

# THE carrot PROJECT



## CLIENT UPDATE

### PEA SHOOT FARM | QUINTA ARVEJITA

#### FARM DETAILS

##### Pea Shoot Farm | Quinta Arvejita Foster, RI

Lucía Cueto Kearney  
1:1 Advising Participant, 2023  
-2024

#### FARM SNAPSHOT

Lucía Cueto Kearney grows diversified vegetables in 30 permanent 30' x 2.5' beds on the 36-acre property of the Wolf Tree Cooperative in Foster, RI. She supplies food for both the Cooperative and two farmers' markets. For off-season income, Lucía sells soap hand-made from sustainable ingredients, including flowers and herbs from the farm. The 2023 growing season was Pea Shoot's first.

#### INNOVATION

Lucía uses a no-dig, no-till system, maximizing the farm's natural resources and using minimal inputs to produce food for the six residents of the Wolf Tree Cooperative plus surplus to sell off-property. She operates with the principles of lean agriculture, which advocates for implementing elegant systems and cutting waste—emphasizing efficiency before scaling up.

## FARM HISTORY

A self-described first-generation farmer, Lucía began growing food at Pea Shoot Farm with eight seasons of small-scale vegetable farming under her belt. After graduating from college in 2013 with an English degree and a passion to make the world a better place, Lucía wanted to travel, so she volunteered on farms in Central and South America, including a stint at her family's sheep ranch in Argentina. After a year and a half of traveling, Lucía felt that farm work was at the intersection of her interest in healing communities and addressing climate change, and that farming gave her a way to move forward on these issues simultaneously.

She returned home to Philadelphia and apprenticed at a four-acre CSA farm in the Lehigh Valley, where she confirmed for herself that: "the work was hard, and a little bit lonely, but I knew I loved it!" She worked on several farms and gardens in and outside of the city, including a gig in West Philadelphia, working at Mill Creek Urban Farm. Here, she also had her first experience living in cooperative housing, which provided a stark contrast to her lonely time at the farm in the Lehigh Valley and cemented Lucía's feeling that: "people are supposed to live in community."

This realization sparked an active process to start a rural housing coop.

She began working with a friend to buy land—they soon gathered a few more interested parties and did extensive visioning and brainstorming. This group ultimately became the six founding members of Wolf Tree Cooperative.

Lucía first became aware of The Carrot Project while researching cooperative housing models. She reached out to Carrot again once the group closed on their property in September 2022, when Lucía began to gear up for Pea Shoot Farm's first growing season.

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*the work was hard...but I knew I loved it!*

## OVERVIEW OF OUTCOMES

“How can we make farming sustainable for farmers? I believe this is possible with intentional planning.”

Before beginning her work with Carrot business advisor Cian Dalzell, Lucía was no stranger to due diligence—in planning the Cooperative, she and her fellow members conducted a feasibility study and systematically researched sites on the east coast in search of affordable land close to a city center before settling on their current site in Foster, RI, which is about 25 miles outside of Providence.

Despite all her growing experience and the studious research involved in starting the Coop, Lucía says that she had: “zero experience running a business.” Because Pea Shoot is incorporated as an LLC and leases land from the Coop, Lucía is solely responsible for the farm’s business planning. This is where Carrot came in—she worked with Cian during the winter of 2022-2023 to set up spreadsheets to track her first season’s yields, monitor cash flow, and establish a 5-year business plan, including establishing benchmarks: “working backwards from there, to help me pinpoint how much produce to grow.”

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*I think it's good to really be in relationship with your farm space and surrounding environment, always observing and listening and learning.*

When the Cooperative took possession of the 36-acre property, Lucía’s first job was to establish the basic infrastructure to get Pea Shoot’s first growing season off the ground. With help from her family, who are in architecture and construction, she built thirty permanent raised beds and a small propagation greenhouse where she grows her starts, plus pea and sunflower shoots.

Lucía has a depth of experience in setting up farming systems which are not only sustainable but regenerative. She combines no-till and no-dig practices with lean principles of agriculture, looking to actively build soil health over time for a net positive impact on the ecosystem of which the farm is a part. Lean farming dictates utilizing resources efficiently to maximize results and minimize costs. No dig-practices actively support lean principles—with heavy up-front investment in time and materials, systems are set up for the long term and should require very little maintenance. In turn, these systems and principles: “take pressure off of the farm and free the farmer up to focus on the big picture.”

Pea Shoot’s raised beds exemplify no dig and lean principles. The beds require very little irrigation and Lucía will integrate annuals, perennials, and pollinator-friendly habitats into a whole system at a market garden scale. Her first season’s success illustrates this system’s high-yield capacity—she grew enough produce to fill the Coop members’ “Homestead Shares,” plus supply two farmers’ markets in the late summer and fall.

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*I have a fatal attraction to crops that aren't profitable.*

Lucia tracked her first-season yields on the spreadsheet she designed with Cian; this winter the two will meet up again to analyze final numbers on which to base her projections for next year and beyond.

Lucía laughs, somewhat confessionally: “I got into dry beans recently—I grew eight different varieties. I think it will really help me to look at the numbers, to sit down and see what I actually got.”

On the other hand, the beauty of the Coop being her primary “customer” is that her farm can be: “a hybrid market garden and homestead. Maybe I’m not going to make a ton of money from winter squash, but winter squash is valuable to the Coop.” This, she says: “is why I really wanted to farm as part of this Coop.”

## ON THE HORIZON

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*I'm planning to stay hyper, hyper-local.*

The slow, steady, and sustainable theme of Lucía's farming methodology plays out in her ideas for the future of Pea Shoot Farm. She plans to keep her emphasis on the health of the soil, her Coop, and her community: "I don't think I'll ever have more than one acre under cultivation. I want to focus on being intensive."

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*We want to make sure we live up to our ideals.*

A second phase of future planning includes growing community partnerships: "As a coop, one of our goals is to live more equitably—to divide our resources and labor in such a way that we lift each other up." She adds: "Part of the goal is to ask how we can accomplish this in ways that extend beyond our immediate group...We're asking the questions: How can we be better allies to BIPOC farmers and the people whose tribal homeland this is? How can we better serve our local community here in Rhode Island?" The group plans to make recurring donations to local organizations, make garden plots available, create a farmstand to increase access to Pea Shoot's produce, collaborate with other organizations on food-access programs, and become a resource for people who are interested in starting their own rural housing coop.

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As an Argentine-American, Lucía is keenly interested in growing more foods that people miss from home—for example, she's currently growing zapallitos, an Argentinian summer squash.

Lucía is looking forward to a long future on her farm and in the Cooperative: "Essentially, we all married each other. We share joint finances, we make decisions together, we're all planning to be there until we die."

