



# BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

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## NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2012

### APPRENTICE PROGRAM

#### Our Growing Farmers' Web

In January, I got an email from Amy Smith ('06) telling me that while she was walking around a mall in CT during a holiday visit, she caught a glimpse of Meryl Streep on the Ellen Degeneres TV show mention CSA's and her farmer (and friend) Andy Szymanowicz ('07). Amy Smith, Andy Szymanowicz and the Brookfield Farm apprentice program all linked through Meryl Streep. Weird. Our extended farm family continues to grow further afield.

We do grow vegetables at Brookfield, and while doing that we also grow the possibility of growing more vegetables in other parts of this crazy connected world. Jeff Tober ('03-'06) told me that his ex-apprentice, Jen recently hired her first apprentices. That might be our first great-grandchild. And I'm only 46! Our farms' web of life extends to all of the people who come to our farm to spend a season with us, working and learning how to grow.

This year, we continued this tradition by having three outstanding participants in our apprentice program. You may simply think of them as "those people who work at the farm." And indeed, that is, in one sense exactly who they are. But, they are also participants in a program which aims to take people with little or no previous agricultural experience and give them the skills to make them able to be productive farmers in our ever-changing, modern food economy.

We were lucky enough this year to have Pete McLean and Tobin Porter-Brown return for a second season. They were joined by newcomer

Erin Roche to round out a very hard-working, fun-loving, and committed crew. It was a good thing we were blessed to have these three capable individuals on the farm, given how difficult the season was overall –without them, I might not have any see "Apprentice," p.8

### WHAT'S HAPPENING AT BROOKFIELD FARM

#### Time to Look Back

After a near-biblical fall harvest season, we have had just about enough down-time now to look back on the season without either just crying or falling asleep in the middle of

this sentence. From here, where there's still no snow and not much cold, at least it's been wintry enough to put some distance on the past growing season and give us a little perspective. As the light starts to return to this part of the planet (more chicken eggs, more hours in the day) it's even possible to look forward to starting the entire endeavor all over again. Almost.

But before turning the page, it's good to try to get one last look at the season that was, to try to gain some perspective – some bit of knowledge from what, in the end, is just one more data point in a lifetime of learning. We spent most of December cleaning up so it wasn't until January that we were able to do our usual job of collecting all possible data from last season; Tallying up the harvest record sheets, filling in gaps in our field records, looking over the crop journals to try to remember important crises, events, and milestones. One big trend clearly emerges – the farm suffered from extreme weather events from January through November. These events caused difficulties in a number of areas (production, finances, etc), but didn't stop us from being a busy place with lots of crop growing, outreach, and education happening all around us.

It was a season-long experience of extreme weather. Excessive snow in January damaged solar panels on our barn roof. The near-miss tornado on June 1 destroyed about 30% of our tomato starts. Over 24" of rain from late August – November caused nutrient stress on our plants and degradation to field roads. The freak October snow-storm caused us to cancel our share for a week. This was a year to (not) remember. Excessive moisture generally causes two big problems. First, plants are starved of air in the root zone, so they have

see "What's Happening," p.7



# GET A HAMMER AND A NAIL

## Building The Future

While we were busily trying to deal with the very “here and now” problems caused by one weather-related-catastrophe after another, we were also building some strong and solid foundations for future growing. When we started the year, we had received two grants and had yet to make good on turning that money (and promise of more money) into a couple of very useful things.

Last February, we received a grant through the USDA, covering the costs to purchase and construct a new fieldhouse. This new growing space would be unheated and could only grow crops (not house

livestock or store machinery). The idea was to promote more local consumption by increasing the amount local production, through season extension. We finished last season with the ground stakes in place and the hoops ready to build. When the snow melted, we got right to work – since we had only until May 15 to finish the project. Luckily, Kerry’s father, Larry decided to bring his engineering mind to the farm every week and liked nothing more than to figure out the skeleton plans to somehow make 1 ton of metal, and 45,000 fasteners into a 30 x 72’ structure, nestled into our emerging greenhouse complex.

There were a few snafus, and a few calls to Ontario to have them send a different bag of bolts, or send us a different drawing of those nylon straps. But after a bunch of work, eventually we figured out how to build the sliding doors, and the plastic covered end-walls, how to build a roll-up side with a wind screen, and how to brace the entire thing to withstand 45’ of snow load. By May 15, the USDA inspected a beautiful growing space. By the next week the tomatoes were planted and we were off to the races.

Late last year we also received word that we had received funding from the USDA for a photovoltaic project that would more than double our current 3.78 kwh system on our roof. We knew we needed to fundraise for the remaining money, so Peter Littell, our board president decided to take on the task. He created a video pitch and sent the link to our list. We not only raised all of the money necessary, but also received another grant from the Mass. Department of Ag. Resources (MDAR) and an additional amount from the USDA, putting us officially over the top in terms of funding alternative energy projects at the farm. We received permission from enough donors to re-allocate their contributions to other, future similar projects. So, not only did our 4.9 kwh project get constructed and paid for on time in June, but we also find ourselves now with an additional \$5500 to spend on another project. We are currently researching our options and will let you know as soon as we move ahead on the next project. In the meantime, we are now generating over 8kwh of energy a year – almost 2/3 of our entire yearly energy consumption on the farm.



Both of these projects represent infrastructure improvements that should last us over 20 years. They have put us on a good footing to produce energy in a sustainable fashion and produce vegetables in a more sheltered environment, which should make us less at the whim of the weather in general.



### BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST (BFCT), INC.

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Peter McLean	Assistant Manager
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#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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(except where noted)

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We had a couple of other projects in store for the year which more or less went according to schedule. We finished the Snyder Farm barnyard renovation just in time for

winter. Larry, put the finishing touches on the “on-demand” cow waterer - a nifty insulated device that keeps the cows’ water from freezing without any electricity, relieving us of the tricky task of providing the herd water in the wintertime. Our neighbor, Jason Edwards finished the grading around the outside of the barnyard to allow us easy access to drop them round bales in the winter. And then we cleaned out the barnyard entirely (making a nice 50-ton pile of compost), and let the cows in for the winter.

We also had plans for road maintenance, at Small One’s, Snyders’, and the Brookfield home fields. We did some nice work at Small One’s and on Hubbs’ Road where ruts and holes were filled with rocks, that were then graded and packed by heavy tractor tires. Unfortunately this job was interrupted – by wet weather and fallen limbs. We figure we’ll need to over 100 hours of tree clearing before getting back to this. Despite all of that, we did get something done this year and the roads are happier for it.

We had plans to invest in irrigation equipment for our fields that we rent at Small One’s Farm. But, at some point in the spring, the septic system at the apprentice house (20 Hulst) failed and left us a big crater in the backyard. We needed to prioritize rebuilding the septic but, luckily there was plenty of rain, so there were no adverse effects of that decision.

We improved the fence that separates the perennial garden from the parking lot. This not only makes the parking lot safer, but helps to delineate some handicap parking right near the entrance to our accessible garden. In addition, we upgraded the lights in our root cellar and harvest shed, so that it’s a little friendlier to pick up your winter share in the dark of the winter afternoon.

We continued to upgrade our equipment during the year. We purchased a new chain saw (well before we knew how much we would need it) and an energy-efficient greenhouse germination chamber. In the spring,

we bought a used roto-tiller to work in the field-houses where our tractors don’t fit so well and a new chore-truck to replace our dead dodge. We also made



a big upgrade by mounting quick hitches on each of our implements making them faster **and** safer to work with for all of our employees.

The weather had its share of

fun on our equipment and machines. The solar panels didn’t really like having so much snow piled on them. After the spring thaw, we discovered that they had been pulled from their roof anchors and were just staying on the roof out of their own good-will. The transmission on the plow truck really didn’t like the early October snow storm. I guess it was better than dying in the winter, but it’s much easier to plow when you can go in reverse and forward. And the cold frame (attached to the greenhouse, was completely bent up, after the big wet storm dropped 16” of cement on their heads.

The warm December did allow us to clean and store nearly all of our equipments in weather-proof structures around the farm. With enough cold and snow to keep us off the tractors, and the fact that they are all pretty much NOT broken now, we are just enjoying them being fixed and clean. It won’t last, but it is nice to have that happen at least once a year, before we go out and break them all again!



## SPECIAL THANKS TO

❖ **Jay & Mary Zyskowski** for donating their minivan to the farm. We use this van to replace the old weeder crew van. This vehicle transports our weeder crew to the fields every morning from May to August. These fields can be up to 2.5 miles away from our barn, so a reliable vehicle goes a long way towards making sure our veggies stay well weeded and our crew get there and back safe and sound. Thanks!

## WISH LIST

Woodsplitter  
Macs to replace our PCs  
4WD Tractor with a loader

## FARM-BASED EDUCATION

### Our Classroom, the Potato Field



Brookfield Farm continues to be a living classroom for all ages. This past season, we had many visitors from local public and private schools, colleges, and clubs. The ages of these visitors range from 5 - 35, and they stayed on the farm from one hour to 40 weeks. Overall, we had over 280 learners on the farm this season.

We started the education season as a study site for the Hartsbrook Schools 12th grade sustainability class, hosting the class for a seminar in March where we looked into how the farm was organized agriculturally and economically. Later in the spring, we hosted the Holyoke Community College class (Sustainable Ag) for 3 work/study sessions focusing on various topics relating to how we manage our farm. In the summer, Gail Voisin brought her summer camp to the farm during many days of June, July, and August where her kids would help with veggie washing, picking for seniors, and many jobs around the farm that were “forgotten” each day. And Karen led a group from Cutchins Programs for two visits of work/study related to crop growing. In the fall, we were hosts for Hartsbrook’s 9th & 10<sup>th</sup> grade practicum, as they brought about 20 students to the farm for 8 work/study sessions over three months from Sept - Nov to help with harvesting and learn, by doing, a little bit of how our farm works. This group also joined with the entire Hartsbrook High School for a community service day where, they harvested all 2000lbs of our fall storage beets in the pouring rain. We hosted the Holyoke Community College classes, “Community Service Learning” and “Politics of Food,” for 4 work/study sessions about sustainable agriculture from Sept – Nov.

Throughout the season, we again provided an independent opportunity for Peter Aronson, an autistic adult, to develop skills in a farm setting that he will hopefully use to build independent work into his future. Pete (and his aide, Fran) could be seen most mornings washing vegetables in the harvest shed, feeding the chickens, moving mulch in the perennial garden, or clearing trails through our woods.



Throughout September and October, we were again graced with a few busloads of Amherst & Hadley elementary school children who came to help with harvesting

carrots, feeding the cows and pigs, and learning about making compost. These groups got introduced to the cycles of life (and death) and

how we work with those cycles on the farm to build a sustainable system (of course for kindergartners we don’t say “sustainable”). In addition, they all learn what we mean when we say “work is love made visible” because surely there is no more wonderful sight than a child’s face as they pull a carrot from the ground and then keep going to pull 500 more! We don’t actively promote programs to local school groups and we don’t charge them to come, but each year we get a steady stream of kids whose teachers want them to be part of the activities and learning opportunities on our farm.



## THE FARM IS OPEN SPACE

### The Table Is Set! Where is Winter?

The farm is quiet, and there’s no food growing, but it’s still a great time to visit the fields and woods that make up our farmscape. Without much snow, we haven’t had much x-country skiing around the trails that loop through the farm and onto adjacent Amherst conservation land. But if it does start snowing, while we don’t have any grooming equipment, the neighborhood skiers usually have the tracks set within a few hours of a good snow, so come on down. And behind the barn, our farmyard Ice Rink is built, but unfortunately it is now too warm for skating. If the weather ever gets cold, you can come to skate (at your own risk) any time. We’ll keep conditions posted on our website. And if it never gets cold or snows, walking around the quiet farm in the winter is always enjoyable. Whatever the weather, we hope you will enjoy being outside at the farm this winter.

## ANNUAL FUND

Thank you to all who have donated to our annual fund for the year. While all of our costs for running the farm come out of shareholder dues, the annual fund is another way we finance our “extracurricular activities” around the farm. And during this year, when we also had a solar fundraiser, and the economy continues to be difficult, Annual Fund giving was up across the board (see below).

So for all of the kids who found out how we make compost, all of the people who have taken a tour of the farm, all of the apprentices who have learned how to drive tractors, and all of the farmers who have used our crop planning spreadsheets to improve their farm management - thank you!

Don’t be afraid to keep giving - just send a tax-deductible check to the BFCT at the address on the front page.

### Here’s this year’s numbers

Total number of gifts	86 (+15%)
Total gifts	\$7060 (+16%)
Average gift	\$82.09 (+2%)
Percent participation	8.2% (+15%)

## SPREAD THE WORD

### Straight From the Field

Our farm provides a wealth of great food, community and fun. It is also a source of information for those who are trying to figure out how to run a farm like ours. We don't have much spare time, but when we can, we try hard to share our hard-earned knowledge by offering workshops, consultations, and tours.

This past winter we hosted a group from Northstar for a tour of our root cellar, and in February Kerry gave a tour and explanation of our CSA to a Japanese Extension agent on a fact-finding mission. Smith College brought their sustainability class out for a tour from Tobin in April, and Mt Holyoke did the same with their alumna Kerry in May. We hosted The Farm School from Athol MA for an afternoon tour and discussion about CSA management in July and later than month Kerry toured a group of Pakistani exchange students and led a discussion about sustainable agriculture. Also in July, Kerry led a work/discussion workshop with a group from Amherst College called "Sansori" which aims to guide students throughout the process of designing and launching a sustainable social enterprise. She wrapped up the tour season with a tour of the entire farm operation for the annual Northeast Organic Farmer's conference in August.

We are frequently being called by other farmers, landowners, or non-profit boards to help get their projects going in one way or another. In March, Dan mentored the grower at Land Sake, in Weston, MA, which included visits to their farm and ours. He also consulted with growers in Colrain about labor management as part of CISA program and with the farmers at Nuestras Raices in Holyoke about irrigation and CSA development. Karen continued to work in an advisory capacity to the Homestead Farm Project which is working to develop a living/working opportunity for people with developmental disabilities in a farm setting.

There continue to be many requests for workshop presentations throughout the year. In April, Dan gave a presentation on Labor Management as part of CISA's winter workshop series. He also gave a presentation on "financial management of CSAs" to a group from the Farm Beginnings Program (June), the NOFA Conference (August), and at the Young Farmer's Conference (December). And in October, we hosted the UMASS Extension Twilight meeting, where over 50 farmers from Maine to NY came to hear about our accessible garden, pest management of Mexican bean beetles with the *Pedobius* wasp, fieldhouse production, and winter share.



We continued to sell our crop planning and record keeping spreadsheets to interested farmers who were either starting or refining their CSAs. Over 50 farmers bought these modest spreadsheets and we continued to hear good reviews about how helpful they were. There continued to be a big increase in activity surrounding database-driven crop planning software this year and we worked as a beta tester for what we consider to be the most promising one - check out Ag-squared.com. We continue to hope that we will be put out of business on this one soon!!

We also seem to field a non-stop request for interviews, surveys, and information from a variety of students throughout the region. This year we were interviewed by a Hampshire student for Div 3 research, a UMass Grad student for PhD research in Sociology, a site for UMass extension soil research project, and lots of local and regional newspaper articles.

In addition, we are always looking for ways to give back and participate in projects that are important to the local community. Our barn served as a depot for distributing organic seed potatoes for local growers. We donated vegetable starts to Gardening the Community and New Lands Farm, organizations building community through agriculture in Holyoke and Springfield. We donated one winter share to the Hitchcock Centers Salamander Soiree and a regular CSA share to the CISA "Eat The View" Auction. We donated produce to the "Free Harvest Supper" in Greenfield MA, the NOFA Conference, CISA's Eat The View, PV Grows, the Recover Project, Shutesbury Elementary School Harvest Dinner, and to the Gleaning Project of Rachel's Table, in Springfield, MA. This last project, which was coordinated by Jessica Harwood, was again a huge success. For the 4th year in a row Jessica got over 50 volunteers into our fields during Sept, Oct, and November, where they gathered food for over 10 agencies in Northampton, Holyoke, and Amherst. Although the harvest in the fall was very tight, and sometimes not the best quality, these volunteers managed to glean and distribute over 1400 lbs of vegetables from our fields for people in need.

All of these projects are undertaken with little or no compensation for the farm. Our Annual Fund is the only source of funding for these activities. We feel that we have a wealth of information and resources which have come from simply operating our farm over the past 25 years and we feel strongly that sharing this experience is an important part of being a participant in our wider community.

## BY THE NUMBERS

### Crop Production

Overall, we had one our least productive harvest seasons in 8 years. While we were only 9% lower than our 8-year average, we struggled to barely reach 243,000 pounds of produce. Coming on the heels of our record 2010 harvest (298,000) it seemed like a lot lower than that. If you look at the production chart (opposite) you can see that we had generally consistent (and below average) production from a very wide range of crops. Our kale, daikon, and scallions all set new records, and we also had very solid showings from corn, cabbage, cukes, edamame, fall broccoli, and summer lettuce. But, we had lots of difficult fall crops and notable failures from Brussels sprouts, celery, celeriac, and spinach. Our winter storage crops were particularly hard hit, leaving us with our lowest total since 2006.

We did continue all of the major operations of the farm; 525 CSA shares sold, 30 acres of vegetables planted and harvested, 200 tons of compost spread. We were able to make 22 tons of hay from nearby fields, managed 98 total acres (55 owned by the BFCT and an additional 43 spread out over 4 other farm sites), raised 12 feeder pigs, moved 50 chickens to various corners of the farm for a fertility boost, re-integrated our herd of 10 cows back into their familiar fields at Snyder Farm, and watched them reward us with six healthy calves in the summer. We distributed 380 shares from our Farm Shop, and 145 through 5 distribution sites in the Boston Area. We sold \$57,000 of local products through our Farm Shop during local CSA distribution hours. We also cut, split, and stacked 4 cords of firewood to be used by the 3 woodstoves in the apprentice, assistant manager, and farm managers' homes. The weather slowed us down a little; we were only able to make about 150 tons of compost this year due to the weather making our compost area impassable for much of the fall and we weren't able to split our wood until January (a task that is usually done in April). Overall though, the farm operations have remained relatively stable despite numerous challenges.

### Money

Our finances were tight this year. On the positive side, we were able to pay all of our employees salary raises, make all loan payments on time, and increase the overall net worth of the BFCT, Inc. for the 11th straight year (+7.2%). However, because of weather related problems (equipment stress, more fertilizer needed) we did see expenses rise. In addition, with fuel and supply prices continuing to



rise, we saw our yearly bottom line shrink (\$-855).

We generally plan to run a small surplus each year (+\$5000), to replenish our equipment replacement fund and give us a little cushion. This year, our cushion didn't exist and our fund did not increase. However, because the farm finished two major infrastructure projects (solar & field house) and refinanced our long-term debt (on the barn and apprentice house), our long-term equity rose significantly (7.4%). Overall, the long-term financial health of our organization was strengthened.

### CSA Membership

CSA shares continue to be our main source of income (90%) and we continued to see strong interest in this central product. We sold 525 regular season shares and 200 winter shares. Shareholders continued to renew their regular-season shares at roughly the same rate (85%) as in the past six years. We continued to sell our winter share at a somewhat faster pace than last year.

Because of decreases in production our regular share was smaller this year than in 2010 (-18%) and our prices per pound rose (\$1.27 / lb for the local regular share, \$1.63 / lb for the Boston regular share, and .95c/lb for the winter share). We hope this is a trend that does not continue. Our winter share was smaller (-20%), but still filled with decent produce as we headed into February.

There is one important development about our waiting list for regular-season shares. Our overall list has shrunk significantly (down 128%). While we still had a sizable list (290 people), most of it (86%) was for on-farm shares. This could mean that there is less demand for our share, or that people have given up waiting, or that there are enough other shares for sale out there that they don't need to wait for us anymore. Because the list was so big (peaking at 634 in 2010), we have been actively trying to steer people to other CSAs. Time will tell whether this is significant in terms of demand for our CSA shares long-term.

<b>Total Production</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% dif</b>
Total lbs (including PYO)	243680	298051	-22%
Total lbs. (no PYO)	209105	254645	-22%
Winter share production	28480	47912	-68%
Acreage planted	30.7	32	-4%
crops planted	58	58	0%

<b>Distribution Comparison</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% dif</b>
Total lbs per share (no pyo)	321.7	369.9	-14%
Cost per lb. per share	\$1.63	\$1.39	+15%
Avg lbs. per share each week	14.1	16.0	-14%



CROP	TOTAL	Unit	per share	2011	2010
BEET	3635	LBS.	7.0	3635	6465
BEET W/TOPS	2295	BU.	4.4	2295	1375
BROCCOLI	3185	LBS.	6.1	3185	2500
BRUSSELS' SP.	0	PC.	0.0	0	905
CABBAGE	20185	LBS.	38.8	20185	16033
CABBAGE, CHI.	1030	HDS.	2.0	3090	3345
CANTELOUPES	1350	PC.	2.6	6750	11240
CARROT	10400	LBS.	20.0	10400	11625
CARROT W/TOP	1300	BU.	2.5	1300	905
CAULIFLOWER	3300	LBS.	6.3	3300	3095
CELERIAC	1180	LBS.	2.3	1180	540
CELERY	913	PCS.	1.8	913	1055
CHARD	1545	LBS.	3.0	1545	1950
COLLARDS	1130	LBS.	2.2	1130	945
CORN	1683	DZ.	3.2	11781	12222
CUCUMBER	7270	LBS.	14.0	7270	6355
DAIKON	1810	LBS.	3.5	1810	1355
EGGPLANT	3010	LBS.	5.8	3010	2455
ESCAROLE	796	HDS.	1.5	796	624
FENNEL	690	PC.	1.3	690	796
GARLIC	1624	LBS.	3.1	1624	1624
GARLIC SCAPES	375	LBS.	0.7	375	258
GREENS	3110	LBS.	6.0	3110	6354
KALE	5506	LBS.	10.6	5506	5335
KOHLRABI	536	LBS.	1.0	536	491
LEEK	6825	PC.	13.1	6825	7790
LETTUCE	10545	HDS.	20.3	10545	8940
LETTUCE	415	LBS.	0.8	415	1250
ONION	6530	LBS.	12.6	6530	5610
PARSNIP	3900	LBS.	7.5	3900	2450
PEPPERS, HOT	280	LBS.	0.5	280	280
PEPPERS, SW.	3310	LBS.	6.4	3310	4535
POTATO	17860	LBS.	34.3	17860	30455
POTATO, SW.	3900	LBS.	7.5	3900	6500
RADICCHIO	975	LBS.	1.9	975	475
RADISH	1625	BU.	3.1	1625	1363
RADISH, WATERMELON	345	LBS.	0.7	345	1150
RUTABAGA	2430	LBS.	4.7	2430	3965
SCALLION	3117	BU.	6.0	3117	2675
SPINACH	55	LBS.	0.1	55	595
SQUASH, S.	6390	LBS.	12.3	6390	9670
SQUASH, W.	17250	LBS.	33.2	17250	27700
TOMATOES	14217	LBS.	27.3	14217	18143
TURNIP, HAKUREI	1435	BU.	2.8	1435	1612
TURNIP	1635	LBS.	3.1	1635	6740
WATERMELONS	10650	LBS.	20.5	10650	12900



**“What’s Happening ,” cont’.**

a hard time growing. In addition, the water leaches nutrients away from soil roots, so even if it does dry out, they don’t have adequate available food. Second, it’s hard to harvest your crops. Field access became a big issue of productivity as the water increased. And after the October storm, the roads were further made impassable by a very large number of down trees.

Despite these compounding difficulties, the farm finished two major infrastructure projects and continued to upgrade our equipment base. In addition, we maintained an efficient workforce and continued to produce something in high demand. This has allowed us to continue to buck the conventional trends and set a new standard that people continue to follow (more CSAs, more local food production, etc). This year, more than ever, the CSA model has helped us weather the volatile nature of farming which is, namely, the weather. If not for our loyal customer base and a model where we are not liable for every loss due to things beyond our control, we would have surely had a very different year. We, like everyone else, are wondering if this weird weather is just weird, or is just what we will now refer to as “the weather.” Time will tell, but surely we can be very thankful that after a year like this, due to your support, our farm finds itself in a stronger position now than it was at the beginning of the season.

Beyond all of this, we also had a full slate of farm events & tours, visiting school groups, interested researchers, and the usual assortment of surprising events that sprang up out of the soil of opportunity that is Brookfield Farm. This newsletter is filled with details and photos of the activities of the Trust during the past year. Through this work, all of us here on the farm, are trying to fulfill the Trust’s mission: To use the resources available to us to create and support responsible, sustainable agriculture. Hopefully through the pages of this newsletter you will see how much we have accomplished this year and what a great position we’re in to continue in the success of this project long into the future – whatever that may bring!

We hope you are enjoying your winter as much as we are.

Your Farmer,

Dan  
 7 (for Karen, Abbe, Kerry, Pete, Tobin, and Erin)



“Apprentice,” con’t.



energy to write this today.

Each year, our basic trade with our apprentices is simple – they give us their labor (for 45 hrs per week, for 40 weeks) and we

give them our information. They work very hard – starting at 6am during the summer – performing a wide variety of not-too-glamorous tasks – from seed sowing, to planting, farm shopkeeping, harvesting, animal chores, brush clearing, etc. And in return they are given training in a mix of skills – practical, theoretical, mechanical, psychological, and economical.

Each apprentice is given two tractors to operate for the season. They use these tractors for whatever work is necessary on the farm and through the maintenance and operation of these they learn more generally about machinery use and care. They also all participate as farm-shopkeepers so they can get some experience in marketing and have a chance to see how the public experiences this product they are helping to produce.

They each take on some management responsibilities as well. Tobin started off as our greenhouse manager and once those plants grew, became our harvest manager. In the fall he took care managing our cows, chickens, and pigs. Pete managed our field planting, making sure that our tomatoes varieties were where they were supposed to be. He also managed the daily work of our weeder crew and in the fall took on management of our bulk harvest crops (cabbage, winter squash, etc). Since it was her first year, Erin spent the early part of the season taking it all in, and then once September rolled around took turns being our harvest and distribution manager. In this way, she had a chance to move people, vegetables, and stuff - getting a taste at how to make decisions on the fly, how to motivate people, and how to stay steady in the midst of a crisis.

We augmented this training with a series of farm visits in collaboration with 15 other diverse farms, giving them a chance to see how others are tackling similar problems (check out [www.craftfarmapprentice.com](http://www.craftfarmapprentice.com)) and to connect with their peers. At the end of the season we reviewed the business aspects of our farm - to learn about the work that supports all of our outdoor farm work. We went over administration, financial management, marketing, and crop planning

## SPECIAL THANKS TO LARRY MANIRE

Larry came to the farm nearly every week from April until November. He was not your typical volunteer. He'd come with a compact car filled with tools (sometimes pulling a small trailer filled with even more tools) ready to use them. He would do anything you asked him, but usually got very excited when the job was particularly difficult or was something no one around here knew how to or wanted to do. Here's a list of the jobs he did this season (Really!)

- Field House Construction (nearly single handed at times):
- including building end walls, sheathing end walls, mounting doors,
- installing roll-up sides, vinyl strap-down securing
- Snyder barnyard water repair
- Hubbs Road construction (pre-wedding special!)
- 20 Hulst Rd (Apprentice House) power wash
- Harvest shed drain cleanout
- 20 Hulst Rd thermostat install
- Bathroom wall-mounted hand dryer purchase & install

Someone asked me how we were going to make-do now that Kerry was leaving and her Dad wasn't going to come to the farm every week. I told them that it was going to be hard on Kerry, when she realized her Dad was still coming here every week. Really, we are going to go back to how we always got along before – a lot worse – but, since Larry has probably given us a three year head start, we might not feel it for a little while. In any case, no words can say thanks enough, but we will miss him (almost as much as Kerry) and look forward when he visits again (hopefully with car-full of tools!)



(to name a few) to give them more tools they will need to start a farm on their own.

One constant thing about running a program like this is that people regularly leave the farm. While it is hard to see them go, we are excited when they move forward and use the information that they have gleaned from this experience to build their own unique futures. Next year, we will be seeing a lot of change as Kerry (who was with us as an apprentice for 3 years and assistant manager for 2) is moving on to start her own farm in Salem, CT (see below). Tobin is headed to be the assistant manager at a newly created farm in Essex, MA. Erin is headed off towards grad school in agriculture or education. And Pete has taken over Kerry's position as as-



## PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET

### Great Farm Crew This Year!

We were able to make it through such a difficult year, largely on the backs of an incredibly dedicated hard-working, straight-forward, and generally efficient crew. Kerry Manire returned for her fifth season and did a great job as our Assistant Manager. She managed the farm shop, irrigation, livestock, equipment and supplies, and buildings & grounds. In addition she was the point-person for the photovoltaic project and the NRCS fieldhouse grant.

Karen Romanowski (too many jobs for a title) coordinated our events, cooked for the apprentice & harvest crew each workday, continued experimenting with winter greens growing, coordinated the accessible garden, and was our un-official nurse for the entire farm-team. She was laid low by a herniated disc in late September, so we didn't get to see her much after that, but she is steadily recuperating and we look forward to seeing her back on the farm this season.

Abbe Vredenburg, our administrator & bookkeeper, again took responsibility for check writing, payroll, and filing. She also managed our membership database, waiting list, and email list-serve. In addition, she took care of all shareholder correspondence, invoices, and was even our Full-Belly Benefit Dance Party Coordinator! How would we do this without her!? Impossible.



Our mechanic Alan, as usual, had a busy year at the farm - with a fleet of 7 tractors, 6 trucks, more than 20 implements, and 5 machinery operators, which keep him hopping trying to keep everything moving along the track. He mostly kept things maintained, but also performed a major overhaul of the radiator of our big loader tractor. Mostly he just helped us remember to drive slow, check the oil, and keep everything in perspective.

In addition, we had a very experienced "Weeder Crew," led so ably by Jazer Giles. There were 13 people on the crew this year and only two newcomers. They successfully crawled many miles of weeds and left our fields beautiful. And our apprentice crew was, once again,

helped in the harvest fields, by a very boisterous and becoming-more-experienced "Boy Crew." These seven kids (age 13-16) helped pick cukes and wash carrots and keep our spirits up! We also had numerous volunteers, and the the usual behind-the-scenes wizardry of Chris Zobel. For the most part, it didn't seem like such a tough year because of so much help from so many great people.



## FAREWELL BROOKFIELD

### Special Thanks to Kerry Manire

After setting the record for longest continual service as apprentice and/or assistant manager (five full seasons!), Kerry packed up her stuff, found a farm in Connecticut, and on Christmas Eve, headed off under cover of night to start her new life; The end of an era for us.

Having come to the farm after a successful three-year stint in the Peace Corp in Togo, Kerry decided to re-ignite the spark she found working on a farm in Vermont after college (Mt Holyoke) graduation. Starting again as a lowly apprentice, with nothing much more than a healthy dream of making her way through the world as a farmer, Kerry plunged herself into the work of learning how to farm for a living. She has proved an indispensable part of our crew, not only for her wide skill-set but, also for incredible positive energy and even-keel personality. She has managed our greenhouse, weeder crew, field planting, daily harvest, bulk harvest, Boston packing, irrigation, livestock, equipment & supplies, buildings and grounds, and farm shop. She has also mastered the skills of direct seeding, mechanical cultivation, and field preparation. She has also mastered operating every one of tractors, trucks, and implements. While we don't want her to leave, it's clearly a good time for her to go and use her newly minted skills in a management situation.

Two years ago she met her counterpart from Riverland Farm, Max Taylor. They shared a similar vision for their futures and began planning together this past year. They were married on the farm in October, found a farm to rent in Salem, CT and signed a lease in November. They packed up all of their stuff, and began to create their very own "Provider Farm" - <http://www.providerfarm.com/> - on the grounds of the historic Woodbridge Farm. They are, as we speak, happily selling shares and looking forward to a great first season. Our loss

is Southwestern Connecticut's gain. We know they come here to leave, and it's always sad, but less so, when they have given so much and have plans to continue giving to some other lucky people somewhere else.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### What are CSAs for?

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary and all of the success that Brookfield, and CSAs in general, have achieved, the question also arises as to whether this marketing model remains strong or is a remnant of a time that has now past. Back in 1986, it was hard to find organic food anywhere except in the backyard of Birkenstock-wearing, wanna-be European socialists. Whole Foods was a small natural grocery store in Austin TX. There were very few Farmers Markets. There was no Organic Certification. CSAs arose from this (un)fertile ground as a straightforward way to get consumers food that they wanted.

There were always positive aspects of CSAs from the consumer standpoint. First among these was that you could actually get fresh, organically grown food for you and your family. You could also get that food at a less-than-retail price, considering it cut out the “middleman.” Picking up your share for the week could also give you and your family a connection to the food that you were going to eat. But just as there were always positives, there were also always negatives about CSAs. They had limited distribution hours which could make getting your food inconvenient. There was also limited choice as to what you could get in your share. In addition, there was the fact that you have to cook your food to make a CSA worthwhile.

From the producer side there were also two sides of the story. For farmers, the biggest advantage to them was to have their entire product sold at a near-retail price before the season started. By locking in a price and making the sale, it became much easier to plan and manage the farm. In addition, because there was shared risk, weather-related crises became less crushing. And getting some part of your sale up front helped with a perennial cash-flow crises. On the negative side, it was difficult figuring out how to manage over 40 crops on a consistent basis. In addition, the farmer had to learn how to deal with all of the skills related to marketing – selling shares, graphic design (newsletter), database management (for many individual accounts), etc.

With all of these considerations there was plenty of attrition at CSAs, but there was widespread acceptance of this concept, and it quickly went from obscurity to relatively common-place. The number of CSAs continues to grow (up to 13,000 according to the USDA in 2007) and the number of CSA shares sold in the US also grows (to well over 1,000,000 shares annually). At the same time, we also have thousands of farmers markets in every state of the union. We also have enlarged supermarket sections of organic food. We have entire supermarkets filled with organic food. We have restaurant menus dedicated to sourcing local, organic food. And lately, we have seen new hybrids - aggregators, food hubs, etc - that find multiple organic growers, and re-sell their products in a variety of different schemes to the public. Maybe we don't need CSAs anymore. Maybe they've

run their course. I know that we have seen our waiting list shrink a little in the past year. There are stories of other CSAs in the Pioneer Valley having a difficult time selling shares. I've heard a few Boston-area growers wondering if there is a waning of interest. To everything turn, turn, turn. Maybe it's time to re-evaluate.

There are many facets to this but let's just look at environmental benefits of one alternative - “aggregators” - which have lately been put up as the “next-best-thing.” This is any person, or group who sources product from multiple producers and makes it available to the public (sometimes it's called “CSA” or “Food Hub” or “Buying Club”). Because of improvements in software development, technology can now help to handle the complexity necessary to balance multiple producers with diverse consumers.

They can even work a measure of choice into the process. Check out [farmfreshtoyou.com](http://farmfreshtoyou.com) with over 4000 subscribers in California – they are powered by a great database which can give consumers big choice, not to mention citrus, greens, etc. On first look, it seems to make sense to have someone get a few items from a large number of farms so that the consumer isn't just dependent on one source.

From the consumer side, this can frequently be advantageous. Increased choice (no box when I go on vacation), increased availabil-

ity of more products (one crop failure in Amherst doesn't stop them from getting tomatoes!), and maybe even a lower price (since the middleman can source cheaper products). There can be good aspects about this from a producer as well. If you have to grow less products, you could specialize and do better at each one. If someone else is doing the selling, there's a lot less to be done.

So what's the problem? Most of the problems with this lay on the side of the farmer. The biggest one is that when farmers lose control of marketing, they leave themselves open to changes in pricing that are out of their control. While aggregators frequently start with a very fair price for their producers, it's eventually very tempting to play one producer against another to continually drive the price down. In fact, *that's the point of aggregators in a capitalist economy.* However, this eventually gets farmers into the exact same place they were when this whole thing (American agriculture) started. And that is, when your market is completely dependent on the outcome as opposed to the process, there will be ample temptation to try to get the right outcome by whatever means are necessary or possible to get there. This is called “externalizing costs.” And it goes like this – If I can't get the price I need in order to produce the crop, what method can I use that will be cheaper, that won't penalize me in the marketplace. In general, environmental costs fit the bill (if you have killed all of the earthworms in your field by spraying atrazine, your land value does not go down, etc). Those become your best choices. So when marketing systems pit farmer against farmer, usually it's the environment that takes the hit. Unfortunately, for all of us, when farmers make those choices, we are ALL effected, since we are all connected to

## “Food For Thought,” cont.

the environment. You might get cheaper tomatoes today. But you also might get climate change, nitrate-poisoned wells, and increased cancer rates tomorrow.

Shouldn't organic certification stop that problem? In a perfect world, yes! But, once people get involved, well, it gets a bit messier. It gets political. That is, the standard of “organic” is a somewhat up for grabs. For example, let's say the highest standard would be to have organic chickens only fed organically grown feed.

But then the biggest player in the organic chicken market complains that they can't get enough organic grain for a decent price. Since they have lots of clout (with lots of money for lobbying, etc) they can influence the standards to say either that the feed doesn't have to be organic after all, or just part of it has to be, etc. etc. Again, this could be good for the consumer in the short term (lower prices, etc), and again most likely somehow damaging to the environment.

Only in a system where risk and reward are actually shared between consumers and producers, are the concerns of the earth even a part of the equation. If farmers know that they will not be penalized by the market (lower prices) for making good environmental choices, it's easier to stick with those choices. This does cause consumers to lose something. In fact, it is specifically in pushing consumers to NOT have everything they want, that helps farmers produce food in a way that is more environmentally sustainable. This was a major impetus of the CSA concept at the beginning and one that is sometimes overlooked as time moves on. This is not to say that farmers markets, whole foods, food buying clubs, aggregators, etc are a bad thing. I think it's great that Wal-Mart is the biggest retailer of organic food in the world. It will eventually make the Chinese the biggest organic growers in the world. This is better than what we currently have. But it's not necessarily the end of the story from an environmental standpoint. So, at least in this case, it's great that CSAs exist to be able to continue to have one element of the agricultural

economy keep its focus on the environmental choices that farmers make. Letting farmers make decisions that are, above all, good for the long-term capacity of the earth to grow life-sustaining food is a very good thing. And this is one thing that CSAs do best of all.



## PARTY TIME

### It's a Hoe-Down!

We know the farm is primarily a place that grows lots and lots of great nutritious food. And we love the work that we do. However, frequently we like to remember that when we take a break and have a bit of fun, we can share this place in lots of different ways.

Rosie Pearson once again started the year off by continuing her New Years' tradition of **Beating the Bounds** around the four corners of the farm ending with a potluck at our neighbor Elaine Kenseth's home.

On Martin Luther King, Jr weekend we co-sponsored the **Full-Belly Benefit Dance Party** at the Hampshire College Red Barn. With a lot of organizing help from Abbe, Karen, and Amy Rothenberg, we had a full house, danced the night away, and helped raise over \$2900 for the Amherst & Northampton Survival Centers and the Kestrel Trust. It was such a success that we plan to do it again at the Northampton Center For The Arts on March 24, 2012 – Keep your eyes peeled for more info soon!

Once the earth had warmed, we had the usual slew of farm events this year as we kicked off the growing season with a **Spring Planting Day** in May where we planted the Accessible Garden and got our barn spruced up. The **Strawberry Dessert Potluck**, our **Garlic Harvest** in July, our **Pumpkin Harvest Party** in September, and our **Potato Dig** in October, were all great gatherings on the farm this season.

Rosie also once again organized our 10th Annual **Art Behind The Barn** which coincided with the Garlic Harvest and left the back porch sparkling with arts of all kinds. And John Root gave his annual well-attended **Edible Weeds Walk** in June.

At the end of the season, the **Harvest Dinner** brought it altogether in an even more special way than usual. We not only had the opportunity to share the whole season and thank everyone who made it happen, but considering we were celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our CSA, we invited all past apprentices and our past grower, Nicki Robb, to come celebrate with us. We had apprentices from as far back as 2000 attend; **Peter Smith ('01)** caught us up on his work as a writer and advocate in Portland, ME. And **Su Wasseluk '00 - '03**, now a nurse practitioner working in a community health center in Hyannis, MA, showed us pictures of the house she just bought and shared her reminiscences of the farms “middle-years.” It was an incredible night, where we had a delicious feast, kept the Trust meeting short and saluted all of the people who had contributed to the farm this season. Nicki helped us figure out just what was going on in the special, retrospective slide show that we put together for the event. Literally hundreds of people flashed before our eyes; People who had given some part of themselves to weave this incredible fabric of community and land use that we now know as Brookfield Farm (we are thinking of making this slide show available on the web, or doing another showing sometime later this winter – stay tuned). We were helped by many volunteers that night that cleaned, lugged, poured, and got all of the incredible food out on the tables and back again. The energy that night and at all of our farm events this year mirrored what we always feel - that the farm and our endeavors here are held in a special place for many people. We continue to feel very grateful to be able to do this for a living.



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### “Apprentice,” cont’.

sistant manager as of January 1.

We were grateful to again have a really strong applicant pool for the three open positions for 2012. We were able to complete our hiring process before the Thanksgiving holiday and are happy to announce that our new apprentices are Jasper Gardner, who recently worked at Next Barn Over in Hadley MA, Kenny Darling, who worked at Appleton Farm in Ipswich MA, and Zoe Abram, who worked at Colchester farm in Galena, MD last season, will round out what looks like a pretty experienced crew for the coming season.

As usual we heard news from many of our past apprentices this year who continue to farm throughout the Northeast and beyond. Here are a few highlights: **Lisa McKeag ‘08-’10** worked as the Assistant Manager at Old Friends Farm where she was responsible for vegetable production and farmers market manager. **Adan Martinez ‘07-’09** works as the assistant manager at Long Wind Farm in Thetford, VT where he was heading up a program implement a geo-thermal heating system into their large-scale greenhouse tomato operation. He also applied to grad school in Environmental Studies. **Danya Teitelbaum ‘08** continued to build Queens Greens in Ware, MA growing and selling winter vegetables. **Chris Babis ‘04 - ‘05, ‘07** had a successful fourth season running his farm, Common Thread CSA in Madison, NY. **Andy Szymanowicz ‘07** toured me around his farm in April where he had a great fourth season running his CSA at Sol Flower Farm in Ancramdale, NY. He continued his CSA and custom flower growing this past season. **Jeff Tober ‘03 -’06** had a great fifth season running his CSA, and raising his two boys at Fernbrook Farm in Bordentown, NJ. **Amy Smith ‘06** told us all about her great

first season at Heart Beet Organics on Prince Edward Island, when she stopped by for a visit in December. **Amy Cloud ‘01, ‘06** rolled through her fifth season at Three Rivers Community Farm in Elsah, MO and enjoyed the Cardinals World Series win! **Abby Youngblood ‘05** continued on as the Fresh Food For All Program Coordinator for Just Food in NYC. **Casey Steinberg - ‘02 - ‘04** continued expanding at Old Friends Farm and is now a major presence at farmers markets from Amherst to Boston. **Marc Cesario ‘02-’03** completed his second season at Meeting Place Pastures in Cornwall VT, where he raised livestock (over 100 pigs!) for his meat CSA and other retail outlets. **Jenny Hausman ‘00** completed her fifth season at Picadilly Farm in Winchester, NH where with her husband and two children now have a thriving farm business with over 500 shares sold in NH, VT, and MA. **Paul Buccciaglia ‘99** completed his tenth season at Fort Hill Farm CSA in New London, CT, where he gave me a tour after we made a very successful eggplant-for-kale-trade in August. **Don Zasada ‘96 and ‘97**, his wife Brigid and two kids completed their seventh season as owner/operators of their Caretaker Farm CSA in Williamstown.

