



September 2024

{{First Name}},

Sorry, y'all. This one's a little longer than usual.

I've been slow to share news from the foodshed this month because 1) I'm human, and 2) because most of you are getting the news everywhere you look. As a graduate of Swannanoa, North Carolina's [Warren Wilson College](#), near some of the greatest devastation in Western NC, **I have watched with despair as Hurricane Helene flattened the homes and destroyed the farms of long-time friends.**

While I am enormously grateful that everyone I know is safe, **it is deeply unsettling to see the climate crisis unfold in real time, just one degree of separation away.** The work we do at Foodshed Capital, at its core, is intended to build *resilience* to climate impacts through capital access and financial preparedness, and resilience feels so insignificant when you see farms (and their lovingly tended, carbon-rich soil) literally wash away down the river.

So what I will say is this: **in a climate emergency, a community's ability to come together is all that matters.**

And *that* is why Foodshed Capital is so dedicated to the slow work of building equity into everything we do. Despite what candidates on the debate stage may say, there is nothing "weird" about the science behind climate change, and there is no longer any near-term likelihood we can meaningfully slow, let alone reverse, the disasters to come. **Knowing where to go for resources, and having the ability to access them; building and nurturing relationships with neighbors... this is how farmers will weather the storms.** (Ok, that, and on-farm renewable energy sources, but I digress.)

We are reminded in these moments to double down on support efforts that urge farmers to consider - and prepare - for the impossible, so they have a plan to activate rather than no idea how to move forward. And we will continue doing the slow, but absolutely critical, work of getting dollars out the door to folks who can't get them anywhere else. **I'm**

incredibly proud that FoodCap deployed nearly half a million dollars in September; you'll find two highlights of the farms we supported below.

It's not lost on us that FoodCap is - for now - a small fish in a big sea of farm advocacy organizations trying to "fix the food system." But **I know for certain we are one of just a very few that are throwing all our energy into dreaming up different kinds of solutions.** Unsecured, 0% interest loans; business support services provided free of charge, or even with payments to participate; a willingness to finance community organizations rooted in mutual aid (who are often the primary sources of fast relief in a disaster)... I'll shoot you straight: we get a lot of blank stares for some of the work we do.

But if we want to be able to eat in ten years, **we MUST be willing to think differently about money. We MUST call into question the status quo's narrow definition of success. And we MUST disentangle the deeply entrenched notion of food production as a means of financial return.** I believe we have it in us, I just hope it doesn't take a personal or proximate disaster for new ways of thinking to take root.

To drier and brighter days ahead,

Erica Hellen
Director of Strategy & Comms.



Capital in the Field



Heartsong Herbs

Athens, Georgia



Founded by Dana Nivens in 2017, **Heartsong Herbs** is a regenerative farm and apothecary that grows a wide range of herbs for processing into tinctures. In addition to direct market sales, Heartsong's tinctures are sold in 24 states and in the United Kingdom. They also host seasonal seedling sales offering over fifty varieties of herbs, as well as quarterly educational workshops focusing on regenerative agriculture and herbalism.

After seven years stewarding acreage leased from the [Athens Land Trust](#), Heartsong Herbs successfully secured FSA financing and closed on property of its own. This fall, Dana is transitioning operations to the new property, and beginning next year, Heartsong will expand existing herb production and launch a diversified vegetable enterprise. Dana plans to operate a **thirty-member vegetable CSA**, hire an **additional full-time staff person**, and begin the process of **USDA organic certification**.

Permanent land security is an enormous win, but it's rare for property to be fully turnkey for a small-scale diversified producer. **Foodshed Capital was proud to extend a low-interest loan to Heartsong to build out critical farm infrastructure on the new farmland**, including a wash/pack building and greenhouse equipment, as well as site preparation costs, electrical, and plumbing.

The Farm at Our House

Rockville, Maryland



The Farm at Our House is the largest USDA Certified Organic farm in Montgomery County, MD, producing over 100,000 pounds of produce annually. Owned by Marc and Catherine Grossman and long-time farm manager Anh Doan, the farm operates on twelve acres in partnership with a juvenile justice rehabilitation residential facility, [Our House](#), to provide residents with fresh produce as well as education, job training, and enrichment opportunities.

In addition to a 250+ member CSA, The Farm at Our House sells produce at three year-round farmers markets and to school districts and food access organizations. **Their goal is to reach a production scale that makes it possible for people to eat organic, locally produced food at a fair price.**

After three years of research into different varieties, pest management, and harvest/storage strategies, **The Farm at Our House will expand long bean production in 2025 to fill a gap in the local market.** Because fresh beans are labor intensive to produce, there aren't many other producers in the region who raise them. They will also sell dried and shelled beans during the winter months.

To support the new bean enterprise, **Foodshed Capital supported The Farm at Our**



Farmer Resources



Document, Report, and Reach Out if We Can Help

With all the wonderful farmer emergency support resources circulating the web (shoutout to our many peers who have launched rapid relief efforts) our team has been interrogating the process of engaging with them. Here are some takeaways:

1) Definitely do document all damage with photo, video, and notes ahead of making substantive repairs. While federal relief will be slow to come, at a minimum, you will need this info for insurance, and it will take time for agents to visit your farm to assess damage. Do wait on any non-emergency repairs. And keep your receipts!

2) Definitely do [report damage to your local FSA office](#) as soon as possible. In most cases, this means you will need to call and talk to someone, or just leave a message. We found a dearth of locales offering an easy damage reporting form, but here are a few quick resources:

- **Virginia Emergency Support Team:** 804-267-7600
- [South Carolina Agricultural Impact Reporting Form](#)
- **North Carolina Farmer Resource & Damage Hotline:** 1-866-645-9403
- [Georgia - Comprehensive Resources](#) and [Online Damage Reporting Form](#)
- **RAFI Crisis Hotline:** 866-586-6746

3) After sifting through various FSA disaster assistance resources, we were frequently funneled to the [Emergency Conservation Program](#). Achieving relief through this program will be time consuming, but will likely be worthwhile - eventually. **Eligible farmers:**

- Must be in a county declared a disaster zone by USDA (so definitely report that damage)
- Must *already* have a farm number. Getting one requires an in-person visit with an FSA agent, after which they give you the paperwork to register your farm. If you don't already have one, you will not be eligible for relief funding.
- There isn't a publicly available application. To our knowledge, you must connect with your local FSA agent to get started.

Up to 75% of the cost to implement emergency conservation practices can be provided; however, the final amount is determined by the committee reviewing the application. **Qualified limited resource, underserved, and beginning farmers/ranchers may earn up to 90% cost-share.** The FSA County Committee is able to approve applications up to \$125,000 while applications of \$125,001 to \$250,000 require state committee approval. Amounts over \$250,000 require the approval of the national FSA office.

If you want to talk to someone other than an FSA agent to understand your options, or if you need help completing paperwork to access disaster relief, please [reach out to Foodshed Capital](#) and we will do our best to assist.



American Farmland Trust Grant Opportunity

Yours truly supported American Farmland Trust's Mid-Atlantic team in designing the Regenerate Virginia planning grant program, intended to pay for-profit Virginia farmers to work with financial and planning experts to increase the financial foundation and long-term viability of their farms.

Application Period: Oct. 15 - Nov. 15, 2024
Grant Amount: Up to \$10,000

[More info here.](#)



AFT Grant Funding for Soil Health

This program supports Virginia producers (single or group, non-profits included) to pilot projects that fill gaps and address barriers to the adoption of soil health-building systems. This program aims to support farmers, ideas, and expenses that are ineligible for other programs.

Application Period: Oct. 15 - Nov. 15, 2024
Grant Amount: \$30,000 - 50,000

[Learn more here.](#)



Out & About





Spice Creek Farm

Brandywine, Maryland

Alongside our colleagues at [Dirt Capital Partners](#), Foodshed Capital was so pleased to visit farmers Gail Taylor and D'Real Graham (center, holding new livestock guardian puppies Ivy and Ruby) of Spice Creek Farm at their new permanent farm home. After many seasons operating successfully on a small leased urban plot in DC called [Three Part Harmony](#), they sought additional acreage to expand production, put down permanent roots, and build out infrastructure that can be shared by other producers in their network.

The visit was coordinated by Dirt Capital to celebrate the successful acquisition of the farm property that adjoined leased acreage where the farmers have been operating since 2022. Dirt worked closely with Gail and D'Real to create a repayment structure that would reflect existing and projected cash flow. Various philanthropic funders and impact investors were in attendance.

I can't understate the passion and clarity of thought that Gail and D'Real bring to the work of nourishing people - it goes beyond just growing food. At every step of their journey as farmers, they have endeavored to work in concert with their community and to build up the resilience of the ["Return Generation."](#) We supported Three Part Harmony with a 0% interest loan in 2022, and will remain in communication as they identify infrastructure needs for their new farm home. We are genuinely thrilled for them as they start this new chapter!

Support Our Work

People tell us all the time that they love our newsletter. That it's personal in a refreshing way, that they share it with their friends, and that they look forward to it every month.

I hope this will be the month that you step up with \$15, \$25, or \$100 to make our work possible, and I promise we'll keep sending you this newsletter to share stories of the work we so proudly do.

Thanks!

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