

Summary & Resources - Modern Heritage Farm

April 2022 Farmer Field Day



Building a Successful Market Farm w/ Low Capital, Minimal Infrastructure, and Leased Land

At [Modern Heritage Farm](#) in Glendale, Jessica and John Thomas Hodges are setting limitations aside and finding creative solutions to make their 2 acres of vegetable production work for them! From the DIY germination chamber (*repurposed chest freezer with a repurposed crockpot plugged into Inkbird Digital Temperature Controller; seeds germinate more quickly with the added moisture and controlled temperature!*) to the wise use of cover crops and resourcefulness in securing funding for “big ticket” items, the Hodges are building success without growing considerable debt.

Farming on leased land, the Hodges avoid installing permanent infrastructure and have developed efficiency to use their dozen caterpillar tunnels for year-round growing and a new wash-pack area.

“We’ve narrowed down our crops - no more space hogs, like melons, winter squash, or pumpkins,” Jessica explained. Instead, they focus on a wide variety of crops that work well in their system of 100’ beds: greens, root vegetables, garlic, onions, celery, tomatoes, peppers, herbs, and sweet potatoes (“we have kept those - our customers love them!”).

The focus on customer service has grown the Modern Heritage community of customers quickly and broadly, as their 60- to 100-member spring-to-fall CSA has a broad waitlist and their farmers market offerings are often sold out early via online pre-orders.

“We put a lot of effort into helping our customers feel like they’re a part of our farm,” John shared, explaining how the CSA was integral to the community-building, farm-family atmosphere they work to cultivate with their customers. Using a personal tone in emails and social media to communicate their offerings and building a private farm CSA Facebook group (managed by a local dietitian who traded for a CSA share!) helps their CSA members feel like family! By using the Square point-of-sale app to dial in customer favorites and a simple online ordering system (built with Google Forms), they’ve built in customer ease and satisfaction and enabled their newsletter subscribers (who get first chance at their remaining weekly harvest) to

join the camaraderie! Collaborating with other local farmers, the Hodges have expanded their CSA offerings to items they don't produce, like microgreens and mushrooms, furthering the customer service.

"But until you farm for a few years," the Hodges caution, "we don't recommend starting a CSA!" Although the early season capital is helpful and can seem enticing to beginning farmers, the demand of offering so many different crops and varieties and ensuring diversity in week-to-week boxes for 22-24 weeks of the year is difficult!

"It's like jumping in the deep end to learn to swim," John Thomas explained. "It's better to find your niche and then start adding!"

That learned experience has benefited the Hodges in other ways as well. As they shared their tools and systems with the Field Day participants, they explained the importance of crafting DIY tools for some items while knowing when it's time "to just bite the bullet and purchase" for bigger investments.

In addition to John Thomas' homemade allium dibbler (see it in [this Farm Hack video](#) from #OAK2022 virtual conference), the duo showcased a slew of home-crafted tools, including:

- Converted lawn mower trailer that straddles the beds for laying compost,
- Fashioned wire weeder from a metal clothes hanger and mop handle,
- Jet-pump irrigation with retrofitted overhead irrigation to improve pressure,
- Indoor temporary greenhouse on wheeled shelf unit with full-spectrum lights and (just as effective) T5 shop lights,
- Repurposed bread trays for washing root vegetables, curing alliums
- DIY wash-pack with greens bubbler washer using spa pump and washing machine greens spinner (see resource links below for plans).

Using a variety of funding resources for beginning farmers and smart planning, the Hodges have been able to afford their tunnels, BCS walk-behind tractor, tarps, row covers/hoops, landscape fabric, seed-starting equipment, and a soon-to-be-finished mobile cooler.

Additionally, they received funding from NRCS to establish a conservation plan for their farm, including perennial hedgerows and cover crops in transition to organic certification. Jessica and John Thomas have also used their OAK membership to make use of [OAK's Transition Trainer](#) services, assisting them through the application and preparation process for certification.

As for preparation processes, the Hodges' production systems have developed over time to systematize (or LEAN) the farm, enabling a smooth process from initial establishment through crop rotations and harvest. Using standardized bed sizes in 4-bed blocks, the irrigation, tarps, row cover, landscape fabric and plant rotations (which avoid putting the same plant family in the same place within 3 years) can all be used efficiently and similarly on each bed block. Stressing the importance of minimal soil disturbance, the Hodges break new ground by first soil testing, then scalping the top layer and flail mowing it, laying a tarp for weed suppression, shaping beds with a rotary plow (never deeper than 2"!), adding amendments according to their soil test, and adding landscape fabric or mulch to keep the soil covered and moist until planting.

They consider the fabric a great way to get started in building soil and creating systems with reduced initial weed pressure, yet they remind growers to remove the landscape fabric and any tarp after the end of the growing season to allow the soil to "breathe" and protect the soil biology. The Hodges also mulch the walkways with wood chips and add shredded leaf mulch to the surface of their beds for weed suppression and to add organic matter to their soil. (Pro-tip:

keep an eye on the soil nutrient balance and pre-test the natural materials for potential contaminants to maximize the value of these natural mulches and maintain [organic integrity!](#)) OAK is grateful for the generous sharing and hosting from Jessica and John Thomas! We're big fans! Follow them @modernheritagefarm on Facebook / Instagram, or email them at modernheritagefarm@gmail.com

Here are some of the Hodges' crop production and marketing tips, followed by a rich list of resources that were mentioned at their April 2022 Field Day...

- Celery: transplant them in the tunnels in August for harvest Nov-April; harvest just the stalks and bundle 8-10 of them for a unique and popular winter-early spring crop
- Bulb onions - cover with insect netting or light row cover when planting to prevent birds from uprooting; add leaf mulch after roots have established, and they'll require little irrigation
- Garlic: a great crop for CSA AND farmers market: so many products in one plant: green garlic, scapes, bulbs, and seed garlic - buy initial seed garlic and harvest healthy bulbs thereafter for your own planting!

Resource Links:

- OAK resources:
 - Upcoming [OAK Farmer Field Days](#)
 - [Join OAK today!](#)
 - [OAK YouTube](#) farmer resources / conference and field day playlists
 - [OAK Transition Trainer](#) - for assistance with certifying organic
 - [USDA's National Organic Program](#)
- Suppliers:
 - [Nolt's Produce Supplies](#)
 - Deerfield Supplies · 2825 Stringtown Rd. Elkton, KY 42220 · (270) 265-2425
 - ReVita Pro, Neptunes Harvest
 - [Earth Tools*](#)
 - BCS walk-behind tractors, hand tools
 - [Farmer's Friend](#)
 - Greens Harvester
 - Caterpillar Tunnels
 - [Thoroughbred compost*](#)
- Seed Companies:
 - [Johnny's Seeds*](#)
 - Also harvest bags and online Growers Guides
 - [High Mowing Organic Seeds*](#),
 - [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#),
 - [Territorial Seeds](#)
 - [Keene Organics](#) -seed garlic
- [Square](#) app: crops<>profits
- Funding:
 - [SOAR loan](#) - southern and eastern KY
 - [KSU Small Scale Farm Grant](#)

- [County Ag Investment Program \(CAIP\)](#) grant: county-specific! Ask your County Extension Agent
- [NRCS EQIP](#) funding:
- cover crop seed, high tunnel, Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition: CPA (formerly CAP) 138
- Tools
 - Earthway and Jang seeders
 - [CoolBot YouTube](#) (including PDF instruction guide) - trailer for mobile cold storage
- Soil testing:
 - [UK Cooperative Extension](#) - county-specific
 - [Logan's Lab](#)
 - [Haney soil sample](#) - more biology focus
 - [Kinsey's](#)
- Farmer-led resources
 - [No-Till Growers](#) / [Collab Farming](#) + podcasts, grower forum, and more
 - Jesse Frost at [Rough Draft Farmstead](#), Lawrenceburg KY
 - **September [OAK Field Day!](#)**
 - [Josh Sattin's YouTube](#) (also [Johnny's tutorial](#) for scissor-door endwalls)
 - [UVM Ag Engineering](#) greens spinner, DIY from washing machine
 - [Ben Hartman](#) ([via Chelsea Green*](#))
 - [Daniel Mays](#)
 - [Bryan O'Hara](#) and ([via Chelsea Green*](#))
- Produce Safety
 - [KY Dept of Agriculture](#) - Produce growers, take [this survey!](#)
 - [University of Kentucky](#)
 - **May 5 [OAK Field Day!](#) Register NOW!**
- Poultry:
 - [Mount Healthy Hatchery](#)