

## **Farm Management**

Thursday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012  
Richmond Room, (9:00am – 5:30pm)

## **Workshop: More with Less**

### **Speaker: JEAN-MARTIN FORTIER**

Jean-Martin has more than 10 years of experience as an organic vegetable grower. He is the founder and co-owner of Les Jardins de la Grelinette, a well-known farm in Québec for its intensive methods of production. Jean-Martin has recently published a book (in french) where he details how he and his wife manage more than 1 acres and half, while using no tractor. His book, *le jardinier-maraîcher*, explains the methods, tools, and horticultural techniques, which can turn a market garden into a viable small farm. More information on Jean-Martin Fortier and his book can be found at this website: [www.lejardiniermaraicher.com](http://www.lejardiniermaraicher.com).

### **Executive Summary**

From finding a consumer base and setting up a crop plan and planting schedule to packaging produce and communicating with shareholders, there is much to consider! Join Island farmer Jen Campbell, as she explains the challenges, triumphs and 'how-tos' of maintaining an ever-growing small-scale CSA model at Jen and Derek's Farm, and seek inspiration in the development of your own!

### **Detailed Notes**

S-1 Jean Martin's farm is La Grelinette in Southern Quebec. Here, he and his partner Maude-Helene Desroches are farming exclusively with hand tools. They do not use any tractors.

S-2 What is important about this farm is its focus on scale and capital, cost of production and accepting good advice. This is how they are able to be profitable without being too big.

S – 3 Jean Martin graduated from McGill University's school of environmental studies. From here he went to work on a small farm in North Mexico. Working on this farm, with the farmer Richard Belanger, Jean Martin thought that farming could really change the world. To him, it represented hands-on ecology. This is where he decided he wanted to have his own farm when he returned to Quebec.

S – 4 Upon return to Quebec, they rented some land and began a small garden. Everything was done by hand, even seeding at this point. They took their veggies to a small market in Montreal. This was a great learning experience.

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S – 5 The next step was a trip to Cuba to see the urban, peri-urban farms there. In Cuba the farmers were growing in cemented raised beds, with no tractors, and yielding a very good harvest. They found this very inspiring, and it helped them to flesh out their vision of the farm they wanted to have in Quebec.

S – 6 They wanted to farm close to Montreal, for access to the market. But land within one hour's drive of Montreal was quite expensive. They were lucky to have found a good deal on an old 10 acre rabbit farm. The farm was in an protected zone, so no development was allowed, which made the price lower.

S-7 To get the startup capital they needed for the farm they applied for a grant from the Quebec government. Because of they were only planning on putting 1.5 acres into production they had to do a lot of work to prove, with numbers, that their operation could be profitable. Eventually, they were successful and received a \$30,000 grant. This set a precedent for other farmers in Quebec looking for startup capital on smaller plots.

S – 8 Their farm is laid out in 170 permanent raised beds, 100 feet long and 30 inch wide. They chose the width of the beds based on the width of their roto-tiller. This idea came from Elliot Coleman's books.

S- 9 During their first year on the farm they raised two hoop houses and a greenhouse. The hoop houses cost \$500 each.

S – 10/11 They also opened a new farmers market, and found that there was great appreciation for fresh, organic produce that really tastes good.

S -12 This is a picture of their farm.

S – 13 The secret to their farm is *intensive* growing, not extensive. This way they manage every single field and row very closely. Nothing is ever out of control, they know what is happening in every plot at all times. This allows them to work as smoothly and efficiently as possible, because there are no surprises.

S -15 The method used is a variation of the French bio-intensive method. In this method they space the vegetables in close enough together that the leaves touch and form a canopy which helps to suppress weeds, maintain soil humidity and reduce wind stress on the plants.

The in-row spacing is defined by the size of the hand-tools used for weeding. The idea is to get the plants as close as you can together, while still being able to pass the hoe before the canopy develops and without compromising the quality of the vegetables.

Another important part of this method is that you do not turn the soil, or turn the soil as little as possible, therefore allowing the micro-organisms to develop which helps the plants to develop great roots systems.

S – 18 – This shows how the hoe fits between the young plants. The hoe only needs to be passed 1 – 2 times before the leaves are big enough to form the weed suppressing canopy.

S – 19 Some other advantages to the close spacing are:

- higher yield per square foot, which increases revenue
- more efficient use of row covers, there they can buy less of them and save money

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The row covers used at La Grelinette are more accurately described as bug nets. They have no thermal capacity. Rather they are a very fine mesh that protects sensitive crops from pests, which they group together to cover more rows with less nets. They do not have to be removed during the season. The nets are purchased from Dubois Agri-innovation, and if treated well can last 4-5 seasons

S – 22 To maintain a good soil structure you must add organic matter. They add 60 tonnes of compost, directly to the raised beds. By adding it directly, none of the compost is wasted in the paths between rows. To have the best quality compost, they buy it off-farm.

S – 23 Over the years they have developed their own intensive spacing charts, which can be found in Jean Martin's book "*Le jardinier-maraicher*".

S – 24 Scale & Capital. They use hand-tools and a roto-tiller because they are efficient and cost effective. Most of their tools come from Johnny's Seeds or Elliot Coleman.

S-25 Based on this system, a person could start a farm for \$36,000. This is much lower than if tractors and heavy equipment were to be included. This is also great, because most people looking to start-up a farm have very little money to begin with.

S-26 For direct seeding they use the earthway seeder and the glazer. The two make a good combination.

S-27 Weeding is taken care of with 1-2 passes of the hoe, no more is needed because of the canopy effect from close spacing.

They use a broad fork on all of the beds, which is great for preparing the sub-soil without turning it. This is very important to the quality of the vegetables.

S-28 Bed preparation takes less time than you would think. Because the beds are permanent they do not have to shape them every year. They cover the beds in a black silage tarps for 3-4 weeks prior to planting so everything is dead and decomposed, therefore they don't have to remove it. And they don't till the beds, so that time is saved as well. The most labour intensive aspect is the deep soil work they do with the broadfork.

The actual time it takes to prep a bed, excluding the time it is under black plastic is 30 minutes.

S-29 – Flame weeder from [flameweeder.com](http://flameweeder.com)

S-32 – Profit = Production (sales) – cost of production

They have no employees. They work full time, which saves a lot on the cost of production. You should ask yourself if you *really* need employees.

The tractor can seed, but it cannot harvest. So, if you use a tractor to seed, you'll need employees to help harvest. Ask yourself if you really need employees.

S-33 You're doing the job, because you like doing the job

S-34 This slide explains which is most profitable. The two main aspects are yield and time (succession planting). Knowing this is the key to specializing.

ex) lettuce = \$500 in 50 days  
leeks = \$400 in 150 days

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ex) Greenhouse cucumbers =\$1300  
Turnips =\$300

S-35 They sell bunching carrots for \$2.50 a bunch because people are willing to pay more when they know its fresh. As opposed to carrots without the greens, that only sell for \$2.50 a pound.

S-37 None of their processing or packaging process is fancy. What this requires the most of is space.

S-38 A commercial walk-in cooler is very much needed. With this they are able to harvest the day before sales with less stress to the vegetables. A cool-bot may be a good alternative to the walk-in cooler. Jean Martin suggests calculating how much cooler space you will need, then buying one twice that size. You will use it!

S – 40 Their farm is laid out in 10 blocks with an easy to follow rotation. It circles their house and warehouse therefore they don't waste time walking around.

S-41 Above all they have focused their farm on being efficient. Not because they want to save money, but because they want time for other things in life!

In goal setting the first priority should not be how much you can produce, it should be how much you can earn.

Be as precise as possible in setting up your objectives – use images and include quality of life in your mission statement.

S-41 Our vision is most important. Start with your vision, then crunch the numbers.

Don't scale up too fast, wait!