



STRONGER TOGETHER



The Woodstock Foundation, Inc.
Billings Farm & Museum

• 2023 REPORT •





2023 was a year that tested our resilience, challenged us to think creatively, and proved we are **Stronger Together.**

We moved forward by uplifting community, expanding connections beyond our site, and initiating long-term strategies for stewarding the lands and animals that are in our care.

Find highlights in the stories that follow.

Message from the President & Executive Director

The year 2023 marked the 40th anniversary of Billings Farm & Museum (BF&M). Over the past four decades, we have **welcomed more than 2,000,000 guests** to experience what no other American museum can offer: an up-close encounter with a working dairy farm, complemented by the remarkable history of our site, and an extraordinary program of educational offerings.

For the second time in 12 years, significant flooding impacted Billings Farm and our local towns. **Our staff found strength together** and sprang into action with creative solutions. We used gravity-fed pipes installed in 1900 to source water from the Pogue for our animals. We partnered with the Woodstock Inn & Resort and the Connecticut River Conservancy to clear flood-deposited debris from our pastures and river banks. We made plans to better prepare for future flooding events. We offered a joyful, complimentary day for our community when it was most needed.

While we withstood many challenges, we also dedicated resources to enhance the vibrancy of the organization for the future. Over an eight-month period, we worked with a museum consultant to craft the first **Interpretive Master Plan (IMP)** for Billings Farm & Museum. This dynamic document will shape and focus the stories we share with our guests in new and innovative ways. The process of developing the plan was deep and broad, including interviews, focus groups, and collaborative workshops with board members, Billings Farm staff, and many stakeholders in our larger community.

As we embarked on this path, we dedicated ourselves to pursuing opportunities that strengthen community relationships; enhance connections to food, programming, and collections; and steward this special “place in the land.” Examples include:

- A collaboration with Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park and the Woodstock Union



High School & Middle School to co-design teacher professional development. This **partnership** links the three organizations and builds future opportunities to create programs together.

- The debut of a Billings Farm-operated **Food Truck**, meeting a long-term objective of providing savory lunchtime fare for our guests featuring Billings Farm cheese.
- The introduction of **rotational grazing** for our Jersey herd and a **chicken tractor** for our heritage breed chickens, which both engage guests in the farm experience and improve the health of our animals and fields.

The staff at Billings Farm & Museum is our greatest resource in advancing our mission and goals. This year we honored many staff members for their significant years of service at BF&M, including two employees who celebrated 25-year milestones. To strengthen our workplace environment, we hired our first ever Director of Human Resources. We continue to attract talented staff who work creatively and collaboratively to share the unique legacy of Billings Farm with our guests.

Reflecting on the role of Billings Farm, one IMP stakeholder interviewee observed this summer that, “In a world where so many things divide people, there’s a spot up in Vermont that is pure. Sustainability, resiliency, endurance. A place where we get back to the roots – dirt under our nails – proof positive that when people come together they do amazing things.” We are most grateful for this sentiment, which sums up what we strive to be!

In the coming year and in the decades to come, we greatly value your continued support as we all work together to uphold and expand the extraordinary legacy of Billings Farm & Museum.

David M. Simmons
President, Woodstock Foundation
Executive Director, Billings Farm & Museum



BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM

MISSION

*Inspiring and engaging
generations through shared stories
of Vermont’s rural culture
and our continued practice of
responsible agriculture.*

The centerpiece of the Woodstock Foundation is Billings Farm & Museum, an operating dairy farm that continues a 150-year tradition of agricultural excellence. As the farm of the historic Billings estate, it serves as the agricultural counterpart to Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park.

Billings Farm & Museum showcases a culture of care and connection to land, food, and community through immersive experiences and shared stories. Guests explore farm life, past and present. They learn how their actions can nourish people, improve community well-being, and support local food systems. The site is filled with vibrant activity year-round, including daily programming, seasonal and farm events, camps, workshops, and unique after-hours experiences.

*The Woodstock Foundation, Inc.
promotes conservation, sustainable land
use, and heritage as values that
are essential to culture, community,
and the human spirit.*

Strengthening Community

In a year filled with challenges and celebrations, Billings Farm's commitment to strengthening community took many forms. The site was a gathering space for farmers to tell their stories, a living classroom for students of all ages, and a destination where community members could experience joy in the face of adversity.

Farm Communities

The **Vermont Female Farmers Exhibition** showcased the stories and portraits of 38 farmers from across the state, documented over two years by photographer JuanCarlos González. The project served to amplify the meaningful and impactful contributions that female farmers are making to the state's culture, identity, and economy. The exhibition provided visibility for the farmers and a platform for Billings Farm to highlight their hard work, the diversity of farm products, and ways people can support them.

Photographer JuanCarlos González with farmers from SUSU commUNITY Farm whose portraits were featured in the exhibition.



School Communities

For perhaps the first time, Billings Farm & Museum hosted students from the **Woodstock Elementary, Middle, and High Schools** all in the same season. In addition to continued annual visits from the Woodstock Elementary School's fourth grade, the Gardens and Greenhouses class at the Middle School visited for a pollinator-focused field trip. Woodstock Union High School's Foundations of Agriculture students also visited BF&M, meeting with Farm Manager Phil Ranney to discuss regenerative agriculture. Through this partnership across all grade levels, Billings Farm has become a resource for the schools to deepen student engagement and to build understanding of local food systems.

Cultural Communities

Billings Farm provided a forum for cultural exchange as the venue for **TEDxHartlandHill** and as the producer and site of the **Woodstock Vermont Film Series**. The TEDx event brought together speakers on the topic of *The Art of Living*, highlighting thinkers, innovators, artists, and authors from the Woodstock community and beyond. The Film Series offered a breadth of storytelling and in-depth conversations with filmmakers and film participants.



Terry Dorman (at left), Quechee orchard owner and film producer, brought apples to share following a Film Series showing of *Whitman Brook, An Apple Orchard and the Nature of Time*.

Farm Manager Phil Ranney discusses regenerative agriculture with high school students.



SUPPORT FOR OUR COMMUNITY



FOOD SHELF DONATIONS

300 lbs of Meat

12 Bushels of Produce

ADMISSION PASS DONATIONS

500+ Passes

\$8,000+ in Value

50+ Local Organizations

YOUTH SERVED

39 Schools

1,500+ Students

\$2,000+ in Scholarships

Finding Strength in

Flooding on July 10 was a shock to the Woodstock community, to our organization, and to towns, farms, and businesses across the state. In the immediate aftermath, Billings Farm staff responded with creative solutions and worked collaboratively with area organizations to aid the recovery.



ABOVE: Gravity-fed pipes leading from the Pogue to Billings Farm were installed in 1900 to supply water for farm operations. Following the July flood, Woodstock's water was shut off for repairs, and this innovative legacy system proved more valuable than ever, providing a steady supply of drinking water for the farm's livestock.



FLOOD IMPACT
Hayfields Damaged:
40 ACRES
Hay Bales Lost:
269
Site Closed to Public:
4 DAYS
Additional Damage:
Walking Trail Path
2 Interpretive Signs

Challenge

Clean Up Days

Over the course of two days in late fall, 35 staff members from Billings Farm and the Woodstock Inn & Resort worked together to clear debris that had been deposited during the July flood. The volunteers removed eight truck loads of trash from the woods and fields along the Ottauquechee River. These clean up days also supported the Connecticut River Conservancy's Source to Sea Cleanup project. PHOTOS BELOW.



A Day of Rest & Recovery for our Community

Community members from Woodstock, Pomfret, Bridgewater, Plymouth, Killington, Reading, and Barnard joined us on July 31 for a complimentary day, following closures of businesses, child-care centers, and camps in the wake of the flood.

“I am thankful that Billings Farm offered a free day when the community most needed it.”

– Local resident

Field Repairs

In November, 40 acres of damaged fields were repaired by Gurney Brothers Construction. This included scraping off silt and rocks, moving branches, trees, and other debris, and filling massive holes caused by flood water erosion. Billings Farm's team then spread manure and added lime to neutralize ph levels. These fields will be replanted in springtime to replenish the hay crops for years to come. PHOTO BELOW.



Strengthening Connections

In 2023, connections with partners broadened our programming and expanded the reach of our farm products. We created new touch points for guests in the gardens, in our food services, and through our online archives.

Programming Connections

As the **Farmstead Gardens** flourished, so did opportunities to connect our educational programming with the annual garden programs at the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park. In August, guests enjoyed a day of garden activities, music, crafts, and more across the two sites. At Billings Farm, guests pedaled a smoothie bike to blend fresh fruit into a refreshing drink. Our Lead Gardener provided garden tours, and guests crafted their own tea bags using dried herbs from the garden. At the National Park, guests enjoyed flower programs, live music, art, and yoga.



Guests fill tea bags with herbs on Garden Day.

Food Connections

We achieved a long-term goal to open an onsite food truck that would feature Billings Farm cheese and other local products. The **Mooveable Feast Food Truck** offered Billings Farm grilled cheese sandwiches and other savory options for hungry guests. Beyond our site, area chefs from the Woodstock Inn & Resort and the Village Butcher sought out Billings Farm-raised meat, creating delicious gourmet meals and expanding the market for our value-added farm products.



Billings Farm's new food truck served 2,760 grilled cheese sandwiches as well as other savory options.

Collections Connections

Researchers and the public were able to delve into the rich resources found in the Billings Family digital archive. In 2023, the digital archive, comprised of more than 1,100 images, photographs, and documents, was visited by 500 users. New collections materials added this year included WWI era YWCA posters collected by the Billings sisters and the original manuscript of Frederick Billings' 1864 Agricultural Speech at the Windsor County Fair.

— PARTNER PROFILE —

SpringRiver Private Foundation Trust

SpringRiver Private Foundation Trust has been an important funding partner of Billings Farm & Museum for almost 10 years. Thanks to their grants totaling nearly \$90,000 during that time, Billings Farm has elevated its education programs, encouraging guests of all ages to grow their own food and incorporate sustainable practices into their daily lives.

In 2019, our shared vision took physical shape with the construction of the **Garden Shed**. The following year, with the Foundation's support, Billings Farm launched the **Billings Backyard Series**, which expanded educational programming for adults and continues to offer workshops that teach sustainable living skills for everyday life.

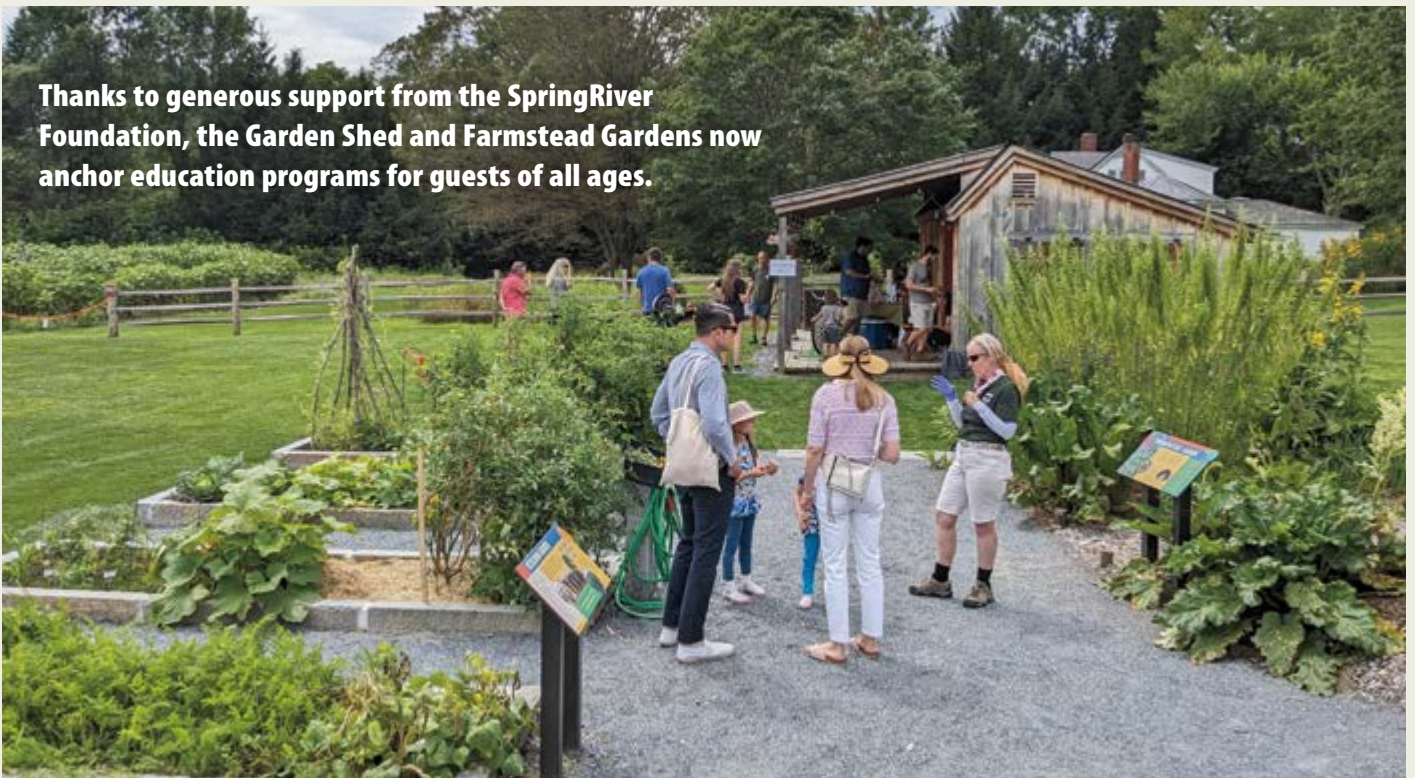
In the past two years, the SpringRiver Foundation helped complete the expansion of the **Farmstead Gardens** and funded the installation of

interpretive signage along the Walking Trail and in the Farmstead Gardens. Additionally in 2023, SpringRiver funded the purchase of a **chicken tractor**. This mobile coop provides BF&M guests with an up-close view of the chickens foraging outside, enhancing the pastures as they are moved to different locations on the site.

“The SpringRiver Foundation is pleased to have supported Billings Farm in many ways over the past ten years. So much of the Billings Farm experience aligns closely with the Foundation's mission of ‘inspiring respect and care for the natural environment.’ The educational component is especially important to SpringRiver, and this is something that Billings Farm does so well.”

– Linda Hanaway, Director of Giving,
SpringRiver Foundation

Thanks to generous support from the SpringRiver Foundation, the Garden Shed and Farmstead Gardens now anchor education programs for guests of all ages.



Strengthening Stewardship

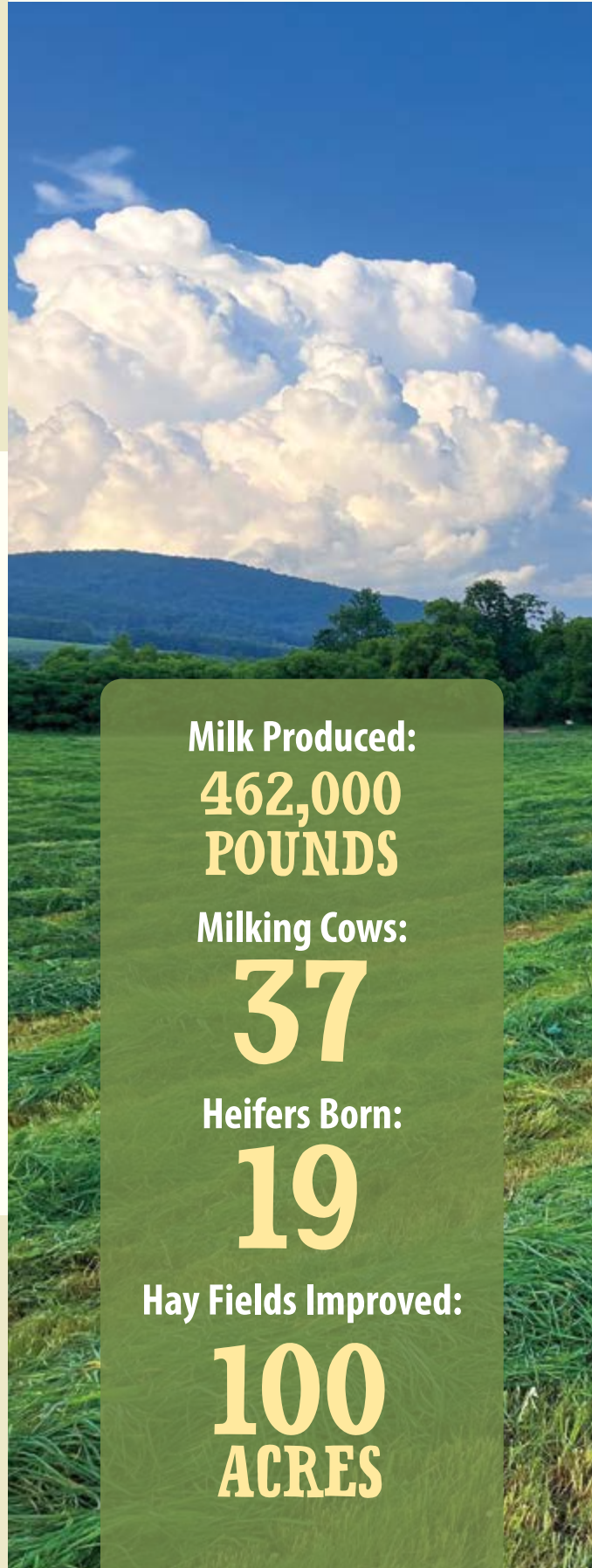
Stewardship of our lands and care for our animals are values we uphold on a daily basis. In 2023, we incorporated approaches that will improve and sustain the quality of our herd and our fields for the long term.

In May, Billings Farm instituted a system of rotational grazing, a best practice for cow and pasture health. This method provides a variety of grasses that are healthy for the milking herd to consume and ensures the grasses do not become overgrazed. When the herd completes grazing in one section of pasture, they move to a new parcel that has had time to regenerate.

The Farm Team also initiated pasture and hay field improvements to enhance soil health. Using regenerative approaches to field management, over the next three to five years BF&M will be able to grow much of its own hay and pasture feed for the herd. This will allow the farm to monitor the quality and consistency of the herd's feed and reduce expenses on hay purchased from other sources. Growing hay on our own fields will also reduce the organization's carbon footprint by decreasing emissions from transportation.

The Proof is in the Milk! This season's Vermont State Milk Inspections were very positive. The reviewer's feedback included statements such as:

*“Cows out to pasture look great!
Overall cleanliness in the milk house
and stable is really good!
Beautiful facility overall!!”*



Milk Produced:
**462,000
POUNDS**

Milking Cows:
37

Heifers Born:
19

Hay Fields Improved:
**100
ACRES**



The milking herd grazing in a fresh pasture.



Lime was spread to improve the soil quality for future planting.



Farm staff haying in early July 2023, just days before the flood.

ANIMALS



EXHIBITIONS

HISTORY



SEASONAL EVENTS



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS



ADULT PROGRAMS



Our Staff

Billings Farm & Museum is most grateful for the contributions of our staff. They bring to their work professionalism, joy, and passion. Their enthusiasm for our educational mission deepens our ability to engage the public and provides a positive experience year-round for visitors.

Two Staff Members Honored for 25 Years of Service

Fran Lancaster's tenure with Billings Farm & Museum began part-time in April of 1998, while also serving as an assistant librarian at a local elementary school. After retiring in 2014, Fran dedicated herself to Billings Farm, where she serves as an interpreter – leading tours of visitors through the 1890 Farm Manager's House and other areas of the site.

Fran feels a deep connection to the principles of stewardship of the natural environment embedded in the Farm's history. One of her favorite parts of working at the site is getting to connect with people she has known for decades as well as with new faces she would not otherwise have the opportunity to meet.

“It's easy to take pride in my work and my role at such an important historical landmark in our town, and I'm so grateful to have found myself at Billings 25 years ago.”



Fran Lancaster

In 1998, while still teaching, **Norine Hopewell** began working during the summer months at Billings Farm & Museum. She believed strongly in the mission to continue educating visitors about the historical and current practices of responsible and sustainable farming. After retiring from teaching in 2017, Norine began working part-time as an interpreter throughout the season. Her role includes educating visitors about past and present dairy farming in Vermont and telling the story of the Farm. After a quarter century, she has taught the principles of stewardship and sustainability to thousands of visitors of all ages.

“I enjoy connecting with guests and helping them learn about our agricultural heritage. I think it’s so important for people to know where their food is coming from.”



Norine Hopewell

2023 Employee Service Milestones

15 or More Years of Service

- Ralph Lancaster
- Lee Mahood
- Ben McLean
- Tina Morgan
- Karen Weinstein

10 or More Years of Service

- Adele Bassett
- Sue Heston
- Elliot Kraut
- Marianne Zephir

5 or More Years of Service

- Gabi Bourassa
- Susan Feinberg
- Nancy Katz
- Christine Scales
- Caroline Shepard
- David Simmons
- Tiana St. James



Christine Scales





BILLINGS
FARM & MUSEUM

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