

Don't Judge a Carrot by its Cover: The story of a carrot & how our imaginations seed the world



The seeds sown at Fruition Seeds grow so much more than calories: Dulcinea is not patented and resists other intellectual property restrictions, unlike many of the carrots commercially available. Photo provided by author.

By Petra Page-Mann

Don't judge a book by its cover...

...as the proverb reminds us...

...and this is true for carrots, too.

The seeds we sow grow so much more than calories and, as we cultivate cultures of care and collective flourishing, our seeds may well grow us more than we grow them.

It's true, this is a story about carrots, though I must warn you: this carrot is orange, long and deliciously tapering. At first glance, you'll simply see a carrot. But these roots are so much more. And if we've done our work well, these roots will nourish us for countless generations.

The Root of Dulcinea

Some fruits and vegetables we know by name: Granny Smith apple, Sugar Snap pea, Brandywine tomato, Cafe au Lait is ohhhhh what a dahlia.

Most varieties are anonymous in our gardens and at the grocery store, the anonymous commodity that fits the status quo's quintessential assumption of what is romaine lettuce, what is an onion. This is basil, this is butternut squash. There are hundreds — thousands! — of stories, 'varieties' that become any given carrot, though many of us simply stop at 'car-

rot.' Nonetheless, every seed, like each of us, has a story. A name. A past, present and future.

This is the story of Dulcinea, a bright orange carrot easy to grow in short seasons, tolerant of stony soils and sweetening in storage more than any other carrot we've tasted.

Dulcinea's story is interwoven with Bolero — and even if you've never heard of it before, you've likely tasted them many times. Bolero is classic orange, long and tapered — yes, it's a carrot. Though not the most delicious, what makes Bolero special is this: super vigor with strong tops, it's ideal for mechanical harvest and thus is grown on thousands of acres across the world, in conventional and organic fields alike, though it is only offered as conventional seed.

Indeed, Bolero is a profoundly patented F1 Hybrid that tens of thousands of farmers must purchase each season.

At first glance, you won't see what makes Dulcinea and Bolero so different.

But like each of us and every seed, there is so much more to the story.

Let's begin at the beginning.

Planting the Seed

Nathaniel Thompson of Remembrance Farm grows 100 acres of biodynamic vegetables in Trumansburg, NY, in the Finger Lakes region, including about 7 acres of carrots each season largely for his winter CSA. Over the years he has trialed dozens of nantes-style varieties, hunting for that holy grail of vigor, storage and sweetness. Though not the most delectable, he has found few that compare to Bolero, which is hard to swallow.

"Even after years of trials, our biodynamic farm is still dependent on this conventional, hybrid seed," Nathaniel sighed. And he isn't alone. In 2015, the French multinational breeding company Vilmorin, who bred and now produces Bolero, announced it would never be releasing the F1 as organic seed.

"After years," Nathaniel said, "I was finally going crazy."

Nathaniel approached us here at Fruition Seeds. We focus on regional adaptation as well as organics and we love to collaborate. We had helped Nathaniel develop select strains of hyper-petaled, super colorful calendula for his salad mixes and a super-frilled, cold-tolerant Red Russian kale to amplify his abundance in both spring and fall. Could we de-hybridize Bolero, as well?

(continued on A-5)

A Note from The Editor

Dear TNF Readers,

It is refreshing and rewarding to receive so much praise for the recent spring issue that highlighted the topic of Land Access. I am grateful for your receptivity and interest. As I've mentioned, one of my intentions for taking on this role as TNF editor is to bring forward real opportunities and challenges we face as farmers and growers in the Northeast, and just as importantly, to highlight issues of equity and inequity in agriculture. The Land Access issue just scratched the surface of topics of importance. I hope you'll continue to submit stories and histories so I may share them in issues to come.

Far beyond the realm of agriculture and land control, we are reminded daily (sometimes more than that) that this country is plagued by racism, oppression and hate. While some call us the "land of opportunity", it's hard to really believe this when those opportunities are not available to everybody. As I sit to compile the articles for this issue, I am deeply saddened and stunned by the news of yet another mass shooting that targeted innocent Black people in a grocery store in Buffalo, NY - and days later there was Uvalde, TX and then Philadelphia, PA. I am filled with anger, grief and disgust and it's unimaginable to process what the victim's families are feeling.

As a white woman in a seemingly safe area of Upstate NY, it can be hard to see why these crimes of hate have anything to do with me, or with us - the NOFA community, but it's our responsibility to make this connection. As stewards of the land, people who literally feed our community, as farmers who maintain land that somebody's ancestors left or were forced from, it's essential that we recognize our role in this greater system of justice and injustice - both on and off the farm. To stimulate your own thought process, I share the wisdom of my NOFA colleague Ulum Ahtoh'il, who wrote these reflections last week online at nofamass.org/articles. And as always, I welcome you to share your reflections with me; write to TNF@nofa.org.

- Elizabeth Gabriel

From Ulum Pixan Athoh'il, NOFA/Mass Education Director and Equity Co-Director:

Some words of solidarity for my siblings, sisters, and brothers, and their families and communities affected by the racially motivated crimes in the city

of Buffalo, NY.

Today, listening to the news of what took place, my mind, body, and soul immediately responded with feelings of anger, terror, and memories of what I felt when I was young in Guatemala and we were told of another military attack in the inland communities, where the majority of the members of the community were indigenous people from one of the Maya groups. During a civil war, it's difficult to feel safe and calm; in that moment I put myself in the shoes of the terrified people during this attack, what they felt, what were their last thoughts as they looked into the barrel of the gun that in the end would take from them the most precious possession in the world: "LIFE". At the same time, I began to think about how their loved ones felt when they heard the news - the anguish, the pain, the rage, and I thought: There is nothing possible to say. There isn't anything or anyone powerful enough to change these feelings, which are necessary to begin this process, I thought. Maybe the only way that I can help, to some extent, is to say that we will not permit their lives and their deaths to be in vain - that we will remember them and respect them forever for the sacrifice that they made to keep their communities vibrant. This was the only thing that helped me to survive during the time of the armed conflict - the thought that the fighters for the rights of the original movements will live eternally in our hearts, with pride and love, and that the victims will never be forgotten and that their sacrifice will always be appreciated, honored, and remembered.

When I feel the foundations of all my hope that our civilization is in the direction of recognition, accountability, and reconciliation, to be able to finally heal ourselves of our hurts, that over 500 years of genocide, theft of land and culture, and invisibilization of black, indigenous, and other communities of color, the hateful minds created by colonization, slavery, and racism continue devastating our communities. In the face of the devastation of our environment, where those who suffer most, and in extreme form the brutal consequences not only of the ecological impact, but also the impacts due to racism, such as inadequate physical and mental health services, education, livelihood, and freedom of religious and cultural expression. In this moment, when I try to understand how it is that someone can see their neighbors as enemies, and can violently kill members of the community, it is imperative that in this moment we declare that we will not leave these acts of hate with motives to destroy the

communities that we love, and for which we work tirelessly, it is immoral not denounced that we must fight and change the immoral system to which we have been subjected, indoctrinated, and which many times we even feel proud of an identity that is not aligned with our heritage and our ancestral beliefs.

Today I cry in solidarity with all my brothers who are fighting with their lives and their bodies to dismantle this system of hate and oppression. Today I send my most sincere condolences to the families of the victims of this racist crime; we must be vigilant that the infection of hate and oppression do not keep growing. We can't continue sewing seeds modified by false promises of an unjust system, unsustainable and that unjustly benefits a small group with a lot of power. I want to denounce all the racists that we will not allow them to continue harassing and committing these hate crimes - we will no longer let them plant these seeds of hate and oppression, watered with false promises of oppressive religions and empty thoughts full of envy, insecurity with a lack of dignity and collective responsibility.

The fight for survival in our streets and gardens is full of seeds of love and resilience. We, the survivors of ancient generations of those who, for millennia, have cared for the forests, valleys, and mountains, seas, lakes and rivers, we are in prayer and meditation, asking all of my ancestors and the ancestors of my comrades in the trenches of the communities affected by the terror of brutal rage and hate that has caused racism, colonialism, capitalism rooted in the illegitimate social advantage that has created the white bourgeoisie. I have so many feelings imprisoned inside, without being able to express them either because of indignation or because of loss of my native tongue that has been orphaned and left without voice before this terrifying fact - all I can do is hug my children and ask the mother creator and the ancestors that protect all of us during the fight of love that we have undertaken since the moment of this absurd patriarchal, white, rich system led by all these irresponsible, unjust, and destructive politicians. There is no space for anything but love, education, care, and joy in our communities, for our collective freedom and for a good life in harmony with all the other beings living on our planet!

UlumPixan Athoh'il Suk'il

I am a worker/owner farmer at Tuck Away Farms and a Co Director at Global Village farms, also NOFA/Mass Education Director and Codirector of Equity and Inclusion.



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Cover Photo Credit: Norman, a Chinese White Goose who loves to be held and snuggled, by Kristianne Gale

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Letters to the Editor

Dear TNF Editor,
Thank-you for publishing the “Critical Spring Temperatures for Tree Bud Development Stages” in the Spring issue. Although I don’t grow any of the varieties you included, I have grown small fruit for many decades and I was able to use the Michigan State website links you posted to locate the same type of data for my blueberry and strawberry crops. I never knew this data existed, but I have already used it this spring to make some key management decisions on nights when freezing temperatures are looming.

Al Johnson, Titusville, NJ

Dear Al,
I’m so glad you found the resources useful! I hope you have an abundant fruit crop this season.

Elizabeth, TNF Editor

Dear Elizabeth,
I have just gotten through all the incredible meaty content of the latest Natural Farmer issue.

You did a really good job recruiting and assembling such a wealth and breadth of information! Thank you for this service you are doing for Northeast farmers. Thanks also for providing a means to get our concept and ideas ‘out there’.

*Mary-Howell Martens
Lakeview Organic Grain*

Dear Mary-Howell,
Your praises mean a lot! I’m grateful the issue on Land Access was so well received. We’ll keep covering that topic in upcoming issues as well.

Elizabeth, TNF Editor

Dear TNF,
The spring issue of TNF included a thought-provoking article on the granting of legal personhood to a river in New Zealand, which the author lauded and suggested as a model for the Missouri River and other natural resources in the United States, in order to protect these resources from depredation by developers, both private and public. While the protection of natural resources is indeed laudable, the legal method used in New Zealand has the potential for setting a far-reaching and nightmarish precedent in the US legal system.

In the US, “persons” within the law are either humans or a “non-human entity that is treated as a person for limited legal purposes.” Regarding the latter, it has become useful in the development of the law governing commerce to treat corporations as persons, giving them the ability to enter into contracts, to sue or be sued, and, most regrettably, exercise free speech rights in the political realm. Given the existing legal personhood of such non-human entities, it might seem like a small step or no step at all to grant legal personhood to a river, or a mountain, or a forest, in order to protect the interests of each. But there is at least one critical difference between a corporation and a river: the corporation is owned and controlled by human persons, and it is in their interests, and with their permission, that the corporation takes action within the legal system. As described by the author of the spring TNF article, ownership has nothing to do with the personhood of the New Zealand river. That personhood exists independent of whoever owns the land through which the river flows, and the “person” of the river has rights that may conflict with, and indeed probably supersede, the rights of those landowners. This may be beneficial to the protection of the river. The article notes that if the Missouri River were a person, “construction of the [Dakota Access] pipeline would first have to be approved by the river,” whose interests might be represented by appointees, as in the New Zealand case.

But the potential for legal chaos in such a system is significant, and might even result in harm to the

river. Chaos, because “the river” is not an entity with a simple definition.

Consider that the Missouri River watershed includes more than half a million square miles, more than 10% of the area of the country as a whole, and has almost 100 significant tributaries, each of which might also be considered for personhood; and each of those has smaller streams that feed it. Granting personhood to a river sets up a system in which (1) anyone might claim to be the true representative of the river’s interests; and (2) the interests of the river might be seen to conflict with the interests of an adjacent resource (such as a tributary or a forest or farmland, and perhaps involving the need for water in a drought year). It seems far too much to expect that the human representatives of each entity will act both selflessly and with perfect insight, and even if they did, there is no obvious way to evaluate those competing claims solely based on what the river or the forest “wants.”

Our legal system is flawed, but not in that it restricts personhood too tightly, but rather that the rich have too much power within it. It is optimistic in the extreme to imagine that granting personhood to a river, or a forest, or a mountain, would change the power relations within the system, rather than provide new ways for the already powerful to exert control.

Finally, granting personhood to entities that are not currently considered persons under the law, and appointing guardians to protect their interests, is a precedent that the anti-choice movement would love to see more of. It seems obvious, at least to me, that those concerned with protecting a woman’s right to control her body should wish to avoid that precedent at all costs.

*Yours,
Richard Robinson
Hopestill Farm, Sherborn, MA*

Dear Richard,
Thank you for your thoughtful note. You raise excellent points and weaknesses of this idea to grant legal personhood to nature. While it seems that one of the reasons to do this is in fact, “that personhood exists independent of whoever owns the land through which the river flows”, your point about who holds power and wealth resonates deeply and is truly something to fear. Perhaps some answers to our questions could be found in looking at the Klamath River in Oregon & California, which was the first river in the US to be granted legal personhood and the Lake Erie Bill of Rights, the first to give rights to a specific ecosystem. See wuft.org/news/rights-of-nature/. I hope your comments generate discussion from other readers as well.

Elizabeth, TNF Editor

Dear TNF,
The last TNF issue that just came out is really awesome. Thanks for sharing all that content about land access and highlighting refugee farmers.

*Corinne Hansch
Amsterdam, NY*

Hi Corinne,
I’m glad we had such a wealth of diverse submissions to make that issue really special. Hopefully, many more like that are to come!

Elizabeth, TNF Editor

TNF enjoys hearing from you! Send your letters and comments to TNF@nofa.org.

Write for The Natural Farmer



Technical articles, personal stories, opinions, book reviews, tool reviews & photos are all welcome.

Upcoming Themes & Deadlines:

- *Farmer Stress & Wellbeing, Aug. 1*
- *Challenging Corporate Capture, Nov. 1*
- *Water & Agriculture, Feb. 1*
- *Farmworkers, May. 1*



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Deadlines:
April 30 for the Summer issue
July 31 for the Fall issue
October 31 for the Winter issue

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The Natural Farmer

(carrots - from A-1)

The day Nathaniel asked us to de-hybridize Bolero, it was our turn to swallow hard. Carrots are prone to severe inbreeding depression and, since they cross so readily with Queen Anne's Lace and are difficult to produce well in isolation cages, they're challenging to grow to seed here in the Northeast. We immediately turned to our dear friend and mentor Irwin Goldman, a public plant breeder at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who has worked with carrots for decades.

Irwin picked up the phone immediately and jumped in right away. Instrumental in founding the Open Source Seed Initiative (OSSI), Irwin shared his insight that since Bolero's parent lines were likely so inbred, it would be counter-productive to simply 'de-hybridize' Bolero. 'Crossing Bolero with OSSI's nantes-style carrot population was an elegant solution,' shared Irwin, 'combining the specificity of Bolero with the broader but still desirable genetics of a healthy nantes population to make a much more resilient carrot.'

That winter, Irwin crossed several Bolero carrots into the OSSI nantes population and sent Fruition the seed the following season, beginning a cycle we would follow for years to come. The seed was sown at Remembrance Farm, with agronomic selections made throughout the season and especially at harvest. We selected each root for classic nantes shape as well as early, abundant leaf production, providing early vigor and early maturity as well as machine harvest. After storing the roots in the root cellar for three months (this is the optimum minimum vernalization period for carrots), we made taste and texture selections, inviting all members of our community to help us decide which roots we collectively loved best. Those roots were then mailed to Irwin who planted them in his glass houses to produce seed over the winter. Brilliantly, and with utmost generosity, Irwin's immense vision and expertise allowed this biennial crop to be produced annually for many seasons, refining our process with each season.

Making the Selections

There is much to select for, Friends! Within the context of Nathaniel's biodynamic farm, we selected this new carrot, brilliantly orange, to be scrumptious in summer as well as in storage. We also valued early, vigorous leaf production and Nathaniel's farm has an abundance of stones (perhaps you can relate!) making long, straight roots in such soil a selection, indeed.

Selecting for flavor was immensely illuminating: Without consistent selection, carrots bring forth their bitter ancestry. Tasting this legacy in all their pine-y, resinous intensity was eye-opening as well as tongue-tingling. At first, perhaps as many as one in eighty carrots would have a distinct and unmistakable pinesol-esque quality. With each generation, the proportion decreases. Still, with every generation and always, we are making flavor selections. And it's paid off: Within three generations, Dulcinea was significantly sweeter and more tender than Bolero both in summer and in storage.

As we made flavor selections, we had three bins: One labeled 'heaven,' another 'hell' and the third one was 'purgatory.' We love flavor wheels and articulating nuance, though as hundreds of people were tasting hundreds of roots, we had to keep it simple! Delicious roots went to 'heaven' to be planted out and become the seeds of the next generation. Bitter roots went to 'hell' to feed our neighbor's pigs. We only circled back to 'purgatory' if we needed more roots to ensure 'heaven' had a healthy population size (200 roots minimum), to avoid any risk of inbreeding depression. Only in the first generation did we have to dip into purgatory, so most of those roots became soup for us all.

Selecting for long-term storage was also straightforward: Nathaniel is growing these carrots largely



Nathaniel Thompson (Remembrance Farm) and Petra Page-Mann (Fruition Seeds) collaborate to regionally adapt and cultivate new varieties of cabbage, kale, onions, beets, calendula and carrots. Photo provided by author.

for storage and has optimal storage conditions, making it simple to select for long-storing roots.

The greatest challenge for us has been selecting for that early, vigorous leaf production that is so much the hallmark of Bolero. At first, we attempted selections by flagging vigorous individuals in the field six weeks after planting. The time invested did not prove fruitful, so we next made vigor selections by simply making a visual evaluation at harvest. Our observations suggest that early, vigorous leaf production may be indicated by above-average leaves present at harvest. Each generation has been improving and we'll be making this selection for the rest of our lives, creating more consistency across the generations.

From a few hundred seeds in 2015, Remembrance Farm grew 2 acres of this new carrot in 2018. From 5 acres in 2019, Nathaniel is currently growing most of his 7 acres of carrots as this new variety, growing Bolero and other carrots as a trial alongside for comparison.

What's in a Name?

Fruition Seeds released this new carrot in 2019, naming them Dulcinea for their sweetness as well as honoring her roots in the Spanish word 'Bolero,' naming her for the muse of Don Quixote. Dulcinea is OSSI-pledged, ensuring Dulcinea (and any other carrots developed with these genetics) will never be patented, remaining in the public domain as a commons we all benefit from.

Dulcinea now grows in gardens, on farms and is being evaluated in trials all across the continent and beyond. We're excited to share Dulcinea with the world and are equally ecstatic to continue intensive selections with each generation. Countless ancestors, both human and plant, have made this work possible; it is our privilege and pleasure to continue such traditions and cultivate new ones along the way.

New Seeds to Sow

In a world increasingly impoverished by industrial and private interest, Dulcinea is the harbinger of a new paradigm. Collaboration between a market farmer, a seed grower and a public university has created an open-source, organic alternative to one of the world's preeminent conventional hybrids. And

Friends, let's take this a step further.

As Rowen White, an Akwesasne seed saver, farmer and educator and co-founder of the Sierra Seeds Cooperative says, 'seed companies didn't exist 150 years ago. If we do our work well, in 150 years, they won't need to exist.'

What are the deeper stories of the seeds you sow? Where are they being grown? What are they being selected for? How do those seeds reflect you, your community and our deepest collective values? Which seeds align most deeply with your vision of (y)our farm, of (y)our future? What seeds might you save on your farm this season? Who else is here to accompany you on the journey? (Hint: Don't be shy!)

We are the Seeds

Indeed, Dulcinea may simply look like a carrot. An orange, tapered carrot. But don't judge a carrot by its cover: there is so much more to each seed, and each of us, than meets the eye.

Seeds are not as small as they seem.

Neither are we.

Our imaginations nourish the world.

Together, let's re-imagine the stories we tell and seeds we sow.

Let's cultivate so much more than carrots!

If you're also hungry to grow, we're right there with you.

Petra Page-Mann is one of the founders and team members at Fruition Seeds, based in Naples, NY.



Chapter News

NOFA MASSACHUSETTS

NEWS

The NOFA/Mass Food Access Department has added several new programs and partnerships this year, including a state-wide Farm Share program, and a new Culturally Appropriate Crops initiative. Participants will learn gardening skills, while providing the community with fresh food that is relevant to their families' food traditions. NOFA/Mass will also partner with Springfield College and Neighbor to Neighbor to provide support for their community garden initiatives, with a focus on techniques such as composting, companion planting, and growing culturally appropriate foods.

Our Soil Technical Assistance program is also expanding, with a new biological assessment as well as new outreach to community gardens. The biological assessment involves analyzing soil, compost, vermicompost, compost teas and extracts by direct microscopy. NOFA/Mass will provide growers with soil test interpretation and recommendations following the assessment. Learn more at nofamass.store/product-page/biological-qualitative-assessment.

POLICY

Several of our priority pieces of state legislation were "reported favorably" (advanced) ahead of a committee deadline, including: Food Justice Frontline, Non-Toxic Playgrounds, Protection from Chemical Trespass and the Raw Milk Delivery. We now have until July to advocate for final passage.

As we continue calling for the long-awaited publication of the state's Healthy Soils Action Plan, we continue to advocate for funding for healthy soils. A \$100M allocation for Environmental Infrastructure in the state's first "ARPA" funding bill may provide some funding for healthy soils practices, though further advocacy is needed.

NOFA/Mass is also working with the MA Food System Collaborative in support of a budget amendment to support the critically underfunded extension office at UMass, which has provided essential educational and technical assistance since 1911. This \$620,570 request would provide resources for new staff positions, focused on issues such as soil health, urban agriculture, pollinators, and addressing invasive pests while reducing the use of pesticides.

The NOFA/Mass Policy Department hosted a roundtable at our 2022 Winter Conference, asking "How can we boost the voices of farmers in the climate conversation?", in collaboration with the MA Food System Collaborative, CISA and American Farmland Trust. NOFA/Mass will host another roundtable in August at the Summer Conference.

Welcome

NOFA/Mass recently welcomed two new board members: Viondy Merisma and Karen Spiller. Viondy cultivates organic cannabis and practices Korean Natural Farming. He is currently working towards becoming a "Soilsmith" in order to teach advanced Natural Farming courses. He has also been farming at Land's Sake Farm in Weston, MA, is the founder of The Green Torch LLC. Karen Spiller is Professor in Sustainable Food Systems at University of New Hampshire, where she connects students, faculty, and staff with the community-engaged, transdisciplinary work of Food Solutions New England (FSNE). Karen is Principal of KAS Consulting and provides mission-based consulting with a focus on resource matching, board development, and strategic planning for health and equity-focused initiatives.

Events

Monthly Minimum Till Farmers Call

The first Monday of every month at 7:00pm EST, online. Take some time to chat with fellow farmers and farm advisors about tillage reduction and soil health in an open, roundtable environment.

nofamass.org/nofa-events/

NOFA Summer Conference

August 5-7, 2022, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA. The 48th Annual NOFA Summer Conference will take place at Hampshire College, with events happening on site, and select workshops, panels, and the keynote also available online. Register at: nofasummerconference.org

Contact

(413) 561-0852 nofamass.org info@nofamass.org

NOFA NEW HAMPSHIRE

NEWS

NOFA-NH hosted our 4th annual "Feeding the Family" Organic Gardening Series from February through May. Over 330 attendees participated in this year's virtual classes. Workshops covered garden planning, fruit and nut trees, permaculture principles, container gardening, backyard herbs, and raising chickens. Courses were taught by six instructors with varied backgrounds: Ron Christie of Living Earth Farm, Nicko Rubín of East Hill Tree Farm, Amy Antonucci of Living Land Permaculture Homestead and Seacoast Permaculture, regenerative farmer and author Acadia Tucker, Maria Noël Groves of Wintergreen Botanicals, and Paolamantina Grullón Livingstone of Living Stone Farm.

NOFA-NH's Farm Share Program, now in its 6th year, is currently underway. We are delighted to be serving 150+ community members with 50 low-cost, certified organic farm shares this year—the greatest number of shares offered through the program to date. We are deeply grateful to the farmers, sponsors, and donors who contributed to this year's program. Participating farms include: Abenaki Springs Farm, Brookford Farm, Local Harvest CSA, Mountain Heartbeet, Picadilly Farm, Pork Hill Farm, Tuckaway Farm, Winter Street Farm, and Work Song Farm.

Mark your calendar for upcoming 2022 farm tours! NOFA-NH is hosting 6 farm tours this year through "The CRAFT of Farming," a peer-to-peer on-farm education program focused on technical education, organic best practices, and networking. Each farm will have a different educational topic that is great for commercial farmers, gardeners, students, and interested eaters. Check our CRAFT webpage for this year's farm tour topics, locations, and dates! nofanh.org/craft

Save the dates for our re-scheduled 50th anniversary events! On Saturday, August 27th, join us for a delicious, local, and organic centered farm-to-table dinner and fundraiser at Colby Hill Inn. On Saturday, October 1st, spend an afternoon with us at an outdoor, family friendly pizza party, exhibitor fair, and farm tour at Brookford Farm. Discover our 50th anniversary archive, find more details, and register for these existing events at nofanh.org/50thanniversary.

POLICY

NOFA-NH is continuing to work with fellow NOFA chapters and regional partners on Farm Bill advocacy, and efforts to support Northeast organic dairies.

WELCOME

We are delighted to welcome two new staff members to NOFA-NH's team: Education Program Coordinator Kyle Jacoby, and Marketing & Communications Coordinator Xochiquetzal Berry. Both Kyle and Xochi joined NOFA-NH in March and offer their unique passions and expertise to our growing community. Education Program Coordinator, Kyle Jacoby is an environmental education professional who has worked with nonprofits across the country that are focused on improving our natural and social systems. He has held roles in teaching, support, and program directing for organizations such as Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), Mass Audubon, The Trustees of Reservations, and Tower Hill Botanic Garden. During his career, Kyle built an appreciation for the impact farming can have while teaching and leading farm-based education

programs at CVNP, Drumlin Farm (MA Audubon), and Appleton Farms (The Trustees). He believes farming can change the world and loves getting the opportunity to work with our NH Community to make that a reality. Kyle lives in the Seacoast region of NH. Marketing & Communications Coordinator Xochiquetzal Berry is a food systems specialist and certified permaculture designer with a background in culinary arts and sustainable food and farming. In her 14 years of experience, Xochi has worked as a chef, garden designer, permaculture program head, and agricultural educator. Through her life's work, she has become acutely aware of the beneficial impact organic, regenerative, and just farming practices have on our people and planet, and she is eager to help the food-loving folks of New Hampshire develop a resilient, equitable, and vibrant regional food system. Xochi lives on an urban homestead in Concord with her husband, daughter, dog, and 7 chickens. Please join us in welcoming Kyle and Xochi to team NOFA-NH!

OPENINGS

NOFA-NH is always looking for passionate farmers, gardeners, eaters, educators, and activists to join our dynamic volunteer Board of Directors! Please contact us to learn more: info@nofanh.org.

EVENTS

NOFA-NH's 50th Anniversary Farm-to-Table Dinner & Fundraiser, Saturday, August 27, 2022, 4 – 9:30 PM, Colby Hill Inn, Henniker, NH. Join us for a delicious, local, and organic-centered farm-to-table dinner, fundraiser, and social at Colby Hill Inn to celebrate our 50th anniversary!

NOFA-NH's 50th Anniversary Pizza Party, Exhibitor Fair & Farm Tour, Saturday, October 1, 2022, 1 – 4 PM, Brookford Farm, Canterbury, NH. Gather for an outdoor, family-friendly pizza party, complete with live music, an exhibitor fair, and farm tour in celebration of 50 years of NOFA!

Contact

603-224-5022, nofanh.org, info@nofanh.org

NOFA NEW JERSEY

NEWS

NOFA NJ has been active with our regular programming efforts, hosting farm tours and workshops, book club meetings, open houses, and planning for our next winter conference. Increasing our activity in policy and advocacy has us keeping a renewed presence at State and County Board of Agriculture meetings, and supporting specific legislation has us meeting with NJ legislators and policymakers.

CONTACT

(908) 371-1111, nofanj.org, nofainfo@nofanj.org,

NOFA NEW YORK

NEWS

On April 29th, 2022, NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC celebrated its 20th anniversary of accreditation with the NOP. Reflecting on the milestone, NOFA-NY, Inc. Executive Director, Bethany Wallis remarked that, "NOFA-NY is proud to be the largest organic certifier in New York State, serving more than half of certified organic operations. Our organization further supports the community through education, advocacy, and outreach as the voice for organic agriculture in New York. As 2022 marks our 20-year anniversary of accreditation to the USDA National Organic Program, NOFA-NY has been there since the beginning and looks forward to continued service to the organic community." As we as an organization celebrate our milestone, you may wonder what sets us apart from other certifiers? "When you choose to join the NOFA-NY community, you know you are a part of an organization focused on integrity – we ensure NOFA-NY Certified Organic is a label you can trust. Not only will you

(continued on next page)

Chapter News

(continued from A-6)

receive stellar certification, but you will also be supported through farmer-to-farmer focused networking and education and your needs will be represented at the state and national level through our policy work”, Wallis said. Although we are proud of the 20 years of service we have provided, this is only the beginning as we add more farms to our already 1,100+ certified operation family and continue to provide education and networking. When asked to describe what this future looks like, Wallis said that “NOFA-NY will continue supporting New York State farmers’ ability to remain certified and transition to organic certification while the industry changes and grows. NOFA-NY will continue to provide ease of certification and great customer service as we evolve, focusing on a just and resilient farming system grounded in a diverse community, now and for future generations.” NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC Certification Co-Director, Jessica Terry, said she plans to keep the organization on track to “Continue supporting small farms’ ability to remain certified while the industry changes and grows, as well as providing ease of certification and great customer service as we evolve with it.” While 20 years has brought significant changes to the organic sector, we look forward to the next the 20 years and beyond. Thank you for working with us to provide a strong and integrity-driven label. If you, or anyone else you know, would like to certify their operation and join the NOFA-NY Certified Organic family, please drop us a line by calling 607-724-9851 or email us at certifiedorganic@nofany.org. We’d love to chat!

WELCOME

Sarah Murdie joined both NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC and NOFA-NY, Inc. as the Operations Director. Kim Kopp joined NOFA-NY, Inc. as the Bookkeeper. Krisztina Blackham joined NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC as the Bookkeeper. Lacey Smith joined NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC as a Certification Specialist. Samantha Shipley joined NOFA-NY Certified Organic, LLC as an Administrative Assistant.

OPENINGS

We are currently hiring a Long Island Organic Educator. More info on our website: nofany.org/about-us/careers/

EVENTS

Join us for the 2022 Field Day Season! More info here: nofany.org/field-days/

CONTACT

315-988-4000, nofany.org, info@nofany.org

NOFA VERMONT

NEWS

This spring, we opened up registrations for our Farm Share program, in which limited-income Vermonters can participate in a CSA at half-cost, with the other half of the cost covered in part by NOFA-VT and in part by fundraising done by the CSA farm. We have continued to see demand for this program rise over the past few years. For the summer CSA season, 57 farms will provide 300 people with half-priced CSA shares. In this win-win program, more members of the community gain access to a regular supply of local food and farms are fully compensated for their labor.

Our Farmer Services team continues to help farmers around Vermont with business planning, cost of production analysis, and technical assistance. Applications for Farm Beginnings and Journey Farmers, our year-long educational programs for new farmers and early-stage farmers, respectively, will reopen at the end of the summer. NOFA-VT’s communications team and Vermont Organic Farmers (VOF), the certifying agency of NOFA-VT, have joined forces to launch a “back to basics” consumer education campaign that will cover the fundamentals of organic practices, the organic label, and the impact of organic farms on

our state and beyond. Keep an eye on NOFA-VT’s social media channels this summer and fall to check out some of the materials from this digital campaign.

Other recent events include distributing Crop Cash materials (coupons that double WIC spending power at farmers markets) across the state and enjoying the workshops and on-farm socials we’ve hosted so far for our annual summer event series.

POLICY

U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, a longtime Vermont senator and staunch supporter of organic farming, will be retiring this year. NOFA-VT is hosting a candidate forum this summer to help educate the public on each candidate’s relationship to issues related to our mission.

Additionally, we have continued to participate in the Soil Health and Payment for Ecosystem Services working group and advocating for a program that includes biodiversity and works for farms of diverse scales and production types.

This past legislative session, we tracked and engaged with a variety of bills and issues related to cannabis equity, prophylactic use of neonicotinoid treated seeds, BIPOC land access and land justice, surface water tracking, and on-farm slaughter regulation.

To facilitate connections between farmers and legislators on important local policy decisions, NOFA-VT co-hosted a series of Small Farm Action Days with another local nonprofit, Rural Vermont. This event series offered advocacy training and opportunities to speak directly to elected officials. Topics included cannabis equity, on-farm slaughter, and general education on the legislative process.

WELCOME

NOFA-VT is excited to welcome Kristin Freeman to the team as the new Finance Director! Kristin is thrilled to join the NOFA-VT team to dedicate her financial and operational skills in support of local farmers.

THANK YOU

We have deep gratitude to extend to two staff members who are leaving NOFA-VT. To Megan Browning and Kirsten Bower, thank you for all your incredible work over the years! Megan Browning worked with aspiring and beginning farmers in her role as the Farmer Services Program Facilitator and supported many new farmers in Vermont during their crucial beginning years. Kirsten Bower served NOFA-VT in many roles for 32 years, most recently as Finance Director. Her impact on NOFA-VT and, in turn, the organic farming community, cannot be overstated. Best wishes to both Kirsten and Megan on their future journeys!

OPENINGS

For latest openings, please visit nofavt.org/jobs.

EVENTS

Check out our full slate of summer events, including on-farm workshops and socials, at nofavt.org/events.



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Opinions

Pay farmers to promote biodiversity: Our food and our future depends on it

By Maddie Kempner

Vermont is on the cusp of becoming one of the first states in the nation to compensate farmers and other land stewards for ecosystem services—a suite of benefits provided by functioning ecosystems that support human life: clean water, pollination, and flood mitigation, to name a few. While the concept of paying farmers for these benefits—beyond the food and fiber they produce—is novel and full of promise, the approach Vermont takes could either lead to incremental improvements that ultimately don't reverse our ecological crisis, or guide us to radically re-envision our relationship with the land that sustains us.

The approach gaining traction in Vermont's Soil Health and Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group has so far, unfortunately, been the former. The working group, created by the legislature in 2019 at the prompting of Vermont's farmer watershed alliances, quickly became fixated on soil health as a panacea to all of our ecological and agricultural woes.

It's true that healthy soils are critical: healthy soil has the capacity to hold more water, making land more resilient to the increased flooding and drought we're experiencing due to climate change. Healthy, rich soil can also store more carbon, drawing it out of the atmosphere and mitigating its warming effects on our planet.

However, focusing too narrowly on improving

soil health in farm fields (by planting cover crops, for example) risks ignoring the multitude of other simple, practical, and cost-effective steps farmers can take to enlist their whole farms and field edges in the task of restoring ecological health.

In addition to the climate crisis, scientists have confirmed we are also in the midst of the sixth mass extinction, where hundreds of species are expected to be lost within several generations. What if Vermont could set an example of how farming and land stewardship practices can actively work to restore the habitat on which threatened species depend, while providing nutritious food for our communities and buffering us all against the worst impacts of climate change?

This may sound complicated and costly to achieve. It doesn't have to be. In practice, it looks like restoring or protecting wetlands, or planting native trees and shrubs along streams and rivers, or letting cover crops flower before tilling them under or crimping them. These practices promote biodiversity and provide habitat for beneficial species. The outcome? Farmers save money by benefiting from farmland that is more resilient in the face of new pest and disease pressures, the need for toxic inputs is greatly reduced or eliminated, and the crucial ecosystem functions that allow us to have a stable food supply, clean water, and breathable air are restored.

We must be bold in imagining a model of land stewardship that restores ecosystems and recognizes that everything in nature is connected to everything else. Farmers already know this. They have the skills, knowledge, and passion to lead this work, but they cannot be asked to do it without our support. Farmers already face prices that don't cover their costs, and regulations that can be expensive and onerous. Farmers cannot also be asked to do the work of restoring ecosystems (on top of keeping us all fed!) without fair compensation.

Vermont can show leadership, and put this vision into action, by providing farmers with a Universal Basic Income. If we expect farmers to care for our lands in a way that goes beyond the most essential work of providing food, we must ensure first and foremost that their basic human needs are met. Granting a base level of income to those who grow our food might be the only way to ensure our land and all the lives that depend on it can also thrive.

Vermont's Soil Health and Payment for Ecosystem Services Working Group should design a program that improves soil health, yes. But it cannot start and end there. If we are to truly restore ecosystems, and the myriad services they provide, we must care for all the life forms—human and non-human, seen and unseen—on which we all depend.

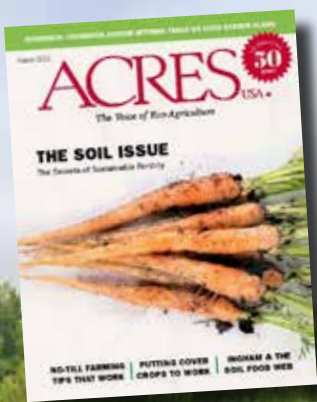
By providing in this way for those who provide for us, we will usher in a new paradigm of land management where we truly value farms for all of the life-sustaining benefits they can provide.

Maddie Kempner is the NOFA-VT Policy Director.



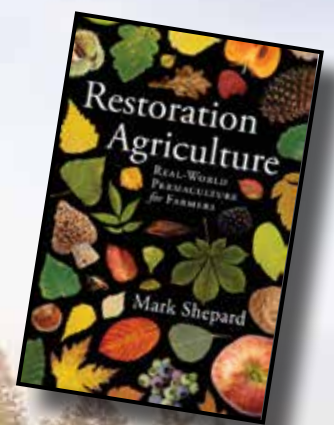
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NOFA's Efforts with Justice, Equity and Anti-racism

TNF is committed to bringing attention to and generating an increased awareness of issues of race and inequality and how these have impacted agriculture and the food system in the past and today. As we highlight these impacts in the larger context within articles and stories in TNF, we also realize the role we hold as part of NOFA. Some NOFA chapters are deep in analyzing their power and place in being part of creating a more just and equitable food system; other chapters are just getting started. We hope to highlight all the chapters in upcoming issues - stay tuned. Please reach out to your State's chapter for more information, with questions or to get involved.

- TNF Editor

NOFA Vermont

In 2018, the NOFA-VT staff and board worked through a strategic planning process that resulted in an updated mission statement. The culmination of that process was the addition of 'social justice' as one of the three foundational pillars of a thriving future for organic farming. Since that time, NOFA-VT as an organization has been learning, assessing, and deepening our understanding of what it means for our work to add social justice to our mission; "NOFA-VT seeks to be a part of nourishing a healed and thriving food and farming system by employing social justice as the fundamental lens through which we assess, evaluate, and engage in all our work."

In centering social justice, we have developed and continue to develop policies, practices, programmatic changes, and culture that support our amended mission.

In an effort to provide baseline anti-racism education to our staff, all new staff members participate in the *Uprooting Racism Training* offered by Soul Fire Farm. While this training touches on many aspects of justice work in addition to anti-racism, including (but not limited to) accessibility and anti-classism, we do not currently have regularly scheduled staff trainings on other justice topics. In the past we held a regular open meeting with an anti-racism consultant, and now provide the opportunity for staff to meet the consultant at any time to help work through obstacles as they arise. Additionally, while all staff are called to center social justice in their work, as is laid out in our mission, we also have a staff Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee that is dedicated to identifying opportunities to increase the positive impact of NOFA-VT's workplace, programs and resources. The JEDI team recently completed an evaluation of our organization on Soul Fire Farm's rubric assessing where we fall on a scale of complicity to dismantling racism. We will now build a plan to shift in key ways revealed by that process.

We are continually revisiting policies and program models through the lens of social justice. This has looked like explicit policies directly targeted at dismantling an oppressive system, or nuance woven into the fabric of a program or offering. Currently, we offer free registration for our Winter Conference and our on-farm workshops for anyone who identifies as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC).

We recently piloted a new participatory grantmaking model to award our annual Resilience Grants to local farmers. The recipients of the grant were chosen by a committee comprised of a diverse group of local farmworkers and farmers in an effort to move away from a gatekeeping grant model and towards a participatory, democratic one. Additionally, we worked to increase our funding for our food equity programs this year, which has allowed us to more robustly meet the increasing local demand.

We know our policies and programs will change as we continue to work to understand how whiteness

has excluded people of color and other people with marginalized identities from participating in NOFA-VT's community and/or benefiting from the organic movement. In 2021 we released a "Statement of Intention on Social Justice", a document outlining NOFA-VT's relationship with and commitment to justice work. That document is available to the public on our website at nofavt.org/statement-intention-social-justice, and we welcome feedback through a form on that webpage at any time.

NOFA New Hampshire

"NOFA-NH is committed to creating an inclusive culture where all forms of diversity are seen and valued within our organization and the greater organic agriculture community. As farmers, gardeners and eaters, NOFA-NH recognizes that modern American agriculture was founded on structural racism and inequality, and that there is much work to be done to address generations of injustice experienced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, LGBTQ+ individuals, disabled individuals, incarcerated individuals, economically disadvantaged individuals, women, veterans, and any other marginalized groups.

"With a mission of helping people build sustainable, healthy food systems for healthy communities, NOFA-NH is committed to advocating for farmers and farmworkers, food justice, environmental justice, and racial justice as part of building a truly sustainable agricultural sector in New Hampshire and beyond."

The above is an excerpt from NOFA-NH's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement published in 2020, the entirety of which is located at www.nofanh.org/dei. NOFA-NH established a DEI Committee the same year: a group of staff, board members, and volunteers that help guide this work. NOFA-NH members are invited to join the Committee and can contact Operations Manager Nikki Kolb to learn more: nikki@nofanh.org. Staff meets to discuss DEI weekly as part of regularly held staff meetings. DEI Committee meetings are held quarterly.

NOFA-NH endeavors to incorporate justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion into all facets of our work, and has outlined concrete goals in our five-year strategic plan to guide this effort. Last year, all staff, Board, and DEI Committee members participated in a "History of Racism in U.S. Agriculture & Organic," webinar. DEI Committee members participated in the Food Solutions New England 21 Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge in 2021, and all staff participated in the Challenge in 2022.

NOFA-NH has also been an active member of the NH Food Alliance's Racial Equity Team since its inception in 2020, and participates in regional NOFA meetings focused on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. In addition to sharing racial equity resources on social media and in our e-newsletters, NOFA-NH developed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Agriculture resources webpage in 2021. We continue to seek diverse farmers and speakers to lead and host our educational programs, and to present at educational events. To remove barriers to participation in our programs, we developed a low-cost scholarship membership level, and continue to incorporate low- and no-cost ticket options into all our programming. In 2022, we revised our mission statement to reflect our commitment to helping people building local, just, and sustainable food systems. We continue to evaluate and amend our policies and procedures through an inclusive and anti-racist lens.

NOFA Massachusetts

Currently, we are examining how to deepen our commitment to racial and cultural equity and justice, including honest work around examining whiteness and dismantling systems of white supremacy that are part of many dominant systems, including food systems.

(continued on A-11)

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Policy Update

After Eking Out a Win for Organic Integrity – What's Next?

by Steve Gilman

On March 29, 2022 the final Origin of Livestock (OOL) Rule was at long last instituted by the USDA, finally resolving statutory language ambiguities from the 1990 Organic Food Production Act (OFPA) that have been keeping family dairies at a major disadvantage in the organic milk marketplace for years. The rule goes into full effect one year from that date. While we celebrate a Big Win for organic integrity and the surviving grassroots organic dairy farmers who have long suffered under the loopholes, we need to become even more vigilant going into the future.

Originally these regulatory changes were publicly vetted through the federal rule-making process and passed by the Obama Administration in 2015. But beset by Big Dairy's hegemony and top down political machinations the final rule had been festering in the bowels of USDA ever since. For over 20 years, organic dairy farmers and their advocates have been trying to get the Agency to put an end to the skewed statute interpretations employed by large scale mega dairies to rapidly ramp up their herd sizes.

Mega Dairies

As allowed by the National Organic Program (NOP) those loophole interpretations are responsible for creating the huge 20,000+ cow operations out west that are linked via pipelines into next door ultra-pasteurized processing plants with adjoining trucking terminals that bulk ship to distributors across the country. With a three-month shelf life such milk now dominates the certified organic market. With the industry controlled by a handful of national buyer/processors who profit from this cheap, industrialized organic milk supply, the resulting low price to family farm operations has put increasing numbers of the smaller bona fide dairies out of business

while further increasing Big Organic's market share.

There's no question that OFPA clearly requires that organically labeled milk and dairy products be produced from dairy cows that are continuously managed organically from before they're born, from the last third of gestation. But because of the lack of certified organic dairy breeder stock back in the early days, the regulations allowed farmers to initially convert their whole herd to certified organic management under a one-time exemption. However as organic milk sales accelerated in the marketplace, various dairies, milk buyers and certifiers began to take advantage of ambiguous language in the law to make allowances that were exacerbated by inconsistent interpretations and lax NOP enforcement.

As a result, some dairies were allowed to routinely transition non-organic animals into their certified operations to rapidly increase their herds rather than having to breed and raise their own replacement animals as intended by OFPA. And taking further advantage of NOP's permissive Big Business oversight, some operations would also take organic animals out of a herd, raise them on cheaper conventional feed and then transition them back into organic to save even more money. The measures gave these companies a huge competitive advantage over the family-scale farmers that are honestly following the rules.

In 2015 organic community pushback against these loopholes reached a crescendo. Tom Vilsack, in his first stint as Secretary of Agriculture launched the rule-making process to clarify the regulations in April. Responding to the proposed rule, thousands of farmers, organizations and consumers took the time to provide extensive comments to inform the regulations. However the process got bogged down during the subsequent USDA review and there was no Final Rule when President Trump assumed office in early 2017.

Political Machinations


The upshot was that under the new USDA Secretary, Sonny Purdue, OOL was buried for the next four years. Further, under Trump's continuing efforts to rescind Obama-era regulations, this was just the beginning of the end for other long-sought organic regulations still in the pipeline. The Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) initiative, known as the organic animal welfare rule, was next on the list.

Garnering overwhelming support in the organic community as well as endorsement from the Humane Society and other animal rights organizations, OLPP was designed to modernize OFPA's livestock and poultry regulations and create higher standards to meet competitive marketplace demands. The new regulations chiefly addressed animal and poultry living conditions, requiring more space and outdoor access for egg-laying hens and meat birds. With a large outpouring of public comments, the proposal made it all the way through the rule-making process in the waning days of the Obama Administration.

OLPP was finalized in April 2016 and published in early January 2017 just before Trump came into office. Kowtowing to the lobbying of the big confinement-style organic poultry operations, USDA Secretary Purdue ended up delaying implementation of the rule three times before withdrawing it entirely in March of 2018. A major public backlash rebuking the Trump Administration's action ensued.

Lawsuits were filed and the withdrawal ruling received a huge number of comments opposing USDA's decision. Finally, a Court decision in March, 2022, sent the Trump withdrawal back to USDA now with Secretary Vilsack again at the helm under the Biden Administration. Despite calls to reissue the previously vetted Final Rule without delay, USDA is going forward with a new proposed

(continued on A-15)



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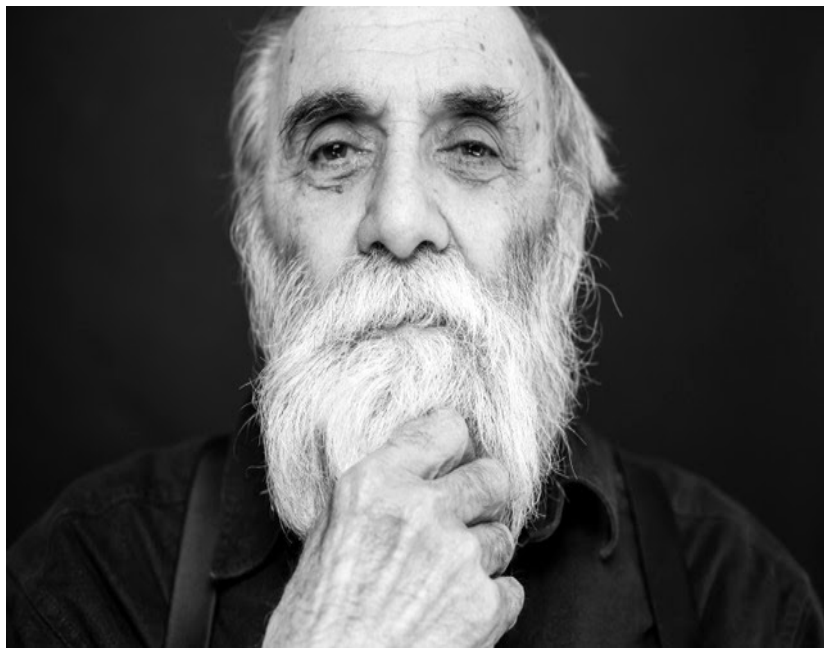
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**Remembering Samuel A. Kaymen:
Founder of NOFA & Stonyfield Farm
Dies at 86**

by Steve Gilman

As a coda to the obituary for Samuel Kaymen I feel so grateful that our Founder was with us for last year's 50th Anniversary Celebration of NOFA's beginnings in 1971. He was featured in Al Johnson's wonderful NOFA history compilation, "Organic Roots" as well as a panel participant in the "Thrilling Tales of Yesteryear" presentation. These Anniversary videos, along with Elizabeth Henderson's "The Next 50 years of NOFA" are available for viewing at nofa.org/nofa-50th/.



Samuel Kaymen. Photo courtesy Erin Little Photography.

As presented in his soulful obit, there are many awesome aspects of Samuel's very full life that I've been unaware of. However they all resonate with the phenomenal person I feel privileged to have learned from in my own journey as a beginning organic farmer back in those early days. But in listing his enormous attributes and accomplishments there was only room for a passing mention of his enduring 50 year impact on the grassroots organic movement that lives on in NOFA.

During a time before the existence of mass communications, the 'Back to the Land Movement' took off in the late 1960's as a spontaneous radical response to society's rank materialism and the ongoing struggles over the Vietnam War, the draft, Civil Rights, nuclear annihilation and a host of other counterculture issues. Heeding the call, Samuel left his New York City roots, moving his growing family to Vermont with an impassioned vision of self-sufficient living in concert with nature. But, as with so many others at the time, such inspiration was initially long on fervor and short on experience.

In a wonderful oral history interview in 1998 that is housed in the NOFA archives at UMASS Amherst, Samuel described naively starting from scratch while building a new life in the North Country. His fledgling experience in nature was growing a first time garden with Louisa that was "overwhelmingly fruitful" and that "blew us away". This led him to devour all the pre-industrialized agriculture books he could find to learn more about growing food naturally.

He described a very powerful book in particular that led to a sudden revelation and insight that subsequently redirected his life. Written by Edward Hyams in 1952, "Soil and Civilization" historically looks at the decline and fall of humankind's past great civilizations due in a large part to ongoing injurious practices that degraded and depleted their soils, thereby undermining their societies and leading directly to agricultural failure. Coming from an urban environment where food seemingly originated in the back rooms of grocery stores, Samuel said simply, "I didn't know agriculture was important" and he emerged with a passionate "born again" focus on the primacy of fertile soil and nutritious crops via organic farming. The book he said, "made

me into an environmentalist and self-taught agronomist". Out of print and pricey, the book archive is now available for free at: archive.org/details/Soil-Civilization/page/n11/mode/2up

An energetic and experienced organizer with skills honed during his social activism days in NYC, Samuel felt a burning need to connect with like-minded practitioners to share his learning about taking care of the earth and farming organically – while wanting to be taught everything he could from them. With his infectious enthusiasm in high gear he began to link up with like-minded others scattered throughout the countryside. Building on the positive response the next step was to create an organization.

Traveling far and wide, he distributed flyers at feed stores, bulletin boards and Cooperative Extension offices all over Vermont and New Hampshire announcing the founding meeting of a new "Natural Organic Farmers Association" to take place on June 7th, 1971 at his Nature Farm in Westminster West, VT. Showing up at that initial hillside meeting was a disparate assemblage of activists, hippies, homesteaders, gardeners and farmers who put together their initial intentions. And NOFA was born.

Learning directly from fellow hands-on growers openly sharing their knowledge and skills proved to be a priceless peer education model. Passing the hat to cover expenses, Samuel began a newsletter, "The Natural Farmer", to

keep members informed and coordinate activities. He initially drove the truck picking up produce from farms along the route for delivery to Day Care centers in Harlem. He started the bulk buying of soil amendments and created an apprentice program before turning these functions over to skilled members to take things even further.

Samuel was also the spark plug at the Summer Conferences that began alternating annually between NH and VT. His high-powered "soil is alive!" workshops were legendary. The membership grew mightily, eventually establishing new state Chapters under the banner of the "Northeast Organic Farming Association" to continue the work. While Samuel moved on to teaching jobs, starting a yogurt company and other endeavors, the sturdy groundwork he created still permeates NOFA and we are all the richer for it. May his memory be a blessing, even as his life was.

(equity - from A 9)

NOFA/Mass acknowledges that the foundation of "modern organic agriculture", like agriculture itself, is rooted in the long-standing cultural practices within communities of indigenous people, people of color, and immigrants. Additionally, we recognize the connections between systems of oppression. We acknowledge that the US was built on stolen land and that the food system was built on the stolen labor of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and other people of color.

A comprehensive vision of agricultural justice for our communities must involve working towards racial, economic, and gender equality. We affirm that racial equity, including an understanding and acknowledgement of historical and ongoing racial inequities, requires a commitment to actions challenging those inequities. Our ongoing work around racial and cultural equity is a core tenet of our organization's outlook and will inform its structure, analysis, and policy development and advocacy process.

Our full Racial Equity statement is available at: nofamass.org/nofamass-working-racial-equity-statement/

NOFA/Mass staff and several board members have participated in a weekly Dismantling Racism series, facilitated by our Equity Co-Director Ulum Pixan Athoh'il, since September 2021. In addition, we hosted consultants from Partnership in Practice at our past two board and staff retreats, giving our full team the opportunity to deepen our shared understanding of the impacts of racism in our own lives and in our organization. Most recently, NOFA/Mass benefitted from participating in the Food Solutions New England 21 Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge. Over the past several months, Executive Director, Jocelyn Langer, has participated in three DEI trainings for organic professionals hosted by the Organic Farming Association. Equity Co-Directors Anna Gilbert-Muhammad and Ulum Pixan Athoh'il, along with board members Jen Salinetti and Meryl LaTronica, are participating in the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance's Confluence series, a 4-month long program designed to build knowledge and practical application on anti-oppression principles in an organization.

NOFA/Mass will be offering several upcoming training sessions relating to racial equity. Topics will include Intro to Racial Equity in the Food System; Racial Equity and Organic Certification; and Best Practices for Language Justice. Dates will be released soon, and workshops will be open to the public. Contact ulumpixan@nofamass.org for details.



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Land Access & Tenure

The spring issue of TNF highlighted issues of land access and tenure. Read it at TheNaturalFarmer.org. The interest in this important topic was so high, we hope to continue to highlight these stories in upcoming issues. Submit your stories to TNF@nofa.org.

El Futuro of Farming

by Chris Brown

Editors note: ALBA uses the term “Latino” and not “Latinx” or “Latiné”. When asked, Chris said “noone in the program has requested otherwise and it is the standard among Mexican immigrants in our area”.

Since 1950, more than a quarter-billion acres of farmland were lost to development, due to a doubling of the U.S. population and the transition to suburban living by many Americans. As many American farmers left their farms, new technologies enabled farmland consolidation into fewer, ever-bigger farming operations which have bid-up farmland prices. Exacerbating the problem, global investors increasingly use farmland as an investment commodity.

Lost in the scramble for assets and market share are small- and mid-sized commercial (or “livelihood”) farms. Once the cornerstone of the rural economy and culture, livelihood farms comprise a declining share of a shrinking number of American farms. A majority of the 5.4 million farms in 1950, livelihood farms are now about a fifth of the 2 million farms that remain.

The loss of small to medium-scale farms disrupted intergenerational transfer of knowledge and assets, creating a wedge between a largely urban workforce and the land itself. We as a nation have drifted away from the land. We may well have lost our way back. Sure, a brave few hold on to the farm, and a few more have aspirations to, but it’s hard to claim that we have reached a critical mass of people and capital to readily confront the shortcomings of the modern food system.

A more environmentally sustainable, and economically vibrant food system would necessitate a resurgence of small- and medium-scale farms which use more labor-intensive, conservation-farming methods to supply their local and regional food economies. Realizing this vision requires hundreds of thousands of Americans, if not a million, returning to the farm. Rediscovering the ‘will and skill’ to farm, therefore, stands as a formidable barrier to this vision. Simply put: ‘Who will farm?’

Part of the answer can be found on Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association’s (ALBA) 100-acre farm in the heart of the Salinas Valley. A non-profit founded in 2001, ALBA’s mission is to create opportunities for limited-resource farmers through land-based training in organic farm management.



Family Farm at work at ALBA. Photo provided by ALBA.

Our farm is teeming with young men and women who have a love for farming and are eagerly pursuing the dream of organic farm ownership.

Who are they? Mostly Mexican immigrant farmworkers who grew up on family farms and immigrated to California to find work. They are hired by large farms through labor contractors to work in the fields, earning only \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually for back-breaking work, receiving neither benefits nor opportunity for advancement.

Despite origins that included hardship, these individuals have exactly what the organic movement needs: the experience, desire and motivation to farm organically. Moreover, they collectively have the youth and numbers to revive the American family farm and the rural economy at large, using environmentally restorative methods to do so.

The U.S. Latino population now exceeds 60 million, including 15 million immigrants. Compared to the American-born population, immigrants typically have stronger experience in and cultural ties to agriculture. Of the 2 million farm workers working American fields, 3 out of 4 originate from Mexico and Central America. Latinos represent over 40% of the entire US agricultural workforce, but own just 4% of America’s farms. This incredible pool of farming talent, given adequate investment in education and resources, and linked up to trusted commercial partners, can help forge a more vibrant and sustainable food system.

Navigating the jump from farmworker to farm owner is not easy. Many farmworkers are hindered by limited formal education, capital, and English skills in a sector dominated by industrial-scale operations. Where do we go from here?

Again, the answer may be found on ALBA’s farm. Our Farmer Education and Enterprise Development (FEED) program is a replicable model for land-based learning, and just one of a growing number of farm incubator programs nationwide. FEED is a five-year program offering subsidized access to land and intensive land-based training in organic

farm management giving start-up farms the time and space to take root and grow.

The program is split into two components. In their first year, aspiring farmers complete the Farmer Education Course, a 250-hour course which prepares them for launching a farm the following year. The course combines classroom with field instruction and includes field trips to successful farms and guest speakers from the industry. In years two through five, participants launch their own farm enterprise in ALBA’s Organic Farm Incubator. In the Incubator they gain subsidized access to land, farm equipment and technical assistance.

Participants are taught conservation practices focusing on soil management to drive plant health, yield and quality. Techniques include the use of cover crops, compost, crop rotation, drip irrigation and natural pest management techniques: nurturing the land and allowing it to give back.

On the business side, ALBA has seasoned program staff advising farmers on finances, marketing, and food safety. In turn, farmers look to our non-profit partners that provide essential business services along the pathway to establishing a viable farm: California FarmLink provides operating loans, mortgages and land matching services. Coke Farm distributes their goods to lucrative markets in the nearby San Francisco Bay Area. Kitchen Table Advisors offers business consulting to farmers as they transition off of ALBA’s land.

In addition, other training partners, alumni and guest speakers from the industry share their knowledge to support beginning farmers. The combination of land access and on-site technical assistance within a learning community of farmers lowers the barriers to starting a farm, giving each emerging farm owner a shot at success after leaving the program.

Once farming independently, our graduates tend to expand to around 8-20 organic acres relying on modest equipment and family labor to cultivate a wide array of organic vegetables and berries. Land is scarce and rarely available in small organic parcels. Many farmers resort to growing on marginal, hilly lands of north Monterey County. An increasingly popular way to farm is to share larger plots among 3-5 farmers, maintaining the social networks forged at ALBA. Some graduates buy land and invite their peers to farm on it. The only consistent method used is tenacity and resilience, again, showing their determination to pursue the dream of farm ownership.

ALBA is nearing completion of a 20-year impact assessment of our program alumni. So far, 185 have been surveyed representing 49% of all graduates. Early results show that, of the 170 now working, 81 (48%) currently operate farm businesses. Of the 52% of respondents who are employed, 81% stated that the program helped them obtain their job and 70% stated that their jobs were related to organic farming and food. Moreover, 83% of all respon

(continued on A-16)



New Crop of Farmers. Photo provided by ALBA.

**Farming Without Land:
An Interview with Anita Ashok Adalja,
Not Our Farm & Ashokra Farm**

by Elizabeth Gabriel

I was inspired to reach out to Anita after reading a recent Not Our Farm blog post and realizing that our paths once crossed - I was the director at the DC farm she managed. She was kind enough to meet me remotely and tell me more about the passion-driven and important work she's doing.

Anita has been farming for over a decade. She has worked on both non-profit and production farms in Pennsylvania, Virginia, California, Washington, D.C., and New Mexico. Before farming, she trained as a social worker in New York City. She is deeply committed to increasing food access for all people, as well as community building, financial security and safety for farmworkers, and empowerment through food production and food sovereignty. She is the founder of the Not Our Farm Project and works at Ashokra Farm, a queer POC farming collective in Albuquerque.

TNF: Tell us a little about yourself and how you got into the work you do now

Anita: I've been farming for 12 years, mostly on other people's farms in NY, DC, VA, NM, PA. My formal training is in social work and when I was working in Brooklyn with unhoused people, we started a rooftop garden. I witnessed the garden really remove a power dynamic that exists for social workers - I was a 25 year old social worker for people all older and wiser than me. Social work is incredibly problematic and this garden really broke down the power boundaries that develop in the social work field (and would probably do something similar for other fields of work, too).

My interest in farming led me to receive a scholarship to UC Santa Cruz Agroecology Program. I then moved to DC and was the Farm Manager at

Common Good City Farm for two years and then moved on to work on production and nonprofit farms throughout the country.

As a queer person of color, farming has saved my life, every season, every day.

That said, I have experienced racism and sexism on farms I've worked, and I've been struck by the power dynamics and knowledge hoarding that happens on farms all the time. Farm workers are expected to work crazy hours - sometimes without access to bathrooms - to prove yourself by how hard and how much you work. But so often, in the end, the people who get respected are the farm owners, mostly white cisgendered men. The communities where I lived and worked would rally around these men, supporting them, buying their food, lobbying for their desires, etc, but the reality was, and is, that farm workers are the heart of the operation. Some of those farm owners rarely even stepped on the farm or did the work that we did day in and day out. I knew it needed to be different for me and I figured I wasn't the only one who wanted this.

TNF: What do you love about farming?

Anita: So much! I love working with other people, and love doing physical labor alongside other people. We physically rely on other people when we farm. The bonds made through this kind of work are unbreakable. Farming has taught me how to mother. I have issues with the female matriarchs in



Some of the crew, Ash and Mallika, with Anita in a reclaimed shipping container now used as a tool shed. Photo provided by Anita.

my life and farming has taught me to be mothered and to mother - be it plant, soil, farm crews.

Not Our Farm grew from this joy and love but it also really came from feeling resentful of the existing farming system and landscape. I knew and all of the farm crews I've worked with knew we needed to stick together.

TNF: Tell us more about Not Our Farm

Anita: Not Our Farm started as a way to let other people know WHO the people behind the scenes are, who is actually doing the work, and to celebrate them. This is an often invisible workforce. It's not the people who are at the farmers' market,

(continued on A-17)



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Decolonizing and Regrowing Our Food Systems: The Work of Our Time

August 5-7, 2022

2022 NOFA Summer Conference: *Decolonizing and Regrowing Our Food Systems: The Work of Our Time*

By Christy Bassett

The 48th annual NOFA Summer Conference, a summer tradition of the organic community, returns as an in-person event at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA the weekend of August 5-7, 2022. Additionally, NOFA will maintain some of the benefits of the previous two years of online Summer Conferences, allowing attendees to interact with the event from anywhere. Attendees can look forward to learning from experts and peers speaking on farming and gardening topics, connecting with their peers, and enjoying local organic food. This year's theme is "Decolonizing and Regrowing Our Food Systems: The Work of Our Time".

With a focus on the relationship of small-scale agriculture and community building, participants can look forward to learning more about favorite topics like foraging, soil health, vegetable production, integrating livestock, and herbalism. In addition to these ever-popular subjects, this year's conference will offer insight into how to maintain mental health and wellness as agricultural workers, the central role that social and racial justice play in building sustainable foodways, and post-colonial economic models to get us beyond endless extraction.

Keynote speaker Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin will help the audience understand what "colonization" means in relation to our food systems, and explain how this way of thinking, being, relating, working and living is at the core of the destruction of the planet and the main barrier to achieving our full human potential. This presentation will clarify how ancestral Indigenous regenerative ways of learning and knowing are not a backwards way of thinking, but rather the path forward. It is also a path that requires a process of decolonization and re-Indigenization of our current ways so that we may achieve our full potential on the farms we tend and the ecosystems we are called to steward.

Reginaldo "Regi" Haslett-Marroquin began working on economic development projects with Indigenous Guatemalan communities in 1988. Before coming to the U.S. in 1992, Regi worked with artisan communities across the highlands of Guatemala, and built fair trade networks in Europe, the U.S. and Canada. He was a founding member of the Fair-Trade Federation in 1994, is an owner-founder of Regeneration Farms LLC, and is founder and President of the Regenerative Agriculture Alliance. He is the current Board Vice President of MOSES (Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Services) and the author of "In the Shadow of Green Man, My Journey from Poverty and Hunger to Food Security and Hope". He currently lives and farms at Salvatierra Farms, a 75-acre family farm home to Tree-Range® chicken in Northfield Minnesota.

The keynote speaker will join about 90 other presenters and panelists who will be leading a cumulative 60 educational workshops throughout the weekend. Reginaldo's workshop, titled Regenerative Poultry Production Systems, promises to teach attendees how regenerative poultry design can change the economic, social, and ecological outcomes of a farm operation. Other workshops that promise to weave the closely-tied issues of social justice and farming together include: Links between Human Wellbeing and Agriculture, Local Food Economy Rooted in Food, Re-Thinking USDA Farm Programs: Answers for Women and Disadvantaged Farmers, Cultivating Well-Being in our Agricultural Spaces, Fairness for Farmworker Act: Equity for Farmworkers, Solidarity Economy: System Change for a Regenerative Agriculture, and Intersectional Landcare Practices: From Individual Scarcity to Collective Abundance.

Embracing the Hampshire College and Farm location, NOFA is excited to offer outdoor workshops that allow for hands-on experiences. In person attendees can look forward to interactive workshops like Gourmet Mushrooms of New England, Soapmaking 101, Backyard Medicine Herb Walk, and A Primer on Natural Beekeeping – which will include an observation hive with live honeybees.

The conference will have a soft opening on Friday August 5th with in-person registration and check in happening at 3pm at Hampshire College. Friday evening is an opportunity to enjoy dinner and entertainment, and attendees can settle into their on-campus housing or retreat to nearby accommodations. Two full days of educational workshops will kick off on Saturday August 6th. Twenty-five workshops, including Saturday's keynote address, will be livestreamed from the in-person conference for virtual attendees to enjoy.

Virtual attendees will benefit from the new online platform for the conference, Whova, where registrants can interact with other attendees, presenters and vendors through chats, direct messages and interactive question and answer sessions. Livestreams, daily agendas, workshop descriptions, and program updates will all be available through the Whova app.

In addition to this year's inspirational theme and wide variety of workshops, NOFA will offer BI-POC and White Ally Caucus spaces for deep dives into racial equity discussions, several workshops presented in Spanish, roundtable discussions led by experts in the field, and intensive sessions with experienced farmers.

2022 also welcomes the return of the NOFA Chil-

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dren's Conference. Kids ages 5-12 can experience hands-on age-appropriate workshops and activities while parents and guardians attend the adult programming. Farm-friendly early childhood educators will host a variety of fun food, farm and garden related games, activities and workshops for young attendees. There will be age appropriate musical and art activities, food preparation and plenty of opportunities to learn and play the whole weekend. Both Saturday & Sunday programming will be available during regular workshop times.

Families and individuals will be able to enjoy food trucks, vendors, demonstrations and live music at the NOFA Country Fair, happening on campus Saturday afternoon from 4-6:30pm. The conference will also host a silent auction to benefit the Northeast Organic Farming Association's education and advocacy efforts.

To keep the conference accessible to all, NOFA is offering a sliding scale registration structure starting at \$50. Full scholarships are also available on a first come, first served basis. For those interested in joining in-person, early registration is encouraged due to limited space. Virtual attendees may register at any time. Recordings of the streamed sessions will also be available to all registrants after the event.

Registration is now open. For more information and to register visit: nofasummerconference.org



(policy - from A-10)

rule requiring further time-consuming comment from the organic community.

Meanwhile, another proposed rule, Strengthening Organic Enforcement, is somewhere in USDA's regulatory pipeline. It is designed to boost NOP certification oversight regarding the production, handling and sale of organic agricultural products, including the well-documented fraudulent grain imports that are contaminating organic products and putting legitimate U.S. organic grain farmers out of business. Even though the comment period closed in October 2020, the Final Rule has yet to be seen.

What's Next for Organic Standards?

Passed as part of the 1990 Farm Bill, the OFPA law might seem to be hopelessly outdated. However, the Standards are designed to keep evolving under "continuous improvement" provisions that requires USDA/NOP to process the ongoing recommendations from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), a unique governmental advisory body invested with special powers that include legal oversight over materials that qualify for the organic label. Unfortunately, NOP is proving to be OFPA's weak link, with scores of NOSB recommendations not acted upon.

But by responding primarily to the lobbying of the Organic Trade Association (OTA), NOP's interpretations continue to benefit industry over farmers and consumers. The NOP claims that its allowance of soilless hydroponics to qualify for the organic label is "a settled issue." Confinement-style egg and milk producers hold the lion's share of the consumer market. Pasture requirements for mega cow dairies remain loosely enforced and fraudulent grain imports continue to impact the integrity of the label.

Meanwhile, the continuous improvement provisions have quite different meanings for organic's differing constituencies. For NOFA and our allies it has everything to do with preserving and advancing organic integrity for farmers, businesses and consumers. For OTA, however, it often means continuously improving the bottom line of their corporate members looking for increased access to the burgeoning organic marketplace.

OTA is also politicizing continuous improvement via Congressional marker bills that are designed to open OFPA to their favored amendments in the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill. They also hosted closely managed national workshops to position their favored initiatives under the guise of wide organic community buy-in. While there is a need to modernize some provisions, those changes can safely be made administratively, thus avoiding opening OFPA to a contentious process where special interests could insert their own amendments to gain access to the organic label's lucre.

In today's politically polarized atmosphere this is an extremely dangerous time to open organic to hostile interests. Midterm elections are typified by increases in the party out of power and a radicalized Republican Congress seems likely this November. Meanwhile, key Members are looking to delay substantive action on the Farm Bill until after they take power.

While it's still too early to predict Farm Bill impacts on OFPA, it's important to recall the early battles over organic integrity when USDA released their first proposed rule for establishing organic regulations in 1997. Due to special interest manipulations, the standards included the allowance of genetic engineering, irradiation and sewage sludge along with another "66 points of darkness" to qualify as certified organic practices.

Back then NOFA helped lead a huge public outcry that resulted in a record 275,603 comments, causing USDA to abruptly withdraw the proposal. After reviewing the comments and rewriting the standards, a clean new proposed rule was launched in March of 2000, and based on positive input, a Final Rule was issued that December, fully 10 years after the originating OFPA legislation.

Regarding OTA's moves to open OFPA and institute their favored revisions, it is important for them to realize that the mechanism for strengthening organic is not thru expanding corporate hegemony – but by reinforcing real organic integrity provisions that resonate in this highly competitive marketplace. And they should further understand that the organic movement stands ready to defend organic standards against any actions that threaten that authenticity.

Why You Should Care About the Farm Bill

by Sara Nicholas

Every five years or so, Congress updates and passes a massive piece of legislation known as the Farm Bill. As Pasa's policy strategist, I recently hosted a public listening session with Adrienne Nelson of National Young Farmers Coalition to share issues and opportunities, and to hear about farmers' experiences and concerns with existing Farm Bill programs.

We've hosted a number of listening sessions for the Pasa community on topics ranging from small meat processing and industrial hemp, to pesticide drift and agritainment law. However, the participation and tone of our recent Farm Bill listening session was different from many of our past listening sessions. The term "flog" immediately comes to mind—as in, flogging a dead horse. For many people, bringing up the topic of this giant piece of federal legislation is met with a sense that it's an exercise in futility. So, why should you care?

For starters, the Farm Bill is BIG. It directs federal spending on agriculture and nutrition-related programs to the tune of almost \$100 billion per year. This is money that has the power to shape our landscapes, our farming practices, our energy investments, and our ability to help support others in need. In fact, 75% of the Farm Bill budget currently goes toward nutritional supplement payments to families, known more familiarly as SNAP payments.

Not to mention, this funding has the power to affect what we might consider the common good—promoting resilient ecosystems, sustainable farming operations, and to access new technologies (the federal Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Grant Program in the Farm Bill's Energy Title that supports solar energy on farms comes to mind). The growth of the Conservation Title—now at 7% of total spending and one of the four biggest titles in the Farm Bill—has supported many regenerative practices under programs like the Conservation Reserve (CRP) and Conservation Stewardship (CSP) programs that address soil erosion, protect stream water quality, and restore multiple natural resource benefits.

And yet, disinterest and skepticism among farmers and sustainable agriculture supporters abounds, and for good reason. Farm Bills through the years have skewed toward promoting greater agriculture-industry consolidation. They've emphasized economic efficiency over equity or environmental protection, and have generated pollution and animal misery through support of confinement operations. Farm Bill administrators have also systematically denied funding to farmers of color.

There are many groups—including Pasa and our community—working to reshape the Farm Bill into an engine for the kind of farming we want to see. This is not an easy battle. There are many interests and forces on the other side working just as hard to ensure that industrial farming remains in place and is subsidized by Farm Bill programs.

It's also not clear that funding levels by themselves can make a substantial difference. Yes, we'd like to see more money for conservation generally. But we'd like to see that same funding get spread around more equitably. Many farmers can't access the largess of the Farm Bill for many reasons: they lease instead of own land; they have no access to land; they don't know how to apply for program funding; they don't speak or read English well; or they fear deportation. There is so much more work to do than simply lobbying for additional funding.

Some groups want to dismantle the entire Farm Bill, particularly the programs that support commodity crops and insure against crop loss—an ever-escalating cost due to our changing climate and more frequent drought, flood, and hurricane-related damages. Others are content to tinker in the margins, hoping an increase of 5% in funding for conservation programs is achieved. We are realistic enough to know that the basic structure of the 2023 Farm Bill—including commodity and insurance supports—is not likely to change quickly.

Here are a few ideas we hope will get you energized, and to get you to rethink why it's important to engage in Farm Bill advocacy:

- Let's increase funding that protects and improves soil health on farms and crop nutrient density.
- Let's lower barriers to accessing land and Farm Bill program dollars for all farmers.
- Let's ensure farmers of all backgrounds and experience levels get technical assistance and financial support.
- Let's eliminate incentives for industry consolidation, and let's redistribute more Farm Bill dollars to small and mid-sized farms.
- Let's ensure that new technology doesn't displace or undermine sound regenerative practices.
- Let's support more urban farms, and ensure that people who live in low food access areas—urban or rural—can find and afford fresh, nutritious foods.

We have 12–18 months to get these and other ideas in front of policymakers! Engage with Pasa your State NOFA chapter.

Sara Nicholas is the Policy Strategist for Pasa. Contact her at sara@pasafarming.org to share ideas about the 2023 Farm Bill.

This article was first published at pasafarming.org/why-you-should-care-about-the-farm-bill/ in May 2022. ☼

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Beginning Farmers and Land Access: A Case Study of the New Entry Incubator Program

By Kevin Cody (he/him) & Olivia Richards H. Richards (she/her)

“I probably would have started my own farm business without New Entry, but certainly not when I did. And I certainly wouldn’t be where I am now if I hadn’t taken the path through New Entry to start the business.” – Incubator graduate

Incubator farms are designed to address critical barriers facing new farm entrants by providing access to resources and educational opportunities. New and beginning farmers learn how to craft a business plan, build networks with peers and service providers, and decipher what resources are essential for starting a small farm business. Access to land is certainly one of those essential resources, especially for beginning farmers.

Beginning Farmers and Land Access

Starting and sustaining a new farm business is a precarious undertaking. Yet, new and beginning farmers continue to enter the field, driving a movement to build local and regional food systems. In New England, beginning farmers accounted for 31% of all producers according to the 2017 USDA NASS Ag Census, slightly above the national average of 28%. Between 2012 and 2017, the number of beginning farmers, measured by years on any operation, increased 77% nationally. The rise in new and beginning farmers can be attributed both to the pull of increasing consumer demand for locally sourced food and the emerging gap in producers as farmers continue to age and retire.

The increase in numbers of beginning farmers, however, can sometimes obscure the challenges of sustaining a farm business over time. For example, a troubling statistic emerges when comparing census data from 2007 to 2017 that confirms that starting a new farm business is easier than sustaining one over time! This is significant.

While formal and informal training programs focused on improving technical knowledge and skills of beginning farmers have certainly improved opportunities for success, critical challenges remain to meet the high start-up costs associated with entering the field. A report from the American Farmland trust in 2014 found that, location and circumstances aside, common challenges faced by emerging farmers included, “securing access to land, qualifying for credit to develop farm infrastructure, acquiring equipment, seeds and/or livestock, determining the right mix of products, and developing markets.” One of the most pervasive challenges among beginning farmers is finding, affording, and obtaining farmland. Changes in land prices, longstanding trends in land ownership, and lack of accessible information contribute to this issue. According to a 2011 report from the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC), between 2000 and 2011 farm real estate and rent prices doubled. It comes as no surprise then, that 68% of the 1,000 young farmers surveyed by the NYFC in 2011 cited finding affordable land to purchase or long-term leases as the biggest obstacle faced by young farmers. Anecdotal evidence of outmigration from urban to peri-urban and rural areas during the Covid pandemic has put even greater pressure on remaining farmland. Unique land-based training opportunities have taken root around the country to address these perennial challenges facing new farm entrants.

Farm Incubators Address Critical Barriers

The incubator farm model addresses common barriers facing beginning farmers by providing access to land, infrastructure, equipment, training and technical assistance. Typically, parcels of land ranging from a quarter acre to ten acres are made available at low or no cost. Farmers often have access to shared farm infrastructure and equipment, including things such as irrigation, greenhouses, high tunnels, wash and pack facilities, cold storage, tractors and other equipment. In addition to physical infrastructure, participants often receive training and technical assistance on topics like crop production, food safety, and recordkeeping. Some incubator programs,

like the one discussed below, also assist beginning farmers in creating a farm business plan and accessing markets. Additionally, incubator models expose beginning farmers to a network of program alumni, community-based organizations, local farmers, and a constellation of agricultural service providers.

There are at least 45 incubator farm programs in the United States, according to a national survey conducted in 2021 by New Entry. Notable examples include programs like Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) in the California Central Valley and Viva Farms in northwest Washington, both non-profit farm business incubator and training programs.

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project: A Model Incubator

The New Entry Sustainable Farming Project is a program of Tufts University’s Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. In operation since 1998, New Entry has been at the forefront of a movement to empower new and aspiring farmers with the resources and technical skills necessary to begin and sustain a small farm business. While programs have evolved over time, initially serving immigrant and refugee populations exclusively, the audience has expanded to include anyone interested in starting a farm business. The core of New Entry programming, skills-based training in starting a business and growing mixed vegetables for local markets, is most clearly demonstrated through the farm incubator.

The Incubator Farm Program started in 2005, first on properties in Dracut, MA, and since 2019 at Moraine Farm in Beverly, MA. Farmers on the incubator typically grow mixed vegetables, primarily for direct markets, on ¼ to 1 acre of land for a period of 1 to 3 years. In addition to the land itself, farmers have access to greenhouses, a wash station, cold storage, as well as equipment and the expertise of the farm manager and other New Entry staff. The experience provides aspiring farmers an opportunity to experiment with production methods and crop selection, build a customer base, and operate a new business in a relatively low-stakes environment.

Program Evaluation & Takeaways

New Entry recently conducted a comprehensive evaluation using surveys and focus groups of our incubator farm program to understand program outcomes, and how the experiences of incubator alumni may provide insights into beginning farmer trends and what might be done to ensure beginning farmers’ long-term viability. The most significant findings related to beginning farmers and land access, organized by business sustainability, the incubator model, and social networks each with a distinct takeaway.

Business Sustainability: Are incubator alumni (still) farming?

A primary goal of the New Entry Incubator Program is to create sustainable farm businesses. Almost all participants hoped to continue operating a farm after the incubator and 84% succeeded at some point in time. However, only 58% were currently operating one, suggesting that not all businesses succeeded. We also wanted to know how long they farmed on their own. Those within 1 to 5 years post-incubator (50% of respondents) spent on average 96% percent of

(ALBA - from A-12)

dents said that ALBA improved their careers and 84% rated ALBA 8 or more on a 1-10 scale.

We could take the credit, but the real story here is the skill, motivation and work ethic of our participants. These results speak to the untapped potential of our nations’ immigrants who are largely shut out of gainful employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. ALBA simply gives them an opportunity and some guidance to show what they can do. What happens on ALBA’s 100 acres can’t change the broader food system, but our experience can contribute to strategies that create pathways back to the land and re-awaken the rural economy.

Fortunately, we are not alone. New Entry Sustainable Farming, a Tufts University Project, has been operating for more than 20 years in Massachusetts and is rallying farm incubator and apprenticeship programs nationwide to create a support network of on-farm education centers for aspiring farmers. Other founding members of the FIELD Network include Viva Farms in Washington, Big River Farms in Minnesota and Global Growers in Georgia. Many more are just getting started, but it shows that there is still a hunger to return to farming as well as a need for education and guidance to make it possible.

Chris Brown is the Development Director for Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association commonly known as ‘ALBA’.

Resources & Links:


albfarmers.org

cokefarm.com

kitchentableadvisors.org

nesfp.org/food-systems/national-incubator-farm-training-initiative/national-incubator-map, An interactive map of Incubator programs






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(continued on A-19)

(Not Our Farm - from A-13)

or showcased in photos at Whole Foods or your coops. Not Our Farm started as a storytelling project of farm workers, to hear what keeps them coming back to farming, who they are, what their challenges and joys are and now, Not Our Farm intertwines with my farm story and where I am at today.

Not Our Farm has led to a camaraderie among farm workers. It's also a place/platform for information sharing and to highlight abuses so they get uplifted and known. When we think of farm worker labor, the immigrant labor force often comes to mind, but Not Our Farm is a majority BIPOC, queer, college educated group of folks who are farming by choice at a small scale. There is certainly privilege here and we do not equate our challenges with immigrant farm workers, but there is also struggle, inequity and some overlap.

We provide resources to farmers and farm owners through a Farm Worker Zine we've created and mailed out more than 600 copies. We were able to translate the Zine into Spanish with funds from the Northeast Farmers of Color. This zine helps new farmers explore what kind of farm job might be best for them, what are red flags and good signs to look for when trying to find a farm job. And through a collaboration with Maine Organic Farming and Gardening Association (MOFGA) and FairShare based in Wisconsin, we've been exploring a series of training sessions for farm owners and managers on centering workers on farms. Our funding comes from donations, various small sources and by Zine donations, although it's also available for free.

TNF: You've interviewed over 80 people, How do you connect with the people you interview?

Anita: Work of mouth and we have 3-4000 followers on Instagram. Not Our Farm started with me interviewing folks I've worked with and they passed the word along to others. On our social media, we do "community questions" such as, "I work in the cold, what are good gloves I can use and still have dexterity?" We get a question and offer it to our

community. It really boosts engagement. People have lots of opinions to share! Some questions are practical like that one, but some also get really at labor issues, such as pay or bathroom access.

TNF: Speak more to the types of abuses you've heard stories about?

Anita: It's often assumed farm worker abuses are limited to large-scale farms - not your farmers market farm, but the big ones are actually subject to inspection by FDA, USDA, GAP certifiers, etc. It's the small farms that aren't often subject to this regulation and this is where we've experienced treatments like not giving proper breaks, or access to bathrooms when needed. I'm certainly not minimizing the large scale operations and their unfair treatment of farmworkers but the small scale farms are doing it too, just in other ways.

TNF: Is there a message you'd like to share with farm owners?

Anita: Farm owners tend to either hate-follow us or really get engaged. We're really not saying farm owners want to abuse their workers. We don't think that at all. It's about having mutual respect between the two. We all know the system isn't working for a lot of people. To change this, we need to have conversations and center on caring for our community. You might care for the land, which is great, but you also need to support farm workers - that is part of sustainable agriculture, too. We know farm owners are working hard and it's difficult to keep your business afloat - we are not trying to shame them or make them feel bad - we really want to make this message clear in our work and workshops. That said, farm owners also have a certain level of privilege and power - they are building equity, they probably have land and resources. The farm workers are building their business with their bodies. Farm owners have an obligation to not perpetuate exploitation and enslavement practices.

We hold trainings for farm owners and try to address the solutions for both farm workers and owners. It's not just about money or paying more - there are

other things farm owners can do to raise morale, to retain more employees, to show appreciation and kindness, etc. Don't hoard knowledge - we're usually working to learn - and don't speak down to us or make us feel bad if we need a break or to go to the bathroom.

TNF: You've mentioned knowledge hoarding a couple times. That one surprises me because the organic farmer network seems so open and willing to share. It's one of the most common reasons people say they love NOFA. Can you tell us more please?

Anita: Yes. Sure, some farmers share, and farmers share with other farmers it seems, when they feel like equals. Often a farm owner doesn't see a farm worker as an equal - "they are there to work for me". So I think it really comes from the sense of urgency that farming cultivates - , success is measured by efficiency and yield and profit. They are driven by rugged individualism. Farm workers rarely get the "why" about a task, they are just expected to do it. And oftentimes farm workers only know one stage of a plant, for example if you're hired as harvest help. It's nearly impossible to transition from worker to owner because you're not building capital but on top of that, you're working within a "need to know" system, so you also don't learn the business or the marketing side of the farm, the plants' other stages, or how to build soil health, for example. This hoarding ends up being a significant part of the oppression that workers experience. After a decade on a farm you think the farmworker would be able to run a biz, but it's oftentimes just not true.

TNF: Do you think your network is queer BIPOC because of your identity or something else?

Anita: I really wanted to be behind the scenes with Not Our Farm and I didn't tell people who was behind it at first, but after a while, my friend told me I needed to share myself and my face. Once I did, BIPOC and queer folks who felt comfortable sharing increased. I do think my identity and lived experience contributed to that. We experience more

(continued on A-19)

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Golden Fertilizer for Greener Grass

By Joseph R. Heckman, Ph.D

Fertilizers are expensive and the current supply is limited. Farmers interested in sustainability are naturally interested in alternative nutrient sources and ways to use fertilizers efficiently.

I want to share with readers of The Natural Farmer my experience using a valuable natural resource; it is something all of us produce every day. The substance I am writing about is urine.

In 2021, I collected my urine and saved it in containers to experiment with its potential use as a fertilizer. After the first cutting of hay, I took some of the accumulated urine and spread it on a field section to spell out the letters: NPK. The photo taken about three weeks later shows a nice green up and growth response to the applied urine.

The average adult produces about 100 to 150 gallons of urine per year. The design of modern sanitary systems normally causes urine to be wasted as it is flushed away to sewage treatment plants. Nutrients contained in 100 gallons of human urine would typically be supplied in pounds: 4.8 Nitrogen, 0.3 Phosphorus, 1.3 Potassium, 0.4 Sulfur, 1.2 Sodium, 0.02 Calcium, 0.01 Magnesium, and 0.002 Boron. This is an average nutrient excretion as urine from one person over a year. Values, however, will vary depending on diet.

A typical fertilizer recommendation to produce grass pasture or hay for livestock feed is to broadcast 25 to 50 pounds of N after each pasture rotation or harvest. Thus, about 500 to 1000 gallons of urine applied per acre as a liquid fertilizer would be needed to satisfy that N recommendation. That

application of urine will supply at the same time useful amounts of other nutrients.

Much of the N contained in urine is potentially volatile as ammonia which can go off into the atmosphere. Thus, to minimize ammonia volatilization and conserve the N for crop uptake, the urine should be applied just before a rain shower is expected or irrigation can be used to move the N into the soil.

Note that a 1000 gallon per acre rate is the amount of urine that can be produced by ten people per year. Now consider a farm that directly markets meat or milk from an on-farm store. Can one imagine a system where customers are invited to bring their urine collection back to the farm to close the nutrient cycle?

Perhaps it could be called "Community Supported Soil Fertility". This would be a new twist on Community Supported Agriculture or CSA wherein this case the objective is feeding the soil that feeds us.

Certified organic farms might be reluctant to use urine as a fertilizer. (So far as I am aware, urine is not on a prohibited list but as always check with your certifier before land application of any material). Nevertheless, there might be other readers of The Natural Farmer with sustainable farms that function much like organic farms but without organic certification.

I am not suggesting urine be used for production of food crops directly consumed by people, but rather the focus should be on grasses which have a high demand for N and are grown for livestock feed.

Resource:
Rich Earth Institute: richearthinstitute.org/

Joseph R. Heckman is an Extension Specialist in Soil Fertility and part of the Department of Plant Biology at Rutgers University.



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(New Entry - from A-16)

that time farming. However, those more than 5 years post-incubator only spend 63.5% of their time farming.

As one respondent put it, "Farming was very physically and emotionally draining without being financially profitable. I was really missing out on time with my family." Another said simply, "It's hard to generate enough income for the time and effort required."

The Takeaway: Farming is a precarious business even for the most well-resourced and knowledgeable individuals, so it's not surprising that there is a decline in existing businesses 5 years post-program. While secure land tenure may not be sufficient to stem the tide of farmer turnover, it is necessary. Secure relationships to land may also promote better ecological stewardship encouraging longer-term investments in soil health and perennial crop production, for example. Organizations working to support new and beginning farmers should focus on access to land and also on long-term lease agreements, even as many as 99 years.

Incubator Model: What do incubator alumni say about their experience on the incubator?

A farm incubator, by design, lowers the most significant barriers to starting a farm business by providing access to land, infrastructure, and equipment and as such, 95% of respondents indicated this. In fact, 87% of alumni strongly agreed that the New Entry Incubator Program made it possible for them to start their business. Recent alumni said of the equipment and infrastructure made available: "What the incubator allowed me to do personally was figure out which of these things I actually needed." Similar sentiments indicated: "A tremendous amount of resources is needed just to get the field ready to grow some food. [And the experience of growing on the incubator and developing a CSA customer base was] "the reason I was courageous enough to spend that money during this time."

Takeaway on incubator model: There is no reason a similar mode of shared resources and infrastructure can't be extended to farmers in more advanced stages of their operations to significantly lower the cost of production. Extending into alternative forms of land tenure, incubator programs ought to serve as models for farmers interested in forming cooperatives or landholders like municipalities interested in ensuring a productive agricultural base for the community.

Social Networks: How do relationships influence the farm business and incubator experience?

Being connected to a community of peer farmers, organizations, and other players within the food system can have positive correlations with land access and business sustainability. Based on the evaluation survey, 79% of alumni said they formed social networks with other farmers as a result of their time on the incubator farm. Groups of interconnected farmers can increase communication and the spread of valuable information. Networks built through the incubator extend beyond the valuable peer-to-peer learning to include other service providers and community members who support the farm business.

One alumnus had this to say about the process of looking for land to start his fledgling business: "I found some farms up in northern New Hampshire and Maine that were gorgeous, that were affordable, but in the middle of nowhere. And so then you think, well, can I take this farm and move it up there? And the answer for me was no... the value is in the network that I built, more than it was in the land, or the farm that I could have had up there."

Takeaway on social networks: More than a strategy to promote peer-to-peer learning, social networks formed through the incubator resulted in social capital. In other words, these interactions can be converted into valuable resources like land and produce sales. Enhancing and enabling this type of network formation in spaces beyond the incubator could improve beginning farmer outcomes, including more

secure access to land.

Conclusions

New and beginning farmers of all kinds have a critically important role to play in current and future food systems. While interest in farming continues to draw new farm entrants to land-based training and incubator programs, the long-term viability of new operations is jeopardized by structural challenges in the food system. And yet, New Entry is full of success stories, and now has statistics to confirm much of what we expected to be true about our incubator alumni: access to land, labor and capital remain key challenges; small-scale farming is a precarious endeavor in the best of circumstances; social networks and community ties are some of the most important intangible assets to sustaining a farm; and the incubator model is extremely effective in helping farmers start new businesses. How then, might we extrapolate from these findings to suggest ways of supporting beginning farmers more broadly? Here are just a few ideas:

- Build out a robust network of "wraparound" services from state and local governments to non-profit and community-based organizations to allow for better coordination and provision of services for new and beginning farmers. See, for example: [Securing the future of US agriculture: The case for investing in new entry sustainable farmers](#), by the University of California Press.
- Actively engage landholding entities like municipalities, land trusts, and conservation-oriented organizations to develop incubator-like programs to reduce operating costs for farmers while providing access to land and critical resources. See, for example: [Agrarian Commons](#) and [Boston Farms Community Land Trust](#), agrariantrust.org/initiatives/agrarian-commons/ and bostonfarms.org/
- Encourage small-scale farmers to explore cooperative business models, including the shared use of critical resources, See, for example: [Small Family Farms Aren't the Answer](#), heated.medium.com/small-family-farms-arent-the-answer-742b6684857e



(Not Our Farm - from A-17)

discrimination on farms than other people, so it's also not surprising that happened. We aren't exclusive to queer and BIPOC people at all but we also need a space to share our stories and be heard - both good stories and bad stories.

TNF: *Not Our Farm is an online platform. Do you also support connecting in person as well?*

Anita: We hope to have a worker conference/meet up one day. Where I work now, Ashokra Farm, I'm trying to cultivate more personal connections in my community. I hope we can expand and offer that elsewhere too. If somebody wants to connect with this network in person there's a few main places to connect with as a starting point of allies; Rock Steady Farm in New York, MOFGA and Bo Dennis in Maine, La Semilla Food Center in southern New Mexico, and NEFOC throughout the Northeast.

TNF: *Where do you see yourself in 5 years?*

Anita: I don't know exactly. I hope Ashokra Farm continues to grow and thrive and embody the values of Not Our Farm. We also are operating under capitalism and making money, but as a part of this coop, part of the intention is to heal with each other, from our traumas and abuses. Healing also means to not perpetuate those traumas in others. We have written our values and we revisit them. They are posted in the composting toilet so we see them daily and hold each other to unlearning the behaviors and we all strive to keep learning, keep growing.

Resources & Links:





notourfarm.org
Worker zine: notourfarm.org/worker-zine/
Instagram: [@notourfarm](https://www.instagram.com/notourfarm) and [@ashokrafarm](https://www.instagram.com/ashokrafarm)

Rock Steady Farm, rocksteadyfarm.com
NEFOC, northeastfarmersofcolor.org



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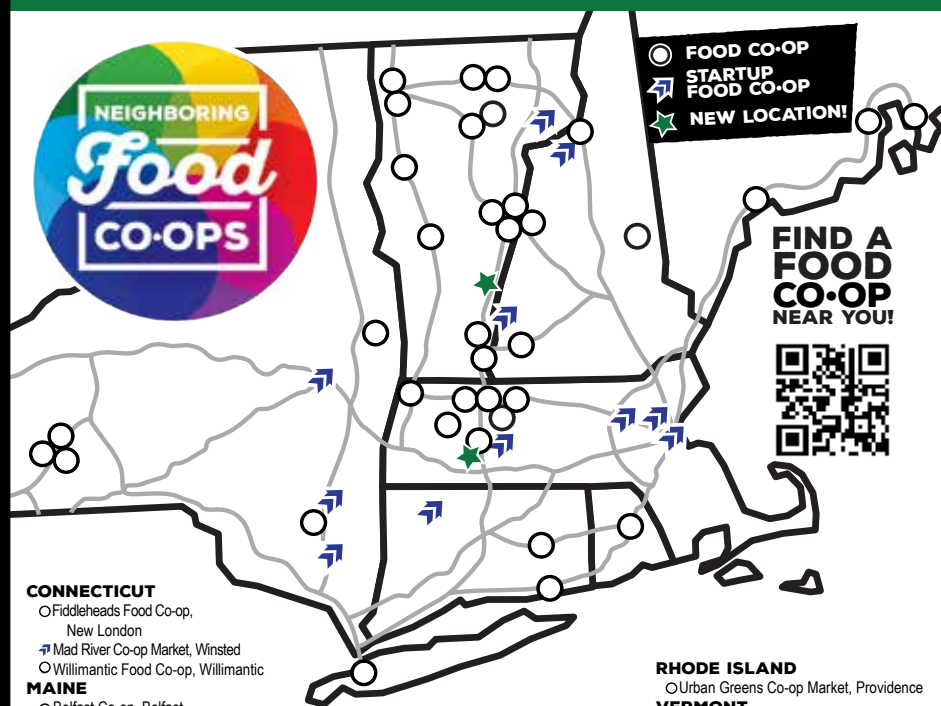
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- Old Creamery Co-op, Cummington
- Quabbin Harvest Food Co-op, Orange
- ★ River Valley Co-op, Easthampton
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- Wolfeboro Food Co-op, Wolfeboro

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- Cambridge Food Co-op, Cambridge
- Electric City Food Co-op, Schenectady
- Flatbush Food Co-op, Brooklyn
- GreenStar Co-op Markets, Ithaca
- High Falls Food Co-op, High Falls
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- Urban Greens Co-op Market, Providence

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- Brattleboro Food Co-op, Brattleboro
- Buffalo Mountain Food Co-op, Hardwick
- 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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