

NOFA-VT'S 41ST ANNUAL WINTER CONFERENCE

BACK TO THE ROOTS



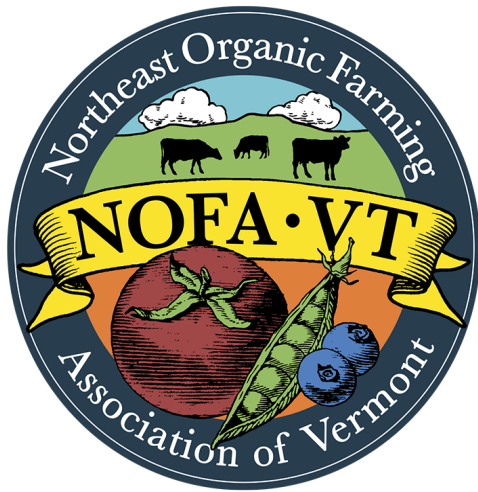
Food Studies Newsletter

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In This Issue:

NOFA Conference Reflections

Northeastern Organic Farmers Association Winter Conference



Each year, the Northeastern Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) hosts a conference where farmers, gardeners, earth tenders, land managers, educators, students, policy-makers, and other food system activists come together to share thoughts and ideas and build community. This year's theme, "Back to the Roots" was all about rebuilding the mycelial, interwoven, buried networks that have been disrupted by covid and our busy lives. The first conference back in person since the pandemic, this 41st NOFA Winter Conference brought farmers, scientists, gardeners, photographers, lawyers, herbalists, artists, and earth enthusiasts together for a day of local food tasting, educational workshops, and joyful networking.



Among the people in attendance were 30 Middlebury students with the student organization Knoll Friends. Knoll Friends attended workshops on a variety of topics including cover crops for pollinator habitats, culturally responsive local food access, herbalism, organic certifications, coppice agroforestry, growing endemic mycorrhizal fungi, how to plant your own perennial vegetable garden, biochar, and a forum on the agroecology movement. Students also participated in the queer affinity table and the BIPOC affinity space during lunch. Students returned to Middlebury with mason jars full of kimchi, pockets of seeds, spicy fire cider, work songs, black printed art, vibrant business cards, and hopeful hearts.

Keynote Speaker: Winona LaDuke

Restoring the Covenant: Native Seeds, Communities, and Respectful Relationships



Winona LaDuke, an internationally renowned activist working on issues of sustainable development, renewable energy, and food systems, began the conference with an inspiring keynote on her work on Indigenous land justice and hemp farming. Winona started by discussing the historical injustices inflicted on people and the land and how our society is suffering from “historical and ecological amnesia”. She reminded us all that it is our job to remember our history and do good. **“Pandemic is a portal,”** she said, a time to decide what to take through to the other side.

Moreover, she told the audience, **“these are epic times, this is the time to be epic”**.

As an activist, Winona urged the audience to look for solutions in communities and in partnership with nature reminding us that **“the solutions for the problems we’re facing are not in the paradigms that caused them”**.

Winona then discussed her own activism on the White Earth reservation in northern Minnesota preventing pipelines from being built across Indigenous land. As she told her story, Winona emphasized the importance of community in these resistance movements and said, **“if you want to change the world, you need some friends”**. Her sentiment was echoed by the fact we all sat in a large auditorium surrounded by other food and farm activists.

Winona then shifted to talking about her own farming operation, producing hemp fiber, and what she calls the “New Green Revolution”. She talked passionately about her work, the connection to her land, and the range of products hemp can produce. Winona argued for a shift from a hydrocarbon economy to a carbohydrate economy, one based on the plants we grow instead of the fossil fuels we mine.

Winona’s keynote address ended with a standing ovation from everyone in the room. Her speech focused on the importance of community and searching for a new path into a future we all want to be a part of.

Workshop from the Knoll

Pop-Up Solidarity Network with The Knoll Garden at Middlebury College



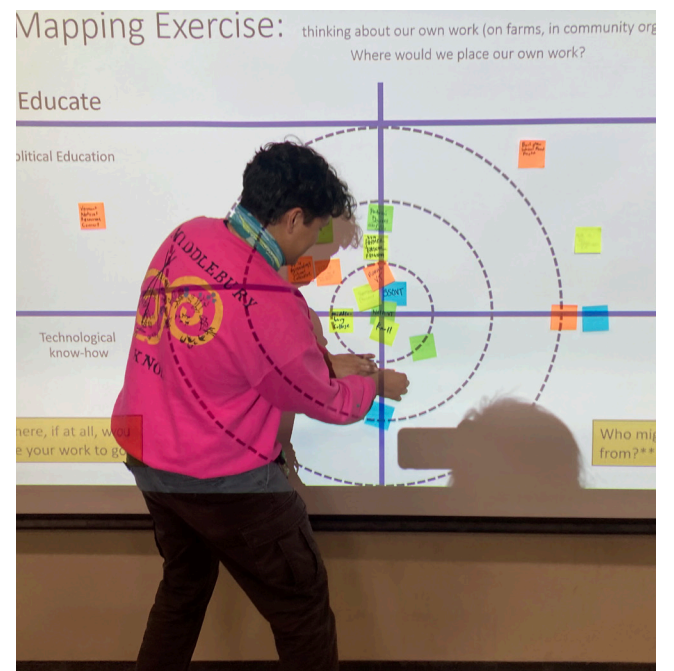
The Knoll is a three-acre site that provides students with hands-on, practical education in organic agriculture and creates a medium to pursue positive environmental, economic, and social change.

Pop-Up Solidarity Network with The Knoll at Middlebury College

Andrés and Megan ran a workshop where they shared stories of the community work at the Knoll and encouraged others to share their experiences running similar projects. The workshop focused on what it means to stand together in times of great uncertainty and what it looks like to have our grassroots movements deeply intertwined with each other. Participants collectively explored each person's role as organizers and workers in the food system, shared resources, and explored opportunities for solidarity work.

Reflection from Andrés Oyaga

"I was honored to do a little presentation with Megan, where we talked about the Knoll and facilitated a mapping exercise to get folks reflecting about the dreams and roadblocks they face as farmers, non-profits, chefs, service providers, etc. A big part of our exercise was making connections to the other people in the room, seeing what skills we might be able to offer as well as thinking about who in the room we could learn from. This gathering came from a place of craving connection and community from food system workers in our area, especially as students at the College can sometimes feel isolated or separate from Middlebury/Addison County/Vermont. A guiding question was thus: what other connections can students make with farmers and organizations in our community? Grateful to the people who joined us in this experiment!"



Andrés presenting a mapping exercise for each participant to think about their own work in relation to others.

Student Reflections

Thank you NOFA for such an amazing conference. It was inspiring to be surrounded by so many people dedicated to making a positive change in our food system. We will be back next year!



Reflection from Viv Merrill

“The NOFA conference was so invigorating! It was really special to be in a space where so many people who care about the land and community health were gathered. Winona LaDuke’s speech was captivating and it was incredible to be present with such a renowned person who spoke so honestly and intimately with her audience. I also really enjoyed the breakout sessions I attended, learning about mycology in agriculture as well as local food access initiatives.”



A Special Thanks

A special thanks to the student organization Knoll Friends for organizing ride-shares and debrief sessions and to the Middlebury Climate Action Capacity Project for funding to attend the conference.