



2024 CSA Share Member Letter

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Overview

As we wrap up the 2024 growing season I want to summarize some of the farm's successes, challenges and opportunities for change. November marks the close to my first year as farm director here at Phillis Bridge. It has been an incredible opportunity to jump into the well established community and CSA here.

Our farm crew this year consisted of two apprentices, our part time farm manager, a farm hand, and myself. We also had over 160 hours of volunteer work from community members! With this labor and love we were able to grow 40,000 lbs of food and counting. We had 200 families in our CSA, and 8 partner organizations with several shares each. A few times this season the crew would pause to think about how incredibly fortunate we are to be helping to feed so many people through work that we love.


Season Challenges

As this was my first year at the farm, there was a learning curve to the season. With a new farm comes learning new soil characteristics like nutrient contents, compositions of clay vs loam, drainage, and pest pressures. As I led the crew through growing in the spring we learned many valuable lessons. Through the summer we applied what we had learned and entered the fall with abundance. Our education director often reminds me, farmers say year one "doesn't count, in the sense that it takes a long time to learn the land." I cannot wait to start strong in the spring for the 2025 season.

Another challenge this season was the weather. With overwhelming rain the weeds often grew more than a foot over the weekend. This meant a lot of time went into weed control. Then, in the summer we were impacted by a local drought where we went through several 3 to 4 week stretches without rain. The well here at the farm has a low capacity, meaning only one section of field can be irrigated at a time and often we have to wait between sections for the well to refill. This meant that when we didn't get rain, someone spent almost 3 hours each day managing irrigation.

Season Successes

From my first day at the farm, I felt an immediate connection to the community, not just through the work, but through the genuine relationships that formed. Whether it was early mornings in the fields or sharing a meal at a farm community potluck, I witnessed how the shared efforts of our members and staff created bonds that went beyond just farming. The sense of belonging grew with each interaction, as CSA members, volunteers, and staff came



together to support one another and the land. It's been incredibly fulfilling to see how we've built this vibrant community, rooted in collaboration and care.

One highlight from this season was our new melon patch, while melons can be considered a luxury item, they are surprisingly easy to grow! Once the field was set up we ran drip irrigation once a week and then viola! Watermelons. Harvesting is a labor of love, some days we were each lifting over 1200 lbs of melons multiple times. But knowing there was delicious watermelon going to your tables and ours made it one of the most enjoyable crops to harvest.

Another milestone this season was breaking ground on a new field at the farm. The difference between the soil in this new field and the soil in the fields that have been in production for over 30 years is astounding. At the same time it makes sense that the soil here is "tired" after all that time. This new field is going to help us give some of the tired soil time to rest in years to come as we rotate our crops through a bit more land. By rotating crops we change what nutrients are being taken out of the soil and also what is going back into the soil. For example, this season we grew corn which not only gave us delicious ears of sweet red corn but also turned a particularly clay heavy section of field into soil rich in organic material, with more aeration. In the fall we planted our red rover radishes and daikon radishes into this renewed soil and they thrived. By rotating what crops we plant and giving some fields time to rest we can create healthier more sustainable soil which turns into healthier more sustainable vegetables for all of us.

Lastly, our winter shares sold out in three weeks this year! We are so excited to provide wholesome fresh food to our shareholders through the cold winter months. Read on below for more exciting news regarding winter shares!

Milestones 2024

- Harvested approximately 40,000 lbs of produce
- Donated approximately 6,000 lbs of produce

The Path Forward

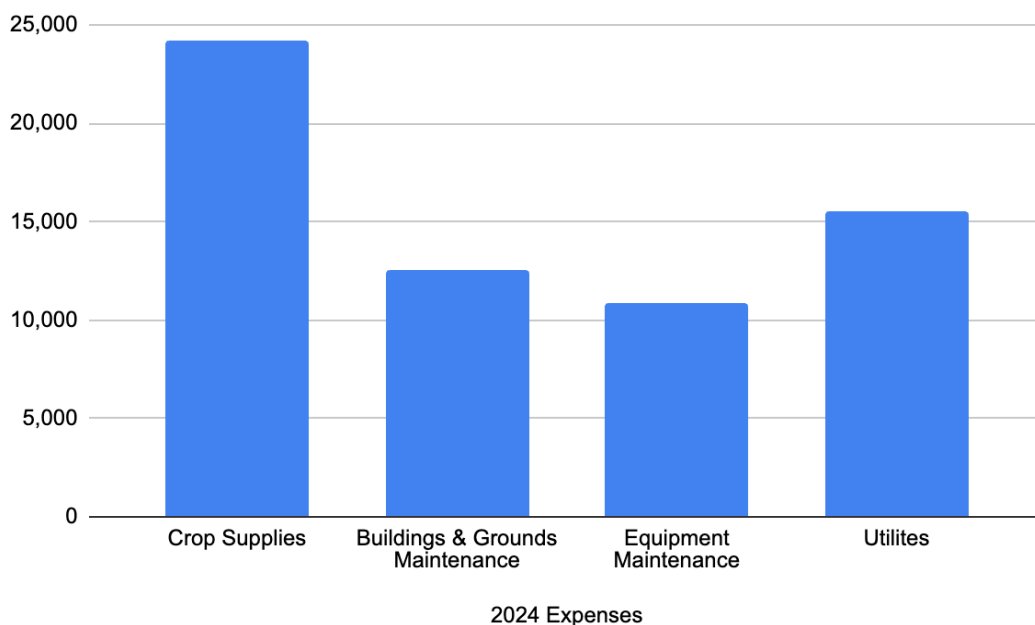
Given the current challenges, I'd like to explain our decision to raise the share price by approximately 7.5% this year (equivalent to an additional \$1.75 per week for half-share pickups or \$3.00 per week for full-share pickups). After comparing our CSA with 12 other

local farms and grocery stores such as Hannaford, it's clear that our shares are currently priced well below market value.


In 2024, the average value of a Full/Big share was \$62.26 per pickup, while members paid only \$39.13 per pickup. This doesn't even account for the additional \$10-\$30 weekly value of the pick-your-own. Looking ahead to 2025, we are confident that, with the insights gained from this season and our ongoing regenerative practices, we will continue to provide abundant shares. The planned price increase is essential to ensure the farm's long-term viability and sustainability.

While our organizational budget balanced for 2024, revenue from CSA shares remains below the costs of labor and materials. As a nonprofit, it's common for us to rely on donations to support our budget. However, as we work toward a truly sustainable farm model, it's crucial that our prices keep up with inflation. This year's price increase will help us maintain that balance, and we are grateful for your continued support.

Below are some expenses taken directly from our 2024 financials, to demonstrate just some of the costs involved in running a farm:



I am deeply grateful for the support provided by our shareholders, whether purchasing CSA shares, volunteering your time, or through generous donations; your contributions enable us to grow healthy food, strengthen our community, and continue our mission of sustainability, education, and food justice. Please keep reading to learn more about this season from our farm crew, our goals for 2025, and milestones from this season. I have



read every single survey response that has come in so far and I appreciate your input. Your thoughts and ideas will go into our goals and plans for the coming year.

Looking ahead to 2025

In 2025, we're excited to introduce several improvements to enhance your CSA experience! We plan to introduce a *No-Till Pick Your Own* field with **more accessible walkways**, so everyone can easily enjoy harvesting their own produce. I have loved seeing the joy out in the Pick Your Own this season and we hope to make it an even more inviting place for you to spend time with our community. Our farming focus will be on **improving pest management** practices and continuing to use cover cropping to **restore soil health**, in order to continue the **abundant share size** we've seen this fall. We're aiming to upgrade our irrigation systems for more efficient water use and implement targeted weed management through cover crops and cultivation. Stewarding soil health will remain a priority as we enhance our practices with compost, crop rotation, and cover crops. We're also striving to improve efficiencies across all farm systems, which will help us keep labor costs manageable while ensuring **fair, living wages for our team**. Finally, we are working on securing funding to **expand our *Winter Share* program**, bringing more fresh, local produce to your table all year long!

Reflections from the Farm Crew

Farm Apprentice, Katie

“What I Enjoyed:

As I reflect on the past 7 months, there is so much I could say about my experience at Phillies Bridge. What I really want to draw attention to is the farm’s ability to extend itself in varying, yet harmonious, directions. We have a Farm Director, Food Justice Director, and Education Director. With all of their knowledge and dedication we can provide food for our members, organizations we donate to, and also welcome anyone to our farm to learn with us. I love the open atmosphere we’ve created here, and I hope you all feel invited in.

What Needs Some Loving:

Weeds. One of the only constants in this life. They may cover the soil and retain moisture, but they are not what we want thriving on the farm! I would love to see better weed control in our PYO and fields next year, and would also love for more members to see the farm and volunteer with us. Hand weeding in a big group can be a really great time!

A Change I’m Excited For:

I am obsessed with high tunnels. High tunnels, high tunnels, high tunnels. I hope that we are able to secure the funding for another high tunnel so that we can provide, and donate, even more food. When working on a farm, it’s a relief to have a growing space that feels a bit more secure and dependable because we are constantly adapting to so many changes.”

Farm Hand, Angelique

My time at Phillies was by far the best work experience that I've ever had, especially on a farm. I have never felt so happy to wake up and go to work not just to see my co-workers but to tend to the beautiful land we work with. The community that Phillies creates is like no other: we were given permission to be silly, and imperfect which gave us the desire and motivation to put our all into the work we did. When you are respected as a human being giving your work your all is a byproduct. The weather at times impacted our harvest which sometimes led us to grind right before CSA and we would put our all into it. A thorn for me is when I see that some members might not understand why there’s sometimes less variety in our offerings. I think it would be great to improve communication with CSA members and invite them to join us on harvest days. This way, everyone can better appreciate the process behind our produce! Something that I am looking forward to would be that with all the learning of the season and land being able to plant food that really thrives and being able to provide more energetically beautiful food for years to come.

Education Director, Ella

“At Phillies Bridge Farm Project, we’re proud to be a diversified farm. Not only is it the only way to provide you, our favorite CSA members, with a rounded mix of vegetables, it also is a more sustainable and inclusive way of farming! Put simply, diversifying not just our crops but the variety within our crops makes the farm more organically resilient against pressure from pests and climate change. All varieties do slightly better or worse depending on the temperature, the moisture of the soil, and lots of miscellaneous other factors like insect pressure, wind, and soil nutrition levels. By growing lots of different varieties, we’re able to ensure that no matter the conditions, we’re able to do our jobs and grow fresh, healthy food for our community.

Sometimes in feedback we get the request for more “normal” varieties. We enjoy being able to push back on the concept of what normal is and should be in our food system! Not only is diversifying our crop list a vital part of our mission towards sustainable land stewardship, it’s also fun and educational! We think of eggplant as a classic Italian vegetable, but did you know it probably originated simultaneously in South and East Asia? We think of potatoes as a standard of English and Irish cooking, but they’re originally from South America, cultivated by the Incas!

By planting crops and crop varieties not often found in grocery stores, we’re opening a conversation about the history of food and food sovereignty, and welcoming more people into our farm community. We love that when we don’t limit ourselves to what is “normal” in a standard American grocery store, we welcome in a mix of new cultures and cuisines.”

Assistant Farm Manager, Suz

Thorn: As irrigation manager, this was a really tough year. Dealing with the impacts and demands of drought coupled with a low-capacity well made it very challenging to irrigate effectively without detracting too much time/energy away from other important field work. Irrigation upgrades would make a big impact!”

Bud: It was so exciting to see the difference in the soil health and crop yields in our new field compared to the fields that have been in heavy production for the last few decades! I’m excited that Phillies Bridge now has more space with which to effectively rotate crops and use cover crops to support the soil and fill your fridges.

“Rose: This year's crew were absolute all stars! Everyone was so tenacious, eager to learn, and could approach the sometimes long and challenging days of farming with a wonderful sense of humor. I feel so grateful to have spent this past growing season with such dedicated and delightful coworkers.