



Funding Local Food In Virginia



April 2020

“The pandemic is forcing people to think hard—and to feel deeply—about their connection to food. There’s nothing like the sight of stripped grocery store shelves to focus people’s attention on where their food comes from. This explosion of interest in food production can help create a new cultural landscape for long-term community and ecological resilience once the pandemic has passed.” This quote comes from a recent article posted in [Civil Eats](#) and it made me think of something I said in last month’s newsletter: that it’s not time yet to be preaching about lessons learned...

Well, now it is time. We are learning many invaluable lessons about how to live in general and how to feed ourselves in particular. Will we embrace these lessons... leaning into them with wisdom, compassion, love, and justice?

I admit to some skepticism when I think about the answer to this question, as it relates to society at large. But skepticism is merely an emotion that wilts quickly under the rays of hope forever sustaining us in all things.

The month of May marks our organization’s two year anniversary. I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished in those two years thanks to so much support from many people across the state. Our latest loan, to [Creambrook Farm](#), is now the 23rd farm or food business we’ve supported with 0% financing in the the past 15 months. Creambrook is an impressive 100% grass-fed dairy in Augusta County, selling raw milk shares across the region. You can read more about them below.

This loan is another step forward in fulfillment of our mission. But our work is barely scratching the surface, even before the pandemic. Funding our local foodshed demands our organization, and others in the local food space, go much deeper. *And* it demands more individuals and foundations with the means to do so step up and

ensure we never let old habits take over our food culture again.

Our local food system is poised to soar. It's ready to feed and nourish our communities the way food is supposed to. Maybe, just maybe, if we invest *now* in foundational systemic change we won't have to panic so badly and throw crazy amounts of emergency funds around so wildly - and often misdirectedly - when the next crisis hits.

Maybe it's crazy to believe in a world where *every* community is sustained 100% by food produced within that community, in ways that make protection of the soil and biodiversity in that community the number one priority, and that *every* single human being in that community, bar none, has equal access to that food. Maybe that's crazy indeed. But that's what I believe in.

May all be well,

Michael Reilly
Co-founder & Executive Director

Please Donate To Our Soil Fund!

New Loan: Creambrook Farm

[Creambrook Farm](#) is a 243- acre dairy located in the town of Middlebrook in Augusta County. The farm produces 100% grass-fed, lab-tested raw milk, which it sells through a herd share program. Creambrook milk is delivered to drop points throughout the Shenandoah Valley, as well as in and around Crozet/Charlottesville, Richmond, Williamsburg, and more recently into Northern Virginia.

While Ben and Kristen have been running Creambrook Farm on their current property since 2017, their farming roots go back many years before that. In fact, Ben and Kristen met at Polyface Farm where Ben was an apprentice and Kristen a summer intern. They made other stops along the way throughout Virginia and Pennsylvania.

Using rotational grazing to foster and maintain healthy pastures, biodiversity, and soil fertility, the farm is a model of excellence in its practice of regenerative agriculture. With its 0% SOIL Loan, Creambrook Farm is expanding and improving its pastures so they can grow their herd share business, without having to rely on baleage from off the farm.

Please see our [website](#), [Facebook page](#), and [Instagram account](#) for ongoing updates on all our projects.



The Beichler Family at Creambrook Farm

Total SOIL Loans Made: 23
Total Value of Loans: \$170,000

** since January 2019*

Accepting Farmer Loan Applications

During these especially difficult times for farmers, we want to re-emphasize our commitment to supporting the financial needs of our local sustainable food producers. To that end, we are continuing to accept loan applications for our signature grassroots program called **SOIL**, a 0% revolving loan program for amounts up to \$10,000. We are especially grateful to all our recent donors who have enabled us to keep this program going during this crisis, including major grants from The Opaline Fund, administered through the [Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund](#), and from the John & Harriet Malbon Family Fund, administered through the [Hampton Roads Community Foundation](#) . Thank you!

[Virginia Foodshed Capital Borrower Information Form](#)

COVID-19 Resources

What holds true one day about COVID-19 resources, including the response by the Federal government, doesn't always hold true the next. Suffice to say, information has been flying around fast and

furiously, and changing rapidly. Nevertheless, we'll try to provide some update information here, at the risk of it being outdated by the time you read this.

On Friday, April 24, Congress passed a bill that replenished the SBA programs well-known by now by their acronyms: PPP and EIDL. Much has been clarified about these programs in regard to farmers, which are now eligible for both (previously farmers were not eligible for EIDL). [Click here for a link to the SBA's website.](#)

Because most of our local farms operate as sole proprietors or LLCs, these two articles may also be helpful:

<https://bench.co/blog/operations/paycheck-protection-program-self-employed/>

<https://bench.co/blog/operations/owner-draws-ppp/>

[Farm Commons](#) is hosting webinars on the EIDL and PPP on [April 29](#) and [April 30](#), respectively.

On the USDA side of things, the [Coronavirus Food Assistance Program](#) (CFAP) was recently announced. This relief program will allocate \$16 billion in direct support to farmers and ranchers who have suffered economically in recent months. USDA will also partner with regional and local distributors to purchase \$3 billion in fresh produce, dairy, and meat. The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSCA), of which Virginia Foodshed Capital is a member, [has a helpful blog on this program.](#)

Also on the USDA front, there remain lots of questions about whether any of the \$16 billion in farm relief authorized a few weeks ago under the CARES Act will actually get into the hands of farmers who rely on local and regional markets. [NSCA wrote a letter about this to the USDA a few weeks ago](#), which Virginia Foodshed Capital supported, but firm direction has yet to be provided by the USDA. [Please follow us on Facebook](#), where we always try to post the most up-to-date information about these issues.

Building Resiliency Gardens During COVID-19



The response from local food advocates around Virginia since the pandemic struck bears witness to the strength and power of our collective community. Last month we told you about the [Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition](#). As a follow up to that, MAFRAC is in the process of gathering needs and resources in the region, making matches, and tracking trends. To help them out, please consider filling out this [Resource Request Form](#).

Another impressive pandemic response effort we'd like to give a shout out to this month is the [Building Resiliency Gardens During COVID-19](#) project in the greater Richmond area, led by Duron

Chavis. They have been building raised garden beds for residents for free around Richmond, using volunteers and donated supplies. They've built more than 100 gardens so far and have hundreds more to go. They've been raising funds to assist the effort. [You can find out more and donate on their Facebook site.](#)

Farmers Market Update

By May 1, just about all farmers markets are typically underway in Virginia. Obviously these are not typical times. While markets are certainly not conducting business as usual, many are open and operating in accordance with state mandated restrictions. For an updated list of farmers markets that are operating around the state, and for information on all things related to farmers markets and COVID-19, please see the [Virginia Farmers Market Association website.](#)

Also, for those in the Staunton and Charlottesville areas, please be sure to check out the [Staunton Local Food Drive-Thru at Newtown Baking](#) and the [Micro Market run by the Local Food Hub](#), held every Wednesday and Friday in the old KMart parking lot in Charlottesville.



Ben Stowe from Little Hat Creek Farm at the Local Food Hub Drive-Through Market in Charlottesville

"Humankind is challenged, as it has never been challenged before, to prove its maturity and its mastery - not of nature, but of itself."
- Rachel Carson (1962)

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