

Interviewee: Ian Giusto
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Date: July 16, 2020



Ian Giusto
Serenbe Farms
Chattahoochee Hills, GA

Date: July 16, 2020
Location: Remote Interview
Interviewer: Diana Dombrowski
Transcription: Technitype Transcripts
Length: Forty-seven minutes
Project: COVID-19 & Foodways

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Diana D.: All right. My name is Diana Dombrowski. I'm here on July 16 with Ian. And, Ian, if you could, please tell us how to spell your name and tell us where you were born.

[00:00:14]

Ian G.: Okay, yeah. So, my name is Ian Giusto, and I-a-n, and last name G-i-u-s-t-o. I was actually born in Delaware.

[00:00:27]

Diana D.: Nice! Really close to Pennsylvania, yeah, yeah. [Laughter] All right. So you grew up in D.C.

[00:00:32]

Ian G.: Right. Alexandria area.

[00:00:36]

Diana D.: Great. And what did your parents do?

[00:00:37]

Ian G.: So, I come from a split family, and so I spent some time growing up with my dad and my stepmom, and then I spent time with my mom and my stepdad. So, my dad was a chef, and my stepmom, at the time when I lived in the Alexandria area, she was working for a company called the Chronicle of Higher Education, so it's

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basically a publication that goes out to like college professors, so that's what she did there.

[00:01:10]

Diana D.: Nice. Okay. And was food a big part of your family life? Do you remember—

[00:01:15]

Ian G.: It was huge.

[00:01:16]

Diana D.: —different meals? Yeah, okay. Sorry.

[00:01:19]

Ian G.: Yeah, it was really big. So, my dad, he's a trained chef, obviously, and his father, Big Lou, which he's known as because my dad is Lou, but he was Big Lou, he was a chef as well, so it's like multigenerational. But, yes, food was huge. We had a thing every—which doesn't go so great with vegetables, but we had a thing every Monday called Mystery Meat Night, and so dad would prepare something and wouldn't let us know what it was until after we ate it, but, you know, when you're eight or nine years old, it was pretty cool to eat a lot of different types of things that kids down the street aren't eating. But, yeah, so, yes, to answer your question, food was huge.

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[00:02:04]

Diana D.: That's awesome. Did he ever teach you how to cook?

[00:02:06]

Ian G.: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we all had a job in the kitchen.

[00:02:11]

Diana D.: Yeah. What kind of job did you usually have?

[00:02:13]

Ian G.: It could be anything as far as, you know, setting things up for like *mirepoix* to put in place or, sorry, *mise-en-place* to put-in-place, or, you know, cutting up vegs for stock or making a sauce or, you know, peeling shrimp or cutting things correctly or learning how to hone a knife.

[00:02:35]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:02:35]

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Ian G.: Or storing things correctly, whatever, you know, whatever he was down for as far as delegating.

[00:02:44]

Diana D.: That's great. So, you guys were learning how to cook from scratch. That's awesome.

[00:02:47]

Ian G.: Yes, we learned to cook from scratch, and continued through my adult life.

[00:02:54]

Diana D.: Great.

[00:02:54]

Ian G.: So, cooking is a big part of my life too.

[00:02:56]

Diana D.: Cool.

[00:02:58]

Ian G.: Yeah, for sure.

[00:02:59]

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Diana D.: Oh, that's fantastic. And when you went to school, were you interested in farming and agriculture since you [audio cut out] as well?

[00:03:07]

Ian G.: No.

[00:03:08]

Diana D.: How did you get into farming?

[00:03:08]

Ian G.: I've always been into whatever I could put my hands on, I guess it is, a very hands-on person, so that could be from tying flies to cooking to, you know, rock climbing, to exploring the forest to, you know, anything, honestly. I loved anything I could do, you could do with your hands. Gardening or farming, it was something that I really kind of got from spending time with my mom's side of the family. So, her mother was an avid gardening, so I spent a lot of summers with her, and that's probably where the real interest came from, as far as like European style of like double digging your beds, and a lot of it had to do with like perennial flowers and maintenance of that. But, you know, yeah, there was no reason, as far as like, "Yeah, I want to start a farm," or, "I want to start a garden," or "I want to go to school to learn agriculture." There's none of that. So, it was more, "I'm tired of my job. There's got to be something more in life. I need a little bit more

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purpose in what I'm doing." So ,I just kind of saved up and jumped right into it
with basically nothing besides, you know, Eliot Coleman's book. [Laughter]

[00:04:42]

Diana D.: Wow!

[00:04:44]

Ian G.: Yeah. So, you know, everything I pretty much have learned has been from
reading and killing lots and lots and lots of stuff.

[00:04:55]

Diana D.: [Laughter] It takes a lot of initiative, yeah.

[00:04:58]

Ian G.: Yeah, you know, I think that's the best way to learn. I mean, I think—well, not
the best way. It's the way that works for me, so I'm always like, "It doesn't work,
try it again. It doesn't work, try it again. If it doesn't work, maybe try something
different."

[00:05:14]

Diana D.: And did you start—

[00:05:14]

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Ian G.: Am I even answering your question?

[00:05:16]

Diana D.: Totally, yes, definitely, absolutely, yeah. So when we do the interview, this is really like so much time, forty-five minutes, whatever it is, for you to put on the record what's important to you about your work and your experience.

[00:05:30]

Ian G.: Right.

[00:05:31]

Diana D.: So, please, yeah, take **us through it**.

[00:05:32]

Ian G.: Right. Totally, yes. So, you know, an interesting fact is like a lot of my applications that come through for internships, all women. Women are the future of agriculture, believe it or not. I mean, I think you probably know that.

[00:05:49]

Diana D.: [Laughter]

[00:05:51]

Ian G.: But of the hundreds—

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[00:05:52]

Diana D.: [Audio cut out].

[00:05:53]

Ian G.: —of applications I get, probably 70 percent of them are women.

[00:05:57]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:05:57]

Ian G.: And, you know, I don't know why that is, but it's been great. All the interns that I've had that have been girls—or women—have been phenomenal, actually. But, yeah, I think it's—why did I get into it? It really started out as food ministry, actually. I was working with a local church and we were doing—basically providing meals for families, you know, low-income families, people that, you know, don't have cars or, you know, grandparents raising grandkids, you know, stuff like that, so I realized just from getting to know these families and the deliveries and going into people's houses and building relationships, that good, fresh vegetables, you know, unless you have a backyard garden or something, like they're not eating it, you know. And so a lot of the stuff that we were getting, obviously it was nice to be able to give someone a meal, but it's just really high-processed foods, really high in sugars, you know, all kinds of additives. And so

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the funny thing was, is that most of the children, especially kids like under the age of eight, they had no interest in it. I don't know if it was because it was such a large part of their diet, but they were just honing in on the veg, and they wanted vegetables and they wanted fruit. That's what they wanted. So I was like, "Okay, so that's pretty interesting," because when I was a kid, yeah, I loved fruits and veg, but not like that. Like if someone put like a slice of, you know, marrow bread pie in front of me or something like that, like I'd be pretty stoked with that. They had no interest. Then the veg that we were getting was stuff that, unfortunately, you know, it's stuff that they can't market, and so it was stuff that, you know, that was going to go basically in the trash, and so we were giving them stuff that even though it was good, you know, we sorted through it, it wasn't the best quality. So I was like, "Well, maybe I can start a garden and grow stuff out. I don't really know what I'm doing. I know how to grow flowers, but I don't know anything about vegetables." So I just started this garden just to grow vegetables for the community, and that's really how it started. Then I realized pretty soon that it wasn't financially self-sufficient, and so I started, you know, getting involved with the local farmers' market, really to just kind of pay my mortgage, is really what it came down to, and I continued to do the food ministry. We started a community garden where we live and kind of saw that grow a little bit. It's since kind of changed hands as far as that food ministry that we had. Since then, so I've kind of strayed, unfortunately, a little bit away from that. But that's kind of how it started. That's really where my interest was, is I felt like this was something that I was somewhat good at, and I felt, I guess, called to pursue it, and it's something

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that's brought me where I am today, and so it's a great job. It's definitely not
easy. [Laughter]

[00:09:18]

Diana D.: Yeah, yeah.

[00:09:20]

Ian G.: You know?

[00:09:20]

Diana D.: That's great, though, because like what the community was asking you to do.

[00:09:27]

Ian G.: Right. Exactly. So, I mean, the need's there for sure, you know. And I'm not
saying get into farming, you know, for that, but, I mean, it's a great avenue for
sure. It's definitely thinking about people that don't have, and being able to
provide it. Hopefully, the best—for me it was trying to grow the best-quality
crops, so being able to give someone something as if they had paid a good price
for it rather than, you know, giving them something that nobody really wants.
[Laughter]

[00:09:58]

Diana D.: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's really [audio cut off].

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[00:09:59]

Ian G.: But that's kind of how I got my run on it.

[00:10:03]

Diana D.: And that was in Georgia, where you are now?

[00:10:04]

Ian G.: That was in Georgia, yeah. That was in Newnan, Georgia. But now I'm at
Serenbe now, been there about a year and a half.

[00:10:17]

Diana D.: Yeah.

[00:10:18]

Ian G.: So that's been good too.

[00:10:19]

Diana D.: I know—I was speaking with Garver about the outpost that Rodale's starting.
He really emphasizes how difficult farming is in the South.

[00:10:29]

Ian G.: Oh, my god.

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[00:10:30]

Diana D.: You were just growing flowers, you know, up around like Alexandria, which I'd say is kind of southernish or adjacent itself.

[00:10:38]

Ian G.: Yeah, we have a winter. I think that really helps.

[00:10:41]

Diana D.: Okay.

[00:10:41]

Ian G.: I think especially as far as like pest management.

[00:10:44]

Diana D.: [Laughter]

[00:10:44]

Ian G.: Having a hard freeze is huge. That's the hardest thing about Georgia, is the multigenerational insects it has. But I do know that, you know, as your soil becomes healthier and your plants, you know, as the plants are obviously healthy because your soil's healthy, you definitely see a lot less pest problems. Georgia

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has tons of fungal issues too. That's the other thing, high humidity, high temperatures at night. Like last year we had ninety days over 95, and so—

[00:10:44]

Diana D.: Oh, my god.

[00:11:20]

Ian G.: I know. And no rain.

[00:11:23]

Diana D.: Oh, god! Brutal.

[00:11:24]

Ian G.: Yeah. And we get a lot of really—because of where we're located, we get a lot of really bad storms coming through from Alabama, so we'll get like three inches of rain, you know, in an hour or two hours, and so you get a lot of flash flooding and things like that. So, yeah, I think if you can—I'm sure everyone says this, but if you can grow in Georgia organically, I think that you're pretty solid most places in the United States. Florida can probably be pretty rough too. I don't know. I've never grown in Florida, but it's pretty warm there as well. But I was just in New Hampshire for five days, and I've never been to the New England area, and I was like taking my daughter for a walk and I was like digging in everyone's yard early in the morning, because I'm like, "Soil can't be like this. This can't be like how

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soil is.” Because in Virginia, yeah, there’s some sections in Shenandoah Valley where you can get some pretty nice topsoil run through, but like up there, like people say—or even in the Midwest, people say, “Oh, I’m just used to throwing a seed in the ground and it grows.” I understand now, because you probably could just throw a seed in the ground and it would grow. The soil is so spongy up there, I guess because there’s such a high fungal activity, but I feel like I’m walking on, you know, walking on one of those air mattresses when I was walking in people’s yards. So I was blown away by the soil up there for sure, and Georgia has nothing like that. [Laughter]

[00:12:57]

Diana D.: So you’re growing organically—

[00:12:59]

Ian G.: Yes.

[00:12:59]

Diana D.: —in this difficult environment, really challenging.

[00:13:01]

Ian G.: Yeah, yeah.

[00:13:02]

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Diana D.: Do you find yourself rotating different inputs or are there a couple that you can usually rely on to like—

[00:13:12]

Ian G.: As far as?

[00:13:13]

Diana D.: To keep soil healthy, you know. Nutrient level.

[00:13:16]

Ian G.: Oh, yeah, definitely. So when I took over the farm at Serenbe, I transitioned it to a no-till farm, and so we've been—all right. So no-till, yes. We do a little bit of shallow cultivation. We have a [audio cut out], you know, because I found that unless you're adding a pretty thick layer of compost to your soil when you're planting things like radishes and lettuces and carrots, it's hard to get a seeder through a no-till situation without doing a little bit of scratch on the surface. But we're never going any deeper than probably an inch and a half, but we're heavily relied on, you know, using the broad fork for whatever we need to, adding the compost, incorporating that into it, you know, finding the time to really try to incorporate cover crops when we can, because I think that's definitely beneficial to the soil here in Georgia when you can do that. The only situation that I kind of ran into is, you know, I took over a farm that had really high demands, as far as for the restaurants that we cater to in the community and the markets and things

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like that, and so it's still a business, still have [unclear] to run, still have expectation, so it's hard to get areas to where you can just really truly rest them when you need to, especially when you're kind of going from a tractor-driven plow, plow, plow, plastic, plastic, plastic to, you know, we're working with 30-inch beds and using a rotary plow to build our beds and we're using broad forks on, you know, every bed that we have, we're top-loading it manually, and it's definitely way more labor intensive. But we're getting there. We're getting better to where, you know, we're able to definitely rest our growing medium a lot better. So I would like to ideally get to a—I was talking to Garver about this the other day, is right now we're set up on ten field blocks and our field blocks are 24 beds and they're 30 inches wide and 50 feet long, but we have room to incorporate another ten field blocks and do like every other year put everything in a cover crops and then flip it, and so that way we could go from like a two- to three- to four-year crop rotation and obviously it would be more like an eight-year crop rotation because you're completely flipping growing areas and you're letting things rest every other year. But I'm not there yet, so—

[00:15:53]

Diana D.: That'd be awesome, yeah. [Laughter]

[00:15:55]

Ian G.: Yeah, for sure.

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[00:15:57]

Diana D.: So that's like a long-term kind of goal.

[00:15:59]

Ian G.: Yeah.

[00:15:59]

Diana D.: And shifting to COVID, what your goals were for this year and how some of those maybe had to change when you first found out.

[00:16:06]

Ian G.: Yeah. So, our biggest impact from COVID was educational.

[00:16:12]

Diana D.: Okay.

[00:16:12]

Ian G.: We do probably about—maybe 25 percent of our budget is based on education, so that's, you know, middle schoolers, elementary kids, you know, different corporate organizations come out for like a private tour. It's usually generally like ninety minutes. For the kids, it's ten—

[Glitch in recording]

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[00:16:36]

Diana D.: Hello?

[00:16:38]

Ian G.: Can you hear me?

[00:16:39]

Diana D.: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

[00:16:40]

Ian G.: Okay.

[00:16:41]

Diana D.: Whew. [Laughter]

[00:16:42]

Ian G.: Good. The children's—when the kids come out, you know, high school and below, it's generally ninety minutes with sixty minutes, you know, walking the farm, talking about what we're growing, talking about how we grow, talk about, you know, soil ecology, talk about the importance of like the ecosystem. Yes, it's a farm that sits within a community, but why it's important that the community is involved as well, not just from like a volunteer level, but like, you know, how

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they take care of their yard and how the surrounding area's maintained is important to the farm, you know, with the birds and things like that. But, anyway, yeah, and then we have like a thirty-minute, you know, they harvest something or something like that, or seed something. But, yes, so COVID completely collapsed our entire education for sure.

[00:16:42]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:17:37]

Ian G.: As far as CSA spiked big time, probably about 30 percent increase just in the month of probably of March and April.

[00:17:48]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:17:50]

Ian G.: So that was pretty cool. Restaurants collapsed. Restaurants were—

[00:17:54]

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Diana D.: That's my next question, yeah. Did the CSA increase offset any of that restaurant loss?

[00:17:59]

Ian G.: A little bit. I'd probably say we're still catching up.

[00:18:05]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:18:06]

Ian G.: Yeah. Restaurants are probably a good—probably almost equal in revenue as far as our CSA.

[00:18:17]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:18:17]

Ian G.: So, they're down probably 70 percent in volume.

[00:18:23]

Diana D.: Wow. Interesting.

[00:18:25]

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Ian G.: Yeah, because there's no traffic.

[00:18:28]

Diana D.: Right! Of course.

[00:18:29]

Ian G.: The community I live in, you know, the restaurants we cater to in the community, it's very much, you know, a place that people come and visit and they shop and they go to the restaurant or they'll go to a show or they'll meet up with friends or something like that, but, you know, no one's really leaving and no one's really coming, so that's definitely impacted that a lot. It's been hard. It's been hard. The hardest thing is the business model has had to change so many times, and sometimes it seems like it's on a daily thing, you know, like how do we increase our CSA and do we offer, you know, like a five-week CSA to cater towards people that maybe are only staying—you know, that are staying in Serenbe and they have a house in Atlanta, but they're staying in Serenbe like an Airbnb, just like, you know, to space themselves from, you know, just the mass population of people, and so kind of cater to that. Then we did drive-through market, so you basically come through in your car, you say, "I want this, I want that, I want that." We take your number, we pack it up, we put it on a table, they get out of their car, they get it themselves. So there's like no contact at all. So we do that on Friday. Our actual farmers' market started off in June, but, you know, we have all the cones set up and we have like basically an hour where it's masks required, and

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then the last hour is basically, or two hours, is like masks is highly recommended, so that way if people want to go in an area where they know that people are definitely following what they should be doing, that they're not going to have going to have that kind of contact. But, yeah, it's crazy. I'm sure everyone says it's pretty crazy.

[00:20:17]

Diana D.: Yeah, sure. I know that a lot of the real response has happened at a state level, you know, as far as getting guidance, and even within that, like a regional and a county sort of level—

[00:20:29]

Ian G.: Right.

[00:20:31]

Diana D.: Do you remember when you first started to realize how much COVID was going to impact how the rest of the year went?

[00:20:39]

Ian G.: Yeah. February.

[00:20:41]

Diana D.: Yeah. Okay.

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[00:20:43]

Ian G.: Yeah.

[00:20:43]

Diana D.: What was that like? Were you reading the news or talking with other people
or—

[00:20:47]

Ian G.: I think it was kind of like, you know, when it's gonna hit that—like when it's
gonna really start impacting the U.S., kind of thing, and seeing like other large
industries kind of start slowing down and shutting down because they can't get
stuff into the country or the production isn't there, and, you know, I always kind
of read up on it a little bit and I had an idea, like, "Okay, it's coming, it's coming,
it's coming," but I think it's going to be at least till next year before we see
anything improve, for sure. I think it's here for a while, for sure.

[00:21:25]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:21:26]

Ian G.: But, yeah, February was when I really started seeing impact, because all the
schools started cancelling come March. So I knew it was pretty serious then.

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[00:21:37]

Diana D.: Did you have children at home or did any of the folks who work with you have children at home?

[00:21:41]

Ian G.: So I have a child.

[00:21:42]

Diana D.: Okay.

[00:21:43]

Ian G.: She's four. Her school was cancelled early. Yeah, none of the interns have children.

[00:21:54]

Diana D.: Okay. All right. Have all of them mostly stuck around or have they made other plans based on COVID to kind of distance or pull out of something?

[00:22:05]

Ian G.: Well, that's the great thing about our community, is it's thirty minutes or so south of the airport, but it's a very close-knit kind of community. It's almost like a

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little town in a way. Not a lot of interaction within—I mean, everyone kind of stays in. People walk a lot, and everyone pretty much always wears masks. You know, I did notice like with—so I did have two interns that actually left early this year. You know, they gave me the reasons that like, “I’m gonna pursue my writing career,” or something like this, but honestly I think a lot has to do with I think people were lonely, honestly. I think people miss not being able to go home, to travel. There wasn’t really like—there was nothing going on within the community, and so I think people were maybe going stir-crazy and I think they missed home. But we’ve since had their replacements and they’re doing well. But they didn’t say that, but I think honestly that’s what it was. I think COVID definitely impacted, you know, quality of life, I guess, for, you know—because, you know, farming’s really hard and so you work all day, so you kind of look forward to your downtime, being able to meet up with friends or meet new people, and like nothing was happening, so it’s kind of like go to the farm, work all day—or not all day. Work your schedule, come back and like there’s nothing. Just hang out at the house, kind of. Nothing’s open, can’t really go grocery shopping. I mean, you can, but—

[00:23:57]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:23:59]

Ian G.: I’m completely cutting my face off. [Laughter]

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[00:24:01]

Diana D.: It's all good. It's all good. [Laughter] It's totally fine. I'm glad you got—you still have like a crop or a new group of interns coming in. That didn't really slow down the pool of applicants.

[00:24:15]

Ian G.: No. You know, that's the thing. We bring our interns in in March. In Georgia, it's year-round. I mean, we grow year-round. So I take a little downtime in December, but January, February, March, we're crankin'. So there's not a lot of downtime. So, yeah, they start in March. The good thing is, is, you know, come May, they pretty much know the role, right? They know the steps. They know like get there in the morning, check the greenhouse, you know, what's on the list, what needs to get done. So, yeah, there's a little bit of guidance on my part, but a lot of it's, you know, kind of going through the routine a little bit, and, you know, obviously we incorporate like a new crop, like, "Hey, we're going to talk about wrapping tomatoes today," and we'll do it, or we're talking about, you know, the importance of why we plant this or whatever. But a lot of it's, you know, it's a machine in a weird sense, I guess. I guess that's a bad term, isn't it?

[00:25:16]

Diana D.: [Laughter] Not for all farmers.

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[00:25:17]

Ian G.: Basically it's like, you know, you don't have to stand over someone's shoulder to make sure they kind of have an idea what they're doing, because they've been there for two months, so they know what it takes to lay out drip tape or whatever it is. So it was challenging with the transition because we were going into our peak season and it was starting to get, you know—tomatoes got to be—you're going through your tomato fields if not every day, every other day, you know. What kind of fungal outbreaks are we getting? Are armyworms coming in? Have tomato hornworms come through? Do we need to work on the suckers? Do they need support? Things like that. And so I was working into my new interns right when that stuff was starting to happen, so basically had to start new, with new interns during the busiest part of the season, that had no formal training, really. But it's—

[00:26:18]

Diana D.: Challenging, yeah, sounds challenging, yeah. [Laughter] Were you guys wearing masks in the field or—

[00:26:26]

Ian G.: No. We wear masks when we're processing stuff and harvesting and things like that, but, no, there's—I mean, I can't imagine wearing a mask in the field when it's 100 degrees. I wouldn't have any interns; they'd quit.

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[00:26:42]

Diana D.: That I couldn't imagine, but like walking—even if you're like on a walking tour, like explaining the stuff to someone, like—

[00:26:48]

Ian G.: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:26:50]

Diana D.: That kind of thing, that's kind of what I was picturing.

[00:26:52]

Ian G.: Yeah, yeah. But, yeah, good ol' COVID.

[00:27:00]

Diana D.: [Laughter] Yeah. I can imagine that thinking back on this, it's just a reminder of how much work you had to do and how flexible you had to be.

[00:27:11]

Ian G.: That's our culture in general, I think, especially small farms. You've got to be able to—like if you're going to get into farming, you've got to have a super positive attitude, you've got to be optimistic, you've got to be able to delegate, right? Because if you think that you can do everything yourself, even if it's delegating to your four-year-old child, it's like, "Help me do this," or pick cherry

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tomatoes, there's just never enough time to get everything you want to get done on your list. So like I always start my list with like six, seven items, and I automatically just cut it in half. I say, "Let's just work on these three if we get these done." That way there's somewhat of a sense of accomplishment. But, yeah, you got to be versatile. You have to be able to figure things out, because, you know, you're dealing with living things. Luckily for me, Garver right now is kind of right down the street, and he is just a world of knowledge as far as someone to talk to. So it's been really great to know him, for sure. He's been a great guy. He's a really great guy. And connecting other farmers, that's key too.

[00:28:20]

Diana D.: Okay. I will. Yeah, because Garver was—I felt like, you know, I really cold-called him because I'm in Pennsylvania up here, where Rodale is based, and I knew that Georgia was probably coming online, but he was so welcoming and totally open and had so much to share, like it's really nice, and I'm glad he connected us because I think that you all are in such a unique position, especially as one of the few organic operations in Georgia.

[00:28:51]

Ian G.: Right.

[00:28:53]

Diana D.: That's quite an accomplishment, yeah.

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[00:28:55]

Ian G.: Yeah.

[00:28:56]

Diana D.: Yeah. Has your certification process been any different this year at all, like the inspector planning online?

[00:29:01]

Ian G.: Yeah, actually it's a two-step process. They do a phone interview, which I have Monday at 1:30, and it's basically the questions that they ask you when they come there in person, and then we have to do a second interview and it's through Zoom, so hopefully I can figure it out.

[00:29:19]

Diana D.: [Laughter]

[00:29:22]

Ian G.: And it's basic. I don't know what that's gonna look like, but I'm most likely just going to be walking the fields. I'm sure they just want to see what we're doing. Last year, certification was—it was actually the first one I've ever done, and it was pretty awesome, actually.

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[Glitch in recording]

[00:29:43]

Diana D.: Are you there? Hello? Ian? Ian?

[00:30:11]

Ian G.: Better? I need to unmute it.

[00:30:20]

Diana D.: Oh, yeah, gotcha. Okay.

[00:30:23]

Ian G.: Are you there?

[00:30:24]

Diana D.: Yeah, I'm here.

[00:30:27]

Ian G.: I'm gonna have a sip of my beer. Is that okay?

[00:30:29]

Diana D.: Yeah. Yeah. So we were talking about—so you went through certification the first time last year.

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[00:30:38]

Ian G.: Yeah.

[00:30:40]

Diana D.: And that was probably in person?

[00:30:41]

Ian G.: Mm-hmm.

[00:30:41]

Diana D.: Okay, yeah. And you had like a good time. That was the last I heard.

[00:30:46]

Ian G.: Yes, yes, and this year it's a phone and then it's a two-part, so then it's virtual.

[00:30:55]

Diana D.: Cool, cool.

[00:30:57]

Ian G.: I have a really loud cardinal here.

[00:30:59]

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Diana D.: I hear it. It sounds very healthy. [Laughter]

[00:31:01]

Ian G.: He's [unclear].

[00:31:04]

Diana D.: [Laughter] Yeah. So we've talked a little bit about the CSA, how you guys ended up there, what the interns' experience has been like. Demand is low, demand is down from the restaurant. Do you have surplus that you're trying to figure out what to do with it at this point?

[00:31:21]

Ian G.: Say it again.

[00:31:21]

Diana D.: Do you have surplus that you're trying to figure out what to do with at this point, or do you usually donate?

[00:31:27]

Ian G.: I have a really good assistant farm manager. [Laughter] She went to school for marketing, but she's like basically been working in logistics her entire life career, and so she has been able to move most of our stuff.

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[00:31:44]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:31:44]

Ian G.: We did lose quite a bit—not lose. We had to compost quite a bit of lettuce early this season just based on the fact that we were banking on 100, 150 pounds of lettuce a week for the restaurant, and that pretty much went down to like ten pounds a week, and that was before our CSA had even started. So, you know, obviously we had some loss there. But for the most part, you know, it's been pretty good. We've been able to move our stuff, but we're just trying to think outside the box, like how do we bring other streams of revenue in, so we're looking into maybe doing Christmas trees at the farm this year.

[00:32:25]

Diana D.: Oh, wow.

[00:32:25]

Ian G.: Things like that, you know, because we do back up to the community, and so instead of the community having to go, you know, to the Christmas Tree Bonanza, whatever, where there's a lot of foot traffic, they can basically just come down the street into their back yard and get a tree there.

[00:32:45]

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Diana D.: Nice.

[00:32:46]

Ian G.: So we're thinking about doing that. That's one of the ideas.

[00:32:49]

Diana D.: Yeah, because, you know, we're, in this project, curious about how people and the operations they work with have been financially impacted. I understand you wouldn't want to share anything like unnecessarily sensitive, but do you think you all are going to be able to weather this storm pretty well?

[00:33:07]

Ian G.: We're in the black.

[00:33:09]

Diana D.: You are?

[00:33:09]

Ian G.: Yeah.

[00:33:10]

Diana D.: Oh, my god! That's amazing! That's so rare! [Laughter]

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[00:33:14]

Ian G.: We'll see what happens next month.

[00:33:17]

Diana D.: Sure, sure.

[00:33:18]

Ian G.: I think we'll have pretty much blown through our savings by probably next month, I'm thinking.

[00:33:23]

Diana D.: Yeah.

[00:33:25]

Ian G.: That's why we're really trying to figure out, like how do we bring in other streams of revenue with a very uncertain market, because I don't think restaurants—I mean, they're shutting down Atlanta again, so I don't think that's gonna happen, and traffic in the community is definitely down, but we're still growing vegetables, so.

[00:33:48]

Diana D.: Yeah, it's interesting that the CSA sales are up, because I've seen a lot of like think pieces and internet writers, news coverage saying people are more interested

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in organics now so they can be more aware of what's going on with the food they're . . . Have you heard that sort of thing from customers when you talk to them or . . . ?

[00:34:10]

Ian G.: Yeah, I think that—I definitely think people are more concerned where their vegs are coming from. I think that—I don't know if it's like people don't want to Instacart veg because like everyone's touching their stuff, because you can get organic vegetables from your local grocery store, whatever, but I don't know. I don't know why that is. I don't know if it's just that it's convenient because we literally are right next door to a lot of our customers. I think we're in a very different type of farm, personally, because it's not like we're a traditional farm where we're growing out, you know, off this road and we, you know, do CSA deliveries or we have a CSA box dropoff or we're going to markets that are, you know, around major metropolitan cities or that we're catering to restaurants that are, you know, twenty-, thirty-minute, an hour drive away. All our revenue and—most of our revenue and who we deal with, besides some of our wholesale stuff, it's all within walking distance of the farm.

[00:35:26]

Diana D.: That's amazing. [Laughter]

[00:35:27]

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Ian G.: Yeah. I think that's one of the reasons why it's been maybe a little bit easier.

[00:35:31]

Diana D.: Yeah.

[00:35:32]

Ian G.: Not easier—not the word. Maybe it's why it hasn't been difficult financially, not to say that it's going to continue to be that way, but, yeah, like probably 80 percent of 90 percent of our CSA members are our neighbors.

[00:35:50]

Diana D.: Wow.

[00:35:52]

Ian G.: Yeah.

[00:35:53]

Diana D.: That's really nice, yeah.

[00:35:55]

Ian G.: It's actually pretty cool.

[00:35:56]

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Diana D.: [Laughter]

[00:35:56]

Ian G.: It's like the best part of my job, actually.

[00:35:58]

Diana D.: Yeah, because—

[00:36:00]

Ian G.: Like literally getting to know the community, like my community. You have your CSA pickup or whatever, and like you get to see this person that's on the list, but like I won't only see them at CSA pickup, I can see them walking down the street, I can see them in their car, I can see them—most of the CSA people that we cater to I know. So it's been kind of cool.

[00:36:22]

Diana D.: Yeah. I wondered how that works, because I haven't been to the community myself, but I've looked online, and they show the plots of the houses and the land.

[00:36:30]

Ian G.: Right.

[00:36:29]

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Diana D.: And like you can just walk right over there, really what people do.

[00:36:36]

Ian G.: They do, yeah.

[00:36:37]

Diana D.: [Laughter]

[00:36:37]

Ian G.: Most of our families in the community that come to get their CSA are either in a golf cart or they're walking.

[00:36:44]

Diana D.: [Laughter] That's really nice, because I know one of the most difficult things about this is the social isolation and the mental stress of not seeing people regularly. That must be such a source of strength for a lot of people to be able to be doing something normal and to be out to see each other.

[00:37:04]

Ian G.: Right. Yes.

[00:37:08]

Diana D.: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

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[00:37:09]

Ian G.: Sure.

[00:37:10]

Diana D.: Yeah. Well, the rest of the questions I have are kind of about your experience with COVID personally. Has your family started going anything differently to keep yourselves safe? Please tell me the internet is not going out again, y'all.

[Pause in recording]

[00:37:29]

Diana D.: Where's the internet? I don't even get it.

[00:37:42]

Ian G.: Yes?

[00:37:43]

Diana D.: [unclear].

[00:37:44]

Ian G.: Am I there?

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[00:37:45]

Diana D.: You're here, yes. [Laughter] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:37:49]

Ian G.: Family and COVID.

[00:37:50]

Diana D.: Yes.

[00:37:51]

Ian G.: So our family are basically hermits anyway.

[00:37:55]

Diana D.: [Laughter]

[00:37:55]

Ian G.: So COVID has no effect on us.

[00:37:58]

Diana D.: Way to stay healthy. [Laughter]

[00:38:00]

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Ian G.: Yeah. We don't get out a lot, really. We really enjoy just playing games and hanging out in the backyard and taking our dog for a walk and, you know, going to a park and walking a trail. I do have family that's close to here, and I come from a really big family, and so we don't have so many of the large family get-togethers like we used to, but our family's so close, at least my side of the family is so close that it's like a best friend. Like if you don't talk to them for like three years and you like run into them at a wedding of another best friend, it's almost like no time has changed, you know? So it's like no big deal, right? So it hasn't really affected us as far as like from a family value-type thing. We have the farm, so we always have, you know, veg and whatever we need to eat, so we don't have to go out a lot. We have done the Instacart once in a while. But I don't know anyone that has COVID. How does that sound? I don't know one person.

[00:39:14]

Diana D.: That's amazing.

[00:39:16]

Ian G.: It's either that or I don't have any friends.

[00:39:18]

Diana D.: [Laughter] Well, you sound safe. You sound like you guys are, you know, just so well equipped to handle something that's really destructive for a lot of other people, a really optimistic attitude to start off with, and a community that's

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depending on you to continue this work, so there's no option of whether or not you're going to do it, you know. You've got to do it. Yeah, I think that—I can hear like, yeah, of course, like you're weathering this well because you kind of enjoy and are drawn to like figuring problems, out, you know, and working hard until you get something right.

[00:39:18]

Ian G.: Right.

[00:40:04]

Diana D.: So I'm glad to hear that y'all haven't been sick, because that's not necessarily something anyone can control for themselves, but at least the impact economically on your work life, you know—

[00:40:18]

Ian G.: Yeah, so far we're good. [Laughter]

[00:40:22]

Diana D.: Yeah, that's great. I'm impressed.

[00:40:27]

Ian G.: Get back to me in December.

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[00:40:28]

Diana D.: Okay. Well, we will, because that's the hope, is like talk to folks while they're in it now, and then hopefully twelve months, eighteen months down the road, be able to check in and have that perspective and hindsight. So let's plan on that.

[00:40:48]

Ian G.: Okay.

[00:40:49]

Diana D.: Yeah. Thank you for your time.

[00:40:50]

Ian G.: Well, if you ever come down here—

[00:40:53]

Diana D.: I'd love to.

[00:40:53]

Ian G.: —check us out for sure.

[00:40:55]

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Diana D.: Yeah. I lived in Florida twenty years, and my first priority, when it gets safer to go there, is to go home again, you know. So I would love to. I'd love to visit. You might even do these interviews in person, if we can.

[00:41:10]

Ian G.: That would be great.

[00:41:11]

Diana D.: Just throw those screens out the window, yeah. [Laughter]

[00:41:14]

Ian G.: That's what I'm talkin' about.

[00:41:16]

Diana D.: Thank you.

[00:41:17]

Ian G.: Well, hopefully I helped you. I don't know. I kind of feel like I rambled a little bit.

[00:41:21]

Diana D.: No, this is—you didn't at all, and this isn't a journalism project. This is all about your experience and—

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[00:41:29]

Ian G.: So what did you get out of it? I'm going to reverse the interview process.

[00:41:34]

Diana D.: Sure.

[00:41:34]

Ian G.: So how do you see us related to other interviews that you've had so far? Is it kind of the same model?

[00:41:43]

Diana D.: Yeah, yours is very unique in that I don't hear this fear of the future.

[00:41:53]

Ian G.: Okay.

[00:41:54]

Diana D.: And it's really present in a lot of other interviews in people I've talked with.
We're all taking it one day at a time.

[00:42:04]

Ian G.: Yeah, of course.

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[00:42:04]

Diana D.: A lot of other folks are kind of concerned like the rug's just gonna be pulled out, you know, or something.

[00:42:15]

Ian G.: Right. Well, what happens when the rug gets pulled out? [Laughter]

[00:42:18]

Diana D.: Right? Everything goes black. I don't know.

[00:42:21]

Ian G.: Exactly. I get disconnected.

[00:42:24]

Diana D.: Yeah. Look. I can't imagine like the stress that some people are under, you know, and how that influences how much fear they have, and, you know, you— because some people, like you said, their farms are way out removed, you know, they're very far from other people, the fact that traffic is down at the farmers' markets makes a really big difference, and they're not able to adapt as easily with online markets or anything. So, the fact that you have a team around you is amazing, the fact that the community you're in wants you there on purpose and calls on you to shop with you and that sort of thing is just really cool. And for my

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part, I work for an organic certifier during the day. That's like my day job. We're definitely anticipating a drop in clients for the next year, that people—the financial impact's going to be so great, we're not sure.

[00:43:28]

Ian G.: Right.

[00:43:28]

Diana D.: Yeah, but even though we're bringing new clients on, we're really expecting to have like no client growth, essentially, because we're going to lose so many folks. So, connecting, you know, with you just on this call for me personally with someone who's feeling resilient and, you know, strong and not overwhelmed is—

[00:43:56]

Ian G.: I'm just really good at hiding it.

[00:43:57]

Diana D.: Are you? [Laughter] I mean, you know, we can talk about the words people use, right?

[00:44:04]

Ian G.: Yeah, yeah, totally, but agriculture in general, like farming, especially in the South, just organic farming, whatever, like it has to be birthed with this positively,

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I mean it has to be there. You just won't make it. Like you have to be—like you could lose half your crop and you just got to be able to like, “Okay, what am I gonna do next time?” or, “What am I gonna follow with?” or, “What am I gonna change?” you know, or just really, really be happy about all your small successes. That's really what it comes down for me. For me, it's like the morning dew. I mean, that makes my day.

[00:44:44]

Diana D.: That's so nice. I miss the light in the South, the yellow-orange, the sunrise, you know. Yeah, it's good. It's good stuff. I used to get up really early in the morning and I was outside, too, going for long walks and bike rides. It's a beautiful place, yeah, it is. So it is, it's nice to connect with you and, you know, just kind of like a touchstone, because I'm a much more social person. I like to interview in person. I like to, you know, be with folks. That's the great thing about at least having an audio interview. I'm not sending you like a list of questions, you know. Like you have a record of how you said something, you know, the tone your voice, and you can pass that on. So the next step is actually that, where we'll conclude today and then I'll send you a copy of the interview.

[00:45:40]

Ian G.: Yeah, sure.

[00:45:41]

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Diana D.: It'll be yours.

[00:45:43]

Ian G.: And I need to sign that thing, so can I just print it out and sign it and then take a picture and send it back to you or something like that?

[00:45:50]

Diana D.: Yeah, let's do that.

[00:45:52]

Ian G.: Okay. Okay.

[00:45:54]

Diana D.: Yeah, we can definitely be flexible. It's not like a legally—I mean, it is a legally [unclear], but, you know, let's just do it that way. It's fine. Yeah, yeah.

[00:46:05]

Ian G.: I'd give you a handshake, but we can't do that.

[00:46:07]

Diana D.: Yeah. Hopefully someday in person. [Laughter]

[00:46:09]

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Ian G.: Okay. All right. Appreciate your work and thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk to you.

[00:46:15]

Diana D.: Thank you. Likewise. It's been really nice to talk with you, and I'm glad that we could make it work. So thanks.

[00:46:22]

Ian G.: Yeah, definitely. All right. Bye.

[End of interview]