




what's up!



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Beyond the Harvest: Growing Community

 Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director

When I introduce someone to Gaining Ground for the first time, I always emphasize that our mission is about growing more than just food—we're growing community. And just as our fields are home to a diverse variety of fruits and vegetables, the communities that take root here are equally varied and expansive.

Volunteers are at the heart of this work. Last year alone, more than 3,800 people joined us—planting, harvesting, delivering food to our partners, and lending a hand behind the scenes. Through these shared experiences, volunteers don't just support our mission; they build meaningful connections—with our team, with our hunger-relief partners, and with one another. I love hearing about volunteers who go on to work with our partners after learning about their impact, about friendships that begin in the fields and extend beyond the farm, and about

Community isn't just about proximity—it's about shared responsibility, collective care, and a recognition that our well-being is deeply interconnected.

families and colleagues who find new ways to connect while working side by side in service of a common goal.

One mother's story will always stay with me. She and her teenage daughter were going through a difficult time, struggling to find common ground. She hoped that volunteering together at the farm might open a new door for communication. What she didn't expect was just how transformative the experience would be. Working the soil side by side, they found a new rhythm—one that fostered understanding, strengthened their bond, and, in its own way, helped them grow something even more important than food.

In addition to cultivating connections among our volunteers, it strikes me that, together, our

staff, board, funders, volunteers, and hunger-relief partners are actively growing the very idea of what "community" means. Community isn't just about proximity—it's about shared responsibility, collective care, and a recognition that our well-being is deeply interconnected. Food insecurity doesn't recognize town lines or neighborhood borders, and neither should our response to it. While some of us may not experience hunger firsthand, we are all impacted by it—through the health of our neighbors, the strength of our local food systems, and the resilience of our shared future. By coming together in the fields, at distribution sites, and in support of this work, we're not just growing food; we're growing a more connected, compassionate, and food-secure world. 

▲ Above photo: Gaining Ground farm staff and Community Farm Team members plant the first tomato starts at Gaining Ground's site in the Mintue Man National Historical Park.

gainingground.org

our mission

Gaining Ground provides free, sustainably-grown produce to people experiencing food insecurity. We do this work with the helping hands of a diverse community of volunteers who work and learn with us on the farm.

Full Circle with Gaining Ground

 Sue Mildrum, President, Gaining Ground Board of Directors

I first got involved with Gaining Ground in 2010 as a volunteer. At the time, I knew nothing about farming or hunger relief—I just wanted to give back and spend time outdoors to balance my computer-based day job. So, I started volunteering weekly.

The farm was a very different place back then. There was no barn, no deer fence, no well, no cooler for harvested vegetables, and no high tunnels. While it was already organic, it was still a tractor farm, with the transition to no-till farming years away.

Over the years, Gaining Ground has evolved, but its mission of growing food and growing community has remained constant. The idea of “growing food” was immediately clear and tangible to me. But as I became more involved, my understanding and appreciation of “growing community” deepened.

I have worked alongside coworkers, friends, and strangers, all unafraid to get their hands dirty—whether in the heat, the cold, or the rain. I have built strong, lasting relationships with farmers, office staff, and board members—people I admire for their dedication to a cause they truly believe in.

Visiting our partner organizations, I’ve seen firsthand how hard they work to support their guests. Their gratitude for Gaining Ground’s fresh, nutritious food inspires me to do more. I have also had the privilege of meeting and corresponding with generous donors who make this work possible.

What excites me most is Gaining Ground’s growing impact. With our expansion onto National Park Service land, we can produce even more food. Our experienced farmers refine regenerative techniques that are not only good for the earth but also incredibly productive—setting an example for others. Our professional and passionate office staff ensures the organization runs smoothly, while our board members contribute their unique skills to help guide its future.

My tenure on the board is coming to an end but my involvement with Gaining Ground is not. My connection to Gaining Ground remains strong, and I look forward to coming full circle—returning to the fields and getting my hands in the soil once again. 🌱

BOARD UPDATES

Our board of directors and staff make an incredible team. Together, they have helped Gaining Ground accomplish phenomenal harvests in spite of unpredictable changes in weather patterns, guided us through the creation of several strategic plans through the years, and enabled us to respond to rising food insecurity in our region.

In the time since our last staff and board updates, we have bid a fond farewell to board members Jen Flint, Amy Capofreddi, Katie Bekel, Shilpi Desai, and Ashley Perssico. Polly Vanasse, Karen Perkins, and President Sue Mildrum will complete their terms this June. We offer our heartfelt thanks to this incredible group of people for their dedication, wisdom, strategic thinking and collaborative spirits over the years—both at board meetings and out on the farm—and wish them all the best in their future endeavors.

“My connection to Gaining Ground remains strong, and I look forward to coming full circle—returning to the fields and getting my hands in the soil once again.”

— Sue Mildrum, President, Gaining Ground Board of Directors



Planting a Seed for Tomorrow

With the generous support of longtime Gaining Ground friends Joe Rigali and Tracy Winn, we're launching a planned giving program.

 Bree Shirvell, Freelance Writer



For decades, Gaining Ground has been woven into the lives of Joe Rigali and Tracy Winn. Their deep connection to the farm, its mission, and its community made it only natural to ensure that their commitment continues beyond their lifetime. By including Gaining Ground in their estate plans, they are planting seeds for the future—ensuring that fresh, sustainably grown, nourishing food will keep reaching those who need it most for years to come.

“We’re in our 70s and fortunate to be in a position to even do estate planning,” Joe says. “Beyond taking care of our daughter, we want some of our assets to go to the organizations and causes we care deeply about. Gaining Ground is one of the key ones.”

Not only is the couple including Gaining Ground in their estate plans, but they are helping to start a new chapter for Gaining Ground’s financial future: a planned giving program.

Unlike traditional donations made from current income, planned gifts are typically arranged in the present but allocated to organizations at a future date, often after the donor’s lifetime, through their will or trust.

“We are deeply grateful to Joe and Tracy for their enduring commitment to Gaining Ground’s mission. Their decision to include the farm in their estate plans is a powerful vote of trust—not just in our work today, but in the

“Unlike traditional donations made from current income, planned gifts are typically arranged in the present but allocated to organizations at a future date, often after the donor’s lifetime, through their will or trust.”

— Joe Rigali and Tracy Winn

future we are building together,” said Jennifer Johnson, Gaining Ground’s Executive Director.


Planned giving is particularly important for small nonprofits like Gaining Ground, as it provides stable, predictable funding and strengthens the organization’s long-term vision and credibility. It can help to attract more support and diversify funding sources. It also allows donors like Joe and Tracy to leave a lasting legacy, ensuring that their values and the causes they care about continue to be supported.


“Planned giving is not an easy thing for a small, social services organization. It takes a lot of work, and a lot of follow-up over many years. We’re hoping that this will provide the impetus for other people to consider a legacy for the organization,” Joe says.

Gaining Ground has long been a family affair for Joe and Tracy, with Tracy first learning about the farm, which was just a garden at the time, from Gaining Ground’s first board

member, Annette Dykema. Tracy and Joe would later both serve and lead the board, and their daughter worked for Gaining Ground for a time. Over the years, the family has had a hand in helping Gaining Ground grow, working on everything from building the barn to communication outreach, and now helping to ensure its future.

“One of the reasons I’m excited to continue our relationship in this way with Gaining Ground is I see the organization as a full circle of goodness. You put seeds in the ground, and your hands in to pull weeds, and beautiful vegetables grow for people who need them.”

If you’re considering a planned gift, it’s wise to first consult with a financial advisor, estate planning attorney, or tax professional to determine the best approach for your individual circumstances. To learn whether Gaining Ground’s planned giving could be right for you, contact Jennifer Johnson at jennifer@gainingground.org or 978-610-6086. 



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CONCORD
250
MASSACHUSETTS

Rooted in the Land

Concord celebrates a quarter-millennium of growth

Beth Ann Mayer, Freelance Writer

As our hometown commemorates the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, which began here in New England, we're proud that Gaining Ground continues to represent Concord's enduring connection to the land.

This anniversary offers a chance to reflect on the evolution of Concord's agriculture and how its farmers have long adapted to changing times. Indigenous peoples first cultivated the soil. Revolutionary farmers left their fields to fight in 1775. The country's first agricultural society, centered in Concord, was formed in 1794. Nearly two centuries later, Concord adopted local "Right to Farm" bylaws in the 1980s, and in 2006, Concord's Select Board established the Agricultural Committee to help the town support farming. Today, agriculture is the municipality's largest commercial use, with both for-profit and nonprofit farms.

"...with our focus on food justice and dedication to educating the next generation of farmers, we're honoring Concord's legacy of farming, resilience, and respect for the land."

We like to think that, with our focus on food justice and dedication to educating the next generation of farmers, we're honoring Concord's legacy of farming, resilience, and respect for the land.

While there will be a number of anniversary events happening throughout the year, the biggest celebration is on Patriots' Day Weekend 2025, as April 19, 2025 marks the anniversary of the battles of Concord and Lexington. We hope to see you out in Concord that day for the parade.

For more information, visit: visitconcord.org/concord-250/

Thank you! 🌱



*Trevor Delaney
Gaining Ground Volunteer
Student at Holy Cross*

Reflections from a Volunteer

Beth Ann Mayer, Freelance Writer

Each year, more than 3,000 people volunteer with Gaining Ground. Without their generosity, we'd be like a perennial without water and sunshine—unable to grow and fulfill our mission to reduce food insecurity, especially as it continues to rise.

Trevor Delaney has been working with Gaining Ground since before he could drive. Trevor, now a college student at Holy Cross, logs miles upon miles, making home deliveries for Gaining Ground's Food for Families program in Carlisle. He has stepped up and taken on more work countless times, sometimes spending hours delivering to those in need. Locals gain more than food from Trevor—they gain connection and conversation. As Trevor shares, the feeling is mutual.

GG: How did you learn about Gaining Ground, and what was it like when you started?

TD: I started volunteering for Gaining Ground about four years ago after hearing about the farm from a family friend and seeing a poster. I started picking up bags of produce and delivering them to local families. I actually started before I got my driver's license. I would go with my mom and get driving hours. Now, I do it entirely independently.

GG: Before Gaining Ground, what was your connection with food security?

TD: I've always been passionate about food equity, health, and the environment. Sustainable farming is something I'm interested in learning more about. Gaining Ground has been a great way to get involved.



...we're shifting more crops to our expansion field at Minute Man National Historic Park. Freeing up space at the Virginia Road farm has allowed us to do the aforementioned trials and double our cooler size—essential as our crop production

Updates from the Farm

with Jared Kimler and Mark Congdon

We have big plans for the year ahead at Gaining Ground.

Our assistant growers, Maddie Weikel, Rachael Walton and Ava Lublin, are now full-time, year-round members of the team, and we're so grateful and excited to have them with us all year. Their addition has allowed us to increase our winter growing production, expand our maple sugaring program and offer more produce to our partners. This summer, we'll also be piloting a summer internship program for aspiring farmers, which will include classroom time on regenerative agricultural techniques, helping us train the next generation of sustainable growers.

On the farm, we're trialing several new programs. Inside the tunnels, we're experimenting with a new trellis system for tomatoes that should help us increase our production. Senior Field Crew Member Zoe Tallmadge has carved out a small plot of land on the farm to test seed saving with Seed Savers Exchange. Zoe will work with dozens of other growers, cultivating the same variety and sharing notes. It's a fascinating

experiment in community-based seed saving that will enhance our seed diversity and improve our knowledge base. Meanwhile, Ava, who recently attended a compost tea workshop, will experiment with implementing the process at Gaining Ground. By composting with elements like molasses and fish fertilizer in the DIY brewer she built during the slower winter season, Ava will be able to create a potent spray to enrich our soil and pathways. The goal? To boost the microbial life and mycelium in the soil, making more nutrients accessible to our plants. This cost-effective approach should also reduce the need for compost applications, a win for our budget and the farm's ecosystem.

Finally, we're shifting more crops, including all winter squash, to our expansion field at the Minute Man National Historical Park. Freeing up space at the Virginia Road farm has allowed us to do the aforementioned trials and double our cooler size—essential as our crop production expands. We continue to work to provide even more nutritious, sustainably grown food for our neighbors. 🌱

GG: Volunteers do a LOT on the farm! What projects or tasks do you like the most?

TD: Delivering to people's houses. The moment that I get to see their reaction to receiving food face-to-face is what I find most gratifying. Even if it's a brief interaction, seeing that smile makes the whole thing worth it.

GG: Do you have a memory you can share of a delivery?

TD: I built up a relationship with this one large family of refugees from Afghanistan. I don't speak Arabic, so there was a major language barrier. What I quickly learned from the experience is that kindness and gratitude are things that can transcend barriers. Even when we couldn't articulate and understand each other in the same common language, I could easily comprehend their gratitude through gestures, emotions and the smiles on their faces.

GG: What else have you learned from Gaining Ground?

TD: Providing sustainable food for people is not just about the food. It's about what they will do with the food and the memories they're trying to create as a family, preparing the food together and eating a meal together. I never really anticipated that before I started with Gaining Ground, but there's so much meaning behind sharing a good meal together and having access to healthy, sustainable food. That's what Gaining Ground offers.

GG: We're lucky to have you on board and glad that you've learned so much from Gaining Ground. How would you persuade others to join a volunteer session?

TD: First and foremost, it's a great cause. It's giving back to the local community, and it's gratifying. It's a mutually beneficial relationship between you and the person you're delivering to and helping. People often think about food insecurity and access to food, but they don't think about providing people with healthy, sustainable foods that are good for their health and the environment. There aren't a lot of nonprofit organizations like Gaining Ground around that work on combating food insecurity in this way.



Gaining Ground farmers and volunteers work together to grow and distribute fresh, organic food to people experiencing food insecurity.



In 2024
3,825 total volunteers from
89 communities chose
to support our mission,
with more than 7,503 hours
of service.
Thank you!



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.

Special thanks go to:

- **Belmont Day School second grade, Thoreau Elementary School third and fifth grades, Tenacre Country Day School sixth grade, Alcott Elementary School second grade, Fenn School Lower School, Nashoba Brooks School second grade, and all of the individual students** who participated in the 2024 Read for Seeds campaign. They raised a record-setting \$16,000 toward Gaining Ground's annual seed budget!
- **Bouke Noordzij** for his assistance with wood chopping, moving caterpillar tunnels, greenhouse assembly, general farm maintenance, and Land Committee involvement, as well as for his wonderful camaraderie and guidance.
- **Neversink Farm** for their generous sponsorship, including farm education and high-quality tools.
- **David Salomón Saléh** for his careful tending of the farm's bee colonies.
- **Cathy Dittmore** for her accounting and bookkeeping services.
- **Tony Rinaldo** for his beautiful photographs of the farm and our staff.
- **Lucy Rosborough** for her thoughtful stewardship of the Food for Families program in Concord. National Charity League volunteers and **Trevor Delaney** for regular delivery help to our guests in Concord and Carlisle, respectively.
- **Liz Chambers** for her beautiful design work.
- **Whit Painter** and **Reed Holden** for weekly bread deliveries to the farmers
- **Rhea Malhotra** for her creative graphic design skills, handmade cards to cheer up our guests, and a beautifully designed flyer for the Food for Families program.
- **Concord Flower Shop** for donations to our June donor appreciation party.
- **Rachel Richards** for her incredibly helpful, last minute produce transport in 2024. **Alicia Blais** for summer bagel donations for our hungry farmers.
- **Pete Kelleher, Sarah Ard, and students in Minuteman High School's Horticulture Program** for their invaluable landscaping, pruning, and fieldwork assistance.
- **Sue Mulvany, Lisa Laich, Laura Tanner** and the **Concord and Wellesley chapters of the National Charity League**, for coordinating volunteers to help with our produce deliveries, flower arranging, appeal mailings, events, and numerous other tasks.
- **Whole Foods Westford, Boston Area Gleaners, the Watertown Food Pantry, David and Quentin Nicolaisen, Phillips Academy Andover, and our many cherished partner organizations** for their regular donations of recycled banana boxes.
- **Jennifer Polito** and the **Concord Housing Authority** for hosting our Food for Families produce distributions at Everett Gardens, and **Bonny Wilbur, Nicole Saia, and Melissa Roman** for their assistance as client liaisons.
- **SavATree, Estabrook Landscaping, City Compost and Minute Man National Historical Park** for donating wood chips and leaf mulch.
- **Chad Castro** and **Kristi Keinholtz** for strategic communications advice.
- **Jen Flint** for copyediting and proofreading help.
- **Sean Walther** for ongoing technical assistance and website support.
- **Trader Joe's** in Arlington for donating 900 paper bags to our 2024 Food for Families program.
- **The many maple tree owners in Concord and the town** itself, who kindly allowed us to tap trees during maple sugaring season. **Bouke Noordzij, Benjamin Cacace, John Jasilewicz** and the **town of Concord** for donating firewood to our maple sugaring operation.
- The hardworking **members of the 2024 Community Farm Team** for their invaluable help all season: **Allison Aley, Poulod Borojerdi, Bob Brooks, Belinda DiSilvio, Laurie Gleason, Hans Heilman, Jonathan Hyde, Jodie Krisiak, Christine Lundblad, Pauline McClellan, Lauren McDade, Deborah Starr Meyers, Susan O'Dell, Paul Ruhlmann, Nancy Shepard, Diane Sinski, Barb Sommers, Janey Tallarida, Julia Tricca, Elif Tosun, Polly Vanasse, and Rob Webber** for their invaluable help during the 2024 growing season.
- The time and commitment of **the volunteers** who serve on our Development, Investment and Land Committees: **Matt Capofreddi, Robyn Eastwood, Bouke Noordzij, Bill Perkins, Jerry Vanasse, and Meg Welbourne.**
- The many **artists and poets** who contributed works to our Poetry and Photography on the Farm exhibits.



2025 Team

We are grateful to have so much of our crew together again for the 2025 season. Visit our website to learn more about this year's team.

Brenna Broderick, Development and Communications Manager

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



341 Virginia Road, P.O. Box 374
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

2025 Board of Directors

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Lisanne Wheeler, Vice President
Sigmund Correa, Treasurer
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Christa Collins
Laurie Engdahl
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Jyotsna Mulgund
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Yvette Philip
Joe Rigali, *Emeritus*
Lucy Rosborough,
Emeritus
Polly Vanasse

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Gaining Ground at a Glance

Incorporated in 1990 on privately owned land, Gaining Ground moved in 1999 to property on Virginia Road that we lease from the Town of Concord and Massport. The site of the farm has been under cultivation more or less continuously at least since the seventeenth century, according to available records—though Native Americans in the Musketaquid area (now known as Concord) had enjoyed the region's rich soils and rivers for about 10,000 years before that. In spring 2023, Gaining Ground embarked on a milestone expansion, to farm an additional 5.1 acres of land in Minute Man National Historical Park, just off the Battle Road.

In a typical year, more than 3,000 volunteers work with our farmers to grow organic produce. Every pound of produce that we harvest—often more than 120,000 pounds annually, depending on seasonal conditions—is donated to area hunger-relief programs, including Bedford Food

Bank; Bridge Boston Charter School, Roxbury; Community Teamwork/Head Start, Lowell; Daniel's Table, Framingham; East Boston Community Soup Kitchen; Eastie Farm, East Boston; Food for Families, Concord; Healthy Waltham; House of Hope, Lowell; Loaves and Fishes, Devens/Ayer; Lowell Transitional Living Center; Open Table, Maynard; La Colaborativa, Chelsea; Sudbury Community Food Pantry; Westford Council on Aging; UTEC, Lowell; and Women's Lunch Place, Boston. Individuals, foundations, businesses, and community organizations provide generous financial support for Gaining Ground.



▲ XXXX need d A short blurb about the tradition of maple syrup at GG. Maple sugaring has become a tradition at Gaining Ground and this 2025 Season was a grand success. We produced over 200 pints of maple syrup. Plan on joining us next spring and go home with a treat.

Contact us:
978.610.6086
office@gainingground.org

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gainingground.org

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