

Dan Perkins - Conference Keynote (1)

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SPEAKERS

Dan Perkins, Christa Hartsook

Christa Hartsook 00:00

Welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension Outreach. In this episode, I interviewed Dan Perkins of Perkins Good Earth Farm in Indiana, who is keynote speaker at the upcoming Iowa small farms conference. I'm Christa Hartsook, small farms program coordinator. And we hope you enjoy the show. Dan, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Dan Perkins 00:21


Thanks. It's fantastic to be here. Even though we are in Iowa.


Christa Hartsook 00:25

We are in Iowa doing this podcast, which is amazing. Tell us a little bit more about Perkins Good Earth Farm.

Dan Perkins 00:32

Sure. Perkins Good Farms, a small farm that's we're a micro farm. And we produce a variety of vegetables for 40 members, CSA in the fall. And then we also do commercial garlic seed production, both seed and table. And we're really about producing high quality, precious nutrient dense produce to our neighbors and community. That's that's what we're focused on. And we really like to, you know, think about how we're going to farm full time someday. Sure. That's the stage of our farm. And you know, I didn't come from a family farm, I don't, I don't have access, I didn't have access to like family land. And so that just whole process takes a while to build. So that's where we're at with our farm. And it's, it's been a fantastic journey.




 Christa Hartsook 01:30

How did you happen to get started in farming, then Dan, if you really didn't have that background?

 01:35

Well, I was I went to school in northwest corner, Iowa. So I'm familiar with Iowa, and just through studying environmental concerns, realized, hey, farming has such a huge impact on the land. And I need to learn more about this. And I need to understand farmers, I was thinking like ag law or something. Sure. And I was like, Well, I don't really, I come from a city. So I'm a city kid. I'm gonna go work on some farms. And so being from the East Coast, I worked on some vegetable farms out there and realized, you know, I love this, like, I don't really want to be inside. And I love the idea of connecting people with their food, and just how impactful food choices can be on our lives that I want to raise food. And so that kind of began a major process to figure out how to do that.

 Christa Hartsook 02:28

Sure, Sure. What makes Perkins Good Earth Farm unique.

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We are one of the few farms in our Northwest Indiana that's certified naturally grown. So we follow organic practices. That's pretty unusual. We're largely a conventional quarantine area. And we produce in the offseasons on the shoulder seasons. And right now, because I do work off the farm. We pretty much don't do that much in the summer. Sure. And that's, that's really kind of odd. When you think about vegetable production? It is yeah. And we did that deliberately. Because we wanted our quality of life. And we wanted to develop our markets that brought a high net return per bed. Okay, you know, we don't talk so much in acres, we talking per bed foot, you know, I want I want I gotta get this returned to make this worthwhile. And that ended up being, you know, those special niche crops that aren't coming from California or if they are there. We can compete with those prices.

 Christa Hartsook 03:36

Sure, Dan you mentioned the commercial garlic production. How did you get started in that?

 03:42

I've just always loved growing garlic. I mean, there's just, I love to eat it. I love just how many? How important it is for our health, sir. It's easy to grow in the sense that you put it in the fall, then you mulch it, and you don't touch it till July roughly. And that just fit in again with our how we wanted to live our lives, you know, not having to pick vegetables every other day, for nine

months straight just didn't fit with what we were trying to do. And garlic. You know, everybody needs it at some level, you know, whether you're a restaurant or a family. Sure. So we just thought it would be easy, somewhat easy to market that.

 Dan Perkins 03:52

Yeah, yeah. I know you work off the farm. Dan, you're certified crop advisor. Tell me a little bit about that balancing act. Sure. So, you know, our philosophy on the farm is not to carry a huge debt load. And so until we can scale up enough and have enough infrastructure, which is really expensive. We just, we just got a quote on my ideal wash pack shed for \$90,000. Yeah, and it's like is that a necessary investment? Right? It sure is. But we have to be able to afford For that, budget that in. So through just my interest in environmental stewardship and agriculture, becoming a crop advisor was a natural fit to working with the farmers in our wider community, focusing on cover crops and conservation, and I just I love doing that. So I love farming. I love doing this. So I want to do both at this point. That's great. Yeah.

 Christa Hartsook 05:31

Dan, you're coming to Iowa next month to be the keynote speaker for our conference. Tell me why you're excited about that.

 05:37

I'm excited because I've never been a keynote at a conference. So it's a little intimidating. But I think what I've been trying, trying to farm, so to speak for 14 years. And I feel like I've really started to hit a balance. That, okay, we're not deriving our full time income from the farm, but that's okay. Yes. And that, do I? Do I want to be farming full time in four to five years? Yes. So I feel like I'm at a really critical, I guess, reflective point to where a lot of people are at. It'll be really interesting to see how many people in the room at the conference are, you know, working off the farm as well. And I have a feeling it's gonna be pretty high.

 Christa Hartsook 06:23

I would guess the same. Yeah.

 Dan Perkins 06:25

And, and that, I don't think there's a lot of good information out there about how, how you navigate that, that balancing act, because there's far too many farms that have started out and, and farmers get burnt out, right. Or there's divorces or there's, you know, just stuff that shouldn't shouldn't define what small farms are. Right. And so I think I just want to share our story, and try to try to help others in that journey.

 Christa Hartsook 06:53



Christa Hartsook 00:55

Yeah, I think that's great. I think it's important for people to hear that message of that balancing act. So we're excited that you're coming. In addition to the keynote, you are providing a breakout session, after the keynote address. Tell us what we can expect to hear in that.



07:09

Well, I'm going to focus on cover crops, that's kind of my dream, sleep, and eat cover crops. And so I think that's such a critical component to farming sustainably, whether you're a large conventional farm corn and beans, or you're a small farm. And I think there's so much value there. But at the end of the day, it comes down to how do we cover crop on our farms in such a way that there's some return on investment. And it's practical and easy, not easy, but it's manageable. In vegetable production, that's it's tricky. Or any any any crop really, so just want to talk through a question and answer. Share some of my experiences on our w we implement cover crops.



Christa Hartsook 08:02

Great, great. We are super excited to have you Dan. The podcast and registration information will be up on our website which is [www dot extension dot iastate.edu/smallfarms](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/smallfarms). Dan, anything you want to add in closing,



Dan Perkins 08:20

I look forward to coming to Iowa. I can't say I'm a Hawkeye fan, but maybe I'll be converted over the conference.



Christa Hartsook 08:28

Oh we'll want you to become a cyclone fan.



Dan Perkins 08:29

Oh yes, that's true.



Christa Hartsook 08:31

All right. Thanks a lot.