



Funding Local Food In Virginia



May 2020

Our culture places strong emphasis on knowledge. People who seem to know a lot are revered and admired. In the financial world, Return on Invested Capital is prized knowledge. In the non-profit space, knowing your impact metrics are essential if you want to have any prayer of receiving grant funding. Knowledge is often synonymous with certainty, success, and power.

But maybe we have it all wrong. Maybe the most powerful words we can say are: "I don't know." Try it next time you're on the verge of digging in your heels on your prized opinions. It just might save you an argument with a friend or significant other.

Saying "I don't know" is the purest sign of humility. It just so happens that the word humility has the same root, "humus," as humanity and humane. In Latin, humus means "from the earth or ground." Biological gardeners and farmers also know humus to be the term for the components of soil that are rich in organic matter.

Without rich healthy soil, food is vapid and food production is extractive. Yes, it takes knowledge to understand this, and our knowledge about soil life has grown in leaps and bounds in recent years. I'm always blown away by the knowledge of our local farmers. Yet for all the knowledge they have, I suspect the most successful ones approach each day with the attitude that they "just don't know." They don't know about the enduring efficacy of the systems they have in place; they don't know about the stability of the market, particularly in this new world of pandemic; and they don't know about the vagaries of Mother Nature, increasingly exacerbated by a rapidly changing climate.

Knowledge can only take us so far, and that's where wisdom takes over. You might say knowledge comes from the head and wisdom comes from the heart. Knowledge and wisdom are not either/or, they are both/and. You can't have one without the other. Our society

has failed to understand this, but now is the time for transformation. Now is the time to nurture and cultivate wisdom. It will lead to healthier soil, thriving creatures of all kinds, and a more beautiful, just, and compassionate world. Maybe it will also free me from having to write about metrics on grant applications. I can only hope.

Meanwhile, if you support the growth of more wisdom, please help us grow our work. We have some exciting developments on the horizon, one of which is discussed below. Thank you all for your support.

May all be well,

Michael Reilly
Co-founder & Executive Director

VFC Now A CDFI



A few days ago, one of our SOIL Loan partner farms, [River Oak in](#)

[Nelson County](#), sent out a great explanation in their newsletter about the backlog at local meat processing facilities as demand for local meat increases during the pandemic. This kink in the system has existed for a while and it underscores one of several infrastructure deficiencies that need to be addressed if we're to develop a resilient local food system.

Land access is another, particularly for farmers of color and other marginalized populations. Just recently, [Agrarian Trust](#) officially announced their [Agrarian Commons](#) project to address the realities of how land is owned, tenure and equity are conveyed, and land stewardship is carried out.

Building a strong local food system that can withstand future pandemics and the threats from a changing climate will take the collective wisdom of so many organizations. We mentioned in our newsletter last month that we felt Virginia Foodshed Capital is just scratching the surface with its work. We're eager to do more and have taken a step in that direction with our recent certification as a [Community Development Financial Institution \(CDFI\)](#).

CDFIs are mission-driven financial institutions dedicated to providing financial services that meet the needs of economically disadvantaged businesses and individuals within underserved communities. CDFIs are certified by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions Fund – known as the CDFI Fund, and it took more than six months for our application to be submitted and approved. We join more than 1,100 certified CDFIs that are part of a national network promoting economic growth in America's underserved communities by financing businesses, creating jobs, and rebuilding infrastructure. We're proud to be among just a handful of CDFI's dedicated to supporting local food and agriculture, such as [California FarmLink](#), [Natural Capital Investment Fund](#), [CEI in New England](#), and [Craft3 in the Pacific Northwest](#).

This designation in no way changes our mission, nor does it change our operation of the SOIL Loan fund. We believe it strengthens both and we're excited about the road the lies ahead!

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

** since January 2019*

Nurture Capital At Work

Nurture Capital continues to do its job in our local foodshed. Dairy is the theme this month. [Georges Mill Farm](#) in Loudoun County got its new milk vat up and running for the cheese it makes from its

pastured goats. The new vat holds 50 gallons of milk and will allow them to increase production and hopefully try some new varieties. In Greene County, [Natural Roots Farm](#) is up and running with its raw milk share program. The farm bought its milking machine with its SOIL Loan.



Please Donate To Our Soil Fund!

Accepting Farmer Loan Applications

During these especially unsettled 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 particularly seeking applications in the Tidewater region.

[Virginia Foodshed Capital Borrower Information Form](#)

Neighbor Loaf



Buy a loaf of locally made sourdough bread sourced with 50% regional flour and it will be donated to the Nelson Food Pantry, helping feed one of the more than 300 rural families that depend on the pantry for food. The "Neighbor Loaf" program is operated by SOIL Loan partner Little Hat Creek Farm in Nelson County, in partnership with [Deer Creek Malthouse](#) in PA and the [Common Grain Alliance](#). The hope is that the program will spread throughout the Mid-Atlantic, supporting regional grain farmers, keeping millers and

bakers employed, and feeding those in need with nutritious, fresh, local food. You can order/donate on [Little Hat Creek's website](#), and through the [Local Food Hub's Drive-Through Farmers Market](#).

New Regenerative Ag Podcast

Our planet needs serious help, but sometimes a little joy and humor can go a long way. That's the tone of a new podcast on regenerative agriculture being launched with the help of Daniel Griffith, who along with his wife Morgan, runs [Timshel Permaculture](#), one of our SOIL Loan partner farms. Daniel will co-host the new podcast, called "Earth2Earthlings," with regenerative farmer Jesse McDougall from [Studio Hill Farm](#) in Vermont. They just completed recording their first episode with [Farmer's Footprint](#). We haven't yet heard any of the material, but knowing the people involved, and the lineup they have planned, wisdom tells us (see top story above :-)) that this will be a fresh and enlightening approach to discussing the types of agricultural practices that are truly needed to help protect the earth and all its earthlings... and that doesn't just mean people, people.

They expect to be on Apple, Spotify and other podcast services within the next month or so. Meanwhile, you can visit the [Earth2Earthlings" website](#) for a glimpse of what they have planned.



"We need acts of restoration, not only for polluted waters and degraded lands, but also for our relationship to the world. We need to restore honor to the way we live, so that when we walk through the world we don't have to avert our eyes with shame, so that we can hold our heads high and receive the respectful acknowledgment of the rest of the earth's beings."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer (*Braiding Sweetgrass*)

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