

Hi Everybody!

We're in full swing of harvesting lettuce right now and are very busy. I'm sure you all are busy finishing your school semester and getting ready for Christmas! Thank you so much for all the great questions. I'm encouraged by how much you want to learn. Don't steal my job just yet! Below, you can see my answers to your questions.

1. How do you plant the seed to grow the lettuce and wheat?

We use planters that are air driven and belt driven for lettuce because the seed is very small. That means some planters are like a vacuum and suck up the seed on to a disc or plate, so it falls in the right pattern on to the ground. And the belt planter uses belts with holes in them to pick up the seed and drop them in to a groove in the soil in whatever plant spacing the farmer wants. Wheat is planted using a grain drill. We put the seed in a big box and then it falls through a bunch of small hoses or tubes in between discs on to the soil.



2. Do you water all your fields in one day?

Some fields can be watered quickly and others take a long time. It all depends on the crop and what kind of soil it is.

3. How much water does it take to water all the lettuce fields?

For lettuce we measure water by acre/feet. Depending on the soil, most lettuce crops can be irrigated with about 16 feet of water if it runs down the furrow, in between the beds.



4. Where do you get the seeds that you plant?  
Our seed comes from seed stores or we will grow our own.
5. How many different kinds of vegetables do you plant?/What kinds?  
We grow 3 major types of lettuce. Iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, and red and green mix leaf lettuce.



6. How many acres is your farm?

We farm close to 1,600 acres.

7. What are the steps to grow hay?

Growing alfalfa is fun because once the field is plowed and laser leveled it is ready to be planted. Once planted, we irrigate with a flood water and allow the seeds to germinate into little plants. We'll water it again a couple more times until it is big enough to cut. Then we'll cut it with a windrower or swather. Once cut, we'll rake it and bale it before it is sent across the country and even the ocean to other countries.



8. How long does it take to grow lettuce? And how long does it take to ship it across the country?

Iceberg lettuce takes the longest, which can be about 90 days in early winter to 120 days in peak of winter. I have lettuce being harvest this morning. It will be in the cooler and sorted for shipping this afternoon and then loaded on a truck this evening. By tomorrow morning the lettuce can be on the shelf of a grocery store for everyone to eat.

9. How many bales of hay do you make in a year?

We can produce anywhere from 60,000 to 75,000 bales in a year.

10. How much wheat do you harvest from one field and in one year?

We average about 3 tons of wheat per acre so some seasons we'll produce about 1,200 tons, or 2.4 million pounds.

11. How much lettuce do you harvest every single day?

Each day will vary, but many days we'll harvest about 10,000 cartons of lettuce in one field.

12. How many people does it take to harvest the lettuce?

Each harvest crew has 30 to 40 people and many fields will require 8 to 10 crews to harvest on time.



13. How long does it take to harvest your crops?

An 80 acre lettuce field can be harvest in about 3 days with 10 crews. Our harvest season is from November to March.

14. How much lettuce do you make every 2 years?

In two years I'm pretty sure we make enough lettuce to wrap around the planet one time. Well, maybe not that much, but a lot!

15. What's lettuce made of?

Lettuce is made up primarily of water. Pretty cool huh?

16. How big can lettuce get?

At harvest time it is about 12 inches tall. If I didn't harvest the lettuce and I let it keep growing it could grow as tall as me!

17. When lettuce gets expired does it still taste good or bad?

Once lettuce is expired it will get kind of mushy and not be crispy.

### Questions about the Farm

1. What do you call the tractor that cuts the hay and the wheat?

A Swather or Windrower cuts hay and a Combine cuts wheat.



Swather



Combine

2. How big is your farm?  
Our farm is about 1,600 acres.
3. How much food can you get from your farm in four weeks?  
That all depends on the time of year, what season it is, and what crop it is. Did you know that each American farmer is now responsible for feeding up to 155 people worldwide? It was only 28 people back in the 1960s!
4. What is your average amount of lettuce produced in a year?  
Depending on the acres grown we can produce almost a million cartons of lettuce a year.
5. Do you have a farmhouse on your farm?  
We do have a couple farm houses but I raise my family in a neighborhood because we're too big for our farm house.
6. How many different fields do you have?  
We farm about 16 ranches that include many fields.
7. Do the vegetables ever accidentally rot in the fields?  
No rotting takes place unless we finish harvest and don't get a disc or plow in to the field in time.
8. Do you grow fruits, or just vegetables?  
No fruits and nuts yet, just vegetables. Maybe someday!
9. Who was the first person to start the family business?  
My great grandfather started farming around 1942.
10. Do you have more than one farm?  
I manage our family farm.
11. Is there certain companies you guys ship your lettuce to?

We grow our lettuce for a company label called Andy Boy. Here's a picture of me and the label we grow for.



12. Are many mistakes often made, if so how many?

We're pretty close to perfect so no mistakes are made on our farm. I'm only kidding. Mistakes do happen, but what makes farmers special is how innovated we can be to find a solution.

13. Do you have a farm we can visit and buy the lettuce?

You're welcome to come to the farm and visit but to purchase our lettuce you'll have to find it in a store.

### Questions about Jon

1. What time do you start/end work and do you have a break for lunch?

I normally get to the farm about 5:30AM and get home around dinner time. I do take a lunch break.

2. Do your children help you on the farm now?

My children love to come to the farm and learn but they're not quite old enough yet. Next summer my oldest daughter should be able to start driving tractors for me.

3. Does your wife work on the farm too?

My wife works in our office from time to time.

4. Do you own any horses, cows, or any other animals?

We own two horses and a dog.



5. Are you a photographer? If not, you could be one! ☺

That is super encouraging and very much appreciated! I wouldn't consider myself one just yet, but maybe one day. Here's a picture I took recently from one of my fields.



6. Do you eat the lettuce you grow on your farm?

We love eating our lettuce. I'll take some home every week so we have a fresh salad at dinner.

7. What is your favorite fruit or vegetable?

That's a tough one. I really like lettuce!

8. Are there other things you produce on the farm, or other jobs you have?

We farm lettuce, hay, and wheat. It requires a lot of tractor work.

9. Do your kids help you plant the vegetables?

My kids have helped me plant our garden.

10. Are your kids vegetarians?

My kids are not vegetarians.

11. Do you have any neighbors?

Our farm has neighbors just down the road.

12. Do you pack your kids a lot of fruits and vegetables in their lunches?

Yes we do!

13. Do your kids ever destroy the plants?

Only after harvest and we're working the ground up.

14. What is your daily schedule?

My daily schedule starts early and usually ends late. The days are filled with learning opportunities, that's for sure.

15. What time do you have to wake up when you start the day?

I wake up around 4:30AM on most days.

Now you may have more questions after this letter. If you do, just let your teacher know and we'll do our best to get some information back to you. It's been fun getting to hear from you all. I hope you all have wonderful holidays and keep asking questions. It's the best way to learn!

Your farmer friend,  
Jon Dinsmore

P.S. Keep eating your veggies. Especially lettuce!!