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Agricultural Partnership
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The Plowshare

Seasonal Newsletter

Spring 2022

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the Spring 2022 issue of The Plowshare! As the seasons change, so too does our farmers' work, and we hope to bring you a sense for all those shifts throughout the year. We at SEMAP are changing, too!

Recently, we have begun more actively engaging with issues of equity, diversity and justice in our food system, which is rooted in antiblackness and reinforced systemically. Our awareness of how these matters are interwoven in our work has developed in recent years, and we are committing to learning more and reflecting on how those learnings affect our work. With this comes an acknowledgment that SEMAP has not properly considered equity issues like racism before, and we must change our perspective. Our hope in this issue is to share some of that perspective with you now.

Beginning this Spring, SEMAP has updated its membership structure to offer a no-cost membership option for BIPOC businesses. For generations, access to resources has been denied or made exceptionally difficult for farmers of color across the United States. Black farmers have lost land and profits due to deliberate systemic actions at state and federal levels. It will require direct, deliberate action to repair this harm, and our hope is that by bringing these farmers into the SEMAP network and providing resources and technical support, we can help address historic inequities in farming and our food system.

We have also made an effort to create a more equitable space in our programming. At our Ag and Food Conference this February, we offered an expanded compensation package to presenters who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), as

historically these groups have received subpar or no compensation for their work in food systems. We also added veterans, low-income and BIPOC folks to our existing discounted admission category, which already included students and beginning farmers. As we better understand the challenges faced by BIPOC farmers, we feel inclined to minimize as many barriers to this knowledge as possible. Our intent is to be more actively welcoming, lower the obstacles to participation, and increase compensation for BIPOC participants.

Our work in food access also reveals some important and uncomfortable truths about our food system. While food insecurity and hunger are indiscriminate, it is well documented that BIPOC individuals and families are more likely to face these issues. In 2021, Project Bread found that Black and Hispanic families in Massachusetts faced food insecurity at nearly twice the rate as white families. While the fight for food access is about getting healthy, local food to all people, we have to consider these truths, which includes focusing on the communities and populations most impacted.

The SEMAP staff and board are engaged in learning about racial inequities, including how to make access to land, information, and training more equitable. We hope to do so through formal trainings and community partnerships, which will assist us in keeping issues of diversity and equity a central part of our work to support all regional farmers. We hope you will join with us in this learning process, hold us accountable, and reach out with any questions.

With gratitude,
Karen Schwalbe
Executive Director

The Twilight Growers Series is Back for 2022!

June 28
Moonlight Rose, Swansea
Alpaca Skillshare

July 21
Weatherlow Farms, Westport
Soil Biology w/ NOFA/Mass

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



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Meet The SEMAP Staff

James Lehner, Communications & Outreach Coordinator



James will help with baby goats too!

It's time to meet the newest member of the SEMAP team! James joined SEMAP last fall after two seasons of vegetable farming in northern Massachusetts. A natural storyteller, he comes with a background in print, audio and digital media, as well as a passion for food and farming.

James grew up in Boxborough, MA, a small rural town with farming all around. After graduating from St. Lawrence University in 2020 with a B.A. in Government, he worked at Applefield Farm in Stow, Massachusetts. Here, James got his first real taste of farming - from planting to weeding, suckering tomatoes to harvesting winter squash, there was hardly a vegetable he didn't have his hands on. Between growing seasons, he spent some time as a State House intern in Senator Jamie Eldridge's office, working closely with the communications team and gaining a deeper sense for working with and around policy-makers.

As Communications & Outreach Coordinator, James offers valuable services to both farmers and consumers in our region. As the lead on our social media and email newsletter, The Vine, James can help with promoting your business' upcoming events, sales, or anything else you want a spotlight on. He also provides support in the promotion of SNAP, HIP and other food incentive programs. This includes reaching potential customers with important information about the program, as well as promoting farms and farmers markets that accept EBT payments.

You can reach James via email, jlehner@semarponline.org, or on the phone at (508) 289-1865. Reach out with any questions about promoting your business, or to talk about any ways to support your work.

Farmer Spotlight: Oake Knoll Farms

Shannon Hickey

Just off of Route 1 in Foxboro, you'll find an oasis of local dairy, meats, eggs, and produce at Oake Knoll Farms. It might seem out of place, steps away from Patriot Place, but it's actually a Century Farm - a farm operated on the same land, by the same family, for more than 100 consecutive years. Though its name has changed - if you're a local you may remember it as Lawton's Family Farm or Foxboro Cheese Company - it's stayed in the Lawton family for 13 generations.

Terri Lawton bought the business from her parents three years ago, and while the historical integrity of the farm remains, she's using her Farm Business Management degree from Purdue to revitalize the family dairy. Alongside her husband Nevin and their four young sons, Terri has taken steps towards her vision of the farm as the agricultural heart of the area. They dream of offering agricultural education opportunities, shared facilities for new farmers, and a dairy supply for schools, food pantries & other emergency food programs.

It's clear that they all love this work, despite its exhausting demands. Terri and Nevin see incredible potential in their farm to meet community needs for local, ethically-produced dairy and beef products. That's why their cows and calves have access to open space and fresh forage, and why Oake Knoll isn't looking to expand past more than 50 milking cows. Happy cows make happy dairy farmers - not to mention better grazers and tastier dairy products.

While Oake Knoll's milks, yogurts, cheeses, and beef cuts speak for themselves, Terri and Nevin have added dozens of other products to their shelves, offering produce, baked goods, eggs, pork, and ice cream. They source from other small-scale local producers, many of whom the Lawtons know personally. It's all part of their goal of supporting other farmers and value-added food producers and strengthening our regional food system. And it's good news for consumers, too; you can do almost all of your grocery shopping at their farm stand, and feel good about where your money is headed!

Meet the Lawton family at Oake Knoll Farm!



Crops Corner: Early Spring Snacks

James Lehner

Spring is in the air, and seedlings are in the ground, or at least very close! While farmers are hard at work getting these crops ready for the season, there are still plenty of great local options to buy now. Though the typical growing season is confined to the Spring, Summer and Fall, plenty of early plants have been prepared in greenhouses over the late Winter and early Spring.

As soil begins to thaw across the region and the ground becomes easier to work in, several of our favorite plants are ready to plant, grow and harvest in the near future. Spring varieties of radish, such as Cherry Bomb, Burpee White and Crimson Giant, mature quickly in the colder weather and only need about a month to mature. Radishes are a great source of antioxidants, vitamin C, potassium and calcium. They're also a great crop for backyard growers, especially those with young children, due to its short time between planting and harvest.

If you are looking for some early Spring greens, there may be no better option than some fresh spinach. A hardy, cool-weather crop, spinach is an ideal plant for New England farmers this time of year. While most

Who doesn't love an early Spring radish?



of us may be used to the baby spinach leaves found in grocery stores, our local farmers are more likely to sell you a full, beautiful spinach leaf, stem and all - packed full of important vitamins, iron and more! There's no need to be intimidated by the larger leaf, or to remove the stems; you can cook or serve it all as you like.

There are many more crops that will be ready in the coming months, so now is the time to get excited about the growing season ahead! Look out for these crops and more at your local farm or farmers market, and keep up with what's in season by checking out SEMAP's seasonal availability chart on our website!

TIE Awards: Rewarding Innovation in Ag

James Lehner

In February, at our 15th Annual Agriculture and Food Conference, SEMAP announced the recipients of this year's Technology, Innovation, Education (TIE) Awards. This year's award-winners were selected from a highly competitive applicant pool across our region, and were selected by a committee of SEMAP staff and board members.



The Patriot Weeder, TIE Award Project from 2018

The TIE award program is intended to promote innovation and experimentation for farmers and agricultural providers. The aim is to relieve some of the economic barriers that prevent farmers from trying new ideas, equipment or techniques. Farmers already work on tight margins, which increases the risk in experimentation and limits access to new and exciting farming solutions.

Applications were evaluated on their value to both their farm production and the greater agricultural community. This year's TIE award recipients include some incredible new machines, research opportunities, and more chances to help build our local agricultural system and knowledge. This includes a tractor mount flame weeder, sugar kelp production, a mechanized compost sifter, and research on alternative oyster growing. The full list of projects and awardees can be found on our website blog.

Receiving a TIE Award also comes with a responsibility to report on findings and knowledge gained from these projects. Results will be presented to the community in a number of ways, through SEMAP Twilight Events, written stories in SEMAP newsletters, and more.