

FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Cultivating for Community

A Regenerative Farming and Education Initiative on the Food Bank Farms



Introduction

Cultivating for Community (CFC) practices regenerative farming methods such as minimal-till farming, plant diversity and companion planting. CFC staff and volunteers grow and harvest organic vegetables that are donated to the Food Bank's member food pantries and meal sites. CFC also educates volunteers and students on regenerative farming, nutrition, food security and the local farm economy.

2024 Accomplishments

- 11,000+ lbs. of organic vegetables were donated to five member food pantries in Amherst, Chicopee and Springfield
- 470 enthusiastic volunteers contributed 1,514 invaluable hours

- 301 students participated in 10 field trips from area schools (Springfield, Chicopee, Amherst Regional, Greenfield, Hadley, Sunderland, Deerfield Academy)
- Launched an incubator for emerging farmers, starting with one farmer who grew vegetables on one acre with access to CFC's irrigation system, greenhouse, barn, and technical support
- Contracted an emerging farmer apprentice to work alongside the CFC team
- Made 48 new planting beds (50 and 100 feet), increasing our growing area from 1.3 to 2 acres (about 1.25 Manhattan city blocks)
- Erected two "caterpillar" greenhouses, purchased a tractor, increasing productivity
- Built one pavilion improving volunteer and visitor experience



**Cultivating for
COMMUNITY**
A FOOD BANK FARMS INITIATIVE



Our **farm-to-school partnership with Springfield and Chicopee Public Schools** has enabled students to gain a deeper appreciation for and understanding of where some of the food they eat comes from. Partner farmers Joe Czajkowski and Gideon Porth sell a portion of their harvest grown on the Food Bank Farm to these schools. (They rent a total of 30 acres of farmland alongside CFC on the same Food Bank Farm.) In 2024, combined, they provided more than 20,000 lbs. of organic vegetables to the Food Bank in lieu of cash rent. Adding this to the CFC harvest, more than 30,000 lbs. of organic vegetables from this Food Bank Farm were provided to people living with food insecurity.

New in 2025

CFC will expand the incubator for emerging farmers to foster equity in the food economy through farm leasing and apprenticeship opportunities. We will lease farmland to a second emerging farmer and recruit our second CFC apprentice!

Case for Support

The Food Bank is committed to providing direct, consistent, and comprehensive food assistance to households experiencing food insecurity when and where they need it. To end hunger, the Food Bank acknowledges it must confront its causes, which are numerous and complex. For example, we know that black and brown communities disproportionately do not have access to and cannot afford local vegetables (much less organic) and especially culturally-responsive food. At the same time, farmers of color do not have access to farmland to grow food for their communities. According to the [2017](#)

“COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY IS A CONDITION IN WHICH ALL COMMUNITY RESIDENTS OBTAIN A SAFE, CULTURALLY ACCEPTABLE, NUTRITIONALLY ADEQUATE DIET THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM THAT MAXIMIZES COMMUNITY SELF-RELIANCE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.”

[Massachusetts Agricultural Census](#), 97% of all farmers in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are white.

Through this initiative, leveraging the assets of the Food Bank Farm, the Food Bank seeks to partner with black and brown communities to strengthen **community food security**:

We envision a thriving Food Bank Farm where emerging farmers with food insecurity experience who wish to establish viable farm businesses can learn about minimal-till farming, lease farmland and benefit from the farm’s other infrastructure (i.e. irrigation, equipment, cooler, barn, greenhouse, security) and collective mentorship at an early stage of their business development. We envision farmers growing nutritious vegetables to sell to their communities that they know best and contributing to healthy, food secure households and communities living with dignity.

To achieve this vision, we have partnerships with other important local institutions like UMass School of Agriculture, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture, and the Northeast Organic Farmers Association – Massachusetts Chapter.

Ultimately, we envision partnering with the Commonwealth and local land trusts, like Kestrel Land Trust, to assist these emerging farmers to purchase their own farmland in the Connecticut River Valley. This way, farmland on the Food Bank Farm can be made available for more emerging farmers to develop their farm businesses and begin the process anew. According to the same [2017 Massachusetts Agricultural Census](#), between 1997 and 2017, almost 60,000



acres of farmland were converted to other land uses and average farm size declined from 130 to 79 acres. Protecting farmland is imperative to achieve **equitable** community food security.

In 2020, the Kestrel Land Trust helped us purchase our second farm in Hadley and place it under an Agriculture Preservation Restriction by securing investments from the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture and the Town of Hadley. The Food Bank secured the remaining funds to purchase it and make significant infrastructure improvements over the last few years with support from MDAR, other private foundations, and generous private donors.

Addressing Climate Change

Climate change is real and it is already adversely impacting global and local food economies. Industrial agriculture is depleting topsoils and polluting land, waterways and groundwater, rendering it unsustainable in the future. Minimal-till regenerative farming is one solution to reverse this trend that relies on local, small-scale, decentralized yet highly productive farming in terms of yields per acre. It also sequesters carbon far more than conventional agriculture because it minimally tills the topsoil.

According to [The New England State Food System Planners Partnership's 2023 Massachusetts State Brief](#):

"A regional approach to food system resilience is both an investment in our shared future and an insurance policy against future risks. A regional

approach to food system resilience means that we work collectively to adapt, expand, and fortify New England's food production and distribution systems to ensure the availability of adequate, affordable, and culturally appropriate food for all who call New England home." (page 2)

This multi-state partnership has adopted the New England Feeding New England goal of six New England states to provide 30% of their food from regional farms and fisheries by 2030. In the Massachusetts State Report, four priority areas are presented of which three are incorporated into our vision for Cultivating for Community, the Food Bank Farm and the Food Bank's commitment to preserving farmland and supporting emerging farmers in the Connecticut River Valley:

- Significantly increase purchases of Agricultural Preservation Restrictions to permanently protect more farmland, as identified in multiple state plans
- Increase investments in production infrastructure
- Strengthen relationships between racially and geographically diverse communities, as well as between all sectors of the food system, to gain trust, share expertise and build momentum for food system change (page 16)



Check out our latest
Farm to Table video!





Financial Goal

Our goal is to raise at least \$237,000 in 2025 and an additional \$1.3M by 2028 to achieve our vision. **We invite you to invest in Cultivating for Community to turn our vision into reality!**

	FY25 Budget	FY25 Secured	FY25 Balance
Operating	\$323,640	\$87,000	\$236,640
Apprenticeship	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$0
Equipment	\$30,800	\$30,800	\$0
Total	\$389,440	\$152,800	\$236,640

	FY26	FY27	FY28	3-Year Total
Operating	\$383,767	\$394,767	\$406,610	\$1,184,647
Apprenticeship	\$36,050	\$37,132	\$38,245	\$111,427
Total				\$1,296,074