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THE CENTER FOR REGENERATIVE PRACTICE



Field of the Future
SUSAN JENNINGS

New Definition of Nutrient
Density Goes Beyond Labels
DAN KITTREDGE

Growing a New Crop
of Regenerative Farmers
AMY HARPER & KAT CHRISTEN

CONTRIBUTORS

Gabby Amrhein, Megan Bachman, Beth Bridgeman, Ariella Brown, Caressa Brown, Kat Christen, Sheryl Cunningham, David Diamond, Emily Foubert, Rose Hardesty, Amy Harper, Bob Huston, Rachel Isaacson, Susan Jennings, Dan Kittredge, Jim Linne, Peggy Nestor, Teddy Pierson, Kenisha Robinson, Rich Sidwell, Cheryl Smith

PHOTOGRAPHY

Dennie Eagleson, Amy Harper, Rose Hardesty, Susan Jennings, Teddy Pierson, Renee Wilde

ILLUSTRATION

Bob Huston

EDITORS

Amy Harper and Susan Jennings

DESIGN

Tika Redding

AGRARIA STAFF

Robert Bacheller, Land Team
Amber Bodkin, Grantwriter
Naomi Bongorno, Development Manager
Ariella Brown, Black Farming Conference Lead
Sherry Chen, Melrose Acres Manager
Kat Christen, Farm Training Manager
David Diamond, K-12 Education Lead
Alberta Dempsey, Research Intern
Lyric Ester, Land Team
Emily Foubert, Nature Education Lead
Adam Green, GIS Coordinator and Web Developer
Rose Hardesty, Social Media
Amy Harper, Communications Manager/Research Liaison
Kelly Hudson, Educator
Rachel Isaacson, Americorps VISTA
Susan Jennings, Executive Director
Stephanie Kelly, Educator
Alex Klug, Food and Farm Program Manager
Matthew Lawson, Project Manager

Matan Mazursky, Educator
Jyoti Miller, Database Coordinator
Scott Montgomery, Webmaster
Pam Miller, Office Manager
Teddy Pierson, Asst. Landuse Coordinator
Kaylee Rutherford, Miller Fellow
Kenisha Robinson, Farmer Training Assistant
Xinyuan Shi, Americorps VISTA
McKenzie Smith, Miller Fellow
Mark Thornton, Educator
Tiffany Ward, Educator
Joseph Young, Melrose Acres Grant Coordinator

FARMER PARTNER

Jason Ward

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Steven Roe
Cheryl Smith

AGRARIA

Box 243
131 E. Dayton Yellow Springs Road
Yellow Springs, OH 45387
937-767-2161



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BY SHERYL CUNNINGHAM

An Invitation to Pay Attention — and Thrive

I started to grow some of my own food in the spring of 2009. I knew nothing about soil health, but the house I had moved into had a big garden and I decided to use it. I got on the Internet and read about something called the “double-dig” method, a sort of tilling by hand. That sounded good to me. It turned out to be an enormous amount of work and I’m still not sure if my lower back has ever forgiven me for it. I planted what seemed like everything that first spring—and it all grew!

Year two, my back and I decided not to double dig. Instead, I attempted to till in a rather clueless way, the borrowed tiller bucking left and right, raked a bit of the soil around, and weeded what was left. My food grew again, but not as well. Too much water? Not enough? Too humid? Plants in the wrong spots?

Nope.

Soil. Depleted soil. I was asking plants to grow without paying attention to what they needed to thrive.

What do we need to thrive? And who, or what, counts as “we”?

The writers featured in this edition of the *Agraria Journal* ask us for something, though they do so gently and with encouragement. They ask us to pay attention to the food we put into our bodies, how it was grown, and by whom. They also ask us to pay attention to the legacies of food and growing, what has been lost, and what can and should be regained.

Beth Bridgeman talks to us about skills from the past and the joy that comes with learning that they are still worth passing down. Other writers encourage us to think



Jacoby Creek crossing on Agraria.

AMY HARPER

about food legacies—Gabby Loomis-Amrhein asks us to pay attention to where and who we are as we forage and the impacts our foraging might have on ecosystem health. Caressa Brown and Kenisha Robinson turn our attention toward their family histories, and their grandfathers’ and fathers’ relationships with growing food, and how those growing lessons are connected to their present and future, and that of their community. Cheryl Smith looks back toward the decline of her childhood home in Dayton, and the liberatory capacity of land reclamation and food production for Black Americans.

Other writers featured in this edition ask us to pay attention to the relationship between soil, food, human health, and the health of ecosystems. Jim Linne walks us through rebuilding a farm, literally from the ground up, while Dan Kittredge directs our attention to the mystery of nutrient density—how can some spinach be packed with

antioxidants, while other spinach may have only a small amount? Megan Bachman’s interview with Elaine Ingham puts a new spin on an old idea—you are what you eat—to make the connection between healthier soils and healthier humans. In her feature on Leslie Edmunds of Clem & Thyme Nutrition, Peggy Nestor explains that there is work being done, just down the road, for people hungry to learn about the healing power of real, whole food.

Susan Jennings asks us to pay attention to the bigger picture, and how new understandings of our interconnectedness with each other and the planet can lead us to a healthful future.

What do we need to thrive? At Agraria, the answers start in the soil.

Sheryl Cunningham is president of the Agraria Board of Trustees and a communication professor and faculty sustainability coordinator at Wittenberg University.

What’s in a Name?

Over the years our organization has gone by different names, but the work has been essentially the same: to research, educate and promote community as both a cooperative attitude and place-based way of life.

Founded in 1940 as Community Service, Inc., the intent was to serve small communities by disseminating ideas and strategies for their economic and cultural vitality. It was only later that the term “community service” came to mean a type of local volunteering.

So in the early 2000s, the organization began using The Community Solution to highlight the ways that community — local, cooperative living — was the solution to many of our most pressing challenges, namely oil and resource depletion.

In 2009, we rebranded as The Arthur Morgan Institute for Community Solutions, honoring the work of our pioneering founder and reflecting our research and education prowess as a new kind of think tank.

The 2017 purchase of our 128-acre farm brought another shift. We called it Agraria in a nod to both a low-energy community design crafted by Pat Murphy and Morgan’s vision of vibrant rural cultures and economies laid



out in several of his books.

The name Agraria speaks to the work to both reclaim and reimagine a more rooted way of life in deep relationship to the land and one another. It brings us back to our foundations as an organization, and as a civilization.

And it brings us to another name change for our 80-plus year-old organization. The legacy that began with Community Service and continued with Community Solutions will now live on under the banner of the Agraria Center for Regenerative Practice. After all, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

BY SUSAN JENNINGS

The Field of the Future

“The answers you get depend on the questions you ask.” -Thomas Kuhn

As we enter a new decade, the ground beneath our feet continues to shift as the natural and human systems that sustain us are increasingly imperiled. Yet our greatest challenge may be the collapse of the narratives that have guided us—narratives about our future, about “progress” and technology, about our relationships with each other and the natural world. Some of the proffered descriptions of our present—that we are in a time of civilizational and ecological collapse, a great reset, a great turning, and a long emergency — provide helpful framing. But there are longer scientific and historical arcs that illuminate a broader context for our predicament and provide new mindsets for developing on-the-ground solutions to our systemic crises.

Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, first published in 1962, is a history of scientific discovery that lays out a thesis that science, rather than progressing from insight to insight in measured steps through experimentation, actually takes its biggest leaps through new theories that arise outside the bounds of the accepted science—think the Copernican Revolution. In this narrative, “normal” science starts to become stressed when anomalies

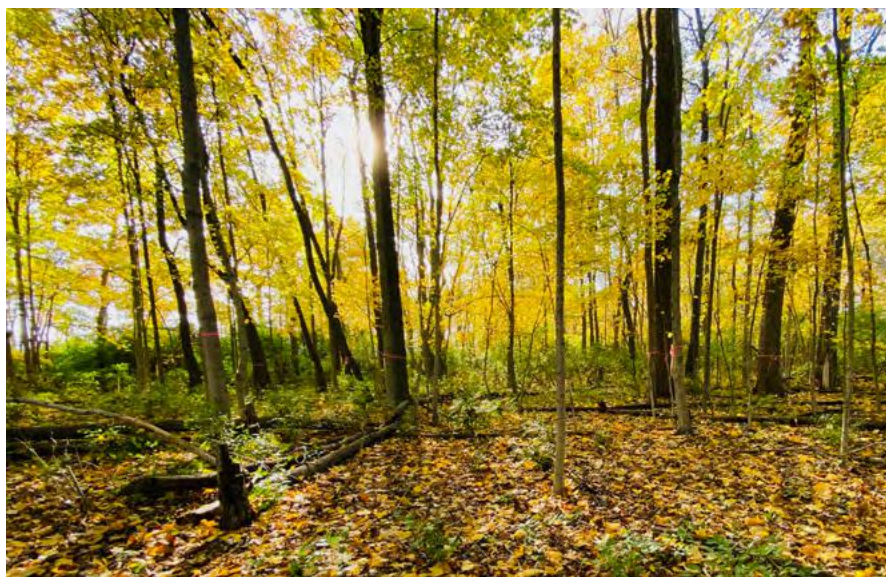
show up in laboratories that cannot be explained by the current understanding of how reality is constructed. When anomalies proliferate, science enters a crisis period that is resolved when a new paradigm arises that shifts understanding and practices.

It’s clear to me that we are in this crisis space between a world organized by materialist science, conceptualized by Newton and Descartes, and an arising quantum paradigm, as understood by Einstein and Bohm.

The tenets of Scientific Materialism (also known as scientism) include the hypothesis that the natural world is without consciousness. An

extreme version of this is seeing all living things as nothing more than machines set loose in a random universe. Rene Descartes famously operated on his wife’s dog when it was awake to show that animals did not have a soul. Materialist science assumes that wholes can be cut into parts without fundamentally altering their nature.

Many of our most pressing problems have at their root materialist thinking. Climate change, ecological overshoot, rampant degenerative diseases, hunger, and inequity share a basic premise that we are fundamentally separate from each



Fall colors along Mary's Way, the bike trail connecting Agraria with Yellow Springs.

AMY HARPER



DENNIE EAGLESON

other and the planet we inhabit. This thinking is evident in agricultural systems that suggest we can kill major parts of the food web, such as insects and soil, without harming ourselves, and confine animals in darkness as if they could be reduced to a piece of a corporate food “chain.” In other systems, materialist thinking shows up in siloed institutions and professions—like urban planning systems that separate the engineers who design roads from the biologists who deal with the challenges of toxic run off. Also witness energy systems created without a concern for the limits of their component parts, and health systems that ignore nutrition and the need for people to be in community with each other and nature.

The atomized separateness epitomized by a one-size-fits all materialist culture urges us toward an evermore brittle centralized control of all systems by an evermore distant other. When drone strikes that kill people on the other side of the planet are done by an “operator” in

an air-conditioned office, and AI-enhanced humans are promoted as an evolutionary option, we know that we are on the edge of an historical cliff. We are on the verge of breaking the delicate threads that bind us to each other and the planet.

Yet fully embracing the arising quantum paradigm gives us reason for hope, and a toolkit for change available to all. The double-slit experiment that forms one basis for quantum physics was first performed in 1801—and has since become the most replicated experiment in scientific history. This experiment shows that light is both wave and particle—and that waves become particles when they are observed. The collapse of the wave function into concrete reality, in other words, happens when we pay attention.

This linking of consciousness to the creation of concrete reality, coupled with an understanding of the unity that underlies all life, gives us principles and practices for re-mending our relationships with nature and with each other. Quantum theory is the

scientific underpinning of the Gaia hypothesis and deep systems thinking. Our understanding of frequencies as communication helps us to see that trees and plants are talking to one another and whales and bees are navigating by sonar. In fact these are just a few known examples of how the fundamental underpinnings of life are akin to a field of energy that connects us in magical yet potentially traceable ways.

Practices based on the understanding of this unity, and the need to repair the systems that threaten it, are proliferating across the planet. In natural systems, through rewilding projects and wildlife corridors and bridges, we are helping to restore biological communities. In our human communities, degrowth and cooperative initiatives; alternative work and currencies; and doughnut and ecological economics are helping us to mend the divides between us—and pull us back from the ecological edge. Permaculture and regenerative agriculture are showing us ways to feed

people healthfully while leaving food for our fellow creatures. And forest bathing, outdoor schools, and an explosion of people starting to grow their own food, are providing opportunities for deep immersion and reconnection between people and planet.

Kuhn stresses that the scientist's tools and viewpoint determine the outcome of experiments. If what we pay attention to determines the outcome of our future, we might think of attention as one of the most important resources we have. Do we choose to "pay" our limited attention to our collapsing structures, or to these vigorous new shoots growing

through the rubble? Clearly, the future is malleable, and dependent on our dreams as well as our doings.

We chose to call Agraria a Center for Regenerative Practice because we understand that the healing that needs to happen on the planet goes far beyond the regeneration of soils. Regenerative practices are those that move forward people, institutions, and projects in an evolutionary-spiraling cycle of growth and development.

Our nonprofit's current work plan assumes that we need to pay attention to multiple levels of healing—the healing of the biosphere and the urban/rural divide; the healing of our

agricultural practices and the healing of the systems by which we share food; and the healing of the silos of education through transdisciplinary hands-on initiatives. We share our work with multiple institutional partners, many of whom are written about in this journal. Together with our funders and volunteers, they are helping to weave a field of the future that is diverse and filled with creativity and hope. We invite you to join us as we develop a new narrative of the possible

Susan Jennings is the Executive Director of Agraria.



Volunteers planted raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, currants, and jostaberries in Agraria's perennial pantry garden.



BY DAN KITTREDGE

New Definition of Nutrient Density Goes Beyond Labels

As a child in elementary school I remember telling my science teacher that I was an Organic Farmer. The disdain with which she responded in front of my peers by saying "organic means contains carbon, so all farmers are organic farmers" sticks with me to this day. It was not actually that long ago that a group of back-to-the land homesteaders took a word that meant one thing in the world of science and redefined it to create a cultural touch point that now has a significant meaning globally.

In much the same way, food scientists have defined nutrient density differently than have those in the broader food movement. Specifically, they determine the nutrient density index of a crop by its average level of nutrients per unit calorie. For example, kale has on average a relatively high level of nutrients but a low level of calories. By this metric then kale has a high nutrient density score. Rice has many more calories in it per unit and so would have a low nutrient density score.

For the broader food movement, however, nutrient density has to do with quality, with how nutritious one bunch of kale is in relation to another. Or one bag of rice to another. Among food scientists there is an implicit assumption that all kale or rice is relatively

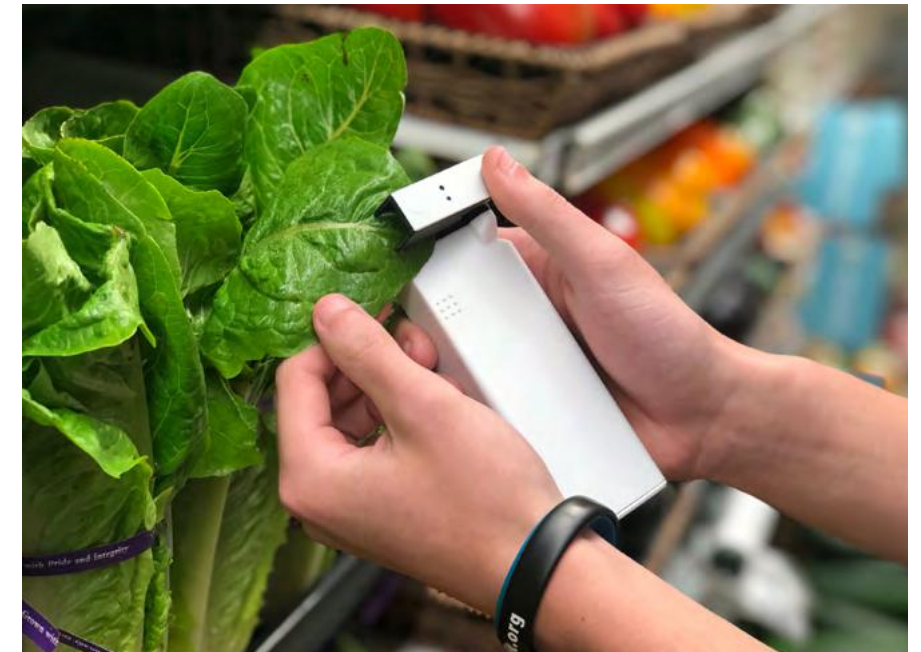


PHOTO COURTESY OF BFA
Bionutrient Meter developed by the Bionutrient Food Association (BFA) measures the nutrient density of food.

nutritionally uniform. This assumption is foundationally flawed.

My experience as a farmer has been that some crops have greater sheen, vigor, vibrancy, pest and disease resistance, flavor and shelf life than others. My understanding is that there are some profound nutrient variations in these crops, and these are really what I should be striving for rather than a label like Organic or Regenerative or local or Non-GMO etc. None of these labels correlate to the inherent nutritional quality of the crop and are

effectively process standards, not quality standards. A crop is either organic or not, local or not. There is no subtlety or nuance in them.

For a decade, the Bionutrient Food Association, which I helped found and serve as executive director, has been working to expand our understanding of this new definition of nutrient density, and for the past four years we have been using the scientific process to do so.

We devised a strategy to move this process forward:

1) Identify the nutritional variation that exists in crops so that an empirical definition of the nutritional density of any individual crop could be accomplished.

2) Identify the environmental conditions and causal factors that relate to those varied nutrient density readings.



Dan Kittredge

PHOTO COURTESY OF BFA

3) Build and calibrate a hand-held nutrient density meter that anyone, from grower to consumer, could use to get a real-time assessment of the food they want so that there would be no need or role for a bureaucratic certification system.

4) Engage as many aligned partners as possible who also had critical subject matter expertise. We call this partnership the Real Food Campaign.

In 2017, we created our first generation “Bionutrient Meter” and presented it at the Soil and Nutrition

conference that fall.

In 2018 we established our first lab to begin identifying the nutritional variation in food and chose two crops to begin with: carrots and spinach.

We reached out to our community for volunteers and asked for samples of these two crops to be shipped to the lab. We received samples from gardens,

farms, farm stands, grocery stores and farmers markets, ranging from Maine to Iowa. We got local, organic, and not organic. We looked at 16 different elements in the crops, like calcium, potassium, copper and zinc, as well as polyphenols and antioxidants, two well defined plant secondary metabolites associated with flavor and nutritional value.

The results we found in this first year of assessment were nothing short of astounding.

The variations for mineral levels were from 3:1 to 18:1. As in, this

carrot has as much copper as those three carrots, and that leaf of spinach has as much iron as those 18 leaves of spinach. When it came to those higher order nutritional compounds, antioxidants and polyphenols, it was 75:1 – 200:1. As in this leaf of spinach has as many antioxidants as those 75 leaves of spinach and that carrot has as many polyphenols as those 75 carrots.

This variation did not correlate with local or organic or any other labeling or marketing type. Some non-organic carrots in a grocery store, for example, had much more nutrition in them than some organic carrots from the local farmers market.

In 2019 we added lettuce, cherry tomatoes, kale, and grapes to our assessment process along with soil from 35 farms where those crops were grown, and management and environmental conditions data like cover cropping, crop variety, soil minerals, tillage practice, soil carbon, fertility amendments and fertilizers, irrigation type, soil biological activity, mulching etc. With the 2019 data we now have the ability to overlay all of these different dynamics in relation to each other. After reviewing this information, although from a relatively small data set of 35 farms, it became clear that no one factor like type of seed, no-till, or fertility product correlates with nutrient density variation. It seems to be a combination of these factors.

Also in 2019 we were able to verify that the dramatic nutritional variation in crops, both in the mineral levels as well as the higher order compounds, is present in the broader spectrum of crops assessed. The most significant variation we found was the antioxidant levels in spinach: 364.5:1. That means

if you ate one leaf of the highest antioxidant level spinach on January 1 of a year, you would have to eat one leaf of the lowest antioxidant level spinach every day for the entire year to get the same level as you received on January 1st of the most nutritious one!

Most impressively perhaps we were able to build a calibration on

In 2020 we increased the number of crops to 20 and broadened our base of labs from the primary lab in Ann Arbor to the first satellite lab at Chico State in California and our first European lab, in partnership with Valorex, in the Normandy region of France. We added oats and wheat

"The results we found in this short year of assessment were nothing short of astounding."

those six crops for our first-generation Bionutrient Meter. The calibration is not perfect, but we have proved that we can build a handheld spectrometer at a consumer price point that can be used in real time and non-invasively to give readings about nutrient density in food.

to our assessments, and we increased the number of farms we are getting management data from to more than 125. We will now have more meaningful data about environmental



AMY HARPER

Corn, bean, and squash, known as the Three Sisters, have been at the center of indigenous agriculture and food traditions for centuries. The three complementary crops grow in Agraria's staff garden.



AMY HARPER

The staff garden on the front campus of Agraria contains native perennials as well as annual crops. Staff members Naomi Bongorno and Kat Christen tended the garden on a staff work day in May.

to increase overall function in the biological system of the operations.

This work has been accomplished solely through charitable donations so all information, raw data, hardware engineering, software code, etc. remains open source and in the commons in perpetuity. We want to make sure that free access to the best information is available to all globally regardless of resources. We hope to have a comprehensive definition of nutrient density with cutting edge spectrometers and a deep understanding of how to do more well within the next five years. The level of support for our work is really the primary variable.

Dan Kittredge has been an organic farmer for more than 30 years and is the founder and executive director of the Bionutrient Food Association.

Edible Ethics

TO HARVEST OR NOT TO HARVEST

BY GABBY LOOMIS-AMRHEIN

Foraging for food is an ancient tradition spanning cultures, and geographic and political boundaries. The practice is seeing an uptick in recent decades in the U.S., particularly among folks who appreciate having a relationship with the outdoors. This trend, along with the current ecological footprint of global trade and market-driven relationships with nature, has created many ethical quandaries.

Some that are often on my mind include:

- Whose land am I on and what does that mean about how I should forage and what I eat?
- What bearing does the way my ancestors' interactions with these

plants have on the communion I now seek with them?

- What are the potential ecological effects of my harvesting or promoting the consumption of this food?
 - What is the difference between “can” and “should” in harvesting and in eating each of the foods I forage?
 - If I find myself at odds with the questions above or similar ones, are there alternatives or do I need to set boundaries with myself now in relation to these foods?
- This last question is becoming a hot one in foraging circles, particularly as it involves the concept of “invasive”

or non-native plants vs. native plants. Let's take Ramps for example, *Allium tricoccum*, var. *tricoccum* or *burdickii*. Much has been written by others about this wonderful plant. This native *Allium* (onion family) is a native woodland plant known for inhabiting shaded areas with good soil quality. The leaves and bulb of the plant are a delectable edible, tasting like a rich, sweet, combination of the garlic and onion commonly found in U.S. supermarket chains. It is often made into pesto, used as an onion/garlic garnish, and of course the foragers favorite in many places, cooked low and slow in butter with morels, which also appear in early to mid-spring.

The questions when applied here, bring some issues to the table. Ramps are a plant with a reproductive life cycle regularly documented at up to seven years. This means it takes the plant up to seven years to reach maturity, flower, and reproduce. So, if I walk into the woods and pull a bunch of ramps from the ground, I'm likely not doing a great job of either stewarding the population in its own right, its place in the ecosystem, or ensuring future harvests for myself or other foragers.

Alternatives, however, have been proposed. Many folks will speak of performing an honorable harvest, using only parts of the plant so it can still grow, as well as only harvesting a



Garlic mustard leaves

TEDDY PIERSON



From left: Garlic mustard flower, ramp leaf, ramp flower

TEDDY PIERSON

fraction of a given patch or population, while others still will encourage foragers to eat other plants entirely. In the case of ramps, this often looks like never harvesting the bulb, only taking one leaf from a plant of two or more leaves, and only taking a fraction of these leaves per patch, with the harvest spread across the patch. The percentage of patch harvested varies widely. I have seen folks suggest everything from 1/3 to 1/250th of any given patch. This brings up another issue though: What if 20 other foragers interact with this patch in this way? Such compounded foraging would surely negate honorable harvesting practices.

To which there is another alternative, named garlic mustard. Garlic mustard is an out-of-place or “invasive” plant found in the eastern U.S. It readily colonizes most any soil in shaded areas, though it particularly thrives in many of the same habitats that ramps do. Garlic mustard has the

potential to outcompete native plants such as ramps, increasing the already ecologically cumbersome footprint of the history of this country.

This plant, in the Brassica or mustard family, is also edible in a garlicky way. As its common name suggests, garlic mustard is more of a garlic/mustard taste combination when set beside the sweet garlic/onion flavor of ramps. I will not lie; ramps easily outcompete in the kitchen. However, I have had incredible garlic mustard pesto, and mixed with other spring greens, it gives salads a great kick. Additionally, the ethics of harvesting as much garlic mustard as you can see in the name of conserving native plant diversity and populations and stewarding local ecosystems far outweighs the potential of contributing to the diminution of those native populations. In sum, I adhere to the harvest of garlic mustard to fill my halitosis needs.

I do have a strong caveat,

however, in relation to garlic mustard consumption over ramps. I am a forager on colonized land who is descended from colonizers. My colonial relation to ramps and to garlic mustard are different than the relationships other peoples hold with these plants. Far be it from me to suggest to any native person what they should and should not eat on their land. Far be it from me to suggest to historically and systemically impoverished Appalachians to refrain from consuming ramps, a traditional food in the region. The communion we hold with food and with where and from whom it comes, is deeply personal, cultural, ecological, and political.

I for one look forward to the coming weeks wherein I will spend my days after work stewarding the land and eating seasonally unique pesto in one fell swoop.

Gabby Loomis-Amrhein is a naturalist, birder, and former lead on the land team at Agraria.

Natural Foods – Native Edible Plants

BY TEDDY PIERSON

WOOD SORREL

Oxalis stricta

Description: Small yellow flower with five petals, bright green heart shaped leaflets in sets of 3 - classic “shamrock” shape, fruits resemble miniature okra.

Growth habits: Common garden and lawn “weed,” can form dense mats

Edible parts: Leaves, flowers, and fruits. Sour, lemony taste. Harvest late spring to early fall. Fruits are delightfully crisp and crunchy. Can be used in salads, cooked greens, soups, sauces, garnishes, teas, and as a cool, sweetened lemonade-like drink.

Nutrition: High in iron, calcium, and vitamin C.



WOOD NETTLE

Laportea canadensis

Description: Tall (2-5') medium green plant with large, alternate, serrated leaves. Stalks and leaves are covered with stinging hairs. This is a native plant often mistaken for another member of the nettle family, stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*). However, the stinging nettle has pairs of opposite leaves only, while wood nettle has some alternate leaves.

Growth habits: Moist, rich soils, floodplain and bottomland woodlands, colony forming

Edible parts: Shoots, tops, young leaves, and seeds. Best eaten early to mid-summer. Gloves must be used to harvest;



boiling neutralizes the sting. Can be eaten as a cooked green, an addition to soups or casseroles, or made into tea. Seeds are very similar to flax seeds and can be used in hot cereals or breads.

Nutrition: There is not

much information about the nutritional content of wood nettle, though its relative stinging nettle is considered a super power in terms of its nutritional content. It is high in iron, calcium, protein, and vitamins C, A, and K, among other things.

EVENING PRIMROSE

Oenothera biennis

Description: Tall (3-6'), biennial plant with dark green, narrow, pointed leaves with a light-green or red contrasting mid-rib. Upper portion of the plant has 1" wide yellow flowers with four petals that come together to form a long slender tube. Flowers bloom early summer to early fall. Only a few flowers bloom at a time, opening during the evening and closing late the following morning. Unopened buds are found above the blooming flowers, and seed pods found below.

Growth habits: Sunny, dry areas such as field edges and meadows.

Edible parts: Taproot of 1st year growth (basal rosette of leaves) can be cooked and used like other root vegetables and has a spicy taste. Young shoots and leaves of second-year growth (flowering stalk) can be eaten raw or cooked as a spicy green. Harvest mid to late spring before flowering. Flowers and buds, spicy and a little sweet, can be added to salads or used as a garnish. Seeds have a pleasant flavor and can be roasted, used likewise as a garnish, or an addition to breads.

Nutrition: The oil of the seeds has the highest amount of gamma-linolenic acid, an Omega 6 fatty acid, of any known food and also contain the amino acid tryptophan. Evening primrose is also a source of protein, carbohydrates, beta carotene, potassium, and vitamin B3.



Teddy Pierson is a naturalist, photographer, and member of the land team at Agraria.

Black Farming and Beyond

BY ARIELLA J. BROWN HORN

Early last year a small group of volunteers came together to create a platform to not only celebrate the Black and underrepresented farming community in Southwest Ohio, but also to take a look back at the history of farming in the Black community and serve as a catalyst for the next generation of Black farmers. The result was the first Black Farming Conference in Southwest Ohio, held virtually in September.

Antioch College, The National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, and Central State University partnered with us on the conference, and we received generous sponsorship support from Nationwide Insurance, The Ohio Farm Bureau, and Farm Credit of Mid-America as well as other contributions and in-kind donations. With more than 400 attendees from around the country over a two-day period and more than 1,000 who pre-registered for the conference, it was clear that we had struck a common chord with our focus on Black farming.

The keynote address, by Dr. Anna Lisa Cox took us back to pre-civil war times, before Ohio was a state, to learn about how Black pioneers cultivated the land in this region and created a livelihood for themselves before it was all stripped away by racist laws, policies, and practices that robbed Black as well as indigenous people of their land and agrarian ways of life.

Access to land is one of the biggest barriers small scale farmers face, and

the Justice for Black Farmers Act now before Congress recognizes that as well as the injustices of the past that left so many Black farmers landless. If passed into law it would create a new Equitable Land Access Service under the USDA that would issue land grants of 160 acres apiece to up to 20,000 experienced Black farmers annually, through 2030. This would expand Black-owned farmland by up to 32 million acres. (Source: <https://www.agriculture.com/news/business/justice-for-black-farmers-bill-introduced-in-senate>)

In 1920, there were nearly 926,000 Black farmers, compared with fewer than 50,000 today. Community Solutions/Agraria hopes to help change this narrative through the creation of the Black Farmers Network. We are bringing local Black and underrepresented farmers together for quarterly roundtables, publishing a quarterly Black farming newsletter, and sponsoring the annual Black Farmers conference. These are small ways in which we can be better citizens of our community. They are also ways of saying thank you to the farmers who work every day to put food on our tables.

The goal of the Black Farmers Network is to create a platform for the Black farming community to network, discuss relevant farming topics, share insights, gain peer support, and connect with resources. Our next network roundtable will be held in October. Our quarterly newsletter is an extension



S.E. PHOTOGRAPHY

of the roundtable discussions and will include sources for grants and funding opportunities, information about upcoming events, a profile of a Black farmer from our region, and much more. To subscribe to the newsletter, contact Rachel Isaacson, risaacson@communitysolution.org.

Our keynote speaker for this year's conference will be Leah Penniman, co-founder of Soul Fire Farm and author of *Farming While Black*. Ms. Penniman is a highly sought-after speaker, and we are delighted she has accepted our invitation to join us this year. Our conference theme will be Black Farming: Community Land and Food Sovereignty. If living through a global pandemic over the past year has taught us anything, it is that we as a society need to get back to growing our own food, truly knowing where our food comes from, and supporting our local, family and community farms. Be on the lookout for more conference details soon.

For more information about the Black Farmers Network or to offer suggestions about how we might better serve and strengthen the region's Black farming community, please contact blackfarmersconferenceoh@gmail.com.

Ariella J. Brown Horn is Associate Director of Gender Equity Programs and Education at Antioch College, coordinator of the Black Farmer Network, and a member of the planning committee for the Black Farming conference.

NEW FARMER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Growing a New Crop of Regenerative Farmers

BY AMY HARPER AND KAT CHRISTEN

A vision Agraria has had since its founding — to serve as an incubator for beginning farmers — became a reality this spring when the organization launched the Regenerative Farmer Fellowship, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and Central State University.

This pilot program will support six beginning farmers through 25 weeks of education and training in regenerative agricultural practices and business planning. The first class of Farmer Fellows is a group of six women, most of whom are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). They represent both urban and rural sites in Montgomery, Greene and Clark counties. According to the 2017 Ag Census, less than 1% of farmers in Ohio are BIPOC, and of these farmers, 30-43% are new and beginning farmers.

The training includes workshops focused on regenerative practices and business planning as well as tours of successful farms and/or markets. It will allow participants to build capacity for their own sites and growing operations and to connect and collaborate with farmers and organizations that support farmers, including

the Black Farming Network coordinated by Ariella Brown of Agraria.

Fellows without property of their own will be able to establish plots on Agraria and on Agraria's partner in Springfield, Melrose Acres Urban Agriculture Center. Leading the training will be Kat Christen, who developed, operated, and managed the Antioch College Farm for 10 years. She has also led educational programming on Smaller Footprint Farm, which she and her husband, Doug Christen, have owned and operated since 2006. Supporting Kat will be Program Assistant Kenisha Robinson, who is also participating as a Fellow in the program.

A unique feature of the program is the financial support the Fellows will receive: \$12/hour for 20 hours per week over the course of the program, from April 19 through October 8. A grant secured by TNC from the North Central Region of Sustainable Agriculture Education and Research (NCR-SARE) program provides funding for the stipends.

The majority of farm internships and trainings are



Regenerative Farming Fellows Kenisha Robinson and River Johnson with Kat Christen at Agraria.

DENNIE EAGLESON

either low or non-paid, creating a barrier for low-wealth “non-privileged” groups, according to a 2015 study, “Situating on-farm apprenticeships within the alternative agrifood movement: Labor and social justice implications” (MacAuley, L. and Niewolny, K. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, April 8, 2016). The study called in part for consideration of strategies that “provide apprentice farmers the equivalent of minimum wage with benefits,” and ways to “supplement apprentices’ educational activities through the land-grant system, programming initiatives, and programs that have had demonstrated success in providing such support.” This project addresses these issues of equity.

The first cohort of six participants includes a diverse range of experiences and interests within the field of regenerative growing and within their communities. Participants have expressed interest in growing annual crops, flowers, and native nursery plants, agroforestry, perennial crop production, and more. In addition, participants are interested in addressing food security in their communities, learning more about specific growing systems, building growing capacity at their sites, selling products, business planning and/or meeting other growers. The Fellowship program will be tailored, whenever possible, to meet the interests and goals of this exciting new cohort.



Program Assistant Kenisha Robinson, of Trotwood, who is also a Fellow in the program, with Fellow Omope Daboiku, from Edgemont Garden in Dayton, and Trinity Hoskins, of Springfield.



DENNIE EAGLESON



Fellow River Johnson with Mandy Knaul, who provided rototiller training to Fellows.

DENNIE EAGLESON

BY KENISHA ROBINSON & CARESSA BROWN

Coming Back to the Land

REVIVING A MULTIGENERATIONAL LEGACY

An edited version of this article appeared in the Black Farming Newsletter

Kenisha Robinson and Caressa Brown are childhood friends who joined forces in 2019 to address the food desert crisis in the West Dayton and Trotwood, Ohio, communities.

Kenisha is a “surprise” third generation farmer. Though she grew up on her family farm in Trotwood, she did not intend to become a farmer. Her parents grew up in the south, in Georgia and Alabama,

and were just one generation away from the sharecropping era. For her grandparents and great grandparents, farming to feed their family was a necessity, not an option.

Both of her parents’ families moved north to pursue better opportunities; they wanted more out of life for their future generations. Kenisha’s paternal grandfather owned horses, raised chickens, and grew produce on his farm in New Lebanon, Ohio, and her father raised pigs and

hogs and grew an array of vegetables and fruits around their farm while also working a full-time job as a mail-carrier. Kenisha’s parents encouraged her to take a different path, toward higher education and a career they thought would provide a more stable and lucrative life. She set her sights on college and the big city lights, graduated from Wright State University with a degree in public administration, and eventually moved to Chicago, where she worked for the Greater Chicago Food Depository, the food bank for Cook County.

Caressa, is the youngest child of a Jim Crow-era sharecropper from Alabama. Her grandfather found himself stuck in a cycle

of debt to a white farmer in a part of Alabama that did not allow Black kids to receive an education. He, his wife, and their nine young children had to work off their debt in the farmer’s field during Alabama’s long growing season. When winter months came around and there was no work for Black people, Caressa’s grandfather had to ask for a cash advance from the white family to feed his family. The cycle continued for almost a decade until one night, her grandfather had enough. He wanted better for his children.

The growing season was over, and as usual he had requested an advance from the white family that he and his family were essentially enslaved to. Only this time, he had no intention of having his family work it off during the next growing season. Instead, he packed up his wife and kids and fled, in the middle of the night, risking their lives. He moved them to town in Texas where he heard there was a school that taught Black kids in K-4th grades, then to another Texas town where there was school that taught Black kids 4th-8th grades, and then once again to another town in Texas that taught Black kids in 9th-12th grades.

Caressa’s father migrated to Dayton, Ohio, after serving in the U.S. Marine Corps, and relocated back to Texas, after she graduated from high school. He had always kept a garden,



KENISHA ROBINSON

Friends and family pitched in to help prepare the ground and plant the first crops in Nouorganic Farm.

but he never taught Caressa to garden because he wanted her to focus on getting an education. She was a part of the first generation in her family to receive a K-12 education in one school system, and one of the first in her family to earn a college degree and take advantage of opportunities that her father and grandfather never dreamed possible. She has a bachelor’s degree in organizational/educational leadership and is now working on a degree in urban affairs.

Caressa begged her father for years to help her start and garden, and in 2019 he drove up from Texas to build a small garden box in her backyard and teach her the basics of gardening. She fell in love with the process and power of growing her own food. So much so, that it fueled her quiet dream of owning a farm, and she flooded her Facebook timeline with updates about her garden and her desire to own a farm.

Kenisha, who had moved back to Ohio to help care for her ailing father, saw Caressa’s post, and reached out to her with an offer: the opportunity to grow on her family-owned property in Trotwood, which had lain dormant for years. Caressa’s vision sparked

Kenisha’s desire to reconnect with the land—and that alchemy generated two new local food ventures in Dayton—Kenisha’s Nourganic Life Farm and Caressa’s Veggie Soul: The Urban Farmers’ Market.

The two women completed The Ohio State University Extension’s New and Beginning Farm College and went on to obtain GAPS Certifications from Cornell University, in 2020. They also attended the first annual Black Farming Conference: Beyond “40 Acres and a Mule,” last year and recently became members of the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association.

Kenisha’s initial goal for Nourganic Life Farm was to plant a variety of vegetables to get an idea of what would grow on the land. A friend with tractor plowed, tilled and disked a small patch of land for them; they purchased a few hand tools and enlisted some family and friends to assist with planting and harvesting. The experience helped renew Kenisha’s connection to and love of nature. She not only wants to restore the land that her family once worked but also use it to help her community.

Caressa’s goals for Veggie Soul: The Urban Farmers’ Market was to partner with churches located in West Dayton and Trotwood to host a weekly traveling farmers market and also teach residents of the two communities how to garden at a community plot in West Dayton. This initiative brought out multiple generations to learn to garden throughout the summer of 2020. However, due to COVID-19 related shutdowns, the churches closed their doors, and the market end of this community outreach initiative did not get off of the ground. Kenisha and Caressa opted to donate their first-year harvest to those who requested it and gave the remaining produce away to family and friends.

“For her grandparents and great grandparents, farming to feed their family was a necessity, not an option.”

They plan to continue encouraging area residents to adopt self-sustaining and self-sufficient lifestyles by growing their own food, not only for their consumption but also to produce fresh, non-pesticide grown produce for sale direct to the community.

Kenisha, who never dreamed that she would one day become a farmer, has reconnected with her farming roots, continuing the legacy her father worked so hard to leave for his family. She now sees farming and growing your own food as a necessity, rather than an option. “It’s interesting how history repeats itself,” she says.

Kenisha Robinson is program assistant for the Regenerative Farming Fellowship Program and also one of six Fellows participating in the program.



Kenisha Robinson and Caressa Brown

As Below, So Above: From Healthy Soil to Healthy Body

A CONVERSATION WITH ELAINE INGHAM

BY MEGAN BACHMAN

I remember the first time I heard the saying, “You are what you eat.” I was young enough to be a little unsettled by the idea that I might become a “chicken” or “popsicle” but old enough to understand that what I put into my body affected my constitution.

As I grew up, my awareness of the organics movement, the local

food movement, and the whole foods movement expanded that initial realization. I sought to avoid food grown with toxic chemicals, eschew overly processed food, and choose fresher foods closer to home.

But it wasn't until I learned about the connection between healthy soils and human health did I fully appreciate the phrase, “You are what you eat.”

That's thanks to the pioneering work of Elaine Ingham of the Soil Food Web School, who's been studying soil life (and its relationship to human life) for going on five decades.

To Ingham, it all comes down to the diversity of the microbiome — in both our soil and our digestive system. She defines “microbiome” as “the totality of microorganisms, bacteria,

viruses, protozoa and fungi and their collective genetic material present in the soil/gastrointestinal tract.”

These microorganisms essentially serve the same function in both places. They help the plant's roots in the soil, and the gut microflora, optimally absorb nutrients from their environment, Ingham explained in a recent Zoom interview.

“The microorganisms need to be in your food so that you always have the correct amount of microorganisms in your body,” she said. “The cells lining your intestines, your colon allow the uptake of the nutrients into the bloodstream, and that is mediated by a whole bunch of microorganisms.”

Take two apples, Ingham says. One is grown naturally, the other sprayed with fungicides to kill apple scab. Though both technically apples, the sprayed one now lacks the healthy microorganisms your body needs to get the most out of the apple, since at least 50% of the beneficial organisms have been killed.

“Where are the good guys going to come back from if you spray that orchard?” she asks.

Instead, Ingham says, eat straight from the garden, gently wash produce — don't scrub or use harsh soaps — and be sure to compost to continue the cycle.

The popularity of probiotics in recent years is one way to improve gut health, especially since 60 percent of the immune system is located there. But why not go to the literal root of the problem? After all, biologically diverse soil not only improves plant health and water retention, it also sequesters more carbon from the atmosphere, Ingham notes.

“You can try to fix the symptom

forever, and you are never going to solve that problem,” Ingham said. “And that's what fixing the biology in the soil will do.”

When Ingham started her work, nearly all soil research focused on the mineral content, not the biology, of the soil. But without microorganisms soil is more like “dirt,” she says. In 1978, she started her Ph.D. research by asking university professors in agriculture all across the country whether she should

slowly killing ourselves? The epidemic of chronic diseases correlates well with the ecological devastation of our soils.

Take the use of the popular pesticide glyphosate. As Ingham explained at the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Conference in February 2021, when glyphosate accumulates in the soil, the soil can no longer hold mineral nutrients for plants. In high enough concentrations, plants will actually absorb glyphosate, which

“They all said, ‘You shouldn't do that because these organisms do nothing in the soil.’ That's how bad our understanding of soil really was.”

look at the role of fungi in soil.

“They all said, ‘You shouldn't do that because these organisms do nothing in the soil,’” Ingham recalls. “That's how bad our understanding of soil really was.”

Since then, advances in ways to image microorganisms, such as x-ray shadow microscopy, have helped shed light on their role in the larger soil food web. The realization of just how biodiverse healthy ecosystems are, was a wake-up call.

“The Bible lists 5,000 species, and the people at Michigan State University showed that in a one-acre woodlot in Michigan [there were] over one million species,” Ingham said.

But change in the larger agriculture industry has been slow. In the meantime, we're losing species of bacteria, fungi and protozoa that may never return, Ingham says.

“One suspects that we are getting close to the no-return point, where the last of the land is desertified,” she said.

And fundamentally, if we are killing the life in the soil, aren't we also

means, yes, we are eating glyphosate. What does that do to our body?

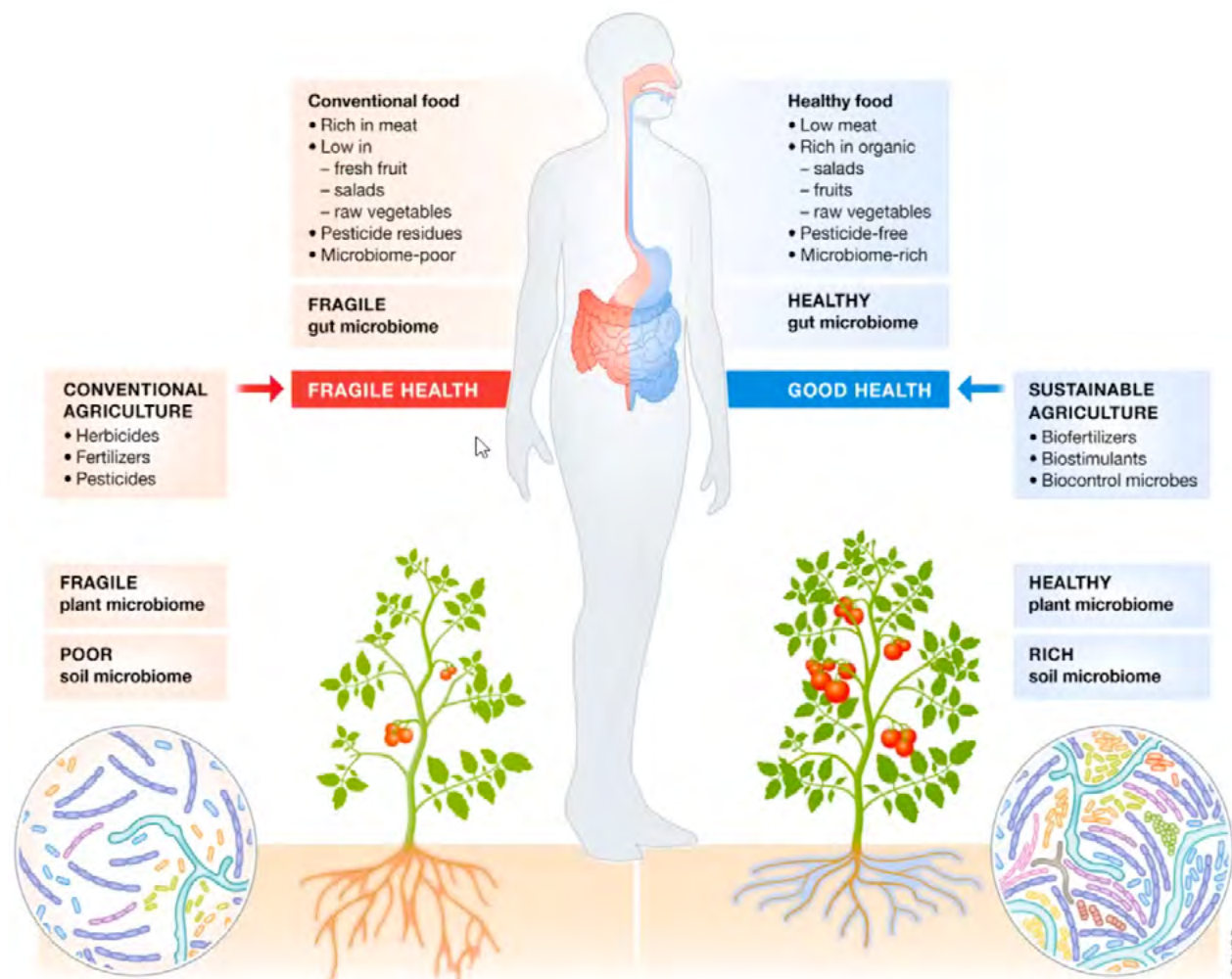
“It's doing exactly the same thing in your microbiome as in the soil, which is to kill those beneficial organisms,” Ingham said, “And it's withholding nutrients from your gut microflora — from your digestive system — so you can't obtain the nutrients that you want.”

Healthy soil grows plants that are unstressed and resistant to disease. But when we eat fragile plants, our human health becomes fragile too.

“We've got to understand that these two things are related,” Ingham said. “We need billions and billions of bacteria — on the outside when we have to grow plants and on the inside when we're growing human beings.”

Now, I know that if I am what I eat, I actually am the soil in which my food is grown. And I sure don't want to be dirt.

Megan Bachman is a board member of Agraria and editor of the Yellow Springs News.



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF ELAINE INGHAM, SOIL FOOD WEB SCHOOL

BY JIM LINNE

OPTIMAL HEALTH

A Physician/Farmer Perspective

As a physician, I was trained in the detection and treatment of disease. During my 35 years in the practice of gastroenterology, I noted a marked increase in diet related disease. NASH (non-alcoholic steatohepatitis), which is primarily caused by obesity and diabetes, is now the leading cause of cirrhosis in the USA. Eosinophilic esophagitis is an inflammatory disease of the esophagus that is due to food allergies. It causes painful swallowing and dysphagia (difficulty swallowing). Once rare, it is now the leading cause of food becoming lodged in the esophagus.

The costs associated with the treatment of these and other diet-related diseases are becoming unsustainable. I felt that we needed

to start focusing our efforts on prevention. While the USA boasts of providing the best health care in the world, our populace suffers from an epidemic of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses that are related primarily to diet and lifestyle¹. To address this problem, we must change our focus from treatment to prevention of disease, with good nutrition being the cornerstone. We need to emphasize whole foods as opposed to the highly processed, high caloric, hyperpalatable foods that are often deficient in nutrients and minerals.^{2,3}

As a farmer, I have developed a more holistic view of health and nutrition that includes the environmental impact of the way we produce food and its effect on the nutritional

content of food. Soil is the foundation of health. Healthy, nutrient dense food comes from healthy biologically alive soil. Our soils have become degraded through the lack of biological diversity, high levels of chemical inputs, and bare fallows.

Our current agriculture is extractive and unsustainable. Regenerative agriculture is a way to grow our foods that mimics Nature. It is a system that produces healthy, nutrient dense food while continuously building topsoil. It helps restore our broken carbon and water cycles.

As a first-generation farmer, my goal was to farm regeneratively. The farm I purchased was in conventional crop production of corn and soybeans with its associated tillage, chemicals, and bare winter fallows. The 5 tenets of regenerative agriculture are: 1) keep the soil covered; 2) minimal soil disturbance i.e., no tillage; 3) increase biodiversity; 4) keep living roots in the soil year around; 5) incorporate livestock.

I started out by planting the entire farm in perennial grasses. I repaired a large erosion gully by building a dam to create a small farm pond. What followed demonstrated the richness and generosity of Nature. This pond is now lined with willows, cattails, and beautiful American Lotus water lilies. It is home to hundreds of fish, insects, amphibians, and reptiles. An explosion of biodiversity. Mother Nature knows

what to do, she just needs us to get our boot off of her neck.

Now that the farm was in grassland, I introduced cattle as a way to build soil organic matter, recycle nutrients, and produce high quality beef. Healthy soil is a living organism with billions of microbes in a single teaspoon. In order not to harm the soil biology, we have avoided using any harmful chemicals such as antibiotics, hormones, pesticides, or herbicides.

With short periods of grazing followed by long periods of rest, the biodiversity of plants in the pasture has increased as the latent seed bank is awakened. The soil organic matter has increased from 1.5% to 4%, cycling carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and sequestering it in the soil. This has resulted in improved soil structure with better water infiltration and water holding capacity. We can now hold an additional 50,000 gallons of water

"Soil is the foundation of health. Healthy, nutrient dense food comes from healthy biologically alive soil."

per acre. Not only does this allow us to grow more biomass, it also helps protect the watershed from erosion, runoff, leaching, flooding and drought. The restored groundwater provides our cattle with clean water year around from natural springs. We are able to produce our 100% grass-fed beef using

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Jim Linne with his herd of cattle on White Clover Farm

RENEE WILDE

only grass, sunshine, and water—the way Nature intended.

Testing done at Michigan State University confirms the high mineral, vitamin, and omega-3 fatty acid

content of our beef.⁴

We direct-market our beef locally, providing a healthy product while improving the land.

Nature has responded to the care that we have given to the land with another gift in the form of birds. We now have hundreds of swallows that follow the cattle herd providing natural fly control. Red tailed hawks, American kestrels, Northern harriers, and short eared owls patrol the pastures and hayfields.

The presence of birds of prey are an indication of a healthy ecosystem with a well-functioning food web.

A holistic definition of health includes the health of the planet as well as all of its inhabitants. They cannot be separated. As we strive to improve our health through better nutrition, we must remember that healthy soil is the foundation for healthy food as well as ecosystem function. Optimal health only occurs when the whole ecosystem is healthy.

Jim Linne is on the Agraria Board of Trustees and also the planning committee for the Nourishing Life Conference to be held June 18-19, 2021. He is owner of White Clover Farm.



The pond on White Clover Farm was regenerated along with the soil.

JIM LINNE

BY RICH SIDWELL



AGRARIA: A New Educational Model

We live in a time when the questions come flooding in seemingly at an ever-faster rate. Big questions about humanity’s place on the earth, past, present, and future all at once. We think we know more than we ever have known yet have only scratched the surface; we’re realizing that there is wisdom awaiting further exploration if only we are open to genuine exploring. ‘Regenerative’ is the new keyword in our conversations about how to move forward to better ways of living with all life on the planet. Regenerative agriculture, for example, is the approach that rebuilds soil, taking our understanding of soil health to new “depths.”

Community Solutions has been exploring solutions to the enduring problem of living in harmony with all life on the planet since Arthur Morgan founded it some 80 years ago. With the founding of Agraria as a Center for Regenerative Practice, four years ago, we have been greatly expanding our own knowledge base while connecting more widely with partners around the globe in the quest to help humanity move into a new paradigm. Our work can be summed up as broadly educating and re-educating fellow

human beings.

We are restoring Agraria’s farmland, providing nature programs for children, and hosting informative and inspirational conferences. We are facilitating community food production both locally and regionally, demonstrating agroforestry and agro-ecological practices, and hosting podcasts. We are becoming a trusted voice of hope and resilience regionally and beyond, and we are partnering with colleagues near and far in the work of promoting the New in the face of the collapsing Old. We do all these things knowing that the future is now, the New encapsulates the wisdom of our ancient past while embracing the truth that body, mind, and spirit are one. Science and spirituality are no longer separate; together, as one body of knowledge, they shape the New we work to bring to the fore.

Ultimately, all that we do can be seen as providing education in one form or another. Like other terms in our limited language, education to most indicates some form of formalized process of instruction that endeavors to transfer knowledge and wisdom. And indeed, we are in the process of expanding our

partnerships with Central State University, the University of Dayton, The Ohio State University, and other institutions to offer internships and accredited certification courses in a variety of fields. Students will be able to get experience at Agraria that relates directly or indirectly to their chosen majors and minors. Our partners at these schools are excited about these expanded offerings for their students knowing that there is no substitute for real experience in work that has wide benefits. Most of us, in fact, who



ROSE HARDESTY

have pursued college degrees will acknowledge the significant importance of in-depth experiences when coupled with academic pursuits.

While we are excited to be moving ahead with numerous educational opportunities for students of all ages, now is also a time to be building new models of education for the future. Many parents are seeking alternatives to traditional education, choosing private schools over public schools, or home-school or un-school parent groups, or some other approach to childhood education. At the same time many high schools, colleges, and universities are facing declining budgets because of the demographic shifts and the growing dissatisfaction with high costs. Because the world is changing rapidly, many schools understandably find themselves significantly challenged to prepare students for uncertain futures; in fact, most students are better



DENNIE EAGLESON

equipped technologically than their teachers to manage the tools that have become the primary access to acquiring information.

So, what would the new, improved, educational models to promote a positive global future look like? And what can Agraria with our diversified land-based programs provide toward that end? These are the questions we are asking as our work rapidly expands. Just as the major issues facing humanity are interconnected, so are the solutions. Food insecurity, economic disparity, poor human health, climate change—all have their roots in the industrialization of our lives that has developed over the last few centuries. We are extracting, consuming and destroying resources continuously, compromising our environment for the sake of unsustainable lifestyles.

The opportunity before us is to explore, learn, and share knowledge and skills that can empower anyone to grow, harvest, store, and consume healthy food wherever they live. These are the goals of our Regenerative Farmer Fellowship Program as well as our work in Springfield to develop

an urban agriculture center in partnership with S.O.U.P., a Springfield nonprofit.

Our online conferences and skill sharing workshops, the Big Map Out project for school age kids, and our increasingly popular Nature Camps are just a few examples of the mix of multigenerational

learning opportunities we offer, both practical and philosophical.

Expanding our ability as a demonstration farm, a site for regenerative practices, is vitally important. But ultimately Agraria can be much more than that. We can help communities learn how to share resources, combine efforts, and increase their overall physical, mental and spiritual health. Perhaps the new education model is more invitational and inspirational than purely instructional. Modeling the New means providing a window into a brighter future.

As we develop individual and community resilience, we may begin to see economic disparity diminish along with the impacts of climate change.

Each of us, regardless of our position in this life, is on our own educational journey. We take in information, take on understanding, learn new lessons, expand awareness, broaden perspectives, experience challenges, suffer pain, and are exhilarated by joy. Providing experiential opportunities for expansive growth and the space, setting and means to share inspirational teaching all may be central to the new “educational” model.

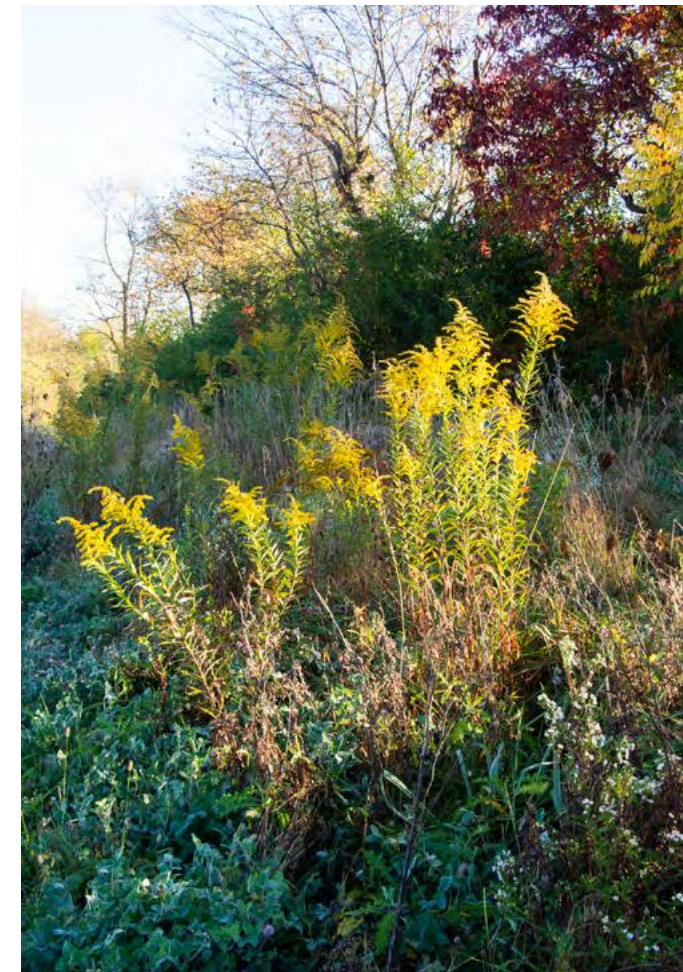
Our vision for Agraria is to be part of the global network of resourceful institutions providing that array of learning options that will equip students of all ages and backgrounds to participate in a truly regenerative future.

We have just begun.

Rich Sidwell is treasurer of the Community Solutions board of trustees and co-founder and treasurer of Raven Rocks, Inc. a 1250-acre wilderness preserve and alternative energy demonstration center near Beallsville, OH.

Around Agraria

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DENNIE EAGLESON & AMY HARPER



FROM ACTIVIST TO ADVOCATE

How I Became a Voice for Black Agriculture

BY CHERYL WOOD SMITH

My story begins in Dayton, Ohio in the early 1950s. Although I am a native of Newark, New Jersey, my earliest memories of “the land” started in Dayton.

One of my most enduring memories is going to “market” with my grandparents. Standing on the corner of Third and Summit Streets, I watched as a caravan of trucks lined up along the block. Each truck was loaded with all kinds of food and almost every truck driver was Black. My grandparents, who lived nearby, carried home produce, herbs, and poultry. A crate of chickens would soon be released in our backyard, their necks would be wrung, their heads chopped off, and shortly my grandmother’s freezer and cupboard would be brimming with food to sustain us through the winter.

Even then, as a little girl, I knew the abundance of sustenance in my community was a barrier to the kind of racist violence we saw weekly in the Jet magazine my parents brought home. The west side was a safe place of Black-owned homes with backyard gardens and fruit trees, and Black-owned businesses where we were welcomed and treated well. We were a real community.

When I joined the Black Panther Party a decade and a half later, one of the cardinal principles that was constantly emphasized to us was the role of the vanguard party in meeting

the needs of the people. It was our duty to see that the people were well fed, clothed, educated and healthy. Our social programs were the real legacy of our movement, not picking up the gun.

Following that, the exodus of industry and commerce for cheaper labor fields left Black people without viable opportunities for employment. And finally, the crack epidemic sealed the



Cheryl Wood Smith

MARIANNE MACQUEEN

Our programs were meant to provide for our people while we helped them prepare for revolutionary change.

Returning to Dayton after a short absence, I experienced what I called “culture shock.” Three major events had completely changed the landscape of my childhood. The first was when affluent and upper-middle-class Blacks traipsed behind the “white flight” crowd to other areas of town; it was a major economic blow to our neighborhoods.

deal. Our community was abandoned and dying.

As I continued to work for the liberation and survival of Black people, I recognized the white power system would forever create poverty by making civic and urban policy that left us out, while they encouraged outside entities to rob us of our land and our resources under the dubious auspices of a hostile city government. I saw one neighborhood after another



DENNIE EAGLESON

Regenerative Farming Fellows visited The Narrow Way Farm in Brookeville, OH. The farm is owned and operated by David and Tia Stuart.

left to deteriorate and then be swept up by some corporate entity who thought a landfill or a parking lot or some other obnoxious structure would work well for them in our space.

Meanwhile Black Americans were once again becoming not just homeless but landless.

I knew then that we had to find a way to save our land and produce the goods and services we needed to survive. And at the very top of that list was Food. We didn’t need food banks and food pantries or free food programs. We needed to create sustainable sources of revenue and goods by reclaiming our communities.

At the same time food apartheid had created such a crisis we had to start with immediately addressing hunger. But, in the long run the survival of “all” people depends on the autonomy and ownership of the land, our land.

I believe education, organization, and reparations are all necessary steps to our future success. This is my passion: to reintroduce descendants of Africans to the heart of our existence—our love for the earth and our allegiance to the land. We have been brainwashed to believe we were created as slaves to work someone else’s land. But we have within us generational knowledge of what we need to create and produce. We just have to unlock those secrets, remove the indoctrination, and return to the land.

Cheryl Wood Smith is a member of the Agraria board of trustees and on the organizing committee for the Black Farming Conference.



DENNIE EAGLESON

Mandy Knaul provided rototiller training to Regenerative Farming Fellows.

Grounded Hope:

FROM THE HIGHWAYS TO THE HEDGEROWS

BY RENEE WILDE

The Grounded Hope podcast, launched in January 2020, pairs radio producer Renee Wilde with the team at Agraria to produce a series of podcasts that introduce people to the past, present, and future of Ohio agriculture. Listeners are learning how historical farming practices—including those of indigenous people and early Black farmers—reflect ways in which our degraded soils can be regenerated. The series takes listeners on a tour of Ohio cities and back roads to meet current farmers and learn how they are rebuilding local food systems that can be resilient in the face of pandemics and climate change. You'll hear about unusual crops and the hope they hold for new products—including fibers, medicines, and foods. You will also be invited to examine how Ohio economics is embedded in agriculture, and how that both supports and challenges the state and its communities. The “Grounded Hope” series is now available on Spotify, Google Podcast, RadioPublic, PRX, and more! Visit the Grounded Hope podcast website www.GroundedHope.org to learn more about the podcast, listen to the episodes, see resources for educators, and find ways to “dig deeper.”



AMY HARPER

EPISODE 1: REGENERATION

Regenerative Agriculture was the number one food trend in 2020, with companies from General Mills Foods to the Patagonia clothing company turning to regenerative farming practices in their businesses. 2021 marks the start of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and in this episode, we take a look at how Agraria is using regenerative practices to

transform a conventional farm into a lush ecosystem; discover how a declining dung beetle population is contributing to greenhouse gas; and learn how regenerative practices in Indigenous Cultures are an important part of their relationship with nature.

EPISODE 2: BLACK FARMING

The number of Black-owned farms has drastically declined since the 1920s, and now make up less than two percent of total U.S. farmland. In this episode, we'll talk with one of the organizers of the Black Farming Conference Beyond 40 Acres and a Mule, learn how three childhood friends created an urban farm out of an abandoned dumping ground in Cleveland, and hear from a first-time grower about the joys of eating food that you've poured your essence into.

EPISODE 3: AGROFORESTRY

Hear three different stories about the importance of trees and our interaction with them. We'll meet a pioneer in the Cincinnati permaculture movement who is creating a food forest on the Grailville Farm; go out with a small-batch maple syrup producer to learn how to tap a tree; and hear one man's journey to save the trees in his community.

EPISODE 4: BEYOND LIVESTOCK: ANIMALS IN REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Regenerative agriculture is more than a human-centered enterprise: it means working with nature and alongside other creatures, to accomplish larger ecological purposes. Our relationships with animals have always been multifaceted, and this episode explores ways those relationships are creating more sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships. We travel throughout the state to farms that are pasturing chickens and cattle; meet a farmer who uses Suffolk horses for farm work; and learn how bison are supporting the restoration of Darby Plains.

EPISODE 5: PLANTS AS FOOD AND MEDICINE

Herbalism is seeing a huge rise in popularity, as more and more people turn to natural remedies to keep their bodies healthy. In this episode of Grounded Hope we explore the American medical botanical movement called Eclecticism through a visit to the Lloyd Library in Cincinnati; visit Dawn



RENEE WILDE

soda fountain, which doubles as a delicious apothecary; drop in on a class at Agraria about foraging for backyard wild edibles; and take a walk in the woods at United Plant Savers, an Ohio organization that's working to save medicinal plants in forests around the world.

EPISODE 6: BUILDING HEALTH FROM THE GROUND UP

In this episode, we turn to the ground beneath our feet to bring you stories from two agricultural pioneers in Ohio. One is a farmer David Brandt, who turned to cover crops in the 1970s to replenish the soil in his fields. The other is an award-winning soil scientist Dr. Rattan Lal, who is researching how healthy soils can be used to combat climate change. We wrap up this episode at Guided by Mushrooms, an urban mushroom farm in Dayton whose gourmet mushrooms are not only good for you but also good for your soil.

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

Each Grounded Hope episode is paired with Resources for Educators curated by our Humanities Scholars Beth Bridgeman from Antioch College, and Rick Livingston from Ohio State University. Resources include discussion questions, links to relevant podcasts and videos, suggestions for further reading, and recipes.

Here are a few samples:


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the costs and benefits—human, environmental, social, economic, political—of food production and consumption today? (Episode 1)
2. Leah Penniman's book is called *Farming While Black*. In what ways might the experiences and concerns of Black farmers be distinct from those of white farmers (or farmers of other ethnicities)? (Episode 2)
3. In what context did the U.S. government first take up agroforestry? What were the benefits of large-scale agroforestry initiatives like the Great Plains Shelterbelt? (Episode 3)
4. What makes bison a “keystone species” for prairie ecosystems? How does their behavior support biodiversity on the prairie? (Episode 4)
5. Many of the plants Janet Lasley mentions tend to be regarded as “weeds:” dandelions, purslane, lambs quarters, clover. What's the difference between weeds and cultivated crops? (Episode 5)


Agraria

BY THE NUMBERS


Distributed 1,058 lbs of produce in 2020




Connected 800 professional and beginning Black farmers and allies through our growing Black Farmer Network for roundtables, updates, and mentoring




Even with some events canceled or postponed due to COVID-19, hosted 2386 people for 18 conferences and workshops in 2020




Recorded over 140 bird species sightings




Served over 300 K-12 students through our online and in-person programming. Some of our educational videos reached over 5000 views!



Planted 1,500 native trees and shrubs



Cleared 25 acres of honeysuckle



ROSE HARDESTY

Food as Pharmacy

BY PEGGY NESTOR

Nutrition is having a moment. There is growing recognition of the power of real, whole food to protect and heal. A very challenging 2020 brought new urgency to tapping the potential of food to boost our immunity, provide for a healthy metabolism and gut microbiome, and to tame chronic inflammation.

Nutrition is so much more complex than a collection of vitamins and minerals, according to Leslie Edmunds, a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and owner of Clem&Thyme Nutrition, a private practice just outside of Yellow Springs. She received her training in medical dietetics from The Ohio State University and a master's degree in public health from Wright State University and in 2019 was named "Ohio's Young Dietitian of the Year" by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Leslie and her team of seven registered dietitians provide individual nutrition therapy and, after pandemic restrictions are lifted, will resume group health education and wellness activities in their newly expanded office.

Leslie describes herself as being passionate about getting to the root of our health problems. "We are a 'functional practice,'" she says. They want to figure out "why you are having your issues and not just apply a band aid." Rather than simply prescribe a restrictive diet for someone with digestive complaints, they do testing to identify the cause. "Maybe it's inadequate digestive or pancreatic enzymes or maybe an overgrowth of bacteria in the small intestine," she said. "Once we know the cause, we can repair, replenish, reinoculate the gut and get you back to eating a variety of foods rather than a very limited diet. We work on incorporating more nutrients and achieving better lifestyle habits in an effort to reduce medications."

One frequently hears the phrase "real, whole food." Real food, according to Leslie, is food our ancestors would have eaten and not something concocted in a factory or laboratory. Whole food implies food in its most natural, minimally processed state. If the food is in a package it can be called real food if the ingredient list reflects food our ancestors would have recognized—without the food dyes, artificial sweeteners, and artificial flavors.

Eating locally and buying from local farmers and

producers is a priority for Leslie. She likes knowing where her food comes from. Eating locally also implies eating seasonally. Food grown close to home has a smaller carbon footprint, and buying locally supports our growers and strengthens our local economy. And in-season produce tastes better too!

Building healthy relationships with food is a priority for Leslie, a busy mother of three young children. Most important is parents' modeling behavior. Leslie suggests actively involving children in grocery shopping, reviewing recipes for the week, cooking and gardening. Include vegetables at every meal. Introduce novelty and a sense of adventure in trying new foods. Avoid labels of "good" or "bad," as it creates a negative relationship with food.

A goal for all of us is eating the colors of the rainbow daily, including cruciferous vegetables, leafy greens and other brightly colored veggies. For older adults, Leslie recommends prioritizing protein. Most are not getting adequate protein and can lose muscle mass rapidly. Vitamin D can be an issue too. It has many roles in the body, including boosting immune function, and she recommends monitoring vitamin D levels.

Clem&Thyme Nutrition does not take a cookie-cutter approach to nutrition, handing out a food pyramid to every client. Their goal is to balance the client's enjoyment of food with their personalized nutritional needs. "Enjoying life will always be my top priority, and I will instill the same passion in my clients," says Leslie.

To learn more about Clem&Thyme Nutrition call 937-206-1131, visit their website at www.clemandthyme.com. You can also find them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ClemAndThymeNutrition> and on Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/clemandthymenutrition/> *Peggy Nestor is a volunteer at Agraria and worked in public health for many years. She is on the planning committee for the Nourishing Life conference, as well as the Pathways to Regeneration: Water conference.*



COURTESY OF LESLIE EDMONDS

for argiope

BY GABBY LOOMIS-AMRHEIN

where is your stabilimentum?
she eagerly asks

her perfect zig-zag reminds me
that hers is north south
north south north south north south

so the sun which is east west east west
will bring dinner buzzing and flitting
to her door west east west east
while trying to pass through into light and warmth

things get sticky

i say i'm not sure
point with uncertainty to my sternum

but she is busy between the tulsi and the peppermint
shaking her house to ward the distracted vole
lest he stumble through her loom again



this all makes sense-
we agree after our respective waverings-
with what little we know of each other

and we go on about our late summer afternoons
happy to share space in the garden
weaving dinner
finding home

Nature-Based Education DURING A PANDEMIC

BY DAVID DIAMOND

What does a center built around experiential learning have to offer during a pandemic? How can we reach students in public schools when they and their teachers are all working from home and no field trips are allowed?

Our education team pondered these questions last summer as we reached out to each other through the phone and internet. Very quickly, Meredith Florkey dreamed up The Big Map-Out!, our first piece of remote education curriculum. Designed as a flexible program that students can do from home, at school, or both, The Big Map-Out! challenges students to develop their own relationship with their outdoor space, whether it is a schoolyard, backyard, or a patch of sidewalk near their home.

Sarah Amin, the Project-Based Learning Foundations teacher for grades K-3 at Mills Lawn Elementary in Yellow Springs adopted the program for all 180 of her students. The students study one feature of their space followed by

another—soil, trees, mammals, landmarks, arthropods, etc.—recording their reflections in a journal and gradually filling a map over the course of the entire school year.

Meredith moved on from Agraria in order to devote more time to her nature education consulting business, and our education staff continued the program. Each week, we sent Sarah a lesson plan and a video, and the results have been transformative. Since all Yellow Springs students were remote for the majority of the school year, The Big Map-Out! allowed them to get away from their computers and closer to the natural world than distance-learning would normally require. Students from all grades submitted wonderful pictures and videos to show their progress, and Sarah said that the program helped her reconnect with nature in a way that she hasn't for years.

The success of The Big Map-Out! has inspired us to expand the program, both by reaching up to 6th- or



Story time for nature campers

8th-grade level and by involving new partner schools. We plan to host teachers in an informal workshop to assess their needs for the coming year, and then to use the videos and lesson plans we already have, adding and modifying where necessary. After seeing the tremendous impact this program has had during the pandemic, we can't wait to see it thrive in new educational "ecosystems!"

Our in-person Nature School programs are also growing. Last fall, we instituted a Coronavirus Safety Plan and downsized our programs to allow us to once again host children and families in-person at Agraria. Many youth programs throughout Ohio remained closed, but we saw an opportunity to serve families through our masked, all-outdoor activities. And people took advantage of that opportunity. Our Winter Camp, Deep Winter Camp, and pilot After-School Program have all been at capacity! And while field trips were banned by the state, several incredible opportunities emerged this spring. High school and middle school students from the Miami Valley School managed the transportation issues and visited Agraria to study soil

health and biodiversity, and also get their hands in the soil for invasive removal. Meanwhile, middle schoolers from Yellow Springs Schools visited Agraria and Glen Helen to reclaim part of a key 7th-grade tradition—the Into the Wild project. Since the communal 53-

mile bike ride and camping integral to this project was impossible this past fall, students hiked along our recently cleared, not-yet-constructed bike path from their school to Agraria, where they monitored bluebird boxes and counted macroinvertebrates in Jacoby Creek. We were excited to have something to offer these students, who spent much of the year in distance learning!

This summer, the Nature School begins a new partnership with KIND Dayton, a free inner-city youth education organization in Dayton that serves K-6 students. KIND's focus on the holistic well-being of children led them to partner with Agraria to offer an outdoor experience beyond what is possible in Dayton. Every other Saturday throughout the summer, these children will be picked up in Agraria's new passenger van and come for a full-day visit, where they will participate in the Nature School's program of nature connection and outdoor skills.

It has been a welcome respite from pandemic monotony to see the children explore and play all over Agraria in every kind of weather as they built fires and shelters, worked together to cross Jacoby Creek, and discovered new human and non-human friends. The outpouring of interest in our in-person programs and field trips shows us that our community is ready for all Agraria has to offer.

David Diamond is education coordinator at Agraria.

Agraria received the 2021 Connect to Nature Site Award presented by Miami Valley Leave No Child Inside (MVLNCI). Shown from left are Teddy Pierson, a naturalist and member of the Agraria land team, student Jaelah Nonis, education team member Kelly Hudson, student Ariana Nonis, Doug Horvath, of Five Rivers Metro Parks, and education team member Emily Foubert.



Students from the Miami Valley School in Dayton moved the chicken tractor during their four-day residency at Agraria. They also planted a garden, pulled garlic mustard and learned about soil health and water quality. Toad bracelets were all the rage at Nature Camp during mating season for Eastern Singing Toads on Agraria.



MIAMI VALLEY SCHOOL & DAVID DIAMOND





The Big Map Out! program and students' tools and books were funded by:

- The Yellow Springs Community Foundation
- The Mills Lawn PTO
- The Yellow Springs School District
- The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
- Agraria



It forced us out of the house even when the weather was not so great. We explored and uncovered things we didn't normally think about. [I liked] seeing him going outdoors with a curious mind and thinking about how to take notes and report back to his teachers and classmates.

Chris Bongorno, parent



Scenes from the Big Map Out! celebration in May.

Big Map-Out!

REFLECTIONS

This has been an incredible project. During the pandemic, we were pushing for kids to outdoors more. As adults it was exhausting for us to be online all day, so you know it was exhausting for the kids as well. What started changing [after the program started] was that students were becoming more and more excited about their outdoor spaces. And not only more connected to their environment, but also more connected to me, their nature teacher. Every time I saw them, in the store downtown or wherever, they wanted to tell me what they had found. Even now when they're back in school, they come to tell me what they've found. Going outside and investigating has become a habit for them. They're investigators. They're noting things and the relationship between living things. It's just fun! And I'm learning with them. I'm also investigating. I was not really connected to nature before. I was afraid of spiders. And now I'm not. I would call Emily and say, "Oh, this is changing my life."

Sarah Amin, K-3 Foundations Teacher/Teacher Support Specialist, Mill Lawn School



It was really cool. I really liked it that it mostly involved outside. I learned how to make a mandala and that was fun. Now sometimes when I'm in my bedroom with the window open and I'm listening to the birds, I hear a certain bird that I pay attention. I like how it sings.

Riley Akers, first grade, Mills Lawn School

Building community through reskilling

BY BETH BRIDGEMAN

I love volunteering at Agraria because it gives me the perfect opportunity to engage in something that is foundationally important to me: "reskilling," or helping folks to re-access their embodied knowledge of how to do things, how to resist "the great forgetting" that is so foundational to capitalism.

In David Foster Wallace's famous commencement speech at Kenyon in 2005, he spoke of the value of real education as "not being about the capacity to think, but rather about the choice of what to think about," of "adjusting our default setting" beyond our self-centered realities and being aware of what is "real and essential."

What I love about sharing reskilling workshops at Agraria is using these opportunities as tools for mindfulness and community-building. One of the consequences of the specialization trend and monetization of the economy is that skills that were once common among the general population, skills that by their nature contributed to a sense of community, skills that could not be accomplished without thought and intention, are now shared by few.

Reskilling brings deep satisfaction. It is empowering for many reasons. I love the feeling of connection I get when I mend, knit, make baskets, dye, save seeds, ferment, preserve, do natural building, etc. And then I also love the meditative nature of reskilling, the mindfulness and the non-linear, "kairos" aspect of slowing down and being present.

During the summer of 2020, when it was so challenging to gather, it was gratifying to have been invited to harvest milky oats with Miller Fellow students and Agraria volunteers, bending over together in the oat fields, harvesting by hand, watching the hand-scything of the field afterward, and then in the afternoon making milky oat tincture with a group of interested folks.

Similarly, I felt a powerful sense of connection to the past, present, future and my place in all of it when building the cob oven and benches that now grace the front campus at Agraria. While digging a large two-foot-deep hole for the foundation of the oven, we unearthed many powerful examples of the skills of those who have gone before:



AMY HARPER

Beth Bridgeman and Marianthe Bickett fired up Agraria's cob oven for the first time in May for a staff pizza party. They oven was built last year as part of a workshop led by Bridgeman with assistance from Bickett.

hand-forged horseshoes, hand-hewn nails, a crowbar, and bits of a coal hod among other things. Stomping the cool clay, sand, water and straw together with our bare feet to make the cob grounded me mindfully in the present, and in working with so many wonderful young people on this project, I sensed the joyful future as well.

The word "share" is an important component of reskilling. It is all about peer-to-peer sharing and lifting each other up. I love the intergenerationality of it. I love seeing my children teach themselves and others skills that they have relearned. Last summer my son and a friend taught themselves how to tan sheep hides. My daughter has taught herself multiple woodworking skills and is especially attracted to the old ways and tools of this profession. My daughter-in-law amazes me with her handwork skills.

Phillip Barnes describes reskilling as "the acquisition of skills essential to satisfy basic needs in a localized and carbon-constrained future... a process, ongoing and never-ending, that evolves as conditions change and contexts change. It is first and foremost a community-oriented method... While one can learn reskilling by watching a video or reading a book, it is the face-to-face interactions that build community... where a talented and knowledgeable individual or group teaches other people what they know." The old barn at Agraria offers such a beautiful space for this community-building.

I think Arthur Morgan had all of this in mind when he founded Community Solutions, then called Community Service. Reskilling encompasses both "service" and "solutions," and I am glad I have found a reskilling home here, at Agraria.

Beth Bridgeman is Associate Professor of Cooperative Education at Antioch College and a regular volunteer at Agraria.

Volunteers

JOIN US AT THE FARM

As an organization devoted to fostering community resilience, volunteer participation is at the heart of everything we do. This year volunteers provided support for barn building projects, invasive removal, brush clearing, gardening and weeding, special events, education, our Produce Perks/SNAPS program, and our food assistance programs. We would love to add your name to our volunteer list! Contact Rose Hardesty at volunteer@communitysolution.org or 937-767-2161 for more information.



BY AMY HARPER

Snapshots Around and About Agraria

Our work to cultivate a strong local food system has expanded and become a major focus for Agraria. The seeds we have been sowing, literally and figuratively, for the last few years have begun to bear fruit, with projects on and off the farm. We are continuing our support of the Yellow Springs Farmers Market and hope to expand to a market of our own pending the opening of a farm store and welcome center.

MELROSE ACRES

Agraria closed in April on the purchase of property that will enable development of the Melrose Acres Urban Agriculture Center in South Springfield. The goal of the project is to increase food security in the area, a severe food desert, along with the self-reliance of neighborhood residents.



It has long term implications, not only for food access in south Springfield, but also for strengthening the local food system and building community and regional resilience.

The purchase of the 7.5-acre parcel and adjoining house was made possible by a four-year \$400,000 USDA-NIFA grant awarded last year to Agraria in partnership with the nonprofit Springfield Urban Plantfolk (S.O.U.P.). Senator Sherrod Brown's support helped secure the grant. S.O.U.P. had been using part of the parcel for several years to grow vegetables and house bees. The purchase will

allow S.O.U.P. to expand food production on site, including fruit, honey and egg production; increase afterschool and community-based educational programs; and engage neighborhood residents in growing, harvesting, selling, and purchasing food at existing summer farm stands. The house adjacent to the garden site will be renovated to house Melrose Acres' educational programming as well as community events. S.O.U.P. coordinator Sherry Chen is the project lead for development of Melrose Acres, which reflects the historic name of the neighborhood where the center is located. Other partners include neighborhood residents, Central State University Extension (CSUE), Wittenberg University, Opportunities for Individual Change, and 1159 South, a nonprofit citizen group in Springfield.

Agraria will serve as an educational resource, continuing a longstanding partnership with S.O.U.P. that includes collaboration on a 2017 Farm to School project for the Springfield City Schools. Last year, Agraria provided produce to S.O.U.P., through its COVID-related food distribution program, to sell at the neighborhood farmstands coordinated by the nonprofit. S.O.U.P. is also partnering with Agraria on the Regenerative Farming Fellowship program. Two South Springfield residents are Fellows in the program and have established their training plots on Melrose Acres. Chen will serve as their on-site mentor. CSUE has consulted with S.O.U.P. on site layout and soil testing and will also provide training and consultation throughout the project.

Chen has attracted a corps of volunteers who have already developed a collaborative Porch Garden Project, a plant sale fundraiser, a production garden, and zoom workshops on food, gardening, and nutrition.



HUSTON ROAD

The new high tunnel on Huston Road is a visible sign of Agraria's developing capacity for agricultural production and training.

Growing inside the high tunnel are a variety of vegetables that Agraria plans to either sell or donate to area food pantries and farm stands in food insecure areas. Sweet potato plants growing alongside the other vegetables are part of a research project conducted by Dr. Marcus Nagle, professor of horticulture at Central State University. A plot outside the hoophouse is also dedicated to the sweet potato research project, which explores the ability of certain varieties to thrive in northern climes.

Visitors to the site this year may also see Fellows from Agraria's new Regenerative Training and Incubation program for beginning and underserved farmers offered in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy and Central State University. Partner farmer Jeremy Schleining will bring some color to the Huston Road site later this year with his plot of cut flowers.

Funding for the high tunnel, which was installed by Agraria staff led by VISTA Xinyuan Shi, was provided by an EQIP grant. The grant also funded installation of a well on that site and another site on Agraria. We intend to plant trees along the perimeter to provide a natural privacy fence



Agraria staff and volunteers, led by VISTA Xinyuan Shi, installed a new high tunnel on Huston Road.

between the site and the neighboring property.

Also planned for the Huston Road site is a Class 2 composting facility, which will serve local residents. Funding for the project was provided by a grant from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.



BOB HUSTON

SILVOPASTURE

Since the purchase of Agraria we've been planning to integrate silvopasture and managed rotational grazing into our farming practices because of the role they play in building and maintaining ecosystem health. Silvopasture is an agroforestry practice that combines trees with livestock and forage production. Livestock in a managed rotational grazing system are pastured in fenced-off sections and moved regularly to prevent overgrazing. The practice builds healthy

soil and leads to healthy animals.

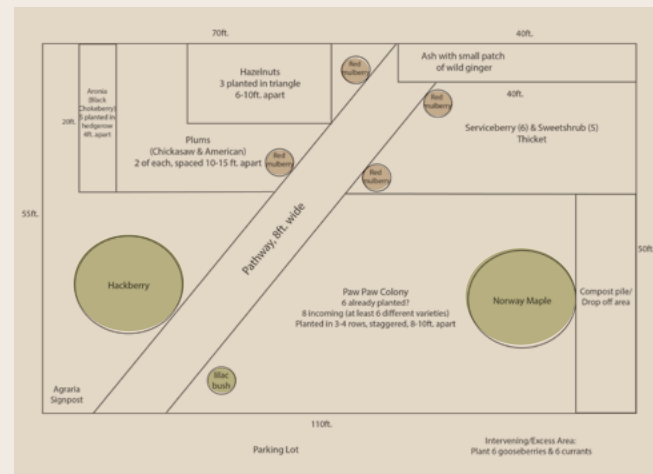
We added chickens and ducks last year to our front campus. The EQIP grant we received provided funding for a well and perimeter fencing around the 28-acre rotational grazing pasture. We are hosting a fencing workshop this fall in partnership with the Tecumseh Land Trust and Central State University. Xinyuan Shi, who has an interest in agroforestry, created a preliminary design for a 3-acre silvopasture

installation, and we expect to plant root stock and cuttings from trees on Agraria in the area within the next year along with native trees purchased from area nurseries. We are planting a forage crop in the pasture this year, and we expect to introduce sheep next year in partnership with farmer Jason Ward.

These projects will help demonstrate the benefits of agroforestry and managed-rotational to area farmers and landowners, delight kids in our nature programs, and serve as a learning experience for the many interns we host at Agraria.

FOOD FOREST

Another agroforestry practice will be added this year--the installation of a food forest, designed by Shi. Her design is being planted in the front yard surrounding the Agraria sign. To the trees that are already growing there, we are adding hazelnuts, plums, red mulberries, chokeberry, wild ginger, and a paw paw colony. The food forest will model “backyard” food forest style plantings, serving our educational mission, while creating a seed and scion bank for future tree nursery activities (growing from seed grafting/budding, etc.) and permaculture practices, reducing lawn maintenance, and producing fruit and nut trees that are not commonly grown in the area.



PERENNIAL GARDEN

Shi also repurposed the pantry garden put in last year by our land team, shifting the plantings from annuals to perennials, but with a continued focus on edibles. Several varieties of berries were planted this year along with asparagus. This will expand our own growing operation and help establish a longer lasting, low maintenance “backyard” garden. It will serve as a demonstration garden while also filling a market gap in the community since many of the crops are not commonly grown in the area. They include



VISTA Xinyuan Shi in Agraria's perennial garden.

raspberries, strawberries, currants, gooseberries, and jostaberries. The garden also has potential to expand to a larger U-pick garden. A portion of what we raise will be donated to S.O.U.P. for sale at their neighborhood farm stands in Springfield.

GIVING GARDENS

The Giving Garden Challenge, a partnership between Dayton Regional Green (DRG3), Five Rivers Metroparks, and Agraria, was launched on Earth Day 2021 to encourage friendly competition between church, community, and individual gardens that will be developing regenerative practices and/or growing food for their neighbors. Practices that will be incorporated in participating gardens include incorporating native species, removing invasive species,



New plant starts for the Agraria high tunnel.

creating and maintaining healthy soil, and eliminating chemicals. An educational event at Agraria in late May included education and presentations on pollinators, raised beds, rain gardens, and composting. To learn more about the Giving Garden Challenge, visit the DRG3 website.

REGIONAL FOOD & FARM PARTNERSHIPS

Our food work flourishes through multiple partnerships. These include our work with the Tecumseh Land Trust, with whom we have partnered on three Growing Green Conferences and who assists us with our conservation easements and EQIP applications; our work with several regional partners on a USDA food system planning grant; food security work with The Yellow Springs Community Foundation and the Yellow Springs Senior Center; Wildlife Certification work with several Yellow Springs Partners; and a working partnership with Co-op Dayton. Central State University Extension continues to provide us and our farmer partners significant support. Agraria was also instrumental in bringing a Farms and Forestry Climate Adaptation online workshop to Ohio in partnership with OSU Extension and the National Institute for Applied Climate Science.

MARY'S WAY

By the time this issue of Agraria Journal is published, construction of Mary's Way, the bikepath connecting Agraria and Yellow Springs, should be about to start or already underway. Agraria's partnership with AmeriCorps NCCC helped keep this long-anticipated project on schedule. Last year, from October to December, a six-member team from AmeriCorps NCCC worked with Agraria's land team to clear the way for construction of the mile-long paved trail. They removed honeysuckle and trees along the route, cleared brush, and hauled and rived logs. In the process, they helped generate fence posts, lumber that will be milled and used for construction projects on Agraria, and firewood that



was donated to Yellow Springs Pottery. They also created brush piles along the way using the material they cleared to create mitigative habitat for small animals and birds.

Plans for the trail, beyond construction, include native plantings alongside the trail, interpretive signage, benches, and a terminus with a patio, bike racks, and a bike repair station adjacent to Agraria's historic barn. The trail is scheduled for completion in August. Stay tuned for information about our grand opening celebration.

JACOBY CREEK STREAM & WETLAND RESTORATION

The branches of honeysuckle lying in profusion along the Jacoby Creek corridor through Agraria are signs of the imminent change in store for this environmentally sensitive water way. Work crews from Cincinnati-based Green Corps



cut down honeysuckle along the creek and its tributaries in 2019 in preparation for the major work set to begin this fall: rehabilitation and restoration of the stream and surrounding wetlands by The Nature Conservancy.

Planning for the project began soon after the purchase

of Agraria, in 2017, by the Arthur Morgan Institute for Community Solutions (now known as Agraria). If all goes as planned, crews will begin the major work this fall of restoring meanders to the stream, which was channelized to increase the amount of land available for agricultural production, rehabilitating and restoring surrounding wetlands, and replanting the restored areas with native trees and plants. A conservation easement protects the 60 acres covered by the project as well as an adjoining 20 acres of productive farmland on Agraria.

TNC is collaborating with Agraria on the selection of native plantings for the outer buffer zone, which will be used to explore and demonstrate permaculture and riparian agroforestry. Landowners can use these practices along riverine corridors and other water ways to diversify their cropping systems while also conserving soil and water health.

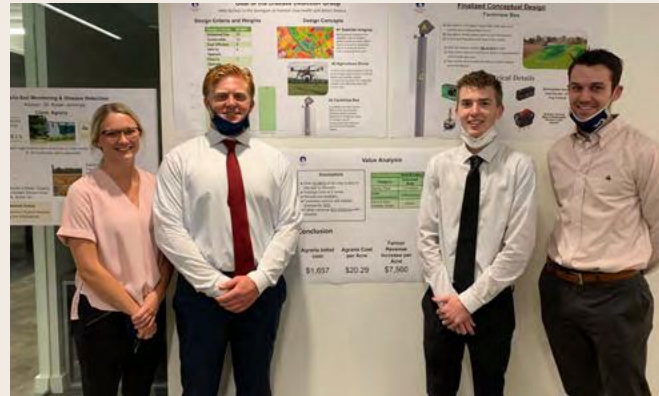
RESEARCH ON AGRARIA

One of Agraria's goals from the beginning was to serve as a site for studying the impact of regenerative practices on ecosystem health, the local food system, and human health. Our partnerships with area institutions and other organizations have generated a number of projects.

Silphium seedlings that went in the ground last year as part of trial begun in partnership with the Kansas-based Land Institute have re-emerged after their winter sleep, demonstrating their ability to survive and even thrive in the southwest Ohio bioregion. The goal of the research is to determine which ecotypes from other regions perform best in this area and whether *Silphium integrifolium* can serve as perennial conservation species in flood-prone riparian borders. Silphium is a new perennial oilseed crop that is useful for forage, revegetation and erosion control, and as a pollinator resource.



CSU students with field assistant Ashley Cordle checking CSU hives on Agraria



Central State University (CSU), an 1890 land grant institution, signed an MOU with Agraria/Community Solutions in 2019, formalizing a partnership that includes collaboration on research and Extension initiatives.

A plot of sweet potato seedlings was planted this spring on Agraria, which will serve as a mirror site for comparing with field trials at CSU, using sweet potato accessions provided by the USDA germplasm. The research will explore organic vs conventional practices, comparing the ability of plants to survive and produce in colder climates. CSU researcher Dr. Marcus Nagle, professor of horticulture in the Agricultural Research and Development Program, is the project lead for this research. He also partnered with The Nature Conservancy to conduct research on Agraria to determine whether and how glyphosate, when used to eradicate honeysuckle, moves in the soil.

Honeybees are the focus of a research project by another CSU researcher, Dr. Hongmei Li-Byarlay, assistant professor of entomology. The research will explore how farm landscape types (organic, conventional, and roadside) affect levels of stresses, both biotic (such as pathogenic viral infections) and abiotic (such as pesticide exposures), and how these levels affect bee development. A hive as well as raspberry stems will be placed on Agraria to study both honeybees and small carpenter bees.

CSU researcher and soil scientist Sakthi Subburayala is monitoring soil and water quality on Agraria and other sites in connection with the Jacoby Partnership Project spearheaded by The Tecumseh Land Trust. Agraria is one of several partners in this five-year project, which aims to encourage conservation practices and farmland preservation with two subwatersheds of the Little Miami River.

We are also exploring collaborations with CSU and others on elderberry and mushroom production on Agraria for both research and education purposes.

Collecting data about bee diversity on Agraria is the aim of a study by Wright State University student Adam

Foster. The study area borders Jacoby Creek and will provide important baseline data for exploring changes in pollinator diversity as a result of the TNC restoration project.

The TNC restoration of Jacoby Creek also figures in another research project that has yet to begin: a study to investigate the potential for harvesting mycorrhizal fungi to improve tree seedling growth and survival. The TNC provided funding to Rua Lab at Wright State University to conduct this research.

Other collaborations with Wright State researchers that have been explored include ornithology field work and feeding of coyotes within anthropogenic environments.

We have served as a research site for a number of student projects in the University of Dayton School of Engineering. The two projects this year focused on soil and crop health. The goal of one student team was to develop a soil monitoring product that could be used by small-scale farms to collect samples and analyze them for nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and pH levels. The aim of the other project team was to design a device for monitoring crop health and detecting disease in plants at an early stage in their development. Both teams presented their final designs during a presentation in April.

INTERNSHIPS

Agraria has served as a site for student internships since its founding, benefiting both the student interns as well as our organization. Since 2020, we have hosted seven Antioch College students in The Miller Fellowship Program

administered by the Yellow Springs Community Foundation. The program offers paid internships for students to work in area non-profits. Our Miller Fellows have helped develop and manage our website, amplify our social media presence, coordinate events and programming, create GIS mapping, and have worked on a variety of projects with our land team, among other things. In short, they have played a major role in helping Agraria grow and develop. This summer we are hosting Ohio State University student Abigail Titzer, who will be working with our social media team to expand our outreach. UD students on site include Kate Kizer, an engineering student who is designing a water catchment system for the barn, and Josie Weitz, who is assisting the education team. Earlham student Aza Hurwitz of Yellow Springs is assisting the education and the land teams. Ohio University graduate Alberta Dempsey is on staff as an intern with the sweet potato research project.

PHYSICAL PLANT IMPROVEMENTS

We continue to upgrade our 113-year-old bank barn with the goal of housing a welcome center, event space, and farm store. Also planned for the barn are electrical upgrades, a cement floor in the basement donated by CEMEX, and new front doors. The barn, house, and offices received a new paint job and beautiful new red roofs this spring.

A grant from Friends of the Ohio Barns will allow us to begin developing interpretive signage for the barn's welcome center. The signs will depict the history of the barn as well as other aspects of agriculture in Ohio.



BOB HUSTON

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

VIRTUAL EVENTS 2021

JUNE 18-19

Nourishing Life Conference **Online Only.**

This online conference will address the interwoven threads of soil health, nutrition, and community health. Free to attend. Donations encouraged. Keynotes include: Dr. Vandana Shiva, Dr. Drew Ramsey, and Dr. Christine Jones. Register at <https://nourishing-life.eventbrite.com>

SEPT 10-11

Black Farming: Community Land & Food Sovereignty Conference

This year's Black Farming conference will look at the economic impacts and possibilities of the cooperative business model with an emphasis on the power of growing your own food--from seed saving to community gardening--and celebrating the contributions of our Black and underrepresented food and farming community. Keynote speakers include: Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, Leah Penniman, Ira Wallace, and Malik Yakini. Register at: <https://blackfarmingconference2021.eventbrite.com>

OCT 16-17

Arthur Morgan Legacy Symposium

in collaboration with Antioch College
Join us as we explore the legacy and meaning of Arthur Morgan's work in Community, Education, Business, and Water Systems with presenters from across the region and across the planet. More information and registration COMING SOON.

NOV 5-6

Pathways to Regeneration Conference

The ancient waters never left us. This most precious resource has through time continued to move and cycle above, below, around and inside us, and all life. Yet today, water and our relationship with it are imperiled on multiple levels. Join us November 5-6, 2021 as we investigate the water crises that

are impacting municipal systems, industry, and agriculture, all intensified by a changing climate. We will explore water at local, regional, and national levels and the social and environmental justice issues that have arisen. We will hear stories directly from Indigenous peoples, artists, activists, and researchers working to protect water. Most importantly, we will present solutions that are springing up across the planet to restore our memory of and relationship with water. Confirmed Keynotes include Dr. Kelsey Leonard and Isabel Friend. More information and registration COMING SOON.

IN-PERSON EVENTS 2021

AUGUST 14-15

Seed School with Beth Bridgeman **10am**

This course is for farmers, gardeners, seed librarians, students, educators, and anyone who cares about food and the seeds that grow it. Join us and empower yourself! No previous experience necessary. Registration: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/seed-school-tickets-148618236145>



IN-PERSON EVENTS 2021

AUG 22

Annual Meeting/Bike Path Walk **2-4 pm**

Come take a tour, walk the new bike path, and learn about the work we're doing! We will also present awards to volunteers and community leaders. Registration: COMING SOON



OCT 1-3

Nature Resiliency Skillshare: Shelter

Join Arrow Wightman in this resiliency skillshare series as we learn about the important skill of being able to build shelter outdoors with natural materials. Optional camping to test out your shelter skills! Registration: COMING SOON.

OCT 15-17

Nature Resiliency Skillshare: Fire

Join Arrow Wightman in this resiliency skillshare series as we learn about the important skill of being able to build a fire! Participants must bring their own knife. Registration: COMING SOON.



NOV 7

Nature Resiliency Skillshare: Water

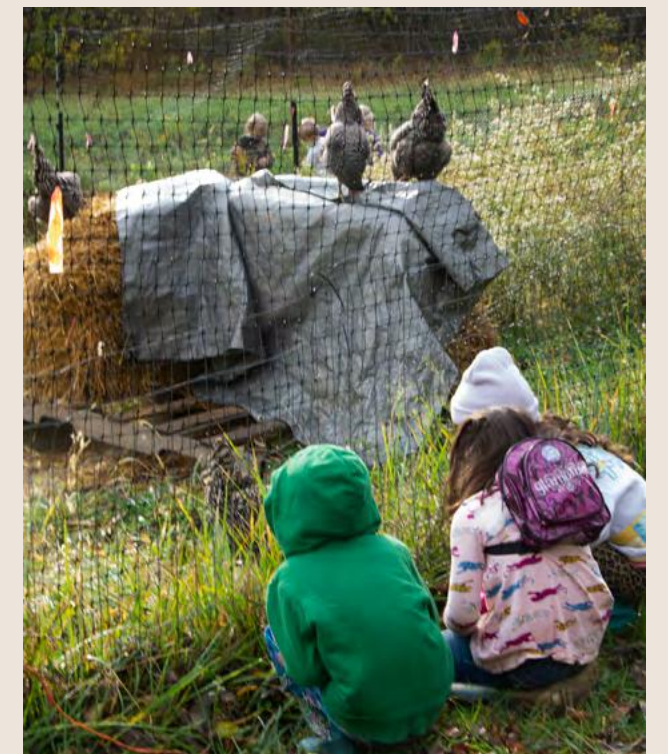
Join Arrow Wightman in this resiliency skillshare series as we learn about the important skill of being able to get clean water out in nature. Registration: COMING SOON.

NOV 19-21

Nature Resiliency Skillshare: Food

Join Arrow Wightman in this resiliency skillshare series as we learn about the important skill of being able to find and cook food for yourself out in nature. This includes foraging, tracking animals, and more. Given the time of year, we'll be incorporating gratitude and reciprocity into this practice. Registration: COMING SOON.

For more updates and information, please visit www.communitysolution.org or email risaacson@communitysolution.org with any questions.



DENNIE EAGLESON

Electric Blue Songs to Nurture the Spirit

BY EMILY FOUBERT

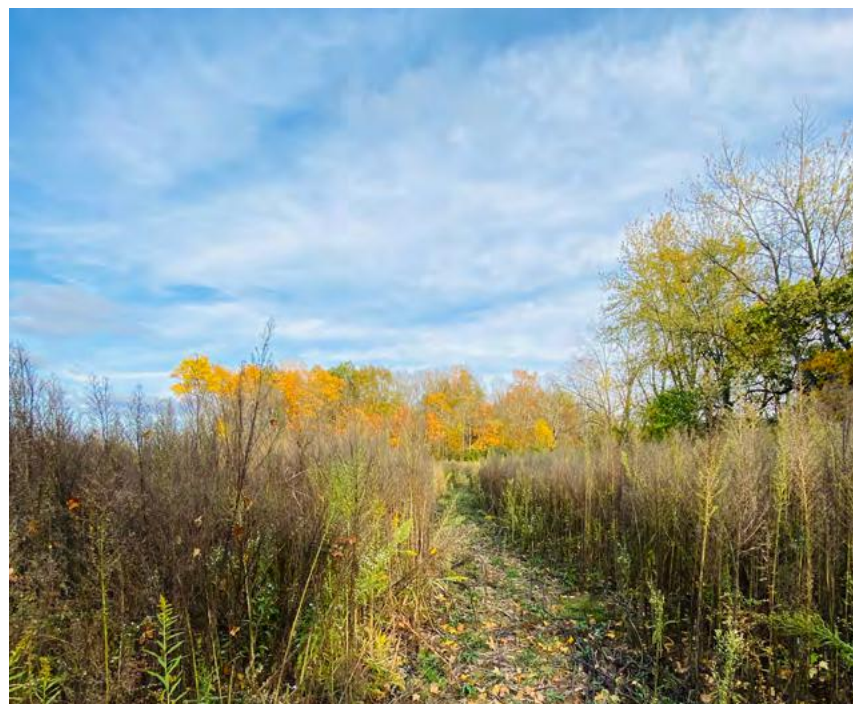
Today on my walk along the bike path past Goes Station, I met a heron rookery. Ten pairs in a sycamore tree, dancing their sticks into the nest together. Their garbling coos like rock doves on the cathedrals of New York City.

And then I went into the wood to say good morning to the river. And there I heard him as I crouched at the bank and paddled a few scoops of water onto my face and into my hair. Indigo Bunting had returned overnight. Singing his descending duos of notes, “Fire fire, where where, here here, don’tchaknow?!”

I responded with bright eyes, outstretched hands, and choked up words that spilled out with a joyful sputter like when you see a long lost loved one: “Hi Mom, hi Granny!” I shouted to the trees in which Indigo sat, too far for me to see, but definitely present.

In many Springs past, my mother would regale me with stories about my grandmother’s relationship with a certain indigo bunting at her home in Granville, Ohio. Every spring Granny would welcome “Mood,” the summer resident indigo bunting, back to the yard with a gentle spoken acknowledgment and note in her journal. My mom, in telling me, was remembering down through the generations, connecting me to Granny through this bird.

Even though Granny died when I was two, I still loved



picturing her in her rose beds in April, gazing up to greet Mood with a smile, while pausing to take a sip of water from her cup decorated with prints of strawberries.

Back on the river this morning, I spoke aloud again to Indigo, “I’m sooo happy to hear from you today. Thanks for coming and sitting with me this morning.” I sat. I cried. And I listened to Indigo sing. The more I heard him, the more I felt my matriarchal lineage fill inside of me. Indigo was a conduit for this moment. Indigo was mom. Indigo was Granny. I told Granny and Mom all about my current life, what I’ve been up to, what I’ve been loving about my days, and the hard parts of life. When indigo sang, I felt their listening ears, beyond this life, assuring me of their presence through his vocal chords, through his beak.

I welcome the indigo buntings back to town with a soft song of my own, of thanks, for their song that foretells of summer; with tears in my eyes for knowing that granny and mama can fly to me in the body of a plump, small electric blue bird; and with a note in my journal of their arrival date: April 5th, 2021.

Emily Foubert is an educator and naturalist at Agraria.

Fundraising UPDATES

BY NAOMI BONGORNO

Agraria’s generous donors, dedicated volunteers, and passionate program participants give our work meaning and make possible our progress. As you’ve seen throughout this Journal, the past year at Agraria has been one of growth and evolution, in which the desire for our work and programs has compelled us forward and expanded our work and reach. Meeting this need is important, both for our community and for us as an organization. To make this possible, we launched the Regenerative Futures Fund in 2021 with a goal of building a consistent foundation of operational support for Agraria during this time of growth. Regenerative Gifts in the form of sustaining monthly donations or a generous multi-year pledge will give Agraria the consistency we need to invest in our wonderful staff, resilient community, and the beautiful land that we steward.

To help move our Regenerative Fund forward, a group of our legacy donors have created a \$100,000 Matching Fund specifically to encourage new supporters to join Agraria! They have championed Agraria since the beginning and hope their dedication to our mission will inspire at least 100 new Regenerative Gifts this year. If you have never attended an Agraria event, volunteered on a work project, or donated to our organization, now is the perfect time. Your Regenerative Gift this year will help build a base of support for Agraria that will ensure our place as a community resource for years to come.

We are grateful for the incredible support we have received through individual gifts and grants, even during a year of pandemic. Since the beginning of 2020, we have received a total of \$460,000 in cash and in-kind contributions from individuals and over \$1.2 million in grant funding.

RECENT GRANTS:

- Baker Heirloom Seed Company
- Clean Ohio Trails Fund
- Christopher Reynolds Foundation
- Farm Credit of Mid-America
- Friends of Ohio Barns
- Greene County Parks and Trails
- HealthPath Foundation
- Kettering Family Philanthropies
- Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
- Mills Lawn PTO
- Morgan Family Foundation
- National Corporation for Community Service
- National Farmers’ Union
- National Resource Conservation Service
- Nationwide Insurance
- Ohio Council for The Humanities
- Ohio Community Development Corporation
- Ohio Environmental Protection Agency
- Ohio Farm Bureau Federation
- Ohio Farmers’ Union
- Patagonia Foundation
- Reynolds and Reynolds Associate's Foundation
- Rising Star Coffee Roasters
- The Nature Conservancy
- United States Department of Agriculture
- Vectren Foundation
- Village of Yellow Springs Green Space Fund
- Yavanna Foundation
- Yellow Springs Community Foundation

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



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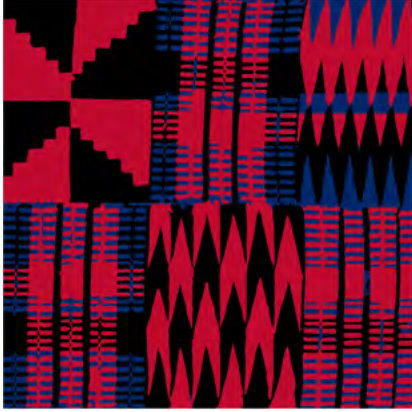
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AGRARIA CENTER FOR REGENERATIVE PRACTICE PRESENTS



BLACK

FARMING

COMMUNITY LAND & FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Save the Date!

September 10th & 11th 2021

Online registration: <https://blackfarmingconference2021.eventbrite.com>

This event is **FREE** and open to the public.

Keynote Speakers: Leah Penniman, author of *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, Malik Yakini, co-founder and Executive Director of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, author of *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, and Ira Wallace, worker/owner of the cooperatively managed Southern Exposure Seed Exchange.

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