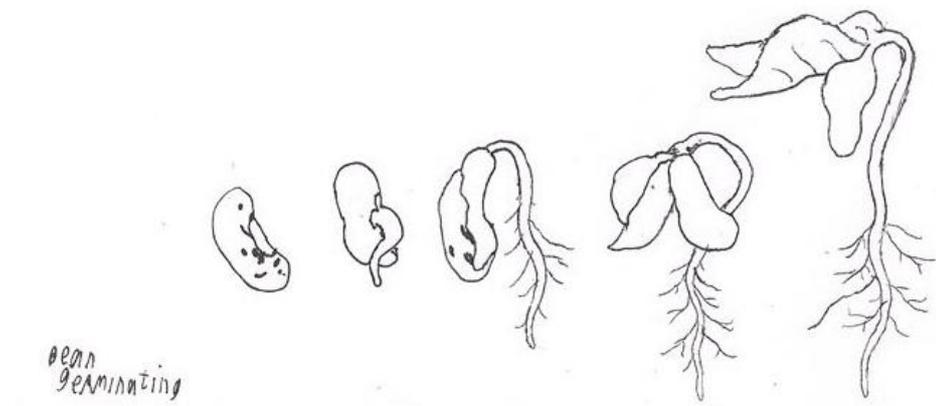


## Greenhorns

*Greenhorn:* “A person who is new to or inexperienced at a particular activity.”



(source: [www.greenhorns.net](http://www.greenhorns.net))

The Greenhorns are a grassroots organization working to support the growth of a thriving, sustainable and healthy agri-culture in the US. They represent an emerging generation of farmers, gardeners and all guardians of the earth. Describing themselves as “a rotating team of soil enthusiasts, filmmakers, tech ninjas, artists, graphic designers, cartographers and hustling interns” they are something of a motley crew (albeit a green-fingered, technically savvy and networked in one).

Whilst ‘fresh’ to the field and diverse by nature, the Greenhorns have a vision that is clear. To ‘retrofit’ current agrifood systems of the US into nourishing ones for ecosystems and bodies, today and into the future and thus to cultivate bold and bright possibilities for a renaissance in agri-culture of the US.

### *Voicing the minority*

The current farming populous in the US is recognized as unsustainable as a result of numbers and ages. The average age of the US farmer is just shy of 60 and most are due to retire in the near future. There are more prisoners than farmers in the US.

However, the Greenhorns insist there is hope. Farmers under the age of 35 have doubled between 2005-2010. The movement continues to grow. The Greenhorns are exploring how these bright young things are digging down and growing up despite institutional, economic and social challenges. In documenting, connecting and supporting the growing minority, often overlooked and underrepresented, they are broadcasting the tales of these diverse and often marginalized voices.

### *From Road Tripping to Farming*

The Greenhorns was founded in 2007 by Severine von Tscharner Fleming, a Berkeley graduate and farm apprentice. With a team of friends and fellow documentarians, Severine began filming the growing young agricultural movement rippling across the States. The production of the film connected with hundreds of young farmers from Deep South ranches to New York rooftops.

Following this epic road trip and the nationwide publicity that followed, the Greenhorns emerged as an open organization. They now collaborate with urban, suburban and rural

farmers, artists, engineers and other engaged folk across the US and beyond in a manner of ways sharing resources, innovations, catalysing and celebrating change.

*Networked in, Speaking out*

The Greenhorns have a portfolio of wide-ranging media, tools and events. Following the success of the film, a website and web-based tools were developed, a weekly radio show broadcast, a popular blog emerged and a number of young farmer literature published. They organize and catalyse wide-ranging events including workshops, mixers, celebrations and arts projects from Seed Circuses to Weed Dating. They also stand strong, supported by a number of wide-ranging coalition and pro-bono professionals.

Although their campaigning work is becoming global, they have a physical base in New York City and have a Greenhorn farm in the Hudson Valley where they grew organic veg, herbs and flowers and a menagerie of ducks, chickens, rabbits and pigs. From this base they are harvesting and offering tools, material, ideas and support, many of them free or open-sourced, for aspiring and young start-ups and campaigners connecting to this renaissance of US agriculture.

As the Greenhorns state,

*“Coast to coast, thousands of people are inspired to dig in and grow food! Yet access to the land, capital, market savvy, and skills requires for successful farming is available only to a dauntless few. Those few are brave, strong, and delightful advocates of the purposeful life, but it will take more than a few to reclaim a food system of industrial monocultures, labor abuse, and toxic factory conditions. This is the injustice our movement seeks to repair.*

*Indeed, it will take the muscle and heart of a large-scale, young-farmers movement: thousands upon thousands of hands on the land — the hands of women and immigrants, the hands of fourth-generation farm kids, the hands of college graduates and former farmworkers-turned-farmers. It will take thousands of new growers of fruits, nuts, vegetables, grains, dairy, and livestock to transform the landscape of sprawling development and corporate control into a dignified, livable, and culturally rich mosaic of ecological farming.*

*The young farmers now emerging onto the land seek to reclaim, restore, and resettle the deserted rural towns of America. We are similarly poised to revive the fabric of urban life with markets, gardens, bees, corn patches and waterways. Motivated by a force of intention that cannot be rationalized economically, with lives driven by an instinct for direct action and stewardship that honors the planet, people, and place, we are the allies of every American. Our instincts are emboldened by the mercury shatter of dew on the broccoli plants at dawn, by the roar of pollinators in a flowering crop of buckwheat, and by the river of neighbors streaming through the farm-gate clamoring for "real" tomatoes and happy chickens. The hands of young farmers on the land seek to push forward an agenda of sustainability on a human scale.*

*There is much to learn, and there is much, as a culture, that we risk forgetting. We need these bodies, we need their work, we need their food and their protagonism. We need young farmers to succeed and we need that success to be rewarded.”*

As the Greenhorns emphasise, the vitality and resilience of this growing, globalizing community and movement towards an agroecological renaissance is only made possible through real connections, collaborations and celebrations of bodies, minds and spirits, wherever they may be.

<http://www.thegreenhorns.net>  
<http://www.serveyourcountryfood.net>

### **Challenging horizons**

Severine suggests that there are three major present challenges within the US for small scale farmers: access to capital, land and healthcare. She was optimistic in contrast when considering the training opportunities available.

#### ***Access to capital***

Tech solutions seem to be a major means of addressing challenges to accessing capital, as well as potentially addressing infrastructural blockages. From kickstarters to microloans facilities, being networked in is key.

*Kiva Zip*, a sideshoot of Paypal, provides start-up farmers with business loans. Kiva is based around the idea of providing crowd-funding loan capital from individuals from around the world.

*Slow Money* is another network of potential investors. It has supported a panoply of projects including the Brooklyn Range, the Carrot Project and Maine Grains. Slow Money also offers a service called *Credibles* that offer investors the opportunity to invest in sustainable food-related businesses by pre-paying with 'edible credits' for goods in the future.

Whilst there is much potential for philanthropic support aided by tech networks and facilities, Severine emphasised the need also to recognise the importance of also lobbying at national and regional level for greater state support for small-scale, sustainable agriculture.

#### ***Access to land***

Improving access to land is dependent upon deepening and extending support from public and private bodies with policies and actions that support small-scale, ecological farming and retailing, this could include the development of public-private partnerships to improve access to land, start-up grants for qualified young farmers, protection of existing and extension of community land trusts, supporting processing infrastructure, state sponsored direct-marketing venues and friendly zoning for markets and stands.

#### ***Salinas growing sites: gaining footholds***

One innovative approach to enabling access to land is that of Alba, an agricultural and land-based training organisation based in the Salinas valley. The organisation offers a 'farmworker to farmer program' where landless farmworkers are given the opportunity to rent a small patch of land, access to facilities and equipment for production and to retail opportunities in the Salinas valley of California. Every year, the amount of land they can rent increases.

According to the organization, "*...serving a primarily Latino audience, ALBA's work is grounded by the belief that in order for limited-resource and aspiring farmers to gain a foothold within California's highly competitive farm sector, they must have access to information, operating capital, and opportunities to access land.*"

#### ***Terre de liens: patchworking agro-ecology***

The Terre de liens case from France offers hope for an enlightened approach to land access for small-scale, ecological growing. A registered charity founded in 2003, it supports organic and biodynamic small-scale farmers in securing agricultural land. In securing land from the commodity market, this land is then preserved in perpetuity only for sustainable agricultural production.

They have two key initiatives that are supportive of land access. Firstly, they have developed Le Fonds, an endowment trust which collects donations and investment in kind and in cash from public and private investors. Secondly, they have la Foncière, a solidarity investment company, which acquires farmland as an organisation which can then be leased to organic, small-scale farmers seeking land.

Terre de liens now owns over 89 farm estates and over 2,000 hectares and operates as a national association with a real estate company and 19 regional associations. They specify that they only work with farmers who farm organically or biodynamically or who are small-scale farmers committed to respecting the environment. As an organisation they have the capacity to bring together diverse stakeholders including local communities, infrastructural agencies and environmental organisations around projects.

### *Mapping Futures*

As well as gaining access to physical parcels of land, the Greenhorns also emphasise the need to be mindful of the current overarching architectures of industrial food systems of present. As part of the 'Serve Your Country Food' campaign, they are in the process of digitising a wide array of maps for open access. From cell phone reception, railway rights of ways, rivers, national forests, oil reserves, soil types, geology, highways to sheep migration patterns. This open, online digitisation and collation of such maps, the Greenhorns suggest, will help 'retrofit' food empires.

### *Access to healthcare*

As well as retrofitting the land and built environment of the current US food systems, Severe emphasizes the need for a renaissance in the political ecology of our bodies and the ways by which they are 'worked on' (or not as the case may be). With a window of positive transformation, the Greenhorns are campaigning for access to comprehensive, affordable health insurance for farmers and food-workers, as well as fair wages and equal labour rights, is a key component of the lobbying work of the Greenhorns.

### *Access to training*

Whilst the edifices and systems of unsustainable, industrial, petrochemically dependent food empires remain standing, albeit cracking and crumbling at their foundations. Whilst time lag by which such edifices and systems are doing, and continue to be doing work upon folk, as exemplified by the accelerating rates of obesity and diabetes that abound there are abundant thoughts and ideas.

Von Tscherner is hopeful when she speaks of access to training for growers of the future. In the US there is a growing range of regional and national networking and training and information exchange. This can be at an informal level, such as wwoofing or completing an apprenticeship at a farm or via a more formalised route at a land-based college training scheme.

A national apprenticeship program led by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) offers training at over 6,000 farms. The Biodynamic Farming Gardening Association (BFGA) offers training apprenticeships in biodynamic growing at over 30 farms. The BFGA is also developing a network of opportunities for the next generation of biodynamic growers (BING) hosts regional and local gatherings and publishes a e-newsletter. Training opportunities continue once growers have found a plot of land. CRAFT for example offers regional training for existing farmers to attend seminars and fieldtrips and join a regional network of sustainable farms.

However, the Greenhorns state that there is still work to be done in terms of increasing access to training for small-scale aspiring growers to learn more about agroecology. This includes further supporting university research that explores low-input, resilient, sustainable production; incubator farms to train aspiring farmers, mentor programs for start-up farmers, farmer forums for networking, marketing, resource-sharing, processing and exchanges and the mainstreaming practical training programs for growers in to the college curriculum.

### *Ubuntu*

In listening to von Tscherner and the work of the Greenhorns, it is clear that collaborations and networks of hospitality and reciprocity clearly support and nourish forms of enlightened agriculture. Public laboratory and farm hack are examples of open source resources for developing farm tools and practices. Community land trusts are grounded examples of beacons of light or glades of hope, exemplary sites from which others can learn, exchange, collaborate and shine on.

In the conversations that arose in the discussions around accessing to land, training and capital at the Oxford Real Farming Conference 2014, there is no doubt, this is a universal movement. As Ana Digon of Regenerative Agriculture Spain explains, Ubuntu is based on the idea of ‘shared light’: a universal bond that connects us all. From FarmHack to apprenticeships to community land trusts, Ubuntu resounds. Every word, every action, every thought is underpinned, as Jyoti Fernandes of Landworkers Alliance, “by the exquisite beauty that is the web of life.” Let us come together and share and nurture this light.

### **Links**

<http://www.kickstarter.com>

<http://www.kiva.org>

<http://slowmoney.org>

<https://credibles.org/>

<http://www.albafarmers.org>

<http://www.terredeliens.org>

[www.woofusa.org](http://www.woofusa.org)

<https://www.biodynamics.com/nabdap-program-structure>

<http://www.tristatecraft.org>

<https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/internships/>

[www.publiclaboratory.org](http://www.publiclaboratory.org)

[www.opensourceecology.org](http://www.opensourceecology.org)

## **Greenhorns at Work**

At the Oxford Real Farming Conference 2014, Severine von Tscharner presented a panoply of projects bubbling away across the states.

### *Farming New York Roof Tops*

The Grange host the world's largest rooftop soil farm on two rooftops in Brooklyn and Queens, at 2.5 acres.

Funded by private equity, loans, grassroots fundraising and crowdfunding platforms, they lease the two rooftop spaces from a private partner and the Brooklyn Navy Yard on ten and twenty year leases. Operating as a commercial venture, the farm grows and sells over 50,000 pounds of organic produce per year. They also have also launched a commercial apiary on a neighbouring roof, keep egg-laying hens and have established a mushroom growing enterprise in two old pharmaceutical labs.

The Grange sell produce to CSA members, restaurants and the public. They have been experimenting also with a pop-up produce store. They offer training to dozens of trainees and thousands of New York kids every year via an educational non-profit 'City Growers'. Key is the provision of a reliable living wage to growers. As well as produce and training, the Grange offer consultancy and construction services. The roofs are also sites for events including weddings, dinner parties and screenings.

Although the Grange is not certified organic, they follow organic principles. Growing on a roof is also an advantage in potentially toxic urban environments since many of the heavy metal particulates do not make it up to the rooftops.

<http://brooklyngrangefarm.com>

### *The River that Flows*



(source: [www.greenhorns.net](http://www.greenhorns.net))

The Vermont Sail Freight Project consists of a sailing barge with a 12 ton cargo capacity. The barge made a 300 mile passage bearing Vermont-produced foods along the river Hudson to trade goods in New York City and other stop-off points along the way.

Named "Ceres," for the Roman goddess of grain and agriculture, the vessel set sail for NYC laden with a hold full of fall produce, including apples, rice, winter squash, dry beans, cabbages, wheat flour, potatoes, onions and garlic, jams, salsas, pickles and sauces, adding to

the load along the way. There is no refrigeration on deck. It takes a different approach to feeding New York, offering an alternative to small farmers having to drive to town to sell their produce and using a lot of time and fuel to do so.

Orders can be made using the online Vermont-based farmers' market [yourfarmstand.com](http://yourfarmstand.com). Customers order and pay online using PayPal. The website offers a live-feed of estimated accurate delivery times.

<http://www.vermontsailfreightproject.com>

### *Carbon Ranching*

Carbon Ranching is supportive of any practice that works towards developing healthy soil and healthy carbon cycle. Practices include enriching soil carbon, planting perennials, employing climate-friendly livestock practices, conserving natural habitats, restoring degraded watersheds and rangelands and producing local food. This might include planned grazing systems; active restoration of riparian and wetland areas; removal of woody vegetation; conservation of open space; no-till farming and the development of long-term resilient systems (defined as “the capacity of land or people to ‘bend’ with changes without breaking”<sup>1</sup>).

Carbon ranch grazing works at the most ecologically beneficial timings, intensities and frequencies of grazing. Benefits of such an approach to ranching might include local grass-fed and organic food, wood, fiber and fuel; habitat protection; rural economic development; educational opportunities; enriched local cultures and diversity; healthier watersheds; biotic integrity; flood, pest and disease regulation; nutrient cycling and soil stability; as well as spiritual educational aesthetic and recreational experiences.

<http://www.carbonranching.org>

### *The Fiber Shed*

Founded in 2012, the Fiber Shed applies the idea of a foodshed to fibre. It seeks to challenge global conventional textile industries by supporting and enhancing local textile cultures, economies and cultures. Fiber Shed when the founder, made a commitment to develop and wear a prototype wardrobe whose dyes, fibres and labour were sourced from a region no larger than 150 miles from the project HQ.

As an organisation, it is working to support and developing regional, resilient, community organised textile cultures. This includes decentralising textile supply chains in California; reducing the petrochemically reliant textile industry and encouraging reliance upon renewable energy sources; increasing sustainable organic production and reducing toxic dye residues; supporting regional communities of artisans and farmers; educating the public on the potential environmental, economic and social benefits of doing so.

<http://www.fibershed.com>

### *Mad River Food Hub*

The Mad River Food Hub is a fully licensed food processing facility in Vermont. It is available for rent at a daily rate and offers support for start-up enterprises. It also offers distribution opportunities to local markets.

The group are also involved in the development of a farms map and Localvore Project which celebrates, supports and publicises local food in the Mad River Valley through collaborating and connecting producers, suppliers, distributors, stores, restaurants, schools and institutions.

<http://madrivertfoodhub.com>

*Farm Hack*

Farm Hack is an independent non-profit organization working towards the development, documentation and manufacture of open source farm tools, research and skills for 'resilient agriculture' and fresh, healthy food and revived local manufacturing.

Farm Hack is not just for farmers but for anyone building and making tools relevant for a resilient agriculture. The online platform links engineers, roboticists, designers, architects, fabricators, programmers, hackers. Off line, Farm Hack initiates skill-sharing and building workshops and events across the US and beyond. According to Farm Hack "greater knowledge sharing will lead to improved tools, skills and biological insight to achieve our goals with elegance. Open-source seeds, breeds and technology are the fastest way to accelerate the innovation and adaptation."

<http://farmhack.net>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.carbonranching.org/INTRO/CWCarbonRanchRangelands.pdf> (White, 2007:27)