

EQUITY TRUST NEWS

December 2024

We are growing! Welcome Ellie and Paola!

Two years ago, we used this end-of-year report to share a Letter to our Community where we laid out our ongoing efforts to reevaluate our work and our commitment to “articulating our land reform message more clearly, eliminating barriers that limit access to our programs and services, and explicitly addressing the central role of racism in the unequal access to land in this country.” The work described in the rest of this newsletter reflects some early results of that focus, but our long-term effectiveness will be determined by those carrying out this work. So we are very excited about the team we are building.

Last year we introduced Terry Gibson, who started as a half-time Project Manager in 2023, and shifted to full-time this July. This year, we carried out a search for an Associate Director to help forge a future vision for Equity Trust, and were so impressed by the quality of the applicants that we decided to hire two! Ellie Angerame started at the beginning of December, and Paola Diaz will join the team in mid-February. We look forward to sharing more in the coming months as our now five-member staff collectively plans this next phase for Equity Trust.



Paola Diaz is a queer land listener and land steward based in Mohican and Schaghticoke lands, weaving between upstate and downstate New York. Her lineage is from campesine culture of Muisca and Pijao territories, in so-called Colombia. She is a first-generation person born on Turtle Island and raised on Lenape territory. Their work involves mobilizing the redistribution of wealth and power in the form of land, money, and resources for land-displaced peoples, facilitating in the land justice movements, as well as space holding for ancestral healing. Paola is the Managing Director of the BIPOC Intentional Community Council and is committed to revitalizing cultural, ecological, and spiritual memory of the ancestors through creating collective pathways towards land security.



Ellie Angerame is a native of Bridgeport, CT and first-generation farmer. Her career in food systems is rooted in her innate love for connecting with others through shared manual labor and homecooked meals, usually in that order. Ellie's decade of experience as a vegetable farmer in Maine, food justice nonprofit leader in Connecticut, as well as her community organizing, mutual aid, and policy work have allowed her to deeply support communities across New England in moving toward food sovereignty and interdependence.

Ellie's roles with the New CT Farmer Alliance and the Working Lands Alliance keep her connected to fellow farmers and farmworkers across Connecticut. She is a soil enthusiast, dedicated aunt to her four nibblings, and avid hiker.

Loan Fund helps communities thrive

Equity Trust made several large loans that enabled local

Partnership with Persimmon Collective Fund

Equity Trust has been collaborating with the Persimmon Collective Fund, a “practitioner-led mutual aid resource to support BIPOC Farmers and Land Stewards in their on- and off-farm organizing efforts,” by providing financing for land acquisition in the Southeastern U.S. In November 2023, we made a loan to the Kinfolk Land Collective, a group of farmers that seeks to celebrate Black farming and provide food for their community. Their mission includes “reimagining farming” and “rethinking eating” by growing food relevant to their community, connecting the land and the people it feeds, honoring their ancestors and indigenous people, and “healing ancestral trauma...on the land and with the land.” While focusing on staple crops including grains and legumes they are also experimenting with less familiar crops like sorghum. Already they have hosted Braiding Seeds fellows from Soul Fire Farm and have welcomed family and community members for farm work days.

This year, we made a similar loan to Tierra Fértil Coop, a farmer cooperative made up of immigrants from Mexico and El Salvador that began as a food distribution initiative during the early months of the covid pandemic and has since evolved to growing food for their community, some of which they continue to give away;



Community work day with Kinfolk Land Collective, GA.

and offering workshops on gardening, nutrition, and cooking. They, too, seek to grow culturally important produce and offer a story to their customers and the general public about workers’ rights, food justice, and environmental sustainability. They envision a community farm at which multiple people and

cooperatives operate complementary farm or food system businesses on the same property, including raising livestock, composting, and performing value-added processing. In addition, they hope to provide space for families to build and live in affordable housing and to create an outdoor gathering place. They want to give their community a chance to dream, an opportunity to create wealth and have something of their own.

We’re working with the Persimmon Collective Fund on strategies for long term stewardship of the land being acquired, making it permanently available to and affordable for BIPOC farmers while enabling the current stewards to build equity and generational wealth. A handful of lenders to the Equity Trust Fund have made it possible for us to offer an interest rate well below the prevailing rate.



Tierra Fértil sells produce at farmers market, NC.

with big investments

groups to acquire property to benefit their communities.

Multi-party collaborations involving CLTs

We've also been helping community land trusts, both new and established, push the envelope on transformative projects. The Southeastern Connecticut CLT had previously acquired two homes with Equity Trust loans, renovated them, and made them

community's needs, including a food pantry, medical clinic, community kitchen, social workers, and skill-building classes, while the CLT's involvement means that the building will always be a community asset.

As if that were not enough, the CLT also acquired a farm property with the aid of a local philanthropist and we have been helping them develop a ground lease for Ceiba Arbor, an eight-member collective of QTBIPOC artists and urban farmers.

This summer, we joined with the Cooperative Fund of the Northeast to finance the purchase of two duplexes in Greenfield, Massachusetts that form the core of Valley Housing Cooperative's effort "to provide safe, decent, and affordable housing for...members and tenants by creating an alternative to renting or owning and taking land out of the speculative real estate market." At the same time, Valley Community Land Trust purchased the land on which the houses rest - with fundraising spearheaded by coop members - and entered into a long-term ground lease with the coop, ensuring that the homes will remain affordable even if the coop decides to sell them. Once again, Equity Trust provided significant technical assistance in the development of the ground lease between CLT and coop, which together with its first land purchase in many years marked a new direction for one of the country's oldest CLTs.



The Place for COMMUNITY Wellbeing opens on Southeastern Connecticut CLT land, CT.

permanently affordable for families in New London. Early this year, they partnered with the local public health authority to purchase a commercial building in a neighborhood with many structural barriers preventing people from accessing services that support their wellbeing. The CLT's partner, Ledge Light Health District, stated, "In all efforts we lead with a commitment to equity, community, and partnership. We consider the Community Land Trust a key partner in the public health system." It will offer a variety of programs and services addressing the



Valley Housing Cooperative celebrates the creation of affordable homes, MA (photo credit: Sara Brown).

A version of this newsletter with links to the organizations and projects mentioned in the articles is available at www.equitytrust.org/2024-newletter.

Breaking the capitalist grip on land

Land Justice

Regional CLT network takes shape

For many upstart community land trusts, there is a steep learning curve to climb in developing lasting sustainability. One way to lighten the workload is to share efforts with others facing similar challenges. Growing the capacity of a CLT by utilizing the strength of a network can provide more than learning; partners can do everything from helping a CLT develop a model ground lease, widening community engagement, giving back-office assistance, and shaping policy and campaigns aimed at reducing barriers to shared equity ownership and increasing state and city support.

Since 2022, Equity Trust has collaborated with several organizations in Western Massachusetts (including Valley Community Land Trust and Valley Housing Coop; see page 3: "Multi-party collaborations involving CLTs") exploring the possibilities for a community land trust network in the region. With the assistance of Jeff Washburne from Burlington Associates, a national consulting cooperative focusing on CLTs, more than thirty representatives of established and emerging CLTs gathered at Woolman Hill in Deerfield, MA for a two-day-long retreat to develop shared goals and a mission statement and brainstorm a variety of domains centering land and



Terry Gibson participates in breakout session at housing and land justice retreat.

racial justice. The retreat also made space to outline working circles based on the sociocratic method to hold various parts of the organization's work.

Following the gathering our cohort named itself Valley Alliance for Land Equity (VALE) and began outlining its governance and membership structures while also creating strategies to increase community engagement, develop local and state lobbying initiatives, and build capacity for property stewardship.



Equity Trust loan yields Land Back

In 2016 with financing from the Equity Trust Fund, Sarah Kohler purchased land near her home in western Massachusetts in order to preserve remnants of "an immense, intentional, fractal, geometric configuration" of rocks, stones, and boulders that appear to have been "placed with deliberate intention" as much as 10,000 years ago. Though it had previously been assumed that there were no significant prehistoric earthworks in the northeastern United States, her discovery could potentially be transformative for humanity's understanding of its earliest societies on this continent.

Sarah realized that "[The stones] were placed by the ancestral People of this land and their teachings must not be lost." She wanted not just to protect the land from development but also to return it to the permanent stewardship of indigenous people. Having repaid the loan in 2021, this year she donated the parcel to Native Land Conservancy, fulfilling her (and our) motivations for entering into the financing relationship. Native Land Conservancy is now working with Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust to further protect it.