



BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

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NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2014

APPRENTICE PROGRAM

A Whole New Look



After losing nearly all of our crew at the end of 2012, we were a little worried as to how this season's crop of bright-eyed and bushy-tailed apprentices would work out. We knew they'd be enthusiastic, educated, engaged people, but when you have to go about training every-

one all at the same time, well, sometimes things can get a little dicey. In addition, when Pete decided to leave last December and start his new farm at Amherst College, we decided that we would be better off having four apprentices rather than trying to find an assistant manager that late in the game. Well, after looking back, we'd have to say that there was really no reason for concern at all. Three new apprentices? No assistant manager? No problem!

No problem, mostly because of who was on our crew this year. Jake Mazar studied finance and economics at Boston College, and then worked as a marketing specialist for an alternative energy company in the Boston Area. At some point, he decided he wanted a different direction and spent a growing season as an apprentice on two farms in Martha's Vineyard. He learned about vegetable and livestock production and then decided that he wanted to continue getting more experience in these fields. He came to our farm hoping to be exposed to a wide variety of skills and systems that we employ, which would hopefully help him be able to gain proficiency and develop his future farm business plan. Over the course of the season, Jake spent his tractor time focusing on direct seeding (with the Allis Chalmers G) and cultivating miles and miles of vegetable crops with our CASE 265. In

addition he was our Farm Shopkeeper who took the most pride in his playlist, loved driving our shares to Boston, and generally found a lot of joy in all of the work that we did. Jake likes to

see "Apprentice," p.8

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT BROOKFIELD FARM

Down Then Up

It took us a little while to get here. But now that we are in the depths of winter (real winter this year!), it feels like a good time to catch our breath and take a look back at what happened here over the last growing season. After a very difficult early growing



season, followed by a very beautiful and bountiful late summer/early fall, we struggled to close the farm down on time. On time, that is, from the jaws of the cold hard winter, which, starting straight-away in December was very cold and very hard. But, the leeks were pulled on the day before the frost was permanent and the last of the machines were stored in the barn just as the snow started flying hard. Then the holidays and more cold and now, finally, some time when there are no crops that can get destroyed by too much cold or too much wet and some time before we have to start it all over again; A good time to reflect and remember.

While it's true that the weather in New England has always been variable and extreme (yes, even the Pilgrims were struck by the severity of thunderstorms and the cold of the winter), it does seem like we've been riding those variations and extremes even more than usual in the last few years. Since farming, in essence, is manipulating raw materials as they pass through biological systems in order to produce food, we are on the front lines of dealing with weather. When it's too cold, plants don't grow quickly. When they don't grow quickly, we don't get a lot of food quickly. Simple as that. There are clearly things we

can do to mitigate some of the curve-balls we are thrown, but the bottom line is that we mostly just have to play the hand that we are dealt. And this year we were dealt a whopper. While the very early season was a bit colder and drier than usual, the late spring was

see "Farm," p.6



GET A HAMMER AND A NAIL

Continuing To Upgrade



We didn't start this whole project 27 years ago by thinking about tools, we started by thinking about what we would produce. What we would produce of value for our community. Once we got straight about that, we started thinking of the people who were going to be working here. How would they achieve their goals? How would they enjoy their time working here? How would they be compensated? And once we got straight about that, we then started to think about what tools we were going to use. And what buildings we were going to need. Community needs. People. Then things. Of course, these all overlapped somewhat, but they did have that general prioritization. Our idea (CSA), and our people (apprentices, staff) have been pretty well established over the last three decades. Once we reached the first plateau (about year 15), we did a big facilities renovation. And since then, we've been steadily improving our tools so that we can continue to have our CSA and the people who run it continue to have more efficiency, more safety, and more enjoyment at work.



BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST (BFCT), INC.

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Karen Romanowski	Crew Cook, Farm Nurse, etc, etc.
Abbe Vredenburg	Administrator
Zoe Abram	Assistant Manager

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This year we made a couple of big leaps as well as numerous small improvements to our fine collection of vegetable production, harvest, and distribution tools. The biggest improvement came when we sold our old delivery truck – an Isuzu 14' box truck which got about 8 mpg – and replaced it with a Dodge Sprinter Van. Like the old truck it runs on diesel, but it sips at about 25

mpg. In this calendar year alone, even though we only make one trip to the Boston area each week, we saved over \$1800 on fuel costs due to this change. Reduced emissions followed suit.



The other big improvement we made has more to do with comfort than efficiency. After 20 years of driving up and down Bay Rd in the



cold winter months to feed our cows round hay bales (which each weigh about 1000 lbs and need to be picked up by a tractor), we had the opportunity to upgrade to a tractor with a heated cab. This tractor is a similar age to the one that we sold, has 4-wheel drive so we can make compost when it's a little wet on the composting pad, not a lot of wear and tear, and a nice bucket loader. But, it also has a windshield (with wipers!) and real heat actually comes out of the heater once its warmed up!

Besides these two big upgrades we also did a lot of general upkeep of existing tools.

We replaced our compost covers, which had lasted for 15 years (even though they were supposed to last only 10!) and our transplanter which was 25 years old.





We also purchased a backup potato digger (in case of break-

down), another row crop tractor (John Deere 2355) so that we could have our Landini do a little less (and so our fourth apprentice would be able to have two tractors like everyone else), and a grain drill which will make our cover-crop seeding more accurate than with our old spinner.

At the end of the season our “little white” (the Nissan truck which had been donated by Brian Moriarty about 100 years ago) finally broke for good (clutch completely gone). We knew it was time, so we parked it in the weeds and began using it as a parts-truck for our “little



red” Nissan truck. And I think, just so we wouldn’t cry too much, we happened upon a quick replacement – a 1995 jet black

Dodge Ram 1500 which will more than do the job around the farm this summer.

But it’s not only about tractors and other hunks of metal roaming around the farm. We also need a wide-variety of buildings and grounds improvements to keep our farm humming along. Every four years or so we have to replace the plastic on the fieldhouses, and this year we “re-skinned” the smallest and the largest of our four unheated hoop houses. We also repainted the farm bathroom, put a new floor in the apprentice house bathroom, rebuilt the outside barn staircase, and continued to clear trees that had fallen during the October 2012 snow storm.

Importantly all of these purchases were made using funds that the BFCT has set aside for capital improvement. Every year the farm borrows money from this fund and pays it back to the BFCT at a rate of 3%



over 5-years. This has enabled us to purchase over \$175,000 worth of equipment while keeping the fund at roughly the same rate over the past 8 years

(the life of this fund so far). The farm was able to fully pay back all of its commitments this year leaving us in good financial position as



SPECIAL THANKS TO

❖**Mat Jacobson & Susan Heitker** for donating two World Series tickets that were raffled off for \$1000.

❖**Bramble Hill Farm** for donating a fuel pump for our diesel tank.

❖**Max Traunstein** for donating 200 lbs of surplus lettuce.

❖**Old Friends Farm** for donating 400 lbs of surplus greens

❖**Chris Zobel** for too many donations to mention (No, we didn’t forget the pallet jack, etc).

❖**Roberta Lojko** for naming the BFCT as a beneficiary of her life insurance policy. A truly amazing, generous gift!!



WISH LIST

Electric Griddle (for cooking demos)
Sandwich Board Chalkboards
That old Mac Book you’re gonna get rid of!!

SPREAD THE WORD

Straight From the Field

The farm is not only a place where we grow vegetables, but it is also a place where we *learn* how to grow vegetables. The smallest unit of learning on our farm is *one year* - that is, we only get one data point on how our eggplants grow in one year. This is a small dataset, which means that even after 27 years, we are still not that wise! It also means that since this entire field of sustainable agriculture is both old (historically) and new (how it relates to this particular cultural reality) as a 27-year old CSA we have a lot to share with those starting out, or transitioning their conventionally managed farm to an organic/biodynamic approach. One result of all of this learning that we have to do is that it gives us a natural opportunity to share this information with others. We make a commitment of time and resources to provide this outreach to many different parts of our community - from beginning farmers to seasoned agriculturalists, from kindergarten students to university ag students, interested consumers and related practitioners

This year we opened our farm up to many school groups. The Hartsbrook High School brought their 12th graders for a talk on sustainable land use and the 10th graders came for a series of work visits where we would talk about some appropriate topic of seasonal, agricultural importance to our work. Kathleen Maiolatesi brought her Sustainable Ag and Politics of Food class from HCC to the farm for a number of visits in the fall. The Pioneer Valley Performing Arts School brought two classes for a field trip and showed us how quickly 60 people could pull garlic scapes off of 12,000 garlic plants (see below)! And Crocker Farm and Wildwood schools (Amherst) brought kindergartners for field trips in October. In addition we gave farm tours for the NOFA summer conference, the Farm School apprentice program, a Pakistani exchange summer program at UMASS, and the "Thursday Club" - a women's group from South Amherst.

We were asked to work as consultants on a number of projects this year - The Farm Viability program hired us to work with Donna Chandler at Brattle Farm on CSA development and machinery assessment. Dave Chapman, longtime tomato grower from Long Wind Farm in Thetford, VT came for a discussion of how the CSA model might work for his greenhouse operation. And we were consulted by many farmers who were expanding production, assessing new projects or tools, or thinking about apprentice programs. In addition, we were consulted by researchers and organizers about local meat production, CSA databases, storage of root vegetables, CSA viability, small-scale seed saving, the politics of food, and land tenure models.



We also gave workshops and led discussions throughout the year. Dan presented two workshops on CSA Management & Finances at the Eco-Farm conference in Asilomar CA in January and was a guest speaker about "Quality of Life" at a CISA program on "Business Decisions You Can Live With" at Bramble Hill Farm in March. Zoe gave a presentation about CSAs at the Northfield Mount Hermon Local Food Teach-in in May and Dan gave a presentation on "Planning for CSA Success" at the NOFA conference in August, and another on "Underground Passive Storage for Root Crops" at the New England Vegetable Growers Conference in Manchester NH in December.

We also continued to use whatever resources we could afford to support our local community. We donated plants to Gardening The Community, The Homestead Project, and some greenhouse space to the Hartsbrook School. We donated vegetables to silent auctions for community groups such as Family Outreach of Amherst, Amherst Survival Center, The Amherst Ballet, and Mass Dash. And Jessica Harwood, at Rachel's Table arranged for over 880 lbs of produce to be gleaned from our fields and distributed to food pantries in the greater Springfield area. In addition, we let our barn be used as a depot for local farmers to order seed potatoes and for the NOFA conference to have a pre-conference event.

In addition we were contacted by magazines, grant writers, photographers, college professors, and students who wanted our opinions, supporting letters, and bucolic setting to help them write their articles, grants, photo projects, etc. We believe strongly that we have a great opportunity to share what we have been able to build here at



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, this fund is one way we help to finance our “extracurricular activities” around the farm.

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	70
Total gifts	\$5710
Average gift	\$81.57
Percent participation	7.9%

the farm with as many people and groups as possible and this year we were able to do so in many many ways.

And here was the funniest outreach request of the year (which we did not follow up):

Hi, Dan Kaplan! I reached out to Christy Raymond and White Barn Farm and she said you might be perfect for this! I'm a development producer at a reality TV development company in NYC called Crybaby Media and we're always looking for interesting people in amazing worlds. It may sound crazy, but we are currently searching for successful farm owners who can help revamp struggling farms! Basically, we're looking for people with big, fun personalities who know everything there is to know about farming to help figure out how to make a lame farm fun and lucrative!! Think something like Food Network's Restaurant Impossible but with farms!! Please let me know if you'd like to chat! Thanks, Brittany

THE FARM IS OPEN SPACE

The Ice Rink Is Looking Great!

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. If it does start snowing, while we don't have any grooming equipment, the neighborhood skiers usually have the tracks set around the fields within a few hours, so come on down. And behind the barn, our beautiful farmyard Ice Rink is built (thanks Chris Zobel & David Schmidt - see below) and looking great. We'll keep current conditions posted on our website. Whatever the weather, we hope you will enjoy being outside at the farm this winter.



SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FANTASTIC VOLUNTEERS

- ❖ **Sophia Salva** for helping in the greenhouse this spring
- ❖ **Sidney Katz** for helping every Thursday, all fall, doing whatever we needed!
- ❖ **Brittany Luvera & Brianna Nemeth** for helping with the harvest in the fall
- ❖ **All of Jake Mazar's Friends** for helping throughout the entire season (see below).
- ❖ **Peter Aronson** for helping in our harvest shed, feeding the chickens and pigs, and keeping our roads clear of tree limbs!





memorable for a steady and drenching rain that brought us close to 22" of rain in the month of June alone. That's nearly half of the average that we usually get in a year. The results are two-fold: First, it waterlogs plant roots making it nearly impossible for them to bring enough oxygen into their systems to allow for growth (i.e. stunted plants). Second, it washes away many available nutrients (since they are by-definition water-soluble). This means that when it finally gets dry, the plants have few nutrients available to grow. Which, in turn, means that we need to fertilize again. Which means spending money

(and time) again. Both of these have the secondary effect of holding plants back at critical times of their development. This has the double-whammy effect of making them more vulnerable to pests & diseases (even if the weather shifts) since they are growing in a timed environment. They have to pass certain growth markers at certain times or the changing day-length, heat, etc will effect their future growth. In essence = it's a bummer!

This season, just when we thought that we were done, that we'd have to totally throw

in the towel on this season, that we'd have to send one of those horrible letters explaining why our CSA was a great idea, but unfortunately doesn't work, the sun came out, dried out the fields, and then stayed like that for nearly 2 ½ months! And while we were mostly drying our eyes, fertilizing, and cultivating, we finally got it through our heads that things were really picking up; The melons were not a mirage. The broccoli was real. The onions were delicious. The sweet potatoes made for a great Thanksgiving treat. We spent most of the



	TOTAL	Unit	per share	2013 (LBS)	2012 (LBS)
BEET	4945	LBS.	7.7	4945	5585
BEET W/TOPS	1844	BU.	3.5	1844	2368
BITTERMELON	0	LBS.	0.0	0	45
BROCCOLI	4760	LBS.	9.2	4760	2565
BRUSSELS' SP.	960	PC.	1.5	960	850
BRUSSELS' SP. TOPS	205	LBS	0.4	205	150
CABBAGE	14215	LBS	13.3	14215	13810
CABBAGE, CHI.	1990	HDS.	3.8	5970	4278
CANTELOUPES	1370	PC.	2.6	6850	11000
CARROT	16040	LBS.	27.1	16040	12895
CARROT W/TOP	2967	BU.	5.7	2967	1603
CAULIFLOWER	3215	LBS.	6.2	3215	1255
CELERIAC	1580	LBS.	1.8	1580	480
CELERY	0	PCS.	0.0	0	1194
CHARD	1525	LBS.	2.9	1525	2545
COLLARDS	805	LBS.	1.1	805	1480
CORN	2060	DZ.	4.0	14420	11928
CUCUMBER	2460	LBS.	4.7	2460	9165
DAIKON	920	LBS.	1.8	920	1545
EGGPLANT	3550	LBS.	6.8	3550	4100
ESCAROLE	705	HDS.	1.4	705	270
FENNEL	745	PC.	1.4	745	0
GARLIC	1320	LBS.	2.5	1320	1690
GARLIC SCAPES	280	LBS.	0.5	280	155
GREENS	5570	LBS.	10.7	5570	5242
KALE	5383	LBS.	9.6	5383	4505
KOHLRABI	246	LBS.	0.5	246	211
LEEK	6675	PC.	11.4	6675	10060
LETTUCE	9937	HDS.	19.1	9937	8004
LETTUCE	3040	LBS.	5.8	3040	1517
OKRA	135	LBS.	0.3	135	55
ONION	8615	LBS.	16.6	8615	10145
PARSNIP	3530	LBS.	6.2	3530	3370
PEPPERS, HOT	640	LBS.	1.2	640	602
PEPPERS, SW.	3185	LBS.	6.1	3185	3510
POTATO	13930	LBS.	26.8	13930	16765
POTATO, SW.	5975	LBS.	11.5	5975	7875
RADICCHIO	405	LBS.	0.8	405	640
RADISH	1543	BU.	3.0	1543	2223
RADISH, WATERMELON	150	LBS.	0.3	150	835
RUTABAGA	400	LBS.	0.4	400	3265
SCALLION	3222	BU.	6.2	3222	3520
SPINACH	2002	LBS.	3.9	2002	1300
SQUASH, S.	4410	LBS.	8.5	4410	9390
SQUASH, W.	28500	LBS.	54.8	28500	33450
TOMATOES	13660	LBS.	26.3	13660	16625
TURNIP	1031	BU.	2.0	1031	1755
TURNIP	2420	LBS.	1.7	2420	4830
WATERMELONS	13100	LBS.	25.2	13100	15135

late season answering the question “How was the growing season?” by saying, “Well, it was pretty bad at first, but then it seemed to turn around a bit.” And by the end of the season, we had almost just let go of needing to say the first part of the sentence, and just answered “All in all, it ended up pretty good.”

And that's what the numbers show (if you look at the charts above and below). For the entire season, our production was about 2% below our 10-year average. And while we only produced about 60,000 lbs of food from June – mid-August (~11 lbs per share per week), we bumped that up to 133,600 lbs from mid-Aug to November (~18 lbs/week). Likewise our winter share production (34,600 lbs) was about 2% higher than our 9-year average. Some crops were real duds – strawberries, garlic, early greens, early summer squash and cukes, green beans, and potatoes – were all challenged this year and performed below-average (or just down-right terrible). But some were incredible winners – the melons, fall broccoli, carrots, late greens,



cutting lettuce, blueberries, and sweet corn – were all better than average or better than ever! This was a real roller-coaster ride of variations and extremes. And we rode them as best we could.



Beyond the vegetable production, which sits at the heart of our commercial endeavors on the farm, there were many other activities – agricultural, cultural, educational – that continued and thrived during this past season. Our cattle herd increased in size to 8 breeding cows and 7 calves. They spent their growing season roaming the fields near Southeast St, bringing their unique fertility-creating digestive selves to the near and far pastures and fallow fields of Snyder and Gray Farm. They produced over 50 tons of manure, which with the addition of cow manure from Cook Farm (in Hadley, MA), leaves from the Town of Amherst, and vegetable scraps from our harvest shed we turned into nearly 150 tons of finished compost. We spread this compost on 10 acres of crop land (our primary fertilizer), bringing organic matter, nutrients, and an incredible amount of biological activity to our soil.



We were able to produce all of the hay for our herd on the fields at Gray's and Hadley's Farm and they are now creating next year's fertility in the winter barnyard at Snyder's Barn as they eat the hay. We also raised 10 pigs and kept about 50 laying hens for additional fertility and some additional protein sources as well. In addition two beekeepers

kept hives on various fields at the farm this year, bringing a total of 8 hives around our little square ¼ mile of fields.

Our CSA shares continued to sell well, although the type of demand we were seeing 5 years ago has continued to decrease. Our overall renewal rate declined slightly to 80% last year (-2.4%) and, in a big change, all of that was due to a decrease in our renewals for On-Farm Shares (85%, down by 4%). Our Boston-Area share renewals increased to 66% (+2.1%). Perhaps the lower numbers in general re-

flect a general change in the overall marketplace with lots more CSA shares, CSA farms, and plenty of other options for locally grown, healthy produce. Still, our season-ending survey results showed continued strong support for the farm. And early results show our renewals at about the same rate for the 2014 season. But, as we expected, our waiting list continued to decrease down from 194 to 67 (and notably our waiting list for on-farm shares really dropped this year). There isn't much incentive to sit on a waiting list when there are so many other options to get your produce right now.

Beyond all of these numbers, there were many instances this year that reflected a strong community supporting the farm. In one of the more memorable moments, when the emergency frost alert went out to our shareholder list on a Sunday morning in early September, nearly 60 people answered the early call and saved 13,000 lbs of squash in about 2 hours (see photo above).

From a financial standpoint, our farm (and non-profit that owns the farm) had a very positive year. We were able to continue to pay for all of the capital development we've done over the past 10 years, as well as purchase new equipment representing serious upgrades in our overall infrastructure. In addition, except for the need to purchase additional fertilizer, we were able to keep our expenses generally within budget and manage to increase wages for all employees while nearly meeting our target for overall net profit.

Our farm also continued to be a site for a wide array of outreach activities - sometimes being the basis for research about sustainable agriculture and, at other times, a kindergarten field trip. We also provide a unique setting for recreation, inspiration, and celebration – all of which were pursued by so many people around the farm in the past year.

None of this, of course, could ever be dreamed about without the continued contribution and commitment of shareholders, donors, friends, and relatives who support us financially, emotionally, and spiritually. For this we thank you, as always, and hope that through the following pages you can get a glimpse of some of what your contributions have helped to grow and nurture in the past year.

Your Farmer,

Dan
(for Karen,
Abbe, and Zoe)



	2013	2012	% dif last year	% dif 10 yr avg
Total Production				
total lbs (including PYO)	263013	283160	-7%	-2%
total lbs. (no PYO)	228325	256160	-11%	-2%
winter share production	34688	39640	-12%	2%
acreage planted	30.1	31.4	-4%	4%
crops planted	61	61	0%	7%
Distribution Comparison				
total lbs per share	343.5	352.6	-3%	-4%
cost per lb. share	1.62	1.53	6%	15%
avg. lbs. per share each week	14.3	14.7	-3%	-7%



"Apprentice," cont.

pack his days full, and in addition to being an apprentice, while he was here, he started developing a

weeder to get our soil weed-free before we put any plants or seeds in the ground. He also was responsible for cultivating our smallest, slowest growing plants - like onions, carrots, greens - with our Allis Chalmers G (pictured right).

Will was known for his erudite answers to all questions related to foreign policy, his propensity to scream very loudly when it was time for the bulk watermelon harvest, and his ability to surprise us all by wearing glasses in the very early hours of the morning. Will also seemed to have a lot of side projects and somehow was able to work a full farm schedule and also be the ARHS Boys JVA Ultimate Frisbee coach in April & May. Will is returning to our farm next season where he hopes to focus on tillage and vegetable cultivation, as well as managing our livestock and daily harvest. He will also be participating in the "independent study" in pastured poultry with Jake.



side-line business with a partner where they will make hard cider. They rented a warehouse in Springfield will start making cider in February. Jake has decided to return to the farm for a second year in 2014 and hopes (while his cider is fermenting) to focus on primary tillage, making compost, greenhouse management, general crop care, field planting management, as well as doing an "independent study" in pastured poultry.

Caro Roszell worked in the non-profit sector developing community-based urban agriculture programming to aid the refugee community in Boston after graduating from Bard College where she majored in environmental studies and philosophy. She then spent a year as an apprentice at Simple Gifts Farm in N. Amherst before joining us to learn about systems development and implementation on our small farm. This season Caro was responsible for plowing and harrowing every inch of our 30 acres of vegetable crop land, preparing it for planting. She also cultivated all of the smaller 2-row crops (like beans, peppers, leeks, and corn) with the trusty Farmall Cub (see front page). Caro was generally to be found washing buckets to within an inch of their lives, investigating the factors which go into making truly healthy soil, and trying to conjure a way for the farm to get barn cats (to help us with our rodent and bird problems and to be doted upon as well). She was successful at all of these activities and really made her mark as a hard-working, conscientious person who could be relied on to go "above and (way) beyond" the call of duty! She is heading back to Simple Gifts in 2014 where she will be an assistant manager and very involved in the vegetable production and distribution at that CSA.



Rounding out the crew, we were lucky enough to have Zoe Abram return for her second season as an apprentice. She felt she would like to have one more year in a learning position, where she could focus specifically on managing areas of the farm that might not be her "natural strengths" as well as continue to gain more experience with tractor operation and maintenance.

Zoe had worked Hearty Roots Community Farm in Clermont, NY after graduating from NYU with a degree in Environmental Policy and Food Systems. This year she managed our greenhouse and field planting. She also managed our Farm Shop including all of the local products for sale in that fine establishment (*she was able to post the highest profit of any manager in the Farm Shops' history - over \$10,000!!*). She then finished off the season by managing our "bulk harvest" which starts with watermelons (in late August) and ends with carrots (in late November). Somehow with all of that she also took an MDAR class on farm business development, studied herbalism, and took care of her baby dog Harry.



Will Van Heuvelen, who graduated from Middlebury College with a degree in Political Science and fluency in Arabic, spent a year on Green String Farm in Petaluma CA after college. He came to our farm to get more experience in the techniques of organic vegetable production as well as the nuances to managing a small enterprise with employees while trying to maintain your quality of life. Will focused on bed prep, using a Lely tine

Community Farm in Clermont, NY after graduating from NYU with a degree in Environmental Policy and Food Systems. This year she managed our greenhouse and field planting. She also managed our Farm Shop including all of the local products for sale in that fine establishment (*she was able to post the highest profit of any manager in the Farm Shops' history - over \$10,000!!*). She then finished off the season by managing our "bulk harvest" which starts with watermelons (in late August) and ends with carrots (in late November). Somehow with all of that she also took an MDAR class on farm business development, studied herbalism, and took care of her baby dog Harry. We feel lucky to announce that she has returned to the farm in 2014 as our Assistant Manager. In this role, she will continue to focus on managing the farm shop and bulk harvest, and bring her special talents to manag-



PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET

File Abbe under "A" for "Awesome"



"What do you do in the winter?" people are always asking me. A legitimate question, considering that mostly what we do is grow vegetables, and, well, growing vegetables when it's winter in New England seems generally impossible, so what do I do? I tell them "fixing machinery" and "ordering supplies, and lots of office work." Usually people look at me like "well that probably only takes a few hours, and then what!?" It's hard to believe really just how much admin-

istrative work does go into running a silly little vegetable farm, but, it turns out the answer is "a lot." I probably should just go shorthand and say "I do some of what Abbe does all year long" which would get the point across as well.

The first year that I was hired to work at Brookfield Farm (1994) was also the first year that Abbe Vredenburg was hired to help with some extra administrative tasks. And now look at her! In her 20 years on this farm she has made herself generally indispensable. At first it was paying bills and writing checks. Then it was expanded to filling out forms (form ABC, RMV-1, etc), interfacing with our accountant to file our taxes, and payroll for the weeder crew.



Then in 2007, after the robbery which woke us up to a lot institutional practices that needed tightening, Abbe's role expanded to managing our member database, sending share acknowledgements, putting together our annual fund mailing, and more. She even took on the administration of our annual benefit dance party when we started that in 2009. Not only does Abbe do so much of the work that I would have to do, but she does it better than I would be able to. She has a great memory, she's organized, and she is very "no-nonsense," which is helpful when it comes to encouraging people to pay the remainder of their share payments! What would we do without Abbe? Simply put, we have no idea and we don't want to find out.



PARTY TIME

All Work and No Play....

Food production is the basis of our activities on the farm. It's the reason we are doing what we are doing. But we have always hoped that through the production of food, the farm could also become a great source of inspiration and accommodation for a wide variety

of events – both food and non-food related.

This year we were lucky enough to employ the talents of Christine Stevens who worked for the farm as our "Events Coordinator." We had to show her the ropes, but once that was over (about 5 minutes) she was able to use her immense talents (dramatic, organizational, ever-lovin-fun-creating) to continue on with many of our traditions as well as create some new ones along the way. We started the year with about 30 people who helped us plant the accessible garden and clean up the Farm Shop to get ready for the CSA season to begin. And then, on opening day, Christine found out just how much coffee, tea, and snacks people can eat with their excitement of the farm season getting underway. From that point on she organized, publicized, set-up, and clean up a variety of on-farm events – from cooking demos (andalusian salsa!) to harvest parties (garlic, pumpkins, and potatoes!), culminating in our giant Harvest Dinner potluck celebration in November.



In addition to our own creations, there were many events that other people brought to our farm. Rosie Pearson once again celebrated the New Year with **Beating The Bounds** around the perimeter of our patch of earth. We co-sponsored the **5th Annual Full-Belly Benefit Dance Party** where raised over \$4800 for local food security. Pete McLean hosted a series of **Birds and Breakfast**, where he helped guide folks around the avian community of Brookfield Farm and shared a delicious farm breakfast after it was over. John Root gave a workshop on **Wild Edibles** around the farm. Rosie continued her now-traditional, **12th Annual Art Behind The Barn** in July, filling our back porch with artisans of all kinds. And our own apprentice, Zoe, created a **Garlic Pop and Story Slam** where people told stories while preparing our garlic seeds for planting.

We have always wanted our farm, centered in food production, to become another node in cultural enrichment – this year was certainly exceptional in that regard!



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Sourcing Eggs (By Zoe Abram)

Can you find eggs that are local, organic and affordable? Even in our farm shop, options perplex. We sell our eggs (\$4/dozen, not organic) which we raise on the pasture, and feed locally grown, conventional grain. But our 50 hens don't produce enough. And, each year, we find someone operating a small organic egg business. We've sold Stonybrook Valley Eggs, Foxtown Eggs, Simple Gifts Farm, Old Friends Farm, etc (\$6 - \$8/dozen), but these vendors seem to come and go. And they never regularly have enough eggs to meet our demand. We also sell eggs from Diemand Farm in Wendell (\$3/dozen). They always have enough to fill our order. What's the beef with all of these eggs?

First, the statistics: Massachusetts isn't a big egg producing state. If we're buying Massachusetts eggs, they are coming from a relatively small farm, compared to egg farms in Georgia or North Carolina. The Census of Agriculture reports that only 15 egg producers in Massachusetts have more than 400 birds. There is one corporate egg producer in Massachusetts; The Country Hen in Worcester County, which has 50,000 – 100,000 birds. The only farm around the Pioneer Valley with more than 400 birds is Diemand's.

This past season, Greg Disterhoft and Kevin Korb ran Foxtown Farm, producing organic eggs from layers on rotated on pasture in Montague. According to Greg, "Foxtown Farm practices are going back to pre-1910 production techniques." About a hundred years ago, people kept layers as part of their diversified farm businesses, 50 – 300 birds, scaling up from what had previously been a part of the home in an agrarian society. These birds were kept outside, around a coop, maybe pastured or just kept in a chicken yard. Our practices at Brookfield match these, and like Foxtown Farm, the "inefficiencies," of our human-scale operations mean we can't scale up very easily; Chick rearing, egg collecting, egg washing, etc all require equipment we can't afford from the profits we make on eggs.

The logistics of replenishing a small flock challenge, and sometimes prohibit, regular production. Chickens lay most prolifically in their first year, less after that, and less in the winter. Foxtown is not producing eggs this year mainly because it wasn't worth it to keep the birds with lower egg production in winter. Brookfield had a lapse in egg production this season because we let our layers get too old before we raised new chicks. Old Friends Farm stopped producing eggs when they had several predator attacks and their coop was destroyed in a storm: fronting the start-up costs again wasn't worth it for a relatively low profit.

Anne Diemand was happy to talk about her farm's egg business with me. Diemand operates at a scale where they can keep production up by raising chicks several times during the year, having a variety of ages within their laying flock, and they have a wholesale market for old birds to stew. In the late 1960s, they began to keep the chickens

in cages, one per cage. Anne had a strong preference for caged layers at their scale: "If your birds are on the floor, how can you see them all? In the cage, we touch each bird every day collecting eggs." But increased regulations have caused them to scale back. In July 2010, a new FDA regulation came into effect for all operations with more than 3,000 birds. The Diemands thought it went "a little too far." For Anne, the kicker was that it would require them to count flies in the hen houses. Also, it would restrict public access to the farm, and they didn't want to cancel the annual Easter egg hunt and other events. So, the Diemands decreased their flock to just under the 3,000 bird threshold, in order to keep their farm practices and community culture.

And what about feed – shouldn't local eggs eat local grain? The Diemands buy a conventional corn-soy feed from Central Connecticut Co-op. It is has no hormones or growth-enhancers. Anne says she "likes the feed we use because they buy a lot of their corn from the Pioneer Valley, and from New York." At Brookfield, we buy our feed from Parson's Farm in Hadley. They grow their own corn and buy soy from a local distributor in Franklin County, and then mix it on the farm. Not totally local, but as-local-as-we-can-get-right-now. But, neither the Diemands nor Brookfield can know that our feed is free from GMOs.



Foxtown chose organic grain because they were concerned about GMOs, and buying GMO grain means supporting an industry that contaminates non-GMO seeds, that increases the use of herbicide, and that has potential risks to human health. But, organic feed is almost never local; the Green Mountain Organic grain they bought is sourced wherever prices are cheapest - part of global trade – we've heard from other producers that this year they hope to keep it "within North America." And then there's the price issue. If you feed

organic, you can get the highest price for you eggs. But because it costs twice the price of conventional feed, Foxtown needed to charge \$8 per dozen – and they still weren't making much money. So then you have the problem that the eggs are expensive *and* the farms aren't very financially sustainable anyway. For the bigger organic farms, like the Country Hen they can charge a middle price (\$6/dz), but they sacrifice pasture (chickens only allowed onto a small "porch") and the source of their grain remains a mystery (a "trade secret" when you ask them directly). The personal connection and accountability you can get from a family farm like Diemands is gone.

We are left with trade-offs: conventional, local-ish grain, that probably contains GMOs or expensive, organic grain from far away? Caged chickens, birds on the floor/porch, or birds outside? Is your labor efficient and your flock replenishment stable enough to stay in business? Farmers will keep trying. Even though Foxtown is not selling eggs right now, Greg feels strongly about being an egg producer: "we kept some of our chickens for personal use. I am bringing eggs to friends and family all the time. It makes them so happy; everybody loves good eggs." However, these issues about the availability of affordable or local organic grain, government regulations, and inefficiencies in production make the affordable, local, organic egg, so far, still somewhat of a unicorn.

LAND IN OUR CARE

It's Not Just About Growing Vegetables

Dana and Mary Snyder have been allowing us to use their land on Southeast St for all of the 20 years that I have been here at the farm. And before I got here, Ian and Nicki Robb used the cow barn and a few acres for at least a few years. That's a long time to be working a piece of land, and we are well aware of just how lucky we are that they are willing to let us continue with this relationship. Our farm is simply not big enough to be able to grow enough vegetables to be economically viable, so having access to land is a vital part of our long-term strategy for success. We are always amazed how many things you learn after you do something for a while. When we first started we figured if you rented land, the biggest cost would be any inputs you needed to add to the soil, or just the cost of actually producing food (labor, seeds, equipment, fuel, etc).

But I am struck, time and again, how many other jobs besides farming have to be done in order to farm a piece of land. For instance, this year at Snyder Farm we completely renovated the two water bars that go across the little road that goes behind the Snyders' house and down into what we call Field 3 (where we had many of our fall carrots, beets, and parsnips). Now, this road has a good pitch to it, and it is bounded on both sides by woods, so it tends to act a bit like a waterfall when the rains come hard in the spring or fall. Dana has always been one to try to live lightly on his land, so in order to keep the water off of the road, he found some down trees, cut two ruts in the road, and then placed the logs at an angle across the road to enable the water to rush across the road, and not wash it out going down hill. Over the years we found that the angle that they were built at was a little shallowly pitched. This had the effect of not moving the water fast enough across the road. Silt would build up in the water bar, and then the water would jump the bank and go down hill. We lived with this for a while, and finally we realized that it was time to rebuild. So this spring, before the biggest rains, we removed the old logs and found two newer ones. Then we completely dug out the ruts and made sure the angle was a bit more sharp. Then we brought the logs in, and graded the project so that the top of the log wasn't much higher than the top of the road. Then we removed some of the road bed in front of the log so that the water would have a channel to run through. Then we cleared the end of the channel so the water would dissipate into the woods. This fall we were rewarded with a hard-pack rut-less road to drive down to get to our fall carrots. Mission accomplished.



FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

Diemand Farm (by Zoe Abram)

Anne Diemand has been collecting eggs since she needed a siblings' help to lift the basket. And that's not even her earliest farm memory. Diemand Farm is important to our farm shop: they produce our eggs, and raise our turkeys. Though the Diemand family has been in business since 1936, eggs and turkeys haven't always been their focus. Ann Diemand told me about an even older memory of standing on a pail beside her mother in their chicken slaughterhouse, when the farm raised roasting chickens. After her mother separated the guts, six-year-old Anne would clean the gizzards. The farm continued to transition: that processing room became the egg cleaning room when they became a commercial egg farm, and then became a commercial kitchen for their prepared foods business, and now also houses the farm's store. Today, Anne, Peter and Faith, three of twelve Diemand siblings, own the business in partnership. Though Diemand remains the second largest egg producer in the state, Diemand farm operates several farm enterprises.

The family always did a few different things: hay, cord wood, chicken barbeques, etc. When Anne, Peter and Faith returned to the farm, each with their own family, they looked for ways to increase income. An extension agent suggested fresh turkeys, so they went to a turkey producers meeting, and got excited. From 500 turkeys in 1989, the business has grown to 4,400 planned for 2014. The turkeys inspired a turkey pot pie enterprise, which puts to use turkeys with bruised legs or broken wings from the slaughter process. "But," Anne told me, "de-boning the legs of all those turkeys was a real drag." Anne roasted turkey legs for the garlic festival one year. People loved them! Now, the Diemands barbeque turkey legs for a half dozen festivals, and sell them fresh and frozen at their farm store.

Deciding what businesses to add and also to give up is a consensus-based process. The Diemands decreased their egg operation significantly, from 15,000 layers to 3,000. To make that big decision, each of the co-owners met separately with their niece Megan who "can focus and can listen." "We each talked about our dreams or interests in the future." The met together afterwards and decided. Decrease the eggs. Go for the sawmill they had each mentioned when meeting with Megan. While they have struggled at times with the sudden drop in cash flow from their egg business, the sawmill is doing well.

And the next generation? Many of Anne's siblings also work on the farm, but few of the younger Diemands do. "I don't think we can pay the kids what they need to survive in today – to build a house." For example, Anne once made more money working one day a week as a part time police officer in the Franklin County House of Corrections than she took home in her six days on the farm. The Diemand's have had meetings with the younger generation, and there is interest in the farm, but "we'll see," says Anne. "My nephew says when he retires he can afford to be a farmer." Talking with Anne, I'm struck by the way Diemand farm, again and again, demonstrates their management style: respond to changes as they come, keep what works, try new things when they need to for business or personal interest reasons. Next on the Diemand's "wish list:" a pavilion to host larger on-farm events, including their famous chicken barbeques! We can't wait to go to one once they have the pavilion, but for now we're excited to head to Wendell and visit their farm store for a turkey leg!



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“Apprentice,” con’t.

ing our irrigation, equipment and supplies, soil fertility, and plant care.

In addition to their specific areas of focus, all of our apprentices were integrated into the production of 250,000 lbs of vegetables; They were all farm shopkeepers, Boston-delivery drivers, and members of our harvest crew. All season long this on-the-job learning was supplemented through our participation in the CRAFT Program (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training), which centers around 10 farm visits. There they get a chance to see how different farmers solve similar problems, as well as create a peer group with the other 40 apprentices from the other 15 participating farms. In the fall, we also have weekly workshops where we go over a variety of farm business management topics such as budgeting, financial management, website development, crop planning, and task list creation, etc.

We are extremely grateful that our program continues to attract such high-level participants who bring their life experience, education, and passion to our farm. They trade us their labor for our information and we are very aware that we could NOT do much without them!

This year we also heard from:

Peter McLean & Tobin Porter-Brown who created Book and Plow Farm at Amherst College. **Aaron Shier** who is applying to Agriculture, Food, and Environment program at Tufts U. **Jasper Gardner** who worked at Next Barn Over, Hadley, MA. **Erin Roche** who is studying vegetable crops at UMaine. **Lisa McKeag** who works at UMASS extension in Amherst. **Kerry Manire** who expanded Pro-

vider Farm in Salem, CT. **Adan Martinez** who is nearly finished with Yale’s Enviro Grad School. **Danya Teitelbaum** who moved, re-established, and expanded Queens Greens Farm in Hadley MA. **Andy Szymanowicz** who also moved, re-established, and expanded Sol Food Farm in Ancramdale, NY. **Chris Babis** who sold his farm, moved to Albuquerque, had another baby (*River!*), and is going to UNM studying Water Resource Management while working at the Alimosa Land Institute. **Amy Smith** who continued Heart Beet Organic on Prince Edward Island. **Amy Cloud** who continued to run Three Rivers Farm in Elsau IL. **Marc Cesario** who sold a LOT of pork at Meeting Place Pastures in Cornwall, VT and had a baby (*Normandie!*). **Jeff Tober** who expanded Fernbrook Farm in Bordentown, NJ. **Casey Steinberg** who expanded and built a new wash facility at Old Friends Farm in Amherst, MA. **Paul Bucciaglia** who continued Fort Hill Farm in New Milford CT and had a baby (*Luca!*). **Su Wasseluk** who continued working as a Nurse Practitioner on Cape Cod, nearly paid off her loans, and met us on the beach in July! **Jenny Hausman** who expanded Piccadilly Farm in Winchester NH. **Kate Rossiter** who is now Jenny’s shareholder, lives in Northfield, MA, and had her 2nd baby (*Dylan!*). And **Don Zasada** who continued to run Caretaker Farm in Williamstown, MA.

