



# THE carrot PROJECT



## CLIENT UPDATE

### FARM DETAILS

**High Road Farm  
Newbury, MA**

McDonough Scanlon  
Training & 1:1 Advising Participant,  
2020

### FARM SNAPSHOT

Farmer/Owner McDonough Scanlon (Mac) is bringing High Road Farm into its eighth season of production. Growing on five acres equipped with three greenhouses, one propagation house, and two high tunnels in Newbury, MA, Mac has a 65-member CSA, sells at one farmers' market, and serves four wholesale outlets. She is "non-certified organic,"—"my customers know me, and they know I grow without commercial pesticides." She employs seasonal workers.

### INNOVATION

Mac runs her farm steeped in the wisdom provided by her off-farm jobs. After completing degrees in psychology and sociology, Mac worked at a psychiatric facility. To process the strain of working with pediatric in-patients, she volunteered at a local farm. "I picked beans and cried," she says – and she drew a strong connection between food and mental health. In the winter of 2021-2022, Mac took a break from healthcare and worked on a scallop boat, gathering daily inspiration in tenacity and adaptivity from the fishermen alongside whom she worked.

### FARM HISTORY

Mac's farm origin story is that of many small, independent farmers—a study in the force of will. She says that when she first started her own farm, "I definitely did not know enough," but she was ready for a challenge. She'd been working at another vegetable farm, first as a volunteer and later in a managerial role. After three years, she was itching to work for herself—she knew of an abandoned lot and called the land owner every day for months until he called back and said yes. "Someone was willing to give me a chance—it was one of those perfect little moments." She grew her business on that land for three years before moving up the road to her present digs.

To hone her knowledge, Mac talked to other farmers and took classes, including The Carrot Project's Making It Happen workshop. In 2020, Mac applied to TCP for technical assistance to develop better systems of tracking her income. She worked with business advisor Julia Shanks, who taught Mac how to use QuickBooks. Mac says that she found it difficult at first to have enough bandwidth during the season to learn a new tool, but Julia was "super patient." They spoke every few weeks, and the result, "totally transformed the way that I view my business—I'm able to make more informed decisions because now I have data to guide me. With more information, I see my business in a different light."

Currently, Mac is building on her work with Julia, motivated to input data on a weekly basis and analyze it more frequently. "I'll know that next week I have all these bills coming in; [if] I have a deficit of \$200, I can ask myself where to find \$200 in my field."

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## OVERVIEW OF OUTCOMES

**“Every year there is a master plan – and then every year there is a monkey wrench thrown my way—and then I’m hand weeding... again.”**

Like many sole proprietors farming diversified vegetable crops and selling to a multi-tiered market, Mac covers a lot of ground on a daily basis. Last season, there were days when she was out delivering CSA shares at 5 am, rushing back to the farm to work the fields, and then heading back out for wholesale deliveries, regularly getting home in the dark. “This is a lot,” she remembers saying to herself. And while Mac is willing “to push through anything” to get the work done, she recognizes that working 16 hours a day takes a toll and isn’t sustainable long term. She’s working out some changes to level the workload—tweaking her marketing outlets and trying to stay one step ahead of monkey wrenches.

Mac has deep roots in Newbury. In fact, she says, “my local friends and family became my first CSA members.” She feels loyal to this group, but she is starting to see, with the benefit of financial analysis, that her wholesale outlets may be more profitable. What’s more, because the workflow to delivery is more streamlined than with CSA distribution, wholesale may provide a better work life balance. For the 2022 season, Mac will cap her CSA membership and experiment with selling more to her wholesale accounts. She is also hiring a full-time farmer to help with the day-to-day tractor work, farmers market, field management, and harvesting, allowing Mac to work on big picture operations.

Back to those monkey wrenches: Newbury, situated near the Atlantic Coast, is surrounded by salt marshes. When it rains too much, there is nowhere for the extra water to go, and in 2021, two acres of Mac’s fields flooded. She lost \$20,000 of crops, including all of her outdoor tomatoes. To manage, she took out a personal loan, then received some grants to repay it. She pivoted to create raised beds filled with faster turnover crops such as salad greens, baby roots, and bunched greens. It was a steep challenge to learn a new machine and create new field maintenance strategies, but it proved the best choice for her land. In 2022 she’s putting her tomatoes in the most well-drained field, transitioning two fields to the raised bed system, planting lots of celery and celeriac (water-loving veggies), and heavily cover cropping other wet areas.

While Mac might be able to raise her prices if she becomes certified organic, she wants to maintain her commitment to food access for low-income and elderly customers. Plus, she says, the label isn’t necessary. “People who eat my food know and trust me. My customers come out to the farm and see what I do.”

Ultimately, Mac will use the tools she gained working with TCP to guide her on her path to profitability and sustainability —“I’ll make new business plans based on what is happening financially.”

## ON THE HORIZON

Mac has a lot to say about the future of High Road Farm. In the near-term, she is looking forward to the post-pandemic return of hosting student field trips at the farm and creating volunteer opportunities for youth and adults from local organizations, particularly those supporting mental health. She’s also excited for the return of farming conferences and workshops, noting that, “comradery among farmers keeps you going and doing your best. I miss that learning.”

A little further out on the horizon, Mac would love to contract with a school cafeteria to provide truly nutritious food for local students, and someday she’d like to have two full-time, year-round farmers working the land with her, so that, together, they can realize greater production. Mac also plans to resume making compost on the farm with local ingredients, a practice she had to put on pause in 2021 for logistical reasons. In past seasons she worked with Newbury’s fishers, crab trappers, hay farmers, landscapers, and horse stables to transform the town’s organic waste materials into compost for her fields.

A long-term dream is to start her own private counseling practice on her land—she wants to continue her role as an advocate for youth, while providing more opportunities for farm access to individuals struggling with mental health issues.

Beyond these concrete goals, Mac sees open skies. “Working with the ocean has opened up my mind. The ocean is so wild and open-ended—the opportunities are endless. I get to work alongside Mother Nature to make my own decisions about work every day: who I work with, what I grow, how I grow it, where the food goes, and who it gets sold to...that creative freedom is a privilege.”