

# **Art, Farming and Marketing : What Do They Have in Common?**

How to Integrate Art and Maine Farms

Research for Internship with The Food Studies Program at the University of Southern  
Maine

By Lauren Olson

## **Overview and Introduction**

This research is part of a Food Studies Internship with the Food Studies Program at The University of Southern Maine looking to see what current efforts are being done that connect art and Maine farms. Research and interviews were conducted with individuals and organizations that had a strong connection to farming and art, or farms that realized the importance of using creative ways for marketing efforts and community connections.

Maine's art scene thrives with local artisans dabbling in various crafts and fine arts. Many artists have been able to piece together careers to make it here in Maine and the same can be said for Maine farms and agriculture. Researching art and farm connections was somewhat of a shot in the dark, having leads and peers that work in both sectors I made some connections and was able to reach out. Interviews took on a snowballing approach, as information was often received during interviews as individuals made connections to others who have some experience or background with the subject.

Overall, valuable information was gleaned and led me to believe that both the arts and farming can benefit from one another and that there are some small efforts occurring all around the state in very different ways, as it continues to grow in importance. There are many different individuals and organizations that have a background in connecting and supporting farmers with design opportunities. There are also farms that are already working to scale up their involvement with a designer to further their marketing efforts and many larger state-wide organizations with available resources to learn more.

## **Creative Technical Assistance**

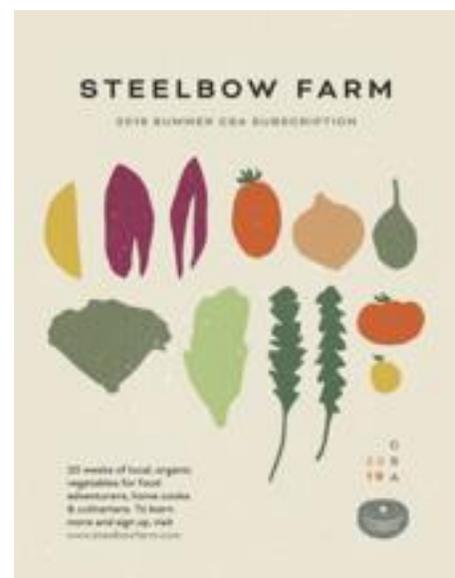
Gabe McPhail is a pioneer when it comes to technical assistance for farmers and food producers looking brand themselves and have their logos more visible in the Maine marketplace. McPhail provided graphics assistance, marketing and design support at a time when branding was just becoming important in the agricultural market starting this work in 1999 as doing it for about six years. She's worked on creating designs for Maine Farms for the Future Project a competitive grant program that provides selected farms with business planning assistance and The Maine Farm Project at CEI business

development programs that include Farm Financing; Farm Counseling; Farms for the Future; Image Building Concepts & New American Farmers, to name a few.

Photoshop and InDesign wasn't as widely used or available as it is today and there were no online services that allowed you to do DIY marketing efforts, not making it possible for farmers to professionally sell themselves on a shoestring budget. What was unique was that these services were able to be offered for free or reduced price due to grants that supported farm marketing efforts, which was then coming from Maine Farmland Trust and Coastal Enterprises Institute. Anyone in small scale agriculture, community food group, non-profit organization, or food producer would qualify to participate. McPhail had recognized that the market has changed but believes that there will always be a need. However, she also thinks there is still a niche market for branding, marketing and design work services, as "people want a personal feel, and want customers to understand their products and their farm".

## Marketing for Farmers

Farmers Finegan Ferreboeuf and Jason Gold owners of Steelbow Farm in Norridgewock have been successful with using art as a marketing solution for getting new customers to participate in their CSA program. In their first year of farming in 2017 they worked with FarmRun, a design and marketing business based out of Vermont. They wanted professional branding and a logo done so that they could have a polished looking business. From there, they had the idea to work with a designer and illustrator to create polished, fun posters that would help them market their CSA. They were looking to not only do online marketing efforts, but also physical non-digital efforts. What was surprising to Steelbow, was that restaurants they currently sell to, which don't normally allow posters to be hung in their establishments, allowed them because of the posters high quality and style. Moving forward, because of the positive feedback, they are looking to have another poster created for this coming season.



(Poster: Caroline Corrigan)

## Showcasing Opportunities

The Maine Organic Farmers Association (MOFGA) has hosted a Maine Craft section in the Common Ground Fair every year, in addition to celebrating rural living and agriculture during the fair through its booths, workshops and people. The Fair celebrates Maine artisans, focusing on crafts that have a low environmental impact, use recycled products and materials from Maine. MOFGA's mission directly ties in the arts and the farming community using artists to illustrate marketing materials for the Fair every year. Lucy Cayard, MOFGA's Southern Maine Outreach Coordinator uses vivid imagery of farms and the natural world for her role, working to connect potential customers to farmers and food producers. Working with farms and knowing the market, Cayard really thinks that thoughtful logos are important for farms to help connect with potential customers.

Maine Farmland Trust had a variety of programs that support the arts as it connects to the Maine agricultural scene. Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), is a statewide organization that protects farmland, supports farmers, and advances the future of farming. Their most recent program, The Fiore Art Center on Rolling Acres Farm is an artists retreat on land donated and placed under an agricultural easement. This is a unique program in that artists have the ability to connect with Maine's farmland while having time and



space to create and work on their art practice as it connects farming and nature. Not only does MFT have an artist retreat, they have a well curated gallery in the Belfast office, which has been open for ten years and is growing into two floors. The gallery's goal is to showcase the multi-faceted nature of farming. Ellen Sabina, Communications and Outreach Director, has pointed out that historically art has tended to show more romantic deprecations of farming, and MFT is looking to expand people's way of looking at farming. Part of Maine Farmland Trust's storytelling is how they use photos and visuals to explain and show the Maine food system, as the public responds well to visuals and there are a lot of descriptive ones in the farming scene. Sabina sees art as a benefit for farmers and marketing efforts, and is working to help all farmers understand

and importance of this.

*(Image: Rolling Acres Farm)*

## **Efforts Around Maine**

There are other fairs and galleries in Maine that recognize the importance of integrating farming into creative endeavors. The Harlow Gallery in Hallowell Maine has done two shows of pairing artists and farmers together, profiling Maine farms in various mediums and curating a show that travels to different galleries in Maine. The Harlow CSA project happened in 2011 and due to its popularity and interest, again in 2017. The show opened up submissions for Community Supporting Agriculture (CSA model) farmers and artists in Maine who were interested in getting paired together for a growing season. The artists worked in various mediums to showcase Maine farms all across the state, promoting local foods and purchasing locally produced foods.

Maine's Fiber Frolic in Windsor, Maine happens every June, and celebrates fiber, fiber animals, fiber arts, and small farms. Vendors set-up to display fiber arts, along with workshops and demonstrations, making the fair a powerful integration of the arts and agricultural community.

There are also a variety of General Stores around Maine that focus on local foods and crafts. Sheepscot General in Whitefield, Maine is a great example of integrating community products into a community store. They host art openings each month, as well as support local artisans with art commission sales in the store and a holiday art fair where they serve and sell local pizza.

## **Parting Thoughts**

As a result of this research I believe that Maine's agriculture and art scene is strong and supported by many individuals and community organizations. There are a lot of efforts to support Maine farmers through in-state programs and start-up opportunities, and at the same time more farmers are realizing that to be successful and reach new audiences more creative marketing efforts need to be made to stand out. Together, Maine is working to support all of its economic sectors, and progress is being made to connect more of the arts through farming and agriculture, and even education projects. One of Maine's large barriers when it comes to communities is connectivity across the state and towns. Since Maine is such a large state, we sometimes see the 'Two Maine's' effect, where southern Maine can be economically and culturally very different than central, western and northern Maine.

For this research, finding direct connections between art and farming, while some there are organizations working on marketing efforts and showcasing farming in a different way, I would say more work is being done on an individual scale rather than a state wide or organizational one. The information obtained here is varied and from all across the state, there are definitely more individual efforts being done that are not as well

known, as there is not much of a network that shares and showcases art and agriculture as one.

## **Works Cited**

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