

## Growing Vegetables in a Perennial Clover Living Mulch: Sawyer Farm's Tillage Reduction Journey



Sawyer Farm - living mulch between annual crops. Photos by Akos Szilvasi, provided by author.

By Lincoln Fishman

Sawyer Farm is in the hill town of Western Massachusetts. We've farmed here since 2010. In the early years, an aggressive regime of cover cropping and applications of homemade compost helped build soil health. However, the whole farm is on a slope, and, while contoured beds reduced erosion, they didn't eliminate it. In particular, increasingly intense rain events in the fall (the tail end of hurricanes moving up the coast) were causing visible erosion. These rains were coming in the critical period when fall cover crops were getting established and didn't provide full soil protection. Still, our cover cropping and manure applications seemed to compensate and soil health improved year over year until 2015.

It took us a while to reach the obvious conclusion: the frequency and intensity of our tillage were causing systemic damage and the cover crops and compost were just our annual apology for the damage we'd done.

Still, recognizing the impacts of tillage and actually moving towards tillage reduction are two different things. We manage five acres of vegetables, mostly storage crops with a relatively low price per pound. Five acres is relatively tiny, but enough that many small-scale, no-till systems seemed impractical for us in terms of labor or materials. (I'll spare you the full story, but we've experimented with tarps and transferred mulch, and still use them for certain crops.) Crimped rye is scalable, but rye doesn't reliably reach anthesis (commencement of flowering, the ideal time to terminate the crop) until mid-June for us, so it was only a solution for a few crops.

We initially settled for a partial solution. We tilled in the spring, got our crops established, and then broadcast Dutch White clover into standing cash crops in July, after the last cultivation or once weeds were well controlled. (Alliums, brassicas, Solanaceae, cucurbits, corn – everything but storage carrots/

beets and salad greens.) The clover provides 100% soil cover by late August, in time to protect the soil from fall rains. The clover overwinters, greens up in early spring, and is easy to incorporate before planting. This system is low labor, requires no new equipment, offers many soil health benefits, and the clover seems to have no negative impact on cash crop yields. Though Dutch White doesn't produce as much biomass or reach down as deep as many other cover crops, it is, in our experience, much easier to manage on a farm growing a diversity of crops, because it requires much less planning than other covers.

Dutch White clover is the clover you see in lawns or overgrazed pasture. It is low-growing - rarely over 8". Other types of clover can work undersown with certain crops (e.g. red clover under corn), but Dutch White, because it is so short, offers much less competition and requires little to no mowing. It spreads aggressively through stolons, so it effectively suppresses weeds.

After a number of years of undersowing Dutch White clover and discing it in the spring, we asked ourselves what, in retrospect, seems like an obvious question: Would it be possible to grow vegetables directly in clover? We doubted it--it seemed like the clover would provide too much competition for a little transplant, but we began doing research and found some university studies looking at transplanted vegetables or direct-seeded corn in perennial clover with exciting but mixed results. What we didn't find was any growers using the system.

In the spring of 2020, we ran a small experiment to test the viability of transplanting crops directly in established Dutch White clover. We put cabbage, squash, and hemp transplants into a 1/10 acre piece of clover that we had established the year before. We mowed the clover short with a lawnmower, used a bulb auger on a cordless drill to make a little hole, threw in a transplant and a handful of

compost, pulled a line of drip tape down each row, and walked away. The clover immediately regrew and seemed to dominate the transplants. Oh well. We nearly forgot about our little experiment as we got busy with the 'real' crops. I occasionally noted that the transplants in clover hadn't actually died. They were even growing a little. But by mid-July, it was undeniable--those crops were really growing. At harvest, the cabbage heads were equivalent in size to the bare-soil cabbage in the next row over. The hemp was somewhat smaller than the bare-soil hemp, but the flowers were denser and slower to succumb to mold. The squash yield was unimpressive, but all-in-all, we were very pleasantly surprised. We'd avoided any kind of tillage in that experimental section, gotten good yields on two out of three crops, and hadn't done any work between transplanting and harvesting. We were excited to keep experimenting.

In 2021, we expanded the experiment to 1/2 acre and with more crops, but the weather conspired against our experiments. The spot we'd chosen doesn't drain well--fine in a normal year, but disastrous in 2021, when we received 16 inches of rain in July and more and more and more after that. Few crops--whether in bare soil or in clover--did well that year, so we didn't learn much. We certainly did notice, however, that there was no erosion in the clover plots.

For 2022, we got a grant for a Mechanical Transplanter. (The bulb auger works really well, but is too slow for multiple acres of transplants.) We put a coultter and an aggressive ripper tooth ahead of the planting shoe to open and loosen a small furrow for the transplant. We had to add a lot of weight (~250 pounds) to the packing wheels to effectively close the furrow, and then counterweight the drive wheel to get good ground contact. (I won't get into lots of detail here, but I am happy to share the nitty gritty--

(continued on A - 4)



# A Note from The Editor

*It's been a while... Hopefully you received our email that the fall issue of The Natural Farmer was delayed because I went on maternity leave nearly two-months before I expected to. Gratefully, despite a 3-week hospital stay and a helicopter ride her older brother is jealous of, our baby has been stable and strong since day 1. A huge thank you to the NOFA IC and TNF Advisory Committee - particularly Eliabeth Henderson for serving as guest editor of this issue - for support, patience and taking on extra work as I tended to the needs of my family and myself. You can expect to receive the Fall Issue 2022 as a "Special Issue" in January 2023 featuring the highly important and timely theme "Farmer Stress & Wellbeing." You can submit articles and stories about this theme through our website until January 1st. May you be warm & well this holiday, Elizabeth Gabriel, TNF Editor ✨*

## Introducing Corporate Capture

In this issue of TNF, we focus on concentration in the food system. As the cover image chart shows, major conventional food corporations have snatched up formerly independent organic brands. Phil Howard has been documenting this process for two decades as the number of independents has shrunk to the point that you can count them on one hand. In an article that summarizes his research, Howard lays out the extent of concentration, explains how it works to maximize profits for shareholders, and suggests ways to resist.

Even where BuyFresh/BuyLocal has been most successful, as in Vermont and the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts, 90% or more of the food people eat still comes through third parties according to USDA. The price markup by these markets is 100% or more. If a customer at a grocery pays \$2 for lettuce, the farmer gets only \$1. The contrast between what the farmer gets and the final price is much starker for "commodity" crops like milk, processing vegetables, and grains. If a customer pays \$4 for a box of organic cereal, the farmer may only get 10 cents. The overall farmer share of the consumer dollar has been falling steadily since Congress gradually reduced parity pricing and supply management from the late 1950s through the 1996 Farm Bill which disappeared parity altogether as corporate capture of global food chains made Washington, D.C. a command center. In tightly consolidated markets, farmers have to take whatever price is offered without any power to negotiate. The systemic racism that underlies the US/global food system singles

out African-American and other BIPOC farmers for especially brutal treatment.

Too many young farmers spend 10 years mastering the craft of farming, accessing land and farming resources, only to throw in the towel when they discover that they cannot earn a middle-class living with their farm business. Understanding the social and economic realities imposed by corporate capture may reduce the tendency to see this failure as personal. The system is stacked against mid-sized and smaller farms. The long history of racism and theft of land from native peoples sets the context for undervaluing food production and food chain workers. But rather than despair, let's take heart from the many forms of resistance our community of farmers and conscious eaters has created.

For over 50 years, NOFA chapters have put a lot of energy, resources, and creativity into developing direct sales markets for organic farmers. We took seriously the teaching of Booker T. Whatley - "Shun middlemen like the plague." The NOFAs have made major contributions to building networks of farmers markets, CSAs and Covid-inspired online ordering hubs. Despite these successes, organic farms are struggling to earn enough to cover production costs and provide living wages for themselves and their employees. Even with quality embellishments like certified organic, and grass-fed, the federal "cheap food" policy limits what farmers can charge.

Iowa farmer and champion of farmer justice George Naylor explains how price supports, supply management and conservation combine in a system that has the power to reign in the so-called "free market," allowing farms to diversify crops, reduce reliance on toxic materials and save monarch butterflies. Fellow champion, Michael Sligh, an organic farmer and one of the Agricultural Justice Project founders, lays out the rights that farmers should have. It may surprise you to realize that organic vegetable farms that sell over a million dollars a year to major retail buyers do not have written contracts and could be dropped in a heartbeat with no recourse. We reprint a summary of what to look for before you sign a contract based on guidelines from the Farmers Legal Action Group.

Grace Oedel, Executive Director of NOFA-VT, explains how crucial it is for the health of the planet to redouble our efforts to support local community-based farms. Edith Couchman, a long-time con-

scious eater and member of the NOFA-NH Board, holds up the Real Organic Project for campaigning against the National Organic Program's tolerance of distorted versions of organic and turns our gaze inward to test how ready we are as NOFA networks to oppose corporate domination.

Then we turn to some of the many creative ways to build economic and actual territory based on solidarity values.

Laura Edwards-Orr introduces us to the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) which is clearing paths for mid-sized and smaller farms to sell to institutions that historically have bought only from the lowest bidder. GFPP provides a ranking system based on five interrelated values: support for local economies, environmental sustainability, a valued workforce, animal welfare, community health and nutrition. In "Building a Food Hub for Economies of Collaboration," Headwater Foods, Inc. founder Chris Hartman describes how a values-based food broker is helping NY farms meet the market opportunity that GFPP offers.

Ed Maltby, Executive Director of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers' Alliance, brings us up to date on the Danone/Horizon story of dropping its contracts with 89 northeast organic dairy farms without just cause and then gives a glimpse of the promising new ventures that could liberate dairy farmers from dependence on corporations with no commitment to our communities.

In an interview with Chuck Blood, we hear from a dairy farmer who is an active member of Organic Valley, the farmer cooperative that unites 1600 organic dairy farms. Chuck's story shows the relentless dedication required for farmers to keep control of their coops and have a say in production and sales.

Emily Reiss, an expert in grain production, tells how Farmer Ground Flour serves a similar function for grain growers, enabling them to group together for market power, longer-term planning, and stable pricing.

Finally, Jared Spears, a staffer at the Schumacher Center for a New Economics, introduces us to Berkshares, an alternative local currency that circulates in the Berkshire region of Massachusetts. By using Berkshares, you can remove your reliance on the dollar to buy goods and services and stop the steady

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## The Natural Farmer

Volume 1 | Number 133 Summer 2022

The Natural Farmer covers news of the organic movement nationally and internationally and features stories about farmers, homesteaders and gardeners, especially those from the 7 NOFA member states, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, and Vermont. TNF is provided to direct subscribers and as a perk to NOFA members and is mailed quarterly to over 6000 homes.

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# In This Issue

## SECTION A

**Cover Story:** *Growing Vegetables in a Perennial Clover Living Mulch*, by Lincoln Fishman.....A-1

### Opinion and News

A Note from the Editor, *Elizabeth Henderson*.....A-2

Chapter News.....A-6

Rev. Charles Melvin Sherrod, Civil Rights Leader Obituary.....A-8

**Policy Update** - NOFA's 2023 Farm Bill Campaign.....A-9

### Articles & Essays

Evaluating Reduced and No-Till, *By Christine Manuck*.....A-10

Inheriting Genetic Resilience in Tomatoes & Ourselves, *By Petra Page-Mann* .....A-12

Native Farmers Push for More Equitable Training and Support in the Farm Bill, *By Gabriel Pietrorazio*.....A-14

Finding Common Grounds, *By j.p. muhly*.....A-16

## SECTION B

### Special Focus - Challenging Corporate Capture

**Cover Story:** Concentration and Power in the Food System, *By Phil Howard* .....B-1

### Articles & Essays

Farmers' Rights: It is not too Late to Set This Right, *By Michael Sligh*.....B-2

What Constitutes a Fair Contract, *An excerpt from the Agriculture Justice Project Toolkit*.....B-3

Defending the US Organic Movement Against Corporate Capture, *By Edith Pucci Couchman*.....B-4

Values-Based Purchasing: Opening Markets for Mid-sized and Smaller Farms, *By Laura Edwards-Orr*.....B-8

A Real Organic Dairy Farm - An interview with Chuck Blood, *By Elizabeth Henderson*.....B-10

Farmer Ground Flour - Growing a local grain ecosystem, *By Emily Reiss*.....B-12

USDA Discrimination Against African- American Farmers Continues, *Testimony by Dania Davy*.....B-12

Danone Puts Local Last: The Fight to save Organic Dairy Farms in the Northeast, *By Ed Maltby*.....B-15

Farming at the intersection of economic and climate crises, *By Grace Oedel*.....B-16

Building a Food Hub for Economies of Collaboration, *By Chris Hartman*.....B-18

A Parity Farm Bill for a Future with Family Farms and Monarchs, *By George Naylor*.....B-19

BerkShares: an Alternative Vision for Thriving Regional Economies, *By Jared Spears*.....B-20

**Book Reviews**.....B-23

**Cover Photo Credit:** *Concentration and Power in the Food System*: This chart shows how concentration has extended its tentacles ensnaring many formerly independent organic brands in the control of conventional food corporations. Phil Howard, professor at Michigan State University and author of *Concentration and Power in the Food System*, has been tracking this process for two decades.

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(Clover- continued from A-1)

-please contact me if you're interested.) In the end, the transplanter created a 6-8" wide furrow and effectively set the transplants. We were able to run the transplanter just about as fast as in bare soil, making transplanting into clover at scale a reality.

Here's a rundown of which crops worked and which didn't in 2022.

#### Homeruns:

Brassicas - cabbage, kale, collards, broccoli  
Multiple varieties of cherry and beefsteak tomatoes  
Green beans  
Chard  
Delicata squash  
Sunflowers

#### Failures:

Ace red peppers  
Cucumbers  
(Neither made much fruit. They seemed to suffer from either low soil temps or clover competition.)

#### Successful, but with a caveat:

Direct-seeded dry beans did well, but need to be harvested in a timely manner because the clover creates a damp environment around the pods as they dry down.

Summer squash yielded less per week than summer squash successions on plastic, but produced all season long.

Poblanos and hot peppers took a long time to produce (lower soil temperatures under clover?) but made a respectable crop after all.

Butterhead lettuce transplanted 6/1 grew nicely and was slow to bolt, but was unmarketable due to slug damage. More upright Romaine-type lettuce might do better, or later successions in the warmer, drier months.

#### Food for thought

When we broadcast the clover, we often mix it with our chicken feed--a mix of cracked grains. Sometimes whole barley kernels make it through the grinder. A number of these managed to germinate this spring and made nice seed heads. Next year, we'll explore whether drilling barley and oats into the clover in spring is a possibility.

We have a lot of faith in this system at this point,

and will greatly expand it in 2023, though it is very much in development.

Here are its current limitations:

1) Crop limited. We believe there are certain crops that will never thrive in perennial clover, such as small, slow-growing direct-seeded crops like carrots. Some transplanted crops, like onions, we haven't experimented with, but we think will not be competitive enough.

2) Cool soil temperatures. Compared with plastic or bare soil, perennial clover shades and cools the soil. It is hard to imagine that it will ever be a good system for early production in the Northeast.

3) Transplanter modification issues. The planting shoe made a furrow that slowly filled in with weeds. Within a few days after transplanting, the clover on either side of the furrow regrew quickly and canopied over the furrow, but weeds did germinate in the furrow. Though they were slow to grow, the weeds finally emerged and took off in late July. We mowed and weed whacked a couple of times to control weed growth. Weeds were much less of an issue when we were using the bulb auger. Creating less disturbance is possible, but will require modifications.

4) Yield reduction. While some crops do not seem to exhibit any yield drag in clover, others do. It is difficult to quantify this loss as it varies so much depending on the season, the variety, etc. For us, some yield loss is economically and/or environmentally justified because of the many benefits of the system.

#### Benefits of the perennial clover system

1) Soil health and ecosystem services abound! Eliminates tillage and erosion. Clover feeds the soil biology all year round. Carbon is being captured, rainfall infiltrates easily, moisture is kept in the soil through shading. Pollinators specifically and insects generally are present in huge numbers. Introducing a perennial into our production system leads to stability in the soil community that cannot be achieved in an annual system.

2) Reduced pest pressure. Aside from slug damage on lettuce and some cabbage worm damage on cab-



Corn stalks above perennial clover. Provided by author.

bage, there were few pest issues and we didn't use row cover on any crops.

3) Clover fixes N, which saves on fertilizer.

4) Labor and fuel savings. Even with additional mowing/weed whacking because of weeds in the planting furrow, the labor per acre was lower than bare-soil cultivation. In between transplanting/seedling and harvesting, the tractor makes zero passes over the field.

5) Pleasant to work in and around. Harvesting in clover is a pleasure. Never dusty, never muddy. The harvest crew is always standing or kneeling on a lawn of clover. The biological diversity inherent in this system is aesthetically very pleasing. Unlike in bare soil, you can lay down anywhere in the clover field and watch hundreds of insects interacting with each other, the clover, and the crop. The field feels and is alive and vital.

(continued on A-5)



Sawyer Farm. Photos by Akos Szilvasi, provided by author.

(Clover - continued from A-4)

### Unanswered Questions

There's so much we don't know about this system yet, both because it's new and because it's a living system that is inherently far more complex and dynamic than growing in bare soil or on plastic. Water and nutrient dynamics are still a bit of a mystery to us. The clover seems to compete for water during crop establishment, but later in the season, it appears to help conserve moisture through shading. Does it help dry out the soil in spring through transpiration? What is the N contribution of the clover in its first year of establishment? Second year? Etc. Does mowing the clover release N for the crop? In what time frame? Does the clover reduce leaching and allow nutrients to persist for longer in the soil? Does it compete for nutrients with the cash crop? If so, which ones? And so on!

Having all these unanswered questions can be a headache. I definitely started farming with a "straight rows, clean fields" mentality. I often failed at that, but I knew what we were aiming for. There was a smaller set of variables. Making the shift to clover has been a real trust exercise. I'm always having to remind myself to be less controlling and put more faith in complexity and diversity. Honestly, it took more mental effort to stop worrying about weeds in the clover than the physical effort it used to take to actually weed!

Now I try to remind myself that these unanswered questions are a good thing. The more complex and biodiverse the agricultural ecosystem is, the more questions there will be. There are more connections and interactions, and more stability and resilience. Giving up control, trusting nature, embracing uncertainty – I think those are things that every farmer has to learn pretty quickly. We are constantly reminded to be humble and are frequently graced with wonder. That seems to be the main kind of compensation we get in this line of work.

### How long does the clover persist?

In our limited experience, the clover forms a solid stand for about three years. In the fourth year, perennial grasses and forbs begin to get a foothold, though crops can still thrive. In year five, the clover field begins to resemble pasture, and needs to be plowed down and re-seeded (or grazed/hayed/fallowed). This season, we plowed and cover cropped a half acre that was sown to clover in 2018. In 2023, it will grow bare-soil crops, undersown with clover. So this is not truly a no-till system, but it does make tillage rare. Once it's fully established on our farm, we imagine that, in a given year, 75% of our acreage will be clover, and 25% will be bare soil. It's possible that with more frequent mowing and more careful applications of lime and sulfur, the clover could persist for longer.

### What's Next

For 2023, we've received a SARE grant, in partnership with American Farmland Trust, Arthur Siller, PhD candidate at UMass School of Stockbridge, and our neighbor, Trip Shaw, at Four Corners Farm. We will gather data to do an economic and soil health analysis of the perennial clover system versus a bare soil control. We hope this data will help point the way for growers interested in trialing this system who need hard data on potential yield losses versus labor/fertilizer/fuel/soil health savings.

We'll also be further modifying the transplanter to reduce weeds in the furrow, and expanding the number of crops we're experimenting with.

The real next step for us is working with other growers who think this could be an exciting tillage reduction system for their farms. Ultimately, we hope to be part of a network of growers problem-solving scalable no-till solutions together.

*If you're interested in learning more about growing crops in a perennial living clover mulch, please contact Lincoln at [sawyerfarmshare@gmail.com](mailto:sawyerfarmshare@gmail.com) or at 413-320-8535.*

*Lincoln has been farming for 15 years, and lives in western, Massachusetts, with his partner and their two children. This winter, he'll be speaking about growing in clover at the NOFA/Mass winter conference, the New England Fruit and Vegetable Conference, and CISA's reduced-till webinar series.*

✱

### A Bit About Cover Cropping

by Christine Manuck, NOFA/Mass Soil Health Projects Manager

As Lincoln outlined, cover cropping plays an important role in building and maintaining soil carbon content and improving the health of your soils. Adding a cover crop to your production can increase the availability of nutrients (including nitrogen), increase water infiltration, decrease erosion of soil and amendments, and support more soil biology, ranging from beneficial microbes to earthworms and insects, to help your cash crops thrive. Cover crops can build soil organic matter, which is essential to help crops thrive by promoting deeper root growth, more water retention (critical for droughty years such as this past summer), better rain infiltration (helpful for super rainy years such as last year or during heavy rain events), and reduced compaction. The type of cover crop you choose depends upon your goals, including cash crop production and timing, desired benefits from cover crops, termination strategy, and any other existing pest-related factors, such as weeds or diseases. Like people, some cover crops are better suited in some roles than others. If you're new to cover cropping or want to learn more to optimize the cover crops you utilize, New Hampshire's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed a Cover Crop Planting Specification Guide that can be applicable for farmers in Massachusetts.

Some exciting aspects of introducing cover cropping or incorporating other soil health-focused management practices are the experimentation/trial and error efforts, as Lincoln described, and visualizing changes in soil health, crop growth, production, and pest incidence over time. The Soil Technical Assistance program at NOFA/Mass uses its soil health assessments and carbon proxy testing to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the current conditions and, with serial testing over many years, soil health changes over time. Doing so offers an interesting way to know how the management you've implemented on your farm is benefitting your soil, and to learn ways to make further improvements. NOFA/Mass has also been involved in several soil health-related grant-funded projects over the past few years, including a USDA-funded Conservation Innovation Grant project that evaluated soil health at 9 Northeastern farms and funding from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources Soil Health Program, in conjunction with American Farmland Trust, that is helping us to increase farmer awareness of the relationship between farm management and soil health. Continual soil health monitoring through these projects and the Soil Technical Assistance program helps us quantify the impacts of management practices, such as cover cropping, on carbon sequestration and soil health.

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# Chapter News

## Massachusetts

### News!

Heading into the new year, NOFA/Mass is gearing up for some important new programming and collaborations, both locally and regionally. Our Food Access Program is growing by leaps and bounds, and we are thrilled to announce that we have received full funding to cover the cost of food for our Farm Share program for 2023-2024. Launching in Spring 2023, this state-wide program will offer fresh produce at no cost to communities across Massachusetts that would otherwise not have access to a typical CSA share.

Other new initiatives include a partnership with other NOFA chapters and similar organizations from Maine to the Carolinas on climate-smart farming; a project initiating research on "Closing the Mushroom Production Loop: Evaluating Soil Microbe Changes Following Field Application of Compost Inoculated with Spent Mushroom Substrate;" and work building on the previous exploration of agroforestry with a project on "Expanding Agroforestry & Nut Crops in Massachusetts through Peer-to-Peer Farmer Education and Consumer Outreach." Finally, we're excited to continue expanding our collaboration with the Pocasset/Pokanoket Land Trust through two programs involving education for beginning BIPOC farmers and outreach to socially disadvantaged farmers.

### Policy

The 2021-22 Massachusetts formal legislative session ended over the summer. While many of our priority policies will need to be reintroduced, we'll start the next session with a broader coalition of allies and the momentum of several important mile markers reached toward critical reforms for ecological integrity and justice. Of particular note, our priority measure to modernize pesticide reporting (H.4931) was actually passed by the entire House of Representatives and sent to the Senate in June. This measure would digitize annual reporting of pesticide use so that we have a more accurate view of current pesticide use across our Commonwealth.

We celebrate the passage of a historic climate bill, signed by Governor Baker on August 11th, 2022 that expands renewable energy, decarbonizing the transportation sector and prohibiting biomass from being considered renewable. A particular provision that our Mass Pollinator Network successfully advocated for was the reinstatement of the Pollinator-Friendly Solar Incentive Program, which provides solar developers an incentive to install and maintain certified pollinator-friendly habitats on solar fields. We thank our Mass Pollinator Network for taking the time to make calls and write letters!

### Welcome

NOFA/Mass recently hired a new Conference Coordinator, Jane Olson, who will take over from Jason Valcourt, who recently stepped down after over 7 years coordinating our Summer and Winter Conferences. Jane brings years of experience in tree work, farming, gardening and landscaping, along with important administrative skills and a particular passion for composting and microscopy. She immediately rolled up her sleeves and enthusiastically got to work on Winter Conference preparations, and we are thrilled to have her on our team.

### Events

NOFA/Mass Winter Conference  
January 14-15, 2023: Saturday, January 14 at Worcester State University in Worcester, MA and online.  
Sunday, January 15 online only.

Monthly Minimum Till Farmers Call: First Monday of every month at 7:00pm Online. More information available at: [nofamass.org/nofa-events/](http://nofamass.org/nofa-events/)

Continuing the Equity Conversation at NOFA  
NOFA/Mass will host another series of conversations on racial equity in organic farming starting in February 2023. Dates are tentatively set for the first

Fridays of February, March, and April at 9:00am. To join the conversation and find updated information on dates, topics, and registration, visit [nofamass.org/nofa-events/](http://nofamass.org/nofa-events/) or contact [ulumpixan@nofamass.org](mailto:ulumpixan@nofamass.org)

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## New Hampshire

### News!

Thank you to the sponsors, speakers, performers, attendees, members, and farmers who made NOFA-NH's 50th Anniversary events at Colby Hill Inn and Brookford Farm such spectacular celebrations of the past five decades of organic gardening, farming, and food in the Granite State. We ate delicious, locally sourced meals, explored our past, looked to the future of sustainable agriculture in New Hampshire and beyond, cultivated new connections, and made fond memories. You can explore these events and our 50th Anniversary Archive at [www.nofanh.org/celebrating50years](http://www.nofanh.org/celebrating50years).

NOFA-NH extends our deepest gratitude to our Share the Bounty partners who helped raise over \$10,000 for our 2023 Farm Share Program. Thank you to the Monadnock Food Co-op, Vital Communities & The Local Crowd Monadnock, Merrimack County Savings Bank, the Kearsarge Food Hub & Sweet Beet Farm + Market + Café, Revival Kitchen & Bar, Warner Public Market, The Works Bakery Café, Flatbread Company Portsmouth & North Conway, and C&S Wholesale Grocers for your generosity and support of food access for all in our communities!

Our 2022 CRAFT season has come to a close. Over 170 farmers, gardeners, and interested eaters came together to build skills, network and work to improve our local food system at six on-farm CRAFT tours. In addition to our on-farm tours, we offered four online CRAFT webinars this fall. Over 55 registrants attended these virtual farm business-focused workshops presented by industry experts. Thank you to our farmer hosts and webinar instructors for sharing your space and expertise with us! If you are interested in hosting a group or presenting a workshop for our 2023 CRAFT season, please email us at [info@nofanh.org](mailto:info@nofanh.org).

We are excited to announce that our Bulk Order Program website will go live in December 2022. Please visit [www.nofanh.org/bulk-order](http://www.nofanh.org/bulk-order) for more information.

### Policy

The NH Farm to School Network, with the support of NOFA-NH, NH Hunger Solutions, and Save the Children, plans to submit the Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement program as a bill to the New Hampshire legislature again this legislative season. Initially submitted in 2021, the reimbursement program will incentivize New Hampshire school districts and food service directors to purchase locally grown and produced food for breakfast and lunch services in cafeterias across the state, boosting youth health and wellness, and agricultural viability.

### Openings

NOFA-NH is always looking for passionate farmers, gardeners, eaters, educators, and activists to join our dynamic volunteer Board of Directors and our numerous committees! Please contact us to learn more: [xochi@nofanh.org](mailto:xochi@nofanh.org).

### Events

Please save the date for an exciting online panel NOFA-NH is presenting in collaboration with Seacoast NH Permaculture. Join us on January 18, 2023, at 7 PM for an online panel discussion: Food and Climate: Carbon Market Pitfalls & Better Strategies for Regenerative Farming Practices. Panel speakers include Cat Buxton of Grow More, Waste Less, Caroline Gordon of Rural Vermont, Ste-

phen Leslie of Cedar Mountain Farm & Cobb Hill Cheese, and Julie Davenson of the Regenerative Food Network, Southshire Meats, & NOFA-NH. To learn more and register, please visit [www.nofanh.org/pes](http://www.nofanh.org/pes).

We hope you will join NOFA-NH and Seacoast NH Permaculture for another collaboration this winter: a 5-part Zoom book discussion of *A Precautionary Tale: How One Small Town Banned Pesticides, Preserved Its Food Heritage and Inspired a Movement* by Philip Ackerman-Leist. Meetings will take place every other Thursday from January 5 to March 2. Register for the whole 5-week series for \$10 (NOFA members) or \$15 (non-members). Only six spots are available and will be filled on a first come first serve basis. Participants must purchase their own copy of the book. Learn more and sign up at [www.nofanh.org/book-club](http://www.nofanh.org/book-club).

Finally, please save the date for NOFA-NH's 21st annual Winter Conference, which will take place online and in-person at Southern NH University in Manchester, NH, on Saturday, February 11, 2023. This year's conference theme is *The Art of Food & Farming: Skill Sharing for a Brighter Future*. We hope you will join us to hone our skills and build community resilience this winter! Learn more and register at [www.nofanh.org/winterconference](http://www.nofanh.org/winterconference).

### Contact

603-224-5022, [www.nofanh.org](http://www.nofanh.org), [info@nofanh.org](mailto:info@nofanh.org)

## New Jersey

### News!

NOFA NJ hosted a farm-to-table celebration on September 30 at Lima Family Farm in Hillsborough, NJ. Farmers, foodies, friends and partners of NOFA NJ and families with children all enjoyed local and organic foods prepared by chefs on-site. NOFA NJ's own Tony Kennette performed against the backdrop of a peachy sunset and silhouettes of grass-fed cattle.

Nearby at Drumthwacket, the official residence of the Governor of New Jersey, NOFA NJ finished filming the second season of "Growing in the Garden State," a series of approachable educational videos to help NJ residents grow their own food. Two episodes have already been released (Episode 1: Pollinator Patch and Episode 2: Pickled Radishes) and two more episodes are in post-production. Subscribe to the NOFA NJ YouTube to see them all!

### Policy

NOFA NJ Policy Committee Chair Cali Alexander and staff have been in constant engagement with NJ policymakers and stakeholders regarding a variety of efforts, from increasing educational opportunities for farmers and farmworkers to supporting the establishment of an Organic Farming Board within the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Recognizing the need for a unified representation of organic and regenerative agriculture in the Garden State, NOFA NJ has helped to connect partner organizations (such as Foodshed Alliance, North Jersey RC&D, and others) with legislators and other policymakers through this outreach.

### Welcome

NOFA NJ welcomes Lynn Flannery, our Winter Conference Coordinator, to the team!

### Openings

NOFA NJ is seeking volunteers to assist with our Winter Conference and also to assist with outreach and membership campaigns - help us grow the NOFA NJ Community!

### Contact

[nofanj.org](http://nofanj.org); 908-371-1111; [nofainfo@nofanj.org](mailto:nofainfo@nofanj.org)

*(continued on next page)*

# Chapter News

(from previous page)

## New York

### News!

As Fall starts toward Winter, we have been hard at work preparing for our annual Winter Conference. This year we will have workshops answering your questions about how to become certified, how to boost your farm's sales channels, how to save seeds, how to scale your business, advocacy workshops, and so many more! Learn more and register for the conference today at [www.nofany.org/2023conference](http://www.nofany.org/2023conference)

Thinking about where to get a local turkey for Thanksgiving or the first fruits of the season when summer rolls around?

NOFA-NY has developed an app that allows you to search NOFA-NY Certified Organic operations close to you so you can shop local and have a positive foodprint. The "Food & Farm Guide" feature allows you to search for local NOFA-NY Certified Organic farms or your favorite farm product (please visit the farm's website or contact them for more information on product availability, and how and where to purchase.) The "Organic Price Index" feature allows you to search by product and region to determine how products in your area are priced. If you are a NOFA-NY member, you can add to the Price Index by logging in and reporting your organic prices. The "Find a Market" feature, developed in partnership with the Farmers' Market Federation of New York, allows you to view a directory of all farmers' markets in New York State. You can filter by county or days of operation. Get directions, hours, contact information, and more.

You can download the app by going to: [www.nofany.org/resources/mobile-app](http://www.nofany.org/resources/mobile-app).

Partial funding for NOFA-NY's mobile app was provided through the New York State Agriculture Budget. We give big thanks to NY Agriculture Chairs Assemblymember Donna Lupardo and Senator Michelle Hinchey for their support in securing this funding.

### Events

2023 Winter Conference, 02/02/23-02/05/23, Virtual. Registration for our 41st Annual Winter Conference is now open; sign up today! <https://nofany.org/2023conference/>

### Contact

315.988.4000; [nofany.org](http://nofany.org); [info@nofany.org](mailto:info@nofany.org)

## Rhode Island

### Openings

NOFA RI is actively seeking new board members! If you would love to support organic farming in Rhode Island, please drop us a line at [nofari@live.com](mailto:nofari@live.com).

## Vermont

### News!

This fall we kicked off another year of our farmer learning cohorts, and added a new cohort opportunity! We're facilitating two learning cohorts for beginning early-stage farmers, Farm Beginnings and Journey Farmer, respectively. We also welcomed our second round of Jack Lazor Memorial Soil Health Stewards, an annual cohort of farmers who wish to deepen their commitment to soil stewardship in memory of the eponymous trail-blazing farmer. New this year, we're offering the opportunity for farmers to explore the world of educational farm programming for schoolchildren in a year-long, cohort-based environment as well. This cohort will gather and learn over the course of 2022, thanks to a Farm to School Grant from USDA Food and Nutrition Services.

Other recent developments in our work include: continued high-demand half-priced CSA shares

through our Farm Share Program, which we've grown 175% since the start of the COVID pandemic; preparation and network building by Farm Resilience Specialist Aaron Guman to increase our capacity to help build climate resilience in Vermont; and the advent of a new professional development opportunity for organic inspectors and other organic specialists in the form of trainings with Vermont Technical College.

### Policy

**Farm Bill:** We have continued to work on our regional Farm Bill platform in collaboration with the other NOFA chapters and are starting to plan opportunities for our members and producers to engage in Farm Bill advocacy. In addition to sharing the details of our platform this fall, we will have a workshop on the Farm Bill at the Winter Conference and hope to bring Vermont's congressional delegation to meet with farmers on farms and virtually as the Farm Bill is written in 2023.

**Payment for Ecosystem Services:** Through our continued engagement in the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) Working Group, convened by the Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets, we have been tasked with soliciting input from our communities about the direction of a possible PES program in Vermont. There are still multiple options on the table as the Working Group prepares to report back to the legislature in January 2023. The Working Group may choose to roll out a pilot PES program on a limited number of farms focused on one or more quantifiable ecosystem services, invest in streamlining and making existing state and federal funds more readily accessible to a greater number of producers or invest in truth-testing multiple program options on the ground in the next year-two years.

**Organic Dairy:** As organic dairy farmers continue to struggle under a stagnant pay price and skyrocketing costs, we are continuing to seek emergency

relief through USDA in collaboration with our Congressional delegation. We have also conducted outreach to FSA and NRCS in Vermont to explore possible avenues for relief and to better understand program flexibilities needed to provide necessary relief in similar circumstances in the future. We are also contacting milk buyers directly and asking for pay price increases (in partnership with MOFGA, NOFA-NY, and NODPA) and are setting up meetings with them.

### Welcome

NOFA-VT is excited to welcome two new staff members in new positions: Aaron Guman as Farm Resilience Specialist and Cailey Gibson as Development Manager, and Jaden Hill as Education and Outreach Americorps Member!

### Openings

For the latest openings, please visit [nofavt.org/jobs](http://nofavt.org/jobs).

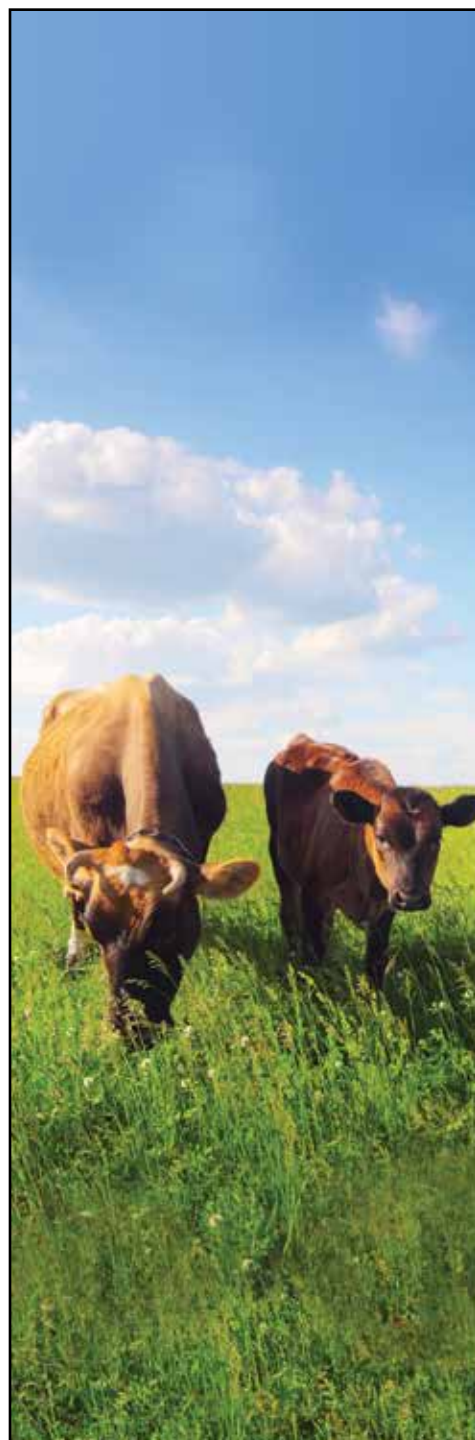
### Events

We're looking forward to our first in-person Winter Conference since 2020! We'll be gathering for our 41st annual Winter Conference at the University of Vermont in Burlington, VT on Saturday, February 18, 2023, with some longer "intensive" workshops scheduled on Sunday, February 19. Up-to-date details can be found at [nofavt.org/conference](http://nofavt.org/conference).

### Contact

Reach NOFA-VT at 802-434-4122, [info@nofavt.org](mailto:info@nofavt.org), and [nofavt.org](http://nofavt.org)

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**Rev. Charles Melvin Sherrod, Civil Rights Leader, Founder of Nation's Largest Black-owned Farm and First Community Land Trust, Dies at 85**

Albany, GA -- Rev. Charles Melvin Sherrod, whose grassroots organizing of unregistered Black voters sent shock waves through the segregated South, and kickstarted the Albany Movement, has died. He was 85.

Sherrod, whose death was confirmed by his family, died of natural causes at his home in Albany on Tuesday at 3:45 p.m.

"He was a great husband, a great father and great servant to his community," said his wife of 56 years, Shirley Miller Sherrod. "His life serves as a shining example of service to one's fellow man."

Sherrod played a transformative role in Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, cofounding SNCC, and inspiring Blacks in Southwest Georgia to straighten their backs and stand up for their rights.

Born January 2, 1937, in rural Surry, Virginia, Sherrod moved with his grandmother and siblings to nearby Petersburg where he became president of his high school student body. He earned both his undergraduate and divinity degree at Virginia Union University in Richmond before engaging in sit-ins at segregated churches and department store lunch counters.

In April 1960, he traveled to Shaw University in Raleigh where he cofounded with others the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The following February, the organization dispatched him and three other SNCC workers to Rock Hill, South Carolina where he chose jail over bail and spent 30 days on the chain gang. It was a strategy he would employ again and again throughout his civil rights career.

In October 1961, Sherrod, headed to Albany as SNCC's first field secretary to help register Blacks to vote. His mastery at organizing mass meetings and empowering Black youth to stand up for their rights, mobilized parents and the status-quo to get off the sidelines. The result was 'The Albany Movement' that garnered national and international attention and attracted scores of demonstrators, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

His civil rights work was not restricted to Albany. He helped bus demonstrators from Southwest Georgia to the 1963 March on Washington and ensured strong attendance in support of the Mississippi Freedom Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Meanwhile, back in Southwest Georgia, Sherrod remained fully invested, spearheading voter registration efforts in surrounding counties, including the racially hostile Baker County. In the summer of 1965, he met the love of his life, Shirley Miller, the daughter of a Black farmer gunned down in his own pasture, by a white farmer whom an all-white jury refused to indict for his murder.

After completing his master's in divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1966, Sherrod broke ranks with SNCC over its ouster of whites. He cofounded, alternatively, the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, continuing with his wife their voter registration work.

In July 1968, Sherrod traveled to Israel with seven others to explore the idea of creating a community-held farm to serve as a safe haven for Black farmers thrown off their land during the Movement. Ultimately serving as the leader, Sherrod took the reins, secured the needed capital and acquired the 5,735-acre New Communities, Inc. in neighboring Lee County.

From 1969 to 1985, he served at the helm of what became the nation's largest Black-owned farm and first community land trust. That is, until drought and discriminatory loan practices brought about its loss. Still, Sherrod stayed the course. He served as one of

Albany's first Black city commissioners from 1976 to 1990, ran unsuccessfully as a state senator in 1996, taught on faculty at Albany State University and served as chaplain at the Georgia State Prison in Homerville.

However, he never allowed himself to forget about the loss of New Communities. In 1999, acting on behalf of the nonprofit, he and Shirley joined other Black farmers in a class action lawsuit, suing the United States Department of Agriculture with discriminatory loan practices. What they recovered in an out-of-court settlement cleared the way for the nonprofit to acquire the 1,638-acre Cypress Pond plantation near Albany. This former antebellum plantation, where the enslaved toiled and which is now managed by descendants of the enslaved, serves as a legacy to him.

In addition to his wife Shirley, Sherrod is survived by two adult children, Russia Sherrod of Albany, Georgia and Kenyatta (Mikhiela) Sherrod of Marietta, Georgia, and five granddaughters, Kourtney (Charles, III) Sherrod Corbin of Auburn, Al, Mia Sherrod of Dallas, Tx, Kiera Sherrod of Marietta, Simone Sherrod of Marietta and Khloe Sherrod of Albany, Ga.

Predeceased by his maternal grandmother Ida Walker, parents Martha Mae Gipson and Raymond Sherrod and brother Altha Gipson, Charles is survived by siblings Ricardo "Dump" (Doris) Sherrod of Fort Washington, MD, Roland Leon (Alet) Sherrod of Richmond, Sheilda Sherrod Fobbs of Richmond and Michael Gipson of Richmond.

He is also survived by his mother-in-law, Grace Miller of Baker County, Ga, and in-laws Nannie (Paul) Jones of Cincinnati, Oh, Sandra (Melvin) Jones of Albany, Rubertha Hall of Salt Lake City, Utah, Debra Walker of Atlanta, and Hosea (Haley)



Charles Sherrod. Source: <https://www.sherrodinstitute.org/>

Miller, Jr. of Leesburg.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that tax-deductible donations in Rev. Sherrod's name be made to The Charles Sherrod Community Development Corporation. Gifts can be mailed to the following address: C/O The Sherrod Institute, 1216 Dawson Rd # 108, Albany, GA 31707.

This article was first printed October 11, 2022, Contact: Clennon L. King, AugustineMonica MediaWorks, 207.450.3585, [clennon@augustine-monica.com](mailto:clennon@augustine-monica.com)

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# Policy Update

## NOFA's 2023 Farm Bill Campaign

The 7 Northeast Organic Farming Association chapters have come together to identify our region's greatest farming and food system needs, and policies that can address them. As the farm bill process unfolds, we will continue to collaborate and offer opportunities for you to inform and join in on our advocacy campaign.

### Principles

In the midst of the chaotic pressure cooker that threatens to overwhelm our movement for food sovereignty based on agroecology, the multiple crises of climate, insurgent white supremacy, economic inequality, pandemics, military and political conflicts, we believe that there is an urgent need for a Farm Bill that is transformative, that will set in motion the transition from a system of farming and food that exploits land, people and animals and is guided by profit and competition. These principles came together with input gathered during spring and summer 2022 farm bill listening sessions hosted by NOFA chapters and through careful evaluation of campaigns being developed by organizations that share our values and priorities.

### We want a Farm Bill that...

**1. Invests in and protects the integrity of organic and agroecological practices as a core solution to our climate and biological crises.**

Organic practices improve soil health, promote biodiversity above and below ground, and require biological, mechanical, and cultural means of pest and disease control like cover crops and crop rotation. By actively working with natural systems and avoiding the use of synthetic fertilizers and toxic

pesticides, organic and agroecological systems eliminate some of the most potent greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions while sequestering carbon and protecting wildlife and their habitats. The Farm Bill must protect the integrity of the National Organic Program (NOP) and invest a substantial proportion of its funding to support expansion of organic and agroecological systems to 30% of farmland by 2030. (Soil Health means soils that have the continuing capacity to function as a vital, living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. The benefits of healthy soil include: supporting the production of food, feed, fiber, and fuel; facilitating infiltration, storage and filtration of water and protecting water quality; enhanced nutrient-holding capacity and nutrient cycling; providing habitat for diverse soil organisms; enhanced resilience to drought, extreme precipitation events, temperature extremes, pests, diseases and other stresses; breaking down harmful chemicals; reducing agricultural impacts on, and mitigating the impact on agriculture of, global climate change; and sequestering carbon and net long-term greenhouse gas benefits.)

**2. Ensures fair treatment and just livelihoods for farmers and workers throughout the food and farming system.**

Farming is essential work that, at its best, provides food for our communities while nourishing and protecting ecosystems and contributing to the creation of community wealth. At present, however, much of federal policy works to extract wealth, labor, and knowledge from those working the land to the detriment of farmers, workers, eaters, and the environment. We need a Farm Bill that reestablishes parity prices that are in balance with the rest of the economy through equitable and just supply management with mandatory participation in conservation measures. It is time to end "cheap food" funded by exploiting farmworkers and the land. The Farm Bill must ensure living wages, and dignified livelihoods

for every worker throughout the food supply chain and end the exclusion of farmworkers from labor protections.

**3. Invests in rural communities, increases fairness and resilience of local and regional supply chains, and breaks up consolidation in agriculture.**

To enable rural prosperity and increase local food system resilience, the farm bill should expand organic and regional food processing, distribution, and marketing infrastructure; invest in community leadership and cooperative ownership models; expand risk management opportunities and market access for small and medium-scale and diversified farms and ranches; and prioritize support for Black, Indigenous and People of Color, and new and beginning farmers and ranchers in all programming. For communities to thrive and build more just and vital regional food systems, more investment and support are also needed for affordable and accessible broadband, healthcare, housing, and renewable energy.

The farm bill must also reverse the devastation to local economies caused by the hyper-consolidation of food and agribusiness industries by enforcing existing antitrust laws, limiting mergers, guaranteeing fair contracts, and increasing corporate accountability to frontline communities.

**4. Centers racial justice across all programs and repairs past and ongoing racialized harm.**

USDA has a demonstrated history of discriminating against farmers of color in lending and credit practices and program implementation. Taken in the context of a broader history of land theft, forced labor and other forms of disenfranchisement, USDA

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### Evaluating Reduced and No-Till: Findings from a Three-Year Study of Northeast Farmers Utilizing Alternative Tillage Systems

By Christine Manuck

In 2019, the NOFA chapters, led by NOFA/Mass, were awarded a U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded project, Organic No-till on Northeast Farms: A Practical Exploration of Successful Methods. The project funded a multiyear evaluation of soil carbon, pests, and yield for 9 farmers committed to performing reduced or no-till farming. Farmers were encouraged to trial different management strategies to help guide their transition as they reduced tillage. In addition to regular learning cohort discussions, farmers also participated in soil health field days throughout the three-year project duration to encourage peer-to-peer learning. Data from soil carbon proxy testing, pest, and yield measurements found some modest improvements in soil bulk density, soil aggregation, and soil hardness. Farmers also reported a benefit from participating in the learning cohort calls and no-till methods trialing. Outreach successfully helped over 3,000 individuals learn more about soil carbon and soil carbon proxy testing, the benefits of reduced and no-till agriculture, and the practical implementation of different management strategies.

Transitioning Agriculture from a Carbon Emitter to a Carbon Sink through Tillage Management Soil has the capacity to absorb a significant quantity of carbon, but it can only serve that purpose if, on the individual farm level, farmers understand and implement the best practices to capture carbon and monitor changes over time. Despite currently being a high emitter of climate change-inducing CO<sub>2</sub>, agriculture is the one industry that has the capacity to absorb more CO<sub>2</sub> than it produces, with the potential to sequester between 25 and 60 tons of carbon per acre. Absorptions on this level would offset over 35% of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. By focusing on improving soil quality and putting carbon back into the soil, farming for

carbon sequestration can benefit both crops and the environment. When soil is exposed to the air, such as through tilling, carbon molecules in the soil are released into the atmosphere. Tillage reduction is a key way to keep carbon in the soil, helping agriculture to transition from a carbon source to a carbon sink.



Ruben soil testing. Credit Monique Bosch

Interest in tillage reduction practices has been increasing in popularity over the past two decades. No-till management can protect soil, conserving its properties and nutrients, while offering a potential means to save time and money. By minimizing soil disturbances, no-till farming can benefit soil water retention, nutrient storage, microbial and fungal life, and ecosystem diversity, which all directly impact crop growth. Conventional no-till farming frequently relies heavily on synthetic herbicides for weed control which are unavailable to organic farmers, requiring organic and herbicide-avoiding farmers to utilize other management strategies to make it successful for them. Such farmers are finding ways to transition to no-till production while avoiding herbicide use through methods including permanent bed systems, cover cropping, solarization and occultation, and use of no-till equipment such as the flail

mower, chisel plow, tandem disk, and broadfork.

Through the USDA-funded Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) project, NOFA chapters in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Connecticut developed a learning community of farmers in the Northeast who have been integrating reduced and no-till methods on their farms. The goal of the project was to increase the practice of organic no-till farming among Northeast farmers by supporting existing low and no-till growers as they innovated and experimented with proven and new methods. To achieve these goals, the three participating NOFA chapters spent the past three years evaluating changes in soil carbon at 9 partner farms in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Farmers participated in regular calls to develop a learning community around organic reduced/no-till production and to foster and support innovation between farms and also participated in community-wide educational events and workshops to share techniques. The farms partnered with their state extension agents to collect data on various indicators to evaluate the role of reduced and no-till in controlling and maintaining crop pests.

Farms participating in the project were, in Massachusetts, Freedom Food Farm, Gaining Ground Farm, and Red Shirt Farm; in Connecticut, Assawaga Farm, Massaro Farm, and Subedge Farm; and in New Jersey, Ironbound Farm, Morganics Family Farm, and Northslope Farm. Farms were selected based on their tillage practices at the project's outset and a committed interest in reducing tillage over the duration of the project. In addition to participating in learning group calls, farmers also provided records of crop yield, weed pressure, and pest observations over the project duration. NOFA/Mass staff performed soil carbon proxy tests at each farm annually to evaluate any changes in soil carbon sequestration and soil organic matter.

Soil carbon proxy testing offers an indirect, field-based measurement of soil carbon and soil organic matter. As the main component of soil organic

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- Caledonia Food Co-op, St. Johnsbury
- City Market, Onion River Co-op, Downtown & South End, Burlington
- Co-op Food Stores, White River Junction
- Hunger Mountain Co-op, Montpelier
- Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, Middlebury
- Morrisville Food Co-op, Morrisville
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(No-till from A-10)

matter and responsible for a soil's water-holding capacity, structure, and fertility, soil carbon plays an important role both in agriculture and the environment. Soil carbon proxy testing uses indicators commonly associated with the presence of carbon to indirectly evaluate the amount of carbon in soils. Certain physical, chemical, and biological components of soil, such as soil aggregates and water infiltration rate (physical), active carbon (chemical), and earthworm and root counts (biological), are highly present in soils abundant in carbon and, consequently, in organic matter. By assessing for these components, soil carbon proxy testing offers a way to quantitatively and qualitatively measure a soil's organic carbon content, and thus soil organic matter content, through a series of field-based metrics. In the context of the CIG project, soil carbon proxy testing was the primary means of assessing changes in soil carbon sequestration in response to changes in tillage management and practice implementation. Soil carbon proxy testing was supplemented with farmer surveying of management practices, crop yields, and pest pressures to understand the tillage practices and their effects on crop production and pests.

**Project Findings**

Project findings showed improvements in some soil carbon proxy test metrics, including soil hardness, bulk density, and depth to compaction, particularly when data was divided between farms performing reduced tillage and those performing no-till. Soil hardness was consistently lower for no-till farms than for reduced-till farms, as was depth to compaction. However, bulk density increased for no-till farms but decreased for reduced-till farms. Aside from soil hardness, bulk density, and depth to compaction, overall findings revealed mixed results on the effects of reduced and no-till management on other soil carbon metrics, crop yield, and pest pressures.

Self-reporting from project farmers on yield, pest, and crop damage resulted in only one farm reporting an improvement in crop yield, for spinach, compared with previous years. Crop yield findings reported by other respondents throughout the study found mixed results, with yields increasing for some crops in some years and decreasing for others. Similarly, farmers did not report either major improvements or negative impacts from no-till on pests; pest interventions and estimated production costs were found to be roughly the same as prior to starting no-till. Of the possible benefits observed by some farms, cabbage worms and potato beetles were the two pests identified as potentially decreasing in prevalence over the duration of the three-year project.

Weeds presented a significant issue for one participating farm that produces oats. While mowing instead of tilling reduced the amount of thistle in their fields, pressure from other weeds that were uncontrolled by mowing intensified. The farmers mowed early in an attempt to help oats get ahead of other weeds but were unsuccessful, leading to a nearly complete crop loss and the farm's worst production year ever. They ultimately concluded that, while zero tillage has benefitted their soil health, they would still need light, superficial tillage before spring oat crops. Minimal tilling for weed control was echoed by some other farmers, highlighting one of the primary issues facing farmers considering transitioning to no-till.

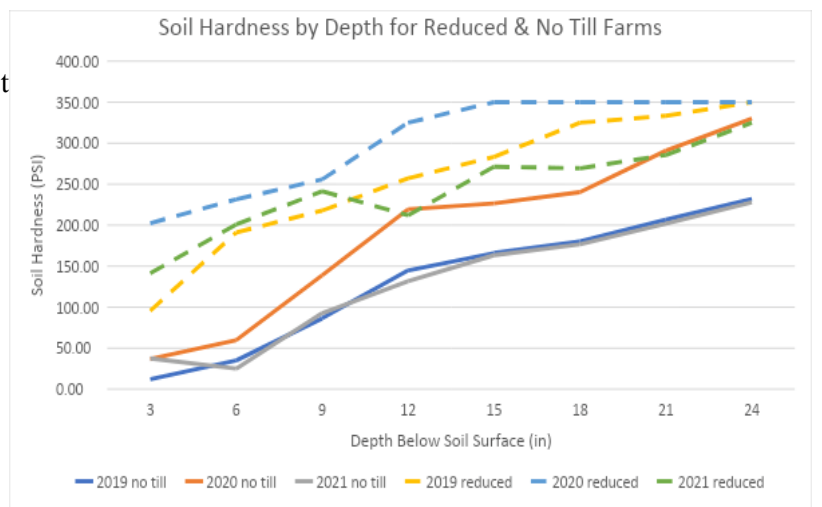
No-till management trialing was successful for farmers, as they were given the freedom and support to try different methods than they may have without the support of the project learning cohort and advisors. Management strategies trialed included solarization, occultation, interseeding, and mulches for weed control, cover cropping, board crimping, and use of a seed drill. In some instances, the strategies were successful, such as the use of tarps allowing farmers to dramatically reduce rototiller use, whereas others were less successful, such as when legume cover crops

were consumed by deer. In response to findings such as these, NOFA/Mass staff developed a No-Till Methods Fact Sheet of the different management strategies trialed by farmers throughout the project and the findings from each experience.

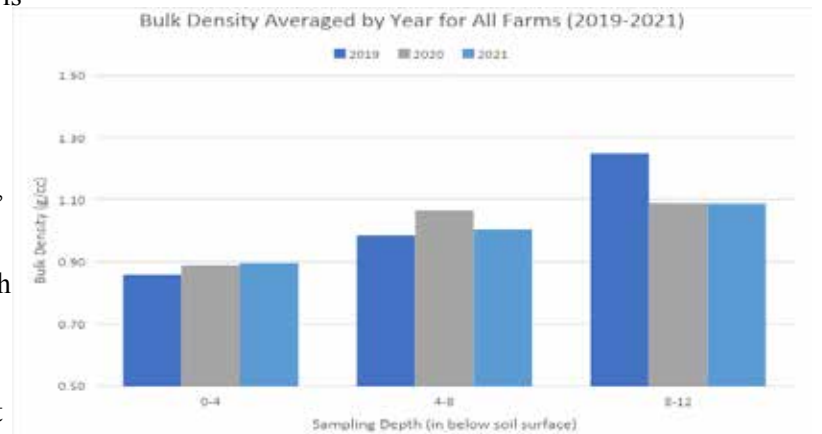
Both reduced and no-till farming have proven benefits to soil carbon, pest pressure, and yield. As no major changes to these components, whether positive or negative, were observed over the duration of the project, it is very possible that the three-year project duration was insufficient to capture the effect of these management changes over time. The general expectation is that it can take several years for pest pressures to begin to reduce after transitioning to a no-till system, and it is likely that the duration of this project failed to capture these potential improvements.

All NOFA chapters participating in this project led several on-farm events, workshops, and other educational outreach efforts to help promote reduced and no-till farming. Education outreach ranged from the practical implementation of no-till farming to soil carbon proxy testing demonstrations to field-based demonstrations of different equipment used by no-till farmers. In addition to the quarterly farmer cohort learning calls, NOFA/Mass also implemented a monthly minimum-till call available to farmers and gardeners on a "drop-in" basis on the first Monday of every month. Stemming from community interest in reduced and no-till methods, the ongoing calls have become an opportunity for the community to learn more about different management strategies from other farmers and gardeners. The calls' informal nature makes them inherently welcoming for all individuals regardless of background and experience, ultimately increasing the potential for peer-to-peer learning by individuals all aspiring to shared goals.

To further study the effects of reduced and no-till management changes on Northeast farms, this project should be repeated in a more controlled format evaluating management and results of soil carbon, pest, and yield. Completing the project of a longer duration, such as 5-7 years, could also capture soil's progression and changes in response to reductions in tillage, and its downstream effects on pests and yield. A longer project would also create a greater opportunity for farmers to evaluate different no-till



Soil hardness (PSI) at various depths below the soil surface for reduced till and no-till farms during 2019, 2020, and 2021. Lower soil hardness correlates to lower levels of compaction, which is a positive indicator of soil health.



Bulk density (g/cc) for all farms over the project duration. Bulk density provides a measurement of the density of the soil; higher densities indicate more soil within a cubic centimeter with fewer pore spaces and channels for roots and soil biota

methods and to see any effect from them on soil carbon, pests, and yield metrics. In addition, involving a larger cohort of farmer participants would provide greater statistical power to support findings and a better learning opportunity for farmers in discussing no-till approaches, successes, and failures.

Soil carbon proxy testing and soil health assessments are a primary component of the soil technical services offered to farmers and gardeners by NOFA/Mass and other NOFA chapters in their states; contact your state NOFA chapter for more information. For more information on the NOFA CIG project described here, including information on the farmers, No-Till Methods Fact Sheet, links to recorded education events, and a full report of project findings, please visit the NOFA/Mass CIG website at <https://bit.ly/NOFA-CIG>.



## 2023 NOFA Winter Conferences



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Registration fees & deadlines vary - please visit your state chapter's website for more details



# Inheriting Genetic Resilience in Tomatoes & Ourselves

By Petra Page-Mann (inspired by Maddie Halpert, Matthew Goldfarb and many other caring humxns)

In my father's garden, we grew tomatoes. Red and yellow, large and small, solid and striped: so much delicious diversity!

We saved seeds of our favorites, often from the earliest fruit and from my earliest days, the gift of seeds was not lost on me: though we only saved a handful of tomatoes, we had more seeds than we'd ever hoped to sow for seasons to come, so we had plenty to share with everyone around us.

As a child, I relished every summer tomato sandwich and came to expect as inevitable the day that always came: black and brown spots, sometimes slow and sometimes fast, arriving on our lowest leaves reducing our jungle of tomatoes to black ooze.

Several decades later, still savoring every tomato sandwich, that fateful black ooze of tomato disease is much more preventable.

Especially in the throes of modernity, so much feels oozy in our world, and I wonder: What might our gardens teach us about community care? About abundance? About disease? Belonging? Not only in metaphors but deep in our DNA?

Here are a few ways we're living into these questions and (re)imagining the abundance of the future we all share.

## Practices of Abundance

On a purely practical level, whether you hope to harvest 10 or 10,000 tomatoes, diseases can diminish your abundance every season. Before we dive into the capacities of DNA and seeds themselves, there are four cultural keys vital to preventing tomato disease. As we hone our practices of community care and mutual flourishing, these cultural, as well as genetic practices, are the foundation of biological resilience in the garden, surrounding us all with the abundance we dream of.

### #1: Increase AirFlow

Most diseases are caused by bacteria, fungi and viruses that need humidity to thrive. Increasing airflow decreases a pathogen's ability to spread, so allowing plenty of space between plants; two feet between tomato plants is beneficial. Weeds can vector disease and their presence decreases air flow, so keep weeds at bay. Trellising tomatoes early and often helps air circulate throughout each plant as well as encouraging each fruit to ripen more quickly and making them easier to harvest.

### #2: Minimize Leaf Humidity

Tomatoes need remarkably little water to thrive; excess moisture helps disease spread. After transplanting, consistent moisture is key for establishment in the first month. After that, if you feel you must water your tomatoes, be sure to water only the soil, not the leaves. Water only in the morning, when excess leaf moisture has the greatest chance to evaporate in the heat of the day.

### #3: Mulch

Mulching ensures that you'll need to water less as well as reducing your risk of soil-borne diseases being splashed on your plants from rain or watering. There are so many mulches to choose from, each with pros and cons. Experiment! Play! Connect with fellow gardeners so we all can learn together, deepening our networks like the mycelium under our feet.

### #4: Scout for disease

Channel your inner garden detective! When you find colors and textures that seem suspiciously pathogenic, immediately identify them. Find such resources on Fruition Seeds' blog (under Identifying & Managing Tomato Disease Organically) as well

as the expansive offerings of Cornell Cooperative Extension. Once you have a positive ID, continue your research to navigate the next steps, remembering you are a part of an interconnected web and the abundance of communities thousands of miles away are impacted by what you do — and don't do.

## Inheriting Genetic Resilience

For 400 million years, plants have been flowering — cross-pollinating! — passing adaptive brilliance from one generation to the next. Every bite we eat and the very air we breathe is the legacy of these plants; we inherit the capacity to adapt from our ancestors plants, humxn\* and beyond.

As we dive into the genetic foundations and possibilities of resilience, let us remember: We all come from a great lineage of farmers and seedkeepers. For more than ten thousand years, being a farmer has been synonymous with being a seedkeeper. Where we live in the Finger Lakes of New York, a small number of farmers are slowly rebuilding their relationship with seed, though the majority of growers no longer keep seeds on their farms. As we honor the Indigenous brilliance deep in the intergenerational memory of each seed, let us also remember that DNA was described in the 1950s, as representing just one way of being in relationship with seeds. Let us trust our keen observation and interest is enough to explore and honor the intrinsic resilience in every seed and each of us.

As we move forward, we can be expansive in our vision of seeds, resisting the common generalization that flavorful heirloom tomatoes have little disease resistance and modern resistant varieties have little remarkable flavor. There are plenty of exceptions and so much more to consider, both in our gardens and beyond, as we learn to unlearn thinking in binaries.

## The Latin Name Game

Latin names can be immensely illuminating and if reducing tomato disease is of interest to you, take note:

Most tomatoes widely available are *Solanum lycopersicum*, though many delicious heirloom tomatoes belong to a separate species, often conferring remarkable resilience to many tomato diseases. *Solanum pimpinellifolium* is one of our favorites, vigorously growing like the jungle itself. Hailing from the mountains of Oaxaca, Chiapas and Coyote are two of our favorites, super sweet cherries often the first to ripen as well as the last, thanks to their impressive disease resistance. Other wild *Solanum* species gloriously exist, offering unique flavors as well as disease resistance, including *arcanum*, *huaylasense*, *neorickii*, *cheesmaniae*, *peruvianum*, *habrochaites* and *pennellii*.

## Heirlooms Past, Present & Future

Though heirlooms generally tend to be known for flavor rather than disease resistance, there are an abundance of heirloom tomatoes embodying the best of both worlds. Heirloom seeds are open-pollinated, each generation growing similar to the previous generations, unlike F1 Hybrids, which we'll soon explore. This means you can save the seeds of your most deliciously disease-resistant and abundant plants, actively co-adapting with tomatoes as we have for thousands of years!

For a suite of intriguing reasons, public records of disease-resistant heirloom tomatoes are hard to come by. Nonetheless, we've noticed many heirlooms expressing notable resilience in our fields including Gold Medal and Italian Heirloom with moderate resistance to Late Blight.

And Friends, heirlooms are history and though



*Resilience is our inheritance, yours and mine, in our genetic as well as cultural histories. Deepening respectful relationships with our family both humxn and plant is the work of a lifetime. Tomatoes are quite an invitation, indeed! Source: Fruition Seeds.*

history happened, history is also happening. Can you imagine if we stopped writing new books, new songs, and new poems? Just as a quintessential family heirloom (imagine the cedar chest made by my grandfather) didn't become an heirloom until it had been passed down across generations, so too new open-pollinated varieties aren't beloved 'heirlooms' until they've been saved and shared 50+ years. Seiger, Finger Lakes Round and Long Paste as well as Gardener's Sweetheart are examples of more recently cultivated open-pollinated tomatoes with notable disease resistances, though they won't become 'heirloom' until our grandchildren tell stories of the tomatoes their family and friends have saved for generations.

Also, a vote for taking notes: We don't crow about potential disease resistance in a variety until we've seen substantial resistance across at least three seasons. This is all to say, take note of your observations, including general precipitation and temperature accompanying disease — or lack thereof. May our collective insight surround us all with all the more abundance!

## F1 Hybrids

Words — even letters — are powerful. Hybridization with a lower-case 'h' has occurred naturally for 400 million years while the F1 Hybrid with an upper-case 'H' emerged around WWI. F1 Hybrids are the first generation (first filial generation = F1) of very deliberate and distinct parents.

Though the F1 generation is incredibly uniform, the second (F2!) generation of seed expresses much more diversity, often looking astonishingly different from the F1 generation. Farmers return to purchase F1 Hybrid seed season after season. And though GMOs get a bad rap for patenting life (deservedly), we would do well to apply such critiques also to most parent lines of F1 Hybrids that are proprietary 'intellectual property,' many are patented and virtually none are publicly available.

Here is where I confess: for decades I appreciated the reliability possible in F1 Hybrids though patenting, and proprietary relationships with seeds deeply troubled me. Further confession: this is still true! Also true: the parent lines of F1 Hybrids needn't be inbred and certainly not patented.

As we compost binary thinking around Hybrids, we realize it is possible to create deliciously disease-resistant F1s with publicly available parents that are not solely inbred. We also recognize that disease-resistant F1 Hybrids are impressively capable as well as nimble tools in our collective toolbox, especially

*(continued on next page)*



(Genetic Resilience from A-12)

as climates change. Considering that stabilizing genetic resistance in an open-pollinated variety takes at least six if not ten generations or more, we found ourselves making crosses to explore creating F1 Hybrid tomatoes with delicious disease resistance.

**The Tale of Two Tomatoes**

We are immensely grateful here in the Northeast to have public plant breeders creating resilient varieties for our short seasons.

One of these public plant breeders, Martha Mutschler-Chu, recently retired from several decades of developing disease-resistant tomatoes at Cornell University.

In 2013, the variety ‘Iron Lady’ was released from her program, becoming the first F1 Hybrid tomato with ‘triple resistance:’ actual resistance to Late Blight, Septoria Leaf Spot and tolerance of Early Blight. (Though Iron Lady is *Solanum lycopersicum*, disease resistance from *S. pennellii* had been crossed into one of the parent lines.) Though tasting better than a standard grocery store tomato in January, the lack of richness and depth of flavor left many growers still wanting better options.

We were among the people wondering what might happen if Martha’s triple-resistant tomato lines were crossed with the beloved heirloom ‘Brandywine:’ would triple resistance and flavor pair in the resulting F1 Hybrid? They did!

We immediately started making the cross to save and share the seeds of ‘Brandywise,’ an indeterminate, large red slicer with the best of both worlds: succulent flavor and resistance to Late Blight and Septoria as well as Early Blight tolerance. We’ve been sharing these seeds since 2018 and if you’d love to see how we make the crosses — and how you can, too! — hop on our blog, The Tale of Two Tomatoes. It’s really quite simple and so much fun; you’ll likely never look at tomatoes the same.

After the revelation of Brandywise, we asked to



*Organic Brandywise Slicing Tomato.*  
Source: Fruition Seeds



*Organic Summer Sweetheart Cherry Tomato.*  
Source: Fruition Seeds

play with one of Martha’s triple-resistant lines, hoping to find another cross whose fruit would produce another disease-resistant and uniquely delicious tomato. We fell in love with a cross between Martha’s line and Will Bonsall’s Gardener’s Sweetheart, a heart-shaped red cherry exceptionally sweet and creamy. The resulting ‘Summer Sweetheart’ is a large two-bite cherry tomato with handsome ribs scrumptious in salads, roasted and stuffed with mozzarella.

And Friends, these two F1 Hybrids are technically ‘top crosses.’ Rather than the two parents being inbred lines, one is inbred (CU-79) and the other is more genetically diverse. If you’ve grown Brandywine, you know not all the plants are identical, though they all are delicious; as a result, Brandywise plants are not exactly identical, though they are still a fabulously consistently red, splendid slicer with impressive disease resistance.

**Inheriting Genetic Resilience in Ourselves**

How might we become resilient, in our values and in our actions? How might we become good ancestors, in our gardens and in our world?

Here is an invitation in three acts:

First, and not least, (re)-connect with seeds. Lean into the 10,000-year legacy of our ancestors co-adapting with countless plants across the planet. Though this relationship may have been lost in the last few generations of your immediate family, the living memory in your every cell remembers this kinship and knows no separation. In gratitude, we rehydrate our imaginations and in sowing, saving and sharing seeds we nourish our individual and collective capacities to grow in ways that amplify abundance for us all.

If saving seeds sounds intimidating, you’re not alone and great news: there are so many ways to begin. Here is one: Choose a plant culturally meaningful for you that you love to grow, preferably an open-pollinated annual that’s easy to save. Tomatoes totally count! Save seeds from the first fruit as well as plants that overall embody health, abundance and resilience. And though seed saved from an F1 Hybrid plant will grow (often dramatically!) different from its parent, this diversity can become the foundation of a new variety the world hasn’t seen before, and how fabulous is that? If you’d love to dig deeper into seedkeeping, this is why we made Fruition’s free online course, Saving Our Seeds, Saving Ourselves, for you and for us all.

(continued on A-19)



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(Policy - from A-5)

must actively work to support access to land, credit, and other resources for self-determination for farmers of color and other marginalized communities. In doing so, they must meaningfully engage with and be held accountable to BIPOC farmers and other stakeholders to develop programs and policies that support their needs on the ground.

**5. Promotes food sovereignty for disadvantaged communities and ensures nutrition security for all.**

It is time to shift the US food system to localized food sovereignty with access to farmland and farming resources for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), women, LGBTQ+, the young, under-resourced and farmers from other marginalized populations. The concept of food sovereignty recognizes access to healthy, nutrient-dense food as a human right and maintains that people should have the ability to be active participants and stakeholders in the food they grow, consume and sell. Just as biodiversity is essential to soil health, social diversity is essential to a healthy and thriving food system. As a matter of justice and public health, people from marginalized populations must be afforded equitable access to nutrient-dense food free of toxic pesticides, such as food grown by organic farms. Further, in order to confront the worsening effects of the climate crisis, we must empower locally-controlled and adaptive efforts for food solutions. Shifting the US food system to localized food sovereignty with access to farmland and farming resources for Indigenous Native American, Black and other farmers of color will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. To this end, Congress has the opportunity to use the Farm Bill to elevate the interests of all who eat food and the small-scale local producers which resilient communities depend upon, particularly through deeper investments in urban agriculture and cooperative land ownership. Also, as a matter of climate resiliency, congress must reinvest in public plant and animal breeding programs to provide farmers with regionally adapted seeds and breeds.

**6. Eliminates the use of toxic substances on farmland and in our food system while supporting a just transition for farmers.**

The use of xenobiotic materials by definition interrupts living systems and soil ecosystems that nourish plants and animals, including humans. It is time to end public policies that subsidize pollution and to require the manufacturers of pesticides, herbicides and genetically modified organisms to pay to clean up the contamination from which they profit. The U.S. must adopt the precautionary principle in introducing new materials and products and carefully weigh the climate impact of fossil fuels and their derivatives, especially synthetic fertilizers. These policies are necessary to protect biodiversity, the health of farmworkers and farmers, wildlife, and all

who eat farm products. A just transition must be provided for farmers who have been coerced into the chemical-GMO-CAFO treadmill with incentives to transition their operations to agroecological systems with localized markets.

**What is a Marker Bill?**

What is a "Marker Bill"? Because the farm bill is such a huge piece of legislation with many, many programs and policies included, marker bills are used to signal specific policy proposals for parts of the larger farm bill but are typically not passed as stand-alone bills. Introducing marker bills allows members of Congress and advocates to build support for policy asks that may then be included in the larger farm bill package.

**Marker Bills NOFA Supports:**

- Agriculture Resilience Act
- Strengthening Local Processing Act
- Farm to School Act
- Justice for Black Farmers Act
- Milk from Family Dairies Act
- Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act
- Food from Family Farms Act

**Take Action**

Sign up for email alerts from your state NOFA Chapter: we'll let you know when to take action and how to share input. Share your farm bill priorities with the House Agriculture Committee tasked with drafting the bill.

Share feedback on NOFA's principles and priorities: email [Katie at policy@nofany.org](mailto:Katie@nofany.org)



(From the editor - from A - 2)

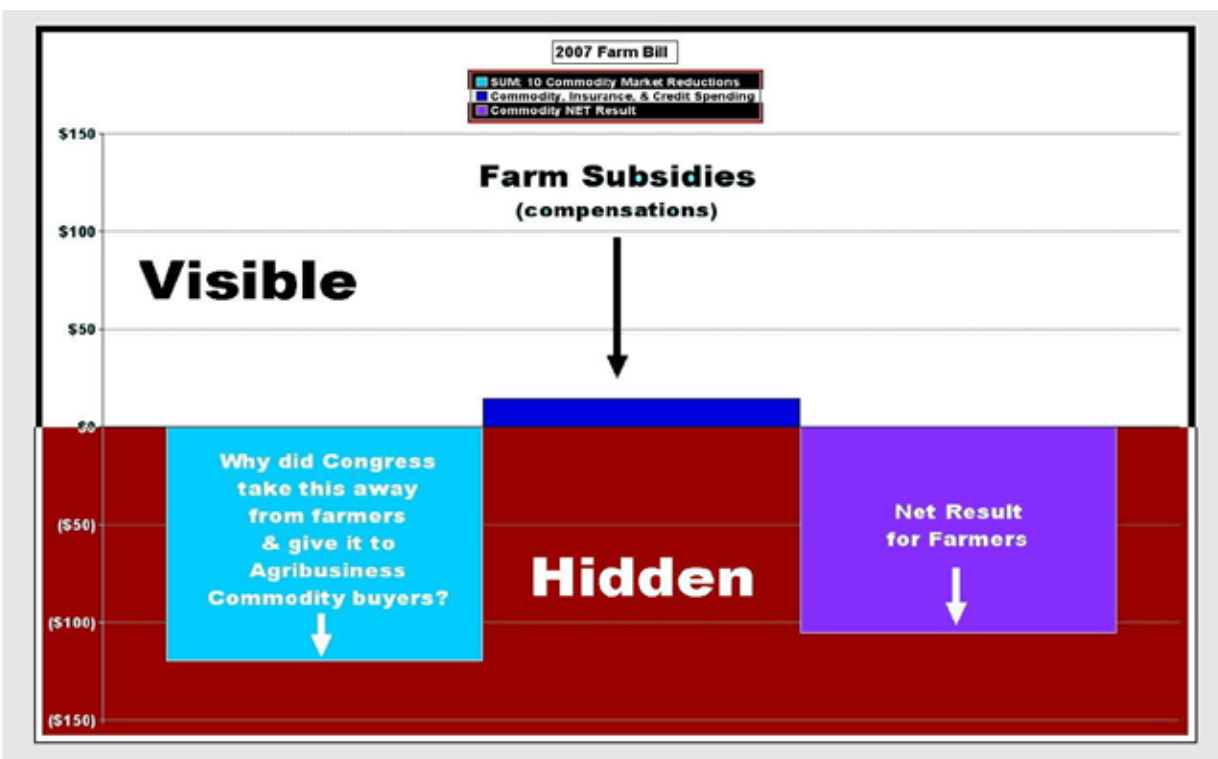
leak caused by credit card fees.

In Section A of this issue, you will find the NOFA Interstate Council Principles for the Farm Bill. Distilled from listening sessions with members, the Principles paint our vision for a Farm Bill that will transform rather than reinforce the status quo. We endorse bills like "Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act of 2022," which would halt corporate concentration. Given the 2022 election results, the path to the 2023 Farm Bill will be long and contentious.

The moment has arrived to demand farmer and community protection through federal food policy so that everyone gets the same service at the same price with no discrimination or vertical integration. In her testimony on credit, Dania Davy of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund makes it clear that the first step towards market fairness must be reparations to existing and would-be Black farmers.

As the New Deal demonstrated, it is within the powers of the federal government to change the rules of the marketplace. But the transformation we need will only take place in response to massive grassroots movements. Organic farmers, the NOFAs and our allies have everything to gain by joining the front lines of these movements.

by Elizabeth Henderson, guest editor. NOFA Interstate Policy Council member and TNF Advisory Member.



Net Farm Bill Impacts. Provided by Brad Wilson, a retired Iowa farmer, farm policy organizer, and leader in the movement for farmer justice since the 1970s.



## Finding Common Grounds

By j.p. muhly

*“According to traditional thought, if we fail to organize all aspects of our lives, including our work to make positive or healing contributions to our relationships, then we are actually making negative contributions instead. In other words, healing is not just a form of emotional or psychological surgery you reach for after there has been a significant injury. Instead, healing is seen as an everyday thing for everyone, something which, like sound nutrition, creates health. In short, the healing perspective must be built into the attitudes and processes that shape every aspect of every day. If it is not, then those attitudes and processes will contribute to ill health instead, and for all of us.”* - Rupert Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice*, 1996

As a Crown Attorney with Justice Canada in northwestern Ontario, Rupert Ross broadened his awareness about being a part of a Legal System that created laws to suit the desires of Justice Canada, the colonists and the business enterprises they were in cahoots with, and acting together for illegal or dishonest purposes, not being the least concerned about Justice. At the same time, he came to appreciate and gain an understanding of Aboriginal, Indigenous and Native People's approaches to justice that are grounded in healing and relationships and visions of community lives that shape them.

Our sense of community and justice depends on a set of norms and expectations to which we all attach meaning. Offending behavior disrupts these senses and becomes offending when the relationships that satisfy our needs, socialize our children and knit us together as a community are broken. When individuals or groups become so focused on personal desires that the results of their behavior on other people and the environment are destructive,

then the concepts of accountability, respect and responsibility that bind cultures and societies together are seriously compromised. Building and maintaining effective communities to counteract these offensive trends requires partnerships among all shareholders in a community to make the processes of collaboration and communication about economic, governance and justice issues more democratic and egalitarian.

Justice is about relationships. Providing justice requires that we understand the inter--and intra-relationships of attitudes and behaviors in the realm of human ecology which is what communities and community dynamics are all about. Doing so can then lead to an understanding of why much abusive and debilitating behavior occurs. It can also lead to an understanding of how to heal those relationships, as well as how to heal our relationships with the natural environment upon which we depend. As a society, too often we have come to view naturally occurring relationships and the naturally created world as inadequate or superfluous and cultures and societies different from ours as uninformed (at best) -- yet in doing so we have created one conflict after another.

In separating ourselves from our communities and our inherited environments, we have disavowed, discounted, ignored and subverted our own humanness and our most fundamental values. We have traded any compassion and sympathy for people and nature in our decision-making processes for supposedly hard data, and have transformed the world into more useful commercial forms. We have given up valuing communities and cultures by joining power, economics and information to create a philosophy of improvement, founded on the ideology of perpetual financial growth and technological achievements. Unfortunately, for this approach to succeed, it was necessary to render nature into abstractions and production statistics; undermine community where attachment to place might not only exist but grow; and convert politics into the pursuit of material self-interest and hence, render people impotent as citizens and communities superfluous in the political and judicial processes.

I'm an 'Other-abled' Vietnam-era veteran who turned conscientious objector when I was a commissioned officer on active duty flying jets off of carriers. I woke up to the reality that it would be difficult for me to live with myself had I killed women and children and other community members for no good reason other than to support warmongering colonialism and the capitalist enterprises they supported.

In addition to over forty years of participation in both the built and natural environments, in the nineties and the turn of this century I was also involved with a few Mennonite Restorative and Transformative Justice programs; as a facilitator with the FoR / Quaker-based Alternatives to Violence Project volunteering in "Correctional" facilities; and training and being a part of a number of Indigenous and Native Peoples Healing and Peacemaking Circle efforts. I also had the honor of being able to dialogue with and be mentored a bit by Rupert Ross.

Other parts of my life have included organic beekeeping, biointensive gardening and community environmental efforts. Having experienced and

struggled to live with post-traumatic issues, I've also, lived in a sort of hyper-empathetic reality -- different from -- but similar to what Octavia Butler chronicled beautifully in her *Parable of the Sower* -- except that mine was more about the destruction of the greater-than-human environment and the webs of life humanity depends on to exist -- and what drives people to be so thoughtless?

This sharing and my thoughts in large measure were prompted by reading Charles Geislers' article *My Back Yard, Equity Concerns, and Land Grant Truth-Telling* which appeared in the Spring 2022 issue of *The Natural Farmer*. While it is a well-researched and written overview that documents how colonialism with its manifest destiny and other rationalizations acquired significant amounts of unceded Indigenous and Native Peoples lands -- in addition to ignoring the slaughter of millions of children, women and communities -- Geislers' article also overlooks two additional great tragedies which are the immense amounts of Bio-cultural Diversity and Traditional Ecological Knowledge which were destroyed -- intentionally -- as part of the colonization of Turtle Island.

Sixty years ago, Elizabeth Sewell in her opus examination of the relationship between language, myth and science titled *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History*, states that: "Myth, ... is not a mere fable but an ancient and vital form of reflection that unites poetry, philosophy, and natural science ... [which] ...share a common perception that "discovery, in science and poetry, is a mythological situation in which the mind unites with a figure of its own devising as a means toward understanding the world."

As seasons change and darkness gathers it also feels an opportune moment to think on Thomas Berry's concept of 'inscendence': the impulse not to rise above the world -- transcendence -- but to find common ground and collaborate to ensure a resilient and sustainable future for all forms of life; and James Lovelock writings about 'Gaia' which Bruno Latour's *Facing Gaia -- Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* provides all sorts of insights about: "The emergence of modern sciences in the seventeenth century profoundly renewed our understanding of nature. For the last three centuries, new ideas of nature have been continually developed by theology, politics, economics, and science, especially the sciences of the material world."

To me, healing and justice are interconnected and are the foundation upon which common grounds reside; and are essential for communities, cultures and societies to be resilient and sustainable. Unfortunately, we seem to be living in a reality that has laws and a legal system structured to benefit corporate agendas, but which lack any meaningful attempts to create equitable realities for all the shareholders involved -- as well as long-term realities as opposed to short-term gains!

For thousands -- perhaps tens of thousands -- of years Indigenous and Native Peoples co-evolved and co-existed with the greater than human natural world and did so with respect and reverence and reciprocity. They also documented their understandings and the knowledge they gained through empirical processes every bit as valid as reductionist scientific views, but in oral traditional ways and shared what they learned in their myths and mythology with children of all ages.

*“In the past, and to a limited extent in some communities today, the world of many Natives had spirits -- allies and enemies -- that were ubiquitous. Magic, ritual, courage and cautious fear allowed them to cope with the world. The non-Native person learns of this and is filled with astonishment, for he has been trained to think of magic as utter nonsense. Science evokes images of objectivity, data collection and accuracy. Magic is thought of as illusions, tricks and sleight of hand... Reality is radically different in the two cultures.”* - Rupert Ross, *Dancing With a Ghost: Exploring Aboriginal Reality*, 1992

(continued on next page)

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(Common Grounds - from A - 16)

*Finding Common Grounds* are rooted in efforts being made by groups and in communities who realize that continuing with the status quo will never lead to an egalitarian reality. And rather than pontificate, I thought I'd share some readings and other discoveries that have given me insights, understandings and knowledge about much of what has and in some places still exists in the world.

In *The Biggest Estate on Earth* Bill Gammage argues that for tens of thousands of years Aborigines created what Australia was like -- before it was colonized by the British -- by using fire and other means to distribute plants and animals on grounds it preferred so that people knew where their resources were located and could harvest them as they chose. They could make paddocks without fences because in Australia the only large predators to disturb things were humans. The Aborigines were not aimless hunter-gatherers; they planned and worked hard to make plants and animals abundant, convenient and predictable. They depended not on chance, but on policy otherwise known as Traditional Ecological knowledge by Indigenous peoples.

In *The Well of Remembrance* Ralph Metzner "... explores some of the mythic roots of the Western worldview, the worldview of the culture that, for better and worse, has come to dominate most of the rest of the world's peoples. This domination has involved not only economic and political systems but also values, basic attitudes, religious beliefs, language, scientific understanding, and technological applications. Many individuals, tribes, and nations are struggling to free themselves from the residues of the ideological oppression practiced by what they see as Eurocentric culture. They seek to define their own ethnic or national identities by referring to ancestral traditions and mythic patterns of knowledge. At this time, it seems appropriate for Europeans and Euro-Americans likewise to probe their own ancestral mythology for insight and self-understanding. By focusing on the mythology and worldview of the pre-Christian Germanic tribes of Northern Europe,

Metzner offers a meaningful exploration of not only Western ancestry, but how it influences much of life today.

David Graeber and David Wengrow magnum opus *The Dawn of Everything* presents "A dramatically new understanding of human history, challenging our most fundamental assumptions about social evolution — from the development of agriculture and cities to the origins of the state, democracy, and inequality - and revealing new possibilities for human emancipation." Drawing on path-breaking research in archaeology and anthropology, the authors show how history becomes a far more interesting place once we learn to throw off our conceptual shackles and perceive what's really there. If humans did not spend 95 percent of their evolutionary past in tiny bands of hunter-gatherers, what were they doing all that time? If agriculture, and cities, did not mean a plunge into hierarchy and domination, then what kinds of the social and economic organization did they lead to? The answers are often unexpected and suggest that the course of human history may be less set in stone, and more full of playful, hopeful possibilities, than we tend to assume. *The Dawn of Everything* fundamentally transforms our understanding of the human past and offers a path toward imagining new forms of freedom, and new ways of organizing society. This is a monumental book of formidable intellectual range, animated by curiosity, moral vision, and faith in the power of direct action:

To me, *Finding Common Grounds* is about relationships. It's about expanding them where they exist; creating them where they do not exist, and repairing them where they have become frayed or destroyed. It includes relationships between people and the greater than the human environment. And includes a lot of listening to why people have come to cherish and hold the understandings they have without being judgmental, as well as understanding histories to enlighten our knowledge of how we've gotten to be who and where we are.

There are numerous groups in the New England, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic areas who are working

to create a more agrarian cultural understanding of the connections between food, land use and health. There are also increasingly powerful, monopolized authoritarian movements and organizations that have been "legally" given the right to buy whatever government best supports their interests. What has been made obvious time after time throughout history are the continuing and growing inequalities and damage that levels of consolidation make on our communities, cultures, economy and social needs that will only bring more harm to communities, farmers, food workers and sustainable local and regional food systems for decades to come.

NOFA and NESWAG in their own unique ways strive to facilitate resilient and sustainable opportunities for multi-cultural and inclusive agricultural opportunities in opposition to the existing, immensely powerful and wealthy industrial agricultural system we struggle with and the inappropriate and unhealthy food system it has created.

What's too often overlooked; however, is that there's an immensely large reservoir of insightful, knowledgeable, working people and groups -- outside of the agriculturally groups -- including elders with long-term additional and perhaps alternative perspectives and understandings, who also struggle with and work to change efforts that are in opposition to community-based decision making and governance -- and whom should be active participants.

A large part of what also prompted my sharing these ideas and thoughts was a feeling that NOFA and NESWAG have the credibility and participation throughout the regions they focus on to stimulate the formation of collaborative and cooperative, local and other efforts focused on the creation of Common Ground-type dialogues and movements that can make their ideals realities, and I'd like to hope that they would be open to doing so!

*j.p. muhly is a peripatetic imagineer and can be reached at [ecorsive@earthlink.net](mailto:ecorsive@earthlink.net).*



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(Native Farmers - from A-14)

### Land-Grant Universities, Boss Farmers, and Early Extension

The establishment of land-grant universities, made possible by the Morrill Act of 1862, opened up opportunities for those aspiring to pursue careers in “agriculture and the mechanic arts” who had been excluded from higher education. But the funds the government used to create them came from selling more than 10 million acres of expropriated tribal lands.

Doug Steele, vice president of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources at the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, doesn’t shy away from that history.

“We have encouraged all of the land-grant universities to understand where that initial land acquisition came from to establish their universities,” says Steele, “in appreciation of what we should be doing today.” He points to the organization’s current land acknowledgment, which explicitly names that land theft.

In the early 20th century, the Dawes Act parceled tribal lands into individual plots and gave them to Indigenous peoples in an attempt to undo the reservation system, granting each family 160 acres of farmland or 320 acres of grazing land. Still, allotted lands were often unsuitable for agriculture, and the effort imposed a culture of farming and ranching onto nomadic hunter-gatherer societies, says Cris Stainbrook, president of the Indian Land Tenure Foundation.

“You had 160 acres that you were supposed to stay on; that just didn’t work,” says Stainbrook, who also sat on the Indian Country Extension Commission. “They put these folks out there called boss farmers to train Indigenous people to be farmers and ranchers. They were the early extension agents for Indian Country.”

The idea of boss farmers came from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), says Joe Hiller, co-chair of the

commission and professor emeritus at the University of Arizona. No more than two agents were employed by any reservation agency. Hiller’s father was a boss farmer on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in South Dakota after the Second World War. He reported to the BIA superintendent, and was tasked with hiring, firing, and training Indigenous producers—separate from South Dakota State University, a land-grant university founded in 1881.

Some boss farmers became contract employees at the land-grant universities, says Trent Teegerstrom, associate director for tribal extension programs at the University of Arizona’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

“When those contracts ended, the universities didn’t have any funds, so the jobs went away,” according to Teegerstrom, who also co-chaired the Indian Country Extension Commission.

Extension agents were eventually phased out and replaced by welfare workers as the BIA began prioritizing social services instead of resource management programs toward the end of the 1950s.

“Then there was this weird thought that the county extension agents were going to supply the tribes with those services under the regular extension program,” Stainbrook says.

The presumption was that the Cooperative Extension Service, although controlled by predominantly white county commissioners, would offer the same treatment to Indigenous farmers. Unsurprisingly, that did not come to pass.

“Our producers weren’t able to access those extension agents, whether it was outright discrimination because of our ZIP codes, names, or tribal affiliations,” says Holden. They were “unable to use services that were directly funded by land-grant institutions, many of which got land that was either seized or sold.”

These extension agents were also ill-equipped to address Indigenous producers and their complicated problems, lacking knowledge of traditional food systems. Indian Country was essentially left on its own to deal with the agricultural hardships incurred by federal anti-Indian policies.

Then, in 1990, Congress agreed to fund the first-ever FRTEP provision, initially called the Extension Indian Reservation Program. But the program has been chronically underfunded, without accounting for decades worth of inflation, a fact that has left tribes competing for limited resources.

### Fighting for an Equitable Future in the Next Farm Bill

In addition to increasing financial resources for tribal extension services, the Indian Country Extension Commission wants to do away with FRTEP’s current competitive four-year grant model. In its report, it requested that the USDA: “Eliminate the competitive nature of the FRTEP funding and instead use permanent funding similar to County Extension programs.” The current FRTEP programs would be grandfathered in and a host of new extension agents would be added throughout the country.

“[Competition] is the absolute worst impediment to these programs,” says Stainbrook. “You’re out there competing with your colleagues, basically.”

Thirty-six FRTEP applications were filed in the last grant cycle in 2017, all of which were approved, according to a NIFA public affairs specialist. But that funding isn’t guaranteed each cycle. Land-grant universities, including the 1994 tribal colleges, are both eligible and vying for the same money, potentially knocking other applicants out of the candidate pool to their fund agents.

“[FRTEP agents] are an incredible resource,” says Sarah Vogel. “If their efforts could be replicated and adequately funded across the U.S., it would be such a remarkable boost for Native American producers and great food for the rest of us.”

Vogel was an appointee to the Indian Country Extension Commission because of her background defending the rights of Native farmers as a part of the North Dakota Nine amid a groundbreaking federal class-action lawsuit, which she wrote about in her recent memoir, *The Farmer’s Lawyer*.

She says, “Native Americans were not getting equal access to services from USDA,” and sees a similar pattern of inequality in FRTEP. Vogel was reminded of that when her colleagues at the Council for Native American Farmers and Ranchers repeatedly sought to fix the tribal extension program decades ago.

“I think it’s getting to be a critical mass of awareness, knowledge, and advocacy. The equity commission is one part of it,” says Vogel, pointing to NAAF and the Native Farm Bill Coalition as reasons behind FRTEP’s rising prominence in the national ag-policy discourse.

Representation plays an undeniably important part in the negotiation process on Capitol Hill. Although 29 states are home to federally recognized tribes, FRTEP touches only 18 of them.

“We need to have some congressional champions that will say this is a very high priority,” Steele says. “One of the issues is that Indian Country has never had a very loud and unified national voice.”

And key lawmakers do appear to be paying attention in the nation’s capital.

“Over time, certain administrative decisions by the Department of Agriculture have made the [FRTEP] program less accessible to those it is intended to serve,” Representative David Scott (D-Georgia) tells Civil Eats in a statement. “The funding available through the appropriations process has also stayed fairly stagnant.”

As chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Scott says he has seen the benefits of FRTEP, particularly for Native youth. Scott says he is committed to “working toward solutions to rectify the challenges that have arisen” by ensuring that extension outreach and programming are “on-par” for tribal reservations, states, and counties.

His ranking Republican colleague, Glenn Thompson of Pennsylvania, tells Civil Eats that he’s ready to start “working and identifying ways to improve the program to ensure producers in every corner of every state are being reached.”

Indeed, advocates say that Congress actualizing its commitment to tribal extension services through the farm bill would be in line with upholding the existing treaties between the federal government and tribal communities.

David Wilkins, who specializes in U.S. treaty law as a professor at the University of Richmond’s Jepson School of Leadership Studies, has searched a database of the roughly 375 ratified treaties. Thirty-six explicitly reference agriculture-related language between 1805 and 1868 alone, Wilkins says, in varying ways from “giving instructions in agriculture” to even paying for “improvements.” Other

(continued on next page)

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(Genetic Resilience - from A-13)

(Native Farmers - from A-18)

Act two:

(Re-)Connect with each other. Since profit-driven cultures of dependency have chipped away at interconnected seedcare networks, we must take active efforts to weave such networks stronger than ever, learning/unlearning/relearning the relationships and responsibilities we have to one another, even across continents. While I grew up saving seeds in my father's garden in the United States, policies promoted by the U.S., among others, have in fact criminalized families in myriad countries for saving seeds their communities have carried for countless generations. What happens if we truly feel such outcomes first and foremost as an unacceptable attack on the culture and lifeways of those involved – and also as a significant threat to visions of diversity and resilience?



*Nakai Clearwater Northup stands in front of three traditional ethnobotany gardens, which he manages at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center. At one time, his people solely relied on them to maintain their cultural connections to food before the founding of Meechooók Farm. (Photo credit:*

Let's tune in to Indigenous seedkeepers and peasant farmers the world over – and note that their current calls include an end to policies like UPOV.

Never heard of UPOV? Thanks to GRAIN for sharing "UPOV: The Great Seed Robbery" – a fabulous nutshell-version of this story in less than 3 awesomely-animated minutes. Share it with a friend!

Follow groups organizing around seed-sovereignty issues – including La Via Campesina, African Food Sovereignty Alliance, North American Food Sovereignty Alliance, and more.

Finally – (re-) connect with ourselves.

Pause. Take a deep breath.

Imagine, for a moment, the love you have for a dear beloved; perhaps your child, your friend, your nibbling\*\*, your sibling, your dog, your partner, or your parent.

Imagine, for a moment, the love you have for seeds in your hand as you sow them, shining and deceptively small.

Now imagine, for a moment, all our ancestors, both plant and humxn, all the moments and generations of promise and pain, all that perseverance and all those dreams, all that love and potential amplified into this moment.

Take another breath. You are not alone. You are so loved.

Resilience is our inheritance, yours and mine.

Deepening respectful relationships with our family both humxn and plant is the work of a lifetime.

Sharing what we love to amplify the abundance of all becomes our gift as well as our responsibility.

May we continue to (un)learn as new ways of being sprout within and around us.

Together, we commit to becoming good ancestors for all generations and species to come and give thanks for the gardens that grow us more than we grow them.

Enjoy every moment and every bite!

Sow Seeds & Sing Songs,

*\*Humxn is a gender neutral term expanding the masculine histories of 'human.'*

*\*\*Nibling is a gender neutral term expanding the binary of 'niece' and 'nephew.'*



treaties mentioned hiring staff, like the boss farmers and early extension agents.

"I would argue forcefully that promises of agricultural programs were a clear treaty and trust obligation voluntarily assumed by the federal government," says Wilkins. And yet, after spending years reading through the agricultural promises, Wilkins adds that "federal lawmakers have long desired that Native folk become yeoman farmers, operating under the wrongful assumption that most Native nations knew nothing about agriculture."

This misperception persists, when in fact advocates say the problem has been the systematic denial of the adequate land and resources to produce one's own food.

"They've never gotten the funding they were promised," Holden says. "It's a matter of treating people more equitably."

*Gabriel Pietrorazio is an award-winning journalist who closely covers Indigenous affairs, food and agriculture, politics, as well as crime and justice. This article was reprinted with permission from Civil Eats, Nov. 1, 2022.*




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