



## The Future is Farmers

The average age of a farmer in Canada is 55, but in the 2016 census we saw the first small uptick in the number of young farmers since 1999. New and young farmers are critical to building and maintaining Ontario's agricultural prosperity and creating the ecological succession plan for the generation of growers that will succeed them.

As the 2021 growing season comes to an end, we checked in on three farmers, who had just wrapped up their first season as a farm owner, to hear about their year and their future plans for their farms.

**Rav Singh (RS)**, is a vegetable farmer and the owner/operator of Shade of Miti Farm, in Caledon, ON.

**Aliyah Fraser (AF)**, is a market gardener and the owner/operator of Lucky Bug Farm, in the Kitchener-Waterloo region.

**Ryan Lawson (RL)**, is a market gardener and the owner/operator of Ryan's Market Gardens, in Burlington, ON.

### Q: How was your season?

RS: This season was really great! I had the opportunity to lay a lot of the foundational work down for my new farm and business. There were challenging moments where I had to adapt really quickly because of climatic events such as late frosts and extreme heat, but there were also moments of growth and success! This season, I experimented a lot with the types of crops I grew, my irrigation system and online education which has been really fun.

AF: This season was my first working as a market gardener and running my own business and, in one word, it was a whirlwind.

RL: Our season was an overall success! This was our first year on this land and with that came some learning curves but nothing we couldn't overcome. It was such a joy

carving out the new land, meeting new customers, and supplying our area with a product that I'm happy to have my name on.

### Q: What was your biggest win this season?

RS: I focused on growing a lot of bitter melon and okra this year, and the response I have received from the community has definitely been the highlight of my year! I had so many people visit me at the farmers market and tell me how happy they were to be able to buy these veggies.

AF: Growing more produce than I could've ever imagined, mostly on my own, and meeting some amazing farmers, market-goers and new friends!

RL: The biggest win of my season would have to be turning a profit in our first year. It took many people coming together to make this market garden happen and their efforts quite literally paid off!

### Q: What did this season teach you?

RS: This season has reminded me of the importance of just taking a breath once in a while. This was my first year farming alone and there were many times (daily, if I'm being honest) when I was feeling stressed and anxious. On top of that, I experienced a lot of eco-anxiety because I understood the weight of the responsibility I carry as a farmer and environmental educator. When I was at the farm, I always had to remind myself to breathe and enjoy and celebrate what I was doing in the moment.

AF: This season reinforced how difficult it can be for new farmers to access and start a business on rented rural land.

RL: This season taught me to trust in the plants' capabilities to produce. At the beginning of the season I became seriously ill with a blood

infection which kept me out of the gardens for two months. In the past I would feel the need to be in the field 12 hours a day and, being forced to take a step back, only to return and find my plants thriving made me realize that, if I feel the need to, I can take a day off and things will be fine.

### Q: What are my goals for next season?

RS: My goals for next year include improving my compost system and planting a lot more bitter melon and okra. I would also like to learn more about farm finances and start saving seeds as I truly believe that seed sovereignty and food justice are interlinked. My long term goal is to turn my farm into a co-op that supports newcomers, youth, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ community members.

AF: Moving the farm to a new location, substantially growing the size of my CSA program and making more frequent trips to market!

RL: My goals for next season are to start a fully-customizable, weekly CSA program that provides the customer with more freedom and to double farm stand sales. I intend to double farm stand sales through increasing sale hours, having a wider selection and higher quantities, and to spread word of our farm stand through marketing.

### Local News/Events

**Local 320 Bruce** — Save-the-date! Local 320's AGM will be held on Wednesday, January 19, 2022 at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom. From the comfort of your home, enjoy a guest speaker (TBA), regional updates, elections, and more! We hope to see you there!