

## Featured Guest Interviews

### Trey Johnson (@stjosephhomestead, stjosephhomestead.com)

---

**Trey Johnson:** [00:00:19] Hi, my name is Trey Johnson. I'm from the St. Joseph Homestead. We run a half-acre market garden, and we sell online to grocery stores and restaurants.

**Diego Footer:** [00:00:40] What initially got you into vegetable gardening? And a lot of people come in—or, vegetable farming. A lot of people come in different ways through gardening, through just looking for a career change, a life change. Why'd you pick this?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:00:55] It was definitely a career change. I was a mechanical engineer working at an engineering firm, designing air conditioning systems and plumbing systems.

[00:01:08] And I didn't really like it. I didn't really like sitting at a desk all day. I looked around for other options and came up with...with just the gardening thing, the farming thing. We didn't have any land, but we found some land pretty soon after.

[00:01:27] And we were able to move out here with my in-laws, and it took probably about five years to get everything set up. But I finally quit my job two years ago, and we've been doing pretty well ever since.

**Diego Footer:** [00:01:43] Some people might hear, five years, that's a long time to get started. Yet, I don't doubt it. Like, I just see how long it takes to get stuff running, infrastructure in place. Why was five years realistic in your scenario? What took that long?

[00:01:59] 'Cause I think people want to flip a switch, quit their job, they're farming the next day. It doesn't work like that.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:02:05] I wanted to. I tried, but I have—We now have six kids. But at the time, I had 2, 3, 4 kids and a family to take care of. So, I definitely couldn't make any rash decisions.

[00:02:18] Like just quitting my job when I didn't even have another income stream. So, what I did was, I did the farm thing part-time for a couple of years until it grew enough. I'd put enough money into a greenhouse and a pack shed and all that.

[00:02:35] And finally felt like we could stand on our own two feet without my income from the office. And we made that jump. It was pretty scary. But after about a year, we really stabilized, and it's doing well.

**Diego Footer:** [00:02:54] For people who want to make that jump, and they've been progressing something on the side, there's always that nervousness of am I good now? Can I go now?

[00:03:04] Nobody's ever quite ready. Oh, I'll transition when I get to here. And then that boundary keeps changing. What advice would you have for somebody who who's in your

position? Family, kids, full-time job, probably paid pretty well, taking care of everybody, doing this thing on the side.

[00:03:22] And yet you don't love it. You want to transition. How do you know when the time is right?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:03:27] Honestly, we prayed a lot, and I did a lot of part time. So I got off the salary, got onto hourly pay to where I could make more decisions about my hours. It just comes down to, for me, it came down to what do you really want and how deep is your drive to get it done?

[00:03:48] And just prudence. Just being aware of, do I have the infrastructure? I have the knowledge, do I have the experience to at least make a go at it? And the longer I have been in this business, the better I understand what it takes to accomplish certain things.

[00:04:11] And it's funny because when I was about a year into this whole adventure, I thought, I thought, man, I'm so close. I'm just going to quit. I'm going to—I hadn't planted anything except a really small backyard garden. I hadn't really done anything.

[00:04:30] And I thought that all it would take really was just, just enough...enough determination. And then, I could make it farming. And that's definitely not the case. You can't just go at it with—I've read Elliot Coleman's book. I've listened to Diego's podcasts, and I'm just going to give it a go.

[00:04:51] Especially with a family, you, you just—you're not going to make it with a wish and a prayer. So after two or three years of really doing a lot of part-time stuff, I knew what it takes, and I knew I wasn't as far along as I want it to be, but I knew that if I just kept putting it off, it would never happen as well.

[00:05:17] So, my wife and I, we made the decision together. We had just gotten a grant from the NRCS to get some high tunnels. We bought, we ended up buying caterpillar tunnels with the grant, and that was a major influence in our decision that we were going to have that infrastructure to go with. And we just went for it.

**Diego Footer:** [00:05:40] It sounds like you had a different paradigm shift, a little bit. When you get in, full of optimism, Hey, I'm going to make this happen. Not that you're not optimistic now, one thing I said—you said that I think is really interesting is I think I now know what it takes to make this happen.

[00:05:54] What do you think it takes to be successful as a market farmer?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:06:00] It takes experience. I had never worked on a farm anywhere else. All I had was YouTube and books. And I spent hours and hours at the office just listening to podcasts. And I thought I had learned so much, but one thing is, every climate is different.

[00:06:23] I'm in south Louisiana, and I've learned that this is a tough climate. It's not the same as your typical Southern, your Tennessee or South Carolina. It's hot here. It's wet. It's humid. we don't get any hard freezes in the winter.

[00:06:45] Insects are...insect cycles are not really halted in the winter. So I think from experience is, is the real—experience is the real key. You've got to have the experience to know precisely what fits in your system, in your climate, in your family, in your market.

[00:07:09] And without that experience, I learned so much more every day when I just really jumped into it and started doing. I took a lot from my knowledge of, through my studies. But it's amazing how much more you learn through experience.

**Diego Footer:** [00:07:28] Yeah. And I think that where people struggle. I need to do this to get experience, but in order to do this, I need to start. And if I'm struggling, it's just tough. I can't make a living doing it.

[00:07:40] How do you balance that I'm gaining experience, yet I'm just getting started, so you don't blow yourself up in the beginning when you're unexperienced? 'Cause you need to make it to where you're at, seven odd years in or however many years in.

[00:07:55] And survive as a business? You're never really gonna make some bad choices due to lack of experience, but the only way to get better experiences to work through those choices.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:08:07] I'll tell you one thing that was very, early on how my priority list was to reduce our bills. We didn't have—we still don't have a mortgage. We bought a trailer, a mobile home to live in, and we paid it off in 15 months.

[00:08:26] And that's still where we live. We're in the process of building a house on the property, but we reduced our bills. We got to the point where if we didn't make the same income one month, we'd still survive.

[00:08:44] And that allowed me to really be more flexible with how I was operating on a month to month, week to week basis. So you've got to put yourself in a position where you can open up to that experience opportunity.

[00:09:01] If you're like me, if you have a family, if you have a job, you have a career. It's going to be very difficult. I don't really think that my situation is even possible for a lot of people with the mortgage that they have or just certain ties to their career.

[00:09:23] But for me, I think God opened up that path for us, and I'm very grateful. But what I would say to anyone who's not married, who doesn't have a family yet to take care of, that it would be crucial for you to get that experience first and give up much of your financial security or your financial—or your material security or material comfort in order to gain that experience.

[00:09:52] Even if it means working for free at an, in an internship or something, just to have that hands-on experience. And I know a lot of people do that. I think that would have been so invaluable for me to have had, but I didn't. So I had to do it my own way.

**Diego Footer:** [00:10:15] Sure, sure. Part of that learning is setting up and selling product. 'Cause that's a whole learning curve in and of itself.

[00:10:21] Before we get into how you sell product and how you started, can you talk a little bit about your area? Because while all climates are different, which you said, also all commercial areas that you're going to sell into are different.

**Diego Footer:** [00:10:36] Different parts of the country value, different things. There's urban, there's rural. What's it like where you're at?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:10:45] Over here, we tried the farmer's market for about six months, and at that time, I wasn't—I didn't really have a good variety of crops. It maybe wasn't a fair assessment, but we didn't see a whole lot of traffic at our farmer's market.

[00:11:03] The market has a lot of artisans. It has a lot of prepared foods. It has a lot of just little crafts and things, face painting. Not a whole lot of farmers, I think, compared to other markets around the country, especially.

[00:11:18] And we weren't—on a good day, we could make four, five hundred dollars. On a bad day, less than a hundred, and if it was raining, which happens a lot around here. And so we didn't think the market was a very—was a very secure income stream.

[00:11:36] And a lot of people around here aren't very interested in going out of their way to get their produce, to get their locally grown, organic produce. And I don't know what it is, but that just seems to be the majority of people around here, but they will take a delivery to their house.

[00:11:58] They'll go online, and they'll spend 50, 60, a hundred dollars on vegetables and get it delivered to their house. And so that's worked out really well for us. Also, the grocery stores have worked out really well.

[00:12:12] Because there are people in town who, oh, everyone goes to the grocery store, but there's people in town who are willing to spend \$5 on a four-ounce salad mix. In our market, we have a pretty good market for greens. Everybody loves our lettuce, especially the 50, 60-year-old range.

[00:12:36] Especially the upper class, higher income, empty-nesters. They spend a lot of money on greens because they've done their research on health, and they think that that's what they want to do is eat more, eat more greens, eat more vegetables, eat more salads.

[00:12:57] That's pretty much my market, is that the home delivery and the grocery stores.

**Diego Footer:** [00:13:05] Little side bar before we dig into those models. Early on, starting out, feeling so good about this life shift, a hundred dollars a week at the farmer's market. What's going through your head?

**Trey Johnson:**[00:13:20] Oh, I knew that wasn't gonna work. When I first started having—I did, I did the Ray Tyler thing. I started growing lettuce.

[00:13:29] And when I first started having like, good harvest of lettuce, I remember one day, on a Tuesday or something, I was supposed to be at work, but I was hourly, so I was driving around in the rain, like dashing to the door of different restaurants and grocery stores trying to sell my lettuce.

[00:13:50] And it took—it took some experience to learn which kinds of establishments were going to be interested and which ones weren't. And which ones were going to laugh at \$5 a pound head lettuce or something.

[00:14:03] And so the grocery stores that I ended up getting into were just the local, locally-owned grocery stores. I can't get into, even a regionally owned grocery store around here

because as much as they advertise buy a local, you have to go 60 miles down the road to their headquarters and talk to someone at their headquarters who won't call you back.

[00:14:27] They won't come visit your farm, who won't do the necessary things to get you into two or three of their stores in your city. And so it all—it was only those locally-owned grocery stores that I was able to get into.

[00:14:46] Same thing with your Whole Foods and stuff. I know other people probably have been successful. I have people around here who have been successful getting into Whole Foods with kale chips or whatever, but I haven't been able to get anybody—get in touch with anybody.

[00:14:59] So yeah, we left the farmer's market. We had a freeze in November, which was really early for us, a hard freeze. I had no produce for three weeks, so I didn't go to the farmer's market. And then, three weeks later, I got back in my salad mix.

[00:15:19] And I decided, I'm just going to bring this to the grocery store. I was already selling to them for maybe a month before I had that freeze, and it was going pretty well with them. And I never went back to the farmer's market.

[00:15:34] And we just kept increasing our sales to grocery stores without the need to go back to the farmer's market, without the need to pack everything up, get up at four in the morning on a Saturday and roll out at six, set everything up and then get rained on.

[00:15:49] Or have the 4th of July where everybody's out of town and nobody shows up to the farmer's market. And we were very, very lucky to, I think, to not be dependent on the farmer's market because it was just a few months later that the farmer's market was shut down because of Covid.

**Diego Footer:** [00:16:15] So with groceries stores and being a newer farmer, how did you deal with just consistently bringing them enough product? You know, you have things like freezes that come up, maybe not prepared for it, don't have the infrastructure yet, and sometimes, weather or life happens.

[00:16:34] And I know that is a struggle for a lot of people who want to go to restaurants or grocery stores. Okay, that's fine, but you gotta be boom, boom, boom, boom, consistent week out. How did that work for you?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:16:49] We definitely had those struggles. We had some very understanding managers at the grocery stores, especially. The restaurants, it's tougher to get consistency even from them on their side.

[00:17:02] We don't—we're closed this week, or we don't need it. And so, I've shied away from restaurants. There's a few that I still sell to, but it's been tough. We have to learn how to prioritize our inventory.

[00:17:17] Where does it go first? If we have—if it's summer and salad mix is limited, where do we send it first? How do we, how do we navigate all this with pissing off the least amount of people?

**Diego Footer:** [00:17:31] Yeah. What was your formula or rough flowchart for doing that? X amount of lettuce, it's gotta go somewhere.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:17:38] Yeah, it's online first, a hundred percent. I get the most money for the cheapest packaging for the cheapest labor. It's just the highest profit would be online.

[00:17:51] But then, second would be grocery stores because we get so much more per pound. There's more labor involved in the packaging, and there's some labeling and stuff and delivery, but it's definitely more profitable to send it to the grocery stores.

[00:18:07] And then after that would be restaurants.

**Diego Footer:** [00:18:11] One thing you said earlier was you noticed that people wouldn't go to a farmer's market, but they would order online. And that's now became, in your flow chart, that's where all the products' going, that's where you want to send it.

[00:18:25] How did you come to that realization? Was it COVID, or what led you to realize, Hey, I got to go online?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:18:34] Yeah. Actually in, I think it was about 2018 when we formalized our business, it was still very, almost not even part-time yet, but we had, we came up with a logo. We came up with the name, and I created a website.

[00:18:52] And based on what I had learned from all the podcasts and everything, I decided I want my website to be an e-commerce site because I want people to order online and come pick it up at the farmer's market. It'd be great to sell it ahead of time.

[00:19:08] Keep it in the cooler at the farmer's market, not let the lettuce get all wilted and just have that security of taking their money first, and then if they don't show up, it's on them. It's very secure to have that income stream through the online store.

[00:19:26] I had exactly two regular customers who would order online before they came to the farmer's market. And almost no people chose any of my pickup locations, which I had a couple around town. And it was very rare to get anyone to even order for one of those pickup locations.

[00:19:48] So after the freeze, when we stopped going to the farmer's market, we basically just didn't use the website for e-commerce anymore until probably a few months later, I thought, I have this, I have this functionality. Why don't I just use it for the online, for the grocery stores?

[00:20:09] Why don't I let them pick out what they want? And they can just choose cash on delivery, we don't have to make them pay with a credit card or whatever online. But that way, I could keep track of my inventory and not have to tell grocery stores when they order 40 salad mix that actually, I'm sold out.

[00:20:29] I know I said I was going to have it, but somebody else ordered before you, whatever. So that's how we did it for a while. And then, COVID happened, and people were calling me, Hey, we're scared to death to go to the grocery store. Would you deliver?

[00:20:48] I was like, yeah, I could do that. I'll deliver, we just maybe need to have a minimum order amount and stuff like that. And we just slowly started to realize that maybe people were ready for this now.

[00:21:01] And maybe, maybe the idea of home delivery wasn't so bad of an idea, which we had never tried before. So I think home delivery really did it, and it knocked it out of the park. the only pickup we have right now is at the farm.

[00:21:19] So we don't do any pickup locations around town. We don't want to be sitting around waiting for people to show up, and we can't find any businesses who are willing to refrigerate our orders until someone picks it up.

[00:21:34] But I think my customers don't even really want that. They want it delivered. I have a few customers who like to drive out to the country and see the farm, but most of my customers love the home delivery, and a lot of them order every week.

[00:21:50] And the average order value is about \$35. So we're getting, we're getting decent orders, and it's actually gone up. My minimum order for free delivery is now \$50. And we're seeing a lot of orders over 50.

**Diego Footer:** [00:22:10] What do you charge if it's under 50?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:22:11] Right now, we're at \$4 for a delivery fee and this is a pretty tight delivery area, and—

**Diego Footer:** [00:22:21] And just on that, let me, let me pause you there. Like, how tight is that area? 'Cause this is another thing a lot of people ask about. How big do you expand the circle out?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:22:28] Yeah, that's been tough. We used to do it by zip code, which is the way that the app works on Shopify. I do, I have a Shopify website. And there's different apps you can use, but when COVID came out, Shopify hastily put together their own local delivery app.

[00:22:48] And that's what we were using when it came out. Before that, we use something else. But they only operate on zip codes. You can't draw your own map, which is, I didn't even know that existed, but I was looking at all these zip codes and the rural zip codes.

[00:23:05] You might want a little pocket of that zip code because it's the suburb, the center of the suburb, but you don't want the however many square miles of the rest of that zip code because you might be driving 10, 20 minutes between houses.

[00:23:22] So I wanted to draw my own map. My wife, she's good with all this computer stuff. She found the app, she found the one that I was looking for, and it lets you draw your own map. So that's what we've been using lately.

[00:23:35] And it took me a while to sit down and really figure out what streets I want to be the boundaries. But the main goal is to really try to keep it very urban because when you have a two minute drive between deliveries or a four minute drive between deliveries, it becomes very profitable.

[00:23:53] Now there's probably a lot of customers we could get outside of that zone, but it would be very difficult to make that profitable without drawing a second delivery zone and calling that a \$10 delivery or something, or a \$15 delivery.

[00:24:11] And I'm not sure that our market would pay for that. We want to go to five, \$5 for delivery, but we're in an introductory period here where we want to get people on board. And it's worked out really well.

[00:24:28] We've kept our delivery fee pretty low because there's no barrier to entry there. And we've gotten, week after week, we've increased our sales increase our orders.

**Diego Footer:** [00:24:43] Delivery fee. Is that a calculated number or a number that just feels good?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:24:50] No, it's not. It's not so much calculated, it's more of a keeping it under \$5 for that barrier to entry. But what I have run some numbers based on gasoline prices as they used to be more than a few weeks ago.

[00:25:09] And what it cost a delivery driver and the number of hours it takes to deliver. And we make up most of that cost with our delivery fees. And we also are not scared to put our prices at a premium to help cover that cost as well.

[00:25:32] So all of our vegetable prices take all of that into consideration as well. What does it take to, to take two bell peppers and have someone put them in a bag and seal the bag and then hand pick that bag for their order?

[00:25:49] There's a lot of—a lot of logistics involved in getting not just from order to ordering online to their front door. But the whole process, of course, seeding, cultivating, harvesting. So we take all that into account when we set our prices on the vegetables, too.

**Diego Footer:** [00:26:13] Yeah. The more and more I talk to people who sell online, it's its own job on the farm. So you have somebody where people who grow and deal with that. And then there's a whole other set of tasks, which depending on the amount of online orders each week, is processing, it's packing, it's delivery.

[00:26:38] It's just managing the inventory, dealing with customers online, sending the emails. How does that look for your farm? That distributed workload?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:26:49] Yeah, the further I get into this, the more I want people to have more individualized jobs. I want everybody to be able to do most jobs, but I want one person to be responsible for each job.

[00:27:06] And so I have, I have two full-time employees and two part-time. And then I have my wife who does a lot of the tech stuff behind the scenes on the website, making sure the notification emails go out, making sure the apps are working properly, chatting with the Shopify agents.

[00:27:24] And one of my full-time guys is kinda in charge of harvest. And another one of my full-time guys is in charge of maintenance, taking care of pruning and trellising or cultivating or clearing beds or whatever.

[00:27:40] And then I have another part-time employee who's like my pack shed manager. So she will take care of printing labels of overseeing the pack team. The whole team helps to pack on Wednesdays and Thursdays. She will reorder supplies. She maintains the inventory, all that stuff.



[00:28:02] And then I have another part-time employee who is—who I'm training to be in charge of plant transplant starts production in the nursery.

**Diego Footer:** [00:28:13] And with that crew, six people total, full-time, part-time. If you include you and your wife, how many orders a week are you delivering?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:28:24] We've been doing about 30 home delivery orders. We've been getting almost 50 total orders. And so, some of the orders might be a family that are just going to come pick up.

[00:28:35] My, you know, extended family or neighbors or whatever. So we've actually had quite a few pickups, compared to the total number of orders, but we'll have, at a minimum, 30 home deliveries every week.

**Diego Footer:** [00:28:50] Okay. So I'm assuming, knowing the trends, COVID hit, big boost in online sales. COVID goes on, things normalize. There's probably been some trickle off.

[00:29:03] What have you seen now in terms of, with everything being more normal, do you find that the customers that you had during COVID have been sticky, and are you getting new customers now, post-COVID?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:29:19] I try to keep track of the returning customer rate. Shopify has that stat for you. And for the most part, we get maybe 80% or more return customer rates, some weeks it's almost a hundred percent, which I tell you is a good thing.

[00:29:37] You want to have a high return customer rate, but I still want to grow. So I'd like to have, at least a 20% new customer each week. So that I can—but only if I'm increasing my sales. And what we've noticed is of course, holidays and things affect sales.

[00:29:56] You're not going to have as many sales on the 4th of July, but we've been basically, over the course of, I guess the last 12 months, we've increased pretty decently, every—from month to month.

[00:30:13] Summers is really, really tough down here. So we are low on supply, which I think affects sales. When people get online and they see half our products are sold out, they're not going to order.

[00:30:28] But we also see, there's some people who order every week, and there's some people who don't. They'll order every two weeks or every three weeks. And so that's still considered a returning customer, regular customer.

[00:30:41] But we want to know how we can get those customers to order every week. And by increasing our variety and also, we've started selling other vendors' products that we think are that fit well with our vegetables. So fermented drinks, fermented vegetables from a fermentation lab.

[00:31:05] Or pastured meat that we get from a farm not too far from here. We've seen that really help keep the sales coming in week after week, because there's more regularity, more, more products to offer.

**Diego Footer:** [00:31:21] So one-stop shop type thing.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:31:24] One stop shop. They don't have any problem ordering a pound of ground pork, a kombucha, and \$10 worth of vegetables because that's a total of \$30 or something.

[00:31:38] Whereas if they just wanted a third a pound of salad mix and a couple of bell peppers, they might say, it may not be worth putting in the order. I'll just go to the grocery store or something.

**Diego Footer:** [00:31:51] For those other products that you aggregate, you just treat that wholesale, essentially? You're buying from them on wholesale, you mark it up a little bit?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:32:00] Essentially, the meat for state regulation purposes, it's considered a consignment, I think, where we can take a commission or something, but I'm not sure what the right—if there's any regulations on the ferments.

[00:32:16] But yeah, we just, we were actually selling at the same price that they sell their kombucha in their store, but they give us a small discount. We make a little profit there. It's more about having the availability of those products for my customers.

[00:32:33] So they don't have to go to the farmer's market to get the kombucha, and then go to this other farm to get their pork, and then go to my website to get my vegetables.

**Diego Footer:** [00:32:46] And you just needed to cover its costs while assisting you sell more veggies.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:32:51] Yeah. And we try to make a little bit, because my wife has just go pick that up. She has to go drive to the farm and get all the meat, or we're also selling fresh, roasted coffee.

[00:33:02] So a guy gets really high quality, organic, low-acid mold-free coffee roasted actually, the morning that we pack. And so they're getting it the next day after it's roasted.

**Diego Footer:** [00:33:16] To give people some sense of the area, if you drive 50 miles out in any direction in a circle, how many people are in that circle?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:33:28] I think it's 400,000 or so.

**Diego Footer:** [00:33:31] Okay. So it seems like that's a pretty large area, I would say, yeah?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:33:35] I think in the city of Lafayette, we're right outside of Lafayette, Louisiana, and in the city, the census of—the latest census was 120,000. And then the, the whole, Metro area is somewhere between three and 400, I think.

**Diego Footer:** [00:33:52] Okay. Big area. So not hyper rural. One thing that consistently comes up that I see people ask is how do I get new customers? You're looking to try and add on more customers into, I'd say, it's a large urban area, with your online sales.

[00:34:11] How do you think you could grow? And these don't have to be things that like for sure work, but what's your plan or some ideas you have to try and grow your online sale customer base?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:34:24] The growth is really good. We are just trying to produce enough for that growth. We're almost holding back on our growth because we're selling out every week. And the best advertisement that we get that I think anyone can get is word of mouth.

[00:34:43] We have really good customers who are sharing with their neighbors, who are telling their friends, and we have really good, just a really good service, really good customer service, and people love our product.

[00:34:56] And people love us, because I write an email every week to my customers. I have a almost 500-person email list that I send out. Basically just a story about the farm, about my kids, things that they've done to help on the farm or something funny that happened between the workers on the farm.

[00:35:16] I might share a recipe or a little tip about gardens. But what I've found is the most opened emails are the ones that are just relational, that are just, here's something about me. Here's something that we're doing here on the farm, and people have really taken to that.

[00:35:35] They really feel like they're—they know me, they're a part of this operation in a sense. And, and they'll email me back a lot of times just saying how much they love the email. And that's, I think, what helps them want to share it with their friends is that they, they know they're getting good quality.

[00:35:56] We never, I never, advertise the quality of my produce in my email. I don't say, "this is the best you can buy. This is all organic. It's homegrown, fresh grown." I don't feel like I have to really hammer that in because they know. They know what local is.

[00:36:15] They know that I don't use pesticides, I don't use chemical fertilizer. But what they—the reason why they buy from me instead of Whole Foods is because they wouldn't dream of buying from anyone else because they know me. They have that relationship with me.

**Diego Footer:** [00:36:35] Do you think, given that they have that relationship with you, you could almost put anything up in your online store, and I don't mean sell anything, but I could list carrots, and I could just have it all be text-based.

[00:36:49] It could just say carrots one barn, \$5 and you'd sell them. Or do you think you need that extra oomph of a nice picture of carrots, nice description of carrots to actually sell them?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:37:02] No, no, we've put a lot of work into our website. It definitely needs to look good, and I think pictures are very important. We, it's—

[00:37:12] For us, it's secondary right now. We don't have the photography skills, and it takes time, and we have to have the produce available. A lot of times, we're setting up our website the night before, and it's dark, and it's not a good time to go out and take pictures.

[00:37:29] So we understand that that's important. And that's one of our goals, is to make our pictures and our descriptions better for our products. But, I think we can wash out a lot of those errors or sins by having just a good-looking website and just good marketing tactics with our email marketing.

**Diego Footer:** [00:37:58] What's worked for you with email marketing in terms of, if you just think about timing, you talked about what you put in those emails.

[00:38:08] If you just go beyond the storytelling that you're doing, what do you think makes it successful?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:38:15] As far as timing, I do it once a week. I do it early in the morning on the day of order. So Tuesdays is order day. We do—we allow for 24 hours of ordering, and we shut it off at midnight, Tuesday night.

**Diego Footer:** [00:38:32] So one day, get it while it's there and while it's open.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:38:35] Exactly. I know other people do a longer window, but I don't want to send more than one email a week. And if you open it up early, no one's going to know unless you notify them.

[00:38:49] Or they're not going to remember unless you send them an email. And then if they know they have four days to order, they're going to put it off. So you've got to send them another email on the last day to make sure they don't forget.

[00:39:02] And to me, I just, I'm not ready to do that. I don't even a lot of times have a good handle on what my inventory is going to be until the day before order. So, I want to make sure I'm not overselling.

[00:39:15] And as we get further into, just getting better with production, I think we could open it up earlier and not worry so much about running out of product. But for now, we're at the point where we can't just throw up a hundred pounds of salad mix if we're only going to have 80.

**Diego Footer:** [00:39:34] Given that you have that one day a week open, have customers been trained? Do you see orders coming in before you send that email 'cause then they know that Tuesday's order day?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:39:44] Yeah, I have people who order at 10 o'clock Monday night. They'll get on the website, and they'll see that I updated all my products, and they know that they can order. And they know that if they don't, some stuff might be sold out by seven in the morning.

**Diego Footer:** [00:39:57] That's a good position to be in, in a way.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:39:59] Yeah. Yeah, they're trained. They're trained to the day. I used to do Wednesdays as my order day, and I still have some old ladies who tell me that they can't shake the Wednesday order day.

[00:40:10] They always forget, they don't check their emails, being on their phone, 24 hours a day. So they'll forget to order just because they thought ordered it was still Wednesday.

**Diego Footer:** [00:40:24] So one question, just to start to close this out. You have retail customers ordering through the online store. You're also selling to grocery stores. Do grocery stores place their orders through that same portal?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:40:37] No. We don't—so once we started doing online, I think we tried it for a couple of weeks doing both, grocery stores and customer, but it didn't work without lot of finagling, a lot of maybe extra apps and stuff.

[00:40:54] And I figured out a better way to keep track of my inventory to guesstimate how much each customer was going to order and how much I had available. So we do it on Wednesday morning. I'll email or text all of my grocery store and restaurant customers after I get the pick list for my online orders.

[00:41:18] So once I know it's sold on the online store, I know what I have left. If celery sold out, then I'm just not going to offer it.

**Diego Footer:** [00:41:25] Yeah.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:41:26] So I know exactly what I'm offering on Wednesday morning, and they have to respond by 5:00 PM on Wednesday so that I can get together the spreadsheets and get everything ready for my pack crew on Thursday morning to pack for grocery and restaurant.

**Diego Footer:** [00:41:41] Got it. I love what you're doing down there, Trey. Thanks for sharing so much in this one.

**Trey's Son:** [00:41:45] I can't hear it.

**Diego Footer:**[00:41:47] Can't hear? Hello?

**Trey Johnson:** [00:41:50] That was—that was my son.

**Diego Footer:** [00:41:52] Okay. It's all good. I love what you're doing, Trey, down there in Louisiana. Thanks for taking the time to come on and chat and share some of your experience to help people out.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:42:01] You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

**Diego Footer:** [00:42:04] All right. That's it right on, man. Appreciate it.

**Trey Johnson:** [00:42:07] Okay.

**Diego Footer:** [00:42:08] So I'll keep you posted.

---

[www.readyfarmerone.com](http://www.readyfarmerone.com)