

2020 Edition

BOOTSTRAP* **MARKET GARDENING**



**How to Start-up,
Market and Manage
a Successful
Small Farm Business**

*** Beginning With Very Few
Resources of Your Own.**

by **Scott** and **Suzie Kelland**

Winners of the
"Premier's Award for Agri-food Innovation Excellence"

www.new-terra-farm.com

Copyright 2020 Scott Kelland

All rights reserved. This book may not be re-sold or given away to other people. No part of this book may be reproduced or copied by photographic or electronic means, except with the permission of the author, with the following exception:

'Fair use' of a brief quotation embedded in an article or review is permitted.

– Table of Contents -

Preface to the 2020 Edition.....	4
Introduction to the New Terra Farm Bootstrap Market Garden	5
The Bootstrap Market Garden ‘Natural Advantage’	8
Key Features of the Bootstrap Market Garden	11
Developing the Bootstrap Market Garden.....	14
Why say ‘no’ to farmers’ markets?	14
Why say ‘yes’ to the bootstrap model?	16
How to start-up your Bootstrap Market Garden	20
The Bootstrap Market Garden business cycle.....	20
How many customers?	
How much to grow?	
How to Market Your Bootstrap Market Garden	
How to find customers.....	
How to get free publicity for your Bootstrap Market Garden	
How to write your free publicity article	
How to get MORE customers	
How to write a good marketing flyer	
How to follow up with customers	
How to answer customer questions.....	
Information you must get from customers	
How to ‘close the sale’.....	
How to increase farm sales	
How to Manage Your Bootstrap Market Garden.....	
Confirm your plan - Run the numbers (again).	
How to estimate start-up market garden costs	
Finding equipment and supplies.....	
Special Section: Finding space for your market garden.....	
Recruiting and hiring farm help	
Scheduling work on the farm	
How to Grow your Bootstrap Market Garden	
How to plan garden production.....	
How to start plants	
How to set out transplants.....	
How to plan your garden	
Planting tips.....	
How to maintain your garden	
How to protect your crops.....	
How to harvest your crops	

Organizing delivery day
Expanding Your Farm Business
 Farm animals and the garden
 Other Ways to Grow More Business
Final Recommendations
ANNEX A - How to Manage Your Farm Business
 How to set up your farm business
 Record keeping for your farm
ANNEX B – New Terra Farm Cash Flow Statement Year 1
ANNEX C - Getting Started Checklist
ANNEX D – Specific Plant Growing Recommendations
ANNEX E - Resources
 Recommended Books
 Useful Websites

SAMPLE

Preface to the 2020 Edition

2020 represents season number 14 operating a market garden at New Terra Farm. There have been a few ups and downs along the way, but this is still the best job I ever hallucinated.

There's a question in the Introduction of the original edition of Bootstrap Market Gardening: 'Why would a forty-something couple buy a small farm?' Well, we're now a '60-something' couple; the work isn't any easier, but hopefully we're a bit smarter ;-)

We've been broke once or twice, but we've never been hungry; the farm has fed us, both physically and psychically for more than a decade.

Just for fun I did a search for the word 'customer' in this book. It shows up 209 times; gives you an idea of what your business perspective needs to be.

Along the way we learned a lot, grew a lot, and had the satisfaction of helping a number of 'newbie' growers launch their own farm businesses.

So the end of the season (I'm writing this in late winter of 2019) and a new era on the farm; high time we updated Bootstrap Market Gardening to reflect some of what we've learned over the last few years. The mission is still the same - help **grow new growers**, and contribute to a long-term sustainable food supply. We also have a **couple grandkids** to add to the mix and give us the incentive to keep on keepin' on.

Introduction to the New Terra Farm Bootstrap Market Garden

Let us start by giving you a little of our back story so you can understand where we were coming from when we developed the 'bootstrap market garden model' for our farm.

You may have seen this question on our web site: 'Why would a forty-something couple buy a small farm'? Farms are hard work, there's a lot to learn, and besides, 'everybody knows' that agriculture is in trouble in North America. There's that 'farm income crisis' we keep reading about. So there's no way a small farm can be productive and actually make money, right?

Read everything you can about farming, and find ways to meet and talk with farmers. The learning curve for farming is as steep as in any other professional activity.

Well, we didn't believe that was necessarily true. Yes, there are problems with the current 'agri-business' model of agriculture in Canada. And yes, many current methods of farming are not sustainable by any definition of the word - i.e. economically, or environmentally.

But we believed there were other models that might not have these drawbacks. So when we bought our farm in June 2000 we decided to explore other ways of doing things.

While for many years we have had an interest in gardening, farming and all things rural, neither of us comes from a farming family. Prior to buying our farm in the summer of 2000, much of our knowledge was theoretical; we had read a LOT of books (e.g. Eliot Coleman, Joel Salatin,

Andy Lee, – see **Annex E - Resources**) and subscribed to a number of 'lifestyle' magazines e.g. Harrowsmith, Back Home, Mother Earth).

Do what you love to do on your farm, but remember that if you want to make money at it, you will need to find customers who love it too.

2020 Update: In the years since, I've met successful growers producing everything from honey to maple syrup to saffron! Plus any number of farm-based crafters, bakers and makers. But this was the right choice for us.

So we spent the next several years exploring, growing and learning. Trying to figure out what we liked to grow, what were we good at growing, and what would sell.

We decided that was the proper order in which to evaluate success – i.e. there was no point in committing to doing something we didn't like just for money (we had already had jobs like that, why create another one)?

And if we weren't good at it, obviously we couldn't be successful financially, and it would be a source of **frustration** rather than **satisfaction**.

Eventually, in figuring out what would we would like to sell, we settled on basic foodstuffs – veggies, herbs, and meats that almost everybody eats. We decided against the 'exotic' things – we didn't eat emu, or wild

We were also members of organizations that brought us into contact with farmers e.g. Canadian Organic Growers, Rare Breeds Canada. While the books and the contacts provided us with a lot of ideas and options for our farm we were still pretty much 'spectators' at the farming game.

We knew that when we bought our farm we wanted to create a full-time farm business (and a full-time income, not necessarily the same thing!)

boar, or buffalo, so we decided not to grow them. We tried rabbit for a couple years but found them difficult to raise organically. So basic veggies and meats were our answer to the question 'what to grow'?

The rest of this book talks about the practical details of how we turned that decision into reality. You will note we are short on theory and long on practice (you will also notice we were short on cash and had to find a way to finance our start-up).

You don't have to duplicate every single thing we have done to be successful. We explain how we did it, but certainly some things we did will not apply to you. You may start with different resources and skill sets. We expect you to **adapt** rather than **adopt** all the methods we explain in this book. The unique model you develop will be based on your skills, your aptitudes, your resources, your goals, and your environment.

So we are giving you quite a lot of the 'how', and some of our 'why', where it helps to explain decisions we made. We hope that you can take the parts of our model that fit for you, and create your own small farm success story.

The Bootstrap Market Garden 'Natural Advantage'

Let me spend a little time on the trends that we believe are driving the success of the marketing and production model built by New Terra Farm. This is not to 'preach to the converted' - if you bought this book you probably know or believe many of these things - but rather to provide some discussion points when you are approaching customers, potential partners and other stakeholders e.g. **spouses**.

There's a saying in stock market investing, 'the trend is your friend'. The trend towards more natural food is great for market gardeners.

2020 Update. Ontario, Canada imports \$4 Billion more produce than we export each year. Beautiful, bountiful Hawaii imports 85% of its food. This represents a tremendous opportunity for non-commodity small local growers.

We believe there are both negative and positive drivers of the success of this model. Some of the negative factors are easy to find; they show up in the newspaper with distressing frequency e.g. food scares, chemical herbicide and pesticide residues on food, hormones in our food, GMO's, and big agri-business / big government that seem to have little concern for their impact on people and the planet.

The model you are creating, based on **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**, is the opposite of those things. It is personal, and personalized. It is 'human-scale'. It is sustainable, both environmentally and economically. And it connects people back to the real source of their food.

There is 'growing' interest in real food, local food and healthy food, and

also in family-sized, sustainable businesses. So do everything you can in your communications and interactions with your customers to personalize your business.

For example, we meet with each and every family who joins New Terra Farm. This takes a lot of time, but it is time well invested in understanding the people we are serving. It's like instant market research to find out what they like and don't like about the service we are offering. And of course you should adjust what you do accordingly, if at all possible.

There are 2 bonuses to this approach:

Bonus #1, you will find out, through your conversation, if there are other things your customers might like that your farm can provide.

Letting your customers know they are getting exactly the same food you eat is also a great marketing point.

Bonus #2, you will meet lots of like-minded people, have lots of great discussions (and possibly some actions – lots can be accomplished if you get a group of 50 or 100 committed people together to address a local problem.)

Your customers' best assurance of food safety, quality and nutrition is this 'local flavour'. You are your own best customer (or you should be). I always let my customers know that they are getting – exactly – the same food we eat, so they can be assured I will take care that it is as healthy as possible.

You are providing your customers good food that is also good for them - i.e. less of the bad things like herbicide, pesticides, hormones and antibiotics – and more of the good things like vitamins and minerals.

This is guilt-free extravagance; buy the best food because it really is better for you.

SAMPLE

Key Features of the Bootstrap Market Garden

Let's take a quick look at the key features and advantages that make up the New Terra Farm **Bootstrap Market Garden**.

2020 Update: The market for organic food in North America is growing faster than the overall market for food. *Go natural!*

1 - Be as natural as possible. There was a competition a few years ago that asked people to complete the sentence "As Canadian as . . . ". The winning entry was "As Canadian as **possible**, under the circumstances".

When we started the farm, we decided to follow, as much as possible for our circumstances, natural and organic farming practices. This means we don't use chemical fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides. All our animals are raised on pasture, and receive only organic supplementary feed. No growth hormones, no routine use of antibiotics.

We use crop rotation (and animal rotation, see the section on **Integrating Animals into your Production**) and composted manure to maintain garden fertility and reduce pests. Keeping our food additive-free is important to us, and to our customers.

However, we are not certified organic. Occasionally we have an injured or sick animal that we **do** have to treat (or lose the animal). Note that we **do not** claim to be certified organic in any of our literature, or in our conversations with customers. We do explain our model, and the choices we make regarding vegetable production and animal husbandry.

Do you have to follow natural and/or organic growing methods in order

to create a successful small farm business? No, but it is a major selling point with customers.

If you are not familiar with natural growing techniques, we outline some of our cultivation and plant protection practices in later sections. We also give specific growing recommendations for many popular vegetables **in Annex D – Specific Planting Recommendations.**

2020 update. We have done some (limited) restaurant sales; these restaurants when we have an excess. We have also sold to a local high-end preparatory college. If you follow this route, make sure you get paid for the value of what you provide.

2 - All farm products are sold directly to consumers. We knew from the beginning we did not want to get caught up in the 'commodity market' of big-time agri-business. We believed the only way for a small farm to make money was to keep more of the consumers' food dollar. This meant bypassing distributors and wholesalers and going direct to our customers.

There are lots of advantages to this approach. You get better profit margins, you can find out directly what your customers want, and you get better networking e.g. customers have pointed us at new opportunities and ways to expand, and we have planned 'joint ventures' with some customers who are also small business people.

3 - NO farmers markets. We came to this position after observing (and shopping at) farmer's markets for a number of years. One year, we sold produce at an on-farm stand.

Our experience and observations convinced us there was a better way to get our goods in the hands of consumers i.e. **Community Supported**

Agriculture (CSA). Learn more about this in the later sections.

4 - The right business cycle. When considering how to launch and run any small business (including a bootstrap market garden), you need to proceed in the right order. The business activity sequence you must follow consists of **Planning**, then **Marketing**, then **Management**, then **Production**, in that order. This 'business cycle' is one of the key ideas that make our model successful. Scott's 'day job' was as a management consultant, specializing in planning and performance measurement (is it any surprise we built some spreadsheets to help manage our farm?)

The rest of this book will explain each of these elements in detail, and the actions to take to create a successful and sustainable farm business.

Developing the Bootstrap Market Garden

In this section we will explain the reasoning and research we followed in developing our successful small farm business model.

Why say 'no' to farmers' markets?

Whoa, what do these guys have against farmers' markets? Well, as a concept and a model filling a niche for a lot of growers and consumers, not a thing (so you market folks out there, put down your pitchforks!) It's just not an efficient model from our perspective.

There's nothing wrong with having an alternate marketing venue for your produce, but we believe a home delivery program should be your main enterprise.

When we evaluated the idea of using a farmers' market to sell our farm goodies, we identified a few drawbacks:

- Unpredictable demand
- Wastage and spoilage
- Competition for customers
- Difficult to get to really know your customer

Let me explain in a little more detail. When you set up at a farmers' market, you are never sure what is going to sell that day i.e. **unpredictable demand**. So you sell out of tomatoes by 8 a.m., and at 1 p.m. bring 50 lbs. of unsold cabbage home.

And the problem is, next market day it might be the other way around. This leads to lost sales opportunities. And because fresh veggies are a perishable item, it inevitably leads to **wastage and spoilage**. And if

you only go to one market day a week, it's hard to keep produce at the peak of maturity and freshness.

The second major problem is **competition for customers**. Other growers will have many of the same goods you do. It's possible to establish a niche by trying to be the earliest grower, or growing unusual or gourmet vegetables. But these all take extra time and attention, and the demand is still uncertain.

And inevitably as the season progresses, there is 'price erosion' e.g. one of your neighboring market growers has a great year for growing tomatoes, so all of a sudden he is selling them for **\$0.50 less a pound** than you are. Your choices are to match his price, and reduce your profit, or don't match it and lose sales.

Farmers markets are great fun; usually awesome people and food, and the social interaction can be enjoyable. But for many reasons a bootstrap home delivery program is the better way.

Finally, one of the biggest drawbacks from my perspective is that it is hard to really get to **know your customers**. Yes you can chat with them (when you are not too busy), and find out a little bit about their preferences in produce.

However, even if you find out they like lots of a particular item, your ability to 'ramp up' to meet that demand is limited; your season is already underway, and it takes weeks or months to increase production.

And the opportunities to find out what other things they might like, that you could supply if you had known, are limited. It's too late once the season is underway!

Why say 'yes' to the bootstrap model?

Compare this to the **Bootstrap Market Garden** model we designed for our farm. In this model, your customers subscribe to the produce coming from your farm. They pay you, in advance, for the growing season. In return, they receive a share of the farm's bounty, delivered right to their door. In effect, everything produced by your market garden is **sold before it is grown!**

We solicit customers in our planned delivery area. We meet with prospective customers well in advance of the growing season. We find out their preferences for vegetables. We ask them if there are other farm products they would be interested in. And, we collect payment in advance for the season!

How does this compare to the farmers' market model? Here's how our **Bootstrap Market Garden** model stacks up:

We establish a known demand for our products. Our customers tell us exactly what they would like us to grow, and in what quantities. No wastage and no wasted effort!

A known demand lets me plan better. When I know exactly what my customers want, I can determine my level of production, my labour needs and my space requirements in great detail.

For example, if I know that 30 customers each want 2 heads of broccoli every week, and I will deliver broccoli for 15 weeks, I can calculate exactly how many plants I need to start, when I should succession plant, how much room I will need in my greenhouse and my field, and how much labour it will take!

No competition for customers. Once a family has signed up with us,

we have a customer for the whole season (and hopefully next season too if we do a good job). All our veggies are sold before they are grown!

By creating your own CSA delivery service, you create a strong market for your other products as well. You can also give other producers access to this market (for a price!)

No 'price erosion'. Customers pay us **in advance** for the whole season! We determine the price we need for our veggies to make a profit, and then we find customers willing to pay that price. Your income and cash flow is known in advance!

Creates a 'customer base' for more sales. When we meet with prospective families, we get the opportunity to learn a little bit more about their lives, and to determine if any of our other farm products might interest them. This means that most seasons, our meats and eggs are 'pre-sold' as well as the veggies. And if there is something they want that we just can't provide this year, we can add it to our planning for next year!

2020 Update: I know of other CSA's that collect fees weekly or monthly through the season. Regardless, you should get some sort of deposit or advance payment of a month or so to fund start-up costs.

BIG point. The advance payment let us 'bootstrap' the farm operation. That is, the early cash flow allowed us to construct a plant starting room, small greenhouse, buy equipment and supplies and pay for part-time farm help, **with no out-of-pocket expense to us!**

There are not many businesses you can start up this way. Plus, **no** accounts receivable, and **no** cash floats to mess with!

Added Bonus #1. When you have your production requirements for

the season documented, all you and your farm help have to do is follow the plan. This makes training helpers easier, reduces risk (for you and your customers) and gives a little peace of mind that you can actually pull this off!

For example, during our first season of working this model, I was away from the farm for 2 periods of about a week each. But because we had documented what tasks had to be completed each week, our farm help could carry on without me and we did not lose production.

Added Bonus #2. It seems to us that it is more efficient and environmentally sound to have one vehicle delivering to 20 families rather than have 20 families driving 20 vehicles to a market. CSA's make good sense both economically and environmentally.

Now, having persuaded you that farmers' markets are not ideal for farmers, let me tell you that they are OK for any 'overflow' produce you may have.

For example, we always build in some extra margin when planning how much of each crop to grow (this is the 'safety factor' in the **Bootstrap Market Garden Planner** spreadsheet). If it turns out to be a banner year in the garden, we may end up with more produce than our customers can absorb.

When this happens, we have an arrangement with a neighbouring farmer who does have a market stand; he takes our extra stuff and puts it on his stand, and we split whatever sales there are.

This works because:

- His farm is close to ours (1/4 mile), so no long travel required;

2020 Update: In 2017 New Terra Farm helped launch and manage the Mid-Week Farmer's Market in Merrickville.

I'm proud to say this venue provided an outlet for a number of first-time growers, bakers and makers. Some of our over-supply went here as well, on a stand run by a neighbour.

- He has a good-looking stand at a strong market, and is a good salesman so he can usually sell most of what he brings;
- His market day is the day after one of our pick/deliver days, so any extra produce is still fresh (we refrigerate, of course);
- We are not attached to how much is sold at the market, or how much we net. It is strictly for overflow; we would prefer see the stuff we grow used rather than wasted.

You might also consider giving away some of your extra produce; this makes us very popular with friends and neighbours. Or make an arrangement to donate extra produce to someone in need in your neighbourhood.

2020 Update: we have since established a separate 'pick up day' at the farm, to help handle overflow. See details in the section on **Expanding your Farm Business..**

So find an outlet for overflow produce, but your main outlet should be your home delivery program. Our produce was distributed approximately 80-90% to our CSA customers and 10-20% to other outlets, depending on the success of the season and time of year.

How to start-up your Bootstrap Market Garden

That's enough of the 'whys' and 'why nots', here's the 'how'! This section will provide details about our Bootstrap Market Garden business cycle - i.e. how to plan, manage and grow a successful small business.

The Bootstrap Market Garden business cycle

Like any successful business, a market garden has to conduct certain business activities in a certain order. These activities make up a business cycle:

One of the biggest advantages of a **bootstrap market garden** is the ability to plan production well before season start; spend some effort to develop a good plan.

1 – Planning. Set targets for desired income and profits; identify the margins needed and find the customers necessary to hit those targets (the **Bootstrap Sales Calculator** spreadsheet will help with this.)

2 – Marketing. Develop and execute a plan to find those customers. We will explain step by step how we did this.

3 – Managing. Once you have recruited enough customers to meet your target, put the management practices in place to serve them.

4 – Producing. Follow your plan and observe deviances so they can be corrected. For example, we take 'inventory' of our started plants regularly, to check on germination. This lets us start replacements if some seeds don't come up.

- **End of Sample** -

Dear reader,

I hope you enjoyed this sneak peek at **Bootstrap Market Gardening**. You can get the rest of **Bootstrap Market Gardening** and the bonus **gardening spreadsheets** [here](#)

Thousands of people have used my books to help flesh out their own Bootstrap ideas for a market garden, a [Survival Garden](#), a D-I-Y [Bootstrap Greenhouse](#), or a small mixed organic farm.

All my books, courses and bundles can be found [here](#)

Happy reading, happy growing

Scott Kelland
New Terra farm