

North Berkshire Food Bank Farm Project

Wyndom Chace and Maya Spalding-Fecher
December 14, 2020



Introductions

Students: Wyndom and Maya

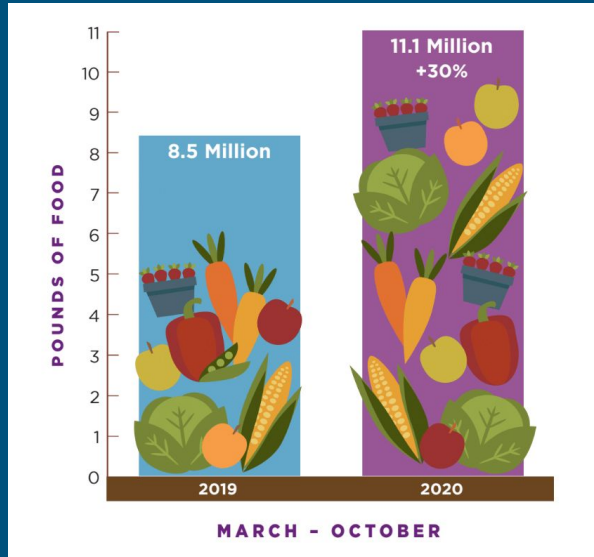
Clients: Amanda Chilson and Megan Bantle



"It is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are learning, speaking and gathering on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all."

(Land acknowledgement from the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians)

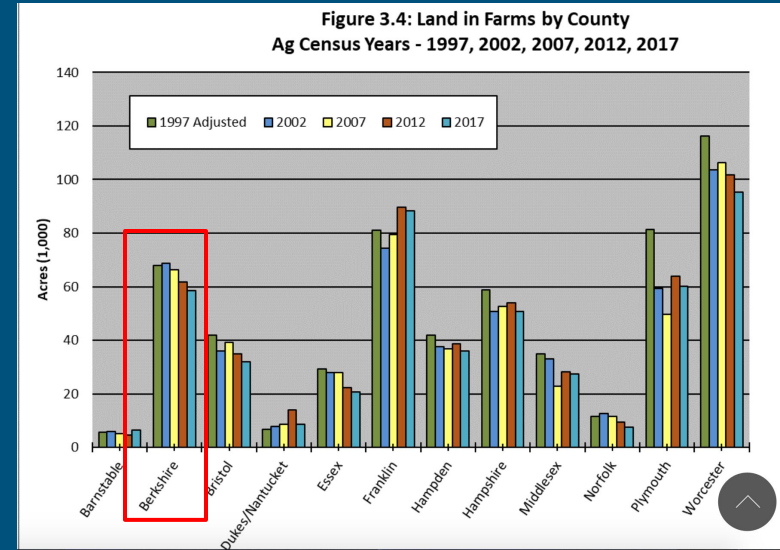
Context: Food Insecurity



- **Nationally**
 - More than 50 million people may become food insecure in 2020 due to COVID-19 (*The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity*)
- **Massachusetts**
 - In 2019, 12% of Berkshire County residents were food insecure (*Berkshire County Community Food Assessment*)
 - During the pandemic, food insecure individuals in Western MA increased by 52% (*Food Insecurity Climbing in Western Massachusetts*)
 - Food Bank of Western Mass serves 30% more than last year (*COVID-19 & Food Insecurity in Western Massachusetts*)

Context: Farmland and Farming

- Loss of farmland in the Berkshires
 - 525 farms in 2012, 473 in 2017 (*Massachusetts Agricultural Census Data*)
 - Per-acre average value \$7,024 in 2012, \$7,644 in 2017 (*Massachusetts Agricultural Census Data*)
- Farming is not always profitable in the Berkshires
 - Food bank farms are a relatively new idea, model has potential to help farms be more viable



Purpose and Process

- Create a feasibility report for establishing a food bank farm in the North Berkshires for the Food Bank of Western Mass (FBWM)
 - Supporting local farmers and farming economy
 - Increasing food security
- Methodology
 - Completed a series of interviews and site visits
 - Studied existing food bank farms and model
 - Researched and narrowed down a list of properties
 - Learned about what a farmer would need to know and how to advertise a position for a farmer



Interviews and Visits

The Zoom logo is displayed in a white box. It consists of the word "zoom" in a lowercase, blue, sans-serif font.

- David McGowan (Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation)
- Andrew Morehouse (Food Bank of Western Massachusetts)
- Jenny Hansell, Mackenzie Greer, Adam Galambos (Berkshire Natural Resources Council)
- Margaret Moulton (Berkshire Grown)
- Owner C (Property owner)
- Brian Cole (Big Foot Farm)
- Keegan Schelling (Green River Farm)
- Dan Tighe, Jake Rathbun (Natural Resources Conservation Service)
- Owner B (Property Owner)
- Don Zasada (Caretaker Farm)
- Brian Young (Reynolds Property hay farmer)
- Ben Perrault (Mountain View Farm CSA)
- Gideon Porth (Atlas Farm)
- Joe Czajkowski (Lakeside Organic of Hadley LLC)
- Michael Docter (Winter Moon Farm)
- Sharon Wyrrick (Many Forks Farm LLC)



Case Studies



1. 1st Food Bank Farm - purchased in 1992,
34 tillable acres
 - a. (Michael Docter of Winter Moon Farm)
 - b. Ben Perrault of Mountain View Farm CSA



2. 2nd Food Bank Farm - purchased in 2020,
41 tillable acres
 - a. Joe Czajkowski of Lakeside Organics
 - b. Gideon Porth of Atlas Farm

Food Bank Farm Model

- FBWM ownership of land
 - Land trusts, foundations, donors, MDAR, municipality, APR (*Food Bank Farm*)
- “Produce in lieu of cash rent” contract with farmers
 - Well-established, large-scale organic vegetable farmers with own operations

Rent/Acre	300									
Total Rent	\$3,000									
								Food Bank Harvest Share		Farmer's Share
	Acres	% of Total Acres	Organic Vegetable	Price/lb.	lbs./Acre	Total Yield (lbs.)	Total Revenue	Contribution to Rent (\$)	Contribution to Rent (lbs)	Private (lbs.)
	3	30%	Butternut squash	\$0.40	20,000	60,000	\$ 24,000	\$ 900	2,250	57,750
	4	40%	Sweet corn	\$0.50	8,000	32,000	\$ 16,000	\$ 1,200	2,400	29,600
	3	30%	Squash (Zucchini)	\$0.70	9,000	27,000	\$ 18,900	\$ 900	1,286	25,714
Total	10	100%			Total	119,000	\$ 58,900	\$ 3,000	5,936	113,064
					Avg. per Acre	11,900	\$ 5,890.00		594	11,306
							Percent of Total:	5.1%	5.0%	95.0%

Based on email interview with Andrew Morehouse; sample calculation does not represent actual farm finances

Possible Properties

A woman with long hair, wearing a light-colored t-shirt, blue jeans, and a dark cap, is walking away from the camera on a dirt path. To her left is a large, dark wooden barn. In the background, there is a white two-story house with a red SUV parked in front of it. The scene is set in a rural area with trees and a clear blue sky.

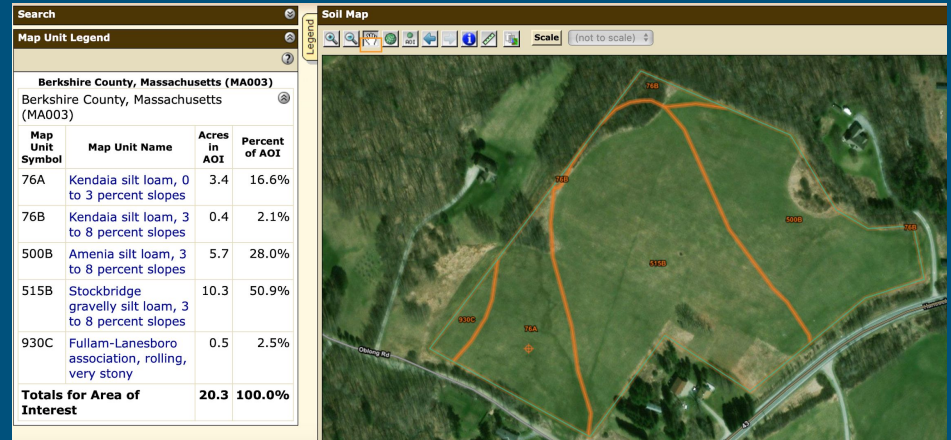
Found 7 potential parcels, visited 5, narrowed it down to 4, and spoke to the owners of 3

1. Property A: Reynolds Property, WRLF, Williamstown
2. Property B: Private, Williamstown
3. Property C: Private, Adams
4. Property D: Private (real estate), Cheshire

Property Criteria

What is required for a successful vegetable farm?

- Number of tillable acres
- Soil quality
- Water availability
- Cost of property
- Willingness of owner to sell
- Impact on existing farmers
- Existing infrastructure
- APR status and conservation



Web Soil Survey

Property A: WRLF, Williamstown

- 22 acres, 16 tillable
- No water or infrastructure
- \$0 (WRLF)
- Very interested in partnership, not selling
- Nearby farmer hays it for his cows
- Already under APR





Property B: Private, Williamstown

- 16 acres, 12.2 tillable
 - land for sale adjacent to it, 2.1 acres tillable
- No water or infrastructure
- ~\$48,000
- Owner interested, could happen soon
- Cattle from farm nearby
- Already under APR

Property C: Private, Adams

- 208 acres, 69.3 tillable
- Private water supply
- Multiple barns and a farmhouse
- \$895,000 asking price
 - Less with APR
- Definitely interested, maybe in a few years
- Not under APR, zoned for Industry





Property D: Real Estate Listing, Cheshire

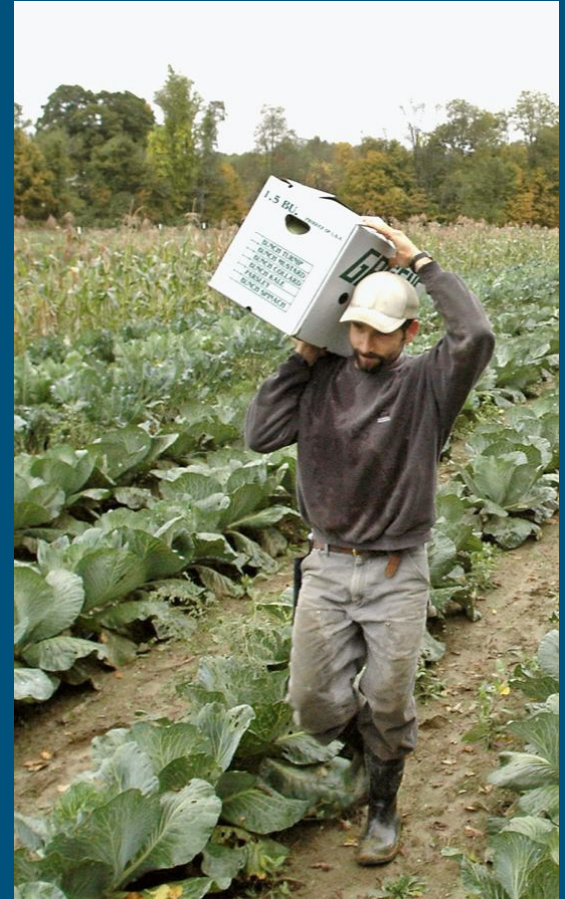
- 28 acres, 8.9 tillable
- Private water access
- Three structures that need renovation
- Selling for \$249,000
- Can be used for agricultural and residential uses

Property Comparisons

Property	A (WRLF)	B (Private)	C (Private)	D (Real Estate)
Location	Williamstown	Williamstown	Adams	Cheshire
Total Acres	22	16	208	28
Tillable Acres	16	12 (+ 2 adj.?)	69	9
Cost	\$0	\$48,000	\$895,000 (less with APR)	\$249,000
Existing Farmer Impact	some	some	low	none
Infrastructure	none	none	house & barns	some structures
Existing APR	yes	yes	no	no

Finding a Farmer

- Via contacts, listservs, and job sites
- Two possibilities:
 - 1. Find local farmer interested in expanding operation
 - i.e. Pioneer Valley farms
 - May not be possible in N. Berkshires
 - 2. Find farmer from outside of N. Berkshires
 - Advertise position for a farmer looking to move/expand or start from scratch
 - Likely would require housing arrangement
 - Could be risky for FBWM





Challenges

- Finding markets
- Making a food bank farm profitable
- Scale of a food bank farm
- Size of farming operations
- Land in the Berkshires

Alternative Options

1. FBWM partners with land trusts to buy a parcel, lease it from land trust at nominal rate, lease to farmer
2. Find many small parcels of land for a food bank farm farmer
3. FBWM buys excess produce from farmers in N. Berkshires for emergency food sites
4. FBWM buys CSA shares from farmers for emergency food sites
5. Have farmers contract directly with food pantries

Environmental Planning Workshop Presentation: Farm to Food Pantry Exchange for Berkshire County

Mon, December 14th, 2020
2:30 pm - 3:30 pm



Olivia Gomez '21 and Sarah Levitt '21 present their fall planning project researching a business exchange that promotes the purchase of fresh produce from local farms for distribution at local food pantries.

All are welcome to attend this final zoom presentation of the Environmental Planning Workshop (ENVI 302).

Contact Prof. Sarah Gardner for more information at sgardner@williams.edu

[BACK](#)

[EVENT DETAILS](#)

[GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS](#)

DATE
MON., DECEMBER 14TH,
2020

TIME
2:30 PM - 3:30 PM

[+ GOOGLE CALENDAR](#)

[+ ICAL EXPORT](#)

Next Steps

- Report (with key) and recommendations will go to Professor Gardner and Andrew Morehouse



Thank you!
Questions?



Bibliography

- Land acknowledgement from the Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians. <https://vimeo.com/474169322>
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