

SPIRIT OF OPTIMISM PREVAILS

AMONG 2024 LOCAL FARMER AWARD WINNERS

Pride. Confidence. Potential. Future Plans.

These words capture the spirit of the 2024 Local Farmer Awards given to fund capital improvements for more than a hundred farms in Western Massachusetts. Farmers are setting practical, creative, and even visionary goals to: improve processes, lengthen the growing season, and significantly expand herds and crops. Among recipients are several repeat winners who have reaped great value from sustained support.

Livestock Farmers see Benefits from New Pens, Fences, and Other Structures

Acquisitions at **Pomeroy Farm** (Westfield) made their calves more comfortable and farm chores faster to perform. An outdoor hut increased group housing space for small calves by 30%. Sturdy updated panels for the newborn calf pens hold calf feed and milk pails in place for easier feeding. "Money is tight in the dairy industry," the farmer explained, "and the award allowed us to make these improvements."

To better manage its grass-fed beef herd, the **North Hadley Sugar Shack LLC** (Hadley) purchased a metal panel cattle catch pen with a gate. This allows the farmer to catch and separate animals needing medications, vaccinations, or simply separation from the herd.

Golden Goose Geponics (Ware) added fencing for their grass-fed cows, enabling the farm to increase the number of animals and extend the grazing season. "We now 100% graze our cattle on grass from July to November and hopefully into December, drastically reducing our dependence on harvested hay."

The **Luther Belden Farm** (Hatfield) reported "absolute delight" with their newborn calf warmer and calf cart, allowing farm workers to move calves more quickly, more effectively, and with less stress. Last winter they lost calves because of cold weather and post-calving stress.



Oak Hollow Livestock

At **Oak Hollow Livestock** (Shelburne) new pens improved the management of a herd of Boer goats and, by allowing separation into multiple groups, "helped ensure that females will be in optimal breeding condition so we can double the herd in the next two years."

Replacement Gates at **Leyden Glen Farm** (Leyden) increased the safety of sheep and lambs which can no longer escape, and thus fall victim to predators like coyotes.



Poultry Farms Raised Profits with Bigger Hen Flocks and More Efficient Egg Washing Systems

Everyday Farm's (Gill) grain bin for laying hens (a shift from bagged feed) improved their pasture-raised egg operation across the board. They were able to go from 300 to 700 hens, increase egg sales and profit, and manage labor more efficiently.

Both **Hillside Farm** (South Deerfield) and **Crooked Trail Farm** (Orange) report similar good news: their egg washing upgrades reduced washing time by a whopping 75%. That reduction meant that farmers could increase their hen flocks; Hillside Farm, for example, increased the number of hens from 200 to 350 and expects to add 250 more in 2025.

Pause & Pivot Farm's (Williamsburg) mobile hydration station allowed them to move chickens farther out into farm fields, expand flock size, and offer healthy grass and bugs to graze on. By managing hydration in a nimble manner, the farm met high season egg demand with a 59% increase in production and sales -- an "incredible feat" accomplished without adding extra daily labor.



Everyday Farm

Maple Farms Pinpoint Practical Ways to Boost Production and Sales



Ferrindino Maple, LLC

Ferrindino Maple, LLC (Hampden) purchased containers to store up to 499 gallons of maple syrup. With a bulk storage tank to assure a steady supply of retail-size containers, the farm can keep products local and distribute them consistently throughout the year, rather than sell off large quantities due to limited bulk storage. The impact in 2024: a 30% rise in local community sales.

With **Boyden Brothers Maple's** (Conway) addition of a storage tank, the farm was able to increase sap storage capacity by 33%, substantially reducing backup complications. More efficient handling of sap also helped ensure maximum quality.

Paul's Sugar House (Williamsburg) expects its Sap Spy Sugarbush Monitoring System to produce around 200 additional gallons of finished maple syrup and significantly reduce the amount of syrup purchased to supplement current demand.

Holiday Brook Farm (Dalton) used its new vacuum monitoring system to raise the sap yield "by 3 inches of mercury" in the system. That effort equated to an increase of 120-150 gallons of maple syrup.

Vegetable and Flower Farms Added Greenhouses, Tunnels, and a Trellis System to Lengthen Growing Season

Quabbin Hill Farm's (Pelham) improved greenhouse heating system let them start plants six weeks earlier and will likely extend the growing season by about two months, making possible a larger yield of seasonal, sustainably grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs to be sold at several farmers' markets.

Bigfoot Farm's (Williamstown) plant propagation tunnel enabled the farm to grow more vegetable starts than ever before, which translated into an increase of 20% in early season revenue. The tunnel is expected to be "a sturdy backbone of future seasons."

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This was a critical infrastructure project that happened this year because of the grant funding...doing it this year leapfrogged us to a new level of production this season.

Bigfoot Farm

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Astarte Farm (Hadley) purchased two new setups for overhead irrigation in their high tunnels and two for field crop irrigation. More consistent germination gave them larger harvests, much better weed suppression, and a 181% increase in yields per bed of direct-seeded greens.

Sweet Birch Herbals (Ashfield) has a new greenhouse to grow more lavender and passion flower for herbal teas and tinctures. The flowers grow abundantly because they are protected and the farmer no longer needs to purchase flowers to fill a supply gap.

A new trellis system to support peas and pole beans enabled **Good Bunch Farm** (Shelburne Falls) to triple production of these high demand items. The pole bean season was also extended into September, carrying the harvest more evenly than bush beans. Reported the satisfied farmer, "We're finally able to meet the demand."

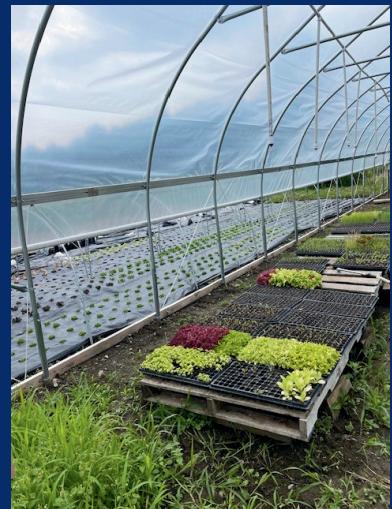
Over the winter, **Little Bend Flower Farm** (Hadley) used its greenhouse for cut flowers, which bloom and are market-ready two weeks earlier than in prior years.



Good Bunch Farm



Quabbin Hill Farm



Bigfoot Farm



Buzz Off Bee Company

Growth Potential Motivates Farmers to Set Ambitious Goals

The Local Farmer Award allowed **Buzz Off Bee Co.** (Westfield) to tackle honey extracting, the biggest bottleneck of the season, by purchasing the New Maxant 20-Frame honey extractor. According to the farm, the grant "not only improved day-to-day efficiency but also **helped lay the foundation for long-term success.**"

Joshua's Farm (Sandisfield) acquired a Hay Tedder to **support their long-term goal of becoming self-sufficient in hay production**. The tedder spreads the grasses, which speeds up the drying process. This enabled them to reclaim a hayfield for the first time in a generation, eliminating the need to purchase hay for their cattle.

With **Meadowsweet Farm's** (Hawley) prototype brooder house for young chicks, the production of broiler chickens expanded by 75%, exceeding expectations. By raising more birds, establishing a wholesale market, and increasing retail sales, the farm is now **planning to build another brooder house and double its production of chickens**.

Hidden Mountain Farm's (New Marlborough) sheep panels, grain feeder, and hay feeder have been a "fantastic" help in separating a group of smaller sheep that need higher quality feed. The farmer feels confident enough to keep and breed more ewes in future years, with **hopes of doubling their capacity to 20 ewes in the next two years.**

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We're gratified that the Local Farmer Awards enable Western Massachusetts farmers to tackle projects they may not have thought possible. Their success impacts all of us who want to be able to buy plenty of healthy local food products.

Philanthropist Harold Grinspoon

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Joshua's Farm

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Harold Grinspoon
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