

Kira Maffett: My name is Kira Maffett. I'm a student with Dominican University working with the Marin History Museum's "Growing the Future" exhibit. It's October 22, 2008.

Jesse Kuhn: Hi, I'm Jesse Kuhn of Marin Roots Farm, a local farmer here in Marin County and we are in the north part of Marin County near the Petaluma border near San Antonio Creek, one of the north borders of Marin County.

Kira Maffett: I'm sorry, did you say we're also behind the Volpi Ranch? Could you describe where your farm is?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, the farm is located on a dairy ranch, the Volpi Dairy, and it's a goat dairy. I'm renting a 10-acre pasture from John Volpi in the back part of the ranch. On the other side of the fence they've got dairy goats. I've got chickens and a lot of farm animals out here, [there are] cows on the other side with the other property.

Kira Maffett: I just want to get to know you a little bit and your background. You said you were born in San Francisco, correct?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, yeah. I was born in San Francisco. I can't remember the name of the hospital, but one of the hospitals there [in] 1974.

Kira Maffett: Nice. Where did you grow up?

Jesse Kuhn: I grew up for the first couple of years in Sleepy Hollow. My parents were living there with my grandmother while they were building their house in San Geronimo and moved out there when I was about three years old, and I grew up in San Geronimo.

Kira Maffett: What brought you into farming? Did you come from a farming background?

Jesse Kuhn: My grandmother had grown up partially, part of her childhood on a farm in Nebraska, and would tell me stories about what it was like living out there. And I think it kind of created a bit of a romantic notion about what farming was like, and she certainly had a green thumb, two green thumbs, and had a lot of plants growing in her one-acre property in Sleepy Hollow. But I didn't have any kind of farming background. We had small veggie gardens at my parents' house where we'd do tomatoes and carrots. You know, a couple plants of each. I visited a few farms but didn't have any kind of farming

background besides when my grandma was out as a child in Omaha. I guess that was [my] most recent farming background.

Kira Maffett: So when you were growing up you helped out with growing those little vegetables and things like that. You had a little bit of experience I guess.

Jesse Kuhn: I picked a few things. I guess I watered sometimes, but yeah, I just remember picking the carrots out when they were, I don't know, probably about an inch long. I couldn't wait, and I certainly liked picking the cherry tomatoes that we had growing.

Kira Maffett: So it was something you enjoyed when you were young?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah.

Kira Maffett: That's really neat. What was I going to say? Who would you say influenced you the most as you were growing? It sounds like your grandmother played a really big role in your interest in farming. Was there anyone else in your family that moved you toward that?

Jesse Kuhn: My grandma, yeah, she definitely had a big influence on me having just a love of nature. She used to take us on lots of nature hikes, my brother and I. I'd say that growing plants just kind of came along with exploring nature with her. I really got into farming in college when I was undeclared for a number of years and I'd taken pretty much all my general ed classes and needed to find something to focus in on so what I did was drop out of college for a year, take a year off and work and just kind of see what it was like to pay rent and that sort of thing, pay bills. And then went back to college and found that the University of Humboldt State that I was going to had a small agricultural program that had just started a couple of years before on a piece of city park land that the city let the college use. The college provided classes and did a little bit of gardening and growing work with the local elementary school that was nearby. So, I started working and volunteering out there, and taking ag classes and just became really interested, and started picking up garden books, and making compost piles in my backyard and started growing a few plants in college. And then later worked and helped manage that farm which was a CSA farm like a subscription farm where family members, local families would buy a subscription and get a weekly share of what was grown out there. So yeah, that was my first real experience in farming and growing plants, during college.

Kira Maffett: The farm, the CSA that you mentioned, it was with the university?

Jesse Kuhn: It was the school farm; it was called the Arcata Educational Farm. It was started and managed by the university through these ag classes that had been started there kind of under the supervision of Susan Ornellis [ph?]. She was the main teacher there that was running those classes, and then I incorporated other classes to get a degree in Bachelor of Science. I did like appropriate technology classes and learned about solar panels and alternative energy systems. I tried to get an overall picture of what through college I wanted to do later on, just kind of building skills as I was in college and with the farming and the jobs that I had along the way. I worked at a soil company while I was up there, an organic soil and fertilizer company, so while I was taking classes at the University I was working stacking pallets of soil for work.

Kira Maffett: What's the name of the university again?

Jesse Kuhn: It was Humboldt State University.

Kira Maffett: Could you tell us the name of your grandmother?

Jesse Kuhn: My grandmother's name is Dorothy Kincaid.

Kira Maffett: What did you enjoy the most while you were in college? What kept you going? For me, as a college student, we all have those times when it's "Forget it! I'm done!" Did you experience any of that, and what kept you interested in it?

Jesse Kuhn: I certainly did too, and that's why I stopped going to school for a while. I took a year and-a-half off. It was really because I wanted to complete something that I started. I had started this degree and I just really wanted to see that to completion. I think that that was a big part of going back to finish college, but then also finding something that interested me, and that I thought that I could apply towards a job or towards a future career. And I was really excited about agriculture and farming because there're just so many different things that you can grow and products that you can make direct from the farm. So I saw that there was a lot of opportunity for trying different things, innovation. Seeing what works and what doesn't. So that was exciting. I mean it's definitely a push getting through college, for sure.

Kira Maffett: Yeah, and a lot of us in college, we worry about, "does this class really apply to what I'm going to do?" Did you find that your work in college prepared you for the challenges, the need for innovation and creativity on the farm?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, I'd say it certainly did. College was a great time, and I kind of wish that I could take some of those classes over again, or go back. And maybe I will at some point. I remember being turned on to a lot of different ideas about the alternative energy systems. You know the ideas that I was learning in these classes was pretty impressive, and ways of moving water. I'm hoping to implement some of them, or some more of them on my farm as time goes on. My electricity out here started with a couple of car batteries to have lights at night finish washing vegetables in the after harvest, and after harvest hours, getting it ready for delivery. I finally got electricity last year. I connected to PG&E but I'm hoping at some point to have like a tie-in system and be creating electricity out here either from wind or from solar panels.

Kira Maffett: You mentioned water innovations and water delivery? Is that right? Can you give us an example?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, this one water system that I was really impressed with in college. It was called the ram pump and it needs a continuous source of water like flowing water like a creek, and also a lot of elevation drop, so you use the water pressure by gathering the water at a high point and putting it through a pipe to a pump mechanism at a low point that uses the pressure of the water to then pump back, I think 10 percent of the water up to a higher elevation. So if you have like a creek on your property or a river or something like that, you can get a water storage supply up higher on a hill top either for a house or for whatever you might want water for just by using the energy of the water to move a portion of itself back up.

Kira Maffett: Could you describe for us a typical day on the farm? What sort of responsibilities do you have to deal with every day and challenges?

Jesse Kuhn: Well, we're always trying to grow more food. We've got to keep planting and here in California we've got a really great growing season, which is basically year-round. I mean I guess it's great in some ways. We can produce a lot of food throughout the winter and all the other months, but then we don't get that winter break where it snows and just kind of go inside for the winter. But I'd say yeah, a typical day for me is getting my daughter to school. I'm a single dad. Her mom passed away last year and so I get my daughter off to school, and then I come up to the farm, try and get some tractor work done, get beds ready for planting. I wind up doing a lot of ordering plants and seeds, a lot more office work than I really realized I was going to be getting myself into starting a farm. But then usually in the afternoon sometimes after I pick my daughter up from school we'll come back up and I'll get some weeding time in or some time actually out picking some stuff either for our dinner, or doing a little bit of weeding or taking care of some of the animals that we have. But a lot of the growing winds up being done my crew, you

know, a lot of the watering. I wind up doing a lot of support and fixing things, making sure the fences are up all the time and the refrigerators are always working and the vans are running right and stuff like that. Running the business, I guess.

Kira Maffett: You said that you weren't expecting to do as much of that. Do you hope to do more work that's hands on, or is that a way you've seen your role has changed as you've taken the farm over?

Jesse Kuhn: When I started the farm I was doing everything. I was planting the seed. I was turning the water pump on, moving the pipes around. I didn't have help. Basically I was doing it all myself for the first year, and then I started by hiring one person then hired two and three. I was struggling that first year because growing—there're really two sides of this farm. There's the growing it, but then selling it is kind of a completely different thing. I guess I hadn't really realized that when I worked at the CSA farm back in college, because it was all sold before. It was just a different farming model. I didn't want to recreate that CSA model, because I wanted to get into Farmer's Markets and I wanted to sell to stores and to restaurants direct, and to grow a bigger farm. Basically, I wanted to just see how much food I could grow and so I'm still growing. I've got ten acres here and my first year I was only farming probably three or four of it, and the next year six or seven, and since then I've got the whole thing planted out. Now I'm thinking I need another 10 acres somewhere to really grow some food. That's kind of moved me away from planting all the seeds myself and doing it all myself, but at the same time I'm growing more food. I think that as the business comes into its own over the next few years, I think that I'll be able to have the trial gardens or something like that will be what I have my hands into. And then certainly there's a lot to be done on the farm, so I'm always out there in the field doing something.

Kira Maffett: What happens with a trial garden? Can you tell us what that is?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, a trial garden would be when I see new seed varieties in a seed catalogue or I'm interested in trying to grow a different crop that I haven't grown before. Or if I wanted to grow say tomatoes but I didn't know which one, I'd try maybe three plants of a whole bunch of different varieties. So I kind of foresee my trial garden as less long, straight rows of vegetables stretching out into the distance, and more just kind of like a really pleasing home garden that would be attached to my house. Kind of like the kitchen herb garden.

Kira Maffett: What are your criteria for selecting seeds?

Jesse Kuhn: Well definitely the flavor of what kind of crop it grows. And then I try and pick something that I think my clientele would like. A lot of the restaurants prefer like small greens and maybe vegetables. But then certainly a lot of things like tomatoes and some of the carrots and stuff like that; flavor is what people are interested in. I certainly want stuff to taste good, too, coming right out of the ground. Yeah, so what will sell is the ultimate of what we plant, but I always wind up planting a few things that I think are cool that don't sell, but I like growing them anyway.

Kira Maffett: It sounds like you're looking for some extra space to grow some more. What are your plans for expanding your farm?

Jesse Kuhn: I found this piece of property by putting an ad in the newspaper in the *Press Democrat*. It read "Organic farmer seeks five to ten acres. Must have water." And got varied responses, and so I've thought about doing that again. I did that once last winter and I got a two-acre site but it was too far away. I realized that I couldn't commute an hour each way to this field and have it be part of my production and crews at both places and stuff. So I'm hoping to find something in the neighborhood from one of the neighboring ranches. I've talked to a couple of people. There might be something out there for me but I haven't found anything yet but definitely keeping my eyes and ears open talking to people.

Kira Maffett: So you farm organically, and what made you choose to do that as opposed to I guess the more traditional form of farming? What draws you to it?

Jesse Kuhn: I didn't want to use chemical herbicides or fertilizers or pesticides just because I didn't believe in doing that. I didn't believe that that would create as healthy a product. Plus I didn't want to handle those types of things just for health reasons, so yeah, I didn't really think of doing anything but that.

Kira Maffett: Do you think that it helps you in terms of marketing your vegetables to businesses in the market and things like that?

Jesse Kuhn: Certainly, I think that a lot of people are looking for organic as a label, because it really does have assurances of the growing practices behind it, that it was grown in a way that was free of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides or any kind of residues. But at the same time I think that a fresh product has got a lot of superior qualities, and something that's locally grown that can be delivered that fresh will have a lot of draw to it so the local clientele and to local restaurants. So I think fresh is number one. It's a tossup, right?

Kira Maffett: So it also seems like to me that sustainability is something that sounds important to you that you're trying to work with local residents. What sort of innovations do you have on your farm if any that help with sustainability?

Jesse Kuhn: I'm conserving soil. I've got a series of ditches that I've put in around my field to keep erosion from happening. I've tried to channel also any excess water runoff into my water supply because everything that we irrigate out here is from a rain catchment pond. But beyond that keeping myself afloat, paying bills. That's a lot to be said for sustainability there and just keeping the business running. Keeping my crew employed, that's probably another reason why I go year-round and don't close for the winter is to keep my employees working so that they have a steady income through the winter months. And actually, they're number one. They're the backbone of the farm and without a good crew I wouldn't be able to have my farm.

Kira Maffett: Tell us about your crew.

Jesse Kuhn: My crew is mostly from _____, Mexico, great workers, great people, really friendly and fun to work with. And they're supporting their whole families back there, building houses and stuff like that. I recently saw a couple pictures of the homes that their families are building from the money that they've earned here, and that's really gratifying to see that this little farm here out in North Marin is effecting so many people in so many places.

Kira Maffett: Was there a knowledge that they have brought in farming from their own heritage in Mexico?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, I'd say so for sure. I don't know that these crops are crops that are being grown down there, but yeah, just the love of the land I see is something that they have brought with them, and a really strong work ethic. They really take a lot of pride, as I do in what we're doing out here, and that comes through in the product too, you know? People comment on it all the time on how beautiful the greens look and that's only because of how much love and care has gone into growing them through all the stages.

Kira Maffett: I'm from a city. I'm not familiar with gardening or farming. Can you teach me a little bit about what is important for soil to create those beautiful vegetables and the healthy greens?

Jesse Kuhn: Well, I'd say first of all you want to keep the soil alive and feed the soil. I think that goes back to being organic, being certified organic. I'm not really trying to feed

the plants. I'm trying to create a really healthy soil. Like when you take a shovel out there and the soil is nice and moist and you dig into it, you'll see a lot of bugs and worms and stuff crawling around in it. I think that will grow. If you take care of the soil then the plants will just do their thing and they'll be happy. So compost is great. We use compost, horse manure and goat manure out here. I got the goat manure from my landlord, and then various horse stables will bring horse manure out and drop it off. So we apply that, and then we just kind of reincorporate a lot of the green stuff that grows, the weeds in between the crops, and turn a lot and we turn that stuff back in. We put some cover crops in from time to time, but I try and keep the fields pretty productive throughout the year. It's amazing how much stuff is growing out there that's not supposed to be, but then at the same time, it's like a blessing because it's something we can turn back into the field and will feed the soil.

Kira Maffett: Can you tell me what a cover crop is? I've never heard of that.

Jesse Kuhn: A cover crop is something that you plant on a field to keep it growing. It usually gets planted in the wintertime, but it's something that's grown just for the express purpose of feeding the soil, of being turned back in and feeding the soil. And there's certain varieties of plants that will actually fix more, like pull atmospheric nitrogen out of the air and create these little nitrogen balls on their roots and so it's a way of kind of building the soil up by pulling nutrients and just growing a crop that the earthworms can feed off of and the sow bugs and other little critters in the soil can feed off of and then it's their excrement that's really enriching the soil. The castings, the earthworm castings and broken down plant materials that are then kind of keeping the soil alive. So it's something that you plant just to kind of build the soil back up and then when you turn it in, then it helps to open the soil up because the worms get in there and they kind of crawl around and eat through everything that's been turned back in.

Kira Maffett: How often do you need to do that?

Jesse Kuhn: Usually cover crops get put in like in the winter if you're not going to be planting a field for the winter, that's a good time, because in this area we don't have to water it. The rain will water it. I guess other parts of the country people will plant stuff in the summertime, and there are different types of covers that you could put on a field for the summertime, and that can also help break a cycle of weeds, like if you have really bad weeds in a field you can plant something to just kind of establish something else for a cycle or for a planting cycle and then try and get away from having a really bad weed problem. But then it also helps to feed the soil as well.

Kira Maffett: Talk a little bit about the clientele that you serve. Do you work directly with restaurants? I know that you work directly with customers in the farmers market. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing that?

Jesse Kuhn: I'd say the biggest advantage of doing that is that I get to know the people that are eating this stuff that we grow and that's pretty rewarding, and I get to get feedback from them also on how they prepared it and how it was cooked. That always makes me hungry. But "what" is also a good thing, "what's" a good crop and "what" people really like, and so "what" then we'll grow more of or not grow. Sometimes people also suggest that I plant things that I hadn't thought of before, too. So yeah, there're a lot of ways. I'd say that having the direct feedback from my customers is really beneficial for the farm.

Kira Maffett: Can you give us an example of a crop that a consumer wanted you to grow that was successful? A new idea that you got from a consumer?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, well, there's probably a lot. I know that arugula, baby arugula has been one that people have asked for a lot, and now wild arugula. There's an Italian variety of arugula that's a little bit more peppery that people really like. Also herbs. I had seen there's a demand for herbs at the farmers market. People are always asking for tarragon and fresh mint, so we put in an herb garden last year, a small one just kind of as a trial as one of these little trial gardens and the plants wouldn't grow fast enough. They'd grow, I'd pick them and have to wait for them to grow back, and so I found that there's a big demand for fresh herbs and we'll probably transplant those out into some of the really long rows next spring.

Kira Maffett: I know you are on the Farmers Market Board, right?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, I was recently elected to the Marin County Farmers Market Board as a board member.

Kira Maffett: Tell me about your experience with that. What's it like?

Jesse Kuhn: It's political. It's different. I've never done something like this before but it's really interesting, and it's great to see kind of the behind the scenes workings of what goes into making a great local non-profit, but then at the same time, the farmers market has been up and running for over 25 years, and so they've really got a good track record of knowing what they're doing and creating a really great farmers market. But right now they're working on trying to get a permanent home set up for the Marin Farmers Market in

San Rafael by creating a Marin Agricultural Institute. A site for where the farmers market will be held, and it will also be a place where people can go to learn about agriculture and find out what's going on locally, but I guess they'll have some kind of interpretive displays. It will be like an educational element involved with it. So, some focus has been put on that. I just got elected this summer, so I've only been to a couple of meetings but yeah, it's a neat process, and it's gotten me more involved to know some of my other producers better by working with them in this different way.

Kira Maffett: Can you describe the effect that a farmers market has on the local growers? How does it impact them?

Jesse Kuhn: I'd say that it's a huge benefit. Yeah, the farmers market are yeah, I know for a lot of local farms, that's their primary way of selling what they grow. And for others it's a great way of advertising, local advertising and getting the name out about your product. But, it's become more and more part of my business as far as what pays the bills; and so right now I'm doing three farmers market: two farmers market in San Rafael at the Marin Civic Center, and one farmers market in San Francisco at the Ferry Building on Saturdays, and the farmers markets have been a lot of fun. Yeah.

Kira Maffett: How did you come up with the name of your farm?

Jesse Kuhn: I was trying to think of a name of a landscaping company. When I was in between graduating college and trying to create a real job, I knew I wanted to work for myself, and I had been working in the landscaping industry because I like working outside, and I like working with my hands. So I had been working for various landscape companies and then getting side jobs and thought, what would I call my company? And I thought, well, I'll call it Marine Roots Landscaping, or maybe start a farm someday and call it Marine Roots Farm and Landscape or something like that. And then I didn't, I decided not to stay in landscaping and really go for it with the farm so that was the name I had kind of picked before I started this farm. My first farm I called Spare Time Organics because I was landscaping, and then after landscaping I would go and try and start this farm on this one-acre spot that I had a lease on at Point Reyes. But like it suggests, it was just a spare time endeavor and it didn't stick.

Kira Maffett: Have you had experience farming in other parts of the country or the state, and can you describe the Marin culture of farming?

Jesse Kuhn: The only other place that I've farmed was in Arcata when I was going to Humboldt State. And the climate was certainly different. It was a lot foggier up there and

just kind of colder in general. And then there are places here in Marin that are like that too. There's a lot of microclimates here in Marin which is pretty neat, and especially if you can have like a field down by the water somewhere that gets a lot of fog, coastal influence and then have one inland or up in the hills where it gets really warm, you can grow melons and really nice eggplants in summer, you know, summer crops. There's a lot of little pockets out here in Marin for some pretty neat growing climates. What was the other part of that question?

Kira Maffett: The culture of it. How is it different?

Jesse Kuhn: Well I guess between the two places I have experienced, in Arcata people were really interested in organic. There're a lot of the same interests in food in both places. I'd just say in the San Francisco Bay area it's just much more amplified because there are so many more people and this translates into a lot more restaurants and yeah, just a huge food culture with the shoppers. A lot of the shoppers that come to the farmers market are eating at the restaurants that we're supplying and getting ideas. It sounds like from what they say they're doing with these crops, it sounds like they're chefs in their own right in their own kitchens, you know, which is pretty neat. You know people really go all out. I tend to eat pretty simply when I cook my stuff, but yeah, people are really into food in the Bay Area for sure.

Kira Maffett: How do you cook your own vegetables?

Jesse Kuhn: Usually with oil, a little bit of olive oil, [and] some salt; a lot of the greens I just cut in half and make some salad dressing and put that on, or grill a little bit.

Kira Maffett: Did you have a mentor or someone that influenced you the most other than your grandma obviously but in terms of modeling your farm and making it work, was there someone in particular that inspired you?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, there were a lot of people actually. And you can probably go to the farmers market and see some of them because I was drawing from the other farmers that were around here and in the area, and I had actually done farmers markets previously for _____ Farms so I kind of had an idea of how I was going to put my farm stand together from that and when I was trying to figure out how to put my irrigation system in and where to have my sprinkler risers come up. Warren out at _____ showed me his farm and how they had the irrigations set out. Because I had only ever done like lawn sprinklers with the landscaping, you know, drip irrigation for shrubs or something like that. So yeah, the other farms, I would either volunteer or work a little bit part time,

you know, kind of gaining experience between graduating from college. I think it was probably six or seven years from graduating until when I started this farm, so in that time I volunteered with Diane Matthews at Mount Barnaby Farm and I worked with Peter Martinelli at Fresh ___[run?_]___ Farm, and David Retzky with County Line Farm. And yeah, and everybody was really friendly and helpful and gave a lot of good advice and suggestions on from their own experience and how they got their operation up and running and things that they learned along the way. But then trial and error is always the biggest teacher; I just put stuff in and see if it worked. When I hook the irrigation, I had the whole irrigation system put in and buried and everything. Actually, no I hadn't buried it because I knew that if there was a leak I was going to have to dig it back up, but I didn't know if the pump was going to pump water up the hill, because we have this water catchment pond that's a quarter mile away and 100 feet lower in elevation than my field, so I wasn't sure if the pump was going to work so I just tried it out and it worked.

Kira Maffett: Good. You could have buried it after all.

Jesse Kuhn: And we did, but every time I plant the seed I'm always kind of curious if it's going to sprout. And it's kind of the same, it's always the same thing, and that's kind of the most exciting times. When it works it's like, yay! See, it's popped up!

Kira Maffett: Where would you like to see Marin agriculture go? How would you like to see it grow?

Jesse Kuhn: I would like to see Marin agriculture feed a lot more of the local population. I think that I mean there's a lot of agricultural land in Marin. I think Marin is half ag land, and a lot of the products are I think are being shipped out of Marin. Largely it's the area and that gets pooled, but I think that there's a lot of room for more row crops in Marin County and I know it's kind of a tough county just in terms of water and water supply, but there's a lot of little pocket dams here and little mini lakes there, and then if Marin Municipal Water District could ever start a program where they would issue agricultural water meters that could really open it up. And so I'd like to see Marin County feeding a lot, at least having the capability of feeding its own county from what's grown here.

Kira Maffett: What do you think needs to happen for that to work? I mean you talked about the Marin Municipal Water District, but what else needs to come into play for that to happen?

Jesse Kuhn: I think we're going to need a lot more farmers; a lot more small-scale farms, and that's kind of what this county would be set up for. It's not vast tracks of land

like the Central Valley or something like that. And with all the urban centers around San Francisco, and Berkeley, and Oakland and all these big cities, there's any number of places to sell stuff if it doesn't all get sold within Marin because yeah, it's kind of, I guess, a lofty goal to say that it would be great if everything could be grown and consumed within Marin County, but as far as for new farms and young farmers to get started there's a lot of opportunity and demand in the San Francisco Bay area for products grown locally.

Kira Maffett: What sort of advice would you give to young farmers that want to start out here?

Jesse Kuhn: Don't give up. Don't get discouraged, or if you do just keep doing it. Keep planting. Yeah, you always have to keep planting with vegetables. I mean if you ever stop planting then you're going to run into a gap in production. Two months down the road you're not going to have anything so you have to keep it planted and keep it watered and weeded and all that.

Kira Maffett: What sort of struggles did you have to deal with when you were first starting the farm?

Jesse Kuhn: Well certainly learning how to grow those crops. You know, after putting the seed in the ground to get them to come up and be ready for harvest, but keeping track of it, the business side of it was the part that I wasn't prepared for and the record keeping that's involved. And that's as important as growing the product because if you can grow it and give it away that's great, but if you need to pay bills then you need to keep track of how much you sold and to whom and be able to create a record. Collective people aren't as organized and don't just start sending checks along. You have to go to tell them "You owe from this invoice and that invoice." Keeping track, business and marketing, and finding new customers and clientele is certainly a big part of having a farm. You can do it by just having one customer and grow and sell it all wholesale. I was selling wholesale a little bit when I started to a couple different wholesalers, but I was a little bit concerned about having all my eggs in one basket, so to speak, and just having one customer, so I wanted to branch out and have a bunch of customers that all got a little bit of stuff versus just one customer that got all of it.

Kira Maffett: What's your support system like? Obviously this doesn't seem like it's the easiest thing to do so where do you find encouragement?

Jesse Kuhn: I find it when I visit all the other farmers at the Marin Farmers Market and plus the farmers market every weekend, and everybody else is doing the same thing and struggling and having successes and failures and so there's certainly a lot of support there, and then also with my family, my parents and my daughter's maternal grandmother. I've got a really great support network there, and from friends also, and so yeah, having that support too. Actually, my parents weren't as encouraging of me starting a farm in the beginning, because they were worried that I would get into too much debt and not be able to get myself out and that certainly could have happened, and it started to, but then it worked out and yeah, I was able to grow and sell enough. It was a struggle and I was negative in income the first year and halfway through the second too. But my family has been great and very supportive and helped me keep track of the business side of it and helped keep the buildings up, vehicles running, things like that.

Kira Maffett: How about Marin Organic, how has that been a source of help to you as an organic farmer?

Jesse Kuhn: Marin Organic has been really great in helping to connect me to the local consumer, because it's basically a local label. It's a cooperative label. Where myself, and probably most of, if not all of the other organic growers in Marin County, are part of this local label that says that yes, it's certified organic, and yes, it's grown in Marin County and they've created a brand. So that sign can get attached to twist ties and boxes of product that goes out. And we have a sign that we hang at the farmers market so that people can recognize that. There's been a little bit of confusion. Some people are thinking that it's the name of a farm or that it's a farm business or something like that. They're like "Oh, that's the Marin Organic Farm," but and not realizing that it's a label of origin. But I think that confusion is passing. So it's been really great because it's name recognition and it's place of origin recognition.

Kira Maffett: You mentioned your daughter. Is she involved with the farm at all? What's her role?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, she's turning 7 this weekend. She helps take care of the animals. She collects eggs. She actually really, really likes weeding, which I hope sticks. But we don't live here at the farm. I rent a house separately so she's not up here as much as maybe I would like. I'd love to have her collect eggs every morning, so she kind of gets me to play a little bit at the farm when she comes up, when I bring her up here and bring her friends up here, it's kind of like yeah, this is why I started the farm. I wanted to have a life in farming and she kind of helps remind me of that and helps me forget about all the responsibilities, all these things that have to be done. It's like we have to enjoy ourselves on the way too.

Kira Maffett: Is it something you would like to see her take on later? I mean obviously if she's into it. There're a lot of family farms out there. Are you interested in seeing that as well?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, I mean I certainly hope that she'd like to be a farmer when she grows up. She loves horses, and she certainly loves all the farm animals. She's talked about being a vet. But I see that as she grows up she'll get more and more involved with the farm, you know that's what I'm going to be doing, and so I imagine her first job if it's not working at a stable it'll probably be helping to sell vegetables at the farmers market or something like that.

Kira Maffett: Does she go with you to the farmers market?

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, sometimes. Yeah, she sets up forts and stuff, plays with other kids that come with their parents to the market too so she's got some little friends that she plays with too. But then she's out there with the spray bottle keeping the veggies fresh sometimes.

Kira Maffett: That's nice.

Jesse Kuhn: We were just looking at this crop of lettuces that we're standing next to, and how I've been irrigating everything on drip irrigation which we were saying is yeah, very similar to the landscaping and drip irrigation is used a lot in landscaping. I started out by using all sprinklers. Well, actually not all. I was using a little bit of drip that first year on the tomatoes but for all the lettuce greens, all the leafy greens I thought that kind of like mimicking the rainfall from above, sprinkling water from above would be the best way. And they really do like being watered that way; they don't need it, though. And it winds up using a lot more water, and because we're pumping using a gasoline-powered pump it's more gas and then it's a limited water supply too, so it's precious water to just have it evaporating off before it reaches the roots of the plant it wasn't working. So we moved to more and more drip irrigation each year. And this year I've got everything on drip this year.

Kira Maffett: And this side?

Jesse Kuhn: This other side here is a planting of chard plants, Rainbow Chard that we just put in from transplants from somebody I was selling next to at the farmers market. [I] Brought him my seed and he started the chard plants for me. I still don't have a green house out here, but even if I did, a greenhouse is a way different way of growing stuff

than growing it in the field, and you know, if you miss watering, sometimes you have to water greenhouse stuff like three, four, five, six times a day if it's too hot. I'd be so worried about having my crop fail by not watering it enough. It's hard enough keeping the water in the field. But yeah, this planting of chard will be what we harvest probably up until next May. The over-winter stuff really grows for a long period of time and we can pick it and it will grow back and yeah, we do that with a lot of our crops out here over winter.

Kira Maffett: What is chicory?

Jesse Kuhn: Chicory is Italian winter lettuce. It's like Escarole and Frisee. It's a little bit bitter, but then in the winter months like when we get a frost, broccoli will get really sweet. The chicories will do the same thing and lose a lot of the bitterness and just kind of get really kind of sweet. Well, sweet in a bitter kind of way, I guess.

Kira Maffett: Bitter sweet.

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, bitter sweet. But yeah, they're really good and you can do a lot with them. You can grill them or just eat them raw. My daughter loves raw chicory, which makes me so proud.

Kira Maffett: It's just gorgeous, just a beautiful farm.

Jesse Kuhn: Thanks.

Kira Maffett: Looks like an oasis, too, in the midst of the kind of the brown hills. I mean it's beautiful California landscape out here, but still this oasis of green that you have.

Jesse Kuhn: Yeah, it's not like a typical vegetable field because it's not in the flatlands. It's on a knoll top so as I'm looking for more farmland I'm looking for a flat field somewhere, because I think that it would be a lot better in a lot of ways. We get a lot of wind up here because it's kind of a pass between these two hill ranges, which is really neat. We get a lot of migratory birds that fly over at the various times of year, but it also means there's always a wind that kind of funnels through.

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