EQUITY TRUST
Celebrating 20 years of helping people to share resources to build healthy communities

Like me, Equity Trust shares the philosophy that if we care about eating locally-grown food, we must care about access to land. Whether it’s for farming or affordable housing, access to land is at the core of our needs as human beings, and an important part of economic justice.

– JUANITA NELSON

Farms for Farmers

EQUITY TRUST TURNED 20 THIS YEAR! Two events, on opposite sides of the country, provided opportunities to reflect on how our farm preservation work has grown and evolved.

ROXBURY FARM, in New York’s Hudson Valley, shared its 20th anniversary celebration with us, recognizing Equity Trust’s accomplishments, and our history together. When we secured a permanent home for the farm, we protected—together with Open Space Institute—140 acres and we created a national farm protection model. Roxbury now provides meat and vegetable shares for over 1,100 families from Albany to New York City on land that Equity Trust holds permanently for working farmers!

On a trip to California this year, Director Jim Oldham visited three CSA farms with which Equity Trust works. Their stories show how early successes have generated new efforts and expanding interest in our farm protection models.

LIVE POWER COMMUNITY FARM, in Mendocino County, CA, was protected through the efforts of the farmers and their CSA members. Equity Trust holds an easement that preserves it forever as an affordable working farm. Farmers Stephen and Gloria Decater continue to look to the future, hoping to add more land into their farm’s protective covenant and always thinking about the farm’s next phase.

We completed a unique conservation easement for our biodynamic horse-powered CSA farm of 40 acres with the unfailing help of Equity Trust. Without their technical assistance, support, knowledge, belief, and courage to try new things, we would not have been able to do what we did. – STEPHEN and GLORIA DECATER

GOOD HUMUS PRODUCE is a 20-acre organic family farm in Capay, CA. Inspired in part by the success of Live Power Farm, farmers Jeff and Annie Main have been working with local partner Yolo Land Trust to adapt the model and place an agricultural conservation easement on their own farm. In seeking funds for the project, they’ve engaged the spirited support of their regional food co-ops, sparking the innovative “One Farm at a Time,” campaign, involving food coop patrons in the protection of the farms from which their food is sourced.

PIE RANCH is a 14-acre farm on California’s San Mateo coast with a strong focus on youth education. Farmers Jered Lawson and Nancy Vail acquired the farm with help from an Equity Trust loan. Inspired by the many farmers they have worked with, including Stephen and Gloria at Live Power Farm, they are now getting the next generation excited about good food and farming, through youth programs on their farm, farmer apprenticeships, and partnerships with local schools.
Farms for Farmers, continued

“It’s worth asking what other models are out there. The answer, for me, has to do with a transition to more localized economies, where people once again become more, not less, dependent on their neighbors… Caretaker Farm is obviously the example supreme of alternative possibilities.

– BILL McKIBBEN in a speech for the Campaign to Preserve Caretaker Farm launch event

Now that I am settled at Caretaker Farm, a farm that was preserved thanks to the vision and dedicated work of Equity Trust, I have an enhanced appreciation for the value of secure land tenure not just for the farmer but also for the surrounding community.

BRIDGET SPANN / CARETAKER FARM

Equity Trust’s early projects captured the attention and imagination of many other farmers and communities. Having developed and demonstrated these models, Equity Trust now provides guidance so others can build on our experience. We annually provide technical assistance to more than 50 groups including farmers, land trusts, municipalities, landowners, and community groups planning or carrying out projects where key goals include ensuring the farm will continue to produce food, and will remain affordable to farmers.

If land trusts are willing to work as hard as farmers for the land and fresh food we all love, many more farmers will have long-term tenure on the land they farm, and many more families will have access to healthy, local food.

– LEIGH YOUNGBLOOD, MT. GRACE LAND CONSERVATION TRUST

Here are a few examples of our farm protection work this year:

• We completed development of two long-term leases for Grow Food Northampton (MA).
• We provided technical assistance for a farm protection effort on Martha’s Vineyard.
• We have consulted in the early stages of a farm protection project in La Puebla, NM, involving the Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute and the New Mexico Land Conservancy.
• We are launching a partnership with Hearty Roots Community Farm and Scenic Hudson to create a permanent home for this CSA farm in Clermont, NY.
• We have participated in regional meetings in New York and New England, and a national gathering in Minnesota, aimed at expanding efforts and improving tools for protecting farms and making them available to farmers and their communities.

We receive many requests to purchase our manual, Preserving Farms for Farmers, and our DVD “Farmland and Farmers for the Future,” and to receive our model legal documents, which we make available at no charge. It’s exiting when we hear, more and more now, from someone we have never worked directly with, that these resources are making it possible for them to carry out a vision for the permanent protection of a working farm in their community.

Our efforts to make our farmland permanently affordable for organic farming are inspired by the examples pioneered by Equity Trust.

– RYAN & SARAH VOILAND / RED FIRE FARM
Equity Trust Fund—Investing in communities

I want my savings shared to support the capital needs of community supported agriculture projects and low-income cooperative housing, rather than to finance profit-making opportunities for banks and mainstream corporations. – KARL MEYER

The Equity Trust Fund makes loans for projects building inclusive, sustainable ways of using land and resources—projects that fulfill our mission to promote equity in the world by changing the way people think about and hold property. We focus on projects that support ecological and economic resiliency, and benefit people with low incomes. The fund’s capital has been provided as a mix of loans and gifts. Several lenders are land trusts, religious orders, and other nonprofits. The rest are individuals. Pooled together, this money provides low-interest loans to groups doing critical work.

So far this year, eleven new lenders have added $215,500 to the Fund, and the Equity Trust Fund has disbursed $437,610 to six new borrowers. The loans are a diverse mix. One supports community land trust housing, a second is to a CSA farm. One loan benefits farmer coops in Central America, another supports recovery of Indian lands in Minnesota. Two loans, (the New London Homeless Hospitality Center, and the Community of Hope) were made through our Fund for Southeastern Connecticut.

HOLYOKE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST provides quality homes to low-income families, with a commitment to increasing resident homeownership. Residents own their own homes, but the land beneath is held by the nonprofit, to ensure owner-occupancy and on-going affordability. Formed in 1992, after a recent several-year period of dormancy it was reinvigorated in early 2010. A cash-flow loan from Equity Trust has been instrumental in helping HCLT get back on its feet. It is once again becoming a vital part of the community with plans to add two new homes.

COMMUNITY OF HOPE is a non-profit organization, whose mission is to assist people recovering from substance-abuse. The loan was used as the down payment for the purchase and conversion of a multi-family house for use as transitional “sober” housing for women.

WHITE EARTH LAND RECOVERY PROJECT (WELRP)’s mission is to facilitate recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation, in northern Minnesota, while preserving and restoring traditional land stewardship, language fluency, community development, and spiritual and cultural practices. A key strategy is to purchase back land from non-Indian owners, and receive donated land. Currently only 10% of the reservation is held by Ojibwe (Anishinaabeg) Indians.

Equity Trust’s loan to WELRP was made in collaboration with White Earth Investment Initiative, a nonprofit lender dedicated to creating jobs and improving community life on the reservation. Equity Trust’s participation supported refinancing, with better rates, the loan for the building that houses the organization’s programs, including the Native Harvest Store, selling heritage crops, traditional crafts, books and more, and a new Ojibwe radio station (“independent news for an independent nation”). Our loan also leveraged a $30,000 write-off on old debt for WELRP.

In this way, acre by acre, we will restore our land base, protect our ancestor’s graves and create a wider sustainable, traditional harvest-based economic foundation for members of our community.

– WINONA La DUKE, Founding Director, WELRP
Equity Trust Loan Fund, continued

I have been thankful to work FOR a more just world through providing loans to Equity Trust Fund. We were inspired to do so by our cherished friend and ETF founder, Chuck Matthei…As Chuck continues to live through the work of Equity Trust, I will continue to give, as I am able, to further that work.

– JUDY COLLINS

JUBILEE HOUSE COMMUNITY (JHC) is a nonprofit that has been working in Nicaragua since 1994. In addition to much other work, since that time JHC has organized 1,600 small farmers into a cooperative business to market their organic crops. They’ve strengthened existing agricultural cooperatives, and developed new ones. Equity Trust made JHC a loan for a project with 2,500 small farmers who have organized themselves into farmer production cooperatives, to help these farmers grow and sell a harvest of organic peanuts.

We help communities. We do not choose individuals and help them. We believe life is sustainable within communities; therefore, we help them organize, if needed, into democratically elected entities (which means we do not go into a community and appoint leaders or work with self-appointed leaders).

We help these communities identify their needs and priorities so that we are not imposing our “outside” value or ideas on them. We help them plan, identify resources, and carry out their goals. It is their job to create their own lives...[W]e want the communities to become self-sufficient and sustainable.

– JUBILEE HOUSE COMMUNITY

RIVERLAND FARM is a certified organic CSA farm in Sunderland, Massachusetts growing a diverse array of certified organic vegetables for 400 member families, as well as for local grocery stores, and local producers of value added products. Equity Trust’s loan was used to renovate their tobacco barn to create a space for their farm office space and a vegetable washing, packing, and storage facility, enabling them to wash and store vegetables later into the season, and even through the winter months.

NEW LONDON HOMELESS HOSPITALITY CENTER is a non-profit whose mission is “to serve as a bridge out of homelessness by helping our guests pursue their self-selected path to permanent housing.” Begun as a coalition of citizens, faith communities, and service organizations, the Homeless Hospitality Center has operated a daytime hospitality center since 2007. They used their loan for the purchase, renovation and conversion of a four-family house into an eight-unit transitional housing for homeless veterans.

If I can help keep speculative land-ownership from preying on vulnerable communities, I’m thrilled to be a part of that!

– BRUCE TRIGGS