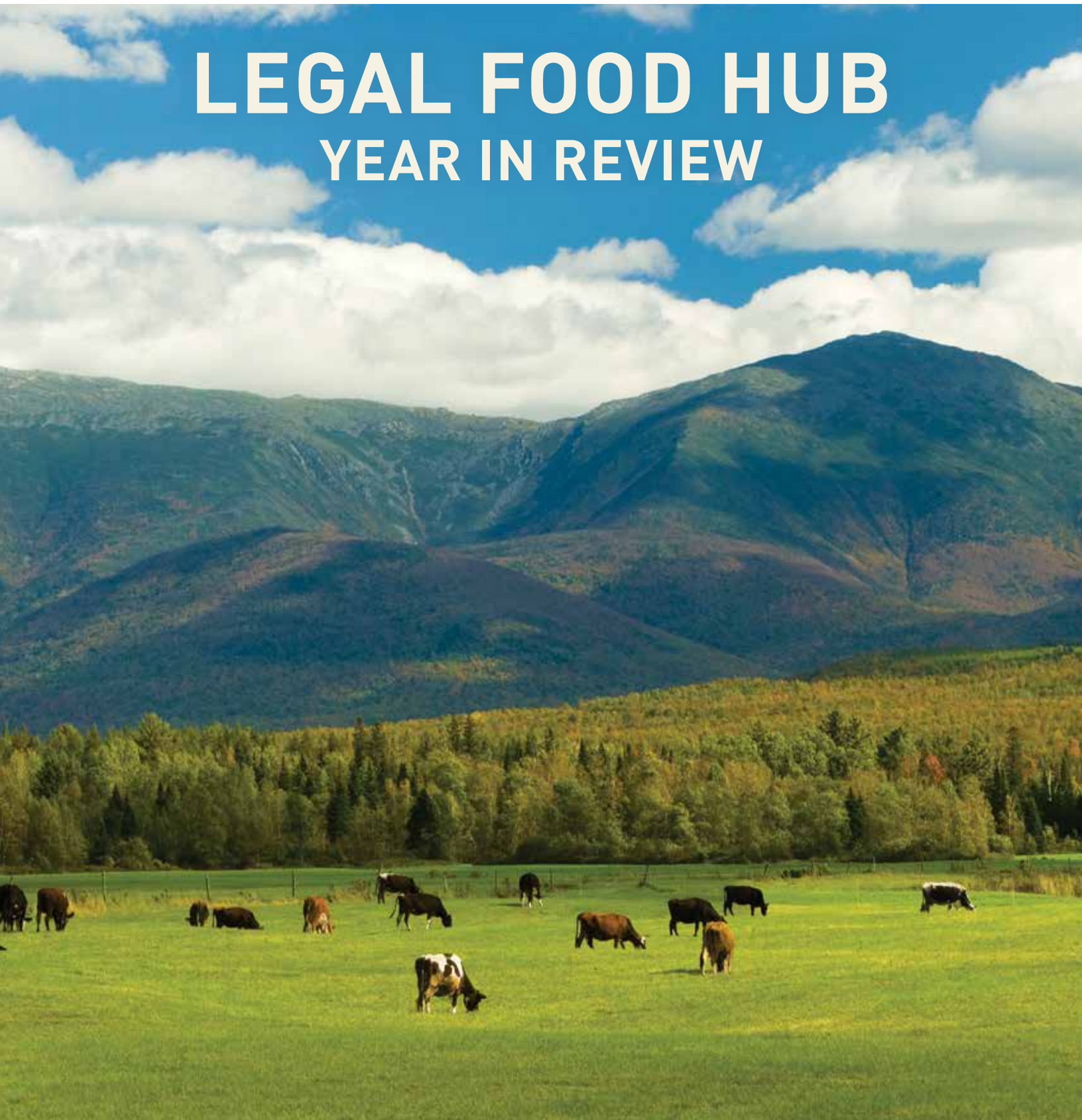




LEGAL FOOD HUB  
*A project of Conservation Law Foundation*



# LEGAL FOOD HUB YEAR IN REVIEW





# OUR FOCUS

The Legal Food Hub provides pro bono legal assistance by matching qualified attorneys in our network with...



FARMERS

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FOOD ENTREPRENEURS

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& THE ORGANIZATIONS  
THAT SUPPORT THEM

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# BY THE NUMBERS

In 2020, the Legal Food Hub served five states across New England.

**150**

**FIRMS  
IN OUR  
NETWORK**

**759**

**CASES  
PLACED  
SINCE  
2014**

**3.8**

**MILLION  
DOLLARS  
LEVERAGED  
SINCE 2014**

# ANOTHER MILESTONE YEAR

This was a year marked by challenge and turmoil in our country and our world.

In spite of it, New England's farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food justice focused nonprofits and community groups forged ahead. We salute the resilience of the movers and shakers who found ways to nourish our communities and lend a hand to neighbors.

At the Legal Food Hub, we worked to support these businesses and organizations through pro bono legal assistance. This year, we surpassed the 750-case mark regionwide, with 105 of those handled in 2020 alone. We also launched a new website that makes it easier to access our services. And we developed dozens of new, easy-to-use legal guides addressing the topics our participants ask about most, from forming a business entity to leasing farmland to protecting a brand. The Legal Food Hub is proud to support the people nourishing our region.



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# DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

## Klavens Law Group

**Boston MA**



We have received an abundance of support from Klavens Law Group, for which we will always be grateful. Their pro bono work has taken many forms: taking on cases, writing legal guides, and providing clarity on legal questions. Klavens stepped up every single time, even if it meant doing additional research to answer our questions.

Of special note was their work in April 2020 when COVID-19 wreaked confusion for many of our participants. Klavens wrote three legal guides addressing farmers' questions about delivery service, selling products online, and becoming a food hub. Klavens went the extra mile to provide us with these guides – sitting in on webinars, speaking with farmers, and tailoring their advice.

We are grateful for your expertise and support, Klavens Team!

## Jeff Bernstein

**BCK Law, Woodstock VT**



Attorney Jeff Bernstein has been instrumental in the success of the Vermont Legal Food Hub. As president and managing director at BCK Law, Jeff was one of the first attorneys to join the Vermont network and readily accepted its first pilot case. He provided valuable feedback to Vermont Law School's Center for Agriculture and Food Systems team as they shaped and expanded the program (which they oversee in partnership with CLF).

In this first year alone, Jeff helped three different pro bono clients, showing his strong commitment to public service and his enthusiastic support for Vermont's local food system. Jeff's deep expertise with nonprofits and business development has been particularly beneficial to program participants.

We are so appreciative of Jeff and his generous contributions to the Vermont Legal Food Hub.

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# LATEST NEWS

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## Breaking Down Barriers to Food Justice

New England's burgeoning local food movement is something to celebrate. It allows small farmers across the region to reach new markets and inspires renewed interest in working the land, especially among younger New Englanders. Even as we applaud this rediscovery of fresh wholesome food from down the road, we also must remain vigilant to ensure that this movement doesn't leave behind those who have historically been marginalized when it comes to land use and food access.

Across the food system, from consumers to producers, too many people of color are trapped by systemic racism that has disinvested in communities of color and dispossessed Black farmers of their lands. The challenges of the pandemic have only deepened those inequities. The Legal Food Hub and countless other organizations in our region are working to support these historically marginalized groups.

Access to land is the foundation of an equitable food system but a historic source of injustice in farming. Throughout U.S. history, unjust laws, policies, and industry practices have stripped people of color of their farmland. In 1920, Black farmers made up 14% of the nation's farmers. Today, that number has dwindled to just 2%.

In the Northeast, the legacy of racist land use and housing policies like redlining have left communities of color dealing with historic disinvestment. Although discrimination remains rampant in the farm sector, many communities of color in our region have pioneered urban agriculture as a way to promote access to healthy food and reclaim the soil.

By breaking down barriers within the farming world for those who have been marginalized, we can work together to transform the way we think about and grow food here in New England. We are inspired by the incredible Legal Food Hub partners like All Farmers, the Food Project, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, and the Somali Bantu Community Association that are working to ensure that farmers of color, New Americans, and other historically marginalized groups have access to the land, resources, and support they need to start successful farming enterprises. However, many barriers still remain.

The Legal Food Hub connects small farmers with volunteers who provide free legal services. The Hub also offers workshops and other educational resources to make starting and sustaining a farm in New England accessible to all, while also supporting policies that will make farming more equitable. Now, more than ever, we must support an innovative farming workforce and uplift those who face barriers in agriculture.



PHOTO: ©ECOPHOTOGRAPHY

# LATEST NEWS

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## Farming in the Era of Climate Change

Farmers stand on the front lines of the climate crisis. Their livelihoods are threatened by it, their work can contribute to it, and, crucially, they have the opportunity to combat it using sustainable farming practices. Our entire food system is connected to climate change – making agriculture a big part of the conversation around how we reach a brighter future. Changing how we interact with land – through better farming methods and restoring ecosystems – can help avert climate catastrophe and feed the generations to come.

Our local farmers here in New England know that climate change impacts are here now – they see them firsthand on their farms every day. Rising temperatures are driving longer but less predictable growing seasons, making it hard for farmers to know when to plant their crops. More frequent and intense heavy downpours are delaying planting and damaging harvests. And pests and plant diseases are spreading more rapidly, which in turn lowers yields.

One key to ensuring farms can stay resilient and productive in the face of our changing climate is soil health. Building soil health can make farmers more resilient in the face of drought, floods, and extreme rain events. Healthier soil drives a range of benefits, including cleaner water, improved crop productivity, enhanced biodiversity, and reduced need for pesticides. At the same time, it helps absorb the very emissions that are causing climate change in the first place.

So, how can farmers keep soil healthy? Well, many here in New England are already doing it. Practices such as always having a crop planted – even in the winter – protect the soil ecosystem. Different crops depend on different nutrients in the soil, so farmers can also use thoughtful crop rotations and avoid using pesticides and synthetic fertilizers that deplete the soil of nutrients. Techniques that avoid or minimize tilling the soil also help.



Farming practices that focus on building soil health are sometimes called regenerative agriculture. It draws upon the age-old idea, rooted in the knowledge and practice of Indigenous people, that farmers can farm in a way that improves the health of the soil. This practice works with, not against, the natural cycles of the land. For example, Indigenous farmers in the Northeast planted the complementary crops of corn, beans, and squash together, which built the soil.

Today, farmers rotate crops or plant a variety of crops together, mirroring those practices. Farmers using these practices are already showing how successful they can be. Organizations like the Northeast Organic Farming Association are training aspiring farmers in regenerative practices, preparing the next generation to transition to a more sustainable food system.

New England's farmers need our support both to adapt to the changing climate and to implement sustainable practices. At the Legal Food Hub, we're advocating for better farming policies – specifically ones that recognize how farmers are our partners in addressing the climate crisis. We want farmers to have the tools they need to fight climate change and to keep their farms prosperous in the process.

PHOTO: ©ECOPHOTOGRAPHY

# LATEST NEWS

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## Strength and Resilience Mark Response to Covid-19

Uncertainty swirled in the early days of the pandemic. Businesses rushed to comply with state orders, households tried to figure out how to keep themselves and their neighbors safe, and we all adjusted to a strange and frightening new normal. Since then, it has continued to be a year of loss and difficulty. Amid all the darkness, the resilience and strength of our local farmers and food businesses have shone brightly.

Across New England, we saw farmers and community members step up and find innovative new ways to feed our neighbors. Farms launched direct-to-consumer websites and delivery services. Residents started new food pantries and community refrigerators filled with local food and found safe ways to share it with their neighbors. Small businesses, schools, local nonprofits, and neighborhood groups stepped up to serve their communities.

At the Legal Food Hub, we were proud to support some of the inspiring new initiatives that launched during the pandemic. Our volunteer attorneys helped new food pantries formalize their nonprofit status so they could accept grants and donations more easily. They also



helped farms set up online sales systems and navigate the new unemployment guidelines. And, our team produced legal guides for understanding the new federal rules for unemployment and sick leave.

As we look to the long recovery ahead, the strength and courage our farmers and local food businesses have shown every day give us reasons for hope. At the Legal Food Hub, we will be there to serve these resilient businesses that nourish our communities.

PHOTO: LOGRI VIA SHUTTERSTOCK



# OUR WORK



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## Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance

The Connecticut River Watershed Farmers Alliance (CRWFA) helps farmers improve their land stewardship practices to promote clean waterways, productive landscapes, and the economic sustainability of the agricultural communities in eastern Vermont and western New Hampshire. In addition to hosting workshops and events, CRWFA rents out pieces of conservation equipment such as a no-till seeder, which allows farmers to plant seeds with minimal disturbance to the soil.

To make this important piece of equipment accessible to local farmers, CRWFA contacted the Vermont Legal Food Hub – an initiative of Vermont Law School’s Center for Agriculture and Food Systems and Conservation Law Foundation – to seek legal guidance on their drill rental contract. They were matched with attorney Sophia Kruszewski, director of the Vermont Law School’s Food and Agriculture Clinic, who reviewed the contract. She drew from her years of experience working with farmers to ensure the provisions were legally sound while still understandable to non-lawyers.

“Accessing free legal advice from the Vermont Legal Food Hub was critical to updating our no-till drill rental agreements for this year,” said Jennifer Byrne, manager of the White River Natural Resources Conservation District. “The language in our new contract is clear, and we feel confident that our drills and our farmers are protected as we grow our conservation equipment library in the Connecticut River watershed.”

# OUR WORK



## Vermont Farmers Food Center

The Vermont Farmers Food Center (VFFC) increases the access to and availability of locally produced food in and around Rutland, Vermont, through education and expanding market access for local producers. An initiative of the Vermont Farmers Market Education Center, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, VFFC launched in 2012 as a grassroots, volunteer-led project. Now eight years old, the organization has some big plans: They are developing an agricultural center in downtown Rutland to help with local food aggregation and storage, plus a commercial kitchen and educational space.

With all that expansion in the works, the VFFC team is rightfully thinking about branding. What kind of slogan might they use on their website and publications to get the message out about their mission and programs – without breaking any trademark rules?

“We were fortunate that just when the Vermont Farmers Food Center was looking for answers and legal guidance, the Vermont Legal Food Hub came online,” said VFFC president Greg Cox. When VFFC reached out to the Hub, they were quickly matched with Francine Miller, an attorney with Vermont Law School’s Food and Agriculture Clinic who specializes in intellectual property. Miller outlined the pros and cons of a trademark the organization was considering and offered suggestions to help the team find a solution while minimizing legal risks.

“From the initial intake form to talking with an attorney specializing in intellectual property, working with the Legal Food Hub helped us clarify the issue and gave us the information we needed to move forward,” Cox said. “This program is an important and valuable resource to support food hubs and the local food movement.”

# OUR WORK



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## Green & Gold CSA

On a small farm in Sudbury, Vermont, farmer Paige Wener grows delicious and nutrient-dense produce with a focus on soil health. She founded Green & Gold CSA in 2019 to sell her produce locally.

A CSA (community-supported agriculture) program can be a win-win situation: Local consumers get a reliable share of a farmer's seasonal bounty, while farmers get a reliable outlet for their product. But that unique business type comes with unique legal needs. Wener sought guidance on forming the appropriate business structure for the CSA, as well as help navigating the legal requirements that come with hiring employees.

Wener reached out to the Vermont Legal Food Hub. The team connected her with Dave Gurtman, an attorney at the Burlington law firm Dinse. Gurtman's pro bono assistance helped Wener understand the pros and cons of different business structures and get a better idea of what onboarding employees would look like.

"[Gurtman] helped me understand where I am in my business now, and where I'd like to be in the future," Wener said. "I am well equipped to change my business structure next year. I have a plan for the future of my farming business through a great legal connection."

# OUR WORK



## Berkshire Compost

Melissa Beeson Higgins launched Berkshire Compost as a curbside compost service out of Housatonic, Massachusetts. The company serves towns in western Massachusetts, picking up food waste at customers' doorsteps and turning it into high-value compost. This service helps households and businesses put to good use food scraps that could otherwise end up in a landfill. Composting has many benefits: reduces waste, cuts harmful emissions, and produces nutrient-rich soil.

After taking a small farm business course, Melissa decided that it made sense to form a limited liability company (LLC) for the growing business. She reached out to the Legal Food Hub for help and was paired with an attorney from Bulkley Richardson.

The attorney helped Melissa form the LLC for Berkshire Compost, so the business can continue to thrive. As it grows, Berkshire Compost will turn food scraps into soil in more communities across Massachusetts. "We're excited for the future," says Melissa. "We believe that compost is the final step in the farm-to-table movement: farm to table to farm!"

PHOTO: JEROME.ROMME VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

# OUR WORK



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## Luluna Kombucha

Lucy Kreger knew she was onto something with her home-brewed kombucha when her family and friends started asking her for batches. The young entrepreneur soon turned her hobby into a full-time business based in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Kombucha is an effervescent drink rich in probiotics. Lucy's brews highlight seasonal New England ingredients like locally grown herbs, fruit, and spring water.

When Lucy was expanding her business, she decided to sell her kombucha through a beer distributor. However, she needed help reviewing the agreement with the distributor to ensure it was the right move.

That's where Legal Food Hub attorney Alex Chiulli of Barton Gilman came in. He reviewed her agreement to ensure it would work for her business and help it grow over time. Now you can find Luluna Kombucha for sale in stores across New England. "The Legal Food Hub's help came at the right time for our growing business. Having Alex's expertise on our team enabled us to expand our distribution with confidence," says Lucy. "As we scale up, we will continue to partner with New England growers to include the best local ingredients in our beverages."

# OUR WORK



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## Refri PVD

In October 2020, Dana Heng placed a refrigerator outside her work with the motto “take what you need and leave what you can.” The volunteer-run community fridge attempts to solve the large food access and food justice barriers the pandemic has brought to Providence, Rhode Island. Dana Heng saw a need in her community and took action to meet it. Once she set it up and saw its success, she became concerned for liability of the fridge. If something went wrong, would she be accountable or would her workplace (which is donating the electricity)? She was also interested in building a shelter around the fridge to protect it from inclement weather but wanted to avoid conflict with the city. She reached out to the Legal Food Hub for answers.

The Hub connected her with Helen Anthony of Handy Law, LLC. Helen and her team advised Dana as she met with the Rhode Island Department of Health and helped guide her through the process. Dana was grateful that “someone had my back, even if there were no big legal issues.”

# OUR WORK



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## Toddy Pond Farm

At Toddy Pond Farm in Monroe, Maine, Greg and Heide Purinton-Brown approach farming as “a partnership with the land, Mother Nature, and the animals we share our farm with.” Along with their two sons, they care for a small herd of Jersey cows, a small flock of sheep, pigs, and chickens. They produce 100% grass-fed cow’s milk yogurts and cheeses using sustainable, humane practices. They also offer education farm camps for kids in the summer and year-round farm stay vacations in their on-farm cottage.

The Purinton-Browns moved onto their modest farm as caretakers in 2012. Since then, they have built a strong relationship with the landowner and have served as nurturing stewards of the land. They have reached an agreement with the owner to purchase the property within 10 years and are excited for their thriving farm business to have a permanent home on a beautiful property.

When they needed help reviewing the terms of the agreement with the landowner, the Purinton-Browns reached out to the Legal Food Hub. They worked with Eben Adams of Pierce Atwood to review the contract and ensure that their interests were protected. “Working with the Legal Food Hub helped us be sure that we were fully informed when entering into the agreement,” says Heide. “Our mission is to create a farming system in which all parts complement each other. We’re investing in this land for the long term.”

Heide and Greg closed on the purchase of the farm property in February 2020.

# THE LEGAL FOOD HUB TEAM



**MAGGIE  
SUPER CHURCH**

**Vice President for  
Healthy and Resilient  
Communities**

For over 20 years, Maggie has been a consultant and nonprofit leader in urban planning, real estate and community development, and environmental protection.



**SARA  
DEWEY**

**Director of Farm & Food  
Initiative**

Sara has worked on environmental, agricultural, and energy issues as a legislative aide in the U.S. Senate and as policy director of an environmental governance initiative at Yale University.



**PHELPS  
TURNER**

**Senior Attorney**

Phelps works in CLF's Clean Energy and Climate Change, Healthy and Resilient Communities, and Environmental Justice programs. Before joining CLF, Phelps was an environmental litigation associate at Sugarman, Rogers, Barshak & Cohen in Boston.



**ELENA  
MIHALY**

**Senior Attorney**

Elena focuses on developing and implementing solutions to protect public health, enhance community climate preparedness, and ensure all communities have equal access to a clean and healthy environment.



**MARY ROSE  
SCOZZAFAVA, ESQ.**

**Senior Fellow**

Mary is a former partner from Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr interested in sustainable agriculture and local food systems. Currently, she is a board member and clerk of LexFarm, an organically certified community farm in Lexington, Massachusetts.



**MARY  
LOVELL EGAN**

**Regional Coordinator**

Mary previously worked at Harvard Business School and Massachusetts General Hospital. She brings great experience as a farm team member and food entrepreneur to her work with the Hub.



**COLIN  
ANTAYA**

**Legal Fellow**

Colin focuses on the development of legal and policy approaches to reduce the use of pesticides in New England, in addition to supporting the Legal Food Hub. Before joining CLF, he clerked for the Honorable Steven D. Ecker of the Connecticut Supreme Court.



**GORDON  
MERRICK**

**Legal Fellow**

Gordon is a legal fellow working with CLF and our partner, Vermont Law School. Prior to attending law school, Gordon worked in community and political organizing, farm and service industry jobs, and emergency medicine.



**SOPHIA  
KRUSZEWSKI**

**Assistant Professor and  
Clinic Director**

In her current roles at the Vermont Law School, Sophia oversees the Vermont Legal Food Hub and supervises students working on Hub cases placed in the Food and Agriculture Clinic.



**WHITNEY  
SHIELDS**

**Project Manager and  
Program Coordinator**

Whitney Shields serves as Project Manager at the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at Vermont Law School. She is also the Program Coordinator for the Vermont Legal Food Hub.



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