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VOL. 45 | ISSUE 1 | SPRING 2024



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Contents

Features

HORTICULTURE

10 **Adding Dry Legumes to the Garden**

STEWARDSHIP

13 **What Farmers Need to Know About Grassland Birds in Ontario**

ISSUES

16 **Do You FaRM?**

COMMUNITY

18 **Growing Food, Not Lawns**

RESEARCH

20 **A Co-operative Advantage?**

SEED

23 **Meadowlark Hearth Seed Festival**

In Each Issue

FIELD NOTES

3 Dear Members,

4 EFAO NEWS

5 PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS

MEMBER PROFILE

6 Tiffany Lauren of Agápe Farmgates

IN REVIEW

25 Good Husbandry by Kristen Kimball

On the cover

Audrey MacDonald of the Greenhouse Eatery hangs out with her brassicas. Hear from Audrey in *Growing Food, Not Lawns*, on pg. 18.





What We Do

Established in 1979 by farmers for farmers, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) is a membership organization that focuses on farmer-led education, research, and community building. EFAO brings farmers together so they can learn from each other and improve the health of their soils, crops, livestock, and the environment, while running profitable farm businesses.

Vision

We envision an Ontario where thriving ecological farms are the foundation of our food system, and where agriculture protects our resources, increases biodiversity, mitigates climate change, and cultivates resilient, diverse, equitable communities.

Mission

EFAO support farmers to build resilient ecological farms and grow a strong knowledge sharing community.

Ecological Farming In Ontario

Ecological Farming in Ontario is published quarterly by EFAO as a benefit of membership to help keep farmers and supporters informed and in touch with one another through articles on relevant farming topics, current farmer-led research, upcoming events, and other news of interest.

Ecological Farming in Ontario is printed on Rolland Enviro-100 paper, which contains FSC certified 100% post-consumer recycled fibres. Back issues can be found on EFAO's website (efao.ca) or are available upon request. Unless otherwise noted, articles may be reprinted or adapted if credit is given.

For information about advertising please visit efao.ca/sponsorship-ads

Deadline for Summer 2024 issue: April 15th.

Help make *Ecological Farming in Ontario* a farmer's journal! Submit articles, photos, opinions and news to the editor, Laura Northey, at editor@efao.ca. We reserve the right to edit submissions for space and/or clarity.

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Dear Members,

So much has happened since the last magazine issue! EFAO's annual conference in London on November 29 and 30 was a huge success – over 350 farmers, growers and supporters came together for two incredible days of workshops (35 of them!), two inspiring keynotes, and many delicious meals and dynamic conversations. We heard heartwarming feedback about the quality of the workshops, how well organized the conference was, and the sense of welcome that was felt by participants. A big thank you to all the presenters, sponsors, volunteers, exhibitors, food and beverage donors, and organizational partners who helped make this event possible. You'll find some photo highlights on page 5.

EFAO's Research Symposium was held online on November 27. Twelve farmers shared their findings, which included variety trials for easy pick beans, okra, faba beans, and no-till potatoes; planting methods for EZ pick lettuce, beetle banks for market gardens, and more! This annual event is a celebration of the curiosity and depth of knowledge that runs through EFAO's membership. On page 20 you can read about Tony McQuail's 2023 research comparing diverse cool season and warm season pasture mixes. We received over 40 applications for EFAO's 2024 Call for Curiosity, so stay tuned to learn more about the research questions members will explore this year through EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program.

In December we also held our 4th intake for the Small Grains Program and are pleased to be supporting 50 farmers to plant over 2,500 new acres of small grains with leguminous cover crops this spring. Our next program intake will take place this summer for fall planted small grains.

In February, Board member Brent Preston, Tony McQuail and I spent a few days in Ottawa at a Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS) board retreat. This was the first time that the FCS Board of Directors met in person, bringing together an inspiring group of farmers and leaders of farm organizations from across the country. We spent two days helping to develop FCS's first strategic plan and one day in meetings with government officials advocating for the release of the Sustainable Agricultural Strategy (SAS).

In December 2022, the federal government, through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, brought together a SAS Advisory group composed of 20+ agriculture,

environmental and First Nations organizations, including FCS. The group has been meeting regularly for over a year and there's a high level of agreement from the Advisory group on the major elements of a draft SAS, including a 25% by 2030 mitigation target (i.e reduction in total net greenhouse gas emissions from farms from 2021 levels). About 18 FCS board and staff members attended over 15 meetings with MPs, Senators and public servants. It will be very interesting to see what impact these meetings have on moving forward the SAS and building relationships on Parliament Hill in support of ecological agriculture. You can read more about FCS's work on page 16.



February is Black History Month! In this issue you'll find several articles that celebrate the inspiring work of by Black farmers, growers, and land stewards in Ontario and beyond. And March is Member Month at EFAO, so please stay tuned to your E-news for awesome events, and tell your neighbours and friends about the value of being an EFAO member! Hot off the press: EFAO is launching a series of Member Networks this March to help members connect and share knowledge online. See page 4 for more information.

To learn more about EFAO's work over the past year in supporting farmer-led education, research, policy and more, please join us for our annual **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** that will be held virtually on **Thursday April 25th, from 12:30-2pm** (registration will be shared through the E-news). We are seeking new members to join the EFAO Board of Directors! If you're interested in learning more please visit efao.ca/join-the-board where you can also submit an expression of interest.

Lots of exciting work is underway, and none of it would be possible without your knowledge, engagement and support.

With much appreciation,

Ali

February is Black History Month

This month, EFAO is celebrating Black farmers, food producers, and land stewards in Ontario who continue to make history. Please also see page 6 for a member profile of [Tiffany Lauren](#) of [Agápe Farmgates](#), and page 23 for an article from April Farms Jones!



Top row, from left to right: Nicole Austin and Leslie Campbell at a field day at the [TMU rooftop farm](#), who hosted an EFAO field day in 2023; Alvis of [Deeper Roots Farm](#), who participated in farmer-led research in 2023, harvesting beets; Akosua Asare of [re.Planted Farm and Floral Studio](#), who presented a session on the economics of flower farming at the 10th Annual EFAO Conference.

Bottom row, from left to right: Ekw Stone from [It's Giving Farm](#), who contributed to the EFAO magazine and presented at the EFAO Conference in 2023; EFAO board member Anan Lololi of [Black Food Sovereignty Toronto](#); Judith Prince of the [Ubuntu Community Farm](#), who presented at the EFAO Conference in 2022; and Audrey McDonald of [The Greenhouse Eatery](#), whose story can be found on page 18 and who is featured on the cover of this issue.

March is Member Month!

In March, we celebrate EFAO members! In 2023, EFAO grew to 1,056 members. Can you help us increase that number by sharing information about EFAO with folks who are new to farming, or who might be interested in becoming a part of EFAO's knowledge-sharing community?

EFAO members who join or renew in March (regardless of when their membership is expired) get entered in a draw to win a piece of free EFAO merchandise!

Don't forget about these other benefits of EFAO membership!

- Access to the **NEW EFAO Member Networks** (see below)
- A listing on the **EFAO Member Map**
- **Discounts** with farmer-friendly businesses
- Access to the **Member Video Library**
- A **subscription to *Ecological Farming in Ontario*** (this magazine!)
- Discounted access to **EFAO events**
- **30% off advertisements** in this magazine
- Much more! See efao.ca/membership for details.

Visit your member account at efao.ca/ login to access your member benefits.

If you have any questions about your EFAO membership, please don't hesitate to contact Martina: martina@efao.ca.

New in 2024: Join an EFAO Member Network!

We're excited to introduce a new member benefit this year: EFAO Member Networks! The member networks are five separate member mailing lists that allow you to take part in conversations related to ecological farming, and share information, news, events, and resources with fellow members.

Member Networks you can join:

- News & Opportunities (for sharing events, job postings, and other opportunities)
- Horticulture
- Livestock
- Field Crops
- Network for Black, Indigenous, and Farmers of Colour

Members can choose to participate in the networks via email only — no new logins required. Log in to the EFAO Member Portal to learn more, or contact Martina at martina@efao.ca (or 519-760-5606) for support with getting added to one of the Member Networks.

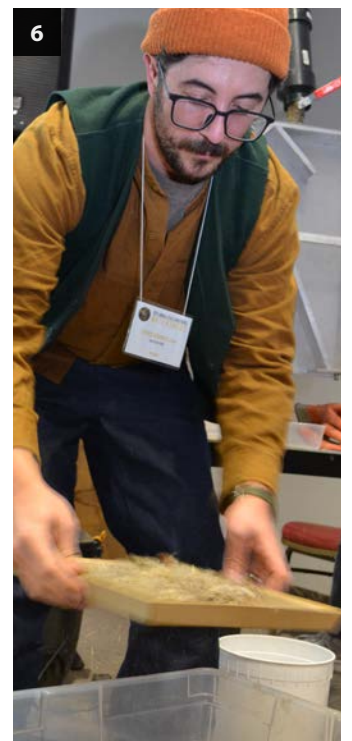
Note: the new Member Networks will replace the former EFAO Forum, which has been removed from the website. They are hosted on an independent software platform called Groups.io.

Take Part in the 2024 AGM

This year, EFAO's AGM will once again be held remotely via Zoom, making it accessible to all members. Please join us on Thursday, April. 25th at 12:30pm to hear updates from the EFAO Staff Team on the various program areas. Register at efao.ca/events (or contact Martina at martina@efao.ca or 519-760-5606 for call-in details).

10th Annual EFAO Conference: Watersheds

1. Tobi Abdul from **Eager Bee Gardens** and Arlene Thross from the **Urban Farm at TMU** browse the program and explore the trade show hall between conference sessions.
2. Conference participants had a chance to evaluate the flavours of carrots being bred as part of an ongoing carrot breeding projects including the **Canadian Organic Vegetable Improvement Project (CANOVI)**, led by the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, and the **Carrot Breeding for Organic Agriculture initiative led by the Organic Seed Alliance**. Bauta's programming is delivered by EFAO in Ontario.
3. The **Strong Water Singers**, opened the second day of the conference with a beautiful story and song, take care of mother Earth, just as she takes care of us.
4. Conference attendees socialize and enjoy the variety tastings.
5. Greta Kryger (formerly of **Greta's Organic Gardens**) and Ryan Cullen of **Growers & Co** chat at the trade show.
6. Stephen Sergenese of **Hawthorn Farm Organic Seeds** demonstrates a seed cleaning technique in a panel discussion entitled, **Seed Saving is For Everyone: Harvesting and Processing Seed from Wild and Cultivated Crops**.
7. Shiyong Lu of **Brilliant Meadows** chats with other conference attendees during the conference social hour and variety tasting.
8. EFAO board members, staff, members, and dance instructor Julie cut a rug during the salsa dancing lesson on the first night of the conference, with music by the **Kumbao Latin Band**.



Tiffany Lauren of Agápe Farmgates

EFAO: Tell us about yourself! How did you land in farming?

TIFFANY: My grandparents, who were biodynamic farmers in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, taught me the importance of being a good steward of the land. They had vast farms with mainly sugar cane and various fruits, vegetables, nuts, and herbs. They only used machines on their land where sugar cane was growing. In addition to that, they raised chickens, goats, and pigs. We got milk from the goats and meat from the farm animals. We got our vegetables, fruits, and nuts from the land. I enjoyed eating the freshly harvested cashews and peanuts the most. My grandparents involved me and my sisters in everything they did on their farms. They gave each of us a chicken of our own. We had to care for our chicken and keep the eggs to do as we wished. Sometimes, we played with the egg too much and ended up dropping it. After a lot of crying, Grandma would replace the broken egg with her own. Most times, we would cook and eat our eggs. When we moved to Toronto, my

parents and I grew vegetables in a backyard garden.

I found my purpose in life in my early teens and started pursuing my passion. I began volunteering at Peel Memorial Hospital, serving meals to seniors when I was 16. In my mid-20s, I volunteered at a shelter for women called Street Haven. There, I worked with chefs to prepare and serve food to the residents. Over the past four decades, I've volunteered at numerous non-profits, and growing, preparing, and serving food has been a constant at these non-profits.

While volunteering at the Daily Bread Food Bank on Bathurst Street in the early 90s, I noticed the need for fresh produce. I saw many families without access to fresh produce while volunteering with the Children's Aids Society. During the mid-90s, my outreach work at Police Headquarters led me to a senior's home. The distressed senior I met was eating cat food on Premium crackers. That sight and the lack of fresh produce have never left me. I've always wondered how to get fresh food to clients who frequent the food banks.



May 2015, starting an organic garden in Moss Park for PWA food bank.

In October 2012, I started volunteering at PWA (Toronto People with AIDS Foundation) as an Ally. I became an Essential Market ambassador and community garden team lead. During my eight years at PWA, I learned how to bring fresh produce to the needy community. With help from clients and neighbourhood residents, we managed a fourteen-plot organic garden in Moss Park, where we grew organic vegetables and herbs for PWA's food bank, called the Essential Market. Each year, we harvest about half a ton of fresh produce for the food bank, and the clients are always grateful for the fresh foods.

My volunteer work fuelled my desire to farm, and my grandparents' practices inspired me to continue their legacy by growing food organically.



May 2015, volunteers preparing the garden plots. We used coffee grounds from Jet Fuel & Starbucks. Equipments and seeds donated from Home Depot, Gerrard Square.



June 24, 2015, one of our plots at Moss Park.



June 24, 2015, our first harvest from Moss Park. We harvest on Wednesdays and bring to the foodbank before 11 a.m.



August 4, 2020, Guelph farm. Four friends helped me cultivate this two-acre space.

EFAO: How did your business get started?

TIFFANY: I started my for-profit farming business in 2020. I moved from urban to rural farming, and I noticed a business opportunity for offering local, culturally diverse food.

My passion for growing diverse food inspired me to name my business, Agápe Farms. Agápe means unconditional love. I started my farming business in Guelph and quickly expanded to Milton and Puslinch. With the help of friends, we grew abundantly in all three locations.



Although the business made no profit in the first year, our start-up was a success. We were blessed to help many people who suffered during the pandemic. We were able to offset several start-up expenses with a bumper food crop. We were able to reach more people. We donated to lockdowned friends and various food banks, including PWA, Eden Food Bank in Mississauga, and a soup kitchen in Scarborough.

EFAO: What's the biggest change you've undertaken in recent years?

TIFFANY: The biggest change we've undertaken was the November 2022 purchase of Trout Lily (See TroutLily.ca). Trout Lily provides seedlings certified organic by Ecocert Canada, according to the Canada Organic Regime



(COR). The change to Agápe Farms doing business as Trout Lily means we can now market high-demand seedlings to the public. We use these seedlings to grow and harvest high-demand organic crops.

In 2023, Agápe Farms expanded its food catalogue. We added culturally diverse seedlings. Having COR's diverse products gave the business government-backed trust and transparency.

EFAO: What's next for Agápe Farms?

TIFFANY: 2024 is shaping up to be an exciting year for Agápe Farms. In January, we introduced Agápe Farmgates. A farmgate benefits the community. Families who purchase from the Farmgate do so without markup. Farmgate organic food is fresher and available on a sliding scale.

Our mission is to address food insecurity and sovereignty. We aim to use practices which support a circular economy. Our vision is to provide access to diverse organic food, from seed to farm to table.

We strive to build a circular organic food hub. We wish to partner with like-minded youth entrepreneurs, newcomers, seniors, chefs, and local food markets.

We look forward to working with Christian Cummins, a youth entrepreneur. He is a member of the



October 16, 2020, Zlata radish from the Puslinch farm.

EFAO, who will deliver nutritious meals to the community. We intend to reach more newcomers. We expect to limit barriers such as transportation and skills development. Our long-term goal will be for newcomers to express an interest in starting their own farm business. Agápe Farms recognizes the importance of seniors. They are an essential source of wisdom. Their experience serves as a basis for future mentoring of youth and new farmers. We look to promote our circular organic food hub to graduating chefs in Food Studies, Hospitality and Culinary Arts. We expect to take our role at the local farmer's market to the next level. Our goal is to increase community involvement. We aim to offer nutritious organic food on a sliding scale.



October 23, 2020, Puslinch farm. Every year, Alex helps me plant, harvest and prepare boxes for the food bank and others in need.



Summer 2022, at the Guelph farm.



Summer 2022, at the Guelph farm.

EFAO: What made you decide to become a member of EFAO?

TIFFANY: I became a member of EFAO to build relationships with farmers. I want to learn more about resilient ecological farm practices.

EFAO: Farming in a just and equitable way is not easy.

What makes you passionate about growing food and giving back to the community?

TIFFANY: I gained my farming passion from my mother and grandmother. They grew food not for money but to nourish their family, friends, and neighbourhoods. As a child, I recall my grandmother bringing cooked food to sick neighbours. After a harvest, she would drop off portions to homes close by.

My mother continued the practice of her mother. Portions of our backyard garden always went to families, church members and neighbours. Whenever I



August 2022, My sisters and I at the Guelph Farm.

brought food to my parents, the first thing my mom did was portion out the food for others.

These two ladies, Mothers of the Earth, are my inspiration. They taught me that collectively, we need to take care of each other. They are why I'm passionate about growing food and giving back to the community. ■



Mother of the Earth, my grandma. She was an amazing woman.



Mother of the Earth, my mom. Another amazing woman.



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Adding Dry Legumes to the Garden

By Theo Wiederkehr

Five years ago I planted a packet of Macuzalito beans in our garden. I did not realize it at the time, but it was the beginning of a major shift in our gardening. Unlike every other bean my family had grown, Macuzalito was not a green bean. Instead, it was a little red bean from Honduras intended for use as a dry bean.

This year we grew forty varieties of seven different species of dry legumes. I have become fascinated with their variation in shape, colour, growth habit, flavour, and growing season, and continue to experiment with new species and varieties.

Dry legumes, or pulses, are the mature seed harvested from plants in the family Fabaceae. All members of Fabaceae fix nitrogen in partnership with *Rhizobium* bacteria, so they are important for soil health. Dry legumes are high in protein, but also have substantial quantities of starch and, in some cases, oil, as well as other vitamins and nutrients. They are excellent to complement or replace dairy and meat in our diets. In our household, they are proving to be key partners in our effort to develop a more resilient and fully sustainable food system. We can't live on salads, but by growing dry legumes we can produce some of the staples which form the foundation of our diet. They are also a part of our response to climate change, because we can grow enough to meet our needs on a relatively small area of land without using fossil fuels or electricity.

Growing dry legumes tends to be easy. They don't need watering, and are ready to harvest when the pods turn brown and crisp and the seeds rattle within them (though in our climate we sometimes have to harvest them earlier and dry them on tarps to avoid rain).

Our family depends on five main species of dry legumes: common beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), peas (*Pisum sativum*/ *Lathyrus oleraceus*), soy (*Glycine max*), grasspea (*Lathyrus sativus*), and runner beans (*Phaseolus coccineus*). We also grow favas, lentils, chickpeas, and cowpeas, but have found them to be less reliable and more challenging to

harvest. We organize these species in various ways.



A harvest of Macuzalito beans.



An assortment of early dry legumes we grow – peas, grasspeas, favas, chickpeas, and beans.

Considerations in the Garden

On the growing end, there are two main considerations: season length and trellising.

Some legumes tolerate frost just fine, and like cooler weather. These are

planted early, and harvested in late July or early August. Favas and peas are in this camp. Beans and soy, on the other hand, need heat and won't tolerate any frost, so they are planted at the end of May or early June and finish around the

fall frost date. Runner beans can take some cold, but don't love it, and also don't love too much heat; and grasspeas will take anything the weather throws at them! By planting a balance of species, we avoid being swamped with planting

or harvest at any one time, and are less vulnerable to unpleasant weather.

Trellising is a bit of a debate. If it rains a lot when dry legumes are near maturity, they can sprout, shatter, or mold. In this situation, taller varieties have an advantage: their pods stay dryer. Trellised varieties of beans and peas also tend to yield about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ times as much as bush varieties per square foot in our garden, so if space is a constraint, they are beneficial. However, building trellises is a lot of work and can take a lot of material. Some trellised varieties also mature unevenly, and so are more work to harvest (though our best trellised peas, St Hubert's and the unique purple-podded Capucijner, are admirable exceptions, maturing very evenly).

How one harvests dry legumes depends on the scale of planting and the variety being grown. In a small planting, or with pole beans, we often pick pods by hand as they mature. At a larger scale this is impractical, so we try to grow varieties



A polyculture of corn and beans.



Capucijner peas growing on a trellis.

where we can cut whole, dry plants. This includes many peas, bush beans, soy, and grasspea. With these we usually use sickles and pile the plants onto a tarp to bring in from the garden.

To be stored without molding, legumes must be dry enough that you can't dent them with a thumbnail. We often harvest them wetter than that and dry them, still in their pods, on tarps (outside on sunny days, inside on rainy ones) for a bit before threshing.

We shell small harvests by hand. Larger ones we trample underfoot on squares of plywood. Some put them in sacks and beat with a stick. We have also successfully used a bicycle-powered thresher built using plans from the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, and are now experimenting with a little wooden treadle-powered spike thresher we built, which seems promising.

Considerations in the Kitchen

Another way to sort dry legumes is around culinary use. We approximately sort our bean varieties by texture into "mealy beans" which include kidney-like beans and orb-shaped beans which are ideal in soup, and "buttery beans" like pintos or Turkey Crow bean which have a smoother texture preferable for refried beans. There is also some variation in seed coat thickness, which changes mouth feel substantially. However, not being gourmands, we also have in-between beans which we use for whatever.

We divide peas into round-seeded normal peas, which can be either green or yellow and which are the kind used for split peas, and "grey peas," which have pink flowers and wrinkled seeds that are often patterned, and which taste somewhere between a regular pea and a chickpea. They also have heavier

seed coats, so are ideal where they will be used whole. In our climate chickpeas are unhappy, so we substitute grey peas for them in recipes. Regular peas mash much better, and make good daal.

Grasspeas' taste and texture is somewhere between a pea and a lentil. They are substantially more productive and easier to grow than lentils, so we use them instead. They are a special little legume which really deserve more attention, and look like they might finally receive it: due to their propensity for weathering climatic extremes, they are attracting growing interest in other parts of the world as a food to grow in response to climate change.

Runner beans make excellent dry beans. We grow a variety with dark seed coats which has a strong beany flavour that pairs best with other strong flavours,

and a white-seeded variety which is very mild and smooth – quite wonderful. Runners are enormous vines and don't know when to stop, so we always have a lot caught by frost in the fall; we shell them and cook them like dry beans, but without needing to soak them.

Soys are soys. Far higher in protein and oil than the other dry legumes, they have been hobbled in attracting eaters by their reputation for a fairly firm/crunchy texture and strong flavour. However, I am developing a taste for them boiled in soups, roasted into "soy nuts," either as a snack food or for grinding and adding to sauces or stews (delicious), or processed further into tofu, which is a bit involved but quite possible to do at home. For those really into localizing their diets, they also make excellent hummus when paired with rhubarb!

Yields and Seed Saving

What sort of yields can be expected from dry legumes in the garden? We measure in cups, because that's how we cook. We grow everything in 3x25 foot beds, and aren't brilliant at recording our yields. But very approximately, our yields per bed have looked like:

Category	Cups/Bed
Bush peas	12
Grasspeas	13
5-foot tall trellised peas	17
Bush beans	20
8-foot tall trellised beans	30

For those wanting to grow significant quantities of dry legumes, it is obviously uneconomical to buy seed. Fortunately, saving seed from most legumes is easy, since the food is the seed. Peas, beans, soy, and grasspeas are all self-pollinating, so minimal isolation is needed to keep varieties pure. Runner beans and favas need more isolation.

Dry legumes have been important parts of subsistence agriculture in societies around the world, acting as cornerstones of both human nutrition and crop rotations. Growing large quantities to sell may be beyond the interests and abilities of many gardeners, but growing enough for personal use is quite manageable, and opens a whole world of culinary possibilities. Do try at least one or two in next year's garden, and see where they lead you! ■

***Theo Wiederkehr** lives in southern Bruce County, where he gardens staple crops and vegetables with his family. He runs Carrick Seeds, and is constantly trying to figure out how to fit together germplasm, appropriate technology, and human culture to develop a sustainable way of life.*



Tarps of bean pods drying in the sun.

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What Farmers Need to Know About Grassland Birds in Ontario

By Matthew Iles

A Birder on the Farm

Several years ago, I was lucky enough to spend an extended time living and working on a small, market-garden farm, just north of Guelph. A few years prior to that, I had moved to the city seeking employment in the environmental sector, whilst also looking to connect with a ‘green-minded’ community. I was in my late 20s and alone for the first time in a country that I had immigrated to a few years before. As I settled into Guelph, regular visits to the Farmer’s Market, Ignatius Jesuit Centre and the annual Organic Conference at the University led me to develop an interest in sustainable and regenerative agriculture as a major part of preserving natural biodiversity and battling climate-change.

Fast forward a bit, and after three years working and living in southern Ontario’s last remaining wilderness — Long Point, at the famous Bird Observatory — I returned to Guelph with a deeper understanding of the connections between colonization, deforestation, wetland and grassland removal, and dwindling numbers of birds. National and international reports surfaced around this time, citing significant declines in bird populations across North America over the past 50 years¹.

Somewhat burnt-out from three years of off-grid, immersive biology fieldwork, I returned to Guelph seeking a change. Several nights enduring -20° C temperatures, whilst trying to live in my beloved 1986 Dodge B250 Camper-Van was enough to make me seek out



The ‘Vanstead’. Credit: Matthew Iles

a more suitable winter living situation. I reached out to the owners of a farm just north of Guelph who had advertised a rentable winter living space through their Facebook page. I started a work/housing trade and ended up staying for the entire year, moving back into my van on the farm – working several days a week on the farm whilst doing some freelance consulting, and educational work at Guelph Outdoor School.

These farming friends helped me set down some roots in the region, and I

am forever grateful to them and their families for supporting me as I rebuilt. I learnt lots in the ways of ecological farming principles and techniques, infrastructure maintenance, and got to make many connections in the ecological farming community. Some of my most cherished memories from these times (I ended up spending three consecutive winters and early springs on the farm), involved connecting deeply with the land and the animals that inhabited it.

Grassland Species-at-Risk Birds

With my camper-van parked on the edge of an old field, which had succeeded into species-rich meadow habitat, I got to know several species of grassland birds pretty well. I was already familiar with what they looked and sounded like, due to their species-at-risk status. But here I got to connect deeply with them, observing behaviour or sometimes just listening to their song, on a daily basis.



Eastern Meadowlark.



Bobolink



Grasshopper Sparrow.

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (Endangered in Ontario²) – Bringing a flash of yellow to the early spring (March-April), and giving their soulful, flutelike whistle each morning, sometimes just a few metres from my bed, I got to know this species first. Part of the blackbird family, their chattering calls, flicker of brilliant white outer tail feathers, and distinctive flight – a sequence of rapid fluttering and short glides, usually low to the ground – make them a delight to observe. In Ontario, the number of Meadowlarks has decreased by almost 65% during the past 40 years³. This species increased when forests were cleared in eastern North America, but as with many grassland birds, Meadowlark numbers are shrinking due to changes in land use and the loss of suitable habitat. Development, changes in farming practices, over-grazing by livestock, grassland fragmentation, reforestation, use of pesticides and increases in the relative numbers of predators, are all impacting them.

BOBOLINK (Endangered in Ontario²) – Filling the air with their robotic, babbling song (and looking a bit futuristic with their little buff-coloured ‘space-helmets’), Bobolink are another species from the blackbird family, that fast became one of my favourites once I really got to spend time with them in their breeding habitat. Historically, Bobolinks lived in tallgrass prairie and other open-meadow habitat, but with the clearing of native grasslands Bobolinks moved into hayfields. The species-rich meadow on the farm provided habitat for over a dozen pairs. Although widely distributed through much of the province south of the boreal forest, Bobolink populations have declined considerably over the past half-century⁴. There are various pressures on the wintering areas in South America and during their migration, but here they face pressure on their breeding grounds from early hay harvest, as well as decline in habitat quality due to modern hay production practices.

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW (Special Concern in Ontario²) – Although the previous two species are still common across Southern Ontario, the diminutive and secretive Grasshopper Sparrow is much less well-known and is much more uncommon, despite having a more secure conservation status. The Grasshopper Sparrow’s buzzy song does sound like their namesake, and they have some really lovely colour and patterning when you are lucky enough to get a close view. They were much less numerous than the other two birds on the farm at which I stayed, with just two pairs present in only one of the two meadows. As such, they quickly became favourites of mine. In Ontario, the grassland habitat that they favour is disappearing, due to an increase in row crops and a gradual decline in cattle farming⁵. They were added to the Species at Risk list in 2015.

My observations

During the time I spent observing these grassland birds, I was surprised by how unfamiliar some folks seemed to be with the conditions that allow for their success. Most were aware of them and their conservation status, but it also felt like there was a gap in their knowledge or familiarity with the birds themselves, their breeding habits, and how the land was significant in providing for them. (I speak here mostly of Bobolink, and to a lesser extent, Meadowlark – Grasshopper Sparrow are still largely unknown to non-birders). I felt like there was work to be done, and more need for celebration – of the habitat benefits that organic and ecologically restorative farming can create for grassland birds. The evidence was clear to me, and I felt a strong desire to find ways to make more of the community aware of this – farm supporters and customers included. This should be a major selling point of farms like this!

Similarly, many (but not all) of my birding peers and pals were often disconnected or uninterested in how supporting local produce and agriculture could help support species at risk. Despite awareness around habitat-loss and the pressures facing these birds, there seems to be less awareness of how supporting small-scale, ecologically regenerative farming can provide substantial benefits to these birds.

The future

I now work for an ecological consulting company that focuses on helping clients and partners to 'realize the ecological potential of every place'. A pet-project of mine is to work with the EFAO and its readership, to get a better understanding of the status of our grassland species at risk birds, and engage farmers and landowners in how they can help. Now is a great time for that, as we enter the fourth year of the 3rd Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas⁶. I also want to help farmers realize the opportunities that they have to provide, create and restore habitat for these species, whilst raising the birds' profile through ventures such as agro/eco-tourism.

As a starting point, I would love to hear from the EFAO readership to get an idea of the distribution of these species across the network of farms and landowners.



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I would also love to connect with those who wish to learn more about species identification and how citizen scientists can help assess breeding status. I'm also curious as to whether there is any interest in support with habitat creation and stewardship. ■

Please take time to answer the following questions. You can send your answers to miles@dougan.ca.

Do you have, or think that you may have, the following species present on your farm/land (either that you own or where you work/study)?

- Eastern Meadowlark
yes/no/don't know (but suitable habitat present)
- Bobolink
yes/no/don't know (but suitable habitat present)
- Grasshopper Sparrow
yes/no/don't know (but suitable habitat present)

Are you interested in attending a learning session on the identification of grassland species-at-risk birds?

- Yes/no

Are you interested in contributing toward citizen science-led understanding of the status of these species?

- Yes/no

Can we reach out to further help you determine the status of these birds on your farm/land?

- Yes/no

Are you interested in hearing about opportunities and incentives to provide, create or restore suitable habitat for these species?

- Yes/no

Having grown up in Wales and studied in Liverpool, England, **Matthew Iles** now works as a Wildlife Ecologist at *Dougan Ecology*. He is also a nature-based educator at *The Guelph Outdoor School* and through his own birding workshops, *retreats* and *guided trips*. He has called southern Ontario home for the past 13+ years. You can follow him on Instagram [@wild_m.iles](https://www.instagram.com/wild_m.iles).

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Do You FaRM?

Building Resilience and Addressing Climate Change

By Brenda Hsueh



Farmers discussing best management practices at an EFAO FaRM field day last year.

For those of us in farming who are concerned about climate change and what may be coming, it can often feel very difficult to know how to respond. Individual actions, even at the scale of a farm, can often feel ineffective, and the constant reports of different upcoming calamities can make it hard to know where to put your efforts. This uncertainty, and the feeling of isolation, is partly what attracted me to becoming involved with [Farmers for Climate Solutions](#).

Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS) is a national farmer-led coalition advocating to make agriculture part of the solution to climate change. EFAO is one of the founding members of this coalition, and I joined one of FCS' working groups back in September 2021, starting to plan, and then roll out its Farm Resilience Mentorship (FaRM) program. EFAO is also a partner in implementing FaRM.

FCS forms task forces, working groups, and advisory bodies, made up of farmers, researchers, and academics, to help determine ways in which Canadian agriculture can take an active part in decreasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. FCS draws together scientific data to back up their recommendations, consults with the agriculture industry to try and unite us on these fronts, and lobbies governments with solutions.

Basically, we try to talk to and hear from as many Canadian farmers, and players in the farming industry as possible, in order to figure out what farming practices, many of which we already know how to use, can have the most effect on slowing climate change. And we back this up with scientific data. I think this helps dispel some of that uncertainty I mentioned earlier, and gives us an idea of where to focus our efforts as farmers.

This collaborative, scientific, and big tent approach has paid off. When FCS went to the government with a specific ask in 2021¹, this approach resulted in the On Farm Climate Action Fund (OFCAF) from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, which provided \$200 million in cost-share funds to farmers across Canada to implement three beneficial management practices (BMPs). These BMPs were the top three presented by FCS to the federal government as low hanging fruit which would result in significant decreases in greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). The BMPs are cover cropping, rotational grazing, and advanced nitrogen management. Some of you may have



A Farmers for Climate Solutions Program

1 A Down Payment for a Resilient Farm Future: Budget 2021 Recommendation' <https://farmersforclimatesolutions.ca/budget-2021-recommendation>



A rotational grazing field day at Black Barn Farms in 2023.

accessed these funds on your farms. OFCAF has since been further funded into 2028 for another \$470 million.

Having worked in a corporate setting before becoming a farmer, the co-operative and inclusive way in which FCS does its work is a revelation to me. This is a highly democratic (sometimes messy) way forward for Canadian agriculture in the face of climate change.

This winter, FCS is hosting the Prairie Farmer and Rancher Forum, which will gather 36 farmers from across Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba who represent diverse views and experiences from different areas on the Prairies. These farmers will help to develop recommendations that can be presented to policymakers for how to better support farmers to make changes. This is a hugely ambitious undertaking, to hear from all farmers, even those who may not believe in climate change, but who acknowledge a change in farming practices is needed.

As part of the FaRM program, my work is liaising with our partners across Canada to deliver training events and farmer mentorship on the cover cropping, rotational grazing, and advanced nitrogen management BMPs. I love getting to know farmers and

farm organisations across the country. It's amazing to learn about the breadth and diversity of our experiences, and about how similar we all are. Even if climate change is not top of mind for all of us, resilience certainly is, as we all try to survive while doing the work we love.

As a farmer, this all has given me a sense of agency, despite the many things I can't control. Learning about farming practices which can improve soil health, and continuously trying to do better as more knowledge is gained, is incredibly empowering. After years of cover cropping and rotational grazing, I have seen an

increase in biodiversity and soil organic matter on my farm, and I think this has helped us produce higher quality food more successfully, despite increasingly extreme weather. Improving the health of the soil increases the farm's resilience.

Please check out FaRM's online learning platform: www.farmlearninghub.ca. There you will find online courses about the three BMPs. The cover cropping course is written by Canadian Organic Growers, rotational grazing by the Canadian Forage and Grasslands Association, and the advanced nitrogen management curriculum by Climate Smart Soils.

In the FaRM Learning Hub you will also find provincial calendars of events, a space to ask questions or join a group discussion with a mentor, and a place to request one-on-one mentorship. This is all free, so please use these resources!

FaRM's mandate is to teach as many farmers as possible about these BMPs, making as many connections as possible to enable us to take up these practices. The FaRM team is constantly working to upload new content and functionality to the learning hub. Sign up for the newsletter to stay informed about new events and resources in Ontario, and if you know any farmers who might be

interested in these resources, please share this information with them.

The next big project for FCS is a task force focused on figuring out how to get the agricultural sector to be more resilient, and produce lower emissions by 2030 and 2050. FCS aims to publish this report in March 2024. So far, we've learned that Canadian agriculture could reduce its emissions by at least 25% by 2030. This might involve nitrogen management, livestock techniques, energy use, and manure, soil, and land cover practices. Climate change is not going away, and whether you believe we can mitigate it, or just become more resilient to it, the on-farm changes required to decrease agricultural GHG emissions are doable on a nationwide basis, as long as farmers are supported by government, industry and society in making these changes. ■

For more information about FCS, visit www.farmersforclimatesolutions.ca.

***Brenda Hsueh** is a Canadian-born Chinese agroecological sheep farmer, who left a financial career in downtown Toronto to start her own farm in 2009. She ran a 1 acre market garden, growing vegetables for CSA members in the GTA for 14 seasons, as the sheep flock and their meat and fibre products increased. Now she is also working with FCS to help more farmers convert to climate beneficial farming practices through the FaRM Program. She wants to see farming become the climate crisis saviour it should be, building soils, sequestering carbon, being a moisture sponge, and providing habitat for countless species.*



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Growing Food, Not Lawns

Since 2011, Audrey McDonald has been growing organic vegetables, culinary herbs, tropical plants, and flowers at [The Greenhouse Eatery](#) on rented land in Brampton, Ontario. Beyond growing vibrant Jamaican callaloo and marketing Greenhouse Eatery's Garlic Bar products (including some seriously delicious black garlic!), Audrey is also dedicated to advocating for local foods and educating her community about their connection to the land. In this interview, we hear a little about how she became a farmer, the motivation behind her work, and her hopes for the future of agriculture.

EFAO: Could you tell us a little bit about your farm journey? Describe the moment you realise you want to become a farmer.

AUDREY: I realised that I wanted to be a farmer after going through multiple career changes. I've done theatre, I've done fashion design. I've got culinary training, and I did social work. And I was always involved with environmental, agricultural, and growing projects in my community. From the latter, I won my community's first green award, and received a Citizens Award of Merit by Michael Ignatieff, my MP, in 2010. I one day asked myself the questions: what did I like doing? What made me happy? What I was passionate about, what satisfied myself? And the answer was growing, farming, and the journey of the seed — those were all at top of the list. So, I started pursuing farming. And because I knew a lot about growing in the ground, I wanted to take the OMAFRA greenhouse course, because that was a completely different can of worms.

EFAO: What drives your passion and inspires your work on the farm? When you think back, who are the people that were vital to your story, and provided you support throughout your journey?



AUDREY: Firstly, I must say that my biggest inspiration would be my grandmother. I'm an immigrant from Jamaica — it starts as a typical story of when your parents move away to a foreign land. My grandmother became my main caregiver. And it just so happened that she was also a farmer, and we had to move to her farm. Her farm had sort of a Mennonite model, where everyone contributes, regardless of age. I'm going to be honest with you, as a little girl, I really didn't like it too much. But look where I am today!

EFAO: Why do you feel like it's important to grow cultural crops? And what kind of relationships do you hope that people will build with these foods?

AUDREY: I'm passionate about watching the journey of the seed, growing and eating good food, sharing recipes, and educating young minds about where their food comes from. I am not in any way a band wagoner and I have been growing diverse, world crops since I started farming, as the *Globe and Mail* reported back in 2012. I have been experimenting with the viability of diverse crops in Canadian soil. It occurred to me that folks feel healthier, more comfortable, more at home, when they have access to their native foods.

They are now astonished and excited that we can produce these crops locally.

EFAO: Can you give examples of the kinds of crops that you've experimented with, and found success with or were challenging?

AUDREY: It begins with some kind of vision. I tell myself to try new things all the time. During the process, I usually work the kinks out of it. Like with the Jamaican callaloo, for example. I knew if I wanted something out of that crop in the present season, that I'd have to start it in a greenhouse. The hot peppers, the pumpkins: I'd have to start in a greenhouse. And that's because the growing season needed for these is so long. You can't just plant them outside in May or June. By the time they start blooming, the frost is here.

EFAO: When you started growing crops like callaloo, did you find that there were other farmers in Ontario doing the same kind of work?

AUDREY: When I went on FarmStart, there were 20 farmers, and some of them were my countrymen. I had the advantage of a greenhouse to grow in, and they were able to help me with pest control and irrigation needs. I was able to help them with time and crop planning. There was an exchange of knowledge.

EFAO: What advice would you give to aspiring or new farmers?

AUDREY: Well, my first piece of advice that I would give is: please be aware that this is hard work. It's trying work. You're not in control here. Every season is different: one year you get flood, another drought. It's like the relationship between the fisherman and the sea, except between a farmer and the weather. But remember, you're not a solo artist. You're gonna need help from friends and family, even the community. You're not going to do this by yourself. You will also need passion and determination. And to the aspiring farmers of colour, especially those interested in growing cultural crops: You have to take the time to observe the Canadian climate, the growing season, and participate in that exchange of knowledge I mentioned earlier.

EFAO: What are your hopes for the future of local agriculture? And what kind of legacy do you hope to build?

AUDREY: I believe that I've built my legacy through sheer determination, vision, and passion. I am often imitated but never duplicated. For example, I was one of the first to bring local, fresh-cut tropical flowers to farmers markets, then other farmers followed suit. I was also the first to carry my niche baby root vegetables to market. Other farmers used to joke with me and say: "People buy that?" And then they started selling it as well. I was one of the first to carry Caribbean crops to markets. And now white farmers grow these as well. Some people would prefer to go and buy that world crop from a white farmer than from the person who brought it to this country, or has the experience with it. They say we're changing and we are making progress, but a lot is still swept under the carpet.

EFAO: Is that something that you hope will change?

AUDREY: I think the younger generation has a different outlook. But the older generation, they are still looking through that lens. It's like tunnel vision. This just proves to me that a person of colour will always have to work harder. The struggle is real. We also bring our preserves, jams or jellies, sauces, and we make jerk chicken live on the grill at markets. You



know, it's the only way for us to get ahead. It can be very challenging. I've had moments where I've had to throw "diplomacy" out the window. I don't tend to get upset in people's faces. But then, I'm considered a rebel just for speaking up! I don't let it get me down though. I just want folks to know when things are not okay.



EFAO: Do you feel like your work on the farm is a form of advocacy or activism?

AUDREY: Yes, I do. It starts with my community. When it comes to teaching young minds, I've been in the schools and I teach kids as young as kindergarten about environmental studies, encouraging good environmental stewardship, connections to the ecosystem, and knowing where your food comes from. I've been advocating for local foods like that. Accessible fresh food, not just secondhand food from a food bank, right? And to bring it back to land and the land connection, I ask a simple question: What's wrong with growing food in an allotment, your yard, your neighbour's yard? My message: grow food, not lawns.

EFAO: How has the scene of agriculture changed since you started farming?

AUDREY: I think it has changed drastically. We now see a highly educated consumer, wanting to educate young minds about eating locally and knowing where your food comes from. They come with this attitude now. People bring their kids to market all the time, encouraging them to ask the



farmers questions. Not to mention, a lot of people are now interested in growing their own food, even on a small scale. They strongly believe in supporting farmers. We also see more Indigenous farmers coming to market. We swap stories about growing the Three Sisters, we exchange seeds, and we exchange knowledge. Also, you now see a lot of younger farmers. And you know what's funny? Whenever there's a new, younger farmer at the market, they throw them beside me — don't ask me why! ■

A Co-operative Advantage?

Comparing diverse cool season and warm season pasture mixes

By Laura Northey



Fifty years ago, when Tony McQuail attended the University of Guelph, he and his classmates were told to plant one variety of grass and one variety of legume to create “the perfect mix” for hay that would mature evenly. There was lots of concern about “weeds” and competition between plants for nutrients, water, and light. On his own farm, Tony eventually became more relaxed about having greater diversity in his hay and pasture. In Meeting Place Farm’s market garden, he experimented with multispecies cover crops and was impressed at how they grew. Everything but corn seemed to thrive in these dense, complex mixtures.

After watching a video of Christine Jones on quorum sensing in very diverse plant communities and the experience of resilience of such communities in the Jena Experiment he got interested in how complex hay and pasture mixes might perform compared with simpler ones. Tony wanted to see what would happen when he used pasture mixes with a much greater diversity of species

in them — “sort of like the prairies used to be.”

Many EFAO members know Tony McQuail as a pasture management expert and Holistic Management educator. Certainly, Tony and his family embody a lifetime of expertise in the literal and metaphorical field. But as any farmer knows, there’s always more to learn. As any *good* farmer knows, one very important way to improve your management is to try new things. And, as any good farmer-*researcher* knows, the best way to experiment is using the scientific method to verify your observations! Luckily, Tony has access to a farming organization that provides this service (and so do you).

In 2022, Tony and his neighbour (who also happens to be his son-in-law’s father) Jon Hustis set out to explore what would happen if they used much more complex seed mixes when seeding a new pasture/hay area on Jon’s farm. They were curious how each would establish and how they would compare in terms of biomass production. They

wanted to know, with a reasonable degree of certainty, whether much greater diversity of plants being seeded would result in “greener pastures” when they seeded a new pasture in an area of Jon’s farm that had previously been cropped.

Tony hypothesized that incorporating a greater diversity of plant species in the forage mixes they used might actually offer an advantage to the plants.

EFAO helped Tony and Jon set up an experiment that would assess how the different mixes performed, using the scientific method. They tested two seed mixes: 1) a diverse forage mix of commercially available pasture species containing 39 cultivars and 25 species, (including some annuals), and 2) a diverse mix of 33 warm season prairie species. The control which they tested these against was a simple, seven species forage mix. Tony underseeded all treatments using the same grain nurse crop.

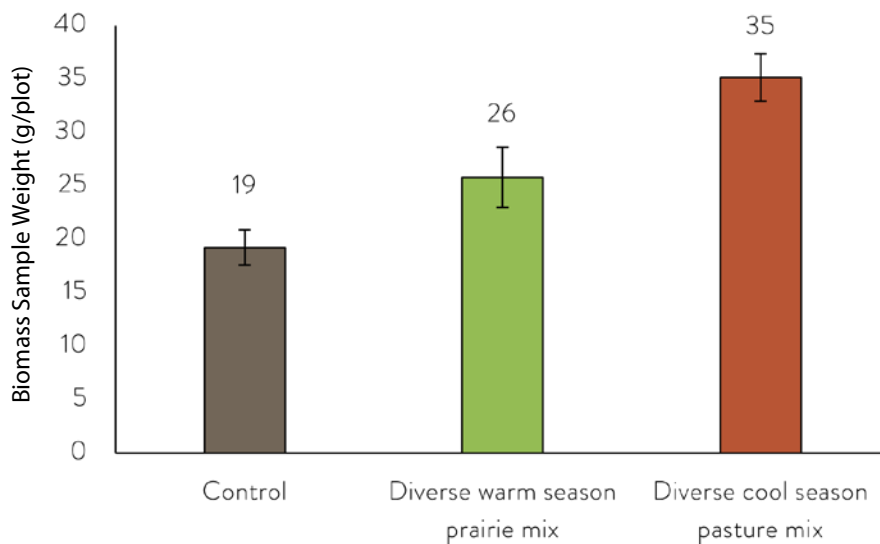


Figure 1

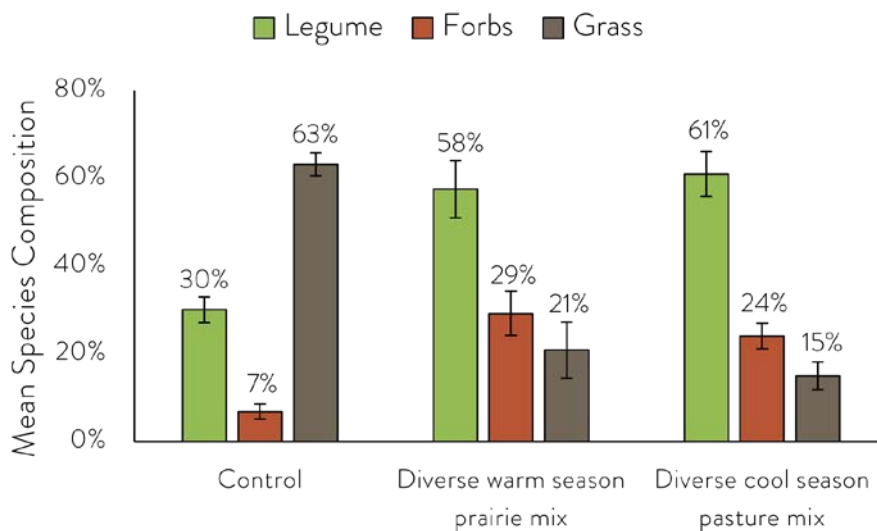


Figure 2

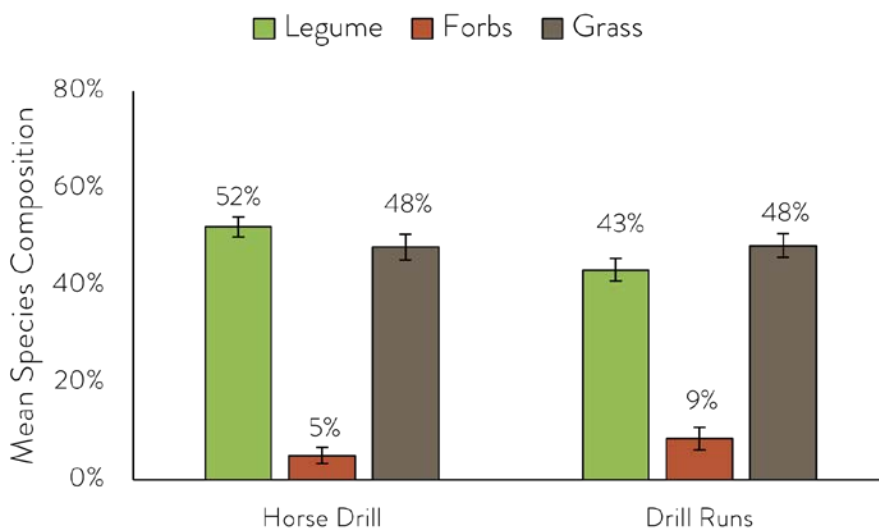


Figure 3

Tony seeded both types of diverse strips using a horse-drawn seed drill, which first broadcasts the seed and then rakes it in with chains and discs. He used the “horse drill” because the conventional seed drill wasn’t able to accommodate the more diverse seed mixes. The control was seeded using both the conventional seed-drill and the horse-drawn drill. He assessed the performance of the different crops by taking six biomass samples of an equivalent amount of space within each test area.

In 2023, after taking samples and comparing them by dry weight, Tony observed that the diverse cool season pasture mix performed considerably better than the control, and the warm season mix performed equally well compared to both the cool season mix and the control, as shown in **Figure 1**. He was surprised that the warm season mix performed so well compared to the control, as prairie is generally considered slow to establish. When assessing the composition of the crops, he also noticed that both of the diverse mixes contained more legumes and forb species than the simple mix used in the control (Figure 2).

Since Tony seeded the diverse strips only by horse drill, he wondered if the method of planting would have an impact on their results. To test this, he decided to also compare plantings of the control mix seeded using both the horse drill and drill runs.

Figure 3 shows the measurable differences between the composition of the mixes seeded by horse drill vs. drill runs. The composition of the forage seeded by horse drill was slightly higher in legumes and lower in forbs, and the overall yield (**Figure 4**) was also slightly higher, but the difference observed wasn’t statistically significant. Therefore, the differences he observed between the seed mixes probably weren’t heavily influenced by the seeding method.

To explain the minor differences between the seeding methods, Tony speculates that because the old horse drill he uses drops (and effectively broadcasts) some of the seed before

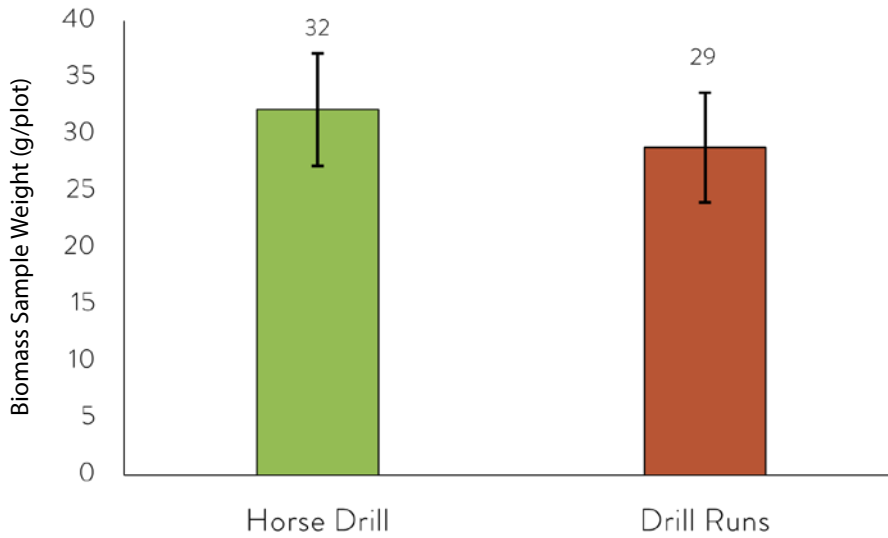


Figure 4

raking it in, the stands that were sown by horse drill were denser, thus explaining the higher yield. The method of seeding may have also increased the soil moisture and weed control of the diverse plots, as a result of the thicker canopy. Tony also wondered if the scattered seeds received more light early on, resulting in better growth conditions for the legumes and forbs in the diverse mixes.



So, what did we learn? “Well, for one thing,” Tony says, “we learned about how complex a research experiment can quickly get with the addition of a single variable! There were challenges in finding a drill that would handle the complex mix – and then the day we seeded was very windy which affected the drills differently. In the end we got usable results but both could have called into question what we were trying to compare.”

Tony concluded that “diversity is not a terrible competitive disadvantage for plants, may be a competitive advantage – or rather, a cooperative

advantage.” He also confirmed that the tools and techniques often matter as much as the seeds themselves: when it comes to seeding pasture in future, Tony believes that broadcast-seeding, rather than drill seeding in “perfect drill runs” might result in a better forage crop.

Tony hopes to sample the biomass again next spring to add further data to his research findings, and plans to observe whether or not the cattle show a preference for different parts of the field.

Tony is pleased that he at least got what feels like confirmation that in pastures, diversity is *not* weakness. “We’ll see how it carries on next year, but it looks pretty promising, and certainly wasn’t what I was taught in school fifty years ago!” ■

Laura Northey is EFAO’s Communications and Member Engagement Director, who also serves as editor of this magazine. Growing up on a hobby farm, she interacted with all manner of livestock, and continues to learn from EFAO farmer-researchers about how best to manage them.

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Meadowlark Hearth Seed Festival

By April Parmes Jones

Building a network of seed resiliency in your garden or farm is a foundational step towards a more productive and nutritious crop. We all desire crops that are able to meet modern day growing challenges, such as being able to thrive with less water, and be pest and blight resistant. Crop diversity, and choosing the best seeds available, allows for additional success in each growing season. By carefully selecting our seeds and partnering with great seed producers, we can create our own climate-resilient crops that will benefit us as farmers and our communities. Sourcing these elevated seeds should be a priority, as it directly correlates to the establishment of a resilient growing system.

Seed sovereignty is a movement rooted in caring for the earth and our neighbors, with adaptability, respect, and the embrace of our natural world, empowering each of us to grow culturally relevant crops that align with our cultural food ways and traditions. [Meadowlark Hearth Farms' Seed Festival](#) is an embodiment of this seed movement. Beth and Nathan Corymb of Meadowlark Hearth Farm and Seed Company in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, are enthusiastic about seeds and seed production. They offer outstanding varieties of seed for home growing or commercial use.

At Meadowlark Hearth, they grow numerous types of vegetable seed, including cabbage, onions, carrots, beets, swiss chard, parsnips, herbs, flowers, legumes, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, melons, cucumbers and squash among many others. Meadowlark Hearth also produces bedding plants and offers a year round CSA (Community Supported

Agriculture) in addition to raising grass-fed cattle.

The 2023 Meadowlark Hearth Seed Festival that took place last September 3rd, was a behind-the-scenes look at seed processing and growing practices. Touring this beautiful farm, the participants learned about the types of crops that were being grown, and how the farm's layout allows for the best growing conditions for seed production. Some highlights:

[The Corne De Bouc](#) french heirloom tomato (available in the Meadowlark Hearth Seed Catalog), is an unusual, five-inch long, pointed tomato, that can be used for fresh eating, sun-dried, or processed to create a thick tomato sauce or fresh salsa. The flavor profile is sweet, slightly smoky, with a robust flesh, outstanding flavor and hearty structure. The name Corne De Bouc means goat's horn.

The [Music Aria Garlic](#) is a sweet variety that adds vigor and robust flavor to meals. Roasting the garlic is an effective way to bring the fullest of taste to each bite. [Red Chesnok Purple Stripe](#) garlic was added to olive oil for salad dressings and to cook alongside a variety of farm fresh vegetables, tomatoes, onions, squash and more.

[Fresh Bono Cucumbers](#) are a select cucumber from Switzerland. They are large, dark green with a smooth skin and the fruit does not need trellising. These Bono cucumbers were sliced up with precision, with an eye for design. The bowl looked like a piece of artwork, as each Bono cucumber glistened in the



sun parading their refreshing, delicious juiciness.

[Orange Rodelika Carrots](#) were grated finely in a large bowl. This type of carrot (Rothild) was bred by biodynamic farmer and breeder Dieter Bauer in Germany. The carrots were prepared simply, showcasing the craftsmanship and history of the expertise of the seed growers at Meadowlark Hearth.

[Red Cabbage Amarant](#) is an early cabbage with a wonderful reddish purple hue. It forms a solid head and stores extremely well and is good as an early, mid season or late crop. This unique cabbage can be stored for a couple of months into winter. It was grated beautifully and added to a bowl with a good dose of organic olive oil, salt and pepper. The color was bold, strong and a vibrant purplish-red color, with an earthy, sweet smell.

[Bono Cucumber](#) and [Super Lakota Tomato](#), [Basil](#), [Valencia Onion](#) was a



medley from heaven. The colors played off each other, red, white and green, like a piece of art. The flavours were exquisitely blended and balanced. It was a nostalgic dish, perfect and refreshing. The Super Lakota is an abundant producer with fleshy six to eight ounce fruits. It is an excellent slicing tomato, very juicy, with good old-fashioned flavor. Basil is certified organic and is a good strain of genovese type basil from a German Biodynamic seed source with an excellent germination rate.

Black Turtle Beans were cooked to perfection with just the addition of olive oil, salt and pepper. The bean is a bush plant that yields small black beans that are packed with flavor. They make a delicious soup, baked beans or spread.

Pike Orange Cantaloupe was bred in the 1930's in Monmouth, Oregon by Aaron Pike. The fruit is colorful and fragrant, weighing between three and six pounds. An oblong fruit with a very sweet, distinctive cantaloupe flavor and lots of sweetly perfumed juice.

During the luncheon, everyone enjoyed the bounty of the land. The Corne De Bouc was transformed into fresh salsa, with Valencia Onions, pungent and sweet. We tried California Early-Nebraska Select Garlic with an aromatic flavor profile, and Bolivian rainbow peppers that were bright, colorful in hues of reds, purple and cream which added flavor, color and heat.

Also as part of the festival, participants were able to see large, juicy, vibrantly red Brandywine tomatoes being

processed for seed. The tomatoes were placed on a machine that pulverizes the tomato into a large bucket. The smell of fresh Brandywine tomatoes was fragrant, robust and sweet. As the red pulp hit the bottom of the bucket with a smacking sound, each tomato built up a layer for the next. Soon the bucket was full of a bright red, luscious liquid that had to sit for two weeks to ferment in order to remove the sticky coating that reduce seed viability.

Participants in the Meadowlark Seed Festival were also invited to be a part of dry seed processing of certain crops such as carrots or fenugreek. A large tarp was placed on the ground, then the dried brown carrot umbels holding the seeds were strategically spread on top of the tarp. Another tarp was placed on top so they were completely covered. Then everyone was instructed to find a partner across from each other and to form two rows. Musicians played the Virginia Reel as participants learned the number and everyone was off to dance

away on top of the tarps to thresh the carrot seeds.

Seed sovereignty is about accessing all of ourselves, our innate musical, dancing, cooking and harvesting ability. This makes us stronger, more resilient and more robust human beings. Accessing seed sovereignty allows us to show off our creative and festive natures.

The Meadowlark Hearth Seed Festival is an elevation of the seed movement that allows each person to participate in the wonder, beauty and elegance of the transformative nature of seeds. It is an enlightening and educational experience where the participants learn how to access, grow and process many different types of seeds.

Seeds are reflective of our cultural values, thoughts, and passions. The beauty of the seed movement is that it adapts and changes with the terroir of the area. Seeds showcase the adaptability of our landscapes and allow us to see the glory of the land. Seed diversity is a strength and resource, the workhorse of our shared agricultural success and prosperity. Seed diversity and uniqueness in the seed movement informs us of what we have to move, shift and change throughout our lives to create a space of love, harmony and care. ■

April Parmes Jones

is originally from Akron, Ohio and advocates for her community as part of the food justice, water access and the food sovereignty movement. She is passionate about community gardens, farmer markets and creating a just food system. Having expertise in the role of farmers markets and in human elements of shifting the food system. She is a writer, public speaker, consultant, blogger, recipe developer, book reviewer, event planner and more.



Good Husbandry by Kristen Kimball

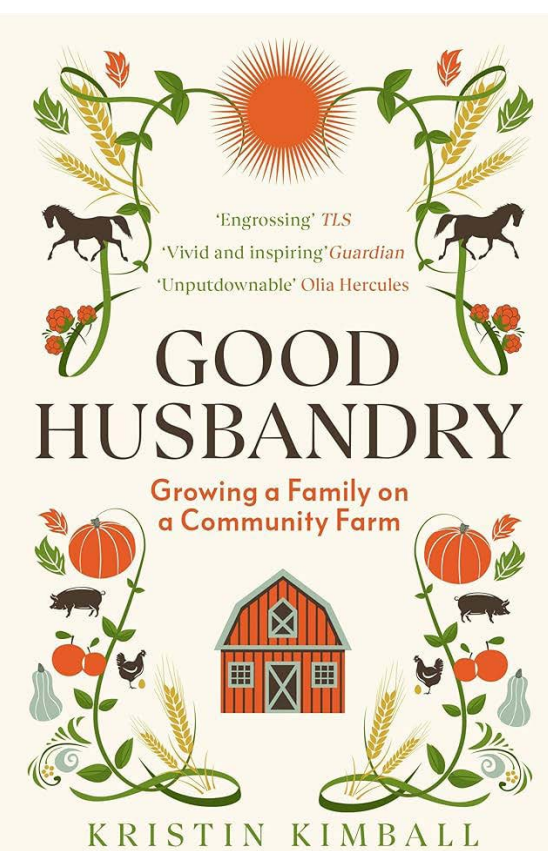
By Skyler Radojkovic

“Some people say farming is the most wholesome job in the universe. I say having a farm is more like having a gambling problem. A farm is...doling out just enough reward at exactly the right moment to keep you coming back for more.”

This is how Kristen Kimball starts her second farm memoir, and it captures her back and forth relationship with farming, and how often she finds herself contemplating giving it up.

For those not familiar with Kristen Kimball, she wrote her first memoir, *The Dirty Life*, in the early 2000's, and it was quite popular. It was a love story that introduced people to the latest wave of organic farming, including using horses, and a CSA model. Kimball is a city girl freelance writer, who meets a young organic farmer, they fall in love, get access to a huge piece of land in New York state and start farming. It was an engaging book, but there was a romance book feel to parts of it and I recall my farming friends at the time not really taking it that seriously. This book *Good Husbandry*, takes up where that book left off, sort of beyond the happy ever afters.

You would not read this book to learn the technical parts of farming, although there are many musings and descriptions on working with horses, the cycles of crops, the joys and brutality of raising animals. However, the reason why I think this book, limited as it is to this one person's perspective, is interesting, is that it lays out in great detail the consequences of choosing to live your life, including raising children, while having it being completely entwined with a farm and another farmer, and how that affects almost every aspect of that life.



Details like how one child plus the farm is manageable, with tasks shared fairly equally, but with a second child, she becomes the main childcare provider, and the farm becomes his priority, without there really being a discussion of it. As part of this, she learns that the farm is much less fun as an observer, that it is just a “tenuously viable business.” Many pieces of writing on farming life will skim over these

more personal details, but Kimball chooses to provide description of the more difficult parts, and how the effects of farming on relationships, and the lives of their children, can be brutal, and could be seen as a warning or reminder for those engaged in farming. “Farm children, even very young ones, get used to relinquishing their own desires for the greater good.”

I have a fairly pessimistic view of farming myself some days, and her darker views on some aspects of farm life certainly spoke to me. I also kind of wish there were more pieces of writing like this, about the mental and emotional aspects of being engaged in farming, along with the many more technical books that exist. So, this might be a bit of a

“pop literature” book, but it has glorious descriptions of farming, and might be the start of further conversations on what it feels like to farm. ■

Skyler Radojkovic farms sheep in Grey country with his partner Brenda Hsueh and their daughter Emma. He also likes trees.



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