



NEWTON COMMUNITY FARM

2023 ANNUAL REPORT and

2024 BUSINESS PLAN



Newton Community Farm
303 Nahanton Street
Newton, MA 02459
617-916-9655
www.newtoncommunityfarm.org

This report is dedicated to NCF'S former Executive Director, Sue Bottino, in gratitude for her four years of outstanding leadership!



Sue assisting with the testing of NCF's new solar energy array on the barn. As with so many other initiatives at the Farm, Sue was instrumental in securing funding and bringing that project to fruition.

ABOUT NCF

In 2005, the City of Newton acquired the historic Angino farmstead, the last working farm in Newton for use as a community farm. The City used Community Preservation Act funds to buy the farm with a conservation restriction held by Newton Conservators. The nonprofit Newton Community Farm, Inc (NCF) has operated the farm since its inception in 2006 under a license agreement with the City and the oversight of the City's Farm Commission. The current license expires March 2, 2031.

Board of Directors:

Officers

Co-Presidents	Paul Holt, Dede Vittori
Co-Treasurers	Barbara Seal, Madelyn Sorenson
Co-Clerks	Laura Bishop, Claire Caine

Directors

Linda Chafets, Deborah Hall, Marietta Joseph, Peter Roaf, Mindy Sieber, Michael Spalding

Year-Round and Key Staff:

Executive Director	Sue Bottino (until 11/1/23)
Director of Administration and Programs	Allyson MacKenna (started in Oct 2023)
Farm Manager	Greg Maslowe
Assistant Grower	Andrea Egan

Mission:

The mission of Newton Community Farm is to engage a vibrant community in sustainable agriculture and best environmental practices on the historic Angino farm.

Engagement:

- Education
- Access to local produce
- Volunteering
- Public access

Core values:

- Environmental Sustainability
- Community Involvement
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Joy

Guiding principles:

- Think globally, act locally.
- Think long-term, act now.
- Lead by example.

Our nonprofit organization strives to benefit the community by:

- Providing locally-grown produce through our community supported agriculture (CSA) program, our onsite farm stand, Newton Farmers' Market, and donations to local food pantries.
- Educating the public about sustainable practices for agriculture, land use, and stewardship of other natural resources through hands-on classes, workshops, internships, and volunteer opportunities.
- Preserving Newton's last working farm as a historic site and valuable open space.
- Aiding gardening enthusiasts through our annual spring seedling sale.

2023 NCF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NCF completed its 18th year as a small working farm and thrived thanks to our talented staff (two full-time, two partial year, and several seasonal), active core volunteers (~100+) including eight high school summer field crew interns, committed community (2,500+ newsletter readers), and many generous donors.

EDUCATION, OUTREACH, and PARTNERSHIPS

- Through funding by the Bard Family Environmental Education Fund, hosted a well-attended (100+ viewers; on-site and virtual) forum focused on climate change education. Dr. Walt Willett of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health delivered his presentation entitled "Can We Feed 10 Billion People With a Diet That Is Both Healthy and Sustainable?".
- Hosted 200+ attendees at our May Open House and ribbon-cutting for the new Dr. Eugene Rubin Greenhouse and we recently installed a solar energy array on the Barn.
- Engaged with 1,500+ people through classes, tours, activities, volunteering, and service-learning opportunities on- and off-site and at Newton's Earth Day, GreenExpo, Pumpkin Smash events.
- Hosted Kids' Fall Fun Party for 130 people in October.
- Ran our educational, hands-on Summer High School Field Crew Intern Program—our 11th year—with eight high school student interns led by our intern supervisor.
- Supervised nine other high school and middle school students during the year in service-learning engagements including field crew work, program analysis and administration, and study of ways to improve use of EBTs (government food subsidy programs) by NCF customers.
- Offered other programming and service-learning opportunities during the year to ~100+ people including the following: Weed Crew; volunteer sessions for businesses (Wegmans and others) and several schools; a monthly book group to discuss books about agriculture; periodic Gardening Circle to share ideas; story time and a StoryWalk on the Farm; a cookbook talk; a sustainable floristry class; and farmer training sessions.
- Produced educational newsletters with an average of 2,500 readers each month.
- Developed relationships with more grantors and increased grant income to support initiatives including our Produce Donation Program, greenhouse renovations, new equipment, and signs.



May 6, 2024 Open House and ribbon-cutting for new greenhouse and solar array.

SUSTAINABLY-GROWN PRODUCE DISTRIBUTION

- Grew 50,000 lbs. of 50+ varieties of produce and herbs on ~1.25 acres of farmable land. Also offered fruit shares, flower shares, and produce from other local farms.
- Distributed ~28,000 seedlings of more than 90 plant varieties to ~ 700 customers through our annual seedling sale and seedling donations in the spring of 2023.
- Distributed produce through our sold-out Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs from June through December 2023 to 150 summer and 35 fall families.
- Increased produce donations to \$16,000 in value distributed over 26 weeks to the Newton Food Pantry and Freedge and the Boston Area Gleaners in response to increasing food insecurity in our community. NCF has donated produce to the community since our first growing season in 2006.
- Added MA HIP (Healthy Incentives Program) to the list of benefits we accept as payment, in addition to SNAP, WIC and Elder checks and increased number of EBT customers at the Saturday Farmers' Market.
- Sold and distributed 50 bags of nutritious produce from NCF and other local farms through our Thanksgiving Harvest Bag program.
- Sold our produce at the Newton Farmers' Market on Saturdays since 2006.
- Ran our on-site farm stand three days a week, June through November.



Plants set up for sale at the spring Seedling Sale

SITE IMPROVEMENTS & ENVIRONMENTALLY-SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES

- Commenced operations of the new Dr. Eugene Rubin Greenhouse and made operational modifications to the existing greenhouse.
- Completed numerous Community Preservation Act-funded farmhouse modification projects totaling ~\$100k including electrifying the heating system in line with the City of Newton's energy priorities.
- As of May 2023, completed installation and commenced operation of the barn solar panels and storage system, which is projected to annually provide 99% of agricultural electric use. Funding via MA Department of Agricultural Resources grant and City of Newton energy funds.
- Installed a new historical sign near the farm stand and translated the information into five languages on our website.
- Installed security cameras on the farm to minimize risk of another incident of plant theft.



Picture from Winchester Street of our new historical sign, greenhouse, and solar energy array.

RECAP OF 2023

This past year was a whirlwind of successes and extreme challenges for NCF. Thanks largely to the strength and expertise of our incredibly competent Farm Manager, former Executive Director, and their teams, NCF successfully navigated the turmoil and ended the year with a long list of accomplishments as noted in the preceding list. NCF's talented and engaged Board were also instrumental in guiding the organization through the difficulties, supporting staff as they coped with relentless pressures, and representing the Farm's interests as situations unfolded during the year. Thanks, too, to the Farm's community and the general public for their strong outpouring of emotional and financial support. It buoyed staff and leadership volunteers along the way and was a reminder of the importance of this beloved farm to so many people in our community.

Successes

In many ways, 2023 was a very big year for NCF. In addition to our on-going successful work offering programs and fresh, locally-grown produce for the public, NCF achieved the following:

- Hosted a very well-attended **presentation by the eminent Dr. Walt Willett** of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health on the question of "Can We Feed 10 Billion People With a Diet That Is Both Healthy and Sustainable?." This was the inaugural event sponsored by the Bard Family Environmental Education Fund and it commenced NCF's multi-year focus on the impacts of climate change on sustainable agriculture and food insecurity.
- Hosted a very well-attended **Open House and ribbon-cutting** on a sunny May day for the new Dr. Eugene Rubin Greenhouse and the recently installed a solar energy array on the Barn. We were honored to hear congratulatory remarks by Massachusetts Agriculture Commissioner Ashley Randle, Newton Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Ledgebrook Condominium President Harvey Crosby, Rubin family member Steven Barg, and NCF Farm Manager Greg Maslowe.
- Formally established a goal of **donating at least 10% of the Farm's annual produce** to organizations that address food insecurity and then increased our level of produce donations throughout the growing season to several organizations. Of particular note is NCF's efforts to provide fresh produce to the Newton Food Pantry's Freedge in the northern part of Newton including the drop-off of 60 sizeable bags of freshly-picked spinach over a few days by our former Executive Director on her way home from work. We are proud of our organization's long-standing commitment to regular food donations and are particularly thankful to our Farm Manager, Greg Maslowe, for stewarding this effort since the Farm's inception in 2006.
- In addition to SNAP, WIC and Elder checks, **added MA HIP (Healthy Incentives Program)** to the list of benefits we accept as payment at our Seedling Sale and Farmers' Market. This resulted in an increase in the number of EBT customers for NCF. In conjunction with this effort, we worked with a group of students from Newton South High School for several months to better understand EBT programs and identify ways to improve NCF's participation so we can reach additional food insecure customers. The students generated a list of helpful recommendations which we prioritized and are implementing as we gain experience with the program.
- Completed numerous **multi-year capital modification and improvement projects** including the Community Preservation Act-funded farmhouse modifications, installation of solar panels and a storage system on the barn, construction of the new Dr. Rubin greenhouse, rehabilitation of our existing greenhouse, and installation of a new historical sign near our on-site farmstand. Several of these projects enable the Farm to operate more sustainably by utilizing renewable energy (use solar array to provide ~99% of agricultural energy needs), reducing use of fossil fuels (electrification of the farmhouse heating system), and growing produce in ways that mitigate the weather impacts of climate change (new greenhouse and modifications to existing greenhouse). NCF appreciates the funding, advice, and/or project management from key partners including the City of Newton, MA Department of Agricultural Resources, Resonant Energy, and Ace Solar.

Challenges

Running a successful farm and non-profit requires diligent planning, careful management, and timely and effective responses to unforeseen circumstances. Fortunately NCF's staff has demonstrable skills and experience in all of those areas but in particular, their strength in dealing with difficult situations was critical again this past year as NCF contended with the following list of challenges.

- **Construction impacts** – In mid-April, NCF staff witnessed flyrock raining down on the farm from blasting at the Opus2Life construction site across Winchester Street. This incident resulted in suspension of construction for two weeks while the Newton Fire Department (NFD) and MA Department of Fire Services investigated the situation and worked with Opus2Life and their contractors to develop an enhanced safety plan. The NFD consulted with Farm staff throughout the process to ensure the safety of our people and protection of the property were paramount as they developed and implemented a plan. We are very grateful to the NFD for their concern, professionalism, and reliability at all stages in the process and in particular, we appreciated their daily presence at the farm during the remaining weeks of blasting.
- **Plant theft** – On June 9th, our Farm Manager discovered that hundreds of plants were stolen from NCF's greenhouse and field overnight. Plants that were taken from the field involved removing the netting over the row and reaching under the hoops to retrieve the plants. General speculation is the theft involved more than one person and was likely pre-planned. NCF received a lot of media attention from the incident and an outpouring of support from our community. As a result of the incident and at the advice of the Newton Police Department, we have installed cameras in the fields to hopefully deter future thefts. We are very grateful for the financial support we received from the public to purchase the security system.
- **Flooding** – On August 8th, part of our fields near Nahanton Street were flooded during a torrential rain storm. The flooding seemed to be from overflow on Nahanton Street due to the intensity and duration of the storm. As a result of the storm and consistent with regulatory guidance, NCF destroyed the produce that was covered with flood water and then suspended production on those portions of the field until next spring. This storm was one of many in an unusually rainy season and illuminated the need for NCF, like many other farms, to find sustainable ways to mitigate the weather effects of climate change. As a result, NCF is now prioritizing development and implementation of climate change strategies for 2024 and following years. We are working with the City to ensure regular clearing of catch basins near the farm and are also looking into options for installing effective flood barriers in vulnerable areas on the farm property.
- **Staff transition** – On November 1, Sue Bottino stepped down from her Executive Director position after tirelessly serving the farm community for four years. Sue was an outstanding ED! She exhibited strong leadership during the pandemic and other emergencies; developed partnerships with many other organizations in Newton; significantly increased NCF's funding from government agencies, foundations, large donors, and the public; and strengthened NCF's community through outreach. Ever the diligent professional, Sue assisted with the on-boarding of our new Director of Administration and Programs, Allyson MacKenna, and worked hard to ensure a smooth transition. We are cheering her on from afar as she embarks on her new role at Harvard University and hopes she stays involved in the NCF community.
- **On-going** – NCF regularly deals with challenges such as protecting our chickens from predators (hawks, coyotes, other creatures), managing farm operations with variable weather, and adapting programs to pandemic protocols.

PLANS FOR 2024

Newton Community Farm's Board of Directors holds an annual retreat each fall during which time we develop a three-year working plan to determine strategies, identify priorities, and discuss challenges. This process allows us to prepare operating plans, develop a budget, seek funding, and hire staff within the context of stated goals that are consistent with our license agreement with the city.

Strategies

As with many organizations, the advent of COVID required NCF to quickly pivot our programs in 2020 and 2021 to comply with pandemic protocols. Although the emergency situation has abated, we are still affected by COVID and try to follow prevailing protocols for minimizing public risk. With that in mind, NCF's Board is using the 'lessons learned' from dealing with uncertainty to revise and reaffirm the broad strategies that guide our plans and decisions. For 2024, those strategies are as follows:

1. **Smaller scale:** Offer smaller scale, cost-effective educational and public access programs and events. Enables NCF to comply with prevailing public health recommendations, pivot as necessary to changing circumstances, better utilize NCF's limited staffing and financial resources, and foster more personal community connections.
2. **Integrated programs:** Offer integrated programming wherever possible to meet educational, historic, and public access goals.
3. **NCF's brand:** Strengthen NCF's brand recognition within the Newton and local community. Tell our story of accomplishments and plans through effective communication channels and outreach.
4. **Partnerships:** Continue to pursue, maintain, and strengthen educational and organizational partnerships to cost-effectively leverage NCF's brand and resources.
5. **Sustainability:** Use sustainability best practices in all aspects of Farm's operations and programs.
6. **Stakeholders:** Seek and utilize stakeholder feedback on a regular basis for key programs.
7. **Financial Support:** Continue to develop and pursue fundraising opportunities through major donors, corporate sponsorships, grants, and publicly-funded earmarked programs.



Major Initiatives for 2024

In addition to our recurring produce programs (CSA programs, farmstand, market, Harvest bags, food donations, etc.) and outreach programs (seedling sale, internships, service learning, city events, fall party, etc.), NCF is working on the following major initiatives for 2024:

- Continue to develop and offer public education opportunities with a focus on climate change and sustainability in agriculture.
- Pilot an on-site farm tour program for adults and families.
- Develop a cadre of knowledgeable volunteers to lead on-site farm education programs.
- Offer two public forums including one for families (topic: Owls, April) and one for the general public (topic: climate change and agriculture, June).
- Secure funding for and commence barn rehabilitation projects including deck and door replacements.
- Evaluate, seek funding, and implement strategies for mitigation of climate-change related weather impacts on the farm property.
- Continue to utilize equipment, growing facilities, farming strategies, and staffing strategies to optimize the Farm's production, revenue, and service-learning opportunities within the challenges of the climate change weather impacts and COVID.

We are looking forward to another eventful, productive, and successful year serving the City of Newton and our devoted farm community!



Waiting for customers at the start of the seedling sale!

BOARD AFFAIRS

NCF continues to have a strong Board of Directors with complementary arrays of skills, interests, and connections. There are currently 12 members (see page 3 for names and roles) including six members sharing three officer positions (President, Treasurer, Clerk). Our organization has been migrating towards a co-officer model and has found it is an effective way for our volunteer-lead Board to manage the workload, provide needed redundancy, maintain institutional knowledge, and develop leadership talent.

Changes in 2023 include the departure of two long-term Board members, Robin Maltz and Lisa Schumann, who contributed a lot to NCF during their six-year tenures. Each of them helped guide the organization through the pandemic thanks to their deep knowledge and experience with the Farm's operations and programs. They also helped establish a strong foundation of programs and practices in their respective areas of interests (Lisa/volunteering, events; Robin/clerk, food insecurity) and stepped-up numerous times to support other initiatives. We are very grateful to them for their long, enthusiastic, and effective service as leadership volunteers!

We also welcomed Madelyn Sorenson and Debra Hall to the Board during 2023. Both women have had impressive professional careers and have been regular volunteers at the farm. Madelyn is already serving as a Co-Treasurer and Debra will help with efforts to develop a cadre of outreach volunteers. We are thankful they stepped up to serve in leadership roles.

Expected changes in 2024 include the departure of Marietta Joseph, who has served for six years as the liaison on our Board from our neighboring Ledgebrook Condos. Marietta has been heavily involved in so many aspects of the Board's work and has consistently led with compassion, wisdom, and diligence. She will be a very hard 'act to follow'. Dede Vittori, current Co-President, is also leaving the Board after serving the maximum of ten years (Board-approved practice). Dede has previously served in numerous other roles on the Board and has a wealth of institutional knowledge about NCF's business functions, history, programs, and operations. Luckily, both Marietta and Dede intend to stay actively involved with NCF by selectively volunteering for projects and initiatives that will benefit from their knowledge and skills.

We have already recruited two potential new Board members, one of whom will serve as the liaison from Ledgebrook to replace Marietta in that role.



PICTURE GALLERY



Assistant Grower, Andrea Egan (middle on left), working with field crew volunteers.



Volunteers from Wegmans planting greens with Assistant Grower, Andrea Egan (gray shirt) and Farm Manager, Greg Maslowe (green shirt).

Kids Fall Fun Party



Children decorated pumpkins using natural materials.

Activity table including the Farm's Museum of Things!

Natural objects found (mostly by kids) on the Farm.

The dried loofah on display was grown on the Farm.

