

GROWING BETTER GREAT BARRINGTON

Toward A Regional Food Economy in the Southern Berkshires

PREPARED FOR THE GREAT BARRINGTON AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION

DOROTHY KINNEY-LANDIS • CARLIN ROLAND • GENEVIEVE GOLDFLEAF
THE CONWAY SCHOOL

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COVER PHOTO courtesy of Molly Comstock

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

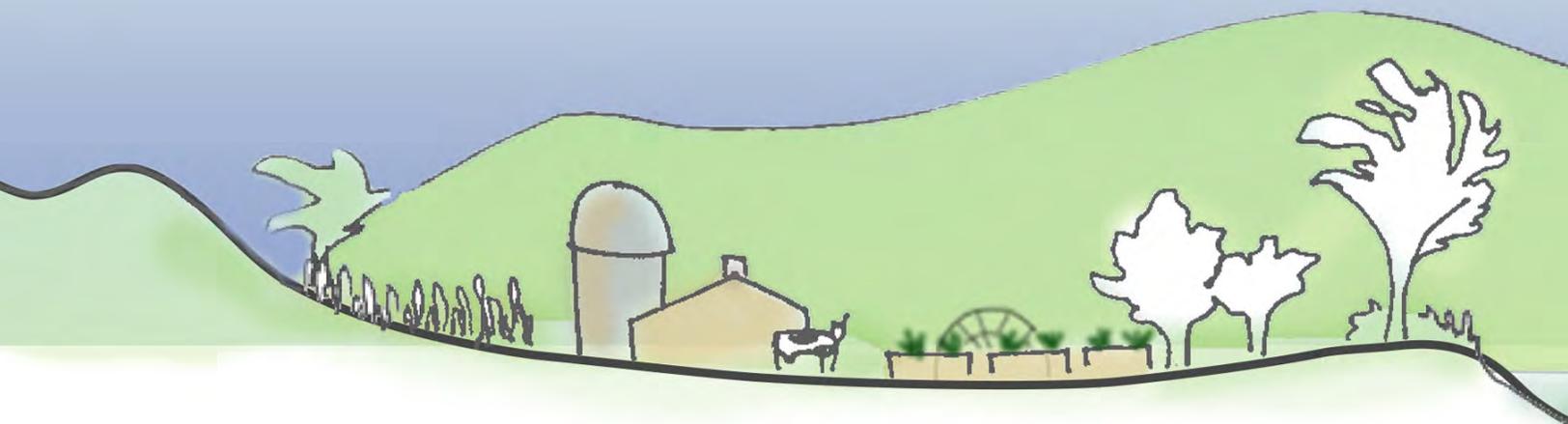
A ROBUST LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT

has been growing in the southern Berkshires for decades. Farmers in these rolling hills and low-lying river valleys were some of the first to adopt the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model; a plethora of organizations work to support local farms and food access; and thriving restaurants and co-ops sell food from numerous local farms. In the town of Great Barrington, **community members are strategizing how to build on this local food movement to create a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable food system** that serves and supports the local community and the landscape.

Although Great Barrington's community is deeply committed to the local food movement, that movement faces both global and local barriers. Global vulnerabilities have been highlighted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,

including supply chain disruptions that left grocery stores inconsistently stocked and farmers waiting for seeds and supplies, and a sudden increase in the number of Great Barrington residents facing food insecurity. **In this moment of crisis, community members in Great Barrington felt a new urgency to find alternatives** to fragile supply chains and mounting climate consequences from conventional agricultural systems reliant on fossil fuel inputs.

Locally, accessing land and housing has become increasingly difficult due to dramatic increases in real estate prices, especially over the course of the pandemic. An influx of new residents fleeing urban areas contributed to the rising cost of real estate and rent prices, displacing working-class residents and pushing many into food insecurity. The increase in land value has also made it difficult for farmers to rent farmland,

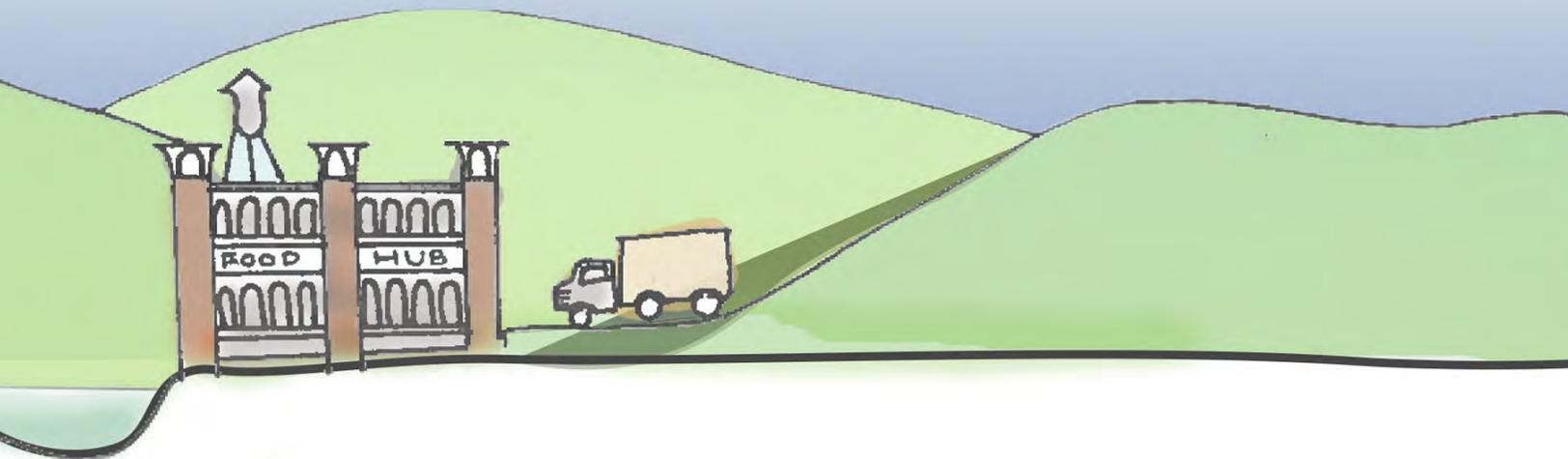


purchase property, or find housing nearby, limiting their ability to continue farming and provide locally produced food for the community. Though many farmers in the Southern Berkshires would like to expand their operations, regional gaps in food processing infrastructure and capacity, such as slaughterhouses and commercial kitchens, have constrained their ability to produce more food for local markets, despite a growing population's increased demand for local food.

This moment of crisis and disruption is also a moment of opportunity to create a more resilient local system that can weather economic, environmental, and social challenges, and is built on a framework of sustainability. This report offers a set of strategies toward building that resilient, regional food economy, developed in collaboration with community stakeholders, including farmers, students and educators, public health workers, representatives from local and regional

nonprofits, and town government and committee members. The participatory engagement process grounded research objectives, spatial analysis and final recommendations in commitments to labor rights, racial equity and climate justice. Recommendations emerging from this co-creative process center around increasing land access for farmers, creating community growing spaces for all community members to grow food, investing in food processing infrastructure, and deepening collaboration among regional food systems advocates.

Now, Great Barrington's community members have an opportunity and an appetite to model a transformative shift toward a more resilient and just food system. This report offers pathways towards a food system that works for everyone, from farmers trying to put down roots to families facing food insecurity.



INTRODUCTION

UPROOTED AT COLFAX FARM

In the summer of 2020, Molly Comstock was operating a successful small farm, scaling up her community supported agriculture (CSA) program to feed 120 families and selling at the West Stockbridge farmers' market and to local restaurants. Molly, one full-time employee, and a crew of part-time volunteers grew vegetables, flowers, and raised chickens. Molly prioritized no-till, organic practices to reduce fossil fuel use, soil compaction, and nutrient loss from four acres of rented land in the southwest corner of Massachusetts, near Great Barrington.

Then, after her tenth year investing in her business, soil, and equipment, Molly received devastating news: **her landlord had decided not to renew their informal twenty-year lease arrangement.** Despite the investments she had made in infrastructure, including one hundred beds of drip irrigation, greenhouses, and the farm store, Molly would have to move on at the end of the growing season. Because all other nearby CSAs were full, her 120 customers were left without a guaranteed source of fresh produce, as supply chain issues worsened during the pandemic.

While Colfax Farm's crisis was particularly sudden, **Molly is far from alone as a farmer in Berkshire County struggling to access land.** During the pandemic, thousands of new residents fled cities for this rural corner of western Massachusetts, turning weekend and summer homes into year-round residences. The already-high value of land shot up by twenty-one percent in a year, making it almost impossible for a farmer to access property without a benefactor offering free or below-market value for land or, as some farmers joke, winning the lottery.

Even if a farmer can find a suitable piece of land, or several smaller sites spread across the county, to rent, a lease is no guarantee of permanence, as Molly experienced. A restrictive lease's terms of use can inhibit the often-messy work of raising crops and animals, and can discourage farmers from making the capital investments they need to run their businesses efficiently in the long-term, like fencing and irrigation systems.

Plus, rented farmland rarely comes with a place for the farmer to live, and the same hot real estate market affects limited housing stock, contributing to an ongoing housing crisis across the county. Molly was only able to operate her business thanks to a stroke of luck in finding free housing with friends. These challenges — land availability and cost, housing availability and cost, and tenure stability — can make building a viable farm business next to impossible, especially for a beginning farmer without generational wealth.

Realizing the problem is bigger than one farmer, Molly's community pulled together to find another way for farmers to access land without having to compete against the real estate market. While the right piece of land for Molly hasn't come up yet, the Berkshire Community Land Trust is now home to the Harry Conklin Fund for Farmsteads. A collaboration between three local nonprofits, the Fund is intended as a community solution to land access for farmers like Molly, raising donations to buy property and convert it into community land trust ownership.

"If we do value farming as part of our community, we have to think outside the box in how we support farmers to do the work they need to do to feed us," Molly says. Under a model developed at local CSA Indian Line Farm, small-scale farmers

like Molly could access farmland with a 99-year lease, while owning the improvements they make to the site, including equipment and, crucially, housing. If a farmer decides to end the lease, they can sell their improvements (buildings, equipment, fencing, perennial stock, and soil improvements) at current replacement cost adjusted for deterioration. The sale would not include the value of the trust-owned land in the transaction, keeping it affordable for the next farmer. The farmstead trust is intended to conserve working landscapes, while making it possible for farmers to do the essential work of growing food for their communities and creating supply chains that are more resilient to disruptions like climate change. The

collaborative fund is also an example of the tight-knit relationships that Berkshire County's community members and organizations have built.

"Farming is a very interesting career, because it really becomes a part of you. Quitting is not really an option," Molly says. "If we can find a success story for Colfax Farm, that would energize people. On the other hand, if it continues to not be solved, that's also energizing. We have to highlight that our community has the resources to support the things that are important to us and continue to have a vibrant community. I hope that within my lifetime, I can see some of these things actually happen."

“*If we do value farming as part of our community, we have to think outside the box in how we support farmers.* MOLLY COMSTOCK



Colfax Farm operated on four acres in Alford, MA, before the farmer's informal twenty-year lease was abruptly terminated. Photo: Molly Comstock

Setting the Table

WHAT ARE FOOD SYSTEMS?

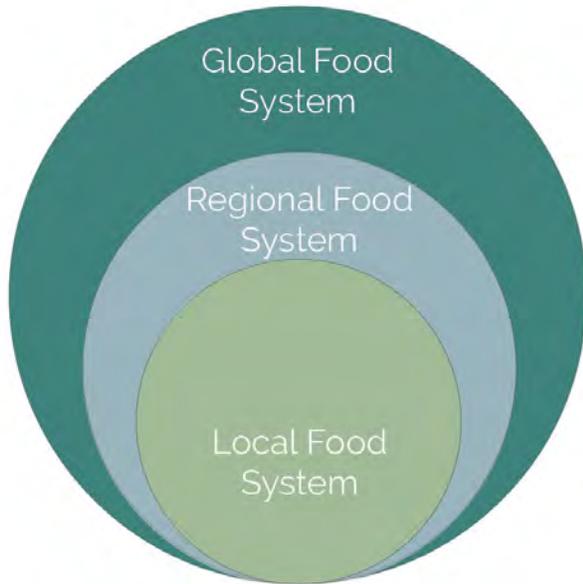
Every bite of food we consume represents more than the transformation of soil and sunlight into the food that nourishes us. It represents a complex network of transformations, interactions, and transactions that incorporates all the ways in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed, and how waste is managed. This collection of interactions and components is the food system. Yet the food system is not just one system, but a set of complex systems that exist at many nested scales. They are often nonlinear and non-cyclical, and are shaped both by the physical world and intangible structures, such as our economic systems and societal and cultural values. These numerous influences on how our food systems function mean that they are dynamic, and are often experienced differently from one community or individual to another.

In Great Barrington, the land and the individuals stewarding and cultivating it have served as the foundation for the local food system for millenia, feeding the community inhabiting the local landscape. Numerous elements of the food system now serving many people in Great Barrington are rooted in global systems. These global elements touch all aspects of the food system, and take the form of non-local fertilizers used on local farms, grocery stores stocked with foods from around the world, and the ubiquity of food chains across the globe. Though a global food system is not inherently bad, reliance on a global system presents a set of challenges and vulnerabilities, some of which have been magnified throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and effects of a changing climate. **Vulnerabilities and inadequacies of a global food system can be diminished by creating resilient and sustainable local food systems.**

The food system in Great Barrington reflects a deep commitment to a local model, with many organizations and individuals involved with producing and distributing locally produced foods that nourish the community. This model is still evolving to become more socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable. Though the local food system in Great Barrington is a focal point of the community's identity, there are still many people who find it difficult to access locally produced, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food, and farmers who face barriers to producing and distributing food, such as the ability to process meat or access suitable farmland. Food systems are not siloed; they are often influenced by or overlap with other systems and societal structures, such as economic structures and environmental conditions. Issues that are embedded across these systems, such as social injustice and environmental degradation, may be addressed in part by changes in the food system.

Given the vastness and complexity of food systems, this report focuses on the specific opportunities and challenges regarding the food system in Great Barrington and the Southern Berkshires, and offers recommendations to improve its sustainability and resiliency while also using the perspective of food systems to address other underlying issues and concerns that the community faces.

COMPLEXITY OF FOOD SYSTEMS



Though "global" food systems and "local" food systems are often compared and contrasted as separate models, they can be more accurately represented as coexisting in a nested structure. The local food system refers to the food systems processes occurring within a local geography, yet even within the local system there will still be many interactions, inputs, externalities, and influences that are part of global food systems. As local food movements try to bring more food systems functions to the local level, communities must fill in food systems gaps, which may include food processing and production, and also balance other goals such as development or preservation of uncultivated ecosystems.



SHELVES AT BERKSHIRE

CO-OP in Great Barrington feature locally-grown produce like blueberries, apples, and carrots, as well as warmer-climate fruits such as oranges, mangos, and avocados. Local stores provide an important outlet for local produce, offering farmers a nearby market and consumers access to fresher produce. Global food markets allow for shelves to remain stocked and provide fresh produce throughout the winter months.

Photo: Berkshire Co-Op.

Report Overview

A Core Team representing Great Barrington's Agricultural Commission, Sustainability & Livability Committee, and Planning Board contracted a graduate student team from the Conway School to examine the local food system. The Core Team identified seven objectives, listed below, to investigate as part of the Planning Assistance Grant funding this project.

OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED BY THE CORE TEAM

- Explore opportunities to encourage more diverse, and biodiverse, agriculturally-based land uses. Explore tools for protecting agricultural land where appropriate.
- Present case studies of communities who have increased their community food security.
- Identify metrics for evaluating the sustainability of Great Barrington's current food system and recommend strategies for increasing sustainability and resilience based on these metrics.
- Identify relevant local food production and distribution resources and systems, such as farms and farmers markets. Identify obstacles that may prevent Great Barrington residents from accessing locally produced food and develop recommendations to help address these obstacles.
- Using existing studies and the associated data, report broadly on external sources of food that cannot be grown locally.
- Provide potential strategies to improve the resilience of agriculture in the face of weather extremes and other effects of climate change.
- Explore potential applicability of the Massachusetts Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit.

These objectives informed the Conway student team's initial research and framing, including the key questions used in the **community engagement process**. More specific priorities for action emerged through the participatory engagement process and objectives, which form the basis for each chapter in this report. Following a **review of existing conditions and structural drivers**, each chapter explores one of the priorities through **research and spatial analysis**, supported with case studies and precedents in comparable communities. Finally, the report offers practical, actionable **recommendations** for the community to consider implementing or exploring further. Specifically, the report focuses on **preservation and access to agricultural lands, community growing spaces** as a way to access food and strengthen community bonds, **regional food processing** to increase availability of local food and support farm viability, and **regional collaboration** of those working within food systems in the region to better coordinate future food systems work.

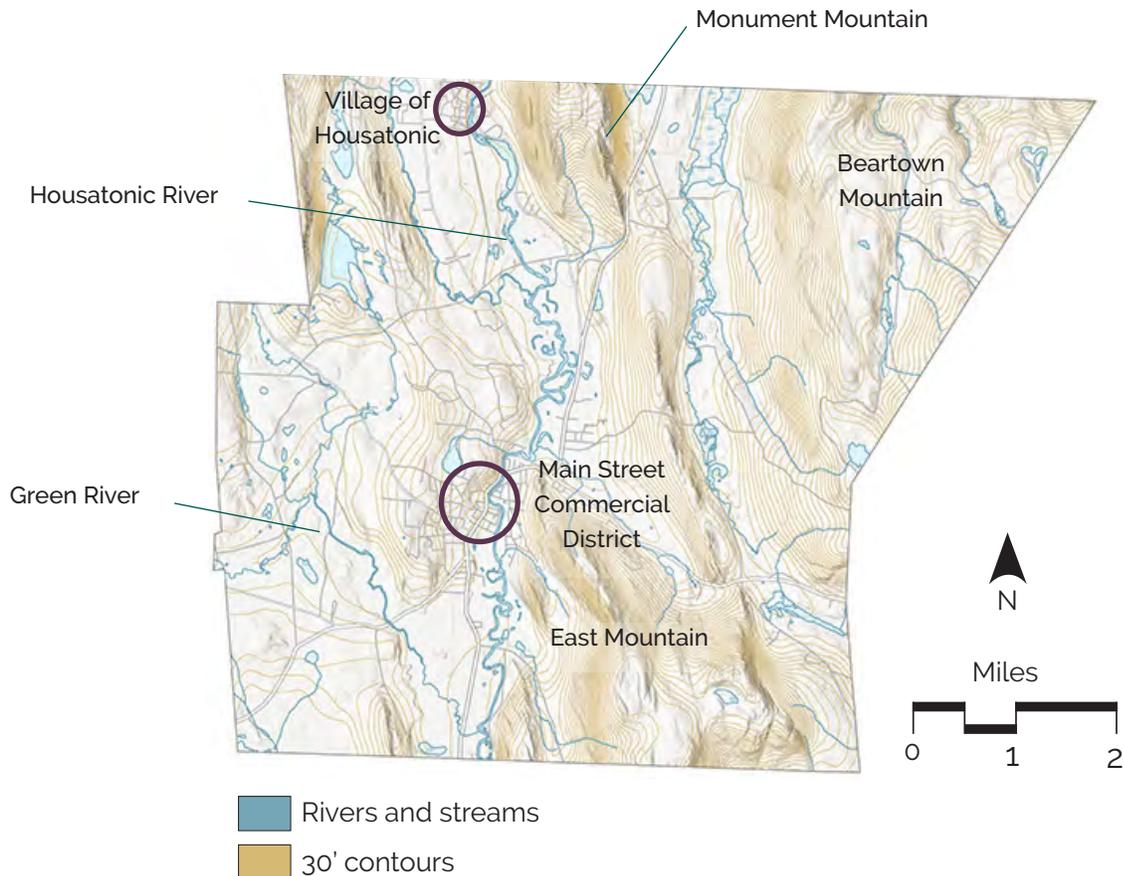
The target population for this project includes Great Barrington community members who face structural barriers that create or compound environmental injustices, including food insecurity, and/or who have been marginalized by previous stakeholder processes. In an effort to center these community members' voices and perspectives, the Core Team members and stakeholders identified **commitments to racial equity and climate justice** as fundamental analyses that ground the research process and recommendations across all focus areas. As a result, climate and equity impacts from these recommendations are not separated into individual chapters, but rather integrated into all.





Existing Conditions

Town and regional context



TOPOGRAPHY

Great Barrington sits in the upper portion of the Housatonic River Watershed, where the Housatonic River flows north to south through the center of town. The river originates just above Pittsfield, MA, and flows through western Connecticut before draining into the Long Island Sound. Elevation change defines the portion of town east of the Housatonic River, with Monument Mountain (1,642') to the north, Beartown State Forest (1,865') to the east, and East Mountain State Forest (1,942') and the Butternut Ski area (1,801') to the southeast. The western side of town is comparatively much flatter and contains the town's three largest open water bodies, Lake Mansfield, Long Pond, and Round Pond. The Green River flows through this side of town and meets the Housatonic just above the town's southern border.

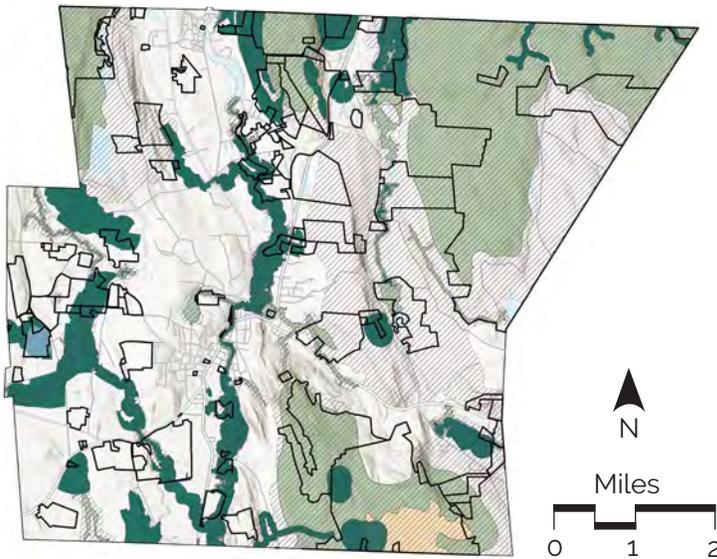
ECOLOGY

The town is part of the **Taconic Mountains and Marble Valleys ecoregion, which includes the western edge of Massachusetts as well as parts of Connecticut, New York, and Vermont.** The floodplains of the Housatonic and its tributaries are part of the Marble Valleys portion of this ecoregion, which is **one of the most unique and biologically rich regions in all of New England.** These valleys contain large numbers of species of conservation concern and priority natural communities. While higher elevation areas contain lower species diversity, they still host a suite of species and communities. Species of conservation concern in Great Barrington include two freshwater mussels, nine insects (dragonflies, butterflies, and moths), two fish, two amphibians, three reptiles, three birds, and twenty-three plants. There are also seven types of natural communities that are considered a priority for conservation due to being imperiled or vulnerable (NHESP, 2011). Many, but not all of these priority landscapes are permanently protected from development (Great Barrington Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2013). Much of the land in Great Barrington is forested, composed primarily of northern hardwoods, hemlock, and white pine, a combination predominant across the southern Berkshires. Areas of core forested habitat cover large sections of town, providing important tracts of uninterrupted land for wildlife.

LAND USE PATTERNS

Great Barrington covers 45.7 square miles of land and water, which is used by the state, town, and its community members in a variety of ways. 78.9% of the land is uncultivated and undeveloped, with forest being the dominant land cover type. There are seven parcels of state-owned land, including Beartown State Forest and East Mountain State Forest, which cover large portions of the east side of town. The only federal land is the Appalachian Trail Corridor, which is owned by the National Park Service. Approximately 2,400 acres, or 7.1%, of the land cover is cultivated land, pasture, or hay fields. These agricultural lands are located primarily on the western side of town, where the land is flatter and the Green River flows towards the Housatonic. 9% of Great Barrington is developed areas and impervious surfaces, which are concentrated along the Housatonic River, the Housatonic Railroad, and the main roads. The Main Street commercial district is located near the geographic center of town, and Housatonic Village is located to the northwest.



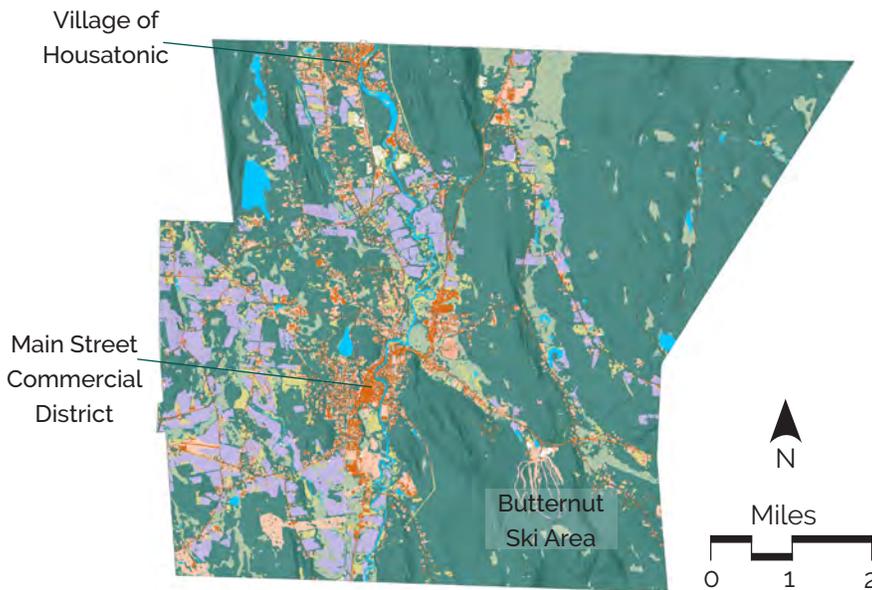


AREAS OF ECOLOGICAL

IMPORTANCE: Core Habitats, areas that are necessary for the survival of Species of Conservation Concern, important natural communities, and intact ecosystems, are clustered on the east side of town. Species of Conservation Concern occur mostly along the Housatonic and Green River. Critical Natural Landscapes are those which are “better able to support ecological processes and disturbance regimes, and a wide array of species and habitats over long time frames” (BioMap2, 2011).

- Species of Conservation Concern
- Core Habitat
- Priority Natural Communities
- Critical Natural Landscapes
- Vernal pool
- Protected open space

Large parcels of protected open space cover much of the town’s area, but not all of these are considered areas of ecological importance.



LAND USE PATTERNS: Clear land use patterns are visible in Great Barrington, with forested land covering most of the east side of town and agricultural land occurring in the west. Most impervious surfaces, including buildings, roads, and parking lots, have been built along the Housatonic. Developed open space refers mainly to cleared land that is not agricultural, such as the Butternut Ski area in the southeast corner of town.

- Water
- Forested
- Wetlands
- Grass & Shrublands
- Developed Open Space
- Impervious
- Pasture, Hay, & Cultivated

LAND USE CHANGES: INDIGENOUS HOMELANDS, FORCED REMOVAL, SETTLEMENT, AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

Land use patterns in the landscape have changed with transitions in populations, demographics, economies, and cultures of the region. **These are the traditional and unceded homelands and waters of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians**, the Muh-he-conneok, or “the People of the Waters That are Never Still” (Stockbridge-Munsee Community, “Brief History”).

Muh-he-conneok people cleared and cultivated low-lying meadows along the river, called *intervalles*, and participated in the fur trade with the arrival of Dutch and English traders and settlers. As colonial economies based on resource extraction intensified and led to scarcity conflicts among native groups and settlers, the Muh-he-conneok’s lifeways shifted to integrate further into the emerging market-based economy.

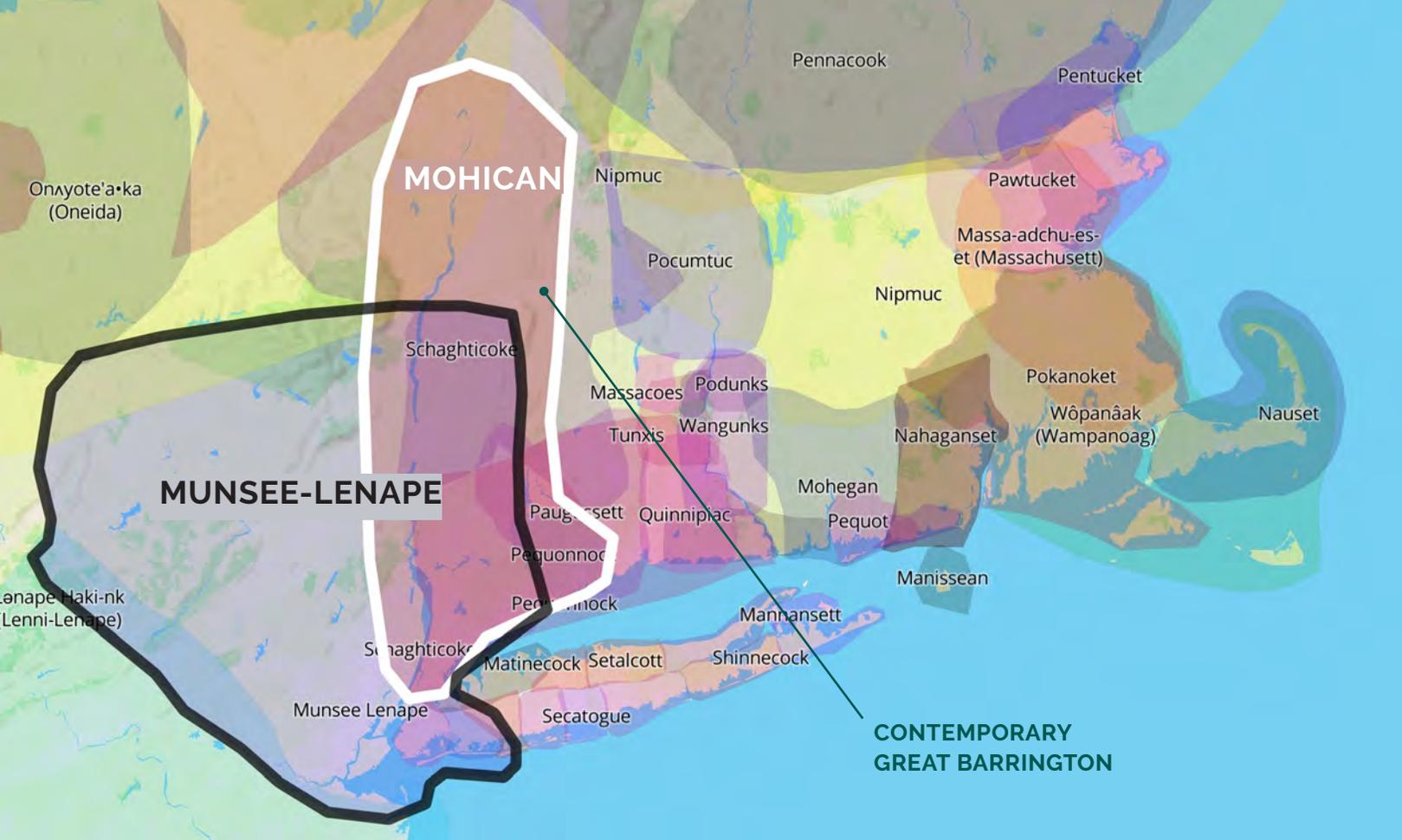
In 1736, the community made a strategic choice to allow settler missionaries to establish the settlement of Stockbridge as a “praying town”, where Indigenous people from several communities who had been converted to Christianity gathered during the colonial period. Settlers seized land during the Revolutionary War, dispossessing the remaining community members. “Although the Massachusetts General Court promised that the land given to the Indians as a reward for their service in the recent war and held in common would never be sold, that agreement was breached” (Calloway, 1995).

After this land theft displaced them, the Stockbridge community and members of other Massachusetts praying towns

accepted an invitation from Oneida peoples to relocate to Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) homelands in so-called Central New York, and through an additional series of forced removals, to land that would be called Wisconsin. The Stockbridge group was joined by a related community from the mid-Atlantic region, the Lenape-Munsee people. A series of Congressional acts establishing reservations for Indigenous peoples allotted this new homeland as a reservation for the sovereign Stockbridge-Munsee nation. The Stockbridge-Munsee community worked throughout the twentieth century to retain ownership and sovereignty over these lands in Wisconsin in the face of continued dispossession and fragmentation, and live there today, maintaining their cultural heritage and stewardship practices.

Two members of the Stockbridge-Munsee community work as full-time staff members at the Tribal Historic Preservation office in Williamstown, MA, to review construction projects and archaeological repatriation work and “ensure the Tribe’s cultural perspective is heard in the planning process” (Stockbridge-Munsee Community). Members of Great Barrington’s Agricultural Commission have been in touch with representatives from the Stockbridge-Munsee Community to open a conversation around the Tribe’s vision and engagement in planning projects on these Mohican homelands moving forward.

After the Stockbridge-Munsee were displaced, settlers along the banks of the Housatonic continued clearing the rich



APPROXIMATE PRE-COLONIZATION RANGE OF MOHICAN HOMELANDS, outlined in white, and Munsee-Lenape homelands, outlined in black. (Native Land Digital). A group of Munsee-Lenape people joined the Stockbridge community of Mohican people in Wisconsin after they had been dispossessed of their respective original homelands, to become the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians. The contemporary town of Great Barrington is near the eastern extent of Mohican lands.

“The Stockbridge-Munsee Community has always maintained a connection to its Eastern homelands and tribal members have continuously returned since the 1850s to protect burial sites or other cultural areas or to pursue land claims. In 1999, this work was formalized by establishing a Tribal Historic Preservation office which routinely consults throughout our New York and New England areas. The office carries out duties under NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) to repatriate cultural items and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to consult on federal construction projects that may impact cultural sites. In 2011, the Tribe purchased 63 acres of land along the Hudson River to protect a culturally sensitive site, and established a satellite Historic Preservation office on Mohican homelands.” (Stockbridge-Munsee Community, “Brief History”)

“*Even though we’ve been displaced, this is our homeland.*”

BONNEY HARTLEY, STOCKBRIDGE-MUNSEE HISTORIC PRESERVATION MANAGER (MARX, 2021)

intervalles for pasture and agriculture. Following the introduction of merino sheep by the Berkshire Agricultural Society in 1807, the lower slopes of the Berkshire hills were largely cleared for grazing. The agrarian landscape and mountainous surroundings served as a place of refuge, inspiration, and recreation for tourists, with destinations like the fifty-seven acre Fairgrounds, which hosted agricultural exhibits and horse racing, drawing visitors from throughout the region.

Many of the elegant mansions and cultural institutions that Gilded Age summer visitors constructed or popularized still operate as resorts and performance spaces, making Great Barrington one of the region's arts and cultural centers. Other venues, like the Fairgrounds, are now vacant.

With the coming of the railroad, Great Barrington became an industrial center for the textile and paper industries, and

later hydroelectric power, lining the Housatonic with mill complexes. W.E.B. DuBois, the civil rights leader born in Great Barrington, wrote that **"the town had made a sewer of the beautiful Housatonic River, instead of the park it might have been."** This industrial legacy continued through the twentieth century as a major GE transformer plant, located upriver in Pittsfield, MA, knowingly dumped toxic chemicals in the Housatonic. Toxins became incorporated into sediments and soils within and along the river, posing ongoing environmental and health concerns and problems.

Like many mill towns in the Berkshires, Great Barrington experienced a post-industrial collapse, leaving the Monument mill complex vacant since 1955. Its economy now relies more on tourism, hospitality, and the service sector, anchored by an active and well-preserved commercial district, cultural events like the Berkshire International Film Festival, and roots in local farms and food production.

MONUMENT MOUNTAIN in Great Barrington has attracted many visitors over the years, including Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, who met during a "social hike" in 1850 and began a deep friendship

Illustration: Edward Sorel.



POPULATION

Great Barrington is the fifth largest town by population in Berkshire County. The town's population, and that of Berkshire County as a whole, had been steadily dropping for the last three decades since the historical peak in 1990 (American Community Surveys and 2020 Census, 1990-2020). **The rate of population loss began slowing in 2018, and reversed entirely during the COVID-19 pandemic,** when, according to USPS change-of-address data, a net increase of 743 new residents established permanent residency in Great Barrington (Paris, 2021). USPS data is referenced rather than 2020 census data, as it is more recent, dating up to June 2021. This influx increased the town's population by 9.4%, passing the 1990 peak by 76 residents to reach a total of 7,915 people.

Berkshire County as a whole saw a net population gain from in-migration during the pandemic; **Great Barrington reported the county's highest influx of**

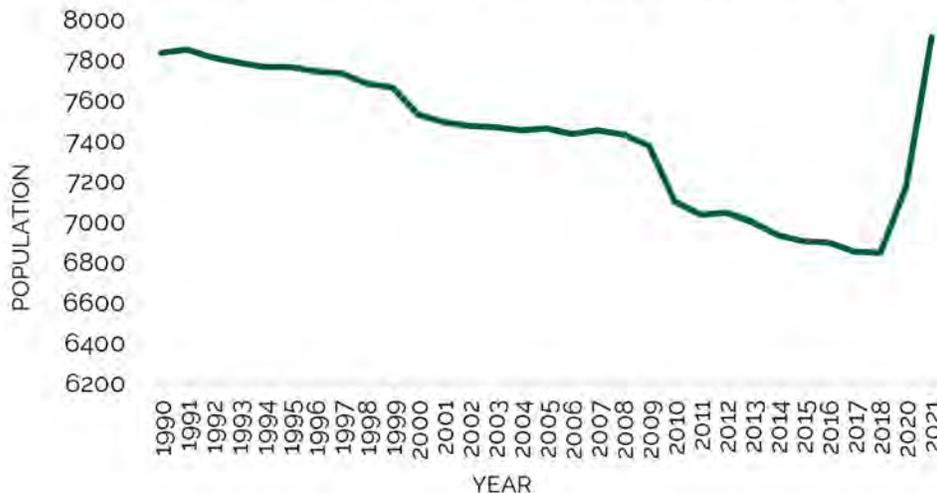
new residents. New residents have been identified as largely exurban second-home owners who are becoming permanent residents (Bell, 2021).

DEMOGRAPHICS

In terms of racial and ethnic demographics, Great Barrington's population was 85.8% white, 6.3% Hispanic or Latino, 3.8% Black or African American, and 2.8% Asian or Asian-American, as of the 2021 American Community Survey. **The town is home to three populations designated "environmental justice communities"** by the Census, including 2,431 residents, or 35.2% of the entire population (see following page for environmental justice community criteria).

Residents of the environmental justice community clustered around the Main Street commercial district earn fifty-four percent of the Massachusetts median income, and the population of the village

Great Barrington Population, 1990-2021

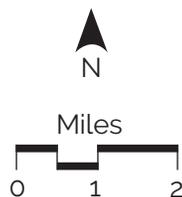
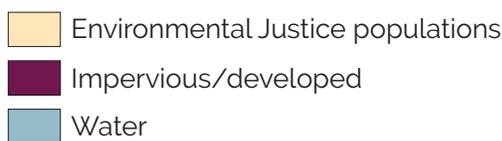
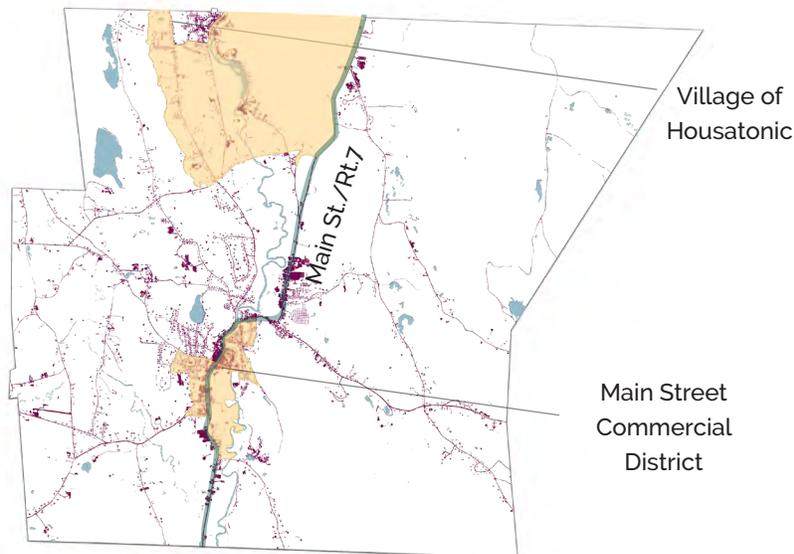


ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES

In Massachusetts, a census tract is defined as an Environmental Justice population if one or more of the following four criteria are true:

1. the annual median household income is not more than sixty-five percent of the statewide annual median household income;
2. minorities comprise forty percent or more of the population;
3. twenty-five percent or more of households lack English language proficiency; or
4. minorities comprise twenty-five percent or more of the population and the annual median household income of the municipality in which the neighborhood is located does not exceed 150 percent of the statewide annual median household income.

The above criteria can help identify communities that are disproportionately affected by environmental issues and hazards, or experience fewer environmental benefits. **These disproportionate experiences are a product of structural racism and classism embedded in our society.**



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

POPULATIONS: Thirty-five percent of Great Barrington's population are part of the town's two Environmental Justice populations. These areas are designated by census block group. Because the town is broken into seven block groups, the boundaries indicating EJ populations do not reflect spatial distributions at a fine resolution, especially for Housatonic. Here, impervious surfaces serve as a proxy for development and indicate denser residential and commercial areas.

of Housatonic to the north earns sixty-six percent of the state median income. 29.8% of the Housatonic population is Latino; Great Barrington has hosted Festival Latino of the Berkshires, an annual event featuring dance, music, and vendors serving cuisine from several Latino cultures, for twenty-five years. 9.2% of the population was born in another country, and 9.6% primarily speaks a language other than English at home (American Community Survey, 2021).

The town is the birthplace of W.E.B. DuBois, and the DuBois Center of Great Barrington celebrates the Civil Rights leader's life and legacy. A number of organizations serve Great Barrington's diverse communities, including Multicultural Berkshire Resources for Integration of Diverse Groups through Education (Multicultural BRIDGE). BRIDGE offers a "Towards Racial Justice and Equity in the Berkshires" program with a TRJ-South team and monthly caucuses, and a mutual aid program. Nine faith communities worship in Great Barrington, including the Macedonia Baptist Church, the South Berkshire Friends Meeting, and two of Berkshire County's seven Jewish congregations. These faith communities partner with public health providers, the senior center, and other nonprofits, like BRIDGE and the Guthrie Center, in a robust network of organizations that support food-insecure residents with emergency food access through farm-to-food pantry partnerships and other programming. The Railroad Street Youth Project offers resources, including apprenticeships, LGBTQIA+ spaces, and substance recovery support, for young people.





For every single industry sector, the average annual pay per employee was less in Berkshire County than it was in Massachusetts as a whole.

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION, 2020

STRUCTURAL DRIVERS

Broader structural issues are key economic drivers in Great Barrington's food system. These include **widening income disparities and limited affordable housing, which contribute to inequities along intersections of race and class**, such as food insecurity and vulnerability to climate change. While recommendations to address these structural issues are beyond the scope of this project, they are implicated in analyses where possible.

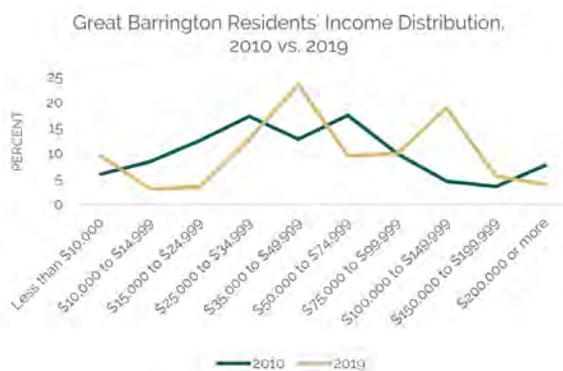
INCOME DISPARITIES

An influx in new residents created a shift in income distribution in Great Barrington. In 2010, during the period when Great Barrington's population was decreasing, seventy-five percent of Great Barrington's residents were earning \$75,000 or under, roughly comparable to the state median household income. By 2019, sixty-one percent were, with thirty-eight percent of households now earning over \$75,000. This represents a thirteen percent increase in households at the upper end of the range, which does not differentiate further between income brackets above \$200,000 per year. At the same time, the number of households earning within the lowest income brackets nearly doubled between 2010 and 2019, with 8.4% of the population in poverty as of 2019 (ACS). An increase in the numbers of both the lowest-earning and

highest-earning residents indicates an increase in income disparity. Income data predates the most recent population data, suggesting this trend is likely more attenuated with the influx of second homeowners and ongoing economic impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the county as a whole saw a thirty-three percent increase in household median income, at the same time as a twenty-four percent increase in poverty (Berkshire-Taconic Community Foundation, 2017).

Income disparities are even starker when considering farm and food system workers, who make up twelve percent of the county's workforce. According to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's 2020 report, food services workers earn among the lowest weekly wages among all industries: "Berkshire County workers on average earned significantly less per year relative to workers in other areas. For every single industry sector, the average annual pay per employee was less in Berkshire County than it was in Massachusetts as a whole. The Berkshire County industries with the highest average monthly employment in 2019 were Healthcare and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Educational Services, and Accommodation and Food Services. Together, these four industries employed 35,180 people and accounted for more than half of 58,533 people employed across all industries in the region. However, these four industries all had

average weekly wages below the median average weekly wage for all industries of \$1,003. Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services had among the lowest average weekly wages, far below the average and median weekly wage for all industries," with Food Services ranking nineteenth out of the nineteen industries surveyed (CEDS, 2020).



An increase in the numbers of both the lowest-earning and highest earning residents indicates an increase in income disparity in Great Barrington between 2010 and 2019.

AFFORDABILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF HOUSING

Prior to 2018, when the population in Great Barrington began its dramatic climb to the current record high population, **many residents were already facing challenges finding affordable housing.** According to the 2020 Great Barrington Housing Needs Assessment, thirty-five percent of residents (forty-five percent of renters) were cost burdened, spending thirty percent or more of their income on housing. Seventeen percent of the population is considered severely cost burdened, spending more than fifty percent of their income on housing. Thirty-two percent (306) of Great Barrington's rental units are subsidized, and the Housing Needs

Assessment reports a deficit of 505 units to meet the needs of households falling in the "extremely low income" threshold (less than thirty percent of average median income). Though the report shows an adequate number of units available for households in the very low to moderate income range, there is also a lack of housing for households falling in the middle income range (101-120% AMI).

The overall lack of housing has led to a vacancy rate of 0%, according to the Housing Needs Assessment. Potential housing for long-term renters is also reduced by units that are only available for short term rentals. The town is considering implementing more regulations on short-term rentals through services such as AirBnB and Vrbo, though these conversations have been contentious and slow-moving.

Affordability has not only been a challenge to renters, but also homeowners. Thirty-two percent of homeowners were cost burdened according to the 2020 study, and the affordability gap of homes in Great Barrington is -\$126,615, reflecting the difference between property costs that median income households are able to afford, and the median sale price of real estate in Great Barrington. Contributing to this gap is the prevalence of second home ownership in the region. 415 units (twelve percent) of Great Barrington's existing housing stock are owned as second homes. **Purchase of second homes and the influx of new residents to Great Barrington since 2018 and through the pandemic has dramatically increased the cost of real estate.** Between 2018 and November 2020, the median listed home price changed from \$340,000 to \$525,000.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A number of planning documents developed at the state, county, and town levels consider these structural issues within the context of land use planning. This report builds on them, aiming to integrate previous research while creating new recommendations relevant to a town-focused food system study.

At the state level, **THE MASSACHUSETTS LOCAL FOOD ACTION PLAN** from 2015 identified opportunities for the state to improve its local food systems. The three major themes that emerged were the need for more educational and informational resources, the need for agriculture regulatory reform, and the need for support to improve the financial capacity and technical proficiency of farms and food businesses. Regionally, the **SUSTAINABLE BERKSHIRES LONG-RANGE PLAN FOR BERKSHIRE COUNTY**, a multi-year plan adopted in 2014, focused on a larger scope of planning for Berkshire County. It includes an in-depth Local Food and Agriculture section, which lays out issues, opportunities, and strategies for land access and availability, food system infrastructure, healthy food access, and farmer education, networking, and support. **KEEP BERKSHIRES FARMING SUB-REGIONAL ACTION PLAN SOUTH BERKSHIRE REGION** is a product of Sustainable Berkshires, focusing on the towns of Alford, Egremont, Great Barrington, Mount Washington, and Sheffield. It lays out similar goals to Sustainable Berkshires with strategies aimed at a more specific region.

At a town level, Great Barrington has engaged planning committees that have produced several detailed documents. The most recent **GREAT BARRINGTON COMMUNITY MASTER PLAN** was developed by the Great Barrington Planning Board in 2013. While the agriculture section of this plan most directly discusses food system-related topics, all of the other sections tie into food systems planning. Goals and strategies are outlined for each of the twelve sections, which include transportation, land use, and energy and climate. **THE GREAT BARRINGTON**



TIMELINE OF RELEVANT REPORTS, STUDIES, AND EVENTS over the past decade. While there have been food system studies at the state and regional level, no town-level food systems studies have been created for Great Barrington, though the Pollinator Action Plan, Master Plan, and MVP Grant all touch on aspects of the food system.

POLLINATOR ACTION PLAN was developed by a student team from the Conway School in 2018. It outlined recommendations and strategies to increase pollinator habitat and connections within the town. It also created the connection between the Great Barrington's Core Team and The Conway School, helping to lead to this current project.

Most recently, Great Barrington was awarded a **MUNICIPAL VULNERABILITY PREPAREDNESS (MVP)** grant in 2020, with grant activities to be completed in 2022. This state program supports municipalities in "planning for climate change resiliency and implementing priority projects." (MVP Program, 2022). In Year One of the grant, the Town of Great Barrington partnered with Multicultural BRIDGE to bring the voices of those community members who are often unheard and historically marginalized to the center of the discussion about climate change and resilience. The findings from Year One of this project have been especially fundamental to Growing Better Great Barrington, and results from the MVP-BRIDGE community engagement process are incorporated into this document's research and recommendations.

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

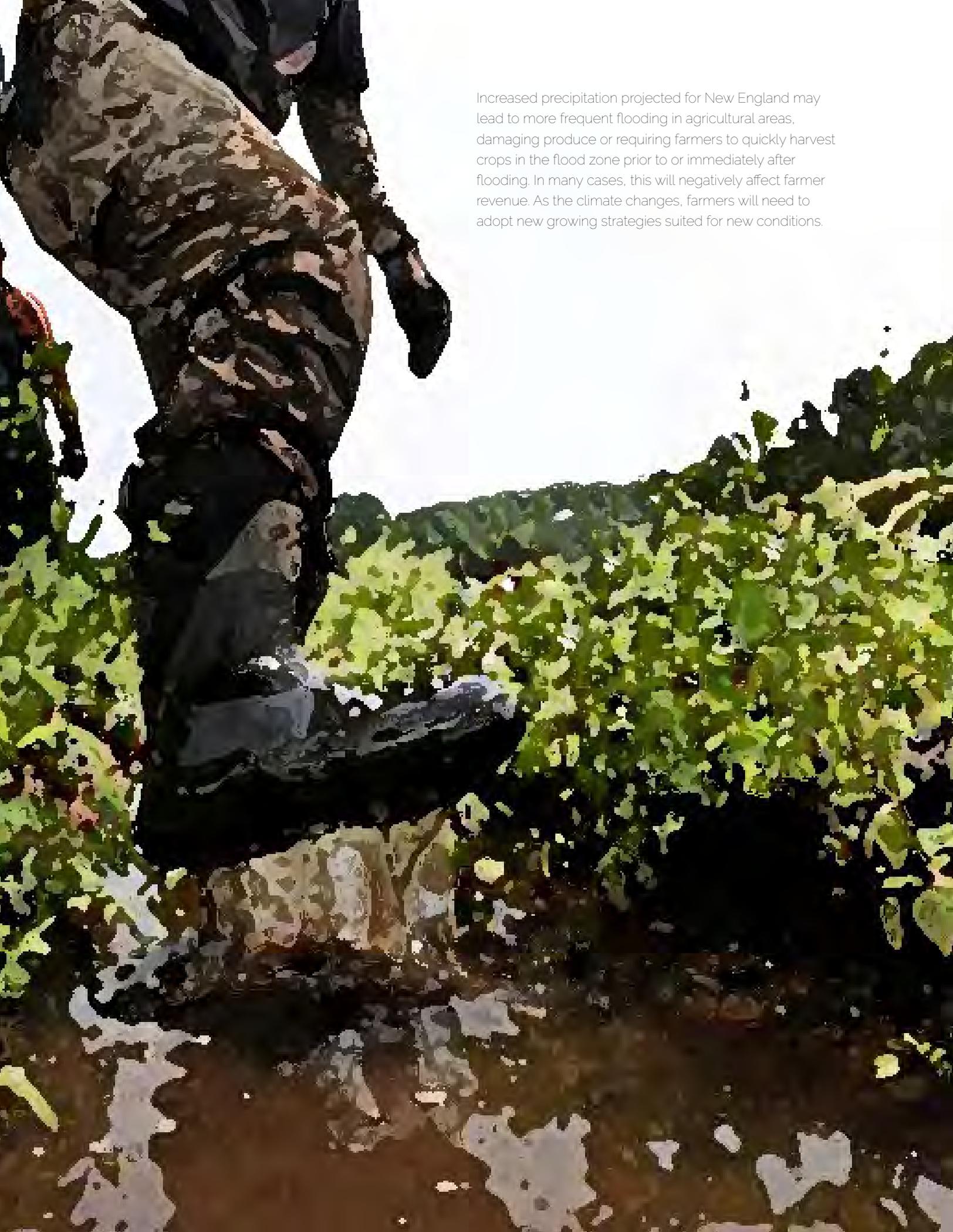
Discussions about a Great Barrington food systems study had already begun when the COVID-19 pandemic escalated in 2020. As the pandemic worsened, its economic and social consequences rippled throughout Berkshire communities. The county saw a fifty-one percent decrease in the hospitality business, an eight percent decrease in manufacturing, and a fifteen percent decrease in healthcare/social assistance during the first year of the pandemic. Food systems organizations pivoted to meet the multitude of challenges. Berkshire Agricultural Ventures (BAV) created the Resilience Fund for farmers and helped farms sell directly to consumers. Berkshire Grown shifted more of their attention towards emergency food access, working with South Berkshire food pantries, which saw a four-fold increase in customers by mid-2021 (M. Moulton, personal communication February 10th, 2022). Through the pandemic, Berkshire Grown's Share the Bounty program, which buys and donates CSA shares, has provided food insecure community members with locally produced food.

While dedicated organizations like these worked tirelessly, global supply chain issues slowed food from getting to Berkshire school cafeterias, grocery prices increased, and food insecurity increased in tandem. **This crisis revealed the food system's vulnerabilities to unpredictable disruptions, including those brought by climate change.** New urgency emerged around finding alternatives to long supply chains and conventional agricultural systems reliant on fossil fuel inputs. Great Barrington is a relatively small community, and like so many others is implicated in much larger systems over which it has little control. The community saw, with the help of insight from navigating the pandemic, that **this moment of crisis and disruption is also a moment of opportunity to strengthen their local food system.**

RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

A changing climate has already revealed vulnerabilities in our food system at global, national, and local scales. In 2022, California, which produces one-third of the nation's vegetables and two-thirds of the nation's fruit, is in the worst drought the region has experienced in 1,200 years, which is exacerbated by increased average temperatures that lead to reduced snowpack and increased evaporation (ARE Update, 2021). As a result of this drought, farmers are adapting to reduced farm productivity and ability to grow certain crops. In Massachusetts, the effects of climate change look somewhat different. While the state has also seen an increase in annual mean temperature (2.4° since 1895), increased precipitation is the more prevalent change in the region. Climate change projections show a continued trend of increased annual precipitation, with more occurring during winter and spring, and higher frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events (Runkle, 2022). One such event was Tropical Storm Irene in 2011, which caused more than forty million dollars in damage in the Berkshires (Fanto, 2016).

Climate change disruptions, such as the drought in California, highlight the need for redundancy and adaptations in food systems. Locally-based systems are an important because they create food system redundancy. Communities that produce, process, and distribute their own food are less vulnerable to supply chain issues that may occur when important agricultural regions, such as California, face disruption from climate change. Climate change also requires adaptations in local food systems to ensure they remain functional and resilient through change. In New England, these adaptations include changing how food is produced to be more compatible with longer growing seasons, warmer temperatures, and periods of flooding and drought, as well as changes to other aspects of the food system, including access and distribution strategies and waste management.

A photograph showing a farmer in a field of green crops, possibly a vineyard. The farmer is wearing a dark jacket and a hat, and is looking down at the plants. A large tree trunk is visible in the foreground on the left. The background shows a line of trees under a bright sky.

Increased precipitation projected for New England may lead to more frequent flooding in agricultural areas, damaging produce or requiring farmers to quickly harvest crops in the flood zone prior to or immediately after flooding. In many cases, this will negatively affect farmer revenue. As the climate changes, farmers will need to adopt new growing strategies suited for new conditions.

Community Engagement Process

Community engagement for this project took the form of two community forums held over Zoom and fifteen focused interviews with individuals and small groups working within the food system in the Southern Berkshires. Five members of Great Barrington's Agricultural Commission, Strategic Sustainability & Livability Committee, and Planning Board met weekly with the Conway Team. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most meetings were held over Zoom.

Community Forums

Two community forums were held over Zoom on February 3, 2022 and March 3, 2022. Both events were open to the public and posted to the town calendar, and a list of pre-determined stakeholders identified by the Core Team were directly invited to participate. The February meeting was framed as an open-ended conversation guided by participant input. During the March 3rd forum the Conway Team shared initial recommendations and discussed them with stakeholders.

COMMUNITY FORUMS AT A GLANCE

February 3rd Zoom Forum, 6:30-8PM

PARTICIPANTS: 42, excluding Core Team & Conway Team

PURPOSE: Community visioning of food system and identifying obstacles and opportunities

STRUCTURE: Group visioning leading into prompted breakout sessions with ten participants or fewer per breakout room. The breakout rooms each reported back on their discussions to the main group. The meeting concluded with a twenty-minute full group discussion.

March 3rd Zoom Forum, 2:30-4PM

PARTICIPANTS: 27, excluding Core Team & Conway Team

PURPOSE: Share initial project findings and recommendations and receive feedback

STRUCTURE: The meeting started with a twenty-minute presentation by the Conway Team sharing their initial project recommendations. After the presentation, breakout rooms were formed based on three groupings of recommendations, and participants were able to choose the breakout room topic they were most interested in discussing. Breakout room discussions lasted thirty minutes, running over time and limiting opportunity for a larger group discussion.

“ | *What’s working in the local food system?*”

During the first community forum, participants were asked to share what they experienced as working well in the local food system, and shared their answers in the Zoom chat. Of these responses, two main themes emerged: community and collaboration, and access to locally produced foods.

Most Frequent Themes	Sample Responses (direct quotes)
COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION	Strong connections with local farmers
	Cooperation among nonprofits in South County
	BRIDGE’s mutual aid program
	Collaborations between multiple organizations utilize local resources
	Generosity in giving esp. during COVID and volunteers jumping in to help
	A lot of knowledge shared between people (e.g., how to garden)
ACCESS TO LOCALLY PRODUCED FOODS	Farmers markets, including winter
	There is a lot of local food available here
	People’s pantry!
	Many organic farms, Farmer’s Market (doubling SNAP money)
	Food coop in town. Interest in and access to local farms for some.
	The GB Coop and its connection with local food producers
	Access to local farms and food
	Access to local/healthy produce
	CSA to food pantries
	Farm stands, like Taft Farms



In your highest vision, what does the ideal local food system look like?

THE FOCAL ACTIVITY OF THE FEBRUARY MEETING WAS THE “HIGHEST VISION” ACTIVITY, in which participants were asked, “In your highest vision, what does the ideal local food system look like?” Participants were asked to share as broad or as focused responses as they wished, and to write their vision in the Zoom chat. Responses were grouped into themes used to create discussion prompts for breakout rooms. The two resulting vision prompts were:

1. EQUITABLE ACCESS TO LAND FOR FARMING AND GARDENING. EVERYONE WHO IS INTERESTED IN GROWING FOOD CAN ACCESS LAND TO DO SO.

2. EVERYONE HAS ACCESS TO HEALTHY, REGIONALLY PRODUCED, AFFORDABLE FOODS THAT MEET THEIR CULTURAL AND NUTRITIONAL NEEDS, AND HAS AGENCY IN HOW THEY ACCESS IT.

Breakout room participants were asked to discuss what obstacles stand in the way of achieving these visions, what resources would be needed to overcome these obstacles, and what new connections could be made within the community to achieve these visions. During these breakout sessions, members of the Core Team and the Conway students took notes on the discussions. The meeting concluded with a large, open-ended group discussion.

THE MARCH 3RD COMMUNITY MEETING was advertised as a followup to the February meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to review the discussion and topics of the previous meeting, present initial research and recommendations by the Conway team, and receive feedback and generate further discussions around those recommendations. Following a twenty-minute presentation by the Conway team, participants joined a breakout group of their choosing that were focused on one of the three themes of the recommendations: land access and preserving agricultural land, community growing spaces, and regional processing and collaboration. These conversations and feedback helped to refine the final recommendations. Conway students facilitated and took notes on the discussions in each breakout room. Meetings in breakout rooms went over their intended time allotment, which did not allow time for reporting back for a final group discussion.

Focused Interviews

Through conversations with the Core Team, community meetings, and background research, individuals and groups were identified with whom to conduct focused interviews. Many were individuals representing local non-profit organizations including Berkshire Grown, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, Greenagers, and the Schumacher Center for a New Economics. These interviews provided opportunities to pose questions regarding specific food system-related concerns and challenges brought up by community members or referenced in previous studies and news articles, and a chance to better understand ongoing work and connections within the community. In total, the Conway Team held fifteen interviews, conducted over Zoom or at the Great Barrington Farmers' Market.

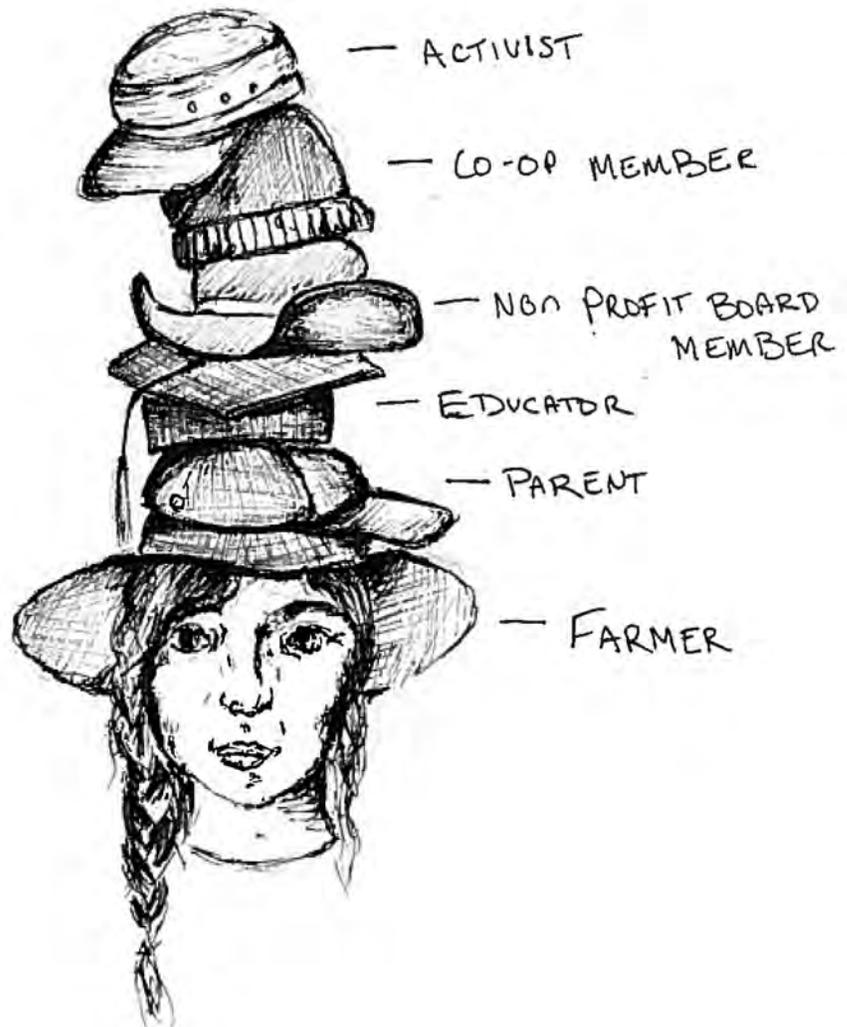
Organization or Business Represented	# of Interviews	Focus of Interview
Berkshire Grown	2	Food access and pantries, food processing, and slaughterhouses
Berkshire Agricultural Ventures	2	Food processing, slaughterhouses, regional collaboration of food systems organizations, land access, collaboration among food systems organizations
Great Barrington Strategic Sustainability & Livability Committee	1	Composting, capacity of town government
Schumacher Center for a New Economics	1	Land access, community land trusts, preserving agricultural lands, affordable housing, farmer housing
Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires/Berkshire Community Land Trust	2	Land access for farmers, affordable housing
Greenagers	2	Community growing spaces, local food processing, youth agricultural programs
Great Barrington Farmers' Market Vendors	2	Land access, labor, affordable housing, technical support and funding for farmers
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	1	Mapping local food sources and distributors
Additional community members	2	Food processing in Great Barrington, community gardens, school programs, SNAP & HIP programs, opportunity for repurposing Fairgrounds

STAKEHOLDERS

Prior to the Conway Team beginning this project, the Core Team members identified stakeholders representing sixty-seven local and regional organizations, institutions, distributors, and farms. Individuals from the organizations identified were invited to participate in community forums over Zoom or partook in focused interviews, though the Conway team was unable to reach everyone identified within the timeframe of the project.

Many community members in Great Barrington are active across multiple organizations, businesses, and working groups. The stakeholder list generated on the following page is based on how individuals introduced themselves in meetings. Missing from this list are individuals who did not specify any associated organizations, or secondary organizations they may be active with, or simply introduced themselves as “interested community members”, but may also wear the hat of farmer, co-op member, or organization board member, and are active in other ways in the community. An example of this cross-pollination is with the seven farmers the Conway Team spoke to, who in addition to farming, are also active in organizations such as the Berkshire Community Land Trust and Greenagers.

Many of the stakeholders who engaged in the community forums and focused interviews are involved with a variety of organizations and programs, or carry a multitude of identities. The breadth of their experience offered numerous perspectives, which helped establish the scope of this project.



Stakeholder	Community Forum = 35	Focused Interviews = 15
Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board	X	
Bard College at Simon's Rock	X	
Be Well Berkshires/Mass in Motion	X	
Berkshire Agricultural Ventures	X	X
Berkshire Area Health Education Centers	X	
Berkshire Bounty	X	
Berkshire Community Land Trust	X	X
Berkshire Conservation District (NRCS)	X	
Berkshire Coop	X	
Berkshire Eagle	X	
Berkshire Environmental Action Team	X	
Berkshire Grown	X	X
Berkshire Immigrant Center	X	
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission	X	
Berkshire South Regional Community Center	X	
Community Health Programs	X	
CONSTRUCT, Inc.	X	
Dewey Hall	X	
Farmers (seven)	X	X
GB Agricultural Commission	X	
GB Conservation Commission	X	
GB Planning Board	X	
GB Sustainability & Livability Committee	X	X
Gideon's Garden	X	
Greenagers	X	X
Multicultural BRIDGE	X	
Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program	X	
National Young Farmer Coalition	X	
People's Pantry	X	
Railroad Street Youth Project	X	
Schumacher Center for a New Economics	X	X
SoCo Creamery	X	
Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce	X	
Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network	X	
Stanton Home	X	
Urban Sustainability Directors Network	X	



Accessing and
Preserving
Agricultural Land

AGRICULTURAL LAND, USED TO GROW PRODUCE AND RAISE LIVESTOCK, IS THE FOUNDATION OF A LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM.

Despite the agrarian history and character of the Southern Berkshires, many community members and farmers report that access to farmland is a challenge. In Great Barrington, **accessing land has become increasingly difficult due to dramatic increases in real estate prices**, especially over the course of the pandemic. In Massachusetts, farmland value increased by 21.2% between 2020 and 2021, bringing the per acre average cost to \$13,700 (USDA, 2021). In Great Barrington, agricultural land without development restrictions frequently exceeds this average, with some undeveloped properties reaching \$100,000/acre because of their potential for residential development.

For many farmers seeking land, these prices are cost-prohibitive, and some farmers have turned to renting from private landowners. While an abundance of land suitable for agriculture is in the hands of private landowners who do not actively farm, renting can be risky for both the farmer and landowner, and often does not provide secure land tenure, recalling Molly Comstock's situation described in the introduction. Renting can also be highly inefficient for farmers, who may have to commute daily between multiple rented parcels. Anna Houston from Off The Shelf Farm, which rents over one hundred acres throughout the Southern Berkshires, reported spending four hours commuting daily and spending \$15,000 per year on gas (BCLT, 2021). Renting can also limit farmers' ability to install permanent equipment, such as fencing and irrigation. An

additional problem posed by renting farmland is the limited opportunity to secure on-farm housing. Whether it is the ability to easily and quickly close a greenhouse in a cold snap, turn on and off irrigation, or close up chicken coops, living on the land that is being farmed is essential for farmers.

A farm business's economic margins can be very slim, unsustainable, or vulnerable to events such as extreme weather or terminated lease agreements. Beginning farmers often rely on benefactors, free housing, free access to farmland, and off-farm incomes while they start their businesses. The set of circumstances that lead to a successful farm business are often difficult to achieve, and even with those circumstances, producers and farmland are still vulnerable. These challenges, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities have made some farmers reconsider the profession and lifestyle. As one farmer in the February 2nd community forum stated, "Driving up and down the Route 7 corridor from the Berkshires to Vermont, and for hundreds of miles, I am passing dead-out dairy barns and dilapidated farms," and asking himself, "Why the hell would I want to do this? Why is this what I want to invest my future in?" Yet farming for many is more than a profession, it is a lifestyle that individuals commit to. As Molly Comstock said in our interview: "Farming is a very interesting career because it really becomes a part of you. Quitting is not really an option."

“Farming is a very interesting career because it really becomes a part of you. Quitting is not really an option.”

Farmland that becomes inaccessible to farmers will inevitably transition out of agricultural use, and in many cases these properties are subdivided and developed, restricting their viability for future farming. Preserving active farmland is a strategy to help support continued local food production in the area. Programs such as the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) protects farmland from development in perpetuity, as that landowner can choose to sell the development rights of agricultural land. This program and others with similar goals, including Chapter 61A can preserve active farmland by limiting development and providing financial incentives for keeping farmland active.

Farmland throughout the Southern Berkshires is enrolled in APR and Chapter 61A, with a total of 2,780.25 acres in Great Barrington. While the number of acres preserved in perpetuity under APR has increased from 982 acres in 2011 (as cited by the 2013 Great Barrington Community Master Plan) to 1,065 according to recent Tax Assessor data, the amount of land in Chapter 61A has decreased dramatically. In 2011 there were 4,060 acres in Chapter 61A, according to the 2013 Community Master Plan, and today there are 1,715 acres. The loss of farmland in Chapter 61A also corresponds with a decrease in the acres of land farmed in Berkshire County, according to the 2017 Agricultural Census, which reports that there was a five percent decrease in the number of acres in farms between 2012 and 2017, as well as a ten percent reduction in the number of farms in the county. While preservation programs and tax incentives are an important tool in protecting farmland and supporting farmers, some farmers have stated that these programs can be too restrictive. For example, the APR program requires a minimum of five acres and location on Prime Farmland Soils, which may exclude many pasture-based operations. The APR program may not allow for the construction of additional farmer housing, which can be a significant challenge for farmers who don't have on-site housing available but do have access to suitable farmland.

During the February 3 Community Forum "In Your Highest Vision" activity, **many participants shared a vision of access to land for farmers and access to housing**. A selection of the responses are included below.

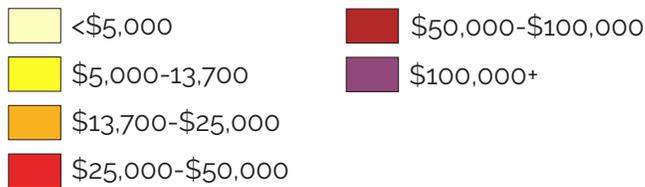
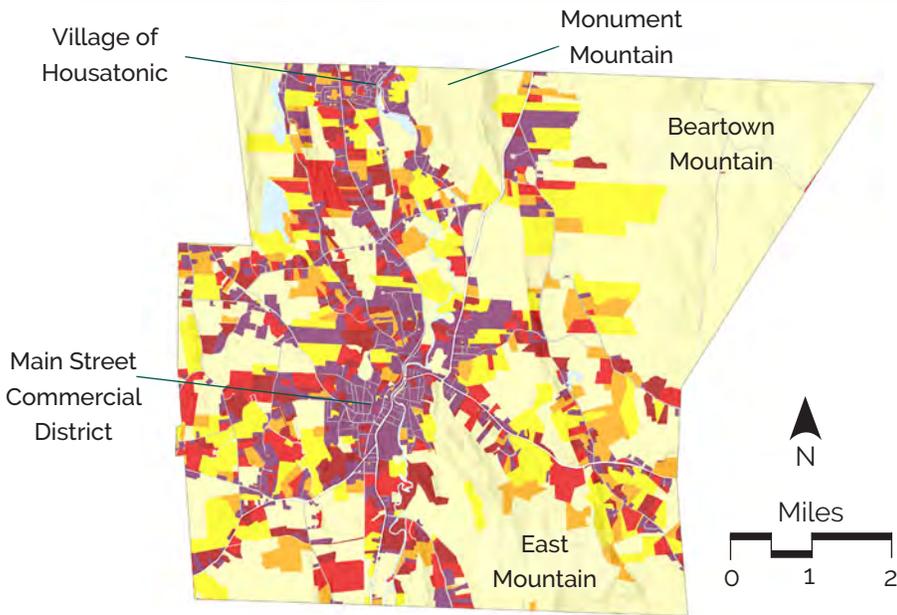


IN YOUR HIGHEST VISION...

- Access of land for young farmers growing local food
- Affordable land for anyone who wants to farm
- Farmworkers owning farms
- Housing for workforce
- Affordable housing for young farmers

OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED BY THE CORE TEAM

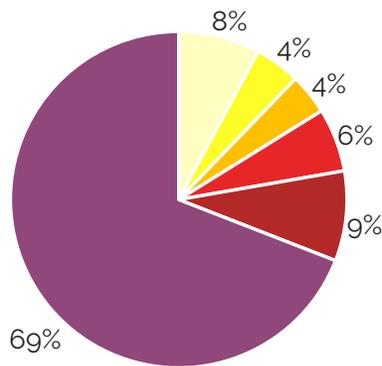
- Explore opportunities to encourage more diverse, and biodiverse, agriculturally-based land uses.
- Identify local food producers (such as farms) and resources (such as farmers markets)
- Identify obstacles that may prevent locally produced food from reaching Great Barrington residents. Explore ways to overcome these obstacles.
- Explore tools for protecting agricultural land where appropriate.



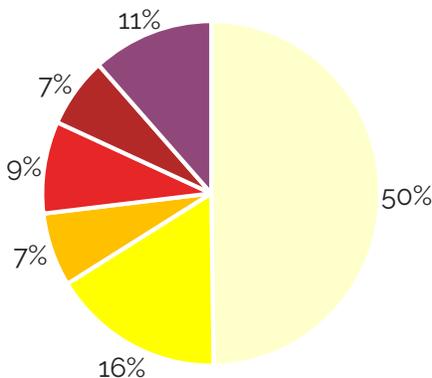
PER ACRE VALUE OF PROPERTIES IN GREAT BARRINGTON:

Many of the most expensive properties by cost per acre are located in the downtown commercial district, the village of Housatonic, and along the Housatonic River. Large swaths of land making up Monument Mountain, Beartown Mountain, and East Mountain are in the lowest cost per acre threshold, as this land is primarily undeveloped and conserved. The \$13,700 threshold represents the average cost of an acre of farmland in Massachusetts. Many of the properties were most recently assessed in 2019 and 2020, and may not reflect recent increases in real estate values.

PER ACRE VALUE BY PROPERTY

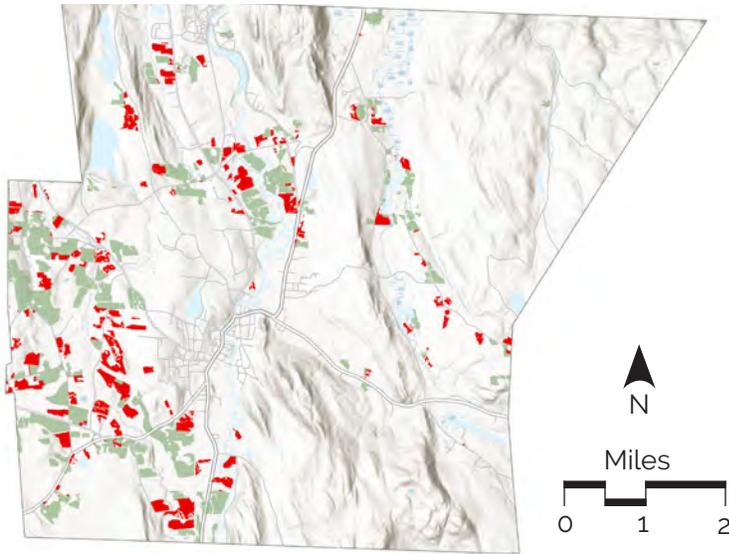


PER ACRE VALUE BY LAND AREA



GROUPING PROPERTIES INTO DIFFERENT COST PER ACRE RANGES

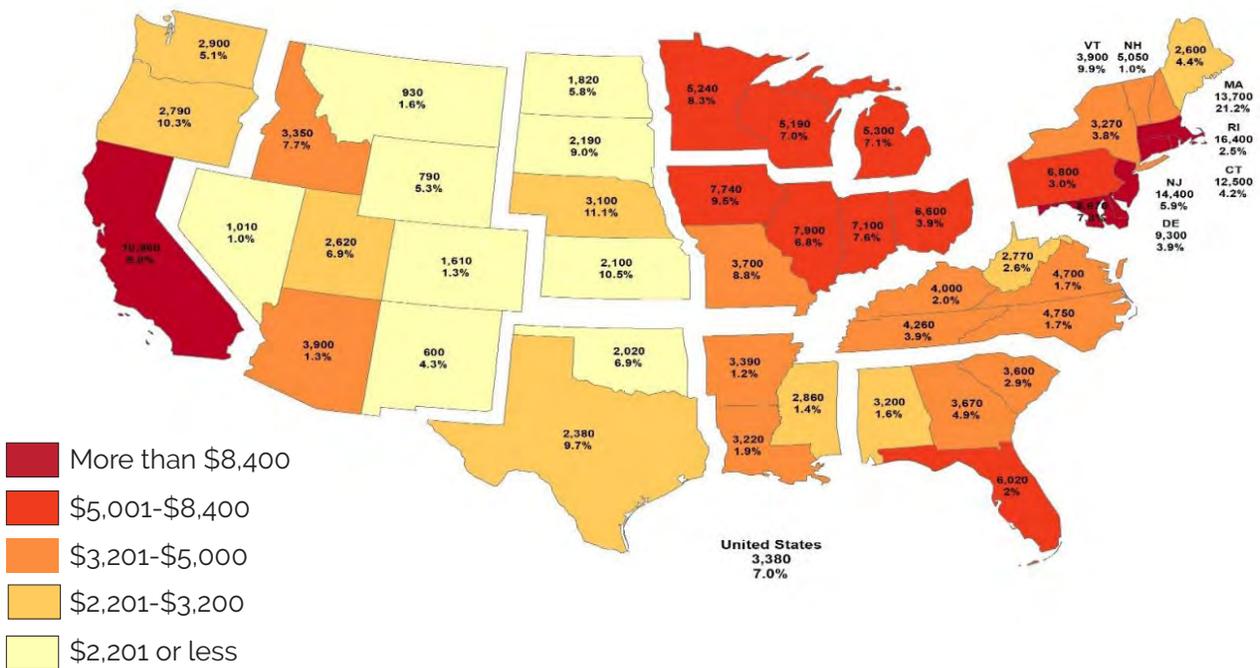
shows that sixty-nine percent are worth more than \$100,000 per acre, and eighty-eight percent are worth more than \$25,000 per acre. Many of these properties are residential and commercial spaces clustered around the downtown and along the Housatonic River, with many having less than an acre of land. Many of the lowest value per acre parcels are part of state forests. Looking at land area, 50% of the land falls into the less than \$5,000 per acre group. While sixty-six percent of the land in Great Barrington is valued at under \$13,700 per acre, much of this is forested land that is conserved, and not ideal for farming due to its soil and topography.



- Farmland less than \$13,700 per acre
- Farmland greater than \$13,700 per acre

COST OF FARMLAND: Using the landcover data to identify actively farmed land (cultivated, pasture, & hay) demonstrates that some farmland falls above the \$13,700/acre state average. Many of these properties have buildings and other structures that drive up the price of land, yet the total land price (building values + land value) must be considered, since purchasing the land alone is typically not an option. The \$13,700 per acre average is also based off of real estate value including structures, not just land value. Forty-two percent (998 acres) of farmland parcels fall above the \$13,700 threshold, meaning these parcels are above the state average in cost per acre. The property value in many cases is based off of 2019 and 2020 data, and may not reflect recent increases in real estate prices. This map evaluates all parcels, and does not distinguish parcels for sale.

**2021 FARM REAL ESTATE VALUE BY STATE,
WITH PERCENT CHANGE BETWEEN 2020 AND 2021**



USDA 2021 LAND VALUES Between 2020 and 2021 farm real estate values rose by 21.2% in Massachusetts, the highest increase in the country. The average cost per acre of farmland in the state is \$13,700, among the highest per acre value in the country (USDA, 2021).

Recommendation 1.1 *Increase Land Under Community Ownership*

The increased cost of land and real estate in the Berkshires has posed an obstacle to farmers, especially new farmers and farmers of color, who are trying to acquire land for farming. Limited affordable housing, low vacancy rates of rental units, and limited housing on rented farmland has made it difficult for some producers with access to land to live on or near the land they tend. The land trust model of community land management offers one solution. Land trusts, such as Berkshire Community Land Trust and the Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires, Great Barrington Land Conservancy, and Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust, can help address a variety of issues in the

community, including **access to affordable housing, affordable farmland and farmer housing, and preserving local ecosystems and agricultural landscapes.** With a campaign to get more land into community ownership in the form of a community land trust, Great Barrington could better strategize how to serve its population and care for the local landscape. These recommendations specifically concern farmland preservation and creating affordable access to farmland, as well as providing housing to farmers. Beyond these recommendations, it will be important for the town to address additional issues around limited affordable housing.

CASE STUDY

INDIAN LINE FARM

Located just southwest of Great Barrington in South Egremont, Indian Line Farm is a well-known farm in the Berkshires. The land at Indian Line Farm has been continuously farmed for over a century. In the 1980s, the owner, Robyn Van En, transitioned the farm to a diversified vegetable farm operating under one of the first CSA models in the country. After her untimely death in 1997, the property was purchased by The Community Land Trust in the Southern Berkshires, and conservation restrictions on much of the property were purchased by The Nature Conservancy. The Schumacher Center for a New Economics assisted in creating the legal documents including the Lease and Land Management Plan. This model was put in place to keep the land under cultivation, remain affordable to farmers, and protect sensitive wetland habitat.

The farm has been operated by Elizabeth Keen and Alexander Thorp since 1997, and provides produce to the community through CSA shares, donations to food pantries, sale at farmers' markets, and restaurants. They lease the land on a 98-year term, and own the structures on the property. Keen and Thorp are able to gain equity through improvements to structures, as well as improvements to the landscape including the soil, which is specified in their lease agreement.

STRATEGY 1: FUNDRAISE TO ACQUIRE AGRICULTURAL LAND

Meeting the goals of preserving agricultural land and providing affordable, on-site housing for farmers will require a significant campaign effort to acquire parcels through purchase or donation. The Harry Conklin Fund for Farmsteads, which is hosted by Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, Berkshire Community Land Trust, and Berkshire Grown, is currently raising money through donations for the purchase of agricultural land to be owned by the land trust. While charitable donations will play an important role in raising funds for land purchase, there may be additional opportunities to raise and access money, including federal and state funds and creating targeted fees or taxes, such as subdivision fees or fees on development of farmland.

POTENTIAL STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS FOR FARMLAND ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT: The CPA allows municipalities to establish Community Preservation Funds to support affordable housing, historic preservation, open space preservation, and funding outdoor recreation. Towns and cities in Massachusetts that adopt the CPA generate money through a three percent property tax surcharge, and funds are also matched by the statewide CPA Trust Fund. Great Barrington adopted the CPA in 2012, and the CPA Committee recently approved \$1.1 million in funding for local projects, pending voter approval (Cowgill, 2022). Great Barrington has previously used CPA funds towards purchasing the Agricultural Preservation Restrictions for Windy Hill Farm and North Plain Farm.

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM: These NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) funds cover up to fifty percent of the fair market value of conservation easements for farmland and wetlands. Funds are available to non-profit organizations, state and local agencies, and indigenous nations.

STRATEGY 2: CONDUCT OUTREACH TO PRIVATE LANDOWNERS ABOUT TRANSITIONING LAND TO OWNERSHIP UNDER A COMMUNITY LAND TRUST MODEL

Property owners with land suitable for agriculture, including second, third, and fourth homeowners can make a significant contribution to a vision of community land ownership by donating land to local community land trusts. To achieve this, property owners will need to be invited into conversations about the community vision for the landscape and the benefits of a landscape under community ownership.

STRATEGY 3: EDUCATE FARMERS ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCESS LAND THROUGH THE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST MODEL

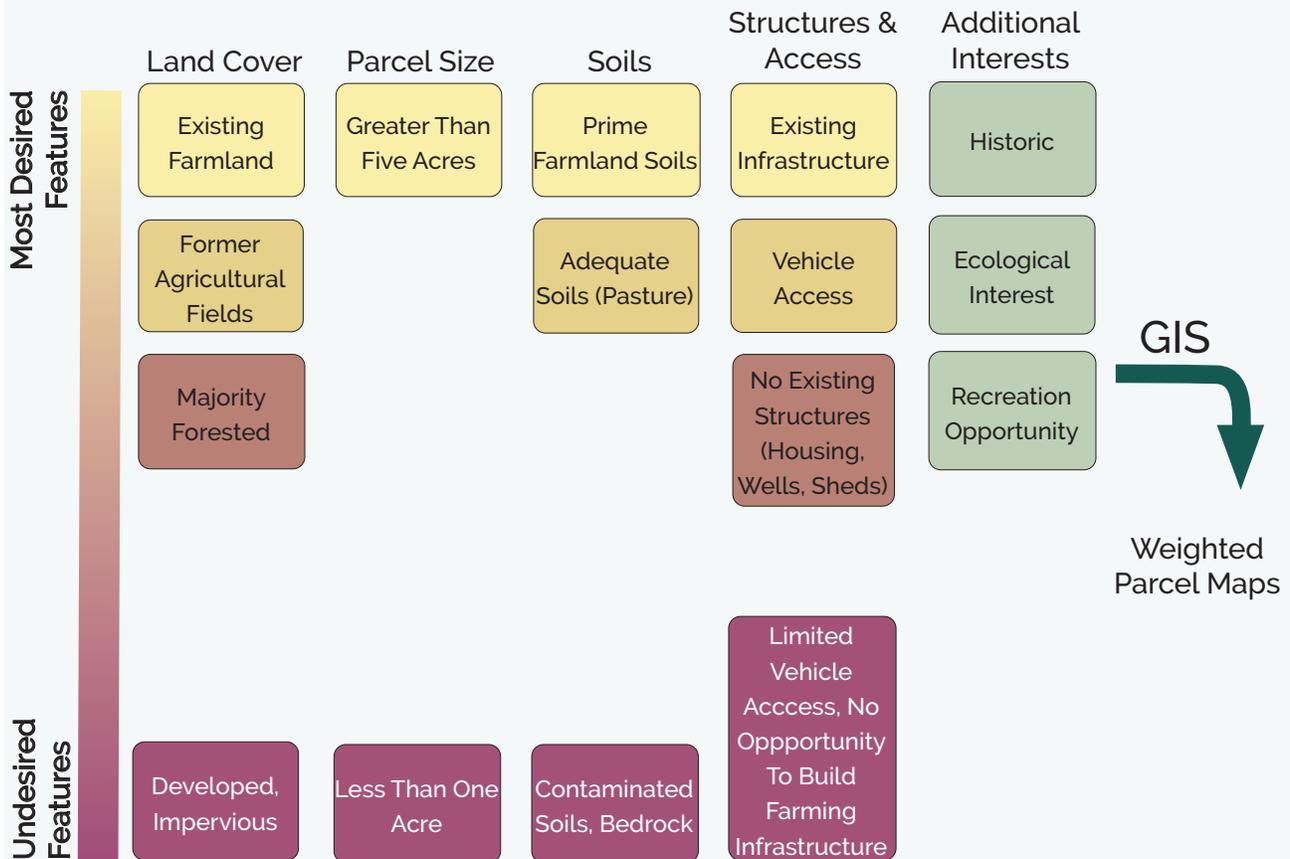
For many farmers, outright land ownership is often assumed to be the primary means of gaining secure land access. As the town of Great Barrington and local community land trusts acquire land for agriculture, they will need to find farmers interested in working with an alternative land access model.

STRATEGY 4: IDENTIFY PRIORITY PARCELS FOR ACQUISITION

Identifying priority parcels to acquire for a community land trust can help contribute to efficient and effective use of available funds. GIS (Geographic Information Systems) can be used to map parcels with desirable landscape characteristics and parcel criteria, which can then be referenced as parcels come on the market, or be used to approach landowners to discuss the future management of their properties. Keeping a database of existing and potential agricultural parcels under community land trust ownership can also be instrumental in creating landscape-level management plans. Many land trusts are already using GIS to prioritize land management for different goals including urban access to open space (Levitt, 2022) and preserving coastal ecosystems (Slee, 2009). GIS mapping can also be used to communicate land trust, conservancy, government, and community efforts to the public, as the Vermont Land Trust does on their interactive website.

USING GIS TO IDENTIFY PRIORITY PARCELS

Landscape and parcel characteristics, such as soil types, parcel size, landscape cover, existing infrastructure, and access, can be identified and organized in GIS to highlight the most suitable or priority parcels for agricultural conservation. The example workflow shown below shows a simplified process with the criteria that can be used to create a weighted parcel map.



Community Land Management

A Holistic Approach to Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

Human land use directly affects over seventy percent of the global ice-free land surface and in many ways contributes to climate change, with twenty-three percent of anthropogenic greenhouse gases coming from agriculture, forestry, and other land uses (IPCC, 2019). Yet land can also serve as a carbon sink, and **changes in land use practices can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create landscapes that help humans to adapt to climate change.** Regenerative farming techniques such as no-till, agroforestry, use of cover crops, and rotational grazing can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural landscapes, and even lead them to sequester carbon (IPCC 2014 via Toensmeier, 2016).

One strategy for communities to mitigate and adapt to climate change is to embrace a holistic land management approach. A holistic approach looks at the landscape at a broader scale, rather than focusing on the parcel level, and includes voices of land stewards, such as farmers and foresters, landowners, educational institutions, local organizations, and local government in making land use decisions and policies. This approach may be more effective at managing resources in a community for sustained use and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as compared to varying management approaches between many private landowners. Cooperative land management models used throughout history have proven that **resources can be sustainably managed for sustained community use** (Ostrom, 1999).

More recently, community land management models have demonstrated the ability to leverage the expertise and strategies of organizations and individuals across different fields to manage landscapes to support multiple functions such as increased carbon sequestration, preserving biodiversity, facilitating low-impact recreation opportunities, and preserving farmland (Levitt & Navalkha, 2021). **Land conservancies and land trusts can be key players in creating community land management strategies.** An example of this is through their use of conservation easements and land management agreements to preserve important ecosystems and ecosystem services while also supporting the sustained practices of landowners and land stewards. One local example is Indian Line Farm in South Egremont, where conservation easements help protect nearby wetlands, and the land management plan promotes soil building techniques and provides farmers the opportunity to gain equity through building soil organic matter. Innovative land management plans developed by a community that promote ecological best practices and economically incentivise land stewardship can promote the ecological, social, and economic sustainability of a landscape and community.

How might we provide secure, equitable, long-term land tenure to farmers?



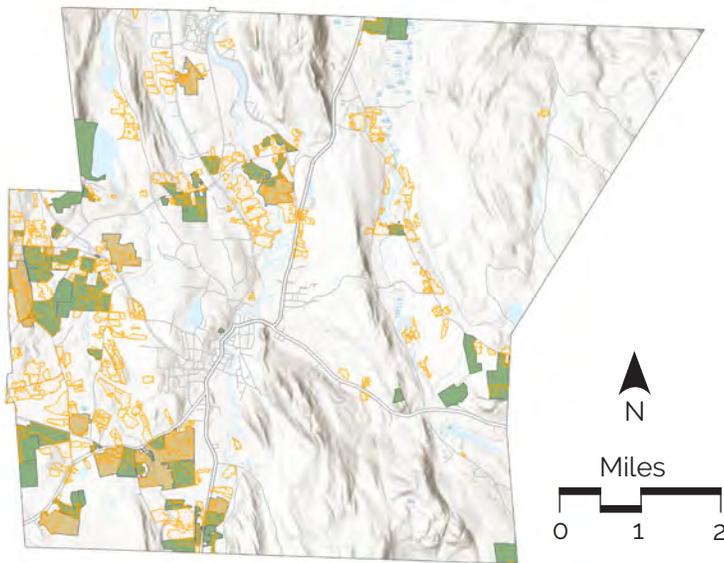
Recommendation 1.2 *Preserve Agricultural Land Through Existing Conservation Programs and Conservation Easements*

Development pressures in Great Barrington have led to farmland being valued at prices significantly above what most farmers can afford to purchase, and farmland continues to be subdivided and developed. Existing federal and state programs can help prevent further loss by offering tax incentives for using land for farming, or providing funding for conservation restrictions and easements on agricultural land. These programs can help reduce or prevent development on agricultural land, and provide financial support or reduced financial burden to farmers.

THE AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION RESTRICTION PROGRAM is voluntary state-run program in which farm owners can sell the development rights of their property and earn the difference between the market price and agricultural value of the property. The development restrictions placed on the property are intended to prevent development or land-use changes that would negatively impact the farming potential of the land. Once farmland is placed in the APR program it is protected in perpetuity. This program targets existing farms on prime farmland soils with greater than five acres. Recent updates to the classification of prime farmland soils means that more land in Great Barrington now is considered prime farmland soil, and may qualify for the APR program.

CHAPTER 61A is a program that incentivizes agricultural land use and managed forests by offering tax reductions to land owners. Land owners can voluntarily put their land into the Chapter 61A program if they meet requirements regarding agricultural land use or forest management, farm revenue, and minimum acreage. Chapter 61A offers tax reductions by evaluating land based on its agricultural potential, rather than development potential. If land in Chapter 61A is sold for development, or if the landowner takes it out of enrollment and changes the land use within twelve months, the town has the right of first refusal on the property.

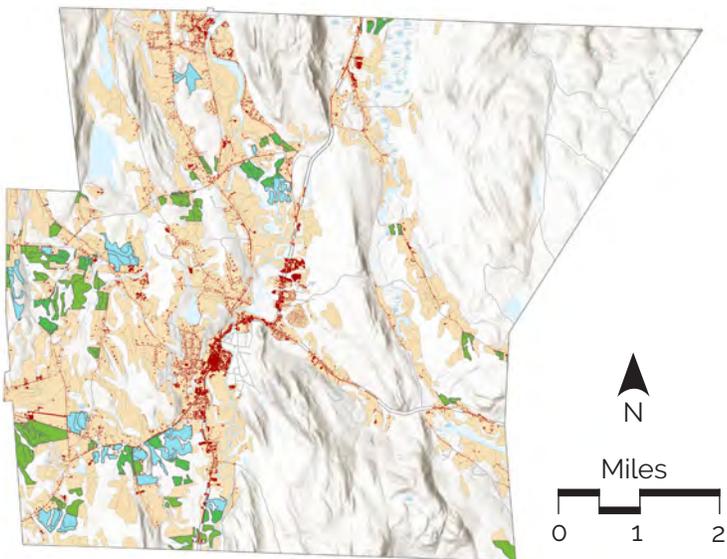
THE NRCS AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM allows owners of active farmland to sell the rights to development on the property through conservation easements, which may be partially funded by the NRCS (up to fifty percent). These easements can be held by local organizations, such as Berkshire Community Land Trust.



- Chapter 61A
- APR
- Pasture, Hay, & Cultivated Land

AGRICULTURAL LAND IN CHAPTER 61 A

& APR: Great Barrington contains 1,065 acres of land under Agricultural Preservation Restriction, and 1,715 acres of land in Chapter 61A, down from 4,060 acres in 2011. The change in the amount of land in Chapter 61A may indicate a transition of land out of agricultural use, and the increased value of land that is evaluated for its development potential. Many of the properties in both programs are larger farms, while many smaller parcels of agricultural land are not enrolled in either program.



- All Prime Farmland Soil (PFS)
- PFS in Chapter 61A
- PFS in APR
- Impervious on PFS

CONSERVED PRIME FARMLAND SOILS

Great Barrington contains 9,433 acres of prime farmland soils of statewide or local importance. This number was increased in 2020 after updates to classification criteria, which now include slopes of 8-15% and the inclusion of some stony soils. Primarily located on the western sides of town and along the Housatonic River, some soils are actively cultivated while others have been built upon. 692 acres of PFS are now covered with impervious surfaces, primarily in the downtown area. 2,714 acres are preserved under APR, and 3,222 acres are in Chapter 61A. 215.9 acres of prime farmland soils are in both Chapter 61A and APR.

Recommendation 1.3: *Explore Land Rematriation & Reparations*

LAND, POWER, & INEQUALITY

Private land ownership has been a way to perpetuate and uphold injustice and unequal distributions of power and wealth since the early colonial period in the United States. This legacy is reflected in contemporary distribution of land and land access, where 98% farms are under white ownership in the Northeast (USDA, 2017). In the U.S., property ownership is a fundamental strategy for families to gain equity and wealth. Practices such as urban redlining have historically prevented Black people from home ownership. While redlining was formally outlawed in 1968, similar practices have played out in rural settings and in recent years, with people of color receiving proportionally fewer and lower valued USDA loans (Rosenburg, 2019). Privatization of land has been one of many barriers to Indigenous people engaging with traditional land practices. Creating a more resilient and sustainable food system not only requires changing production practices and distribution methods, but also addressing the underlying systems that perpetuate injustice.

STRATEGY 1: WORK WITH STOCKBRIDGE-MUNSEE COMMUNITY ON REMATRIATION EFFORTS

Rematriation refers to restoring Indigenous people and practices with their ancestral lands (Sogorea Te', 2021). Although many of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans are now located in Wisconsin as a result of forced removal and dispossession, they are still connected with the community and landscape in Great Barrington. Rematriation efforts could help continue to develop and mend relationships in the community. Rematriation can take many forms, including the return of land to Indigenous people, representation in organizations such as land trusts, taxes directed towards Indigenous groups, and cultural land use agreements. Forms that rematriation takes will need to be determined through conversations with the Stockbridge-Munsee community.

CASE STUDY

SHUUMI LAND TAX

Non-Indigenous people and institutions living and operating in the Confederated Villages of Lisjan's, otherwise known as East Bay in California, can pay Shuumi, a voluntary tax which supports the work of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust. This tax recognizes that the unceded land has a history of violence and displacement against the Ohlone people. The Sogorea Te' Land Trust, led by urban Indigenous women, works on rematriation of land, and revitalization and preservation of Ohlone cultural practices. Projects that the Shuumi Land Tax have helped to support include urban agriculture programs, community resiliency centers, and cultural revitalization education and workshops (Sogorea Te Land Trust, 2021).

STRATEGY 2: EXPLORE REPARATIONS

Regarding the agricultural system, Leah Penniman of Soul Fire Farm in North Petersburg, NY has written that **"this system is built on stolen land and stolen labor, and it needs a redesign"** (Nexus Media, 2019). Repairing generations of trauma and addressing ongoing inequity and injustice is not easily achieved. A movement towards a more sustainable regional food system needs to include a framework on righting historical and ongoing social inequities and injustice. Reparations may take many forms, including connecting Black and Indigenous people and other people of color with land, providing funding opportunities for new farmers and farm owners of color, ensuring representation and empowerment within organizations and local government, and supporting the work of organizations such as Multicultural BRIDGE.

NORTHEAST FARMERS OF COLOR LAND TRUST

Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (NEFOC) is a network of Black and Indigenous land stewards developing and expanding existing collaborations to ensure farmers of color have secure access to resources, including training, education, markets, business development, and financial planning. In addition to facilitating land stewardship, NEFOC is working at local, regional, state, and national levels to create policies in support of climate transition, BIPOC land access, and Indigenous and regenerative land management. NEFOC may be a valuable partner as a community of practice to move forward with land access recommendations and formulating action towards reparations and rematriation.

CASE STUDY

MUMBET'S FREEDOM FARM

Mumbet's Freedom Farm, located south of Great Barrington in the town of Sheffield, is a Black and Brown-led cooperative farm and sanctuary. The farm is named after Elizabeth Freeman, known as 'Mumbet', an enslaved nurse, midwife, and herbalist living in Sheffield who won her freedom in 1781. Freeman's legacy and the values she represented are core to the community at Mumbet's Freedom Farm. The community is made up of farmers, land stewards, activists, healers and health practitioners, and artists who practice sustainable agriculture, educate, host community events, and create spaces of sanctuary and healing. This community recognizes the power that stewarding the land has for building human relationships, healing, and respecting the legacy of previous human and non-human communities, and demonstrates the importance of creating access to land for BIPOC communities. By stewarding the land and having a place to ground their community, Mumbet's Freedom Farm is able to provide fresh, sustainably produced food for its community, and opportunities for others to connect with the land and each other. The cooperative highlights the potential for creativity, healing, connection, and stewardship that comes with the opportunity to connect with the land, which may be achieved through reparations.

Recommendation 1.4: *Support*

Farmers and Landowners Leasing Farmland

While purchasing farmland in the Berkshires may be cost prohibitive to many farmers, leasing on privately owned land can create opportunities to connect farmers with viable farmland. Although some farmers have experienced challenges leasing on private land, creating a local program to connect landowners and farmers, and providing both parties with resources to construct mutually agreed upon lease agreements could reduce the risks associated with leasing.

STRATEGY 1: CREATE A LOCAL “LAND SPONSOR” PROGRAM TO CONNECT LANDOWNERS AND FARMERS.

While existing services such as Land for Good and New England Farmland Finder provide a platform for listing available farmland, creating a local program with supporting educational resources can help farmers and landowners connect within their own community, and create more visibility around local leasing opportunities. Landowners could include aging farmers looking to retire and non-farming landowners. A local program could provide ways for interested parties to meet, such as through a digital platform with profiles or a digital forum, and through in-person events. This program could also offer support in drafting documents such as leases and land-use agreements. A mutually-agreed upon lease is essential for a successful leased farming operation. Although organizations such as Land for Good and New England Farmland Finder offer templates for farmland leases, additional support may be valuable for developing leases specific to the needs of the farmer, landowner, and local landscape. Local organizations, such as the Schumacher Center or Berkshire Community Land Trust, could assist both parties by providing educational opportunities and resources on how to create and refine secure leases.

STRATEGY 2: INCENTIVIZE NON-FARMING LANDOWNERS TO MAKE LAND AVAILABLE FOR LEASING

Landowners with agriculturally viable land, including previously farmed land, could be offered tax-based incentives for keeping their land under cultivation, including Chapter 61A or a program created by the town. Non-monetary incentivization, including recognition of those providing land access or exchange for food produced on leased land, may also be important strategies for recruiting landowners into a local land-link program.



4

Creating Community
Growing Spaces

COMMUNITY GARDENS AND OTHER GROWING SPACES HELP TO ENGAGE MORE PEOPLE IN THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM.

When asked about their “highest vision” in the February 3rd meeting, many stakeholders shared a **vision of access to community gardens**. In subsequent individual conversations, stakeholders indicated that while there are a few plots scattered across Great Barrington, the town does not have a consistently-operated, sizable community garden. Gardens were installed at the Fairgrounds in 2016, but limited access to water and difficulty accessing the space on foot led to its decline. The First Congregational Church in downtown Great Barrington has a small garden, and the Berkshire South Regional Community Center has two small plots.

In the second stakeholder meeting, nine community members joined a breakout room to discuss creating community gardens in Great Barrington. Two main topics and numerous ideas emerged from that conversation. First, participants shared a concern that community gardens would be more accessible to those with more privileges, and wondered how to make these spaces more accessible to those who have less time, who don't know how to garden and may be nervous to try, and who may not be aware of the opportunity due to not frequenting the spaces where gardens might be advertised. Second, participants recognized that successful

community gardens require not just a piece of land, but also strong organization and leadership.

The MVP grant process also highlighted a desire for community gardens before this project began. In community conversations, “people expressed a desire to grow their own food to feed their families and share the bounty with their neighbors” (MVP report draft, 2021). A group of immigrant women who are a part of BRIDGE were asked about their needs around food access, and one of three findings was a request for community gardens.

Participants identified current strengths that could help efforts, which included extensive knowledge and experience with growing food in the community and the strong foundation that BRIDGE's mutual aid work has created over the past year. They identified land access as a needed resource and mentioned the idea of connecting to a land trust, and also identified a need to address class disparities and create a welcoming space. Farmers, organizations including BRIDGE, Greenagers, Berkshire Grown, Berkshire Botanical Garden, and the Town of Great Barrington were all identified as key players in any plan.

“

People expressed a desire to grow their own food to feed their families and share the bounty with their neighbors. BRIDGE-MVP



IN YOUR HIGHEST VISION...

- Neighborhood food hubs or garden sharing systems
- Everyone can afford and access healthy organic food. Many community gardens. Affordable local food store
- Spaces / events to enjoy food together and to build community
- Gardens in every front yard, supported by community gardeners
- Citizens and government transforming lands, lawns to pollinator ecosystems, planting native bushes, trees, and food gardens that feed us all and help the climate
- Community garden, kitchen, education programs
- Lawn and ornamental trees turned to produce vegetables and fruit
- Support for all to learn season extension, plant gardens, use natural gardening methods, and community learning, sharing of best practices



BRIDGE-MVP GOALS

- Linking this development to the development of transportation
- Community coming together – building relationships
- A hub for accessing resources (ex. Happiness Toolbox camp education for kids)
- More public space where people can harvest their own food
- Develop sustainable mutual aid
- Honey House!

OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED BY THE CORE TEAM

- Identify relevant local food production and distribution resources and systems, such as farms and farmers markets. Identify obstacles that may prevent Great Barrington residents from accessing locally produced food and develop recommendations to help address these obstacles.
- Explore opportunities to encourage more diverse, and biodiverse, agriculturally-based land uses. Explore tools for protecting agricultural land where appropriate.

HOW CAN COMMUNITY GROWING SPACES BENEFIT COMMUNITIES?

Numerous factors can prevent those in Environmental Justice communities from accessing locally-grown food. Perceptions of food access points, including but not limited to grocery stores, farmers markets, and farm stands, are tied with personal experience and cultural significance. These perceptions influence where all communities, including Environmental Justice communities, shop (Fish et al., 2015). As a result, **not everyone is comfortable shopping in the locations that sell the most locally-grown food.** In Great Barrington, another barrier is that less than half of the food access points that sell locally-grown food also accept SNAP. While SNAP users may want to shop at those food access points, this would make it financially unfeasible for some. In addition, families without SNAP may find local food prices too high for their budgets.

The benefits of community gardens have been studied extensively, and the consensus finds that **while community gardens cannot resolve food insecurity on their own, they can help improve access to fresh food.** In a community garden, community members have access to fresh, locally-grown food that they otherwise wouldn't have bought, grow the food that they want to eat and know how to cook,

or cut down on grocery bills by growing what they would usually buy.

As an added element of food security, food grown in community gardens is produced locally, so it is mostly independent of the supply chains that have proven to be unreliable in stressed circumstances.

Aside from food-related benefits, community gardens have the potential to provide other health benefits. They have been described as **creating social support, emphasizing informal networks, and building community empowerment,** which are key characteristics important for increasing health in minority communities (Armstrong, 2000). These characteristics are also related to "social cohesion," a concept with varying definitions that refers to the strength of connections within a community. Social cohesion has been linked to mental health following a natural disaster, with higher levels of cohesion leading to more mental resilience. Social cohesion-building efforts like community gardens have emerged as an important way for towns and cities to prepare for climate change-induced weather events (Greene et al., 2015).



In Great Barrington, food retailers that both sell local products and accept SNAP are limited.

SOCIAL COHESION

"Social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community." *JUDITH MAXWELL, TULANE UNIVERSITY*

When engaged in community gardening, both children and adults can gain knowledge not just about how to grow food, but about their place in the food system and how food affects health. One study references a five-year-old who picked a peach in a Baltimore community garden and exclaimed "good for my body!" (Corrigan, 2011). Knowledge can be gained informally through working with other gardeners, through programmed workshops, events, and newsletters, or other types of communication. These opportunities can also move past food to focus on broader topics like climate change, or immediate needs like community networking.

Stakeholders mentioned a desire for cooking classes, especially resources for families to learn together about how to use what they are growing. Large community kitchens, discussed in Chapter 5, could offer access to food preservation for year-round food access, or smaller kitchens could serve a neighborhood garden. In addition, in ethnically-diverse communities, gardens create the opportunity to grow culturally-familiar foods. This can eventually lead to the sharing of knowledge, recipes, meals, etc. that create social ties across ethno-racial lines (Kearny, 2009). While not all crops from

warmer climates are able to grow in Massachusetts, gardeners have the opportunity to learn how to grow certain crops from those who have immigrated from warmer regions.

TYPES OF SPACES

Community gardens encompass a number of models. Gardens can consist of individual plots, where each person, or a certain number of people, has a set amount of square feet or acreage in which to grow their food. Alternatively, there are cooperative gardens, where members work together to grow everything. Instead of individuals taking home the food that they grew, produce is split up based on factors like the size of a family (see case study, p. 69) Other growing spaces are less focused on vegetables and row crops. For instance, community orchards require less maintenance throughout the growing season and can provide fruit and nuts for many people. Orchards are typically open to the public, without requiring that users become members.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

While community gardens offer the potential for a myriad of benefits, these benefits are not guaranteed. Challenges to getting a successful garden in motion include organization and community engagement, land tenure, start-up costs, knowledge and skills, seasonal limitations, soil health, town/urban planning, and vandalism (Community Food Security Coalition, 2002). Regarding vandalism, a study focused on community gardens in New York State found that rural community gardens rarely experienced vandalism (Kearny, 2009). The rest of the challenges will be addressed in this chapter's recommendations.



COMMUNITY ORCHARDS provide fruit to anyone who wishes to pick it. Photo: Flickr



Gardens could have **INDIVIDUAL PLOTS** or be **COMMUNAL**. Siting gardens closer to neighborhoods can increase accessibility. Photo: Wikimedia Commons



ALL AGES CAN PARTAKE IN COMMUNITY GARDENING, building shared values and helping create social cohesion.

Photo: 3BL Media

Recommendation 2.1 *Continue discussions to determine who can lead efforts*

This is intentionally included as the first recommendation because of its necessity. Stakeholders with experience in community gardening and other research and studies emphasize that one of the most critical factors to successful growing spaces is the organization behind it. Studies have shown that **gardens are more successful when the community is involved in the planning process from the beginning with a “bottom-up” approach** (Corrigan, 2011). Even when communities are engaged from the start, strong organization and commitment is required. Stakeholder participants cautioned that many spaces have been started with excitement and good intention, but long-term commitment is required to deal with the inevitable changes and challenges that arise. Without this commitment, growing spaces are prone to decline. Therefore, using a bottom-up approach and determining leadership roles are two important first steps.

STRATEGY 1: WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS

More outreach could be aimed at identifying members of the community who would like to lead these efforts. There are many examples of growing spaces that are volunteer-led, sometimes with financial support from a town or an organization. In addition to financial support, the town could support their efforts through advertising events on the town website or through other venues, and providing land and/or infrastructure.

STRATEGY 2: CREATE PAID POSITIONS

A paid position has the potential to ensure the long-term commitment required for successful growing spaces. The town could add to or change the role of a current town employee to include helping with community growing spaces. It could also create a new role, along the lines of a Community Garden Coordinator (see case study, p. 69). This may be the most effective option if there are multiple spaces throughout town. A coordinator role could emphasize education, support, and guidance around the gardening process as well as help with maintenance of the growing spaces.

STRATEGY 3: COLLABORATE WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Existing organizations may have the capacity to work on a community garden project, especially with support from the town and volunteers. Greenagers is a well-established and connected youth organization that focuses much of its attention on gardening and agriculture projects. Their Front Lawn Food program installs garden beds on private properties, with each household paying for their own installation and subsidizing beds for an economically disadvantaged household. Greenagers operates April Hill Farm on 100 acres in neighboring Egremont, and has spoken with BRIDGE about the idea of leasing portions to families. There may be additional opportunities for the town or volunteers to engage Greenagers to work on creating a space, or work with their land, although it is outside of town in South Egremont. Another potential organization is MassAudubon, which has run a 100-plot garden in Pittsfield, MA, for over forty years. If an organization has interest in leading the efforts, Terracorps is another resource that could get the project off the ground. Terracorps connects Americorps members with land-focused non-profits for eleven months, filling roles like community engagement, sustainable agriculture, and youth education coordinators.

CONTINUE SUPPORT OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

In February 2022, Great Barrington's Agricultural Commission recommended funding through the American Rescue Plan Act to support three existing programs. The first, **Sustainability and Solidarity Shares**, is a partnership between BRIDGE, Greenagers, and Woven Roots Farm, aimed at expanding home gardens and the community garden at Great Barrington's First Congregational Church. The second is **Gideon's Garden**, a collaboration of Taft Farms and Grace Church, which operates a two-acre farm run with assistance from youth and volunteers. In 2020, Gideon's Garden donated 9,000 pounds of produce to six food pantries. Funding would go to a greenhouse to help expand their operations. While not a community garden in the sense that the food is solely grown for donation to another organization, it is a garden that builds and benefits the local community.

The third is the school district's **Resilient Living Laboratory Campus**, which builds on the Monument High School's Sustainable Monument 2025 Plan. Funding would be used to hire designers and planners to integrate regenerative small-scale agricultural land use into structural improvements for the school. While the school has been dismissed as an option for community gardens, due to its distance from residential areas, it is another opportunity for youth to be engaged in the local food system. With the elementary and middle school adjacent to the high school, a school-based model for a community garden could be explored.



GIDEON'S GARDEN, a partnership between Taft Farms and Grace Church. Photo: Gideon's Garden

Recommendation 2.2 *Commit to centering underrepresented voices*

Stakeholders expressed concern that Environmental Justice communities may end up with less access to new growing spaces compared to residents with more privileges. When using the bottom-up approach, interested members of these communities should help lead the conversations about what they need and want.

STRATEGY 1: WORK WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO DESIGN, CREATE, AND ADVERTISE SPACES

BRIDGE was asking their community questions about food access before the onset of this project and should stay at the center of the efforts to create a community garden. Garden designs developed with BRIDGE community input from the beginning, including location, size, type of space, etc. would better serve the diverse groups with whom BRIDGE works. Working with community organizations

will also address the concern that opportunities to join a garden could become exclusionary, based on where it is advertised. If organizations help to create the growing spaces, the opportunity to work in the spaces could also be advertised to everyone associated with the organization. Railroad Street Youth Project was also highlighted by stakeholders as a potential partner.

STRATEGY 2: PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY INCLUSION

Community members with less gardening experience may feel less able to engage with a community garden; providing educational opportunities for new gardeners will help to ensure that interested members can become involved with gardening opportunities regardless of prior experience. Creating these opportunities throughout the season will help provide adequate support to gardeners, especially those in their first growing season. On top of being a regular presence at the garden, knowledgeable community garden members could prepare trainings and workshops with the broader community garden network to help new members develop their gardening know-how.

This knowledge-sharing can be viewed as a form of mutual aid. When community members take action to share what they can without the need of approval from power structures, a myriad of benefits can arise. In this case, benefits could include a more bountiful garden and stronger community ties.

Lack of time can be another significant

factor preventing community members from participating in a garden at all. The cooperative garden model, as opposed to one based on individual plots, may be a good option if interested community members report concerns about time commitments as a barrier to entry. Cooperative garden members are usually required to spend a minimum amount of time working in the garden, but it is typically less than what would be required for maintaining an individual plot. This type of garden can also be less intimidating for those new to gardening, because there will usually be someone else there with whom to work and learn. For both cooperative gardens, or gardens with individual plots, including a drop-off space is another idea to encourage the team effort mentality from the start. This is a place where any extra produce can be left for free for anyone who would like to take home more. All of these ideas can be discussed in the initial planning conversations, prioritizing from the beginning that the garden be a welcoming and educational environment.

GRANTS TO HELP FUND A COMMUNITY GARDEN

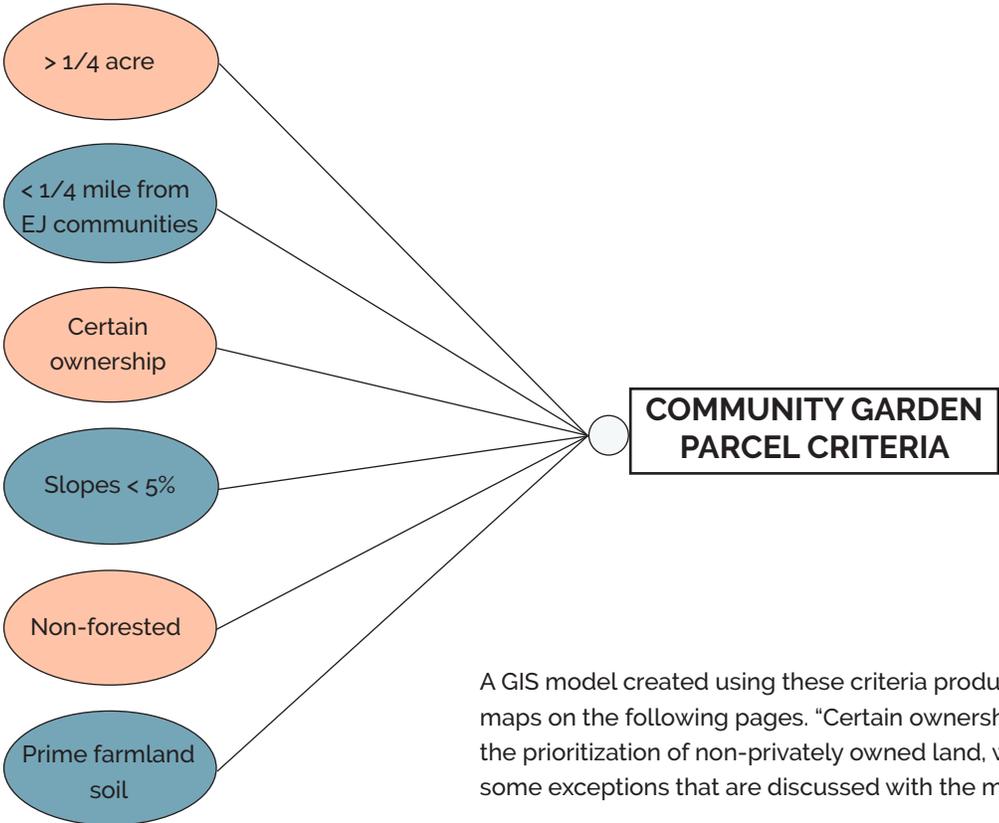
Start-up money for creating workable soil, building infrastructure, and obtaining tools, seeds, and other resources will be needed at the beginning of the project and likely at the start of every season. While someone would need to dedicate time to grant-writing, grants are a viable option for obtaining some or all of this money. This list is not exhaustive.

- **Seed Money:** seedmoney.org
- **Massachusetts Agriculture Grants:** <https://www.mass.gov/guides/agricultural-grants-and-financial-assistance-programs>
- **Massachusetts Urban Agriculture Program:** <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-the-urban-agriculture-program>
- **Open Society University Network** (specific for Bard College at Simon's Rock) <https://tools.bard.edu/wwwmedia/resources>

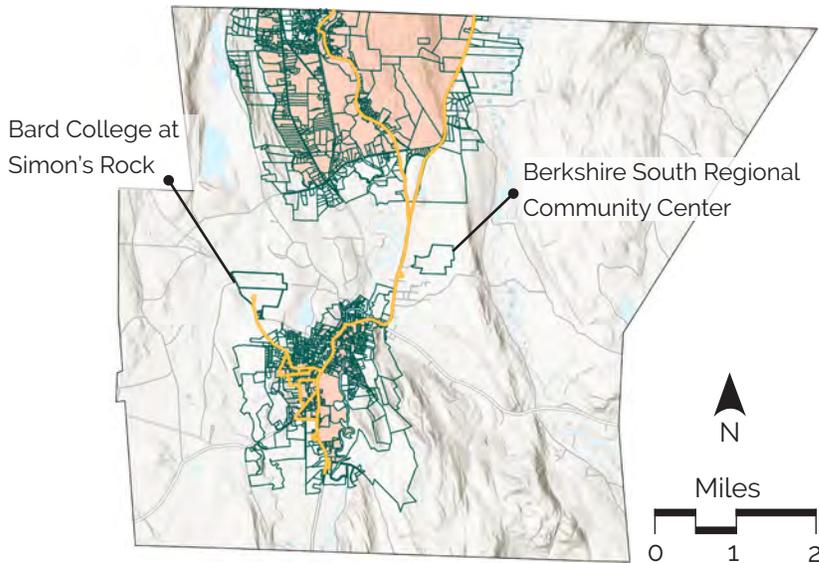
Recommendation 2.3: *Use criteria to choose appropriate sites*

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A SITE FOR A COMMUNITY GROWING SPACE

A community growing space could be sited on a large parcel, with some community members who live in denser, more developed areas having to travel farther to access it, or several smaller spaces, ideally near the center of dense residential areas. If small spaces are used, multiple could be considered to serve as many people as that of a larger space. Spaces for community gardens should have mostly flat land that is unforested. To be accessible to people with limited mobility, slopes need to be less than five percent, unless grading the topography is an option. Ideally, spaces are also close to neighborhoods and Environmental Justice communities in downtown Great Barrington and Housatonic, and are not privately owned. A GIS model was created using these and other criteria (shown in the diagram below). The model produces a map of potential community gardening spaces ("Potential Spaces" map), and could be updated over time.

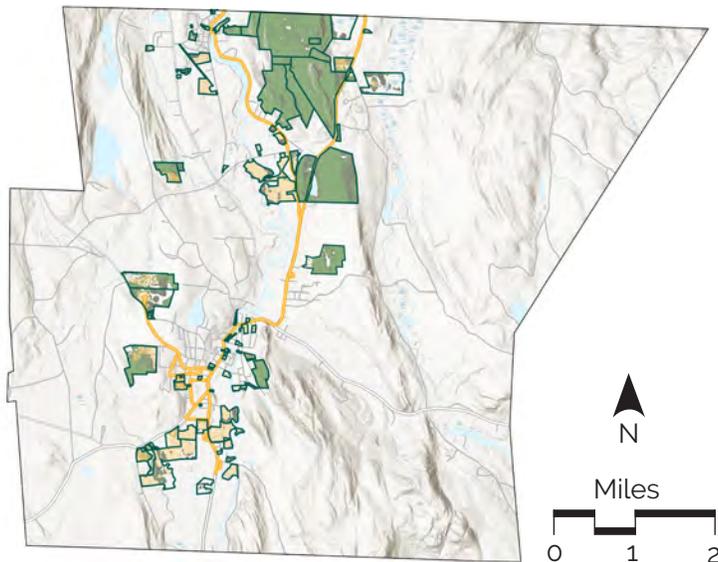


A GIS model created using these criteria produced the maps on the following pages. "Certain ownership" refers to the prioritization of non-privately owned land, which has some exceptions that are discussed with the maps.



- Parcels within 1/4 mile of EJ communities
- EJ communities
- Bus route

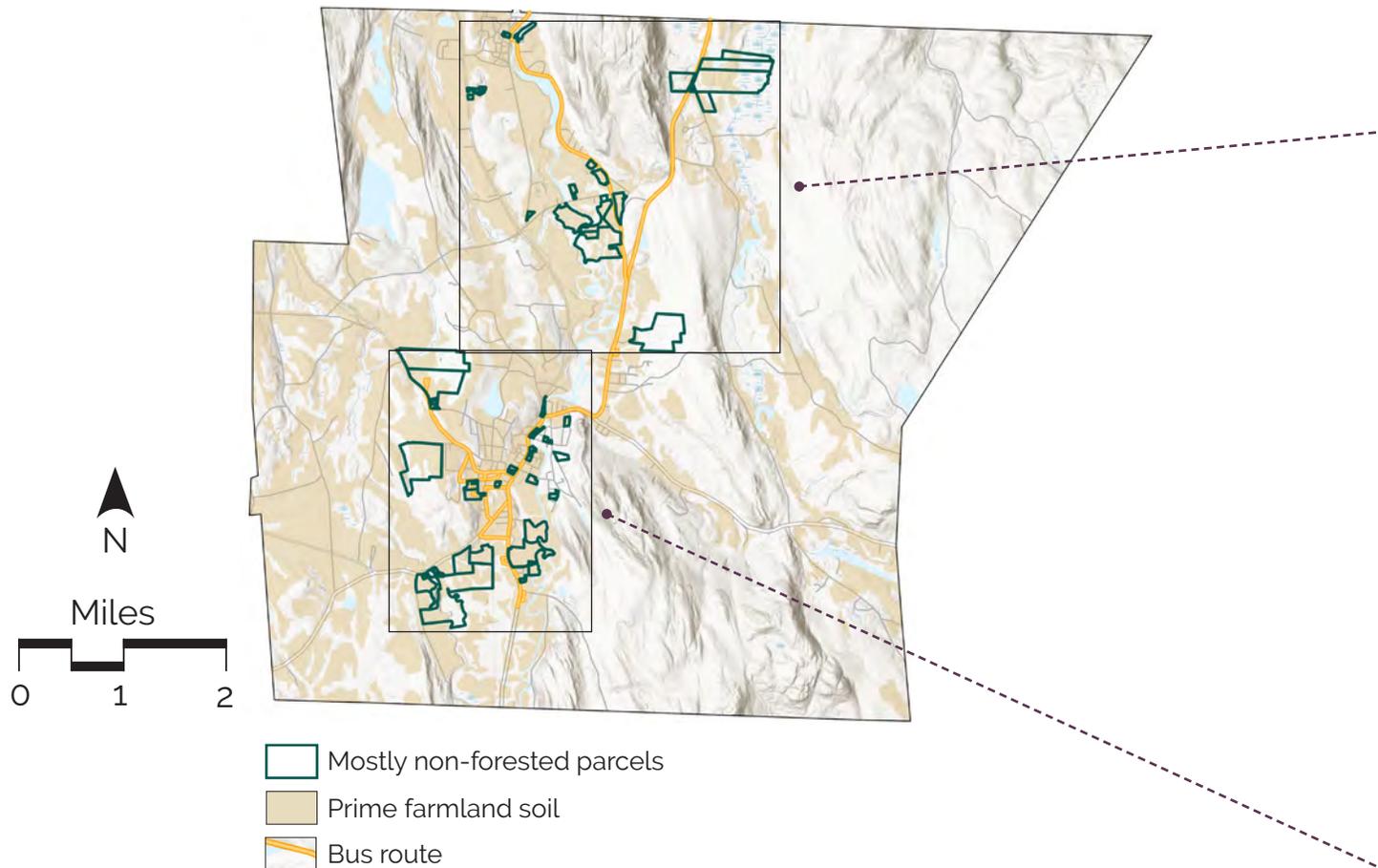
STEP 1. Tax parcel data was clipped to keep only those that are within 1/4 mile of one of the two EJ communities. Bard College at Simon's Rock and Berkshire South Regional Community Center were added back in because stakeholders suggested them. Both are still close to the bus route.



- Non-privately owned parcels
- Forested, 5-33% slope
- Forested, 0-5% slope
- Open land, 0-5% slope
- Open land, 5-33% slope
- Bus route

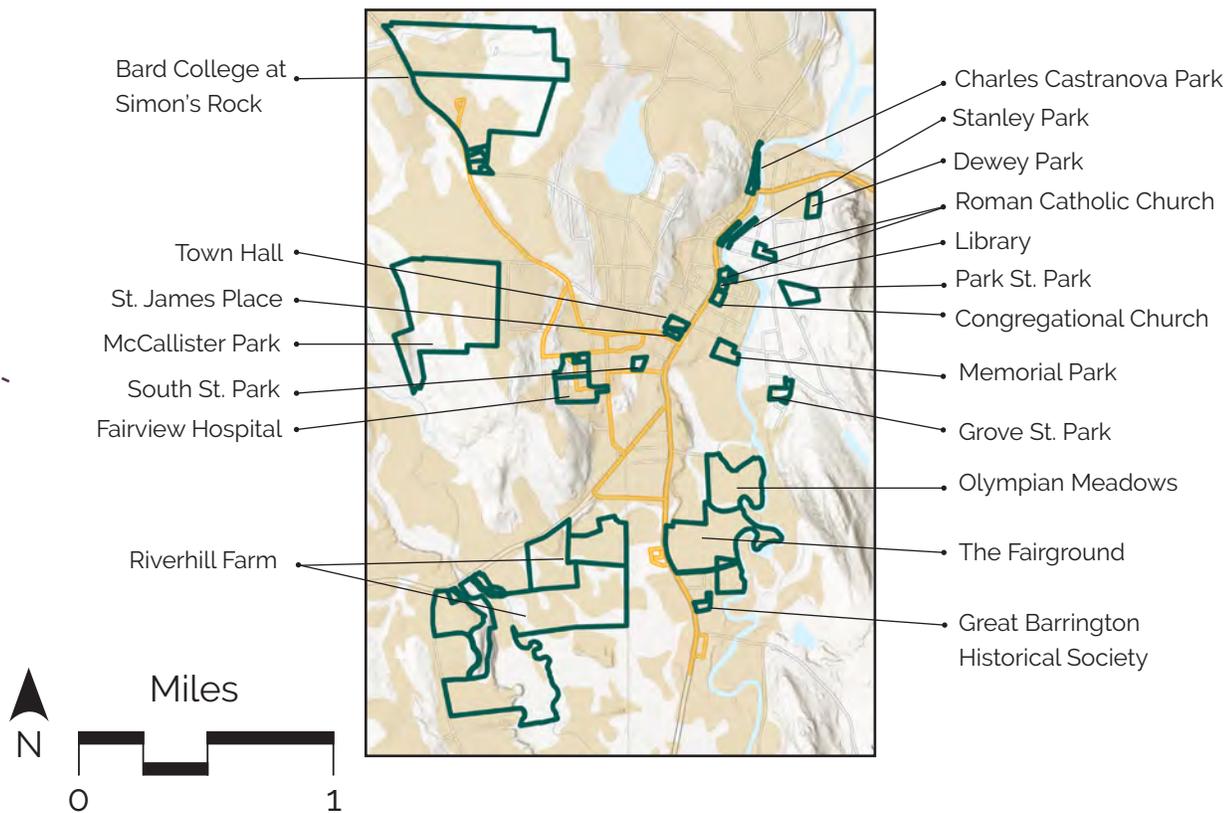
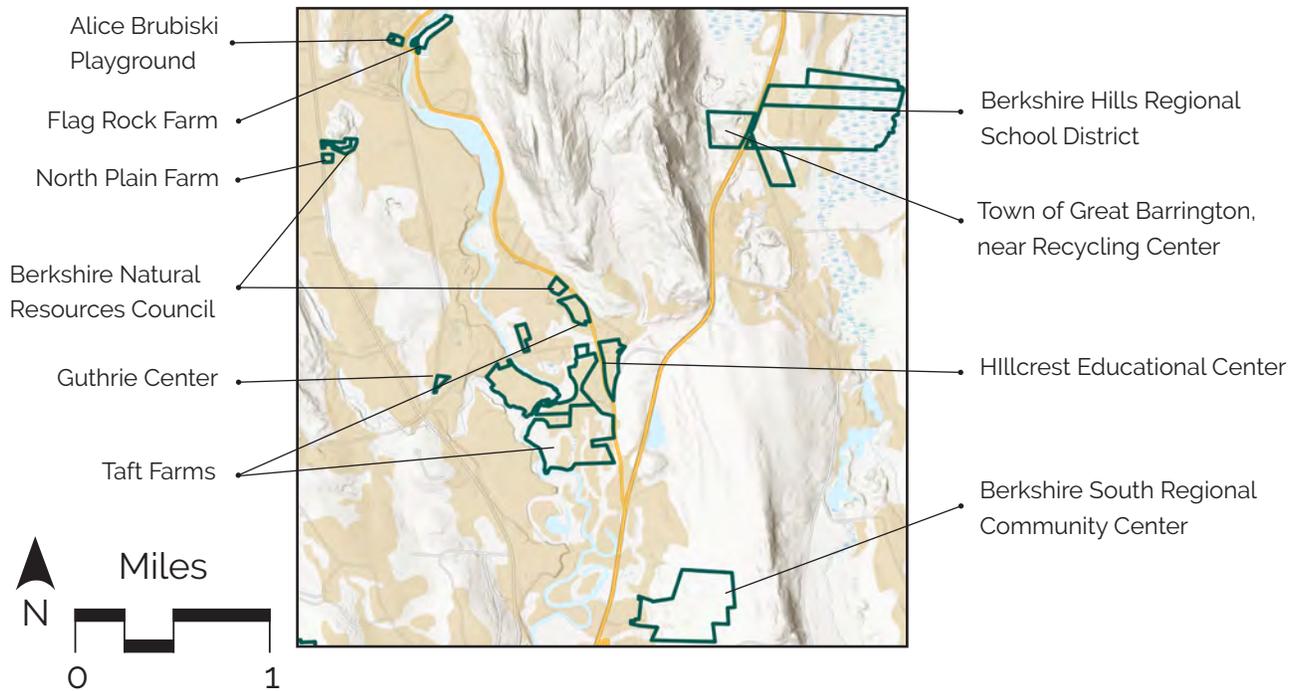
STEP 2. Most privately-owned parcels were eliminated based on the assumption that access to this land may be difficult and/or temporary if the parcels are not acquired by a public entity. Exceptions are the college, the fairground, and multiple farms because of stakeholder input and, in the case of farms, previous successes on related projects like Gideon's Garden. Slope and land cover analyses identified the parcels that have the flattest and most open land. Land covers that were excluded altogether are impervious surface, wetland, and open water. Slopes greater than thirty-three percent (the typical angle of repose for soil) were also excluded. On the map, areas within the parcels without a color tone represent one of the eliminated land covers or slopes.

STEP 3. Only parcels with some portion of non-forested land were kept. The exception is the community center, which has mostly forested land. However, there is an open path connecting it to a health center, described on page 62. Prime farmland soils are overlaid, showing that most parcels have a majority of prime soils. The previous map can still be used if alternative forms of agriculture like agroforestry are to be considered for the forested areas.



POTENTIAL COMMUNITY GARDEN PARCEL RESULTS

A total of sixty-one parcels resulted from the application of these criteria. They fall under seventeen different owners which include farms, places of worship, schools and educational centers, a land trust, a hospital, a community center, the historical society, and the Town. The Town owns the highest number of suitable parcels, seventeen in total, which all have some open space with which to work. Town-owned parcels include the Town Hall, library, courthouse, and parks. Some parks may be more fitting than others based on site conditions that don't appear on GIS and activities that may prohibit the installation of gardens. For example, a couple of parcels showed baseball diamonds, and it is difficult to know the exact amount of space they require or if they are still in use.



BERKSHIRE SOUTH REGIONAL COMMUNITY CENTER

The community center currently offers two community garden plots managed by staff and requiring registration. If there is capacity to expand this operation, the center could be a suitable location for additional community gardens, as it already functions as a community hub. It also serves as an emergency food location, meaning the growing spaces would be accessible to some low-income community members.

THE OLD ROUTE 7 GREENWAY TRAIL between the Community Center and the Community Health Programs building to the north could be another opportunity. This town-owned trail was funded in 2021 by MassDOT and goes through a non-forested piece of land. The momentum of that project could be harnessed, and fruit trees or bushes planted along the trail. Combined with educational signs, this could be a valuable way to use space between two centers focused on community health.



AN EDIBLE TRAIL: Fruit trees lining the Old Route 7 Greenway Trail provide fresh food and learning opportunities, and encourage more interactions between community members. Residents walking between health centers pause to pluck a peach.

BARD COLLEGE AT SIMON'S ROCK

Stakeholders identified the college as an area of open land that could work for community growing spaces. With robust environmental and food studies programs, the college has a small, student-driven farm that serves as a laboratory for agroecology and organic farming courses, an apiary and a small-scale maple sugar operation. In 2013, Simon's Rock launched The Center for Food Studies "to advance the community's knowledge of food as a cultural force and awareness of our responsibilities as stewards of a sustainable food system." The Center for Food Studies hosts the annual ThinkFood Conference, which is open to the public and brings together farmers, educators, and entrepreneurs for discussions of interdisciplinary topics, including food activism, regional food culture, and the future of farming. Simon's Rock is interested in expanding its relationships with the community, with regional outreach as a strategic priority. A partnership between the town and the college might leverage the school's infrastructure, interest, and curricular investment in food, sustainability, and civic engagement for community benefit. As of March 2022, students, faculty, and administration have expressed support for this idea. Simon's Rock is a member institution of the Open Society University Network, an international consortium of schools that could provide another venue for collaboration and possible source of grant funding for community engaged educational initiatives. While Simon's Rock is a little over a mile from the center of town, it is on the bus route, and while privately owned, it is focused on education and community building. Therefore, the barriers of private ownership may not be insurmountable. Other private colleges, like Williams College in Williamstown, MA, and Wheaton College in Norton, MA, have been successful in opening up land for public community gardens.



ROOM TO GROW: The location of the student farm provides ample room for expansion into community gardens. . Students frequent the gardens from the science building, shown in the rear of this photo, and community members can make their way from the bus stop, a quarter mile away.

PUBLIC PARKS

DEWEY PARK is a one-acre parcel of flat, open land adjacent to the courthouse. In 2018, community members highlighted in a town meeting that the surrounding community includes people of all ages, and that eleven units of affordable housing are close to the park.

ALICE BRUBISKI PLAYGROUND is 1.1 acres of open space that could be an ideal location in central Housatonic. While it includes a baseball diamond and playground, the sloped portion of the site could be planted with fruit trees, and some of the flat area could be designated for garden plots. The playground is adjacent to the Housy Dome, the location of the winter farmer's market, and the former Housatonic School, one of the properties suggested as a possible site for food infrastructure redevelopment in Chapter 5.

PARK STREET PARK is five acres of mostly forested land, but the portion at the intersection of Park Street and Quarry Street is open and flat. This land is central to the neighborhoods on the east side of town and does not seem to have permanent recreation facilities.



DEWEY PARK COMMUNITY GARDEN: The acre of land hosts a small garden tended by the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. Raised beds grow a variety of vegetables, and herbs and pollinator plants line a pathway to the courthouse. Fruit trees and bushes provide additional produce on the perimeters of the garden.

SPACES IDENTIFIED IN THE POLLINATOR ACTION PLAN

The Great Barrington Pollinator Plan, produced by Conway School students in 2018, identified spaces in town to prioritize pollinator plantings and corridors. Comparing the Pollinator Plan map with the parcel map on p. 60, town-owned spaces including the **TOWN HALL** and **STANLEY PARK** feature in both. If efforts are already in place to transform these areas into pollinator habitat, edible plants would be an easy addition. Most fruit trees and shrubs also provide for pollinators and could therefore provide multiple benefits for people and wildlife.



TOWN HALL MIXED GARDENS: Suggestions from the Pollinator Action Plan are incorporated in front of the Town Hall, with edible plants like fruit trees and herbs mixed throughout. Because the gardens sit near the center of town, many residents are able to access them, and non-resident visitors are inspired with ideas for their own towns.

Drawing: Evan Abramson, Elan Bills, and Renee Ruhl.

Recommendation 2.4 *Design for climate change adaptation*

Community gardens foster many social benefits in a community looking to adapt to a changing climate. When considering designs for a garden space, physical elements can also be considered to further benefit the community (including the natural communities) in a changing climate. The strategies below could be used within community growing spaces to help to mitigate and adapt to climate change. If funding is available, an ecological landscape design firm could be hired to help with this process.

STRATEGY 1: RIPARIAN BUFFERS

If the community growing space is near the Housatonic or another body of water, planting trees along the water's edge can benefit the water and the land. Trees help slow surface water runoff, preventing excess nutrients, pollutants, and sediments from entering the river. Groundwater supplies also get recharged through the slowing of runoff. Precipitation in New England is expected to increase with climate change, and this infiltration of water can also help reduce flooding and erosion (PennState Extension, 2017). A riparian buffer can be created with fruit- and nut-producing trees and shrubs for an additional source of food. However, because of toxins present in the Housatonic River's sediments and in soils along the river, soil testing should be done, and trees and shrubs should be chosen that do not collect toxins in the fruits.

STRATEGY 2: HEDGEROWS

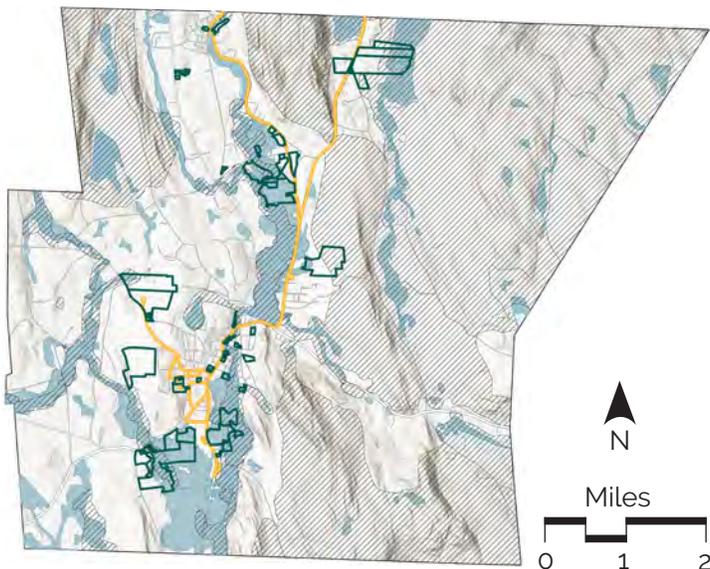
If the land borders a road or another property, trees, shrubs, and groundcover can be planted to create privacy, decrease pollutants, and provide habitat for pollinators and natural enemies of pests. Minimizing gaps between the shrubs, trees, and other vegetation optimizes habitat to support these insects (Garratt, 2017). As with riparian buffers, edible trees and shrubs could be used. Whether the garden has private plots or shared growing spaces, the trees and shrubs could be open for everyone to pick from, providing another area for social exchanges.

STRATEGY 3: POLLINATOR PLANTS

With or without a hedgerow, pollinator plants can be incorporated into a garden to benefit both pollinator populations and gardeners' plants. As the Pollinator Action Plan discusses, pollinators, especially bees, have been in decline for decades due to pesticides, habitat loss, climate change, air pollution, and light pollution. While flowers on non-native food plants do support many pollinators, they could be further supported by adding in native pollinator favorites, like goldenrod, coneflower, and asters (Mass Audubon, 2016).

STRATEGY 4: SOIL

If in-ground plots are being considered, especially near the center of town, initial soil testing should be done to test for heavy metals like lead. In the likely event that lead is present, remediation may be possible for some pollutants, or raised beds with clean soil could replace in-ground growing. Creating healthy soil on site is not only fundamental to productive growth, but can also help sequester carbon. As more microorganisms and other lifeforms grow in the soil due to the addition of compost and good management practices, more carbon is sequestered from the atmosphere. And as more carbon is sequestered, more soil life will continue to grow, creating a positive cycle.



- Non-privately owned, mostly unforested parcels
- Flood plain
- ▨ Critical Natural Landscapes
- Bus route

FLOODPLAIN AND HABITAT CONSIDERATIONS

Two additional, and climate-change related, criteria to consider are **flooding** and **wildlife habitat**. Floodplain extent was not used to eliminate parcels because the GIS data is not exact and alluvial floodplains contribute to especially fertile soil. However, because precipitation is expected to increase in Massachusetts, parcels in the floodplain may be more prone to damage from increasing floods. Additionally, because of the toxins present in river sediments and soils along the Housatonic, any site in the flood plain should have its soil regularly tested.

The Critical Natural Landscapes in Great Barrington also cover most of the other BioMap2 categories in the Areas of Ecological Importance map (p. 13). BioMap2 was designed to highlight areas for biodiversity conservation efforts and to focus land protection and stewardship (BioMap2, 2011). The community may decide to avoid a parcel in these areas, and if one is chosen, efforts could be directed at creating the least amount of disturbance.

GROW FOOD NORTHAMPTON

In 2009, when 180 acres of prime farmland in Northampton was about to be purchased by the town and turned into sports fields (Grow Food Northampton, 2022), a group of community members came together to preserve the land. They researched, lobbied, petitioned, and engaged with a land trust, eventually forming a nonprofit that was able to fundraise and purchase 121 acres of the land. The largest contribution came from the City of Northampton, which gave a pre-payment for a 198-year lease on the portion of land to be used as community gardens.

Today, some of the acreage is leased at low costs to farms; some is dedicated to a Giving Garden, where all produce is donated to food pantries and community meal sites; and some is dedicated to a 320-plot organic community garden. It serves over 400 community members, over half of whom receive subsidized plots. Members are given the options of 10'x20' or 20'x20' plots: a full-cost plot is \$36/year, and discounts are available for senior citizens, who pay \$28, and those enrolled in SNAP, who pay \$10. Everyone has access to shared tools, low-cost compost, and other materials including town water.

A guide outlining resources, rules, and practices, as well as a regular newsletter are available in English and Spanish, and an email group shares resources and information. There are communal picnic tables in “neighborhoods” throughout the gardens, and the organization offers land- and food-based educational programs for both adults and children.

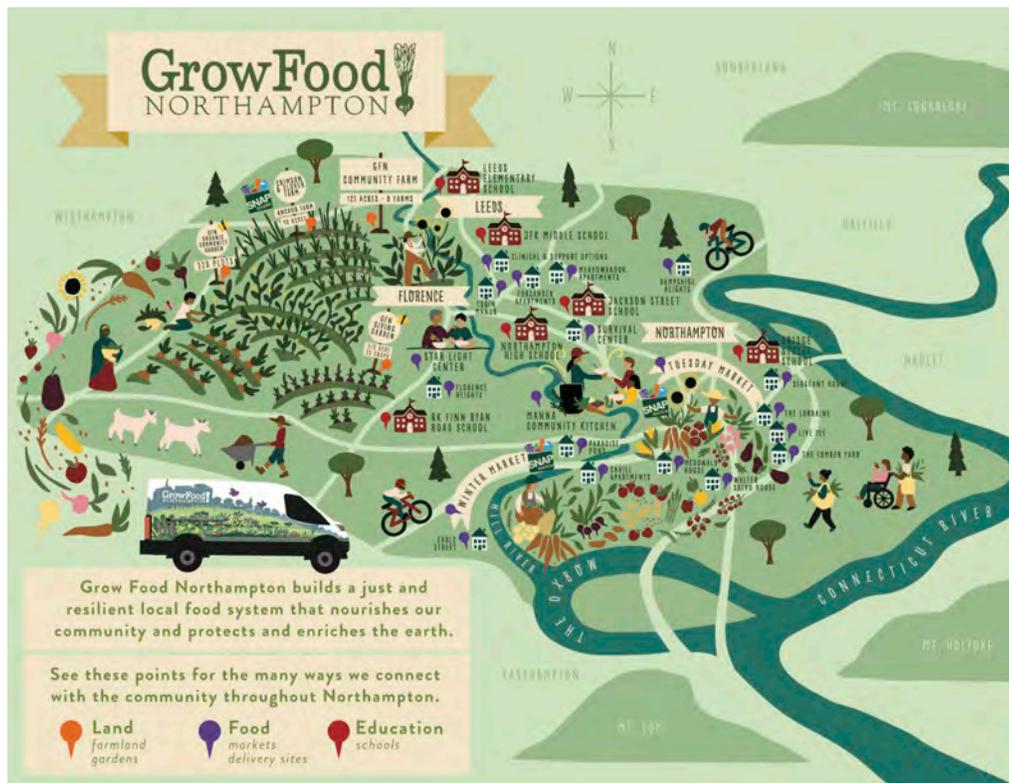


Image: Grow Food Northampton

KEENE COMMUNITY GARDEN PROGRAM

The Keene Housing Authority oversees twelve gardens throughout Keene, New Hampshire, a small city of about 23,000. The gardens are located at affordable housing complexes, where all residents are given the opportunity to participate. This is an example of a model where the town has created a paid role to oversee the efforts. A Community Garden Coordinator meets with gardeners at each garden weekly, providing support and guidance and answering questions. Growing spaces, plants, seeds, and tools are all provided by the Housing Authority. When gardens are located at senior living residences, beds are designed to meet the physical needs of the residents.

LELAND STREET COOPERATIVE GARDEN

In 1983, the Boston Natural Areas Fund purchased three vacant lots and committed to keep them "green and open to the public." After some initial efforts to turn the lots into a garden, the space received a grant from the Grassroots Program of the City of Boston. A landscape architect was hired and worked with the neighborhood to design a community garden. It was designed to be a shared space instead of being divided into individual plots. Since then, it has been run by volunteers who organize work days and monthly meetings.

Recently, ownership was passed to the Trustees nonprofit organization, and the name was changed to include "Cooperative," in order to emphasize the lack of individual plots. There are vegetable beds with pollinator-friendly perennial borders, an herb garden, a cutting flower garden, and bees. Advertised events and gatherings include Saturday workdays with potluck lunches, winter soup nights, beekeeping demonstrations, events for children, concerts, and Honey Day.



Community garden run by the Keene Housing Authority.
Photo: Keene Housing Authority



Leland Street Cooperative Garden
Photo: Genevieve Goldleaf



Investing in Food
System Infrastructure to
Fill Regional Gaps



How do you get the food from the farm?

How do you get it where it needs to go?

Where is it stored? Where do you transport it?

BERKSHIRE FARMER

During the February 3, 2022, Community Forum's "In your highest vision" activity, **participants focused on the need for expanded food system infrastructure, including commercial processing, slaughterhouses, or community kitchens.** These priorities echo stakeholder comments from the BRIDGE MVP process and directives identified by the Core Team, which included production and distribution, and barriers to accessing locally produced food.

These regional gaps have long been a local, regional, and statewide priority, as noted in Great Barrington's most recent *Community Master Plan (2013)*, *Sustainable Berkshires Local Food and Agriculture Plan (2014)*, *Massachusetts Local Foods Action Plan (2015)*, and seven other regional feasibility studies conducted between 2000 and 2020. Limited progress has been made since these reports were issued, while farmers and food businesses face increasing difficulties in staying viable, despite rising demand for local food.



IN YOUR HIGHEST VISION...

- Locally grown food storage and processing
- Local slaughterhouse
- I second Deb: local slaughterhouse, for sure
- Kitchens for community food processing

BRIDGE MVP COMMENTS

Commercial kitchen (along with food storage) for personal and local food security, access, sovereignty; pleasure, and also to support small businesses

OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED BY THE CORE TEAM

- Identify relevant local food production and distribution resources and systems
- Identify obstacles that may prevent Great Barrington residents from accessing locally produced food and develop recommendations to help address these obstacles
- Explore potential applicability of the Massachusetts Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit

Opening up the bottleneck between producers and their markets, described in the *Local Food Action Plan*, addresses chronic limitations. When food producers have consistent access to processing, storage and sales channels, they can scale up production and staffing to match expanded capacity, as some farmers participating in the Sunderland Collective have (see case study, p. 80).

FROM SUSTAINABLE BERKSHIRES LOCAL FOOD ACTION PLAN (2014)

"Currently there are barriers within the Berkshire local food and agriculture system. These include the absence of a central body or location for the aggregation and distribution of products, the absence of a nearby, accessible, and commercial scale value added processing facility, and the absence of a centrally located, accessible and USDA certified meat slaughter and processing facility. These capacity deficiencies impede the viability of small-scale, commercial farming in the Berkshire region, and impede scale increases in production and sales, hence limiting overall economic potential. Berkshire farmers want to produce more, and Berkshire residents want to buy more local food. A lack of regional processing infrastructure offers opportunity for new business development."

Access to processing facilities also allows producers to offer value-added products such as jams, sauces, and frozen foods that can be sold out of season for higher profit margins than fresh produce. Changes like these at strategic points along the supply chain help to keep current farm and food businesses in operation, and make it more possible for new businesses to launch and scale up, like the 400 businesses incubated in the Western MA Food Processing Center (see case study, p. 74).

Expanding food processing infrastructure, including commercial and community kitchens, food hubs, and slaughterhouses, provides opportunities for numerous farm and food producers at various points in the system, from production to processing to distribution.

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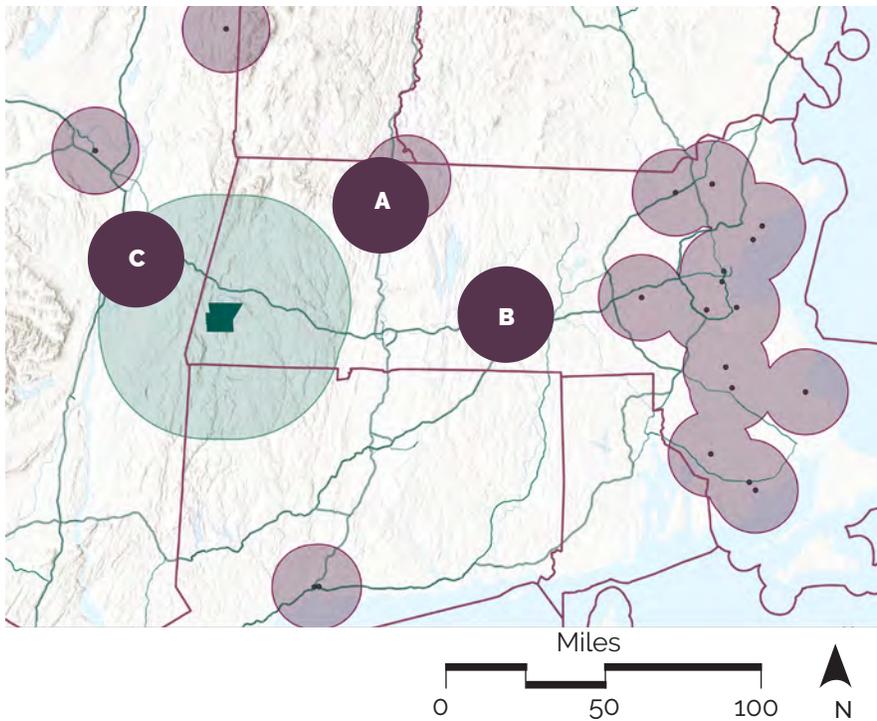
If we had a processing facility in the summer for our bumper crops, that would be a huge shift. BERKSHIRE FARMER

COMMERCIAL KITCHENS AND CO-PACKERS

Commercial kitchens and co-packers are shared-use food processing facilities that offer specialized, inspected equipment and services for small food businesses that do not have the capacity to invest in their own equipment. Access to these facilities reduces barriers for entry for small businesses, helping them to become economically viable and get products to market year-round.

Shared-use facilities may offer canning, freezing, storage, and/or packaging, and some offer distribution and business support, including regulatory compliance. Commercial kitchen users must complete all labor themselves, whereas co-packing allows farmers to drop off produce to be processed and packaged without participating in labor or recipe development.

Few commercial kitchens or co-packers are easily accessible for farmers and value-added producers in the southern Berkshires. The closest co-packer is out-of-state in Kingston, New York, forty-five minutes away, but businesses that sell products over state lines are subject to additional federal regulation, nutritional testing and labeling (UMass, 2014). The closest in-state commercial kitchens are in Greenfield and Worcester, both almost two hours away. All three facilities have limited capacity to take on new clients.



COMMERCIAL KITCHENS AND CO-PACKERS IN SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND: The facilities that value-added producers in the southern Berkshires use, indicated with darker circles, are in Greenfield, MA (A), Worcester, MA (B), and Kinderhook, New York (C), forty-five minutes to an hour away.

- Commercial kitchens and copackers + 10-mile radius
- Copackers used by Berkshire food producers + 10-mile radius
- Great Barrington, MA
- 25-mile radius = approximately one hour driving time

WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS FOOD PROCESSING CENTER

The Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center serves as a one-stop shop for producers in Hampshire, Hampden, and Worcester Counties to turn locally grown produce into value-added products like sauces, jams, soups, and full meals. It offers a wide range of services and specialized equipment for small food businesses, from commercial kitchen and baking facilities, to processing, freezing, and packaging for value-added products, and shipping/receiving. The facility is housed within the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, and functions as a business incubator in support of the CDC's mission, and offers support on-site for business planning, licensing and regulatory compliance, and office space. The center can host up to fifty clients at a time and is often near capacity. The center was started in 2001 with \$800,000 in state and federal support from MDAR and HUD and has incubated 400 businesses to date. As noted in its citation as the 2021 Franklin County Manufacturer of the Year Award, the Food Processing Center has become an integral part of the regional economy, supporting local farms and small businesses to reach viability, and filling the gap between production and distribution for locally grown and produced foods.



Photos: Western MA Food Processing Center

Food Hubs

*from “Local Food and Agriculture,”
Sustainable Berkshires Long-Range Plan for
Berkshire County (2014)*

Restaurants, institutions and farmers identified a desire for a collaborative infrastructure such as a “food hub” to provide processing, storage, marketing and distribution. While the scale and function of a “food hub” varies, the basic idea is to have a centrally located facility with a business management structure to facilitate some combination of the following: the aggregation, storage, packaging, distribution/delivery and/or marketing of regionally produced food products.

Food hubs are particularly valuable in a small farm context like the Berkshires, where individual farms have a difficult time consistently meeting commercial-scale food demand but several farms working together could do it well. However, there needs to be a point person or management system in place to build relationships, pick up products from different farms and perform quality control, packaging and then delivery to end users.

Currently, there is no regional infrastructure to assist in the processing, storage and distribution of foods, although one business, Berkshire Organics, does partner with regional farms to operate a delivery program to individuals, along with deliveries to some local schools under their non-profit arm. The two co-op markets also will pick up food from farms, presenting potential opportunities for a pick-up/delivery system for interested institutions and restaurants that are located on or near existing delivery routes. Farmers are often unable to focus significant effort in building and maintaining these contract relationships. By providing that function and handling the aggregation and distribution functions, food hubs create the predictable conditions needed for stable producer-to-market relationships. Some food hubs, such as the Intervale Food Hub, in Burlington, Vermont, work with farmers to set prices and thus help enhance business viability. They can also offer technical assistance and business planning—season extension, cold storage, packaging, marketing, new farm incubation, etc.

A Berkshire food hub could be a centrally located facility with processing, storage and distribution infrastructure for farmers. It would facilitate the aggregation of regional food, and help to solve some of the issues cited by farmers, institutions, restaurants and meal sites/food pantries to be barriers to selling and using more local food (BPRC 2014).

COMMUNITY KITCHENS

Community kitchens are licensed and inspected for use by nonprofits or small businesses to prepare food. Stakeholders involved in emergency food access programs brought up a similar need for increased access to community kitchens for meal programs, and local families without kitchen access. They can also be used as commissaries by small-scale food businesses who need a space to do commercial food preparation, such as for a family-owned food cart, adding another opportunity for local food business development. While there are a few community kitchens in Great Barrington and nearby towns, often in churches and soup kitchens, stakeholders noted that they are not well-maintained due to limited budgets and have limited capacity to meet increasing demand.

MEAT PROCESSING

Food processing limitations are particularly severe for livestock farmers. Sean Stanton of North Plain Farm in Great Barrington is one of many Berkshire farmers who reported that **“one of the most challenging aspects of raising meat animals is finding somewhere to process their animals into meat for retail sales”** (Southard, 2021).

Massachusetts livestock farmers must use USDA-inspected slaughterhouses to process meat for sale, as the state does not offer an inspection program. There are only three in-state USDA-inspected slaughterhouses in Massachusetts (see map on p. 78); the closest are in Groton and Athol, over two hours away. A third facility, three hours away in Westport,

opened in 2018. The nearest out-of-state, USDA-certified slaughterhouses that livestock producers in the southern Berkshires use are in Hoosick and Eagle Bridge, NY, and Terryville, CT, all between one and two hours away. Although federal rules permit meat slaughtered at any USDA-inspected facility to be sold across state lines, New York has few USDA facilities because it offers a state inspection program for in-state sale.

USDA slaughterhouses in Massachusetts were out of commission for several years due to a fire at Blood Farm in Groton in 2013, and fires at Adams Farm in Athol in both 2006 and 2018. Some facilities have reportedly lapsed in certification during the COVID-19 pandemic due to unwillingness to comply with the state mask mandate, limiting options further (J. Levin, 2022).

Each of these facilities have limited capacity. **Scheduling can be backed up for months at a time;** in the worst-case scenario, farmers may not be able to get a date within the window needed to slaughter animals at the right age and weight (Southard, 2021). For instance, as of March 2022, Adams Farm is fully booked for 2022, and will begin scheduling 2023 dates in June (Adams Farm, 2022.) The scheduling bottleneck is aggravated in the fall and winter, when most spring-born livestock is ready to be finished (Cornell, 2019).

When a farmer can schedule appropriate slaughter dates, a slaughterhouse may only have availability for a few animals at a time per farmer. Each slaughter date requires two round trips to drop off animals and pick up the meat a week or so later, amounting to as much as ten hours

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If we value food, we need to value the people who are growing the food. BERKSHIRE FARMER

of driving. **Longer trips take more time, use more gas, cost more, and are more stressful for both the farmer and their animals.** Not only are longer trips less humane, but released stress hormones can compromise the quality of the meat (Bova et al., 2014). Making numerous trips multiplies the time and resources required for farmers to process their intended output for the season, cutting down already slim margins and presenting a real challenge to business viability (CISA, 2013).

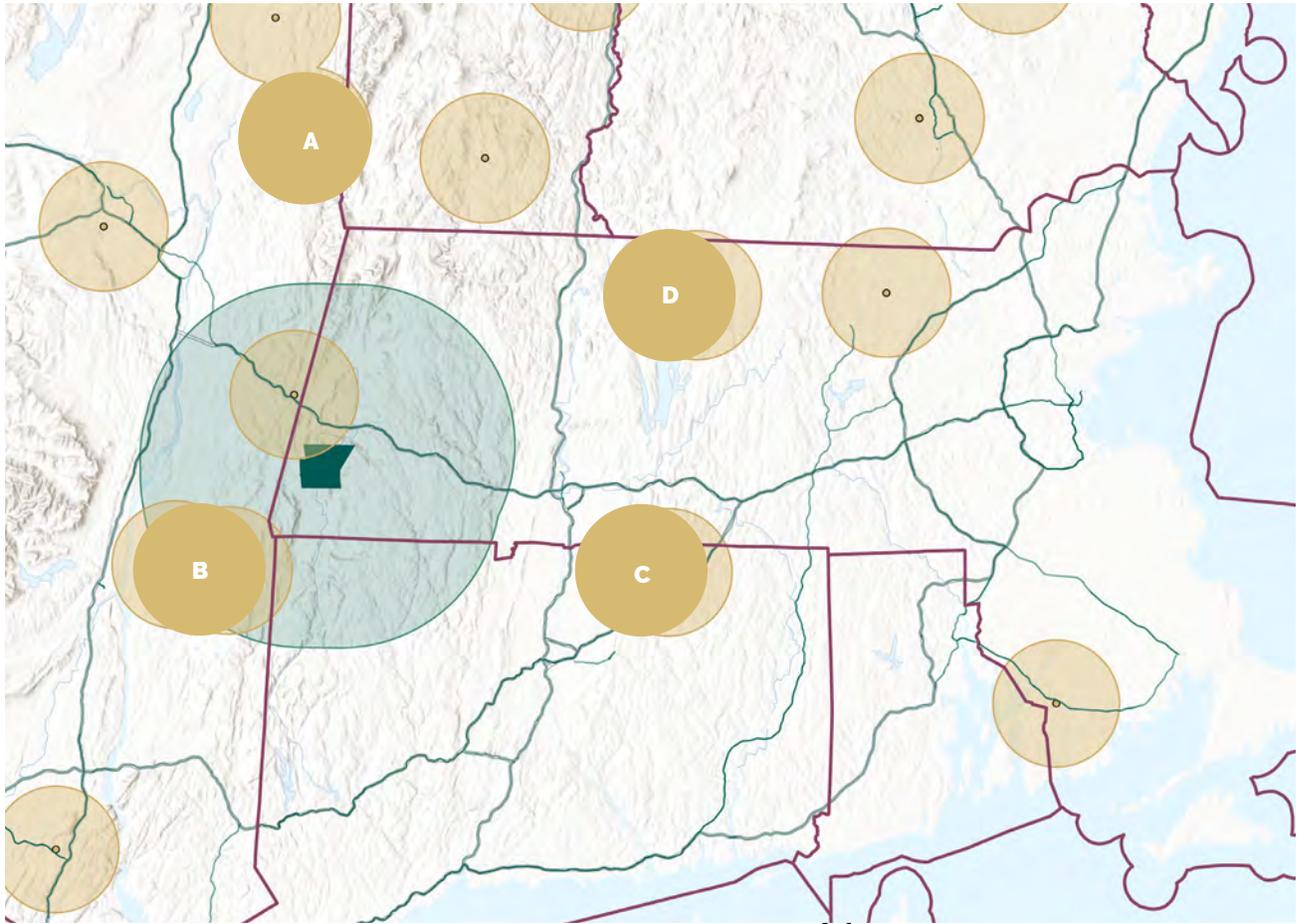
According to Jake Levin, a former Great Barrington-based butcher who is now Berkshire Agricultural Ventures' Local Meat Processing Support Program Coordinator, capacity limitation in slaughterhouses is due less to insufficient space or equipment, and more to a lack of workers who are trained to break down and package meat, reducing the total volume a slaughterhouse can process (see below). The annual mean wage for meatpackers in Massachusetts is just above minimum

wage at \$15.55/hour, or \$32,340 annually (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Again, the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing in the area limits workforce hiring.

COVID itself further reduced capacity, as over 300,000 poorly protected meat cutters in larger facilities elsewhere in the country contracted COVID, disrupting eleven billion dollars worth of production, and driving demand to local meat and local supply chains that were ill-equipped to meet it (Saitone et al., 2021). Demand for local products, and meat in particular, has been steadily increasing over the past decade and accelerating during the COVID-19 pandemic. The BAV report found that "residents of New York City and Boston fleeing to weekend and summer homes in the Hudson Valley and Berkshires also created additional demand for local meat, with less concern about pricing" (LeBow, 2021).

SLAUGHTERHOUSE BOTTLENECKS

"The biggest problem slaughterhouses face is lack of (skilled) labor and/or ability to retain labor. The direct cause of the bottleneck at processors is the ability to keep up with the cutting and wrapping, not the actual killing. The cutting takes a lot more time and skill than the killing, and so is affected by the processor's ability to hire and retain skilled labor. If processors could attract and retain skilled labor it would help to alleviate the bottleneck. Retention has to do with the fact that it is a low-medium wage job with extremely high risk (high injury rate) and more often than not the processors offer no to few benefits. The high-skill employees tend to leave the processors to work for the USDA or in retail (grocery stores/butcher shops). I would say it is a systemic issue." JAKE LEVIN, BERKSHIRE AGRICULTURAL VENTURES



-  USDA slaughter facilities + 10-mile radius
-  Slaughterhouses used by Berkshire farmers + 10-mile radius
-  Great Barrington, MA
-  25-mile radius = approximately one hour driving time

USDA-CERTIFIED SLAUGHTERHOUSES IN SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND: The facilities that livestock producers in the southern Berkshires use, indicated with darker circles, are in Hoosick, NY (A); Eagle Bridge, NY (B); Terryville, CT (C); and Athol, MA (D), one to two hours away from Great Barrington.

“The mean round-trip distance traveled by a producer in the Pioneer Valley to the processing facility is roughly 73.8 miles, with travel time totaling over an hour and fifty minutes. This represents an additional expense of roughly \$87 per trip to producers in terms of vehicle and gasoline usage, which results in an even higher cost of meat products, as well as the large opportunity cost of spending this time away from on-farm activities” (CISA, 2013).

Given the urgency of the meat processing bottleneck, several efforts across the state and region are prioritizing this work.

Berkshire Agricultural Ventures recently commissioned an industry report that offers recommendations for expanded meat processing (LeBow, 2021.). The report prioritizes expanding capacity by at least twenty-five percent at facilities that are currently operating, through extensive business technical assistance and funding; creating a community meat locker, a space for farmers to store meat that has already been processed and frozen for later sale; launching a regional collaborative to help farmers brand, market and sell product; and exploring the feasibility of launching new cut-and-wrap facil-

ities in the shorter term, and a new slaughterhouse in the longer term, in the Berkshires. At a slaughter facility, animals are killed and butchered, while cut-and-wrap facilities break down cuts further and package them, or process meat into value-added products like sausages or smoked meat.

Following this report, BAV received a one-million dollar grant from USDA in 2021, which will support their new Local Meat Processing Support Program and a livestock working group in partnership with Berkshire Grown to begin implementing recommendations (Krzanik, 2022).

POULTRY SLAUGHTER AND PERSONAL USE EXEMPTIONS

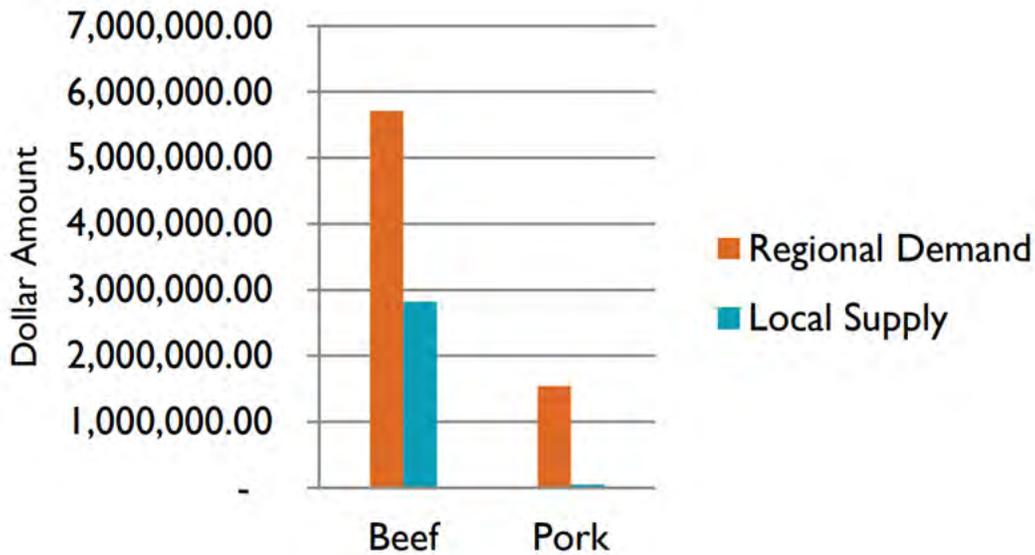
In Massachusetts, the rules for slaughtering poultry are different from those for mammals. Up to 1,000 poultry can be slaughtered at home without inspection or at a custom slaughterhouse, for off-farm sale for personal use by the owner or whole birds. There are no state- or USDA-certified poultry slaughter facilities in Massachusetts, so poultry farmers are limited to home or custom slaughter. If they want to slaughter more than 1,000 birds or break them down into cuts for sale, they must use state or USDA-inspected facilities in neighboring states or use a mobile poultry processing unit (MPPU). There are three licensed MPPUs in Massachusetts, in the Boston area, on Martha's Vineyard, and in the Amherst area.

Red meat for personal use is similarly exempt from the USDA slaughter rule and can be processed at a custom slaughter facility. Custom slaughter cannot break down the whole animal into cuts, and cannot be sold to another customer (SARE, 2010).

Although poultry processing facilities are limited, this report focuses on commercial slaughterhouses and processing facilities for red meat, as options are even fewer than for poultry.

SUNDERLAND FARM COLLABORATIVE

Immediately after COVID shutdowns began, a group of Connecticut River Valley farmers led by Caroline Pam of Sunderland's Kitchen Garden Farm quickly mobilized to capture surging consumer demand for local food. By March 23, 2020, the collaborative of four farmers was offering twice-weekly home deliveries and pickups at locations across the valley. Two years later, over seventy businesses, including nine meat producers, are participating, and the Collaborative has moved to an online ordering platform, where they accept SNAP, EBT, and HIP. "We're starting to look like a food hub ourselves," says Pam, "but we didn't set out to be that. We were just answering an immediate need and trying to get more local food to more places" (Nelson, 2021). The Collaborative's ongoing success indicates both how high demand remains for local products, and the opportunity for a local food aggregator and distributor to capture this demand. Some members have even scaled up production for the 2022 season, as a result of increased sales through the Collaborative.



COMPARISON OF LOCAL MEAT SUPPLY TO DEMAND: According to *Keep Berkshires Farming*, "regional demand is much greater than local supply, particularly in beef and pork. This highlights the challenges present in the Berkshire food system which make it difficult to get meat to market, most notably the lack of local slaughter and processing infrastructure" (BPRC, 2014). While this study dates from 2014, it remains the most recent market analysis, and demand has only increased alongside population growth and a local increase in median household income since its release (LeBow, 2021).

HERITAGE BREEDS: Berkshire farmers often raise heritage breeds that are well-adapted to browsing and pasture rather than grain. Not only do these breeds require less intensive inputs, lowering their greenhouse gas emissions and water usage, many find their meat superior, differentiating local products from CAFO-raised meat.



Recommendation 3.1 *Identify most-needed and viable food processing facilities*

STRATEGY 1: WORK WITH THE BAV-BG WORKING GROUP TO IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE FACILITY TYPES

Berkshire Agricultural Ventures and Berkshire Grown's ongoing feasibility study and livestock working group have already begun assessing what types of food processing facilities would be most appropriate and viable. The working group is considering a commercial kitchen, a food hub, a slaughterhouse, a cut and wrap facility, and a community meat locker. This partnership is well-positioned to develop a rigorous set of recommendations, and the Agricultural Commission should stay in touch with the BAV-BG team to see if there are any ways to support their work.

Among the options in play, **a community meat locker may be the simplest and most cost-effective to establish**, with significant impact. A Cornell study found that "lack of cooler space constraints throughput for 68% of facilities" in New York and New England (Cornell, 2019). One participant in a BAV focus group commented that "a local option for rental freezer space would add a lot of flexibility for farmers, at a different point in the chain, but it could make up for some of the inflexibility with processors" (LeBow, 2021). A pilot Community Meat Locker in Ithaca, NY, uses a self-storage model with a community ownership structure, requiring relatively little staffing to maintain, while significantly expanding capacity for storage and direct market sales (LeBow, 2021).

The BAV report also found significant demand for a value-added cut and wrap facility to convert butchered meat to products such as a custom sausage blend, helping producers differentiate products from the generic recipes and packaging at current facilities. A cut and wrap facility would be a less complex and costly facility to launch than a food hub or slaughterhouse, as it requires less inspection, equipment, live animal housing, and waste management (J. Levin, 2022). While strict federal regulations governing meat processing and inspection often prohibits slaughter or cut-and-wrap facilities from sharing space in other food processing facilities, CISA's 2013 report on local meat processing suggests that cut-and-wrap could be possible within a commercial kitchen on a fee-for-service basis (CISA, 2013).

A survey of the demand for local meat in Great Barrington, updating the 2014 *Keep Berkshires Farming* study, would complement the efforts of the BAV-BG working group. Results from the survey demonstrating interest from producers and consumers could support a case for Great Barrington as a possible site for a new facility. This survey could take place in partnership with Berkshire Grown and other community partners.

STRATEGY 2: DEVELOP CRITERIA FOR SITING PROCESSING FACILITIES AND CREATE AN INVENTORY OF SUITABLE LOCAL SITES

While the BAV-BG feasibility study is ongoing, the Town could also take initiative to develop criteria for siting various types of processing facilities, and create an inventory of suitable local sites to position them as candidates for commercial food processing facilities. *Keep Berkshires Farming* recommends that municipalities undertake this assessment and offers these initial guidelines (*Keep Berkshires Farming*, 2014):

- *A suitable size of the site for requisite buildings, parking lots, access roads and potential future expansion, as well as potable water for processing needs and a sewage system able to efficiently handle liquid waste and process water.*
- *Site should not be near areas of industry that attract vermin, such as sanitary landfills and scrap yards.*
- *Site should avoid areas of industry that produce odors and airborne particulate matter such as oil refineries, trash dumps, chemical plants, sewage disposal, dye works, and paper pulp mills.*
- *Prevailing winds should be considered—what might be blown to the facility, or where might the odors from the facility go?*
- *Suitable space and layout for separation of official and non-official establishments.*

As a starting point to identify potential locations, Berkshire CEDS maintains a Berkshire County Project Priority list, an inventory of “economic development initiatives, programs, and projects that, if

implemented, would help diversify, stabilize, and strengthen the region’s economy” (CEDS, 2020). The list includes both thematic priorities, including “Adaptive Reuse of Mills,” and “Growing the Future Food Economy of the Berkshires,” and physical locations. Its South Sub-Region list prioritizes the Great Barrington fairgrounds, Housatonic School, and Monument Mill complex.

CEDS selected these spaces as priorities for preservation and adaptive reuse for their historic architecture, large lot and building sizes, and proximity to residential areas and existing utilities. **Several of these priorities align with Massachusetts’ Smart Growth toolkit**, another valuable set of considerations in developing more specific criteria.

SMART GROWTH TOOLKIT

Smart growth is a planning approach that emphasizes context-appropriate development to balance resource conservation, economic development, historic preservation, and dense, livable communities. One emphasis of smart growth is to reuse already-developed areas, reinvesting in existing infrastructure. Massachusetts’ Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs offers a Smart Growth/Smart Energy toolkit that includes case studies and model bylaws for Massachusetts municipalities and planning commissions. Toolkit topics include low-impact development, agricultural preservation, and mill revitalization districts.

STRATEGY 3: ASSESS ZONING FOR SITES IDENTIFIED AND AMEND BYLAWS IF NEEDED

Sites that align most closely with identified criteria and priorities may fall outside current commercial zoning. The Town's planning department could reassess and introduce a proposal to amend bylaws to accommodate high-priority food infrastructure projects.

Recommendation 3.2: *Expand capacity in existing food processing facilities and vocational training programs*

In the February 3 and March 3 community forums, stakeholders mentioned that existing community kitchen facilities are under-resourced to meet demand by local families, meal programs and entrepreneurs. **Allocating funding to support renovations in existing community kitchens could help to expand capacity for shared community and commercial use.**

Stakeholders also brought up vocational training as a valuable element for capacity building. Berkshire Community College recently launched a new Culinary Institute as part of the hospitality program at its Pittsfield campus. At the same time, BCC's downtown Great Barrington campus building, which has been closed due to COVID, will undergo redevelopment as part of a new Community Preservation grant (Berkshire Eagle, 2021). The building will house The Sustainable Food Lab, "a newly formed group dedicated to creating sustainable local food systems and encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship" (Berkshire Eagle, 2021). These two programs offer new avenues toward vocational training, alongside existing programs like Railroad Street Youth Project's Culinary Arts Program. The upcoming Monument Mountain Regional High School renovation presents another opportunity to expand vocational training. The Great Barrington Agricultural Commission has proposed a "Resilient Living Laboratory Campus" and Green STEAM programs to the Berkshire Hills Regional School District. The aim is to enhance horticultural and agricultural experiential learning programs and to provide new opportunities for career vocational technical education (Great Barrington Agricultural Commission, 2022).

However, multiple stakeholders cautioned against encouraging vocational training without addressing housing. The severe lack of affordable housing discussed in Chapter 3 threatens low- and median-income residents, food system workers among them. While beyond the scope of this project, **finding ways to prioritize expanding access to affordable housing is crucial to Great Barrington's future** as a place where people across the income spectrum can afford to work, live, and raise their families.

Recommendation 3.3: *Leverage funding opportunities to invest in food processing infrastructure*

An unprecedented series of federal funding supporting food processing infrastructure capacity building has been rolled out in 2021-22, with specific earmarks for rural areas and municipalities.

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	FUNDING AVAILABLE
MEAT AND POULTRY PROCESSING EXPANSION PROGRAM (USDA)	Expand meat and poultry processing options, strengthen the food supply chain, and create jobs and economic opportunities in rural areas	\$215 million (up to \$25 million per award)
MEAT AND POULTRY INSPECTION READINESS GRANT (USDA)	Support expanded capacity and efficiency in meat and poultry slaughter and processing facilities	\$32 million (up to \$200,000 per award)
AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN FUNDS (USDA)	Expand meat and poultry processing capacity, including \$150 million for existing small and very small processing facilities	\$500 million (multiple sub-programs)
FOOD SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT (MA ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, VIA ARPA)	Support COVID recovery through farm and food system capacity investment	Up to \$500,000 per applicant, including municipalities

The Agricultural Commission could assess if there is an immediate opportunity for funding food system infrastructure projects through these expansive federal and state grants, particularly FSIG funding, alone or in collaboration with local nonprofit partners or other municipalities. The committee or Town can also sign on to proposals or submit letters of support for funding submitted by other applicants that would expand capacity in a service area including or benefitting Great Barrington. See Chapter 4.1 and 4.2 recommending increased collaboration as a strategy to leverage opportunities for shared funding.

In addition to applying for funds directly, Town leadership can play a role in communicating priorities to representatives responsible for allocating funding. The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative has issued recommendations for ways Massachusetts could deploy ARPA and FSIG funding to support statewide food processing infrastructure goals (CISA, 2022).

Recommendation 3.4 *Explore*

institutional purchasing to support local food producers

STRATEGY 1: IMPLEMENT A TOWN PROCUREMENT POLICY TO PRIORITIZE LOCAL SOURCING

Local food procurement policies recognize the opportunity that institutional buyers, including governments, can take to deploy their purchasing power to support local food producers, processors, and distributors; model institutional purchasing for other municipalities; and demonstrate demand for expanded processing and distribution infrastructure. **Implementing a Town ordinance could serve as an important precedent** as, at the time of writing, no government smaller than a city or county has passed such an ordinance in the United States (Good Food Purchasing Program). Much as the Pollinator Action Plan has served as a precedent for other towns, including Northampton, Williamstown, Egremont, and North Adams, **Great Barrington could model aligning its ethical, economic and environmental values with the economic tools at its disposal through a commitment to local food sourcing**, at a smaller scale (Cowgill, 2021).

The City of Boston passed the first Good Food Purchasing Ordinance on the East Coast in 2019. While Boston's ordinance may not be directly applicable due to the scale of the city's institutional purchasing, it offers precedents for working with current state laws and partner organizations, and prioritizing equity and workers' rights in addition to economic development and environmental sustainability. The Healthy Food Policy Project provides a detailed case study, including a breakdown of the process to develop and pass the ordinance, an overview of the final policy, implementation steps, and best practices (Healthy Food Policy Project, 2021.)

Great Barrington's limited purchasing budget may make a local sourcing ordinance easier to implement on a pilot basis, especially as some vendors are already local. In 2020, the latest year for which data is available, Great Barrington's town government expended at least \$4,330.06 on food (Carmel, 2020). A local food purchasing ordinance could take the form of a non-binding recommendation or resolution in support of prioritizing local purchasing; a mandate that a percentage of all purchasing patronize vendors located within a specific boundary, radius or ecoregion; and/or a percent price preference. The state of Massachusetts uses the latter model, requiring state agencies to purchase in-state products when they are less than ten percent more expensive than out-of-state competitors. In addition to this policy, Massachusetts has several laws and programs to encourage institutional purchasers to source food locally (opposite).

Institutional buying, especially at a larger scale, may be difficult to implement without addressing the processing issues discussed previously. Due to increased demand for higher volumes

STATE LAWS AND INITIATIVES FOR INSTITUTIONAL PURCHASING (VIA FARM TO INSTITUTION NEW ENGLAND)

MASS GEN. LAWS CH. 30B, § 4(D): Establishes a local food small purchase threshold, allowing local government bodies, including school districts, to purchase up to \$35,000 of Massachusetts agricultural products without soliciting more than one price quote.

MASS GEN. LAWS CH. 7, § 23B: Creates a price preference for agricultural products grown in or produced from products grown in Massachusetts. Requires state agencies, colleges, and universities to use “reasonable efforts” to purchase locally produced foods. Further, state agencies must purchase a locally grown product if it is within ten percent of the price of a product that was grown outside of Massachusetts.

MASS GEN. LAWS CH. 20, § 6C: Establishes a Massachusetts Food Policy Council to generate recommendations to increase the production, sales, and consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods through institutional purchasing, in addition to several other goals.

COMMONWEALTH QUALITY PROGRAM (via MDAR): Helps consumers, including institutions, identify state-grown products produced using safe and environmentally sound practices.

of product, wholesale and institutional purchasing often relies on access to a food aggregation and distribution partner, such as a local food hub. **Instituting a local procurement ordinance or program could lend weight to the case for launching a local food hub**, by demonstrating demand for increased services and increasing the pool of potential wholesale clients.

STRATEGY 2: WORK WITH THE SCHOOL DISTRICT TO IMPLEMENT A FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Beyond the limited extent of purchasing food by the town government itself, working with town-funded institutions may offer more significant opportunities to direct purchasing towards local sourcing. For instance, the **Berkshire Hills Regional School District's proposed 2022 budget includes \$100,000 for food purchasing**. Many school districts across the state have already implemented local sourcing programs. The Massachusetts Farm to School Network offers resources, including trainings and consulting services, to help school districts transition to local sourcing. Farm to Institution New England, Massachusetts Farm to School program, and Berkshire Grown, which hosted a networking event to connect local producers and institutional buyers in 2020, are all likely partners for pursuing this recommendation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING LOCAL FOOD PROCUREMENT POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONAL PURCHASING

- Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic (2015). *Increasing Local Food Procurement By Massachusetts State Agencies*.
- PolicyLink (2015). *Equitable Development Toolkit: Local Food Procurement*.
- Farm to Institution New England (2019). *Institutional Procurement of Local Food: Massachusetts Policy Snapshot*.
- Dillemath, Ann, and K. Hodgson (2015). *Local, Healthy Food Procurement Policies*. In Kimberley Hodgson and Samina Raja (Series Editors), *Planning & Policy Briefs. Growing Food Connections*.
- Food Literacy Center (n.d.). *Food Policy Blueprint: Local Food Procurement Policies*.

CONCEPTUAL SKETCH: A food processing hub in the former Monument Mill complex, in Great Barrington's Housatonic village. Monument Mills is listed on Berkshire CEDS' Project Priority list, an inventory of "economic development initiatives, programs, and projects that, if implemented, would help diversify, stabilize, and strengthen the region's economy" (CEDS, 2020). The list includes both thematic priorities, including "Adaptive Reuse of Mills" and "Growing the Future Food Economy of the Berkshires", and physical locations, including Monument Mill complex (see p. 83).







Connecting and
Collaborating
Regionally

“ *I can grow a ton of food and get it to people, but that doesn’t actually change any of the inequity parts of that conversation.* ”

BERKSHIRE FARMER

During the February 3, 2022, stakeholder meeting, participants were asked to reflect on what they saw working well in their local food system, and what they would like to see in their highest vision. Responses to both questions emphasized **collaborations between local organizations, sharing knowledge, and moving towards equity, transparency, and participant leadership.**

The following recommendations offer an additional set of strategies that pertain to previous recommendations towards building resilient, equitable farm and food systems.

“ **IN MY HIGHEST VISION...** ”

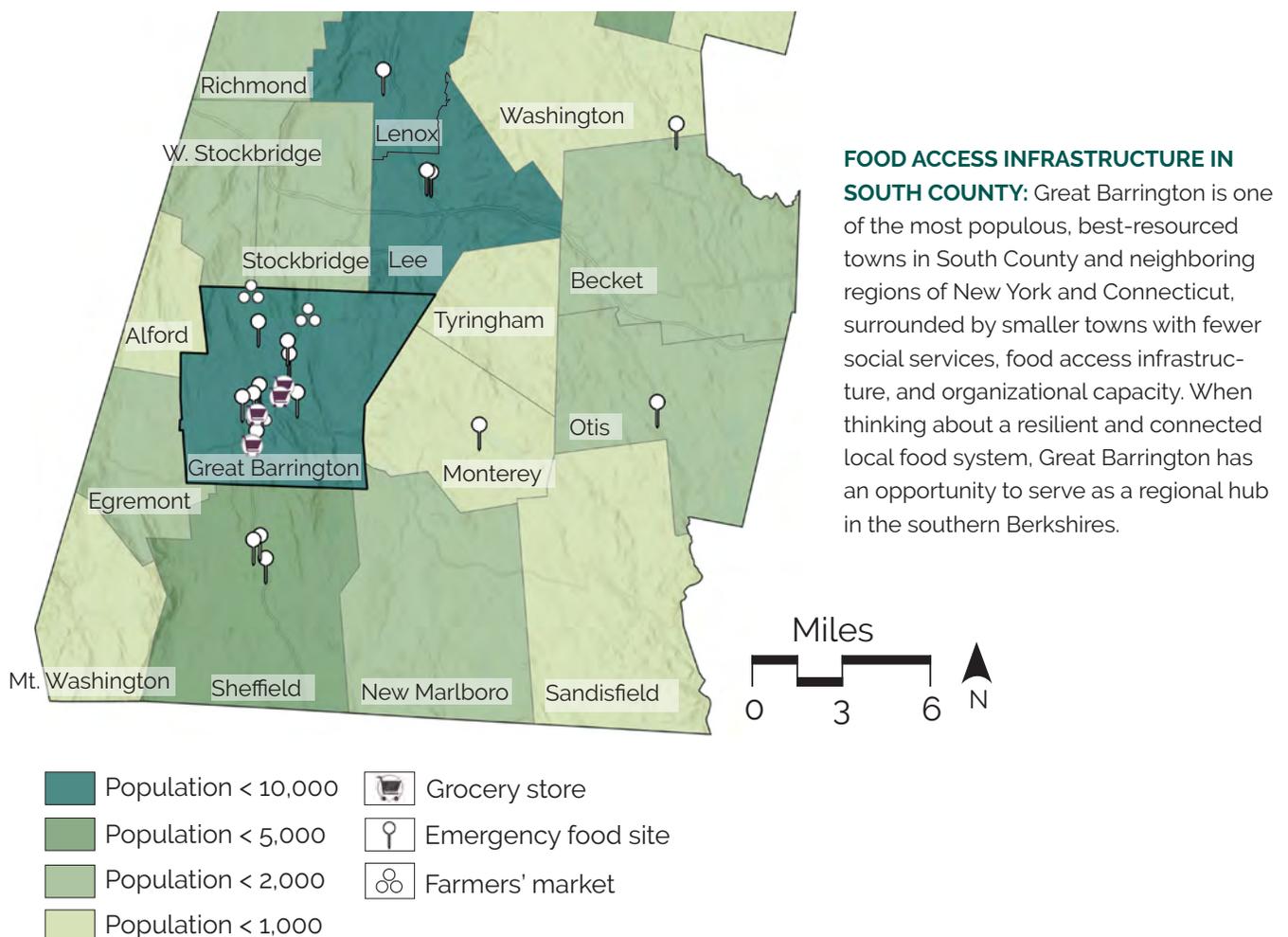
- A community that is generous with not only sharing food but also sharing information & resources to support
- Collaborations between multiple organizations utilize local resources
- A lot of knowledge shared between people
- Strong connections with local farmers
- Multi-sector collaboration

Initial research suggests that out of fifty-seven farm and food system nonprofit organizations, twenty entities are headquartered in Great Barrington or neighboring towns, four of which have broader service areas; nine organizations serve southern Berkshire County, and eighteen serve the entire county; and fourteen organizations cover statewide, regional, or national service areas. Twelve offer programs that focus on climate resilience and/or agricultural sustainability; five offer commercial retail opportunities, such as the Berkshire Food Coop; fifteen focus on community building, network facilitation, or mutual aid, such as Multicultural BRIDGE; thirteen provide emergency food access or public health programs; two offer funding; seven are potential community garden sites; fifteen are land trusts or organizations that focus on alternative land tenure models; six are working on food processing or aggregation; and twenty are research, nonprofit, or governmental organizations. In addition to the thirteen nonprofits focusing on emergency food access, an additional thirty-nine businesses, nonprofits and religious institutions across Berkshire County provide food access, through emergency food programs or retail.

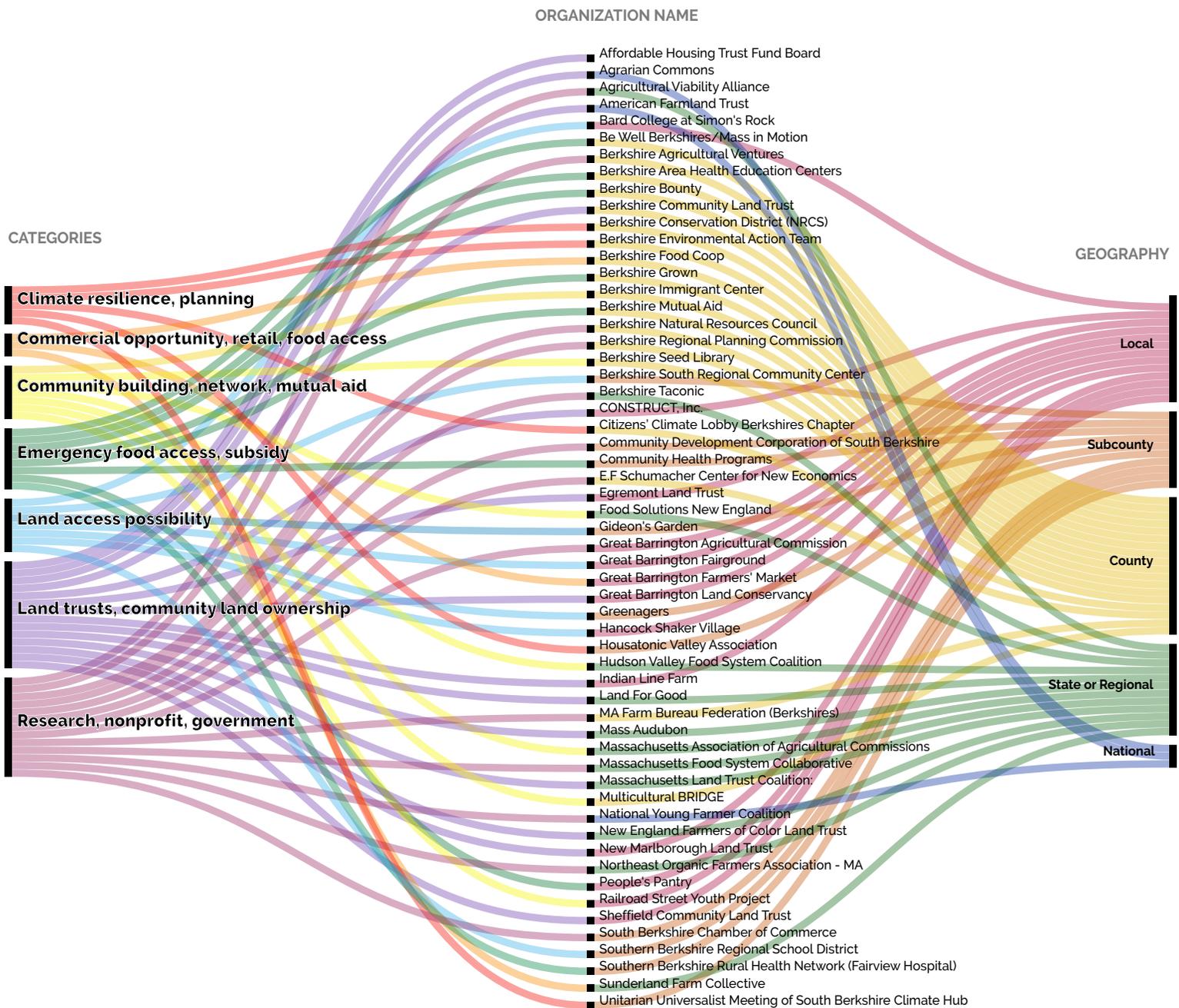
These fifty-seven nonprofits offer at least 191 separate initiatives among them. As several representatives from the thirty-five organizations who participated in stakeholder meetings or

individual conversations noted, **many of these organizations and businesses have active collaborative relationships** and have been hard at work on improving the region's food security, in many cases serving as national or regional models for decades. For instance, representatives from Berkshire Grown, Community Health Programs, Be Well Berkshires/Mass in Motion, and the Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network have a standing meeting to coordinate emergency food access programs. Effective collaborations have emerged from these connections, such as Berkshire Agricultural Ventures and Berkshire Grown's 2021 shared USDA food processing infrastructure funding. Inspired by connections like this, **there may be additional opportunities for collaboration among organizations, particularly those that are not already well-networked between or across sectors.**

If Great Barrington is already serving as a regional hub, what roles would be appropriate for the town to play in a more connected regional food economy?



NETWORK VISUALIZATION: Organizations working on climate resilience, food access, land access, and farm viability, at local, subcounty, county, state and regional, and national scales, as of 2022. While many organizations fall into multiple categories, each organization's primary focus area is shown here. This chart is not comprehensive and should be revised as more information is brought to light.



	Name	GEOGRAPHY	Climate resilience, planning	Commercial opportunity, retail, food access	Community building, networks, mutual aid	Emergency food access, subsidy	Funding opportunities, resources	Land access possibility	Land trusts, community land ownership	Research, nonprofit, government	Processing, value-added	Total number of initiatives	Town	State
1	Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board	1 Local							1			1	Great Barrington	MA
2	Bard College at Simon's Rock	1 Local						1				1	Great Barrington	MA
3	CONSTRUCT, Inc.	1 Local							1			1	Great Barrington	MA
4	Egremont Land Trust	1 Local							1			1	Great Barrington	MA
5	Great Barrington Agricultural Commission	1 Local	1				1			1		3	Great Barrington	MA
6	Great Barrington Fairground	1 Local		1				1	1		1	4	Great Barrington	MA
7	Great Barrington Farmers' Market	1 Local		1								1	Great Barrington	MA
8	Great Barrington Land Conservancy	1 Local							1			1	Great Barrington	MA
9	Hancock Shaker Village	1 Local						1				1	Great Barrington	MA
10	Indian Line Farm	1 Local							1			1	South Egremont	MA
11	New Marlborough Land Trust	1 Local							1			1	New Marlborough	MA
12	People's Pantry	1 Local				1		1				2	Great Barrington	MA
13	Railroad Street Youth Project	1 Local			1							1	Great Barrington	MA
14	Sheffield Community Land Trust	1 Local							1			1	Great Barrington	MA
15	Berkshire South Regional Community Center	2 Subcounty			1	1						2	Great Barrington	MA
16	Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire	2 Subcounty								1		1	Great Barrington	MA
17	Community Health Programs	2 Subcounty				1						1	Great Barrington	MA
18	Gideon's Garden	2 Subcounty				1		1				2	Great Barrington	MA
19	Greenagers	2 Subcounty			1	1		1				3	Sheffield	MA
20	Housatonic Valley Association	2 Subcounty	1									1	Stockbridge	MA
21	South Berkshire Chamber of Commerce	2 Subcounty								1		1	Sheffield	MA
22	Southern Berkshire Regional School District	2 Subcounty		1		1		1				3	Egremont	MA
23	Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network (Fairview Hospital)	2 Subcounty				1						1	New Marlborough	MA
24	Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire Climate Hub	2 Subcounty	1									1	South Egremont	MA
25	Be Well Berkshires/Mass in Motion	3 County				1						1	Great Barrington	MA
26	Berkshire Agricultural Ventures	3 County	1	1			1			1	1	5	Great Barrington	MA
27	Berkshire Area Health Education Centers	3 County				1						1	Dalton	MA
28	Berkshire Bounty	3 County				1						1	Great Barrington	MA
29	Berkshire Community Land Trust	3 County							1			1	Sudbury, MA	MA
30	Berkshire Conservation District (NRCS)	3 County	1									1	Pittsfield	MA
31	Berkshire Environmental Action Team	3 County	1									1	Pittsfield	MA
32	Berkshire Food Coop	3 County		1	1							2	Great Barrington	MA
33	Berkshire Grown	3 County				1				1	1	3	Great Barrington	MA
34	Berkshire Immigrant Center	3 County				1						1	Pittsfield	MA
35	Berkshire Mutual Aid	3 County				1	1					2		MA
36	Berkshire Natural Resources Council	3 County								1		1	Pittsfield	MA
37	Berkshire Regional Planning Commission	3 County	1							1		2	Sheffield	MA
38	Berkshire Seed Library	3 County	1			1						2	Pittsfield	MA
39	Multicultural BRIDGE	3 County				1	1					2	Lee	MA
40	Citizens' Climate Lobby Berkshires Chapter	3 County	1									1		MA
41	E.F Schumacher Center for New Economics	3 County							1	1		2	Great Barrington	MA
42	MA Farm Bureau Federation (Berkshires)	3 County								1		1	Marlborough	MA
43	Agricultural Viability Alliance	4 State or Regional	1		1					1		3	Boston	MA
44	Berkshire Taconic	4 State or Regional								1		1	Sheffield	MA
45	Food Solutions New England	4 State or Regional				1				1		2	Keene	NH
46	Hudson Valley Food System Coalition	4 State or Regional	1			1				1	1			NY
47	Land For Good	4 State or Regional							1	1		2	Keene	NH
48	Mass Audubon	4 State or Regional							1			1	Lincoln	MA
49	Massachusetts Association of Agricultural Commissions	4 State or Regional				1						1		MA
50	Massachusetts Food System Collaborative	4 State or Regional								1	1	2	Greenfield	MA
51	Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition:	4 State or Regional							1			1	Stockbridge	MA
52	New England Farmers of Color Land Trust	4 State or Regional				1			1	1		3	Petersburgh	NY
53	Northeast Organic Farmers Association - MA	4 State or Regional	1							1		2	Northampton	MA
54	Sunderland Farm Collective	4 State or Regional				1					1	2	Sunderland	MA
55	Agrarian Commons	5 National							1	1		2	Weare	NH
56	American Farmland Trust	5 National							1	1		2	Northampton	MA
57	National Young Farmer Coalition	5 National				1				1		2	Hudson	NY
	TOTAL		12	5	15	13	2	7	15	20	6	191		

Recommendation 4.1 *Convene*

Berkshire-area working group(s) to leverage shared funding and resources

Given the high volume and wide-ranging scope of projects in this active community, representatives from several organizations also raised concerns that local organizations do not always collaborate effectively or transparently, or worse, that their efforts could be duplicative or competitive. Farm and food system organizations in the Berkshires and the larger Berkshire-Taconic region, including organizations in adjacent counties in New York and Connecticut, do not have an established forum to communicate with one another as a community about their current initiatives, goals, and needs. For instance, participants expressed appreciation for this project's stakeholder engagement process in convening conversations that brought together representatives from groups working on separate aspects of the food system.

Building on these informal networks and initial connections, the Agricultural Commission, or another advocacy organization with more capacity, could convene a working group with representatives from organizations working in the southern Berkshires or the surrounding four-county region. Members of the working group could share information about ongoing projects with one another, and work toward leveraging shared funding and grant proposals. A working group could take many forms along a spectrum of formality, whether a standing monthly conference call or in-person meeting (pending public safety restrictions), a shared email listserv or Slack to accommodate asynchronous collaboration, or another form. While stakeholders engaged in this work have expressed that limited organizational capacity is already a major constraint, **finding additional ways to collaborate could increase transparency around ongoing efforts, lead to sharing resources, and ultimately build additional capacity.**

Stakeholders suggested that in addition to focusing on partnerships among South County organizations, deepening extant partnerships with organizations in nearby Litchfield, Columbia and Dutchess counties might be more relevant than building new connections with northern Berkshire County.

Looking ahead, a new regional food hub (described in Chapter 6) could also serve as a physical connection space to host regional collaborations.

NETWORK VISUALIZATION: Organizations working on climate resilience, food access, land access, and farm viability, at local, subcounty, county, regional and state, and national scales, as of 2022. This chart is not intended to be comprehensive and should be revised as information is brought to light.

Regional farm and food networks

THE HUDSON VALLEY FOOD SYSTEM COALITION is a new coalition working in the Hudson Valley, overlapping with the Berkshire-Taconic region. While membership appears limited to New York-based organizations, it may be possible for Berkshire-area organizations to participate in interest groups and learn from their ongoing formation process through monthly remote meetings. The coalition, founded in 2019, is developing strategic priorities on racial equity and justice, processing and distribution, community food security, farmland access, regenerative practices, economic development, and network building.

THE AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY ALLIANCE is a network of organizations that support farm and food business viability across New England and the Hudson Valley. The Alliance focuses on increasing capacity, including ways to share and expand limited resources effectively and equitably, for organizations and advisors who work with food producers. The Alliance offers a list-serve and convenes working groups to coordinate among members. In addition to the resources offered, the Alliance provides another example of ongoing coalition formation, as a relatively new network launched in 2018.

THE MASSACHUSETTS FOOD SYSTEM COLLABORATIVE created the MA Local Food Action Plan, and works to connect agricultural organizations with food system policy and advocacy efforts designed to create a more secure and sustainable local food system. The Collaborative provides leadership on statewide legislative priorities, municipal food policy planning, farmland access and protection, and climate resilience.

FOOD SOLUTIONS NEW ENGLAND: A regional organization and host of the New England Food Vision, FSNE offers many resources for farm and food system collaborations. In addition to serving as a network itself, one of FSNE's priorities is offering logistical support for working groups and committees to meet network goals and build alliances across food, farming, fishing, and forestry sectors. FSNE's network programs are built in conjunction with **INTERACTION INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**, a community of practice that builds collaborative capacity in organizations and networks working for social justice and racial equity.

NORTHEAST FARMERS OF COLOR LAND TRUST: As noted in Chapter 1, NEFOC may be a valuable community of practice to move forward with land access and tenure recommendations, and equally importantly, as a model for convening a collaborative network that centers BIPOC leadership.

MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONS is a statewide organization that provides AgComs with services and education to advance their agricultural support work at the local level. MAAC builds support for agriculture in communities through effective relations with state and federal agencies, elected and appointed officials, private and nonprofit organizations, and the public. While MAAC has been inactive for a few years, it remains a possible resource for future connections.

Recommendation 4.2 *Connect with extant networks*

Increasing communication and alignment between South County food system advocates offers promise for expanding transparency and capacity. At the same time, envisioning and coordinating new vehicles for partnership will likely be a significant undertaking, especially given the already-limited capacity of the organizational staff and volunteers involved. As a point of comparison and caution, the most recent precedent from Berkshire organizations working on food insecurity, the Central/South Berkshire Food Access Collaborative, is no longer active. Stakeholders who participated in the Collaborative may be able to provide further insight on why it lapsed. Given the effort required, and the value of learning from previous endeavors, connecting with the extant farm and food system organizations networks (listed opposite) operating across Massachusetts, the Hudson Valley, and New England, could offer structures and collaborative opportunities.

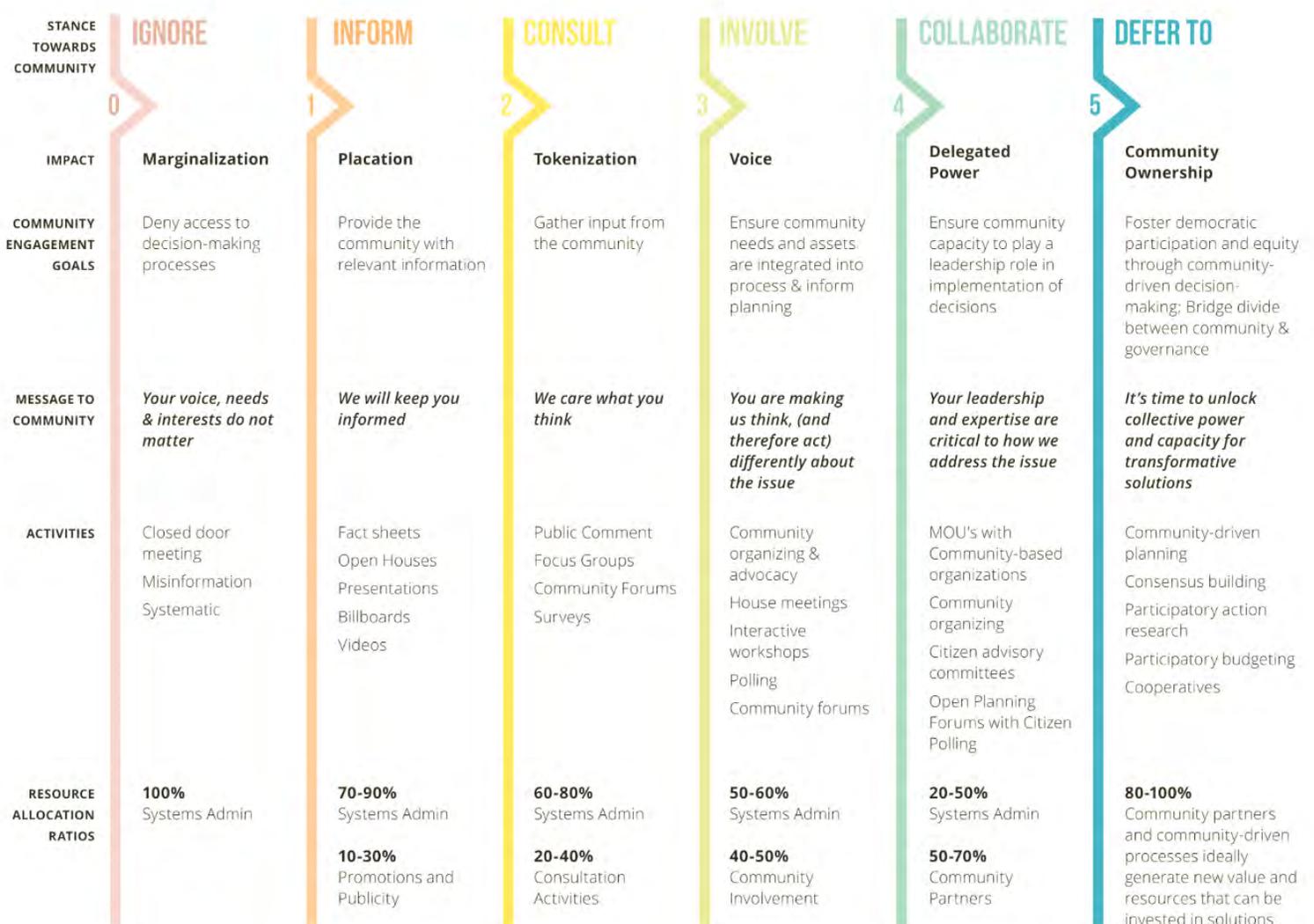
Recommendation 4.3 *Appoint Food Ombudsperson to act as regional coordinator*

Looking to local models that have been effective at navigating complex systems, stakeholders praised Fairview Hospital's Advocacy for Access program. The program coordinator works directly with individuals to connect them with health insurance and navigate state and federal resources. An analogous role could converge with the recommendation to convene a working group, in the form of a **food ombudsperson tasked with connecting local farm and food system partners and initiatives**. The committee or a working group could explore where the ombudsperson could be hosted or funded. Depending on the role's focus between emergency food access, policy advocacy, and economic development or farm viability, stakeholders suggested it might be allied with the Rural Health Network, Berkshire Grown's current operations, or a role within Town government, such as the Agricultural Commission.

Increased local and regional collaboration could play a significant role in leveraging the depth of experience, richness of community and efficacy of programming already at work in Great Barrington and the surrounding region. While Great Barrington's community members and local organizations have much to offer, **regional food security can only be achieved through regional collaborations.**

Recommendation 4.4 *Redistribute power through equitable decision-making*

Beyond convening and connecting extant organizations and community leaders, **Great Barrington’s community members have an opportunity and an appetite to model a transformative shift in collective decision-making through stakeholder leadership.** Local community leaders, such as BRIDGE, have already laid groundwork for models of equity, transparency, trust-building, and participant leadership in collective knowledge-sharing and priority-setting processes. Another model that may offer guidance is the “Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership”, developed by Facilitating Power. Ongoing work can and should continue to prioritize accessibility, equity, transparency, and stakeholder leadership at all levels and stages of planning, decision-making, and implementation, moving toward stages four and five of the spectrum, “Delegate Power” and “Community Ownership”.





IN MY HIGHEST VISION...

- Mutual aid from BRIDGE and programs like New Pathways that showcases community solutions
- Prioritizing, respecting, and amplifying the work of existing organizations and people of color in our food system
- An effective way to listen to those folks who are accessing services to give feedback on those services and participate on expanding those services to make sure no one is left out
- Residents with lived food insecurity experience leading the decision making

BRIDGE-MVP GOAL

Train community members to create safe, inclusive spaces for diverse members of the community to come together for collective learning, teaching, engagement and problem solving

Members of the community who commit to food sovereignty and resilience work should continue to engage critically with historical power dynamics, towards developing **intersectional analyses of racial equity and climate justice, and shifting power materially** across difference and disparity. This could take many forms, such as finding a balance between policies that address structural disparities in addition to crisis management, and shifting resources to expand capacity among efforts already led by people most affected by structural disparity. These include people who have been historically excluded from decision-making power, such as low-income communities, communities of color, and youth organizers.

For instance, compensating community members for participating in town-hosted decision-making forums could help to expand access to activities that have traditionally required economic ability to afford volunteering time. In the food system setting, this could take the form of working towards ensuring that low-income and early-career farm and food workers are present in all initiatives about worker needs and priorities; offering childcare and/or stipends for participants in working groups; allowing the time, space, and accessibility accommodations, including translation services, for all participants to contribute as they are able; and building skills and accountability to navigate through conflict in these settings.

In addition to co-creating shared futures, building community resilience offers another strategy towards a just climate transition and a solidarity economy. Facilitating Power offers this perspective: **“The key to closing equity gaps and resolving climate vulnerability is direct participation by impacted communities** in the development and implementation of solutions and policy decisions that directly impact them... The stronger our local democracies, the more capacity we can unleash to address our toughest challenges, and the more capable we are of surviving and thriving through economic, ecological, and social crises. It is going to take all of us to adequately address the complex challenges our cities and regions are facing.”

Summary of Recommendations

1

Accessing and Preserving Agricultural Land

1.1 INCREASE LAND UNDER COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Fundraise to acquire agricultural land

Conduct outreach to private landowners about transitioning land to ownership under a community land trust model.

Educate farmers about opportunities to access land through the community land trust model.

Identify Priority Parcels

1.2 PRESERVE AGRICULTURAL LAND THROUGH EXISTING CONSERVATION PROGRAMS & CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

1.3 EXPLORE LAND REMATRIATION & REPARATIONS

Work with Stockbridge-Munsee community on repatriation efforts

Explore reparations

1.4 SUPPORT FARMERS AND LANDOWNERS BY DEVELOPING SECURE FARMLAND LEASE AGREEMENTS

Create a local "Land Sponsor" Program to connect landowners and farmers

Incentivize non-farming landowners to make land available for leasing

2

Creating Community Growing Spaces

2.1 CONTINUE RESEARCH TO DETERMINE WHO CAN LEAD EFFORTS

Work with volunteers

Create paid positions

Collaborate with other organizations

2.2 COMMIT TO CENTERING UNDERREPRESENTED VOICES

Work with local organizations to design, create, and advertise spaces

Prioritize community inclusion

2.3 EXPLORE POTENTIAL SPACES

Berkshire South Regional Community Center

Public Parks

Bard College at Simon's Rock

Spaces identified in the Pollinator Plan

2.4 DESIGN SPACES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

3

Investing in Food Processing Infrastructure to Fill Regional Gaps

3.1 IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE MOST NEEDED AND VIABLE FOOD SYSTEMS FACILITIES

Work with ongoing feasibility study and working group to identify appropriate facility types

Develop criteria for siting processing facilities and create an inventory of suitable local sites

Assess zoning for sites identified and amend bylaws if needed

3.2 EXPAND CAPACITY IN EXISTING FOOD PROCESSING FACILITIES AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

Allocate funding to support existing community kitchen renovations

Prioritize expanding access to affordable housing for food system workers

Work with Community College to explore food processing professional training program

3.3 LEVERAGE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO INVEST IN FOOD PROCESSING INFRASTRUCTURE

3.4 EXPLORE INSTITUTIONAL PURCHASING TO SUPPORT LOCAL FOOD PRODUCERS

Implement a town procurement policy to prioritize local sourcing.

Work with the school district to implement a farm-to-school program

4

Connecting and Collaborating Regionally

4.1 CONVENE BERKSHIRE-AREA WORKING GROUP(S) TO LEVERAGE SHARED FUNDING AND RESOURCES

4.2 CONNECT WITH EXTANT NETWORKS

4.3 APPOINT FOOD OMBUDSPERSON TO ACT AS REGIONAL COORDINATOR

4.4 REDISTRIBUTE POWER AND DEVELOP RESILIENCE THROUGH EQUITABLE DECISION-MAKING

Develop equitable, participatory stakeholder leadership model

Expand capacity and amplify efforts already led by community members most affected by structural disparities

Lower barriers to participation through accessibility accommodations and compensation

Future Work

FORTHCOMING REPORT AND INTERACTIVE GIS INTERFACE ON SOURCES OF FOOD BY MCLA STUDENTS

In 2021, two students at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts began a GIS project mapping local food resources in Berkshire County, with the goal of improving visibility and connections between existing food resources. Their data was originally obtained from Berkshire Grown, and they plan on adding additional locations before completing the project. The map has filters to view farm stands, farmers markets, CSA, local grocers, locations that accept food stamps, senior coupons, and HIP. There are also plans to include food pantries.

The interactive map and its data are currently hosted on a private account, but the students hope to find an organization to host it once the mapping is completed. The map is accessible (as of the time of writing) at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/93b22186b60b48a495a35f529d783d39/page/Map-Page/>.

MUNICIPAL COMPOSTING PROGRAM

Significantly fewer methane emissions are produced when food waste is composted instead of being sent to a landfill. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that in 2018, 2.6 million tons of food was composted in the United States. While a large number, this accounts for only 4.1% of total wasted food (EPA, 2018). Towns and cities across Massachusetts and the country are creating municipal composting systems to keep local food waste from going to landfills. There is currently no town-wide composting system in Great Barrington, and launching one would be a further opportunity to create a more sustainable food system. Generated compost could be used on farms and community growing spaces in town, creating a closed loop from locally grown food to locally made compost.

Interviews indicated that efforts to transition to municipal composting have been stymied, as the Department of Public Works budget does not include funding for food scrap diversion and composting. A feasibility project could identify if Town leadership has interest and capacity to implement this project, where funding could be found, and what other efforts and resources would be needed. The neighboring town of Sheffield serves as a case study with a positive outcome. Sheffield composting advocates applied for and received funding to install a composting system at the transfer station, which is now available every day the transfer station is open. If Great Barrington doesn't have the resources to add composting capacity at the transfer station, a feasibility study could also help identify other opportunities. For instance, Stanton Home, a day and residential program for adults with special needs, has a small-scale operation that may have the potential for expanding, and Berkshire Compost is a locally-owned curbside pickup service that could potentially bring much of the town's food waste to a processing location.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITIES IN THE REGION

Another 2022 Conway School project prepared a food systems study for Holyoke, MA. This city of about 38,000 is almost exactly an hour east from Great Barrington on Route 90. Fifty-four percent of the population in Holyoke is Hispanic or Latino, with a Puerto Rican community forming the majority (ACS, 2021). Despite decades of effort to increase Holyoke's food security, there are still unmet needs and desires for locally produced, affordable food. Holyoke is a dense, post-industrial city at the base of Mt. Tom, and has little land suitable for agriculture. Great Barrington and the surrounding area have comparatively large amounts of farmland. Both municipalities have significant Latino communities, and it would be interesting to explore how land in Great Barrington could be used to grow culturally-specific food for both communities.

FAIRGROUNDS PROJECT

The Great Barrington Fairground came up in numerous conversations during this project, and it could be a worthwhile future project. The fifty-seven acre property's private owners began a nonprofit in hopes of redeveloping the site in 2013. The nonprofit's mission is "to preserve and restore the environmental health of the Fairgrounds site, and to provide agricultural, educational, recreational, and other beneficial opportunities to the local community and visitors through the preservation and sustainable development of this historic site." The nonprofit attempted a community garden and invasive species removal, but forward motion has stalled. Many stakeholders still see potential for community gardens, small farms, infrastructure redevelopment, and other agriculturally-focused endeavors on site.

PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES TO PRODUCERS

Creating more resilient and sustainable food systems will require a major pivot away from industrial agriculture systems that degrade local resources, are a source of greenhouse gases, and are vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Many farmers across the Berkshires and New England are already engaging in alternative growing strategies, such as organic, regenerative agriculture, biodynamic farming, permaculture, and small plot intensive (SPIN). Organizations and institutions such as Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), The Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT), and extension agencies offer a variety of networking opportunities, technical support, funding, and education for farmers interested in adopting new techniques or sharing their expertise. To support more sustainable agricultural methods, the Agricultural Commission in Great Barrington could work with local and regional organizations to host educational and networking events and provide farmers and gardeners with educational materials.

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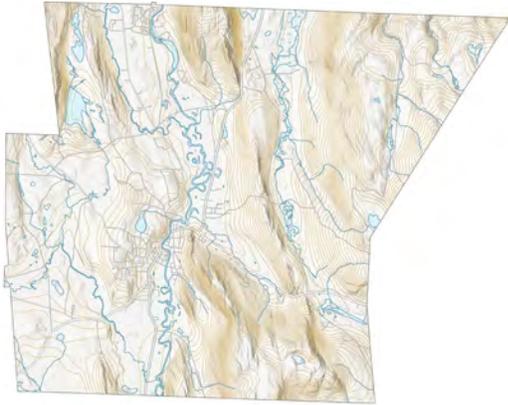
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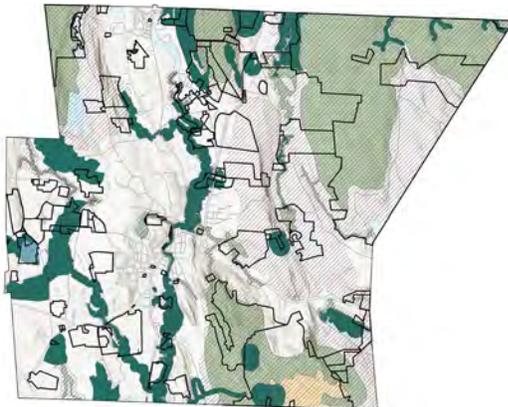
Appendices

A: Map Data



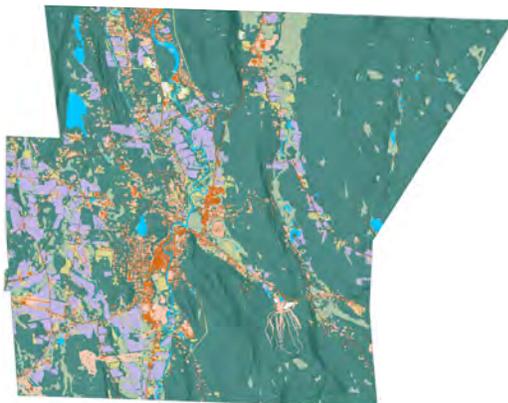
TOPOGRAPHY AND HYDROLOGY

- National Atmospheric & Oceanic Administration LIDAR data



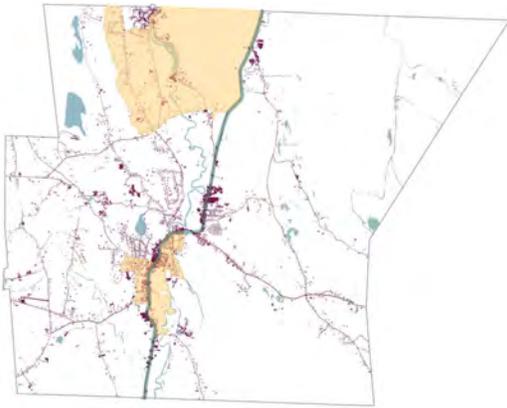
AREAS OF ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

- Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
- MassGIS Protected & Recreational OpenSpace



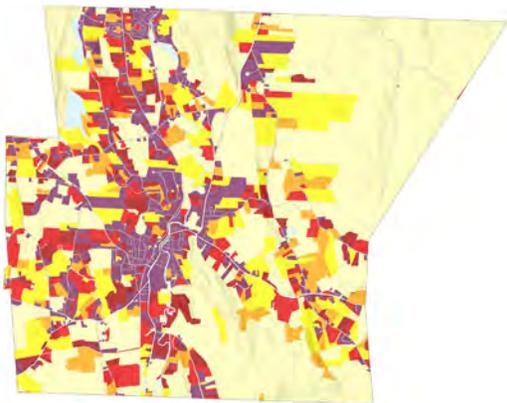
LAND COVER

- MassGIS 2016 Land Use Land Cover



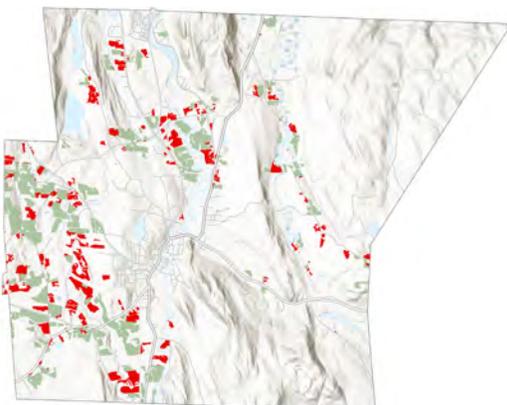
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES

- 2020 Environmental Justice Populations
- MassGIS 2016 Land Use Land Cover



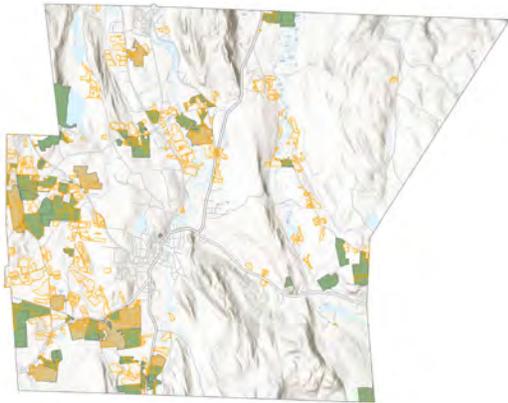
PER ACRE LAND VALUE

- MassGIS Tax Parcel Data



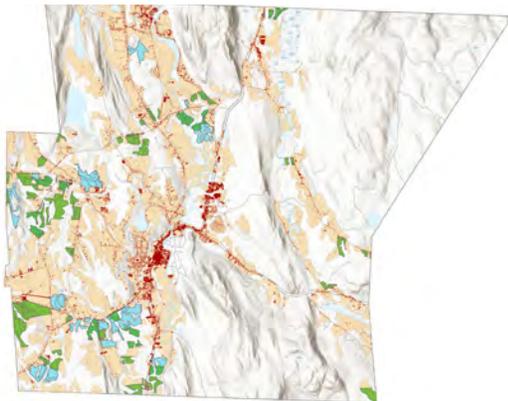
COST OF FARMLAND

- MassGIS Tax Parcel Data
- MassGIS 2016 Land Use Land Cover
- MassGIS Protected & Recreational OpenSpace



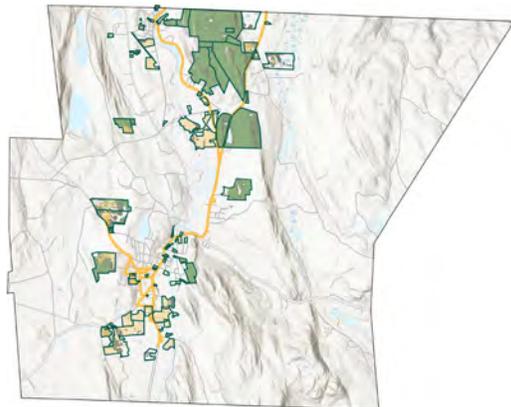
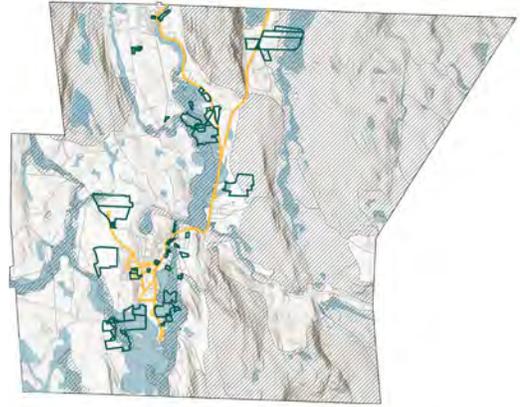
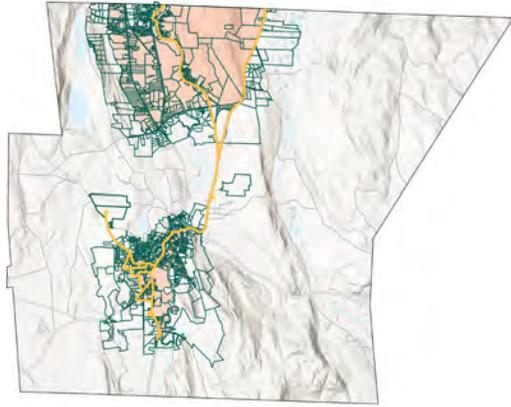
AGRICULTURAL LAND IN CHAPTER 61A & APR

- MassGIS Land Use Land Cover
- 2022 Tax Assessor Records
- MassGIS Protected & Recreational OpenSpace



CONSERVED PRIME FARMLAND

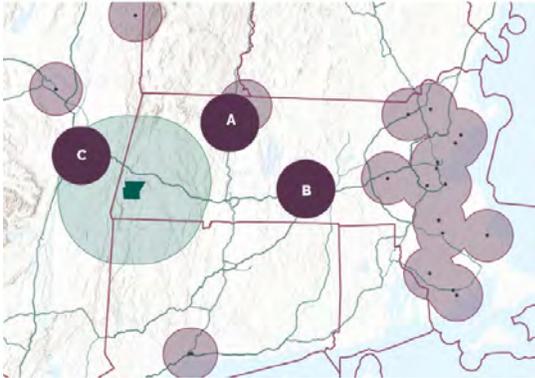
- MassGIS Prime Farmland Soils
- 2022 Tax Assessor Data
- MassGIS Protected & Recreational OpenSpace



POTENTIAL COMMUNITY GARDEN SPACES

- MassGIS Tax Parcels
- Regional Transit Authority bus routes
- MassGIS 2020 Environmental Justice Populations
- MassGIS 2016 Land Use Land Cover
- National Atmospheric & Oceanic Administration Lidar data
- NRCS SSURGO-certified prime farmland soils
- FEMA Q3 Floodzones
- MassGIS BioMap2

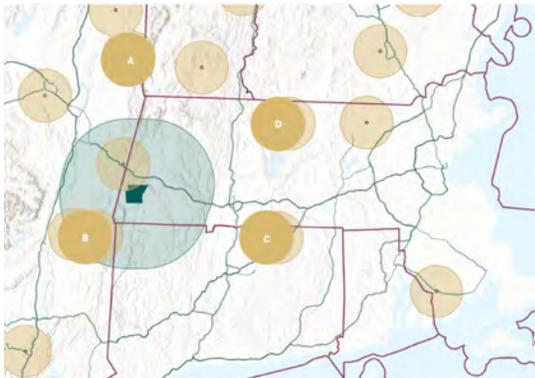




COMMUNITY KITCHENS AND CO-PACKERS

Geocoded data from:

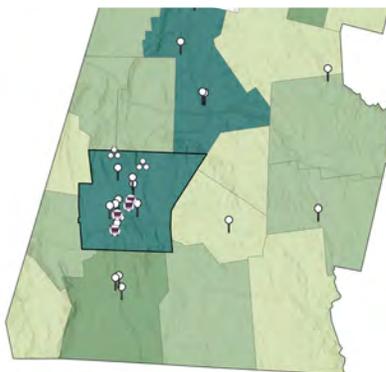
- Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Shared Use Kitchen Space and Co-packer Businesses
- USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Local Food Directories: Food Hub Directory



USDA SLAUGHTERHOUSES

Geocoded data from:

- Vermont Sheep and Goat Association, Vermont Slaughter Facilities
- Cornell Small Farms Program, New York USDA Slaughterhouses
- New Hampshire Farm Bureau, USDA Inspected Meat Processing Facilities
- Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, Berkshire Meat Processors



FOOD ACCESS INFRASTRUCTURE IN SOUTH COUNTY

- USDA Food and Nutrition Service SNAP Store Locations
- MassGIS Farmers Markets

Geocoded data from:

- Berkshire Grown 2021/2022 Berkshire County HIP Vendor List
- Berkshire Grown Directory of Farm to Pantry Partnerships
- The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, Berkshire County, 10/12/21

B: Metrics

POSSIBLE METRICS FOR MEASURING DESIRED OUTCOMES & EFFECTIVENESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

These proposed metrics may help to measure the impact of the recommendations provided in this report, and to assess changes in the food system over time in Great Barrington. Some metrics use data that is already collected by local organizations, the town, or state, while others may require new data collection.

LAND ACCESS & FARMLAND CONSERVATION:

- Per acre cost of farmland
- # of acres farmland conserved in perpetuity
- # of acres farmed under Land Trust or similar models
- Record of farm transitions: Sales to farmers, sales to developers, subdivisions
- Record of principal farmers with on-farm housing

COMMUNITY GROWING SPACES:

Percent of population with:

- Plot or work share at community garden
- Within walking/biking distance of community garden
- Ability to use public transportation to easily get to community gardens

For those who access growing spaces:

- Percentage of grocery bill offset by gardens
- Total value or volume of produce from community gardens

FOOD SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY:

- Total volume or value of value-added products produced in county
- Number of kitchens operating, commercial kitchen users, meals produced or food program participants served
- Successful grant proposals or funds awarded/allocated annually toward food infrastructure projects
- Volume or % volume of foods purchased from local vendors, for town purchasing or school system

- Livestock farmers able to schedule slaughter dates when needed
- Reduced average miles or trips traveled for processing/distribution
- Percentage of locally-raised meat that is sold within county border
- Expanding capacity by at least 25% at facilities that are currently operating (per BAV)
- Increase in cubic feet of storage available
- Number of workers with year-round living wage in food processing sector
- # of local businesses employing culinary vocational training program graduates

REGIONAL COLLABORATION:

- Number of groups involved in active collaboration
- Number of successful initiatives emerging from new collaborations; # of grant proposals funded from collaborative applications
- Funding allocated to existing majority BIPOC-led initiatives
- Demographic analysis of decision-making bodies
- # of accessibility accommodations provided: hours of childcare provided, % of meetings with translator services, amount of stipends accepted

C: Stakeholder Comments

FIRST COMMUNITY FORUM, FEBRUARY 3, 2022

The following are discussion prompts and direct quotes from fifty-one participants, anonymized and organized into themes. These themes informed the Conway student team's priorities for research and recommendations.

WHAT IS WORKING IN GREAT BARRINGTON'S FOOD SYSTEM LANDSCAPE?

COMMUNITY/COLLABORATION

Strong connections with local farmers
Cooperation among nonprofits in So County
BRIDGE's mutual aid program
Multi-sector collaboration
The GB Coop and its connection with local food producers
Collaborations between multiple organizations utilize local resources
Generosity in giving esp. during COVID and volunteers jumping in to help
Community support
Mutual aid from BRIDGE and programs like New Pathways that showcases community solutions
BRIDGE also put on
A lot of knowledge shared between people - how to garden, for example

OTHER

A lot of motivated young farmers
We have healthy soils
Awareness of issues beginning to really take hold

ACCESS TO FOOD

Farmers markets, including winter
An active and lively farmers' market
There is a lot of local food available here
People's pantry!
Many organic farms, Farmer's Market - doubling snap money
Food coop in town. Interest in and access to local farms for some
The GB Coop and its connection with local food producers
Access to local farms and food
Variety of food at retail outlets
Lots of options from supermarkets that support local to CSAs to farmers markets. Lots of producer/consumer interface opportunities
Access to local/healthy produce
CSA to food pantries
Farm stands, like Taft Farms

IN YOUR HIGHEST VISION, WHAT DOES THE IDEAL LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?

FOOD ACCESS:

Access to land for young farmers growing local food

Resilient food systems are closed loop, and all people have equal access to food

Nutritious food is affordable, and all community members can readily grow or raise it, find it, obtain it, transport it, prepare it and eat it

Regional food self-sufficiency where we can provide for the basic needs of all residents of the region

Everyone can afford and access healthy organic food. Many community gardens. Affordable local food store

Access to climate resistant, sustainable food sources, better access to composting for those who do not do so in own backyards

Everyone has access to enough fresh, regional foods that meet their nutritional and cultural needs and farmers can sustainably provide those foods both environmentally and financially.

Real food coop where you can work in exchange for a large discount

A food security navigator like Cheryl Thompson is for healthcare

An effective way to listen to those folks who are accessing services to give feedback on those services and participate on expanding those services to make sure no one is left out

Flexibility to meet fluctuating and changing nature of food needs. Adequate food sources. Knowing extent of need i.e., how many people in need, where are they, quantification of need individually and in the aggregate.

Everyone is paid a living wage and can make choices about how to spend their income in ways appropriate to their family. Ideally, they will source their food from local farmers at multiple access points, and share pride and enjoyment in their local food connections.

Everyone will have access to excellent, healthy, affordable food. A food culture, a food-equitable economy, local agricultural systems built for carbon sequestration, and a local currency tied to carbon storage will provide the armature for this system. Education will be at the center of our work.

A community where everyone has access to food that is healthy, nutritious, and accessible regardless of ability, income, race, and a community that is generous with not only sharing food but also sharing information & resources to support self-reliance of growing and preserving if folks so choose to

Residents with lived food insecurity experience leading the decision making

FARMERS' NEEDS:

Access of land for young farmers growing local food

Pesticide free farming and gardening

Affordable land for anyone who wants to farm

Farmworkers owning farms

APR, food preservation

Farmers know they are supported and appreciated, especially young farmers. Farmer appreciation day?

Housing for workforce

Prioritizing, respecting, and amplifying the work of existing organizations and people of color in our food system. Banning dangerous chemicals to pollinators like neonicotinoid coated corn and soy seed. Developing collectives, that again, prioritize the work, health, and safety of our most vulnerable communities

Affordable housing for young farmers

Support for all to learn season extension, plant gardens, use natural gardening methods, and community learning, sharing of best practices

Support local seed banking

Regenerative agricultural models.

IN YOUR HIGHEST VISION, WHAT DOES THE IDEAL LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM LOOK LIKE? (CONTINUED)

COMMUNITY GARDENS/HOME GARDENS:

Neighborhood food hubs or garden sharing systems

Everyone can afford and access healthy organic food. Many community gardens. Affordable local food store

Spaces / events to enjoy food together and to build community

Gardens in every front yard, supported by community gardeners

Citizens and government transforming lands, lawns to pollinator ecosystems, planting native bushes, trees, and food gardens that feed us all and help the climate.

Community garden, kitchen, education programs

Lawn and ornamental trees turned to produce vegetables and fruit

Support for all to learn season extension, plant gardens, use natural gardening methods, and community learning, sharing of best practices

COMPOSTING:

Access to climate resistant, sustainable food sources, better access to composting for those who do not do so in own backyards

A community wide effort to collect and recycle all organic waste (leaves, wood chips, food scraps, grass clippings, etc.) to build the soil of the community.

Each south county resident knows where to go and how to: bring yard waste and compost somewhere where it can do some good; give resources on a regular basis to people in need; bring their Christmas trees somewhere

PROCESSING:

APR, food preservation

Locally grown food storage and processing

Local slaughterhouse

I second Deb: local slaughterhouse, for sure

Community garden, kitchen, education programs

Kitchens for community food processing

OTHER:

One health considerations in planning and development

Part of a just ecological bioregion that can adapt and change as climate and other challenges unfold. It embraces the idea that we are better together and rejects the idea that turning on each other can ultimately get anyone anything we need.

SECOND COMMUNITY FORUM BREAKOUT ROOMS, MARCH 3, 2022

LAND ACCESS: TWELVE PARTICIPANTS

Town can help land trusts fundraise through seeking donations, giving land to land trusts

Need to strategize how to approach private landowners w/ farmland, education towards landowners and general public may be key

Need to incentivize landowners to donate land or allow for farming on land

Farmers need housing on or near farmland

Farmers need a voice on land management decisions and support

CPA funds may assist in housing and farmland security goals

Conservation trusts have been successful in getting donations of land, more educational campaigns for community land trusts may be successful for demonstrating the importance of preserving working landscapes, especially when showing multiple dimensions of why its important (climate change, economic security, housing security)

Education to farmers on different ways to make money through land stewardship, such as Healthy Soils Initiative funding

COMMUNITY GARDENS: EIGHT PARTICIPANTS

To be successful a community garden needs oversight and organizational structure

Providing education and resources to those interested but inexperienced or lacking tools, etc

Community Gardens may serve as a catalyst for other local movements and activity

MVP surveys found interest in community gardens

CG spaces could also serve as locations for bounty sharing, redistribution of excess crops and food

Public/ town owned land makes sense, but perhaps Simon's Rock or private owner are options

FOOD PROCESSING AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION: FOUR PARTICIPANTS

Commercial kitchen access would be valuable for food access programs, food entrepreneurs, and storage; not all available spaces are in good condition. Would several, smaller locations or fewer, larger locations be better?

Increasing slaughterhouse capacity and reducing distance is essential for making livestock businesses viable. Grazing or silvopasture is often the best local land use, so need to make it possible

Culinary vocational training important for economic development and good year-round jobs pipeline, but "don't bother training" if housing is not available

Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network convenes an active county-wide collaboration for emergency food access and public health programs, and are transitioning from crisis mode to strategic planning. Discussing missions and visions, food processing, distribution, and storage.

Connections between processing infrastructure and emergency food access: food pantry travels two hours for locally grown meat

Enthusiasm around getting municipal governments more involved in planning, fundraising, and administrative capacity. Other towns are considering using ARPA funding, would be good to partner and build capacity

Berkshire Grown and BAV programs are making inroads with Farm to Food Access program and other collaborations; food access coordinators are in touch with Mass Collaborative and Mass Food Policy Council

How would the food ombudsperson role be defined and funded: emphasis on food access or policy?



Although Great Barrington's farmers, food producers, and community members are deeply committed to the local food movement, that movement faces both local and global vulnerabilities highlighted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This moment of crisis and disruption is also a moment of opportunity to create a more resilient local system that can weather economic, environmental, and social challenges, and is built on a framework of sustainability.

This report offers a set of strategies toward building a food system that works for everyone, from farmers trying to put down roots to families facing food insecurity. A participatory engagement process grounded research objectives, spatial analysis and final recommendations in commitments to labor rights, racial equity and climate justice. Recommendations emerging from this co-creative process center around increasing land access for farmers, creating community growing spaces for all community members to grow food, investing in food processing infrastructure, and deepening collaboration among regional food systems advocates.

Great Barrington's community members have an opportunity and an appetite to model a transformative shift toward a more resilient and just food system.

WINTER 2022

the **Conway School**

Graduate Program in Sustainable Landscape Planning + Design