



# BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

PO BOX 227, AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS 01004 (413)253-7991

WWW.BROOKFIELDFARM.ORG INFO@BROOKFIELDFARM.ORG

## NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2024

### OUR FARM YEAR

#### When the wind shifts, adjust your sails

Going into our third year as managers of Brookfield Farm we had no idea what to expect. Our first two seasons had given us polar opposite extreme growing seasons. Our first season was a deluge of rain basically from start to finish and our second season was a drought of historic proportions. There is always going to be unknowns and unpredictability in any growing season. Reflecting on this previous season it is easy for us to only remember the bountiful harvest of fall carrots and the amazing storage cabbages. It's a combination of recency bias and our rose-colored glasses.

How quickly we forget that 2023 was another year of extreme weather, here on the farm and in our greater community. Our spring ended with very late and very hard frosts, which led us scrambling to protect our precious strawberries and blueberries. Wild fires in Canada left the valley blanketed in smoke for much of June, and with us wondering if it was safe to be outside. We then returned to the torrential down pours of our first season here. With the rain came unprecedented early summer flooding of the Connecticut, Mill, Deerfield, South and other rivers in our area. While our fields and crops weren't directly affected by flood waters, it pained us to see so many farms suffer catastrophic losses.



Outstanding in her field

Despite the adversity of another challenging growing season, Brookfield Farm not only survived, but thrived. With a couple of growing

seasons under our belt, we feel like we're finally hitting our stride. The crops were excellent and abundant, our crew was fabulous, and the farm felt vibrant and full of life with well attended events. We harvested a ton of food this year and our new external walk-in cooler was up and running, giving us extra space to store crops.

The world post-covid pandemic has shifted greatly. One of the biggest things we've witnessed is a seemingly ever shifting labor market. While things

are still surely in flux, 2023 saw us return to a bit of normalcy with two full time apprentices on the farm for the whole season. The two apprentices joined our assistant manager Bonnie, Kerry, myself and a proverbial army of part time workers, volunteers and weeders to ensure that the crops were planted, weeded and harvested all season long.

The world is changing all around us and we have no choice but to adapt and change with it. It is nice to know that even if we never have a 'normal' growing season again, we can still figure out ways to keep doing what we do by adjusting our approach and reshaping our thinking.



Spring Brassica Going In



Frosty Morning



## BROOKFIELD BY THE NUMBERS

Though many farms struggled in 2023 with heavy rains and flooding in our area, we were fortunate to be able to produce approximately 244,728 pounds of produce (up from 12.2% in 2022). Highpoints abounded and included strong spring offerings like bok choy, beets and broccoli, beautiful early fall broccoli, abundant onions and loads of pick your own cherry tomatoes. Our fall production of storage roots was especially strong. We did not go without injury due to the wet weather and our cucumber family crops were hit especially hard. We lost our watermelon crop due to disease as well as saw heavily reduced winter squash and cucumber yields. Our sweet potatoes were also in an especially wet field and saw reduced yields.

2023 Share sales were strong and we sold out at 527 summer shares and served 662 households. We expected an uptick in sales in 2023 due to everyone returning from post covid vacationing but budgeted for sales equal to 2022. Our hunch proved accurate and 2023 sales



A Perfect Field Of Fall Brassica

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

PO Box 227  
Amherst, MA 01004  
Phone: (413)253-7991  
Email: [info@brookfieldfarm.org](mailto:info@brookfieldfarm.org)  
Website: [www.brookfieldfarm.org](http://www.brookfieldfarm.org)



#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Marcie Muehkle, President  
Paris Boice, Vice President  
Phil Pettit, Treasurer  
Erika Zekos, Clerk  
Donald Allison  
Elaine Fronhofer  
Roberta Lojko  
Catherine Madden  
Jen Veshia

#### STAFF:

Max Taylor	General Manager
Kerry Taylor	General Manager
Abbe Vredenburg	Administrator
Leila Tunnell	Farm Educator
Bonnie Lathrop	Assitant Manager

#### BFCT NEWSLETTER APRIL 2024

Writer/Designer - Max and Kerry Taylor

The BFCT NEWSLETTER is published once yearly  
by the BFCT, Inc.

surpassed 2022 sales by 4.75%. Boston area shares held steady and were roughly equal to sales in 2022.

There continues to be strong interest in winter shares and 180 winter shares were sold meeting budget. Given the high production of storage crops, we also offered two one-off shares: the December holiday share and a Valentines share.

### Farm Finances Strong!

The farm ended the year in strong financial standing. We were able to continue to strive to reach our goal of increasing wages across the board and improving our infrastructure while showing income 6% higher than we projected due to strong share sales, strong fundraising efforts and an expanded Seedling Sale. Expenses were up slightly by .6% with materials and supplies higher than projected but general labor lower than projected. We were able to pay all of our loans and ended the year with a net operating income up 114% from projected.



Harvesting Morning

After two years of evaluating equipment and infrastructure needs, we began to address some immediate equipment needs and started to spend down our growing Capital Fund. We replaced our old harrow and mower vastly improving Max's quality of life by reducing repeated break downs and increasing our efficiency. We repaired our hay storage greenhouse which blew apart during the winter's polar vortex and added important wind bracing to improve the structural integrity of the greenhouse. We also faced some major tractor repairs replacing tires and rims and rebuilding transmissions and replacing head gaskets. In the late fall, our trusty plow truck failed and we purchased a new plow truck just before the snows flew. All these capital improvements left our Capital Fund strong at \$67,003. We will continue to work to spend this down as we continue to make prioritized capital improvements in the years to come.



## 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.

## Fundraising

While our CSA share fees cover the bulk of our operating budget for our agricultural activities on the farm, Brookfield Farm does a lot more than just grow food. Everything else we do – community composting, outreach events, and agricultural education – all these activities take resources from the farm and the annual fund helps to keep these activities going.

This year we continued to grow the annual fund and expand upon our success of 2022 by having December as our month of giving, repeated fundraising updates on email and social media. These efforts proved to be fruitful and we had our greatest yet Annual Fund of \$15,115 (surpassing our goal of \$12,000).

We also maintain two additional funds to support our work in food access and continue to fund raise to support this work. This year we added a donation button to all payments made through our website to fund our Donor Funded Share Fund. This fund helps families who need a little help bridging a short fall to make their share payments. We received \$1,141 in donations through online donations.

We also maintain the Donor Funded Food Access Fund which funds donations of produce we make to area food banks. Through our mug donation fundraiser, small donation tickets at the register and online donations on our website, \$2,308 was raised to support these efforts.

The Brookfield Farm community and the greater community has proven generous in supporting our goals to reach as many people as possible through the farm and create a thriving and vibrant community. Together we will keep our community strong.

## Grants

This year the farm received several grants for infrastructure improvements. From the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, we received \$2,500 for greenhouse improvements helping us improve our seedling quality.

We also received \$3,947 from the American Farmland Trust to purchase new water lines for watering our cattle and crop irrigation. These new lines replace old decaying and leaky watering lines, reducing failures and water loss and improving our efficiency in watering.

The USDA NRCS (Natural Resource Conservation Services) issued Brookfield Farm a grant of \$69,406 over the next 4 years to develop a well and irrigation practices at our new Warren Wright fields. These fields are some of our few very well-draining fields and adding irrigation will dramatically increase their production capabilities.

The Massachusetts Dept. of Agriculture Climate Smart Grant program issued us a grant of \$25,635 in the fall to purchase high efficiency refrigeration equipment to replace our old inefficient freezer and refrigerator units.

We also received a Massachusetts Cultural Council Arts Festivals grant for \$2,500 to hold a mural painting party. This mural will decorate our new cooler.

## FOOD ACCESS – Good Food for All

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

The Donor Funded Food Access Fund supports our food donation efforts. In 2023, we donated 8,395 lbs. of produce at a wholesale value of \$13,258. We again partnered with The Survival Center who used the produce in their kitchens and distributed it to their clients. We also grew our partnerships and number of pick up days to two per week and worked with Rachel's Table who helped expand our area of reach by bringing produce to agencies in Greenfield, Holyoke and Chicopee.

This program is a wonderful way to dovetail the resources of the Brookfield Community with the experience and distribution network of those already 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 to meet their budgetary needs to secure a share. In 2023, the fund helped 17 shareholders access shares. Brookfield Farm also participates in the state HIP program which matches federal SNAP dollars paid to local farms for produce. In 2023, 30 shareholders used this program to secure shares.



Radish Harvest





Bob Gray



Bob Hoisting The Harrow

## In Memoriam

Early this spring we were saddened to learn of the passing of Bob Gray. It is hard to state the impact Bob has had on Brookfield Farm over the years. Bob has been our land lord since 2001, leasing the farm 10 acres of some of the best vegetable land we cultivate. Bob Gray is the best metal worker, fabricator and mechanic I have ever met. There was nothing we brought to Bob that he couldn't fix. No problem he couldn't solve. More than just fix what was broken he could invent and fabricate solutions to problems both big and small.

Bob showed us tremendous kindness and generosity in the years that we have been at Brookfield. He always seemed happy to help, to take whatever mess of twisted farm equipment and broken metal we brought him and straighten it out for us. Bob seemed to fully understand the stress and uncertainty implicit in farming and did what he could to keep us rolling. He was generous with his time and free with his advice.

Bob was incredibly humble and a very funny individual, truly one of a kind. I feel grateful that I had the opportunity to know him. We will miss Bob tremendously and feel so much gratitude for how much he has done for the farm. Truly, South Amherst will not be the same without him.



One Of The Many Tools Bob Built For The Farm



## A LIVING CLASS ROOM

Education and outreach lays at the heart of Brookfield Farm. Our goal has always been to be more than a farm that grows great food. For over 30 years Brookfield Farm has been training the next generation of farmers (including current manager Kerry) through our apprenticeship program. We have welcomed countless school groups onto the farm over the years to give children the opportunity to see where their food comes from and witness the cycle of produce to compost to soil and then back to produce. We welcome Umass's Organic Vegetable Production class to the farm in the fall to show them hands-on how we produce vegetables. And perhaps most dear to our hearts, we welcome hundreds of families onto the farm to pick up their CSA share, to smell, touch and see the farm each and every week.

### Education and Outreach at Brookfield Farm

Brookfield Farm is a place of multi-generational learning. In the fall, we again partnered with the Amherst Elementary School Garden Program (with former apprentice Leila Tunnell at the helm) to give every elementary student in the Amherst schools a farm experience. This year approximately 154 students visited the farm with 14 educators to learn about nutrient cycling. They were able to visit the cows and pick a bunch of kale to bring home with information about preparation for a meal.



**The Great Potato Dig**

We also integrate with our local institutions of higher learning. In early summer, we hosted two UMASS student farmers who did on farm practicums. In the fall, we had the UMASS Organic Vegetable Production class for a tour and then they got their hands dirty harvesting our bumper potato crop. The farm also hosted UMASS bumble bee researchers studying how sunflowers affect bee health.

Brookfield hosted over 1,374 hours of volunteers this year. We welcomed a Tuesday crew of volunteers who seeded virtually all of our seedlings. In the spring, the Marcotte family renovated our gardens in the front of our barn and kept it tidy all season long. The Deerfield Academy farm service crew came to the farm in the fall on Wednesdays to help out with the fall harvests. We had University groups including the UMASS Lambdas, Amherst Track and Field and the UMASS Airforce reserve pitch in. The Kushnrik family, newly arrived from the Ukraine worked with us weeding crops and on farm maintenance. Larry Manire (Kerry's dad) continued to serve the roll as all around handy man. We had a spring clean up where our Board of Directors cleaned up around the barns and Board member Roberta created our brand new little library. In addition, volunteers like Leda Cook, Kirk Kim and Victoria Lau joined us on tasks all over the farm.

We were so delighted to have Carol Wood and Karen Tunnell as event coordinators this year. They hosted 9 events this year starting the year with a spring planting day and ending it with a potato dig and did a great job bringing in additional volunteers to help. Karen Tunnell engaged all ages in arts and crafts activities at each event.

The farm hosted its second ever Seedling Sale in May and we sent home thousands of seedlings to new homes. We saw great growth in interest in the seedling sales and brought in lots of new faces to the farm. Kids of all ages were invited to plant their own seedlings to take home.

Art Behind the Barn returned again this year and it was bigger then ever with many new vendors displaying and selling their beautiful arts. We ended the farm season with our Harvest Dinner hosted by the BFCT Board where we came together to eat farm food and celebrate the season together.



**Cabbage!**



## Farmer Training

The apprenticeship program has been going strong since the earliest days of the farm. This was the 29th season of apprentices at Brookfield Farm. Training the next generation of farmers has been one of the driving pillars of our mission. In fact, it has been so successful that amongst the many former Brookfield Farm apprentices who have gone on to manage their own farms, many of their own apprentices have also started farms. We have met more than one young farmer who has told us they are a 'grandchild' of Brookfield Farm.

In continuing with this strong tradition, this year we welcomed two new apprentices to the farm. One of the best things about the apprenticeship program is that it brings in people from all sorts of backgrounds with diverse experiences and interests. We have had apprentices with years of agriculture experience and apprentices who have never set foot on a farm before. This year we brought together two apprentices with a very different personal history with Brookfield Farm.

Ryan Dinger joined us as a first-year apprentice but it was not Ryan's first time working at Brookfield. Born and raised in nearby



Getting Ready For The Plant Sale



Danielle and Ryan

Hadley, MA, Ryan is a veteran of the Brookfield Farm weeder crew. Starting out on the weeder crew at the age of 14, Ryan was one of the youngest weeders ever as well as the first ever (to my knowledge at least) weeder turned apprentice. Ryan was an invaluable force on the farm this year. Operating the John Deere 2355 and doing all the heavy primary tillage in the spring, Ryan spent hours getting fields plowed and harrowed in preparation for planting. When he wasn't driving tractors Ryan brought his high energy enthusiasm to every aspect of the farm. We are delighted that Ryan will be staying on and joining us for 2024!

Danielle Desir made her way to Brookfield Farm from New York City after deciding she needed a change and wanted to pursue agriculture. There is a fair amount of uncertainty to moving to a new place, especially when the contrast is as big as going from NYC to Amherst MA. Danielle navigated the transition seamlessly and did a fantastic job of exploring western Mass and integrating herself into the community. She drove the Landini, steering the ship for all of the mechanical transplanting on the farm. Danielle was a steady force on the farm, taking care of a ton of tasks. Notably, she quickly became a deer fence expert, which was key for saving our fall crops. While we are sorry to see Danielle go, we are overjoyed that she isn't going far. She will be continuing her agriculture education at the Food Bank Farm in Hadley.





All Hands On Deck For A Onion Harvest

**CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance Farm Training) program**

Brookfield Farm continues to be an active member in the CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance Farm Training) 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 are excited for some big changes to the CRAFT program for 2024 as for the first time, we start to open up workshops to our broader agricultural community as we work to revitalize the program.



Seeding Lesson





## MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

The farm wouldn't work without all the wonderful people who make it happen. Every season, in addition to the apprentices, we have a wonderful crew of people on the farm day in and day out making sure things are planted, harvested and weeded on time.

We were lucky enough to have Bonnie Lathrop return for her third season as Assistant Manager. Bonnie proves her worth day in and day out on the farm and this season was no different. We ask a lot of Bonnie and she always delivers. She drives tractors, manages the farm shop, makes sure the greenhouse is humming along and helps train the apprentices. She has put the farm first more times than we could ask her to, including this year when she tore her ACL while trail running and elected to wait and have surgery after the farm season ended. We are very pleased that Bonnie and her surgically repaired ACL will both be joining us for another season.



The Weeders Making The Most Of A Moist Field



Seeding In The Greenhouse



Bonnie!

Emily Brozski returned for her second season as a part time worker and took care of the farm shop on Saturday and helped out with field work a few days a week. Liam O'Conner stayed on from the weeder crew to help us get our bumper fall harvest in too. We also had a special guest Philemon Terer hailing all the way from Kenya helping out in the fall when he wasn't running marathons.

One of the most vital components to our success is our indomitable weeder crew. The Brookfield Farm weeder crew is the stuff of legends and while it is made up of individuals, they all coalesce together to form a multi-headed, many limbed weed killing machine. Hand weeding can be very dull and tiresome work but we're always impressed by the weeder crew's ability to keep themselves entertained and smiling even on the hottest days in the weediest crops. Becca Nicholson was at the helm of the weeder crew this year as weeder leader, bringing a great positive leadership style to the group. We extend a great big thank you and round of applause to the weeder crew this year.





Pumpkin Picking!

## New Faces on the Board – Hellos and Goodbyes

Brookfield Farm is guided by a dedicated volunteer Board. Thank you to Gillian Freeman for her service on the Board as she stepped down this summer. Jessica Wolf completed her term as President and on the Board. Thank you Jessica for your many years on the Board, supporting the farm through many changes and welcoming us as new managers here on the farm. Marcie Muehkle moved up from Vice President duties to assume Board President duties in 2024. Paris Boice will move from clerk duties to assume Vice President duties (thank you Paris for all of your great clerking!) and Erica Zekos assumes the Clerkship.



The Board Of Directors



Kohlrabi





**THE BIODYNAMIC FARMLAND  
CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.**

P.O. BOX 227  
AMHERST, MA 01004  
WWW.BROOKFIELDFARM.ORG  
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT  
BULK MAIL  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
AMHERST, MA  
PERMIT NO.237



### SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Jason Edwards, neighbor extroid-inaire, who makes all our hay and is an all-around great neighbor.

To our farming neighbor Gordy Cook who cuts our straw and is always ready with cow advice.

To Abbe Vredenburg, our bookkeeper and administrator and the brain of the office who keeps everything going behind the scenes.

Thank you to all the volunteers, who lent a hand this year.

Special thank you to our farm landlords and neighbors who tolerate the everyday workings of a sometimes noisy and smelly farm. Thank you to the Snyder family, the Clay family and the Gray family.

### FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

I used to think the only thing we could be certain of in farming is that nothing is ever certain. Since coming to Brookfield Farm, while we have faced a lot of uncertainty in terms of weather, pests and other forces outside of our control, we have also experienced an incredible and steadfast amount of support from our community.

We are so happy and grateful to be here and so happy and grateful that you're all here as well. It's impossible to predict what the future will hold for the farm but we are so excited to find out!

