & their title(s): Tim and Kirsten Livingstone, Strawberry Hill Farm

Executive Summary

Tim and Kirsten take us on a very personal journey through their struggle to balance their farm, business, marriage, family and personal lives. They share how holistic management has helped them figure out their priorities and how to make time for to get off the farm and spend quality with their family.

Detailed Notes

- Their farm was neglected and run down when they bought it.
- They planned was to spend three years transitioning to taking over Jolly Farmer CSA but plans changed and they had to take over much more quickly.
- 2014 was a very difficult year for them
- They had lots of issues with employees including problems with drugs.

Need to Refocus

- They were working seven days a week with no down time.
- They were finding it way too stressful dealing with all aspects of farm.
- Something needed to change.
- The farm became so stressful that it divided them and they needed to make a change and compromise.
- They were stuck trying to decide whether to make the farm bigger or smaller.

Where to do for help?

- They sought help from a friend/business owner in Ontario who is a successful business advisor.

Personal Goal

- The goosebump meter: start asking yourself what do you really really really love? What has real meaning to you? If you assess this it helps you decide where you want to go.
- How can you make changes to enjoy what you're doing?
- It is important to be able to enjoy life.
- If the Goosebump Meter is a 1 to 10 scale, we want to live in the 6 to 8 range.
- Tim and Kirsten started by just thinking about what they wanted to get out of life.
- Everyone has their own personal goals.
- It is important look at what you really want and really need to be satisfied rather than what you just need to do for the farm.
- When you are always on the farm your home is your headquarters and there are always employees coming and going.
- For Tim and Kirsten it was very important for them to have time away from the farm so they built a camp on an island in Bay of Fundy as a retreat.
- It is important to figure out how can your farm or business support your personal goals? For example having trust worthy employees to be able to leave in charge of the farm.
- An important goal from Tim and Kirsten is to find a way to have reliable employees all year round.
- Having a plan will help focus your goals.
- Book Recommendation: Richard Wiswall - The Organic Farmer's Business Handbook
- They refer to their business plan to make sure that their business goals are on track.
- One change they made to their business plan was to move their warehouse building to the first year from second year with a loan that they got from the bank. They were able to get this loan because they had a business plan that they could show the bank.

How did it work out?

- It is important too figure out what can be delegated and what can't. What jobs can an employee do? What jobs are teachable to someone? What jobs do we have to do?

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- They mapped out all the jobs involved on the map - sales, HR, bookkeeping etc etc to see it all in one place.
- Then they asked: Which jobs can we hire out to someone who already has those skills ie customer service?
- Quality control is very important, they always have to be on the CSA packing line because an employee is not capable of maintaining the quality they need.
- Creating their business plan and mapping everything out helped to define personal, business and financial goals.

Discussion Period

- Someone shared a personal story of taking a year sabbatical from growing and the market and they were able to come back to the market and have all their customers return. This allowed them to re-evaluate where their farm was going and what they were doing
- It is mentioned that there are different models of the work week for example: 4 hours of work, 4 hours of personal pursuits.
- Employee situation: they have struggled to find the right employee to entrust to a year round position - someone mentioned the importance of cooking and eating with employees.
- Someone asked about couples farming together vs one person farming and one person working off farm: the reality is that most farms have one outside income but this should not be required. There is something wrong with farming if it requires outside living to make the farm work. Growing food is so important and we should be able to make it work and have a good lifestyle. We should not have to make all these sacrifices just because we are farmers.
- Tim and Kirsten's son: When you think about, farming is really hard work and you do put in long hours but think of all these people that we are feeding, it is so worth it.
- Working off the farm also enables you to interact with people who are not your partner.
- DISC personality profile is another tool they used and it analyses: what type of person you are, how you think something through etc