

Linda Engle Introduction: Sustainable Idaho is brought to you by the Portneuf Resource Council.

Madison Long Introduction: Welcome to Sustainable Idaho. I'm your host Madison Long and today I talked with the father and son managers of King's Crown Organic Farm.

Nate Jones: My name is Nate Jones.

Wilder Jones: I'm Wilder Jones.

Nate Jones came back to his third-generation farm about 30 years ago, in the midst of the farm crises of the 1970s and 1980s. To remain profitable, Nate began working with an organic farmer to develop a niche crop. From there, he saw the premium benefits from beans, potatoes, and other items that were grown organically. Now his farm has grown to around 700 acres with the inclusion of bees, cows, chickens, and with help from his son Wilder.

ML: Now that you've been working together as organic farmers for several years, what does sustainability mean to King's Crown?

NJ: If you talk sustainability, we need to be profitable, number one. We need to be soft on the ground or building soil is what I used to say back in the day. So it's healthier the next year. I don't want to shift ecological costs onto my neighbors.

Wilder Jones: We're organic in our certification, our process, our philosophy. You begin to see all your profitability in your savings. The sustainability that bleeds into our business enterprise, our fertility, our pest management, our labor, our skill set, that bleeds into our approach towards the ecosystem we're in and helps inform how we show up for society.

ML: According to the United States Department of Agriculture, organic farming prioritizes using tillage and cultivation methods to improve the soil structure whether through crop rotation, cover crops, or plant and animal materials. Your website emphasizes raising healthy produce, meat, and soil. Particularly, what does healthy soil mean to you?

NJ: We integrated pasture into our rotation about eight years ago and we have healthier soil, better yields when we tweaked that 12 year rotation. Now we're doing three years alfalfa, three years row crop, three years pasture, three years row crop, then back to alfalfa.

WJ: The regenerative, sustainable, and agroecological practices that farmers implement do take time. He's talking about a recent major paradigm shift for us, because we live in a place where land is worked rather aggressively because we have high cost water. That creates a financial treadmill for all farmers to always be seeking a cash crop and rarely introducing rest, recovery, fallow. We think decadal, my dad has been a vigorous tree planter and not for crops, but for shelter belts, wind erosion, and all of the myriad of benefits that trees are.

ML: Organic farming also prohibits the use of synthetic herbicide control. Synthetic formulas provide quicker and more highly predictable results, reducing labor costs. However, according to the Rodale Institute, a nonprofit agricultural research institute, key ingredients such as Glyphosate from weedkillers are regularly found in human urine due to its presence in food, air, and water. The Environmental Protection Agency and the International Agency for Research on Cancer debate the effects of Glyphosate, but several of their studies point to potential cases of liver and kidney damage, hormone interruption, reproductive issues, and digestive issues.

Ultimately, organic farming aims to promote farmers to adopt more naturally derived, and quickly degradable substances for herbicide control. This reduces chemical runoff in waterways, reduces toxic residues on food, and protects the soil health.

How do you overcome the biggest challenges of not using synthetic herbicide control?

NJ: I learned weed cycles. Weeds can tell you what your fertility level is. Strictly in our row crop situation, it's all about the timing on your cultivations. When you water, we have a tickler or a tine weeder. You can use that particularly if you get a rain because weeds are always going to start with moisture.

ML: A tine weeder is a specialized rake that quickly and easily uproots tiny, thread-stage weeds in the top half-inch of soil.

WJ: As far as other pests, we are exceptionally diversified in the way that we have row crop commodities, orchards, a large vegetable garden, sheep, pigs, cow, calf, some laying hens, an enterprise that accommodates and complexifies our farm. For us, because of our scale, we have the luxury of moving our market garden every year, at least an eighth of a mile, if not more, if we want it. And so we just walk away from the pest population that is accumulated over there.

ML: As part of the King's Crown farm ecosystem, animals like Wilder mentioned, those pigs, cattle, sheep, honeybees, and chickens are essential for providing natural fertilizer from manure, stimulating plant root growth in the pasture, controlling weed growth, and providing a biodiverse environment.

WJ: These soil and plant communities need animals. When an animal grazes something, it looks bright green and already growing again. Their excrement and manure being incorporated into our soil ecology and biology is all part of the concert of why farms are supposed to have animals.

ML: Similar to years past, Idaho is facing a growing season with reduced water deliveries and usage due to low snowpack and aquifers. Several water districts in Idaho like American Falls, Twin Falls, Minidoka, and Milner have announced their reduction in water delivery between 12 and 33%. However as of May 5, 2026, King Hill's water district has chosen to instead adopt pipeline improvement projects to reduce ditch water loss. How does water management play into your work on King's Crown?

WJ: Over time, water management is the development and implementation of technology, so there's an efficiency beyond just water quantity and quality, but also labor savings. On our operation, we have a variety of water applications, we flood irrigate, open ditch and gated pipe, and there's wheel lines and pivots. It's really easy to have a glass of water and consider it like a bank account, and now that I've consumed some, there's less of it, but water is a never ending cycle. By having a tree, shading the soil, that soil is at a cooler temperature, it has less evaporative demand. Those little things do add up.

ML: Although the 2022 Census of Agriculture shows that the total number of farms has decreased 7% from 2017, more farms are transitioning to organic. Over 2,000 farms with acreage transitioned to organic in 2022, with the certified number increasing 5% since 2019. Is there anything else you wanted to add about the process and future of organic farming in Idaho?

NJ: Since I've been into organic farming, I've watched it grow. Unfortunately, I've seen it become commodified to an extent that some of our price premiums aren't there any longer. Selling food, not commodities, is key, and local is also key.

WJ: I think that Idaho will have lots of challenges as you turn over acres into development. All of those decisions have a cascading effect of consequences on the land, on your watershed, on your neighbor's place. It's difficult to sometimes spend more money on local fresh organic food. It feels elitist, and we charge that because we haven't externalized that cost in the planet. I just want you to see that what I'm doing is not just for me. It's for us. You begin to appreciate that farming is not just hard work, but talent. This innate thing called talent is, I think, learned and cultivated in someone. And my father is exceptionally talented in his keen awareness of what's happening on his land, investing long term.

ML Outro: Thank you to Nate and Wilder Jones from King's Crown Organic Farm for sharing more about their organic and sustainable farming practices through cover crops, animal husbandry, learning weed cycles, and finding natural alternatives to synthetic sprays. To learn more about their work, check out kingscrownorganics.com and kisu.edu/sustainableidaho.

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