



Southeastern Massachusetts
Agricultural Partnership
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The Plowshare Seasonal Newsletter

Winter 2022

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

We are happy to share the latest issue of The Plowshare, our seasonal newsletter, to keep you connected to our work supporting farmers, promoting local food, and helping get fresh, nutritious fruits and vegetables to underserved communities. SEMAP's mission is broad and covers a distinct geographic area, and touches on issues of local food production, protecting rural landscapes, food security, climate change, soil health, land access, fair wages, and more.

The past two tumultuous years have shown us how important our farmers are in a globalized world. When national and global supply chains sputtered and failed, they were there for us, creating new business models and reaching new and expanded markets. The impact on their businesses was immense and stretched their capacity to the limits. Farmers have to balance many challenges, needing to expand and adapt their businesses to meet increased demand while also farming, one of the most demanding jobs, with little to no time for anything beyond planting, harvesting, weeding, and selling.

Knowing these challenges, SEMAP provides training and support through educational and networking programs. We focus on bringing in experts in financial management, marketing, social media, labor management and more to present the most up to date information for our farmers to help them make good business decisions. Through workshops, 1:1 sessions and in-depth technical assistance, we help farmers at all stages of business development, whether just breaking ground or already deeply established.

An equally important part of SEMAP's mission is connecting farms to consumers across our region. Many farmers have difficulty finding the time for marketing and promotion in the height of the season and have limited exposure outside of their immediate communities. SEMAP uses its reach to amplify farmers' marketing, keep resources up-to-date, and consolidate information on where to access local food. Our Local Food Guide, published each spring, highlights a wide array of local food offerings in Bristol, Plymouth, and Norfolk counties, including where the nearest farm stands are, when they're open and what they're selling. It also includes information on local farmers markets, fisheries, restaurants, value-added producers and more to help paint a picture of the entire food system. We keep up-to-date information on regional farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture shares on our website and maintain a robust social media to boost direct farm sales.

Buying locally is so important - it protects our farms and rural landscapes, increases our local resiliency, and of course allows us to enjoy fresh, delicious, and sustainable food. A strong local food system is critical to a thriving and regenerative society. The rest of this newsletter will provide more detail on how SEMAP is working to support our farm communities, and we hope you find it insightful and engaging.

With gratitude,
Karen Schwalbe
Executive Director

Join SEMAP at our upcoming farmer networking events!

Beginning Farmer Networking
Friday, March 11 2022
3:00pm - 5:00pm

Direct Market Farmer Networking
Friday, March 18 2022
3:00pm - 5:00pm

Find More Details on our Event Calendar, semaponline.org/events



SEMAM STAFF

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Meet The SEMAM Staff

Shannon Hickey, Program Coordinator

The SEMAM staff is growing! With a background in agriculture, food access, and policy, Shannon joined SEMAM in March of 2021 as Program Coordinator. In this role, she coordinates workshops and one-on-one business assistance for farmers and fishers across our region.

After growing up in Stoughton, Shannon received a B.A. in Government and Environmental Studies from St. Lawrence University in Northern New York, where she also got her first taste of farming as a volunteer, apprentice, and then student garden manager. The farm produced everything from fruit trees, diversified veggies & grains to poultry, nuts & medicinal plants, but it was the pig operation that got Shannon hooked on ag! Since then, she's also farmed and sold produce in both Wayland, MA and Alaska - where she often had moose visitors at farmers' markets!

Shannon rounds out her food & agriculture obsession with experiences in food access, nutrition education, and agriculture & aquaculture policy research. She comes to SEMAM following a year of AmeriCorps service with a nutrition education non-profit organization, three years of volunteer management at an emergency food distribution service, and an internship with U.S. Senator Ed Markey. She is encouraged by the potential for food systems work to facilitate climate, racial, and economic justice.

Get in touch via phone at (781) 908-4466, or send an email with questions, requests for business assistance, or just a chat!



Keeping cool at Matanuska Glacier in Alaska

Understanding HIP

By James Lehner

The last two years have seen a steep rise in food insecurity in the state and across Southeastern Massachusetts. More people now are struggling to afford healthy food than before. While there is a lot of work to be done to remedy this crisis, one solution available already is the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP).

HIP is a state-funded extension of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides monthly financial support to low-income families for food. All SNAP recipients in Massachusetts are automatically enrolled in HIP, a 1:1 match program for buying fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets and farm stands worth up to \$80 a month. This credit is instantly restored to their SNAP balance and is usable for other grocery essentials. HIP provides immense support for both low-income communities and the farmers who participate as HIP vendors.

For customers, HIP increases access to locally grown, nutritious fruits and vegetables, and thus provides major health benefits for them and their families. HIP users in Southeastern Massachusetts reported overwhelmingly positive impacts from the program. Many said they primarily use HIP to get better, healthier food - and more of it - and felt an array of health benefits, including decreased stress and hunger, and increased energy. They also cited relief in managing tight family budgets.



Fresh. Canned. Dried. Frozen.
It's HIP to be healthy!

The benefits of HIP aren't just for shoppers, though. Because it is a match program, farmers who accept HIP can provide more equitable access to local food insecure communities, while ensuring that they are still able to receive a fair price for their produce. In fact, regional HIP vendors reported a substantial increase in sales with the program, ranging from five to sometimes 50 percent growth. They also gain access to a wider range of buyers year-round, meaning they can sell more food, cutting down on waste and allowing for local farms to increase their production.

For more information on how to support the program, access HIP as a SNAP user, or learn more about the HIP program in Massachusetts, feel free to reach out by email to jlehner@semamonline.org

Crops Corner: Shellfish

By James Lehner

While the ground in Southeastern Massachusetts may be frozen and covered in snow, there is no shortage of growing and harvesting to talk about - we just have to look to the sea! Shellfish are a vital part of our region's ecosystem and economy, and this time of year is perhaps the busiest for our aquaculture farmers.

Though we might not typically think about oysters and clams the same way we do agriculture in our region, they are a fascinating piece of our local food system. The Port of New Bedford alone plays an extraordinary role in the local economy, providing nearly 7000 jobs and over \$11 billion in economic value, more than any other port in the United States.

Shellfish also provide great ecological benefits, and are crucial to protecting our aquatic environments. Mollusks absorb excess nutrients from the water, filtering out materials that could be harmful to the water they live in. Feeding on microscopic organic matter, these creatures can grow to size for harvest with less hands-on attention than traditional agriculture, and require less environmental intervention.

Perhaps more important to some of us, however, are the shellfish we get on our plate. Shellfish are a great source of protein, omega-3 fatty acids and other important nutrients, making them an underrated piece of a healthy diet. Oysters are especially interesting, as depending on where they grow, they can possess a noticeably different taste. Like how wines are considered to derive flavor from their conditions, such as soil, sunlight and water, oysters too are influenced by their environment, as algae, currents, mineral content and more create an oyster taste unique to each region. In wine, this is called terroir, and for oysters, it is known as merroir.

If you are looking for a treat that is good for you, good for the environment, and has a truly local flavor, why not pick up some shellfish from one of our local fisheries, like 2 Rock Oyster in Duxbury or Cuttyhunk Shellfish Farms in Westport.



Handful of oyster seed, 2 Rock Oyster Farm

SEMAM Business Assistance

By Shannon Hickey



Technical Assistance is just one of our services

Amidst a pandemic that has prevented us all from gathering with our peers, maintaining opportunities for business assistance has been challenging. Simultaneously, farmers and fishers are facing higher-than-normal hurdles related to climate change, public health, and labor shortages. It has become more important than ever that we provide opportunities for both business support and farmer connection.

This past year, SEMAM has provided a dozen farmers with personalized one-on-one assistance with everything from grant-writing to succession planning to labor management training. We've worked directly with cranberry growers, dairy producers, diversified farmers, and aspiring growers across the region. We've joined them in fields, barns, and bogs to do this work, gotten our hands dirty, and loved every bit of it!

Through skills workshops and networking events, we've also reached more than 70 farmers, fishers, and market managers. Though the public health crisis has necessitated that these gatherings be virtual, we are still grateful for the opportunity to bring food system workers together in any capacity that allows them to share, learn, and build relationships with one another. We are excited to plan our safe return to in-person business assistance programs this spring!

In the meantime, join us at our conference on February 27th for a dozen programs on a wide range of subjects, and in March for networking events. And look forward to new opportunities like a farmer-to-farmer mentorship program, a succession planning summit, and much more in the coming year! If you are interested in participating in our business assistance program, either one-on-one or with fellow growers, please reach out to Shannon, shickey@semamonline.org.