



GAINING GROUND

Gratitude Report 2025

OUR MISSION

To provide free, sustainably grown, fresh organic produce
to people experiencing food insecurity.
We do this with the helping hands of a diverse community of volunteers
who work and learn with us on our farm.

OUR VISION

We envision a future where everyone has equitable access
to healthy, sustainably grown produce.



Community

Gives Us Hope and Purpose

October 2025

Dear Friends,

At a time when more people in Massachusetts are struggling to afford food—and when funding for programs that support basic needs is being cut—your support of Gaining Ground has never meant more. Together, we are meeting this moment with action, compassion, and resolve.

Everyone deserves access to nourishing food, yet for too many, that fundamental right remains out of reach. The need crosses town lines and life stages, touching young families and elders alike. It's shaped by forces far beyond our farm's borders: inflation, housing instability, eroding public safety nets, and persistent inequities. And yet, amid these daunting realities, we've seen something extraordinary unfold in our fields: a community growing stronger, more connected, and more committed to helping one another.

We often say that Gaining Ground grows more than just food—we grow community. That truth is visible every day in the people who come together to make this work possible. Farmers and volunteers, staff and board members, donors and partner organizations all tend not just the soil, but the social fabric that holds us together. Each harvest box, each delivery run, each generous gift, and each shared hour in the field is a thread in that fabric.

Last season, more than 3,800 volunteers joined us to plant, weed, harvest, deliver food, and support the farm in countless ways. Many arrived as individuals or groups and left with new bonds, a deeper sense of purpose, and a connection to a mission that extends beyond the farm gate. Our farmers brought deep knowledge and care to every seedling, working tirelessly in a changing climate to grow nourishing, culturally relevant food. Our partners helped us listen—closely and humbly—to the needs of the communities they serve. And our donors made this entire ecosystem thrive through their generosity, trust, and shared vision of a more food-secure region.

You'll see many of these stories in the pages that follow. I hope they leave you feeling proud of what you made possible and inspired by the spirit of collective care that defines Gaining Ground.

Thank you for showing up for your neighbors, for the land, and for one another. We are grateful beyond measure to count you as part of our community.

With appreciation,



Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director



Photo, cover: Community Farm Team members harvest late-July onions at Virginia Road.

Photo, left: Eastie Farm Youth Climate Corps volunteers harvest an early June succession of carrots at Virginia Road.

Working Together

to Uplift Immigrant Communities

by Samantha Zuniga-Levy

La Colaborativa has been serving Latino/a immigrant communities in the Greater Boston area for over 35 years, working to promote food and housing security and economic progress, celebrate cultural heritage, and cultivate immigrant leadership. For the last two and a half years, La Colaborativa has partnered with Gaining Ground, and Juan Camilo Saavedra was instrumental in cementing that relationship.

Providing food to local communities has always been an important part of La Colaborativa's mission, but, according to Juan Camilo, up until two and a half years ago, it was difficult to source high-quality, fresh produce. In addition, Juan Camilo says, immigrant communities often had little familiarity with foods grown in New England and struggled to cook with them. Juan Camilo, who was La Colaborativa's Director of Food and Nutrition for two years before transitioning to his current role as Director of Small Businesses and Entrepreneurship, says it was a question of bridging the gap between local farms and urban communities experiencing food insecurity. When he started at La Colaborativa, he set out to connect with some of these farms, among them Gaining Ground.

La Colaborativa now picks up food weekly from Gaining Ground to distribute to families experiencing food and nutrition insecurity. The items vary seasonally. Along with the food, Gaining Ground sends a list of recipes utilizing each ingredient, which Juan Camilo says is very helpful for La Colaborativa's nutrition programming, especially for ingredients that are unfamiliar to Latino/a families.

Juan Camilo also praises Gaining Ground's efforts to grow crops that would be appealing to Latino/a communities—even when it doesn't always work out. He reminisces about the time Gaining Ground farmers tried to grow yuca (cassava), after La Colaborativa

received multiple requests for it, even though the climate in Boston is not well-suited to the plant. "It came out like a little carrot," Juan Camilo laughs. "It was a very long, tiny yuca, but the fact that they tried it was amazing to me. It goes to show how they are able to adapt and make their partners really feel heard and understood."

In addition, La Colaborativa brings groups of volunteers to the farm, including adults with farming backgrounds in their home countries and youth from La Colaborativa's youth development programs.

Juan Camilo underscores the impact that access to fresh and nutritious food can have on those who are food insecure, and on immigrant communities in particular. "For low-income communities who are struggling to put food on the table at times, having vegetables and fruits—especially now, with the prices and the tariffs—is becoming a luxury," he says.

Without access to free or low-cost produce, families frequently turn to cheaper, ultra-processed options that are high in sodium, calories, and sugar, and lead to weight gain and chronic illness. What's more, says Juan Camilo, food insecurity "affects your ability to keep a job. It affects your ability to have upward mobility, either through education or a career. It forces people to make decisions between putting food on the table or paying for rent or medicine or education."

La Colaborativa distributes food to around 3,000 households on a weekly basis. Despite the disappointing results of the yuca experiment, Gaining Ground has had success with other culturally relevant foods such as cilantro, parsley, chilis, jalapeños, beans, and squash, and Juan Camilo says some folks come all the way from New Hampshire to collect food, due to the variety La Colaborativa is now able to offer, thanks in large part to Gaining Ground.



Carlos Morales (left) and Juan Camilo Saavedra (right) at the La Colaborativa produce distribution center.

“For low-income communities who are struggling to put food on the table at times, having vegetables and fruits—especially now, with the prices and the tariffs—is becoming a luxury.”
JUAN CAMILO



“Gaining Ground is well run; they’re caring, they’re strategic, and they’re efficient.”
MAUREEN AND MIKE RUETTGERS

Sometimes, a partnership can begin with something as simple as being neighbors. Maureen and Mike Ruettgers live in Carlisle, MA, and have made their home there for over 40 years.

But Maureen and Mike had more than a passing interest; they have been working to address food insecurity for many years. The couple established the Ruettgers Family Foundation after spending time in Rwanda and witnessing severe food shortages there. Maureen says, “We had spent a lot of time doing international work, and we thought it was time to work here,” in New England.

When the couple heard that Gaining Ground was looking to expand, they jumped at the opportunity to support the project. “Several years ago, we were talking to [Gaining Ground] about what they could do to expand,” Mike recalls, “and they were looking for land, and at that time, we said, ‘gee, if you could find a piece of property, we would help fund the infrastructure for it.’”

When Gaining Ground decided to move forward with a license to farm a piece of land in Minute Man National Historic Park, Mike and Maureen didn’t hesitate. Sometimes, the Ruettgerses say, funders don’t really know how their money is being used. But “Gaining Ground was different,” says Maureen. “The fact that they were serving so many people and they had so many partners was really appealing to us.” What’s more, Maureen and Mike trusted Gaining Ground’s staff to ensure the project went forward, and to keep the Ruettgerses updated about any snags along the way. Maureen and Mike are avid gardeners themselves, and they could see the passion the staff at Gaining Ground brought to their work.

It’s a tough time in the world, Maureen observes—especially after COVID—and food is expensive. Mike cites a recent Greater Boston Food Bank study, published in June 2025, that found more than one in three Massachusetts households struggled with food insecurity in 2024.

Maureen and Mike knew their support could potentially allow Gaining Ground to nearly double its growing capacity. But more importantly, “What I’ve always liked about [Gaining Ground] is that they have such respect for the people that they’re donating food to,” says Maureen. In particular, she points out that the organization takes the time to ask the people they serve what food products they would prefer and tries to incorporate these crops in their planning. She concludes, Gaining Ground is “well run; they’re caring, they’re strategic, and they’re efficient. What more can you say?”

Supporting Neighbors

by Samantha Zuniga-Levy





The Power to Change

by Samantha Zuniga-Levy

*“When people get gorgeous fresh food,
they feel respected—it’s a dignity issue.”*

POLLY VANASSE

When Gaining Ground launched CFT in 2022, Polly was among its founding members. The team is made up 20 or so core volunteers, many of whom are retired. Polly recalls, “We had a high school farm team that worked beautifully every summer, and a farmer dedicated to working with them, and someone had the grand idea that we could be like a post-high school farm team. There would be the high school kids and,” as Polly cheekily refers to the adults, “the geezers.”

Most CFT members volunteered at Gaining Ground prior to joining the team, but CFT provides the opportunity to volunteer regularly and affords a greater sense of community. CFT frequently hosts potlucks, and last winter, they introduced a workshop series to share skills among the group.

One of the draws of CFT is that its members participate in the entire crop cycle, from soil preparation, to planting, to harvesting, to distribution, and are thus able to witness the results of their labor.

Polly speaks passionately about Gaining Ground’s mission to provide free, sustainably grown, fresh organic produce to people experiencing food insecurity. “When people get gorgeous fresh food, they feel respected—it’s a dignity issue,” she says. “And when they receive a beautiful bouquet of flowers in the summer, they feel loved. Gaining Ground can do that better than anybody else I’ve ever seen.”

In the time that Polly has been with Gaining Ground, she’s seen it evolve from a small private garden to an operation that produces and distributes nearly 140,000 pounds of food each year, drastically improving the soil along the way.

Polly reflects, “I fell in love with Gaining Ground. I saw the power it had to change kids’ lives, but I didn’t see the power it had to change my life. It just changed it as I went along, and I didn’t even know it.”

Polly’s last term on the board ended in June, but, she says, “I’m just not ready to be separated from this place, and so Community Farm Team gives me a way to stay part of Gaining Ground as long as I can stick my hands in the dirt.”

There was a time when Polly Vanasse admits, “I didn’t even like gardening.” Now? She’s a devoted member of Gaining Ground’s Community Farm Team—or CFT—a group of volunteers who come to the farm weekly to help out for three hours at a time.

Polly has been a part of Gaining Ground since 1994, when the organization’s founder, Jamie Bemis, walked into Polly’s classroom at Nashoba Brook School and asked her if she’d be interested in bringing a group of kids to Jamie’s front yard to harvest apples for donation. Polly, who taught earth and environmental science, geology, astronomy, and algebra, agreed. Thus began a decades-long commitment to Gaining Ground and to its work to address food insecurity through sustainable farming. What started with leading school groups, over the years led to volunteering with Gaining Ground’s partner organizations, fundraising, and serving as vice president and eventually president of its board.

The Harvest is Shared

At Gaining Ground, every beet pulled from the soil and every box of produce delivered is part of a shared effort—a generous, hopeful collaboration between farmers, volunteers, donors, and community members like you. You are part of this work, and there are many ways to continue planting seeds of change:



Visit the farm

There's something powerful about seeing the work firsthand—seeing rows of rainbow chard glisten in the morning light, watching a harvest in motion, and meeting the farmers and volunteers who bring this mission to life. Reach out to schedule a visit.

Volunteer with us

We welcome individuals, families, corporate groups, classrooms, and community organizations to join us in the fields. No prior experience is necessary, just a willingness to learn, pitch in, and connect with others through meaningful work.

Support the work year-round

We remain committed to never selling the food we grow. Instead, we rely on the generosity of donors like you to help us nourish our neighbors with dignity. Whether you give once or monthly, every gift helps us build a more equitable food system, one harvest at a time

Leave a legacy of nourishment

One of the most meaningful ways to sustain Gaining Ground's mission is by including us in your estate plans. A planned gift ensures that your values—equity, community, and access to nourishing food—continue to take root and flourish for generations to come. Whether you choose to name Gaining Ground in your will, designate us as a beneficiary, or explore other giving options, your legacy will help grow a healthier, more just food system well into the future. To learn more, please contact us at office@gainingground.org, or 978-610-6086.

Stay in touch

We share reflections, updates, seasonal photos, and community stories throughout the year via our newsletter, social media, and website. It's one of the best ways to see your support in action and to share Gaining Ground's work with others who care.

Let's stay connected:

- **Website:** gainingground.org/support-us
- **Email:** office@gainingground.org
- **Phone:** 978-610-6086
- **Instagram:** [@gaininggroundconcord](https://www.instagram.com/gaininggroundconcord)
- **Facebook:** [GGConcord](https://www.facebook.com/GGConcord)

The 2025 Gaining Ground Team

From left to right:
Mark Congdon, Director of Agriculture and Volunteer Experience
Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director
Rachael Walton, Assistant Grower
Maddie Weikel, Assistant Grower and Education Coordinator
Zoe Tallmadge, Senior Field Crew
Celia Harnish, Senior Field Crew
Jared Kimler, Farm Manager

Skylar Cheng, Field Crew
Christine Hicks, Field Crew
Ava Lublin, Assistant Grower
Austin Bullis, Intern
Elizabeth DelGiudice, Intern
Fatima Swaray, Intern
Allison Goodwin, Operations Director
Not pictured: Geoff Nelson, Groundskeeper



Statement of Financial Position

As of December 31, 2024 (Unaudited)

	TOTAL
Assets	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	\$1,757,582.95
Accounts Receivable	\$553,663.68
Other Current Assets	\$-5,497.75
Total Current Assets	\$2,305,748.88
Fixed Assets	\$737,831.35
Other Assets	\$9,724.00
TOTAL ASSETS	\$3,053,304.23

Liabilities and Equity	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	\$4,459.51
Credit Cards	\$5,926.88
Other Current Liabilities	\$23,693.00
Total Current Liabilities	\$34,079.39
Long-Term Liabilities	\$9,873.00
Total Liabilities	\$43,952.39
Equity	\$3,009,351.84
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	\$3,053,304.23

Please note that this is our unaudited Statement of Financial Position. You will be able to access our fully audited 2024 financial statements as well as the complete lists of our 2024 donors and volunteers on our website at www.gainingground.org/our-story/gratitude-reports-and-financial-statements/

2,100

HOUSEHOLDS
SERVED WEEKLY

50

POWERHOUSE
CROPS, INCLUDING
146 VARIETIES

3,825

VOLUNTEERS FROM
89 CITIES AND TOWNS

18

HUNGER RELIEF
PARTNERS

300–500

BOXES OF PRODUCE
DONATED EACH WEEK



Mapping Our Reach

The 18 meal programs and food pantries we partner with serve clients from more than 40 Massachusetts towns throughout Greater Boston, Lowell, and the MetroWest area.

PARTNER LOCATION	PARTNER(S)	TOWN(S) SERVED	*	Defining Environmental Justice (EJ) Populations
AYER/DEVENS	Loaves & Fishes	Ayer, Devens, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Littleton, Shirley	27	In Massachusetts, Environmental Justice populations are identified by factors such as income, English isolation, and race. These communities often bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards, including climate-related issues and limited access to fresh food. In 2024, all of our partners distributed produce among at least one EJ population.
BEDFORD	Bedford Food Bank	Bedford, Carlisle, Concord, Billerica, Burlington, Lowell	26	
BOSTON	Bridge Boston Charter School	Boston (Roxbury)	6	
	Women's Lunch Place	Boston (Dorchester, Roxbury)	3	
CAMBRIDGE	Harvard Square Churches Meal Program	Cambridge	3	
CHELSEA	La Colaborativa	Chelsea, East Boston, Everett, Lynn, Revere, Malden	2	
CONCORD	Food for Families	Concord, Carlisle	22	
CONCORD/MAYNARD	Open Table	Acton, Bedford, Billerica, Boxborough, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Concord, Framingham, Hudson, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Lowell, Marlborough, Maynard, Natick, Stow, Sudbury, Waltham, Wayland, Westford	29	
EAST BOSTON	East Boston Community Soup Kitchen	East Boston, Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Revere, Somerville, Waltham, Winthrop	5	
	Eastie Farm	East Boston	5	
FRAMINGHAM	Daniel's Table	Framingham	4	Photo, right: Gaining Ground farmers during an early August harvest of rainbow chard at Virginia Road.
LOWELL	Community Teamwork/Head Start	Lowell, Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Tewksbury, Westford	11	
	House of Hope	Lowell	12	
	Lowell Transitional Living Center	Lowell	9	
	UTEC	Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill	2	
SUDBURY	Sudbury Food Pantry	Sudbury, Acton, Clinton, Concord, Framingham, Hudson, Leominster, Marlborough, Maynard, Natick, Stow, Waltham, Wayland, Worcester	28	
WALTHAM	Healthy Waltham	Waltham	5	
WESTFORD	Westford Council on Aging	Westford	27	

* Number of Years as a Gaining Ground Partner



“We can’t tell you how much the produce you
and the farmers provide is appreciated by our clients.”

SUDBURY COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY

OUR VALUES

INTEGRITY—we remain true to our mission.

We grow high-quality, fresh produce in a sustainable manner, respect and honor all individuals, provide meaningful experiences for volunteers, and maximize the generous support of our donors.

EQUITY—we donate everything we grow.

We believe that healthy food is a human right. We provide our produce for free to eliminate barriers to access and maximize our impact on food insecurity.

INCLUSION—we welcome everyone.

We welcome staff, board members, volunteers, partners, and donors with diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

INSPIRATION—we nurture joy and wonder in our fields.

We cultivate an environment of discovery, belonging, and meaning.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING—we learn from others and share our knowledge.

We embrace learning, acknowledge the contributions of other cultures and individuals to our farming practices, and always look for ways to improve our operations. We readily share what we've learned and strive to lead by example.

SUSTAINABILITY—we are good stewards of the land.

We are committed to modeling sustainable agricultural practices that prioritize thoughtful use of water resources; the health of our soil, crops, and species that pollinate our crops; and the well-being of people who eat our food and of all who work in our fields.

2025 STAFF AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Board officers

Lisanne Wheeler,
President
Christa Collins, *Vice President*
Sigmund Correa,
Treasurer
Kristen Van Damm,
Secretary

Board members

Belinda DiSilvio
Robyn Eastwood
Laurie Engdahl
Reed Holden
Sam Hiersteiner
Jane Huber
Michael Leahy
Jyotsna Mulgund
Yvette Philip
Joe Rigali, *Emeritus*
Lucy Rosborough,
Emeritus

Staff

Skylar Cheng, *Field Crew Member*
Mark Congdon, *Director of Agriculture*
Allison Goodwin,
Operations Director
Celia Harnish, *Senior Field Crew Member*
Christine Hicks, *Field Crew Member*
Jennifer Johnson,
Executive Director
Jared Kimler, *Farm Manager*
Ava Lublin,
Assistant Grower
Geoff Nelson,
Groundskeeper
Zoe Tallmadge, *Senior Field Crew Member*
Rachael Walton,
Assistant Grower
Maddie Weikel,
Assistant Grower and Education Coordinator

2025 Interns

Austin Bellis
Elizabeth DelGuidice
Fatima Swaray

Gaining Ground Gratitude Report 2025 Layout by Liz Chambers. Photography by Tony Rinaldo LLC, Danielle Capalbo, Mark Congdon, Allison Goodwin, and Maddie Weikel.



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Concord, MA 01742

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