

Ontario 150 Project “Living Off the Land”
 Edited Clips of Oral History Transcript of Luke Sheldrick

	Start of Clip 1	
LD	Where did you grow up and how did you end up in the market garden business?	
LD	I grew up in White Lake. My parents were actually farmers as well. They started out on the commercial scale growing sweet corn and organic garlic but never to the scale that we are going for necessarily – or the same commitment level. They always had gardens for themselves and owned the health food store here in town. So [I] was always around that kind of mentality.	
LD	So you grew up with it. And did you go to school to take any kind of business or related [courses] to running this business?	
LS	I actually went to school at an agriculture school, Guelph University, but I went for Anthropology actually.	
LD	When did you start to take this seriously deciding that this was going to be..?	
LS	It kind of happened casually. This is on our website but it is kind of interesting. It really blossomed with our relationship (mine and Dana’s) because when we started dating she and I enjoyed coming out to the farm to help out. And when the harvest started to come in, we both work in the restaurant industries and work around high quality food all the time so we approached my father and said “look why don’t we bring some of this in to our friends?” We had heard of the CSA model and we kind of just casually did it working with him as something for fun and then Dana and I started to realize that it was taking off - word of mouth was spreading and people were very interested. So, we approached my family and offered to lease part of the land so we had total control over the production, that we wanted. And that was when we decided we felt confident to launch as a business so we registered and started to promote through social media, branding. Prior to it, we hadn’t really launched any sort of branding or anything.	
LD	So what year did you launch?	
LS	That would be our third year, so we are just entering our third summer of what I would classify as operating as a business. We did two years on leased land and I guess it went pretty well because we have just purchased our own.	
LD	Could you explain the CSA program?	
LS	CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture. It’s been common in North America since the 1970’s. I’d say it’s gaining more popularity in the last decade; especially in the last five years, in my experience anyways. I know it’s been around for quite some time. It stands for Community Supported Agriculture, as I say, and we describe it on our website in a quote by someone named Robyn Van En. I don’t want to misquote her but it is basically a relationship – a commitment from a customer in an economic form or any other form I suppose – of a customer to the farmer for the season. And then likewise, a commitment from the farmer to produce for the client.	
LD	I’ve read in certain publications that I’ve read that there are different models within that, for different sized families.	
LS	Precisely	
LD	So do you do that type of thing?	
LS	We offer three different types which is full share – for sixteen weeks, bi-weekly, 8 weeks, or a vacation share for 14 weeks but there are countless ways to set it up. We call them shares or boxes. The way we set it up is that people pay in the spring and that is basically a subscription and that gets their season paid for and we produce vegetables for them. Some people do it by separate payments, some people have worker shares. Some places it is set up like a community supported farm where you have to come for a certain	

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	amount of hours for your share. Things like that.	
	Start of Clip 2	
LD	Can you explain the name... how you picked it, what it means to you, well it is pretty obvious but maybe not to everybody.	
LS	Well yes, it's actually really lucky. That was the name that my parents had for their farm and when we were starting out I asked them if they would mind if we carried it on they didn't, so that's awesome. It does mean Love the Earth. So that's pretty nice. I love it personally, so I was really honoured that they would allow us [to use it]. You know there is that dream of passing on the family farm and when you realize that it wasn't economically viable for that to happen in our situation, to be able to pass on the name I think meant a lot for us and my family, so that's kind of nice.	
LD	You are working off the farm currently, but once a certain date rolls around will you be full-time farming?	
LS	Yes, we both do keep one shift a week in the city. I guess it's important to say that we both work in the restaurant industry in our off-season so it works really well. Often, people are going back to school in the winter so it's easy for us to go back to that line of work. It also allows us to have good connections to the restaurant industry which is one of our sales avenues. So yes, we do keep one shift a week. We have it so that we both work the same night and that's also the day that we do our restaurant deliveries so it works out well for us. I am sure someday we would love to – and many farmers that are doing what we're doing are working hard enough in the summer that they are taking two months off in the winter to rest and plan and maybe take a vacation and prepare for the following season. So that's the goal. Currently we're not there.	
LD	I noticed that you talk about non-certified organic. Can you explain that to me please?	
LS	That's kind of an idea I had, just because of my history actually in anthropology. When we were starting out we discussed whether we would venture to get certified and we decided we wouldn't. It's kind of drawn from direct trade in the coffee industry. I did a little bit of work in my undergraduate, studying some of that. Direct trade, we feel, is as strong or stronger of a certification than a third party certification because since we're dealing in direct sales, we don't feel the need for a certification and we also feel that it's beneficial to promote that to our customers. Because, I feel like certification is synonymous with sort of NOT knowing where you are getting your food. I think it's important to people who are buying at the grocery store. You're shopping in the produce aisle – you want to have some sort of idea of what sort of quality – and you have no idea when you are standing in that aisle where your food has come from. But when you are either shopping at a farmers market [or] getting it dropping off to your restaurant, or going to the farm or shaking the farmers hand at the market at the pick-up in Ottawa.... There is no time when we are selling our produce at least right now that people don't know exactly who we are or have the opportunity to come and see how we farm.	
	Start of Clip 3	
LD	So, you've been doing this for three years. What are the challenges you've faced so far?	
LS	Ah....weather, definitely weather (laughter)... we're learning.... But I mean, Ya, I suppose it's going pretty well like I think just keeping a level head, you have to remind yourself throughout the season that it's an industry where there's no consistency. You're always loosing somewhere and it's kind of a fact. You are going to look out on your field and	

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	<p>you're going to see a thousand problems, and that's just how it is. And I think it's really important to remind yourself [of that]. That is probably the hardest thing. But I don't want to make it sound negative because we really enjoy and it's just important to remind ourselves of the fact that that's just how it is. It's the small battles but there are small victories too for sure.</p>	
LD	And so what is your favourite part? What are your successes?	
LS	Well we love food. Coming from the food industry we love to indulge in nice dinners. Although that drastically contrasts being farmers but at least we get to make it ourselves. Tasting and....well I guess I'll kind of reference social media, but when we see one of our customers post them unpacking their boxes at home or something they've made we really encourage them to share what they've made. Or if a chef says "Oh my God, I love that". Because there is truly that much more flavor in this produce than what you have access to in most other ways, so those people that are having in my opinion a carrot for the first time, is really cool.	
LD	So your success is obviously increased customers - the ability to work at this almost full time - those are successes - having a partner that's as involved and as interested in this as you are...	
LS	Ya, we do everything together. It's important I guess to know that since she can't be here. It's really reliant upon the two of us really are working... we've been able to get the infrastructure we need and things like that because we were able to work 60 hours a week, 80 hours a week throughout the summer.	
LD	Does Dana have a farming background?	
LS	No, she had grown up in Navan, which is definitely a farming community, so she was also aware of it, but likewise with me it was a just a passion for food and enjoying the fruits of the labour. It's really rewarding work.	
	Start of Clip 4	
LD	So you've recently purchased a new place, a new farm. Tell me about that.	
LS	October 28 th we took possession. It's in Burnstown. That was an amazing experience. It definitely the past season very interesting. Yup, it's a little 8 acre parcel of land. It was originally, it seems have originally been farmed because the soil quality is good, although it's up on a hill. I was anticipating a lot of rock but luckily there's not much rock in the soil which I'm very pleased with. And there appears to be to the side of the fields, some rock walls (which I forget the name, there is a classic name for that) where they have cleaned the rocks out of the field so obviously I think it has been used before. Yup, 8 acres, roughly 5 tillable. Do you want to hear details about the farm land or just how it went?	
LD	No - anything you want to tell me about, the drainage, the soil quality, the type of soil. Do you have mainly loam there?	
LS	Ya, it is sandy loam there. I think it's actually named It's named after the community... I always forget. There are the soil maps for each region, so we did use that prior to buying it just to cross reference but it is right where we are up on the hill it falls under... I forget. It is sandy loam with a bit of clay so that's pretty ideal.	
LD	And in terms of the growing zone, would you be a 5, a 5a?	
LS	People doing what we're doing are beginning to grow in the winter. I think this will be our first winter where we do grow a few crops throughout the winter which will be pretty cool. It will more be just a pet project.	
LD	So 8 acres and 5 tillable you say. And you said all by hand, that you worked on this by	

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	hand mostly.	
LS	Hand tools ya. So it's a really interesting sort of booming market (I guess you can't really call it a sub-culture) but the small scale farms are very small scale in what they're doing. We aim to not exceed much more than an acre this year. And people kind of shake their heads and wonder what you're talking about when you say that but intensely farming it and direct sales allows for, the two of us can make a nice living doing that. And others are doing it. It's pretty interesting.	
LD	And because of this new location, will you change anything in terms of how you approach your business model?	
LS	There's no plans for that currently. We are still without a tractor. We use something called the two-wheel tractor. It has different implements like a tractor, it does have a PTO shaft, however it's just two wheels, easy to maneuver and great for small-scale. It just allows us to still work the soil.	
LD	So you don't want to have horses or cows or anything like that, or chickens or... at this point?	
LS	At this point no. Chickens are definitely on our radar. We did enjoy having them when we were at my parents place (leasing). My mother likes to keep chickens, so she has layers and birds. We want to perfect one thing first, so we are really focused on the vegetables. There is just so much, especially when you are growing 30 varieties, there's so much to learn about each individual [variety]. The needs of each, the amendments, pest control. So we are really trying to refine that.	
	Start of Clip 5	
LD	Have you had any failed crops? Have you had anything that has been totally decimated by bugs?	
LS	Ya. Last Spring was a really hard start with the dry weather, the flea beetle loves that and it's this little black guy that hops and they'll put holes in everything. Another common one that we've dodged is cucumber beetles. A lot of people last year at market just didn't have any cucumbers. We use things like row cover and we are aware of the threat. Just in general, we kind of dodged that bullet – we used row cover – so we didn't have that.	
LD	What is that?	
LS	Floating row cover allows air and water through. It's kind of lightly woven. I think they use plastic. It's called Agri-bond. There's other brands as well...but it's a light woven almost like mesh covering that you lay over to protect and it also holds in some warmth so you use it in the Spring and the Fall. The alternative to it in the Summer is called Protect Net because it doesn't have any warmth holding capacity. It's just completely for the sake of protecting against insects. So using those that's the best natural defense against bug pressure.	
LD	What about deer?	
LS	We have a Rottweiler for that! We haven't had a problem. We don't know about the new place but we did buy that breed of dog with the intention of it being easy to train and protective of property.	
LD	Do you ever see yourself getting into fruit trees and branching out?	
LS	Yes, again just with where we're at – we're I'd say too young – but something that really interests us is permaculture. So you're working your land to have I guess a symbiotic relationship. Like I say I'm just beginning to get interested in it, I don't have all of the	

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	terminology that would be applicable. But you’re using hedgerows, trees, as part of your production to harness the elements in a way. I suppose with a break wind – you don’t want wind to come across your soil - so, incorporating fruit trees, raspberry bushes, blueberry bushes, things that, like high bush blueberry... things like that are definitely in our plans for the future. Currently we’re not there but you have to plan for the long-term for sure.	
LD	I know you are part of the local food movement, but are you part of a formal group that, you know, have a membership in?	
LS	Currently no. Well we are both part of the EFAO – we are just becoming familiar with these, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario. So that is small to medium scale ecologically focused farmers. ACORN out east is really good. They’re far more focused on small-scale farming, I think just because they have to be small, like there is way more small-scale farmers in the east coast, I think it’s because they don’t have access to greater markets so there is more small-scale in every little community. There’s a great community out there. I went to a conference out there and kind of caught up with those people. There is definitely a big on-line community. There’s a lot of people producing literature right now focused on farms from 1 to 5 acres. Not to get off-track but sustainability is a big factor for why people believe that this is a positive thing for the future... just greater access to food.	
LD	Where is your drop off point in Ottawa?	
LS	Seed to Sausage. So it’s at the corner of Bronson and Gladstone. It’s a little boutique butcher. They own a place out in Perth as well, this is their general store - just like an Ottawa location. It’s a really nice spot. It’s a great relationship that we have because they love...at no charge we are able to set up there. They love just having people who are obviously into that style of food coming every week come to pick up their vegetables and of course you go inside.	