Issues Facing Family-scale Farmers and their Laborers in the Northeastern United States

by Becca Berkey

The economic justice issues facing organic farmers and workers in the northeastern United States are consistent with many of the challenges faced in conventional agriculture such as inadequate pay, lack of housing, intense market competition, and health-related problems due to the strenuous nature of the work. The reasons for these issues, however, may differ in the organic farming sector. In small-scale organic farming the issues largely come from a lack of systemic infrastructure within which the farmers themselves can make enough income to support and enact their values of justice and sustainability. Thus small-scale organic agriculture and its farmers and laborers can be considered a population marginalized within the larger political-economic landscape of U.S. agriculture.

Who are these farmers and workers on small-scale organic farms in the northeastern U.S.? Publicly available reports offer a useful snapshot of organic agriculture nationally, including who works on different types of farms and farm types predominant in different regions of the country. They offer little decisive information, however, that tells the story of farmers and laborers on organic farms in the northeastern United States. What follows are some of the results of a survey of NOFA farmer members meant to illuminate the answer to this question.

The survey included 36 items asking questions about the market for organic products, including where farmers sell their products and issues they encounter (if any) with their major buyers, pay for workers, housing, attitudes toward policies such as unemployment insurance thresholds, membership in organizations like NOFA, and benefits farmers derive from those memberships. In addition, the survey asked about farmers’ values and practices related to farming organically, such as whether they do so because it is a family tradition, and whether they uphold ideals about the environment.

While for this survey it would be desirable to generalize the results to all the farmer-members of NOFA and/or organic farmers in the Northeast, it is important to note that the results collected are only representative of those farmers who completed the survey. The survey was administered using an online survey tool, and it opened for responses on January 2, 2013, and closed on March 15, 2013. An invitation to participate was sent electronically on multiple occasions to all members using a variety of email lists that reach NOFA farmer members. In addition, recruitment materials were distributed in print at state chapters’ annual meetings. Participants had the option of filling out the survey via paper and mailing it back in a postage-provided envelope.

There were 357 usable survey responses from NOFA farmer members. Per information collected by NOFA’s Interstate Council, there are about 5,000 members of NOFA across their network, approximately one-quarter of whom are farmers. Based on these estimates, then, the

(continued on page A-3)
The growing momentum of the campaign to raise the minimum wage to $15 per hour presents those of us who are farming with a serious challenge. Most of us pay significantly less than that to our farmworkers. Many of us do not even earn $15 an hour ourselves, as owner-workers.

The minimum wage campaign was successful in a few cities at first, notably achieving various phased-in raises culminating in $15 per hour a few years hence in the municipalities of Seattle, New York, Buffalo, Syracuse, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland. Last year the states of New York and California joined the march to $15, with thirty more plus Washington DC raising their minimum wages significantly. The city raises were often targeted at restaurant and food service workers, having little impact on farms. The state raises, however, are a different story. In some states agricultural workers are not exempt from state minimums, in others they are but the reality of all other traditionally low wage work escalating to $15 an hour in a few years may make workers reluctant to take jobs on farms which pay so much less.

As Frank Gasperini, executive vice president of the National Council of Agricultural Employers says, “For agriculture, one of our real differences if the country goes that way is that exemptions really don’t do us much good because we’re competing in the marketplace with jobs that will be paying $15 an hour.”

But farms, as opposed to food service establishments that exist in a local marketplace, often sell their products at a distance and even abroad, having to compete with prices from competitors paying significantly less for labor.

New York Assemblyman Bill Nojay, R-Pittsford, is a strong critic of raising the minimum, believing that it will cost upstate New York 200,000 jobs. He says New York farmers are already paying an average of $12.40 per hour for workers. He says New York farmers are already paying an average of $12.40 per hour for work, which is about $5 more than Pennsylvania, $4 more than New Jersey and Ohio, and over $2 more than farmers in California.

Dean Norton, New York Farm Bureau president, says: “People aren’t really looking at our competitiveness. Many of our members tell us they will be forced to make tough choices…like reducing staff, changing what they grow and how they grow it, or just leaving farming altogether.”

Farm Credit East conducted a study to estimate the impact of New York’s minimum wage rate changes on the state’s farm economy. They came up with increases in labor costs between $287 and $622 million by 2012. “Because New York farm businesses deal in global and national markets,” it says, “they have limited ability to pass costs to consumers, the increase in labor costs is likely to reduce net farm income between 31.8% and 51.1%. We anticipate that this increase, without a significant change in farm economic conditions, will place 1,365 to 1,995 profitable farms in a loss situation.”

Supporters of the higher wage, however, argue that over 200,000 workers in the Finger Lakes region of New York, who currently earn $9 an hour, and 6 million Californians who currently earn $10 an hour, will have more money to spend in the local economy. And, they believe, higher labor costs will not necessarily drive up food prices commensurately.

Philip Martin, professor emeritus at the University of California at Davis, says: “The fact is that most of what people spend on food is not for the labor intensive parts of food. They spend it on milk and cheese and meat and bread and things like that. And the labor costs there are much less than they are in strawberries, or fresh peaches.”

Besides, point out wage increase supporters, farm profits have increased more rapidly than wages. In 1974 California farm employers reported an average cost of $2.60 per hour for workers. That would be the equivalent of $12.49 per hour in 2014. But reported hourly wages in 2015 were in fact only $11.75.

Many observers have noted that in many instances even $15 an hour may not be adequate for a real living wage. In many parts of California, because of high rents, more is required. A study by the Alliance for a Just Society completed in late 2015 found that single adults in the Golden State need to earn $19.39 to cover basic living costs. With dependents, those costs increase. The accompanying graphic illustrates a MIT Living Wage Calculator estimate for what would constitute a living wage in various counties of California in 2022. For an adult with one child in Sacramento, the number is $26.93 per hour, or $56,000 per year.

Some farmers feel that the Living Wage movement can be an opportunity for farms to achieve higher prices. They believe we should ally with farm and food service workers to make the case for economic justice for all of us involved in feeding America. Given that 84% of existing farms are in debt, that the USDA calculates farm incomes are dropping significantly, and that fewer organic farms and organic acreage exists in America than existed 7 years ago perhaps, these folks reason, our future would be brighter if we joined forces with a movement which is making economic and political gains. In this issue we explore that idea.

How $15 compares

Wages vary widely across California. The proposal to increase the minimum wage to $15 per hour by 2022 would create a wage that is high for much of the state, but still less than a livable wage in seven counties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Lowest Living Wage</th>
<th>Projected Living Wage for 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>$16.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesto</td>
<td>$15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>$14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>$13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redding</td>
<td>$12.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>$12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>$11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator (http://livewage.mit.edu/), adjusted for inflation

NATHANIEL LEVINE slevine@sacbee.com
As you’ll see in the data presented, according to the survey most farms in the NOFA network are small-scale farms using organic practices, a population about whose labor practices little specific research has been done. Findings also indicate that these farms rely heavily on labor from family and community members in order to operate. While this study is by no means a comprehensive examination of all organic farms in the Northeast, it provides insight into the labor force and related justice issues faced by small-scale organic farmers and farmworkers.

Further researching the experiences of these farmers and laborers is essential for informing future policy and practice not only within NOFA, but also across the Northeast and nationwide. In addition, expanding the geographic scale in a future study in order to include small-scale organic farming across the U.S. would be helpful to compare across regions what is working well to advance justice for organic farmers and their laborers. Doing so could expand and strengthen the network through which organic farmers can connect with and learn from one another toward the development of not only more environmentally sustainable farms, but also economically sustainable businesses that are able to fulfill their values for justice for their owners and employees.

**Figure 1. Number of Farm Types by Type of Labor (N=357)**

All 357 respondents included in this analysis answered the series of questions asking them to indicate what type of labor they use on their farms. As shown, the overwhelming response was ‘family members’, which is not surprising given that the Northeast is known for its small scale, family farming. Figure 1 reports the number of farms that indicated using that type of labor. Note that the categories are not mutually exclusive, meaning a farmer could check more than one referring to the same worker (i.e. ‘Paid employees’ could also be ‘Family members’, etc.). For those who answered ‘other’, responses included spouses, developmentally disabled adults, youth needing community service hours, court mandated community service, and ‘wwoofers’ (people involved in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms network), among others.

**Table 1. Total Number and Mean Number per Farm of Labors by Type, Paid Labors (N=357)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labor Type and Time on Farm</th>
<th>Total Paid Labor</th>
<th>Mean Paid Labor</th>
<th>Total Unpaid Labor</th>
<th>Mean Unpaid Labor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Time, Year Round</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time, Year Round</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time, Seasonal</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Members, Year Round</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interns/Apprentices, Year Round</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors, Year Round</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers/CSA Members, Year Round</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant Workers, Year Round</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant Workers, Seasonal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2A* Workers, Year Round</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-2A* Workers, Seasonal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers, Year Round</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers, Seasonal</td>
<td>3,730</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,459</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.500</strong></td>
<td><strong>507</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.73</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are nonworkers who are in the country on a temporary visa called K-2A, which allows them to work in United States agriculture (Thompson, 2005).

Another important concern with respect to labor is retention. Thus, respondents were asked, “What percentage of your workers in 2012 were in their first year working on your farm?” A higher percentage of workers on the farm in their first year would indicate lower retention from the previous year or that the farm was new. Figure 2 summarizes the results of the 287 responses to this question. At nearly half (49%) of the farms, only 0-10% of workers were in their first year working at that location, but 32% of the farms reported that greater than 40% of their workers were in their first year on the farm.

**Figure 2. Payroll Ranges and Benefits to Workers.**

Two open ended questions asked respondents to report the amount paid per hour to their lowest and highest paid hourly worker. Some 124 respondents filled out the question asking about the lowest paid hourly worker, and 118 answered regarding their highest paid hourly worker. Several respondents declined to answer this item and instead wrote things such as, “they work for nothing because they are part of the family.” These answers were not included in the analysis for this item. The below Wage Table provides the range paid for hourly workers as well as the state minimum wage (NH gives the federal minimum) and living wage for each of the states in the network as a point of reference.

**Wage Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Reported Hourly Range with 95% responses removed (across all respondents per state)</th>
<th>Minimum Wage</th>
<th>Living Wage (E+ adult) ($/hour)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>860-1050</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>10.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>7-20-2500</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>8.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>5.50-2000</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>11.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>7-00-1600</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>9.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>5.60-10.75</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>3.50-25.00</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>11.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>8.00-22.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>9.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>6.50-16.00</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>9.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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more benefits-eligible workers. The survey itself did not provide this definition, so participants were left to determine ‘benefits-eligible’ on their own. Many respondents had no benefits-eligible workers on their farms in 2012. The number of responses for each of the benefit types listed is represented in the Benefits Table on page A-3. The most prevalent type of benefit provided to benefits-eligible workers by respondent farms is workers compensation insurance, while the least prevalent are maternity/paternity leave, retirement benefits, and time and a half for overtime. Note that not all of the benefits listed are mandated by the government for eligible employees; the only mandatory benefits are worker compensation and leave through the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in all of the states where NOFA farms are located. This accounts for the 100% compliance with workers compensation insurance provision.

As you’ve seen in the data presented, according to the survey most farms in the NOFA network are especially the low milk prices of this past year have driven out yet more farms. Since the height of the farm crisis in the 1980’s, the organic label has been a refuge that has saved thousands of farms and allowed people like me to create new ones. (See the film “The Real Dirt on Farmer John” for the death and rebirth of John Peterson’s farm.)

In NOFA-land, there are some farms that are financially successful, where the farmers earn a middle class living and can afford to make continual investments to improve their farms. Most organic farmers, however, are not making their full living from their farms. Their earnings from farming are modest and, like most conventional farmers, they have health and other benefits because someone in the family has a “real job” off the farm.

When the NOFA Domestic fair trade committee teamed up with Becca Berkey and did a survey of organic farms in 2013, farmers reported that the wages they pay are above minimum wage, though not by much, benefits for workers are limited, and the main constraint to paying more is not farmer willingness, but the level of the prices farmers can get for their products. This is the difficult equation that confronts us: how can we have a just, equitable and sustainable food system supplied by farms using regenerative organic practices with access to healthy food for all if farm prices do not cover living wages for all the people who work on farms?

Immediate Farm-Based Solutions

The articles in this issue of The Natural Farmer show that there are organic farmers who are finding ways to raise wages without going out of business. These are some of the practices that farmers are adopting:

*Reducing the cost of production so that a higher portion of revenues can go to the farmer and employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetable Crop FIELD DAY May 28, 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stress Relief for Vegetable, Flower, Horticultural and Specialty Crop Growers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In just one afternoon discover how you can:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• save your back, neck and knees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• say goodbye to the aches of bending, stooping and crawling in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reduce fatigue and injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increase labor productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• be more timely and grow more produce with less labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increase your farm profits in an increasingly competitive market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Farm host Eesha Williams at: (802) - 254-2531

John Bashaw at Pendragon: (262)-642-7793
employees, what Richard Wiswall calls “Farming smarter, not harder.”

*Increasing the percentage of sales that go direct to customers without a middleman so that the farm gets more of the final food dollar. In Maine and Vermont, 10% of farm sales are selling direct, or what the Europeans call “short circuit,” through farm stands, CSAs, farmers’ markets, and local or internet sales. [https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Newsroom/2016/12_20_16.php](https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Newsroom/2016/12_20_16.php),

*If selling wholesale, associating with other farmers to form a larger bargaining unit in negotiating with buyers. Farmer marketing cooperatives like Deep Root play this role.

*Increasing on farm worker efficiency so that employees can work shorter hours for higher pay per hour. See the profile of Willow Wisp Farm for a good example.

*Reducing the cost of retraining workers every year by raising wages and improving conditions to increase worker retention. All four of Paul Martin’s 2016 employees are coming back for 2017 after Sweetland Farm became a “Living Wage Employer.”

*Cutting out crops or enterprises that do not generate enough revenues to cover costs. Old Friends Farm eliminated egg production when they realized that, even though customers liked it, they could not make any money selling eggs.

*Diversifying crops and value-added enterprises to provide year-round work for employees and reduce

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*Adopting open book management: you allow everyone who works on the farm to see the farm budget and to understand the financial implications of their work and agree to share any increased revenues between the farm and the employees.

*Taking workshops in “Relational systems on the farm” such as with Polly Shyka where she provides tools and teaches about ways to articulate, cultivate and strengthen interpersonal relationships for farm resilience and new awareness of farm teams.

*Making it a priority farm goal to know costs of production in order to get prices that cover those costs including fair wages for farmer, workers and a little profit. Consumers Union research shows that there are consumers who care and might even pay a little more:

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**Consumer Reports (2016) Survey Question:**

“When purchasing food, how important is each of the following as an objective for you?”

- Supporting your local farmers: 91%
- Reducing pesticide exposure: 89%
- Supporting fair pay/working conditions: 88%
- Protecting the environment from chemicals: 84%
- Better living conditions for farm animals: 83%
- Reducing antibiotic in food production: 79%
- Avoiding artificial ingredients: 75%
- Avoiding GMO's: 75%
- Not Important: 20%
**NOFA Efforts in Pushing for Fair Trade.**

Where people’s hearts are and provides the basis for first small step to making it happen, but it does show and between farmers and farm workers.

Between the buyers of organic products and farmers, entrepreneurship should provide long-term contracts for workers in other sectors. Fair and transparent negotiations should provide long-term contracts with the larger entities, processors and retailers, who purchase farm products. Provisions would include:

- An implied promise of good faith – the processor or retailer must present the contract to the producer with accurate and honest information.
- Plain language and disclosure of risks – the contract must be easy to read and understand, with a clear disclosure of the major material risks to the producer up front.
- 3-day review right – the producer has up to 3 days after signing the contract to change his or her mind and cancel the agreement without penalty.
- Confidentiality clauses prohibited whether oral or written.

Passing a resolution like this, of course, is only a first small step to making it happen, but it does show where a farmworker’s hearts are and provides the basis for NOFA efforts in pushing for fair trade.

Here is a list of policy actions NOFA chapters could promote to mitigate the impact of raising the minimum wage on the fragile farm economy:

**State-Level Actions**

1. State laws that would limit the percentage of the final consumer dollar that a processor or retailer receives to ensure that the producer receives a fair share of the point of purchase price. If farmer pay price goes down, the final price to consumers should also go down.
2. Tax or other incentives, such as special marketing programs, for farms that adopt domestic fair trade standards that include $15 an hour wages for farm workers. Programs like the “Certified NY” labeling program could provide an enhanced label for fair trade farms. NYS has a new Farm Workforce Retention Credit, a fixed dollar amount credit on state tax payments for each eligible farm employee with annual increases through 2021.
3. Pass state versions of the Producer Protection Act to set basic minimum standards for contract fairness and promote meaningful competition in agriculture so that family-scale farms can negotiate fair contracts with the larger entities, processors and retailers, who purchase farm products. Provisions would include:

- First priority producer lien – the producer can collect damages related to any significant breach of contract and the contractor terminates, the producer can collect damages related to any significant breach of contract and the contractor terminates.
- Recapture of capital investment – if there is not a default, failure of the farm, or retailer has financial problems.
- Ban on arbitration clauses – implement dispute resolution alternatives such as mediation. Arbitration clauses can limit a farmer’s access to the courts even when a violation of state or federal law has occurred.

4. Conduct an energetic public campaign to spread wider public understanding of why farms are going out of business and promote public support for paying farmers prices that cover the full costs of production including living wages for farmers and farm workers.
5. Create a program to assist family-scale farmers who pay $15 an hour wages to employees in paying for health insurance for themselves and their employees.
6. Establish supportive pathways for migrant workers of color (POC) to become land-owning farmers running their own businesses. Funding for training programs led by POC, that address trauma and history, strategies for navigating in a racist food system (e.g. full scholarships for POC to land-grant institutions for agricultural degrees). Hire POC farmers as adjunct faculty to offer on-farm credit-bearing courses for new farmers.
7. State funding to pay farmers for preserving and production including living wages for farmer and farm workers.

- First priority producer lien – the producer can register a lien, making the producer a primary and secured creditor. This provision significantly increases the producer’s ability to be paid, even if the processor or retailer has financial problems.
- Recapture of capital investment – if there is not a breach of contract and the contractor terminates, the producer can collect damages related to any significant capital investment that was required as part of the contract.
- Ban unfair trade practices and clarify producers’ rights such as the right to join producer associations without fear of retaliation from the buyer. This provision would also prohibit “tournament competition” (the ranking system) for payment.

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enhancing ecosystem services and guarding the public trust (water purification, carbon sequestration, pollination, genetic diversity). On the flipside, industrial agriculture needs to pay for their externalities - dead zones in aquatic ecosystems, aquifer depletion, and killing pollinators.


9. Change the EBT/SNAP system to allow online payment and automatic deduction for farm food purchases. EBT is a federal program but state governments could advocate for this fairly simple change.

Federal-Level Policies

1. Instead of subsidies that prop up constantly falling farm prices and really only subsidize the big processors and import-exporters, we must have a federal system of fair pricing. We need to dust off and refresh the concept of parity. Parity was a national policy of price supports which we had in this country from 1933 – 53. It functions like a minimum wage for farms. Here is a description from “Crisis by Design: A Brief Review of US Farm Policy by Mark Ritchie and Kevin Ristau: The parity program had these central features:

(a) It established the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), which made loans to farmers whenever prices offered by the food processors or grain corporations fell below the cost of production. This allowed farmers to hold their crops off the market, eventually forcing prices back up. Once prices returned to fair levels, farmers sold their crops and repaid the CCC with interest. By allowing farmers to control their marketing, the CCC loan program made it possible for them to receive a fair price from the marketplace without relying on subsidies.

(b) It regulated farm production in order to balance supply with demand, thereby preventing surpluses. (b) It regulated farm production in order to balance supply with demand, thereby preventing surpluses.

From 1933 to 1953 this parity legislation remained in effect and was extremely successful. Farmers received fair prices for their crops, production was controlled to prevent costly surpluses, and consumer prices remained low and stable. At the same time, the number of new farmers increased, soil and water conservation practices expanded dramatically, and overall farm debt declined. What is even more important is that this parity program was not a burden to the taxpayers. The CCC, by charging interest on its storable commodity loans, made nearly $13 million between 1933 and 1932.

Published by the League of Rural Voters Education Project 1987, pp. 2 – 3. Also see “Parity and Profits” by Charles Walters. Posted on July 30, 2001 on Weston A. Price website. Remarks of Charles Walters, Executive Editor, Acres USA Given at the Acres USA Conference December 1999, Minneapolis, MN

Ritchie and Ristau make a very important point: (p.14) "Paying farmers a fair price would result in a one-time increase in food prices of only 3 to 5 percent, less than a nickel on a loaf of bread. Since the supply management proposal also contains provisions for doubling the funds available for food assistance, the poor would not be hurt by this small increase in food prices."

(c) It created a national grain reserve to prevent consumer prices from skyrocketing in times of drought or other natural disasters. When prices rose above a predetermined level, grain was released from government reserves onto the market, driving prices back down to normal levels.

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There are a few national organizations that endorse parity – the National Farmers Union, the National Family Farm Coalition, and the HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance. With a little extra policy funding, the NOFAs could support these organizations.

2. Pass the Producer Protection Act for contract reform. See the description above.

3. End the exemption for farmworkers from the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Like farmers, farm workers need freedom of association and the legally protected right to organize. Same for the exemption for farmworkers in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Farmworkers should be entitled to a decent minimum wage and time and a half for overtime like the people who work in other sectors. It pays off on the national level, these changes would not cause competition among the farms of the various states.

4. Push for immigration reform. To protect the 60% of current farmworkers who are undocumented, we need immigration reform based on human rights that includes a path to legal residency and citizenship for farm workers who choose to remain in the US without punitive measures like high fees and a 14-year rigmaurole to get to legal status. Even the more liberal bills, like the one proposed by Senator Schumer, include mandatory e-verify that will make farmers’ lives as small employers miserable.

5. In addition to fair prices, there are other potential sources of revenue that can keep market prices down while compensating farmers. Our farms protect the commons of clean water and air, and restore soil carbon. The public can pay us for these services as is done in Europe. Incentives for good practices could be built into the tax system – farmers who build healthy soil could pay lower taxes. NOFA is a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition which works for a whole series of conservation measures that pay farmers to increase cover crops, improve rotations, and pasture management and research that increases our knowledge of organic and sustainable farming systems.

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Paying Living Wages at Sweet Land Farm

by Elizabeth Henderson

Early in 2016, Evangeline Sarat at Sweet Land Farm announced publicly that she was paying wages to her employees at the Tompkins County living wage level.

Evangeline explained, “For me, it is very pinpointed: if my employees work, they should make a living. Especially, with food. If they’re working to grow healthy food, I don’t see how it’s logical that they not get enough to live.”

Her declaration set off a flurry of emotional discussion among farmers and foodies that has not died down, especially with Governor Cuomo agreeing to gradually raise the state’s minimum wage to $15 an hour. A few months later, Paul Martin, Evangeline’s former partner, replaced her as the manager of Sweet Land (perhaps one day, they will tell the story of their partnership) and agreed to explain the consequences of her decision for Sweet Land.

To afford to pay higher wages, Evangeline raised the price of her farm’s CSA shares by $100. The immediate effect was that member numbers dropped from 380 to just 300. When Paul took over, he paid their four workers $15 an hour for the 2016 season. Although he has not completed all of his financial calculations for the season, he reports that things were “a little tight,” but worked out. The drought made it harder: there was only enough crop for summer wholesaling.

Nevertheless, Paul is determined to make things work and says, “At Sweet Land we are still experimenting on how to have an economically sustainable farm. The farm has to be thriving enough, an attractive business model so that my kids or someone else would want to buy the business. I still feel like it is important to pay labor, but it is just as important to pay the farmer a living wage and that has to come first.” He has set out to achieve the balance among pricing to customers, the needs of his employees and his own needs.

Sweet Land Farm in Trumansburg, NY, is coming up on its 10th anniversary in 2017. Farmer-owner Paul began his farming career in 1997 at Simple Gifts Farm in Lancaster County, PA. He had grown up in that county, surrounded by farms and working in his mother’s garden at a time of unrestricted development. Seeing houses “going up on beautiful dark soil” upset him so much that he told his mother, “When I grow up, I am going to stop them from putting houses on farmland.” After graduating from college, he decided to take a year to learn how to grow his own food. He was looking for work that “gave something back for me and the community.”

Simple Gifts had a CSA and did some wholesaling. “It felt good,” Martin explained. “The community component of CSA really attracted me.” After three years, Martin took a job managing a farm for Good Will Industries. The 1999 CSA conference, where he met a lot of other people in their twenties who were excited about CSA, was a turning point for him. There he met Evangeline and a bunch of the farmers, including Nathaniel Thompson of the Full Plate Collective, who are now his neighbors in Tompkins County.

Paul poses with one of the sunflowers grown on the farm.

Paul and Evangeline wanted to farm together. “I just knew we were going to farm regardless of repercussions. People who are close to making that decision still don’t know. We were nervous but did not have that hesitation – it was more how we were going to do it - figuring out not just how to farm, but how to have an economically sustainable farm.”

The couple did not have any capital and quickly realized that was a big hurdle. They went to work at the Kimberton CSA for Barbara and Kerry Sullivan who leased the land from a Waldorf School. The Sullivans called what they were doing a CSG, a Community Supported Garden. Paul says he learned a lot from the Sullivans and even though Sweet Land is three times the size of Kimberton, he sees it as a garden. “Part of our strategy is that people can come to the farm and park in the middle near the barn surrounded by flowers.” Paul explains that they deliberately designed the farm like a very large garden.

After working for the Sullivans, Paul and Evangeline spent four years at New Morning Farm with Jim and Moie Crawford where they were able to live cheaply, save money and learn a lot. Paul was the farm manager and Evangeline was in charge of mechanical cultivation. As manager, Paul was responsible for plowing, seeding, cover cropping and keeping equipment in shape.

“Being able to be employed by someone, trouble-shooting without owning it, knowing how to fix old equipment without worrying that the whole farm was going to fall apart,” he learned a lot about equipment, capital and building a farm business. He recalls that he spent a lot of time thinking about those things: “The benefit of working for other people – you realize the value of equipment. For example, I had no hesitation about buying a barrel washer cause I knew the labor saving with that machine would pay for itself.”

While working at New Morning, Paul and Evangeline worked on a business plan, crunching numbers on how much money they would need and how big their own farm would have to be. He realized that “we had to get to the size we wanted to end at quickly and not have our eggs in different baskets. There is not enough time in the day to work both on the farm and off. I did that for the first two years as vineyard manager at Atwater Vineyards. I worked from 6 – 2, and then 3 – 8 at our farm. It was unsustainable.”

Jonha Smith, Paul Martin, Elizabeth Pickard, Conner Benfield, and Holly Taylor pose in the 144 x 30 foot greenhouse. They grow standard and heirloom tomatoes there on a single leader with basil on each side of the tomatoes. Cherry and paste tomatoes are grown outside.
They spent three years researching farm manager situations and looking for the right farmland. They settled on the Ithaca area where land was more affordable and marketing is brisk. Paul says they identified the house first – a 5000 square foot house – and reasoned that “good land builds big houses, a sign of pay dirt.” The Farm Service Agency agreed to lend them enough money to purchase that house and 21 acres of a beautiful 100 acre farm that belongs to Rod Porter, an organic grain grower. Critical to their plan to scale up to a 400 member CSA, Rod was also willing to rent them a 15 acre parcel next to the house, and Sweet Land Farm was born.

One third of the 30 acres of Sweet Land Farm are usually in annual crops with an acre in strawberries, raspberries and fruit trees. Paul keeps the rest of the acres in cover crops, carefully scheduling the seeding of cover crops to make sure that something is growing on most of the ground most of the time. Rye/vetch, peas/oats and buckwheat are his favorites. To build healthy soil, he chops the cover crops and tills in the residues to increase organic matter and recycle nutrients. There is always a big patch of sunflowers, both for beauty and for the hefty contribution they make to soil carbon. A peripheral deer fence protects the crops. Instead of an 8 – 10 foot wire fence, Sweet Land uses two separate strands of electrified wire, offset from one another to confuse the deer. Significantly cheaper than a more solid fence, it seems to work well.

Sweet Land Farm is primarily a CSA farm. The farm’s mission statement emphasizes the mutual benefit for farmers and supportive customers:

“A CSA is a farmer-friendly model. The farmer develops a stable, long-term relationship with reliable customers. This economic model benefits both the consumer and producer in its stability. This makes it easier for the farmers to plan yearly crops because they know what, and how much, product their customers want. Additionally it allows the consumer to plan their food budget. The CSA model also enables farmers to do most of their marketing in the slow winter months, so that when the growing season rolls around they can spend more time producing excellent produce. It provides the farmers with a viable business, an essential element in sustainability.”

Although the farm has enough land for 400 shares, for the 2017 season, Paul plans on 300 plus members for summer shares and 80 winter shares and is engaged in an energetic social media campaign to attract them. Last season, they introduced half shares at half price, but this year the price will be 3/4s of a full share. Members get a lot of choices. This is how the Sweet Land system is described on their website – note the appeal to support paying living wages for employees:

What Is Included In The Two Adult Household Share?

• Weekly distribution of your choice of richly grown produce in a Filled Sweet Land Farm bag
• Greens from the Free Choice Side of the Barn (take what you need for the week)
• Itemized vegetables including tomatoes and garlic
• Access to u-pick crops
• Invitation to farm events
• An invitation to come to the farm for family or personal recreation - walks, picnics
What Is Included In The Single Adult Household Share?

- Weekly distribution of your choice of richly grown produce in a Half Filled Sweet Land Farm bag
- Greens from the Free Choice Side of the Barn (take what you need for the week)
- Itemized vegetables including tomatoes and garlic
- Access to u-pick crops
- Invitation to farm events
- An invitation to come to the farm for family or personal recreation - walks, picnics, etc.

Note: The Single Adult share will be slightly different in the coming 2017 season. The only difference between the Single Adult Share and the Two Adult Share will be that the Single Adult Share receives half a bag of vegetables every week. The itemized limits will be the same as the Two Adult Share i.e. you will receive the same amount of tomatoes and garlic. The u-pick limits are the same as well as the invitation to farm events and access to the farm.

Another Important note: The Single Adult Household Share is not a half share. It is not for two adults. If another adult is in your household and they “do not eat vegetables” or have another source of vegetables this share is not for you. If you have two adults in your household I would hope you would purchase the two adult household share and help us cover the true cost of sustainable farming. We are in this together, the cost of the CSA share covers the expenses of the farm. That is how it is priced. We work hard to keep the share affordable and are committed to investing in soil fertility and paying our employees a living wage. We are happy to be involved in the Healthy Food For All program, which helps families who qualify receive financial assistance to purchase a CSA share.

Paul explains that he discourages customers who only want a few vegetables because parking at the farm is limited. If people do not really want a lot of vegetables, he urges them to shop at a farmers’ market instead. Previously, when the farm valued the share at $540 ($23 a week), he says members did not worry about skipping weeks if they were on vacation. Over the course of the season, they get good value and can pick up either Tuesday or Friday and can switch back and forth. The distribution shed is also open on Saturdays from 8 till noon with no staff. There are seven delivery days for winter shares: members pay for 6 with one skip built in.

For 2017, Paul has found a drop off point at a school in New York City. Regional Access will make the weekly delivery. They will start with 30 shares and hope to grow to 80. Paul also does some winter wholesaling to distributors in the Finger Lakes region. The price from wholesaling is about half what the farm gets for CSA shares, but it is worth it when he can sell a couple of thousand pounds per sale and the additional revenues help cover labor costs.

I reached out to a few of Sweet Land’s members to give them a chance to comment. This is what Sarah Koski has to say:

“It's important to me that our kids not only eat whole and healthy foods, but know where the food comes from. It's priceless to see them handingfuls of sweet cherry tomatoes straight from the vine and crunching into carrots and turnips before we even get home with our farm share. Walking through the fields on a beautiful day, picking food I know my kids will eat, and greeting new and old friends, are things I look forward to every week.

Join these family farmers

Pete and Gerry’s started as a family egg farm more than sixty years ago. Rather than becoming a large factory farm, we have grown by recruiting small family farms to produce eggs for us.

We recently added a new brand – Carol’s Pasture Raised Organic Eggs. These premium eggs are produced on very small farms in flocks of 2000 hens under rigorous Certified Humane™ pasture-raised standards. We’re looking for family farmers who would like to produce these eggs for us.

Interested? Contact Karl Johnson at karl@peteandgerrys.com or 603-638-2034.
Our family has a sense of pride and ownership in “our farm”, and in turn are excited to try new vegetables. Buying our food directly from a farm down the street makes sense on so many levels - we are supporting a friend and neighbor, keeping the land around us healthy and productive, and investing in the health and well-being of our family.

“Creating jobs that maintain work/life balance and pay well is a totally noble goal. Sweet Land’s commitment to providing these jobs means that they can hire and retain farmers who care about the farm and its mission. We are proud to support a business that cares about its employees.

All things considered, the price of our farm share isn’t a huge factor for us. We would be happy to pay a little more if it meant the farm was a better place to work. With lots of payment options, most families could make it work within a budget.”

Jen Wofford, who has purchased summer and winter shares for five years, lives less than a mile from the farm and finds Sweet Land convenient. She explains: “We like being part of community that loves good food,” and adds “I’m glad Sweet Land Farm has committed to paying a living wage. That said, Sweet Land Farm has been and continues to be my CSA of choice, regardless.”

For 2017, Paul intends to continue paying all four returning employees $15 an hour. (That is an impressive retention rate!) The hot discussion over whether or not to pay time and a half for overtime is not an issue for Paul. He feels very strongly that the work day should be 8 hours and no more so that, as he puts it, “they can continue to have life outside the farm.” He would rather hire another worker than increase the hours. Paul wants a balance between life and work and believes that his workers need that too, and also that people are more productive if work time is limited and they have time for rest and recreation.

Start time is Paul’s pet peeve. The work day at Sweet Land starts at 8 am and he wants everyone there on time so that he does not have to repeat the plan of the day. He designed the barn to maximize efficiency with an outdoor truck delivery dock. When workers arrive, he has pick lists ready and off they go. Five people do the harvesting for 300 shares - 60 members per worker. They use a lot of pallets, pallet jacks and two fork loaders. The crew also spends very little time hand weeding. They plant and harvest. Weeding is mechanical. “You don’t need a wheel hoe,” Paul insists. “If you are weeding a lot, you have not figured out your tractor cultivation.” The Sweet Land ratio is 1 worker per 4 acres while Eliot Coleman has 1 per 2.5 acres.

Paul also does his best to respect the other end of the day - 4:30 sharp - creating an 8-hour day with half an hour for lunch. Occasionally, when rain is threatening, Paul will ask workers to stay later, but he says that is rare. And he finds it easier to manage for no more than 8 hours at a time. Although he does not do evaluations of his employees at intervals through the season, he sits down with each worker at the beginning of each season to find out where they are, learn if they have issues from the previous year and get a commitment to the season to come. He has a written worker agreement for each employee and conducts an extensive and detailed introductory meeting each spring to be sure the conditions of work are clear to everyone. Paul has never hired migrant workers, though he has considered the H2-A program: “We are fortunate to live in an area where I can find local employees who are good workers.”
I asked Holly Taylor, who has worked at Sweet Land since July 2015, what she thinks of Sweet Land’s labor policies. She says that Paul is a great boss, very aware of employee morale and making sure no one is overworked. She appreciates the consistent work hours and the 8-hour day.

“If you want to stay and finish a job, Paul is cool with that,” she explains, but if they have something else to do, Paul does not put employees under pressure to stay after 4:30. Holly hears of people working from dawn to dusk on other farms and does not understand how they manage to do anything else in their lives. Getting a raise to $15 an hour made a huge difference and played a big part in her decision to return to the farm for two more seasons: “We work hard all day from April to the end of November. Knowing you can live on what you earn is so helpful. You are not working for nothing. I try to live frugally. Last year, I took a winter job, but this year I am working part time at Sweet Land. Knowing I get a living wage for the whole season, I am grateful. I can make it through the winter even if I don’t get other work, but it would be awesome to work year round at the farm. I love working outside and being involved in helping grow quality organic food that I am proud of for people in my community. I have entertained the idea of farming on my own, but right now, I am happy working for Sweet Land.”

On harvest mornings, Paul and the workforce of four pick hard from 8 to 10 am to get ready for distribution. Then they have a 15 minute break for which the farm provides coffee and an angel supporter brings baked goods. Paul finds this a good way to stay friendly with his employees. As a result, the retention level is high. Most employees stay for 2 to 4 years. He has only had to fire one person in the ten years of the farm.

Having such a big house, Sweet Land was able to offer worker housing which they did for a few years. Having such a big house, Sweet Land was able to offer worker housing which they did for a few years. Although Paul does not claim to have hit the perfect balance yet, he remains true to the values that attracted him to CSA farming. He considers bringing people to the farm a special gift. The drought of 2016 actually helped members to feel more a part of the farm, to feel that they were “vested” in it. That connection is vital to Paul: “We want to be an important part of the community, preserve the farmland and grow in a sustainable way. For me, a key thing is I always enjoy the farm. There are few farms where people come to the farm and get to relate to one another over food. That is really important. I try to sell the farm as a way to get away from the day to day chaos and be real. We need to limit our time on social media. Reality has been hijacked. Let’s declare media-free Sunday and make boundaries. A CSA farm gives a place where people can be real, pick food, and be part of the weather.”

A benefit of focusing on the CSA, Paul says, is that they get to stay together on the farm with less driving around and less hassle. By planting fall root crops to fill the farm’s refrigerated trailers for winter wholesaling, Paul is able to extend the season for his crew. They fill out their days in October and November harvesting for winter sales. Whatever is left once the weather gets too bad, Paul leaves in the ground – this year, some radishes and hakurei turnips. This winter, he had work for 1 worker part time. Winter wholesaling offsets labor costs.

Instead of maintaining the higher share price from 2016, Paul is lowering the full share price to $580, just over $25 a week, hoping that he will attract more members. Evangeline had introduced a sliding scale of $680 to $750, but Paul found that members were confused by that. He believes they need a clear number: “When people are not sure about what to pay, they can decide to buy at a farmers’ market or another CSA. You have to stay relevant to your customer base and be aware of what customers can afford to pay.” He is not eliminating the sliding scale completely, but offering it as a voluntary option to pay $600 - $700.

Paul justifies the pay option as a way to encourage those who can afford more to do so: “Part of that is our commitment to pay living wages, but also an investment by CSA members who want to be investors in preserving the farm and have the means to pay a little more.” He admits that growing enough to cover all expenses and living wages for himself and his workers pushes him “to farm a bit more than we would like.”

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A Brief History of Farmworker Wages in the US, and Current Requirements

compiled from the Farmworker Justice Blog and from an article by Elizabeth Henderson

During the New Deal Era, President Roosevelt struck a bargain with Southern Democrats: they would support worker rights legislation so long as their farmworkers (and other predominantly African-American workers, such as domestic workers) were exempt. Thus, Congress excluded farmworkers from the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA). By 1938, the Supreme Court of the United States found that the provisions of the NLRA did not apply to farmworkers engaged exclusively in the production of agricultural products. The court stated that farmworkers were “outside the jurisdiction of the act.”

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), originally enacted in 1938, was designed to address employee working conditions and wages. It covers both maximum and minimum wage requirements, and it requires employers to keep records of wages and hours worked. FLSA also provides for overtime pay by requiring that most employers pay a rate of one and a half times the regular wage rate for all hours worked in excess of forty in a week. FLSA further requires employers to comply with record-keeping requirements, including maintaining payroll records for employees.

Until 1966, the FLSA excluded farmworkers. FLSA, now applies the minimum wage and overtime requirements to farmworkers employed by farmers. Agricultural workers who are paid on a piecework basis rather than an hourly basis are entitled to receive the minimum wage – their average earnings should be sufficient to yield an average hourly wage at least equal to the minimum wage. The overtime pay provisions of FLSA, however, are still applicable to farm workers engaged in secondary activities. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which is administered and enforced by the Department of Labor, requires that most employers pay a minimum hourly wage and pay time and a half for overtime (over 40 hours in a workweek). Federal law also requires that the “piece rate” be set so that the slowest worker still makes the minimum wage.

In enacting AWPA, the legislature established labor law obligations on the part of the growers who employ farmworkers, even if the growers use the services of farm labor contractors. Some growers have claimed that they do not “employ” any farmworkers and therefore need not comply with the minimum wage or other labor laws; such growers contend that the labor contractor is the sole “employer” of the farmworker. In some instances, growers claim that farmworkers are “independent contractors” and “not employees” at all. To address such problems, Congress also adopted a broad definition of employment relationships so that in most cases a farmworker is an “employee.” And the growers who use a FLC are responsible, as a joint employer, with the FLC, as well as with the AWPA, for the labor contractors also are required to be licensed by the Department of Labor. With regard to working conditions, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration Field Sanitation Standard requires employers to provide portable toilets and hand-washing water in the fields. Federal and State wage and hours laws protect workers’ rights to be paid for all of the hours they work. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which is administered and enforced by the Department of Labor, requires that most employers pay a minimum hourly wage and pay time and a half for overtime (over 40 hours in a workweek). However, FLSA does not apply to labor contractors or their workers. However, FLSA further requires employers to comply with record-keeping requirements, including maintaining payroll records for employees.

In summary, workers engaged in agriculture are covered by one or more of the major federal laws, which include the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, (AWPA), and the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). The Fair Labor Standards Act, which provides for minimum wages and protections against discrimination, is the most comprehensive of these laws. The Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, which provides for farmworker rights to be paid for all of the hours they work, is the most specific of these laws. The Occupational Safety and Health Act, which provides for workplace safety and health, is the most comprehensive of these laws. The Fair Labor Standards Act, which provides for minimum wages and protections against discrimination, is the most comprehensive of these laws.
the survey results did not include dependents living outside of the United States, this number may not completely reflect the number of families living in poverty. Fifteen percent of workers stated that they or someone in their household had received food stamps in the previous 2 years; however, farmworker use of public assistance has historically been low and many families that are eligible may not be participating in the SNAP program.

Unfortunately, DOL has not published a report in many years and until recently it even stopped releasing the data to the public. Farmworker Justice requested and obtained DOL’s release of the public data from the 2011-2012 surveys. The raw data is available at http://www.doleta.gov/agworker/naws.cfm.


Interns/Apprentices/Trainees
Whatever name you give it, federal law regards on-farm interns and apprentices as employees and to avoid fines, the employer must pay at least minimum wage for all hours worked. For a farm, taking on interns is not cheap labor. It is a commitment to providing a real learning experience and means that the farmer will be acting as teacher as well as employer. The California Guide to Labor for Small Farms offers several models for on-farm training that meet legal requirements.

The six-part test for whether a person is an intern is as follows:

1. The training, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to that which would be given in a vocational school.
2. The training is for the benefit of the trainees or students.
3. The trainees or students do not displace regular employees, but work under their close supervision.
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the trainees or students, and on occasion his/her operations may actually be impeded.
5. The trainees or students are not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the training period.
6. The employer and the trainees or students understand that the trainees or student are not entitled to wages for the time spent in training.

The New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) has excellent materials on mentoring and on-farm training which you can order from their website: www.smallfarm.org

Some people take up farm work as a way to learn the skills for owning and running their own farm someday. Others do farm work for many years and may even choose to make that their life’s work. Our movement for a local, sustainable agriculture needs both more farmers and more professional farm workers. Knowing the responsibilities of an employer or the rights of a worker provides the basis for a positive relationship so that small farms function as integrated teams. In this era of climate change, it takes everyone’s contributions to make farms flexible and resilient.

In her keynote speech at the NOFA-NY Winter Conference, Rosalinda Guillon, Director of Community to Community, spoke eloquently about “good hard work,” and about how her farmworker father taught her and her siblings to work with pride and with appreciation for the beauty of working close to nature. If we want our network of small farms to be a way of life that is worth sustaining, farm work must be a respected vocation that is compensated appropriately for the values farm workers provide for society.

Resources:


Farm Commons (www.farmcommons.org) has a growing list of guides to farm employment law, including specific handbooks for Vermont and New Hampshire, as well as information on internships, farm worker housing, taxes and required paperwork. “Farm Labor Law: Know the Basics and make them work for your farm” is available as a free download.

California Guide to Labor for Small Farms, Aug. 2013 NCAT and CA FarmLink. – Much of the information is CA specific, but some applies country wide. Main goal of publication – to boost on-farm learning opportunities and help farms that train interns do it legally. Appendix has template for intern contract and a sample time card for employees.

Farmer Legal Action Group FLAG (Minnesota) http://www.flaginc.org/
• Farmers Guide to Farm Employees: Federal and Minnesota Labor and Employment Law for Small-Scale Family Farmers, August 2012, Farmers’ Legal Action Group, Inc.
• Farmers’ Guide to Farm Internships: Federal and Minnesota Labor and Employment Law, February 2013, Farmers’ Legal Action Group, Inc.

From the New England Small Farm Institute: www. smallfarm.org
• Cultivating a New Crop of Farmers – Is On-Farm Mentoring Right for You and Your Farm? A Decision-Making Workbook ($20)
• The On-Farm Mentor’s Guide – practical approaches to teaching on the farm ($35)
*DACUM Occupational Profile for On-Farm Mentoring, 2001.

Order these online at http://www.smallfarm.org/main/bookstore/publications/
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Guaranteeing Living Wages to All Farm Members at Willow Wisp Organic Farm

Organic Farmer Greg Swartz has gone to the extraordinary measure of moving his entire farm so that he can fulfill his farm goals which include paying living wages to everyone who works there. This year, Willow Wisp will be starting to farm the newly purchased ground where in a few years, they will be able to quadruple their previous production.

Greg started Willow Wisp Organic Farm in 2007 on 12 acres on the Delaware River in Damascus, PA, 120 miles northwest of New York City and across the river from Sullivan County, NY. This is a rural area within driving distance of some of the highest-end markets in the country. After ten years of apprenticing and working for other farmers, as well as a brief spell as Executive Director of NOFA-NY, Greg set out on his own to grow fresh market organic produce. He focused on direct sales, establishing markets at the Union Square Greenmarket, the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket, two more local farmers’ markets and a delivery route to restaurants and independent grocers.

In addition to Greg’s vegetables, Tannis Kowalchuk, Greg’s wife and farm partner, grows flowers at the farm for sale at farmers’ market and by special order for weddings and events. (Tannis is also the artistic director of NACL (North American Cultural Laboratory Theatre in Highland Lake, NY). NOFA-NY LLC certifies the farm and since the new land had been a horse farm that did not grow crops or use any prohibited materials, the organic certification can start there right away.

Greg Swartz and his wife Tannis Kowalchuk, holding Simon Kowalchuk Swartz, stand in front of farm sign.

Guaranteeing Living Wages to All Farm Members

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For the future, Greg plans to add solar panels on the barn roof, fruit trees, asparagus, microgreens, more flowers and vegetables and build a commercial kitchen so that they can have their own line of value-added products as well as event space. The goal is to spread production through the year and keep extra heavy harvest times to a minimum. 2017 will be the first year of 12-month production.

In 2016, the farm had five full-time and four part time employees, all local. Four of them work year round on salary. To guarantee them a living wage, Greg wants to make it possible for everyone to be able to work in a professional position, to be able to raise a family and pay off a mortgage. He is not there yet and admits that he may always need to hire a few part-timers. For his core workers, however, beyond day to day work and training, he is engaging them in whole system planning as well as continuous education. The farm paid for most of the crew to attend the NOFA-NY winter conference. Greg wants to institutionalize summer tours of other exemplary farms. He hopes that each employee will engage in what is happening and be the eyes and ears of the farm. He will make the final decisions, but the crew will be invested in what they are doing together.

These are Willow Wisp’s whole farm goals:
- Managing soil to increase its biological health which results in nutritious and delicious crops
- Increasing biodiversity and protecting our natural resources
- Selecting varieties of crops that are the most flavorful and adapted to our soil
- Guaranteeing that all members of the farm team make a living wage
- Producing solar electricity for a renewable future
- Engaging with our community to make this a great place to live

All crew members engage with the financial side of the Willow Wisp business. They determine crop increases from year to year by current sales and expenses. Wages range from $10 to $15 an hour, based on experience. Greg starts new employees at the low level and does a review after the first 30 days. Annually, he reviews their performance, engagement,
what they need to be mindful of, and checks in on how they are feeling and what else they might need to integrate better into the farm.

Besides pay, the farm provides coffee breaks with coffee and snacks, lunch (one person cooks each day and the farm provides the ingredients), and they can take home all the produce they need for their families. The full-time workers get personal and vacation days based on their annual review and how long they have been with the farm. Greg says that most of his workers earn more than any other job they could find in that area. Impressively, all nine 2016 employees are returning for 2017!

To finance the move and expansion, Greg has attracted a few investors. These are private loans with individuals, not equity investors. There has been one round of financing for expansion and he is about to start a second. The farm pays interest on the loans, negotiated with each investor. Greg has a novel way of structuring the payments, backloading them to time with when the farm has more cash flow. He pays interest only payments for the first 6 months of the year and principle payments for the 6 months when the farm has more money coming in. Greg has also taken out bank loans with an operating line of credit. A slow money group is forming in the area. Greg is working with them, envisaging how slow money could help.

In summarizing his approach to running a farm business, Greg has this advice, “As farm business owners, we need to invest more time in our team and try to build a team for the long-term. That seasonal cycle is so hard – always new people. Hard for farmers and hard on the farm. I can make a very good business case why it is good to invest more money in people, as well as investing energy in making people feel a part of the team and that they really matter. The people who work here like it because they know what the plan is and they believe in what we are doing. Structure your business so that you can afford to pay well. This will make our work easier over the long run and allow us to provide jobs for as many local people as possible.”

**Employees Brian Bennet and Mark Keoppen pick radishes.**

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The Natural Farmer Spring, 2017

The Fight for Living Wages

by Rebecca Thistlethwaite

Published in The Natural Farmer Spring, 2017

This article originally appeared in the May 27, 2016 LocalHarvest Newsletter

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The Fight for $15

Building on the momentum of the Fight for $15 minimum wage campaigns around the country, mainly in big cities such as New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles, there is now a growing movement to raise minimum wages to between $12 to $15/hour at the state level in places such as New York, Oregon, California, and Massachusetts. Some states are talking about establishing different wages around their state based on the relative costs of living. In more rural counties, the wages won’t go up quite as high or quite as fast. California, however, is talking about $15 across the state, regardless of location, cost of living, or industry.

Without diving into some of the really hot-button issues around employment, wages, and farm labor, I am just going to share a couple stories and quotes from various people thinking about how a substantial increase in wages (30-60%) may affect the viability of small and mid-scale farmers, particularly those growing more labor-intensive crops like fruits and vegetables. Will farmers have to drop growing specialty crops, the very same ones that we are supporting, or will they choose to invest in new, innovative technology as a way out?

Many have been worried that a large wage increase will have unintended consequences of steep cost increases. Some of the negative impacts can range from not being able to afford the time to train new hires, to raising the cost of housing and transportation, to hiring fewer, and having to cut back on workforce. As farms are facing these economic challenges, they are realizing that the current system may no longer be sustainable.

Many have been worried that a large wage increase will have unintended consequences of steep cost increases. Some of the negative impacts can range from not being able to afford the time to train new hires, to raising the cost of housing and transportation, to hiring fewer, and having to cut back on workforce. As farms are facing these economic challenges, they are realizing that the current system may no longer be sustainable.

Another negative impact a large wage increase like those proposed or being implemented could cause is discouraging farms from hiring young people or inexperienced workers. That will not only close another industry from hiring young people (whose unemployment rate hovers around 15%) it will also inhibit new, inexperienced folks who want to get started in agriculture.

“My workers are all worth 15 bucks an hour because they’ve been around,” said Duane Chamberlain, who also sits on the Yolo County Board of Supervisors in California. “Starting people out, it would be nice to hire kids at lower wages because they’re not worth it. They don’t know what they’re doing.”

Farmer Sarah Wiederkehr of Winter Hill Farm in Freeport, Maine whom I interviewed for this article felt similarly. She said “We definitely would NOT hire new, inexperienced labor if we were mandated to pay a much higher minimum wage. We already decided to stop hiring apprentices because we simply cannot afford the time it takes to train newbies. We decided last fall to only hire hourly employees, and ones with experience.”

Another nuance to consider is that farms often provide other forms of compensation, such as free or reduced cost housing, transportation, food, and sometimes child care, health care, or other services. None of these things are taken into account when a city or state passes new wage laws. Although agriculture has a long world history of not providing the best compensation and working conditions compared to many other industries, it also has a history of providing housing of some sort, often due to the rural location of the farms. Will farms be able to afford to continue to offer housing or to fix up and improve their housing if wages go up 30-60%?

Rebecca Thistlethwaite and husband Jim Dunlop run the Tastes Like Chicken Ranch in Los Lomas, California

Northeast Organic Farmers Association of New York (NOFA-NY) states: “Fair wages are an important value for NY’s organic farmers, yet the wages farmers pay their workers range from only $9 up to $20 an hour. Most of the farmers are not earning much more, and in the first 10 years of their farming careers often pay their workers more per hour than they earn themselves.”

The minimum wage is not tied to inflation. It should have been indexed to inflation a long time ago, rather than just raised every now and again based on political whims. Had the 1968 floor of $1.60 per hour been indexed to inflation, it would be $10.90 per hour today, more than 50 percent higher than the current federal minimum wage of $7.25. However, should some states be raising their minimum wages by double that $7.25 over a few years to make up for decades of political inaction? What price will our diversified family-scale farms pay for these rapid cost increases? And are you, as consumers, ready to do your part by paying higher prices for your food, particularly the labor-intensive healthy foods you should be eating? Not only will food be more expensive, which is not necessarily a bad thing, some specialty crops will be scarcer because some farms will choose to stop growing them.

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B-20
Overcoming Organic’s Price Squeeze
by Eric Holt-Giménez

As the organic market expands, the cost to consumers is slowly but steadily dropping, making organic food somewhat more accessible to more people. This has been good news for wholesale and retail processors and retailers. For farmers—and farm workers—not as much.

Why hasn’t the expansion of the organic food industry translated into higher wages and farm gate prices?

The simple answer is because organic farming is at the wrong end of the value chain.

But that is true for all farmers. What puts organic farming at a disadvantage is, in an organic nutshell, capitalism.

The high retail price of organic food frustrates farmers and consumers alike. Reasons given for the price difference between organic and conventional food for some crops up to 300 percent revolve around factors like low supply and high demand, greater labor input and postharvest handling, inefficient distribution chains and disadvantages in economy of scale.

All commodities—including food—are the products of human labor. Even honey, made by the planet’s bumblebees, requires human labor to collect and process by human labor; wild mushrooms still need to be gathered; salt needs to be mined or produced in evaporating ponds; and wild fish must be caught.

Once a commodity is produced, the value is determined by the labor in our food.

Organic systems use on average of 15 percent more labor than conventional farming systems. Sustainable organic farms provide a suite of valuable environmental services including soil, water and biodiversity conservation. Because of this—though it doesn’t translate into higher wages—the actual value of organic farm labor is much higher than the average wages paid for conventional labor. This is due to the extra skill required in organic farming and because conventional farming has set an artificially low level of “socially necessary labor time” in food production. This socially necessary labor time is a measure of the average level of worker productivity in a society. It determines how much labor is valued within a product.

Once this value is established, other market factors can come into play, for example, supply and demand, input and transaction costs, organic premiums, conventional subsidies. Regardless, the main factor is labor. The undervaluing of labor in food commodities is a heavy leveler and helps explain why organic and fair-trade systems were built—to get a better price. Another is to internalize the environmental externalities of conventional production (a “polluter pays” principle for agriculture). Another would be for society to make housing, healthcare education and social services free to farm workers who work on diversified, organic farms, and to provide incentives for farmers to hire more year-round workers. This would raise the “social wage” to workers and help recognize the value of their work. If we continue to favor organic, sustainable and fairly produced food—and make large-scale chemical agriculture pay for the damage it does to people and the environment—eventually, organic will become the dominant system, re-setting the levels of socially necessary labor time.

The undervaluing of labor in food commodities is a heavy leveler and helps explain why organic and fair-trade products have failed to “raise the bar” in the mainstream food industry. When voting with our fork, we should remember that the freedom to buy food according to our values does not, in and of itself, change the power of conventionally produced commodities in our food system. If we want to change that, we have to change the way we value the labor in our food.

This article is excerpted from the July 6, 2016 issue of In Good Tilth.

Healthy organic produce

Undocumented workers—without whom the food system would collapse—are criminalized by definition. This status makes it extremely difficult for them to demand living wages, benefits or basic rights. Further, a significant part of the cost of undocumented labor is assumed by the immigrant’s countries of origin and are free to both Western Europe and the United States. The low cost of undocumented labor works like a tremendous subsidy to the food system. Most of this value is captured by shippers, processors, retailers and input suppliers.

As a result, both farm labor and the family labor on organic farms are tremendously undervalued.

But, you say, an organic carrot is not the same product as a conventional carrot! The organic carrot has no pesticide residue, did not use synthetic fertilizers and did not poison people or the environment!

True, but the price of the extra labor power and the higher level of skill needed in organic production is not determined by the organic production process itself but by the cost of socially necessary labor in agriculture, generally.

This helps explain why it is often hard for small, organic farms to pay living wages and provide benefits to their workers. Many do, of course, but it is harder for them than for larger, conventional farms. It also helps explain a trend in organic farming to shift from small, diversified, labor and knowledge-intensive farms to large, capital-intensive, organic monocultures. These are the farms giant supermarket chains like Wal-Mart buy from because they can pay less for their products than larger organic farms, and the product comes in familiar, standardized pallets on a fixed schedule.

The downward pressure of socially necessary labor time on wages also helps explain the growing conflict between small-and-large scale organic farms and between peasant farmers and new, mechanized farms producing ancient indigenous crops like quinoa for newer commodity markets. The combination of mechanization, large buyers and lack of regulations against environmental pollution by large-scale conventional production lowers the value of socially necessary labor and favors large, conventional farms.

Small-scale, organic family farmers tend to “self- exploit.” It’s not uncommon for them to make less hourly than the seasonal workers whom they hire. They may not be able to save much for their children’s education or their own retirement. It is in their objective interest to ally with farm workers to raise the minimum wage and improve working conditions on all farms—large and small, organic and conventional, because this would raise the value of socially necessary labor in food commodities and the value of the farmer’s own labor. If all farm workers received living wages and basic social benefits, it would help to level the playing field between large-scale industrial operations and small-scale production, ultimately benefiting farms that use family labor.

There are many social and environmental benefits to certified organic and fairly produced products, including the possibility for small and medium-sized farmers—the ones upon whom both the organic and fair-trade systems were built—to get a better price. However, the steady entry of large-scale producers into these markets is driving down the value of socially necessary labor time. This is welcomed by large retailers because higher volumes mean more sales (and profits); it also lowers prices for the farmers and eventually squeezes out all but the largest producers.

From the perspective of value, there are different measures that could protect small and medium-size producers. One is to peg the organic and fair-trade premiums to the costs of production rather than to the conventional price. Another is to internalize the environmental externalities of conventional production (a “polluter pays” principle for agriculture).

But that is true for all farmers. What puts organic farming at a disadvantage is, in an organic nutshell, capitalism.
How Was the Minimum Wage Created?

by Oya Aktas

The rapid growth of the “Fight for $15” minimum wage movement and President Barack Obama’s changes to overtime regulations have sparked new rounds of debate over the economic consequences of an increased overtime pay threshold and a higher minimum wage. Advocates of overtime and wage hikes argue these policies protect workers from exploitation and discrimination. Opponents insist these regulations will hurt workers in the long run, as they will inflict a burden on companies that will be forced to cut jobs. These concerns are nothing new—this debate dates back to the early 20th century, before the minimum wage even existed in the United States and when overtime pay was unheard of.

At the end of the 19th century, economists predicted that markets, if left to their own devices, would function at equilibrium levels with the best possible distribution of resources. Rapid industrialization created the Gilded Age of American wealth, and people credited the free market with their increased prosperity. But along with growing industrialization, industrialization also sharpened economic inequalities and made certain groups particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Debates over hour and wage limits focused on which groups required labor protections and the best mechanisms for protecting these groups.

Labor regulations began in the 1890s as state-level maximum hour and minimum wage protections, which workers could challenge administratively to be struck down. Federal standards were not created until four decades later. This article details the arguments that shaped hour and wage limits in the early 20th century.

Women’s maximum hours

The Supreme Court actually was discriminatory in its protection of the free market—although it consistently blocked labor laws that applied to men, the high court allowed restrictions on women’s employment. The Supreme Court passed distinct rulings for men and women by emphasizing different doctrines for the two sexes. For men, the court consistently upheld freedom of contract; for women, the court privileged police powers.

The Supreme Court’s gender discrimination began with cases concerning maximum hour limits. In Lochner v New York (1905), the court justified its decision to strike down the 1895 Bakeshop Act—which placed hour limits on New York bakers—with the freedom of contract doctrine. Freedom of contract comes from the due process clause of the Constitution, which says that no person shall be “deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.” At the time, justices interpreted due process to mean that individuals should be free from restraint except to guarantee the same freedoms to others. But government could not rely on people’s ability to acquire future property. Limiting the hours that New York bakers worked, proponents argued, took away their liberty to choose the terms of their labor. The government could not reasonably claim they could earn, so maximum hour laws violated freedom of contract.

Just three years later, the Supreme Court set a different standard for women. In Muller v Oregon (1908), it upheld a 1903 Oregon law that prohibited women from working more than 10 hours a day. The court argued that women’s freedom to contract was superseeded by the police powers doctrine, which allows government regulation for the purpose of promoting health, safety, morality, and the general welfare of the public. The court found that “as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical wellbeing of woman is an object of public interest.” In other words, protecting women’s reproductive health was about more than respecting their freedom to contract. Women were also seen as fragile, vulnerable, and lacking the skills necessary to effectively bargain for pay and working conditions, and therefore unable to exercise their freedom of contract. These sex-specific discussions about government-imposed hour limits set the stage for a new conversation: the passage of state minimum wages.

Women’s minimum wages

In 1912, Missouri became the first state to pass a minimum wage law that applied only to women and children. Thirteen more states (along with DC and Puerto Rico) followed in the next 11 years. These legislation created a patchwork of legislation with a range of standards that limited wage and employment protections. One case in point: in 1923, the Wage Board in the District of Columbia set a weekly rate for laundry workers that was $1 lower than the across-the-board minimum adequate weekly wage of $16 it had previously chosen. The board explained that since 90 percent of laundry workers were African American, “the lower rate was due to a crystallization by the conference of the popular belief that it cost colored people less to live than white.” By not extending equal minimum wage protections to African American women, minimum wage laws reinforced their lower economic status.

In the next decade, legal changes in women’s status, paired with the economic optimism of the Roaring Twenties, brought a big shift in minimum wage legislation. Rattled in 1920, the 19th Amendment granted Women’s Suffrage. Shortly after, in a victory for more equal gender standards but a loss for labor protections, the Supreme Court issued a ruling that struck down women’s minimum wage laws across the country. In Adkins v Children’s Hospita l (1923), the court overturned the 1918 law that created D.C.’s Wage Board, which had set minimum wages for women employed in laundries and food-service establishments. The court reasoned that women were now politically empowered to advocate for themselves in the free market, the Court privileged freedom of contract over police powers and nullified minimum wage laws in the United States.

This optimism about the competitiveness of the free market did not last long. Once the Great Depres sion hit, people lost faith in the fairness of the U.S. economy. The failure of the banks cultivated distrust of large business and large corporations. Panics were afraid that business concentration hurt competition and created unfair trusts. The new popular economic narrative of economists said that imperfect and monopolistic competition dominated the economy. Unions, the Supreme Court had protected businesses a huge advantage, which they used to exploit labor. Public opinion shifted toward seeing government intervention not as redistribution but rather as reestablishing a competitive market.

The Fair Labor Standards Act

In this rapidly shifting political and economic climate Franklin D. Roosevelt won the 1932 elections and appointed Frances Perkins as his Secretary of Labor. Perkins’ platform included the National Industrial Recovery Act, which tried to improve working conditions through voluntary industrial participation. Under the proposed law, industries would be able to form alliances, which previously violated anti-trust laws, if they complied with maximum hour and minimum wage standards. A return to voluntaristic cooperation would display a Blue Eagle emblem in their stores, brandishing their patriotism and commitment to post-Great Depression recovery. In Schechter Poultry Corp. v United States (1935), however, the Supreme Court struck down the law, drawing the ire of Roosevelt and forcing Perkins to find a new way to pass labor reform.

Out of growing frustration with the Supreme Court’s challenges to his policies, Roosevelt came up with a plan to pack the court. He set off a campaign to reform the Supreme Court so he could appoint additional members to the court who would vote in line with his New Deal reforms. Faced with this existential threat and greater public support for labor laws, in 1937 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Washington state’s minimum wage law for women in West Coast Hotel Co. v Parrish. The court’s ruling de-emphasized the freedom of contract, reversing its 1923 decision and opening the door for future minimum wage legislation.

Following the Supreme Court decision, Perkins and Roosevelt sent a maximum hour and minimum wage bill to Congress. The original draft of the bill called for industry-specific, regionally variant minimum wages to account for regional differences in prices and cost of living. As the bill made its way through Congress, two more opposition groups emerged: unions and northern industries. Unions feared that government-imposed wage and hour restrictions would undermine their influence in collective bargaining. Northern industries opposed regionally specific wages for fear that industries would follow the cheap labor south. To appease these two groups, Roosevelt and his Democratic allies in Congress tweaked the bill to make it more popular. Roosevelt appeased the unions’ fears in his State of the Union address by emphasizing that more desirable workers would be the responsibility of collective bargaining. Lawmakers suggested a national minimum wage to satisfy northerners, but set the wage low enough to appease southerners.

In its final form, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the so-called Fair Labor Act, increased the standard workweek, scheduled to decrease to 40 hours in three years, with time and a half for overtime wages. The new law also created a minimum wage of 25 cents an hour, set to increase by 5 cents a year to reach 40 cents an hour by 1945. The original law was not universal. It included exemptions for agricultural, domestic, and some union-covered industries—once again, mostly in
Industries dominated by African Americans. Since the law lacked a mechanism for automatically increasing wages beyond 1945, it has been updated over the decades to increase wages and broaden industry (and racial) coverage. In the most recent revision to the Fair Labor Standards Act in 2009, the federal minimum wage was increased to $7.25 an hour.

Conclusion
The intellectual history of maximum hours and minimum wages is a story of debates over which groups should be protected from exploitation and what form this protection should take. Concerns over women’s health, ambivalence toward African American rights, and advocating for unorganized workers dominated the debate at different points. As social views changed, so did economic policies. Today, women account for two-thirds of minimum wage earners and people of color account for two-fifths. Studying the history of the minimum wage should compel policymakers to question how social priorities influence different groups, who is considered worthy of protection, and to what extent their welfare is considered. By implementing effective maximum hour and minimum wage regulations, policymakers can protect vulnerable workers’ standard of living to encourage productivity, push companies to increase their efficiency, and consequently cultivate long-term equitable growth.

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How was the Minimum Wage Created?
A timeline of legislation and Supreme Court cases that shaped maximum hour and minimum wage regulations in the U.S.

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Workers Come First at Old Friends Farm

by Jack Kittredge

Missy Bahret and Casey Steinberg in the fall of 2016, showing some of the vegetable production areas on Old Friends Farm.

Land in the Pioneer Valley, the alluvial plain along the Connecticut River, is arguably the best farmland in the state of Massachusetts. In fact Hadley loam, a deep, well drained soil formed in the silty alluvium of level flood plains and considered one of the premier agricultural soils in the nation, is named for the town of Hadley, which is adjacent to Amherst, Massachusetts. Adding to the quality of the soil there are the valley’s moderate elevation (mostly under 300 feet) and ample rainfall (approximately 48 inches per year) which make land in the Valley a Mecca for Northeastern farmers.

Two young farmers originally from New York and Vermont, Missy Bahret and Casey Steinberg, migrated to the Valley over a dozen years ago by different paths – but ended up running a farm together in Amherst.

“I’m from New York – the Hudson valley,” says Missy, “We met in college at the University of Vermont. We were friends there but didn’t plan on farming. But we worked together on projects. I was studying environmental education and Casey was studying outdoor education.”

“Basically that is outdoor adventure mixed with ecology and environmental education,” inserts Casey.

“They had been on a farm for 3 years previously, and thought she should keep exploring. Having interviewed at 3 places in the Valley she was disheartened at the wages she was offered. They were high school biology teachers.”

Missy spent time hopping around on different farms with a goal of learning more about farming and where her food came from. She eventually moved to the Pioneer Valley because it was a vibrant farming area. She had been on a farm for 3 years previously, and she knew it was important, but she didn’t enjoy it. She says, “because although I loved being outdoors I wasn’t enjoying facilitating that experience for others. I knew it was important, but I didn’t enjoy it. I got tired of group process (which is ironic now that we run a crew of a dozen!) But at the time I wasn’t into it.”

He apprenticed for a season, then was assistant manager for two more years at Brookfield Farm in South Amherst. From there it was a small step to join Missy at her farm a year after she started it. He has been there now for 12 years and co-manages Old Friends Farm with Missy.

“I come to farming with my systems approach to things,” she observes. “Casey is really, really good at details and the goings on at farms. So we find that we have complementary approaches.”

They lease their land from Bramble Hill Farm – which is owned by the Open Field Foundation, a nonprofit private operating foundation created in 1996 by Gordon Thorne and Anne Woodhull to hold the assets of Bramble Hill Farm, to protect and sustain the unique and diverse ecologies associated with open land, and to explore alternative uses for productive agricultural acreage.

Bramble Hill Farm was the location of a dairy farm on Route 116 in South Amherst. It was a highly visible farm, abutting the town golf course among other properties, and was the first in Massachusetts to be set up under the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program – to prevent it from ever being developed.

“Starting up as we did,” says Casey, “it would have been impossible for us to buy this kind of land in Amherst. It has been a great incubator for us. We began with less than a quarter acre when Missy started the farm, and now we lease around 30 acres. We pay a market rate for the land and each building – $200 per acre per year, as well as a monthly rent for the buildings plus utilities.”

Casey and Missy are at the end of a 5 year lease right now and talking with The Open Field Foundation about a 99 year one.

The pair primarily raise salad greens, although they also have vegetables and flowers. About 25 or 26 acres are in active production.

“The salad greens are land hogs,” says Missy, ruefully, “and take up a huge amount of space. We probably have only an acre or so in flowers – a little more if you count sunflowers – and a couple of acres of veggies. We also have an acre under cover.”

“The vegetables are all hand harvested,” points out Casey. “We do use tractor cultivation with them and use black plastic for all the hot crops – peppers, eggplants, early zucchini, and some flowers. If we have a plastic-covered bed where the crop is done we will try to use the space again to get the most use of the plastic.”

They take the plastic up every year – it isn’t too much of a hassle if they have done their weeding. The plastic lifts up and comes off pretty easily. They don’t use biodegradable plastic because it is not approved in organic production.

“Carrots we do all season long,” Casey adds, “beets we do early spring and late fall, but we don’t do a whole lot of root vegetables and we don’t do winter storage crops. Neither of us really has any interest in dealing with root cellars and lugging 25 pound bags of roots around all winter.”

A half acre or so of salad greens are seeded each week, and since the crop takes only four weeks until harvest the beds can be reused three times in a season.

“These are not permanent beds,” says Casey, “but they probably much stay the same. The bed and pathway width are based on our tractor, the number of beds that can be covered by row cover, how many beds irrigation will reach, etc. We use bags filled with compost to hold the row cover down (it is windy) so that when they break it is compost on the bed, not something you don’t want there. We used to mix lettuce varieties in beds but if for some reason one performs poorly one time you don’t want to use the whole mix out. We have many various standard mixes we put together.”
All the farm’s tillage and bed formation and seeding is tractor-based. They use a high density seeder which requires a perfectly level bed.

“We used to do this in a different way,” Casey explains, “where we made our beds and sowed individual lines with a seedway seeder. Then three to five of our crew would spend three or four hours on their knees tending them. We figured that wasn’t sustainable – everyone would need knee replacements. But we have no intention of using up our workers. We want them to be able to be farmers for life, and not aching or groaning. So we decided to make changes to our workplace so that it is a positive experience and safe and healthy for our workers. We said let’s put this to the forefront and if we can’t make it we can’t make it.

“For salads we don’t cultivate,” he continues. “We plant so densely and prepare our beds so that weeds aren’t a problem. We use stale bedding. We harvest an area and turn it over for two or three weeks and then get another week or two of weed suppression, and then plant it. The weeding can be done in the form of tillage, but there are other ways to deal with weeds. In preparing the soil you can make the bed really shallow and let the bed former scrape the top layer off the bed, including weeds. Or we have a basket weeder we can use, or a flame weeder. But it is an issue that we think about all the time. Because we have a land crunch and we need to support ourselves and our crew, we trade our crew’s quality of life and physical wellbeing for tillage.

“Salad is the only thing for which we have mechanized harvesting,” he concludes, “although we will also dig roots with an under cutter bar instead of using a pitchfork. We bag by hand, though, and processing is not mechanized. That probably is next. We triple wash in three tanks and spin dry the greens. Then we pack by hand.”

Pests are a problem for Missy and Casey. They say they have lots of flea beetles, aphids, and tomato hornworms. Row covers are the main things they use for control, but they’ll spray for hornworms in the greenhouse. Mostly they try to use crop rotations and spacing to prevent pests.

“We make our own compost,” says Casey, “and everything gets cover cropped.” This fall we have oats and peas growing, and that section that is bare ground now was rye and sunflowers. That is going to be our garlic. We try to use cover crops as much as we can.

Last summer, of course, Massachusetts experienced an extended drought. Old Friends Farm was heavily impacted by it, being without their staple crop – salad greens – for six weeks! Some spotly storms came by and some farms got precipitation, but not Old Friends.

The farm has two ponds for irrigation, but both ran dry (or got so low it was below Missy and Casey’s threshold of a respectable ecological level). The pair had to contract with the town to get water from fire hydrants.

“We haven’t received the bill yet,” Casey sighs, “but it is going to be very expensive. The water goes for $3.60 per hundred cubic feet, which turns out to be about $30 an hour. It is not potable water, so there is no chlorination. But the kicker is that the price includes use of town sewers!”

Irrigation for the salad greens is overhead because drip would be too much of a hassle. It would have to be moved from fourteen 300-foot beds -- 4 to 6 lines per bed -- every time they were seeded.
Casey estimates that the farm sells 60% of its produce wholesale and 40% retail. Missy thinks it is even more wholesale, probably like 75:25.

The retail sales are primarily at two farmers markets – Amherst on Saturday and Northampton on Tuesday.

“Farmers markets used to be all we did when we were first starting,” says Casey. “We did 5 a week and sometimes two on one day. We slowly pared that down to just 2 for our peace of mind. To load the truck at 6 am and go to Boston and sell all day and not get home until 11 – that is a hard day to put anyone through.

“The Saturday market wasn’t always on our lists,” he continues. “We couldn’t get into it for awhile and because of that we looked a little further – to Boston. When we finally did get into Amherst we were able to stay a little closer to home.”

“That was a key to the puzzle for us,” emphasizes Missy. “Once we got into Amherst it really changed things for us!”

For almost a decade Old Friends Farm has been certified organic, through BayState. Casey feels being certified organic means a lot to both their wholesale accounts, as well as at the farmers markets. Missy agrees.

“It is fair to say we certify as a marketing tool,” Casey explains. “We are using those practices anyway, keeping those records anyway. But being certified organic proved to be the only way to prove it. It was the only way people could trust it. It is still very important for our retail customers, especially our new ones. Once they get to know us it changes. Being certified is maybe the foot in the door, but once they know us it is the soul of who we are that keeps them and. One of the things they learn about us is the workplace or the positive experience working here.”

Most of the salad mix is sold wholesale. It ships in 3 lb. cases for $21.75 per case for large orders. Whole Foods and River Valley Coop are among their best customers.

“For the most part,” Casey says, “when it comes to pricing we have a wholesale price and all the distributors pay it. It is based on our knowledge of the costs of production and what we need to recoup that, plus some profit. We try to keep that price such that it can pay us what we need and also be acceptable. We talk to people and look at prices at the store to get an idea what the competition is charging.”

“We time tracked the labor to measure them,” recounts Missy. “We were trying to create a workplace that isn’t subsidized by low wages. We actually try to work smart with a goal in mind and be ruthless, like with the chickens. We enjoyed them, we loved having the eggs, the customers loved them, they had so much going for them. But we rode it out for too many years.

“We were known for them,” recalls Casey. “They were that good! But as soon as we were, like, we don’t need to be known for that anymore, we can let that go, we can let somebody else be the ‘best eggs at market’ person, it was good riddance.”

When held up against the pair’s goal of meeting a triple bottom line – a healthy environmental, social, and economic result – they were not making it economically. They had to be changed.

“We time tracked the labor to measure them,” relates Missy. “We did it for a whole year. That seems like a big deal, but all it is is a pocket notebook and a pencil. We give everybody a watch and they could write down how long they spend when we are time tracking something. There is really no other way of gauging it accurately.

“QuickBooks will tell us what our receipts say,” she continues, “but labor is hard to track – unloading feed, washing eggs, moving houses, anytime you are doing anything relating to the chickens, write it down. One person would compile the little pieces of paper with notes of 2 minute here and 5 minutes there. And that person’s wages would be counted, too!”

“There is a ruthlessness to that approach,” Missy concludes. “This doesn’t sound profound, but when it comes from a farmer it is profound – Our lives, all the aspects of our lives, are as important as our farm! We still put our hearts and a ton of time into it. We give everybody a watch and they can write down how long they spend when we are time tracking something. There is really no other way of gauging it accurately.

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Old Friends Farm has hired more employees as its business has grown. Counting Missy and Casey, the crew is now 13 people – one works for the full year and the rest work March through December. During January and February some will travel and some pick up other work. All are post college, with the youngest being 26. The farm has a high worker characterizing their attitude now, they say, it might be something like wanting to ‘work smart’.

“There is a cultural mentality,” says Missy, “that you farm from dawn to dusk, that you don’t treat this as a business, you don’t have hours. That it should be all-absorbing is the cultural norm. It is part of our goal to not do that. A lot of people don’t have that goal or else they would stick to a stopping point. If a project can’t get done they would change their operation next year or not grow that crop.

“It is the same with finances,” she continues. “If people really looked at finances they would stop growing some crops that weren’t cutting it. I think it is a bit of a comfort zone of oblivion that a lot of people take on. They will figure that their situation is unique or come up with another reason to continue.”

“My biggest lesson is always to get to know,” says Casey. “When I was a newer, younger farmer I was proud that I am less of a workaholic than I used to be. The people we work with are able to identify our limits instead of pushing to the point. If a project can’t get done they would change their operation next year or not grow that crop.

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“I think pride is a big part of it,” asserts Casey. “When I was a younger farmer I was proud that we did all these markets in Boston. We worked 70 or 80 hours a week. That was a source of pride. A few years into that I started seeing that pride as a limitation. We couldn’t get into it for awhile and because of that we looked a little further – to Boston. When we finally did get into Amherst we were able to stay a little closer to home.”

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After so many years at it, Steinberg and Bahret are no longer starry-eyed about farming. If asked to

Missy picks a few peppers for snacking on

Greens are a big part of the farm’s output

“Farmers markets used to be all we did when we were first starting,” says Casey. “We did 5 a week and sometimes two on one day. We slowly pared that down to just 2 for our peace of mind. To load the truck at 6 am and go to Boston and sell all day and not get home until 11 – that is a hard day to put anyone through.

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“There is a ruthlessness to that approach,” Missy concludes. “This doesn’t sound profound, but when it comes from a farmer it is profound – Our lives, all the aspects of our lives, are as important as our farm! We still put our hearts and a ton of time into it. But our pride is coming from a more truly sustainable place.”

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After the dry summer of 2016, the irrigation pond is pretty low.

The employees get a week off unpaid during the season, an educational stipend of $100 which can be spent for professional development like a con-

ference or a book, a free lunch on Mondays, and produce from the farm. The day starts at 7:30 and ends at 4:30.

"We feel if the day isn't done at 4:30 and they are held for whatever reason," Casey says, "then that is a management error on our part. We have lives outside of the farm and want the crew to be able to have that as well. If they make a doctor appointment or want to go to a yoga class or a concert of go for a walk while it is still light they should make a plan and be guaranteed they are going to be able to do it. That feels like just basic respect on our part.

'In any other workplace environment," adds Missy, "we pick, "We do some group team building activity that is ap-

propriate for that in order to provide education for how to do things in a better way. We do a monthly check-in at the beginning of the new year about how we're doing. That is the time for anyone to pipe up about changes or needs they have.

"Where possible we try to give people tractor work if they want," explains Casey. "If we have a really great employee we will try to meet their needs if we can. We're pretty set with tractor operators right now. But we might give an employee who wants to learn a chance. We could give them a few beds to manage and they could pay us their professional de-

velopment fee to teach them to run the tractor there, or go to a weekend workshop on tractor operation.

As an example of this responsive flexibility, the farm will be growing more this winter to support an employee who wants to work there year-round.

"Just because Missy and I are not interested in growing year round does not mean that we don't want to have employees all year round. If it takes to keep them year round is having an aspect of the farm that we might not be passionate about, but that they are, that is great." Right now, according to Casey, wages for all 13 workers represents about 21% of the farm’s budget. Although by normal standards that is considered a successful ratio, Casey and Missy are trying to get it higher!

"We got some financial planning consulting through CISA," he says. "We're trying to find out how to cover that cost."

"If other farms are having to do that too, it would help with the customer education," adds Missy. "We would raise our prices and explain why we raised them. We've done it before."

"Once we bumped everything a dime," Casey recalls, "and over the course of a season that was $15,000. That's half an employee right there. If the minimum wage was raised we'd just have to figure out how to cover that cost.

"In setting prices we rely on our time tracking to show what we have to get," says Missy. "We pick a few crops and time track them for a year. We also look at what the market can handle so we can set prices of increasing worker wages, including ourselves. So with that in mind we will never go lower than what we need to get for the crop.

"That is a downward slope, to lower prices, Casey insists. "You do it and the next person does because he thinks he has to and so forth. Then the farmers are subsidizing the food. We're not going to do that. The risk is being seen as elitist. Having people say 'Oh, your food is not accessible to everybody.'

"So what is at the root of that," Missy asks? "It is not true that we are elitist. The work we do with the food stamp program and accessibility has helped this food to be accessible. And I don't feel good about running a workplace where my employees' ability to cover their costs is cut in order for some-

one else to get cheaper food who maybe have put their kids through college already and are living in a retire-

ment plan!

"Customers and farmers alike," she continues, "are out of touch with the real cost of making food.

There is the cultural mentality of 'woe-is-me poor farmer, uneducated, don't stand up for yourself'. So we sell still staff dirt cheap. It is similar to being at market when someone balks at a price. Stand up for it! This is helping you get money to raise a family, to put your kids through college. Don't lower that price! That negative, self deprecating mentality does not help the local food movement."

Both Missy and Casey feel that communication lines are important to making employment suc-

cessful. They check-in with new employees after a month of work, then do a mid-year check-in, then a check-in at the beginning of the new year to ask about how people feel about returning, what they want, what are their needs. They also do a closing or exit inter-

view whether the employee is coming back or not.

"Our daily morning meeting varies from 2 minutes to 20 minutes," Missy relates. "It is a chance for someone to be the bearer and tell us what each other is doing. That is the time for anyone to pipe up about changes or needs they have.

"There is also a monthly meeting," adds Casey, "where we activate our 'wheel of appreciation'.

That is a dry erase board in a circle which spins. It is divided into pie pieces. You can nominate anyone and say why you appreciate them. At the end of every month we read each one out loud, there are probably 16 slots, we spin it and whoever it lands on gets a free massage. The reading of it out loud is important – you hear what others do which contrib-

utes to a culture of appreciation.

Both Missy and Casey say a key aspect of managing is respecting that everyone works best in positions they have an interest in. When you cater to people's interests they are more productive. They say any-thing engaged more and have a better work experience. So it is a 2-way win.

Different people also learn in different ways," Missy elaborates, "and we have done a bit of work on learning styles and how co-workers can learn to relate with each other in a way that will work best. We do a monthly recharge meeting. We have some sort of theme and it is really a sort of pep rally. We do some group team building activity that is appli-

cable to work.

"The situation is best when trust goes both direc-

tions, too," Missy says. "If they understand the need for efficiency then maybe they will suggest areas of time track certain crops where there might be prob-

lems. They can do calculations as they are working harvesting or planting. They can do a calculation to decide if what they are doing is worth it. If we are going through the turnips and pulling so many that it is taking so long they can do a quick calculation and say: 'Wait a minute, is this worth it?'

Casey and Missy are active in the Agricultural Justice Project and its effort to campaign for living wages and worker empowerment, certifying farms and businesses throughout the food chain which meet its standards.
Before I left I had a chance to sit down with Casey and a number of the farm workers during their lunch break. They were primarily young women, mostly in their twenties, without children. They were clear that working at Old Friends Farm was a positive experience. Among the comments were:

“They [Missy and Casey] have been very flexible with a muddle of hours. A rising comes up in your personal life they are willing to work with you on that.”

“Another excellent fringe benefit is all the extra top quality organic produce we get. That would cost a lot at Whole Foods.” (general assent to this)

“Earlier in the year I was interested in a class offered by another small farm in the area doing medicinal herbs and processing them mostly by drying. So Missy and Casey paid for me to take that class which was offered through NOFA to see how their operation was set up. I learned a lot about how I could apply that here and use it if I wanted to start something like that on my own later. I thought that was great.”

“They’re great at listening to what we are interested in and finding ways to fit our position to our interests. I started here washing salads, now I work in the field more. But that said, it is not a teaching farm. It’s a business, primarily.”

But when I asked about the more fundamental issues of income and security, and whether they could survive on these for the long term, the comments were a little more muted:

“It would not be easy if this were your only income.”

“I would like to, and say 5 years ago I was way more convinced that I could do that. That it was a financial future that made sense. But now I’ve had enough experience in the world and it seems like there would have to be a lifestyle commitment. But that said, I still think about it all the time.”

“When I think of being a farm manager as a financially palatable future I like to think that is a good option. But I want to make enough to live comfortably. And I think that would be hard.”

“I’ve been thinking of that $15 an hour goal as being a funny place to be in terms of income. As your income goes up benefits get taken away – health care, food stamps – for being near the poverty line. So that would have to change, too. In 15 years I’d like to be making $25 an hour in today’s dollars. With me and my partner working we could send kids to college and buy a house. Would I be doing this? Maybe, maybe not. That would be sweet because I love doing this.”

Resources on Fair Trade, Farm Labor and Living Wages

compiled by Elizabeth Henderson

Domestic Fair Trade and Farmer Justice Organizations

Domestic Fair Trade Association

The Domestic Fair Trade Association is a collaboration of organizations representing farmers, farmworkers, food system workers, retailers, manufacturers, processors, and non-governmental organizations. Our primary goal is to support family-scale farming, to reinforce farmer-led initiatives such as farmer co-operatives, and to bring these groups together with mission-based traders, retailers and concerned consumers to contribute to the development and support of sustainable agriculture in North America. DFTA has posted on its website a detailed evaluation of fair trade claims in the US market. NOFA is a founding member of DFTA. http://www.nofa.org

Agricultural Justice Project

The Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) is a non-profit initiative to create fairness and equity in our food system through the development of social justice standards for organic and sustainable agriculture. On the website you will find a Tool-kit for farmers with resources on fair labor policies, intern contracts, fair pricing, contracts and the background for fairness in international certified fair trade farming organizations and a continuing partner in AJP. http://www.agriculturalljusticeproject.org/

Fair World Project

Fair World Project (FWP) educates and advocates for a just global economy where: people are treated fairly with dignity; the environment is respected and nourished; commerce fosters sustainable livelihoods and communities; and the global society based on cooperation and solidarity; fair market opportunities and fair government and trade policy defend and support the contributions of farmers, workers, and consumers to our global society; marketing claims have integrity and promote throughout entire supply chains, and support dedicated brands that put people before profits. FWP publishes a quarterly magazine with reports on domestic and international fair trade, evaluations of standards and certification programs. http://www.fairworldproject.org

Farmworker Justice

Farmworker Justice Farmworker Justice is a nonprofit organization that seeks to empower migrant and seasonal farmworkers, improve working conditions and support farmworker rights by monitoring immigration status, health, occupational safety, and access to justice. http://www.farmworkerjustice.org/

Workers’ Centers

There are Workers’ Centers in Central New York, Tompkins County, and the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts, and Vermont. These centers provide training for low-wage workers in their legal rights, support workers who have been cheated out of wage and overtime pay, connect workers with unions and with information about medical treatment for injuries on the job and how to apply for Workers’ Compensation or Social Security. The Workers’ Center of Central New York focuses on organizing dairy farm workers. The Pioneer Valley Workers’ Center mission statement is typical of these centers: “The RVWC builds power with low-wage, and immigrant workers in Western Massachusetts. Through innovative and creative worker-organizing strategies, the Center unites community allies to win real change in the lives of working families and our communities.” Centers engage in direct action, document human trafficking, and educate the public about labor issues.
They organize campaigns on immigration reform and help re-unite immigrant families broken up by the arrest and detainment of a family member, facilitate bail and identify sources of legal help. The Tompkins County Workers’ Center certifies Living Wage Employers who must commit to paying the living wage calculated by the center for the Ithaca area of NY. https://workerscnw.org/en/home/
http://www.lcwworkerscenter.org/
https://www.prworkerscenter.org/
https://www.workerscenter.org/

Farmworker organizations in other regions:
Farmworkers Association of Florida (www.florida-farmworkers.org)
Centro Campesino, Minnesota (www.centro-campesino.net)
Community to Community Development, Washington State (www.foodjustice.org)
Lideres Campesinas, California (www.lideres-campesinas.org)
Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), based in Toledo, Ohio. FLOC organizes farmworkers in Ohio, NC, SC and Mexico. (www.floc.org)

United Farm Workers
Founded in 1962 by Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers (UFW) of America is the nation’s first successful and largest farm workers union, currently active in 10 states. The vision of UFW is to provide farm workers and other working people with the inspiration and tools to share in society's bounty. Farmworkers on improving communications, and worker conditions, provides training to farmers and farmworkers on improving communications, and provides resources for farm workers on its website. http://devsoc.cals.cornell.edu/outreach/cfp/

National Center for Farmworker Health
The National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) is a private, not-for-profit corporation located in Buda, Texas dedicated to improving the health status of farmworker families by providing information services, training and technical assistance, and a variety of products to community and migrant health centers nationwide, as well as organizations, universities, researchers, and individuals involved in farmworker health. http://www.nacfh.org/

The New Farmer Development Project
The New Farmer Development Project (NFDP) identifies, educates, and supports immigrants with agricultural experience by helping them become local farmers and establish small farms in the NYC region. http://www.grownyc.org/greenmarket/nfdp

National Farm Worker Ministry
The National Farm Worker Ministry is a faith based organization which supports farm workers as they organize for justice and empowerment. When United Farm Workers founder Cesar Chavez began organizing in the 1960’s, he called on the religious community to change its emphasis from charity to justice. NFWM became the vehicle for people of faith to respond to that call. NFWM brings together national denominations, state councils of churches, religious orders and congregations, and concerned individuals to act with the farm workers to achieve fundamental change in their living and working conditions. Grounded in faith, NFWM works side by side with farm workers throughout the country, organizing vigils, picketing, coordinating boycotts and educating constituents. http://nfwm.org/

Books, Films, Articles:
Labor and the Locavore: The Making of a Comprehensive Food Ethic
By Margaret Gray (U. CA Press, Berkeley, 2014)
The result of ten years of study of the conditions for both farmworkers and farmers in the Hudson Valley of New York, Gray gives us an honest picture of how farm labor relations look through a labor justice lens.

“Hands that Feed Us: Challenges and Opportunities for Workers Along the Food Chain”
From the Food Chain Workers Alliance, a coalition of organizations that includes farmworkers, restaurant workers, unions that organize food service workers, and other grassroots stakeholder groups. This study is based on a survey of FCWA members and reports on their work, their wages and benefits, and makes recommendations for change. http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012-06-Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf

Farms Hands
By Frank Bardacke
Not for the faint of heart, this 740 page study by a man who worked with UFW for a decade in the 1970’s, attempts to capture in great detail both the strengths and weaknesses of Cesar Chavez and the organization he created. Bardacke paints a vivid picture of the obstacles to organizing farm workers, struggling against farms and agribusinesses determined to maintain control, and the bitter fights within the labor movement.

The Color of Food: Stories of Race, Resilience and Farming
By Natasha Bowens, 2015.
A voice for food sovereignty in communities of color as well as a book by Natasha Bowens. The Color of Food is a multimedia project that aims to address the lack of voices from Asian, Black, Latino and Native American communities in the dialogue on healthy food and food justice. http://thecoloroffood.org/home.html

New York Times Articles:
Illegal Workers Sweep From Jobs in Silent Raids

The Other Side of Immigration (Film)
Based on over 700 interviews, The Other Side of Immigration asks why so many Mexicans leave home to work in the United States and what happens to the families and communities they leave behind. http://www.theothersideofimmigration.com/

After I Pick the Fruit: The Lives of Immigrant Farm Women (Film)
For ten years, Nancy Ghertner filmed the lives of 5 women farm workers in Wayne County, New York, at work, with their families, dealing with the Border Patrol and deportation. http://www.afteripickthe-fruit.com

Harvest of Empire
This film examines the role that US military and corporate intervention in Latin America has played in recruiting waves of farmworkers from Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America. Based on book by Juan Gonzalez of Democracy Now! Available for free viewing at vimeo.com/21016985

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The whole crew at Old Friends Farm is assembled here. Owners are Missy (at the far right in the first row), and Casey (sixth from the left in the standing row).

This newspaper contains news and features about organic food and farming in the Northeastern US as well as a Special Supplement on Farming for a Living Wage.