

Small Ones Farm Amherst, MA



Are you dreaming of owning a farm?

Bob and Sally Fitz – owners of Small Ones Farm in Amherst, MA – spent many years dreaming of owning their own farm. They would go on long Sunday drives and admire houses that looked like barns, and mowers that looked like tractors. They would visit an orchard gift shop several towns away and Bob would talk to the owner about the apple crop. They would buy apple pies and cider donuts and feel like they caught a piece of the farm dream. Then, after several life-altering events, they decided life is too short for dreams to wait. That's when they bought the 63-acre property that became Small Ones Farm.

Sally and Bob were well into adulthood when they bought the farm (i.e., they were not young). They had never owned or operated a farm. And while much of the orchard was in place when they bought the property, there was plenty of opportunity for growth. Over the past 18 growing seasons, Sally and Bob have nurtured Small Ones Farm into a productive and beloved part of the Pioneer Valley landscape, producing thousands of pounds of organic fruit and vegetables and hosting hundreds of community visitors each year.

If you have been dreaming of owning a farm, this property is ready for you.

The farm is in active production right now



The property is currently producing thousands of pounds of fruit and vegetables. The orchard consists of over 500 mature fruit trees: 70% apple, 22% peach, 8% Asian pear. There are over 900 row-feet of raspberry, blueberry and blackberry plantings. There are 35 acres of tillable land available, 13 of which have been in active vegetable production for over 15 years. Since Sally and Bob have owned the property, organic and/or biodynamic farming practices have been in place; no synthetic chemicals have been used on the farm. Since 2007, Small Ones Farm has participated in the Certified Naturally Grown program, which follows the USDA organic guidelines.

Distribution outlets for the farm's produce are in place

Most of the farm's produce is sold via its beautiful – and busy – on-site farm stand and through distributions to farm shareholders (the “CSA” model). In the Pioneer Valley, there are many outlets for farmers to sell their produce – over 40 active farmers' markets, wholesale to local restaurants and stores, CSA programs, and farm stands. There is exceptionally strong support from the community to “buy local,” and there are several organizations that make it easy for consumers to find growers and their produce.



Farmers are available to work on the farm



Most of the vegetables grown on the farm are grown via lease agreement on 13 of the tillable acres by Max and Kerry Taylor of Brookfield Farm, one of the oldest and most established farms in the Valley. And there are several fruit growers in the area who may be interested in leasing part or all of the orchard and berry operations. The Five Colleges are a source of young people who are looking for opportunities to explore their farm interests. Small Ones Farm has an active internship program for college students who can earn course credit for their work on the farm. And several of Small Ones Farm current and former staff members are graduates of the agricultural programs at Hampshire College and UMass Amherst.

Climate mitigation systems are installed

The Fitzes have installed several systems on the farm to help lessen the impact of the changing climate on the farm's production. An extensive underground irrigation system brings water to crops during drought conditions; and the drip-technology system directs water where it is needed, resulting in 90% less water usage than above-ground broadcast watering systems. The three installed high tunnels (i.e., unheated greenhouses with open ground as the floor) offer weather protection, which extends the growing season and increases crop yield. (The high tunnel that contains a stand of peach trees is one of only a handful of such installations in the US.) An orchard heating system helps reduce the effects of late frost on tree fruit. And, a wireless internet-based monitoring system provides early warning of problematic temperatures.



The farm is integrated into the local community

The farm stand is open daily from June through November, with many loyal customers, some of whom



are willing to drive long distances to access produce that is difficult to come by (e.g., local organically-grown peaches, fresh-pressed organic apple cider). The Orchestra in the Orchard summer concert series (partnered with The Valley Winds) and apple picking in the fall bring many families to the farm. Local school groups and civic organizations regularly reach out to visit the farm. In past years, Small Ones Farm ran a licensed summer camp for young children. The farm regularly donates its produce to local organizations and has helped civic groups raise thousands of dollars through its “pie fundraiser” program. The farm is also affiliated with many farm organizations in the Valley,

including Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), The Northeast Organic Farming Association - Mass. (NOFA-MA), The MA Fruit Growers Association, and the UMass Extension.

The property contains unique natural features

Over 50 species of birds have been observed on the property, including many species with declining populations due to loss of habitat. One bird researcher described the property as “one of the most diverse and productive farms” she has studied. There are 2 vernal pools on the property (i.e., seasonal pools of water that provide protective habitat for distinctive – and frequently endangered - plants and animals), which come alive each spring. (This is a particularly wondrous experience to share with young children). Running through the property are Plum Brook, Plum Spring, the Ken Cuddeback (KC) Trail and the Small Ones Farm Trail. And many wildlife species live on the farm, including a Blue Heron we have named “Kevin.”



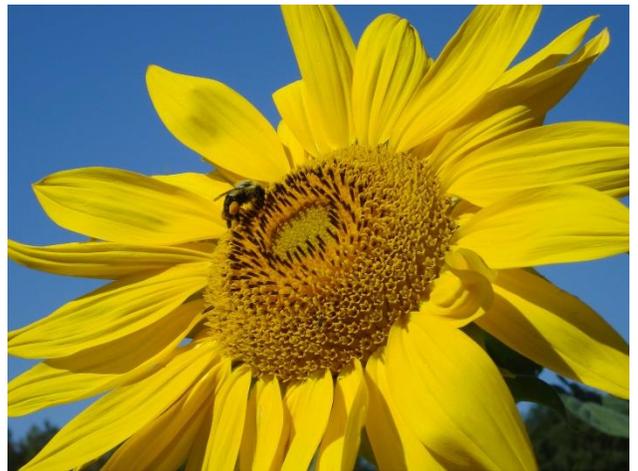
The property includes historical structures



The barn dates back to 1850, and contains milking parlors - a vestige of the farm's early days as a dairy farm. The Greek revival farmhouse, also built around 1850, includes beautiful wide plank boards. The farm was featured in *Harvesting History: Amherst Massachusetts Farms - 1700-2010* (edited by Sheila Rainford and Ruth Owen Jones). The Hollyhocks pictured in this montage are the same as those featured in a photo of the barn taken 50 years ago, which appeared in *North of Norwottuck: A Sampler of South Amherst, Mass.* (by Marjorie Atkins Elliott, 1984).

The property is a popular site for researchers

Many Five College faculty and graduate students have chosen the property for their research projects. For example, the farm has been a site to explore songbirds' dietary habits, the migratory paths of Box turtles, the benefits of various beehive structures, and the impact of sunflowers on native bumble bee populations. This fall, the farm will be a test site for garlic planted in cover cropped fields. And, the farm was also chosen by the UMass Extension as an organic test site for a new apple being introduced to the US market.



Substantial farmer support is available in the Pioneer Valley



“Exploring Your Small Farm Dream” – a course offered through the New England Small Farm Institute – and “Tilling the Soil” – a course offered through the MA Department of Agricultural Resources – are examples of the resources that helped Bob and Sally get Small Ones Farm started. Grant funding is available to local farmers, along with resources to help farmers complete grant applications. Grants helped to fund Small Ones Farm’s underground irrigation system, 2 of its 3 high tunnels, the farm stand, and farm equipment.