

# WEST VIRGINIA AGRARIAN COMMONS FARM ACQUISITION



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# OVERVIEW

The [West Virginia Agrarian Commons](#) is collaborating with the Agrarian Trust, the Fayette County Farmland Protection Board, the Fayette County Commission, and Fayette County Urban Renewal Authority to realize a new land-based economy in the post-coal region of Southern West Virginia through the support for local farm development, increased food access, security, and equity.

Agrarian Trust is supporting the raising of funds to acquire the 82 acre Whitlock Farm, currently owned by the Fayette County Farmland Protection Board. Once acquired, the West Virginia AC will convey two equitable 99+year leases for New Roots Community Farm and an emerging agricultural producer cooperative. New Roots Community Farm will continue food access work, further develop models for producer and consumer education regarding food system issues, and continue aggregation and distribution of local food products as members of [Turnow: Appalachian Farm Collective](#). The agricultural producer cooperative will collectively farm vegetables, flowers, fruit, meat, poultry and mushrooms. This multiple-leaseholder collaboration will serve as a model of a cooperative labor system and progressive agroecological production practices-- widely applicable across the region. New Roots Community Farm and the producer cooperative will work closely together to address identified barriers in the development of a just food system.

At the heart of this collaboration is Fayette County, West Virginia. Fayette County is an innovative and experienced national example of successful farmland conservation. Utilizing a recording fee surcharge, the County has raised funds to leverage USDA/NRCS ACEP-ALE (and formerly FRPP) funding to conserve a number of farms over the years. Recognizing agriculture as a “life support” industry, the County stepped forward and acquired the Whitlock Farm in 2016 to protect the farm with a conservation easement.

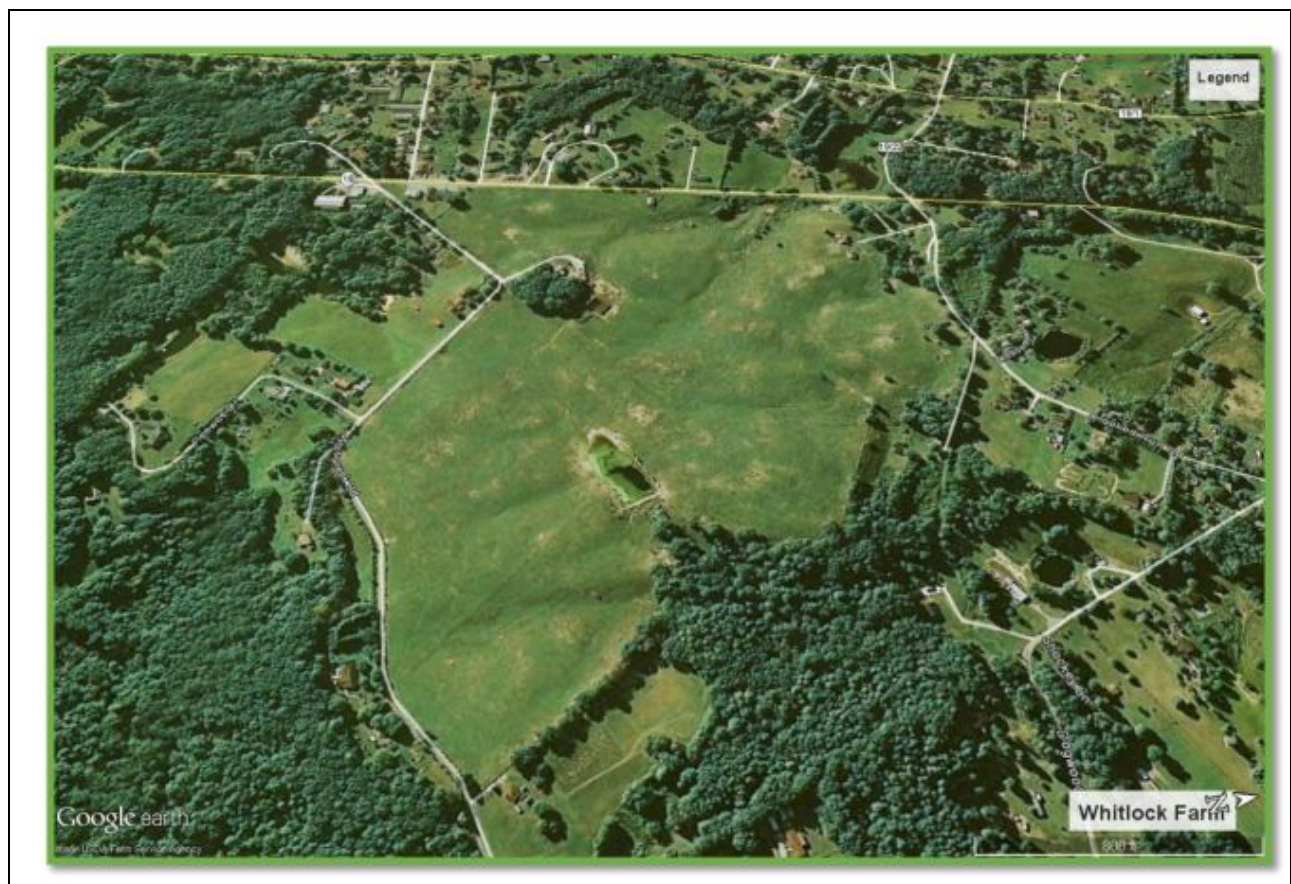
The County chose to invest in Whitlock Farm because of the property’s proximity to the town of Fayetteville and its history of farming. The land is ideal for conservation because “it is located in an area susceptible to development; it includes soils appropriate for crop production as well as livestock production, and is home to wetlands and wildlife habitat in need of protection.” After acquiring the farm, the County then worked with local community stakeholders to develop a vision for the farm to support the local community and agrarian economy, and to serve as a model for sustainable development. As identified in the County’s [feasibility study](#) for the project, “This type of purchase by a Farmland Protection Board is atypical and presents a new strategy and approach for protecting agricultural property in West Virginia.” Now, the County has identified the Agrarian Commons model as the ideal next step in preserving and supporting the land for next generation equitable agricultural stewardship. Sale of the Whitlock Farm to the West Virginia Agrarian Commons will further protect this land for agricultural use for community

benefit, and the County will reinvest funds from the sale back into the farmland protection program.

New Roots Community Farm, Fayette County Farmland Protection Board, and the Agrarian Commons will continue their collaboration to increase the number of easements on farms as well as properties transferred or purchased by the WV Agrarian Commons. This is an opportunity to ensure that land with secure tenure is available to the next generation of West Virginia Farmers.

The West Virginia Agrarian Commons is a new and innovative model for further preserving Appalachia's proud agrarian way of life in community-centered land-holding entities. The Commons will provide affordable land access, permanent and equitable land tenure, investments in soil and ecosystem health, as well as layered enterprise and partnership opportunities for next generation farmers. The West Virginia AC's vision of community ownership resounds in possibilities for Appalachian people, for whom there is a long history of solidarity and collective action against corporate financial extraction interests, from multiple 20th century coal miner strikes to more recent state-wide strikes initiated by teachers and librarians. The vision of community ownership affirms this history and stands in stark contrast to the historic trend of land accumulation by absentee land holding and development companies.

Learn more at: <https://agrariantrust.org/agrariancommons/support-wv/>





## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE REGION?

Southern West Virginia is a place of unbelievable natural beauty and rich cultural history. It represents the largest protected natural river habitat east of the Mississippi, and one of largest mid-latitude contiguous natural areas on earth. The West Virginia Agrarian Commons recognizes this beauty and seeks to bring forth a new land-based agrarian economy to hold it “in common” for the present and future health of people and the earth.

Many communities in West Virginia were created directly as a result of the building of camps and towns to house workers for natural resource extraction; as a result, absentee land ownership by out-of-state land holding companies has remained a norm for over a century. While coal provided the foundation for industrialization throughout the United States, Appalachia supplied the raw materials and the human labor to power this monumental growth while becoming a “national sacrifice zone” in the process. Strip mining, mountaintop removal mining, drilling, and various other forms of extraction have destroyed West Virginia mountains and streams. As a major hub for the fossil fuel industry, Appalachia now confronts the perils of hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” and pipelines. These present forms of extractive industry trace their history to dispossession in Appalachia through colonialism and occupation. Mike Clark, formerly of the Highlander Center said:

*“every problem Appalachia has--mine safety, black lung, strip-mining, pollution, the decline of farming, floods, substandard housing, welfare, every single problem--can ultimately be traced back to the question of who owns the land.”*

Despite its challenges, Appalachia’s agrarian and communal way of life perseveres in pockets throughout the region. As the long-time Appalachian community organizer, the late [Carol Judy](#) has said, “if you look hard enough, you’ll find an essence of Appalachia culture in any resilient community.”

The West Virginia Agrarian Commons is a tool for collective organizing to rebuild landscapes and build new relationships in life-affirming ways. The Commons’ commitment to regenerative agricultural practices goes against 100+ years of extraction in the region, and local land ownership, stewardship, and governance stands in stark contrast to rampant [absentee ownership](#). The Agrarian Commons structure permanently removes land from the commoditized private market representing an important paradigm shift in a region where nature has a long history of commodification and extraction, mostly by outsiders with financial interests.

Through transformation in land ownership and local stewardship, the West Virginia Agrarian Commons also makes way for sustainable and regenerative diversified food production for food insecure communities, and offers an equitable and affordable pathway for next generation farmers to access land. This farm acquisition and transfer into the community-centered Agrarian Commons is an important step in realizing the potential for a new sustainable land-based economy in Southern West Virginia.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FARMS?

Since the County acquired the Whitlock Farm, New Roots Community Farm has been operating on the land to build a diverse and just regional agricultural system. For them, the Commons model offers a way to overcome their own land insecurity, but it also serves a larger role in the work they aim to do-- it is the tool through which they can build a robust land access initiative. The original solution to land access in the area was to provide small plot rentals at New Roots Community Farm, but this isn't a viable long term solution. Creating long-term leases on larger pieces of property allows farmers to deeply connect with the land, and make important investments in land and water resources, as well as infrastructure and equipment necessary for a sustainable operation.

Collaborating with diverse organizations, governmental agencies, and businesses can strengthen individual impacts to resolve food system issues. Partnering with the Agrarian Trust means receiving the support of a national organization, access to legal assistance, fundraising support, guidance, and increased land access across the state.

"The future of New Roots Community Farm is at risk since we do not own the land," says NRCF Farm Director and West Virginia AC President Susanna Wheeler. "This is something that is very common among many new and beginning farms across the nation."

The transfer of ownership to a community structure means funds are freed up to invest more in farm infrastructure, soil health, and sustainable practices at New Roots Community Farm. This enables the farm to continue to provide food for the community while better protecting and stewarding the land that the community depends on.

*"When this property is transferred into the Agrarian Commons, that will provide long-term stability for New Roots Community Farm. We are very excited to work in unison with the Commons, the Agrarian Trust, our local county governments, and other project partners to combine our programmatic work and add a robust land access initiative. We also hope that our experience as a farm leasing land from the Commons can be shared and communicated in a way that supports the success of other farmers following in our path."*  
- Susanna Wheeler, NRCF Farm Director and West Virginia AC President

This project will also allow New Roots to leverage their partnership with [Tunrow Appalachian Farm Collective](#) for even bigger impact. Through their current partnership, New Roots has helped aggregate over 30 new producers over the past 2.5 years, expanding food access for 200% new customers through local markets. While the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food security gaps, diverse food system stakeholder partnerships (schools, retail sector, food banks and pantries, individuals) and new protocols like drive-up vehicle deliveries have been implemented to respond to the growing need. New Roots is able to leverage its physical assets to support market growth for regional producers, serving as a sales, aggregation, and distribution partner.

## ABOUT THE FARMS

### NEW ROOTS COMMUNITY FARM



*Photo by Tabitha Stover Photography*



[New Roots Community Farm](#) is an organization of next generation West Virginia farmers leading a collaborative approach to build a more just and diverse agricultural system for the region. New Roots Community Farm was initiated as a response to decline of the coal industry in southern West Virginia and recognition of the need to reinvest in the community and create models for sustainable economic development in its rural communities. They hope to increase the number of and viability of local farms through a robust land access program in partnership with the WV Agrarian Commons and through market development work with [Turnrow Appalachian Farm Collective](#) to ensure new farmers have stable and informed local markets. New Roots increases the community's ability to access healthy food through local food aggregation and distribution, and organizes community gardening plots, runs a demonstration farm for intensive vegetable production, and provides demonstrations and training for farmers and helps grow retail and wholesale markets for farmers to sell their products.

The food system lies at the nexus of complex global economic, socio-cultural, and environmental interactions and issues. The way in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed has broad repercussions for communities all over the world. There are problems in this system that warrant immediate action. Solutions are needed because access to nutritionally and culturally appropriate food is a right and issues of food access and security are inextricably



linked to the health and well-being of individuals. Second, the effects of climate change and the non-sustainable use of resources is a serious threat to government institutions, the welfare of the people, and the security of systems built on a predictable and productive environment. In regions such as southern West Virginia that have been defined by short sighted economic policy and resource-extraction based economies, supporting the development of a viable agricultural industry in rural communities will be critical in demonstrating a more just and sustainable form of development in these places. New Roots Community Farm aims to play a critical role in addressing barriers to a more just food system that is built on collectively identified values. They have identified land access and equity, training and education for both consumers and farmers, improvement of environmental quality, and increasing local market outlets in low-income and isolated communities as critical issues to be addressed in southern West Virginia. The work carried forward by New Roots community Farm and its partner organizations represents a local community's response to these interconnected and complex issues.

### EMERGING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCER COOPERATIVE

An emerging agricultural producer cooperative is forming and will become the second leaseholder of the new West Virginia Agrarian Commons. Whereas New Roots Community Farm encompasses multiple programmatic initiatives including education and training, the cooperative will focus solely on providing land access for next generation farmers to produce diversified food for community consumption. Four experienced farmers are identified to lead the forming of this cooperative with many more farmers to come.

The producer cooperative makes possible what could take decades to create on one's own. Cooperatively managed labor, cooperatively maintained and owned infrastructure and machines, and cooperatively managed markets provide security and support to anyone interested in building a farm business. Land stewardship and intensive management of soil, pastureland, forest, and other systems is critically important, especially in an age where our global ecosystem is seeing such rapid, irreversible change. As a part of practicing smart, progressive agriculture techniques, the cooperative will consider habitats not in production as integral parts of our production system. Protecting and supporting biodiversity leads to better farming systems, and ultimately healthier human communities.

This project has come full circle, as three of the four young cooperative farmers have been connected in their pursuits of agriculture and food systems change for over a decade. In this time, they have been working hard on their efforts to find solutions for establishing food sovereignty, addressing environmental concerns, and bringing regenerative agriculture to the forefront in West Virginia. The Agrarian Commons provides the opportunity to carry out the work that they want to do to dedicate to the community.



## Incoming Next Generation Farmers



**Susanna Wheeler** currently serves as the Farm Director for New Roots Community Farm and will be a member of the cooperative. These two projects represent a culmination of her passions, academic pursuits, and experiences over the past decade. She is humbled to work alongside her friends and allies in building communities with access to the beauty and benefits of an agrarian life. AS a member of the cooperative she will build upon her knowledge of intensive vegetable production, while increasing her involvement in livestock management. Ms. Wheeler will coordinate operations within the cooperative and serve as a facilitator between the WV Agrarian Commons, the cooperative and New Roots Community Farm.

**Tyler Cannon** is the Production Manager at New Roots Community Farm. He supported the project in its early stages in January to March of 2019, and is thankful to return. He will become a member of the producer cooperative when it is developed, and his goals as a member of the cooperative are to develop a small fruits enterprise and to incorporate livestock into tree fruit management. He would also like to use perennial companion plants to increase and support biodiversity on the farm and to create diverse income streams while reducing mowing, pest control, and other labor inputs in a small fruit and orchard setting.



**Dina Hornbaker** has been working with New Roots Community Farm during their first production year and will continue serving as the Aggregation, Distribution and Sales Manager. Dina's background in farming and permaculture has led her to farm internationally and here at home. She is not only passionate about local foods and ensuring healthy soils, but has deepened her knowledge into the fungi world and the important role it plays. Dina's farming plans include growing gourmet and medicinal mushrooms as part of the cooperative.

**Josh Stover** of [Stover Heritage Farms](#). Josh and his family have been landless farmers for the past 10 years. The Stovers practice pasture based, regenerative farm raising pastured poultry, pastured Heritage Breed pork, grass fed lamb, and grass fed and finished beef. They understand the realities of farming; including the high cost of entry and the difficulty of building an operation without long term security on the land. Participating in the cooperative will allow them to have the security needed to live out their dreams of producing top quality craft meat from happy and healthy livestock.





# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

With your support, Agrarian Trust will support the West Virginia Agrarian Commons in purchasing the 82 acre Whitlock farm in Fayetteville, West Virginia. Whitlock Farm is valued at \$225,000 and Agrarian Trust has secured an option agreement to purchase the farm once funds are raised. Once acquired, the property will be transferred to the West Virginia Agrarian Commons and two 99+ year leasehold interests will be conveyed to both New Roots Community Farm and the emerging agricultural producer cooperative focused on food production, respectively.

Following the acquisition, the Agrarian Commons will continue to engage philanthropic and investment capital to support critical farm investment projects and land stewardship, management, and endowment funds to ensure long term sustainability and viability of the farms and Commons for generations to come.

**DONATE HERE:** <https://agrariantrust.org/agrariancommons/support-wv/>

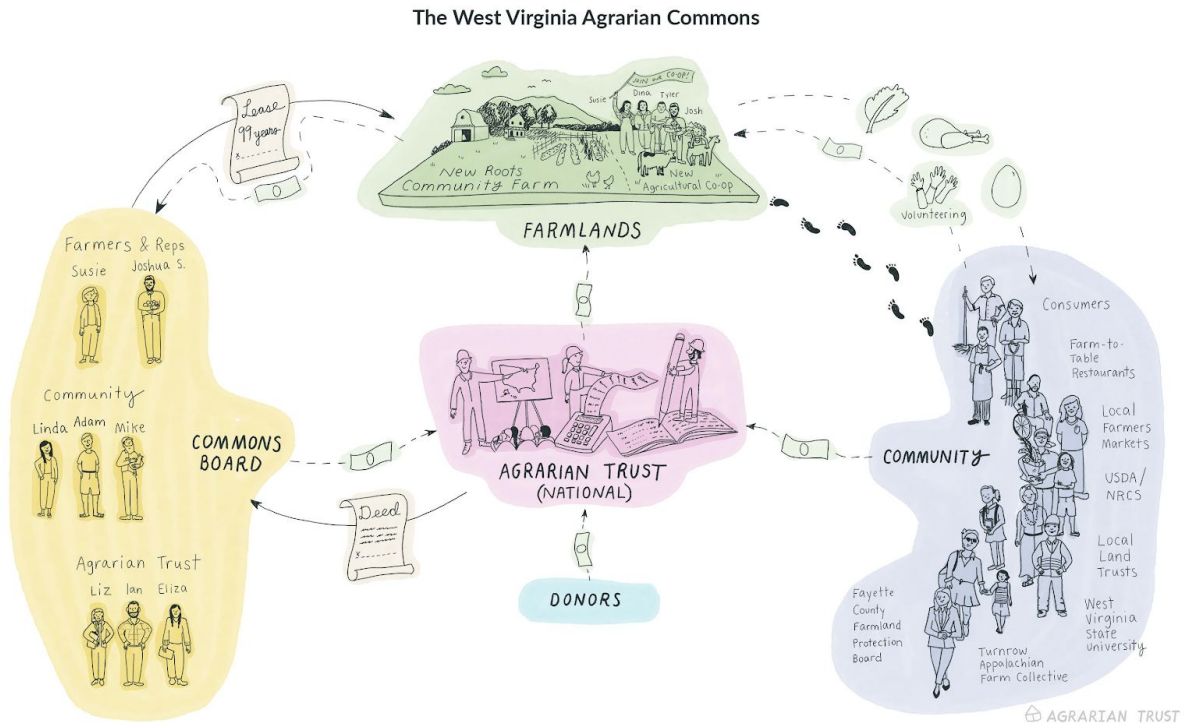
<b>Crowdsourced Fundraiser</b>	
Whitlock Farm Purchase Price	\$ 225,000
Project and Closing Costs	\$ 33,000
<b>Sum of Acquisition Costs</b>	<b>\$ 258,000</b>
<b>Philanthropic and Investment Capital (post-acquisition)</b>	
Management, Stewardship, and Endowments	\$ 98,000
Farm Investment	\$ 200,000
<b>Sum of Post-Acquisition Costs</b>	<b>\$ 298,000</b>
<b>Total funds needed to realize project</b>	<b>\$ 556,000</b>

# AGRARIAN COMMONS STRUCTURE

Agrarian Trust, a national 501c3 agriculture land trust, is creating community-centered land holding commons (501c2 Agrarian Commons) to provide long-term lease tenure for chemical-free, regenerative, diversified agriculture that produces food for the surrounding community. This land holding model creates shared land stewardship through investment in pollinator habitats, soil fertility, ecosystem diversification and protection, farm viability, community food security, and agrarian engagements.

# West Virginia Agrarian Commons

<https://agrariantrust.org/agrariancommons/west-virginia/>



## Board of Directors:

Susanna Wheeler  
 Josh Stover  
 Mike Smith  
 Linda Stein  
 Adam Hodges  
 Liz Campbell  
 Eliza Spellman Taylor  
 Ian McSweeney

The agrarian commons creates an equitable model that centers equity and decisions making locally, while simultaneously eliminating significant land barriers and supporting:

- Food and Land Security
- Ecological Stewardship
- Economic Viability
- Community Building
- Cultural Preservation
- Healing and Connection



# AGRARIAN TRUST DETAILS



## **Vision**

Nationally-supported, community-held land and agrarian property that supports diversified sustainable food production, shared ecological stewardship, agrarian community vitality, and the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

## **Need**

The U.S. is in the midst of 400 million acres of farmland changing hands as a generation of farmers and ranchers retire. Next generation farmers struggle with land access, affordability, and tenure. Farmers of color own less than 2% of the farmland, while making up over 60% of the farm workers. At this same time, from 2012 to present, small to midsize farms are closing at a rate of 37 per day and almost 30 million acres of farmland has been lost to development, extraction, and speculation.

## **Mission**

The mission of Agrarian Trust is to support land access for the next generation of farmers and ranchers, guided by our [Principles](#) of: Commons, Transparency, Equity for Farmers, Dignity, Opportunity, Affordability, Protected in Perpetuity, Restorative Justice, Diversity, and Food Security all framed within the realities of farmland management in the U.S.



## Agrarian Trust Initiatives



Agrarian Commons: a model focused on the structural roots of sustainable and viable agriculture and regenerative food systems. Land ownership, stewardship, and tenure define the equity, viability, and justice within agriculture and food systems. Most of the farmland that people see in their regions is not producing healthy, nutrient-dense, short-supply-chain foods for local and regional needs. Most of that same farmland is not secure or affordable as a long-term asset for local food production.

Agrarian Commons hold equity and authority in the community to manifest decommodifying land, permanent reinvestment in soils, sharing ecological stewardship, returning equity and control of land to local communities, and providing secure, long-term tenure for regenerative agriculture. The 10 Agrarian Commons across the country are developing an interconnected national network of community land trusts to hold farmland for sustainable food production, carbon sequestration, and soil and ecosystem regeneration. Oversight, guidance, and support is provided from the 501c3 Agrarian Trust. The Agrarian Trust and Agrarian Commons model supports and creates accountability for land stewardship and organic/natural/biodynamic chemical-free farming practices. This structure promotes soil health, carbon sequestration, water protection, habitat diversity, and regenerative agricultural practices across all of the diverse farms and land that make up the Agrarian Commons.

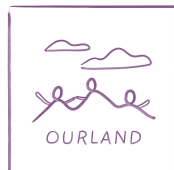




[Agrarian Legal Support](#): a network and learning community of attorneys, landowners, farmers, land-based organizations, and service providers dedicated to supporting/cultivating/nurturing the next generation of sustainable farmers and ranchers, and to advance our collective mission of healing land and communities through equitable land tenure and ownership, reparative justice, and regenerative agriculture.



[FaithLands](#): a national movement focused on connecting, inspiring, and guiding faith communities to use their land in ways that promote ecological and human health, support local food and farming, enact reparative justice, strengthen communities, and benefit their communities and the Earth. FaithLands recent [articles](#).



[Our Land Symposium](#): a series of talks, exhibits, and events that aim to advance the broadening discourse on land commons and farmland futures. View [ourland.tv](#) and symposiums [2014](#) and [2016](#).

**Board, Staff, Collaborators, Contributors, Advisors, and Supporters**

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