



BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

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NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2023

OUR FARM YEAR

Resiliency

Every season on the farm has its own unique tone and character. We may do virtually the same thing year after year but still every year is different. Amongst all the unique years, every once and awhile you get a year that really stands out - a year that feels particularly notable for various reasons, or at times for one single big reason. In retrospect, 2022 feels like a particularly distinctive year. Coming into our second season managing Brookfield Farm we had hoped for a smoother sea to sail the ship on but, as is often the case, things didn't go quite the way we had anticipated.

After an incredibly wet year in 2021, our prayers for drier weather apparently went a bit too far and in 2022, we found ourselves in the midst of a historic drought. The spring started out cold and windy as spring often does, but as the season progressed the lack of rain quickly became apparent. You will often hear farmers say 'a dry year is better than a wet year, since you can always add water but you can't take it away'. This is true, so long as you have ample irrigation. We are fortunate here at Brookfield to have good sources of water for most of our fields. With some creative crop plan rearranging combined with a lot of overtime hours spent moving irrigation lines and keeping pumps full of gas, we were able to survive the drought with no major losses.



A Rainbow Over The Pigs

Social distancing and mask mandates may be becoming a distant memory but the effects of the pandemic still linger both in the world and on the farm. It is undeniable that the pandemic changed many aspects of our lives in significant ways. As we start to find ourselves on the other side of things, we are still coming to terms with what that means for the farm. Most notably for the farm so has been the shifting of the labor landscape and not just for us, but nationally. Historically most of the work on the farm has been done by the apprentices, however this year we saw record low interest in the apprenticeship program.

While we were able to successfully hire two apprentices, both were students and left some major gaps in the labor landscape of the farm. Fortunately, we were not in need for very long and we were able to hire some incredible part time workers to help us fill out the farm crew. Many hands make light work, and there were certainly times this year when we didn't quite know how we would get it all done, but time and time again people came through when we needed them and we were able to keep the farm rolling right along.

Being agile and adaptable is essential for any farm to endure the test of time. This year was a wonderful illustration of how strong the Brookfield Farm community is and how resilient the farm is because of that.



Spring Brassica Going In



Harvest Morning

BROOKFIELD BY THE NUMBERS

Though 2022 proved to be a challenging production year due to the drought, we produced 218,120 pounds of food (up by 28% from 2021). Highpoints included excellent spring greens including spinach, lettuce and boc choy, excellent sweet spring beets and a Brookfield record for onion production. Our winter squash, fall beets, and rutabagas especially took the drought on the chin and saw lower than projected yields.

We sold 509 total summer share “units” serving 645 households. We projected an across the board downturn in post pandemic share sales due to a lot of societal movement in travel and a general reshifting of populations and general cooking fatigue which proved accurate and we budgeted accordingly. We oversold budgeted projections by 4%. Boston shares overall were down from 2021 but there continues to be increased interest and growth in Senior shares. There continues to be strong interest in the winter share and we sold out at 200 shares.



The Home Farm Looking Lovely

BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST (BFCT), INC.

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Leila Tunnell	Farm Educator
Bonnie Lathrop	Assitant Manager

BFCT NEWSLETTER MARCH 2023

Writer/Designer - Max and Kerry Taylor

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Farm Finances Strong!

The farm ended the year in a very strong financial standing. Total income was up by 9% due to higher than projected sales, new income streams (the Seedling sale) and an expanded annual fund. Expenses were up by 3% due to increases in labor costs and supplies. We were able to pay all of our loans and commitments for 2022 and had an overall net operating income up 41% from projected.

We have been spending the past two years evaluating and prioritizing the capital needs of the farm and only dedicated capital funds to making required equipment and infrastructure repairs and purchases leaving our capital fund at \$64,821. We expect to start drawing on this going forward as we address the prioritized infrastructure and equipment needs of the farm. Our balance sheet continues to show our strong financial position as our assets continue to grow by 5.8% and our liabilities are down by -4.4%.

Land Legacy Funds

Our land legacy funds from our 2021 campaign are held in an account earmarked for land purchasing. In 2022, we received additional pledged funds of \$19,042 bringing our account balance to \$426,702.



Harvesting Radishes

Annual Fund

While our CSA share fees cover the bulk of our operating budget for agricultural activities on the farm, Brookfield Farm does a lot more than just grow food. Everything else we do - community composting, outreach events, hosting college groups and elementary student visits, providing open space through our trail network - all these activities take resources from the farm and the annual fund helps to fund these activities.

This year we expanded our annual fund by spanning the giving window across the month of December and creating an emailed ask, regular emailed reminders and social media presence. These additional efforts benefited the campaign and we had record donations of \$11,058 for the month of December (the goal was \$7,000) from 96 donors.

Grants

This year the farm received several grants for infrastructure improvement. From the Harold Greenspoon Foundation, we received \$2,500 to improve our irrigation infrastructure which couldn't have been better timed given the record drought we had this year. These funds were put to fast work upgrading our drip irrigation systems and repairing our overhead systems.

We also received \$39,480 from the state of Massachusetts Food Security Infrastructure Grant program to build the cooler you will see standing in front of the barn now. This cooler increases our cooling capacity as we contend with climate change and serves as back up cooling to our current infrastructure making the farm more resilient.



Beautiful Baby Calf

FOOD ACCESS – Good food for All

At Brookfield Farm we believe everyone should have access to healthy food. We work in numerous ways to increase access to the farm in the community.

In 2022, we received \$10,000 from a private donor to trial a new program called the Donor Funded Food Access Fund. This program funds the farm to harvest, wash and pack excess produce the CSA can not absorb and get it to partner organizations who can distribute it.

We partnered with The Survival Center who used the donated produce in their kitchens and distributed it to their clients. The Survival Center received almost 4,0000 lbs of produce of a wholesale value of \$6,311. Our trial year was an overwhelming success and was an opportunity to sort out any kinks and to understand what donations serve the community best.

This program is a wonderful way to dovetail the resources of the Brookfield Community with the experience and distribution network of those operating in the field to get our produce into the hands of people who need it but can't access it through the CSA.

To strengthen access to our CSA, we continue to offer donor supported shares to self identified shareholders to help them meet their budgetary needs to secure a share. Brookfield Farm also participates in the state HIP program which matches federal SNAP dollars paid to local farms for produce. In 2022, 42 shareholders used this program to secure shares.



Jumping For Joy



Bonnie Plowing Warren Wright For The First Time

A New Year, A New Field

Warren Wright

2022 was the first year that we dipped the plow into the ground at our new fields on Warren Wright Road. In 2019, Brookfield Farm purchased 15 acres of prime vegetable soil only a mile away from the home farm, just down Hulst Road. For the next 3 years, the fields were put into fallow in order to transition them to being biodynamically managed. It is always exciting to begin growing in a new field and especially exciting when it is a field that the farm owns out right thanks to our 2021's Land Legacy Campaign.

Warren Wright was home to an entire season's worth of sweet corn as well as all of our winter squash. The fall brassicas were supposed to go there as well, but the irrigation system has yet to be installed and with the drought in full force we decided to move the brassicas to a field with water. The sweet corn did incredible, despite lacking in size at times due to the lack of rain. We lost a bit of corn to a black bear, but fortunately we only ran into it once when we were harvesting and it chose to run away pretty quickly.

The winter squash was happy at Warren Wright, although it too would have liked some more water. Although, compared to 2021 when all the squash melted due to an overabundance of rain, some yield loss due to it being too dry is quite alright with us. We harvested the winter squash with the help of an organic vegetable production class from UMASS.

Warren Wright was also home to field trips from the Amherst Public Schools in the spring where Lelia got to walk the kids through the fields and teach them about soil.

We have been working with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to design and install a well in 2023. We have big plans for Warren Wright for next season and seasons beyond!



Harvesting Winter Squash From Warren Wright



Butternut



Hazel And Bonnie Killing Weeds

A LIVING CLASS ROOM

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH AT BROOKFIELD FARM

Farmer Training

The apprenticeship program provides aspiring farmers with an intensive practical agricultural education and is the heart of our educational mission. Typically, apprentices spend a full season on the farm. With the major shift in the labor market, we saw a decrease in interest in the apprenticeship and offered it up to students who could not make the full season commitment.

We welcomed two apprentices Hazel Levey and Becca Cox this year. Both were students coming in for abbreviated seasons. They had limited experience in agricultural field work and they had crash courses on the farm systems upon their arrivals in early summer.

Hazel came to us in May after completing her freshman year studying Animal Science at UMASS. She arrived just in time to greet everyone at the Seedling sale. She quickly learned to drive our Landini and drove the transplanter for all our summer and fall



Hazel and Goblin The Cat



Getting Sweet Corn In The Ground

crops. Hazel proved to be a sharp tractor operator and also picked up the John Deer tractor to plow fields in preparation for fall crops. Hazel returned to school for the fall semester but we were delighted to see her each Saturday share day as she continued in her shop keeper roll.

Becca Cox came to us in mid-June after graduating from Wellesley College in Environmental Studies. Becca was trained up on the John Deer to drive the perfecta harrow to learn field preparation techniques for our late summer and fall crops. In August, Becca decided farm work was not for her and left Brookfield to pursue other interests.

CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance Farm Training) program

Brookfield Farm continues to be an active member in the CRAFT program, which hosts educational workshops for apprentices at each member farm. Member farms are responsible for a managing role in the organization and we commit to sending our apprentices to all workshops. This year we hosted a fall workshop on business planning and tractor systems.

We hosted a Holyoke Community College Sustainable Agriculture intern Sarah Fairbanks who joined us this summer to work alongside the crew and get practical experience in sustainable farming. Brookfield also hosted the UMASS Organic Vegetable production students for a farm tour and an afternoon of winter squash harvest-



All Hands On Deck For A Carrot Harvest

ing.

Former apprentice Leila Tunnell continues to serve as the farm education coordinator. She brings Amherst Elementary School students to the farm where their classroom lessons come to life. In addition to hosting student visits, Brookfield also raises the students' seedlings in our greenhouses to be planted out by the students in their school gardens.

Brookfield Farm hosted over 850 hours of volunteers this year. We welcomed a weekly Tuesday crew of volunteers in our greenhouse that completed much of our seedings as well as a Saturday group of youth. We hosted several field harvesting volunteer days and



Crafts Behind The Barn



Watermelons!

had lots of help with our wash, the Boston pack and post harvest tomato sorting. Larry Manire (Kerry's dad) continues to serve in the volunteer role of all around farm handy man, doing everything from rebuilding our accessible garden beds to adding bird netting to the porch ceiling to researching grant opportunities. In the spring, we hosted the fraternity Lambda Psi Epsilon who cleared the flower garden and raked the straw off all the strawberry beds.

We were thrilled Karen Romanowski returned to the farm as events coordinator. She brought with her a wealth of experience, her wonderful welcoming hosting abilities and fantastic cooking. Karen Tunnell joined bringing her creativity and experience as an art teacher and brought crafts for all ages to all of our events. Karen R. and Karen T. hosted 9 events this year starting with a lovely spring planting day and ending with the annual potato dig. Karen T. coronated the barn with a beautiful farm quilt painted by the Brookfield Farm community.

The farm hosted its first ever Seedling Sale in May. Thousands of seedlings went home to community member gardens and Karen T. organized a seedling planting activity for children.

With the pandemic subsiding, we saw the triumphant return of Art behind the Barn hosted by Rosie Pearson with thirteen artisans from our local community displaying their art. We also had our first in person (since the pandemic) Harvest Dinner hosted by the BFCT Board where we came together to eat farm food, celebrate the season together and thank Peter Littell for his long tenure on the Board with the Top Soil Award.

MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

The farm wouldn't work without all the wonderful people who make it work. This season, in addition to the apprentices, we had an absolute stellar crew of both part time and full time farmers out in the fields this year.

Bonnie Lathrop returned for her second season as Assistant Manager and once again proved why she is one of the farm's most valuable assets. Bonnie wears a lot of hats on the farm, she is an impeccable tractor operator, capable of driving every machine we own. She has her finger on the pulse in the greenhouse and harvest manages when Kerry isn't available. She helps train apprentices and wrangles volunteers and weeders. In addition to her tireless dedication to the farm, she is also an incredibly talented trail runner, finishing top 3 female in both races she ran last season. Oh and she somehow also finds the time to rock climb. We're thrilled Bonnie is returning in 2023.



Bonnie Changing Oil, Doing Basically Everything



Camille With A Nice Turnip

Camille Tahar joined us for the entirety of the 2022 season hailing all the way from South-west France. Camille showed up in the spring just when we were wondering how exactly we were going to accomplish anything without apprentices until after the season ended. She brought an incredible amount of light and joy to the farm. She spent some time in the farm shop on Thursdays late in the season and was always happy to take on any task we could throw at her.

In August we found ourselves unexpectedly shorthanded and were wondering how we were going to make it through the fall. A very untimely back injury put Max on the sidelines and things were starting to look a tad dire.

Enter The Fall Harvest Crew

We put out the call for help and were so fortunate to have that call answered. Emily Brozski, Jess Ladin and Ari Jewel all joined us for the end of August until the week of Thanksgiving. Farm work can be incredibly hard at times, so finding a group of people who are not only willing to do the work but willing to do so with smiles on their faces is always a great feeling. Ari, Jess and Emily fit into the farm seamlessly and after a few short days it felt like they had all been working here for months.



Harvesting Tomatoes



Jess, Ari, Camille, Bonnie and Emily Showing Off Their Brookfield Pride

New Faces on the Board – Hellos and Goodbyes

Brookfield Farm is guided by a dedicated volunteer Board that saw some big changes this year.

The Board welcomed four new members: Gillian Freeman, Elaine Fronhofer, Catherine Madden, and Erika Zekos. New officer appointments were also made: Jessica Wolff as President, Marcie Muehlke as Vice President, and Paris Boice as Clerk.

Thank You Peter!

We would like to extend a big thank you to Peter Litell for 25 years plus of service to Brookfield Farm. Peter has served as President of the Board for as long as we can remember and stepped down this year to make way for new leadership.

Peter has overseen the farm as it has grown from 200 member families to over 600, saw the farm through projects like building the main distribution barn, piloted the farm to huge budgetary growth and two capital campaigns and has been a stalwart supporter of the farm through thick and thin. We thank Peter for his guidance and vision over the years and for the welcoming support he offered us as we have settled in as the new managers of this farm.



Carrots!



THE BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

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SPECIAL THANKS

To Jason Edwards who makes all our hay and helps out with all the cow things and keeps the farm driveway sanded and salted in the winter.

To our farming neighbor Gordy Cook who cuts all our straw and supplies us with manure to make compost.

To the weeder crew, without them there would be no food: Abby, Asher, Alex, Becca, George, Johann, Layla, Lukas, Nolen, Silas and Thomas. Big special thanks to Sarah Kennedy who crushed her role as weeder leader.

To Abbe Vredenburg for keeping the books in order, the CSA sign ups organized and for her treasure trove of historical information to guide us through the transition years.

Thank you to all the volunteers who lent a hand this year including but not limited to: Scott Biales, Paris Boice, Karen Corrigan, Kathleen Holwell, UMASS Lamdas, Jessica Ladin and family, Larry Manire, to the Nicholson/Nuesslein Saturday crew, Roberta Lokjo, Sue Shenkman, Su Wasseluk, Katie and Chris Zobel and everyone unmentioned who came out on our volunteer days.

Thank you to our farm landlords and neighbors who tolerate the everyday workings of a sometimes noisy and smelly farm: Elaine Kenseth, Joanna and Victoria Hubbs, and neighbors on Hulst Rd. To the Snyder family, the Clay family, and Gray Family.

FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

With another season under our belts, we're feeling more at home here and ready to face whatever is to come. In a lot of ways 2022 was a tough year on the farm, but really that just makes us all the more proud of what the farm accomplished.

The world around us is changing: the climate is changing and what used to be normal may never be normal again. We have a tremendous amount of faith in the strength and resiliency of this farm and this community. We feel so fortunate to get to be a part of it and are looking forward to great things in 2023 and beyond!

