



## Corie Pierce Bread and Butter Farm LLC



By Josiah Taylor  
UVM Agricultural Risk Management and  
Crop Insurance Education Program  
Photos courtesy of Bread and Butter Farm LLC

March 2021

Richly marbled and layered with fat, pork chops flop down into the hot lard, sizzling with peppercorns, garlic, and rosemary, savory scents filling the kitchen. As we chomp into the succulent, juicy pork we rest assured the pigs that grew this meat must have been as well cared for as possible. Given the farm's mission to engage with community and build relationships among people and land that nourish and are based in reciprocity and sharing, it's fitting that I was gifted this pork chop from a friend at Bread and Butter Farm the night before my visit with farmer Corie Pierce.

Corie started Bread and Butter Farm in 2009 with the vision of creating a highly diversified community farm, centered around land stewardship and growing food for the local community. Looking over the Champlain Valley in the Muddy Brook watershed, Bread and Butter Farm is situated on 143 acres of conserved land, 90 acres of which are open land including pasture and marsh, while the farm also grazes animals on another 100 acres of neighbors' land. The farm also has 3 acres in intensive vegetable production, as well as 15,000 square feet of greenhouses, all of which are managed with no-till practices, without machinery, to mimic a forest soil ecosystem. Grass-fed beef, organic vegetables, and woodland pork are the main commodities produced on the farm, while they are looking to start new types of livestock and crops. A free-choice model CSA wherein members can select the products they desire is also one of the foci of Bread Butter Farm with emphasis on all members picking-up their shares on-farm, engaging adults and children with farm experiences and walking trails. The farm also offers experiential educational programs such as summer camp and The Village School, helping children develop resiliency through being on the land and working directly with the farm, cooking over wood fire and eating food they help grow. Corie also worked with a team of others to found the UVM Farmer Training Program and does other educational outreach with UVM and local schools.



While the farm sells most of its produce directly through the CSA, Bread and Butter Farm also has a farm store that operates on site and does online orders. The Farm creates economic opportunities for other farm entrepreneurs, integrating businesses like Blank Page Café, a farm-to-table inspired bakery and catering venture renowned for their delicious butter coffee and

gluten free treats that has a retail location at the farm. Music for Sprouts, Burger Nights, and other events including music and food are ways the farm has fun celebrating land stewardship with their community of neighbors and friends. For all of their events and food production, Bread and Butter Farm takes great care with food safety, maintaining a certified commercial kitchen with all the necessary health inspections, and keeping staff ServSafe trainings up to date.



As both a productive and community farm, there are myriad potential risks involving agriculture and the community that spends time there. Because of the many farm customers, trail users, and students on site, Bread and Butter Farm maintains liability insurance for protection. They also mitigate anticipated challenges with waivers for program participants, parent student handbooks, protocols and training for staff including wilderness first aid or EMT, staffing a nurse, and implementing incident reporting and communication systems. Covid has created another whole level of risk management. Signage is crucial for engaging with the public so extensively and they added hand washing stations and instituted policies regarding mask wearing. Sadly, due to Covid, programs such as summer camp and Music for Sprouts were forced to operate in a reduced capacity during the 2020 summer, though plans are excitedly underway to have a boisterous summer in 2021. Social engagement and building a committed and durable community is one of the farm's biggest assets. With strong community engagement, the farm benefits from social resiliency.

Since Bread and Butter Farm began operation in 2009, it continues to work diligently on building physical infrastructure, farmland fertility, and resiliency. The farm is windy and exposed to extreme weather. Gradually adding more perennials is helping to add biodiversity, additional crops, as well as increasing hedgerows to break the wind. The farmers remediated a large section of pasture that was frequently too wet to graze on until July through spreading bedded pack above the pasture. Serendipitously, all the added organic matter drew water up from the pasture making it grazable in April while also creating a newly fertile vegetable field! Using regenerative farming practices such as rotational grazing, keyline plowing, and reseeded pastures, Bread and Butter Farm has measurably improved their soils, reducing compaction, enhancing cycling of nutrients, and boosting soil and root development. Because the farm is in a busy suburban area, keeping fences hot and animals in the pastures and off the roads is an ongoing concern, for which the farm is raising funds and developing plans to upgrade electric fencing. Additionally, the farm is strategizing to develop long term, ecologically sustainable water systems for both crops and livestock.



Adding to the long-term improvements of the land, the farm has acquired access to another adjacent 400 acres – however it is highly depleted from haying for many years previous without fertility being returned. As a result, it is very compacted Champlain clay that has sections which



are almost exclusively invaded by spotted knapweed, demanding years of careful management before it is useable for agriculture. Land and animal manager Brandon Bless carefully documents the changes to the land over the years of efforts, creating evidence that will be helpful in future farm management and showcasing the farm’s sustainable practices to supporters.

While the farm currently has business insurance, liability insurance, and special insurance for farm educational programs, it does not subscribe to commodity insurance. With assistance from UVM’s Agricultural Risk Management and Crop Insurance Education Program as well as Vermont Law School pro bono legal counsel for farmers, Bread and Butter Farm continues to explore risk management and business structure options that will best protect against losses and maintain financial security of the multi-faceted business.

One of the most pervasive risks in founding and operating Bread and Butter Farm relates to land acquisition and ownership. Corie bought the land for a relatively modest price, but there was no house on site in which to live. The mortgage has been difficult to carry and Corie mostly hasn’t paid herself wages for the last decade. She never felt like part of the quest was to become a big landowner, and sees problems with that type of ownership model. The big goal has been to have multiple people and families growing opportunities on the farm, while also creating social resiliency and continuity. Corie envisions a community farm that can survive through multiple generations by relying on diversified community ownership rather than a single person or family. Sole proprietorship tends to be risky, isolating, stressful, and given what we see with other farms in our region, uncertain to continue in the long term. Turning from farmer to social thinker, Corie probes deeply:



“What if the next generation doesn’t want to farm? Then it all kind of falls apart. I really want to see this farm and this land exist well past me and well past my generation, and for many, many, many generations. So I feel like my life’s work is to set that up to be as viable as possible, and that might mean that my kids aren’t the ones farming it. But [it’s crucial] that we’re cultivating that second generation, third, fourth, and fifth generations, down the line, and we’ve set it up so it can work. So long term single person land owning doesn’t work – eventually there’s the pressure to sell.”

Corie endeavors to break that cycle of debt. She doesn't want to continue the convention of working the farm till retirement, then selling to someone who has to go through the same debt and mortgage trap all over again each generation, with minimal assets and security both for elderly farmers and the next generation. "It can be wonderful for a single person to own land, but this land is truly for everyone in the community, so it just makes sense that it is held in a commons model. But how do we provide housing for multiple generations? We want to be able to live our life out on the farm, while also providing housing for the next generation - so what is that magic number for this piece of land in terms of the amount of housing to sustain this vision?" Affordable housing is truly a pressing issue for which they are working hard, but it's tough because people with a lot of money quickly snap up land with buildings that come up for sale. Corie Pierce and Bread and Butter Farm are not alone in their concerns about intergenerational farm sustainability. In collaboration with the Agrarian Trust, Corie and the Bread & Butter Farm team are working together with the Vermont Land Trust to form a commons model to create solutions. Organized legally as a 501(c)(2) not for profit, the Vermont Agrarian Commons works to provide affordable 99-year land leases to a new generation of young and diverse farmers. Bread and Butter Farm is the first farm in Vermont to convert its land ownership model into such a program. Corie Pierce, Brandon Bless, and the entire Bread and Butter Farm community look forward to continuing farming and building ecological, social, and financial resilience over the coming seasons - and with enough sunshine, rain, and community support, hopefully a century and beyond. It's hard to think that far ahead, but this farm is doing it with patience and passion, creating a new vision for the future of sustainable community farming in the Green Mountain State.



You can visit the farm website: <https://breadandbutterfarm.com/>

To learn more about Agrarian Commons, visit the trust website:  
<https://agrariantrust.org/agrariancommons/vermont/>



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

National Institute  
of Food and  
Agriculture



NORTHEAST  
EXTENSION  
RISK  
MANAGEMENT  
EDUCATION

*This material is based upon work supported by USDA/NIFA under Award Number 2018-70027-28584 and Award Number 2018-70027-28588. USDA and the University of Vermont are equal opportunity providers and employers.*

*The University of Vermont works in partnership with the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the University of Minnesota Digital Center for Risk Management Education and the Northeast Extension Risk Management Education Center to educate Vermont and New England producers about agricultural risk management, Federal Crop Insurance and USDA Disaster Assistance Programs. For more information, please contact UVM Agricultural Risk Management Education Coordinator Jake Jacobs at [jake.jacobs@uvm.edu](mailto:jake.jacobs@uvm.edu).*