



Southeastern Massachusetts  
Agricultural Partnership  
PO Box 80625  
South Dartmouth, MA 02748  
www.semamonline.org

Save The Date!

16TH ANNUAL  
**AGRICULTURE & FOOD**  
CONFERENCE  FEB. 26  
2023

Register today for this year's Ag and Food Conference! Workshops and panels for farmers, foodies and advocates alike!

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The Plowshare  
Seasonal Newsletter

Winter 2023

**A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR**

January is a time of reflection and hope for many people. For farmers, winters are for rejuvenation, optimism and planning. It is when farmers are able to assess the failures and successes of the previous season and problem solve for the next. It is a time to research new equipment, techniques, sales channels, new plant varieties, diseases, and pests. It is an occasion to reconnect with other farmers and share stories. It is when we plan an entire year of farming, from seeds to cash flow in a few short months. Finally, we use the calm of winter to actively choose to farm another season, despite the hardships of the previous one.

It is during this time of renewal and hope that I am excited to join the SEMAM team and bring my farming experience in Southeastern Massachusetts and my work with local nonprofits to the Executive Director role. This year, SEMAM celebrates 25 years of promoting local food and supporting farmers. I hope to shepherd SEMAM into a new phase of growth and development. We want to expand our work on food equity and access and develop more programming and support, addressing the needs of mid-career and larger scale farms in our region, all while continuing to build on our work with beginning and smaller scale farms.

This past season was a tough one for farmers in our region, with unforeseen struggles due to the pandemic and climate change. Many farmers took a hit financially, with rapidly increasing prices on everything from diesel for tractors to animal feed and fertilizer. It was harder to find and retain quality employees in a time of skyrocketing labor costs and labor shortages. Severe drought caused crop losses and decreased yields.

Livestock farmers were especially hit hard with much smaller hay and grain harvests and the extreme heat causing stress in many animals. Both commercial farms and backyard producers faced the worst poultry health disaster in our history, as more than 50 million birds died in the U.S. last year due to the highly pathogenic bird flu.

SEMAM continues to offer support and educational programming to farmers through our 1 on 1 technical assistance, workshops and networking events. The Ag & Food Conference on February 26th will address issues farmers are currently facing, including protecting your poultry from the bird flu and how to retain employees over multiple seasons. SEMAM also offers the TIE (Technology, Innovation and Excellence) Award Program, which encourages local farmers to trial non-traditional equipment, implement novel farm systems and address challenges faced by farmers across our region. The application for the TIE Award is open until February 1st.

With your support, we can also build a stronger SEMAM, grow the organization and develop new programming. Get involved today by becoming a member and attending events. Donate to SEMAM, sponsor an event, or advertise in our local food guide.

We all need to do more to help support our local farms and build a resilient local food system, and not just in the summer. Now is the time to join a CSA and shop at winter farmers' markets.

With gratitude,  
Susan Murray  
Executive Director

**Join Us For Our Winter Networking Meetings!**

Wednesday, March 1 4-6 p.m. UMass Dartmouth	Tuesday, March 21 4-6 p.m. Bristol Aggie H.S.	More Events To Be Announced!
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For updates on event dates, locations and topics, head to [semamonline.org/events/](http://semamonline.org/events/)



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# Meet SEMAP: Susan Murray

Introducing SEMAP's New Executive Director!



Tony, Susan and Amelia!

SEMARP is excited to introduce our new Executive Director, Susan Murray! Susan comes to us with a wealth of experience in both non-profit work and in agriculture. Susan has farmed at Flying Carrot Farm in Dartmouth for 12 years, alongside her husband Tony. Together, they grow a variety of fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs on 10 acres, while also raising chickens for eggs and meat. Before coming to Dartmouth, the two farmed in Mississippi, Maryland, and in Berkshire County, Massachusetts.

Before becoming farmers, both Susan and Tony were biologists looking for a change of pace from the academic world. After reading more about the food system and engaging with local farmers and markets, they decided it was time to make the switch. "We put our interest in the local food movement and our love of working outside together and decided to give farming a try. We knew pretty quickly into our first farm apprenticeship that farming was exactly what we were looking for."

While farming, Susan also contributed to the Southeastern Massachusetts food system in a number of different capacities. She worked with Coastal Foodshed in New Bedford, managing in-person and virtual markets, and at the Southern New England Livestock Institute, developing educational programs and helping to build up Meatworks in Westport.

As you might guess from the name of the farm, one of Susan's favorite crops is Rainbow Carrots. "I love the brilliant colors, how they look on a market table, the subtly different flavor profiles of the different varieties, and I love the educational opportunity of teaching people about the diversity of veggies in the world and that a carrot doesn't have to be just orange." However, carrots do not come without their own challenges in the field, including intensive weeding and watering. "But," she says, "who can pass up a good carrot?"

# Understanding Farmland Access

Protecting, Preserving and Maintain Farmland in Southeastern MA

In November, SEMARP hosted our first Land Transfer & Succession Planning Summit in Easton, joined by experts from Land for Good, MDAR, nearby law offices, and more. Dozens of farmers - aspiring, mid-career, and retiring - shared in a day of land transfer fundamentals, networking, and delicious food! We covered a range of topics, including conflict mediation, conservation restrictions, and entity formation. We are grateful for all who attended and made this possible, and we know it's the first of many more conversations on this important topic.

It's an age-old story for suburban Massachusetts farmers: farmland is scarce, expensive, and disappearing. Farmland owners and seekers alike must navigate a complex process. For many retiring farmland owners, it's a matter of preserving an agricultural legacy and finding the right fit to continue stewarding the land. It's hard to let go of land and a business you've poured your heart and soul into, especially to a perfect stranger. At the same time, the option of selling to a developer is tempting, as the likely higher sale value could ensure a well-deserved comfortable retirement.

For farmland seekers, grappling with the incredible lack of available land would be challenging enough, but they also deal with impossible purchase costs, an absence of realtors and lawyers with agricultural familiarity, and immobility of infrastructure and investments they've made on temporary land. Moving to a new piece of farmland is stressful in its own right - adjusting to new microclimates, building or adapting infrastructure, possibly needing new markets or farm crews - but here in Massachusetts, where an average of 5 acres of farmland are lost every day, the pressures of land purchase are exacerbated.

As a coastal state on the frontlines of climate change, land is also becoming less arable through trends like saltwater intrusion, erosion, drought, and flooding. All of these variables combine to form the perfect storm of land inaccessibility, and make our fight for farmland preservation all the more crucial. Tune into our Ag & Food Conference keynote presentation to hear more about land challenges & solutions, and keep an eye out for our spring networking events, one of which will focus on land access. Follow us on social media to hear more about farmland preservation too!



# Crops Corner: Winter Greens

It's Never Too Early To Think About Shopping Local!

While folks may not think of winter as the time for fresh fruits and vegetables, farms in our region are still working through the shorter, colder months. For many, farmwork truly never ends, as they are still growing and providing food for folks across Southeastern Massachusetts.

Farmers across our region are expanding their productions with greenhouses and high tunnels. These structures allow for growing an array of tasty greens, from lettuce and kale to arugula, chard and so much more. With these increased options, local produce is becoming more widely available even when we might think there isn't any to be had.

Last November, SEMARP hosted a Twilight Workshop at Skinny Dip Farm in Westport, where farmers Ben and Hannah Wolbach walked us through their greenhouses and discussed their winter production. Skinny Dip Farm received a TIE Award from SEMARP in 2018, which they used to test low tunnels for winter crops - a setup they found to be unsuccessful. However, it led them to explore the greenhouse system they currently use, which has done wonders for them. TIE Awards allow farmers to test different ideas and tools, and applications for this year are open until February 1.

Leading us across the farm, Bend and Hannah shared the story of how they started their winter operation, how it has grown, and advice on how other farmers can do so as well. Farmers from around our community were able to ask questions and dive deeper into the different aspects of off-season growing. This was a tremendous learning experience for everyone who attended, and we are excited to see more farmers diving into this work in the near future.

If you love local food, but assumed you can't get your hands on fresh produce in the winter, its time to find your nearest winter market and farmstand. More and more farmers are finding ways to keep bringing food to our neighborhoods and communities across Southeastern Massachusetts.



# A Slice of Local from Gilded Tomato

Rehoboth-based Farm-to-Table Caterer Awarded for Sustainability



Grab yourself a locally-sourced slice today!

Last year, Gilded Tomato Company in Rehoboth received the Sustainable Business of the Year Award for a Farm-to-Table business from the Sustainable Business Network (SBN) of Massachusetts. If you've ever had the chance to experience their work and taste their delicious, locally sourced pizza, this should come as no surprise.

Gilded Tomato has been operating since 2013, when owner Julie Sweet and her husband returned from Maine with a new copper and clay backyard oven. From there, the vision of a sustainable, environmentally conscious and locally grown food business blossomed. Now, Sweet uses their farm to serve locally-sourced, oven-fired pizzas to folks across New England.

Sweet and her husband live on the roughly 2-acre farmstead, which dates back to 1845. Her hope is to restore the farm to its original working habitat as much as possible. This means keeping the environmental aspects top of mind, including working with cover crops, no till practices, seed saving, and developing pollinator habitats across the property. "My mother says I always wanted to be a farmer," Sweet explains, "and I guess she was right."

It was never a question that sustainability would be a central tenet of Gilded Tomato. Her parents raised her with an eye for sustainable living in every facet of life, and she still carries that with her today. "I'm committed to it because I was raised that way," Sweet explains. "It's my way of sharing love and nurturing for the earth."

This year, Sweet is hoping to expand by hosting Farm to Table Dinners, providing workshops on gardening, cooking, and building on other aspects of the business. In the spring, they will install a Lakota Teepee and a new cauldron for other cooking projects, to help broaden the scope of their work.

Ultimately, it comes down to one thing for Sweet - building a community around sustainability. "I want to share this property with others - that feels like the greenest thing I can do."