



*Love Apple Farms*

GARDENING & COOKING EDUCATIONAL CENTER

# Earning A Living from your Backyard Garden or Homestead

Cynthia Sandberg  
Love Apple Farms

# Format of Talk

- How I did it
- Ideas for revenue streams
- Resource acquisition
- Execution
  - Legalities
  - Marketing

# Background of Love Apple

- Started out with an education in Law
- Took 6 or 7 Horticulture classes at night
- Bought a property with an old farmhouse and 1-1/4 acres
- Put in vegetable garden and fell in love with tomatoes most of all
- Had too many tomato plants one spring and decided to sell them at a roadside stand
- Later same year opened up tomato fruit stand with excess of tomatoes

# One of my first tomato stands



# Selling Tomato Plants



# Visitors Were Curious About How Things were Grown





- I started teaching classes and gathering email addresses.
- I brought baskets of tomatoes and seedlings to media folks.
- Started getting media attention.

# The Key to the Beginning was Focusing on a Specialty





# Next Huge Step

Attracted Attention of Chef, David Kinch of Manresa



- He asked me to bring him tomatoes
- Following season he asked me to be his farming partner
- You don't need to wait for someone to approach you, though
- Our agreement was that he got first dibs on everything created on the farm
- We crafted crop lists each season

# Our Relationship Ended

## Reflections on Why it Ended after 10 Years

- I paid for everything - he gave me a monthly payment
- I spent more than he paid me
- It worked for a whole decade due to the publicity I got
- Labor was too expensive because...
- We tried to grow 100 different things - that means more people, more harvest time
- We couldn't grow that many things really well and have it all in stock every day of each season
- Our partnership spawned lots of specialty growers and he gets his veggies from them now

# How to Find Your Homestead Revenue Generator

- Find something you can be passionate about
- Do your research to find out its economic viability
  - Find another person doing what your idea is and research them. Prices?
  - Then figure out if you can merely emulate them or need to differentiate. If in same geographic area, may need to differentiate unless market is big enough for a new provider.

- If you need ideas
  - Read trade magazines
  - Homesteader websites for inspiration
  - How can you fill a void? Voids reveal themselves with research.
  - Follow other farms and providers on Facebook and Twitter. Peruse their business and see if they have ideas for you.
  - Sign up for other businesses' newsletters. Even if you don't copy them exactly, they can sometimes give you ideas.
  - Go to events:
    - Eco-farm conference among others
    - Local or regional one-degree of separation gatherings: Fiber Fair, Mushroom Fest, etc.

# Another Example

I was on Youtube looking at videos for aquaponics. All of the videos had interesting, related videos. Lots of ideas! Got one on Vertical Pipe Vegetable Gardening.



# Other Ideas

- Growing a specialty crop for restaurants or to piggy-back on to another farm's CSA box
- On-site farm stand
- Cut flowers
- Eggs (Quail/Ducks too)
- Jams, Pickles & Other Ferments
- Baked Goods
- Wool/Fleece
- Rabbits for meat and/or fiber
- Seedlings/Succulents

- Tomato cages
- Soap
- Honey
- Worm castings
- Unusual Herbs
- Micro greens
- Butter
- Goats for meat, milk, cheese, soap, brush-clearing rentals
- Cannabis
- Seed saving & selling
- Bee-Keeping
- Kid classes

# Detail on Growing a Specialty Crop

- Find your specialty
  - Really know and love your crop (tomatoes, peppers, edible flowers?)
  - Don't grow a bunch of different things - there are too many players in that market
  - Research fine restaurants on line, then google images, chef twitter accounts, yelp reviews with photos
- Find your chef/s
  - Put a gift basket together of crop and drop it off at fine restaurants
  - Find good restaurants by going to industry sites, not yelp or simple google searches.

# Specialty Crops

**What's "hot" right now?**

**Micro-greens**

**Fermented products**

**Native foraged plants**



# Why Don't I Advocate You Taking Your Crop to a Farmer's Market?

- Tough to get into some markets at ALL
- Tough to get into some markets without organic certification
- Usually must commit to a whole year or whole season
- Must staff market stall and pay for stall (you may not have time to devote two days a week to a one-day sale)
- You may not have enough production for one day a week, while the rest of the week your crop goes to waste. Example: cut flowers
- Market-goers can dry up during wet weather

# What I DO Advocate Farmers Markets for....

- Ideas: Walk around lots of markets to find out who has the longest lines and see if you can emulate that in your area.
- Making connections with other farmers (think joint CSAs or idea exchanges or co-op bulk supply purchase)
- Share a stall with two or more other small producers and share costs and staffing labor

# Why Don't I Advocate You Starting a CSA?

- Tough to START a CSA - to gain customers.
- Must really know how to grow a wide variety of crops
- Must be willing to have it be your entire life (very labor intensive)
- Very hard to make it pay-off
- Almost impossible to do on your own, even on a small scale
- Your labor is so time-consuming, you may not have time to do the essential marketing and administration of accounts.

# Other Beefs about CSAs

- Customers want to pick and choose what's in their boxes now
- That's because new businesses are out there who aren't farms - they're amalgamators (middlemen)
- Defeats purpose of CSAs being from farmer to consumer
- Amalgamators are cheaper and can allow customers to pick and choose
- Traditional CSAs are losing customers because of them

# What I don't mind about CSAs

- Piggy-back on someone else's CSA
- Have them be the main source of marketing and accounting
- Hook up with an amalgamator (note you are selling to him for wholesale)
- If your CSA is a complete specialty, meaning something like cut flowers
- If you can gain 30 families or businesses that want a bouquet of dahlias each week, then go for it!

# Detail on Rabbits

- Doesn't take a lot of space to raise humanely.
- Quick crop from birth to harvest (10 weeks).
- Rabbit meat is gaining in popularity with public & chefs.
- Pelts, fiber and manure also high-value.
- Sustainable meat source (can produce 6# of meat on same food supply as 1# of beef).
- Can market directly to restaurants.
- Can be value-added to another farm's CSA box.
- Can partner with another meat source at farmer's markets.



# Best Practice: Position Yourself as an Expert in your Field

- Give free talks (I often do that, especially when I first started out)
- Media like to publicize freebies
- Write articles for newspapers, other people's blogs, educational social media posts
- Write proposals for seminars for various conferences (totally doable!)
- Reach out to garden clubs to give talks - or your specialty club
- Start a Youtube channel with iPhone videos

# Bottom Line on Finding Your Idea or Niche Market

- Better to stay an expert in one or two things than be mediocre at many things.
- Love and respect what you do.
- Research, research, research!



# Resource Acquisition

Or the MYTH of needing to own a lot of land

- Can earn income on just an acre, even less for some things like worm castings, micro-greens, kitchen-processed items.
- Don't need to own land, can rent if interested in larger-scale production.
- Can also borrow land or garden space from relatives and neighbors.
- Put an ad on Craigslist or look into FarmLink for cheap or no cost arrangements.

# Start up Money

- In addition to what you've already thought up: your own savings, loans from relatives, spouse income, etc:
- Try new farmer loans from USDA.
- Crowd funding thru GoFundMe, Kickstarter, Indiegogo
- Don't buy anything new. If you can't find it on Craigslist, put a wanted ad up.
- Run lean and mean. Don't buy anything you don't have to.
- DIY: Most good farmers are also cooks, carpenters, plumbers, electricians and small-engine savvy.

# Legalities

- Always check your state, county, and city ordinances before putting in money on a venture.
- Never upset your neighbors. Always try to keep them happy.
- Do you need a business license or permit?
- Pay attention to zoning laws.
- New law called California Homemade Food Act

# Marketing

- A web presence is a must
  - Free or low-cost, easy blog platforms
    - Typepad
    - Blogger
    - Blogspot
    - Wordpress
    - Or just a Facebook page
  - Get a listing on Localharvest.org
  - Etsy
  - Give freebies to newspapers, magazines, bloggers who may write about your product
  - Frequent Craigslist ads

# Newsletter

- Start a sign-up sheet at your point of sale.
- Never miss an opportunity to get folks' emails.
- Have a sign-up button on your blog with an incentive.
- Can't just send out mass email, must have newsletter service.
- Mailchimp is a good one. Simple to use.
- Start taking lots of pics, you'll need them!



**get our  
newsletter!**

latest classes & events,  
exclusive offers,  
ideas, stories, pix,  
recipes & more!

# Social Media Marketing: Facebook

- Set up a FB account in your business name
- Daily: post something fun or relevant.
- Post photos of what you're doing
- Stay away from personal, inflammatory or spammy comments
- Have a FB "LIKE" button on your blog
- Change your header to reflect some upcoming news

## *Chef Pim's Artisanal Marmalades*

January 26, 12 pm - 4 pm

February 23, 12 pm - 4 pm



In this fun and delicious class you'll get hands on experience making three different styles of marmalade.



**Love Apple Farm**

3,499 likes · 148 talking about this · 575 were here

✓ Liked



# Social Media Marketing: Twitter

- Set up Twitter account in your business name.
- Post daily or several times a day.
- Follow others in your field, suppliers, customers, or those you respect.
- Retweet relevant & interesting tweets.
- If you don't know who to follow, check out who some of your contemporaries follow.



The screenshot shows the Twitter profile for EcoFarm. The profile picture is a logo with the letters 'EF' in green and brown. The name is 'EcoFarm' and the handle is '@Eco\_Farm'. The bio states: 'EcoFarm promotes ecological agriculture through education, alliance building and advocacy. Joanna Dillon, Comm Dir, tweeting. Soquel and Davis, Calif. · <http://www.eco-farm.org>'. The statistics show 1,040 tweets, 2,025 following, and 4,632 followers. The user is currently following the account. Below the profile, there is a list of accounts being followed:

- Brad Wilson** @FarmJustice: *I see Farm Justice as a superior paradigm. A more holistic KNOWLEDGE base, leading to a fairer concept of JUSTICE, and more proactive and effective STRATEGIES.*
- FoodWhat?!** @FoodWhatFarm: *Youth empowerment & food justice program using food as the vehicle for growing inspired teens. We are a program of LifeLab.*
- Seedling Projects** @SeedlingProj: *A 'Do Tank' for the Food Movement*
- TS Designs** @tsdesigns: *Printing t-shirts for good | We offer many sustainable custom tee options, including: Cotton of the Carolinas, organic Cotton of the Carolinas*

# Social Media Marketing: Instagram

- IG is a photo site
- Get a free account in your biz name
- Post photos every day of your product and what you're doing.
- “Follow” other IGers who may be interested in your product or who could market for you (example, SFFlowerShow)
- Comment and “Like” at least 20 other photos each day, that will gain you followers
- Hashtag every relevant word in your post!



# Newer Social Media Avenues

- Snapchat
- Periscope
- Tumblr
- Reddit
- Meerkat
- Videos on Facebook

# Final Tips

- Never be afraid to try and fail.
- Don't give up after a failure.
- Don't overprice yourself.
- Don't sell yourself short.
- Always know your business.
- You must love your work, or you won't be able to keep up.
- Seek out colleagues and stay connected.
- Don't be afraid to knock on a door.

