

Glynwood

August 29, 2019



Training the Next Generation of Farmers in Responsible, Sustainable Agriculture

By ML Ball (SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019, EDITION 32)

Photographed by Steven Steele Cawman

WE NEED A NEW food system. One that promotes biodiversity, social justice and sustainable land stewardship. That can mitigate climate change. That is accessible to all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, education or income status. Does such a system exist? Yes, at Glynwood.

Five miles outside of Cold Spring in the middle of Clarence Fahnestock State Park, this nationally recognized nonprofit is training the next generation of farmers in the practices of regenerative agriculture, believing that food grown and raised with the best soil-building and husbandry practices is fundamental for human health.

Fortunately for those of us living in the Hudson Valley, Glynwood's methods are not only working but thriving.

Says Kathleen Finlay, Glynwood's president, "The mission of Glynwood is to build and keep expanding the regional food system we've developed here in the Hudson Valley. There are many threats to that—development being a major one.

The aging out of farmers is another. My charge is to amplify the impact of this organization, and at the same time, help other areas trying to create regional food systems to understand what we're doing."

To carry out that mission, Glynwood focuses its efforts in three program areas: Training Farmers, Empowering Changemakers and Creating Coalitions. Each area is comprehensive and multilayered, with a 360-degree vision of what resources and support a particular group needs in order to best succeed.



For example, Glynwood's Training Farmers program goes far beyond educating first-generation farmers in the basics of regenerative agriculture practices. "Basically, we're developing a pipeline of farmer training," Kathleen explains. "We start with farm apprentices who have farmed before, a few seasons typically. We follow that with a second-year apprentice program and a Farm Business Incubator. After you complete these training programs and you're either managing a farm or starting a farm, we still support you in a variety of ways, with business planning, people management, marketing and operations. We're really developing tomorrow's workforce for the kind of farming we want to see in the Hudson Valley—regenerative, climate-resilient, all the things we believe in."

In the area of Empowering Changemakers, Glynwood brings together people from a variety of backgrounds "whom we feel can really move the concept of regional food forward, such as physicians, policy makers, philanthropists and journalists," Kathleen says. "We bring them here to our campus where they can stay overnight and participate in a range of different experiences, such as tastings, farming demos, content-sharing, educational courses, workshops and policy issues. They also go out on the farm and work with vegetable production or our livestock operation, getting a deep understanding of this kind of farming and what we're talking about."

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, Glynwood concentrates on Creating Coalitions. "We identify certain sectors that by working together can successfully move the needle on regional food."

—KATHLEEN FINLAY

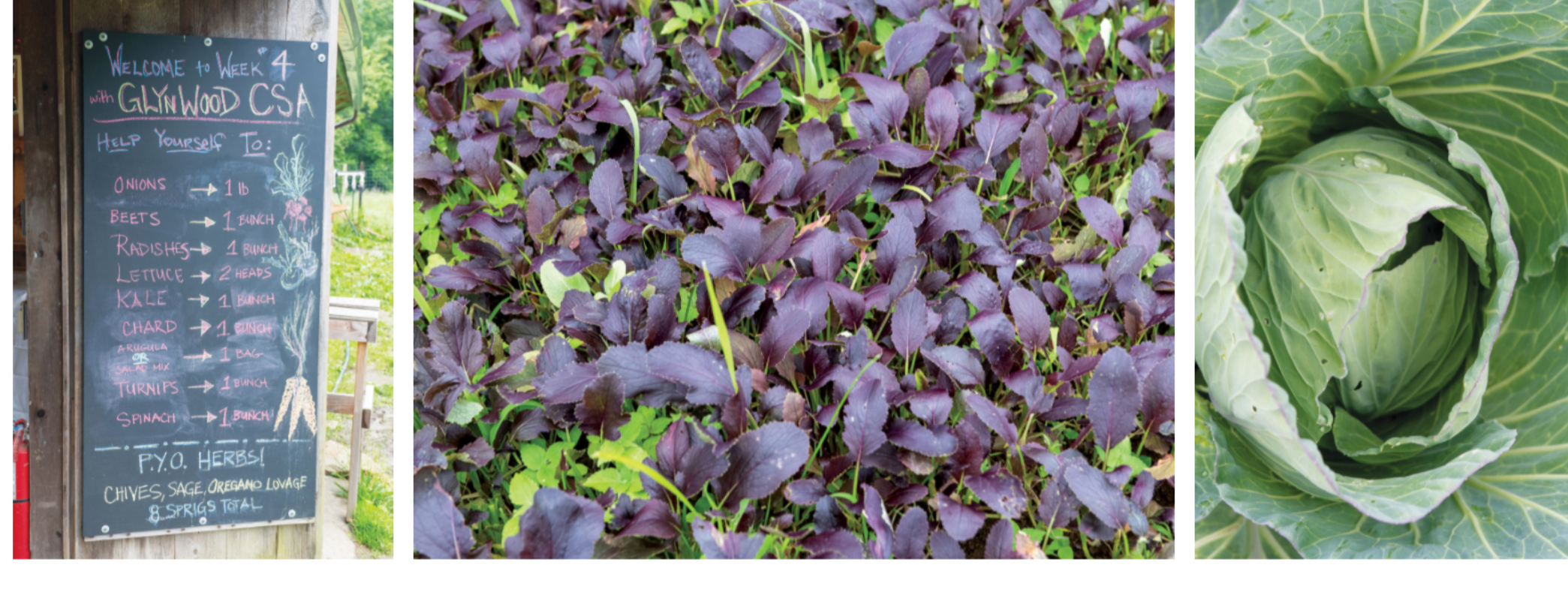
"The most successful and longest-running example of this is our work with hard cidermakers. Ten years ago, we brought together a handful of cidermakers who wanted to bring back commercial hard cider to New York State, which at the time was virtually absent. Now there are over 100 cideries in New York. We also started a New York cider trade association, and we coproduce cider weeks twice a year in New York City and the Hudson Valley. We effectively led a cider renaissance in New York."



"That is coalition building—bringing producers together."

Building on its success with cidermakers, Glynwood replicated that approach with CSA (community-supported agriculture) farmers. "This has been extremely beneficial to new-entry farmers," Kathleen states. "Not only do they get their capital up front before the season starts, but they get to share the harvest with their customers every week. It really builds community around a farm and gives the farmers a direct relationship with the folks who are enjoying their food, the actual people they're feeding."

Another highly successful Glynwood-initiated coalition is one of chefs, farmers and seed growers. According to Kathleen, "Local seed growers are trying to regionalize seed production in the Hudson Valley. They want to know which crops grow best here, and if people like them. We spearheaded a project [that] entails three years of trials on different varieties of seeds and different crops. These are tested on farms, and farmers report back to us. Then they're tested on the plate, and chefs report back to us. We then highlight the winners of all of those trials, with the end result being that, collectively, we're creating showcase seed varieties of the Hudson Valley that taste really good, that grow really well here, and that benefit our farmers."



Considering all the initiatives being undertaken at Glynwood (and there are many), Kathleen readily admits that coalition-building is currently very exciting to her. "It's the most challenging," she says, "because producers and participants all have different agendas and could be considered competitors, but they learn that the benefit far outweighs any risk of coming together. It also takes time, year after year. It's a big investment of time and money for a nonprofit, with unknowable outcomes, but the impact is profound."

As Glynwood continues to refine and expand its purpose, it seems the timing couldn't be better.

"There's a different consciousness around food today, a different level of awareness," says Kathleen. "People want it to come from farms that they know. They want to know [what] impact producing that food has on the environment. And they're willing to support ecological, humane and economically viable farming."

Along those lines, Kathleen and her team recently hosted two groups of professional chefs, including a team from New York's Gramercy Tavern, for two days of learning about the kind of agricultural practices followed at Glynwood. Through a partnership with the James Beard Foundation, Glynwood also recently hosted a group of 15 chefs from across the country to educate them about a variety of food issues faced by food and agricultural organizations, so they can go back to their restaurants and be knowledgeable advocates for a good food system.

In addition, Glynwood works very closely with other regenerative farming nonprofits—other "Glynwoods"—in the Hudson Valley, as well as nationally. "We established a farmer-training collective so that we can be in close contact with other programs that train farmers, as we do," Kathleen explains.

Yet, with all that Glynwood and other regional farming operations are doing to advance the public's consciousness of the importance of responsibly produced food, Kathleen says they still have a lot of work to do to make sure this knowledge isn't siloed within certain demographics.

"We're spending a lot of time trying to figure out how to get CSA memberships into neighborhoods that might not have heard of CSAs," Kathleen emphasizes.

"We feel it's really important to make sure that the regional food movement progresses in an inclusive and diverse way, rather than in an elitist way. Several ways we are doing this is producing outreach in Spanish and working with Spanish radio and in Spanish-speaking magazines. We're also looking at how we can serve folks who have food-assistance dollars, how we can help them tap into CSAs and buy from local farms with those benefit dollars."

What lies ahead for Glynwood?

"In the future," says Kathleen, "I would like to expand our educational experiences so that more people from more diverse backgrounds could do deep dives into regional food. I'd also like to focus on our farm infrastructure, making sure we have the best tools and resources to train new-entry farmers—and by 'best,' I don't mean latest or most expensive. A conscious choice in our training program is to use technology and techniques that are easily accessible to these farmers. This means inexpensive, easy to obtain, easy to maintain. We want the equipment they're training on to be things they could realistically acquire and use in their first few years of farming."

A mission lived, every day. As stated on its website, Glynwood's mission is "to ensure the Hudson Valley is a region defined by food, where farming thrives."

Without fail, every morning that the sun rises over those 250 acres outside of Cold Spring, that mission is fulfilled.

For more information about Glynwood, upcoming events and how to get involved in its programs, visit glynwood.org.

