

GAINING GROUND

Gratitude Report 2026



OUR MISSION

With deep respect for land and community, Gaining Ground grows and donates fresh food to nourish our neighbors experiencing food insecurity in Massachusetts. We do this through community partners and alongside volunteers who work and learn with us on the farm.

OUR VISION

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



“Like the soil beneath our fields, the many people and organizations who believe in Gaining Ground’s mission form a connected web, helping to nurture something that is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Dear Friends,

One of the things I’ve come to appreciate about farming is that some of the most important work happens beneath our feet, hidden from view. Healthy soil isn’t simply dirt. It’s a living ecosystem of bacteria, fungi, microbes, insects, and countless other organisms, all connected in ways we’re still learning to understand. Together, they create the conditions in which a tiny seed can grow and eventually become nourishment for our neighbors.

The more time I spend at Gaining Ground, the more I realize that our community resembles healthy soil in an important way: Much of what makes it thrive happens out of the spotlight, through relationships that often go unseen. Like the soil beneath our fields, the many people and organizations who believe in Gaining Ground’s mission form a connected web, helping to nurture something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Volunteers collect and bring us banana boxes so that our harvest can be packed and transported with care. Children read books and collect pledges through Read for Seeds, helping us purchase the seeds that yield thousands of pounds of fresh produce. On the farm, volunteers weed, plant, spread compost, and lend many helping hands alongside our farm team. Others drive freshly picked vegetables to our food access partners throughout Greater Boston and Lowell.

Those partners are another essential part of this living network. Because they know their communities so well, they help us understand not only where the need is greatest but what foods people are excited to cook and enjoy with their families. Their guidance shapes what we grow just as surely as the weather.

And, of course, none of this would be possible without the generosity of the individuals, foundations, and businesses who choose to invest in this work. Your support provides the resources that allow every other part of this community to thrive.

Every time I walk through the fields, I’m reminded of the vibrant connections beneath the soil. Thank you for being one of those connections in the Gaining Ground community.

With gratitude,



Jennifer Johnson, Executive Director



Growing Our Impact

As demand for hunger relief in Massachusetts reached unprecedented levels in 2025, your support helped Gaining Ground provide fresh, healthy food to our partner organizations.



508,728

INDIVIDUAL SERVINGS DONATED

Reflecting our yield in servings accounts for variable weight among crops, from hefty winter squash to feathery cilantro.

15,000+

PEOPLE SERVED

By partnering with 18 community-based hunger relief programs, Gaining Ground helps nourish people of all ages in 46 cities and towns across eastern Massachusetts.



50+

POWERHOUSE CROPS, INCLUDING 14 NEW VARIETIES

Community needs and preferences drive each of our distributions, with spicy hot peppers for some and crunchy tatsoi for others. This year, we introduced new cold-hardy varieties of bunching broccoli, onions, and kale to boost winter growing.



3330

VOLUNTEERS FROM 177 CITIES AND TOWNS

Engaging the community on the farm is part of our mission. We welcomed an additional 1000 youth volunteers for hands-on learning on the land!



77

NEW GROWING BEDS WERE ADDED AT THE MINUTE MAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Each 18 x 80' bed yielded an abundance of tomatoes, eggplant, cantaloupe, winter squash, and parsley. Plus, we broke ground on two more acres at the Park, and planted cover crops to start building soil fertility.



1,680

FRESH-CUT FLOWER BOUQUETS DONATED

Not only are flowers beautiful, the 70 varieties we grow attract and nourish the pollinators that our crops rely on for reproduction and fruit-bearing. Producing food and flowers helps us nourish both body and soul.

More than a Delivery

Lucy Rosborough doesn't need to consult her GPS once in the three hours it takes to deliver Gaining Ground produce to families experiencing food insecurity across Concord.

After all, she's been at this for decades—volunteering every Saturday of the farm season to oversee Food for Families (FFF), our direct-to-client, fresh produce distribution for neighbors in need.

She begins by coordinating a centralized pick-up for dozens of clients and then embarks in her trusty Subaru to personally deliver nourishment to folks around town. They include working families, people with mobility challenges, and many elders. FFF clients receive seasonal produce from mid-June to early October, with a special delivery before Thanksgiving. They also receive bouquets of Gaining Ground flowers put together by National Charity League volunteers.

"I think of Lucy as the Queen of Food for Families," says Operations Director Allison Goodwin. "When I start planning the program each year, the first thing I do is check to make sure that she's still up for it."

At 85 years old, Lucy has no plans of stopping.

"Why would I?" Lucy says. "It brings joy to the recipients and to me, it brings good health, and it models the way that we should be interacting with each other: listening, helping, and caring."

Lucy has been involved with Gaining Ground since its inception. She credits "visionary" Founder Jamie Bemis with starting a 'soup-kitchen garden' and inviting Lucy, a friend, to help.

"Jamie raised awareness about food insecurity at a time when people really didn't talk about it," Lucy says.

FFF emerged as Gaining Ground blossomed and has grown exponentially to keep pace with the rising need for food assistance. Before COVID, for instance, the program served about 30 households per season. Today it serves 125 households.



"Lucy is a community builder, plain and simple."

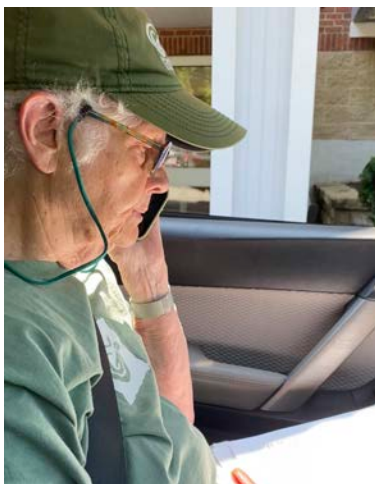
Clients are referred by local health officials, town Councils on Aging, and by Lucy herself.

Lucy has forged a personal relationship with most participating families: She knows their backgrounds, if someone recently had surgery, what veggies they love and what they dislike, and where their kids go to school.

"Her engagement goes well beyond handing out food," Allison says. "Lucy is a community builder, plain and simple."

The care is mutual. On a recent Saturday morning, one client after another lingered by Lucy's car to ask about her son's birthday, her grandbaby, and her health.

"There used to be a show on television, I Love Lucy," says one Concord resident, who has been an FFF participant for nearly a decade. "When I met her, I thought, 'Here's a Lucy, and we do love her.'"



Above: Lucy loaded up for home deliveries, 2018

Far left: Lucy calls ahead before making home deliveries.

Right: Lucy (left), 2009

Scan here for a video of Lucy in action!



Together at the Table



For over 30 years, Gaining Ground has teamed up with Open Table to provide fresh, healthy food to neighbors in need.

Founded by volunteers in 1989, Open Table serves 21 communities throughout central Middlesex County. Clients range from young families experiencing temporary hardship to older folks on fixed incomes.

Local health and human services providers refer people to Open Table, but “word of mouth is the best,” says Executive Director Alexandra DePalo. “People let others know, ‘They’re good. You can trust them. You’re safe going there.’”

Open Table is widely recognized for prioritizing fresh food that promotes good health. Nearly 75% of Open Table distributions are nutritious, perishable foods—including Gaining Ground produce. Gaining Ground donates more than 40,000 servings of vegetables, fruits, and herbs to Open Table each year.

“Clients are blown away by the quality and freshness of the produce from Gaining Ground,” Alexandra says. “They appreciate feeling connected to the local food system.”

To meet rising demand, Open Table recently converted an underutilized building next to its main food pantry in downtown Maynard into a warehouse to store more donations, serve more people, and expand services.

“Food is a basic need,” Alexandra says, “and we are committed to working with incredible partners like Gaining Ground to ensure that we can serve as many people as possible.”

FROM FARM TO TABLE

We donate food at peak freshness to local people in need, typically within 24 hours of harvest. Here's how Gaining Ground produce reaches Open Table, one of our distribution partners.



PICK UP

By noon, our farmers have harvested, washed, and packed the day's bounty. Open Table Truck Driver and Pantry Assistant Brandon Crocker loads the van with eggplant, cantaloupe, tomatoes, spinach, fennel, and more. Buckets of fresh-cut flowers, Brandon's favorite, complete the bounty. "Everyone deserves something beautiful," he says.



LOAD IN

Donations travel nine miles to Open Table in Maynard, where Brandon unloads everything into the spacious new warehouse. The bounty weighs in at about 700 pounds. "We receive more than \$1 million annually in donated food," says Open Table Executive Director Alexandra DePalo. "Imagine if we had to purchase that food."



SORT & STORE

Open Table distributes Gaining Ground produce through a variety of programs. Some ingredients, like crisp lettuce, fresh onions, and fragrant basil, are packed into grocery bags for pick-up and home delivery, while others, such as spinach and mixed greens, are incorporated into prepared meals.



PREP & COOK

With support from volunteers, Kitchen Manager Luke Giroux and Kitchen Assistant Peter Kilbridge cook over 1,000 healthy meals each week, frozen in individual portions. Gaining Ground's harvest is found in tasty meals from vegetable frittata to chicken with roasted potatoes.



TAKE HOME

The dignity of choice is essential at Open Table. Clients may order groceries in advance, visit the drive-through pantry, or receive home delivery. "We are really intentional about providing a welcoming environment, and lifting people up at a difficult time," Alexandra says.

Strengthening the Organization Behind the Harvest

Accelerating positive social impact with the Social Innovation Forum

Last fall, Tanya Inwald sampled a handful of Gaining Ground spinach and it took her by surprise.

“I don’t even like spinach,” she says, “but it was so crunchy and so yummy—I was really impressed!”

Tanya is the director of programs at Social Innovation Forum (SIF), an organization that accelerates positive social change by connecting small- to medium-sized community-led nonprofits in eastern Massachusetts with the resources, networks, and knowledge they need to achieve greater social impact.

Gaining Ground had been selected as a finalist for SIF’s signature two-year Social Innovation Accelerator program, prompting Tanya’s visit.

Fewer than 10% of applicants are selected each cycle—and after the farm visit, Gaining Ground was chosen for the 2026 cohort!

Of course, our selection was about more than the spinach.

“The Gaining Ground model might look simple, but it’s not at all,” Tanya says. “The team collectively balances a high-quality commitment to sustainable farming, strong community relationships that help connect fresh food to people in need, and an extensive volunteer program.”

Our Executive Director Jennifer Johnson says the generous funding—a minimum of \$30,000 in unrestricted funds—is

just the “tip of the iceberg.” The Social Innovation Accelerator program also offers participants critical capacity-building resources and networking opportunities.

“SIF is strengthening the organization behind the harvest by investing in our professional development,” she says. “To fulfill our mission, we need more than seeds, potting soil, and compost. We need to improve our operations management, storytelling, and impact measurement. That will help us get more food on the plates of more people.”

A highlight of the Accelerator program thus far has been a months-long messaging and strategy process that culminated in a community showcase, where Jennifer had the chance to deliver a compelling pitch about our work to potential partners and investors.

Gaining Ground has also benefited from a range of pro-bono services, including graphic design and fundraising consulting. Perhaps most important, we are now connected to a dynamic network of Innovators past, present, and future.

“It’s a little bit like when you go to school,” Jennifer says. “You leave with your degree, but you also leave with meaningful relationships. This generous investment from the Social Innovation Forum will reverberate for years to come.”



Executive Director Jennifer Johnson with Mass Mutual’s Grants Portfolio Manager Lucas Orwig at the 2026 Social Innovator Showcase. Photo credit: Mike Ritter

“To fulfill our mission, we need more than seeds, potting soil, and compost. We need to improve our operations management, storytelling, and impact measurement. That will help us get more food on the plates of more people.”



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	PARTNER LOCATION	AREA(S) SERVED	PARTNERS SINCE
Bedford Food Bank	Bedford	Bedford, Carlisle, Concord, Billerica, Burlington, and Lowell	1999
Bridge Boston Charter School	Roxbury	Boston	2019
Community Teamwork/Head Start	Lowell	Lowell, Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Tewksbury, and Westford	2014
Daniel's Table	Framingham	Framingham	2021
East Boston Community Soup Kitchen	East Boston	Boston	2020
Eastie Farm	East Boston	Boston, Revere, Chelsea, Winthrop, Everett	2020
Food for Families	Concord	Concord and Carlisle	2003
Harvard Square Churches Meal Program	Cambridge	Cambridge, Somerville	2021
Healthy Waltham	Waltham	Waltham	2020
House of Hope	Lowell	Lowell	2013
La Colaborativa	Chelsea	Chelsea, East Boston, Everett, Lynn, Revere, and Malden	2023
Loaves and Fishes	Ayer, Devens	Ayer, Devens, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Littleton, and Shirley	1998
Lowell Transitional Living Center	Lowell	Lowell	2016
Open Table	Maynard	Acton, Bedford, Billerica, Boxborough, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Concord, Framingham, Hudson, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Lowell, Marlborough, Maynard, Natick, Stow, Sudbury, Waltham, Wayland, and Westford	1994
Sudbury Community Food Pantry	Sudbury	Sudbury, Acton, Clinton, Concord, Framingham, Hudson, Leominster, Marlborough, Maynard, Natick, Stow, Waltham, Wayland, and Worcester	1997
UTEC	Lowell	Lowell, Lawrence, Haverhill	2023
Westford Council on Aging	Westford	Westford	1998
Women's Lunch Place	Boston	Boston	2022

Defining Environmental Justice (EJ) Populations
 In Massachusetts, EJ 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 2025, all of our partners distributed produce among at least one EJ population.

Statement of Financial Position

As of December 31, 2025 (Unaudited)

	TOTAL
Assets	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	\$2,267,813.96
Accounts Receivable	\$243,274.33
Other Current Assets	\$15,489.79
Total for Current Assets	\$2,526,578.08
Fixed Assets	\$749,734.36
Other Assets	\$34,946.00
TOTAL ASSETS	\$3,311,258.44
Liabilities and Equity	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	\$77,755.99
Long-Term Liabilities	\$20,386.00
Total Liabilities	\$98,141.99
Equity	\$3,213,116.45
TOTAL FOR LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	\$3,311,258.44

Please note that this is our unaudited Statement of Financial Position. You will be able to access our fully audited financial statements on our website at: <https://gainingground.org/our-story/gratitude-reports-and-financial-statements/>

Farmer DIY: Compost Tea Brewer

Healthy food starts with healthy soil, and healthy soil depends on life we can't even see. Farm Co-Assistant Manager Ava Lublin brews our compost tea—enriched liquid extracted from solid compost—to multiply beneficial microbes in our fields. When applied to soil, this concentrated solution helps break down organic matter and make nutrients available to plants.



“The more—and more diverse—microbes there are in the soil, the better. It takes all levels of the soil food web to break down organic matter.”

– Ava Lublin,
Farm Co-Assistant Manager



Scan here to
see a video of
compost tea
in action!



The 2026 Gaining Ground Team

Back row l-r:

Mark Congdon
Maddie Weikel
Rachael Walton
Zoe Tallmadge
Kaitlin Katirachi
Maddie Pearson
Shannon Applegate
Debbie Pullen
Allison Goodwin
Jennifer Johnson
Gianni Venezia

Front row l-r:

Christine Hicks
Cora Voet
Lucy Moan
Ava Lublin
Nat Bloom
Aaron Richmond-Crosset



Expanding the Harvest

Gaining Ground is growing! Thanks to your support, each new bed of tomatoes planted and each additional row of watermelons harvested makes healthy food more accessible to our neighbors. Your care and commitment are foundational to this growth.

There are many ways to ensure that every member of our community has the nourishment to grow, learn, work, and thrive.



Let healthy communities be your legacy

Sustain Gaining Ground's future by including us in your estate plans. A planned gift ensures that the values you support—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.



Volunteer with us

Connect with others through meaningful volunteer work on the farm. No prior experience is necessary—just a willingness to learn, pitch in, and make a difference. We welcome both group and individual volunteers.



Support the work, year-round

Gaining Ground grows food year-round, and 100% is donated to people experiencing food insecurity. To do this, we rely on the generosity of donors like you to help nourish our neighbors with dignity. Each gift expands equitable food access, and a monthly gift helps sustain this work all year long.

Stay in touch

Keep updated on farm news, seasonal photos, and mission impact via our newsletter, social media, and website. See your support in action and share Gaining Ground's work with others who care. Infuse your feed with colorful harvests and sweeping farm views!

Let's stay connected!

Website:
gainingground.org

Email:
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[@gaininggroundconcord](https://www.instagram.com/gaininggroundconcord)

Facebook:
[GGConcord](https://www.facebook.com/GGConcord)

Phone: 978.610.6086

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.

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.

INSPIRATION—we nurture joy and wonder in our fields.

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

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.

2026 STAFF AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD OFFICERS

Lisanne Wheeler
President
Christa Collins
Vice President
Yvette Philip
Treasurer
Kristen Van Damm
Clerk
Jennifer Johnson
Assistant Clerk, (ex officio)

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Robyn Eastwood
Laurie Engdahl
Reed Holden
Sam Hiersteiner
Jane F. Huber
Michael Leahy
Jyotsna Mulgund
Joe Rigali
Emeritus
Lucy Rosborough
Emeritus

2026 STAFF

Mark Congdon
Director of Agriculture and Volunteer Experience
Allison Goodwin
Operations Director
Christine Hicks
Assistant Grower
Jennifer Johnson
Executive Director
Ava Lublin
Farm Co-Assistant Manager
Debbie Pullen
Development and Communications Manager
Zoe Tallmadge
Assistant Grower
Rachael Walton
Farm Co-Assistant Manager
Maddie Weikel
Assistant Grower and Education Coordinator

2026 FARMING APPRENTICES

Shannon Applegate
Kaitlin Katirachi
Gianni Venezia

2026 INTERNS

Nat Bloom
Lucy Moan
Cora Voet

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