



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

## Save The Date!

# Land Transfer Summit

Thursday, November 17



Look out for more details on our website:  
[semaponline.org/land-transfer-summit](http://semaponline.org/land-transfer-summit)

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# The Plowshare

## Seasonal Newsletter

Summer 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 2022 Twilight Grower Series Continues!

September	October	Late Fall
Soil Microscopy and Microbiology w/ NOFA Mass Location TBA	Livestock Preventative Health Location TBA	Low Tunnel Winter Green Production Skinny Dip Farm, Little Compton

For updates on event dates, locations and topics, head to [semaponline.org/programs/](http://semaponline.org/programs/)



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Ivory Silo Farm

# 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



Election Day is Tuesday, November 8

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 state representatives and senators are in the midst of campaigning across their districts now. After re-districting from the 2020 census, 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."

Massachusetts primary elections will be held on September 6, covering any contested primaries for local, county, state or federal elections. The general election, where primary winners will face off against each other, will be on Election Day, Tuesday, November 8.

# 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!

In just a few weeks, bogs across the region will 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 being cared for almost year-round, it's in the early fall when work really picks up. Wet harvesting starts in early October, while dry harvesting starts even earlier, sometime in September, and requires an ability to respond to weather conditions quickly.

Dom is a third-generation Cape Verdean farmer, who's family began growing cranberries in Southeastern Massachusetts in the 1920s and 30s. When he came back to the family business 42 years ago, he never imagined he'd stay in it for so long. In his words, "I ended up catching what I call 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 were part of Massachusetts identity." Preserving that identity through his growing

From sauces to juices, dried or frozen, 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 local-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!