



Young Farmer Network: History of YFN

founded by Margiana Peterson-Rockney



Young Farmer Night was started by Margiana Petersen-Rockney in the spring of 2010 as an informal series of gatherings for beginning farmers to get to know one another. After a year of farming alone, Margiana observed that many beginning farmers work in isolation, expending energy and resources troubleshooting scale-appropriate tools and practices in solitude, and too often burning out. The goal of the Young Farmer Night events, which occurred every other week on different host farms, was to create a supportive and collaborative community of beginning farmers. Over the course of two seasons of informal Young Farmer Nights, the network grew via word of mouth to about 100 people on the listserv. Today, that number has grown to over 600.

The farmers, prospective farmers, and farm allies who participate in the Young Farmer Nights see value in the community and connections that are created. Collaborations from equipment sharing to shared market booths have been borne from the connections made at Young Farmer Nights. We have also expanded our work to offer educational opportunities to farmers in our network, "Farmer Short Courses"—filling gaps we perceive in the service provider landscape and designing courses in everything from tractor repair, to business planning, to agriculture-related policy work. More recently, YFN has prompted other local beginning farmer organizations to organize regional events, discussing topics such as race and equity as related to beginning farmers' access to land and other resources, and the importance of unearthing the histories of land dispossession and slavery in New England to better understand the context of contemporary landscapes and labor issues.

Building solidarity among farmers, consumers, and justice groups will help us develop resilient communities as we struggle with issues from climate change, to land security, and from structural racism, to the economic viability of small farms. The opportunity to visit farms and talk with other food producers, and brainstorm solutions to the broad or specific challenges we face is the backbone of the Young Farmer Network. At farm tours, social events, and workshops alike, we focus not only on education, but also on the cultivation of a strong social fabric, based in the diversity of cultural and practical facets of New England agriculture.

We believe our substantial growth—and the regional and national recognition we have received as a model beginning farmer network and events series—affirms the demand for a farm-centric community in both rural and urban places, and the centering of food issues in conversations about intersectional justice. As a grassroots network with the energy and drive of beginning farmers, we are always eager to have more input from the constituencies we serve. Please be in touch if you have thoughts about the unmet needs of farmers in Southeastern New England, or visions for efforts towards justice through working landscapes and the communities that surround them.