

what's up!



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Filling big boots— with tomatoes, beans and support

REFLECTIONS ON OUR 18TH GROWING SEASON 🌿 *By Kayleigh Boyle and Michelle De Lima, Farm Coordinators*

With Verena having moved on from Gaining Ground, we were left with some big boots to fill. Eager to get to work, we each picked up a boot and headed for the field—though we quickly realized that farming definitely requires two!

In the early spring, over the sugaring stove, we hired our Assistant Farmer, Rafe. Once we invited our Interns back, our crew was complete, and we were ready to start our

spring projects. We spent March and April working in the greenhouse and transplanting cold, hardy crops into the bare fields.

Our tomato seedlings were vigorous and green, but when we moved them outside to harden off, 10 days of frequent rain caused a fungal disease to take hold. But a few days later, we received an amazing offer: the Massachusetts Horticultural Society had 2,000 tomatoes left over from its plant sale that it wanted to donate to Gaining Ground. May also brought 500 asparagus crowns, 200 raspberry canes and two-dozen fruit trees, as well as lots of volunteers to the farm to help.

We began to distribute our produce at the end of May. With our friend from Ayer Council on Aging unable to pick up any longer, we spread out our harvest to more recipients, including Lowell Catholic Charities, Stowe Food Pantry, Food for Free in Cambridge and Open Table Maynard. The new Massport land allowed us to feed this demand while cover cropping other acreage. Visitors to the farm this summer could see a clover field along the farm road and stands of oats and peas scattered around the farm.

We hope the fertility from these cover crops will help fight the myriad of pests and diseases we faced this season. Mexican bean beetles showed up in large numbers. Nobody was safe: bush beans, pole beans and dry beans all suffered a lot of damage. We plan to release beneficial insects to ensure

that everyone can enjoy more beans next season.

After celebrating a Harvest Fest filled with music—provided by Rafe and friends—work is starting to slow down at the farm. The vivid colors of summer's fruits have given way to the autumnal hues of winter squash, onions, popcorn and root vegetables. In the cold winter months, before the sap starts to run, we will spend our time flipping through seed catalogues, mapping our fields and attending Board planning meetings. We're looking forward to these months, when we can take off our boots, slip on our wool socks and plan for the year to come.

Rafael Wolman, Assistant Farmer, works with volunteers from Thoreau Elementary School.



2011 season highlights

This was our second year using our own sugaring stove, and we received lots of help in the form of firewood donations. Our thanks to the private citizens and the towns of Concord and Carlisle who let us tap roughly 120 trees, resulting in 27 finished gallons of syrup.

Two crops figure largely in Concord's agricultural history: strawberries and asparagus. This spring, in honor of his family roots and Concord's Italian immigrant history, Dominic Ingegneri gave Gaining Ground a generous donation of approximately 500 asparagus plants.

We have added approximately 200 new raspberry bushes and a mix of 24 fruit trees: peaches, plums and pears. We know the fruit will be a welcome addition in the years to come.



A summer on the farm teaches more about people than plants

By Andrew Allen-Fahlander, Intern

summary was. I didn't just farm this summer—I taught and I laughed, I learned and I was humbled. I soaked up the conversation, reveled in the cooking and discovered profound beauty where before I saw only a field and some leaves.

Gaining Ground is not just a farm for plants. It is a farm for people, too. It's a place where bare feet sink into the soil and pull up something eternal, something real and wholesome. I remember leaving work physically exhausted and yet mentally invigorated, as if a new branch of truth had been grafted onto my brain, a new window into the botanical enigma that keeps us all alive.

In a world where this type of cathartic experience is being eliminated by techno-food and convenience, it's even more important to keep Gaining Ground alive. The food we produce is only half of the story. On a deeper level, we are a place of soul-searching and salvation. The essence of Gaining Ground is found in the empty spaces of the day, the times when there is

nothing but hands and dirt and tender shoots needing love and care. These are the moments when we understand that our physical and emotional health hinge upon our fragile relationships with plants and soil and sun, and most of all, with one another.

If I have learned one thing from Gaining Ground, it is that a positive attitude has greater implications than it's given credit for. If the carrots don't come up, or if the cabbage turns into a pest colony, at least you are growing. If you can learn to embrace the process rather than the product, the struggle to find meaning in your life might just dissolve.

I came to the farm to learn about plants, and I certainly did, but I think that I left having learned a lot more about people. Just like plants, people need to be cared for and made to feel important. That is why even just one organic meal a week is so important for someone who is really struggling—it keeps their stalks hearty and their leaves a deep green.

When my peers in Colorado asked me what I did this summer, I told them that I worked on an organic farm in Massachusetts.

“Oh, so, you were doing what? A lot of weeding and stuff?”

“Yeah, a lot of weeding for sure, but also seeding and harvesting and fixing all sorts of farm problems.”

“Cool, man. That's sweet.”

“Yeah, it was fun.”

During the first few days of school, I had this dialogue over and over again, and every time, I thought about how futile my



Our 2011 Farm Crew (L to R): Alec Ellsworth, Rafael Wolman, Michelle De Lima, Andrew Allen-Fahlander, Kayleigh Boyle, and Zoe Reich-Aviles.

Familiar faces in our 2011 farm crew

In January, our seasoned Assistant Growers Kayleigh Boyle and Michelle De Lima became the Farm Coordinators for Gaining Ground. We're thrilled to have their farming expertise overseeing the fields and friendly manner working with volunteers. Both are passionate about healthy food—growing and eating it—and they let nothing go to waste as they turn field thinnings into farmer lunch on the pavilion stove.

They are joined by a new Assistant Farmer: Rafael Wolman. Rafe livens up lunch on Fridays for volunteers when he rosins his bow and starts fiddling. It's good food for the soul.

We're also happy to welcome back Alec Ellsworth—also a fiddler!—for a second year as our Gardener at the Old Manse. You might see Alec pulling the bike trailer between the Old Manse and the main farm on Virginia Road—it's hard to miss! The Old Manse has organized several events during which you can learn more about the garden from Alec, including an English Tea and a new nighttime tour and talk.

The other regular faces at Gaining Ground this season are our returning farm Interns. Louisa Rigali has led the effort to revitalize the farm's apiary, and she is joined in the fields by Andrew Allen-Fahlander and Zoe Reich-Aviles.

Harvest Fest 2011

brings together the Gaining Ground community



On a Saturday in early October, we celebrated our 18th growing season at Harvest Fest 2011, a party like no other. Although the weather could have been better, the rain (mostly) held off and this year's Harvest Fest drew an enthusiastic crowd of Gaining Ground supporters of all ages—including volunteers, food recipients, Board Members, and many others. Thanks to everyone who attended and made the event possible!

Top Row: Making apple cider is always a favorite Harvest Fest activity; Assistant Farmer Rafael Wolman and friends generously provided music and square dancing instruction. Bottom Row: Creating vegetable print napkins; the ever-popular funnelator; an artful display of veggies was laid out for the "store."

READ FOR SEEDS

The pages you read help people in need

Thanks to the many classes (and hundreds of readers) who participated in Read for Seeds 2011!

Hundreds of students from local public and private schools participated in Gaining Ground's Fifth Annual Read for Seeds read-a-thon. Collecting pledges for the number of pages they read during a two-week period, students helped raise money for the farm's organic seeds. Thank you to all who make this program possible:

Alcott School

Belmont Day School

Carlisle Public Schools

Gene Stammell, Project Coordinator

Concord Public Schools

Brad Bennett, Project Coordinator

Fenn School

Winnie Smith, Project Coordinator

Nashoba Brooks School

Polly Vanasse, Project Coordinator
Susan Cheever
Lori Weiss

Thoreau School

Brad Bennet
Mary Gallagher
Merrie Najimy

By Kristin Moore, Office Administrator

I started working at Gaining Ground in late January, when the snow was three feet thick over the fields. Not long after I started, I was introduced to one of Gaining Ground's central missions: "enabling the joy and wonder of the garden." At that time of year, however, the concept didn't resonate with me. So I waited.

In May, Pam Goar and I brought a group of third-grade girls, including our daughters, to the farm to learn about bees. Nancy Heselton, Board member and beekeeper, had populated a refurbished hive. During lunch, prior to coming to the farm, the girls enthusiastically shared their dislike of bees: "I'm allergic because I hate them so much!" "I hate them, too!" Tastes of honey, beeswax candles and miniature honey bear containers did little to convince them that bees had anything worthwhile to offer.



At the farm, it was a hot and sunny afternoon with dandelions in full bloom. Nancy explained that as long as everyone stayed calm and quiet, the bees would be far more interested in the dandelions than in us. Curiosity overcame reluctance, and the girls followed Nancy to the hive. After watching the bees going in and out, Nancy spied one resting on a nearby dandelion. The group of girls became rapt as they watched Nancy let the bee walk on her hand. Soon they were in a circle around her, taking turns letting

the bee walk on their hands. Calm but excited whispers followed: "It's our pet bee!" "It needs a name!" "Let's call it 'Honey'!" It was an extraordinary transformation from the lunchtime discussion.

As we prepared to leave, my daughter skipped to the car, exclaiming how much fun she had had. Joy and wonder happened. It was worth waiting for.

The joy and wonder of the garden— from bees to belonging

By Kayleigh Boyle, Farm Coordinator

Stories comprise a big part of your day on a farm. There is endless time while hovering over the sugaring stove, weeding a bed of carrots or planting thousands of teeny onion starts. In the early spring, a newly acquainted farm crew will share the 'where you froms' and 'what school did you go to.' After a week, though, we're sharing more current, intimate affairs, like what we each had for breakfast that morning, almost in danger of running out of things to say.

Thankfully, our steady stream of volunteers keeps us talking. They help us with our workload and help us pass the time. Almost every day on the farm, we get a new face with a new story. On top of the day-to-day updates, we also have a collection of farm legends—the stories we pass down from season to season, from farmer to apprentice. Here's mine.

During the height of tomato season, the farm received a volunteer from the Restorative Justice program. These volunteers are mandated by the court to complete a set number of community-service hours for criminal behavior. When Aaron* arrived, he was shy and uninterested in

taking part in any chat over the harvest crates. However, after a few visits, he began to ask questions and show interest in his farm tasks. Critters seemed to be his main source of excitement. When digging in the wood chip pile, he unearthed a nest of pinky mice. In the gentlest way possible, he brought the nest over to the flower garden where I was working to show off his treasure.

Aaron never told us his story, though his parents explained what had led up to the court mandate: a bully. Aaron hated school, did not fit in and made some bad decisions to get noticed. He never told us how important the farm was to him, but it was his silence, and focused, happy work that made me believe he had found a place where he belonged.

It is these stories, not our notes or spreadsheets, that help us remember the seasons past. For me, a good story conjures up a feeling or a moment, one of the hardest things to record for the years to come.

**name changed*



Many thanks to the Gaining Ground community!

At the close of our 18th season, the Board and staff of Gaining Ground are grateful to every one of you—our hundreds of volunteers, our generous donors, our community partners and our food recipients. We owe a special thanks to:

- **Massachusetts Horticultural Society** for donating hundreds of tomato plants in our hour of need.
- **Bill Kenney** for tackling our new raspberry bed with a rototiller and spreading compost elsewhere as needed.
- **Tim Jones** for ploughing many of our fields this spring with harrow and disc.
- **Frank Scimone** for the timely loan of a travelling disc harrow.
- **Liz Rotter, Jessica Huddy and Julie Bogart of studio-e design** for generous and outstanding work on Gaining Ground's printed materials.
- The **Concord Water Department** for providing us with timely assistance with our water main this spring.
- **Chris Fielding and Jack McNally Fielding and Associates**, whose plows tackled the seemingly ceaseless snowfall last winter.
- **Jon Storrs**, whose plowing of several feet of snow made it possible for us to get to the sugar shack and boil maple syrup this spring.
- The **Thoreau Farm Trust** for providing water in the early spring to our greenhouse and enabling us to start a fruit orchard behind the pavilion.
- **Grace McNally** who singlehandedly organized an army of CCHS volunteers to help Gaining Ground with our spring appeal.
- **Amy and Adam Simon** for generously hosting Gaining Ground and its supporters.
- **Farfalle Italian Market** for their spirited support and excellent wines.
- The **Concord Book Shop** for our spring window and years of generosity.
- The **Carlisle Department of Public Works** for kindly donating a truck bed (or two or three) of wood chips to compost our new raspberry field.
- **Michelle Ezzy and Whole Foods** for 5% of the Bedford Whole Foods total sales on April 13—a whole lot of support for Gaining Ground!
- The **Concord Chamber of Commerce** for organizing the first annual West Concord Give Back Day, the participating local business and all the shoppers whose spending gave back to many local charities, including Gaining Ground.
- **Tomasen Brady** for helping us send our thanks to all the Read for Seeds supporters.
- **Sam Royce, Aidan Cyr, Thomas Ratcliffe, Thomas Salemy, Eric Sellew and Lior Selve** for running and paddling on behalf of Gaining Ground in the Concord-Carlisle Community Chest Challenge (and being co-winner of the fastest agency team award)!
- The **Concord-Carlisle Community Chest** for its ongoing support.
- **Paul D'Oliveira of Paul Bryan, Inc. (Concord)** for putting some zip back into our aging office computer.

Special thanks to our funding partners

- Cabot Family Charitable Trust
- Carlisle Garden Club
- Charles Engelhard Foundation
- Concord-Carlisle Community Chest
- Crawford Idema Family Foundation
- Dinah Buechner-Vischer Advised Fund
- First Parish, Concord
- Foundation for MetroWest
- Garden Club of Concord
- George A. Ramlose Foundation
- George and Alice Rich Charitable Foundation
- Green Leaf Foundation
- Harpley Foundation
- Middlesex Savings Charitable Foundation
- NLT Foundation
- Trinitarian Congregational Church of Concord
- Vanguard Charitable Endowment Program

Where a portion of our produce goes

Gaining Ground regularly contributes to Open Table, which offers weekly community suppers and food pantries in Concord and Maynard. We are proud to be part of Open Table's long-standing service—over 20 years—toward hunger relief work in our community. Our deep thanks to Peter Hilton, Jane Lifton and our Open Table partners for their collaboration and enthusiastic support of Gaining Ground.

Open Table hours in Concord are Thursdays, 12:30–3:00 PM. The meal is served from 5:00–6:30 PM at First Parish Church, 20 Lexington Road.

Meeting the need for hunger relief

In 2011, Gaining Ground strived to reach more than 50 families through our Food for Families Program. Families and individuals in Concord-Carlisle received free, nutritious produce every Saturday throughout our growing season in what was the seventh year of our direct distribution. Current economic conditions have contributed to making this program more in demand than ever. Thanks to Angela Smith, Carlisle's Council on Aging Outreach Coordinator, and Aileen Buford, Concord's Community Services Coordinator, for helping us keep this program vital and strong.



Mark your calendar—Saturday, December 3

Debra's Natural Gourmet's 5% Day

On **Saturday, December 3rd**, Debra's Natural Gourmet will donate 5% of its proceeds to Gaining Ground. Set aside the date to shop at Debra's, 98 Commonwealth Avenue in West Concord, and help Gaining Ground, too! We greatly appreciate Debra's Natural Gourmet's generous and long-time support of our work and mission.

Gaining Ground at a glance

Founded in 1994 on privately owned land, Gaining Ground moved its main garden in 1999 to the Thoreau Birthplace Property on Virginia Road in Concord—a site that has been farmed for more than 350 years and that we lease from the Town of Concord. Gaining Ground also collaborates with the Trustees of Reservations on an award-winning 19th-century reproduction vegetable garden at the Old Manse in Concord.

Volunteers contribute thousands of hours of work in our gardens, and all of the produce they

help raise is donated to area hunger-relief programs, including the Acton Food Pantry; Loaves & Fishes, Devens; Bedford Community Table & Pantry; Food for Families; The Open Table, Concord; The Pine Street Inn, Boston; Sudbury Food Pantry; and several programs served by Food for Free, Cambridge.

Individuals, foundations, community organizations such as the Concord-Carlisle Community Chest, and businesses generously support Gaining Ground financially.

Gaining Ground Wish List

Occasional help from...

- ✓ drivers (for events, compost & firewood pick-up)
- ✓ carpenters (for small projects, like shelves)
- ✓ handypersons (for machinery, tool & building repair)
- ✓ firewood-choppers (for our sugaring program)
- ✓ photographers (for events)

Farm

- ✓ gardening gloves
- ✓ clippers
- ✓ pitchforks
- ✓ rakes
- ✓ tarps
- ✓ 8- or 16-oz. Mason jars

Contact us at 978.610.6086
(or office@gainingground.org)
if you'd like to help!



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