

# LETTERBOX FARM COLLECTIVE



HUDSON, NY

# LETTERBOX FARM COLLECTIVE

We are a 7-year old diversified market farm collectively owned by three farmer-owners (Faith, Nichki and Laz).

We raise: vegetables, herbs, flowers, pork, chicken, eggs, and rabbit using best practices in animal welfare and organic management.

We distribute our goods through: 3 farmers markets, a fleet of restaurants in the valley, a few distributors, and a 50 member full-diet CSA that runs April-Christmas.

To support our business, we also host a few private events per year and run a farm stay program. Outside the work day, we undertake research, education and organizing projects that benefit the farm community.



2013





2019

# Vision Statement: Letterbox Farm Collective

Letterbox Farm Collective is a small worker-owned farm business that seeks to address the challenges to young and beginning farmers through collaboration.

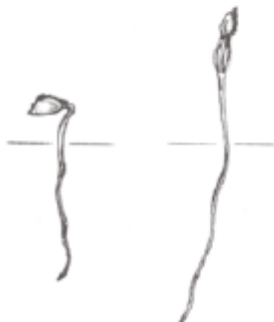
- Mission**
- To create a just livelihood and a livable lifestyle for new farmers
  - To supply our community with accessible food that is rich in nutrition and rich in heritage
  - To act as a cultural and educational resource by cultivating artistry and sharing our relationship with food, farm, and forest
  - To be responsible stewards of our land and to restore the vitality of our ecosystem

**Vision** Letterbox provides a model of agriculture that is mutually supportive, ecologically responsible, and aesthetically rich. Our central values include:

**Inclusivity:** We seek members of diverse backgrounds and opinions, and strive to make our food accessible to those of limited means. Most of our events and workshops are conducted on a sliding scale. We are a democratic workplace that involves all stakeholders in decision-making processes.

**Transparency:** We are open with our financial practices and seek to share our experiences and support others who wish to recreate our model.

**Humility:** We are stewards, rather than owners, of our land and knowledge. We approach our entry into agriculture and to Columbia County humbly, remaining receptive to the experience of others and to the social fabric







2013: Starting Out













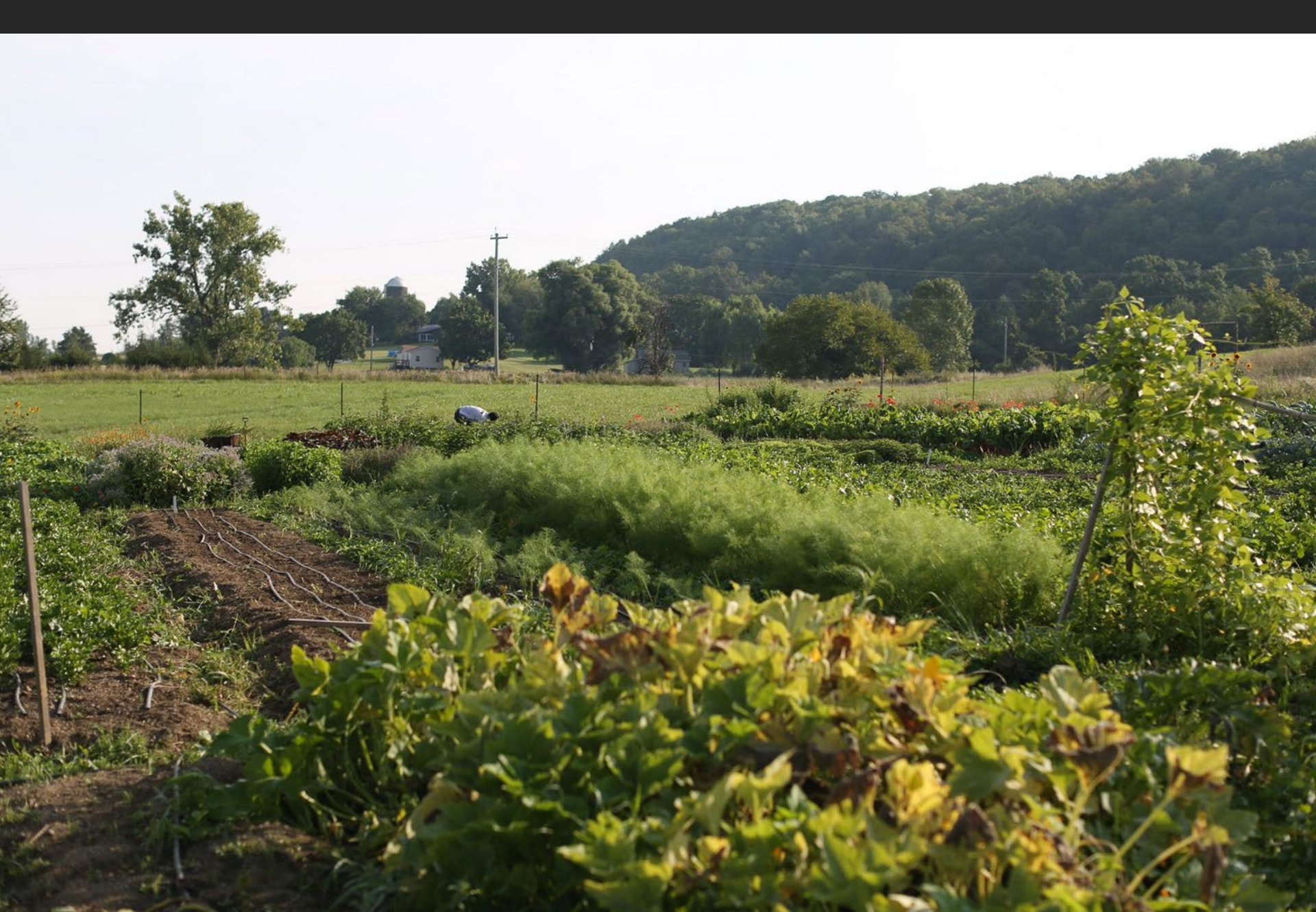




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## 2014: The Land Saga

In 2014, my business partners joined me on the land with their livestock, and we worked together on expanding the farm.

That same year, the landowner passed away – and we had to either try to buy it or leave at the end of the year.

With two additional partners, 5 young people set out to raise funds to purchase a 64-acre parcel... in 6 months.



# Letterbox Farm's Land Purchase

- 35%: Mortgage from Farm Credit East, co-signed by family member (the largest amount we could afford)
- 35%: Conservation easement from Scenic Hudson
- 15%: Equity from 5 partners & contributions from their family members
- 12%: Bridge loans crowd-sourced from friends, family, community members
- The difference: fundraised at one very stressful fundraising dinner















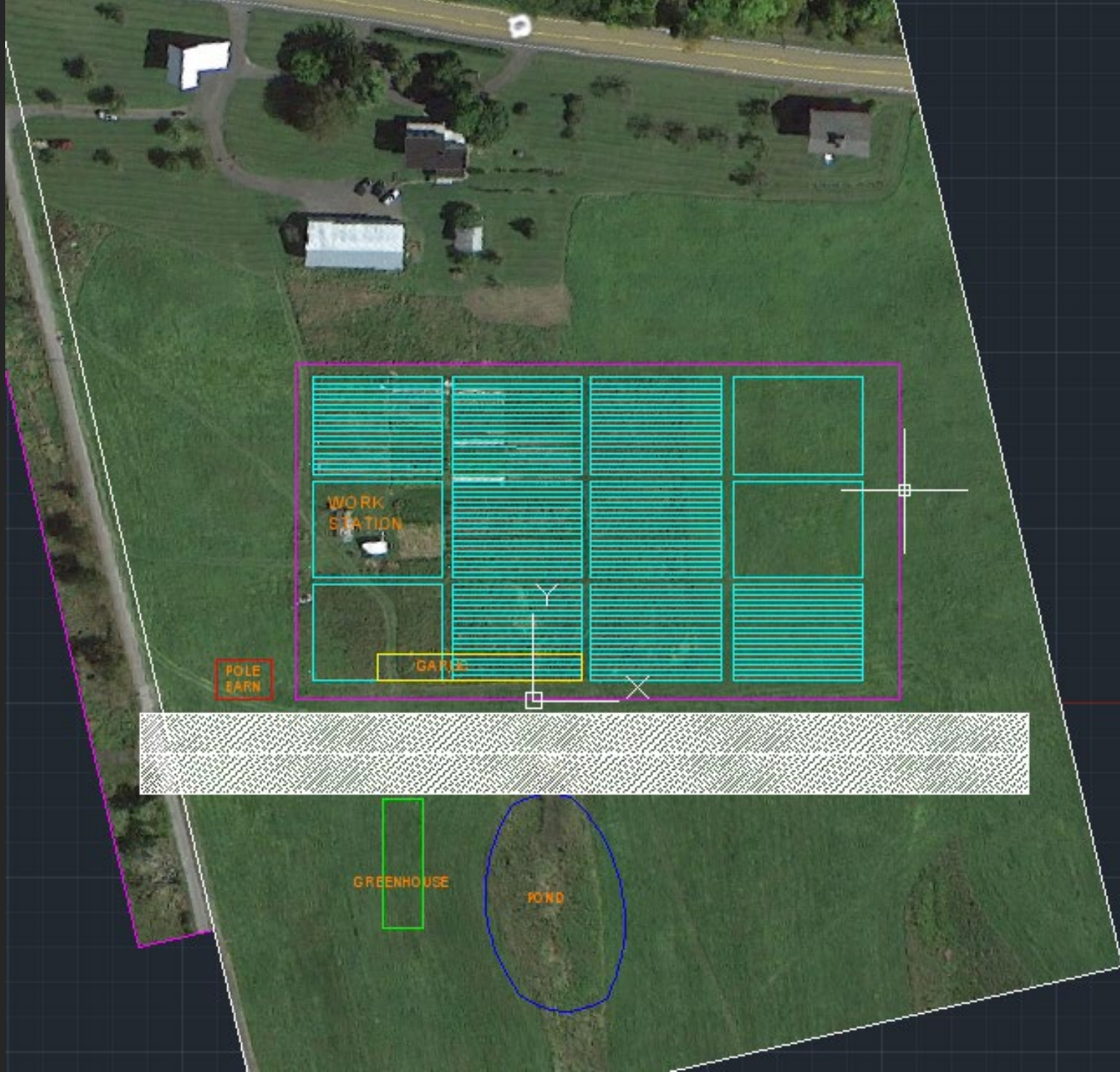
# 2015: The Big Build

## ~50k to ~150k

To support our whole team and our new land costs, we had to triple the size of the farm.

We added a CSA, two new livestock enterprises, and our first employee.

We installed an irrigation pond, put up new fencing, constructed a 30x96' greenhouse, purchased new tractors and equipment and learned to use them, built mobile livestock housing, and supervised/participated in building a small home for Nichki and Laz, and cleared out buildings for farm use.







Mountainview







# 2016: The Conundrum

## ~150k to 200k

As construction wrapped up, we settled into our new spaces and systems. We had our first seasonal crew (3 people) and focused on planning and standardizing farm production.

However, even after another 25% expansion, we had not met our financial goals, and we needed to take another growth leap to be viable.

But! We had a lot to grow into already, had little/no financial buffer, and were personally exhausted and overworked. What was our lowest risk, personally attainable, and most affordable option for growing our business?



# 2016: The Conundrum

## ~150k to 200k

We modeled different scenarios for scaling up – 5 acres of vegetables, or season extension

What would the investment costs be?

What actions and skills would each require?

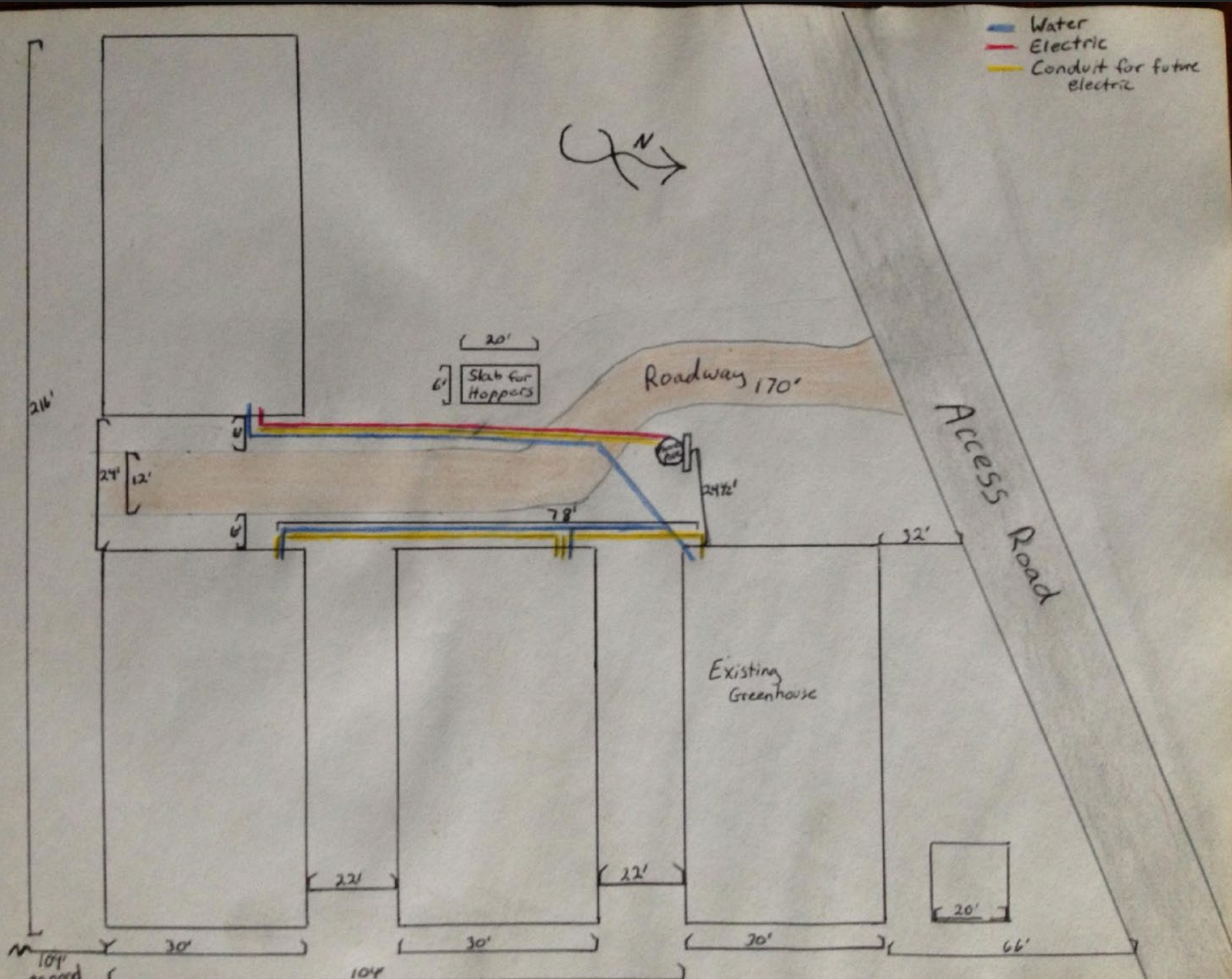
What felt more attainable and supported more of our goals?

We pursued different sources of capital... and modeled out different scenarios in case any of them didn't go through.

SOURCES OF FUNDS	
FCE Line of Credit	\$50,000
NRCS EQIP Grant	\$14,300
NYS New Farmer Grant	\$29,991
<b>Total Sources of Funds</b>	<b>\$94,291</b>
USES OF FUNDS	
Equipment and Buildings	30900
3 Hoop houses, 30'x96' with roll-up sides	23400
Bulk Feed Storage Bins	7500
Construction Materials	\$8,200
Contract Labor	\$17,075
Supporting Expenses (Non-Eligible for Grant - For Information Only)	
Well Installation (for greenhouse water supply)	\$18,000
FCE Stock	\$2,000
Roadway development to greenhouses	\$2,000
Small Equipment	\$3,806
<b>Total Eligible Expenses</b>	<b>\$59,981</b>
Grant request - 50%	\$29,991
<b>Total Uses of Funds</b>	<b>\$81,981</b>



- Water
- Electric
- Conduit for future electric



# 2016: The Conundrum

## ~150k to 200k

Repeat of 2015 process:

- thorough budgeting, construction and timeline planning
- application to NYS New Farmer Grant
- AND additional term loan.

Applied and received funding for two vegetable hoop houses, a new livestock house, a frost-free water source (new well), and bulk feed bins.



# 2017: Going Year Round

## 200k to 250k



# Where we are now...

Growing into our new infrastructure, taking a moment to make no big growth leaps, and continually streamlining our multi-faceted farm. Here's how it looks now...





























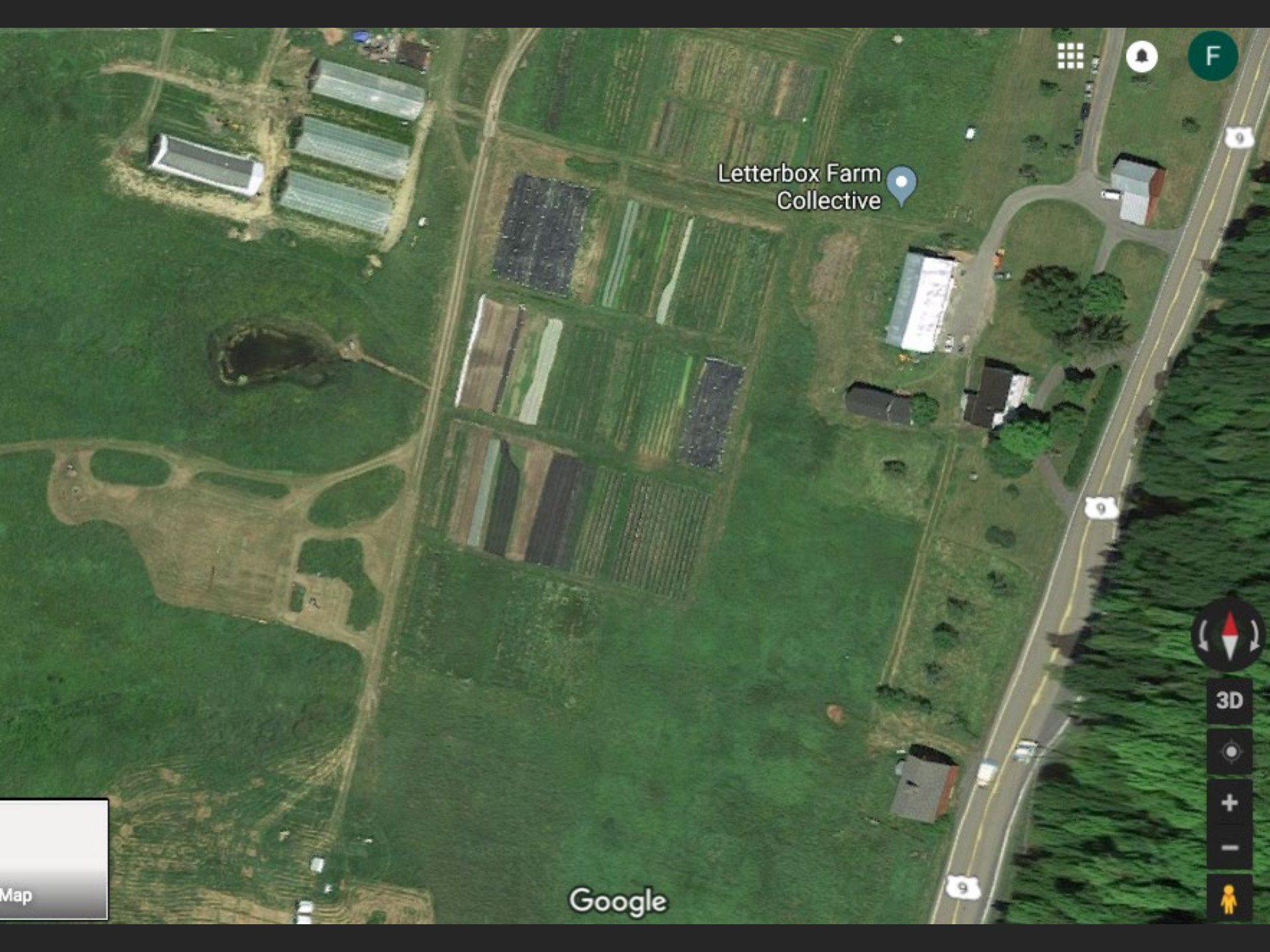








Mountainview



Letterbox Farm  
Collective

Google

Map

Navigation controls including a compass, 3D view toggle, and zoom in/out buttons.



# LETTERBOX FARM PRODUCTION AND SALES HISTORY

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Intensive Vegetable Production	.75 acres	1 acre	1.5 acres	2.5 acres	2.75 acres	2.75 acres
Pigs		3	10	24	28	30
Meat Birds	400	1000	2000	2400	2800	2800
Laying Hens/Ducks	20	100	200	300	350	350
Farm Revenue	\$45k	\$135k	\$180k	\$220k	\$240k	\$290k
Agritourism, Research, and Education			\$5k	\$35k	\$45k	\$52k
Total Revenue Increase from Previous Year	250%	181%	50%	28%	15%	17%
Owner Operators	2	3	3	3	3	3
Seasonal Staff	0	1	3	4	4	2
Year-Round Staff	0	0	0	0	0	2

## The Tools We Used...

### To Purchase Our Land:

- Community bridge loans
- Fundraising Advisors
- Family member co-signer; family contributions
- Cooperative strategy (pooled capital)

### To build our business:

- Written Proposal
- Budget templates (to start)
- Part-time/winter jobs in the first 1-2 years
- Cost research and detailed budgeting for investments
- Low-interest Farm Service Agency loans
- Records-based decisions on what was working and what needed to change
- Lots of shameless bravado



## ARTICULATING VISION

## PLANNING FINANCES

## ORGANIZING PEOPLE + OPERATIONS

### KEY QUESTIONS

- WHAT SHOULD THE NEW ECONOMY LOOK LIKE?
- WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR ...
  - YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE?
  - YOUR COMMUNITY ROLE?
  - YOUR ECOLOGICAL IMPACT?
- WHAT WILL YOU CREATE IN THE WORLD?
- WHAT DOES YOUR PROJECT LOOK LIKE "ON PAPER"?
- WHAT RESOURCES WILL YOU NEED TO BEGIN?
- HOW WILL MONEY FLOW THROUGH YOUR PROJECT?
- WHAT DOES BUDGETING TELL US ABOUT APPROPRIATE SCALE FOR OUR PROJECTS?
- HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR PROJECT EASY TO RUN?
- HOW DO WE CULTIVATE POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE?
- HOW DO WE ACT IN HEALTHY PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS?
- HOW DO WE LEAD AS AN ACT OF SERVICE?

### TOOLS & SKILLS

- HOLISTIC GOAL SETTING
- UNDERSTANDING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
- WRITING BUDGETS AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
- PARTNERSHIP & COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS
- MEETING FACILITATION & RHYTHMS
- STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

### TAKE- AWAYS

**PROPOSAL**  
FOR YOUR FUTURE PROJECT

**BUDGETS**  
FOR THE FIRST 3 YEARS

**HANDBOOK**  
OF ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES