



# Preserving the Magic in Skagit Valley: Diversified Sustainable Production on Hedlin Farms

By  
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The Northwest Direct farm case studies were developed to provide in-depth information about the direct and semi-direct marketing opportunities that exist for farmers within their regional food system and how these opportunities are captured by a diverse set of successful producers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Direct marketing strategies employed by the farmers featured in this series include farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), u-pick, farm stand and on-farm sales. Semi-direct marketing strategies include sales to restaurants, caterers, retailers (grocery stores, butchers, etc.) and processors, arranged and completed by the farmer him/herself without the use of brokers or wholesalers.

In 2002 and 2003, members of the case study research team performed in-depth on-farm interviews with each of the 12 farm families in this study. Interviews were transcribed, financial information was collected, reviewed and interpreted and outlines for the case study content were developed. Professionals were hired to write the case studies. Each case study went through a series of reviews by the case study farmers, university faculty and research team members with final permission for publishing and distribution given by the farmers themselves.

The nature of profitable small acreage farming demands flexibility and the willingness to change. These case studies, therefore, reflect a "snapshot in time" of each farm. Readers should be aware that these farms have undoubtedly evolved since the initial interviews. They should also be aware that the unique nature of each farm necessitates an individualized treatment of the analysis of farm profitability and the criteria by which that is measured. The case studies contain financial information to the extent that farmers were willing to share, and reflect our intention to educate the reader, while at the same time protecting the farmers' need for confidentiality.

It is our intent that the case studies will be of use to:

- Current farmers who want access to a greater share of the revenue that comes from the foods they grow and raise and are interested in exploring one or more marketing options.
- New farmers who are designing their production and marketing systems, who are interested in employing one or more marketing strategies, and are establishing a business plan for their farm.
- Educators and other agricultural professionals who work with producers and others interested in direct and semi-direct marketing.
- Policy-makers who are interested in enhancing the financial stability of family farms in the region through innovative policy and government funding.

A total of 12 case studies were produced by Rural Roots, Inc. and the University of Idaho as part of the Northwest Direct project. A list of the other case studies in the series is included at the end of this document. These case studies are one component of a larger USDA Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems project called *Northwest Direct: Improving Markets for Small Farms*. For more information on this project and its outcomes, visit the project website at <http://www.nwdirect.wsu.edu/>.



Colette DePHELPS, NW Direct Case Study Research Team Leader



**Dave Hedlin and Serena Campbell**  
**Hedlin Farms**  
**Mt. Vernon, Washington**

**Marketing Strategies Employed**

Produce Stand  
Farmers' Market  
Restaurants

**Primary Crops**

Pickling Cucumbers  
Market Garden (25 Acres of  
Fresh Market Vegetables)  
Strawberries  
Tomatoes, including Heirloom

**Other Revenue**

Custom Greenhouse Contracts  
Bee Hives  
Field Crop and Seed Sales  
Christmas Tree and Poinsettia  
Sales  
Direct and Catalogue Dahlia  
Sales

**Certifications**

Organic Certification  
Food Alliance Certification

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MARKETING  
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# Preserving the Magic in Skagit Valley: Diversified Sustainable Production on Hedlin Farms

## *Farm Overview and History*

Dave Hedlin knows he is a lucky man. "Being able to farm here on this land with Serena as a partner is a privilege," he says. Dave Hedlin and Serena Campbell are the third generation on the Hedlin family farm, raising crops on approximately 400 acres of fertile land in the Skagit Valley of northwestern Washington outside of La Conner.

"The Magic Skagit," as it is called by locals, is home to some 90,000 acres of farmland. The people here value the beautiful scenery, the rich soils, the diversity of wildlife sustained by slough habitats, and the cultural heritage of their unique valley. Hedlin and Campbell are active members of the organization, *Skagitians to Preserve Farmland*, dedicated to preserving farmland and wildlife habitats, promoting farming as an economically viable livelihood, providing educational opportunities for farmers to improve their marketing and management skills, and educating the community in the process.

Hedlin and Campbell's devotion to this cause is fed by their desire to stay true to their ideals while remaining financially

stable. Hedlin says, "Serena and I are trying to...figure out how to make a living without losing track of who we are. We like being farmers. We like producing food for people that is good for (them)." Through the years, they have continued to evolve as farmers, diversifying their business plan and their production methods to fill the niches available to them in the area. They grow a variety of crops on 400 acres. Everything they grow is Food Alliance and Salmon Safe Certified, and some crops are Certified Organic. They have a half acre greenhouse operation, where they grow 6000 square feet of tomatoes, including heirlooms for high-end markets. Here, they also provide services to vegetable seed companies and tissue culture labs. They grow field crops in large quantities, such as pickling cucumbers, plus they grow a diverse selection of vegetables and fruits in their 25 acre market garden. They have a fresh and mail order dahlia service, and sell Christmas trees and poinsettias in the winter, in an effort to have income from sales year-round.



Young plants are kept in an outdoor holding area on Hedlin Farms. The market garden is in the background.

Dave Hedlin's grandfather, Rasmus Koudal emigrated from Denmark in 1904 and slowly bought the Skagit Valley property they now farm. Hedlin's parents were graduates of Cornell University in crop and weed sciences. Dave Hedlin was raised on the farm.

Of his own background, Hedlin says, "I was very mechanically inclined. When I was seven years old my grandfather gave me a Chevrolet car, and my dad gave me a bucket of tools, and I took it all apart. It took four years. Anytime they needed to find me, that was where I was.... It was a good life. I was never pushed to farm, ever. My father died when I was eleven and I helped my grandfather for a number of years. When I was fifteen, I was too young to start farming and he was old enough that he had to retire. He was in his eighties. So the family farm was rented out for a number of years. I graduated from high school and took two years of industrial mechanics at Skagit Valley College. I worked...as a mechanic for pea harvesters.... Then I went to work full time for a food processor and started accumulating equipment so I could rent the family farm back. I did that in 1974. (I was) never pushed to farm. I came to that on my own. Like most kids I was pretty sure that I didn't want to farm when I was my son's age. (I was) pretty sure that I *did* four years later."

*"Serena and I are trying to...figure out how to make a living without losing track of who we are. We like being farmers. We like producing food for people that is good for (them)."*

Serena Campbell was raised in Bellingham, Washington. Her family was affiliated with the timber industry. She received degrees in biology and oceanography, and worked for the University of Washington for ten years. She and Dave Hedlin were introduced by Hedlin's sister. Although Campbell's family was somewhat skeptical about the farming industry, Hedlin says, "I told (Serena) that there was big money in farming and that we should get married. Fortunately we were safely married before she found out that there was only big money in farming if you put it there." Campbell says that the science of farming and the science of oceanography are very similar. She has been able to use her biological knowledge to their advantage and apply it to their farming endeavors.

Hedlin and Campbell have two grown children, Lauren and Arne. Lauren attends an equestrian college in West Virginia. Arne is going into mechanical engineering, though he helps at the farmers' markets and with some of the production. Dave Hedlin says that regardless of whether his children pursue farming, he wants more than anything that they be good stewards of the family land.

The family property is divided in half by Sullivan Slough, which connects to the Skagit River. Hedlin and Campbell own water rights for drainage and irrigation. Hedlin owns a second farm in Dodge Valley on the Skagit River, with a private dike. The Skagit has both riverine and tidal influences at that location. Occasional floods deposit silt and nutrients into the farm's soil, making the ground extremely fertile. "It's wonderful land," says Campbell. The locals like to joke that they spend more money on pumping excess water out than on bringing water in for crop irrigation. Only about 15% of Hedlin's Dodge Valley property has to be irrigated.

The R.C. Koudal Land Company, a partnership in stewardship shared by Hedlin and his two siblings, owns much of the farm property. Hedlin Farms and its produce stand operate as a separate business entity from the family partnership, and rents the land



Dahlias in bloom at Hedlin Farms. Photo courtesy of the Festival of Family Farms.

on which the stand sits. The farm rents 130 acres from the family trust, owns about 50 acres, and rents another 220 acres from other sources.

Hedlin Farms employs seven full-time employees, and hires up to 40 workers in the summers, plus some local kids. As the farm diversifies, Hedlin and Campbell are challenged by the management aspects, including allocating the right amount of labor to the right task at the right time.

## ***Marketing***

When asked about his strategy for direct marketing Hedlin Farms products, Dave Hedlin jokes, “I would call it stumbling around.” Hedlin and Campbell actually do a rather successful job at marketing their produce through their produce stand, which they consider to be their primary marketing focus, as well as through farmers’ markets and restaurants.

### ***Hedlin Farms’ Produce Stand***

The farmers went into business 25 years ago with a small strawberry stand. The stand was a “tiny shed” - a six by eight foot structure on the side of the road. For the first ten years the farm sold only strawberries. They then added tomatoes. In 1996, Hedlin and Campbell bought a dahlia business and began selling and advertising the flowers at the stand. In 1998, they offered a full line of fresh market fruits and vegetables at their stand, plus they began selling produce at wholesale price to other fruit stands. In 2001, a new structure was built by altering a tractor garage which they bought and hauled from the owner’s property. Their current stand is twelve feet by twenty and has two metal kiosks for shade. More produce is displayed outside, and they have purchased additional amenities, such as a cash register, a cooler for storage, scales, and electricity. Dave Hedlin says that the operating hours of the produce stand are “from 10:00 to 6:00, or pretty much from when we open, until we close.”

In addition to their standard fare of fresh fruits and vegetables from their market garden, the farmers provide hothouse tomatoes, peppers and basil to people desperate for fresh produce from May to the end of November. They also sell pumpkins in the fall, and for several years they have sold Christmas trees and poinsettias to boost winter sales. The start-up cost for this sales venue was very minimal, Serena Campbell says, “We’ve done this on a shoestring from the beginning.”

### ***Farmers’ Markets***

Hedlin and Campbell have been selling at farmers’ markets for over 15 years. When their daughter was six, they began selling strawberries at the Mt Vernon and Snohomish



Greenhouses on Hedlin Farms

markets. Over the years, they added more products and stayed at market more weeks of the season. They have sold at the Mt. Vernon market since its inception, and have tried the Fairfield market as well. At the time of the interview, the farmers were looking into another farmers’ market to supplement their Mt. Vernon sales.

The farmers’ markets started as a way to involve their children in their business. Campbell says, “It has been as much a kid project as a business strategy.” But Hedlin and Campbell see the markets as an advertising venue as well. They say that customers that come to their stand often find them first through the farmers’ markets. Campbell says, “We depend on the markets to keep us in people’s thoughts.”

*“We depend on the (farmers’) markets to keep us in people’s thoughts.”*

Campbell describes some of the ways that farmers’ markets provide free advertising for the farm. She says that when selling their heirloom tomatoes, “these older ladies would show up and be first in line. Then, they would sit there and visit. When other people would show up who weren’t familiar with what we were producing, they would look at the tomatoes and (complain about the prices.) This group of older ladies would stand there and ... explain to them for us why they were worth that much. They would tell them that the worst thing that could happen is that you end up being hooked on these tomatoes and you’d have to come back every week and buy more. This went on for several summers. It was really good advertising.”

Also, a local chef who sold at the market would include Hedlin Farms' products in the dishes she was cooking on site, and then send people over to buy the fresh product. These avenues of relationship marketing, afforded by simply being present at the farmers' markets, have served Hedlin and Campbell well.

### ***Restaurant Sales***

Hedlin Farms began selling to restaurants because chefs began purchasing their produce at their produce stand. Now they deliver to La Conner restaurants, such as at the Wild Iris Bed and Breakfast and Kerstin's. Dave Hedlin explains, "Kerstin's, one of the up-scale restaurants uptown, features our tomatoes and basil. It is listed on their menu, and people talk about them, and customers say they are the best that they have ever had....The waitress tells them that they can stop by the produce stand and pick up a flat to take to their friends."

### ***Advertising***

Hedlin and Campbell don't pay much to advertise. They keep brochures for the farm at their produce stand. They have some signage and are developing a website. They occasionally advertise in the local newspaper. Campbell explains, "The problem is that we don't have a lot of time and it is difficult allocate time to advertising. Currently we are

discussing the hiring of a market manager—someone that could do advertising, website development... (and) professional signage." They pay attention to trends in the market, however, and adjust their production and sales accordingly. They have increased their range into organic markets over the years, and are reaching people who are interested in having a high-quality, locally produced product. Hedlin says, "Our slogan is, 'Grown while you watch, by people you know.'"

They also get their name out by being "really involved." Their voice in the community is well-known as they support local schools, speak out on development and conservation issues, and sell products that stand out for their freshness and quality. Campbell explains, "We are willing to be involved in community groups (and) talk about who we are."

### ***Production Methods***

By following the market trends, and in order to remain diverse and economically viable, Hedlin Farms has been in transition for a number of years. Hedlin explains, "It is a big transition for a production type farm to transition into a fresh market produce stand. It is a different kettle of fish." He continues, "My heart of hearts is in produc-

*"If you have a business with 200 customers, you have a business. If you have a business with one customer, they own you."*



Photo courtesy of Skagitonians to Preserve Farmland and the Kellogg Foundation (c) 2003.

*"Grown while you watch, by people you know" is Dave Hedlin's marketing slogan.*

*He and Serena Campbell take a personal approach to crop production, marketing, and customer service.*



A large greenhouse provides shelter for hundreds of tomato plants.

tion. I like to grow 30 acre blocks of cucumbers.” But by obtaining organic and Food Alliance certifications, by adding a 25 acre fresh market garden, and by growing fresh food and products that can be sold year round and through a variety of sales venues, Hedlin and Campbell ensure their longevity as family farmers.

The farmers have transitioned a portion of their land into Certified Organic production. In order to do this, they grew hay without pesticides for three years, bartering the hay for manure with a neighbor who owns a dairy. Some of their pickling cucumbers are being grown on organically certified land, as is some of the cabbage being grown for the local sauerkraut plant. Much of their greenhouse production takes place without pesticides, but sometimes with conventional seeds or fertilizers, so certification doesn't apply there. More than fifteen years ago, Hedlin was interested in growing organics. But at the time, the regulations mandating the use of organic seed were not in place, and therefore the price differential for organics did not exist as an incentive to grow crops organically.

Hedlin uses a five year rotation on all crops except spinach, which requires a ten year rotation. He grows cabbage, beet and spinach for seed. Green peas have been grown on Hedlin Farms since the forties, but recently profit margins have been too low to justify it. He grows cucumbers, pumpkins and winter wheat as cash crops, plus the wheat serves as a rotation crop to break down clay soils and add organic matter.

Hedlin does custom planting and transplanting, and provides services to seed companies through custom greenhouse contracts. He also keeps bees for pollination of crops, and rents his 250 hives to other farms and to seed companies for extra income. The hives are kept on trailers,

which are moved to other properties and rented according to the time used and the crop being pollinated.

Hedlin and Campbell do not raise livestock for profit. Hedlin says, “I am a vegetable farmer. You put a vegetable on the truck, it stays on the truck.” Hedlin explains that their horses, chickens, dogs and cats are merely remnants of the children's 4-H projects. He qualifies this by saying, though, “We do run about two million head of bees.”

### ***Management Issues***

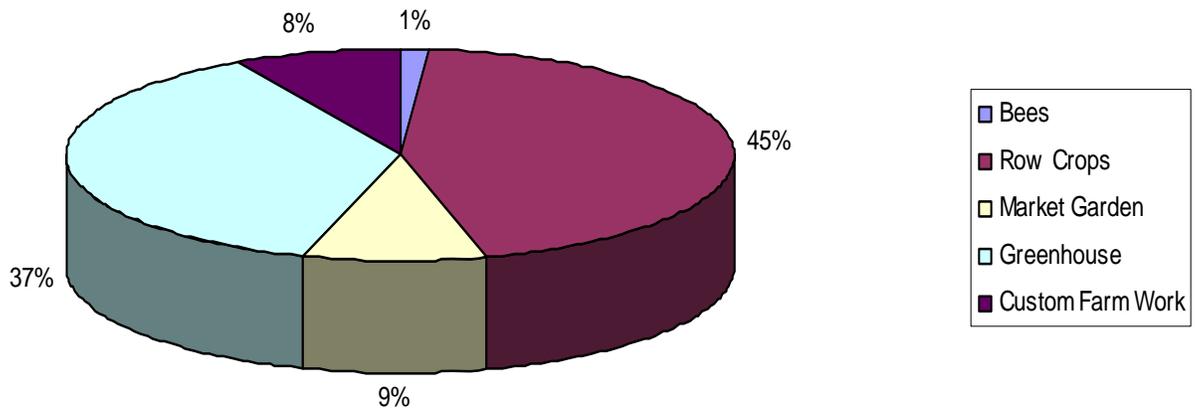
Campbell says, “One of the really big challenges in a farm like ours is figuring out how to allocate management, because inevitably, you are thin on management.” There are a lot of management issues Hedlin and Campbell face in their transition into direct marketing their products. The first is management of time. The farmers struggle to

appropriately divide their time, and the time of their employees, between tasks related to the different enterprises. The control of weeds, for example, especially in the certified organic fields, is a time-consuming endeavor. When labor is allocated to different areas, like greenhouse work, it is difficult not to fall behind. Mistakes in the allocation of resources results in higher costs, either in labor or in lost opportunities. Hedlin states that he might drive by the market garden and see that something should have been done earlier. As a result, he has to pull the crew out of the greenhouses and “put 400 or 500 hundred dollars worth of labor into a crop that will probably only gross 400 to 500 dollars.”

Campbell states, “We only have a certain number of people we can hire and not enough (profit) margin to hire all of the people (we) would really like to have around.” Hedlin spends a lot of his time on production, and Campbell manages the office, paperwork, payroll and administrative tasks associated with the greenhouse operation. As a result, the produce stand and other direct marketing endeavors are unable to get their full attention. Campbell says, “I know that if Dave and I could get down to that produce stand, we could double the sales if we were there full time. But I can't do it when we are shipping out a lot of greenhouse transplants.”

To be effective in supplying the direct markets, the farmers have to be able to forecast production for the upcoming season, including being able to predict the volume of crops needed for particular markets. Then their planting schedule must be derived from those estimates. This process can be very complex, especially when growing many different crops.

**Figure 1: Breakdown of Income by Production Sources, 2003**



### ***Equipment***

Hedlin says, “We have bought one new piece of equipment.” The farmers own a six row Monosem seeder that they purchased new. Because Hedlin studied industrial mechanics, his ability to repair equipment has made expensive purchases unnecessary in many cases. They tend to buy used equipment at auctions, and then make any necessary repairs. Hedlin has hand built some equipment as well, such as a swather that cuts hybrid cabbage. Increasingly, they are leasing more equipment. As their production has diversified, he no longer has time to repair things like he used to, and the costs have gone up. Hedlin says, “We have a 4640 (tractor) with a gazillion hours on it, a John Deere. We bought it for \$25,000. It doesn’t really owe us anything. The trick is that if the transmission goes out of it, you have to be willing to walk away from it. It will be \$15,000 to fix it, and what you have is an incredibly old tractor with a new transmission. In the old days, I would fix anything if it broke. I (still) have the ability to fix things, but a lot of the time, it just doesn’t make sense.” The complexity of the new machinery, the expense of parts and testing equipment needed to fix new machinery, and the time involved, are all factors prohibiting Hedlin from using his skills and resources in this way.

### ***Profitability by Enterprise***

Hedlin and Campbell’s farm profitability goals all relate to risk reduction, and by extension, their efforts to preserve the farming industry in the valley. They are working towards achieving these goals through three primary means: entering into non-speculative growing con-

tracts, establishing year round sales to provide cash flow, and selling directly to consumers. Hedlin explains, “If you have a business with 200 customers, you have a business. If you have a business with one customer, they own you.”

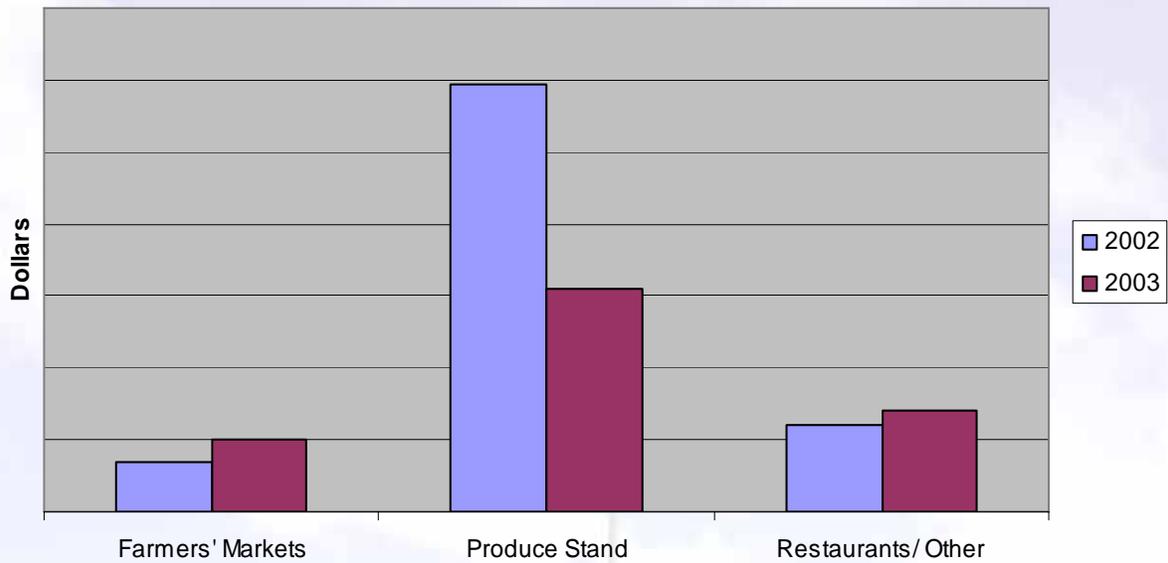
Growing contracts that are non-speculative in nature, a “service for a fee” approach, gives the farm consistent income to carry the more speculative ventures. The farmers calculate their costs for growing the product and tack on the desired margin. A contract is signed with the seed companies, and Hedlin and Campbell plant the crops with a better idea of what they will be receiving for that production.

Providing year round cash flow through various direct market sales also reduces financial risks to the farm. The market garden, dahlias, and seasonal sales of Christmas trees and poinsettias help provide the farm with income throughout the year, reducing the feast or famine dynamic inherent in seasonal enterprises. This makes the financial burden of meeting payroll and paying bills easier.

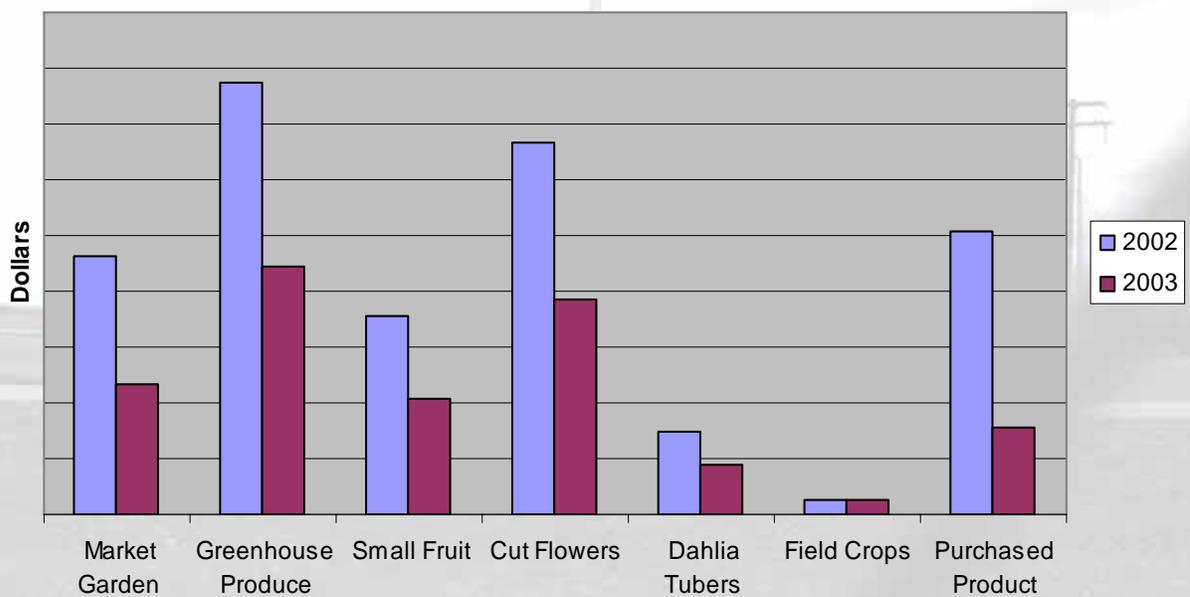
Finally, selling through direct markets increases their return on the crops that they grow. While there are additional costs to selling locally on a smaller scale, they still end up capturing larger portions of the revenue stream by selling them directly to consumers at premium prices.

Hedlin Farms is a complex operation with many production methods and sales avenues being utilized at all times. Sales from row crops sold through conventional markets were the largest source of gross receipts, accounting for 45% of sales in 2003. Greenhouse sales through contracts with other operations, and other greenhouse produce, like the heirloom tomatoes and basil accounted for 37% of gross receipts. While direct marketing sales were

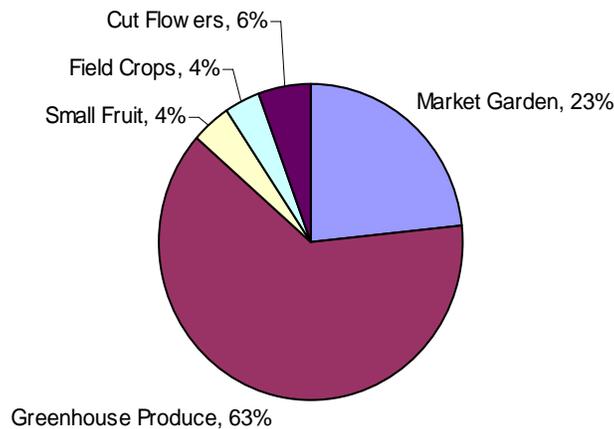
**Figure 2: Breakdown of Revenue from Direct Marketing Sources  
2002-2003**



**Figure 3: Income from Produce Stand Sales, 2002-2003**



**Figure 4: Product Origin for Farmers Market Sales, 2003**



small relative to the size of the other sales, they are important to the overall operation. They are financially stable and they provide steady cash flow and higher margins than other sales avenues do. In total, they accounted for 9% of gross receipts in 2003 (See Figure 1).

Another interesting source of income for Hedlin Farms isn't a crop or produce item, its bee hives. Bees are essential part of the farm ecosystem, pollinating crops. Originally the bee hives were brought on farm to pollinate their own seed crops and pickling cucumbers. After Hedlin Farms started engaging in greenhouse contracts they diversified into custom transplanting their greenhouse starts for other farmers in the seed industry. Offering the bees as a pollinating service was a natural extension of the greenhouse business operation. In 2003, the bee hives contributed 1% of total receipts.

### ***Produce Stand***

There is a striking contrast between the breakdown of receipts through the direct markets between 2002 and 2003. In 2002, the produce stand provided 76% of direct marketing receipts, while farmers' markets only accounted for 9%. In 2003, however, the produce stand business dropped substantially, and contributed only 56% of direct marketing receipts, followed by farmers' market sales at 18% (See Figure 2.) The sales figures in 2002, the first year of operation for the new produce stand, were great. Coming out of that year, Campbell was very optimistic about what the produce stand could ac-

complish financially. But that optimism was quickly stifled by road construction that took place in 2003 directly in front of their stand. Campbell says that her goal for that season was simply to, "maintain a presence and not lose money." The impact of the construction was tremendous. "It halved the income from the stand," says Campbell (See Figure 3.) "People couldn't get there, it was dirty, it was noisy- it was total chaos. A lot of days you couldn't get to the driveway, and if you could, it was covered with equipment. They destroyed our driveway, tearing it up I don't know how many times. It was a big mess."

Despite the construction, the produce stand still managed to break even. "We knew that it was going to be hard and that we had to get through the summer anyway that we could.... The easiest thing to have done would have been to sit the year out, but we have a customer base," explains Campbell.

### ***Farmers' Markets***

Hedlin Farms sold a large selection of products at farmers' markets in 2003. Most of the produce (63%) came from crops raised in the Greenhouses (refer to Figure 4.) These sales were primarily of heirloom tomatoes, but also include basil and a variety of peppers. Produce from the market garden also played a significant role, representing 23% of total sales. Cut flowers, field crops, and small fruits rounded out the remaining percentage of sales, each accounting for approximately 5%.

*"The easiest thing to have done would have been to sit the year out, but we have a customer base"*

While Hedlin enjoys selling at farmers' markets, Campbell isn't sure that they necessarily pay for themselves. "I'm not sure that I'm as positive about the farmers' markets as Dave is," she says. "I think that it is great advertising for us (though), as long as we aren't losing any money. I do feel like there are some intangibles that carry through." Those intangibles include generating cash flow during the cash poor months in the early summer, developing a customer base to support additional produce stand sales, and introducing their products to area chefs, which sometimes results in restaurant sales.

Hedlin and Campbell agree that farmers must know their production costs, and charge accordingly, in order to make a profit at the market. "Farmers' markets are a sustainable sales avenue only when the prices charged at market are an accurate reflection of what it actually costs to grow the food," says Hedlin.

### ***Greenhouse Operation***

The greenhouse operation provides products for sale to both the seed industry and to Hedlin Farms' direct marketing avenues. The majority of that production is plugs grown for the seed industry. These include crops such as cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, brussel sprouts, radishes, beets, and chard. The farmers also grow a number of vegetables in the greenhouses for sales through the produce stand, farmers' markets, and restaurants.

There are several benefits that the greenhouse operation provides to the farm profitability. First, growing in the greenhouses lowers risk of crop failure. Second, the seed and tissue contracts pay well, and provide consistent cash flow at a dependable profit margin. Finally, the greenhouse operation gives Hedlin and Campbell the opportunity to offer consistent, year round employment to their workers, which keeps employee satisfaction and productivity high.

Ten years ago, they started growing tomatoes in the greenhouse in the hopes of "figuring out how to grow a good tasting greenhouse tomato-" something Hedlin had noticed was lacking in the market. Since that time they have expanded their tomato production three-fold and have incorporated other produce into the mix, including basil and a wide variety of peppers. Despite their success, however, Hedlin says, "We are what we like to call 'militantly small' on that. We can't compete with the 'faster, cheaper, bigger' paradigm of food production, so we would only expand if the sales are there on the highest tier."

By using the contracts from the greenhouse operation as a means to stabilize their income, and keeping their tomato production to a manageable size, Hedlin and Campbell are able to remain diversified in both their production methods and their marketing avenues. Diversification and appropriate pricing are keys to keeping the farm profitable. The instability of markets, as well as the risks associated with any given production method, cautions against the reliance on any one strategy.



Hedlin Farms Produce Stand

## *Philosophy, Goals, and Future of the Farm*

Hedlin and Campbell are committed to preserving the lifestyle and livelihood of farmers in the Skagit Valley. In order to do this, they spend a significant amount of resources and energy being involved in organizations that further this goal. Some of the organizations that work to support farms and farmers in the region include the Northwest Agricultural Research Foundation, the Puget Sounds Seed Growers Association, and the Skagitians to Preserve Farmland.

The Skagit Valley is a very complex farming landscape. Currently, over 80 crops of commercial significance are grown in the Valley. Research is an essential component of balancing the economic, cultural, and ecological needs in the area. In reference to the production techniques that are unique to their area, Dave Hedlin says, "It is difficult to transpose rules and knowledge based off of slope agriculture onto sub-tidal lands...." To fund agricultural research in the Skagit Valley, most of the area's farms make a donation or assess themselves a certain percentage of their income. In 2004, over 90% of the farms in the region made a contribution.

The future of Hedlin Farms lies in the farmers' willingness to diversify, strategically market their products, and remain flexible. Hedlin explains, "Fifty years ago you could ride a good idea for a lifetime. Now it is good for about two years. I think change is inevitable, as is the evolution of this farm. Being flexible and ready to change is critical." Dave Hedlin and Serena Campbell see a lot of potential for themselves in the future of farming in the region. Hedlin says, "I think that there is a real opportunity for people in small businesses to reinvent themselves on a regional scale.... I think that the slow food movement and the organic movement are indicators that people want quality and are willing to pay for it. People are starting to realize that there are better alternatives to the way that they are currently eating."

Hedlin and Campbell enjoy living on their farm. They say they have the best ground for growing things and are surrounded by wonderful people. They look forward to growing old together in a community with a multigenerational sensibility. Hedlin concludes, "It may be tough to make a living, but who else gets to raise their kids on a dead end road on Sullivan Slough at the mouth of the Skagit River with eagles up in the trees? Every (creature) on the (Department of Ecology) wetlands poster swims, flies, hops, or crawls by our office everyday."

"(Plus) a few things that aren't," adds Serena Campbell.

*"I think that the slow food movement and the organic movement are indicators that people want quality and are willing to pay for it."*

### ***Find Hedlin's Farm Fresh Products***



**Hedlin Family Produce: 12275 Valley Road Mount Vernon, WA**

**Snow Goose Produce: 15170 Fir Island Road Mt. Vernon, WA**

**Bellevue Farmers Market: 1717 Bellevue Way NE Bellevue, WA  
Thursdays 3 pm - 7 pm (May 19 - October 21)**

**Mount Vernon Farmers Market: Gates & Main Mount Vernon, WA  
Saturdays 9 am - 1 pm (May 28 - October 8)**

**Coppa Mediterranean Bistro: 1224 Harris Avenue Bellingham, WA**

**Manino's Italian Restaurant: 1007 Harris Avenue Bellingham, WA**

**Porterhouse: 416 West Gates Mount Vernon, WA**

**Rexville Grocery Store: 19271 Best Road Mount Vernon, WA**

**Rose's Bakery Café: 382 Prune Alley Eastsound, WA**

**Seeds Bistro and Bar: 623 Morris Street La Conner, WA**

Northwest Direct is a four-year research project involving the five partners listed below. Our goal is to increase profitability of small farms in the Pacific Northwest through research and extension. We have documented locally based food systems, developed case studies of direct marketing farmers, fostered expansion of farmers markets, and addressed regulatory and infrastructure barriers to direct sales. Northwest Direct is coordinated by Washington State University's Small Farms Program. More information is available at [www.nwdirect.wsu.edu](http://www.nwdirect.wsu.edu).



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Life in the Slow Lane:  
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