





# Making Major Money with Minor Crops



## PRODUCING PROFIT ON THE EDGES

*(BASIL, CILANTRO, CHOI, PARSLEY, SCALLIONS,  
SHALLOTS, & SUMMER LEEKS)*

DEREK CHRISTIANSON - BRIX BOUNTY FARM

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2016 NOFA/MASS WINTER CONFERENCE

SATURDAY JANUARY 16, 2015 - WORCESTER, MASS

# Brix Bounty Farm



Exponential Growth in Health Care Costs

**Growing a Foundation for Health... Starts in the Soil**

Market to Our Immediate Community

Passion for Growing Food (Working in the Field)

Harness Nature's Bounty – > Employing Nature's Diversity



# Productivity & Profitability

Seeds  
Soil  
Sunshine  
Rain  
Labor  
(\$)

=  
Veggies

Lettuce Mix – Nov 17, 2015

# Specialty Crops Project – NOFA/MA, NH, & VT



3 year project funded by USDA Specialty Crops Grant  
(administered by each state)

32 farms each growing 2-3 crops

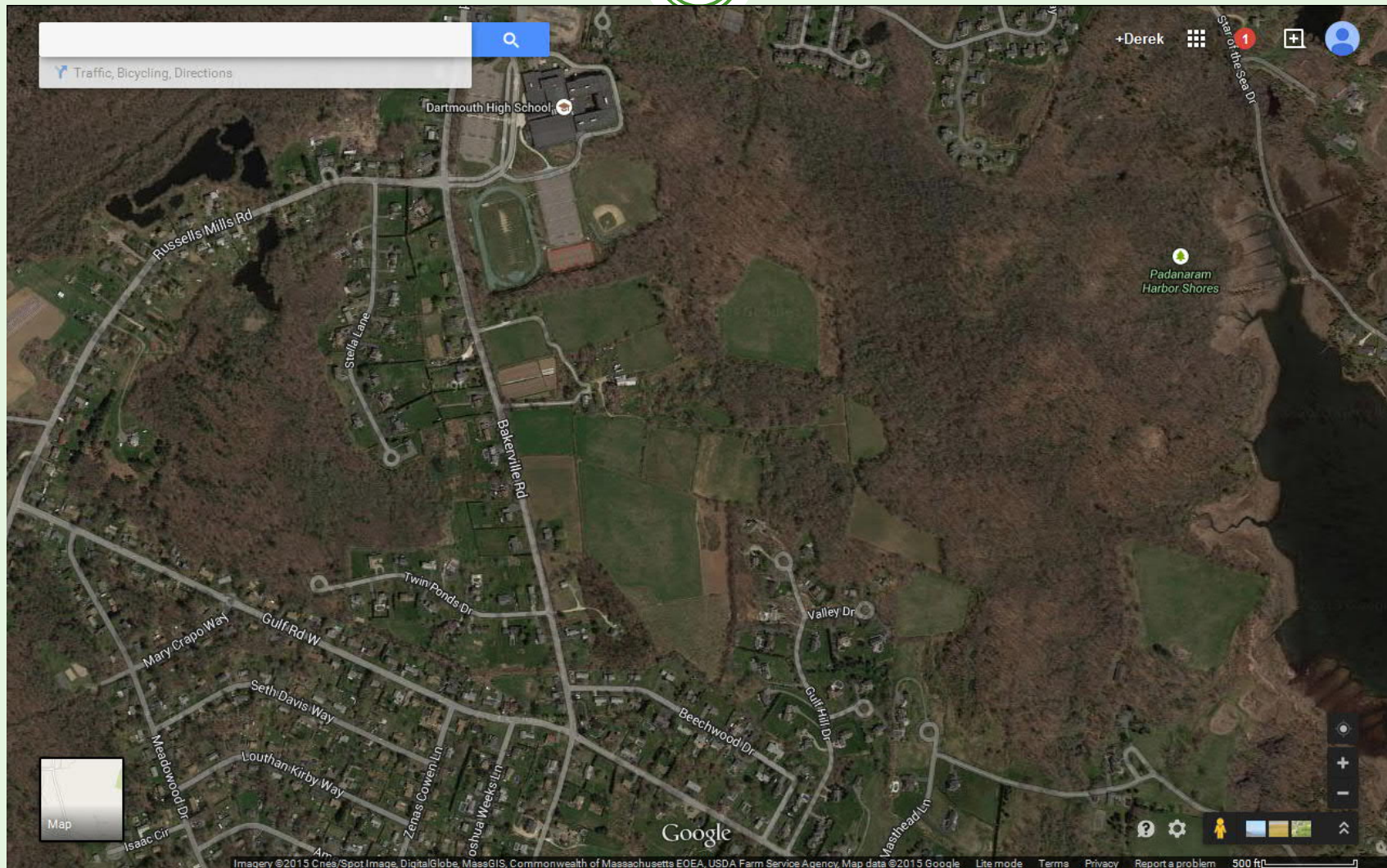
Enterprise Analysis

Examining Productivity & Profitability

*Wiswall, Organic Farming Business Handbook*

*Hartman, Lean Farm*

# Google View – Brix Bounty Farm



# Brix Bounty Farm – Labor & Experience



Derek Christianson – Growing Veg Since 2002.

Brix Bounty 2008, Relocated (2 miles) in 2014

~7 acres under production w/3,500 sq. ft. under plastic

2 Full-Time Employees (March > Nov) + winter

1 Part-Time Seasonal (May-Aug) + 3-4 workshares

David King – Tractor Work – primary tillage, etc (100 hrs)



# Brix Bounty Budget at a Glance



“Early Stage Maturity” at Markets  
\$145K Veg Sales projected for 2016

Roadside Stand (\$80K)

80-90 member Summer CSA (\$45K)

40 member Winter CSA (\$12K)

Downtown NB Market (\$8K)

~\$3-5K additional Farm Income (consulting, projects)

# Gross Sales “Targets” per Bed



Currently we have 233 beds on the farm – approx. 7 acres  
33 beds per acre (1320 sq. ft. – 220' x 6' avg.)

## **High Value Crops**

Target \$60K+ per acre or \$2K per bed (~\$1.50 sq. ft.)

## **Medium Value Crops**

Target \$35K per acre or \$1k per bed (~\$1 sq. ft.)

## **Low Value Crops**

Target \$20K per acre or \$600 per bed (~.50 sq. ft.)

# Enterprise Budgets: Simple > Complex



## The Importance of Fieldkeeping



Accurately Reflect  
Costs of Production

Budgeting our Time

Determining Profit  
Pricing

# Labor Costs – At Brix Bounty



Labor Costs are the Largest Cost for the Farm.

Our Crew – an Investment in the Community  
Wages Rise as Farm's Capacity Increases...

Target Net Income \$40-50K (depending on reinvestment)

~3500 hours (\$11.50 - \$14 hour)

*includes community work and non-production hours*

# Gauging Your Farm's Common Rates



Cost of Producing Flats (GH Production)

Primary & Secondary Tillage

Amendment Applications

Direct Seeding / Transplanting

**Row Cover**

**Cultivation & In-Season Fertility**

Irrigation

**Harvest**

**Post Harvest**

Mowing & Establishing Cover Crops

# Basil



GH (4-5 wks) > TP (4-6 wks) > H

Select Varieties for Your Needs:

Italian Large Leaf

4 seeds/cell – 128's at 3 Rows 6" or 1'

At Brix in '16 – 15M for 500' + 240' late (\$30 for seed/3yrs)

Target Yield of 6 bags per bed foot for main crop

{CSA 100x10, Mkt 24x12, Stand 1,500 = 2,788}

\$3 per bag

Gross Target: \$18 per bed foot

\$3,960 per bed or ~\$140K per acre

# Basil – August 13, 2015



# Basil – August 21, 2015





# Basil – August 21, 2015



# Perspectives on Basil



Ultimate High Value Crop  
(Especially in Tomato Season)

Alas... Basil Downy Mildew – limits sales in Fall

Select the Harvesting Method which Meets Your Needs

At Brix we Harvest Large Bunches from the Top and Bunch or Bag (mostly bag – reduce injury to leaves, etc.)

Seasonality – we offer a bounty to our CSA w/ease during high season...

# 5 Characteristics of High Value Crops



Short “Real-Estate” Period (days in the field)

Scallions vs. Lexton Leeks

Compact Growth Habit / May Be Densely Planted

Cilantro vs. Artichokes

Multiple Harvests (re-growth)

Basil vs. Cabbage

Easy/Quick to Harvest, Minimal Post Harvest Work

Parsley vs. Green Beans (slow harvest)

Small Size per Unit – High Value per Space on Market Truck

Shallots vs. Watermelons

## Potential Gross Value for These Crops (weeks in the field)



Basil (10-12): \$18-\$20/bed foot (at \$3/bag) – 6 - 6.75 bags

Choi (3-8): \$7.50 - \$15/bed foot (at \$2.50/bunch) – 3-6 b.  
alternatively cut loose for multiple harvests (in the spring/fall)

Cilantro (6-10): \$18/bed foot (at \$2/bunch) – 9 bunches

Parsley (~16): \$18/bed foot (at \$2/bunch) - 9 per bed'

Scallions (6-8): \$6/bed foot (at \$2/bunch) – 3 per bed'

Shallots (16): \$8.25/bed foot (at \$3 per pint or ~\$.75 ea)

Summer Leeks (12-16): \$9 - \$10.50/bed foot (\$3 - \$3.50)

# Choi



GH (3 wks) > TP (3-8 wks) H

Select Varieties for Your Needs:

Joi Choi (types), Black Summer, Mei Qing, Red Choi

2 seeds/cell – 128's at 3 Rows 6''

At Brix in '16 – 15M for 1200' (\$50 for seed)

Target Yield of 3 bunches per bed foot = 3,600 bunches

{CSA 100x7, WCSA 40x4, Mkt 12x17, Stand 1,200 = 2,264}

\$2.50 per bunch

Gross Target: \$7.50 per bed foot

\$1650 per bed or ~\$60K per acre

# Choi – June 15, 2015



# Choi – December 27, 2015



# Perspectives on Choi



**Very Broad Harvest Window – Great for CSA**  
cut at baby stage if you need a cooking green,  
let grow to larger size as necessary

Protect from Flea Beetles – at planting

Bunching ... takes a while 2-3 b. per minute (\$300-\$450 H/Hr)

“Easier” to produce high quality in the fall

Increase Yield (equal footprint)...  
1<sup>st</sup> cut as loose leaf in Oct 2015



# Cilantro



Multiple Successions – Transplanted, yes Transplanted!

GH (3-4 wks) > TP (3-5 wks) > H:

## Calypso

4 seeds/cell – 128's at 3 Rows 6" – protect from rodents

At Brix in '16 – 20M for ~740' (\$13.25 for seed - extra)

Target Yield of 6 bunches per bed foot per succession

{CSA 100x11, WCSA 40x5, Mkt 24x17, Stand 2,000}

\$2.00 per bunch

Gross Target: \$12 per bed foot

\$2,640 per bed or ~\$95K per acre

# Calypso Cilantro – June 12, 2015



# Perspectives on Cilantro



Potential for very good returns per square foot

Hand transplanting allows “young” seedlings to be set out.  
& “Wide Window” for Initial Cut... potential for 2x-3x cuts

FERTILITY MANAGEMENT (Calcium)

Very Quick to Harvest (when well cultivated)

Gardeners are challenged by cilantro... strong market

# Parsley



## Multiple Successions

GH (5-6 wks) > TP (5-6 wks) > H:

4 seeds/cell – 128's at 3 Rows 6'' – protect from rodents

At Brix in '16 – 15M seed for 240' (3x), 120' (3x), 240' (2x)  
(\$18 for seed) FRESH EVERY YEAR!

Target Yield of 9 bunches per bed foot per succession

\$2.00 per bunch

Gross Target: \$18 per bed foot

\$3,960 per bed or ~\$142K per acre

{CSA 90x9, WCSA 40x6, Mkt 30x17, Stand 2,000}

# Determining Demand and Seasonality



Parsley – 1,060 b. after October 1, ~3,600 b. total

Summer CSA – 9 distributions x 100 = 900 b.

Winter CSA – 6 distributions x 40 = 240 b.

Market – 17 markets x 30 = 510 b.

Stand = ~2,000 b.

June 50 x 4 wks = 200

July 90 x 4 wks = 360

Aug 120 x 4 wks = 480

Sept 90 x 4 wks = 360

Oct 60 x 4 wks = 240

Nov 40 x 4wks = 160

Dec 25 x 4 wks = 100

# Perspectives on Parsley – Deer Fencing!



Potential for **Very Good Returns** per square foot

Market Preference for Flat Leaf

Alternaria & Leaf Blight

**Very Quick to Harvest - when well cultivated**  
**Target 4-6 bunches/minute (\$480-\$720 H HR)**  
Quick to wash (if necc)

Need to Over-Produce in Summer to Meet Need in Fall?

# Scallions



GH, TP, H

Parade, White Spear

5-6 seeds/cell – 128's at 3 Rows 6''

At Brix in '16 – 33M for 1100' (\$30-\$50 for seed)

Target Yield of 3 bunches per bed foot = 3,300 bunches

{CSA 100x5, WCSA 40x4, Mkt 20\*17, Stand 2,000}

\$2.00 per bunch

Gross Target: \$6 per bed foot

\$1,320 per bed or ~\$47K per acre

# Scallions – June 15, 2015





# Scallions – August 1, 2015



# Scallions – August 20, 2015



# Perspectives on Scallions



Very Popular at Market,  
Wide Harvest Window (if quality/market support is there)

## LABOR INTENSIVE TO HARVEST

Pull, Trim Roots, Bunch, Top (if necc) > Spray  
60 bunches / hr (\$120 H Hr)

Post Harvest pretty quick > (\$100 H+PH Hr)

If less peeling necc ... up to 120 bunches / hr

at Competition for what other activities?

We limit scallions to our CSA (2x June, 1x Summer, 2xFall)

# Considering Input Costs – a Case for Compost



Traditional Scallion Culture at Brix Bounty – 3 Rows, 6''

1 Bed Yields ~660 bunches or \$1,320 Value

Casella Compost - \$24.75/cu. yd. delivered

If we were to apply 2 yards to a bed (70 yds/acre) cost would be \$50 + labor to apply...

Provide fertility for 5 Rows, 6'' > \$2,200 Value

**\$880 Increase in Gross Value minus Costs of Compost**

# Roles of “Minor Crops” on the Farm



Create market diversity for our farmstand, CSA, and farmers market customers.

**Crop Diversity = Our Crop Insurance**

Provide crops which are less common or less consistent in home gardens – e.g. complement tomatoes



# Shallots



GH (seeded):22715, TP: 50215, H: mid-August

Camelot (large size), Conservor

2 seeds/cell – 128's at 3 Rows 6''

At Brix in '16 – 3M for 220' (\$52.25 for seed)

Target Yield of 4 x ½ pints per bed foot = 880 boxes

{CSA 90x3, WCSA 40x5, Mkt 60, Stand 350}

\$2.50 per ½ pint or \$.75 each

Gross Target: \$10 per bed foot

\$2200 per bed or ~\$80K per acre

# Camelot Shallots – August 20, 2015



# Perspectives on Shallots



Classic High Value Crop - ~\$4 to \$6 per lb.

We market at the stand:

\$2.50 for a heaping ½ pint or \$.75 each

Start in GH early as reasonable, keep weeds and pests at bay

**Harvesting & post harvest is “labor intensive”**

15 minutes per 5 gallon bucket if peeling/clipping for fresh market sales

If 26 buckets = 6.5 labor hours in field + 2 post harvest

(\$250+ per hour H+PH value)

Good storage life... but at what cost? Aug-Dec at Brix



# Summer Bunching Leeks



GH 222 or 229 > TP 425 > H: beginning mid/late July  
Lincoln, Alto (High Mowing Seeds)

5 seeds/cell – 128's at 3 Rows 6''

At Brix in '15 – 4M for 120' (\$12 for seed) – 2x in '16 ?

Target Yield of 3 bunches per bed foot = 360 bunches

{CSA 100x2, Mkt 8x6=48, Stand 20x6=120}

\$3 - \$3.50 per bunch

Gross Target: \$9-10.50 per bed foot

\$1,980 per bed or ~\$70K per acre

# Perspectives on Alto Leeks (8/20/15)



Popular among “Foodies”

Not much more work than scallions  
(2 additional cultivations)

a bit more \$ per bed foot

Provides mid-season allium diversity

avoid onion burnout in CSA

preview of Fall Leek season



# Takeaways



Labor is Expensive... (Less > That is Good)

Fertility is Both a Good Short and Long Term Investment

“Fieldkeeping” – A Decision Making Tool

Minor Crops Are Only 1 Part of the Picture

Focus on Major Crops -  
Where You Invest the Most Land and Labor

# Quick Exercise Sheet – Determining Harvest Needs



**Mkt Outlet #1** \_\_\_\_\_

# of Units \_\_\_\_\_

x Distributions \_\_\_\_\_

**Mkt Outlet #2** \_\_\_\_\_

# of Units \_\_\_\_\_

x Distributions \_\_\_\_\_

**Mkt Outlet #3** \_\_\_\_\_

# of Units \_\_\_\_\_

x of Distribution \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL # OF UNITS** \_\_\_\_\_

Yield Per Bed Foot \_\_\_\_\_

Estimate Yield in Field  
at 80 – 90%

therefore plant additional 25%

Also plan for losses in the gh

seed additional 10-20% of # of  
transplants needed

# Fieldkeeping Made Easier



Dedicated Clipboard or Folder (if multiple person team)

Don't Try to Measure Everything...  
Measure Standard Rates

“Snapshot” of yields and time spent on activity

i.e. GH Spinach (Jan 8, 2016) – 34 X-L Bags – 30 bed ' FH beds at 5R, 6" - plants cut to base  
4 Orange Bushel Baskets – 40 min to H + PH (bag)  
\$5 per bag value = ~\$250 per H + PH HR

# Growing Profit at the Edges



Important to Consider Fixed Costs of Farming

If you have customers, is there something you could add to your production cycle which would be popular and profitable.

Helpful for CSA, but real profit for these crops come from market, stand, direct sales...

Capacity to create your own niche

# Upcoming Educational Events



Winter Study Session (Wednesdays in Feb/Mar.)

*The Farm at Ecosystem – Jerry Brunetti*

**Soil & Nutrition Conference 2016 – Feb 8,9 at Kripalu**

**Mid-Season Corrections w/ Foliar Sprays**

**SEMAP Ag & Food Conference – Sunday Feb 28 – Dighton**

**Hugh Lovel – March 5-7 in Warren, Rhode Island**

<http://bionutrient.org/events>

# Thank You



Handouts & Presentation  
Available at [www.brixbounty.com](http://www.brixbounty.com)

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presentation contact:

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