



JUNE 2024

{{First Name}},

Have you ever wondered where the expression "dog days of summer" comes from? After nearly four weeks of no rain in central Virginia broken only by one single, merciful downpour, I keep finding this expression on the tip of my tongue.

So, I googled it for you: "The brightest star in the sky is Sirius, also known as **the Dog Star**. **It was regarded by the ancient Greeks as the bringer of scorching heat, because its early-morning rising coincided with the hottest summer days of July and August.**"

Surprising no one who's paying attention, the heat came to us earlier than it might have for the Greeks. **We felt it on farm visits in Chicago, where Director of Ag. Business Advising, Alex Pate, visited a handful of inspiring farmers working with our new partners at [The Conservation Fund](#).** And Lending Director, Indy Brahm, and I sure felt it when **we visited Puerto Rico in May, where it was approximately a million degrees but the locals kept saying, "The real heat is coming!"** As promised, read on for an overview of what we've got brewing in the most tropical climate Foodshed Capital has served yet.

Despite the heat, **the regeneration-focused farmers we support are still out there, every day, working with the resources they have and against great odds to feed us. FoodCap sent \$230,000 out the door to these farmers in June**, and as always, we're so proud to highlight the ways they're making nutritious, regeneratively produced food more accessible to their communities.

If you're new to these monthly musings, welcome! To our faithful funders, friends, fellow service providers, and farmers, thanks for keeping up with our journey.

With gratitude,

Erica Hellen
Director of Strategy & Comms.



CAPITAL IN THE FIELD



1) Rustic Road Farm // Elburn, Illinois



Hot off the presses! We just closed this loan on Friday, **so you're the first to hear about our support of the very good folks at [Rustic Road Farm](#)**. Because we love firsts and why stop with one, I'll point out this is also **our first loan made through a referral from The Conservation Fund's Working Farms Fund**. You can bet there will be more to come as we expand our work in the Midwest.

Rustic Road Farm was **founded in 2012 by Marc and Luis Bernard on a 5.5-acre piece of land in rural Elburn, IL with the intention of providing fresh, sustainably grown vegetables** to select Chicago restaurants. Quickly, Marc and Luis realized the folks right nearby in Kane County were hungry for produce that was grown ethically and with passion, so **they pivoted to a model that focused on feeding their immediate community**.

RRF has since expanded to 18 acres, launched an on-site farm stand, and grown their CSA from 25 to over 750 members. In 2016, the farm began offering a line of farm-grown soups and sauces, and production has grown to include hogs, poultry and eggs, honey, and a variety of tree fruits.

In 2023, RRF partnered with The Conservation Fund's Working Farms program to purchase the historic 30-acre Cloonlara Farm. Over the next ten years, TCF will work to place a permanent conservation easement on the property before transferring full ownership to RRF. Rustic Road's expansion onto the Cloonlara will allow them to **expand further to produce wagyu beef, value-add their products, and host community events**.

A low-interest loan from Foodshed Capital will allow RRF to drill a new well on the property, as well as renovate Cloonlara's large historic barn to accommodate a new milk house, creamery, and kitchen. If you're in the Chicago area, be on the lookout for their forthcoming artisan goat cheese!

2) Jones Gardens // Staunton, Virginia



Sure, we love firsts, but we also love seconds! **In June, we were proud to provide a second round of 0% interest financing to the women-owned force that is [Jones Gardens](#).**

Launched in 2021 by Staunton natives Naomi and Sarah Jones, their **goal was to create enriching community spaces called "garden parks" which would be simultaneously beautiful and functional:** places that could be enjoyed just like any park or green space, while providing locals with healthy food. Having grown up in a lower income household, **the Joneses personally identified with the struggle to put fresh food on the table.**

Jones Gardens has since transformed unused parcels of land in Staunton into vibrant edible landscapes, **improving fresh food availability in the community and providing a setting for people of all backgrounds to gather.** They began their first garden park on just .14 acres of land and produced 1,600 pounds of organic food during their first growing season. They have now expanded to a second parcel, **upping their yield to 6,500 pounds produce and allowing them to feed over 60 Staunton households every week.**

In 2022, we provided Jones Gardens with a 0% interest loan to hire an employee to staff their neighborhood market. **In June, additional 0% interest financing allowed them to add a food storage facility and cold storage to accommodate increased production.** We have a feeling there is more growth to come!



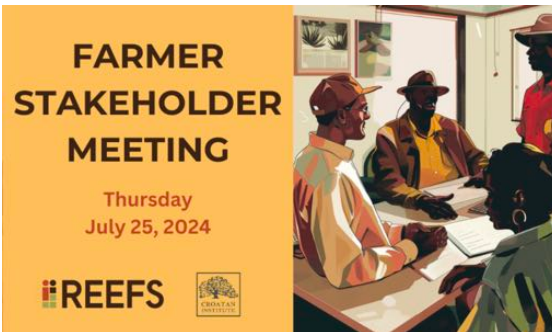
**Brighter
Future Fund**

by American Farmland Trust

AFT Brighter Future Fund

This national [grant opportunity from American Farmland Trust](#) is dedicated to supporting beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged, women, and veteran farmers and ranchers. **Typical max grant amount is \$5,000.**

Hurry! Applications accepted TODAY July 1st through July 8th and will be reviewed in the order they're received. [More info here.](#)



Farmer Stakeholder Meeting

Attention, BIPOC farmers! Join our partners at [Croatan Institute](#) for an action-oriented day offering free financial resources, 1:1 technical assistance, and networking.

Thursday, July 25, 2024
Register by July 22

FoodCap will be in attendance - please say hello! **There is no cost to attend, but spots are limited. Farms and food business owners in the Northeast are eligible to receive up to \$10,000 in support.** [More info here.](#)



Monte Azul Foundation // Yabucoa, Puerto Rico



Andrew Hermann, Executive Director of Monte Azul Foundation, with FoodCap Lending Director, Indy Brahm, and Director of Strategy & Comms, Erica Hellen.

Monte Azul Foundation is an agricultural non-profit that supports farmers in Puerto Rico with technical assistance, farm planning, resource sharing, and other business growth needs. It was founded in 2018 after Hurricane Maria to help meet the urgent need for more local food, a significant task on an island where over 85% of food is imported.

Back in October, **ED Andrew Hermann reached out to FoodCap with a desire to learn more about 0% interest lending in the hopes of filling a major gap in capital access for small-scale farmers on the island.** Fast forward to now... We've had numerous conversations with Andrew and laid the groundwork to fill the role of capital provider for Monte Azul's farmer network.

In May, Director of Lending, Indy Brahm, and I made our way down to PR to meet with Andrew and several of the partner farms to **better understand what regenerative agriculture looks like in a tropical context**, and to work through the final pieces of a custom, Spanish-language version of our loan application. Later this summer, we'll kick off this pilot loan fund by **providing ten farmers in Monte Azul's network with 0% interest micro-loans to expand their businesses through egg-laying hens.**



Getting the lowdown on island-grown diversified veggies with Nick (right) of [Finca Caribe](#)

The foundation's headquarters is also home to a farmstand, "The Canasta Saludable," which provides a **retail outlet for regional farmers including fresh produce, pantry items, frozen meats, ice cream, in-house roasted coffee, and even kombucha.**

In the coming months, **Monte Azul will add a commercial kitchen to the property for farmers to value-add their products.** They are also in the process of renovating a building that will house laying hen breeding stock so partner farmers can purchase pullets locally rather than importing them.

There is a small amount of land in cultivation with peppers, tubers, pineapples, and other tropical plants. Raised beds with drip irrigation and shade cloth protect herbs from the intense heat, and across the road, **an additional 25+ acres will soon be planted with dwarf plantain trees, which are more resistant to hurricane winds.**

Thanks to Andrew for graciously providing Indy and I with the grand tour of Yabucoa and several of the partner farms (as well as feeding us plantain cooked more ways than we could count!). Even on such a small island, there is incredible variation in micro-climate: weed pressure makes to-till an impossibility in wet flood-prone lowlands, but using a tractor up in the mountains is a recipe for major erosion.

With no 'one size fits all' solution to agricultural technical assistance in PR, **Andrew and his team of agronomists take care to work closely with every farmer to custom-fit Monte Azul's support services,** and to connect the farmers to each other to build morale and foster resource exchange. **We're so proud to be partnering with this organization which is so equally focused on leveling the playing field for small-scale farmers,** particularly in a geography where "limited resource" takes on new meaning.

We'll keep you posted as the pilot project unfolds!



Talking plantains and peppers with Gabriel of [Finca Tavite](#)

PLEASE: SUPPORT
OUR WORK

With five different ways to support our work, there's a little something for everyone.

Please click on through today to help us make transformative 0% interest-lending and zero-cost business support possible for more farmers.

Support Our Work



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