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The up-and-comers here on the South Coast are younger and more diverse than the generations that preceded them. Certified organic? Not necessarily. But sustainability and community engagement are essential attributes.

BY LAURA KILLINGBECK AND SAWYER SMOOK-POLLITT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDRIA MAUCK

Round the Bend Farm garden manager Benoit Azagoh-Kouadio, who maintains two acres of crops, fruit trees, herbs, and flowers, says farming is more than production; it is about engagement, balance, and systemic healing.

EARLY SUMMER 2022

The MODERN FARMER



ANDREW ASHBROOK AND KATE GETZ

AEONIAN FARM | WESTPORT

A winding dirt driveway in Westport, Massachusetts leads into Aeonian Farm, a one-acre plot of land tended by Andrew Ashbrook, 35, and Kate Getz, 32, that grows vegetables year-round using sustainable and holistic methods. Aeonian Farm first began growing in the spring of 2020, but Ashbrook and Getz, who are a couple, had been working together for years.

They first met doing what they love — farming. Getz applied for a job at Riverbank farm in Connecticut where Ashbrook had already been working for three years. He conducted her interview.

“Kate and I worked together for 20 minutes — she was great, we were talking the whole time,” says Ashbrook. “After she left, I told my boss, ‘You need to hire her, she’s really good.’ I didn’t have any ulterior motives at the time, that came later, she was just a really hard worker, and smart too.”

Before they met, Getz worked an office job in Washington D.C. when she quit to travel the globe volunteering on farms in Europe and Africa. Meanwhile, Ashbrook was a student in New York City who felt stifled by city life.

“I just was miserable ... I needed an antidote,” says Ashbrook. “I got lucky and was accepted as a volunteer on this urban rooftop farm called Brooklyn Grange. You go up there and you just forget. You can see the skyscrapers and stuff, but it’s quiet, there are bees, bugs and soil, and there’s open space. That’s what got me.”

After working together in Connecticut, Ashbrook and Getz moved into a position in Maine as assistant farm managers at Four Seasons Farm under Eliot Coleman, a farmer known for his exploration of organic practices and for promoting small-scale agriculture. This hands-on experience prepared the couple for their own venture with Aeonian Farm.

Ashbrook and Getz supplement their soil with natural additives like azomite, a volcanic ash that Ashbrook describes as “the A to Z of minerals.” These micronutrients do not improve crop yield, he explained, but they do improve the quality, flavor and vibrancy of their vegetables.

“The idea is that all soils would have, if they weren’t farmed, a certain baseline of micronutrients and trace elements,” says



Aeonian Farm co-owners Andrew Ashbrook and Kate Getz have been profitable both years since they started their farm. “It’s a really exciting time to be a farmer,” says Ashbrook.

Ashbrook. “But when you’re cropping intensively, that stuff gets drawn up really fast and needs to be replaced.”

Ashbrook and Getz lease their farmland from landowners who ensure that each farmer who grows on the property uses sustainable practices. The previous tenants used similar organic methods that contributed to the quality of the soil.

While Aeonian Farm is not certified organic — a process that can take years and lots of paperwork — Ashbrook and

Getz are happy to explain their methods to customers at the several farmer’s markets where they sell produce.

“It makes me really happy going to the market and talking to people about recipes and sharing the love of vegetables,” says Getz. “That interaction is a big part of why I love farming.”

Ultimately, says Ashbrook, what matters is that they have a relationship with the land and the produce they grow. “The whole idea is that farmers have relationships with soil,” said Ashbrook. “Not chemicals, and plastic infrastructure.” Tools from farming communities in France, South Korea and Japan let them efficiently work the land without resorting to heavy machinery that can disrupt the natural balance of the soil. “It’s a really exciting time to be a small farmer because there’s been a lot of innovation in the last 15 years,” says Ashbrook.

Innovations in hand tools and in winter growing have made it much easier for small-scale farmers to grow year-round and have a constant cash flow by selling at markets in every season. This past winter, rows of carrots, chard, cilantro and bok choy growing underneath layers of insulation inside a large greenhouse made their way to the Hingham Winter Farmers Market, one of three markets where Aeonian Farm sells produce.

“We’ve been profitable both years, and we have enough capital to grow this year. We’re not killing each other yet,” says Ashbrook. “So, yeah, everything’s going really well.”

3 Stone Fruit Lane, Westport

 aeonianfarm.net  [@aeonian_farm](https://www.instagram.com/aeonian_farm)

BY SAWYER SMOOK-POLLITT • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDRIA MAUCK





BENOIT AZAGOH-KOUADIO

ROUND THE BEND FARM | SOUTH DARTMOUTH

Benoit Azagoh-Kouadio sees farming as a symbiotic relationship between many organisms. “We are dancing and not wrestling with our ecological surroundings,” he says. “We are constantly adapting with a philosophy of respect for our interdependence.”

On most days, you can find Benoit at Round the Bend Farm, a Center for Restorative Community, with his hands in the soil and a calm, determined look on his face. Small farming on the South Coast is a relentless, beautiful, and complex kind of dance.

Benoit, now 33, grew up in Northern Vermont. Benoit started working at Round the Bend in 2016, and is now the garden manager. He maintains two acres of annual and perennial food crops, fruit trees, medicinal herbs, and flowers. He also mentors new farmers, makes herbal medicines for the farm apothecary, and hosts educational workshops for the larger local community.

For Benoit, farming is about more than crop production. It’s about engagement, balance, and systemic healing. He makes his own compost and arranges his work schedule in rhythm with seasonal and celestial patterns. He saves many of his own seeds and collaborates with local initiatives to protect indigenous and heirloom species. The result is a garden full of vibrant food that grows naturally as part of a larger integrated landscape.

Before arriving at Round the Bend, Benoit studied psychology at Boston College, with a focus in neuroscience, psychopharmacology and holistic clinical practice. Since then, he’s been able to fuse his academic background into a unique perspective on farming and systemic healing. This perspective has also been shaped by his experiences of health and wellness on the farm.

In 2017, Benoit contracted anaplasmosis, a tick-borne illness now common to the area. He became dangerously ill,

and his doctor told him he was at risk for kidney failure. He took antibiotics, but for months afterward still felt sick. “It was a dark time for me,” he says. “I had come back to the point of functionality but I still felt worn out mentally and physically. I didn’t know what to do.”

Drawing on his background in holistic clinical practice, he began researching alternative healing practices. He found a book called *Natural Treatments for Lyme Coinfections: Anaplasma, Babesia, and Ehrlichia* by herbalist Stephen Harrod Buhner, and began a regime of natural treatments. Once Benoit started taking Buhner’s recommended herbs, he began to feel better. “They were life changing,” he says. “I felt myself come back to normal.” This bout with anaplasmosis was Benoit’s “ah ha” moment about the power of herbal medicine. After that, he began integrating more herbs into the Round the Bend gardens, and started crafting a holistic farm apothecary.

Two years later, Benoit simultaneously contracted two other tick-borne illnesses, Lyme disease and babesiosis. This time he was prepared. “I felt very privileged because at that point I knew there was a whole body of work out there about how to address these illnesses with herbs, especially in cases when industrial pharmaceuticals are not sufficient.” Once again, he combined antibiotics with herbal medicine, and



Benoit holds the roots of Japanese Knotweed, which he uses to make a specialty tincture.

slowly began to feel better.

“I think everyone in our town knows someone who has been impacted by these illnesses,” he says. “There is a need for more information and more access to herbal medicines.” He notes that although the South Coast has its ticks, it also has a lot of plants that heal tick-borne illness. Benoit now offers free workshops to help people learn how to heal tick-borne illness with herbal remedies.

Japanese Knotweed is a common invasive species and a key anti-inflammatory for healing Lyme. I took a workshop. By the end, I was able to make my own Japanese Knotweed tincture and assess a range of other herbs for healing. My father, who had contracted Lyme and babesia recently, continues to use his herbal tincture as part of a long-term recovery strategy.

On the third Saturday of each month, Round the Bend Farm hosts Open Farm Days for the general public. Take a farm tour, eat a grass-fed burger, buy fresh produce, and take a free workshop. This year, Benoit will host his second annual workshop series, “Herbal Medicine for Tick-Borne Illness.”

92 Allen Neck Rd, S. Dartmouth



roundthebendfarm.org



@rtbfarm



Round the Bend Farm has been raising pigs and cows since 2012, four years before Azagoh-Kouadio joined the venture.



BY LAURA KILLINGBECK • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDRIA MAUCK

BILL BRAUN AND DEE LEVANTI

IVORY SILO FARM AND FREED SEED FEDERATION | WESTPORT

“Seed is the heart and soul of how we grow food,” says Bill Braun, who with wife and partner Dee Levanti, both 40, is reframing the conversation on what it means to be a farmer on the South Coast. “Staying small is our strength,” meaning operations are lean but diversified; it also means investing time and attention to the careful propagation of locally adapted seeds.

Bill worked for several years as the co-manager of Eva’s Garden before launching Ivory Silo Farm in Westport in 2014. His first year working alone was a challenge. He spent long days outside and eventually contracted Lyme disease. “If Dee and I hadn’t been courting, I would have died,” he quipped.

The following year, Dee moved onto the farm and the two of them worked side by side. Dee utilized her background in commercial crop production, and Bill leveraged his experience in specialty crops and seed saving. Together, they formed a successful five-acre market garden with a diverse array of organic, open-pollinated vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers. They also started selling locally adapted plants at their seasonal plant sales.

Ivory Silo Farm is located on the historic Howe Family farm, which is preserved for agricultural use through an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR). Bill and Dee’s agreement with the Howe family gives them access to prime agricultural land, and they hope that this agreement can serve as a model for other landowners and young farmers in the area.

Most of the food grown at Ivory Silo Farm is sold directly to local restaurants. These include Little Moss in South Dartmouth, and Giulia, an Italian restaurant in Cambridge. Bill and Dee maintain close relationships with restaurant chefs who embrace a “you grow it, we’ll cook it” attitude toward farm-to-table cuisine. These collaborative relationships have allowed Bill and Dee to create a viable farm business centered on “caring for seeds that slip through the cracks of the commercial seed trade.” This means more biodiversity on the farm, and more biodiversity on peoples’ plates. During the growing season, Bill and Dee also sell seedlings to the general public. This is their way of sharing locally adapted plant varieties with the larger local community.



Hixbridge Road, just west of the intersection with Horseneck Road, Westport (Plant sales)

 freedseedfederation.org

 @ivorysilobill

In 2017, Bill and Dee connected with Linnea Michel at the Legal Center For Nonprofits, a New Bedford non-profit which serves Southeastern Massachusetts. With Michel’s assistance, they created a separate non-profit entity, Freed Seed Federation, to continue the work of seed saving alongside the Ivory Silo Farm market garden and plant sales. This allowed Bill and Dee to partner with farmers and seed savers, while still maintaining their original vision of a viable market farm. Freed Seed Federation is now a collection of autonomous entities that work in partnership with each other, breeding locally adapted seeds for the public domain.

For Bill and Dee, the work of Freed Seed Federation is crucial to their viability as farmers. “The most effective way to

adapt to climate change and produce nutritious food is to return to the understanding that seeds need to be cared for by the people who are growing food,” says Bill. He explained that until very recently in human history, all farmers were plant breeders; they saved seeds from their crops and replanted them the next season. Over generations, this created a diversity of agricultural plants uniquely adapted to local climate.

But within the last century, this practice has changed. As small farms were replaced by larger farms, businesses began outsourcing seed saving to regional seed companies. Over time, those seed companies consolidated into larger and larger businesses. “We now have large companies growing larger quantities of seed to do well over larger swathes of the planet—it’s easier and more profitable than maintaining 40 different strains of carrots that grow great in certain areas but not in others,” he says. Less seed biodiversity means less resilience in ecological systems, more dependence on chemical farming and big tech, and more fragility in the face of climate change.

By partnering with regional farmers through Freed Seed Federation, and by collaborating with local chefs through the Ivory Silo Farm market garden, Bill and Dee hope to change the course of seed saving and agricultural biodiversity on the South Coast. They envision a future where small farms proliferate, people enjoy biodiverse local cuisine, and everyone gets to know their seeds. “This is about how to sustain ourselves on this planet; it’s indispensable to how we continue to exist.”

BY LAURA KILLINGBECK • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEXANDRIA MAUCK



Bill Braun and Dee Lanvanti say most of the food grown at Ivory Silo Farm is sold directly to local restaurants. They hope that their relationships and Freed Seed Federation changes the course of seed saving and agricultural biodiversity.



Sarah Turkus says land access is the largest barrier to farming. Her Seekonk farm provides land to Lee Family Farm, Muck and Mystery, Night Garden, and Hocus Pocus (see page 26)

SARAH TURKUS

OSAMEQUIN FARM | SEEKONK

On any given day, you can find Sarah Turkus, 34, doing farmwork: pruning berry bushes, moving sheep, repairing tools, editing spreadsheets, sending emails, hosting workshops.

Turkus is the Director of Osamequin Farm, a 400-acre non-profit entity and working farm that hosts a cooperative of small-scale farmers, public gatherings, and educational opportunities. She is also the president of the Young Farmer Network's advisory committee. The Young Farmer Network hosts networking events and workshops to help young farmers establish successful farms.

Originally from rural New Jersey, Turkus moved to Providence after college, and later found her way to Seekonk.

According to Turkus, the primary barrier young farmers face on the South Coast is land access. "It's astronomically expensive or non-existent," she says. "The challenges are even greater for farmers of color and farmers who hold other marginalized identities that set them apart from the mainstream perception of a farmer."

At Osamequin, young farmers are able to secure favorable long-term leases and share key infrastructure that would

otherwise be prohibitively expensive. "We've found that sharing facilities not only makes economic sense, it also offers an easy point of connection for commiserating, troubleshooting, and celebrating the many triumphs that come up in a farming season," adds Turkus. The farming collective of Resident Farmers currently includes Lee Family Farm, Muck and Mystery, Night Garden, and Hocus Pocus.

The Osamequin farmstand is open spring through autumn, and features a build-your-own bouquet display of flowers, fresh produce from Resident Farmers, and seasonal berries. The farm also hosts a variety of workshops on skills such as natural dyeing, maple tapping, herbal remedies, paper making, and more.

"Take a chance on a new farmer, and spread the word about the folks you run into," says Turkus. "Every little connection adds up, and your farmer will be grateful."

Corner of Prospect Street & Walnut Street, Seekonk

osamequinfarm.org [@osamequinfarm](https://www.instagram.com/osamequinfarm)

BY LAURA KILLINGBECK

STEVEN RITTENHOUSE

STEVEN'S FARM STAND | ROCHESTER

In 2004, Steven Rittenhouse and his grandmother began selling farm fresh eggs on a family farm in Acushnet. Years later, after his grandmother passed, Rittenhouse carried on his family's farming legacy with Steven's Farm Stand, a hand-tended small-scale farm in Rochester.

Rittenhouse, 30, grows everything from carrots and cabbage to strawberries and cherries using methods that are informed by a lifetime of experience farming. As a child, he worked on his uncle's dairy farm and in his parents' garden. He continued to learn the ropes as a student at Bristol County Agricultural High School and then went on to earn a degree in sustainable agriculture from Bristol Community College.

Already equipped with hands-on experience, the business side of Steven's Farm Stand was strengthened after participating in the Entrepreneurship for All program, a series of courses and workshops that function as an incubator for start-ups and small businesses throughout Massachusetts. Armed with education and practical know-how Rittenhouse has been powering along ever since.

This year, the growing season began with seedlings of kale, swiss chard, beets, lettuce and other greens that were planted in early March. Rittenhouse has plans to grow carrots, bok choy, onions, and more as the season continues.

Rittenhouse grows his produce without using pesticides or other chemicals. Instead, he uses physical barriers like row covers, which are fabric or plastic tarps, to protect his vegetables from the cold and insects. Two high tunnel greenhouses on the property let Rittenhouse grow some crops with extra protection from the elements.

Now, alongside his chocolate lab, Waylon, Rittenhouse is preparing for the 2022 CSA season. Offering small and large shares of crops, he will set up at the New Bedford Farmers Market in Buttonwood Park and Brooklawn Park as well as the 35 Rosebrook Farmers Market in Wareham.

stevensfarmstand.com [@stevens_farm_stand](https://www.instagram.com/stevens_farm_stand)



Steven's Farm Stand's Steven Rittenhouse began this season with seedlings of kale, swiss chard, beets, lettuce, and other greens.

BY SAWYER SMOOK-POLLITT



SASHA WOLFE

HOCUS POCUS FARM | SEEKONK

“Our food system is really [messed] up,” says Sasha Wolfe, 29, who manages Hocus Pocus Farm in Seekonk, Massachusetts.

“It is really meaningful for me to participate in the food system [by] growing food for my friends and my family,” says Wolfe. We are “trying to create culture around local food systems and also making it accessible for low-income people or people who don’t have access to local fresh food.”

Food justice, land stewardship and natural approaches to growing are values that Hocus Pocus embodies through its business model and approach to farming. At Hocus Pocus Farm, this takes the form of a sliding scale Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) where people pay what they can for a share of the farm’s harvest. “It’s a way to redistribute wealth,” says Wolfe.

Customers around Seekonk often pay more than the recommended cost of a share, which in turn subsidizes the cost

for customers in low-income areas. For others who may want a closer connection to their food, a workshare program allows people to work on the farm in place of payment.

“Folks come out once a week and help out in the field, usually weeding, harvesting or transplanting,” says Wolfe. “I’ve met some really amazing folks through the workshare program. We hired one of them partway through the season last year, and he’s coming back for another season with us.”

Building community through the customers it supports or through volunteers-turned-coworkers is important to Hocus Pocus Farm. Wolfe leases their farmland from Osamequin Farm, a larger landowner that provides a support network.

“We share resources with other farmers on the property,” said Wolfe. “We share a greenhouse, storage space, access to some tools, a wash station and we support each other with irrigation.”

The growing methods at Hocus Pocus Farm are low-till and

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Wolfe donates excess crops to Providence's Hope's Harvest, honoring their Jewish gleaning traditions. They also take pride in being a queer representative in the farming community.

a flower-share, where customers can buy bouquets of flowers through a CSA.

"I grew up gardening with my mom, and she grew up gardening with her dad. He had a lot of beautiful flowers in his garden," she explains. "There's something about flowers. They're just so magical."

Excess crops that don't sell at farmers markets or make their way into CSA bundles are given to community fridges in Providence through an organization called Hope's Harvest, which pays farmers for donated food.

For Wolfe, this is more than just charity, it is a way to embody their values and a way to investigate their own Jewish faith. "There's a lot of ancient practices in the Torah, such as gleaning, which is sort of like leaving the extras for folks that can't afford to buy it."

Wolfe's own personal identity also helps to shape the community of the farm as a queer space. Queer representation in the farming community was often hard to come by, but a queer farm boss in Boston served as a major inspiration.

"We're a mostly queer farm. And I think about that as a form of accessibility [for people who] don't have access to land or to have a relationship with it. So I am hoping to just build a queer space and queer community where people can hang out and be themselves."

In the future, Wolfe hopes that Hocus Pocus Farm can perfect its methods and tighten up production, but they have no plans to increase in size.

"We are limited by space

and we're definitely pushing up against that. We have 70 CSA members. So I think we're at that limit," says Wolfe. "This is a really good scale for me. I think growing [the farm] would be really stressful because I'm not someone who's very business oriented. My main goal is not to be running a business, it's to be farming." 🌱

90 Walnut Street, Seekonk

 hocuspocusfarm.com

 @hocuspocusfarm

sustainable. Though not certified organic, Wolfe is dedicated to being a responsible steward of the land.

"The principle that I'm coming from is the less soil disturbance, the better," says Wolfe. "There's all of the fungal activity, the mycorrhizal stuff down there that helps communicate with plants — their crops and fruits — and makes all the minerals and good stuff accessible."

While Hocus Pocus Farm supplies customers with mainstay veggies like tomatoes, cucumbers and potatoes, Wolfe also runs

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