Together we can rebuild our food system, restore our soil and waters and revitalize our rural communities.
Today, systemic racism continues to manifest in our food and agriculture system as land and business ownership. Or perhaps a better question is how can we commit to supporting immigrant farmers today, tomorrow, and in the years to come? For decades, immigrant farm workers have helped feed American families with little recognition or opportunity to build something of their own.

Latinx immigrants first came to the U.S., including our own town of Northfield, during World War II labor shortages. Millions of Mexican men were recruited to work in the fields through farm labor programs, and again in the 80s during the farm crisis. In both instances, when America saw itself in the direst of conditions, they looked to my home country, Mexico, for cheap labor.

America’s food and agriculture industry was built on stolen lands, slave labor and the backs of immigrant farmers. Today, systemic racism continues to exploit farmworkers of color, while also denying them an equal opportunity to access and own land. Land is the foundation of nourishment and resiliency, yet only a few have access to it.

It is important to have this history in front of us, to learn from it and to help us decide how we will move forward differently.

At Sharing Our Roots, we are working at the intersection of land justice, food sovereignty, regenerative agriculture, climate change mitigation and conservation. These elements are all inter-connected and interdependent. Our 100-acre farm is a home base to more than a dozen emerging Latinx, Kenyan and White farmers who are helping us restore the land and modeling a new way of farming in our region through commons based farming — one that values farmers, respects the environment and is rooted in community.

For immigrant farmers at Sharing Our Roots, farming is a livelihood. It is what nourishes them. It is an important part of their identity, culture and heritage. Our team is committed to supporting them with long-term access to land for a greater sense of stability and a way to build equity. They can build financial wealth from having their business on the farm. We also provide capital and resources to help them continue farming in the U.S. and reclaim their food sovereignty.

We hope our work at Sharing Our Roots can inspire other landowners across the Midwest to take the bold actions our country needs. Among them, opening up access to their lands for the next generation of farming professionals. We all have a role to play in re-imagining and rebuilding our food and agriculture system.

Rocky Casillas Aguirre
Executive Director
Sharing Our Roots

Soil, water and community are our most valuable assets.

Over 97% of our food comes from the soil. Years of traditional agriculture cultivating corn and soy has led to degradation of the land and harm to the water caused by runoff and pesticides in the United States. One-third of the Earth’s topsoil has disappeared over the last fifty years. We aim to restore our soil to generate highly nutritious food. To make agriculture more sustainable, we are putting regenerative agriculture into action.

Regenerative agriculture is not new. Before the term came into play, indigenous people were practicing beneficial methods of farming in their native landscapes. Centuries of building up the fertility of the soil resulted in growing more food without using additional land, water, chemicals and fuel. Mesoamerican practices like intercropping and agroforestry resulted in an abundance of complementary food crops like maize, beans and squash, while preventing erosion at the same time.

Today, regenerative agriculture is considered to be a form of agroecology, using ecological principles to guide farm management, such as nutrient cycling, biodiversity, and predator-prey relationships. These practices restore soil and mirror natural ecosystems. The overall goal is to manage all crops as systems that are environmentally safe, socially just, culturally sensitive and economically viable for the local community. This approach often applies commons based models to include people of color and other emergent farmers who have long been denied access to land.

In America, 98% of rural lands are owned by white people, leaving only 2% owned by individuals who identify as black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Given the facts that the average age of a farmer in the United States is 57.5 years old and that there are almost 400,000 farmers over the age of 75, we must look to and support future farmers. One third of America’s 3.4 million farmers are over the age of 65, and nearly a million more are approaching that age. The aging U.S. farmer has been a cause of concern. Who will feed America in the future? Land access and food insecurity plague our community. Sharing Our Roots advances a resilient agriculture system that demonstrates the power to heal our lands, nourish our communities and prepare emerging farmers.

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“lt never was about the place but, instead, about how people animate the place. The Commons, where we all belong, the places that we find all that we share that none of us has in isolation”.
Jay Walljasper – Author, All That We Share: A Field Guide to the Commons
Our Vision
At Sharing Our Roots, we envision a world where food and agriculture systems are profitable for farmers, fair to workers, beneficial to consumer health, restorative for rural communities and regenerative for the environment.

Our Mission
To advance a resilient agriculture system that demonstrates the power to heal our lands, nourish our communities and prepare emerging farmers.

Our History
In 2016, Sharing Our Roots acquired 100 acres of degraded corn-on-corn farmland. We are restoring it to health by keeping the soil covered, planting perennials, cleaning up waterways and adding wetlands. We are also working to improve production for perennial crops such as elderberries and hazelnuts, and conducting on-farm research documenting wildlife resurgence. The Sharing Our Roots Farm allows us to support aspiring farmers, enhance local wealth, food security and innovate a resilient agriculture system.

We exist to share. We share the land, machinery, infrastructure, produce, rootstock, technical expertise and community. We also exist to demonstrate innovation on the land.

The emergence of COVID-19 in 2020 necessitated the Sharing Our Roots Farm closure to the community. In response, we expanded our Community Garden efforts for people to farm where they live. We set up power to our new walk-in freezer for year-round access. We’ve also started conversations with local architects to help us design a net-zero building that will be used as a farm office and gathering facility for staff, growers and visitors. In 2021, we were able to open up 2 acres for farming. As of 2022, we have opened the whole 100 acres.

Located in the Cannon River Watershed, we share the land with Rice and Dakota Counties and those living downstream of Mud Creek. This extremely polluted tributary to the Cannon River feeds into the Mississippi River, contributing to the dead zones of the Gulf of Mexico. In addition to our agricultural practices, we work with Dakota County to mitigate erosion and runoff through our perennial landscape designs, native plantings and water management which improve the water quality of Mud Creek.

ISSUES
FOOD INSECURITY IN THE COMMUNITY
LAND AND WATER DEGRADATION
INACCESSIBILITY TO THE LAND

INITIATIVES
GROW ORGANIC, HEALTHY AND CULTURALLY SPECIFIC FOOD
EMPLOY REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE
PROVIDE LAND ACCESS TO BIPOC AND EMERGING FARMERS

IMPACTS
HEALTHY FOOD FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY CONSUMPTION
RESTORED ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
MAINTAINING WEALTH WITHIN THE COMMUNITY WHILE PRACTICING SHARED EQUITY, DIGNITY AND RESPECT
At Sharing Our Roots Farm, we address issues of food insecurity and land access. We lease land to local Kenyan, Latinx and a small number of emerging white farmers at an affordable rate for them. Our emerging farmers have a range of zero to ten years of experience, while our Kenyan farmers bring more than ten years of experience, primarily from their home country. Many of them are harvesting foods familiar to their homelands, including chinsaga and managu.

Moreover, our farmers enjoy working in community, sharing food, knowledge, experience and friendship.

Our land sharing efforts began as a co-creative process from conversations with community members who were seeking spaces to grow food for home consumption. Initially, these neighbors helped us harvest our food on the farm. Their desire to actually grow it themselves has now become a reality. Since 2019, the farmers on the land have doubled from seven to fourteen. This has progressed to what we call today the Farmer Cohort. We are opening up our entire 100-acre farm to emerging and immigrant farmers from the community in a new commons based model. The cohort is a group of individuals who wish to farm alongside one another in ways that restore our soil and water, while also providing nourishing food for their families and communities. BIPOC, LGBTQ, immigrant, female, young and emerging farmers make up this initial Farmer Cohort.

While we formerly served as a training farm, we have pivoted to a commons based farming model. Our organization no longer views itself as a trainer in food production, but a support system for farmers in need of access to land and resources. Many of the immigrant farmers we work with already know how to farm, but often are unfamiliar with planting in Minnesota’s climate and, for those who wish to sell, navigating U.S. food regulations. Here, we follow the principles and practices of biocultural diversity, stacked functions and shared decision-making.

We honor the knowledge and experience our farmers bring to the land. Our supportive knowledge of local soil conditions, pests, equipment training, food and safety regulations are welcomed. It’s a reciprocity that benefits all.

An Example of Stacked Functions

An elderberry grove is used by a nursery farmer for taking cuttings that can be sold as potted elder plants. The same grove is utilized by a botanical farmer for harvesting elderflowers and berries for teas and fermented beverages. After the edible crop has been harvested, a grazier utilizes the same grove as mid-season forage for their sheep, while leaving behind organic fertilizer that nourishes the elderberry grove.
are women.

and Asian/Pacific Islander. Two thirds of food grown is Latinx, African, Caucasian and non-perishables and 100 masks. We also delivered more than 2,250 pounds of fresh vegetables to 200 households. For the past two years, with the unexpected arrival of COVID-19, our team prioritized the production and distribution of food to families most impacted by the pandemic. Community Connectors planted culturally appropriate foods on our farm and, throughout the summer months, made weekly deliveries to five Northfield-Faribault neighborhoods. More than 2,250 pounds of fresh vegetables were donated to 200 households. We also delivered more than 1,080 pounds of chicken, 130 boxes of non-perishables and 100 masks.

Since COVID-19, there has been much interest in growing vegetables at home for food security. This year, Community Connectors are working with 121 people who are growing food in community gardens, the Sharing Our Roots Farm, and at home. This is a 57% increase in engagement compared to 2021. Participants are Latinx, African, Caucasian and Asian/Pacific Islander. Two thirds are women.

Everyone deserves access to healthy food. Our 100-acre farm offers space for community members who identify as low-income to grow culturally familiar crops. However, for families who live farther away transportation can be a barrier. To address this issue, our Community Connectors help enhance and establish local neighborhood gardens, and support families growing food at home.

The importance of wildlife to our food and agriculture system is often overlooked or forgotten. Many farmers see birds and insects as pests, not recognizing the ecosystem services they can offer. The benefits birds provide when it comes to pest control, far outweigh any chemical sprays. Species like sparrows, can collect over 335 insects to feed their young in a single day, while barn owls can consume over 1,300 field mice, voles and shrews in one year. Increased diversity of birds on agricultural lands can greatly reduce pest problems and grow crop yields through pollination and seed dispersal.

Our citizen science wildlife monitoring project is an important effort at the Sharing Our Roots Farm. It engages Minnesotans in learning about their native wildlife, while also helping us document the return of species to the Sharing Our Roots Farm after decades of heavy tilling and chemical use for corn and soybean production. Because birds, frogs and insects are sensitive to changes in their environment, they can be indicators of an ecosystem’s health, warning us of issues that need our attention like habitat degradation, disease or pollution.

Some species observed on the farm, like the Dickcissel, Savannah Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow and Yellow-headed Blackbird, are either rare or of special concern to Dakota County. Through our yearly monitoring and documentation, we are able to implement land management practices that will protect these species on our farm. Wildlife can help tell the story about the importance of transitioning to regenerative organic farming for the health of our communities and the future of our planet, if we simply listen.

At Sharing Our Roots, we are taking inventory of all wildlife seen on the farm, from tiny insects and colorful birds to prehistoric-looking reptiles and charismatic mammals. We want to share a story of hope by demonstrating how a different way of farming can revive our soils, draw down carbon and protect our wildlife heritage.

Community Connectors

Three dynamic women, originally from Mexico and Kenya, serve as our Community Connectors. Sharing Our Roots provides structure, support and networking opportunities for Community Connectors to mobilize their neighborhoods and enact positive change. Connectors liaise with their local communities connecting farmers seeking land to the Sharing Our Roots Farm or to neighborhood gardens near where they live. Our Community Connectors are trusted neighbors working on the frontlines of food insecurity across Rice County.

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Community Connectors currently support gardens in Northfield and Faribault by:

- Building partnerships with property managers, city officials and other nonprofits
- Helping develop guidelines for gardens
- Recruiting, allocating and overseeing available garden plots
- Providing technical assistance to growers for pest control
- Doing workshops and field demonstrations
- Coordinating management and upkeep of garden spaces
- Donating seeds and plants to growers
- Coordinating the delivery of compost and materials

Community Connectors are addressing food security in:

Northfield
- Viking Terrace Mobile Home Park
- Grenvilee Place Neighborhood Garden
- Grenvilee Community Garden
- St. Dominick’s Community Garden

Faribault
- Cannon River Mobile Home Park
- Cannon River Neighborhood Garden
- Evergreen Estates Mobile Home Park
- Health Finders Clinic Garden
- Faribault High School Garden
Sharing Our Roots is part of a national conversation surrounding the issue of agriculture land access and reframing solutions. Minnesota Land Commons seeks to support community led, regional food systems with a focus on serving BIPOC and emerging farmers. “Commons” ownership makes land access affordable, sustainable and productive for generations of future farmers.

Land access for a growing tapestry of people who farm through Sharing our Roots provides a model of what is possible on other farms. It’s a practical map to navigate structural inequity in agriculture.

Minnesota Land Commons, a new initiative, will expand and formalize this approach across the region. Its purpose is to facilitate the transfer of farmland by strategically acquiring and stewarding a network of farms in the region using a commons based approach. This will open the door to aspiring farmers, particularly those of color, who have been separated and kept from land throughout this country’s history.

This is a paradigm shift from the privately owned property model in place today to a community owned and managed model where land is no longer a commodity.

Instead of individual ownership with its associated debt and risk, farmers cooperatively support each other’s efforts within Minnesota Land Commons. Reciprocity occurs on many levels at both the farm and in the local governance of this new initiative. Sharing the land, sharing resources, sharing knowledge, sharing an economy. The listening and mutual exchange of information makes for strong partners in governing the commons, and stronger community on the farm. Immigrant farmers, like the Latinx and East African farmers of Northfield and Faribault, MN, bring a life history of organizing and farming as a community. They prefer this over farming alone.

Through Minnesota Land Commons, farm land is acquired and legally taken out of the private sector, to be permanently held as a 501c25 or 501c2. This allows the land to be used as a commons, with the purpose of growing healthy food through regenerative practices. Equitable access is the goal for the participating farmers allowing them long term leases to farm the land with affordable, yet flexible terms that reflect and serve both the farmers’ and the land’s needs. Moreover, the Minnesota Land Commons is a democratic, self-governing body of stakeholders that includes organizers, organizations for aspiring farmers and environmentalists.

At Sharing Our Roots, we are learning. Re-imagining what is possible is the beginning.

It is possible to plant perennial cropping systems to help build soil health and store carbon.

It is possible to stop erosion and chemicals from entering our waters.

It is possible for many immigrant or emerging farmers to access farmland.

To be respected.

To regain food sovereignty and to raise livestock.

It is possible to grow and access local healthy food.

It is possible to rebuild habitat and restore wildlife for a healthy ecosystem.

It is possible to share the land and improve the quality of life and relationships in our community.

It is possible, together.

If we can do this on just 100 acres, imagine what else is possible.

Please join us.