

THE AGRO-ECO PROJECT

IMPACT REPORT 2024



A note from the president:

This past year saw great growth for our small organization. We doubled our food production, ramped up our educational activities and strengthened our relationships with like-minded organizations in our community. All this would not be possible without the help of our talented team. Katie Greger, our farm manager, executed our crop plan meticulously and greatly expanded the overall volume of produce production all the while holding fast to the agroecological principles that guide our mission. Pieter VanderBrug, in his new role as community outreach coordinator, organized volunteer events, gave presentations at local schools and worked tirelessly on the day to day tasks of our farm. Our team then proceeded to greatly expand our value added products program by producing jams, jellies, pies, juices and soups all made from scratch using produce from our farm. This allows us to diversify the range of products we provide to our community and, crucially, enables us to extend our donations into the colder months as our vegetable production halts. A big thank you also goes out to our 2024 intern Gabby Wexler who brought great enthusiasm and a very strong work ethic to her work on the farm this year.

We also had great success with our Local Chef Initiative, where we worked with two chefs in the Worcester area to create healthy ready-to-eat meals using our produce to be donated to local soup kitchens. Our other program, the Greater Table Initiative, continued to purchase food from the Worcester Food Hub thus allowing us to diversify our donations with produce we may not grow.

Looking forward to the new year, we aim to build on the work started in 2024. We have expanded our vegetable growing into an adjacent 10 acre chestnut orchard. Our aim is to expand our agroforestry operation there by alley-cropping our annual vegetables in between the rows of chestnuts. Not only will this increase biodiversity and aid with soil regeneration, but it will serve as an excellent case study demonstrating agroecological production within a broader agroforestry system. We look forward to carrying out farm tours and providing educational opportunities showcasing this system.

Finally, we look forward to increasing the hands-on classes we carried out in 2024. Our microgreen class and our pasta making classes were great examples of how we aim to demonstrate the links between growing food agroecology and cooking deliciously healthy food. The link between regenerative food production and healthy, tasty eating is an underlying theme in all of our work. It informs our crop selection, our value added products, our educational activities and our many other initiatives.

A big thank you to Overlook Farm, Woofridges, the Rutland and Barre food Pantries and the many other organizations we partnered with this past year. Your help is invaluable in creating strong, resilient and sustainable regional food systems.

OUR FOOD DONATIONS



WHO DID WE DONATE TO?

RUTLAND FOOD PANTRY



ST. JOHN'S FOOD FOR THE POOR PROGRAM



BARRE FOOD PANTRY



WORCESTER COMMUNITY FRIDGES



PRODUCE DONATED FROM FIELD



220.5 lbs.



641 bs.



6,993.5 lbs.



LOCAL CHEF INITIATIVE



Mayari's Voyage, our local chef, using some of our produce, made us 360 Meals.

Metta Heart, our new local chef, made us 180 meals.



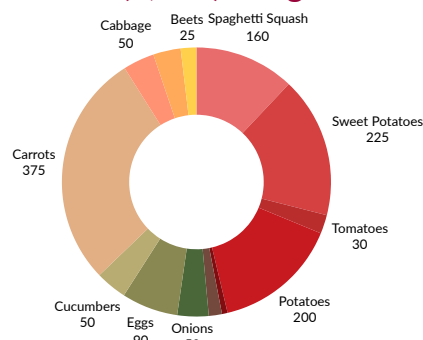
540 MEALS
DONATED to
St. JOHNS



GREATER TABLE INITIATIVE

PURCHASING LOCAL FOOD FOR LOCAL FOOD PANTRIES

Total Pounds (1,327) Bought and Donated



Value Added Products

In the early Spring we made: 80 jars of salsa verde, 39 ground cherry jams, 45 gooseberry jams and 44 strawberry jams.

This Fall we made:

- 135, 16oz. bottles of Pear Juice
- 27, 8oz. of Strawberry Jam
- 308, 8oz. of Raspberry Jam
- 111, 32oz. of Tomato Soup
- 78, 8oz. of Currant Jam
- 78, 8oz. Gooseberry Jam
- 13, 16oz. Salsa Verde
- 35, 8 oz. Salsa Verde
- 27, Mixed Berry Pies
- 232, Pumpkin Pies
- 428, mini Pumpkin Pies



Winter Workshops

PASTA MAKING CLASS

This Winter we hosted a pasta making class in conjunction with Overlook Farm. Giulio led the class discussing first our farm and the importance of Agroforestry. Then he proceeded to show the class different types of flours and how to turn the different flours into pasta. He showcased chestnut flour and how nutrient dense the pasta can be.



MICROGREEN CLASS

Our second class of the Winter was a microgreen class. Katie led the class and provided already grown microgreens for the class to take and taste as well as providing the means for them to grow their own.



EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

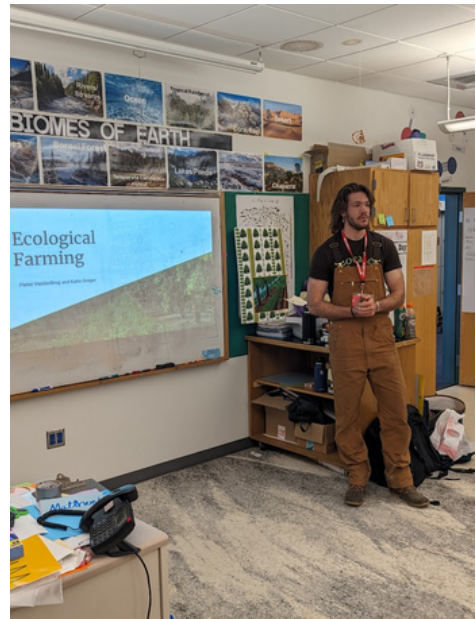
MAPLE TAPING CLASS

In late February, Pieter visited Fitzgerald Community School, where he taught students about the process of tapping sugar maples and he shared the history of maple syrup production. During the visit, the students helped identify sugar maples of the appropriate size for tapping and had the chance to observe the process firsthand. To conclude the session, Pieter provided homemade maple candy made from locally sourced syrup, offering the students a delicious and memorable taste of the region's agricultural heritage.



BANCROFT SCHOOL

Pieter also had the chance to visit the Bancroft School in collaboration with the Worcester Community Fridge for their Youth Equity and Action Day. This year's theme focused on environmental justice, and during the event, middle school students learned about agroforestry, permaculture, the soil food web, and the issue of food waste in the United States. As part of the hands-on learning experience, we provided the students with materials to plant their own vegetables. The session concluded with an engaging Q&A, where students asked insightful questions about plant care and ways they could contribute to environmental stewardship in their communities. Their enthusiasm and curiosity were truly inspiring.



GUILD OF ST. AGNES MICROGREEN CLASS

Finally, we had the opportunity to visit The Guild of St. Agnes, where we taught students about growing microgreens. We brought fully grown microgreens for the students to sample, along with materials to help them grow their own. The session, which included twenty 9-12 year olds, was highly interactive, with the students engaging deeply with our presentation and asking insightful questions. To connect the lesson to community impact, we also showcased an example of the produce we donate to local food pantries. The students were so enthusiastic about the fresh vegetables—many of which they had never tried before—that we left with fewer vegetables than we arrived with, as they eagerly sampled the produce. It was rewarding to see their curiosity and excitement for both healthy food and sustainable growing practices.



Volunteer Groups

One of the most significant changes this year was the introduction of volunteer groups at our farm. We had the privilege of hosting three diverse groups, including members of the Worcester Community Fridges, YouthGrow students from the Regional Environmental Council, and medical students from the University of Massachusetts

WOO FRIDGE VOLUNTEER DAY



In June, about 15 members of the Worcester Community Fridges visited our farm to assist with tasks such as moving mulch around our chestnut trees and installing tomato stakes. Katie and Pieter are accustomed to handling these tasks on our own, so the extra help was invaluable.

REC VOLUNTEER DAY

Later in the season, the Regional Environmental Council brought 50 YouthGrow interns to the farm, where they helped with additional mulch work and caught up on weeding. The high school students were incredibly energetic and passionate about sustainable agriculture, and it was truly inspiring to see their enthusiasm for environmental stewardship.



MED STUDENT VOLUNTEER DAY

Finally, a smaller group of five medical students joined us to harvest fruit and vegetables from the farm. They worked diligently, asking thoughtful questions about our operations and demonstrating a strong interest in the intersection of health, food systems, and sustainability. Once the harvest was complete, they helped package the produce and deliver it to the Worcester Community Fridges, contributing to the redistribution of fresh, local food to those in need.



From Our Farm

From our Farm Manager Katie

Closing out my seventh season on the farm we were able to double production with a record breaking 8,680 pounds harvested. Keep consistent weekly donations, even doing two donations a week for a total of 31 donations. We got a tractor that aided in less manual labor which saved us time and our backs. Then we also had the help of an intern and we hosted three volunteer groups. All of which helped with the many usual and new tasks posed this season.

This season was filled with endless things to do from putting new rows in, doing weekly donations, having to figure out watering the new field, growing mushroom production and working within the usual challenges we find every season. We had the chance to go to the Perennial Farm Gathering which was a great networking opportunity for us. We ended the season in a drought and in the kitchen.

Here's to another season!

From Our Community Outreach Coordinator Pieter

Over the past year, I am proud to reflect on the significant positive strides our organization has made. Not only did we nearly double our fresh produce production, but we also strengthened our engagement with the Worcester County community. From hosting educational workshops on healthy eating to welcoming volunteer groups and collaborating with schools, we have fostered meaningful connections throughout the year.

Looking ahead, I am excited to further expand our community involvement in the coming year by offering more educational opportunities and increasing farm visits. While addressing food insecurity remains the core mission of the Agro-Eco Project, we also strive to educate the community about the sustainable practices that make our produce truly unique. One of this year's highlights was our involvement in the Worcester Community Fridge documentary, which provided an invaluable platform to spotlight our efforts and share our story.



Pictures from the Team



Pictures From our Donations



Lots of Produce!

