Fiction Farm PlanUsable Table of Contents

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## Introduction

The farm will be managed predominately by myself (David Alexander). I have close to 10 years of experience working for an organic farming organization. This work gave me lots of exposure too many different types of farms and helped me build a good network of contacts in the industry.

I have always dreamed of starting my own farm business. For an introduction to my reasoning, see the vision sheet in the appendix. There are a number of things that I think I am quite good at and an equal number of things I need to work on.

Below is a list of what I believe my strengths are.

1. I think I am a good people person. I can be good at making personal connections with people and have no trouble with small talk.
2. I am a detailed oriented person. Budgeting and record keeping will be a strength I can lean heavily on when planning.
3. I am confident in my production skills. I think I am an observant person. Of course, I have many things to learn and will continue to further my own education when it comes to production practices. I will do this through intentional trials every year, reading farm books, and attending workshops and conferences.

Below is a list of things where I definitely need to improve.

1. I have never been a good salesman. I don’t enjoy it. I don’t like website work or social media work. I don’t like creating physical marketing content either. I don’t feel that I’m an overly creative person. I will either have to invest time in taking courses so I can manage this myself or will hire/barter with someone to help me manage this aspect of the business if it is needed.
2. I am not a risk taker and have trouble making decisions quickly without weighing all my options carefully. This can cause me to procrastinate when getting important tasks done. I will spend time every winter trying to anticipate what big decisions I will have to make and doing my research in a less busy time.
3. I like working with other people but have trouble being a ‘boss’. I would like to work with my children at some point. I also dread working alone for the next 30 years so would like to consider having a staff person at some point. I will re-evaluate the needs of the business every year and will focus on professional development to improve these skills should the need arise.

## Vision

I am starting this business for a wide range of reasons. One of the main ones is that I am concerned about what sort of planet will be handed off to my children. I feel that agriculture and food is an excellent way to address ecological, social, and financial issues that I believe need solving. My hope is to address these issues through demonstration.

I also hope that the farm will be able to provide employment opportunities for my children down the road should they be interested.

I would also like to be active in my community at some point. I’m not sure in what way yet.

Many of my vision goals are going to be a long process in achieving. In the short term, the main focus with be financial stability. This would likely mean putting larger vision goals on pause. The vision document will be incredibly important for my family to revisit regularly.

See my strengths/weaknesses above. I will be setting up the business to play to my strengths and avoid my weaknesses.

Mission Statement – To steward the land in a way that leaves it in better condition year after year. To share the land with all manner of other life in a respectful way. To farm in way that leaves my person, my family and my community nourished and fulfilled.

Guiding Principles – to achieve Fiction Farm’s Mission I will

1. Farm in the most environmentally sound way I know of. I will constantly strive to improve methods and practices.
2. Farm in a way that allows my family to enjoy a high quality of life.
3. Farm in a way that allows my whole community to benefit from the farm.

## Production

**Land and Infrastructure**

My partner and I own a house with 10 acres of land about 20 minutes outside of Guelph, Ontario. The land has a house that is our personal residence and has a small room that will serve as the farm’s office. There is a detached garage as well but would prefer to keep that for family use instead of farm use. There is a 500 square foot drive shed that will be used predominately by the farm. There is four acres of cleared land surrounding the buildings, the remaining six acres is mixed woodlot. The soil is a sandy loam common in the Guelph area.

**Products/Services**

 The plan is to grow a small selection of vegetables available for wholesale to small retail stores, restaurants, and other distributors. There is still a desire to tell the story of the farm so those customers will be carefully selected and worked with to ensure that there is an alignment of values and that the story is being told in a way that is consistent with the message I want to send.

**Field Preparation**

We do not own a tractor at the current time. We have a neighbour who we paid to open 1.5 acres of land last year. That land is currently in cover crop. The same neighbour will be helping to manage that cover crop for us this year. We plan to grow on ¼ acre for this season. The rest will be actively managed to suppress weeds and boost fertility through green manures. We do have a used BSC walk behind tractor that will be used for all the secondary tillage and bed preparation. I would like to explore the possibility of going to no-till permanent beds in the future.

**Transplant Production**

We have a small well-lit area in our house that will be used to start all transplants this season. In order to accommodate all the trays needed as dictated by the crop plan we will have to build a rack to hold all the trays. A priority for this fall will be to erect a small hoop house (~2000 sq. ft.) that will be used for seedling production in future years. We have already purchased all the trays we will need for this upcoming season and have potting soil being delivered this spring.

**Direct Seeding and Transplanting**

All transplanting will be done by hand. For direct seeding, we have purchased both a Jang and an Earthway seeder. Some crops will be direct seeded by hand. If the farm does acquire a tractor at some point, a tractor mounted direct seeder would be a desirable option.

**Harvesting**

We have purchased a large number of harvest bins second hand. We also have a garden cart to move things to and from the garden. We have a large selection of scissors, pruners, harvest knives, digging forks, shovels, etc. that should be suitable to harvest all the crops we plan on growing.

**Post-Harvest**

The hope is that our distribution model will not require much in the way of packaging (twist ties, rubber bands, etc). For the short term, we will use large plastic bags and boxes (both waxed and non) to distribute to restaurants. Once relationships are established, I will explore zero waste packaging options that might work for each individual client. A wash station will be set up in and near the drive shed. Most of the washing will have to happen outside the shed as there is no drainage inside. We have a tent that can be erected for shade and there is a bit of a gravel pad to help with drainage. We have picked up two large stainless steel sinks from an old restaurant that will be used to wash. We also have a few wire rack tables that we can spray crops on. Inventory management is something I would like to spend some time developing a system for. We have purchased a number of hoses and spray nozzles to facilitate washing.

 We plan to purchase some old refrigerator panels to erect a 150 square foot cooler with a coolbot inside the driveshed.

**Irrigation**

 We have a drilled well on the property that has enough output for all residential needs, wash station and irrigation. We plan to purchase a mix of both drip and micro overhead to meet our watering needs.

**Weeding**

 We have purchased a wide variety of hand hoes and have plans to purchase a pair of wheel hoes. All of the weeding will be done by hand for this season but if a tractor is purchased in the future mechanical weed control is highly desirable. We explored using black plastic to help control weeds but have ethical issues with it. Will experiment with paper in future years.

**Long-Term Goals**

* We would like to avoid buying a tractor if possible. We have always been inspired by draft power and are hoping we can get away with custom work and the BCS until we make a long term decision.
* Improve soils. We will constantly be striving to improve soil quality. We will conduct annual soil tests and take steps to improve every year.
* Fertility. At this point, ruminants are not one of our long term goals. Although the farm will not be biodynamic we do like the idea of the farm as a closed loop and would like to produce as much of our own fertility as possible. With our limited acreage we are not sure if we will be able to pasture animals. We also don’t have the infrastructure to house them. We will remain open to the idea and continue to explore ways to produce as much of our own fertility on farm as possible.

## Marketing

###  Products

 I will place a high priority on growing what restaurants and other retail outlets want. I’m not entirely sure how to introduce myself and my product to start building a relationship. I may try waiting until I have a product I can offer as a sample and visiting a bunch of restaurants/shops mid-season.

 The long term goal would be to have very stable relationships with a couple of chefs/restaurants. This would include winter meetings to talk about what was provided in the previous season and what might be desired in the upcoming season.

 I would like the partners I work with to tell the story of Fiction Farm. I would work to get a high level of engagement from the partners. Maybe have restaurant staff come out to the farm for a tour and work project once or twice a season.

###  Distribution

 I would like to minimize my off-farm time and fuel consumption. Distribution efficiencies are of high importance to me. Ideally, I would like to have one afternoon where all deliveries are made to a whole variety of customers.

 I would like to have an efficient was to communicate with the chef/restaurant partners. I’m happy to work with the partners to iron out what this might be. For myself, I would like to send out a weekly email with what will be available in the upcoming week. Partners would have a set amount of time to order from that list and then all deliveries would happen in one day. An example could be: List goes out Friday, orders in by end of day Monday, deliveries happen Wednesday afternoon.

## Financial Strategy

 In my first season, I’ve kept my gross revenues at what I feel is an attainable level. $4000. There will be much investment that will need to happen in the first season. I plan to keep everything simple and cheap for the short term to ensure this business model works without investing too much into specific systems. First season priorities will be:

* Cooling. This will likely be a cool bot and self-built cooler. I’m hoping to get used freezer panels for a discount price.
* Hoophouse. I would like to erect a 20’ by 60’ hoophouse at some point this summer so I can start experimenting this fall/winter with some production.
* Small tools. I have some but will need to purchase many more.
* Irrigation. Will need to purchase a system that is manageable for one person. Hoping for a mix of overhead and drip.
* Seed starting equipment. Mainly plug cell trays.

Other things I’ll be thinking about in the first season:

* Wash station. I’ve already obtained some stainless steel sinks and hose, etc to get started. If the business ends up focusing on cut greens I will explore a converted washing machine to spin dry and save labour.
* Distribution. Our family already owns a minivan that I plan to use for deliveries in year one. I would like to keep the business needs as separate as possible from personal but it is unlikely the business will be able to afford its own vehicle in the short term.

The overall financial strategy

## Risk Management

## Regulations

## Record Keeping

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