



Member's Bi-annual Newsletter

Winter 2021-2022

We apologize for the long hiatus of the Ayers Newsletter, for rest assured twas not a lack of events or information preventing its dispatch.

Please be informed that if you are receiving this newsletter, you have signed-up or have been included as a member because of your or your organization's support and/or interest of/in the Ayers Foundation (AYERS).

I believe 2021 was for most of us a year of recovery, restraint, and reorganization. During difficult times, I am always reminded of the need to adapt and cooperate with others. Suffice it to say there is real truth in the adage, "collaboration is the new innovation." So much can be accomplished when folks work together and share resources, knowledge, and relationship capital.

As I write, the Farmers' Community Food Hub – a social enterprise and project of the Ayers Foundation – is now 17 partner farms strong, most recently adding Wishing Stone Farm in Little Compton, RI to our ever-growing collaborative group. The volumes of produce and proteins (lamb, pork, chicken, duck, and beef) per farm that we bring to market continues to grow, in some rare cases, more than 50%. While not yet tabulated, we anticipate in excess of **140,000** pounds of locally/regionally produced foods marketed through the hub in 2021. This milestone and RECORD volume brought lots of savory and nutritious foods to the heralded chefs of our communities as well as to individuals and families (disadvantaged and otherwise), while lending substantial support to hardworking farmers in CT, MA, NY, RI, and ME. For those of you interested, the breakdown of partners by state is below:

RI - 6  
CT - 3  
MA - 3  
ME - 1  
NY- 4

As 2021 comes to an end and a new year begins, the Ayers Foundation sanguinely continues to build upon past successes by diversifying its programming and projects to further impact the communities we serve and build new ones! We are raising money to add new infrastructure and hire new staff to support this growth. We are always looking for people and organizations who/that share our passion for real food system change and resetting the clock of food ecology. We continue to build community awareness of our current food – even health care - systems and promote change for a healthier world (see <https://modernepidemic.org>). So, if you are an inspired teacher, student or whomever, pick up the phone; jot us an email; or simply come visit to check-out what we're doing!

The DIFFERENCE between knowledge and wisdom is DOING, and that is what we promote, practice, and teach. In our humble opinion, experiential learning has been the missing link in k-12 education for the past 50+ years and is now making a slow return with palpable results.

All of our projects and programs foster community wellness, particularly in the context of food sovereignty, holistic nutrition, and environmental literacy.

**Some 2021 news worth highlighting follows:**

- [Revamped website](#) with better flow, enriched information, and lots of new pics (see [www.ayers-foundation.org](http://www.ayers-foundation.org))!
- Raised sufficient funds to erect the frame (happening now in 2021-22) and weatherproof the Hobart B. Ayers Meeting House toward the completion of this multipurpose building that will function as:
  - a farm store
  - a value-added teaching kitchen
  - a memorial and small agricultural museum
  - a storage and processing center for the Farmers' Community Food Hub.
- Our new on-farm infrastructure will help us achieve the following goals:
  - Boost direct sales to nearby communities
  - Provide an agritourist venue
  - Improve public access to organic, farm fresh foods
  - Reduce farm waste and increase food security
  - Increase survivability of partner farms

- Expand and enhance educational activities (workshops, nutritional science...)
  - Raise awareness around matters concerning healthy food and its sovereignty
- [www.modernepidemic.org](http://www.modernepidemic.org):
  - Continues to deliver content-rich video animations, white papers, web links, books, published articles and more on how modern food and big medicine are actually debilitating us as a race.
  - Is a call to action to accelerate the pace of revolutionizing our food growing and distribution systems around the world. It also legitimizes real concern about the overuse and misuse of medicine.
- Collaboration with the Middlebridge School (MS) of Narragansett, RI is two-pronged involving the work of both the Food Hub and the Ayers Foundation. MS is a school specializing in the secondary education of students with learning challenges (e.g. ADHD, ADD, APD). Collective goals include:
  - Growing the service-based learning opportunities for MS students who particularly tend to benefit from multi-sensory, hands-on, work-based education. Opportunities being considered include but not limited to:
    - Increasing the size of school garden as a source of cafeteria food and venue for learning (now in its 3rd year of expansion)
    - Weekly internships at nearby farms and farmers' markets
  - Helping enhance the overall quality of food being served through dining services with weekly deliveries by the Farmers' Community Food Hub.
  - Other programming around nutritional science involving expert speakers on salient topics like the Human Microbiome, Food as Therapy, and more....
- Continuing collaboration with Tri-County Community Action Agency.
  - This relationship bolsters the work-based educational opportunities available in South County, and nearby counties as appropriate, by offering paid internships using Hillandale Farm as the primary learning site. WIOA - (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities ACT) eligible and/or GED students are two prime examples of beneficiaries. Some "learning" objectives include:

- Enhance students' understanding of marine, animal, and plant science
  - Supply chain management
  - Deeper understanding of sustainability
  - Creation of community gardens
  - Introduction to farmers' markets, food hub, and associated operations
  - Culinary arts
  - Direct farm retail
- Collaboration with Johnson & Wales University culinary-based Sustainability and Wellness degree program:
  - Ayers is on the advisory committee in developing curricula for this new degree program. The first learning expeditions under this program are scheduled to occur this winter/spring at Hillandale Farm and at our partner Wild Harmony Farm in Exeter, RI. An emphasis on soil health will allow students to gain a better understanding of carbon sequestration, organic matter, and the importance of compost.
  - Future programming will cover all aspects of organic and regenerative agriculture in order to equip future food and related professionals with the knowledge to make impactful decisions.
  - Adequate attention will also be allocated to food system change, food sovereignty, and community resilience.
  - Frequency and annual number of Learning Expeditions are expected to increase substantially (historically 6 per year in the fall, winter, and spring).
  - Internships throughout the year would be made possible through our partner farm network and collaborations with Tri-County Community Action, and will be designed specifically to support classroom theory. JWU is looking to its collaborators to expand internship possibilities to enhance the experiential learning.
  - In sum, real-world experiences would be leveraged to improve the quality of JWU education and the knowledge of its graduating students.
- Collaborations with the Westerly-based Transition Academy and the Perspectives Corporation continue to provide opportunities for students with developmental challenges, those on the autistic spectrum, or simply HS graduates transitioning into the workforce.

- o Students come to farm 1-2 times per week and spend up to 3 hours performing various farm chores and interacting with animals
  - o Students learn how to care for chickens, care for plants, process fuelwood, care for machinery, along with the development and refinement of life skills
  - o This weekly schedule for developmentally challenged students provides a multi-sensory, therapeutic approach toward integrating them into the workforce and building self-esteem
- The Ayers Foundation (AF) collaborated with Westerly Public Schools and community partners (Westerly Rec, United Way, Opening Doors, Southern Rhode Island Conservation District, New England Science & Sailing, and Save the Bay) to offer the Westerly Summer Learning Camp 2021 free of charge to fifty Westerly school-age (10-14) students. Campers participated in six weekly learning expeditions, spending five weeks with hands-on learning at Hillandale Farm (an AF sister company), culminating in an opportunity to practice what they had learned by revitalizing the Westerly Middle School garden. Leaders/educators on the farm included professional farmers, licensed teachers, Master Gardeners, nutrition experts, farm science undergraduate students, and a music teacher. While on the farm each week, campers participated in a variety of hands-on STEM activities including animal husbandry, soil management, plant care, culinary arts, nutritional science, and music/art.
- **Birds and Bellies** - an initiative addressing hunger in the region while concurrently preserving an organic chicken supply chain (please see <https://www.ayers-foundation.org/birds-and-bellies-food-recovery-program.html> )
- We are looking for new Directors to join our BOD, so please reach out if interested or if you know anyone who might be a good fit
- Talia Pettini-Gynther is joining the team as a part-time Program Coordinator to help with news updates, website and social media maintenance, school-aged outreach and programming, and the Summer Learning Initiative planning.

Representing our Board of Directors and the entire staff, I want to thank you for your support in helping AYERS move our cause and agenda forward. It is through like minds and an esprit de corps that great things happen!

With highest regards,

Maxson B. Hence  
President  
AYERSfoundation  
[www.ayers-foundation.org](http://www.ayers-foundation.org)