



# the NATURAL Farmer

The Newspaper of the Northeast Organic Farming Association

Fall 2024, Issue 142

Section A

## Uprooted: Black New York Herbalist Forced to Move After Racial Harassment

Amanda David is an active community member, healer, grower, mother, teacher and a longtime friend of NOFA. She and Mandana Boushee have run the In Living Color space at the NOFA-NY winter conference for three years, a space designed to center the needs, experiences, and voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) by creating an open-hearted and meaningful container to connect, provide comfort, respite and care. Everything Amanda has created and how she treads on the earth is rooted in a synergistic relationship between people and the planet. Despite the systemic barriers for Black and Brown people in our society, especially in land access, she's devoted her life to regenerative land work and teaching others to heal themselves and the planet in what she calls "liberatory community herbalism." She runs Rootwork Herbals, including multiple projects such as the Jane Minor BIPOC Community Medicine Garden and the People's Medicine Institute, which finally rooted on a piece of land Amanda bought in Brooktondale, NY, in in Tompkins County, in 2020. Yet since moving her three children and her herbal programs there, her family has faced continued racial harassment and threats, which are forcing her to relocate for the safety of herself and her family. Please support the GoFundMe Relocation Campaign, [gofundme.com/f/help-us-relocate-black-farmerowned-rootwork-herbals](https://gofundme.com/f/help-us-relocate-black-farmerowned-rootwork-herbals).

By Elizabeth Gabriel

In 2020, Amanda David finally achieved a lifelong dream of buying her own piece of land for her family and community. Once settled at her new home in a small town outside of Ithaca, NY, she started a small homestead, herbal medicine farm and place of respite. She started the Jane Minor BIPOC Community Garden, a sanctuary for Black, Brown, and queer people to tend and harvest their own crops.

Now, just a few years later, friends are fundraising to relocate the New York native, who is Black, from her homestead due to continued threats and racial harassment by her neighbor, Robert Whittaker, who is white. David built a fence that Whittaker repeatedly tampered with, and the harassment got so bad that in June this year, she filed a lawsuit against him.

"I have been working hard for many years, never able to afford a home," David said to the *Amsterdam News* in June. "I was finally able to buy one, and as soon as I purchased it, I wanted this to be a place where Black and Brown folks can have access to this little piece of nature, [for it] to be a sanctuary, a place where people can build community and reconnect to the land and all of those beautiful healing things that have been systematically taken away from us.

"To then almost immediately be subjected to this kind of racial harassment—the exact thing that I was trying to create safety around is now happening daily to us. Despite that, we have built a beautiful community. We have classes and events that really bring people together [who] are really healing, but it's gotten to the point where it doesn't feel safe to do that anymore.

The lawsuit explains that Whittaker called David and her children anti-Black slurs and remarks, many of which have been captured on video and included



Amanda in her Brooktondale garden. Images provided by Amanda.

threats to beat her son with a stick while referring to him with the N-word. Another incident states that Whittaker fired a gun from his porch when David hosted an event for Black teens.



One of the signs Amanda's neighbor posted.

multiple orders of protection, he has still continued to harass her.

According to *Amsterdam News*, while Whittaker faces civil and criminal actions, David's options remain limited. Sally Santangelo, executive director of CNY Fair Housing, representing David, said most injunctive relief obtained by the organization in past harassment cases comes from landlord-tenant disputes rather than neighbor versus neighbor.

"It's possible that the monetary damages could be significant enough to force him to sell his property or allow her to move, or the threat of that might be enough," Santangelo said. "Even if a court couldn't act directly to force him to sell his property, it's possible that it could happen as a result of monetary damages."

Mutual Aid efforts to defend David sprang up following the harassment from local and distant supporters. One member of the organizers of Neighbor Solidarity Network (NSN), and neighboring farmer, Erica Frenay, said Whittaker seems to behave more pleasantly when white people like her are present. "We've tried to step in to do things like put up

the security cameras along a border of the property that she doesn't feel comfortable going to," Frenay said. Other people in the Network help care for the animals when she doesn't feel comfortable going outside, provide mental and emotional support and help to organize a spreadsheet to document things such as when a police report is filed, when any type of harassment happens, and if the police are called. The Black Farmer Fund, a national not-for-profit that nurtures Black community wealth & health by investing in Black agricultural systems in the Northeast, has also provided support to David.

Nobody should live with this type of fear of their neighbor. David weighed her options but, sadly, despite the tremendous emotional, physical, and monetary cost, believes moving is the best choice.

People of Color own less than 4% of all the land in the US and Black and Brown farmers historically, and to this day, face discriminatory obstacles when trying to secure land or resources to farm. The town where David lives, not unlike most of Upstate New York, is overwhelmingly white—more than 85%, according to the 2020 Census. These inequities are rooted in the history of land theft and intergenerational wealth on which this country was built and the systemic racism Black farmers have faced for generations, encompassing everything from discriminatory lending practices to violence and intimidation.

In a packed Caroline Townhall courtroom on September 9th more than 100 people showed up to stand in solidarity with David and to witness the proceedings of Robert Whittaker, Junior, who was charged with stalking as a hate crime and criminal contempt on August 30th. According to an NSN press release from September 10th, Judge Gary Reinbolt made the verdict to keep Whittaker in custody, stating, "It is not physical harm, but living under intimidation, particularly when you don't know when or where the next threat is going to physically be, even if the defendant is making it from his own property." Reinbolt also noted the defendant's record of contempt of court orders. "He has twice shown utter contempt for an order issued by this court." Reinbolt said. "Apparently, he doesn't think the court has authority over him. It does."

The verdict provides at least temporary peace and relief for David as she and her community of support work hard to raise enough money for her relocation. "My children and I should be able to feel safe and secure in our own home, but we don't. Mr. Whittaker's persistent and horrendously racist and sexist intimidation and harassment has made that impossible. His discriminatory behavior hasn't just harmed my family; it has also harmed the entire community of BIPOC gardeners and herbal medicine practitioners that I work with."

### Links:

Rootwork Herbals: [rootworkherbals.com](https://rootworkherbals.com)  
Relocation Fundraiser: [gofundme.com/f/help-us-relocate-black-farmerowned-rootwork-herbals](https://gofundme.com/f/help-us-relocate-black-farmerowned-rootwork-herbals).





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*The Natural Farmer* covers news of the organic movement nationally and internationally and features stories about farmers, homesteaders and gardeners, especially those from the 7 NOFA member states, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, and Vermont. TNF is provided to direct subscribers and as a perk to NOFA members and is mailed quarterly to over 6,000 homes.

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Dana Jackson, he/him | Director of Communications and Development for CT NOFA, CT

Chris Travis, he/him | *Soil and Water Conservation District Technician, NY*

Elizabeth Henderson, she/her | *Agriculture Justice Project, NY*

Holli Cederholm, she/her | *MOFGA, ME*

Richard Robinson, he/him | *Hopestill Farm, MA*

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April Jones, she/her | Writer & consultant, OH

Lauren Chiyoko, she/her | Town of Bethlehem's Farms & Forest Conservation Program & BIPOC land tenure, NY

Hannah Shafer, she/her | UVM Plant Biologist student & gardener, VT

Donald Sutherland, he/him | Long Life Farm, writer & member of NOFA Mass policy planning committee, MA



# Letter from the Editor

Fungi are all around us. They're beneath our feet, in the air we breathe, in the soil we work in, and sometimes even in our eyebrows. Their ability to reproduce and weave themselves into nearly everything is both miraculous and frustrating (*see the article on B-18*). Fungi can remove pollutants from soil (*see B-5*) and creep behind shower walls. As consumers, most of us are interested in the fungi that produce fruit, aka mushrooms, so we can consume them for food or medicine (*see B-18 and B-19*). As farmers, we're interested in our ability to produce mushrooms consistently, with relative uniformity (*see B-1 and B-14*). Mushrooms maintain symbiotic relationships and provide tremendous ecosystem benefits because of their extensive ability to decompose other things (*see B-7 and B-10*).

In our home, I'm surrounded by mushrooms all the time. At least once a day, mushrooms are cooked, made into medicine, or consumed in a tincture. About once a week in the warmer months, a harvest basket sits upon the counter filled with mushrooms found on a recent forage. I'm married to a fun guy (sorry, I had to say it) who runs a mushroom farm, teaches mushroom production and forest ecology, and eats at least half a pound of mushrooms daily. I take my immunity blend of Shiitake, Oyster, Turkey Tail and Lions Mane tincture daily. While I genuinely appreciate fungi's role in our ecosystem and owe mushrooms deep gratitude for keeping my immune system strong as I received 12 chemotherapy treatments in 2016, if I'm honest, I can't stand the taste or the smell of mushrooms. I wish I did.

People who love mushrooms really love them. It's an adoration unlike any relationship I've seen between humans and a plant (no, mushrooms are not plants, but I use this comparison because plants are another thing people forage and most farmers cultivate plants.) I've been on dozens of walks with mushroom lovers as they gleefully frolic through the trees and forage. I've witnessed the giddy joy of my partner and our

mushroom-loving friends as they share a meal of fresh mushrooms mmming and groaning between bites. I am proud when customers ogle at our mushrooms as they walk by our farmers market booth, "is this food or art?" they say, commenting on the mushrooms' beauty. Mushrooms are alluring.

Mushrooms' elusive nature sparks curiosity. Their ubiquitous character makes them powerful enough to hold the record as the world's largest species. They are acclaimed for their long list of researched health benefits, from boosting immunity to inhibiting memory loss to supporting mental health (*see B-4*). Mushroom coffee blends have even become part of many people's morning rituals. Whether you like to consume mushrooms or not, I hope this issue illuminates the wonders of fungi, inspires you to produce mushrooms on your own at any scale (*see 6, 8, 19 and 22*), encourages you to forage safely (*see B-2*) and helps connect you to the many communities of mushrooms lovers in the Northeast (*see B-12 and B-15*).

As always, I welcome your letters about this issue or another topic you'd like to write about. Our upcoming TNF themes are Farmers of Color, Draft Animal Power and Organic Pasture Conversion & Management.

Liz Gabriel

*Elizabeth (she/her) is a mom, a farmer, and an activist. Besides working for TNF, Liz is an organizational equity consultant, a member of the Soul Fire Farm Speakers Collective and runs Wellspring Forest Farm with her family in the Finger Lakes, on land originally stewarded by the Gayogohó:nǫ' Indigenous people and who still reside here today south of and surrounding Cayuga Lake.*



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Upcoming Themes & Deadlines:  
Farmers of Color, 11/1/24  
Draft Animal Power, 2/1/25  
Organic Pasture, 5/1/25

Stories, interviews, technical articles, photos are welcome.  
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# Chapter News

## Connecticut

### News

Over the past several months, CT NOFA has been rolling out their statewide Farm Share program, coordinating with farms to provide over 60 discounted CSA shares to families and individuals in need of food financial assistance, giving them access to locally grown, nutritious food that they might not otherwise have been able to obtain. CT NOFA has also rolled out our 2024 soil health programming, including workshops covering compost tea, native tree and shrub establishment, cover cropping, and no-till farming practices.

### Policy

If your Chapter has been involved in any policy efforts, please share those here. You may provide a short summary to be printed within the Chapter News section or a more lengthy article to be printed in the Policy Section of TNF.

The CT State General Assembly ended its session in early May. The most important victory in CT NOFA's state legislative program this year was passing a bill banning PFAS in a broad range of consumer products and banning the use of sewage sludge on agricultural land. Our other initiatives - such as the CT Environmental Rights Amendment, creating an option to purchase preserved farmland at agricultural value, and several important climate bills - gained support in committees and, in some cases, in the state House of Representatives but failed to get a vote in the state Senate in our short session. On the federal level, Dr. Kim Stoner (CT NOFA Director of Policy and Advocacy) has joined the state technical committee for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). She is working with Sherlene Rodriguez, CT NOFA Director of the Transition to Organic Partnership Program, and with the NRCS staff to build more technical support and funding from NRCS for our aspiring organic farmers.

### Welcome

CT NOFA is proud to welcome two new members, Kaitlyn Kimball (co-owner of Sunset Farm in Naugatuck, CT, *top*) and Enya Cunningham (Farm Manager for Hungry Reaper Farm in Morris, CT, *bottom*), to its board of directors.



### Upcoming Events

SAVE THE DATE: *CT NOFA's 43rd Annual Winter Conference*, March 1, 2025, Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic, CT

### Chapter Contact Information

CT NOFA, [ctnofa.org](http://ctnofa.org), (203) 408-6819, [ctnofa@ctnofa.org](mailto:ctnofa@ctnofa.org)



## Massachusetts

### News

NOFA/Mass had a successful Spring and Summer event season — we hosted over 20 education workshops and webinars this year. We look forward to even more soil health trainings, organic certification discussions, and community events for farmers through the Fall and next year.

NOFA/Mass will continue our work on several long-term projects with farmers in our region in the coming months.

We're proud to be a Core Partner in the Transition to Organic Partnership Program. If you're an experienced organic farmer (regardless of whether or not you own a farm), or if you're looking for support and practical advice about transitioning to organic production, please apply for our mentorship program at [organictransition.org](http://organictransition.org).

We're also excited to continue supporting farmers who adapt Climate Smart practices like cover cropping, agroforestry, and reduced tillage. Visit [climatesmart.org](http://climatesmart.org) to learn how to get involved.

### Policy

Our farming community must not be burdened with protecting our families and ecosystems from PFAS "forever chemicals." Centering farmers in state-level PFAS reforms was one of NOFA/Mass's top policy priorities for this legislative session. Unfortunately, despite having majority support in the Massachusetts House and Senate, our priority bill on this issue was stuck in the House Ways and Means Committee. It did not move to a full chamber vote before the end of the formal legislative session on July 31st, 2024. This means it must be reintroduced in the new session next year.

### Welcome

We're excited to welcome Najee Quashie (*below*, *source nofamass.org*) as our new project manager! Najee will work on many of our grant-funded projects, as well as supporting the communications and development teams. Najee has a background in environmental justice, composting, equity, and community engagement. At the core, his focus will always be to uplift historically excluded communities from environmental racism, destructive policies, and a lack of funding. As Project Manager, he oversees NOFA/Mass grant programs, promotes the organization's achievements, and supports the Development team in securing additional funding. You can find him rooting for the Steelers, going on long walks, and being politically active outside of work.

### Thank you!

NOFA/Mass extends a heartfelt thank you to Richard Robinson for years of dedicated service to the NOFA/Mass Board and the organic movement.

### Openings

Find job openings, including Administrative Di-

rector, and volunteer opportunities to support the NOFA/Mass Board of Directors at [nofamass.org/home/get-involved/jobs/](http://nofamass.org/home/get-involved/jobs/)

### Upcoming Events:

*Biological Diversity: Fostering Thriving Ecosystems Below Ground:*

- Sunday, September 29th, 10am-2pm, Woven Roots, 12 McCarty Rd., Tyngham, MA 01264
- Thursday, October 3rd, 10am-2pm, Farming is Life, 683 River St., Winchendon, MA 01475

Through hands-on activities, participants will learn about the dynamic world of soil microbes, get an introduction to paper chromatography to evaluate soil health and discuss management techniques that support biological diversity in their soil. This event will be presented in English with Spanish interpretation.

### Chapter Contact Information

NOFA/Mass: [nofamass.org](http://nofamass.org), (413) 200-2858 (**new phone number!**), [info@nofamass.org](mailto:info@nofamass.org)



## New Hampshire

### News

We are so pleased to share NOFA-NH's 2023 Impact Report with our community and all we have accomplished this past year. 2023 brought with it unique trials and triumphs, which highlighted how NOFA-NH's 50+ years of experience cultivating and promoting organic, climate-resilient farming, gardening, and eating practices are more important now than ever!

We are forever grateful to face these challenges and breakthroughs with our fantastic community of farmers, gardeners, eaters, and advocates who share our common vision — a locally centered NH Food system that is just, sustainable, and ecologically sound! We hope you enjoy reviewing our report at [nofanh.org/annual-reports](http://nofanh.org/annual-reports) and look forward to cultivating even more good together in the rest of 2024.

NOFA-NH is expanding on our Farmer Relief Fund, established in 2023, by creating a new Organic Transition Fund. Thanks to a generous contribution from the You Have Our Trust (YHOT) Fund, NOFA-NH will be awarding mini-grants to farmers and producers across the state for projects related to building climate resilience, farms in need of emergency relief, transitioning to organic farming, and organic certification cost reimbursement in 2024. In order to best identify the needs of our community, we developed a survey seeking input on funding needs and selection criteria. We look forward to sharing more about this offering soon!

NOFA-NH's 6th season of CRAFT on-farm tours began on July 17th with a tour of Wild Fern Farm in Kingston, NH, covering maximizing growing in small spaces. This was followed by tours at Rosaly's Garden, Windcrest Farm, and Brandmoore Farm. We still have 2 more CRAFT On-Farm Workshops scheduled for this fall: the Dartmouth Organic Farm in Hanover, NH, on September 25th, and Generation Farm in Concord, NH, on October 3rd.

On July 27th, in conjunction with Grounding Stone Farm, NOFA-NH hosted Organic Blueberry Management Tours, which included fun, family-friendly activities, blueberry picking, and tours from owners Kathleen David. It was a great day to observe July's harvest of the month, get a little messy with blueberry fingerpainting, and put our thinking caps on with blueberry scavenger hunts. These tours and the 2024 CRAFT programs were partially funded by the Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP).

NOFA-NH kicked off NH Eats Local Month with a Fun on the Farm event at Brookford Farm in Canterbury, NH, on August 1st. Attendees came together to celebrate the season's bounty, savored delicious farm-fresh tacos made with on-farm ingredients, jammed to great tunes by Fox+Fern, played games and spent a



# Chapter News

lovely summer evening in the farm fields.

We look forward to more opportunities to nurture community and cultivate connections in the coming months. Please save the date for **NOFA-NH's 23rd Annual Winter Conference: Sowing Hope, Cultivating Joy**. On Saturday, February 8th, at Southern NH University in Manchester, NH, we will be digging into the work of co-creating a brighter future and leaning into all the delights of the Granite State food system. We can't wait to see you there!

Policy

NOFA-NH is so pleased to share that Governor Sununu signed HB 1678, the **Local Food for Local Schools Reimbursement Pilot Program** bill, into law on July 12, 2024.

HB 1678 is a win-win-win — a win for farmers, a win for students, and a win for the economy. The pilot incentive program will invest \$420,000 into New Hampshire's economy by incentivizing ten schools to purchase local food from New Hampshire farmers. The program is expected to be funded and launched by early 2025. Thank you to everyone who advocated for this bill and provided their support.

## Welcome

Please join NOFA-NH in welcoming two new Board Members to NOFA-NH's team, Benée Hershon &



James Stever! One of Benée's (left, source [cheshireconservation.org](https://cheshireconservation.org)) greatest passions is connecting others with nature and doing active conservation work in agriculture and working landscapes. She currently serves as the Community Engagement Director for the Cheshire County Conserva-

tion District (CCCD). Benée offers social media and digital communications consulting services for farms, food, and environmental organizations. She is passionate about uplifting and engaging local communities through storytelling and is thrilled to work with farmers and organizations in this capacity.

James Stever (right with his partner Marley, source



[generationfarmnh.com](https://generationfarmnh.com)) owns and operates Generation Farm in Concord, New Hampshire. He has been growing and selling certified organic

produce for over a decade. James is passionate about responsible agriculture, utilizing solar power, low-till techniques, and fostering a diverse 60-acre forest habitat around growing areas.

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

## Upcoming Events

NOFA-NH's Farmers Organic Roundtable, Third Thursday of Each Month, 6:30pm, Online Via Zoom. Connect with other farmers to network, learn about organic farming, solve problems, build connections, and share your voice! Visit [nofanh.org/topp](https://nofanh.org/topp) to register.

The CRAFT of Farming:

- *Exploring Agroforestry and Native Tree Cultivation*, September 25, 2024, 4:00pm-6:00pm, Dartmouth Organic Farm, Hanover, NH.
- *Utilizing Greenhouses for Growing Greens in the Shoulder Seasons*, October 3, 2024, 4:00pm-

6:00pm, Generation Farm, Concord, NH. Learn more & register at [nofanh.org/craft](https://nofanh.org/craft).

NOFA-NH's 23rd Annual Winter Conference: Sowing Hope, Cultivating Joy. February 8, 2025. Southern NH University, Manchester, NH. Learn more at [nofanh.org/winterconference](https://nofanh.org/winterconference).

## Chapter Contact Information

NOFA-NH, [nofanh.org](https://nofanh.org), 603-224-5022, [info@nofanh.org](mailto:info@nofanh.org)



## New Jersey

### News

NOFA NJ has begun renovations on a newly acquired commercial kitchen in Milford, NJ. The kitchen and ensuing activities, dubbed "Farmers Process," will support local farms and food businesses with technical support in producing value-added products (e.g., tomatoes into salsa or drying herbs into tea blends). The kitchen will host a variety of farmer- and consumer-focused engagements, workshops, and classes and will be available to the community to rent as a commercial kitchen. The 1820's building has long been a home to beloved local food businesses, including the Milford Oyster House, Lovin' Oven and The Potager.

In August, NOFA NJ staff, board, and volunteers were inundated with tomatoes after multiple successful community events. FesTomato! at Walking Bird Farm in Egg Harbor City was a smash, with 350+ attendees, a 7-piece band (Tony & the Trees), and many happy farmers and vendors. FesTomato! at Fairgrown Farm was equally enjoyable, albeit slightly smaller, with a focus on the food security work being done by The Chubby's Project with support from Fairgrown. A tomato tasting at the Somerset County Regional Farmers Market capped off the month. NOFA NJ's life-sized tomato mascot, Mrs. Tomato, was along for each event to spread the fun tomato vibes!

### Thank you!

Thank you to Morgan, Julie, Susan, James, Kathleen, Noele, Renata, Cindy, and Virginia for all your help at events this August!

### Openings:

NOFA NJ is seeking nominees for our Board of Directors. We are specifically looking for individuals with strong community ties to the South Jersey region and expertise in legal professions and fundraising. For more information, email [Devin@nofanj.org](mailto:Devin@nofanj.org).

### Upcoming Events:

There are lots of fun events coming up, including farm tours, pawpaw workshops, and more. Visit [nofanj.org/events](https://nofanj.org/events) to learn more.

## Chapter Contact Information

NOFA New Jersey, [nofanj.org](https://nofanj.org), 9083711111, [nofainfo@nofanj.org](mailto:nofainfo@nofanj.org)



## New York

### News

NOFA-NY has enjoyed hosting a series of Farm Fest events this summer! These community-building events are an annual series that connect consumers and farmers in a fun and educational way. This year, we celebrated the farms of Long Island, Central NY, and the Hudson Valley in June, August, and September, respectively. These gatherings have been a fantastic way to connect with our local, vibrant farm communities in different parts of the state. If you have a venue suggestion for next year, please reach out!

In addition to these events, we're committed to providing robust technical assistance. Our weekly call-in hours offer a chance to get guidance from our education staff on your organic questions. Our

on-farm field days and webinars provide information and networking opportunities for both beginning and seasoned organic farmers.

Our ongoing projects include Climate-Smart Farming and Marketing, which now has farms enrolled throughout the region. This program offers vital support for farmers working to make their operations and farmland more resilient to our changing climate. The Transition to Organic Partnership Program has sponsored all of our 2024 events and will start a new mentorship cohort in October.

## Policy

New York State's legislative session ended in June. While many bills were stalled, some of the priorities that NOFA-NY and our members advocated for passed! The Good Food NY Bill and the Climate Change Superfund Act will be headed to the Governor to sign or veto by the end of the year, thanks in part to the calls and emails the NOFA-NY community made to their representatives!

The Good Food NY bill is an important step towards creating a more transparent and community values-aligned food system.

The Climate Change Superfund Act will require the state's worst polluters, particularly major oil companies, to pay for repairing and addressing the harm they've caused.

A package of bills designed to eliminate PFAS in certain products sold in NY, including menstrual products, personal care and cosmetic products, and several household products, failed to pass this legislative session.

Next year, we'll continue to advocate for regulating PFAS and investing in climate resilience. Over the coming months, we'll work to identify additional budget and legislative priorities for 2025 that will move us towards a more just and resilient local food system.

Email [policy@nofany.org](mailto:policy@nofany.org) to get involved in our advocacy!

### Thank you!

We thank Bert Olechnowicz for his dedication to NOFA-NY over the past two years. Bert has significantly improved daily business administration and successfully ushered through the transition to online certification services through the Clover Portal. We wish him well in retirement.

### Opening

We are hiring! Please check our website at [nofany.org/about-us/careers/](https://nofany.org/about-us/careers/) for current postings.

### Upcoming Events

*Organic Flower Production: Seed, Planting Stock, and Moveable High Tunnels*, Wed, Sept 25, 5-7pm @ Treadlight Farm, 1576 Crescent Valley Rd, Bovina Center NY. Learn about growing certified organic ornamentals & flowers while catching a glimpse into season extension with moveable high tunnels.

*Organic Fruit Production*, Wednesday, October 9, 4-7pm @ Fishkill Farms, Hopewell Junction, NY. Learn about organic orchard production and what it is like to maintain a split operation. Includes farm tour and social hour.

NOFA-NY **Winter Conference Call for Proposals** is live on our website.

*Farmer's Forum*, weekly on Tuesdays, from 3 to 4 p.m. via Zoom. Open to all, this call-in hour is a forum for any farming, gardening, processing, or handling questions.

## Your Chapter Contact Information

NOFA-NY: [nofany.org](https://nofany.org), 315.988.4000, [info@nofany.org](mailto:info@nofany.org)



(continued on A-7)





# Welcome New TNF Advisory Committee Members!

We're thrilled to welcome a new cohort of members to *The Natural Farmer* Advisory Committee! Committee members join for two years, during which some of our goals are to understand our readership better, finalize TNF's equity statement, research new layout styles for the paper, and compensate all writers. Visit our website to read the committee members' complete bios and learn more, [TheNaturalFarmer.org](http://TheNaturalFarmer.org).

Thank you to Christa Nunez, Bobcat Bongura, Leila Rezvani, and Angela Highsmith, who just completed their two-year terms. We're grateful for your contributions and time!  
~ Liz & Melanie, TNF's Editor & Communications Coordinator



OMOWALE ADEWALE (NY)

Omowale (he/him) farms under Liberation Farm in the black dirt region of Orange County, NY. He is the author of "An Introduction to Veganism and Agricultural Globalism" and "Brotha Vegan." Omowale fights for Black food and land sovereignty in New York and speaks and writes regularly on the topic of food justice and liberation.



HANNAH SHAFER (VT)

Hannah (she/her) is a plant biology graduate student at the University of Vermont. Before starting her graduate studies, she worked on several small farms throughout the Northeast, where she fell in love with plants and growing good food. She is an avid gardener and aspiring farmer.



LAUREN CHIYOKO (NY)

Lauren (she/her) has a diverse farming background ranging from native seed production in NYC, to biodynamic farming in the pastoral Eastern Townships of Quebec and now serves in a farm-adjacent role, overseeing the Town of Bethlehem's Farms & Forest Conservation Program in Albany County, NY.



LOUIS BATTALLEN (MA)

Homesteading on the eastern-facing slopes of the Berkshires, he has held various food industry jobs in organic potato fields, on the factory line, and at the kettle. Louis's work and passion are primarily found in the confluence of social justice and agriculture with the pen and in the field.



DONALD SUTHERLAND (MA)

Donald (he/him) is a USDA Certified Organic vegetable farmer for 13 years at Long Life Farm in Hopkinton, MA. He is a member of NOFA Mass Policy Planning Committee, the Hopkinton Sustainable Green Committee and Chair of the Environmental Working Group subcommittee.



DANA JACKSON (CT)

Dana (he/him) is the Director of Communications and Development for CT NOFA and the former editor and publisher of Edible Nutmeg, a regional magazine focusing exclusively on western Connecticut's food community, including farmers, chefs, and locally produced food of all kinds.



APRIL JONES (OH)

April (she/her) is from Akron, Ohio, and advocates for her community as part of the food justice, water access, and food sovereignty movement. She has expertise in the role of farmers markets and in the human elements of shifting the food system and as a freelance writer.





(Chaper News - from A-5)

## Rhode Island

**News**  
NOFA Rhode Island partnered with the Young Farmer Network and the University of Rhode Island (URI) for a relaxed and informative gathering at URI's Agronomy Farm on Sunday, August 4th. URI researchers and extension staff showcased work on cover crops, vegetables, pest management and more, followed by a complimentary dinner and field games.

Otherwise, NOFA/RI focused on our organization's nuts and bolts this past summer. We revised our bylaws, sent out a Farmer Survey to hear from our constituents as to where we should focus our efforts, and shifted our membership management to a new software service, with a renewed push to bolster membership signups.

### Welcome

Heather Meehan (*top*) joined as our Office & Out-



reach Manager earlier this year. Heather is also a farmer currently working at Little State Flower Company in Tiverton, RI. She began farming in 2021 at Quail Hill Farm on the east end of Long Island, one of the nation's first CSA farms. Heather is thrilled to be a part of the NOFA family and helping to support farmers in her newly adopted home state.

Kelli Roberts (*bottom*) joined our board. She founded Roots Farm in 2009

with her husband, Mike. Roots Farm is a certified organic, diversified vegetable farm that grows year-round on a small acreage using no-till, regenerative, and compact farming methods. They run a year-round farmshare program and do three farmers markets, two year-round. Kelli has long been involved with NOFA/RI as a member and Farm Advisor, and we are thrilled that she joined our board earlier this year.

### Openings

NOFA RI is seeking new board members, particularly individuals with experience in fundraising or policy. For more information, please contact Jan at [nofari@live.com](mailto:nofari@live.com).

### Chapter Contact Information

NOFA Rhode Island, [nofari.org](http://nofari.org), [nofari@live.com](mailto:nofari@live.com)



## Vermont

### News

We enjoyed an action-packed summer. From July to September, we toured the state for a series of on-farm workshops and pizza socials, bringing opportunities for farmers, homesteaders, gardeners, and food system aficionados to dig into exciting food-system topics, learn new skills and enjoy moments of delicious connection over farm-fresh pizza.

On the first anniversary of last July's catastrophic flooding, Vermont once again experienced a significant flooding event, affecting many farms and communities across the state. Unfortunately, as the summer rolled on, Vermont continued to experience record flooding events, leaving many Vermont farms and communities saddled with the aftermath of this devastating flooding, some while still recovering from last year. We are still assessing the ongoing impacts, but one thing is clear: farmers are turning to NOFA-VT's Farmer Emergency Fund again for immediate disaster relief. We've been engaging in fundraising efforts to keep dollars rolling into the fund as we work closely with farms to disperse the funds to meet their emerging needs.

### Policy

The 2024 Vermont legislative session marked an incredible win for food access in Vermont: the State Legislature allocated \$300k in one-time funding to support NOFA-VT's food access programs! Building on this momentum, we will return to the State House this fall to request base funding to support NOFA-VT's Crop Cash, Crop Cash Plus, and Farm Share programs. We will once again coordinate testimony from program participants, participating farmers, and farmers market managers to help communicate the value of these programs to our legislators. We also asked community members attending our summer events to sign supporter cards advocating for this funding. We will deliver the cards to legislators to show broader community support.

Another legislative win in the last biennium involved our successful member engagement campaign supporting H706, the Pollinator Protection Act, and a landmark bill restricting neonicotinoid insecticides (neonics). Despite strong bipartisan support in the House and Senate, the governor initially vetoed the bill. Through a strategic process of member engagement in collaboration with several other local organizations, we encouraged legislators to overthrow the Governor's veto successfully and the bill became law.

### Welcome

We'd like to welcome the following new members to our NOFA-VT staff: Jess Hays Lucas, Grassroots Organizer; Kiya Vega-Hutchins, Development Coordinator; Annie Hopper, Farm Business Advisor; Medina Korajkic, Winter Conference Assistant; Emily Tompkins, AmeriCorps Education & Outreach Assistant.

### Upcoming Events

Planning and research are underway for our 2025 Winter Conference, which will be held at the University of Vermont on February 15-16, 2025.

### Chapter Contact Information

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



# Opinion

## Anti-trans laws are a threat to NH agriculture

By Ariel Aaronson-Eves

As residents of New Hampshire, we live and work within a vibrant and diverse landscape. Our agriculture is dominated by small and adaptable farms. The resiliency of those farms relies on ingenuity and perseverance of individuals, along with the many forms of support farmers give each other.

I am calling on that support now, to protect this vibrancy and diversity, which is currently under threat from legislation on its way to Gov. Sununu's desk. As the coordinator of the New Hampshire Queer Farmer Network, I hear powerful stories from queer farmers in New Hampshire and beyond. One theme that has frequently emerged is that of challenging gender norms and having work that is affirming to one's body. Work on the farm, for many, including myself, invites opportunities to explore one's gender expression and to learn to love a body that had once been a source of discomfort.

This is one of many ways that farming can be a source of healing for queer and trans folks. Yet there remains a dominant narrative of queer life: that we leave rural places, where we are not welcome, for cities, where we can find community and ourselves. Certainly, this is the experience of many, but it can come at great spiritual cost, severing relationships to land and place.

Part of the work of the New Hampshire Queer Farmer Network is to counter this narrative, to build community, and affirm the presence of queer farmers, who have always been here, even if many of them

were and are too scared to come out. I have talked with farmers from other states who are considering moving to New Hampshire in part because the existence of a network of queer farmers suggests that they may find community and be welcome here.

That welcome is threatened by four pieces of anti-trans legislation that have passed the State House and are on their way to Gov. Sununu's desk. HB 396 would roll back the 2018 nondiscrimination protections for transgender people in public spaces that Gov. Sununu signed. HB 1205 would ban transgender girls in middle and high school from finding belonging with other girls on girls' sports teams, with the extreme requirement of being forced to "prove" their gender. HB 1312 would require a two-week notice and opt-out options for LGBTQ curriculum in public school classrooms and define it as "objectionable content." HB 619 would ban certain healthcare for transgender teen girls, even referrals out of state.

It is imperative to call on the governor to veto these bills! But while the governor has the power to determine if these bills become law, we the people have the power to shape culture. Our culture and communities are threatened by these pieces of legislation, and we need a cultural and community response.

One place businesses in the food system can most likely make the greatest difference is in response to HB 396, which rolls back protections in public spaces, but has gotten the most attention as the "bathroom bill." One of the impacts of this is that trans people, as well as anyone who does not fit traditional gender presentations, are vulnerable to state-sanctioned harassment in public facilities.

This has a profound impact on both who want to live and work in New Hampshire and those who feel safe traveling through New Hampshire, especially the rural parts of the state. That's why New Hampshire Businesses for Social Responsibility's sign-on letter

against all anti-LGBTQ bills has received widespread support from across the state. I encourage you to sign on to this letter if you have a business.

If you have restroom facilities for the public or employees, make a public pledge that you will not discriminate against who use those facilities. In so doing, you communicate to current and potential employees and customers that they are safe and welcome, whatever their gender or gender-presentation. You also communicate to the state government that this bill does not reflect your interests.

The future of farming is queer. According to the 2022 National Young Farmers survey, nearly 25% of farmers under 40 identify with a sexuality other than heterosexual, and we are only beginning to collect useful data around gender identity.

In New Hampshire, queer people are leading some of the most innovative farms, businesses, and community-building efforts which support thriving and vibrant communities and ecosystems that benefit all who live, work, and travel here.

If you hope for a thriving agricultural future for New Hampshire, it is essential that you support welcome and inclusion on the farm, in the community, and at the State House. Together we can care for a community where people can live free to explore, express, and embrace their true identities.

*Ariel Aaronson-Eves is the coordinator of the NH Queer Farmer Network, @nhqueerfarmers.*

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### Resources:

[queerfarmernetwork.org](http://queerfarmernetwork.org)  
[notourfarm.org](http://notourfarm.org)





# Policy Updates

## From Farmer to Advocate: Help Those in Need with Psychedelics

By Avery Stempel

The Legislative Office Building at the State Capitol in Albany, NY, has so much marble. Whenever I visit, I am awestruck by the glistening stone walls and the way my steps echo when no one else seems to be around. The hearing room, where we had our first lawmaker panel and discussion about creating a pathway for legal access to psilocybin-containing mushrooms for New Yorkers, followed a screening of 4 short films by Reconsider about the impact of psilocybin and other psychedelics, is lined with lovely warm wooden walls. It’s cozy, with comfortable chairs. The early April event was attended by Assemblymembers and Senators, a couple of dozen aides and legislative assistants. The questions were thoughtful, the discussion lively, and the interest levels were high. Legislators on both sides of the aisle are dedicated to making this happen, and many are considering whether they should add their support. Shaking my head in humored confusion as I often do when I leave the Empire State Plaza, I wondered how I found myself rubbing elbows with lawyers and lawmakers and helping to pen a bill now being considered by the New York State legislature.

Mushrooms have always played a role in my life. They’ve been a source of inspiration, a reminder of the mysteries surrounding us. I grew up on a small family sawmill in East Berne, New York. I would traipse through the forest with my mom while my dad felled trees. We decorated our house with hummingous shelf mushrooms harvested from cut logs. We burned wood for heat that was myceliated with tiny brackets like Turkey Tail and Violet Toothed Polypores.

After my undergraduate studies, I entered the professional world, married, had children, and meandered through life for a few years, only tangentially touching the world of fungi. It wasn’t until I met Amy Hood that I began to hear the song of the mycoworld once more. She had been growing Shiitake in logs as a hobby, and we both found and identified mushrooms in the wild whenever we encountered them. We started foraging for food. Talk about running a mushroom farm would occasionally splash into our conversations and we’d smile at the thought of constantly being surrounded by growing fungi.

When the COVID pandemic hit, I was managing a performing arts center. With in-person gatherings halted, I was furloughed. I decided it was time to pivot, to take the leap, to learn to farm. We officially opened Collar City Mushrooms for business in February of 2021. Having a background in education and art, I planned on hosting educational field trips and artist exhibitions where we grow our specialty culinary crops. We built three fruiting chambers and a lab with windows so visitors to the farm could get as close to the process as possible.

Now, we are a retail shop for fresh mushrooms, collectibles, and grow supplies. I quickly realized that a third or more of our guests were coming in to find psilocybin-containing products. With furtive glances or bold declarations, these guests would ask where to find “those kinds” of mushrooms. They assumed we were growing psychotropic varieties. From veterans suffering from PTSD to folks with parents dying on hospice care to parents with depressed children who’d been medicated for decades but were still struggling, patron after patron would enter and plead with me for help. They all wove such compelling tales, with the common denominator being a drive to try something new, something natural, or something they had heard actually works.

Corinne Carey was one of our most ardent early customers. She is a culinary artist and professional advocate, and at the time, she was a producer for the Sanctuary for Independent Media’s radio show. She heard all these stories and decided we needed to take action. We assembled New York State’s first official

symposium on psilocybin-containing mushrooms: Ending the Prohibition of the Mind. We produced a two-hour program featuring therapists, lawyers, advocates, and two lawmakers, Assemblymembers Linda Rosenthal (D-Manhattan) and Pat Burke (D-Buffalo), the first lawmakers to sponsor legislation to open access to psilocybin. Participants asked how they could get involved during the question and answer portion. The next month, we hosted the first monthly meetings of our group, New Yorkers for Mental Health Alternatives (NYMHA), which has been going strong for over three years.

Our regular meetings are advocacy-forward; we primarily plan actions and discuss our successes and challenges. They have also become a haven for people seeking information about how psilocybin-containing mushrooms can be incorporated into one’s well-care routine. We have hosted a myriad of guest speakers: spiritual leaders, doctors, lawyers, advocates, veterans, a former police chief, and researchers, who have all provided our community with insight and concepts to ponder. In addition to meeting at our Troy-based mushroom farm, we’ve gathered in person at a gallery in Kingston and, at The Linda in Albany, we hosted a disc golf tournament at a public park and spent countless hours at the Capitol meeting with lawmakers. We have hosted 2 Spotlight on Mental Health Alternatives sessions in the Legislative Office Building, where groups from across the state shared their reasons for wanting to create a pathway for legal Psilocybin use.

We have been meeting with Senators and Assemblymembers on agriculture committees as we lay the groundwork for when legal cultivation of psilocybin-containing mushrooms begins. These will become a viable crop for mushroom farmers.

Educating lawmakers and those unfamiliar with psychedelics about the promise held by substances that promote neural plasticity takes time and effort. However, it is becoming easier as we work to disentangle misinformation from facts and correct people’s misperceptions. Our core team pushes to create change and continues to grow. Lawyers, therapists, researchers, counselors, doctors, chaplains, nurses, veterans, chefs, musicians, artists, programmers, and farmers dedicate their time and expertise to the cause. Our group’s name and our work are now getting national attention as news of our bill spreads.

Four bills are active in the New York State legislature that directly pertain to psilocybin-containing mushrooms. A114 by AM Rosenthal aims to decriminalize possession and use, as well as growing and sharing. There is no provision for sales in this bill. A3581/S3520, carried by AM Burke and Senator Nathalia Fernandez (D-Bronx/Westchester), would create a “therapeutic access program” where New Yorkers will be able to use psilocybin for a wide range of conditions, overseen by trained experts. A8349/S7832, also carried by Burke and Fernandez, would establish a psilocybin-assisted therapy pilot program for ten thousand veterans and first responders from the western region of New York State. Psilocybin-containing mushrooms would only be available through the approved therapy sessions. The fourth bill, A10375, introduced by Assemblymember and Health Committee Chair Amy Paulin (D-Scarsdale), would create a “personal psilocybin permit system” allowing adult use of psilocybin for health and wellness purposes. The bill would require that adults complete a health screening and take a psilocybin safety education course to acquire a permit. Permits would authorize adults to purchase, grow, possess, and independently engage in regulated use of psilocybin. The bill would also allow licensed cultivators to sell limited amounts of psilocybin to permitted adults with secure delivery. Unlike legislation authorizing adult use of marijuana, the bill does not contemplate the sale of psilocybin in retail stores. The bill would inform permitted adults of their ability to hire trained and certified support service providers who can help reduce risks and increase safety during the use of psilocybin; those professionals would be required to satisfy ethical standards of care and ongoing educational requirements.

We worked closely with Chairwoman Paulin to craft this first-of-its-kind, safety- and wellness-focused approach to psilocybin legislation based on hundreds of conversations with professionals and legal experts nationwide and a thorough review of the evidence.

Through 2025, we will continue our efforts to educate New Yorkers and those who represent them in Albany alike about the soundness of this approach while working with advocates to replicate the model in other states. We have begun meeting with advocates and lawmakers from New Hampshire to Maryland to California. Our ultimate goal is to create a system with the right amount of guardrails and educational components to allow individuals legal access to these natural substances that promote neural plasticity, are anti-inflammatory, spiritually significant, and potentially facilitate healing.

If this is an area of interest to you, please get involved. Change to laws and policy only happens when citizens step up and raise their voices. The best way to create change is by sharing your personal story. Talk to your friends, neighbors, and family. Most importantly, tell your state representatives that this issue is important to you. You can also join our monthly meetings held in person at Collar City Mushrooms in Troy (333 2nd Ave, Troy, NY 12182) and online via Zoom to those dialing in from across the state. Visit [NYMHA.com](http://NYMHA.com) for more information on our advocacy efforts and [collarcitymushrooms.com](http://collarcitymushrooms.com) for information about our farm.



## The New Bird Flu Epidemic: Hazardous Industrialized Ag Practices are Coming Home to Roost

By Steve Gilman

Since its detection in 1996 in Hong Kong, the initial outbreak of the H1N1 “Bird Flu” virus has significantly strengthened and morphed – circling the planet, mutating and jumping species as it goes. Initially mild in wild birds, it now severely impacts over 485 bird breeds with major implications for avian biodiversity. In 2022, the virus was discovered in mammals, killing hundreds of seals in New England and Quebec, followed by a “mass infection event” at a Spanish mink farm. This modern, widely promiscuous version of the H1N1 virus is now labeled “Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza” (HPAI) – presently impacting a wide range of 48 mammal hosts, including cats and dogs, mice, seals, sea lions, raccoons, foxes, and bears – as well as dairy cows and humans.

With occurrences in 48 states, the confined poultry industry remains the hardest hit. Since February 2022, 101 million egg-layers and meat birds have been put to death in attempts to control the accelerating outbreaks. Then in March 2024, it was discovered that virulent bird flu had jumped into dairy cattle in Texas. At this writing in August 2024, HPAI was authenticated in 192 dairy herds in 13 states, 64 of which were in Colorado. These official numbers are squishy at the base, however, due to piecemeal testing protocols and uncoordinated responses that vary significantly from state to state, topped with disjointed federal actions from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

In the meantime, hiding in plain sight are the officially promoted conventional ag production practices dictating today’s industrialized food supply that lie as the undivulged root of the viral outbreaks. In the U.S., some 212,000 CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) crowd large numbers of animals into small spaces, dominating today’s factory farm “efficiency of scale” livestock and poultry production. Also contributing to this so-called efficacy are unregulated practices that allow feeding potentially contaminated poultry manure to cattle as an inexpensive way to grow meat and dispose of waste

(continued on next page)



(Bird Flu - from A-8)

litter simultaneously. What could ever go wrong?

Moving into Dairy Cows

In a major species jump, a newly modified HPAI outbreak was discovered this March on U.S. dairy farms in Midwest and Western states, producing symptoms ranging from mild malaise and low milk production to death. The virus was also found in the milk. Unlike the poultry operations that rely on culling entire flocks, cattle are a major long-term investment.

While this outbreak immediately called for effective state and federal remedial responses, the piecemeal testing protocols and remediation attempts vary considerably, and the overall magnitude of the outbreaks remains elusive. Meanwhile, the virus is still spreading, infecting more distant dairies and beef cattle. Herds in Eastern and Northeastern states have not been affected at the time of writing, now is there an identified threat to cows who spend time on pasture.

Initially, USDA maintained that cow infections were mainly transmitted between animals via herd-wide milking equipment. State and federal officials broadcast assurances to the public that the virus typically causes minor illness in cows and can be controlled by taking additional precautions when moving cows and equipment. Further reports, however, indicated that some animals were dying from secondary infections due to weakened immune systems caused by the virus. Others had to be killed because they failed to recover. Then, a new study published in *Nature* that investigated outbreaks on nine farms in four states reported a significant increase in cow deaths. Further, the HPAI virus was found in more than 20% of the studied cows’ nasal swabs, even among those with no symptoms, where it could be easily transmitted to other cows along with the ability to extend more widely to new locations and further species.

To overcome the resistance of many farmers to test their herds since that might require them to take further culling actions, in June, USDA finally announced support via a disaster relief fund to compensate them for the value of milk lost from each cow as a result of infections for a period of 28 days. They sent postcards to 20,000 dairy producers, notifying them of the payments and further financial support for expenses such as veterinary treatment and purchasing protective gear for farm workers. Released in July, the funding is based on 90% of the conventional milk pay price, which means that, should it be necessary, organic farmers will not be compensated at the higher organic milk price level, which reflects expanded production expenses. By early August, \$2 million had been paid out for milk production lost to bird flu.

After reports documented that the virus also showed up in the milk, officials hastened to proclaim that the dairy supply is safe because pasteurizing milk products entirely kills any virus that might be present. Recent samples tested by the FDA’s Center for Food Safety found no active virus in 167 dairy products, including milk, cheese and ice cream purchased at stores in 27 states – although 17% contained viral fragments. In mid-September, USDA will collect tissue samples from healthy milk cows sent to slaughter in a year-long testing program to determine if the virus shows up in cows with no symptoms.

While USDA can exercise federal power to require testing for cattle moved across state lines, the bulk of the testing and on-the-ground response is delegated to the states. Whether these efforts are too little/too late remains to be seen, as testing only a small fraction of the nation’s nine million dairy cows. Michigan, for example, recently reported its 27th infected dairy herd and has issued a new Risk Reduction and Response Order requiring all dairies to adopt enhanced biosecurity measures – including prohibiting the exhibition of all lactating dairy cows and those in the last two months of pregnancy across the state for at least 60 consecutive days. As the state with the highest number of reported cases, Colorado is implementing bulk-tank testing at dairy operations in a singular, effective effort to prevent the further spread of the infection. However, the state has documented “spillover events” where the mutated virus has moved back into poultry CAFOs, requiring the culling of 3.2 million infected birds. Thus far, there have been no

reports of any outbreaks in the Northeast.

Humans Infected

So far, 13 farmworkers working directly with infected poultry or cows have tested positive for the virus, mostly with mild flu-like symptoms. However, while officials have evaluated thousands of cows, they do not have the authority to compel workers to get tested, and only about 60 farm workers have been monitored to date. Infectious disease experts, however, believe many more have been affected. Clearing out culled birds and sanitizing the barns after an outbreak is sweltering work and many workers fail to wear the hot protective gear when provided while remaining fearful of losing their jobs if they have to call in sick. Thus far, there has been no documented person-to-person spread or mutations found in the strain’s genome that would allow the virus to spread more easily in humans.

However, the original H1N1 strain has taken on more deadly configurations, or clades, in poultry flocks in Asia. Some 900 human deaths were attributed to the initial 1996 outbreak. And here in 2024, multiple hospitalizations and a recent death are ascribed to outbreaks of a more deadly infection that has been affecting poultry handlers in Cambodia since 2023. Thus far, the H1N1 Asian clade is distinct from the primary HPAI mutation circling the planet and is responsible for the current animal and human outbreaks in the U.S.

As the number of infected cows rises, however, there are increasing concerns on the part of health officials that the more the virus spreads via multiple pathways, the more opportunity it has to mutate and infect people, potentially resulting in a more widespread pandemic. The past COVID-19 experience revealed significant problems in the U.S. approach to testing and countering emerging pathogens. This time around, the CDC is spending \$5 million to vaccinate CAFO workers against seasonal flu to prevent a potentially dangerous mutation with bird flu. It is working to develop a vaccine to treat workers who are involved with culling infected poultry. Meanwhile, many antiviral drugs developed during COVID are in short supply or are now being evaluated as ineffective. As concerns continue to spread, some bipartisan members of Congress are requesting that USDA ramp up its bird flu response definitively along with vigorous research and remediation efforts.

CAFO connection and the No SHT Act

This virulent HPAI strain of bird flu has quickly become a major food production crisis for the nation’s densely populated factory farms, directly affecting the U.S. food system and the overall economy. As a flagrant example of agency capture by the highly profitable agribusiness interests, after decades of functioning as a primary incubator for HPAI, USDA still does not incriminate the large CAFO-style poultry farms that produce 90% of the nation’s meat and eggs, placing the blame on biosecurity breaches from wild birds instead.

Large-scale factory farms confine up to 125,000 birds in a single windowless barn, creating ideal conditions for proliferating viral mutations. The largest CAFO dairies hold permits to house 70,000 cows, while the nation’s biggest meat cattle CAFO in Idaho is an 800-acre facility holding 150,000 cows at a time. Along with their prodigious water use, large multi-sized CAFOs also generate huge quantities of polluting waste – putting public health and the environment at risk via toxic air and water conditions and methane and nitrous oxide emissions that are intensifying climate change. Meanwhile, the so-called “efficiency” of large CAFOs with their purported economies of scale has put smaller, sustainable, ecologically responsible livestock farms out of business. Even more suspect is the USDA-protected conventional ag practice of feeding poultry litter to cattle as a possible source of HPAI contamination. Due to the unique digestive system of ruminants, the economics of the beef cattle industry has long been based on feeding waste materials as a source of dietary nutrients. The litter is a mixture of chicken feces, feathers, and bedding materials from confined chicken houses and is sold as fertilizer and low-cost cattle feed. Studies have shown that the chicken litter fed to cattle can harbor salmonella, E. coli bacteria, botulism, antibiotics, and residues of the bird flu virus – generating concerns that chicken feces are a potential

cause of the viral outbreaks in cows.

There are currently no federal regulations governing this industrialized livestock feeding practice. However, California has prohibited feeding chicken litter to dairy cows while still allowing it to feed beef cattle. In 1967, the FDA initially objected to using chicken litter as a feedstock but rescinded their opposition in 1980 in the face of targeted industry research – leaving the allowance to the states instead. In 2003, the FDA temporarily banned feeding poultry litter to prevent the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease). However, they later reversed their decision to prohibit cow and sheep brains and spinal fluid in chicken feed, which could then be excreted back into their litter and utilized as cattle feed. Meanwhile, the European Union and Canada have banned the use of poultry litter as animal feed due to its confirmed disease potential. In response here in the U.S., Senator Cory Booker (D, NJ), backed by a range of scientific experts, recently introduced the NO Stool in Herd’s Troughs Act – known as the NO SHT Act – prohibiting the intentional addition of excrement to animal food. In reply, the American Feed Industry Association denied the charges, instead pinning the blame for the HPAI outbreaks on the usual suspects: wild migratory birds and small flocks of home chickens.

What’s Next?

As promulgated by federal and state officials, the outbreak numbers cited in the 8th month of 2024 are just a snapshot of the current development and spread of HPAI since 2022 in the U.S. Since the infection outbreaks regularly go through periodic lulls, it’s difficult to ascertain the efficacy of the responses taken to control it. So far, Colorado is the only state requiring bulk tank testing to identify infected herds straightforwardly. What is clear is this accelerating virus is a global event that has taken on a life of its own. Where it goes from here is unknown – but due to its virulence and the track record of other viruses, it is not unknowable.

As a major example, we witnessed the COVID-19 virus ramp up into a full-scale pandemic, sickening many and taking millions of lives. Although it has become a better-contained endemic disease, new mutations continue to develop. Five years after the initial outbreak, the public’s guard was down, and the CDC reported high wastewater levels of the virus in every state. COVID cases are surging, with twice as many hospitalizations and deaths as in 2023, though

(continued on A-10)



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# A Different Kind of Potato Farming

By Annie Sholar

Potatoes are an extremely versatile food – they’re delicious fried, mashed, roasted, or boiled, even soaked in water with leaf mold for 48 hours!

Okay, sure — that last idea isn’t necessarily great food for you to eat, but it is extremely nourishing for the microbial life in your soil.

**JADAM Microbial Solution (JMS)**  
JADAM means “people that resemble nature,” coined by Korean farmer Youngsang Cho in 1991. He advocates for a low-cost, low-input form of organic management, open information sharing between farmers, and free access to techniques on the JADAM website.

**What is a Biostimulant?**  
Biostimulants are microbes or other inputs that help spur a plant’s natural metabolism or immune system. Unlike conventional fertilizers, biostimulants do not directly provide the chemical and mineral nutrients a plant needs. Instead, they encourage plant activities that support nutrient uptake or the production of protective compounds. In other words, they support healthier plant growth through a vibrant microbial community in the soil.

**Why Focus on Microbial Life in Soil?**  
If you’re a longtime NOFA member, you’ve repeatedly heard us talk about soil health. That’s because managing and rebuilding your soil is a crucial step towards growing more and more nutritious food from living soils.

A common misconception about transitioning to organic farming is that it takes a long time to return to a conventional level yield. The truth is that simply swapping in organic amendments in place of conventional amendments does result in a loss of yield. But, if you can simultaneously start working to improve your soil biology – reintroducing micro and macro fauna & flora, like bacteria, nematodes, earthworms, fungi and more – yields improve quickly. That’s because the creatures living under the soil do a lot of work to support plant matter growing above the soil.

For example, microbes help roots fix nutrients and increase nutrient uptake. Microbes sometimes carry nutrients through the roots and into the plants before returning to the soil in a process called rhizophagy. Microbes are also responsible for building healthy soil structure, aerating the soil and allowing water and air to reach plant roots more easily. A lack of microbial communities is one factor that leads to soil compaction.

Microbial-plant interactions also help support plant immunity and lead to harvests with beneficial properties for human health. Laura Decker of microBIOMETER, an affordable, on-site soil microbe test using patented smartphone technology, explains that, in the presence of pathogens, microbes send hormones into the soil and root network. When plants “receive” this hormonal message, they can similarly respond with hormonal signals that fight off the pathogens as part of the plant’s immune response. This plant activity generates antioxidants, which we can eat to support our immune systems!

**What do Potatoes Have to do with it?**  
The JADAM microbial solution takes existing soil microbial life from leaf mold fungus and gives those microbes an environment to thrive and multiply. Keeping the leaf-mold inoculated water covered and warm gives the microbes a comfortable home, and the cooked potatoes provide the right mix of nutrients, such as carbohydrates, sugars, and vitamins, for the microbes to grow. After providing the microbes with a good environment in which to grow and multiply, you can introduce them to your growing area to act as a biostimulant for your plants.

**Brew JMS**  
Gather your materials. You’ll need a 5-gallon bucket, non-chlorinated water, 2-3 cooked potatoes, 1 tablespoon of non-iodized sea salt, a stick or dowel, cheesecloth and string, a leaf mold, and cover.

**A note on water:**  
*Most tap water is chlorinated to kill off the microorganisms that can make us sick if we drink it. But we don’t want to kill microorganisms in our microbial solution – just the opposite! If you have access to non-chlorinated water, like well water or rainwater, use that. If not, dispense the amount of water you plan to use, then either aerate it for 20 minutes or leave it uncovered for about 24 hours to off-gas. This should eliminate the chlorine in the water source. If your water source has chloramine, you should use humic acid (enough to change the color of the water) or citric acid to complex out the chloramine. Off-gassing alone won’t remove the chloramine.*

1. Find leaf mold in your area: Look for a pile of leaves or sticks at the base of a tree. Use leaves with a white, powdery substance – that’s the mold and the source of our microbes.
2. Fill a 5-gallon bucket with water.
3. Add the sea salt to the water, stirring to dissolve. Place the cooked potatoes and the leaves with mold in a cheesecloth and tie it closed. Place the cheesecloth potato bundle in the water, and agitate or massage the bundle to break up the potatoes. Massage the cheesecloth until the water is cloudy and the ingredients are mixed.
4. Place a dowel or stick across the top of your 5-gallon bucket, and securely attach the cheesecloth bundle to the dowel so that it hangs suspended in the water.
5. Cover the bucket (with a lid or bag) and leave it in a warm, dark place for 1-2 days. The solution should start to bubble – that’s the sign that microbes are multiplying!
6. To use the JMS, strain your solution into another container and dilute at a 1:20 ratio when ready. To apply, thoroughly drench the soil in your growing area as often as once per week.

**Experimenting with JMS**  
NOFA/Mass’s Soil Technical Services and Education Director Ruben Parrilla loves the simplicity of JMS and is excited to experiment with tweaks to this base recipe to see how microbial growth changes.

For example, Ruben added multiple inocula to the mix in his first batch. Next, he wants to experiment by using a specific inoculum in each batch – for example, trying each of these on their own: leaf mold, compost, grass silage, an IMO3 product (Indigenous Microorganisms 3), and no inoculum at all. He will then use a microscope to analyze the diversity in each batch to identify which brew provides the most diversity with the least amount of work and the lowest cost.

Ruben hypothesizes that adding more inocula to one batch is better for achieving maximum diversity. However, as the brewing process selects specific organisms, it could be better to brew multiple batches separately and combine them before application. He encourages others to experiment and says, “I don’t want people to copy my process and then feel disappointed if it doesn’t work. I want to empower people with the knowledge and tools they need to ask questions about the process – what will work for me & my farm? What if I changed the amount of water or leaf mold?” What if? Give it a try!

**Measuring Microbial Activity**  
Ruben’s essential tools for measuring the outcome of different experiments are a microscope and microBIOMETER. Both help shed light on the bacterial and fungal growth in a given soil or solution over time.

**More Resources**  
To learn more about using on-farm microscopes and other tools to better understand your soil biology, check out the NOFA/Mass events page for upcoming workshops and webinars, or join them on the first Monday of every other month for bimonthly Soil Health Calls. Also, check out the Healthy Soils playlist on the NOFA/Mass YouTube channel for tons of great sessions on farm microbiology. Contact [info@nofamass.org](mailto:info@nofamass.org) to sign up for a free microBIOMETER to use on your farm in Massachusetts.

Annie Sholar is the NOFA/Mass Project Manager.

(Bird Flu - from A-9)

for the non-immune compromised, the general cases are more akin to bad respiratory flu.

A distinction this time is that these aggressive, newly developing HPAI outbreaks are clearly part and parcel of our industrialized food system. Despite the culling/slaughter of over 100 million poultry in futile efforts to contain it, Bird Flu has flown the poultry CAFOs to directly infect dairy and meat cattle along with an expanding list of innocent mammals, including humans. Meanwhile, despite the vigorous official assurances that our food system remains safe, these industrialized methods are coming into focus. More consumers are beginning to see through the veil of cheap food production, masking inherently unsustainable and hazardous food practices.

Years of overt USDA support, coupled with taxpayer subsidies and corporate concentration, have enabled large-scale factory farms to dominate our food system. Their embrace of industrialized mass production methods applied to agriculture is producing a proclaimed lower-cost “efficiency of scale” that has forced countless farmers out of business. Today, the remaining grassroots farmers are struggling to survive due to low prices and market competition.

It’s important to remember what happened to food security when COVID-19 severely impacted the entire conventional food supply chain from workers and food production to processing, distribution and demand. With their “just in time” supply model in tatters, the meat, dairy, and egg CAFOs were especially hard hit. It was the grassroots food economies of localized farmers and community enterprises that stepped into the breach to feed the populace.

To illustrate, USDA’s recent study, “Local Food Systems Response to COVID,” documented weekly consumer expenditures in various market channels and by community size – specifically large and small cities and non-metro medium and small communities. Across the board, the biggest market supply gainers were specialty markets, health food stores, small-format groceries, CSAs, and direct-from-producer purchases. Because of gathering restrictions, Farmers Markets and restaurants were initially impacted but later significantly increased their market share. Meanwhile, supermarkets showed little increase as a key link of the agribusiness food chain.

Today, however, agribusiness is in the food economy’s driver’s seat and thanks to so-called “inflation,” food is more expensive than ever. However, major government-sanctioned food corporation consolidation and record profits fed by food sector domination on the backs of highly exploited guest workers is not so easily concealed. Meanwhile, core community farmers are reeling with the shocks of extreme heat and cold, flooding and drought, fires, disease, and pests – along with the financial effects of the rapidly expanding climate crisis.

In the face of mounting climate challenges and further food security impacts, we all need to step up to support our community farmers and local food infrastructure directly all of the time, not just during dire events. Helping to bolster and build a thriving long-term local food supply resilience is key to our wellbeing and civilized survival. While we need more organic, soil-health-based family farms and farmers, everything from home gardens and Community Supported Agriculture groups to food hubs and co-ops are important parts of the picture.

It’s also well to remember that it is the role of our representatives to represent us – not the Big Food establishment. This requires engaging in policy advocacy to marshal support at the local, state and federal governmental levels. Our seven state NOFA Chapters welcome participation.

Steve Gilman is the Interstate NOFA Policy Coordinator.





# Introducing the Massachusetts Pollinator Network

By Renée Scott and Brucie Moulton

## Advocate for Native Pollinators

The Massachusetts Pollinator Network launched in 2021 to provide statewide support for native pollinators and everyone working on their behalf. As a network, we seek to educate the public, connect people and groups, provide a growing range of resources, and support legislation to protect and increase pollinator habitat and reduce pesticide use.

## Why pollinators?

While most people are familiar with the climate crisis, many do not know about the equally calamitous biodiversity crisis. Human impacts, including habitat loss, pesticide use, pollution (including light), the introduction of invasive species, and climate change, are causing flora and fauna species’ declines and, in many cases, extinctions. Pollinators and other insects are the foundation of the ecosystems that support life on Earth and suffer from the biodiversity crisis. We cannot afford to lose them.

“If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos”. E.O. Wilson

## Are pollinators and plants interchangeable?

They are not. Over millennia, each pollinator evolved with specific plants, creating intricate, mutually beneficial relationships. The insects pollinate the plant, and the plants provide food and shelter to the insects. While some of these relationships are more general, where a plant or insect can benefit or benefit from many other species, many relationships are exclusively between one plant and one insect. When species that did not evolve in a particular ecosystem are brought in intentionally or accidentally, they often have few to no predators that would naturally keep them in check. They can easily take over an area, pushing out the native species that did evolve there and are not part of the food web. As a result, insects are left without food and shelter and plants lose their pollinators. This is why we talk about the importance of native species. All insects and plants are native to somewhere. The key is to keep the original ecological bonds together so they can function as part of the food web and survive.

## The Massachusetts Pollinator Network

Created as part of NOFA/Mass, the Massachusetts Pollinator Network (MAPN) grew out of a regional group whose founder, Peggy Macleod, saw the urgent need for an organization that could reach every corner of the state to build a widespread understanding of the immense diversity and importance of native pollinators. NOFA/Mass Executive Director Jocelyn Langer and Policy Director Martin Dagoberto Driggs collaborated with Peggy. They formed an advisory committee to clarify the new group’s mission and framework and to hire a coordinator.

MAPN was fortunate to have as its first coordinator bumblebee scientist, Rosemary Malfi, who shifted from academic to policy work. Last year, Rosemary joined the International Xerces Society’s pesticide policy group. The new coordinator, Renée Scott, brought a strong native plant perspective. She and Tori Antonino co-led the successful Somerville, MA, campaign to pass a Native Planting Ordinance, a first-in-the-nation accomplishment. Benefitting from the complementary perspectives of its first two coordinators and the hard work of its steering and advisory committees, MAPN was off to a strong start.

## Mission

Our mission is to support pollinators by protecting and creating habitat, reducing pesticide use, and controlling invasive species. We do so by providing education and support to as many people as possible because everyone can do something more to support pollinators. We have resources for people and organizations with different circumstances. Perhaps you have a small garden full of non-native plants or an es-



tablished native plant garden, or you are a municipal employee trying to increase the ecological health of the land you manage or a farmer wishing to attract beneficial insects to help with pollination and pest management. We can help!

Stay tuned for our new website, which will be a resource hub for information on what to plant, where to find them, and more.

“Knowing that we must preserve ecosystems with as many of their interacting species as possible defines our challenge in no uncertain terms.” Doug Tallamy

Do you want to get started with creating and supporting pollinator habitats?

We offer common sense steps for how to garden ecologically.

## Choose the right plants

- Prioritize planting your landscape with native plants, including trees and shrubs
- Ask your local nursery for seeds and plants that are native (preferably to New England), straight species (not cultivars), and pesticide-free
- Plant a variety of species with different heights, flower shapes, colors and bloom times.
- Diversify your lawn by adding low-growing, flowering plants, especially clover, violets, self-heal (Prunella), wild strawberries, and native grasses
- Try to have at least 70% of your plants be native species

## Care for your garden

- Minimize soil disruption (digging, tilling) to protect soil health

- Avoid all pesticides (herbicides, insecticides & fungicides) and granulated fertilizers
- Identify and remove invasive plants
- To protect overwintering insects, use leaves as mulch and leave plant stalks in place. Skip fall cleanup and wait until mid-spring to cut stems to about 12” (or better yet, never remove them!)
- Don’t rake/blow/shred leaves; if they are in a path, gently move them to a garden bed
- Where it is safe to do so, leave dead tree trunks standing and stash fallen branches in an inconspicuous place; they are vital insect homes
- Mow every 2-3 weeks; allow grass to get 3-4” tall

## Other ways to support wildlife

- Put our shallow water dishes with some small stones for landing spots and change the water every few days to deter mosquitoes from laying eggs
- If possible, keep outdoor lights off or use yellow motion-sensor lights pointing downward
- Leave areas of bare, loose soil for ground-nesting bees

Visit [masspollinatornetwork.org](https://masspollinatornetwork.org) for more information.



# GREEN MOUNTAIN SPINNERY IS A CO-OPERATIVELY OWNED MILL & YARN SHOP

## CERTIFIED ORGANIC PROCESSING VEGETABLE BASED SOAPS & SPINNING OIL

### MINIMUM LOT SIZE: 35 POUNDS



# Iconic New York Lakeview Organic Grain Mill Turns a Page

By Dan Sullivan

The ties that bind.

For nearly 30 years, Lakeview Organic Grain has been providing organic livestock feed grains, bagged feed, animal supplements and crop seeds to the organic community throughout the Northeast. Customers and farmers who provide raw materials to the mill are like family, and the business has helped new and existing organic farming operations in the region flourish.



Mary-Howell Martens holds down the fort at Lakeview. Credit: Dan Sullivan.

In an April newsletter, Lakeview owner/manager Mary-Howell Martens announced all that would change: “After nearly 30 years of supplying feed to Northeast organic farmers of all sizes, we have decided it is time to let others carry this on and direct our efforts elsewhere.”

Martens, who largely steered the ship — more recently with help from youngest son Daniel — intends to focus more on other endeavors, including writing, teaching and being a grandmother.

Her husband of 38 years, Klaas Martens, while still very much involved in the day-to-day operation of the farm — with 1,900 acres of organic grain crops, edible beans and hay under cultivation — is also applying the brakes some, as the dynamic couple helps eldest son Peter build his rapidly growing organic food-grain business, Seneca Grain and Bean.

They plan to transition ownership of their dairy farm and 65 milk cows to a young couple currently leasing the operation.

Neither can imagine fully retiring.

## In the Beginning

Mary-Howell was a grape breeder at Cornell, and Klaas was a lifelong farmer with an ag degree from SUNY at Cobleskill when they tied the knot in 1986 and began farming 500 acres of corn, wheat, soy, and hay conventionally under government programs.

Realizing that crop/acreage combination represented a financial dead end while becoming increasingly wary of conventional ag chemicals, they began farming organically with diverse crop rotations in the early '90s.

By 2001, the USDA Certified Organic label was on the horizon and the sector was taking off, close to home in no small part due to the Martens and their willingness to share their success and knowledge with neighbors. The Martens had also become regular workshop and keynote speakers at organic farming conferences across the country.

They saw an opportunity to vertically integrate and fill a niche by providing organic feed to dairies, poultry farms, and others transitioning to organics. They purchased an old Agway mill in Penn Yan, 5 miles from their farm.

Eric Glasgow, who, with his wife and a crew of 30, runs the 240-acre Grey Barn & Farm creamery and bakery on Martha’s Vineyard, said Lakeview and the Martens were instrumental in helping him get started when he pivoted from international oil sales to farming 15 years ago.

Grey Barn, “a typical New England Farm with a backbone of dairy,” Glasgow said, milks 45 Dutch-Belted and Normande cows and makes cheese, sold directly to customers and distributed nationally. The farm also raises pigs and has a small egg-laying operation. “In the early years, I definitely leaned on them [the Martens] to a certain extent for some advice or thoughts on things,” Glasgow said from his farmstand, where business was already brisk as tourism season kicked in. “I didn’t have experience or any of my own specific knowledge to apply.”

In its newsletter to customers, which took the tone of saying goodbye to an old friend, Lakeview included a list of alternate organic animal feed sources in Vermont, New York and Pennsylvania.

“I’ve been out to Penn Yan, and I’ve had dinner with Klaas and Mary-Howell,” Glasgow said to underscore the personal relationships Lakeview has held with its customers.

“This is a story, I think, that encapsulates where the organic movement has been for the past 30 years and perhaps where it’s going,” Mary-Howell said from her office inside the mill. “It’s changing direction, and we see this as an opportunity for us. We see it as opportunities for others.”

Son Daniel, who has been running the mill’s grinding operation for the past five years, is ready for other endeavors, including helping his brother Peter grow Seneca Grain and Bean, the food-grade side of the family enterprise.

A few years ago, the family invested in a state-of-the-art grain cleaning facility. “It is just taking off,” Martens said. “There are so many opportunities with bakeries, with flour mills, with consumers, with all sorts of people who want to grind their own grains



Mary-Howell Martens and son Daniel. Credit: Sullivan.

and have a source of fresh, local, organic things to eat.”

Lakeview Organic Grain has been instrumental in growing that community and the farmers who serve it. Products have evolved to include bulk dairy feed, chicken feed, pellets of small animal and poultry feed, specialty feeds like no-soy chicken feed and customized rations. “We’ve done this for years, and it has been successful,” Martens said. “It’s allowed an awful lot of people to do what they’ve wanted to do. They’ve wanted to raise chickens, they’ve wanted to raise pigs - we’ve been able to supply the feed. When we started, there was nobody else doing it.”

When the couple began the endeavor, they could easily sell their soybeans in the tofu market, but there was no market for their rotational organic crops like corn, small grains and oats. “That’s why we started grinding feed back in the mid-’90s,” Martens said. “We needed a way to use up our rotational crops.”

And the first organic dairy farmers needed organic feed.

“We thought, ‘No big deal,’ we could provide the grains,” Martens recalled. “A friend of ours had a mixer-grinder on his farm and a small feed truck, and he could deliver them, and that was that. It was just a simple thing to do. But that market took off very fast, outgrew the capacity of our farm and his farm, and we bought this facility from Agway in 2000.”

Agway was going bankrupt, she said, and the mill had basically been abandoned. With no small amount of elbow grease, ingenuity and retrofitting, Lakeview Organic Grain was up and running in 2001.

Within a year, Lakeview added two employees. The following year, they had their own truck driver. “We kept adding on and upgrading equipment,” Martens said. “It has been a wild ride, and it has been a hard ride, but it’s been very successful. We’ve had great customers and people and loved working with everybody.”

She added that 60% of the mill’s customers are Mennonite or Amish and Lakeview is a women-run business. It has been an interesting and rewarding cultural learning experience.

Now, other companies grind organic seed, and Keystone is about to open a brand-new automated, computerized organic feed mill in Seneca County.

“There are others in the business,” Martens said, “and we see that it’s time for us to focus our work, our resources, more on our sons’ interests; let them drive the ship and move on from what we’ve created here.”

## Not Going Away

Lakeview Organic Grain will continue as a brand that focuses primarily on seed sales of cover crops, small grains, and crop mixtures.

“The number of organic vegetable farms in the Northeast who need cover crops is essentially unlimited,” Martens said.

Paul and Maureen Knapp own and operate Cobblestone Valley Farm in the Preble Valley of Central New York. They milk about 60 cows on the diverse, fourth-generation dairy farm, which also raises pastured poultry, beef, and pork. They were one of the Martens’ first organic feed customers. The Knapps said the Martens represent the true spirit of organic farming.

“That’s kind of what the whole organic community has been about ... everybody pitches in and helps help out one another,” Paul Knapp said. “Somebody’s doing something. You ask them how and why, and they’ll tell you. You try to fit some of those pieces into your puzzle. Klaas and Mary Howell have been right there since the beginning doing those sorts of things. They’re great proponents of organic agriculture and very willing and free to share information.”

“They’ve been mentors to just about everybody in the organic community if they’re willing,” Maureen Knapp added. The Knapps expressed both admiration and amazement for Lakeview’s dedication to its customers over the years.

“On more than one occasion, we would call a feed order in on a holiday, maybe a Friday or a Monday that’s a holiday, just thinking we’d get the answering machine and just to get a jump on it to get an order in,” Paul Knapp said. “And Mary-Howell would pick up the phone, and she’d be there in the office.”

*This article was originally printed in “Lancaster Farming” and was reprinted with permission.*





# Finding the Market that Fits Your Farm Business

By Becca Toms

It doesn't matter what kind of farmer you are; finding the right market for your products is a journey every farmer must undertake. For most of us with limited experience in professional marketing, this journey is often filled with trial and error. We navigate countless opportunities, striving to get our meats, grains, vegetables, flowers, mushrooms, and more into the hands of those who will appreciate them. Yet, even after securing a market, the question often lingers: "Is this worth my time?"

While only you can make that final determination, many farmers have wrestled with this question, navigating hurdles, performing calculations, and weighing considerations to find a solution that best suits their farm business. The Solid Ground Program at UConn Extension seeks to share these collective experiences, hoping to reduce trial and error and increase farmers' profitability.

Over five years ago, Connecticut farmers collaborated with Solid Ground to create a publication for new and beginning farmers called *Finding Your Market*. Given the many changes the world has seen since then, the Solid Ground team recognized that it was time for an update. This revised edition will not only expand on marketing channels the previous guide addressed, such as farm stands, farmers markets, CSAs, value-added products, and selling to restaurants and schools but will also delve into new opportunities. These include pick-your-own operations, food aggregators, institutions, co-ops, grocery stores, farm-to-food assistance programs, and online ordering platforms.

Solid Ground is again partnering with farmers in Connecticut and across the country to ensure this new version meets their current needs. The guide will provide valuable insights into the advantages and disadvantages of various marketing channels and suggest additional efforts you might need to consider. Scattered throughout are quotes from farmers, offering a glimpse into how these ideas have been successfully implemented in real farm businesses.

This guide will be available in late fall 2024, both in print and digital formats, through the Solid Ground website. It will be offered as a Connecticut-focused guide and a broader national version for new and beginning farmers around the U.S. While the Connecticut edition will include state-specific regulations and considerations, the national version will focus on market channels with more uniformity across the country.

Although this guide does not encompass every possible marketing channel, we hope it will address the most common and accessible outlets. By reflecting on the challenges and successes of fellow farmers, we aim to provide insights that can help reduce the burnout many new farmers face. Conventional wisdom suggests casting a wide net - experimenting with all available marketing channels until something sticks. However, this approach can lead to overwhelming demands on your time and resources, particularly during peak harvest and production seasons.

With the shared wisdom of the farming community, we can better prepare farmers at every stage of their journey and foster a collective knowledge base that improves how we serve our communities. Yes, we are all small businesses striving for sustainability and creating positive working environments for our employees. But many of us enter agriculture driven by a deeper sense of purpose - to contribute to the

wellbeing of our communities, preserve open and green spaces, and provide access to nutritious, culturally meaningful food. Yet, the challenges of thriving in various markets can sometimes turn a once joyful task into the struggle of simply meeting the bottom line.

If you've navigated these "highs and lows" of farming and gained valuable insights from your experiences with different marketing channels, the Solid Ground team would greatly appreciate your help guiding the next generation of farmers. We are actively collecting quotes from farmers across the U.S. about the pitfalls to avoid, the keys to success, and general advice. To share your knowledge, please fill out the brief form at [s.uconn.edu/findyourmarket](https://s.uconn.edu/findyourmarket). If your quote is selected, we will credit you and your farm in the publication.

Becca Toms is a partner farmer at Off Center Farm in Southern Connecticut and a Communications and Outreach Assistant for Food System programming at UConn Extension. If you have any questions or thoughts about this article or would like more information, please reach out to her at [rebecca.toms@uconn.edu](mailto:rebecca.toms@uconn.edu).

**Resource:**  
*Finding Your Market*, a publication for new and beginning farmers, [solidground.extension.uconn.edu](https://solidground.extension.uconn.edu).



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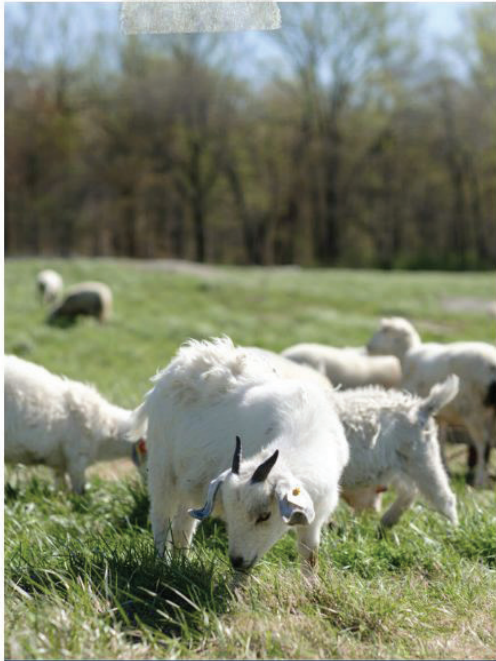
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We prioritize publishing submissions from People of Color and/or about issues related to land & food justice, anti-racism & those applicable to growing in the Northeastern US.



# Vermont Organic Milk for Vermont Schools

Provided by NOFA Vermont

This past school year, a project to transition three Vermont schools from conventional milk to local organic milk ultimately led to the switch of 12 other schools.

By the numbers:

- 2,750: Vermont students drinking Vermont organic milk every day in school
- 12: Participating schools across six Supervisory Unions
- 250: Gallons per week of Vermont organic milk going to the schools
- 8,000: Total gallons of Vermont organic milk sold to schools this past year
- 3: Scheduled field trips to Miller Farm, where students will see and experience where their milk comes from

A little over a year ago, a Vermont organic dairy farmer and a local school nutrition director sat on a circle of milk crates at Miller Farm with NOFA-VT staff and a few farm-to-school partners. We talked about what it would take to transition three local schools from cartons of conventional milk to fresh, Vermont organic milk from a bulk dispenser. As we sipped sweet, cold Miller Farm milk in the April sunshine, we also discussed why this project mattered—why Vermont organic milk for Vermont schools? And why now?

In recent years, a perfect storm of factors coalesced to put tremendous downward price pressure on organic dairies in the Northeast, forcing over half of Vermont’s organic dairy farms to close in the past eight years alone. These factors include skyrocketing production costs, corporate consolidation, and economies of scale that render Northeast dairies less competitive than their megafarm counterparts out west. One thing is clear: if we want the dairies that dot our hillsides to stick around for the next hundred years, especially certified organic ones, we’ll need creative solutions. Our team at NOFA-VT is working on this urgent, critical issue from multiple angles: providing technical assistance to struggling farms, advocating for policy reform at the state and federal levels, securing \$6.9 million in emergency relief funding for Vermont organic dairy farms last year, ensuring organic regulatory integrity, raising consumer awareness, and developing a broader market for Vermont organic dairy.

The goal is to support the state’s colleges and universities, health care centers, and K-12 school districts—significant dairy buyers across the state—in transitioning from conventional dairy to Vermont organic dairy products. The NOFA-VT wholesale markets team is equally driven to expand access to healthy, fresh, local, and organic food. Unlike in homes, where access to local, organic food is often stratified by a household’s income, we all eat the same thing in a public cafeteria. This presents a powerful opportunity that we can use to ensure that more Vermont children grow up eating, learning about, and valuing the healthy, delicious food grown by their neighbors.

So, in the weeks that followed that April afternoon, our team of partners — NOFA-VT, Miller Farm, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union (WNESU), the Northeast Organic Family Farm Partnership (NOFFP), and Farm to Institution New England (FINE)—were off to the races. Pete Miller of Miller Farm and Harley Sterling, Director of School Nutrition for WNESU, identified a price point that would work for the farm and the schools. The team secured funding from USDA’s Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center to expand Miller Farm’s milk processing facilities and ensured the milk met the National School Lunch Program’s requirements.

Sterling debuted bulk Miller Farm milk in three cafeterias on the first day of school in August 2023. The reception from students, teachers, and administrators was overwhelmingly positive. By the end of the month, Sterling had expanded this exciting new milk service to all six schools in WNESU, transitioning the entire supervisory union to Vermont organic

milk. “To say the students were excited is an understatement.” Sterling wrote, upon introducing Miller Farm milk to Grafton Elementary School, “One kid shouted, ‘This tastes like real milk!’ And another said, ‘You should bring this every day.’ When I told them that’s exactly what we’re going to do, they exclaimed, ‘I LOVE THIS LUNCHROOM NOW!!!’”

As word spread and schools farther afield began to express interest, Food Connects and Upper Valley Produce, who both distribute Vermont food across the state, jumped in supportively and now deliver Miller Farm milk from its origin in Vernon farther north up to Addison County and the Upper Valley. This support was welcome, as the pilot had quickly ballooned from those initial three schools to twelve participating schools.

Our NOFA-VT wholesale markets team organized a celebratory on-farm field trip in the fall to foster a direct connection between the 200 WNESU elementary students and the people and place from which their milk comes. The team also facilitated the introduction of Dairy in the Classroom, a program that educates students about Vermont dairy to ensure these connections endure. Food Connects’ farm-to-school staff now offers the program at WNESU.

With lunchroom-ready Vermont organic milk now on the market, the question of cost is likely on the minds of Vermont’s K-12 buyers, as Miller Farm’s bulk milk sits at nearly twice the cost of conventional cartons. Sterling crunched the numbers after a year of Miller Milk in WNESU schools. He explains that the transition has proven to be cost-neutral due to the significant reduction in waste and associated cost savings, emphasizing that “the waste reduction has been profound.” With bulk dispenser milk service, students have become more mindful of their consumption, resulting in minimal milk and packaging waste compared to the previous carton-based system. Sterling estimates that WNESU will save money this year on milk despite the upgrade to this local organic product.

The wholesale markets team hopes this pilot will encourage more Vermont organic dairies and schools to



build upon this program’s success. Farmer Pete Miller invites other Vermont organic processors to sell to local districts, noting, “We feel it is critical to raise a generation who knows where their food comes from and that they, as consumers, will eventually vote with their purchasing power to enact the changes they want to see in this world...This model of local, small processor to school could be replicated across the nation.” Sterling underscores, “We want to help pave the way for connecting local dairies with local schools, as they represent the largest institutional buyer of milk in most towns in Vermont. Some of the best food on earth comes from Vermont, and we want to see it help nourish our communities, or as we like to say, ‘Vermont food for Vermont kids.’”

Want to learn more? Contact Wholesale Markets Program Director Lauren Griswold at [laureng@nofavt.org](mailto:laureng@nofavt.org).

*Participating schools: Bellows Fall Union High School, Bellows Falls Middle School, Rockingham Central Elementary, Saxtons River Elementary, Westminster Central, Grafton Elementary, Vernon Elementary, The Prosper Valley School, Woodstock Union High School and Middle School, Woodstock Elementary, Leland and Gray Middle and High School, and Mt. Abraham Union High School.*

*Project partners: The USDA Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center, Miller Farm, Windham Northeast Supervisory Union, Northeast Organic Family Farm Partnership, Farm to Institution New England, New England Dairy, Food Connects, Upper Valley Produce.*





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