

Community Conservation SPOTLIGHT



Lookout Mountain Conservancy's leadership interns from a local high school connect to the land by building raised beds, growing vegetables and learning how to prepare them.

With hunger on the rise throughout our country, whether it be youth, families or the elderly, land trusts are finding new ways to connect their conservation work to others in a way that brings joy, builds a sense of shared mission and purpose and meets the core needs for healthy communities.

Research and common-sense documents that hungry children and adults can't focus well and stress increases challenges for learning and employment. This *Spotlight* features land trusts who are facilitating the growing, preparing and eating of healthy food in their communities as a powerful way to help directly people in their community and bring their work and land trust's mission to life.

If your land trust works in education, or conserves and stewards agricultural land, these programs provide examples of a how to boost your impact.

Community Guided Agricultural Land Protection

Nebraska Land Trust*—NE

Nebraska Land Trust recognized an opportunity to launch an agriculturally based community conservation project that would serve more landowners and step up the pace of conservation in an area that previously had not expressed much interest in conservation.

The process started by creating an advisory committee to help create region-specific land protection criteria that identifies lands important from agricultural, historical and natural resources perspectives. The result is an increase in community trust and respect, upswing in requests for assistance, as well as completed projects protecting a diversity of farm/ranch lands and natural areas.

- Partners: Nebraska Big Game Society, The Pine Ridge Advisory Committee, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, The Sterns Foundation, Land Trust Alliance (a grant for outreach)
- Staff: 2 FTE
- nelandtrust.org

“We now conserve lands that are locally, and regionally, important.”

— David Sands, Nebraska Land Trust Executive Director

Colorado Open Lands*—CO

The land trust holds the easement on Rio Grande Farm Park, just four blocks from downtown Alamosa, accessible by trails along the Rio Grande.

The park provides plots of irrigated land to families and new farmers, including immigrant farm workers from Central America, and is a farm incubator. At the end of the three-to-five-year tenure the park staff helps them find funding opportunities to start up their own operations. This is the only farm incubator in the San Luis Valley.

- Partners: San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition, Rio Grande Farm Park, Trust for Public Land
- Staff: 2 FTE implementing program at Rio Grande Farm Park
- coloradoopenlands.org, tpl.org, riograndefarmpark.org, slvlocalfoods.org



Protecting a Community Treasure

Agricultural Stewardship Association* and Pitney Meadows Community Farm—NY

Located across from the high school and the regional YMCA, in an urbanizing portion of Saratoga Springs, New York, the Pitney Meadows Community Farm is a place where people from all walks of life can learn, enjoy, connect to each other and build a sense of community.

The 166-acre farm was purchased in partnership with the City of Saratoga Springs and the support of hundreds of donors. The Agricultural Stewardship Association helps protect the parcel and partners with the city to ensure regular monitoring.

The farm is home to community gardens for individual gardeners, and volunteers and partners who grow food for the local food bank. It has raised gardens for those who benefit from waist-high growing beds and educational and recreational garden areas, too.

The farm hosts a major component of the Saratoga Greenbelt Trail System, a network of nine urban/suburban trails and nine miles of rural trails. Nature trails compatible with farming operations will wind through the farm and connect to 13 miles of trails within the neighboring state park.

Recreational opportunities centered around growing and relaxing in the garden space—including story-time and family programs—help build a broad-based level of community involvement.

- Partners: City of Saratoga Springs, Pitney Meadows Community Farm
- ASA staff: 5 FTE, 3 PTE | Pitney Meadows Community Farm staff: 2 PTE directors, 1 PTE garden coordinator
- agstewardship.org, pitneymeadowscommunityfarm.org



For more examples check out
Working with Veterans Spotlight.

“This is a truly inspiring project which will put our community on the map through innovation, environmental development and education for farmers and gardeners of today and tomorrow.” — Suzanne F., community member

Healthy Food, Healthy Communities

Peconic Land Trust — NY

Peconic Land Trust owns and operates Quail Hill Farm, one of the original Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the United States. Since its establishment in 1990, Quail Hill Farm has grown to 35 acres serving over 250 families. The farm is also the location for educational and recreational events offered by the land trust throughout the year.

In addition to the food produced for local families the farm delivers fresh food to local restaurants and food pantries and participates in the Sag Harbor Farmers Market throughout the season. A central part of the mission at Quail Hill is to educate the public concerning such issues as soil health, our seed supply, food security and sustainable, organic farming practices.

The farm has trained over 150 apprentice farmers. Using three greenhouses, five tractors, extensive irrigation and a healthy collection of hoes, the farm offers both a summer and a winter share.

- Partners: Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York
- Staff: 30 FTE, including 2 farmers on staff. The farm also employs 6 apprentices.
- peconiclandtrust.org

LandPaths — CA

Programming includes the Farming for Health project, where community members share ideas on growing vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants to address health and healthy eating. The land trust runs a Free Lunch program at the farm.

Community groups organize healthy eating workshops, cooking sessions and family-tested recipes. Bilingual printed materials include healthy eating recipes and other helpful information provided by the land trust. The city owns the land; the land trust manages the land and community engagement.

- Partners: City Recreation and Parks, Redwood Empire Food Bank, agencies, community organizations
- Staff: 14 FTE | .75 FTE for program
- landpaths.org

For more examples check out *Inspiring Youth Beyond School Spotlight*.



Providing Affordable Access to Land

As land becomes increasingly expensive—and often out-of-reach for farmers when on the market for estate housing—land trusts are stepping in to provide long-term leases or conservation easements that ensure the land will be affordable or accessible for farmers into the future.

Equity Trust—National

Equity Trust is a small nonprofit working with land trusts and community groups throughout the country on land access and affordability challenges.

Their *Farms for Farmers* program promotes alternative ownership structures for farms, to benefit farmers who need affordable farmland and communities that want a secure source of locally grown food and a way to preserve their environmental heritage.

The Equity Trust Fund is a revolving loan fund enabling socially conscious lenders and donors to support projects that are creating new ways of owning, using and stewarding property.

- equitytrust.org

Vermont Land Trust*—VT

The Vermont Land Trust's Farmland Access Program is the link between beginning farmers ready to own their own land or current farmers looking to expand their business and farms in transition. VLT uses conservation tools to help make the land more affordable for farmers and then keep it at its agricultural value for future farmers. VLT, one of the pioneers of this work, holds over 1,900 easements and in the past decade has helped with the transfer of \$55 million in Vermont farm real estate to new farmers.

- vlt.org

Genesee Land Trust*—NY

Owns a 110-acre farm, farmed by local farmers with a 25-year rolling affordable land lease that was developed with assistance from Equity Trust. The previous long-time farming couple recently retired and the land is now farmed by a young couple who are continuing to run a Community Supported Agriculture on the farm as well as direct sales at local farm markets.

- geneseeandtrust.org



Growing Food for the Hungry

American Chestnut Land Trust*—MD

In 2015, American Chestnut Land Trust (ACLT) changed its program from “Community Supported Agriculture” to “Agriculture Supporting the Community” and donated 75% of the farm yield (more than 6,000 pounds) to nearby food pantries. In addition, an educational garden was developed to share organic gardening methods with the public—a subject very important to farm volunteers.

ACLT reached out to faith organizations; other local organizations like The Arc, an organization providing support for adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities; as well as networks of farm groups, like Farming 4 Hunger. It also held farmers markets and farm tours. The program has grown to include school, scout and club visits.

ACLT continues reaching out to and making connections to land available to as many people as possible through as many means as possible.

- Partners: Faith, community, farming and other groups
- Staff: 4 FTE, 1 volunteer | 3 volunteer project managers, staff support, volunteers
- acltweb.org

Capital Roots and Agricultural Stewardship Association*—NY

A local organic farm, not far from a small city where hunger is an issue, planted extra crops to help feed those in need.

The Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA) helped two food pantries, Capital Roots and the Comfort Food Community, mobilize volunteers to harvest fresh fruits and vegetables. Once harvested, the produce was transported and distributed through the food pantries. ASA rallied additional volunteers to glean other fields for donations to the food bank.

- Partners: community groups, volunteers
- agstewardship.org, capitalroots.org



Maine Coast Heritage Trust*—ME

At Erickson Fields Preserve in Rockport, Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT) runs several agricultural programs for youth, teens and families. Teen Agriculture Crew (TAG Crew) is a social entrepreneurial program where teens are paid during the summer to grow food to donate to food pantries. The program focuses on six to eight teens ages 14–18 and incorporates leadership and business planning skills in addition to training centered around managing the 4-acre market garden.

The program has steadily expanded, now encompassing 4 acres on MCHT Erickson Fields Preserve with a dog-friendly 2.5-mile trail and the construction of a walk-in cooler, produce wash station and seeding greenhouse to improve farm efficiency.

In addition to local food pantries, TAG Crew supplies fresh produce to the area public schools, a retirement home and several restaurant accounts. The TAG Crew has distributed over 20,000 pounds of fresh vegetables to six food pantries annually.

- Partners: 15 community organizations
- Staff for program: 1 FTE farm manager; 1 FTE seasonal apprentice March–October; 6–8 PTE TAG Crew members May–October
- mcht.org, aldermere.org

Lookout Mountain Conservancy*—TN

Lookout Mountain Conservancy owns and manages an organic garden as part of its high school youth and leadership program. Students discuss with their families what vegetables they would like to eat, plant and care for over the summer in an individual garden plot; and then harvest and prepare the vegetables for both their family and the other interns using an on-site kitchen.

Interns are paid as part of the Conservancy's leadership program. For many of the students, this is the first time they have gardened or eaten these vegetables.

A number of youth have reconnected with their grandparents over the growing and preparing of vegetables they had eaten in their youth.

- Partners: Community gardeners, businesses
- Staff: 2.5 FTE | 1.75 FTE for summer program, 1 seasonal assistant
- lookoutmountainconservancy.org

For more examples check out *Inspiring Youth Beyond School Spotlight*.



Hub for Agricultural Activity: The Incubator Farm

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy*—NC

The Farmer Incubator Program is a critical part of Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy's Farmland Access Service, which provides access to land, infrastructure (greenhouses, washing and cooling facilities, livestock and storage sheds, irrigation, miles of permanent and temporary fencing), equipment and technical support for a nominal monthly fee to currently four farmers.

The farm incubator lands vary in size from ¼ to 15 acres; farmers can lease the land up to five years.

Active annual, perennial and livestock farming is balanced with resilient natural environments through a symbiotic relationship. The program also connects participants with service providers, new markets and promotional opportunities while they build a solid foundation for their farm business.

- Partners: Organic Growers School, WNC Farmlink, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program
- Staff: 13 FTE | 1 FTE for program
- appalachian.org

Ozaukee Washington Land Trust*—WI

The Making Allies for Healthier Communities partnership promotes healthy communities by conserving quality farmland for local farmers to grow and sell fresh food to all of Milwaukee, especially in underserved neighborhoods, and to improve water quality in the Milwaukee River Watershed and Lake Michigan.

It also advocates for land security for immigrant and beginning farmers and promotes best farming practices to build healthy soils to ensure all people have access to good food and clean water.

- Partners: Fondy Food Center, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, local Hmong farmers, Land Trust Alliance
- owlt.org, fondymarket.org, mmsd.com, landtrustalliance.org



Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

© Chris Link

Urban Gardens—Growing Community and Food

The urban garden movement is steadily growing, with land trusts all across the country working with their communities to create places for gathering, growing and celebrating their community. Rural, suburban and urban land trusts ranging from all-volunteer to staffed groups, are making an impact. Some own and manage the land; others host the gardens and the community runs the garden project.



Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust

© Jacqueline Chirakian

Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust—CA

This program equips student leaders and community members to facilitate a biweekly, farmers' market-style, Free Food Distribution at the Fremont Wellness Center and Community Garden. Each month the program distributes 6,000-plus pounds of free produce to students, local residents and community-based agencies.

The Gardening Apprenticeship Program, an after-school youth development program provided by the land trust, develops the leadership skills of African American and Latino youth in grades 9–12 at Fremont High School, a Title 1 school in South Los Angeles, to address environmental and food injustices facing their community. The program develops the next generation of environmental, health and policy leaders who will use their skills to advance social progress in South Los Angeles.

- Partners: University Muslim Medical Association, Food Forward food recovery organization
- Staff: 11 FTE
- lanlt.org, ummaclinic.org

Baltimore GreenSpace—MD

- Neighborhood managed and run community gardens
- Five food gardens protected by the land trust, as well as six additional community spaces, such as sitting parks and forest patch
- Staff: 2 FTE
- baltimoregreenspace.org

Brooklyn Queens Land Trust—NY

- Works in 20 diverse neighborhoods within two New York City boroughs
- Owns 35 gardens and leases two others
- BQLT provides gardens with management support, garden liability insurance and emergency resources (e.g., for tree removal and pruning) and provides free access to water via water systems and fire hydrants
- Staff: 0.5 FTE | Over 600 volunteers
- bqlt.org

For more examples check out *Inspiring Youth Beyond School Spotlight*.

Community Gardens, New Americans and Culture

Southside Community Land Trust — RI

Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT) was founded in 1981 to increase the availability of healthy food for low-income, urban and immigrant Providence residents. It has since turned 32 acres of urban and peri-urban land into 52 community gardens and four production and demonstration farms in three additional communities.

The land trust co-founded three farmers markets and three growers' collaboratives. It serves more than 225 young people each year through a Youth Employment and Education program.

While its sustainable agriculture programs, organizational reach and operations have grown over the years, many people it serves still cannot easily find or afford fresh produce for their families. In response, SCLT trains growing numbers of beginning farmers each year through hands-on training, marketing workshops and farm apprenticeships. It is putting more acreage in the state to use growing food by connecting farmers with property owners seeking to keep their land from being developed.

- Partners: Towns, community organizations, schools, nursing homes, etc.
- Staff: 15 FTE
- southsideclt.org

New Haven Land Trust — CT

Community gardening provides neighbors with exercise, stress relief, a sense of well-being and opportunities for family time and learning new skills.

The New Haven Land Trust provides technical assistance and supplies to more than 50 community gardens.

Its Growing Entrepreneurs Program teaches farming, carpentry and job skills to 13 New Haven teenagers who are paid year-round: Part time during the academic year and full time over the summer. The teenagers start their own food-related entrepreneurial businesses, grow food to sell to local restaurants and work on the land trust's sites.

- Staff: 9.3 FTE | Volunteers
- newhavenlandtrust.org



Southside Community Land Trust



New Haven Land Trust:
Growing Entrepreneurs at Grand Acres
© Ian Christmann

Triangle Land Conservancy*—NC

The Conservancy was given the 269-acre J. Logan and Elinor Moore Irvin Nature Preserve as a bequest in 2007 with the provision that it not be open to the general public. Today the Preserve supports four benefits of conservation—it filters water and provides wildlife habitat and, with the help of two other nonprofits, it also connects people to nature and supports a farm.

Transplanting Traditions Community Farm (TTCF), one of the nonprofit partners, began in 2010 on 1 acre and 28 participants and has grown to almost 8 acres with 56 farmers and their families. TTCF helps Karen refugees from Burma to grow and sell their own food at the local farmers market, to local restaurants and through a Community Supported Agriculture program.

The farmers bring a wealth of agricultural knowledge and skills, but farming is drastically different in North Carolina. TTCF provides weekly farming and business workshops as well as programs for teens and young children that focus on leadership development and communication skills, nature, nutrition and cooking and physical activity.

- Partners: Transplanting Traditions Community Farm
- Staff: 15 FTE | 1 AmeriCorps volunteer
- triangleland.org

Wildlands Trust—MA

Established a 17-plot community garden at the land trust's office. Two elevated garden beds are designated for people with special needs or mobility challenges.

Organizations supporting these people bring them to the site on a regular basis to care for, and harvest, the food. One bed is grown for the foodbank; excess produce from the entire garden is also donated to the local food bank.

- Staff: 7.5 FTE | Garden takes 100 hours/year
- wildlandstrust.org



Five Tips for Addressing Food and Hunger

- 1. Brainstorm with individuals, community organizations,** local businesses and agencies on how your land trust might be able to help. Share examples of what other land trusts are doing.
- 2. Assess how you might partner with existing programs or community initiatives.** This may involve adapting partnerships and programs in new ways or rethinking your land conservation priorities and strategies.
- 3. Consider if you could replicate a program, or land protection effort,** from another region in your service area—or a portion of your service area. Listen to what the needs are “close to home.”
- 4. Listen to what challenges your community is facing related to health, food and hunger.** Keep an open mind as examples could be as diverse as the opioid crisis, homelessness, farmer/rancher stress, insufficient education or employment, lack of clean water or access to land, elder landowners and isolation, poor market access and soil degradation, etc.
- 5. Get out the word, inspire others.** Community conservation that uses land and water to directly change lives in tangible ways, throughout the community, often results in finding new partners, supporters and ambassadors for the work and for other focus areas of your organization.

Interested in other tips, examples, and suggestions?

Go to the Land Trust Alliance’s website at www.lta.org/community-conservation

Do you have a program or project to spotlight? Email communityconservation@lta.org

“Our work with the community to address education, food and hunger dovetails with the ethic of caring for the land and people. We see them intertwined.”

—Travis Custer, Montezuma Land Conservancy Executive Director



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Join the conversation

Community Conservation Learning Network forum on the Learning Center
<https://tlc.lta.org/CCLNforum>

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*Denotes accredited land trust. See landtrustaccreditation.org