



SOUTH HERO LAND TRUST

Newsletter

Fall 2020

Adapting in Uncertain Times: Farmers Getting Food on our Tables



Fall winter squash harvest at Pomykala Farm in Grand Isle

As the deep impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic spread through our community this spring and summer, one of our biggest fears was about feeding our families. The closure of businesses and schools, disruptions to supply chains, and loss of jobs and income, all impacted our ability to access food. And we didn't know what would happen to the local farms that rely on restaurants, hospitals, and grocery stores to buy their products. At South Hero Land Trust we immediately reached out to farmers, food producers, and markets in Grand Isle County, to see how we could help. Together we were able to find new ways to get food onto tables in our community.

Just a week into the spring shut-down, the first online ordering systems and home delivery options were developed. Farm stands opened early and offered curbside pick-up. We began publishing a weekly guide to local food, helping consumers learn what was available and how to get it. South Hero Land Trust and the Healthy Roots Collaborative worked with the Champlain Islands Farmers' Market to navigate the many challenges created by the pandemic and successfully open in May. All of the work that we have done together over the last 20 years to strengthen the local food system and empower farmers paid off, and food continued to move from farms to tables.

As summertime rolled around, we continued to look for ways to get the word out about all of the local food available in the Islands.

"I hope you'll join me in a big cheer of thanks for our local farmers and the other Islanders who are keeping us fed."

*~Emily Alger, Executive Director of
South Hero Land Trust*

SOUTH HERO



LAND TRUST

a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the farmland, woodland, natural and recreational areas, and open spaces which give South Hero its distinctive quality of life

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The Role of Land Conservation in Racial Justice

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I'd like to expand on some thoughts I first shared in June, in response to this moment of enormous social change, fed by the deep racial and class inequities that the pandemic has exposed, and to the uprising across our country for racial justice.

Since the initial shut-down in Vermont this spring, I've taken comfort in many walks in the woods. I have always thought of the outdoors as a place where everyone is welcome—I was devastated to realize that many people are not welcome or even safe in a place that brings me such peace. And my family has eating food from our garden and local farms daily, but I'm newly aware of how few farmers of color own land and farm businesses in our state. The protests against police brutality that have swept the county following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others demonstrate the deep pain and inequity we are facing in the United States.

People of color are fighting for their lives, and it is past time that we all join the fight. Let's listen to the stories of people of color. Let's be open to change in our own lives and actively work to dismantle the systemic racism inherit in our institutions and policies. Let's make sure that black and brown people are welcome and welcomed in our community. Let's be anti-racist, as individuals and organizations.

As a leader of a land conservation and community organization, I'm wrestling with how we address inequity in our community today and with the complicated history of land ownership and access in our country. Nick Richardson of Vermont Land Trust summarized this clearly: "from the first land speculators who laid claim to the lands of the Abenaki people; to campaigns in the early 20th century that recruited white people of northern European descent to visit, settle, and farm in Vermont; to the Vermont Eugenics Program which targeted poor, disabled, and Abenaki people; white landed Vermonters have benefited from systems and structures that have long excluded people 'unlike them' from this land." The land conservation movement has historically been led by a predominately white group of people. The stories and vision of people of color are missing, and conservation projects often primarily benefit white people.

Addressing this history and the current disparities in our communities is challenging and ongoing work. South Hero Land Trust is committed to this work, beginning with learning and with reviewing our practices and activities through new eyes. We have always been committed to projects that serves our community, but if we want to serve those who need us most, we need to rethink how we do this work.

As I wrote in June, I am not an expert. I have no solutions. I will probably make many mistakes along the road, and I hope you will forgive me for them. I am committing to listening, to learning, and to responding with love. I am committed to standing in solidarity with people of color across our nation, as an individual, and as the leader of a community organization. I hope you will join me.

In Hope,

Emily Alger
Executive Director

One way that we've done this is by highlighting farmers in a new series of profiles. We've loved learning more about the stories behind our local farmstands, and we hope that you will enjoy reading them. Here is our first profile, of Sandy Bottom Farm in Isle la Motte.

Sandy Bottom Farm: a New Farmer on the Block

Patrick Helman got his start in farming in the Hudson Valley of New York. He was initially interested in dairy, but when he moved to the Islands and began working at Pomykala Farm, he discovered he preferred vegetable farming, not least because vegetables don't need to be milked in the winter.

After meeting Mary Catherine, who has roots in North Hero, the two settled in Isle la Motte, where, as Patrick says: "The land was cheap!"

At the farmers' market, their farmstand, or out and about the Islands, Patrick is always ready with a witty remark. When asked why he got into farming, given how difficult it can be, he simply replied: "Why not?"

While Patrick comes across as humble and easygoing, that doesn't mean that these two aren't serious about their farm business. In getting started, Patrick and Mary Catherine (who works at Local Motion as Senior Manager of Education and Safety Programs) decided to not take out loans. Instead, they bought and built everything as they went. The first few years weren't easy. Patrick credits "sheer stubbornness" in how they managed to build a barn, a greenhouse, two hoop houses, a walk-in farmstand, cultivate 1 acre of sod without a tractor, while also completing a total renovation and remodel of their house, all with a new baby!



Patrick holds up garlands of red onions, photo by Mary Catherine Graziano



Patrick and Mary Catherine's daughter catches a ride with some rhubarb plants, photo by Mary Catherine Graziano

Now, their hard work is paying off, and their business is growing in leaps and bounds. This year they have added a delivery-available vegetable CSA with 29 members, all but one of whom are Island residents. They are a vendor at the Champlain Islands Farmers' Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Their farmstand is a popular stop for locals and visitors to Isle la Motte, they are doing more and more business with restaurants, and their farm was recently certified organic by NOFA-VT.

We asked Patrick what it was like farming in the Islands. The first thing he said was that he appreciated the support from the farming community, especially the help and advice he got from other farmers. Besides learning "all my commercial vegetable production skills" from Bob and Jane Pomykala; local farmers Christine Bourque & Adam Farris of Blue Heron Farm and Amanda & Hugo Gervais of Savage Gardens have become mentors, openly sharing

their knowledge with the new kid on the block. Plus, Patrick credits other Isle la Motte businesses for supporting them, especially Ember and Stacey at Happy Bird Poultry, who send lots of people down the island to their stand.

continued from page 3

Read more stories about Savage Gardens, Hackett's Orchard, and Hall's Orchard on our website at www.shlt.org/news. And more profiles are coming soon!

Northwest Vermont Grown

One way you can celebrate our local farmer is by checking out the latest update of our Guide to Agriculture, which expands the online version to cover both Grand Isle and Franklin counties.

We'll continue to print the map, focusing on the Champlain Islands and Grand Isle County, but the now online Northwest Vermont Grown Guide will expand our horizons and support access to a wider variety of local foods, from fresh vegetables to craft beer. Plus you'll be able to find restaurants, places to stay, and good stops on a bike ride. The expanded guide was created in partnership with the Healthy Roots Collaborative, check in out at www.nvvtgrown.com.



Sandy Bottom Farm's farmstand is open for business, and Partick can also be found at the Champlain Islands Farmers' Market in Grand Isle through October this year.

A Community Solution: Farmers and Gardeners Feed Neighbors

Sometimes it takes a Village

When local community members and parents Regan Henry and Erin Morse reached out to South Hero Land Trust in March, they were worried about the families in our town who could be out of work and struggling to access food. Summertime is often a challenging time for families who access free or reduced price meals at school, as Kaight Althoff knows from her work with Food for Thought, a program of the South Hero Congregational Church, that provides weekly bags of food to families with children across Grand Isle County, to help fill in the gap during school breaks. Would more kids and families be at risk due to the economic backlash of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Socially distant planting of the donation garden plot at Health Hero Farm by South Hero volunteers

At the same time, we were hearing from local farmers whose markets were at risk. Many of them usually rely on selling their products to local restaurants and large employers who were closed indefinitely at the time. Our local farms are essential employers, and a critical source of fresh vegetables, eggs, and meat for our community. We needed to find a way to help keep them afloat during the tumultuous spring.

Was there a way we could help both? We decided to find out. We brought together these local parents with our partners at Food for Thought and the Healthy Roots Gleaning Program to create a new "Grow for your Neighbor" campaign.

With seed money from the Ben & Jerry's Foundation and local donors, we worked with Regan, Erin, and other community volunteers to grow donation gardens at Health Hero Farm and the Folsom School & Community Garden. We created a free seed library at the Worthen Library. And we bought seedlings from local farmers and distributed them directly to families through local partners. Finally, we signed up volunteer gardeners to grow extra plants for local food shelves and meal programs. Here's a snapshot of what we've accomplished so far:

- 5** partnerships with local farms
- 7** community organizations and food shelves help distribute plants and food
- 15** volunteer gardeners growing extra food for local food shelves
- 85** packets of seeds distributed through the free Seed Library at the Worthen Library
- 180** seedlings donated by local gardeners to be raised in the community garden plots distributed directly to families in need and volunteer gardeners
- 350** packets of seeds sent home to elementary school students in the Islands through partnership with the Healthy Roots Collaborative
- 400** lbs of produce donated to local food shelves and meal programs so far
- 456** vegetable seedlings distributed directly to families in need and volunteer gardeners

"I was just dropping off some books at the library and a woman was there with a little boy who was probably around 5 or 6. I'm assuming mom and son. They were going through the seed box and he would pull something out and ask "what's this?" and the woman would explain "that's kale, it's really yummy in salads." He was having SO much fun looking at everything and it was a really sweet moment to witness. They were picking out some seeds and they were excited to go home and plant some food!"

Thank you all for making that possible. It was fun to be an observer and watch the box of seeds work its magic."

~Kaight Althoff, local parent and Food for Thought organizer



It was exciting to see this program grow so quickly, and we hope that it will continue in years to come. If you'd like to learn more or participate, email guy@shlt.org.

New Garden Grows at Folsom: Outdoor Space for Today and Tomorrow

A year ago, we began to plan a complete renovation of the garden at Folsom School. First built in 2009, the garden has become a well-loved space for growing vegetables for the school, learning and art projects, and social activity. Students at Folsom School were regularly planting beds and learning about root growth, pollination, and other topics. The Champlain Islands Parent Child Center's summer program cared for two beds in the summertime, and kids in the Grand Isle County Mentorship Program met their mentors there. Food was grown for the school meal program, as well as summer meal boxes distributed by Food for Thought. The garden became a hive of activity, but the seasons wore down the beds, and over time its use outgrew the space.

South Hero Land Trust began to develop plans for a new garden, that would allow all of these activities, invite classes to meet in the garden more easily, and be more accessible than the old space. And then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the garden became even more critical than before, as both a space to grow food, and as an outdoor classroom.

With funding from the Vermont Community Garden Network, RiseVT, the Ben & Jerry's Community Action Team in St. Albans, and local families, we kicked into high gear, and broke ground on the new garden in September. The renovation will continue through October, and finishing touches are planned for the spring- but the garden has already made outdoor learning for students possible this year! Check out the students harvesting kale for the school cafeteria right before the old garden is disassembled, and then beginning to prepare the ground for the new beds. We can't wait to see you in the garden!



Farmers' Market Steps Up: Keeping a Critical Outlet for Farms Open



Farmers like Jane Pomykala wore a mask and set up behind an extra table this summer, creating a 6 foot barrier for social distancing. Customers made requests, and farmers bagged up their orders. One way traffic further facilitated safe shopping.

After an uncertain start to the season this year, the Champlain Islands Farmers' Market has been running strong. While fewer tourists have been visiting the Islands, many local have felt safest shopping local, and the market have been an essential stop for loading up on fresh food.

For farms that lost wholesale accounts when restaurants and other buyers closed, the Farmers' Market has been especially important this year, and we are grateful that South Hero Land Trust could play a role in helping the market open and run this summer. Programs Director, Guy Maguire, was at the Wednesday Market all summer, guiding customers through the new market logistics.

The Saturday market had been extended through the end of October this year, visit them from 10 AM-2 PM each Saturday at St. Joseph's Church on Rte 2 in Grand Isle.

Sharing the Trails this Fall, plus Some Great Outdoor Activities

Fall is a wonderful time to enjoy the trails in South Hero, but please remember that we all share the woods- walkers, runners, dog walkers, and hunters. We recommend you wear orange, make your presence known (make some noise), keep your dogs on leash (and throw some orange on them, too) and avoid dawn and dusk if you can.

Some of the big dates for hunting in Vermont are in October, November, and December, beginning with archery season, which opened on October 1st.

Round Pond Natural Area is a a state owned property and is open for all kinds of hunting. The Landon Community Trail is on private property, and hunting does take place there. The trail CLOSES for rifle season. There is no hunting at Tracy Woods or the South Hero Recreation Park, but be aware that hunting does occur on neighboring properties, something that goes for all the other trails as well. Wear orange and be safe!



Learn more about hunting seasons from the Fish and Wildlife Department at vtfishandwildlife.com/hunt/hunting-and-trapping-seasons. And check out trail maps and more trail info at www.shlt.org/natural-areas. **Plus, looking for some ideas for exploring the outdoors this fall and winter? We'll continue to share inspiration and activities of all kinds on our website. Learn more at www.shlt.org.**

FALL 2020 NEWSLETTER



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<p>A SHAGBARK HICKORY TREE</p>	<p>A WISHING ROCK</p>	<p>A BUTTERFLY</p>	<p>A GOLDENROD IN BLOOM</p>
<p>A VIEW OF THE GREEN MOUNTAINS</p>	<p>FRONT FOOT BACK FOOT RACCOON</p> <p>AN ANIMAL TRACK</p>	<p>A WILD APPLE TREE</p>	<p>A NUT OR A NUT SHELL</p>
<p>A TREE YOU'Z CAN WRAP YOU'Z ARMS AROUND</p>	<p>AN ASTER IN BLOOM</p>	<p>AN ANIMAL HOME</p> <p>WHO LIVES HERE?</p>	<p>A BIRD FLYING</p>
<p>A GRASSHOPPER</p>	<p>A TREE YOU'Z CAN'T WRAP YOU'Z ARMS AROUND</p>	<p>A FALLEN TREE DECOMPOSING</p>	<p>A MUSHROOM</p>

We Miss You!

We won't be hosting our Annual Celebration of Conservation & Community this year, but hope you enjoy our local farms, trails, and beaches this fall.

Please stay in touch: email emily@shlt.org or guy@shlt.org to share how you are enjoying your connection to the land right now.

Looking for a fun way to get outside? Try a scavenger hunt on one of our trails!