

# AMERICAN FARMLAND

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Brighter Future Fund • Ways We Made a Difference in 2022 • America's Farmers Market Celebration



Asa Ysrael (center) of Local Lands, a family owned and operated farm in Dublin, Georgia, with son Eli Yahu on the left. Asa and his wife Raphaella (right) used a Brighter Future Fund grant from American Farmland Trust to make infrastructure improvements on their farm.

## The Brighter Future Fund Helps Farmers Grow in the Face of Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare many inequities in the American food system. As shelves of supermarket chains emptied, local farmers provided a consistent source of fresh, healthy food that wasn't reliant on a disrupted supply chain.

American Farmland Trust noticed farmers and ranchers everywhere pitching in to help, and we wanted to substantially support their efforts. The Brighter Future Fund was created to do just that. Generously supported by Tillamook Creamery and American Farmland Trust members, we launched the fund to help farmers diversify, grow, and sustain their farms in the face of unprecedented challenges. Grant funds are used to improve farm viability, help farmers adopt more sustainable practices, and facilitate the access, transfer, or permanent protection of farmland.

Last year, the fund gave away over one million dollars to more than 200 farmers in

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— RAPHAELA YSRAEL, LOCAL LANDS FARM



44 states and Puerto Rico. The fund prioritized farmers from communities that have been resilient in the face of historical disadvantages, especially those identifying as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, female, or beginning farmers.

One of the Brighter Future Fund grantees is Asa Ysrael, the owner and operator of Local Lands farm in Georgia. Asa and his wife Raphaella plan to use the funds from their grant to build their own chicken processing facility. The new facility will allow Local Lands to keep their chicken prices affordable

for their customers, since they'll no longer need to drive long distances to reach a suitable processing facility.

Affordability is an important consideration in the area where Local Lands does business. Their farm is located in Clayton County, Georgia, a place where low incomes and limited access to nearby grocery stores combine to produce high levels of diet-related diseases. Raphaella, who

previously practiced as a dietician, often felt defeated by the barriers her clients faced in affording and accessing healthy food.

"For people who had difficulty being able to access fruits and vegetables, you could try to counsel them and let them know how they need to change their diet, but there was a lot more resistance. They wondered why they would spend money on a salad when they could buy something more filling," says Raphaella.

Now, Local Lands is a tangible part of the solution to this problem. They work with the non-profit organization Wholesome Wave Georgia to offer 50% off on fruits and vegetables for customers who purchase their food with an EBT card. Through this work, Raphaella finds herself able to play a part in directly addressing the issues that hampered her efforts as a dietician.

Increasing access to healthy food is one of many ways that working in agriculture has deepened Asa and Raphaella's connection to their community. "We've really had to expand our networks and find different resources in order to grow. There's so much that needs to happen in order for a farm to be able to make a profit. We've noticed in this journey how so

**Brighter Future**, continued on page 2



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

I write from my home here in Maine, where it has been cold and there is a layer of snow on the ground at the farm. As I worked outside today, I had a chance to reflect on how the last few years have thrown twists and turns into all of our lives. Of course, there has been no shortage of pandemic-related disruptions. And, unfortunately, a multitude of weather disasters rocked the farming world in 2022—from a mega-drought in the West that left farm fields fallow from Colorado to California to Hurricane Ian's devastation of citrus groves and other farms in Florida.

Every year, the farmers who feed our nation get smarter and more resilient, but it's increasingly stressful for them to adapt to extreme variability related to climate changes. I draw hope from how the actions we took this year support renewable energy and combat climate change:

- We released a report on biochar, an emerging technology that can help reduce greenhouse gases and build healthy, high functioning soils.
- We developed *Smart Solar*<sup>SM</sup> principles that accelerate solar energy while strengthening farm viability and protecting the land best suited for farming.

- We created a solar leasing guide for Pacific Northwest agricultural landowners to help them better understand the emerging solar development field.
- We expanded our national *Climate Initiative* team by hiring additional climate scientists and soil health experts.
- We hired our first Midwest Solar Specialist to accelerate the pace of solar energy generation and farmland conservation.
- We released a report in New England demonstrating that agriculture is a key tool in the fight against climate change.
- And we launched a new \$30 million initiative to help the U.S. beef supply chain transition to carbon neutral.

We all know that it is a critical time for agriculture, but it's also a very hopeful time. So much is moving in the right direction.



American Farmland Trust's effort over 42 years to protect farmland and promote better farming practices is paying off. Public awareness of these issues has never been greater, and government officials are responding.

Thank you for your continued support, which allows us to work with increasing numbers of landowners as they adopt regenerative farming practices that rebuild soil health, sequester carbon,

protect our waterways, and strengthen the farm economy.

Here's to a bright future ahead!

John Piotti  
President & CEO  
American Farmland Trust

## Save Now on No Farms No Food<sup>®</sup> Merchandise!



There has never been a better time to show your support for our nation's farms and ranches. American Farmland Trust members receive **15% off** official No Farms No Food<sup>®</sup> gear—from tote bags to t-shirts, hats, aprons, and more. Visit [farmland.org/store](http://farmland.org/store) to claim your discount by applying code **THANKYOU15** at checkout. (The offer stands until March 31, 2023.) All proceeds benefit American Farmland Trust's work to save the land that sustains us.

### Brighter Future, continued from page 1

many different organizations have helped us along the way to get to where we are today," says Raphaela.

One of those organizations is the Conservation Fund, which was instrumental in helping Local Lands acquire a piece of permanently protected farmland to expand their operation. In the past, Asa and Raphaela have also purchased pieces of land and equipment from retiring farmers without heirs lined up to take over. While these purchases have been helpful to Local Lands, they also raise concerns about the precarious state of farms in American agriculture. "We buy a lot of equipment from places that are closing down, and while it's helpful from a price standpoint, it's still a shame to see because if this country doesn't have an agricultural future, it doesn't have any future," says Asa.

With the population of Atlanta expected to increase by 25% by 2030, working to secure the future of agriculture in Georgia—and across the country—has never been more critical. "American Farmland Trust's *Farms Under Threat* research shows a devastating loss of farmland in the Southeast region. With the increasing demand for food, threats to farmland, and an aging farming population, it will take the contributions of all farmers—including a diverse group of producers—to ensure there are consistent, viable, and sustainable agriculture practices within local communities," says Courtney Owens, American Farmland Trust's Southeast Regional Director.

American Farmland Trust and the Brighter Future Fund are committed to supporting the next generation of farmers and ranchers who can help build a more sustainable future for us all.

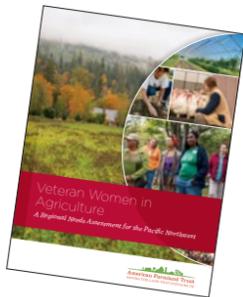
**i** The Brighter Future Fund is an American Farmland Trust grant program, presented by Tillamook, providing direct support to farmers and ranchers across the country. 100% of donations are given to farmers. Learn more at [farmland.org/brighter-future](http://farmland.org/brighter-future).

# Ways We Made a Difference in 2022

American Farmland Trust's regional offices around the country work on-the-ground to give farmers and ranchers the tools they need to steward the land that sustains America. Here are a few highlights of the many American Farmland Trust achievements that your support made possible in 2022!

## REACHING VETERAN WOMEN IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Our Veteran Women for the Land project—a partnership among American Farmland Trust, Farmer Veteran Coalition, and regional partners—hosts listening sessions, learning circles, and other educational opportunities that provide veteran women in the Pacific Northwest with the skills, training, and experience they need to be successful in agriculture. This year, the project conducted a regional needs assessment and developed educational materials to help farmland and ranchland owners understand the emerging solar development field and its potential to impact agricultural land.



## PROMOTING SOIL HEALTH AND CONSERVATION IN THE MIDWEST

American Farmland Trust received a “Partner of Conservation” award in Illinois for our leadership in helping farmers implement conservation practices. Since 2015, American Farmland Trust has leveraged more than \$1.7 million in the Vermilion Headwaters Watershed to advance cover crops, reduced tillage, and nutrient management—decreasing the amount of nutrients and sediment flowing downstream. American Farmland Trust also collaborated with state programs to provide farmers with technical assistance, education, and financial incentives to increase cover crops throughout the region. Our work on smart solar siting also advanced, and we added a solar specialist to the Midwest team.

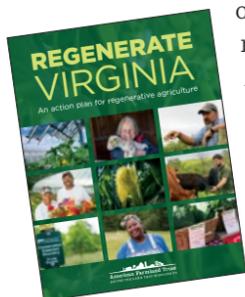


AGRSOLAR CLEARINGHOUSE

## CHARTING A PATH FOR MID-ATLANTIC FARMS AND FARMERS

In collaboration with regional partners, American Farmland Trust started the Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative, which works to stop the loss of grassland birds while improving the resiliency of working landscapes. We also released new, groundbreaking research that

outlines a holistic path forward for regenerative agriculture in Virginia. *Regenerate Virginia* outlines an action plan to tackle farmland loss. The report also recommends strategic actions to facilitate land access for a new generation of diverse farmers—and help them thrive.



## SUPPORTING CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND GROUNDWATER IN CALIFORNIA

American Farmland Trust provided \$1.5 million to farmers implementing soil and water conservation practices in depleted groundwater basins in the San Joaquin Valley, in partnership with area resource conservation districts and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These funds, coupled with on-farm technical assistance and conservation planning, will promote climate resilience and economic viability for farmers. Our coalition efforts also achieved significant victories in state policy and increased funding for farmland protection, drought resilience, and climate-smart agriculture.



## BOOSTING THE HEALTH OF NEW ENGLAND AGRICULTURE

The New England Farmer Microgrants Program awarded over \$400,000 to its largest group of farmers to date. The program addresses some of the key barriers faced by farmers in the region. American Farmland Trust also awarded soil health grants to help Massachusetts farmers overcome hurdles to achieving their soil health goals. We worked to accelerate the expansion of renewable solar energy while maintaining New England's most productive, resilient farmland through our smart solar partnerships, and we advanced farmland protection and access through state policy and action plans.

## ADVANCING FARMLAND PROTECTION AND LOCAL FOOD IN NEW YORK

American Farmland Trust released new research that provides guidance on how to expand solar energy while strengthening farmland protection in New York. We convened service providers to strategize how to better serve women landowners in the state, and we helped bolster locally grown foods in schools through the New York Farm to School Institute. We also piloted a program in the Hudson Valley for non-farming landowners to foster equitable connections with farmers seeking land. Linda Garrett was named our New York regional director in May 2022.



## BUILDING SOUTHEAST CAPACITY

Our continued expansion in the Southeast was given a boost when Dr. Courtney Owens was named American Farmland Trust's Southeast regional director. Throughout his career, Owens has led community-based rural development education programs. In Kentucky, American Farmland Trust also researched solar development in the commonwealth and outlined how it can advance renewable energy while protecting agricultural land.

## Dr. Ann Sorensen Given National Award for Conservation Excellence

The Soil and Water Conservation Society awarded the prestigious Hugh Hammond Bennett Award in 2022 to American Farmland Trust Senior Research Advisor, Ann Sorensen, PhD, for her 50 years of service to the conservation of natural resources. The Hugh Hammond Bennett Award, the highest honor bestowed on an individual by the society, is given for extraordinary accomplishments in the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.

Sorensen led research efforts at American Farmland Trust for nearly 30 years, including two groundbreaking series on farmland loss in America: *Farming on the Edge* and *Farms Under Threat*. Sorensen dedicated

her career to conserving natural resources by pursuing the twin strategies of protecting the land and the underlying soil. She understood that people cannot conserve soil and protect natural resources without first protecting agricultural land from development. She also understood that we cannot implement critically needed conservation planning without first overcoming barriers to adoption.

Understanding the value of sound research in the public policy process, Sorensen's



work directly shaped public policy at a level rare for researchers, helping to drive the creation or expansion of over two dozen state farmland protection programs, as well as the current federal agricultural conservation easement program (ACEP-ALE) and its precursor (FRPP). She also played an influential role in the dramatic expansion of the Conservation Title in the 2008 Farm Bill. Sorensen has demonstrated how sound research can drive policy decisions and improve agricultural policymaking.



## Become a **PERENNIAL PARTNER** Today

It's an easy, affordable way to ensure a bright and productive future for America's farmland and rangeland. By making a monthly gift to American Farmland Trust, you help to save the land that sustains us, year-round. With your monthly gift of \$10 or more, you'll receive our exclusive No Farms No Food® tote bag.



Call (202) 331-7300 or go to [farmland.org/perennial](http://farmland.org/perennial) to sign up.

## America's Farmers Market Celebration

This past summer, American Farmland Trust hosted our 14th annual Farmers Market Celebration (FMC), a contest that allows folks from across the country to cast votes for their favorite farmers markets with the chance of winning prize money and national recognition for their market.

The FMC is also a great way to spread awareness and enthusiasm for the importance of locally grown food. Monroe Farmers Market in Connecticut, which placed fifth in this year's celebration, received a visit from Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont when their standing was announced. Over the last two years, Governor Lamont has approved several changes to Connecticut's state food assistance programs that expand benefits to farmers markets and help people of all income levels access healthy, locally grown food.

In a press release, Governor Lamont noted, "Every individual should have access to nutritious food regardless of whether they live in a rural, suburban, or urban neighborhood, and by expanding our food assistance programs to increase the ability to accept these benefits at farmers markets, we can get healthy food to everyone. Additionally, supporting farmers markets means supporting Connecticut's agriculture industry and the jobs that this sector maintains."

Farmers markets also provide a space for community building and direct-to-consumer sales, which make them a crucial



point of market entry and brand building for new farmers. Corrina Smith, the market manager for this year's second place winner, Columbia Farmers Market in Missouri, says that the FMC has helped boost attendance and involvement. "This year will be our best year ever; we've already broken some of last year's records... and I would absolutely say that success was made possible in part by our participation in the Farmers Market Celebration," Smith says.

As the winter season settles in, some farmers markets will pack up their stands until next season, while others will brave the cold to continue providing their communities with fresh food. Either way, take a moment to be thankful for the farmers and ranchers that fill

(Clockwise from top left) Gov. Ned Lamont at the fifth-place Monroe Farmers Market in Conn.; shoppers at West Windsor Community Farmers' Market in N.J., fourth place; the winning Overland Park Farmers' Market in Kan.; produce from Idaho's Nampa Farmers Market, third place; flowers at Columbia Farmers Market in Mo., second place.

the tables of your local farmers market, and the countless benefits that they provide.



**American Farmland Trust**



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Columbia Farmers Market in Columbia, Mo.