

Sholan Farms-The People's Community Orchard

Happy New Year!

Well, 2020 sure had its challenges—more than we expected. We know that farming is never easy when dealing with Mother Nature, but throw in the 2020 pandemic and we were all forced to think differently. This year was certainly one for change—but through it all we did find safer ways to manage our day-to-day work. We continue to be amazed at the generosity of our volunteers, staff, greater community, neighbors, members and customers for the unselfish support that you gave throughout the year. We did not have optimistic feelings about what the pandemic would do to our business. But through it all the Sholan team made this one of our most memorable years. We are incredibly lucky to have a top-notch team in place.

At Sholan Farms, we look back on 2020 with gratitude for the opportunity to provide for and connect with the community. With all the changes we faced together, our relationships have grown stronger. Whether it was shifting to virtual meetings, social distancing, wearing masks, reorganizing customer flow, or launching a new drop picking bag program, Sholan Farms took some leaps this year, and this community has been supportive all the way.

We are all grateful for the many individuals, businesses, community groups and foundations that support our agricultural and educational initiatives. A substantial percentage of our income comes from contributed support, we extend our deep appreciation to all those who give charitably to help us focus on forging relationships between people, their food supply, and the land from which it grows.

Highlights of Accomplishments:

- Ralph Sacramone and Northstar Roofing for renovating the Grandstand
- Apple Picking -The staff and volunteers harvested over 4,000 bushels of apples
- Orchard Removal - A small team removed over 100 less-productive Marshall McIntosh apple trees to make way for new varieties such as Evercrisp & SweetMAIA
- Sold produce at Westminster, Fitchburg and Leominster Farmer's Markets
- Blueberries— a hearty team of volunteers transplanted over 100 plants
- Installation— New Interpretive Sign "Johnny Appleseed Rambo Tree" funded by Freedom's Way

As we look towards 2021, we will continue to be good stewards of the land, and protect open spaces for future generations to come. A thought hit me— The Friends of Sholan Farms began this journey in 2001 and the farm itself dates back over 200 years. Overall, keeping this farm in operation is an amazing accomplishment. We are hopeful that by the fall we can offer educational tours and other interactive social events.

2021 holds lots of promise for Sholan Farms. In addition to pruning thousands of trees, we are busy planning for the new section. With over 3,000 apple trees in the orchard, pruning can be a daunting task. To be exact, it takes our team, with the help of our "Saturday Crew" volunteers, three months to complete. The most important reason we prune in the winter is because the trees are in a dormant state. Dormant pruning stimulates stronger, more vigorous growth. If you are interested in helping with pruning please contact Joanne or Mike. We are grateful for everyone who has helped make the Farm a success—the original team of visionaries who got the Farm up and running, all the fantastic staff we have had over the years, Board members who have done everything from planning, picking, planting, rubbish pick up, cleaning filing tax returns, and everyone who has supported the farm with gifts large and small, buying our produce and attending events and educational programs. This Farm will continue to grow and thrive because it is a cherished part of this community. We wish you and your families a fantastic and healthy new year. We hope you will continue to support Sholan Farms in the year ahead. To find out how you can help please feel free to contact any board member. We welcome any and all suggestions.

With Gratitude,
Joanne DiNardo, President FOSF

Christmas Tree and Light Show Update

Just when we think we have everything figured out something happens and everything changes. This year with the pandemic we thought Christmas tree sales would not go well so we ordered less trees. Steve ordered 100 less trees than last year thinking that we'd be lucky to sell them all.

We opened for sales the day after Thanksgiving and in **9 days** every tree, wreath and swag were gone! People came quickly to purchase their trees this year. Was it the pandemic that brought them out for some fresh air and holiday cheer? We're not sure but are thankful for the sales and the profit. We thank the many volunteers and staff that set up the tree lot, unloaded 400 trees and worked in the tree lot waiting on customers, carrying trees to their cars and securing them for safe transport home.

The Christmas Light Show was spectacular this year. We thank Steve and Cynthia Smith and their son Jeffrey for all their work planning and setting up the light show. It takes many hours of tedious planning and coordinating to produce the light show. They quietly go about their work without fanfare. They added to last years display and it was enjoyed by so many people. The parking lot was full every evening with cars parked along Pleasant Street and across the street watching the show. It was a safe, family oriented event for all to enjoy.

—Patti LaGrassa

Apple Blossom Festival

Nothing would please me more than to announce that the 20th Apple Blossom Festival will be held on May 16.

We have all lived through challenging times this past year. We all believed we would be back to normal long ago. With the release of the COVID vaccines once again we thought we would see relief from the virus. Now, unfortunately, getting that vaccine to us is taking longer than expected. With all that said, I am still hopeful that we can have our festival. We usually begin planning meetings in February. This year, I think it best to hold off on planning until things get back to normal.

My hope is this new year brings positive change quickly. I know that all of the festival teams will pull together if we can safely hold a festival in May.

—Patti LaGrassa

Community Gardens

Looking for a new Team Leader

If you like gardening and are detail oriented, you are the person I am looking for. After a good number of years, I am looking for someone to learn the ropes of running the Community Gardens. The job is not very physical. I have a few go to people that are extremely helpful. I send out a few letters to returning gardeners to stir up interest, plan sign up dates, collect fees, and plot locations. A little problem solving is involved at times. For the most part I really enjoy dealing with the people, many of them have become friends. If this sounds like something you might be interested in give me a call.

Joe LeBlanc—508-331-0829

Board of Directors

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Special thanks to the Friends Board of Directors who volunteer their time throughout the year to make Sholan Farms succeed. A sincere thanks goes to their family members who have also given their time and support to the board members which enabled them to make such a commitment to Sholan Farms.

Thank You All

Thoughts from Mike Meehan, Orchard Manager

Good day, all! Sitting in my kitchen, watching the winter wind blow through the trees, I can't help but start getting pumped up about the upcoming season at Sholan Farms. Felt good to be back at the farm last year, and I am super excited about hitting the ground running this spring.

"Whoa, there, bucko!", you might say to me. We have to make it through the winter first! And you'd be right. Any stir crazy folks out there want to get out and about on the farm on a cold winter's day, just let me know! When the pruners arrive, there will be plenty to do. Probably about two weeks of brush pulling, pushing, top pruning, etc....I'm gathering a team to take care of this work lickity-split, let me know if you want to be part of the fun!!

Speaking of which, allow me to take a moment to express my gratitude to the volunteers that make this farm work, and make my job such a pleasure. It is an honor to work with each and every one of you, and I can't tell you how much I appreciate your assistance. From picking rocks, mulching blueberries, and singing John Denver songs in the spring right up to selling Christmas trees at the start of winter, you all have never let me down. Thank you.

OK< now, let's get down to the elephant in the room. The big gaping hole where half of our Marshall McIntosh were (north end of the farm, adjacent to Pleasant St.)....I know some people have expressed concern about the future of Sholan Farms when they saw us cutting a couple acres of trees. Fear not! It was merely the next step in some ongoing orchard revocations we have undertaken. Like any farm or orchard, we grow more of certain varieties than we really need. It is a hard emotional decision to make, cutting down all those beautiful trees, but a necessary one. We grow far more Marshall McIntosh than we can sell, so the decision was made to take them down and replace them with varieties that will help round out our offering. Exactly what we are going to replace them with is mostly unknown at this time, as meetings have just started to plan this out. One thing for sure, though, is that we will definitely be putting in some great early apples to start our u-pick earlier in the year.

So, after pruning, what's next? Spring is a busy time on the farm, and I can't wait to get started. There is nothing in the world like the feeling of the springtime sun on your back as you break the farm out of its winter slumber, and prepare it to face the long summer ahead. There is nothing like it. If anyone feels the need to just get out of the house, there is always something to do at the farm. Feel free to contact me at any time. Below is a list of farm activities that are always available for volunteer activities (in rough order):

- ~Trellis pruning, mid-February, contact Joanne DiNardo for details 987-870-5555
- ~Pruning cleanup, brush burning, etc.
- ~Spring equipment maintenance, repair
- ~Field preparation, rock picking...
- ~Mowing, weed wacking, general landscaping...
- ~Garden planting
- ~Irrigation setup, repair, etc....
- ~Blueberry mulching
- ~Ongoing summer activities: Garden, raspberries, blueberries, etc...maintenance and harvest

I think that's it! Besides, I am out of space. Again, can't thank you all enough for sharing the wonder of Sholan Farms with me. I am very much looking forward to this coming year, and I can't wait to see y'all at the farm!

—Mike Meehan 978-660-4556



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Sholan Farms®

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This newsletter was compiled and
edited by Patti LaGrassa

About Our Organization

The Friends of Sholan Farms is a non-profit corporation that relies solely on the support of its members, sponsors and volunteers. We are formed under the 501(c)3 statutes and all donations are a tax write-off. Founded in 2001.



Calendar Notes

February

March

April

May

Sholan Farms Staff

Mike Meehan, Orchard Manager

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mikemeehan@sholanfarms.com

Give Mike a call if you would like to help out in the orchard.