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Cultivating A Movement

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Amy Courtney: Freewheelin' Farm

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Amy Courtney



Photo by Tana Butler

Freewheelin' Farm

Shareholders in Freewheelin' Farm's community supported agriculture program enjoy an unusual perk: delivery by bicycle-drawn trailer. Freewheelin' founder Amy Courtney, a 1997 graduate of UCSC's Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture, strives to produce fresh, healthy food while minimizing her environmental footprint. Courtney started the farm in 2002 with almost no motorized vehicles, incorporating used equipment and recycled materials wherever possible in the farm's operations. She and her current farming partners, Kirstin Yogg and Darryl Wong, still haul all of their CSA shares by bicycle six miles into Santa Cruz.

Courtney's work as a farmer springs not only from a love of land and plants, but also from a commitment to social justice, community health, and cultural vitality. She majored in community studies as an undergraduate student at UCSC; before founding Freewheelin' Farm, she worked with school gardens, Santa Cruz's Homeless Garden Project, the United Farm Workers and the AFL-CIO, and an agricultural extension program in Cuba. Freewheelin's website places the farm "at the forefront of the growing movement towards community renewal, addressing issues of environment, health, and social equity in a simple and delicious way." The Freewheelin' farmers have begun collaborating with "Food, What?!"—a youth empowerment program based at UCSC's Life Lab Garden Classroom. Other cultural and educational initiatives at the farm have included an annual community art show, yoga classes, and cooking instruction with Zen Buddhist priest and Tassajara Bread Book author Edward Espe Brown.

Courtney's long, low house sits on the original Freewheelin' acre, a stretch of cultivated land between the Coast Highway and the Pacific Ocean in northern Santa Cruz County. The house and land belong to Courtney's friend and mentor Jim Cochran—proprietor of nearby Swanton Berry Farm, and the only organic farmer to have signed a United Farm Workers contract. Sarah Rabkin interviewed Courtney there on the late afternoon of January 16th, 2009: a day of clear blue skies and brilliant sunshine that heated Courtney's southwest-facing living room—with its large windows looking over the ocean—to a tropical warmth. Courtney and her two farming partners were poised on the brink of big changes: they had just signed a lease for an additional parcel of land, multiplying the farm's acreage eightfold, and they were laying plans to ramp up Freewheelin's 40-share CSA to a membership of 100.

Additional Resources

Freewheelin' Farm: <http://www.freewheelinfarm.com/home.html>

Elizabeth Henderson and Robyn Van En, *Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture*, Revised and Expanded, (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007).

Beginnings

Rabkin: It's Friday, January 16th, 2009, and I am on the Coast Road at Freewheelin' Farm with Amy Courtney. Amy, I'm going to start with really basic background, so when and where were you born?

Courtney: I was born August 24th, 1974, in St. Louis, Missouri.

Rabkin: And where did you grow up?

Courtney: Also in St. Louis, in the suburbs of St. Louis.

Rabkin: And tell me about your schooling.

Courtney: I had the good fortune of starting [in] a really small Montessori school when I was two. It was a pre-school, and went from age two up through sixth grade, through this very small, three-room schoolhouse school that was an anomaly for our area and kind of why I think I'm a freak to this day. [Laughter.] I mean that in the best sense of "freak," but— Then I went to a private boarding school, prep school in St. Louis, and then was abruptly taken out of that school by some financial decisions in my family to go to a public school. So there was a little bit of a jostle there.

Rabkin: Was that in the midst of high school?

Courtney: It was right after junior high school and then switching into high school. I went to a 2,000-person public school.

Rabkin: How did you get interested in sustainable agriculture?

Courtney: It wasn't a moment where a light bulb went off exactly, but I do remember wanting to garden throughout my life in my homes, and nobody in my family was gardening, and so I was making stuff up—planting the apple seeds after I ate the apple, and digging up the grass and going and buying flower starts at the hardware store and sticking them in the ground. Marginal success, but the interest was always there.

Rabkin: Do you remember how the interest got started? Were you exposed to any books or people who influenced it?

Courtney: That's a good question. At that stage, no. I don't really know where that might have come from. At the Montessori school we had a garden for a year, but I don't remember having a profound connection with it.

And then I did go to undergraduate— That's funny, I left out college. I did go to college. [Laughs.] I was not that engaged with it. I was tired of being inside, in schoolrooms, being talked at and turning around reports. It wasn't a style that was really working for me and the energy that I had at the time. So I took a year off and I went abroad.

I was looking for work throughout Europe, and I ended up landing in Italy. I remember seeing these beautiful backyard gardens/farms, small-scale farms, one after the other, linked up fencerow to fencerow, neighborhood gardens where people were growing their food. I was fascinated. It looked so beautiful and like such a wonderful place to be. I wanted to be on the ground with them, growing food. So simultaneously, I'm frustrated with the academic world that I'm in and realizing I want to learn a trade and want to do something more hands on, and being charmed by this observation in Italy. I came back and made a plan to go through undergraduate studies through the community studies program at UCSC.

Rabkin: Had you been at UCSC before?

Courtney: Yes, I was.

Rabkin: So that's where you began college and felt disillusioned.

Courtney: Yes.

Rabkin: If you would, just tell me where in Italy you were that you saw all the gardens.

Courtney: The moment that's seared in my brain is in Florence, up on the top of the Plaza Michelangelo, which has a beautiful view of Florence, the city. But if you go to the other side of the plaza (I'm always snooping around to the back

stage or whatever, coming in the back door), on the other side of that hill is this beautiful vista of all these backyard gardens and homes.

Community Studies at UC Santa Cruz

Rabkin: Great. So you came back to UCSC.

Courtney: Right, what I really wanted to get was a trade. I felt invested into my undergraduate studies, so I was going to try to finish it and try to weasel out a trade at the same time. I saw community studies as a really good marriage for that, meeting those goals. I went and worked at what was then the Rural Development Center, which is now ALBA [Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association] in Salinas¹, as an intern for nine months, and then was doing my community studies work through that, and ended up graduating and then going to the Farm and Garden. That sealed the deal. I loved the work and was getting great training and kept pursuing the agricultural thread from there.

Apprentice at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems

Rabkin: So you went straight from your community studies major, graduated, and into the apprentice program at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems.

Courtney: Right.

Rabkin: Tell me about that experience.

Courtney: Oh, it was amazing, fabulous. Now I wish I could do it again. Maybe every ten years we could do it or something. I feel like I missed a lot because I was young and it was new to me, but it also kick-started this real passion and gave me some great grounding of tools to keep going in this world of agriculture.

Rabkin: What do you feel were some of the most useful tools that you came away with out of the apprentice program?

Courtney: Gosh, just the basics, and confidence in the basics. I think there's some inherent knowledge that we all have about growing stuff. Stuff wants to grow. We're just standing by and facilitating it as much as we can. [I learned] some basic understanding of soil systems and water and how plants like to grow. [I gained] a detective's eye for knowing what a problem might look like, or knowing, seeing the cycles of life that happen and getting comfortable with the senescing death part of plants and knowing that that's not a problem. [I gained] some basic familiarity with plant growth cycles and the confidence to know that you're not going to know everything, and you can't know everything, and what you do know is good enough to get started.

Rabkin: Did you have important mentors or teachers among the staff and faculty in the agroecology program, or among your fellow apprentices?

Courtney: I would say every single person that I encountered. The community and connecting into that community was a huge learning experience—[seeing] the breadth and depth of the work that my fellow apprentices were doing or aspiring to do, and then keeping in touch with them over the years, and following their path and what they're doing, and staying connected with the knowledge they've continued to get. And of course, all of the teachers and the second-year apprentices who were there [were] amazingly knowledgeable and inspirational.

John Farrell was in the down garden at that time. He now farms up the hill from here, and every now and then at the roadside we have a little chat and try to connect and stay connected. He taught me sort of the Zen, maybe the confidence part of it, actually: it's gonna be okay. Life marches along, and you don't have to push it and force it, and you plant the seeds and—just sort of the beauty of it. And Orin [Martin] is an incredible encyclopedia of knowledge. His drive and passion for what he does was certainly inspirational. And Jim Leap—an endless wealth of knowledge about a larger scale.² We've been in touch with Jim a lot over the years through the growth of Freewheelin' Farm, asking for advice and guidance on any number of issues. So those relationships continue, and we're still learning things from all of those guys.

Rabkin: Which year were you in the apprentice program?

Courtney: 1997.

Rabkin: And did you stay for a second year?

Courtney: I didn't. I think I was too young to really want to. In my heart I was young and antsy and wanted to get out in the world. I needed to get away from the university that I had had this association with. I was trying to pack my bag and go and do something with whatever I had learned. Certainly, I would love to do a second-year apprenticeship now. Sounds great. But no, I did not.

Working with the Homeless Garden Project

I immediately went into sort of a spin-off of a second-year apprenticeship program the next year, which was an AmeriCorps project that Paul Lee pulled together that was working primarily with the Homeless Garden Project, the UCSC Farm and Garden, and the [UCSC] Arboretum and, in conjunction, creating school gardens in the remaining schools that didn't have educational gardens in them. I did that for one year. It was an AmeriCorps-funded project. That was great, primarily because I got to plug back into the Homeless Garden Project, where I had been an intern as an undergraduate, and get to really work there day to day and learn some more hands-on stuff and connect with that community that has also been a great resource mutually in the growth of Freewheelin' Farm. We've always had a really nice relationship with the Homeless Garden Project.³

Rabkin: Are there particular people there who you're connected with?

Courtney: Everybody, really. They're all totally dear to my heart. My boyfriend at the time that I started Freewheelin' Farm was the co-garden director, along with Patrick Williams. Patrick and I had been friends for years prior to that relationship. So being really connected to the two guys that were running the garden out at Natural Bridges [Farm], and Darrie Ganzhorn is a dear woman who's always been really supportive. And now, of course, Paul [Glowaski] is out there, and he's a friend as well and went through the apprenticeship while Kirsten [Yogg] and Darryl [Wong] were there, and lives with Kirsten. It's all very connected.

Rabkin: Kirsten and Darryl are your two farm partners now.

Courtney: That's right, yes.

Rabkin: Yes. And tell me what the relationship was between the work you were doing at the Homeless Garden Project, and the schools you mentioned, and the Arboretum and the Farm.

Courtney: There were six different teams, six teams of four. I was on a team with two other ex-apprentices, who are also doing really cool work out in the world in agriculture right now. We were focused on the Homeless Garden Project and Soquel High School. The other five teams had other sites that they were connected with. There were other teams that were doing Homeless Garden Project at Bay View Elementary; another one was working at the Arboretum and Harbor High. So everybody had their assignments.

Rabkin: And you were helping grow the farms and do teaching, both?

Courtney: Correct. Yes, we were helping each of the institutional gardens or farms to do whatever it is they do, kind of extra labor. I plugged in at the Homeless Garden Project on helping with the CSA [community supported agriculture] organizing. They had taken a break from CSA the year prior, so we were reviving the CSA. So focusing on that, but mostly just doing field work for them.

At the Soquel High School, we were attempting to create an educational garden, but it wasn't terribly successful. There wasn't a lot of buy-in from the teachers and the staff, and we were four young twenty-somethings walking in with our pitchforks and saying, "Hey, we want this to happen." We weren't getting a whole lot of support on an organizational level to make that happen and get the buy-in from the school, itself. We did create a garden. We had some interesting connections with some of the youth, but there was never really any accountability or class program to give *them* incentive to come out and learn what we were offering. So it was a little bit of a flop, but a good experience for us.

Rabkin: Tell me about moving on from that chapter of your life. What happened next?

Working with the United Farm Workers

Courtney: I had had a dream going through community studies. [I] always [had] two hearts. I wanted to learn a trade, and I love working with the plants and being outside. But I also have a real interest in social justice and had been interested in working with the United Farm Workers. At the time that I was going through the [UCSC] Farm and Garden [apprenticeship program] they were going through a really big resurgence of trying to get contracts in the strawberry industry in the Pajaro Valley. That's where the focus was for statewide, national-wide UFW. I wanted to be a part of that and help that cause. So I got a job working in an office. It was the job that was available. I was a researcher for a year and a half for the United Farm Workers in Watsonville. I learned very quickly that I didn't like office work any more than I liked academia. [Laughs.]

Rabkin: No matter how close to your heart it was in terms of content.

Courtney: Exactly. I trudged through because I was passionate about the goals, but I was not personally very fulfilled with the day-to-day work that I was doing. But I learned a lot and met some really wonderful people, not the least of which is Jim Cochran, who owns the property that we farm on now and that I live on.⁴ So just making that connection was certainly wonderful happenstance for my life.

Rabkin: This is Jim Cochran of Swanton Berry Farm, who has a UFW contract with his workers.

Courtney: Correct.

Rabkin: And you were working with him in some capacity when you were working for the union?

Courtney: Yes. In the last few months, maybe last six months of being there. One of the things as a researcher that we would do is try to figure out ways that we could create incentives for growers to have union contracts and make use of our infrastructure and our staff to improve their whole business, because that was mutually of interest to both the union and the union workers on the land, for those businesses and for the business owner. So I got assigned to work with Jim in trying to help expand Swanton Berry Farm. At the time, he was just farming down at Wilder Ranch here and hadn't yet acquired the big ranch. I had nothing to do with him acquiring the big ranch, but I was helping him flesh out ideas and helping him look for land and that sort of thing. So we met through that and then stayed in touch.

Rabkin: And is that what led to your access to the land that you're on now?

Working on a State Extension Farm in Cuba

Courtney: Well, there's a little blip in between, which is I left the UFW and I went and did some agriculture in Cuba, which had its own pretty fresh greening movement happening. I wanted to check it out, so I went there for a couple of months and worked on a small—basically, it was like a state extension sort of a farm, where they were doing a lot of research projects and then taking those projects out to neighboring farms. So I got to get a lot of experience working with different farms in Cuba as they were taking their research, or checking in on their research projects, and plug in for a day or two on this next farm that they were checking in on and see how their system was going. So it was a really amazing and wonderful opportunity to get to see how things were working there. Again, another great confidence-booster that stuff wants to grow; you don't need lots of resources. People the world over are growing tons of food for themselves and their neighbors and their communities and the cities that they live near. You don't have to go to school. You don't have to have an agronomy, science degree. There're lots of avenues into successfully growing food.

Rabkin: How did that Cuba opportunity come about?

Courtney: I think the social-justice angle had had me interested in the revolution that happened there in general. And then, the Food First involvement with making the book and the film⁵ of the greening of the revolution got it more on my radar that [it's] not only an interesting place politically, but there's something there that's really near to my heart, and a way for me to plug in and be there and

connect with what is my passion. And there was an ex-apprentice who did help to point us in the right direction. She was an apprentice [at UCSC's CASFS] several years before me, and I had heard that she was helping to get urban gardens started within Havana. I never met her, but we had some e-mail and phone conversations, and she pointed me in the right direction of people to contact when I was there.

Rabkin: Was this during the period when Cuba was having to localize its food production and reduce its reliance on petrochemicals and oil?

Courtney: Yes, it was. It was starting to not be as urgent of a campaign. It all started in '90, and this was 2000, so there were lots of projects under way and rolling and doing well. But it was part of that whole period.

Rabkin: Is there anything in particular you learned or absorbed, do you think, in that experience, that you've taken with you?

Courtney: Well, I think, again, the broad stroke of not needing to have all the latest gear and gadgets to be a successful food grower in the world. And the heart and soul of feeling connected to other people who are doing this kind of work. That stays with me as I do my work. We can get caught up in what our version of success is around here and how that's very tied to how much money we make. Their barometer of success is putting food on the table. Certainly, people want to make money too, but there's a lot of variation in our perspectives on what is being successful.

I saw some great systems. I can't say that I've actually applied a lot of the systems, but I do remember them. [There were] some great vermiculture, really easy worm casting/harvesting methods that I was intrigued by, but I've never done them, and some cool methane gas capturing systems, where people were fueling their homes with the methane gas from their pig manure that they were running down into a slough and then having Pepsi bottles and really easy plastic piping to bring it into the house, and the Pepsi bottle just to have it off gas—you know, have a little bubbler on it.

Rabkin: Wow.

Courtney: It was very, very simple. That's how this one house in particular was fueled. Yes, there were a few little nuggets like that. But, again, I don't have pigs, and I have never tapped my house for methane gas. But you never know. It might come in handy someday.

Rabkin: What about the social and cultural atmosphere? What was that like?

Courtney: In Cuba?

Rabkin: Yes.

Courtney: One thing that I observed on that is that people who lived in the cities seemed like they were living a hard life, and not super happy with where things were at. And then as soon as I got out of Havana and Santiago, people seemed

pretty stoked. That was maybe a comparison to rural America and rural Guatemala, rural Honduras, rural Mexico, which [are in] sort of similar economic positions, but people were educated, well fed. They had decent homes. There wasn't this rural abject poverty happening. People were eating well. In fact, in the rural areas, people were eating really well. And in the cities, people were more reliant on the food rations that were coming, and wheeling and dealing and skimming off what you could through your little back-door schemes that you might have, which is a big part of city living. I think it's a big part of living there, but definitely in the cities. Having access to land is a really big thing for having a good quality of life, even in a country that's not economically thriving.

People across the board were amazingly educated, well read. They seemed very politically informed, to me, and way more engaged. We have so-called free press, and they certainly do not. I didn't see anything but state-issued media. But somehow information is flowing among people on the ground. Rural and urban and people that you might in this country have a stereotype [about]—like, oh, they're not going to be very well educated or have a political opinion that I want to get into, were very well educated and had thought a lot about their political circumstance. It was impressive. I thought that was pretty cool.

Rabkin: So how long were you there, and when did you come back, and then what?

Renting from Jim Cochran

Courtney: I was only there for two months. I was there in the spring of 2000. So I came back, and when I came back, I needed a home in Santa Cruz. So I contacted a whole bunch of people and asked, did anybody know of a rental? Jim [Cochran] was on that e-mail list, and he wrote back and said, "I actually do have a rental up on my property, and if you're looking for work, I'm looking for someone for my ranch." I took him up on the house offer and delayed on the work offer because I actually had another position doing research, similar work, for the AFL-CIO. It was just a temporary position. It was interesting. I was researching airports and trying to build a multi-union campaign within airports. This is all right before 9/11. Once 9/11 happened, the entire attempt to organize within airport structures just disappeared overnight.

So I took him up on the house. I live here now. It's eight years later. I thought, I'll get this lucky blessing of getting to live on the North Coast, beautiful ocean view, nice, beautiful hills and canyons and creeks right behind us, and I'll just ride that wave as long as I can. It's been eight years now. I ended up working for Jim for a couple of seasons as a manager, which was not exactly what I wanted to do with my life, but it was the position, again, that was open. [I] did harvest and post-harvest handling, anything and everything: the human resources aspect of that, supplies, coordinating farmers' markets, doing the sales with the wholesale buyers, that angle of his operation.

Starting Freewheelin' Farm

Then he stopped farming an acre that's right out front our door, because he had expanded successfully. Now one acre on Coast Road was actually more of a liability in terms of keeping an eye on it, and sending a crew out, and having equipment out here at all. So he opted to stop farming it. I asked if he would mind if I tried my hand. He said, "Okay." At the time, he still had blackberries in about half of it and was not sure if he was going to want to come back to them or not. So we, who was at that time Cassandra Brown, a friend and then housemate and now neighbor of mine—we started Freewheelin' Farm together. We farmed half of that acreage, tried things out, had some successes and some disasters, of course. We had a very small, ten-member CSA the first year that spread through word of mouth and people we knew.

Rabkin: What year was this?

Courtney: It was 2002, we got the land, in the fall. 2003 was the first CSA season.

Rabkin: And had you fantasized about having your own farm before this came about?

Courtney: Oh, yes, definitely. Sure. Isn't that everybody's dream? [laughs]

The funny thing is, though, I found my senior thesis from UCSC a couple of years ago, and it's very funny. It's entitled, "Why CSAs Are Not Good for Small

Farmers” [chuckles] or something like that. It would be very interesting. It was this whole thesis of why it was not an economically viable approach for small-scale farmers. [Laughs.]

Rabkin: Small-scale as in what size?

Courtney: Oh, I’m not even sure if I defined it in the thesis. This is ten years ago. Obviously I don’t stand by that now.

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Community Supported Agriculture

Courtney: But somewhere between writing that and ten years later, or whatever, I decided it was a good idea. [Laughter.] To start a CSA felt like the best thing. I wanted to not just start a farm, but a CSA. I think the real reason for that was the community part [of it]. I like going in the back door. It feels like we are the people who are deciding the terms of our food situation and cutting out as much bureaucracy as possible to make that connection, go back to as simple as it can be. Again, maybe inspired by the relationships I saw in Cuba: you grow food, and you get it to people who want to eat it, and voila.

So I chose the CSA model. Every year I’ve thought: is this the best model, and are there better ways to approach this? And every year I come back to wanting to do the CSA. It has a lot of strong quality-of-life points to it, and it’s steady, reliable

income throughout the year that we can count on. So that's peace of mind. And we are building community through it. I mean, year one, you're, like, we're kind of a community, but then you look and now six full seasons have happened. There're people who have been a part of it for all of that time, and they're really a part of my life and the farm's life, and that's great.

Rabkin: How many members do you have now?

Courtney: Forty off of this acre for the last couple of years, and then we just got new acreage and are going to do a hundred members this coming year.

Rabkin: Wow.

Courtney: So we're in a big-jump year, and we need to be. Cassandra and I farmed that half acre for the first year. Then I farmed three years alone and expanded it out to the full acre over the course of those three years.

Rabkin: Did Jim take his berries out?

Courtney: He didn't. Well, he kind of did. He took out berries, inasmuch as you can take berries out, and I wrestled with them the next year after that and tried to keep killing them back. Then finally reason dawned on me, and I decided the most prolific of them was going to get to stay. Lucky for me, it was an erect, thornless variety that is very tasty and has been producing for us wonderfully for the last—I guess, four years now. I've just let the blackberries do their thing,

and just been taking care of them and having blackberries is a part of the CSA. But the rest of it did clean out pretty good.

Finding a Farming Partner

So that brought us to year five. I'd been looking for a partner throughout these three years of farming alone, but it's not something to be taken terribly lightly. You want the right person when you're looking for a business partner. Kirsten approached me at one of our farm art shows one year, and she was lovely. We had a nice couple of meetings after that, and I had this feeling after I left talking to her at one of those meetings: Oh, my gosh, I have to get this person! This is the person I've been waiting for.

Rabkin: And did Kirsten Yogg also come out of the apprentice program?

Courtney: She did.

Rabkin: More recently?

Courtney: Let's see, she's been at Freewheelin' for two years, and the year prior to that she was a second-year, so her first year was four seasons ago. So in 2004, she was a first-year apprentice [at the UCSC Farm and Garden].

So Kirsten came into the picture for season five. I was feeling kind of burnt out. I've always had a lot of other interests, including the farming and camping and

hiking, and visiting friends and family that are far flung around the country, and dance and massage—I've been doing massage on the side to help pay the bills in the off season of farming, and pursuing more education around massage and receiving massage and—

Rabkin: Are you a certified massage practitioner in addition?

Courtney: I am.

Rabkin: Wow.

Expanding the Farm

Courtney: So there were all these compelling reasons to take a break for a year. I took last season off, and I didn't farm, and Kirsten brought in Darryl Wong, who was a first-year in 2003 and was a second-year when Kirsten was a first-year in 2004. They worked together this season wonderfully. They did a fabulous job. They have a great dynamic with each other, and I really appreciate Darryl as well and have had a really great rapport with him. So now we've decided we want to keep all three of us. [At first it was] like, well, Darryl comes in and we'll see how it goes and then all decide what happens for next season. [But] it was not even a conversation to be had. It was a no-brainer, like, of course. This is great energy, all three of us. Three's a good number, too. We have really good idea, counterpoint, discussion, peace-maker, okay, compromise. It's a nice dynamic with the three of us. We didn't want to lose any of that. So we're, like, okay,

we've got one acre. It's barely enough for one person to be making their money off of. We've been doing two people for the last two seasons, just to finesse this partnership thing, and now we're three so we need more land. And miracle of miracles, we got this beautiful, sweet seven acres catty-corner to the farm. A landowner owns this beautiful stretch of beach up to Majors Creek Canyon, and we had a conversation with him last week. He said he had these seven acres. He didn't really want to lease it to the previous grower, who was a conventional grower who hadn't paid his rent for several years, and he really liked us. We approached the conventional grower and said, "How do you feel about us farming that?" And he said, "I've been farmin' that for twenty years!" And we're, like, "Okay, that's cool. We get it." You know, tail between our legs: "Well, keep us in mind if you have anything or if you ever want to shake loose a few acres." And we walked away from that conversation, defeated.

We showed up at the landlord's door the next day to ask about this other one-acre piece that's deep in the canyon and not ideal and a little waterlogged, but we're, like, "It's something." He said, "Oh, and by the way, here is the piece of paper that turns the water into your name, and I've told the other grower that I want to lease to you guys. So if you want it, it's yours." He really rallied for us on a short meeting, but a really positive one. He's excited about what we're doing and that we're organic and community-based. So we signed the lease today, actually.

Rabkin: How exciting!

Courtney: Very, yes.

Rabkin: So the landlord—

Courtney: It was like the Christmas miracle. [Laughter.]

Rabkin: And the timing sounds amazingly serendipitous.

Courtney: It is. We'd set a deadline for mid-January: If we don't have land by mid-January, [when] we need to have a crop plan and have our seeds in; then we need to figure out how we're going to do this and what other jobs some or all of us get. We're really, really stoked that we did not have to make those decisions, and now we just have to decide HOW MUCH do we grow?

So we're going to expand to the 100-member CSA, which feels like it's even a little bit of a cautious, conservative [decision]—but that's kind of the Freewheelin' style. I've seen a lot of people get burnt out, and a lot of people overwork themselves and get too in debt. I want to be here for the long haul, and I think we all want that, and we want to have good, healthy, sane lives as well. So taking these little baby steps to get grounded with each new innovation of the farm is good.

Rabkin: And how are you finding those additional sixty or so CSA members?

Courtney: Well, time will tell, but we do have a wait list, and we've traditionally always had a pretty healthy wait list. It's facilitated by the fact that we're pretty small, so it doesn't take too many people to give us a wait list. The Local Food Guide has been a great outreach tool for us—people call a lot from seeing that. LocalHarvest.org—we're on there.⁶ A lot of Internet searches. People find us through the Internet.

Rabkin: Is word of mouth a big component?

Courtney: Definitely. Word of mouth is probably *the* biggest thing, for sure. "Oh, my friend So-and-so does it. Do you have any spots left?" That's pretty much the meat of the wait list. Once we start going out in the world, too— We are on bicycle; we bicycle-deliver all of our shares into town. And it's a little bit of a, like, "Hey, what? What's goin' on over there?" kind of thing. That draws a little bit of attention, and then people stop you and they say, "What are you doing? Whoa! Those look good. Strawberries, huh?" So we get some people interested that way.

We throw some community events, which brings more people out to the farm, and get some people signed up that way. We are contemplating, for the first time ever, really, paying to do some advertising. I will keep it a secret right now. We have an idea of an untapped advertising avenue for CSAs that we think would be a pretty good place to go. But advertising—it's a cost, so we're trying to weigh the pros and cons of that. We are making up a new and improved brochure, and

upgrading the website, and the old tried and true, which has been pretty good for us in the past.

Delivering CSA Shares Via Bicycle

Rabkin: Since you mentioned your bicycle-based delivery, let me ask you more about that. Tell me how that got started and how it works.

Courtney: It got started because I wanted to farm that half-acre, and neither Cassandra or I had a car. We didn't have a car because we philosophically and politically didn't want to have cars. We live about five miles outside of the edge of town and really liked having the opportunity and the necessity to bike into town a lot. It's a beautiful ride. So that's where it started. In our culture, in our world, pulling things with a bike trailer was just how we did get big things around, and how people in our community were moving big things. That's what you do when you don't have a car. You put stuff in a bike trailer, and you bike it in.

Rabkin: So you not only didn't have a pickup truck—

Courtney: Right.

Rabkin: You didn't even have a car.

Courtney: No.

Rabkin: So you had to move whatever supplies and equipment you needed all by bike trailer.

Courtney: No, for compost and bales of hay and that sort of thing, we would borrow, in year one, our friend Greg [Kendricks'] truck. Greg later became a first-year, I believe the year that Kirsten was an apprentice. But at the time he hadn't gone through the program yet and was actually a computer programmer and whatever. We can't take full credit for his turnaround—[Laughter.] But we'll try to take some. So, yes, he would generously lend us his vehicle. We'd bake him some cookies and fill up the tank and try to make it a good deal for him, too. He let us use his truck an awful lot to get some basic stuff out here.

And the trailer—we were thinking about buying a \$250 trailer online, and then we—

Rabkin: Bike trailer.

Courtney: A bike trailer. And then I was down at the Bike Church [Tool Cooperative], which is a fabulous bike resource locally. It was at their old location behind the Civic Auditorium. When I showed up just to do my regular bike maintenance stuff I was working on, someone from Terra Nova [Ecological Landscaping] showed up and put their old trailer in the recycle, give-away, free box that they had down there.

Rabkin: This is a landscaping business that works by bike trailer.

Courtney: Exactly. And I was, like, “Um, are you putting that in the give-away pile?” She’s, like, “Yeah, it just needs a couple of wheels and it’s good to go.” It was perfect. It had a [Burley] hitch on it, which is the standard. It was already ready to get hooked up. Pretty wide aluminum piping, pretty light. That is the very same trailer that we still use to this day. It’s kind of amazing. She’s gotten a few facelifts, some little tinkerings here and there to make her a little cuter and stronger, but it’s the same trailer.

Rabkin: How many CSA shares can you carry in the trailer at a time?

Courtney: Twenty is what we found is the max. We’re at forty, so we do two runs of twenty at a time.

Rabkin: Are you delivering door-to-door to every member, or do you have pickup points?

Courtney: Kind of a combination. Each year we recreate how the route is going to go, and obviously we try to make it make sense for our biking, not to give one route all of the hills, and one route going hither and dither and yon, and one route just going downtown. It’s a little bit of a trick, but at least it only happens once a year, and then you’re kind of done with it. But within that, we try to do what makes sense. Some people end up getting their bag straight to their door, and some people are in cluster groups where they pick up at somebody else’s house. Over the last couple of years, we’ve been building an east-side-and-beyond base that picks up in the Seabright neighborhood.

Rabkin: So your members are not just on the Westside of Santa Cruz.

Courtney: No.

Rabkin: They're over on the other side of town, too.

Courtney: Yes, we go as far as the Seabright area. But anybody beyond Seabright, we recommend that they come to the Seabright pickup spot, or maybe they work downtown and we drop it at their work or something like that. We've had some funny drop-off spots because of that. Somebody's girlfriend worked at the laundromat, so we were dropping off a share at the laundromat at night, and then in the morning she'd come and get the—[Laughs.]. Stuff like that.

Rabkin: So with this expansion, are you going to need another trailer or just be doing more runs?

Courtney: Both. We're going to need another trailer, and we're looking at more souped-up models. There's a great place called the Center for Appropriate Transport in Oregon that was started by Jan VanderTuin.⁷ He is credited with starting CSA, oddly enough, on the East Coast many moons ago, and then moved to the West Coast and started this thing called Center for Appropriate Transport. One of the many things that they do is create bike accessories so that people can be biking more stuff around rather than getting in their car. So they have some really good models. It's an investment, but it would be a wise investment for us, and we're just trying to make some decisions around what we

can get. But it looks like there're bigger trailers that would work for us, and we could end up going in with three runs total for the week, three different trailers. It could be two days still—one day with one trailer and one day with two trailers, one of those being the old faithful. So it looks like it won't be too much of a push to make it to this next level. We'll just have to invest in a better trailer at this point. But it's time. [Laughs.]

Rabkin: How much weight are you hauling at a time?

Courtney: Well, at twenty shares— I think the bags tend to weigh ten to twelve pounds each. Come winter squash season that can go up a little bit, but on average we're looking at two to three hundred pounds in the trailer. But wheels are an incredible invention. Once you get the momentum going with wheels, they just keep wanting to turn. It's not like lifting three hundred pounds. You keep the momentum going and things roll.

Rabkin: And do you try not to be going up too steep hills with all the weight?

Courtney: We do, although last year we had a delivery up on High Street. It was at the lowest end of High Street, but it was one of the first stops, so the trailer was fully loaded. We were kicking ourselves for having signed up for that. But we committed to it, so we did do it.

Rabkin: How much of your route is on Highway 1?

Courtney: Well, we go five miles to the edge of town. From here to the edge of town is all Highway 1, and then the rest of it is in town, squirreling through side roads and stuff. So that's probably another two miles once the route's done.

Rabkin: Is it challenging, hauling the bike trailer down the highway?

Courtney: No. I contemplate my death an awful lot [laughs], thinking of how tenuous it all is, just being a little bike and these big cars going past. It does cross my mind maybe at least once in every journey—not in a morbid, obsessive kind of way, but it crosses my mind. I see road kill. It makes me connect with that just tenuous part of existence on a regular basis, which I think is kind of healthy, really. Makes me appreciate the road kill and the animals that have—I feel more akin to them than I do the cars in that moment, and so that softens me up around that issue.

It's actually a pretty easy ride. The wind is in our favor ninety percent of the time. There're not too many hills. And the truth is, people quit their jobs and get divorced and pack up their lives on a bike trailer just so that they can bike down—

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Courtney: —the coast of California.

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Courtney: And I'm, like, this is my commute to make my job happen. So I feel pretty lucky for that.

Rabkin: Good point.

Courtney: Yes.

Community Volunteers and Apprentices

Rabkin: I want to go back to the people who work on the farm. You now have three partners. In addition to that, have you brought in interns or apprentices or other labor?

Courtney: Last year we had two full-time apprentices through the meat of the summer and into the fall. This year we intend to do the same. We have some housing that we can offer and of course lots of kale, all the kale you can eat. We're still working on the financial arrangement of that relationship, but we want to keep cultivating that full-time apprenticeship relationship. We've had oodles and oodles of volunteers, people who just pop in, people who come every week, people who come multiple days every week.

Rabkin: CSA members? Neighbors? Friends?

Courtney: Not so much CSA members, unfortunately. Everybody can't be everything, but we have definitely found that there is a disconnect with CSA-

member physical participation on the farm. Not entirely. Certainly, that has happened, but it's community members—young and old alike. For two seasons a man who lives in Fremont who works in the computer industry was coming over here every Saturday to help out on the farm because he wanted to garden and farm and didn't have a space like that and loved being out here in this beautiful spot. It was amazing to me that he carved out that kind of time in his life to make this commitment and be out here.

That's been a real blessing, that community part. When we started the farm, I was like, I just want to grow food, and we'll get it to the people, and our community will be these people that we sell the food to. What really happens when you start a farm is people want to be a part of it. You become a community organizer or a community institution or something, and you spend a lot of time fielding phone calls and coordinating volunteers and doing tours and that kind of thing. There's a real hunger for that kind of connection. That was an unforeseen byproduct of growing food to me. I was, like, what's the big deal? We're just growing food. [Laughs.]

I'm certainly grateful for all of the community interest and of course for all the help that people give to the day-to-day operations. It's definitely a relief for us too—even if we don't move any faster with somebody else out, which sometimes is the case with volunteer help, it definitely mixes up the day and makes the work lighter and more fun, even if we're not going to save time. It makes it more of a rich experience.

Rabkin: So it's worth the time and energy you have to spend getting people up to speed on what to do.

Courtney: That's a constant balancing act. Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't. I think that has a lot to do with where we're at in our stress or production needs. And it depends on who shows up, and how well we're able to draw those boundaries, or spell out what needs to be done, and hold fast to doing what we need to do, regardless of what they're doing. [Laughs.] "You're welcome to sit and watch the ducks for a while, but I'm just going to dive into what"—you know. We're still learning. I think it's an ongoing balancing act. But overall I would say it's worth it.

Community Events

Rabkin: Tell me about the community events on the farm that you mentioned holding.

Courtney: Well, on that volunteer sort of note, we have been hosting a work party every spring for the last couple of years at least. In spring there's a lot going on, so we try to pick the two most grueling tasks that we do in the spring and bring the community in for a little potluck and just go for it.

And then every fall (and traditionally it's been at the end of the harvest season, although we bumped it up this year and we'll probably continue to have it earlier than the end of the season because of rain considerations), we have an

end-of-the-year farm art show. That's been going for three years now. Prior to the art show, there was an end-of-the-year wrap-up, CSA-member-honoring dinner, or potluck, or some kind of party to bring everybody together and have some closure on the season. Then we morphed that into the farm art party. That was the brainchild of Melinda Lundgren, who's a local photographer/artist, and a wonderful person, who moved here from Boston, found us on the Internet, came out here. Immediately we fell in love with her, and she fell in love with us and the farm and started working on what she thought she could contribute to the farm, which, given her life at the time, wasn't weeding carrots; it was creating a larger, more community-connected farm event that was connecting this other community that I feel like I have one foot in and she's got two feet in, of bringing artists onto the farm and having the mutually beneficial sharing of our space and energies and our communities that each of the artists and the farm community bring, and melding those together to celebrate.

Rabkin: And do the artists show and sell their work at the party?

Courtney: Right, yes.

Rabkin: And why art? Is it that you have artists in residence on the property?

Courtney: I think that helps to keep the momentum there. But I think art primarily because Melinda is an artist, and it was her brainchild, and she was excited about making it happen, and she's connected to a lot of artists. On top of that, I have some connections to artists by virtue of lots of artists living on the

property, too, and being an appreciator of art and that sort of thing. But the real crux of it is Melinda's genius, and it's been working out wonderfully. It was such an easy fit because of those other connections, that we've just stuck with it for the last three years.

Water and Land Costs

Rabkin: Great. I'd like to ask you a little more about the farm itself.

Courtney: Sure.

Rabkin: What's your financial relationship with Jim on the land? Do you lease from him?

Courtney: Well, sort of. We lease, but the rent is nothing. [Laughs.]

Rabkin: That's handy.

Courtney: [Laughs.] I'd say. It's a pretty fair price. It's a handshake agreement. We don't have anything in writing. I think in year one we talked about doing something, and neither he nor I made anything happen, and now it seems almost silly to go back and— Yes, it's just a year-to-year agreement. We check in once a year and make sure we're both still on the same page. He has been to a lot of the farm parties and has been very supportive in many ways: with advice, and early on with equipment and bringing his crew down to disk the initial field pass, and

extra plants that he's had. He'll call and say, "Oh, my God. We have so many artichokes. We're going to have to throw a bunch away. If you want some for your members, come on up." So we don't actually pay any rent to him.

But we do pay for the water. It's a city ag meter. That's how we get our water up here. It's pretty costly. It's not as expensive as a residential line, but it is pricey.

Rabkin: And you'll be leasing this new seven-acre plot from your new landlord.

Courtney: That's right, yes.

Rabkin: And your water arrangement there?

Courtney: Is the same. It's the ag water meter. There is a water diversion off of Majors Creek that comes down toward the land, but it looks like it might not really be enough to bother trying to tap into it.

Other Challenges

Rabkin: And what are the advantages and disadvantages of farming on this piece of the coast, in terms of climate, soil?

Courtney: I feel like I've been pretty positive, so I'll dive right into the disadvantages. [Laughs.] It doesn't get that hot here, so we really have struggled with how to incorporate hot crops into our CSA drops. Everybody loves

tomatoes and peppers and eggplants. We just can't grow enough of them. We do have a really wonderful hoop house that was built by Swanton Berry Farm employees back when it was being used out here, but it's not that big. We've basically just dedicated it to tomatoes. We pick one crop. We'll try to give people enough of tomatoes. Tomatoes are the kind of thing you can never have enough of. So that's been a shortcoming for us. We've been trying to work with other farmers for that sort of thing in the past. This year we supplemented our tomatoes a fair bit with tomatoes from Meder Street Farm and gave them greens, because they're very hot up there, and in the middle of the season they don't have the capacity to do greens.

Rabkin: I just have to say that we're sitting here in the middle of January on one of the hottest days of the year in this house.

Courtney: Right.

Rabkin: It's probably 80 degrees.

Courtney: [Laughs.] And we're hiding in the shade.

Rabkin: But that's an anomaly in terms of the temperature out there, where you're growing.

Courtney: Right. Well, maybe that's what we should do, is try to grow our tomatoes in the dead of winter—[Laughter.]

Rabkin: I just picked tomatoes yesterday, by the way, at my house.

Courtney: Oh, nice! Rub it in! That's fine. [Laughs.]

Rabkin: But it's a bizarre year. Yes. Anyway.

Courtney: That's the biggest downside, for sure. Being on a year-to-year lease and being on the coast, we've always fantasized about having orchard trees, and there's not a whole lot that's going to thrive right here. We'd have a bang-up lemon grove, I guess, which would be worth doing. But then the year-to-year lease part comes in, and there's always been concern about how long are we going to be here? So establishing perennials has always been a question. That's not about this location but just being a tenant. I love peaches and nectarines and apricots, and that's just never going to happen here.

But it's been good in terms of having to reach out and try to make other relationships with other growers. Some of those connections have been really great in terms of community and friendship and fun and learning about other farm systems and that sort of thing. In fact, this year we are going to be partnering with Judy and Alan Hasty down on Ocean Street Extension to supplement—they have hot weather. They can do tomatoes and eggplants and peppers and melons on their land, and they also have pears and Asian pears and apples on their property. So they're looking for a market and a little more knowledge and experience on the growing techniques and varieties and this sort

of thing. So we're going to match our forces and funnel their produce into our CSA to try to fill it out and have a little more diversity.

Broccoli and Fava Beans

Rabkin: Terrific.

Courtney: Yes.

Rabkin: Are you growing any unusual or innovative varieties? I heard something about—Darryl mentioning it at an event last night, about the broccoli that you grow?⁸ Is it broccoli that's—

Courtney: Our de Cicco. We have a longstanding debate about how you say it. I say it deh-CHEE-koh. I'm not sure how you say it, but it's an Italian variety that sends up a lot of long, lanky shoots after you cut the relatively small head. It's super-prolific with these shoots, just puh-choo-choo-choo, and it's perfect broccoli because you just grab and cook. There's not a big stalk there. It's just these little, petite, succulent, delicious little broccoli shoots. I think in the CSA world in this area and farmers' market world in this area that it's not unheard of. It's definitely out there and kind of popular, if you will. But, yes, we do grow that.

We actually have a pretty good little fava bean niche. When we started growing fava beans and giving it to people, people were a little dubious. We did not

single-handedly create a fava bean craze, but we did kind of hop in. It was all happening at the same time, but people have gotten a little ga-ga for fava beans.

Rabkin: Do you grow them as a cover crop?

Courtney: Well, that's where it started, is I grew them as a cover crop and thought it would be nice to have a few extras on the side for harvest, and I'd get a better seed price if I just did one bean, and so I just did it all as fava and then saved some for the crop and turned the rest in. That's where it began. But now we don't actually use fava as a cover crop; we just get a cover crop mix and sow that and then sow fava beans for harvest in the spring.

Rabkin: And how are your CSA members learning about how to cook with fava beans?

Courtney: We have a really open communication policy. They're welcome to call us, e-mail us. We have a discussion post, blog-y, internal thing that one of the CSA members started, so people share ideas amongst themselves on that. But we also provide recipes for people. And of course when we send out the favas we give strict instructions on how to trim them and cook them and then some recipes.

Rabkin: So you send out a hard-copy newsletter-type thing with your shares.

Courtney: We do. We go every other week with the newsletter because it's a little bit of an extra task. People love it, but we're trying to walk this line of doing it but not spending our whole week coming up with new, interesting things to say in the newsletter and digging around in our recipe boxes. So every other week we provide that. But we do try to nail some of the more questionable recipe items, things people don't really know what to do with. Most people know what to do with a carrot, so we'll tend toward the more obscure items, giving people recipes for those.

Rabkin: Or another thing to do with kale.

Courtney: Right, right, it's true.

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Courtney: Yes, we do need help, even with carrots. It's like, "Okay, what else? C'mon, gimme somethin' else." It's true.

The Advantages of the Location of Freewheelin' Farm

I want to talk about the advantages of being here.

Rabkin: Yes, let's talk about that.

Courtney: The view is the first thing. It's gorgeous here. It's just gorgeous. You can't be too bummed, as stressed out as you might get or something's not working out. It's a hard place to be too unhappy.

Rabkin: You're right on the coast. You look directly out over the water.

Courtney: Yes, yes. Oh, and I don't know if the mics will pick it up, but the train is going by right now. [She pauses to let the sound of the train get picked up.]

Rabkin: I think they probably will pick it up, yes.

Courtney: I have a thing for trains. For many years people would ride the trains, and a lot of them were friends or acquaintances within the community, and that was actually a fun little perk, a little break in the day to see the train come up, and who's going to be on the train and say hi. But I do love getting to see the train go by three times a week. [Laughs.]

Rabkin: Is this the spur route that goes up to the Davenport Cement plant?

Courtney: Yes, correct. And then we can do greens and sweet, succulent things like that all year long. That's really fabulous. That's the mainstay of many people's diets, especially around here. So that's a real blessing.

Rabkin: You run your CSA year 'round?

Courtney: No, we don't, but we eat year 'round. [Laughs.] We do six months of harvest.

Rabkin: So tell me about your chickens and ducks.

Chickens and Ducks

Courtney: A CSA member who lives down the street—she started having chickens on her property, backyard chickens. She fell in love with her chickens and kept talking up her chickens, and then finally (this is probably year three) she said, “Okay, if you do chickens, I'll help you. I'll take care of them on the weekends, and I'll help you build a hutch, and I'll give you all the info you need, and I'll even go and pick up the chickens. I know a great —” So she was the full-on chicken instigator. It was too sweet of a deal to pass up, really. So her and her husband built a mobile chicken tractor, and I built the run, and off we went. We got eleven chickens to start with. I don't remember why it was eleven, but for some reason I think it was eleven. The flock goes up and down. We're doing a pretty good job of feeding the natural wildlife around here. It does seem to be a part of having birds in your life. It's constantly a balancing act of trying to give them freedom to roam around and be free in the world, and having them not get eaten.

Rabkin: So word's gotten around to the local coyotes and raccoons and foxes?

Courtney: Bobcats and raccoons seem to be the big culprits. They know. We're on their regular route to check. We've lost quite a few that way. And others have died just of whatever. But the flock has gone from eleven to twenty-some-odd. We've inherited some chickens that people got and then they realized it was more work than they wanted, and then they brought their chickens over. And then we got ducks. So now we're down to four ducks and two chickens.

Rabkin: And do you include eggs in your CSA shares?

Courtney: Initially, when the CSA was smaller and we had more chickens, I did, and it was on a rotating basis. And then the next year, it was on a seniority sign-up: we're committing to X number of dozen for this CSA share. But the birds have gotten older. We haven't refreshed the flock. They're all at least three years old now. There's one chicken that's probably two years old. But they're getting on, and they don't lay that much anymore. So now it's not really even connected to the farm anymore; it's just my home chicken flock, chicken-duck flock that happens to be out on the farm.

Rabkin: Do you use the manure on the farm?

Courtney: We do, but not in any kind of way that we can measure and account for. We moved the chickens that were in the mobile chicken hutch around, but we, over Christmas, had a raccoon massacre of that mobile chicken unit. So at the moment there is no chicken tractor. But for three, four years that was moving around the farm. They were doing their thing, eating bugs and weeds and then

pooping and then moving along to the next thing. I think it adds something. I think it's actually really helped get the slug and snail population down, more than I've noticed that the manure has been particularly helpful. And then when we clean out the stationary duck palace, that straw goes into the blackberries as mulch, and then it's got all the poop on it. So it's used, but we're not counting on it.

Inputs

Rabkin: Do you compost or have other inputs that you bring in from outside of the farm?

Courtney: We do, and we've done a real mix of things from year to year, depending on what we feel like the farm needs and what resources are available. That's one of the freewheeling aspects of the farm. One year somebody showed up with, gosh, forty, fifty-pound bags of ground-up fish pellets and said that they got the wrong thing and do we want them?

Rabkin: Free?

Courtney: Free, if we just go and actually move them out of their shed. So we used that throughout the year instead of bringing in a compost *per se*. But we have bought compost from different sources. I like using different sources all the time so you get a diversity of where the compost is coming from. And we've relied pretty heavily, especially in the early years, on horse manure from up Back

Ranch Road. Some neighbors have horses, and we just load up our truck with their front-end loader and bring it down. It's free; it's easy; it solves a problem for them. It's better on the organic matter than the nutritional value, but it's definitely helped to bring the soil up.

We had a problem with some symphytan a couple of years ago and read that horse manure or too much horse manure can contribute to having symphytan problems. So we've backed off of using the horse manure almost at all in any of the farm. But it's not like we're sworn off of horse manure; we're just kind of giving it a rest for a while.

Rabkin: What other pest problems have been especially prominent for you?

Courtney: Early on, slugs and snails was a real problem. We see a little bit of everything—flea beetles in the early spring. We just row cover. Year one, we learned you have to row cover all of the Brassicas. There's no two ways about it in the spring. Or you get nothing. The flea beetles munch them down. It's kind of a nice thing. I don't like the aesthetics of the row covers, but they last for a while. We have some that we've had for four years that are still doing fine. They keep the moisture in. They keep the heat in. It creates a little bit of a greenhouse to speed up production and keeps every little bugger out.

Cabbage maggots. That's also been an issue, particularly in the early spring. Aphids, a little bit later on. In the late summer we see some of it. Haven't had them too, too bad. [Raps table.] Knock on—[Laughs.] But they exist out here.

Some cucumber beetle, but nothing crazy. The biggest thing that was a real wipe-out was the symphylan. It was exasperating. It was, like, you plant something, and the whole bed just disappears, or you've got little patches that are left, and so you have to make the bed disappear because you can't just keep tending this spotty bed. But it was just this one year, for one chunk of the year, and we're not totally sure what it was. We were throwing everything at it, and finally the problem went away. We don't really know what it was that we were doing that made it go away or if it had anything to do with us. Maybe [it] just was the time of year—the daylight, day length, the heat just switched their patterns and off they went, and then we haven't seen them in big numbers again. So, thank goodness.

Energy Conservation on the Farm

Rabkin: Yes. Tell me about your efforts to minimize energy and resource use on the farm.

Courtney: Well, the bike trailer is certainly a part of that. Delivery is a really big part of where agriculture raises its ratio of gobbling up a lot of petroleum. The farm was hand-worked for the first many years. I did have a walk-behind rototiller. I didn't like to use it that much, for the petroleum use, but also because it was not working very deeply and presumably creating a hardpan underneath the three inches, at best, that it was really working. So it was used cautiously. That was arguably exhausting, to work it by hand. When I finally had the means to get a tractor, I did, and that was many thanks to California FarmLink⁹, who

had an individual development account program that I got to join in on and save with them for two years. At the end of that, they returned my money plus three times the money I put in, to amount to almost \$10,000, with which I got a tractor, a small tractor with a spader. [We're] still paying for the spader, but we're almost done, almost paid off, and that's been a real godsend. I think the soil is better cared for. And in the end—I did the breakdown last year of the petroleum usage, but we did not use more than fifty hours on the tractor.

Rabkin: For an entire season?

Courtney: For an entire season. And that was true again this year. We're just at about 100 hours now on the tractor. They're pretty fuel efficient. Especially with the spader on it, it's working really slowly. So pretty fuel efficient, actually. We're using biodiesel and putting that in the tractor. So to answer that, every time that we have to bring in something new onto the farm, we do try to think of other ways to do stuff. But always in the balance is trying to think about our time and trying to be wise about that. But it does feel like there're often other solutions, not just for petroleum use but resource use. We don't want to buy new everything and anything. It's petroleum use down the line just making that thing and then transporting it to the hardware store, and then you going and getting it. There's just so much stuff everywhere in back yards and land fills and front yards. There's just stuff. And so we do a pretty good job of putting feelers out and keeping our eyes and ears open for "stuff." [Laughter.] And it saves us money, too.

So we do use a tractor. We have vehicles now. At the moment, I have a straight vegetable-oil truck. It does run on diesel as well, but it can spend much of its trip time running on straight vegetable oil that's collected from a local institution, and then I process it here and run it through the truck. So it's constantly a part of the mix of trying to keep it on the minimal. But it is a useful tool.

Rabkin: Are you ever tempted to use the truck for your deliveries, or are you really committed to the bicycle delivery system?

Courtney: In six years, we have done two weeks of deliveries in a truck, and that was just this year when the hitch spontaneously broke on a harvest day, and we had to order a new one because locally nobody had the exact same hitch anymore. I guess it's that older version now, and we had to wait for that part to come in. In that two-week period we did deliveries with the truck, but that's it.

Rabkin: Wow.

Courtney: Yes.

Rabkin: And you'd like to keep it that way?

Courtney: I think we all would. We've talked about it. We would all like to stay true to that vision. It's a fun way to round out a harvest day. It's just part of what we do now. It's hard to even think about getting rid of that part. I mean, it's in the name. It's in the logo—

Rabkin: Yes, right. [Laughs.]

Courtney: You know, we've kind of, like, tattooed it on us. It's like: what do you do now?

Rabkin: Right.

Courtney: [Laughs.]

Rabkin: You're famous for that now.

Courtney: I do think that as I get older in this process that I'd like to see having more rotation on the delivery route. I enjoy it, but I want to keep enjoying it. Having more interns or trying to figure out volunteers that might be more interested in doing that, versus thinning carrots or whatever, and having them help out with that aspect to lighten the load, so to speak.

The Food What?! Program

Rabkin: So there was an event last night at which your partner, Darryl, talked about, among things, working with some of the kids from the Food What?! program.¹⁰

Courtney: Right.

Rabkin: Can you talk about that?

Courtney: Yes. A friend of all of ours, Doron Comerchero, started a program called Food What?! out of the Life Lab Science Program at UCSC. He's been working for a couple of years now with high-school-aged youth, trying to direct his attentions on that group, where a lot of ag and gardening education has been directed at the elementary level. He's created a fabulous mix of ag and food education as well as a youth empowerment, a life skills project. It's a really admirable and wonderful project. They have, for the last couple of years, come out here in different capacities with the youth and done workdays, and last year they came out during their summer program. They came out once a week and worked out on the farm and had more of stake in the farm.

So at the end of the year this year, we all started talking about the possibility of us working collaboratively together to have Freewheelin' Farm be their home-base farm, where the kids are getting more of a real day-to-day stake in day-to-day operations of the farm, and rather than being housed at UCSC or at multiple different farms, having a sense of place and home base for them, and having Freewheelin' Farm be that place. We all felt like we needed more acreage to make that happen, and ideally that that acreage would be closer to town so that the youth could access the farm and come and go as their schedules permitted. Unfortunately, our attempts to find such acreage didn't really pan out for this year, but we've laid the groundwork and talked to a lot of people and perhaps, maybe something will shake out in the future. In the meantime, we have a pretty good chunk of land that feels like plenty of ground for us to play with, with their

help, and them creating some home base there, and working with us out at this acreage. The transportation issue is going to make it so that they only come probably a couple times a week. But it's a good start, and we can slowly start building that collaboration and going deeper, step-by-step.

Rabkin: How many youth are there in the group that comes out here?

Courtney: Last year it was just under twenty, I want to say, but the exact figure is escaping me. This year I know that they want to expand it, but the logistics of exactly what has been hinging on the land that we might get, and we just got the land today, so I think all of those details are yet to be worked out.

Rabkin: Do you know where these kids come from?

Courtney: They're all from Santa Cruz County. Abby Bell also works with Doron on that now, for this expansion. They created a new position, and she's been working with him. I'm not sure how they do their outreach, but it does seem that they're very connected to all of the schools and all of the alternative-ed teachers and people in the know on that, and spread the word via that, and word of mouth through the students themselves. But I'm not sure what all avenues.

Rabkin: What's that experience been like for you, working with these kids?

Courtney: Well, my experience has been pretty limited, because the first year that they were out here, they didn't come very much. It was very positive and

exciting to me that there were high-school-age youth that were excited about food and growing food and eating food and learning about bugs. I thought, teenagers, they're too cool for that, or they think they're too cool for that. But these kids were really jazzed on it, I think much to Doron's credit of making it a really exciting issue for them in their lives, where it maybe wasn't before.

So that part was really great. Just having that connection with high school youth is something different for me. I don't know a lot of people who are in that age group, and so it's refreshing to plug in and see what's going on at that level right now. But this year I was away from the farm more than I was here, so Kirsten and Darryl had that interaction and could speak to that better.

Selling to Restaurants

Rabkin: Okay. Besides your CSA (and I do want to ask you a couple of more questions about the CSA in a moment), I'm wondering if you have any other outlets for distributing your farm produce: farmers' markets or direct marketing to restaurants?

Courtney: Anything extra that we've had, we've always sold to restaurants. It's been our pressure valve, release valve.

Rabkin: You have some restaurants in town that you have that kind of arrangement with, where if you have something available you can call them up and say, "Could you use X?"

Courtney: Yes. Most restaurants are open to that phone call, and some of them will respond, more times than not, with a positive answer, and some of them will respond, more times than not, with a no, and then everything in between. So we hit the phones. And over the years those relationships have been growing, to where certain restaurants expect the call at this point. Some restaurants are familiar with us calling here and there, and some restaurants are, like, “Who are you, again?” So there’s a full range of, depending on how much extra we have, how far and wide we have to throw the net. But that is something that every year we have wanted to do, and we have worked on successfully cultivating more of those relationships and making the existing relationships more solid.

This year in particular, we’re really wanting to have strong relationships with a handful of restaurants and be making our crop plan in accordance with what they want so we can be more consistent for them. Because that’s been the issue; it’s hard to just pop in and pop out.

Rabkin: Which restaurants in town do you have the most regular relationships with at this point?

Courtney: Gabriella Café has definitely been the most supportive of us. Whatever we have extra, they figure out what to do with it, and that’s been really great. Costanoa up in Pescadero has been a new add-on that’s been really open to new stuff, and spontaneous in-and-outs. We’ve had good relationships with Pearl Alley [Bistro & Wine Bar] and [Ristorante] Avanti in the past. Pearl Alley was at a time, with a certain chef who is now gone, also a really consistent

purchasing. Now it's pretty spotty. And Avanti—we come in and out, and sometimes that works for them, and sometimes it doesn't.

A Smaller-Sized CSA

Rabkin: Great. Going back to the CSA for a moment, your CSA has been on the small end of the spectrum in terms of CSA sizes in this region. I'm wondering if there have been either drawbacks or advantages to having a relatively tiny CSA in a community that has some pretty big, visible ones.

Courtney: The drawback would be less land, less members, less money. So paying the bills and meeting all of our personal financial needs in life, or going beyond our needs and hitting a lot of our wants has been an issue. I would say that's the one drawback to the scale. The advantages are: I know the names of all of the CSA members; I know what a handful of them particularly like and don't like. I know how many people are in their family. In a lot of cases, I know their dog's name.

Rabkin: And whether they run after bicycles. [Laughs.]

Courtney: [Laughs.] Right, exactly. That real connection with the people [is] something that you start to lose the bigger that you get, and we'll certainly be facing that a little bit in this coming year.

Rabkin: Do you actually end up personalizing your shares a little bit?

Courtney: We have in the past, and we have gotten away with that. We started getting away from it when it was less about just me and my memory of what people liked, and then it became two people. Just to make it more reasonable we needed to start packing in a more standardized pack. Every now and then I dip my hand in and grab the bunch of carrots that So-and-So doesn't like and get them an extra bunch of beets because I know they are not going to eat those carrots, and we've got the beets. But that's just me meddling, really. [Laughter.] I think as we move into a hundred-member CSA, that that is not even going to be possible.

Other advantages are, it's easy to fill the membership, relatively. I mean, it's not like it's effortless, but we're not often panicked about filling the rolls. I think it's maybe been an advantage that we haven't been that threatening to other CSAs, so people have been into sharing information and even been very generous to share with us their extra—or bump people our way.

Rabkin: Yes.

Courtney: I think that that happens within this community anyway, but think being small makes it just even easier for people to want to support you. It's not that threatening.

Rabkin: Do you have a sense that the CSA market is coming close to being saturated in this area?

Courtney: I don't have that sense. Maybe it's just what I need to believe based on where I'm headed. There are so many people who eat. [Hearty laughter from both Rabkin and Courtney]

Rabkin: There's a lot of that going around.

Courtney: Yes. [Laughs.] And they're not going to stop.

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Courtney: I think the more food education that people are getting—and I see that increasing and increasing. The circle of informed food consumers is getting bigger every single year. And this community—I mean, it's everywhere. You have to, like, live under a rock to not have some idea, living in Santa Cruz County, that there're other options other than Safeway for getting your produce needs. There's just so much potential still, within the spectrum of people who are already in the know, and people who are still getting all of their food at Costco.

So, yes, I'm hopeful. I think actually, as money turns tight, my story, my version of reality is that people are going to eat at home more and they're going to want to make that more pleasant, because they're not spending money on other luxury items that they were because money is tight. So they're going to splurge and get strawberries at the farmers' market instead of just hunkering down and eating their pita pocket, microwaved or whatever.

Rabkin: What do people pay for a share?

Courtney: This season it's \$600 - \$725 sliding scale for a twenty-five-week share. So it comes out about twenty-four [dollars] for a share, a week.

Health Insurance

Rabkin: You talked earlier about that balance of meeting your own life needs, having an income stream that keeps body and soul together, and then playing with that edge of going a little beyond that sometimes and being able to meet your wants. It made me wonder about health insurance and how you deal with that.

Courtney: Yes. Health what? [Laughter.]

Rabkin: Uh-oh.

Courtney: Yes, it's one of those. I don't have health insurance. I haven't had it the whole time I've been doing this. Luckily, my preventative health insurance of eating lots of kale and whole grains is working so far, but I'm not getting younger, and it's definitely a concern, and I'd like to be able to incorporate that into my life.

Rabkin: Have you talked with other people in similar circumstances, farmers who are trying to make a go of it, and have you heard stories about how people deal with that issue?

Courtney: With health insurance?

Rabkin: Yes.

Courtney: Not so much. I think that would be a good place for me to start. I think I'm just now coming to the place where it's really something that I want to try to nail down in my life. I have vacillated between just on principle not wanting to have insurance, because then I just give them my money and then they just tell me they're not going to cover stuff. And then you go and see a movie like *Sicko*, and you feel like, why should I even bother? So I've definitely done some vacillating about it even being something that I want to jump into. But I think just for a catastrophic backup plan that it would be good for me to look into how other people address this, if maybe there're even some farming pools that happen. But I don't know.

Rabkin: It's sounds like a good Eco-Farm [the Ecological Farming Association conference] topic.

Courtney: Yes, right? It does. That's a good idea.

Rabkin: Are there any aspects of this life that keep you up at night?

Daydreaming about the Next Season

Courtney: Not right now. This is the sweet time, when you're reflecting on last year and daydreaming about the next year and how fabulous it's going to be and how perfect all of your plants are going to come up.

Rabkin: "Now" as in mid-January.

Courtney: Right, exactly. Springtime—I refer to it as right before show time, you know, when rains are still threatening and it's dicey getting in on the land and just trying to get that first harvest to happen on time and be full and come out with a bang for people's first—because some people are new in the CSA year, and the first bag, you want it to say: "Wow! Welcome to your life of being a CSA member," and not: "Well, you know, gee, in June, it's going to be really something—"

Rabkin: [Laughs.]

Courtney: "You just hang in there." I have had some, not sleepless nights, because I actually am blessed with the capacity to sleep through just about anything. I'm a pretty good sleeper. But I have gone through some pretty stressful periods of freaking out that I'm not going to have this or that, or not enough—beating myself up about that. But I've done it enough now that I know if it happens, and I'd like to say it's not going happen again, but it's always tempered with this history of knowing, like, okay, it always works out. It's little

bit less of a freak-out each time, because I know that I always do that, and it doesn't help and it's not going to change anything, and everything's going to be fine, anyway.

Mentors

Rabkin: Thanks. You've mentioned a bunch of significant mentoring or cooperative types of relationships that you've had, that have really been helpful to you as a farmer, mutually supportive, cooperative things. I wonder if there are any of those kinds of relationships with other farmers that you haven't talked about that would be worth touching on.

Courtney: Well, one that comes right to mind is Martin Bournhonesque, who was just here on Tuesday and spent the whole day looking at the new seven acres and walking around the old farm and talking tractors to soil amendments to irrigation—trying to help give us a sense of what it's going to take to go from this level to the next level, a really generous man, and kind, and a very successful small farmer. He's been farming down in Salinas for the last many years, at ALBA, on land that ALBA leases to him, and selling primarily to restaurants. He's financially very successful at what he does, and I really admire his ability to make things efficient and be successful in that way, and still have a sane and happy life.¹¹

Rabkin: Wow.

Courtney: So he comes to mind.

I'm very appreciative and admire very much the work that Nancy [Vail] and Jered [Lawson] are doing up at Pie Ranch.¹² Nancy and I were first-year apprentices together, so we've been watching each other's growth and blossoming, all along, through the county, and get to spend some time together checking in around all of that life stuff. I think what they're up to is totally beautiful, and love to be in their space and learn from the graceful way that they're pulling a lot of complicated pieces together and doing it so wonderfully and community-oriented.

Just everybody that is making a go for it. In the last couple of years there have been some great new upstart farms that— It seems like [for] many years, apprentices have learned what they learn here, and we have to go elsewhere because we can't get a foothold in the land around here. But Meder Street Farm and now the New Meder Street Farm and Oso Velloso [Farm]. My neighbor Toby [Kline] is a part of that project. Pie Ranch, Blue House Farm. Mike [Irving] and Teresa [Kurtak] from Everett Family Farm now starting Fifth Crow [Farm] with John Vars. This momentum of young perspectives on farming in this county [has] been really great. It's good energy. It's exciting and gives me hope. My front yard is conventional Brussels sprouts, and I'm imagining in ten years all these Brussels sprout growers—what is going to happen when those guys retire, and who's going to be ready to step up and take all these state park leases on? There's a lot of farm acreage here that not too many people are ready to be able to step into. I'm glad to see that we're all getting our legs on and getting little

footholds, and maybe we can really turn this county into a little fruit and veggie basket.

Jeff Larkey is also a great inspiration.¹³ He's, again, sane and fun, life and livelihood along with growing great produce and keeping the price—he's had a philosophy of keeping his farmers' market connections and prices reasonable for the local people that created his farm and supported him all along the way. I think that's a beautiful thing.

Of course, I couldn't be here literally without the work that Jim [Cochran] does. I think the inspiration I get from him is more as a businessperson and a dreamer—how to pull all of your hopes and dreams for what you want to see be your business together and hold true to that kind of thing.

Rabkin: Yes. Great.

Courtney: We're so lucky in this area. Lots of rich inspiration.

Sustainable Agriculture Organizations

Rabkin: You've also referred, in addition to individuals, to various kinds of institutional or organizational support. You mentioned the FarmLink program¹⁴, the saving program, and you also mentioned the Local Food Guide, which is put out by Community Alliance with Family Farmers. Are there other, local or

regional organizations concerned with agriculture and farmers that you've gotten help from?

Courtney: Well, Eco-Farm, which I think you mentioned, has been an amazing networking and community-building tool. I've gotten so much inspiration and knowledge from having that regular yearly check-in with ag school.

Rabkin: Do you attend the Eco-Farm conference pretty much every year?

Courtney: I do, if I'm in town. Sometimes I try to cut out in the winter and go somewhere very warm and relax. But when I'm in town I do go, and I am planning on going this year. So that comes to mind. We have actually used the Cooperative Extension offices a little bit, and they've been really helpful.

Rabkin: With what kinds of things?

Courtney: The first thing was identifying a problem in the blackberries the first year. There was a mite that was getting into the berries. And, yes, it was like, oh, now that we know what it is, we can deal with it. We didn't even know it was a mite. We were just, like—something's wrong with the berries. That turned that around. Just helpful and sweet and nice that they have the time and energy for a one-acre plot, just as much as a 200-, 2,000-acre farm.

Rabkin: And happy to advise you in terms of organic farming?

Courtney: Yes, yes. When we had symphyllans, we had a lot of communication with them. Symphyllan is a little bit of a mystery for everybody, so unfortunately they didn't have the silver bullet. But they came out and did some trials and tests and gave us some clove oil and other organic attempts at trying to nip this thing in the bud. It was a helpful process, even though it—who knows? Maybe it did work. [Laughter.] We don't know. Certainly CAFF's work and the Local Food Guide has been huge.

Organic Certification

Rabkin: You are not certified organic.

Courtney: Right.

Rabkin: Talk about that decision.

Courtney: Yes. It's one that might, could, get reviewed into the future, but as a one-acre farm serving forty people who we know by name, it did not ever seem necessary to go through that. In the first year, we looked into it because we wanted to be by the book, and look professional and all that. Our first year, I think our upstart costs were a thousand bucks, maybe fifteen hundred dollars, and it was going to cost five hundred dollars just for the inspector's time to come out and look at the land. It was like, this just doesn't make a lot of sense. So we let that go and haven't really revisited it as being something we want to spend time and money on. I guess if we start running into trouble marketing our stuff,

that's when we might consider it. It's not that we're ideologically opposed to being certified; we just haven't really needed it to get it in the hands of the people that we want to serve, and it's not cheap, so we've been pinching our pennies on that one.

Inspiring Others

Rabkin: Sure. Your farm, itself, is quite small, as we've been talking about, although it's about to grow a little bit. But you've used it to model sustainable practices that would certainly have greater impact if they were practiced more widely. And I wonder if you've deliberately done any kinds of outreach in hopes of exporting or publicizing your efforts here.

Courtney: It's kind of like the way that community finds you when you start a farm. It seems like somehow media or publicity finds you too, if they're interested in what you're doing. So some of that has just happened without any effort of trying to get that to be put out into the world. But that hasn't really been a focus. We're just doing what we're doing. That's interesting to some people and not to others, and that's just what it is. I've been learning from other people's interests more what's interesting about it. I'm just doing what I can do, and what is the organic vision coming from what we have and what we want to make in the world. I sometimes try to step outside of just being me and look at it and see: Well, why *is* this interesting to people? What's different about this, or useful about it? I think I'm still educating myself about that aspect of it. But if it can be useful for people, then that's great. I think one of the things that I'm "getting" is

that, especially for young women, and for people without a lot of financial resources, it's inspirational because it's sort of like what I learned in Cuba: You can just make it happen. You don't need to have tons of money, and you don't need to have tons of land. You don't have to be twenty acres to make a go at it. So I think that that's a part that I "get," and I'm happy for people to hear about it more and more, to inspire other people to duplicate small. I love Meder Street Farm. It's like, take some big front yard or back yard of some mansion and make it into a farm. I love that. There's plenty of land to be farmed still. Let's use those little nooks and crannies.

Being a Woman Farmer

Rabkin: You mentioned the gender aspect, so I'm going to ask you: You're still in something of a minority as a young woman farm proprietor. Have any of your experiences as a farmer been shaped by that, or have people's reactions to you been shaped by the fact that you're a woman?

Courtney: Probably. I think it's still something also that I am getting perspective on. I just happen to be a woman, and this is what I wanted to do, and so I'm doing it. Other people are saying, "Hey, that's different. Do you know that? Do you notice this?" I'm getting that. But I think if anything, I've been lucky to live in *this* county that's very pro-woman. And so if anything, I think it's been a positive thing. I think I've gotten a lot of embracing and support for being a woman doing this work. And I think it might look a lot different if I were still in Missouri doing this work. I think even in Missouri, actually, that there is

certainly a community that would be stoked about that. It's something different and refreshing. Women do most of the food buying in the world, and if they can identify with the person growing the food that much more, I think that that's actually a helpful tool.

I think the only thing maybe that was a negative is that there were times when I have doubted myself or been intimidated early on to ask questions, and felt like, oh, I have to do this like men do it. They just pretend they know what they're doing.

Rabkin: [Laughs.] Fake it till they make it.

Courtney: You know, like, I made this story up. I'm not saying that's really how men do it. [Laughter.] I was not being terribly authentic in that way, but can notice now that some of that was just about being a little intimidated as a woman, not knowing what I was doing, to be going to some old-timer guy and not wanting to be treated like a child or something like that. Mostly that didn't happen.

Young Farmers

Rabkin: You're among the people featured in a forthcoming independent film about young farmers called *The Greenhorns*.¹⁵

Courtney: Right.

Rabkin: Tell me a little about that.

Courtney: I don't know that much about the film. I've had a couple of nice conversations with Severine [von Tscharner Fleming], who is the mastermind behind that film, and I think it's a very timely and wonderful film concept. The trailer that I've seen shows beautiful cinematography, and it looks like it's going to be really delicious and inspiring when it's done, but I haven't really followed up on where that's at. I know that it's kind of a manifesto for the next generation and what are we going to do? Kind of macrocosm of what we have here. What are we going to do when all of the corn growers from Iowa are retired and who's going to take over all this ag land and continue to feed the country? There is this real strong energy of young folks, college-educated, opting to go backwards, by some people's standards, and want to be farmers. I think it's going to be great. I can't wait to see it.

Rabkin: Did they already bring a film crew out here and film you?

Courtney: They did. They came, but they were just filming for the trailer, so they've created bits. And who knows what of that also might wind up in the film? But it was a pretty short interview, and it was primarily just to create the trailer so far.

Rabkin: So it's possible they may come back and do a longer thing.

Courtney: Yes, yes. That's kind of how it was left.

Farming and Activism

Rabkin: I want to ask you how activism and farming relate to each other.

Courtney: They've been a little bit at odds with each other in my time for many years, but it's coming into balance more and more all the time, and especially as I can see the work that I do on the farm with the food movement as the anchor of that work for me. It's where I can contribute in a real consistent way with the larger picture of social and environmental justice. I think it touches on all of those key bits that are dear to my heart, although it's slower and more methodical and more, I don't know—it's maybe not as sexy, if you will, of activism work, but it's more sustainable in changing the face of the world that we live in and trying to make it more just.

And I think the community-supported part of it is huge. I really love the idea of us, especially with this economic meltdown and people who thought they had jobs and pensions and stocks they could count on—it's so clear you can't count on that stuff, but this is something we can count on, and if we build it as a community, we can support our community through—literally support and nourish our communities in times of trouble, and that feels pretty good.

But sometimes I feel like, oh, I should be this or I should be that, and I wish I was working on this campaign or that campaign, or gosh, I am a little unclear on all the nuances of what's happening in Palestine, Israel right now. I can beat myself

up about not being abreast and as active as I would like to be on every issue. But we're all doing the best we can.

Rabkin: You haven't figured out how to clone yourself yet.

Courtney: Yes, right. I'm working on it.

Rabkin: I'd just like to ask a couple more questions and we'll wrap up.

Courtney: Sure.

Advice to New Farmers: Listen to Yourself

Rabkin: What advice would you give others who are interested in starting their own organic farms in this region?

Courtney: Gosh, [I'm] a little wary about advice. Listen to yourself. I mean, that's the thing. I've gotten so much good advice and I'm sure that there's probably something I could say, but I think one of the things that's worked for me is listening to myself and trusting in myself, and again, trusting that stuff wants to grow. If you're moving from your heart, the community part comes with it, and whether you're community-supported agriculture or farmers' market or wholesale, it ultimately is about the community that you cultivate. You need to be a good community player within whatever community that you're playing in, to make the whole circle happen.

Listen to yourself. Information is a dime a dozen now. It's so easy to get information about the right this or the right that, or what kind of bug is this. Use the phone, use the Internet, but don't freak out too much about the details of that. Just do it. Find a nice piece of land and move from the heart and make it happen.

Hopes for the Future

Rabkin: That's beautiful. Makes sense to me. What are your hopes and visions for Freewheelin' Farm and for your own future trajectory? Anything we haven't talked about yet?

Courtney: I'm trying to not think too far ahead in general, but I do like to see that it's growing a little bit. I'd like to see it not grow too much. I see that there's sort of a sweet spot in growth of farms in particular, where people's needs are getting met and people are still close enough to the ground, literally, that they're still farming and not just managing a business. So I'd like to stay connected to that vision. But I do like that it's growing and able to bring more people in and sustain more people with the income and good livelihood and educational opportunities, and that means a broader community that it affects, and on and on. I like that. And definitely, nosing in to try and cooperate more with some specific educational programs, with Food What?! and the County Office of Education potentially to be bringing in more youth for youth education on the farm and around food issues.

I feel like if we stay alive, it's a success. [Laughs.] You know what I mean?

Rabkin: Yes.

Courtney: So I am, yes, hoping we stay alive.

Rabkin: Is there anything we haven't touched on that you would like to talk about before we wrap up?

Courtney: [Pause.] Maybe I touched on it, but a big thing for me to highlight has been balancing life with farming.

Rabkin: Yes.

Courtney: I think that that's something that gets missed a lot and that there's even some sort of industry (as much as it's an industry) pressure or peer pressure to have to be sleep-deprived and over-caffeinated and working yourself to death. I can't live that way, and that's not sustainable for me, and it's not what I'm shooting for. I feel like that there are models and ways of doing this kind of work that you don't have to kill yourself to make it happen. I guess I have yet to really prove that to myself, because we're not meeting the financial goals that we want, but, still, holding all of those pieces and trying to make them all come together—I think that's a really important thing for all of us, especially in this next generation of farming, to hang onto and continue to cultivate our livelihood

part of it all. But it's a good life. It's good stuff. It's a good way to spend your days.

Rabkin: Thank you, Amy, very much.

¹ See the oral history with Jose Montenegro for more on the Rural Development Center in Salinas, California. See also the oral histories with Rebecca Thistlethwaite of ALBA, and J.P. Perez, Florentino Collazo and Maria Inez Catalan, all farmers who came through the ALBA program.

² See the oral histories with Jim Leap and Orin Martin that are part of this series.

³ See the oral histories with Darrie Ganzhorn and with Paul Glowaski of the Homeless Garden Project in this series.

⁴ See the oral history with Jim Cochran in this series.

⁵ See "Cuba: The Accidental Revolution – Pt. 1, Sustainable Agriculture," (Bullfrog Films 2006).

⁶ See the oral history with Guillermo Payet of LocalHarvest.org in this series.

⁷ See <http://www.momentumplanet.ca/profiles/jan-vandertuin>

⁸ Rabkin is referring to a screening of the movie "Good Food" sponsored by Transition Santa Cruz, after which Darryl Wong spoke about Freewheelin' Farm and moderated a discussion about relocalization of farming in the Santa Cruz area—Editor.

⁹ See the oral history with Reggie Knox in this series for more about the California FarmLink program.

¹⁰ See <http://foodwhatblog.blogspot.com/>. See also the oral history with Gail Harlamoff in this series for more about the Food What?! Program.

¹¹ See the oral history with Rebecca Thistlethwaite for more about ALBA.

¹² See the oral history with Jered Lawson and Nancy Vail in this series.

¹³ See the oral history with Jeff Larkey in this series.

¹⁴ See the oral history with Reggie Knox for more about the Farmlink program.

¹⁵ See <http://www.thegreenhorns.net/home.html>