



Southeastern Massachusetts
Agricultural Partnership
PO Box 80625
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www.semaponline.org

Save The Date!



Join us to learn more about our progress this year, and what we're looking forward to next year!
More details coming soon!

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The Plowshare

Seasonal Newsletter

Fall 2022

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Climate impacts on local farming are affecting both farmers and crops. We have felt the effects of climate change throughout southeastern Massachusetts this summer with hotter temperatures, less rain, and extreme precipitation when and where it happens. Our early summer heat wave has exacerbated the drought, as well as stress on farmers and farm workers, and the USDA has recently designated all of central and eastern Massachusetts (9 counties) as primary natural disaster areas. While the weather pattern is likely to change in the Fall, the damage to both crops and farm finances has already been done.

Farmers are facing many increased challenges as the planet warms up. The risks for our farmers and farm workers are countless due to the strenuous nature of their work, with issues ranging from heat stress, to poor air quality, and an increased chance of insect-borne illnesses. When conditions are so hot as to impact productivity, labor costs increase while output goes down, affecting the farmer's bottom line.

Some of the climate impacts reported by our farmers include rising temperatures that alter pest pressure, and affect the timing and behavior of pollinators and beneficial insects. They face hotter, drier summers that decrease the water availability and increase plant stress, reducing the yield of perennials and annual crops, and lower nutritional values of pasture grasses. Heavy precipitation events damage crops, and wetter springs delay planting, which can lead to later harvest and reduced yields. There is also an increasing need for farm labor to irrigate crops and provide water for

livestock. Overall, there is much less predictability on the farm, which in turn leads to a less reliable living.

Though the small farmers of Massachusetts are not the biggest contributors to climate change, our farmers have a crucial role to play in mitigating climate change. Small-scale farmers like many in our region are able to more quickly adjust their farming practices. Climate friendly practices like composting, cover cropping, mulching, integrating livestock into crop production systems and no-till agriculture can build organic matter in the soil, which helps alleviate some of the effects of extreme weather events and stores carbon in the soil. Recent federal government support through the Inflation Reduction Act will increase funding to farmers to implement climate friendly farming practices and allow farmers to adapt with regionally-specific farming practices at a faster pace.

We can support our Southeastern Massachusetts farmers in reducing the threat of climate change. Talk to your farmer - especially about how they grow their food. Buy from your local farm stand or at your farmers' market. Vote for legislators that prioritize climate change mitigation, and then hold them accountable to these promises. Prioritize purchasing fresh local food over convenience whenever possible. Our farms, our food, and our future depend on it.

With gratitude,
Karen Schwalbe
Executive Director

The 2022 Twilight Grower Series Continues!

September	November 1	Late Fall
Soil Microscopy and Microbiology w/ NOFA Mass Location TBA	Winter Green Production Skinny Dip Farm, Little Compton	Land Transfer Summit Location TBA

For updates on event dates, locations and topics, head to semaponline.org/programs/



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Meet The SEMAP Board

Dee Levanti, Ivory Silo Farm

It's time to meet SEMAP's newest board member! Dee Levanti joined the SEMAP Board in March of this year. Dee brings several years of farming experience with her, as well as a great vision for the big picture issues facing food systems in our community.

Dee has been farming in Westport at Ivory Silo Farm since 2015, growing vegetables, herbs, flowers, seeds and more on eight acres. Before coming to Westport, Dee began farming full-time at Casey Farm in 2007. Since then, she has worked on and managed several other organic market farms and CSA farms.

For Dee, farming is about more than just producing food; She sees a bigger picture at play. "The people, plants, and food drew me right in when I started farming, but it was the sovereignty that inspired me and the tractor work that hooked me." Now, she also sees the biological systems at play in the fields too. "These days I most love being at eye level with creatures who are invisible in most of our daily lives."

While farming in Westport, Dee has also started another project, the Freed Seed Federation. Dee and co-farmer Bill Braun began FSF to support regional food resilience from the seed up. "We do seed and breeding work at Ivory Silo Farm which inspired us to create the Freed Seed Federation, allowing us to focus some of our time on growing, maintaining, and breeding localized seed stock." Taking a seed-level perspective to farming means thinking about the relationship between seed and soil, and looking at microorganisms we might otherwise forget. "Growing seed and doing breeding work, which requires multiple seasons, has transformed the way I farm."

Make sure to stop by Ivory Silo Farm at the corner of Hixbridge and Horse-neck Road in Westport to see more of the great work Dee is up to.



Meet Dee Levanti and Bill Braun

Election Day and Local Food: A Primer

James Lehner



Make sure to get out and vote this November!

While midterm years can feel less dramatic or impactful than other years, there are still important issues being decided this year. At the top of the ballot is the contest to replace outgoing Governor Charlie Baker. However, more offices across the Commonwealth and in our region will be decided in November, all with important impacts on food policy.

"Massachusetts will have a new Governor and Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Auditor, potentially Secretary of State, and many new state representatives and senators after the 2022 elections," says Becca Miller, Program Manager for the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative. "Learning about the candidates and engaging them in conversations about issues you care about is essential."

Local officials, state representatives and state senators are in the midst of campaigning across their districts now. While easy to overlook, these races are crucial to crafting state policy, as these officials are meant to represent their specific communities and the needs they express.

"Legislative races often don't get much attention, but are important to making sure your voice is heard on Beacon Hill," says Miller. "State representatives and senators need to hear from voters in their district about how policy affects them so they can make informed policy choices."

Although issues around food do not always feel central to campaigns, results from this Fall will have a large impact on our food system. As Miller puts it, "state policy determines how children are educated in how to cook, grow food, and learn about nutrition and the food system from kindergarten through twelfth grade; how much money MDAR grant programs and the Healthy Incentives Program receive; how farmers are supported in adapting to climate change; and much more."

The Massachusetts general election, where primary winners will face off against each other, will be on Election Day, Tuesday, November 8. Be sure to show up and vote with farmers, food access and farmland in mind!

Crops Corner: Cranberries are Coming!

James Lehner

There are many great traditions around Massachusetts to mark the transition into Autumn: cider donuts and pumpkins, Salem's transformation into a Halloween haven, New England Patriots games on Sundays. Down in southeastern Massachusetts grows another tradition with deep roots - cranberries.



Get ready for cranberry season!

Bogs across the region will soon be deep into harvesting and processing these delicious berries. For cranberry growers like Dom Fernandes of Fresh Meadows Farm, this means the busiest time of year is right around the corner. While the crops are cared for almost year-round, it's in the early Fall when work truly picks up. Wet harvesting starts in early October, while dry harvesting starts even earlier in September, and requires an ability to respond to weather conditions quickly.

Dom is a third-generation Cape Verdean farmer, whose family, like many Cape Verdeans, began growing cranberries in Southeastern Massachusetts in the 1920s and shaped the industry into what it is today. When he came back to the family business 42 years ago, he never imagined he'd stay in it for so long. As he puts it, he "ended up catching the cranberry bug - the lifestyle was something that had been instilled in me as a younger person."

Fresh Meadows Farm grows two heirloom varieties of cranberry native to Massachusetts: Howe and Early Black. For Dom, growing these berries is also about preserving a uniquely Massachusetts cranberry industry. "They were unique to Massachusetts and they are part of Massachusetts identity." Preserving that identity through his growing practices.

There are so many ways to celebrate Massachusetts' proud history of delicious, local cranberries. As you get ready to prepare your favorite cranberry dish this fall, look for some locally-grown, proudly Massachusetts cranberries to use.

Why Farmers' Markets Matter

James Lehner

With the growing season at its peak, farmers' markets across the region have opened their doors and put up their tents for folks to come and check out some great local food and vendors. In nearly every community, local farmers, artists, bakers and more gather to offer their many goods to their neighbors.

According to Sarah Labossiere, Mass in Motion Coordinator for Fall River and organizer of three pop-up markets in the city, "purchasing food grown on a local farm supports farming families, who are our neighbors; it helps these families keep their land as undeveloped, agricultural space, which helps to stabilize the climate; and it reduces the environmental impact of transporting food from far-away locations." The more the general public buys from and learns about local farmers and farming, the more they understand the value of local food and can support it.

When it comes to increasing access to local food, farmers' markets are a great tool for reaching folks who might not otherwise have easy access to these goods. In 2021, over \$100 million of federal nutrition benefits were spent between farmers' markets and direct marketing farmers. In Massachusetts, the Healthy Incentives Program, which provides SNAP users with additional monthly funds to buy local produce, saw similarly high usage, with \$6.3 million redeemed as of December 2021.

Find all your local favorites at a farmers' market



"Farmers' Markets are such a personal and impactful way to make fresh-picked, nutritious, locally grown produce available directly to folks who experience food insecurity," says Labossiere. "It is wonderful to offer folks the choice of wholesome food that was grown and harvested with care by a local farmer."

If you are looking for a farmers' market near you, you can head over to SEMAP's website and check out our page on regional markets, which includes information on locations, times, dates, and whether SNAP or HIP are accepted. You can also find this information in our Local Food Guide, available online or in print across the region now!