



LEGAL FOOD HUB
A project of Conservation Law Foundation



LEGAL FOOD HUB YEAR IN REVIEW



BY THE NUMBERS

The Legal Food Hub matches farmers, food entrepreneurs, and farm and food organizations with free legal help in every New England state.

158

FIRMS
IN OUR
NETWORK

1,000

CASES
PLACED
SINCE 2014

4.76

MILLION
DOLLARS
LEVERAGED
SINCE 2014

89

LEGAL
RESOURCES
PUBLISHED

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Farmers and food businesses across New England overcame the pandemic, and they are ready to thrive.

When our national food system stumbled under the pandemic's weight, New Englanders turned to our region's farmers, food businesses, and farm and food organizations for help. New England's farm and food leaders delivered. Farmers fed our communities and stewarded our working lands. Food businesses connected farmers to eaters, created jobs, and made our communities more vibrant. Nonprofits taught New Englanders how to grow their own food, improved food access, and established urban farms and gardens. Farmers, food businesses, and food nonprofits innovated and persisted. Their hard work inspires all of us at the Legal Food Hub, and we are proud to support them.

This year, we helped more than 90 farmers and food businesses get the legal help they need with the support of our network of pro bono attorneys. We published new legal guides on topics that ranged from agricultural employment law to nonprofit governance. We offered a winter webinar series that addressed participants' most pressing legal concerns. And we delivered in-person trainings about farmland contamination, land access, and entity formation.

Shawn Menard of Seacoast Eat Local offered this reflection on the Legal Food Hub's work: "It's a real service. Sometimes you think 'it's too good to be true,' but this is definitely not one of those things. At the end of the day, it is trying to make the food system better. Sometimes you have to acknowledge that you are not an expert at everything, and so take all the help you can get. We took the plunge, and I am glad we did."

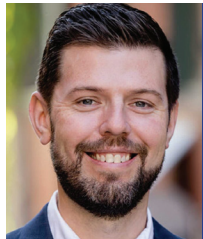
The pandemic showed us just how important our local food system is. As New England emerges from the pandemic, farmers, food businesses, and farm and food organizations continue their essential work. They are ready to thrive, and we look forward to providing the legal services and resources that they need for years to come.

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DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

Keith Richard

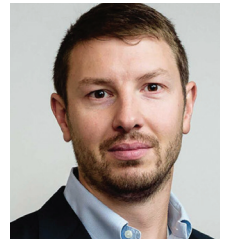


Keith Richard of Archipelago in Portland, Maine, has been an outstanding partner for the Legal Food Hub over the past few years, taking on matters ranging from contract disputes and LLC formations to negotiating the sale of a conservation easement. He is particularly passionate about working with farmers and small business owners, tackling food waste, and composting. Keith's broad skill set and tireless advocacy have made him an indispensable partner for the Hub.

Keith first began accepting referrals from the Hub in his prior position at Libby O'Brien Kingsley & Champion in Kennebunk, Maine, and moved to Archipelago in June of 2022. He will continue to assist Legal Food Hub participants in his new role.

Thank you for your contribution to the local food movement, Keith!

Andrew J. Kraus



Andrew J. Kraus joined the Legal Food Hub's network in 2016 and has been invested in supporting New England farmers and food entrepreneurs ever since.

Andrew is a business attorney with a focus on protecting intellectual property. Over the years, Andrew has provided many farmers with peace of mind by securing their trademarks. He has also helped participants securely establish LLCs, which provide foundational legal footing for budding new businesses. Participants that are lucky enough to be supported by him always have good things to say about working with Andrew. At the Hub, we know our participants are in good hands when they partner with Andrew at Opticlaw Law.

Thank you, Andrew, for your hours and years of service.

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LATEST NEWS

Seeding Change

by Pamela Reynolds

In 2015, Robert Peck led a trip to work on urban farms as part of an AmeriCorps volunteer group.

While building garden beds in southern cities, Peck's eyes opened to new possibilities: If healthy local produce could be grown in the hearts of Memphis and Tallahassee, why not in his hometown of Bridgeport, Connecticut?

Inspired, Peck returned home and started a 40-square-foot vegetable garden in his mother's yard. Eventually, that seed of an idea sprouted into Hemp Milk & Honey, a "community supported agriculture" (CSA) enterprise in which people can subscribe to get boxes of fresh veggies from Peck's gardens, now scattered about the city. Peck, who nicknamed himself the "Hood Farmer," hopes to address what he calls Bridgeport's "food apartheid," a divide that leaves the city's neighborhoods of color with less access to healthy foods – a direct result of structural racism.

When Peck needed an expert pair of eyes to review a lease for his continued expansion, he decided to try out a resource he'd heard about through the farming grapevine: CLF's Legal Food Hub.

A HELPING HAND FOR LOCAL FARMERS

Peck is one of hundreds of farmers and food entrepreneurs who have sought help through the Legal Food Hub since it launched in 2014. CLF created the Hub after realizing that only 10% of farmers use legal services, compared to 70% of small businesses in general. That leaves many farmers vulnerable when it comes to navigating the business complexities of running their farms, including incorporating, hiring help, drawing up employee contracts, leasing land, or transferring a farm to heirs. Many of these small business owners know they need legal help but can't



Robert Peck developed his interest in urban farming during an AmeriCorps trip. He's especially passionate about cultivating and sharing mushrooms with his local community. Photo: Hemp Milk & Honey

afford it. Others try going it alone. Many never realize they need help at all – until it's too late.

"CLF believes a thriving New England means a thriving local food system," says Mary Lovell Egan, senior program coordinator for the Legal Food Hub. "But we can't achieve that if our small farmers and food business are left vulnerable legally." The idea is this: We can fortify a robust regional food system by providing small food entrepreneurs and farmers with legal assistance they might not otherwise be able to afford.

"The Legal Food Hub helps these food businesses move beyond costly legal needs so they can focus on growing, thriving, and providing for the community," says Egan. In turn, New Englanders get access to more high-quality fresh foods that are locally grown. And the local food economy thrives as a result.

Since its inception in Massachusetts, the Hub has expanded to serve farmers and food businesses in every New England state. Over the years, the Hub has assisted farmers 511 times, food entrepreneurs 213 times, and food-related nonprofit groups 281 times.

The Hub now draws on a network of volunteer lawyers from 158 law firms across the region. Although most cases are relatively simple, there have been some more complicated ones, including the real estate legal work behind the Boston Public Market, which opened in downtown Boston in 2015. Peck's Hemp Milk & Honey set a new milestone for the Hub – its 1,000th case.

ADVICE THAT HELPS FARMERS AND FOOD BUSINESSES GROW

"It's been pretty invaluable," says Peck of the free legal assistance he has received through the Hub. He was matched with attorney Tyler Archer of Shipman & Goodwin LLP in Hartford. Archer combed through a lease for a plot of land outside Bridgeport, where Peck plans to grow an expanded selection of vegetables and a variety of mushrooms. The work was done just in time for Peck's first growing season as a CSA.



The Hub draws volunteer attorneys like Tyler Archer [above] from a network of more than 150 firms.

"The lease that we were looking at initially looked good to the naked eye," says Peck. "But once you get someone who has the background and the wherewithal to give insight to what you're looking at, well, it was super helpful."

It's a sentiment Egan has heard repeatedly from farmers and food businesses participating in the Legal Food Hub. But the experience isn't meaningful only to those receiving free legal advice – it's also a boon for those dispensing that advice. "It's not that a business owner can't negotiate a good contract alone," reflects Archer, who joined the Legal Food Hub network in 2022. "But in the end, adding a lawyer to the team brings in a new perspective and can take some of the pressure off, allowing the focus to be on growing the business."

Archer decided to volunteer because his firm already had a deep roster of larger food and agricultural clients. Working with the Hub, he says, allows him to "stay local and support those smaller producers working to feed our communities."

BOOSTING THE REGION'S ECONOMY WHILE FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Although every participant and volunteer is vitally important at the Hub, the overarching mission runs deeper than any single legal case. The reality is that New Englanders import about 90% of the food we buy in traditional grocery stores. And the current system of industrialized food production fueling that imported supply degrades the environment and climate, says Scott Sanderson, manager of CLF's Food and Farm Initiative. The Legal Food Hub is one way of protecting small farmers who are committed to growing food more sustainably.

"We have to both boost our ability to produce our own food in New England and then make sure that as we do that, we don't reproduce the harms embodied in a lot of the food that we're importing," he says.

1,000 CASES ARE JUST THE BEGINNING

The Legal Food Hub's 1,000 cases to date are a healthy start toward achieving that larger goal. So are the comprehensive online resource library and free webinars the Hub offers, which reach a wider audience than those that qualify directly for the Hub's free legal services.

In the end, the Hub has proven itself instrumental for small start-ups like Hemp Milk & Honey that have been able to use its services to advance their own goals in their own communities.

"[Local food] is just a way that really gets the community involved with what's going on," reflects Peck. "The more people that are getting connected to local farmers, the healthier we are locally as a community."

LATEST NEWS

Overcoming PFAS Contamination

by Scott Sanderson

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) made headlines across New England when farmers throughout Maine found these toxic “forever” chemicals in their soils and waters. The discovery forced farmers to make difficult decisions. After all, farmers care deeply about their communities. They worried about selling contaminated food products, and they wanted to protect public health. Limited testing, guidance, and information made their decisions even harder. Some impacted farmers felt that they had no choice but to stop farming altogether.

Maine’s farmers and their allies soon identified biosolids and other products derived from sludge, septage, and wastewater as the likely source of PFAS contamination. Biosolids have long been spread on farmland to improve soil fertility. Regulations, however, have not required biosolids to be tested for PFAS.

The Legal Food Hub’s partners acted quickly to support farmers. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association and Maine Farmland Trust launched a PFAS Emergency Fund. Other agricultural service providers worked closely together, coordinating their services to address the challenges that PFAS contamination posed.

Maine’s lawmakers also responded. They passed a series of bills designed to protect farmland from PFAS and to assist affected farmers. One bill prohibited the distribution of pesticides containing intentionally added PFAS. Another halted the spreading of sludge and biosolids. A third created a \$60 million fund to help farmers recover. Legislators throughout the



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country are now looking to Maine as they consider PFAS legislation in their own states.

These are important steps, and all evidence indicates that New England’s food supply remains safe, healthy, and wholesome. For farmers dealing with PFAS contamination, the future can feel daunting. All of us at the Legal Food Hub are determined to connect farmers with the legal assistance they need to navigate the PFAS crisis. We are building our capacity, recruiting attorneys with critical expertise, and offering webinars on key legal topics. Now, more than ever, we need to support the farmers who work so hard to bring fresh, healthy food to our doors. The Legal Food Hub is ready.

OUR WORK



Town Farm Tonics

Owned and operated by herbalist Carissa Davenport and regenerative designer Adam Davenport, Town Farm Tonics makes hand-crafted, locally inspired tonic teas, herbal syrups, and infused vinegars. With the belief that “healing herbs and wild plants that grow in our climate are best suited to support us,” the married couple tries to source as many ingredients as possible locally, with a plan to soon begin farming their own herbal ingredients. They are from Westport, Massachusetts, and manufacture out of a shared kitchen in Warren, Rhode Island.

The Davenports wanted to trademark their business name and logo as their business

grew. The Legal Food Hub matched the couple with attorney Lucy Lovrien, a solo practitioner in the Boston area. With over 25 years of experience in trademark and copyright law, Lovrien was the perfect lawyer to assist the couple with their trademark.

According to the Davenports, “the Legal Food Hub was an easy and helpful resource for our business to figure out the logistics of creating a trademark at a time when we didn’t have the funds or time to do it ourselves. For a startup food business, every bit of support like this can make a huge difference down the road.”

OUR WORK



Dandy Ram Farm

A farmer since 2008, Bo Dennis has worked on a wide variety of operations, including dairy, livestock, vegetable, and educational farms. In 2019, he started his own business, Dandy Ram Farm, focusing on sustainably grown flowers, seeds, and evergreen wreaths. At the time, he was leasing farmland from multiple landowners. But traveling between and farming the three different properties took its toll. Dennis decided to purchase a home that came with farmland, so he could spend more time farming and less time running around.

It took almost four years, but Dennis finally found a property that met all his needs in Monroe, Maine, where he was already leasing land. First, however, he needed to secure an appropriate sales agreement with the landowner. Dennis was working with one of the Legal Food Hub's partners, Land for Good, and they referred him to the Hub. The Legal Food Hub paired Dennis with attorney Peter Kenlan of Pierce Atwood. A lawyer who had represented many clients in commercial real

estate acquisitions, Kenlan was the perfect fit to ensure Dennis received a fair deal in one of the most significant investments of his life.

Dennis reached out to the Hub again in late 2022 for help reviewing a floral design contract. His flower business has grown so much that Dandy Ram Farm now offers full wedding floral design services. Given the effort required to provide local flowers for a wedding, Dennis wanted to ensure that clients follow through with their purchase when their big day arrives.

This time, Dennis was matched with attorney Carrie Yardley of Yarmouth, Maine. She agreed to go over the floral design contract with Dennis free of charge. "The Legal Food Hub has helped me access necessary legal services to build my legal resilience as a business," says Dennis. "Through the skilled attorneys I was connected with, I am able to move forward with more confidence in the services we are providing as a farmer florist."

OUR WORK



Revival Road Farm

Siedric White and Anna Pierce-Sliver are pursuing a lifelong passion. After over a decade of professional experience around food and farming, they founded Revival Road Farm in 2023. A jack-of-all-trades when it comes to food, White is an entrepreneur, chef, caterer, server, bartender, and farmer. With a background in hospitality and trained by the Urban Farming Institute, he brings a depth of knowledge about food production all the way from seed to plate.

Pierce-Sliver has been building community around food and farming for the past decade. From community gardens and educational gardens to farmers markets, she has brought people together to share in the magic of locally grown food. She is currently the farm manager of an urban nonprofit that feeds 300 people every day.

For their latest adventure, Revival Road Farm, the couple are leasing 11 acres from Phoenix Fruit Farm in Belchertown, Massachusetts. They will grow vegetables, herbs, and flowers using regenerative agriculture practices that

will leave the land better than they found it for generations to come.

To make this dream a reality, they must clear more than a few hurdles – two of which require legal assistance. They need to form a legal entity for their business and review leases for both their land and residence. As regenerative agriculture requires years of work and financial investment in the land to build the soil, they also need a lease that will provide them with a sense of security over the land. With all the other expenses and priorities needed to start a farm, adding attorney's fees can be a financial strain for any budding entrepreneurial farmer.

Fortunately, the Legal Food Hub exists for just these circumstances. The Hub placed the two entrepreneurs with attorney Rich Cavanaugh of Common Grow, who was able to review both their land and residential leases and create an entity for business, all free of charge. Thanks to the Hub and Cavanaugh, White and Pierce-Sliver can pursue their dream with the assurance that all their hard work stands on solid legal ground.

OUR WORK



Kearsarge Food Hub

About a half hour west of Concord, New Hampshire, sits the town of Bradford. With around 2,000 residents and lacking a conspicuous commercial corridor, this rural community is not what one would envision as a hub of activity. That didn't stop a passionate group of friends fresh out of college from imagining how they might build a sense of community around local food there.

They were not alone in their desire to bring people together. In 2015, several eager community members lent the group small plots of land on which they could farm and build a farm stand. Sweet Beet Farm and Farm Stand were born.

In 2016, a small local company bought the Bradford Inn, a 10,000-square-foot building that had sat abandoned for 15 years. The company partnered with the Sweet Beet team to revitalize the space as a hub for the community centered around arts, local business viability, and, of course, food. Together, they slowly transformed part of the space into a year-round local market and café, complete with a commercial kitchen. The

market prioritizes selling food grown in New Hampshire, preferably hyper-locally within a 30-mile radius.

The mission of Kearsarge Food Hub (KFH) – the nonprofit organization that encompasses the Sweet Beet Farm, Market, and Café – is “to reinvigorate our community within a restorative local food system by cultivating food sovereignty, growing engaged learners, and nurturing community.” To pursue that mission, KFH needed to secure the space in which they operate. When it was time to renew their lease at the beginning of 2022, Kearsarge reached out to the Legal Food Hub.

The Hub placed KFH with Mark Beaudoin of Nixon Peabody. A resident of nearby Hopkinton, Beaudoin agreed to review all their leases at no charge and support KFH teammates in working through rental agreements. The Legal Food Hub, Nixon Peabody, and Beaudoin are all proud to be added to the growing list of community members who have contributed to KFH's ability to revitalize their small town into a vibrant local food and community hub.



LEGAL FOOD HUB
A project of Conservation Law Foundation



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