Growing New Farmers

**2 More SAgE Farm Leases Signed, 2 Plots Still Available**

There are now six farms in the Foodshed Alliance’s Sustainable Agriculture Enterprise (SAgE) program on two locations in northwest New Jersey. SAgE is an innovative program that makes 10-year affordable leases of preserved farmland available to farmers that are committed to natural and organic practices.

Our two newest farms are Seek-No-Further Fruit Farm, which will grow organically certified tree fruit, berries, and vegetables to retail consumers, restaurants and wholesale distributors on nine acres, and Lionshead Bee Farm, which will assist in pollinating its neighboring farms while producing honey products. They are on the Sussex County SAgE site at 290 Route 206 South in Andover. They join the Sussex County Community College School of Agriculture Student Farm, the Munsee Three Sisters Medicine Farm, and Dark Earth Farm. Bread Lock Botanicals is our sixth SAgE farm and is located on our Warren County site in Stewartville.

There are two plots still available at the Sussex location (8.6 acres and 11 acres). Applications for a SAgE plot are available at FoodshedAlliance.org/SAgE.

The SAgE program was created to make preserved farmland accessible and affordable to emerging and expanding organic farm businesses. While New Jersey has the second most expensive farmland in the country, it has preserved a higher percentage (29%) of its farmland than any state in the country.

Through the SAgE program, the Foodshed Alliance works in partnership with organizations that preserve farmland such as the Ridge and Valley Conservancy and County of Warren and acts as the linchpin connecting preserved farmland and sustainable farmers who want to grow healthy food. We are currently looking to expand the program and we are looking for new partners and sites.

In addition, thanks to support from the Franklin Parker grant from the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, we will work to make sure communities of color have full access to the program’s opportunities by assessing the needs of these communities, adding SAgE sites that would meet those needs, and publicizing the opportunities and recruiting farmers in communities of color.

For more information on the SAgE program, contact eric@foodshedalliance.org for details.
As Need for Services Skyrocket, LocalShare ‘Works Smarter’

Not only is food insecurity way up this year due to unemployment spurred by the pandemic, but there is less surplus farm food this year (farm sales are strong) and fewer gleaning volunteers (due to social distancing). “To meet the increased demand, we realized we had to ‘work smart’ to distribute larger quantities of food more efficiently,” says Christine Parada, LocalShare coordinator.

LocalShare worked with many social-service partners to set up several free Pop-Up Produce Markets in communities of need. “These markets were extremely well-received and people so appreciated being able to select and take home just-picked nutrient-dense produce,” Parada said.

While LocalShare continues to glean and deliver to food pantries throughout seven counties, we are making increasing use of aggregation sites where pantries can come to pick up food. Currently, we have use of a refrigerated unit at Sussex County Community College and warehouse space in Franklin Township.

Thanks to the LocalShare SOS Fund organized after the pandemic hit, we’ve been able to supplement gleaned food donated by farms with food purchases from farms and the food bank. In addition, Community Advisory Boards of Newton Medical Center and Hacketts-town Medical Center granted LocalShare $20,000 to purchase food for distribution to those in need.

We are extremely grateful to all donors, farms, volunteers, and social service agencies who help make this work possible.

Newly Launched Food Hub Pilot Facilitates $8,000 in Farm Sales

Since launching in July, a pilot food hub project has been connecting rural and urban farms in northern New Jersey with urban communities and institutions to increase access to healthy local food. As of the end of October, the hub has facilitated $8,000 in farm sales and has served more than 250 customers in the greater Newark area.

The Foodshed Alliance, which published a Food Hub Feasibility Study in 2018, partnered with Urban Agriculture Cooperative (UAC), a grassroots nonprofit based in Newark, to create the pilot project. The Foodshed Alliance enlisted eight farms in northwestern NJ to supply farm food for the pilot.

Several urban farms and community gardens in the Newark area also supply the hub. Each week, urban customers order online and UAC places aggregated orders with participating farms. Our rural farm partners then deliver their food hub produce to a central aggregation point, currently Longmeadow Farm in Hope, where it is picked up by UAC and taken to Newark. There the food is sorted for delivery to five distribution points in Newark and East Orange, where customers come to pick up their food. Approximately 30% of customers use nutrition benefits, such as SNAP and WIC.

“As our Food Hub Feasibility Study showed, the infrastructure that gets local farm food to local communities no longer exists,” said Kendrya Close, executive director, Foodshed Alliance. “Through this pilot, we are working with rural and urban farmers who are looking to increase sales and who are sensitive to the food-access mission of feeding underserved urban consumers. Our partner, UAC, is doing a tremendous job organizing and staffing distribution, reconnecting the logistical linkages between supply and demand.”
New Jersey Ranks #1 For Addressing Loss of Farmland

First, the good news: According to American Farmland Trust’s recently released multi-year study, “Farms Under Threat: The State of The States,” New Jersey ranks first in the nation for implementing policies and programs to stem the loss of farmland. The study also found 61% of New Jersey’s farmland is considered ‘nationally significant’ land that can reliably produce abundant yields for many decades to come if farmed sustainably, compared to 39% considered nationally significant in the lower 48 states.

New Jersey earned the top spot in the ranking due to its long and impressive record of preserving farmland under the State’s Farmland Preservation Program, administered by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC). To date, New Jersey’s Farmland Preservation Program has resulted in the permanent protection of over 2,600 farms, accounting for more than 237,000 acres – or roughly one-third of all farmland in the state – and has made a bigger financial investment in farmland protection than any other state in the country.

Now, the bad news: New Jersey also ranks 3rd among states with the most threatened agricultural land (Texas is #1 and North Carolina #2), evidencing the continued need for a strong Farmland Preservation Program. Between 2001 and 2016, New Jersey lost 70,862 acres of farmland to urban high density or low-density residential land use. Notably, 55% of farmland converted in New Jersey became low-density residential land – a new category identified by AFT which includes housing subdivisions, individual housing spread out along rural roads, and agricultural land surrounded by existing development. Low-density residential land “compromises opportunities for farming and ranching” by driving up land prices, and threatening generational transfer of farmlands.

“We applaud New Jersey’s efforts to protect its farmland and keep farmers on it,” said Kendrya Close, executive director, Foodshed Alliance. “But the high cost of New Jersey farmland makes it difficult for farmers to secure land, and more needs to be done to encourage regenerative practices and increase resilience to climate change. That’s why we created our Sustainable Agriculture Enterprise program offering 10-year affordable leases on preserved farmland to farmers that are committed to natural and organic practices.”

Join the Foodshed Alliance
and support our work to build a stronger, more resilient local food system.

I would like to make a one-time gift of:

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I would like to make a monthly tax-deductible gift of $_______

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Please make checks payable to Foodshed Alliance • P.O. Box 713 • Blairstown, NJ 07825

Donations can also be made online at FoodshedAlliance/donate.

Foodshed Alliance (EIN 27-2834150) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Your donation is tax deductible.
The Foodshed Alliance began in 2001 as a program of Genesis Farm, Inc. a nonprofit ecological learning center in Blairstown, NJ, to work towards creating a self-sustaining rural economy — based on the production and sale of local foods — to preserve the fertile soils, pristine streams, wooded hills, dairy and crop farms, and historic villages of northwest New Jersey.

In 2010, the Foodshed Alliance incorporated as an independent nonprofit and eventually became a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization. Beginning with volunteers and part-time employees, we increasingly tackled issues to help rebuild a self-sustaining rural economy that values the health of our food, our families and our land.

Today, with six full- and part-time employees, the Foodshed Alliance works at the intersection of food, farming and the environment in northern and central New Jersey, where 5.8 million people live. Our strategy is to work as a catalyst or linchpin organization creating a statewide network of partnerships to address and take action on issues in agriculture, conservation and local food access.

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**Milestones**

**Education**

Educating people about rebuilding a healthy local food system has been front and center at the Foodshed Alliance. Over the years, we’ve hosted hundreds of people at dozens of educational events, including a GMO panel discussion, film screenings, book clubs, cooking demos, TedX viewing parties, and conferences and workshops.

**Farmers’ Markets**

Helping local farms thrive and providing access to local food has been an ongoing goal of the Foodshed Alliance. We have launched a number of farmers’ markets in the region, including a virtual farmers’ market—which was way ahead of its time. While the virtual market and the Newton market are no longer open, both the Sparta and Morris County markets are still in operation, now run by organizations closer to home. The Blairstown Farmers’ Market has just finished its 13th season. Over the years, we estimate these markets generated more than $4,000,000 into our local food economy.

- Blairstown Farmers’ Market (2008 – 2020)
- Virtual Farmers’ Market (2012 – 2013)

**LocalShare**

In 2012, we realized that local farms often had surplus food while many, many people in our communities went hungry. We responded by holding “Pay What You Can” LocalShare Community Dinners, where we used surplus food from farms, prepared by some of the region’s best chefs, served by volunteers, to guests from all walks of life who “paid what they can.” At one of these dinners, we had so much surplus produce we put it out for people to take home. The response was dramatic! It was clear that food-insecure people needed and wanted farm-fresh food!
Land Trust Partnership Series

In 2016, the Foodshed Alliance began collaborating with the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the NJ Land Trust Network to hold a series of gatherings to discuss issues surrounding local food, farming and conservation. In six gatherings over three years, land trusts, agricultural nonprofits, government officials, farmers and others explored issues and brainstormed solutions. Two initiatives, Farmland Advisors New Jersey and the Sustainable Agriculture Enterprise program, grew directly out of these discussions.

Farmland Advisors New Jersey

To address land-access challenges for farmers, the Foodshed Alliance worked with American Farmland Trust to bring together a statewide network of 15 agriculture professionals to participate in the Farmland Advisors New Jersey program. The group completed a year of training to help farmers successfully access farmland. The group is in the process of developing an outreach plan in order to service the community effectively.

Green Drinks

In 2014, we realized that farmers were so busy, they rarely had the opportunity to meet socially, learn from each other, and network about what they have in common. We borrowed the “Green Drinks” concept from the environmental community and launched our own Green Drinks: special gatherings at local restaurants where farmers and those interested in the local food movement can get together in an informal setting. Unfortunately, this program has been curtailed due to the pandemic, but we look forward to gathering again soon!

River Friendly Farms

In 2014, the Foodshed Alliance partnered with North Jersey RC&D to bring the River Friendly Farm program to northern New Jersey. The River Friendly Farm Program recognizes farmers that use environmentally friendly farming practices to help protect water resources.

Regional Foodshed Resiliency Plan

In 2014, the Foodshed Alliance received funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to do a comprehensive report on the state of northern New Jersey’s foodshed. The year-long research project culminated in publishing the Regional Foodshed Resiliency Plan in 2015, which analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to our local food system. Since then, this report has informed and clarified our work, putting our focus on critical issues facing our local food system: land access for farmers, local food distribution, access to healthy food for all, regardless of means, and climate change. It was a basis for collaboration with groups, businesses, academics and individuals all over the state.

SAgE

The Foodshed Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Enterprise (SAgE) program is designed to address one of the biggest challenges to New Jersey farmers—access to affordable farmland. Through this program, which launched in 2018, the Foodshed Alliance works with land trusts that hold deed-restricted farmland and facilitates farmers’ access to affordable 10-year lease agreements, which allows them to invest in infrastructure and the long-term improvement in soil health, critical to farmers using organic methods. There are currently two SAgE sites in two counties providing farmland to six new farm operations.

Food Hub

In 2018, the Foodshed Alliance completed a feasibility study for a northern New Jersey food hub. The study concluded that a food hub that aggregates and distributes farm food could help strengthen the farm industry in New Jersey by giving farmers easy access to urban and institutional buyers to fill the need for locally grown, fresh healthy food. This summer, the Foodshed Alliance helped launch a pilot food hub connecting rural and urban farms in northern New Jersey with urban communities in Newark. As of the end of October, the food hub has generated more than $8,000 in local food sales.
Networking to Protect New Jersey’s AG Interests

In 2017, the Foodshed Alliance joined with the national nonprofit Environmental Working Group to connect with New Jersey farmers, agricultural groups, land trusts, conservation groups, social service agencies and anti-hunger advocates to form consensus on what they wanted to see in the 2018 Farm Bill and to formulate a plan to inform New Jersey legislators of these priorities. We met with the New Jersey Congressional Delegation in Washington and New Jersey to educate them on the importance of passing a fair and equitable Farm Bill.

Climate Change

One of the recommendations in the Regional Foodshed Resiliency Plan was to increase organic and regenerative farming to support the soil’s ability to reverse climate change. Rebuilding the soil and sequestering carbon hold great promise to create resilience to climate change, and it is a goal of our efforts in increasing the number of emerging and expanding farm enterprises.

Farm-to-Fork Dinners and Wine Festivals

Early on, we committed to both support local farms and showcase their incredible products in our fundraising efforts. Since 2007, the Foodshed Alliance has partnered with premiere local chefs and farms to create our Farm-to-Fork Dinners and Wine Festivals. We are so grateful to the farms, chefs, volunteers, sponsors and, of course, attendees!

Andre’s Restaurant/Lakeside Dining (2013-2016)
A Toute Heure (2013)
Mohawk House (2012)
Sweet Jane’s (2010)
Donaldson Farms (2007-2009)

This Couldn’t Be Done Without You!

This work couldn’t be done without support from those who share our dreams for a healthy food system that nourishes our bodies, provides good livings for our hard-working farmers, and keeps our soil, air and water clean. We can do this work only because we have support from hundreds of individuals, groups, businesses, foundations and government agencies. We are so grateful for your help to rebuild our food system based on our values—one that is local, sustainable, fair, humane and healthy. Together, we can impact our future.