



what's up!

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Partnerships Nourish Us All

 Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director

At Gaining Ground, we often talk about growing food and growing community, but at the heart of both is relationship. As we look toward a new season of planting, harvesting, and learning together, I'm reminded that reciprocal partnerships are integral to our work.

Every week, our farm team provides nutritious food grown with care. In turn, our partners provide this food for their communities. Our partners across Boston, Lowell, and the MetroWest share with us the stories, preferences, and lived experiences of the people they serve. Their feedback directly shapes our crop plans, from choosing culturally relevant varieties to adjusting the timing and volume of distributions.

When volunteers join us on the farm, they step into a space shaped by our partners' voices.... They leave with a deeper understanding of community care, carrying those insights back into their schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

These partners teach us what matters most to their communities, and we grow better because of it.

Reciprocity is also reflected in the countless ways partners show up for us: welcoming our staff and board members for site visits and volunteer shifts at their own locations, surprising our team with heartfelt gestures of gratitude, and reminding us why this work matters. Their commitment fuels our own.

When volunteers join us on the farm, they step into a space shaped by our partners' voices. They learn about food insecurity,

regenerative farming, and the better world we are trying to build. They leave with a deeper understanding of community care, carrying those insights back into their schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods.

As the 2026 season begins, I'm grateful for the many reciprocal relationships that enrich our mission. Together, we cultivate far more than vegetables. We cultivate connection, dignity, and shared purpose.



Photo: Our generous funding partners, The Boston Foundation, join us for a volunteer session on the farm.

Cultivating Abundance



Ramping Up Hunger Relief

Once a stretch of compact, depleted soil in 2023, Gaining Ground's new satellite fields at Minute Man National Historical Park now burst with fertile beds of squash, melons, and eggplant. This expansion allows Gaining Ground to ramp up donations as food insecurity surges in Massachusetts. After yielding an additional 15,000 pounds for our hunger relief partners last year, we anticipate an even bigger bounty this season.



Feeding the Soil that Feeds Us

As no-till farmers, we obsess over building healthy soil rich in organic matter and active microorganisms. While layering on high-quality compost nourishes this microbial life, brewing and applying a compost tea is another strategy for boosting nutrients. Using a DIY compost tea brewer to steep compost, kelp, molasses, yeast, and photosynthetic bacteria in water, this living homebrew is sprayed over crops, saving time and money. This season, using controlled experiments on beds of carrots, we will compare compost vs. tea for soil health and nutrient content. Stay tuned!



Harvesting Through the Snow

Thanks to investments in infrastructure, like high tunnels, caterpillar tunnels, and heaters, our winter growing capacity has surged. Despite a winter with sub-zero temperatures and historic snowfall, we harvested thousands of pounds of fresh produce this winter—an increase of 211% over last year—that nourished our neighbors in need.



Partnering for Healthy Meals

It's exciting to dream up creative, healthy, and nutritious meals.

Our guests can truly taste the difference and it shows in every bite!" Inna Khitrick,

Women's Lunch Place, Boston

Because our partners serve people of all ages from diverse populations, we grow a wide variety of crops—from head lettuce and hot peppers, to Brazilian jilo and bok choy. While some partners, like Daniel's Table in Framingham, help clients learn about fresh ingredients they will bring home from the pantry, others like Women's Lunch Place in Boston and House of Hope in Lowell use our produce in nourishing meals that serve hundreds of guests each day.



Surpassing 4000 Volunteers

At Gaining Ground, we grow food and community. In 2025, we reached a record milestone as over 4,000 volunteers—including individuals, students, groups, and corporate teams—joined us to support hunger relief. Tasks are tailored to every ability to ensure a meaningful experience for all, while raising awareness for sustainable agriculture and food insecurity. As Mark Congdon, Director of Agriculture and Volunteer Engagement, notes: "We are so much better together, and Gaining Ground grows exponentially because of these trusted relationships."



Growing New Farmers

Did you know the average age of a Massachusetts farmer is 58.7 years, with 40% of producers aged 65 or older? Locally grown food is vital for a resilient food system that nourishes residents. To inspire young people to connect with the land, Gaining Ground offers formal training opportunities through summer internships, high school volunteer programs, and beginning this season, farm apprenticeships. 🌱



“We are so much better together”

—Mark Congdon, Director of Agriculture and Volunteer Engagement

Photos, above, clockwise from top left: Whole Foods Market leaders from the US, UK, and Canada gently working the fields with broadforks at Minute Man National Historical Park; Nury at Community Teamwork/Head Start in Lowell slicing fresh strawberries from the farm; spreading a protective layer of hay on a new bed at Minute Man National Historical Park; selecting fresh Gaining Ground produce, jilo at Daniel’s Table in Framingham (photo credit: Arthur Illmann/Metrowest Daily News); a midwinter’s harvest; Doing Circle volunteers harvesting spinach; a snowy winter on the farm. Photos, left page: 1. New satellite fields at the Minute Man National Historical Park; 2. Assistant Grower Ava Lublin analyzing the level of organic matter in soil; 3. Head lettuce harvest this winter; 4. Volunteering at Women’s Lunch Place in Boston; 5. Volunteers show off the cherry tomato harvest; 6. Senior Field Crew Member Zoe Tallmadge and summer intern Fatima Swaray.



Bridge Boston Nourishes the Whole Child

It takes 80 pounds of fresh okra and spinach for Chef Keverne Glasgow to feed Bridge Boston Charter School his signature Trinidadian callaloo. When the stew is served, the K-8 students recognize the ingredients—because they helped grow them at Gaining Ground.

Since 2019, Gaining Ground has partnered with the Roxbury school to provide students with nutritious meals brimming with fresh produce. By combining hands-on farm learning with produce donations, students experience the true meaning of farm-to-table. Bridge Boston's mission is to meet the needs of the whole child, ensuring every student is nourished with three healthy meals a day to eliminate hunger as a barrier to learning.

“The trip is filled with joy, laughter, and hands-on learning. ... their lunch comes right from the soil they helped to feed.” Thayer Lawson, Bridge Boston Charter School

Fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs from Gaining Ground help Keverne serve a creative, USDA-aligned menu, and even offer tasting events to introduce new veggies. When school is out for summer, he distributes fresh Gaining Ground produce through a free farmer's market for families.

“Bringing the kindergarteners to the farm is an amazing opportunity for them to learn where food comes from, get their hands dirty, and understand that their

Top photo: With the crew at Bridge Boston Charter School in Roxbury L-R Diocelyn, Supinah, Chef Keverne Glasgow, Assistant Grower Rachael Walton, and Luis.

Bottom photo: Bridge Boston students explore a bed of lettuce and give the fresh leaves a taste.

lunch comes right from the soil they helped to feed,” says Thayer Lawson, Dean of Coaching and Intervention.

On the farm, students also learn that growing food is a collective act. “They do an excellent job modeling teamwork,” says Maddie Weikel, Gaining Ground's Education Coordinator. To move compost, students sometimes use “wolf-pup style,” digging and throwing it between their legs for a friend to catch in a bucket.

Between munching on fresh lettuce and marveling at worms, the children run through the fields, connecting with the land that feeds them. “The trip is filled with so much joy, laughter, and hands-on learning,” says Thayer. “Students are in awe of all the farm has to offer.” 🌱

Grounding the New Hire Experience

This past November, 20 of Welch's newest employees gathered at Gaining Ground on a cold, windy day. Bundled against the elements, they hauled tarps and sandbags to help the farm prepare for the winter shutdown.

Each year, Gaining Ground welcomes thousands of volunteers—individuals, schools, and corporate teams—to work alongside professional farmers. These groups learn about no-till agriculture and Gaining Ground's response to food insecurity in Eastern Massachusetts.

Since 2023, Welch's has incorporated a day of service into its new hire orientation. "Even with the cold and wind, people appreciated this part of orientation," said Mae Quilty, Talent Development Manager. "It helped them form relationships with colleagues from different departments and locations."

"Sometimes it's hot, sometimes it's raining. That makes it memorable."

Gregory May, Welch's

The partnership also reinforces Welch's identity as a 150-year-old farmer-owned cooperative. "Supporting American farmers is core to our identity," Mae added. "At Gaining Ground, volunteers get their hands dirty and gain a deeper understanding of the work our 600+ grower-owners do that ultimately brings our products to shelves across the country."

Welch's teams visit three times a year, traveling from nine sites across the U.S. "Knowing we have a trusted partnership feels really good, especially in the shoulder seasons," said Mark Congdon, Director of Agriculture at Gaining Ground. In March, they prep the land; in November, they help put the fields "to bed."

"Sometimes it's hot, sometimes it's raining. That makes it memorable," said Gregory May, Welch's Business Development Manager. Beyond the physical labor, the visits plant seeds of friendship. Colleagues bond over parenthood or shared backgrounds, like two employees who recently discovered they were both veterans.

The impact carries back to the office. "The power of collaboration is clear on the farm," Gregory said. "A field that would take me two days to weed alone is finished in hours with the team. Similarly, daunting company projects feel manageable when the team pulls together for a common purpose." 🌱

Below: Employees from Welch's working together during their new hire orientation, helping to lay a walking path among the expansion fields at the Minute Man National Historical Park.





A poem inspired by nature and spring from Bridge Boston Charter School eighth-grader Keybell Gonzalez

I WORRY

I worry about our Bugs, Birds,
our Air, and our Water.
But.....the season of SPRING
Spring is here!
Take off your puffy jacket,
Put on bright colors.
The flowers are blooming
The bees are pollinating
For kids, it's back to playing outside.
For animals, it's time to wake up
from their long slumber.
For adults, it's time to tend to the garden.
Daisies, tulips, roses, and poppies,
Tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, and cabbage
Pull out weeds,
Sprinkle water,
Add fertilizer.
HOLD the pesticides.
You planned to eat a nice salad right?
I worry about our Bugs, Birds,
our Air, and our Water.

DONORS



It Makes a Big Difference

Andy and Carolyn Limeri didn't originally set out to become monthly donors; their connection to Gaining Ground blossomed through a shared conviction that both people and farmland deserve care.

They first discovered the farm through our partner, Daniel's Table. Andy, a former board member at the Framingham-based hunger relief organization, often drove to Gaining Ground to collect produce and was immediately struck by the team's kindness.

"It doesn't change anything for us," Carolyn said. "But it makes a big difference for the organizations we support."

"The team was always ready for us," Andy recalled. "They'd even help us load up." Carolyn was equally impressed by the harvest's quality. "It looked better than what I buy at the grocery store! For that to be freely given to people who can't afford it—that's why we got involved."

Originally annual donors, the Limeris switched to monthly giving in 2022 after learning how steady cash flow sustains nonprofits. "It doesn't change anything for us," Carolyn said. "But it makes a big difference for the organizations we support." For them, Gaining Ground represents a dual investment in healthy food access and land conservation. "Any farmland we can keep—especially small-scale, organic—is a good thing," Carolyn added.

"Andy and Carolyn remind us that generosity doesn't have to be complicated," notes Executive Director Jennifer Johnson. "Their steady support helps us grow food, care for the soil, and ensure families have access to fresh produce all year long." Andy sums it up simply: "I feel lucky. I'm in a position where I can help. So I do." 🍀

Help Gaining Ground to plan for the seasons ahead and ensure our harvests reach families in need each and every month. Set up a monthly donation in any amount at www.gainingground.org or through your donor-advised fund.

ANSWER TO BACK COVER QUESTION: In January, a frost-free hydrant burst and flooded the area by the winter wash station. The repair required digging deep and pumping out water that continuously filled the hole. Assistant Grower Rachael Walton had the honor of replacing the broken hydrant.

Special Thanks

The board and staff would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those who gave generously and shared their time and talents with Gaining Ground last season.

- 2025 Read for Seeds: **Belmont Day School 2nd grade, Thoreau Elementary School 3rd grade, Tenacre Country Day School 6th grade, Alcott Elementary School 2nd grade, Fenn School Lower School, Willard School PTG Green Team**, plus the **individual students** who raised \$19,600 toward Gaining Ground's annual seed budget!
- **Dan & Sally Reilly** and **Michelle Schmidt** for leading the Evening on the Farm event committee. **Middlesex Savings Bank, The Gilson Family Foundation, The Butler Wheeler Team, Domaine Travelle Winery, The Dan & Sally Reilly Foundation, Concord Foot & Ankle, The Concord Lions Club, and The Marquis Team at Cross Country Mortgage** for generously sponsoring Evening on the Farm.
- **Lucy Rosborough** for her thoughtful stewardship of the Food for Families program. **Trevor Delaney** and **National Charity League volunteers** for regular delivery help to Food for Families guests in Concord and Carlisle.
- **Jennifer Polito** and the **Concord Housing Authority** for hosting the Food for Families produce distributions at Everett Gardens, and **Bonny Wilbur, Nicole Saia, and Kathleen Bond** for their assistance as client liaisons.
- **Sue Mulvany, Laura Tanner, Aida Martinez** and **National Charity League (Concord and Wellesley)**, for coordinating volunteers to help with produce deliveries, flower arranging, cheerful card creation, appeal mailings, events, and numerous other tasks.
- **Pete Kelleher, Sarah Ard, and students in Minuteman High School's Horticulture Program** for their landscaping, pruning, and fieldwork assistance.
- **John Althouse** for sharing his expertise in fruit tree pruning.
- **Tony Rinaldo** for his beautiful photographs of the farm and our staff.
- **Alicia Blais** for her generous weekly bagel donations.
- **Neversink Farm** for their sponsorship of farm education and high-quality tools.
- **Yankee Pest Control** for donating non-toxic pest management services.
- **SavATree** and **Minute Man National Historical Park** for wood chips and leaf mulch.
- **Trader Joe's (Arlington and Acton)** for 9,000 paper bags for Food for Families.
- **Art for All in West Concord** for decorating bags for our Thanksgiving distribution.
- The many **poets** who contributed works to our Poetry on the Farm exhibit.
- **Boston Area Gleaners, David and Quentin Nicolaisen, Whole Foods Market (Westford), Phillips Academy Andover,** and our cherished **partner organizations** for their regular donations of recycled banana boxes.
- The many **maple tree owners** and the Town of Concord who kindly allowed us to tap sugar maple trees, and the **Minute Man National Historical Park** for firewood.
- The hardworking **members of the 2025 Community Farm Team** for their invaluable help all season: **Allison Aley, Bob Brooks, Lisa Curtis, Belinda DiSilvio, Maya Fingerle, Claire Gersh, Laurie Gleason, Hans Heilman, Linda Huet, Jonathan Hyde, Kara Kiely, Christine Lundblad, Lauren McDade, John McNeil, Susan O'Dell, Zubin Patel, Megan Radogna, Jay Ravi, Rachel Richards, Paul Ruhlmann, Nancy Shepard, Diane Sinski, Barb Sommers, Janey Tallarida, Elif Tosun, Polly Vanasse, Rob Webber, and Zhili Xin.**

- The time and commitment of volunteers who serve on our Development, Investment, and Land Committees: **Matt Capofreddi, Dan Reilly, Bouke Noordzij, Bill Perkins, Jerry Vanasse, and Meg Welbourne.**



Above top to bottom: Community Farm Team member Bob Brooks chopping wood to fuel the maple boil, Genna decorating bags with Art for All, Volunteer Trevor Delaney loading up Thanksgiving home deliveries for Food for Families.

2026 Farm Team

We are grateful to have many of our crew back for 2026. Learn more about this year's team on our website.

Shannon Applegate
Apprentice

Mark Congdon
Director of Agriculture

Johanna Flies
Farm Manager

Allison Goodwin
Operations Director

Christine Hicks
Senior Field Crew Member

Jennifer Johnson
Executive Director

Kaitlin Katirachi
Apprentice

Ava Lublin
Assistant Grower

Debbie Pullen
Development and
Communications Manager

Zoe Tallmadge
Senior Field Crew Member

Gianni Venezia
Apprentice

Rachael Walton
Assistant Grower

Maddie Weikel
Assistant Grower and
Education Coordinator



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Christa Collins, Vice President
Yvette Philip, Treasurer
Kristen Van Damm, Secretary

Sigmund Correa
Belinda DiSilvio
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Gaining Ground at a Glance

Gaining Ground is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organic farm that grows vegetables, fruits, and herbs exclusively for hunger relief.

- 100% of the produce harvested on the farm is donated to neighbors experiencing food insecurity
- 10,000+ people are nourished in 41 communities in eastern Massachusetts
- 17+ trusted partnerships with food pantries, shelters, schools, meal programs, and mutual aid organizations
- 4000+ volunteers of all ages and abilities work and learn with us on the farm
- No-till, sustainable farming practices that boost total yield and nutrient-density, while promoting climate-resilience and environmental responsibility

Gaining Ground has never sold a single fruit or vegetable. This work is only possible through the power of community, and the generosity of individuals, foundations, and corporations who support this mission.

Visit gainingground.org to learn how you can help.



*What is Assistant Grower Rachael Walton up to?
See bottom of page 6 for the answer.*

Contact us:
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office@gainingground.org

Learn more about us:
gainingground.org

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