



**SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST**

# Growing for Good

Fresh news from Southside Community Land Trust

SPRING 2021

## The future looks bright for new farmers in RI

In 2021, SCLT will offer increased support for local farmers, expand access to farmland and improve our ability to distribute healthy food, particularly in Black and Brown communities. To do this, we've hired three, experienced local farmers who will enable people to grow and market significantly more, healthy (chemical-free) food for Rhode Islanders than currently.

One of the new hires is Matt Tracy. Matt co-founded Red Planet Farm in 2004, growing on a patchwork of urban and peri-urban plots before small-scale urban market farming was a widely accepted and supported practice. "We grew food on whatever land we could find, from hay fields



Matt Tracy clearing land at the Good Earth Farm in Cranston.

to vacant lots to friends' backyards," he recalled. "It was a constant battle to compete for land with real estate developers."

To farm in this way meant finding allies, following local politics and learning the finer points of real estate negotiation. Eventually, Red Planet Farm moved to one location in Johnston, but stayed connected to the Providence community by selling through a CSA and through Little City Growers Cooperative.

Matt volunteers on the Board of the Northern RI Conservation District, which helps farmers, landowners, municipalities and agencies become better stewards of the state's land and water resources. He

*Cont'd on page 2*

## The theme of this year's Plant Sale? We've got this!

"Next year we're going to come back bigger and better," said Rich Pederson, after the extraordinary turn of events when COVID caused the world to shut down last spring.

While we're about to turn the corner on the pandemic, we're not quite able to return to SCLT's beloved, in-person plant fest at City Farm. Nonetheless, with time to strategize and plan, this year's online Plant Sale will have more of everything, including more varieties of vegetables, herbs and fruits, and more perennials than we could offer last year.

The data from 2020 showed us what people most wanted to grow during a time of uncertainty about the food supply. We also saw what sold out the quickest, which helped us make adjustments during the production phase at City Farm this spring. While many of our worst fears about produce scarcity didn't materialize last year, SCLT's membership rose 20%, mirroring the nationwide spike in growing one's own food.

This year, we've found safe ways to increase staffing and

welcome volunteers back to the Farm. Our perennial donors are also back, doubling our supply of select favorites.

*Cont'd on page 3*



## Your support helps us respond to ongoing food insecurity in COVID's wake

Dear friend,

In 2021, we will celebrate SCLT's 40th year as an urban agriculture leader and architect of a more equitable and sustainable Rhode Island food system. During the past 12 months we've gained many new members and donors, some, no doubt, in response to the pandemic. For those of you who joined SCLT specifically to support our healthy food access work, welcome! Please know that your donations help our gardeners and farmers meet the tremendous rise in food insecurity from COVID-related job losses.

Meanwhile, the ongoing loss of life in Black and Brown communities due to police violence and the hate crimes against people of Asian descent weigh heavily on our hearts. During the year ahead, we will increase our efforts to combat racial violence

and inequity through policy advocacy and community programs, and by inviting more Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls residents to shape our work through staff and board leadership.

Thank you for your continued love and support.

**Margaret**  
Executive Director, SCLT

**Rochelle**  
President, Board of Directors

**PS: When you make your membership contribution, please consider "rounding up" in honor of our 40th anniversary. You can use the enclosed envelope or go to our website, [www.southsideclt.org](http://www.southsideclt.org)**

## New Farmers *Cont'd from front page*

focuses on developing long-term leases for farmers on publicly owned land, including Snake Den Farm in Johnston.

**"Turning a piece of land into a farm in the modern context is a weird skill set," Matt said, but one that suits him fine as SCLT's new Land Access Manager.** His first project at SCLT is guiding the farm succession process for the Good Earth Organic Farm & Garden Center in Cranston. SCLT is buying this 20-acre property from retiring owners John and Joyce Holscher. Matt will develop a five-year plan to build on the Good Earth's legacy in the organic growing community.

He is also advising the farm's newest leaseholders, a mix of rural and urban farmers. He thinks the Good Earth can ultimately host 6–8 farmers, with potential opportunities for greenhouse growers, compost production and permaculture.

Matt will also resume quarterly meetings of the statewide Land Access Working Group, which shares information with farmers about USDA financing programs, innovative land transfer strategies, financial and risk management and farm succession opportunities.

Dave Kuma, who ran Moor Food Farm for the past two seasons, is now SCLT's Farm Services Coordinator. He is working closely with URI's Assistant Professor of Agroecology John Taylor to conduct research on high-value rhizomatic crops, such as hops, ginger and turmeric, to determine optimal varieties and growing methods so they can be grown successfully in Rhode Island.

According to John, they will "develop ideas collaboratively to address the needs of urban growers, and then evaluate those ideas both under controlled experimental conditions at the URI Gardner Crops Research Center and under real-world conditions at SCLT sites." They will share their findings with farmers in workshops and demonstrations by the end of the two-year grant period.

Ben Torpey now serves as Manager of Urban Edge Farm. Ben has been involved with growing food and running CSAs since 2003,

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*Yuvi Cambero, a student in URI's Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems program, working in an urban-adapted tunnel developed in partnership with SCLT.*





## Putting people at the center of environmental policy

The land, the water, the air and the people. In the eyes of many environmental activists, it is the people who have too often been left out of the environmental movement. In many Northeastern cities like Providence, Bridgeport and Boston, the damaging effects of industrialization have destroyed the natural environment. Now, people in these communities are demanding policy changes to rebuild healthy environments.

The Rescue Rhode Island Act encompasses three separate bills: Food, Housing and Green Justice Zones that address the intersection of environmental degradation on both people and the planet. In the fall of 2020, SCLT signed on to join the Renew RI coalition, the state chapter of a larger coalition that encompasses more than 150 organizations across New England working to turn these bills into legislation. In Rhode Island, the coalition is made up of 20 organizations including: Direct Action for Rights and Equality, the RI Food Policy Council, GroundWork RI and the Race and Environmental Justice Committee of Providence.

The three bills are all ambitious and robust, and aim to get at the root of environmental and economic inequity, especially in places like the Port of Providence and Olneyville, where years of toxic industry and low tree coverage cause higher rates of respiratory illnesses like asthma.

Local activist and Renew RI Co-chair Monica Huertas testified during the Senate hearings in March about the impacts of pollution from the Port on her family and neighbors in Washington Port. She has worked to prevent more toxic industry from entering the Port, including new liquified natural gas facilities.

“The main idea [for the food bill] is that you have to have a food system that works for everybody,” she said. “When people think



about food and farmers they think about, what? The white farmer on a tractor with acres and acres [of land], but they leave out the urban farmers, the suburban farmers, those Black and Brown folks and everybody in between.”

**While each of the bills has its own merit, their collective importance is really about addressing the intersections of inequity, including economic and housing insecurity.**

Representing as individuals and on behalf of SCLT, staff members, including Executive Director Margaret DeVos gave supportive testimony in the Senate hearing for the Food Bill (S 468). The bill outlines programs that would be housed inside of the RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM); a Regenerative Agriculture Program that would provide financial incentives to local farmers to adopt or continue employing ecologically sustainable farming practices, coupled with fair labor practices; a Garden Agriculture Program, which would enable more Rhode Island residents to establish small-scale food gardens by providing tools and raised beds; and a Community Agriculture Program, a new grant program to fund community agriculture cooperatives (land trusts).

All three bills received strong support with over 100 people testifying online about data and sharing stories about why the bills are critical for frontline (poor and majority people of color) communities. But each has been held in Senate committees ‘for further study.’

For SCLT, support of our neighbors through increased access to land and resources to grow food is mission critical. Expanded funding through RIDEM would increase not only SCLT’s but future community land trusts’ ability to shape our food system in ways that feed and provide thriving work opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.

—Jazandra Barros, Community Outreach Coordinator

**For more information about the Rescue RI Act and the Renew RI Coalition, go to: [www.renewri.org](http://www.renewri.org)**

## Plant Sale *Cont’d from front page*

The format of the Sale will be much the same as in 2020: SCLT members will be emailed a link to the retail website on May 10, where they can pre-pay and schedule a pick-up time for their purchases from May 15–18. We’ll publicize access to the website for non-members on our site and on social media on May 11. You can find all of this information at [www.southsideclt.org](http://www.southsideclt.org)

**The Plant Sale is staying true to its roots, with each plant having a purpose: as edible or good pollinators or both.** Also,

once again we’re partnering with Hope’s Harvest RI to distribute 3,000 free plant starts to Rhode Islanders in need through food pantries around the state.

While we can’t see you in person in 2021, we’re making the most of our safety-first situation. Plant Sale fans who crave face-to-face interaction may volunteer during our curbside pickup days, May 15–18. If that’s you, please fill out the volunteer form on our website at [www.southsideclt.org](http://www.southsideclt.org)

—Shana Santow, Development Director





## New Farmers *Cont'd from front page*

both in the Hudson Valley and, since 2012, at Scratch Farm in Cranston, where he will continue to raise crops for area restaurants (but not for his CSA).

Ben will provide fiscal oversight of UEF, create mentoring relationships and foster new business partnerships among UEF farmers, many of whom immigrated to the US from countries such as Cambodia, the Dominican Republic and Liberia.

Of UEF's 50 acres, 22 are now in production by 18 farmers. SCLT has been steadily improving the infrastructure so farmers can grow, harvest and store more crops until they are sold. Last fall, Ben set up a depot to provide farming supplies at or below cost, including landscape fabric, tomato stakes and organically approved pesticides. "In small-scale vegetable farming, timing is critical and having the necessary materials on hand without having to pay for or wait for shipping, especially with COVID-related backlogs, has been valuable this spring," says Ben.

Ben is pleased by the mix of new growers at UEF and "more established farmers who are serving as mentors and advisors, while also running their own businesses. **The mix of experience and expertise is turning out to add a richness and stability to the farming community as different growers bring different strengths to contribute to the group.**"

Meanwhile, SCLT is supporting local farmers with its VeggieRx program. Last year, we partnered with Integra Care Network to source produce from 14 farmers in our network for 40 low-income families in East Providence. In 2021, we will expand VeggieRx to Providence, serving a total of 60 households, or 200 people.

With our new Farm-to-Market Center at 404 Broad Street, we'll be able increase our capacity to collect and distribute fresh produce to communities where it is needed most. Who could've predicted that this simple goal, set by SCLT's founders, would require such complicated programs 40 years later?

—Jenny Boone, Grants & Communications Manager



Southside Community Land Trust's mission is to provide access to land, education and other resources so people in Rhode Island can grow food in environmentally sustainable ways and create community food systems where locally produced, affordable and healthy food is available to all.

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Donors to SCLT's GROW! Capital Campaign are listed in our Annual Report.

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