
Enhancing and Preserving Community Farms in Massachusetts

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Overview

1. Connecting Boston Area Community Farms and Gardens with Food Justice Communities: Models and Recommendations
2. Farmland preservation via legislation, zoning, community engagement
3. Promoting local sourcing through restaurants
4. Systems analysis of impactful organizations

Connecting Boston Area Farms and Gardens with Food Justice Communities: Models and Recommendations

Natalia Tanko

Purpose

- Community farms and gardens enhance food justice missions
- Need help to sustain themselves



Image courtesy of thefoodproject.org

Definitions

- Community farm versus community garden:
 - Community farm: farms in which community members and farmers share risks and benefits through advance payments that provide upfront capital and a secure market for the farmer, and fresh, local, and sustainable produce to members throughout the growing season (1).
 - Community garden: a common land resource used by a community, open to any member of the community, in which the individuals that care for/participate in the garden reap the benefits of the garden (2).
- Food justice:
 - The right to culturally-appropriate, healthy, local, fresh, nutritious, affordable food, with a supply chain that is fair, equitable, and sustainable.

How do community farms & gardens connect to food justice?

Close proximity!

- Local, fresh food
- Easier access
- Education, participation, and employment
- Direct communication with community
- Better accountability



Image courtesy of eastiefarm.org

Case studies

- Eastie Farm - East Boston, MA
- Hannah Farm - Boston's South End and Boston Harbor's Long Island, MA
- The Food Project - Dorchester, Roxbury, Lynn, and Lincoln, MA



Image courtesy of eastiefarm.org



Image courtesy of bgood.com



Image courtesy of thefoodproject.org

Common themes

- **Significant, consistent** community interactions
 - Employment, education, cultural events
- Youth engagement
 - Youth programs, youth employment, education programs
- Require outside funding to sustain business



Image courtesy of bgood.com

Common challenges

- Rely on outside funding
- None have organic certifications, but all practice organic/sustainable
- Challenges in reaching customers
- Providing enough produce in small spaces
- Protecting against developers



Image courtesy of eastiefarm.org

Policy recommendations

- Creating grant, loan, or subsidy programs that either aid the gardens and farms, or aid food justice communities that buy or get produce from these organizations (1)
- **Subsidize youth programs run by community farms and gardens**
- **Preserve urban and suburban farmland** and gardening spaces through improvements in legislation, state funding, and public engagement
- Create a resource center or hotline for community farms and gardens with information and tools

Policy recommendations

- Aid farms and gardens who have educational programs by funding or subsidizing these programs, providing educational resources for the programs, and increasing visibility of these types of events and programs.
- Offer grants for using sustainable, climate resilient, or organic practices, and/or provide easier, cheaper pathways to organic certifications

**Improving farmland preservation via legislation,
state grants, and public engagement.**

Will Chang

Areas of Opportunity for Preservation

- Expansion of Grant Programs
- Changes in Zoning Codes
- Increased education / outreach

Main Sources:

- Bob O'Connor - Director of MA Conservation Services
 - Jen Boudrie - Agricultural Land Use Outreach Contractor
 - MA Food Policy Council
 - American Farmland Trust
-

The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program

- Created in 1977 to increase local food production and agricultural land.
- Purchases a permanent deed restriction on the land.
- As of 2018:
 - Protected more than 71,000 acres of MA farmland.
 - 909 APR contracts in 13 of 14 MA counties.
- Targets commercial farm operations, like most federal and state assistance programs.

Case Study: Caretaker Farm (*Williamstown, MA*)



Photo Credit: Caretaker Farm

Case Study: Caretaker Farm (*Williamstown, MA*)

Caretaker Farm will always provide a common meeting ground and source of local nourishment, both material and spiritual, for all who yearn for abiding community.

Case Study: Urban Farming Institute *(Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan)*



Photo Credit: Shelby Larsson

Case Study: Urban Farming Institute *(Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan)*

- Founded in 2011 to revitalize the local food system and neighborhood experience.
- Has trained 150+ urban farmers, 80% of which work in the industry.
- Produces more than 15,000lbs of food for local restaurants and markets, and hosts more than 600 visitors each year.
- Receives MDAR grants to improve infrastructure and transport. But could use APR!



Photo Credit: Shelby Larsson

Imprc Restr

Section 31: Restrictions, defined

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Primary R

Section 31. A conservation restriction means a right, either in perpetuity or for a specified number of years, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land or in any order of taking, appropriate to retaining land or water areas predominantly in their natural, scenic or open condition or in agricultural, farming or forest use, to permit public recreational use, or to forbid or limit any or all (a) construction or placing of buildings, roads, signs, billboards or other advertising, utilities or other structures on or above the ground, (b) dumping or placing of soil or other substance or material as landfill, or dumping or placing of trash, waste or unsightly or offensive materials, (c) removal or destruction of trees, shrubs or other vegetation, (d) excavation, dredging or removal of loam, peat, gravel, soil, rock or other mineral substance in such manner as to affect the surface, (e) surface use except for agricultural, farming, forest or outdoor recreational purposes or purposes permitting the land or water area to remain predominantly in its natural condition, (f) activities detrimental to drainage, flood control, water conservation, erosion control or soil conservation, or (g) other acts or uses detrimental to such retention of land or water areas.

1. Farm

A preservation restriction means a right, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land or in any order of taking, appropriate to preservation of a structure or site historically significant for its architecture, archeology or associations, to forbid or limit any or all (a) alterations in exterior or interior features of the structure, (b) changes in appearance or condition of the site, (c) uses not historically appropriate, (d) field investigation, as defined in section twenty-six A of chapter nine, without a permit as provided by section twenty-seven C of said chapter, or (e) other acts or uses detrimental to appropriate preservation of the structure or site.

2. Land

prece

3. Farm

each

An agricultural preservation restriction means a right, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land appropriate to retaining land or water areas predominately in their agricultural farming or forest use, to forbid or limit any or all (a) construction or placing of buildings except for those used for agricultural purposes or for dwellings used for family living by the land owner, his immediate family or employees; (b) excavation, dredging or removal of loam, peat, gravel, soil, rock or other mineral substance in such a manner as to adversely affect the land's overall future agricultural potential; and (c) other acts or uses detrimental to such retention of the land for agricultural use. Such agricultural preservation restrictions shall be in perpetuity except as released under the provisions of section thirty-two. All other customary rights and privileges of ownership shall be retained by the owner including the right to privacy and to carry out all regular farming practices.

\$5 for

and.

Recommendations for Assisting Community Farms

- Clearer program regulations
- Transparent application processes
- More relevant program criteria
- Establish channels for community outreach & education

Promoting local, community-based sourcing through restaurants

Alana Danison

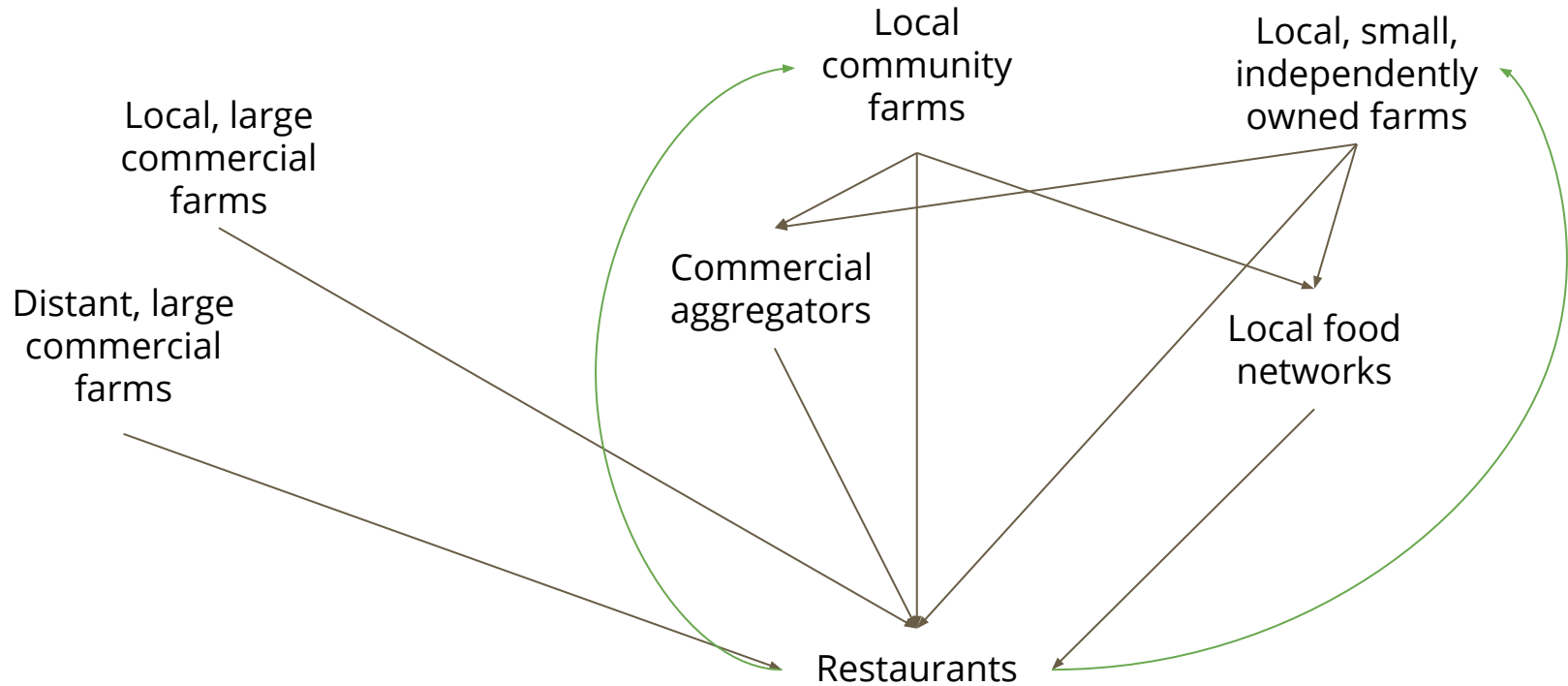
Case studies

- Mei Mei (Boston/Brookline)
- Homefield Kitchencraft & Brewitchery (Sturbridge)
- Sweetgreen (nationwide)
- Dig Inn (Northeast, mainly NY and Boston)

Identifying businesses that interact with local community (and commercial) farms

- How are restaurants interacting with local farms?
 - How do restaurants choose which farms to source from?
 - How do restaurants help support local sourcing through consumer education?
-
- What are the barriers to other restaurants sourcing locally?
 - What benefits does local sourcing provide to the local community?

How are restaurants interacting with farms?



What are the types and impacts of different producers?

- Large-scale, commercial farms
 - Can be local or distant
 - Can minimize costs through economies of scale
 - Continual use, monoculture fields; tilling; fertilizer and/or pesticide application; little to no community engagement
- Small-scale, community or independently owned farms
 - Mainly local
 - Diverse, rotating, seasonal and regional crops; integrated pest management; community engagement
- Just local is not enough



@ufiboston via Instagram



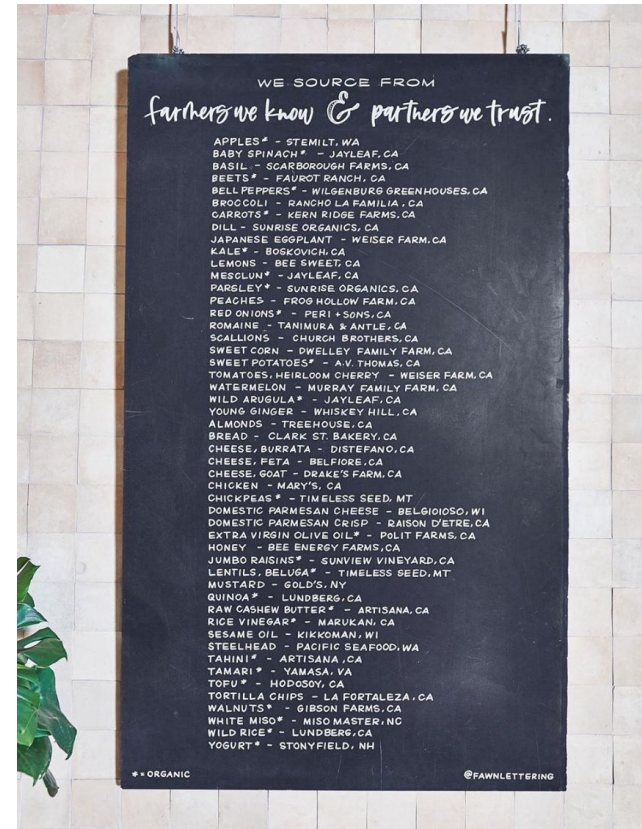
@waltham_fields via Instagram

How do restaurants choose which farms to source from?

- First and foremost: they want to go in person, meet the farmers, and see their farming practices firsthand, over third party certifications
- Third party certifications
 - Organic certification
 - ASPCA welfare standards
 - GAP and GHP
 - Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch
- These restaurants want to support organizations that they see doing good in their communities
 - Better working conditions for farm workers and distributors
 - Education and accessibility
 - Prioritized purchasing from small-scale, minority, POC, LGBTQ+, women

How do restaurants educate their consumers?

- Often people's first interaction with local sourcing
- Information displayed in-store or online
- Changing expectations when it comes to food and availability, hopefully having customers leave more excited about their food and ready to ask questions about where their other food is coming from
- Mission-oriented business (community, land preservation, responsible production)



@sweetgreen
via Instagram

What can we take away from these case studies?

- Local and responsible sourcing provide benefits to the larger economy and ecology of the region that go far beyond the restaurant itself
 - Broader focus of restaurants with responsible sourcing: sustainability and minimizing waste within the restaurant, community building initiatives, accessibility, employee education and advocacy
- Barriers to local sourcing: access, information, cost (money **and** time)
 - How do we encourage and facilitate restaurants with more conventional sourcing models to transition to local, responsible sourcing?
 - How do we help foster lasting relationships between local farms and businesses?

How policymakers can help support local, responsible sourcing

- Create or support existing training programs that help restaurants train their employees, transition to local, community-based sourcing
- Certification programs that are responsible and accessible, both for the restaurants themselves and the farms they source from
- Office of travel and tourism advertisement of businesses that source locally and responsibly (certification also plays a role in this)
- Sponsoring conferences where business owners and producers can share their experiences and challenges, build lasting business relationships

Developing Local Agricultural with System Mindsets

Within *a vision* for New England food sustainability

Regional Context

5%

Land that is food producing

90%

Food that comes from outside the region

15%

People who lack regularly sufficient access to food



The Goal

Long term vision

- Common progress
- Accountability
- Forward momentum



Adopting the Goal: Farm Fresh RI

“We adopted the 50 by 60 framework as an organizational goal to make explicit what we’ve been working on in a less clear manner”

Where does MA stand?



Food producing farmland

- 1.1% increase in farmland since 2012¹

Access

- The cost of a meal in MA is the most expensive in the US²

Regional reliance

- Massachusetts Food Policy Council (FPC) since 2015
 - [MA Local Food Action Plan](#)

¹ UMass Amherst The Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment

² Greater Boston Food Bank/ Feeding America

Common Barriers to Effective Programs



Fragmentation



Management Skills



Public Presence

Root Cause Analysis

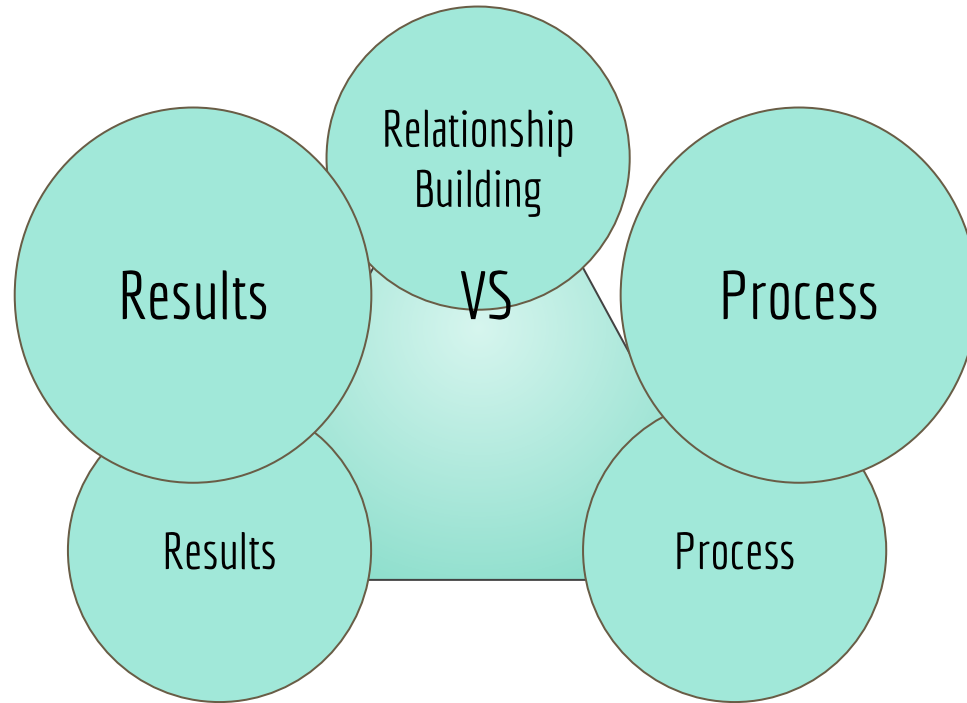


What are we seeing on the surface?

How do we address the problem?

What is the root cause?

Sustaining the Vision¹



¹ Lisa Fernandes, Food Solutions New England Director of Communication

“Fragmentation weakens our
collective ability to move
institutions towards a coherent
vision about our food future”

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

Mission: improve local and regional food systems by training the next generation of farmers to produce food that is sustainable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate

Addresses underdeveloped management skills

Connecting agricultural administrators to educational trainings and resources

Taking it Further

Systems Thinking

- Designated staff member to running programs and thinking on a national scale



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Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture

Mission: build the local food economy by strengthening farms and engaging the community

Addresses fragmentation and system thinking



Connects smaller systems to one another while thinking ahead

How CISA Engages with Policy

Access to legislators and legal expertise

- “a small piece of anyone’s job”
- Agriculture Day at the State House
 - Big commitment
 - All day affair



Waltham Fields Community Farms

Mission: encourage healthy relationships between people, their food supply, and the land from which it grows

Addresses public presence and knowledge

Connecting communities to their food and food education



Waltham Struggles with University Institution

Previous Waltham UMass Field Station property to be sold by UMass Amherst

Reflection on University Reliance

- Limitations
 - Restricted staff
 - Perception of being too far removed from practical work
- Benefits
 - Wider resources & network
 - Experts
- Occurrence
 - New Entry Sustainable Farming Project
 - Food Solutions New England
 - Waltham Fields

Waltham Field Station, UMass Land Sale Closer To Happening

The city council approved \$13.75 million to acquire the field station, which is currently owned by UMass.

By Jenna Fisher, Patch Staff

Nov 15, 2019 4:40 pm ET | Updated Nov 16, 2019 11:38 pm ET

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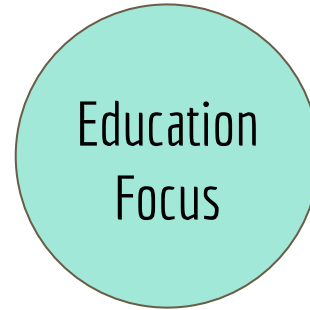
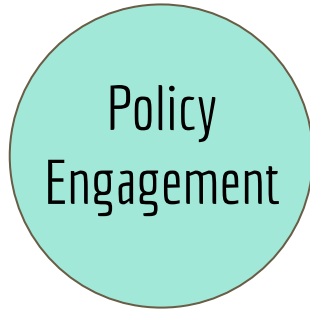
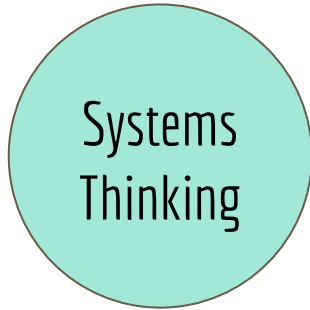
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A happy ending

What Makes Successful Programs



Some Avenues to Progress

- Absorption of farm sponsored educational programs into school curriculums
 - Take pressure off individual farms
- More frequent conferences to increase access to legislators
 - Provide stipends & lessen time commitment
- State sponsored training for new entry Farmers
 - Through dept of workforce development
 - How to turn profits while maintaining charitable missions
 - Wean off grant reliance
- Adopting tangible institutional sustainability goals
 - For grander institutional impact (hospitals, prisons, schools)

