

Farming Cooperatively: Alternative Arrangements to Farm Start-Up with Daniel Brisebois, Tourne-Sol Co-operative Farm and Cammie Harbottle, Waldegrave Farm, Certified Organic Produce

The first half of the workshop is done by Daniel Brisebois – Tourne-Sol Cooperative Farm:

The five co-op members/owners of Tourne-Sol Cooperative Farm in Les Cedres, Quebec:

Frédéric Thériault– Does all of the book keeping for the farm. He manages market harvests, examines how much we should target for, and keeps regular records for tracking purposes. He also manages soil fertility and sourcing appropriate amendments. Crops: He takes care of tomatoes, leeks, onions and most of the heading brassicas and the farm perennials.

Renée Primeau– Takes care of record-keeping and other admin associated to maintaining organic certification. She makes sure we have receipts, are in compliance with the Canadian Organic standard, and talks to organic inspectors. She researches pest and disease management practices for the farm, while also managing the cut flower production as well as the zucchinis, winter squash, lettuce and some of the greenhouse production.

Reid Allaway– The farm machinery guy, focusing on farm infrastructure needs. He's also the apprentice coordinator and manages the farm's cover crops. Crops: In charge of carrots and beets and potatoes and beans.

Emily Board– She is the CSA Program Coordinator. She also grows, gathers and dries culinary and medicinal herbs, in addition to managing several brassica crops, including kohlrabi. She builds baskets and plans winter and summer CSA production. She coordinates all the crops that we can't do single-handedly;

Dan Brisebois- Manages crop planning; crop rotation; online store; garlic and seed production. Crops: Salad greens, garlic, cucumbers.

We break down the tasks based on what we like, what we're good at, and partially just because it needs to get done.

They also bring on 2-4 apprentices every year!

The Advantages of Cooperative Farming:

Reliable Labour: We have to be extra efficient so we can get enough revenue to pay for ourselves. We don't have to worry about training people, since we are all invested in the land and business. Employees don't necessarily have the same dedication as the farmers do. They have a 5-person dedicated workforce.

Shared Equipment: We don't need to have three of every thing. At the start we only needed one tractor, one cold room, one wash station, ... These savings in investments help contribute to an overall fund so that we can invest in other useful equipment.

Quality of life: As one person farming, you have so many things to worry about; so many things to maintain/ensure are running smoothly. At Tourne-Sol, with five people we can divide tasks, we trust each other; we are happy to delegate without second-guessing. We're each handling a different crop, so we can better understand it's agronomy and give it what it needs. Through this focus and division, all of the crops are doing great, not just a couple.

Quality of life/Over the Season: Having numerous folks committed to managing the farm can allow for everyone to take a little bit of time off. It creates trust that tasks will get done even when some of the group is not there. It brings peace of mind, and helps contribute to the long-term farm (and personal) sustainability so people don't burn out. This creates a support network.

Logistics of Cooperative Farming

In the beginning, your fellow co-op farmers aren't familiar to you as working partners. They are relationships that are cultivated with clear communication, respect and dedication.

Dividing time fairly: Made a common schedule for everyone. We initially tried to have everyone record their hours – and it didn't work. This can work better during the summer months, but during the wintertime, it took a lot of notes to figure out how many hours we worked.

Dividing money fairly: All farmers have the same hourly wage. Profits divided in proportion to hours worked during season. Future partners might start at a lower rate and work their way up the pay scale. It's important to maintain equality.

Communication: We use a lot of blackboards, which need to communicate clear messages. We also meet a fair amount, once a week during fall, to plan out the year. This is when we come up with goals and work through those for the year.

Summer: board meetings once a month to discuss things that popped up during the week. On Monday morning, one person plans out the week. There is a quick daily meeting at the beginning of the day, to review what needs to get done, any help that anyone may need, etc. Weekly/monthly discussion is for discussion.

We also practice:

NVC – Non-Violent Communication. Taking ownership of your statements and feelings. Directing language so that it's not about confronting the person, more about the circumstances.

Holistic Management – A management approach for livestock management specifically. About setting quality of life goals and environment goals and creating a system that meets these goals.

Initially the farm was *just* financially viable. Now the farm is financially viable + we're achieving the quality of life we want.

Challenges:

(First years) Empowering all members (not just one) – making decisions that everyone contributes to and feels ownership over.

(Present) Improving our quality of life – requires decent income, but it's also possible to enjoy life without too much! Makes for more of a pleasant environment (not just a work environment); allowing for time off etc. On the last Friday of every month, everyone stops at 3:30 / 4:00 to have a BBQ. It's important to have a friendly environment; incorporate family integration and make a point to nurture friendships, not just working relationships.

(Future) Planning for members leaving – even in a pleasant manner. The farm is supposed to outlive its owners. It's not about creating profit, but instead creating

employment. Still up in the air. Important to have something set up before it actually happens.

Working with other people means learning to listen, discovering your shortcomings and working on them. Essentially working with other people is about becoming better people as ourselves.

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### **Cammie Harbottle of Waldegrave Farm begins 2<sup>nd</sup> half of workshop:**

Cammie grew up in BC. Completed Linnaea Farm Ecological Gardening Programme (Cortes Island, BC) then worked on an organic farm for 5 years. Pretty set on being out there. Moved out to the east coast with her partner.

The farm was purchased by a group of friends who went to University, cycled across Canada, and wanted to buy land together and do something constructive. Waldegrave Farm is a 100-acre farm with an old farmhouse and many out buildings. Farm was purchased 8 years ago and has since been transferred to the Tatamagouche Community Land Trust. It took several years to get to where they are now.

Community Land Trust: Land is held in trust by a cooperative (can't be bought or sold again). Goal is to make land accessible and affordable for people and take it out of the speculative market. The group donated land to the co-op and thus no longer own the land. Over time the board will be only 1/3-lease holders, right now they're all board members.

Currently there are 7 long-term renewable leases on the land. Can't sell it, but can build a house on it. Access to all buildings, farmhouse and fields and forests. Do whatever we want within our bylaws. Can sell the house, not the land. House would sell at how much it costs to build it. So it's affordable. Worked out a lot of systems for financing.

People were just experimenting at first. A lot of people living in the main farmhouse at first. Now there are three main residences aside from the farmhouse. People are branching off and forming their own families.

### **Waldegrave Farm:**

The Waldegrave Farm business is not a co-op. The farm is located on the land trust, which includes a 9-acre agricultural lease. This provided access to land right off the bat without a mortgage. *Report at the AGM if any plans in the works, other than that, can manage the land as I wish within the bylaws in place. Access to other outbuildings as well.* Things I wouldn't be able to afford as a beginner farmer.

We set up a **machine co-op** so people didn't have to purchase a tractor or other machinery for each person. This way each person only has to pay a fraction of the cost. Paying in for a per-use basis. Equipment is either purchased collectively or donated into the machine coop. Then members can borrow the equipment from the coop without having to buy all of the equipment themselves. **Tool Sharing** is in place as well.

**Support: This is one of the most important aspects of living cooperatively in community. There is support from all of the people living on the farm with is invaluable.** Constant communication and help during problems. Putting up greenhouses would be hard to do single handedly! People want to see the land worked, and are invested in it. With this network in place there is almost always someone who can lend a hand, which also makes it easier to take some time away from the farm, when needed. Can call on people for help when I am in a bind or have something that needs to be hauled out of the field (eg. Squash before a frost, etc.) or to go to market, help with packing, help with Keir. Also people to empathize and celebrate with.

People are always around and interested. There is a sense of community.

**Challenges:** Working with a lot of different personalities, ideas and visions. Doesn't always work out smoothly. We learn different techniques to improve communication and abilities to work with each other.

There are a lot of complicated systems that are in place. Financial, or land systems. With a 20-year plan for infrastructure, we need to plan out a lot!

Decision-making can be challenge but also a benefit. A much longer process, but with seven heads rather than one. Ultimately we make a lot stronger decisions this way.

So many different options, we need to get out of the mindset of *needing* to own your own farm and land. Equipment co-ops could be expanded for not just one piece of land.

