CULTIVATING ACCESS:
THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF USING COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS TO PRESERVE FARMLAND AND SUPPORT FARMERS.

BY

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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Innovative methods of preserving working farmland are urgently needed as threats to agriculture loom large across the United States. The demand for development due to population growth, a booming housing market, and the generational transition of farmland presents a profound challenge to agriculture. Without proper succession plans in place among farmers nearing retirement in the United States, a significant amount of valuable farmland is expected to enter the market in the next decade (Plotkin and Hassanein, 2019). Moreover, agricultural land, especially near urban and peri-urban areas, is in high demand for development as it is usually flat and well-drained.

Over the last several decades, affordable housing, civil rights, and environmental advocates have developed the community land trust (CLT) model to uphold community land-use priorities (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020). CLTs acquire land to be held in perpetuity for the benefit of the community to which the land trust is accountable (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020). Under the CLT model, land trusts hold fee simple ownership and lease out parcels of land for productive use, like agriculture (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020). CLTs are governed by a Board of Directors who provide input on land acquisition projects and land uses (Davis Emmeus, 2010).

Compared to other voluntary methods of agricultural land management, CLTs promote alternative ownership structures for farms to preserve land and benefit farmers. While CLTs have a long history with agriculture, there is an apparent and increasing interest in

using the tool to preserve farmland and support regional and local food systems. Accordingly, this professional paper seeks to answer: What are the benefits and challenges of using the CLT model to protect agricultural land and provide access to land for farmers and ranchers in areas experiencing development pressure? What recommendations can be made for CLTs and others exploring this tool for farmland protection that provides farmers with security and affordability while encouraging sustainable stewardship practices?

VOLUNTARY METHODS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND PROTECTION

Various methods exist to protect farmland amidst a growing demand for development in the US. This study will focus on voluntary, rather than regulatory, tools for farmland preservation. One such tool, conservation easements, is a widely used approach to protect open space and farmland (Schwartz et al. 2013). A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that permanently limits the uses of land (Plotkin and Hassanein, 2019). When placing a conservation easement on the land, landowners may sell, donate, or a combination the rights to develop on their land. While conservation easements are an effective method for restricting development, there is a growing recognition that more is needed to keep farmland in production and affordable for farmers (Schwartz et al., 2013). There is no guarantee that farmland protected with a conservation easement will remain in agriculture. Land protected by an easement may still be sold on the open market, and in many but not all cases, there are no mechanisms to ensure the affordability of such land (Plotkin and Hassanein, 2019). Though buyers cannot develop the land they purchase, they do have the right to take their land out of agricultural production (Schwartz et al., 2013). This means that

farmland protected by conservation easements "is being underutilized or going out of production, and selling at prices that will never be affordable" to the average working farmer (Schwartz et al. 2013, 26).

Agricultural land protected by CLTs is more likely to remain in active production because the CLT can enforce land use practices and select tenants that intend to use their land for farming. Land tenure approaches are not the same for every CLT, but for protected agricultural land, a long-term lease with affordable monthly rent is typically utilized (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020). Long-term leasing allows farmers to acquire land at costs that have not been skewed by increasing land values (Schwartz et al., 2013). Farmers are also more likely to invest in infrastructure and ecologically responsible stewardship practices when they can lease land long-term (Schwartz et al. 2013). CLT models not only protect farmland but encourage active agricultural production to provide local food to their community and economic opportunities for farmers.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

While the CLT model presents an exciting approach to alternative land ownership structures, further research is needed to examine the potentials and limitations of the CLT model in agriculture. Therefore, this professional paper intends to expand on current research to create an overview of CLTs focused on preserving agricultural land and providing affordable land access for farmers. Ideally, this paper will be helpful to those interested in utilizing the CLT model for preserving farmland.

The first chapter establishes the foundation of my research, exploring the context and significance of CLTs in agriculture. It begins by examining the threats to agricultural land, including population growth and the booming housing market, and underlining the urgent need for innovative land preservation strategies. The chapter then outlines Ribot and Peluso's “A Theory of Access” (2003) to explain the theoretical framework behind the CLT model. Chapter one also incorporates insights from preliminary research conducted in Spring 2023, drawing upon interview data to enrich the discussion on potential applications of the CLT model in agriculture. By broadly including insights gleaned from preliminary research, Chapter one offers valuable perspectives from stakeholders directly involved in CLT initiatives.

Chapter two presents the methodology and research methods utilized in this study. This section provides detailed explanations of interview procedures and data synthesis processes, ensuring transparency and clarity regarding the research approach. Moreover, it offers an overview of interview participants, and the case studies the paper covers, establishing the foundation for the subsequent analysis of CLT initiatives in agricultural land preservation.

Chapters three and four describe and analyze the two cases, Lopez Community Land Trust and Community Farm Land Trust. These chapters begin with comprehensive overviews of the CLTs, including their locations, mission statements, and organizational structures. Chapters three and four also incorporate quotes from research participants

to provide insights into the approaches employed by these CLTs to integrate agriculture and the dynamics between farmers and CLT staff.

The final chapters of the paper—chapter five, the discussion chapter, and the conclusion—synthesize the main findings from the interviews and offer insights into their broader implications. These chapters aim to inform other organizations interested in adopting mechanisms of the CLT model for farmland protection. Through a comprehensive analysis of the case studies and synthesis of interview insights, the paper concludes with reflections on the potential of CLTs in addressing the challenges facing agricultural land preservation.

CHAPTER 1: COMMUNITY LAND TRUST ROOTS

THREATS TO AGRICULTURE AND THE CLT MODEL

The generational transition of farmland is on the horizon for an aging population of US farmers. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the average age of US farmers is around 60 years old (Halvorson, 2022). Farmers in the United States nearing retirement may require succession planning to pass their land on to the next generation. The complicated logistics and costs associated with succession planning present challenges for many farmers. Without proper succession plans in place, a significant amount of valuable farmland is expected to enter the market in the next decade (Plotkin and Hassanein, 2019). Moreover, the value of farmland has soared in recent years, hitting record highs and outpricing most beginning farmers (Qiu, 2022). With a growing population has come a demand for development and, in turn, increased land value. Among several other factors, the booming housing market has contributed to the rising cost of farmland, particularly farmland close to city centers (Qiu, 2022). New housing and construction puts pressure on farmland and contributes to rising land values that push farmland on the market and out of agriculture (Plotkin and Hassanein, 2019).

In a survey conducted by the National Young Farmers Coalition, beginning farmers named finding affordable land for purchase or lease as the top challenge in 2022 (Halvorson, 2022). Most new farmers hope to sell their products directly to consumers through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or farmers' markets (Schwartz et al., 2013). Unfortunately, farmers looking for farm properties near city centers "face competition from city dwellers and estate buyers" looking to purchase land (Schwartz et

al., 2013). The result is unobtainable market prices for most working farmers, especially those who rely on farming as their sole source of income. Few crops can be sold at prices that would cover higher land costs, and adding a premium on crop prices to reflect land costs is not a realistic option for many growers (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020).

Innovative community land trusts are a potential solution to maintaining farmland production. CLTs are non-profit organizations that acquire land either through a donation from a landowner, by purchasing land from a landowner, or a combination. The CLT model protects farmland and encourages active agricultural production to provide local food to a community and economic opportunities for farmers. As such, the model is designed to promote alternative ownership structures and increase equitable access to resources, particularly land. To fully evaluate the potential and limitations of the CLT model, it is essential to consider the socioeconomic factors that impact our ability to derive benefits from these resources. Ribot and Peluso's “A Theory of Access” (2003) provides a helpful framework to examine the CLT model within the property and access theory context.

WEB OF ACCESS FRAMEWORK

In their work, “A Theory of Access”, Ribot and Peluso argue that property and natural resource analysts have not adequately theorized the notion of access despite frequent use of the term. The authors aim to clearly define access and defend their claim that access differs from property in several ways. Ribot and Peluso define access as the ability to benefit from things, like material objects, institutions, or people, rather than the right to benefit from things (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Focusing on *ability* rather than

rights brings attention to various socioeconomic conditions that can prevent or enable people to benefit from resources (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In other words, instead of considering access to resources such as land as an automatic right, we should focus on our ability to access and benefit from land. This shift in perspective helps us better understand access barriers and how they prevent people from benefiting. Examining property within a web of access framework generates a method to map dynamic processes and relationships that impact resource access. Establishing a web of access helps to bring attention to the range of social relationships that can constrain or enable people to benefit from resources without focusing on property relations alone.

Property is often linked to ideas of ownership, defined by law and land tenure systems. Land tenure systems determine who has access to what resources, for how long, and under what conditions (Munro-Faure et al. 2002). Under current land tenure systems in the US, land is seen as private property and treated as a commodity. The CLT model is rooted in critiques of the dominant land tenure system and its focus on private property and wealth accumulation. As such, CLTs seek to implement alternative land access structures and theories of land reform on a smaller scale. *Land reform* is a purposeful response intended to correct land tenure systems deemed harmful to a community (Davis Emmeus, 2010,44). Essentially, theories of land reform center around the notion that some people own more land than they need, while others need land they do not own. Applying Ribot and Peluso's web of access framework to the CLT model helps expand on this theory and consider more deeply the conditions that allowed the CLT model to arise.

Given the basic framework for a theory of access outlined above, we can begin to establish an access analysis:

> Access analysis involves 1) identifying and mapping the flow of the particular benefit of interest; 2) identifying the mechanisms by which different actors involved gain, control, and maintain the benefit flow and its distribution; and 3) an analysis of the power relations underlying the mechanisms of access involved in instances where benefits are derived (Ribot and Peluso, 2003).

Analyzing resource access first requires identifying a particular benefit from a specific resource. In this case, the access analysis framework will be applied to farmland in the US to examine CLT's role in increasing access.

BENEFIT MAPPING

Preserving agricultural land offers many benefits. As local farms get bought up or converted out of agriculture, people lose access to open space and local food production. Establishing regional food security is a central goal for many CLTs focused on preserving agriculture, as is incorporating local food production requirements in farmers' ground leases (Center for Community Land Trust Innovation, 2022). Regional food security relies partly on producing food the community can access through local markets. Ground lease requirements are not intended to limit farmers strictly to a local market, but require that farmers on CLT land sell a percentage of what they produce locally.

Apart from food security and benefits to the local food economy, protecting farmland also adds the value of green space and farming education. For instance, some CLTs that support affordable housing hold land for community gardens and farms (Center for

Community Land Trust Innovation, 2022). These gardens and farms provide access to green space, community engagement, and farming education. The long-term benefits for children engaged in community gardens and farms include healthier eating and understanding food systems.

In agricultural production, securing land tenure through land ownership or "enabling stable access through a long-term lease is important if farmers aim to root themselves in a place" and invest in infrastructure (Plotkin and Hassanein 2019, 2). Without long-term tenure or lease security, farmers have little incentive to implement good stewardship practices as they may be difficult to justify economically (Schwartz et al. 2013). Farmers with long-term access to farmland however, may choose to grow perennial crops, invest in farm equipment, and have the time to become familiar with and improve the physical characteristics of their farm. Additionally, farms that have been around for a long time have more opportunities to build relationships and sell their products in local markets. Ideally, preserving agricultural land and ensuring long-term access through CLT ground leases supports the local food economy and adds the value of green space, community engagement, farming education, and good stewardship practices.

MECHANISMS OF ACCESS

Ribot and Peluso describe mechanisms as the means, processes, and relations by which actors can gain access to resources. Rights-based mechanisms are access to a resource granted through a law or custom, such as a deed or lease agreement (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In the case of CLTs, farmers can access farmland through a ground

lease. Ground leases are perhaps one of the most significant components of the CLT model. The CLT ground lease is a shared equity model, meaning land trusts legally own the land they lease, but lessees own any infrastructure built on the land they lease from CLTs. This approach gives farmers an ownership interest, where they can invest in farm infrastructure, own it, and sell it in the future. CLTs also differ from traditional land ownership models because they incorporate long-term leasing that typically lasts 75 to 99 years depending on the laws and customs of the particular place. Despite the CLT model's unique approach, access to resources can only be granted to lessees through rights-based mechanisms. In his 1968 book, *The Seventeen Problems of Man and Society*, Ralph Borsodi distinguishes between what can be legally owned and what should be held in trust and communally controlled (Witt and Swann 2017, 244-252). By Borsodi's definition, anything an individual creates due to labor on the land can be owned and treated as a commodity (Witt and Swann 2017, 244-252). The land itself, however, is a limited resource and should be held in trusteeship, with its uses allocated on a limited basis (Witt and Swann 2017, 244-252). Models of land ownership, such as Borsodi's, have greatly influenced the structure of the CLT model, which aims to reduce barriers to access.

Although CLTs own parcels of land and follow a leasing structure, the CLT model seeks to incorporate elements of communal land-use decision-making through their governing board. The CLT board is typically made up of CLT residents, community residents, and public representatives who provide input on land acquisition projects and land uses (Davis Emmeus, 2010). Community land trusts acquire land to be held in perpetuity for

the benefit of the community to which the land trust is accountable (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020). Within the CLT model, land trusts hold land rights and lease out parcels of land for productive use, such as agriculture, to benefit farmers and the greater community (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020).

While the classic CLT structure provides access to resources through ground leases and oversight by the CLT governing board, innovative variations of the CLT model have emerged to find other means to provide access. The table below presents a range of strategies employed by land trusts to integrate agriculture and community gardening into their organizational frameworks. Drawing from insights gathered through interviews conducted during preliminary research, these cases highlight the adaptability of the CLT model to diverse resource constraints. Participant and organization names are not included in the table as participants did not give permission to be identified during preliminary research. Each approach enables access to farmland and garden space and extends these opportunities to a broader community.

Sample Approach	Description
Community Farm Establishment within CLT Neighborhood	A CLT reserves 5 acres of urban farmland and partners with a local certified organic farm for management. Farmers access the plot through an affordable ground lease, integrating it into their operations. In return for reduced rates, farmers oversee the farm and organize community events. This approach leverages local expertise without requiring significant staff capacity or agricultural knowledge from the CLT.

Community Garden Establishment within CLT Neighborhood	A CLT allocates green space within its neighborhood for a community garden project. The initiative comprises 327 garden plots tended by 190 families annually, with a sliding scale cost structure based on income. Collaborating with a local non-profit specializing in community garden development, the CLT entrusts stewardship of the non-housing portion of the property to the non-profit, which also provides educational programming to the community
Integration of CLT Model into Conservation Land Trust	A conservation land trust partners with a local farmer who invests in 14 acres of prime agricultural land. Financial strain prompts the farmer to seek support from the trust to safeguard the farm. The trust collaborates with the farmer to establish an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) and a CLT ground lease. This partnership extends the trust's mission to preserve working farmland while providing the farmer with long-term land access.

Table 1 Diverse approaches to farmland and community garden management through the CLT model. Overview of different strategies employed by CLTs and other land trusts to integrate farmland and community gardens into their organizational frameworks. Data derived from interviews conducted in Spring 2023.

POWER RELATIONS

The CLT model was created to address the unfair distribution of farmland ownership. Local civil rights activists formed the first CLT in the late 1960s near Albany, Georgia, called New Communities. This CLT was established for Black sharecroppers who lost access to their farmland after registering to vote. As the model's founders put it, CLTs were formed as "a legitimate alternative institutional expression of land ownership, thereby contributing to America's much-needed social and economic reconstruction”

(Swann et al., 2013, 2). The CLT model was developed by the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements to create a fair power distribution in lease agreements.

An analysis of power relations involves examining the power structures underlying mechanisms of access, especially those that impact where benefits are derived. According to Ribot and Peluso, "People and institutions are positioned differently in relation to resources at various historical moments and geographical scales" (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, 154). This is particularly true when considering the US's history of land tenure and those granted the "right" to own land. Thus, analyses of power relations must consider the changing nature of power and "the multiplicity of ways people derive benefits from resources, including, but not limited to, property relations" (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, 3). The regulation of resource access can be divided into those who control access and those who must rely on others in control to maintain access (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). Recognizing this distinction is critical to viewing access as a dynamic area of analysis. In contrast to static areas, which remain fixed and unchanging over time, dynamic analysis areas are characterized by their fluidity and adaptability, often responding to shifting social, economic, and political contexts. Recognizing this difference is essential for appreciating access as a dynamic analysis area, where factors such as power dynamics, ownership structures, and social justice considerations continually evolve.

Although the CLT model provides an alternative ownership structure to address inequality of resource access, inherent power relations are at play with any agreement

between a lessee lessor. CLT literature emphasizes that all lease agreements are two-sided and that tenants' wishes should be considered along with the community governing board's interests when providing access to CLT land. The CLT model tinkers with "the bundle of rights and responsibilities provided to a CLT leaseholder, especially those affecting the use, improvement, and resale of the CLT land" (Center for Community Land Trust Innovation, 2022). Through this tinkering, CLTs aim to create a workable balance "between a form of property different enough from traditional land ownership to protect the community's long-term interests" but close enough to traditional land ownership that tenants feel secure in their land tenure.

CONCLUSION

CLTs offer a promising solution to the challenges of preserving farmland and supporting farmers. With increasing development and decreasing availability of farmland, CLTs have emerged as a viable and sustainable alternative ownership structure for farms. By promoting communally controlled land, affordable lease prices, and farming practices that benefit the surrounding community, CLTs can help preserve farmland, support regional and local food systems, and promote equitable and affordable land access. The theoretical framework of access proposed by Ribot and Peluso provides a valuable lens through which to examine the CLT model and its historical roots. Investigating theory related to property, natural resource commodification, and power dynamics can help us better understand how CLTs work within current land tenure systems in the US. Overall, more research on CLTs and farmland preservation is essential in addressing the challenges facing agriculture in the US and ensuring that farmland remains in the hands of farmers for generations to come.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

In this study, I provide an overview of the objectives, methodologies, and key findings from my investigation into the use of CLTs in agriculture. This research encompasses a review of relevant literature, in-depth case studies of two CLTs in Washington state, analysis of data collected from the case studies, and recommendations for communities and professionals interested in utilizing the CLT model for farmland protection. The findings and insights presented in this study aim to contribute to a better understanding of the potential of CLTs in preserving farmland and providing affordable access to agricultural land.

OBJECTIVE 1: PROVIDE CONTEXT FOR CLT USE IN AGRICULTURE THROUGH A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND ARCHIVAL DATA.

An in-depth analysis of relevant journal articles, books, newspaper articles, and nonprofit publications (e.g., past case studies carried out by The Center for Community Land Trust Innovation and Grounded Solutions) was conducted to develop a comprehensive understanding of the history of CLTs in agriculture and current methods of preserving farmland using the approach. The potential benefits and drawbacks of the CLT model in agriculture are identified by systematically reviewing relevant literature, and an overview of its scope of use is provided.

OBJECTIVE 2: CARRY OUT TWO IN-DEPTH CASE STUDIES DRAWING PRIMARILY ON SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH LOPEZ CLT AND COMMUNITY FARM LAND TRUST, BOTH IN WASHINGTON STATE.

This research focuses on two case studies of CLTs protecting farms. First, the Lopez Community Land Trust, based on Lopez Island in the San Juan Islands of Washington, incorporates affordable neighborhoods, local businesses, and a sustainable agriculture and rural development program. Lopez CLT includes two farms, one of 48 acres and

one of approximately 117 acres in size. Second, the Community Farm Land Trust (CFLT) is based in Olympia, WA, and focuses its work on agricultural land south of Puget Sound. CFLT has preserved a total of 216 acres in Thurston County across four farm sites. CFLT differs from Lopez CLT because they not only utilize a CLT model, but they also incorporate agricultural conservation easements with an option-to-purchase at agricultural value. Data collected for case study analysis include interview transcripts, a review of both CLT websites, and an examination of sample ground leases. By comparing the approaches of these two organizations, I aim to understand the different strategies used to preserve and provide affordable access to farmland, as well as the benefits and challenges encountered.

OBJECTIVE 3: DESCRIBE AND ANALYZE DATA COLLECTED FROM EACH CASE STUDY TO UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THIS FARMLAND PROTECTION APPROACH.

My approach to social research and qualitative data collection explores participants' experiences and values surrounding land reform and agriculture. I used a semi-standardized, interview guide to conduct each interview (Turner, 2010). The same interview guide was used for each interview, meaning each participant was asked the same set of questions. For more in-depth data collection, I used probing questions as a way to follow up on the open-ended questions. Information from interview data collected during preliminary research conducted in Spring 2023 about participant experiences working with CLTs and their goals in using this model for farmland protection is used to inform current research and provide context for this study.

Interview participants were selected based on information provided by staff of the organizations studied. My goal was to interview various research participants, including at least one person from the CLT staff, at least one person on each CLT board, and as many farmers as possible. I sent fourteen requests for interviews; eleven of the fourteen contacts responded and agreed to participate. Though eleven interviews were conducted, six interviews included multiple participants. This study includes 19 participants in total. Eight interviews were conducted in person, and three were conducted virtually to accommodate participants' schedules. Interview questions and procedures underwent review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. The IRB confirmed that privacy and confidentiality concerns were appropriately addressed in the interview guide, with each participant providing verbal consent to be interviewed, recorded, and identified.

OBJECTIVE 4: MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMMUNITIES AND PROFESSIONALS EXPLORING THE USE OF THE CLT MODEL FOR FARMLAND PROTECTION.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interview transcriptions were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis involves coding data for relevant concepts and themes that address my research question (Becker, 1986). Coding topics were developed based on concepts emergent in the data. Data analysis consists of a review of topics that frequently arose during the interview process (Becker, 1986). Many quotes were obtained from the interview transcriptions, categorized under each topic, and then examined to see if they were relevant to the application of CLTs in agriculture. Quotations have been edited to remove unnecessary words (e.g., "I mean" and "you know").

Several key themes emerged in the interview data. Participants extensively discussed their farming experiences, including backgrounds, goals, favorite aspects, and challenges encountered. Another significant focus was on the roles of staff and board members within community land trusts (CLTs), covering motivations, roles, and organizational capacity. Lease specifics and land access were prominent, addressing fees, affordability, stewardship, and improvement value. Mechanisms of the CLT model are another key topic, with discussions highlighting participants' familiarity with and interest in its unique attributes. Discussions also touched on comparisons between land ownership and renting, and potential disagreements with CLTs. Lastly, participants provided valuable advice for farmers and CLTs, stressing effective communication, collaboration, and a commitment to sustainable land stewardship.

In growing communities, development pressure poses a challenge to preserving farmland for agriculture. Innovative methods of land preservation are becoming increasingly essential. This analysis aims to provide insightful observations and recommendations for CLTs interested in holding land for agricultural use. Through a qualitative approach, this study identifies the benefits of the CLT model for agricultural land preservation and the obstacles that CLTs face. Drawing upon the relevant literature and data from case studies, the study highlights various opportunities for CLTs in farmland preservation and land access for farmers.

Figure 1 Stonecrest Farm. 2023, photo by author.

CHAPTER 3: LOPEZ COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION: LOPEZ ISLAND AND LCLT

Lopez Island, the third largest of the San Juan Islands in Washington State, spans approximately 30 square miles, and stands out as the most rural among its larger counterparts. Its landscape features a picturesque blend of forests, farmland, and beaches. Lopez Island's allure is heightened by its proximity to Seattle and other major Washington cities, making it a sought-after location for vacation homes. The island's popularity has significantly impacted land prices and the availability of farmland. In response to these shifts in land prices and population dynamics, the Lopez Community

Land Trust (LCLT) was established in 1989 to safeguard the well-being of the Lopez community.

LCLT operates as a non-profit organization with a multifaceted approach, encompassing initiatives like affordable housing, rural development programs, and agricultural ground leases. Structurally, LCLT adheres to the tripartite governance model, whereby its board of directors is made up of LCLT staff members, LCLT leaseholders, and allied community representatives. Among the interview participants within LCLT are Sandy Bishop, who has served as the Executive Director for over 25 years; Breton Carter, the Assistant Director; and Rhea Miller, the Community Liaison. LCLT Board members include Quaniqua Williams, Chair, who brings insight as a former LCLT employee who now lives in the LCLT Salish Way cooperative. Jan Marshall, Treasurer, who relocated to Lopez in 2021, and Joe Schneider, co-founder of Seattle-based JAS Design-Build, and Lopez homeowner since 2000.

Breton Carter, Assistant Director, explained the group's origins, stating, "LCLT started in 1989 because the cost of housing that year rose 190%." Over time, Lopez has become synonymous with second-home destinations, contributing to substantial tourist booms. Breton highlighted a concerning statistic:

> 45% of the houses and land in San Juan County is vacant most of the year because they're secondary homes for people, which is just putting immense pressure on the cost of land. The median home prices are over a million dollars. Purchasing land on the island is incredibly difficult, especially when larger tracts of farmland are turned into estates for second homes.

The allure of beautiful views, land investment, and an off-the-grid lifestyle act as a siren call to off-islanders hoping to purchase a second (or third, or fourth) home. This influx of off-island investors has led to a high turnover rate in the island's population. LCLT staff also emphasized that many of these new residents are buying land as investors. They explained, “People come here because they think it's a cool place, but once construction is finished, because they always have to remodel, they don't know what to do with themselves. They haven't really invested much in the community.”

Sandy Bishop, Executive Director, articulated the core mission of LCLT, stating “We're a land-based organization committed to the community. We work locally, just on Lopez Island. Everything we do first starts with the land and removing land from speculation so that it's in service of the community.” Affordable housing was a paramount concern on Lopez Island at the time of LCLT's establishment. External forces influencing land prices, coupled with low labor rates, left locals struggling to secure housing amidst a growing tourist population and limited land availability. While LCLT initially focused on housing, its overarching goal centers around empowerment. Rhea Miller, Community Liaison, explained, "We're an empowering organization; nothing we do is in the attitude of charity. We help people get on their feet." Sandy added, "LCLT gets tagged as a land trust for affordable housing, but our service to the community can manifest itself as housing, agriculture, cottage industries, cooperatives, reforestation, anything." The organization's multifaceted approach reflects the diverse needs of the Lopez Island community and the potential of the community land trust (CLT) model to address these needs.

This case study explores LCLT's methodology for preserving farmland, beginning with an examination of its organizational structure. Subsequently, I delve into the leasing procedures, offering firsthand insight from farmers engaged in LCLT ground leases. Finally, I wrap up with an assessment of key takeaways shared by LCLT staff and farmers, focusing on their approaches to farmland preservation.

LCLT STAFF AND BOARD ROLES

LCLT manages seven limited-equity housing cooperatives, construction and rural development internship programs, and two agricultural leases. During interview discussions, each staff member described the circumstances that allow them to manage their work within a fairly limited staff capacity. Breton Carter, Assistant Director, explained that LCLT combines the CLT model with limited equity co-ops, by leasing land to a housing cooperative through a long-term renewable ground lease. Applying this model to LCLT housing means that staff can communicate with co-op representatives rather than checking in on each individual household. Agricultural ground leases, however, require a whole other set of skills to manage. Sandy Bishop, Executive Director, shared,

> There are built-in challenges to everything we do; of course, it's just baked into our existence. There's not much support for stewarding land, and we can't charge enough of a lease fee to really pay somebody to oversee stewardship. We're fortunate that we have a small crew of people that can do all this work. There's going to have to be more financial resources brought in outside of lease fees to help steward some of our property and maintain the ideas behind ground leases and the CLT model. However, I like our work because we're learning and growing as a community, not just on Lopez but nationally. We have a lot of support and resources.

LCLT Board members, both leaseholders and non-leaseholders, play integral roles in fostering a diverse and well-rounded board composition, bringing varied perspectives and skill sets to the table. They engage with leaseholders, offer support for ongoing projects, and actively participate in site visits to farms. Joe Schneider is a self-described newcomer to the LCLT, having joined a few weeks before our interview. He described his motivation for getting involved with the board by saying,

> I just wanted to get in there and learn about the CLT model. Some of the more important community members on Lopez live in LCLT housing, and they became business owners because they had affordable housing. You really get to see what the model did for certain people's lives over a 20-year run.

When asked about farmer involvement in the LCLT Board, Quaniqua Williams, Board Chair, shared,

> We don't have any of our farmers on the board, but we are very active in our relationship with them. We get to understand their experiences as farmers in a relationship with LCLT. So, it's not like their perspective isn't brought into the discussion; it's just that they don't have the capacity to add board responsibilities to their schedule.

LCLT staff and Board members collaborate closely to advance the land trust's mission, uphold its values, and foster sustainable land stewardship practices within the community. Through their collective efforts, they ensure effective management of LCLT resources for the community's benefit and enhance staff capacity to steward LCLT land with robust community input.

ACCESS TO FARMLAND

The potential to integrate farmland into LCLT's land acquisition initiatives arose in 1991 after founding members attended a CLT conference in Vermont. During the event, LCLT Board members visited a historic farm that had been acquired by a local CLT and entrusted to beginning farmers through a long-term lease. As the farm transitioned into the care of a new generation, the previous owner remained on the property. Reflecting on this experience, Sandy Bishop, Executive Director, recalled, "We knew right away that's what we wanted to do. It just took a long time for that to be able to manifest." The inclusion of farmland into LCLT's mission resonated with their objectives in the Lopez community: land preservation, local empowerment, and the establishment of a resilient local food system. However, acquiring farmland presented significant challenges. Sandy explained, "We needed land availability and enough of an organizational structure to hold the land and afford it. You know, we had to do it all with private money. There was no public funding." Initially uncertain about their ability to raise sufficient funds, Sandy emphasized, "We didn't think we would be able to raise enough private funds. It took a while, but we're opportunists." The opportunity to purchase farmland materialized when local landowners approached LCLT with the desire to sell their land, leading to the acquisition of Stonecrest Farm.

Stonecrest Farm is a 48-acre historic working farm located on a hill overlooking the Center Valley of Lopez Island. Sandy shared, "The folks that wanted to sell Stonecrest pursued LCLT for probably three years before we were able to purchase it from them." LCLT faced the challenge of raising $1,000,000 to acquire Stonecrest Farm from its original owners. Rhea reflected,

> At first, we just thought, 'Wow, that's a lot of money, and there are only a couple of houses on that property. Can we afford to put all of that money into farmland?' Then we realized that by acquiring Stonecrest Farm, we were going to attract a different pool of donors, and that's exactly what happened.

Through major donors and extensive fundraising efforts, LCLT successfully purchased Stonecrest Farm to be held in perpetuity. Recognizing the critical role of selecting the right farmers to take over the Stonecrest lease, staff members understood that this decision was integral to the success and longevity of the farm.

Those “right farmers” turned out to be Mike and Meike who started their farming careers fifteen years ago after making a move from California to Gunnison, Colorado. Both originating from non-farming backgrounds, Meike explained, "I'm from suburban New York. He's from suburban Chicago originally. You know, we came to Colorado as skiers at first, but we had this epiphany in Gunnison County. Gunnison was cattle, cattle everywhere but, no local steak to eat." She further explained, "We were in cattle country, but those calves were all contracted. It was tough at the time to get local hogs and local lamb. You could get local beef occasionally, but rarely. We were like, okay, here's our niche." Since then, Mike and Meike have applied holistic farming practices to regenerate soil through livestock.

In 2017, Mike and Meike set their sights on the Pacific Northwest in search of farmland, facing steep land values along the way. Meike recalls their struggle, stating,

> I mean, we were just shocked, totally shocked. We just were really surprised at how little farmland was available and affordable. You can get 20 acres for $500,000 with a beat-up double-wide on the property if you're

> lucky. Then you have to think about fencing and other infrastructure. And God forbid you have to buy a few cows.

Mike added, “The real estate aspect is probably the biggest challenge of being a farmer. Communities have become so disconnected from their food and how that relates to land values. I mean, that's what land in this country is becoming: an investment. It's so commodified.”

Confronted with the reality of land prices, Mike and Meike explored the option of an agricultural lease. Meike explained, "Mike stumbled upon the RFP for the land trust here, and we called them up and asked if they would be willing to entertain non-locals for this lease. And they said absolutely. So, we met them literally the next day."
An RFP, or request for proposal, serves as a formal document to announce a project and invite bids from interested parties. Such documents are common practice for CLTs seeking new leaseholders, particularly in the competitive realms of affordable housing and farmland. Emphasizing the significance of the application process, LCLT staff stress the importance of selecting farmers whose stewardship practices align with LCLT goals. Mike reflected, "It seemed like the RFP was written for us. It checked all the boxes with regenerative agriculture and all the other buzzwords at that time. If the shoe fits, pick it up and put it on." However, the extensive nature of the application process caught both Mike and Meike by surprise. They recalled, "It was actually pretty intense. We filled it all out, submitted all the needed paperwork, and yeah, it was all very formal."

A few years after acquiring the Stonecrest property, LCLT seized the opportunity to acquire 118 acres of farm and forest land on Lopez Sound Road. Through a combination of loans, private donations, and collaboration with the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank, LCLT successfully completed the purchase. Subsequently, in 2021, LCLT sold part of the original property, that is, 75 acres of forest land to the SJC Conservation Land Bank, thereby expanding the existing 400-acre Lopez Hill Preserve. In the same year, LCLT selected Andrew and Lena Jones for a long-term lease at the Lopez Sound Farm and Forest Preserve. By 2022, LCLT, Lena, and Andrew had finalized the ground lease agreement and commenced the development of Still Light Farm LLC on the remaining 43 acres.

Lena and Andrew bring a rich and diverse background to their farming endeavors. Lena's journey into farming began with an internship at a farm in Wisconsin; she shared, “We had a 300-person CSA, so pretty large scale. That was my first introduction to farming. I went on to do other things, working for nonprofits and publishing. I went to grad school, but Andrew and I always planned to farm. We were always working toward that goal.” Andrew, on the other hand, has deep roots in farming, having grown up immersed in agriculture. As he put it, "I have a long history of family farming. I grew up on farms and around farms. A lot of it was what we would call truck farming back east. So mostly like sweet corn and tomatoes, growing that kind of produce." When asked about his favorite aspects of farming, Andrew reflects, "I like the diversity of skills that are required to be a successful farmer." After deciding to leave the family farming operation, Andrew pursued the hard skills he thought necessary to be a successful

farmer, including working as an arborist and taking welding classes. Andrew and Lena's long-term goal of owning a farm began with their search for land in 2020.

Andrew and Lena sold their home in Portland and moved to Bellingham, Washington, in 2020 to start looking for viable farmland in Skagit County close to family in the area. Lena recalled, "We were just looking for anything that was available in the county. A lot of what was available was five-acre farmette properties in more rural areas. We just felt like we would have a hard time finding community in those areas." Andrew added, ‘‘That was sort of all that was in budget. We thought, you know, we sold our house for a lot of money because it was during COVID, and all the house prices were going way up, and we were excited about that. We thought we'd be able to buy 40 acres, but we realized we could afford about four.’’ The couple expanded their search to the San Juan Islands when a ten-acre property became available on Lopez. Upon visiting the island, Lena shared, ‘‘We had this list of things we were looking for in a property, and one of the things I think we didn't put on the list, but really wanted, was community. When we came to Lopez, we felt like this is a place where you could really make a life, you could get to know people who are living here.’’

With Lopez Island on their radar, Lena and Andrew began to search for farmland there. Their Lopez search began when they reached out to an old friend who was working as an agent for the San Juan extension office. As Andrew put it, ‘‘I just sent him this out of the blue email like, 'Hey, I haven't talked to you in 15 years, but what's up? We're looking for farmland; what do you think about moving to the islands to be a farmer?' And

he had just gotten the RFP from LCLT sent to his email that day.” Lena explains their uncertainty around the RFP by sharing,

> We thought we wanted to buy something not to rent, but then I got on the phone with Sandy. Andrew and I came out and saw the property, and you know, our list was, like, 40 acres, access to water, privacy, a long driveway, and community. That was just so idealistic, but this property has all of them.

From there, Andrew and Lena began the process of filling out the RFP and understanding the CLT model.

LCLT's latest farm acquisition project involves collaborating with a local business, Barn Owl Bakery, to protect farmland crucial for growing grain and other crops essential for their bakery. In 2023, Sage Dilts and Nathan Hodges from Barn Owl Bakery approached LCLT, seeking to enhance the stability of their farm and bakery through innovative land ownership models and community partnerships. Despite the bakery's success, operating on a small island with high land costs requires innovative solutions and additional support. LCLT agreed to acquire the 17.5 acres of land where Barn Owl Bakery operates, relieving Sage and Nathan of their land debt through a 99-year lease arrangement. This ensures their security, equity, and the ability to pass on the business to future generations, while LCLT holds the land in trust to serve the local food system.

This collaboration marks a significant milestone for Sage and Nathan, who established Barn Owl Bakery on Lopez Island in 2013. They expanded in 2019 by purchasing 17.5 acres of land along with an old lumber barn, transforming the buildings and land into a diverse agro-forestry system with managed forests, perennial crops, fruit trees, and an

intensive annual garden, preserving a variety of rare and heritage grain varieties. Sage described their collaboration with LCLT:

> It's an interesting dynamic because we're not farming to grow crops for profit. That sort of production isn't really our goal. We mostly just grow what we need for our bakery. So, our relationship with LCLT is a little less direct than some of the farmers they work with, but I think that our work really aligns with LCLT's mission to support cottage industries and the local food system.

To complete the purchase of farmland in collaboration with Barn Owl Bakery by 2024, LCLT must raise $189,650, with $200,000 currently secured through a matching fund. A review of LCLT's latest annual report provides more information on how these funds are secured to carry out land acquisition projects. In 2022, LCLT's largest source of income was from grants and contributions. Lease fees and fees from the few rentals that LCLT maintains around Lopez Island also contribute to LCLT's total income. LCLT staff members explained that fundraising efforts and grant funds are essential to continue to accrue the capital necessary for farmland purchases, especially as land values on Lopez continue to rise. LCLT's diverse programming enables the organization to pursue a variety of grant funding sources. Additionally, revenue streams from rental properties, housing projects, and agricultural leases provide LCLT with financial stability beyond grant funding.

CLT GROUND LEASE

The ground lease format stands out as one of the most significant yet often puzzling elements of the CLT model, especially in the context of agriculture. Crafting a ground lease for agricultural purposes involves several key components unique to the CLT model, including long-term security, affordable lease prices, stewardship requirements,

and the opportunity for lessees to build equity through improvements on the land. Understanding these aspects can be challenging however, particularly for lessees unfamiliar with the CLT model. Sandy Bishop, Executive Director, explained,

> The lease process involves months of going through the lease together with the farmer. Housing ground leases are often pretty similar from development to development, but one thing we learned early on with farm leases is you need to be prepared to take the time to work with farmers and understand their goals.

CLT staff members are clear that the ground lease is a collaborative process. Sandy stated,

> There's a public aspect to what we're doing. That's by design. The farmers that we work with are contributing to an overall healthier food system. I think when you're a small team like us, you have to feed multiple birds with one worm. LCLT staff can't be the sole eyes looking at the ground lease. It takes a whole community to do that.

Rhea Miller, Community Liaison, added, “We encourage farmers to have their own legal representation in lease discussions, and of course, we have ours." Lena and Andrew both emphasized the importance of creating a collaborative environment with LCLT staff. Lena reflected on the process sharing, “I think that this process was informative for both the land trust and us because they didn't have a project quite like this under their belt. The lease we ended up working out moved their lease process forward as well. It was a really good learning experience for everyone.”

It's important to note that the farmers at Stonecrest and Still Light Farms had slightly different experiences negotiating their ground leases. The Stonecrest farm lease was an

entirely new project for LCLT. Meike shared, "We knew that we were kind of the guinea pigs for this ground lease, and we were okay with that."

Interview data suggests that farmers had limited prior interaction with the CLT model before engaging with the organization. This lack of familiarity appears to have contributed to initial confusion surrounding lease components and farmers' relationship with LCLT. Farmers at Still Light began their education on the CLT model and lease components while working on RFP responses. Andrew explained, “I don't know that I spent a lot of time engaging with the CLT model. We saw the LCLT office and learned about the project, but I really didn't know anything about CLTs. We just really worked on what our relationship would be to the land trust.” Lena added,

> I feel like the whole beginning of this project was a crash course into CLTs. What's been interesting is you have to sort of learn how to strip capitalism out of things. Which was something I was trying to find ways to do anyway, but it's hard. Even for people who live and breathe CLTs, it's still challenging. It's super hard to think outside of a capitalist structure; your gut instinct is always to try to figure out how to protect your financial interest.

Farmers at Stonecrest faced a significant learning curve as they delved into the structure of a typical CLT ground lease, underscoring the importance of education and transparent communication between lessees and the CLT. Mike and Meike exemplify this learning journey, expressing initial concerns about the lengthy duration of the lease and raising questions about lease agreements and parameters. Meike shared, "At first, they wanted us to sign a 99-year lease, and we really balked at that. We didn't even know what this land was like or what it's like to farm here." Mike added, “We didn't

know. Really, when we came into that discussion, we were caught off guard by the 99-year lease because that wasn't actually in the RFP. If a long-term lease period had been proposed to us early on, I think we would have been more open." Eventually, farmers at Stonecrest and LCLT agreed on a 15-year lease with a five-year renewal after fifteen years. Mike and Meike shared that they have both considered the possibility of reworking the lease period now that they are more familiar with the CLT model and their relationship to LCLT specifically.

Affordable lease pricing is fundamental to the CLT model, often determined through an affordability calculation to keep lease rates relatively low. In agricultural contexts, affordable lease pricing aims to grant farmers access to farmland that would otherwise be financially out of reach. According to data from the 2023 USDA report on rent prices for cropland in Washington State, the annual average rent price for non-irrigated cropland in WA stands at $76 per acre, while irrigated cropland commands a staggering $440 per acre, resulting in a state average of $238 per acre (USDA, 2023). This places Washington State among the top ten most expensive states in the US for renting cropland.

The LCLT sample ground lease outlines that the lease fee is calculated based on the fair rental value of the leased land, and is subject to periodic adjustments every third year of the lease term to ensure it remains reasonably current. The fair rental value of agricultural land is established by comparing rents paid by farmers for similar land in the local real estate market. Once the fair rental value is determined, LCLT staff and

lessees negotiate an agreeable lease price, using the fair value as a baseline. The ground lease also specifies that this lease fee calculation takes into account several factors:

> (a) that certain costs of ownership, including property taxes, are paid directly by the Lessee and are therefore not costs for which Lessor should be reimbursed through the Ground Lease Fee, (b) that use of the Premises is restricted by the Lease in ways that reduce the fair rental value, and (c) that Lessee will be providing certain benefits to Lessor including but not limited to preservation and enhancement of soil quality and protection of the environment.

The lease agreement at Stonecrest Farm is divided into two fees: one for the farmland itself and another for the residential quarters and outbuildings on the property. Mike and Meike explained that they pay a total of $1,000 per month, with $650 allocated for the cottage they reside in and an additional $350 for the outbuildings. The land lease stands at approximately $50 per acre per year. Expressing dissatisfaction with the lease fees, Stonecrest farmers noted, "The lease fee for the land itself seems pretty high considering the state of the land when we started farming here." Since beginning their work on the Stonecrest property, Mike and Meike have focused on revitalizing soil depleted from years of hay production and mismanagement. They explained, "We started farming here pretty intensely because we knew that looking at the soil and looking at the state of the grasses, what this place needed was animals immediately." Enhancing fencing, improving watering systems for livestock, and years of intensive soil regeneration efforts were essential in establishing animal presence on the land. They further note, "We also cover all land taxes and utilities for our cottage. So, is it more affordable? Yes. But sometimes, the land lease fee seems high considering all the other

expenses." Long term security, however, suggests that these farmers will continue to benefit from these investments in the property for years to come.

Farmers at Still Light Farm collaborated with LCLT staff to devise a distinct lease agreement. Lena and Andrew explain that their lease arrangement varies slightly from the Stonecrest lease. The lease involves paying a fee for the agricultural part of the property and implementing a profit-sharing agreement for the forested area. Determining this structure took significant time. Upon assessing the land, Andrew and Lena noted the absence of infrastructure for year-round agriculture without substantial investment. Essentially, the agricultural land functioned more as a hay field or pasture. Reflecting on this, Lena shared,

> We basically set the base fee as low as everyone felt comfortable with, just because we have had to put so much into this property just to get it to a place where we could farm. The farmer that comes after us will have a very different property. They'll be taking on a completely different project, and they'll be able to negotiate something really different with LCLT.

When asked about the affordability of their lease overall, both Andrew and Lena agreed that their lease arrangement feels fair and affordable despite the infrastructure investments. A contributing factor to this affordability, Lena explains, was the ability to postpone their lease fee and other lease requirements while working on the farm infrastructure. Lena added, “A lot of the aspects of our lease are scheduled to kick in at later dates. Because again, we can't live here yet. We still need to build the house and other infrastructure while making the land farmable. So, we just paid our first lease fee this month, and we've had the lease for around 18 months.”

Another significant aspect of the CLT ground lease is the chance for lessees to accumulate equity through property improvements. LCLT staff stress that many farmers operate on tight profit margins while possessing substantial land assets, making them "land rich." A staff member noted, "Many farmers lack substantial retirement funds, which underscores the importance of building equity." Farmers at Still Light elucidate that improvement values are determined using the Consumer Price Index. Andrew explained, "The value of our house, once completed, will be assessed upon completion and then accrue interest tied to the Consumer Price Index." The Consumer Price Index serves as an economic gauge to measure average price changes (i.e., inflation) paid by consumers over time. Essentially, the house's construction cost should be adjusted to reflect inflation changes. Lena elaborated on the equity-building opportunity, stating,

> Many view their home as a lifelong investment. The value of their home is something they bank on when they retire. Our situation is also most like we're putting all of our money in a relatively high-yielding savings account. The hope is that our cost of living will stay low, and we'll have to worry less about paying off buildings or land, and down the line, we'll get a small return investment on infrastructure.

The LCLT sample ground lease outlines clear procedures to support the shared equity component. Before building any agricultural or residential structure, lessees must obtain written approval from LCLT staff and determine the base value of improvements. This base value represents the construction cost, tracked during construction or appraised afterward, and serves as the basis for pricing residential buildings. Parties can also agree on a maximum sale price for an improvement, regardless of its actual cost. Upon termination of the lease agreement, any infrastructure and improvements on the leased property are transferred to LCLT staff. In exchange for the deed to these improvements

being transferred back to LCLT, lessees receive the maximum sale price determined for their improvements.

Embedded within many CLT agricultural ground leases are stewardship requirements aimed at promoting practices aligned with CLT goals. For LCLT, these requirements extend to encouraging farmers to sell to markets supporting local food systems. Sandy shared,

> We're pretty clear about how much food needs to be produced and sold locally. The reason we're really working with farmland is to secure a more localized food system. We're not doing it to offer somebody a pretty place to homestead. We're not opposed to that; I'm just saying that's not our goal.

Farmers at Still Light explain, "Our lease dictates that we have to generate a certain amount of revenue, growing food for the island. There's an expectation that we don't pursue selling goods to markets on the mainland." Similar requirements exist for farmers at Stonecrest Farm regarding keeping goods local. However, the farms adopt different approaches to meet this mandate. Stonecrest Farm operates a self-service Barn Stand where visitors can purchase various produce and meats alongside an online ordering system through the San Juan Island Food Hub, catering to local consumers.

Figure 2 Stonecrest Farm Stand. 2023, photo by author.

Lena shared Still Light Farm's current markets, stating, “Our primary crop right now is heirloom dry beans. We've been on the farm for a couple of years, but this was our first growing season. So, we sold bean shares this year that were combinations of all different varieties, and we'll expand that next year.” Additionally, Still Light Farm will be supplying vegetable starts to a local hardware store this season, inheriting the contract from another local farmer. Andrew discussed Still Light's approach, stating,

> We are trying to find our place in the market and a lot of that has to do with evaluating what's already here. There are farmers growing really awesome veggies already. As outsiders, it was really important for us not to come in and be competitive with farmers that have been growing here a long time.

Apart from market requirements, the LCLT ground lease enforces stewardship practices dictating farmers' general approach to land management. Farmers at both Stonecrest and Still Light Farms share similar lease terms requiring regenerative agricultural practices, although their reported experiences with the requirements differ. Stonecrest farmers find the regenerative agriculture clause ambiguous and lacking measurability. They shared,

> We're not limited to what we can do up here. In our lease, it doesn't say we can't till this whole place up. You know, we could till it up every single year, and plant and plant and plant and take and take and take, would that be considered regenerative? I don't know. I think that's one big weakness of our lease.

In contrast, Still Light farmers worked with LCLT to clarify the regenerative agriculture component. Lena explained, "LCLT spent a fair amount of time using the word 'regenerative' in lease discussions, which we defined to ensure clearer requirements." Generally, the regenerative agricultural clause in the LCLT ground lease prohibits chemical pesticide and herbicide usage, in line with San Juan County restrictions, while promoting soil health-building methods. Lena and Andrew also advocated for additional stewardship requirements, particularly a mandate for pollinator habitat preservation on their property. Lena added,

> We were really interested in having a requirement around pollinator habitat being set aside on the property. That was a restriction that we had asked to add to the lease because it's something that we're really interested in building, and we didn't want someone to then come in and be able to remove it all.

Clearly defined or not, the primary method of LCLT staff enforcing stewardship requirements relies on an annual site visit and, to an extent, trust. Lena explained the enforcement of restrictions by stating, "We have an annual farm walk with the land trust, and if they were to see something that they felt was out of line with our requirements, they would tell us, and we'd have a certain amount of time to correct it." Meike echoed this experience and shared that methods of enforcing requirements are fairly minimal,

> There's nothing super strict being enforced. We're not required to maintain an organic certification, for instance, which is a good thing. We're not complaining about that. Without having a farming background, and without having farmers really involved with the CLT, I think it's hard for any CLT to come in and tell a farmer what they can and can't do.

Though there is minimal oversight from LCLT, staff does not express any concern about requirements being met. Rhea, Community Liaison, explained this by saying, “It all depends on relationships. So even in the ground lease, there's very little there about quantities and measurability. It's all about quality, direction, and intention. We're cautious about selecting farmers working towards the same goal.”

ADVICE FOR FARMERS AND CLT STAFF

The process of developing a ground lease was a collaborative effort involving both LCLT staff and the farmers they worked with. This collaboration reflects the essence of LCLT's mission: empowering farmers and fostering sustainable land use practices. Throughout this endeavor, LCLT staff and the farmers they collaborated with also relied on support from outside resources like Jim Oldham of Equity Trust, a nonprofit organization specializing in innovative approaches to land ownership and stewardship. Farmers at Still Light farm highlight the importance of autonomy within the ground lease

agreement. When asked about advice for farmers considering working with a CLT, Andrew shared,

> Make sure there's no penalties in your lease for bad behavior. What I mean by that is, if you cut a tree down on your property, are you going to get in trouble? Do you have to go in front of a committee to say, 'this tree is going to fall over, I'm gonna cut it down', because you don't own it. It's not yours. I just think that farmers need to be able to make those decisions on their land, even if they're renting from a land trust. They need to be able to make those calls for themselves.

In line with Andrew's viewpoint, the farmers at Stonecrest Farm stress the importance of thorough preparation and negotiation when considering a ground lease. They emphasized the need for farmers to assess the land carefully, "Make sure you do your homework. Really take a look at the land, have the infrastructure inspected, and come to the table prepared to negotiate. You have to recognize your intrinsic value. We're not just a dog and pony show up here. We're land managers." In essence, the perspectives shared by farmers at Stonecrest and Still Light Farms highlight the symbiotic relationship between farmers and land trusts in promoting sustainable agriculture and land stewardship.

CONCLUSION

LCLT plays a pivotal role in preserving farmland and promoting sustainable land use practices on Lopez Island. The collaborative efforts between LCLT staff and farmers underscore the importance of transparency, autonomy, and mutual respect in lease agreements. The partnership between LCLT, Still Light Farm, and Stonecrest Farm emphasizes the significance of thorough preparation, negotiation, and maintaining autonomy within the lease agreements. These partnerships exemplify the symbiotic

relationship between land trusts and farmers in promoting responsible land stewardship and sustainable agriculture.

As LCLT continues to evolve and expand its impact, it remains committed to its core mission of community empowerment and sustainable land stewardship. Through ongoing collaboration and dedication to shared values, LCLT and its partners are shaping a future where Lopez Island's agricultural heritage endures, communities thrive, and land is stewarded responsibly for generations to come.

Figure 3 Oyster Bay Farm. Photo by Pat Labine.

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY FARM LAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION: THURSTON COUNTY AND CFLT

The Community Farm Land Trust (CFLT) is a dedicated community land trust striving to conserve farmland in Thurston County, home of Washington State's capital, Olympia. Specifically, CFLT focuses on preserving farmland south of Puget Sound, an expansive inland estuary connected to the Pacific Ocean. The southern boundary of Puget Sound encompasses the cities of Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater, all situated within Thurston County. Thurston County's proximity to major urban centers such as Seattle and Portland, combined with its abundance of waterfront properties, has made it an increasingly attractive target for development.

Thurston County is experiencing rapid farmland depletion. Between 1950 and 2017, reported acreage of irrigated and non-irrigated pasture and cropland in the USDA Census of Agriculture declined from 170,640 to 62,250 acres (Washington State University, 2023). While only a third of Thurston County's farmland acreage remains, agriculture is still important to the county's economy, showcasing diverse farming activities ranging from berry cultivation to organic produce farming. The economic sustainability of these ventures is directly tied to local markets, including the operation of six farmers markets within the county (Washington State University, 2023). Recognizing the imminent threat posed by farmland depletion to local agriculture and food systems, CFLT underscores local small-scale farms' contributions to farm families and the broader community. The organization's overarching goals include the permanent preservation of working farmland, supporting farmers' economic sustainability, and raising public awareness about the significance of farmland preservation.

Structurally, CFLT operates as a nonprofit organization with a dynamic composition made up of a working board of directors, three part-time employees, dedicated volunteers, and a community membership actively contributing support, skills, and expertise. Among the key figures within CFLT are Natalie Martzolf, serving as the Outreach and Office Coordinator and managing editor of CFLT's "Fresh from the Farm Guide"; Marcie Cleaver, Co-Chair, and retired rancher passionate about farmland preservation; and Pat Labine, Clerk on the CFLT Board and former owner of Oyster Bay

farm and retired professor of ecological agriculture and community development at Evergreen State College.

Since its establishment in 1997, CFLT has preserved four farms with a total of 216 acres of farmland in Thurston County. CFLT utilizes the CLT ground lease model and agricultural conservation easement approach to preserve working farmland in Thurston County. CFLT began its journey to secure farmland by establishing Scatter Creek Farm & Conservancy in south Thurston County, WA. At Scatter Creek, farmers access affordable farmland through long-term ground leases. Colin Barricklow and Genine Bradwin from Kirsop Farm are among those who lease this property, cultivating vegetables, grains, and poultry on 60 acres of land, while utilizing historic buildings for farming operations. Additionally, the land supports other small farm enterprises, such as Joseph Gabiou's Wobbly Cart Farm, which uses the space for processing, packing, and storage. GRuB (Garden-Raised Bounty) community farm, led by executive director Deb Crockett and youth program manager GaBriel Marks, began leasing 1.8 acres of farmland from CFLT in 2013, through a CLT ground lease. Melissa Barker, Nate Lewis, and their daughter Olivia Lewis, collectively called the Oyster Bay All-Stars, purchased Oyster Bay from the previous owners in 2018. Oyster Bay Farm, dating back to the late 1800s, constitutes CFLT's inaugural agricultural conservation easement. CFLT’s most recent acquisition, a 29-acre portion of the James Family Farm, is now leased by Common Ground CSA, a woman-owned and operated vegetable farm offering CSA memberships with sliding scale pricing.

Insights gleaned from farmers operating on two of the properties conserved by CFLT, GRuB and Oyster Bay Farm, are included in this chapter. This case study delves into CFLT's multifaceted approach to farmland preservation, beginning with insights from staff and board members regarding the organization's operations and capacity. Subsequently, I explore the leasing process, drawing from farmers' experiences with CFLT, and conclude with a review of advice and takeaways from both CFLT staff and farmers regarding their strategies for farmland preservation.

CFLT STAFF AND BOARD ROLES

The division of responsibilities between CFLT staff and board members is distinct. Staff members' primary focus is on producing the organization's annual “Fresh from the Farm Guide”, a vital resource supporting local food and agriculture. The guide serves as an educational tool for underserved populations and Thurston County residents, directing them to sources of local, affordable, fresh, and healthy foods, including CSAs, farm stands, markets, and food banks, along with nutritional incentives and matching programs. Both board and staff members highlight the significance of the farm guide, not only for community engagement but also for fundraising. Pat Labine, Board Clerk, emphasized the guide's impact, recounting how it led to a significant grant donation. She described its pivotal role in fundraising, referring to it as the "goose that lays the golden egg."

The success of the “Fresh from the Farm Guide" prompted the establishment of three part-time staff positions dedicated to its production and other fundraising events. Natalie Martzolf, one of these staff members, highlighted the guide's popularity within the

community. Natalie described her initial responsibilities as a staff member by sharing, "I was hired to expand the farm guide. More specifically, I was hired to interview farmers to gain their perspective so consumers better understood what it took to bring food to their family's table." Natalie also emphasized the guide's role as an educational tool and avenue for building sponsorships, which is crucial for supporting fundraising events like the annual Farms Forever dinner.

According to CFLT's most recent annual report for the 2023 financial year, community memberships and donations emerge as the primary contributors to the organization’s annual income, accounting for over half of the total. Additionally, the "Fresh from the Farm Guide" and fundraising events significantly bolster the CFLT budget. This underscores the importance of maintaining dedicated staff positions focused solely on managing the CFLT farm guide and coordinating fundraising events. Rental income constitutes a relatively minor portion of the yearly revenue, aligning with the organization's commitment to maintaining affordable rent prices for farmers. Notably, grant funding also makes up a negligible fraction of the organization's annual income.

Beyond the funding sources outlined in their report, CFLT Board members have highlighted the Thurston County Conservation Futures Program. This program facilitates land preservation by enabling landowners to sell property or future development rights to qualified conservation organizations like land trusts, using funds provided by Thurston County government. For CFLT, this program has proven

instrumental in their efforts related to the Oyster Bay Farm conservation easement, rendering the process more financially viable.

Board members' roles differ significantly from those of staff. The CFLT Board of directors, a volunteer working board, contributes diverse skill sets to inform farm acquisition projects. Divided into three general categories—lessee, general, and public representatives—the board's structure allows for input from various perspectives. Co-Chair Marcie Cleaver explained the dynamics of a working board, highlighting the correlation between board size and organizational capacity. She explained,

> When you have a working board, your organization's bandwidth depends on the number of board members. The more board members you have, the more projects you can take on, and the faster things can happen. We recognize that time commitment is hard for people who have full-time jobs. That's why people like myself, who are retired, put in more time.

Pat Labine reflected on the difficulty of recruiting committed board members amid life's hectic schedules, despite solid support from the community. She shared, "Sometimes it feels like the board is hanging on by our fingernails."

The executive committee, comprised of three retired community members, is critical in guiding CFLT's operations. Marcie Cleaver, Rachel Friedman, and Pat Labine bring diverse ecology, law, and real estate expertise to the board. Conversations with staff and board members shed light on Marcie's role as the "boots on the ground," initiating projects such as the James Farm acquisition. Marcie explained,

> We started our project with the James Family Farm after I knocked on the previous land owners' door and asked if they'd be interested in selling their land to the land trust. I did the same thing last week with a different parcel

> of land. I don't have a problem with that. That's one of my strong points on this board.

Pat Labine highlighted Marcie's responsiveness and dedication by adding, "Marcie is like the fire brigade. If you ring the bell, she comes running."

In addition to the executive members of the CFLT Board, the CFLT ground lease requires that farmers with a CLT ground lease also join the board. GaBriel Marks, youth manager at GRuB Farm, reflected on this experience by sharing,

> It's an interesting experience to navigate. You're kind of wearing two hats. I'm on the board of CFLT and here as a staffer. I have to be very mindful of who I'm speaking to, and I'll often ask for clarification to help me understand what is appropriate to share and advocate for in our board meetings. It's kind of a conflict of interest.

Deb Crockett, executive director of GRuB Farm, added,

> We had a big meeting about a year ago with the CFLT Board to clarify roles for GRuB staff who serve on their board. It gets fuzzy sometimes when we have staff representing GRuB on the board; meanwhile, I'm negotiating lease terms with other CFLT Board members. We still have to work through communications and boundaries when these things come up.

ACCESS TO FARMLAND

In examining the impact of rising land values on farmland preservation, participants universally acknowledged the trend in Thurston County. The consensus was clear: land costs are rising due to mounting development pressures. Pat Labine, CFLT Board Clerk, contextualized the situation, stating,

> We're halfway between Seattle and Portland, within commuting distance. We're fortunate in Thurston County because our farmland is good but marginal enough that big industrial agriculture wouldn't consider it. So, at

> least we got that pressure off, but the development pressure is astonishing. It's enough to turn you into an anti-capitalist radical.

GaBriel added to this observation, highlighting, "I've been meeting a lot of folks coming to Thurston County to escape wildfires further south. There are so many factors pushing people to the area."

The escalation of land values poses a significant threat to farmland preservation efforts. Farmers face increased financial barriers to accessing and maintaining farmland as land becomes more valuable. Marcie Cleaver emphasized the challenge, noting, “One of the biggest issues in this area is an aging population of farmers. Some of these farmers don't have a lot of resources, so they want to sell their land for the best price, which means it’s sold to developers” To combat this trend, CFLT staff articulate their mission: to address the loss of farmland by mobilizing resources and acquiring farmland for preservation before it is lost to development pressures. Their strategy involves leveraging funds to secure land through either conservation easements or ground leases. Through proactive intervention, CFLT aims to maintain Thurston County's agricultural landscape and ensure its continued contribution to local food production and community well-being.

In 2013, CFLT secured funding from the Thurston County Conservation Futures Program for an urban agriculture project benefiting GRuB (Garden-Raised Bounty), permanently protecting 1.18 acres of the GRuB Farm in 2015. GRuB Farm is a dynamic three-acre youth-led vegetable farm in Olympia, Washington. GRuB operates at the nexus of food, education, and health systems. GRuB directly engages approximately

1,500 Thurston County residents annually through relationship-based programming, prioritizing marginalized groups such as low-income families, students, seniors facing hunger, tribal communities, and veterans. Deb Crockett, executive director of GRuB, added, “Our mission is growing healthy food, people, and community, and we see all those things as being intertwined. We really want to listen to the community members about what they are looking for and work each of our programs towards meeting those particular needs.”

Staff members at GRuB oversee farming operations, youth training and mentorship programming, and community outreach projects. Deb described her farming and nonprofit background by saying, "I've always had a love for connecting with the natural world and working as an educator. Farms are such a rich place for that to happen. I've worked for 25 to 30 years doing different forms of environmental education." Outside of educational programming, GRuB Farm plays an important role in local food production; GaBriel Marks, GRuB Farm youth manager, explained:

> We grew a little over 7000 pounds of produce last season, although the yield varies annually. About 80% of our produce is donated, primarily to the Thurston County Food Bank, with our partner organization CIELO being the second largest recipient. CIELO supports the LatinX community in our region, and we're committed to growing culturally relevant crops for their food bank.

Deb added insights into their evolving approach:

> In recent years, we've seen significant shifts in our food distribution methods. For many years, we ran a CSA here, but there was always tension between where the food was going for the CSA and meeting some of our other goals. If you're so focused on delivering a CSA, you can’t slow down enough on the farm to focus on learning experiences for youth

> participants. So, we decided to experiment by discontinuing the CSA, allowing us to focus more on the holistic learning experience.

During a tour of the GRuB farm, Deb and GaBriel discussed the start of their collaboration with CFLT, recounting how in 2013 GRuB staff sought assistance from CFLT to secure an additional 1.18 acres of land to expand their farming operations. Deb emphasized the critical role CFLT played, stating, "Without CFLT's involvement, this land, situated in the heart of a residential neighborhood, would likely have been developed." GRuB Farm owns a portion of its property today, and holds a long-term ground lease with CFLT for the remaining land.

Oyster Bay Farm, a sprawling 40-acre certified organic farm situated on Totten Inlet in Olympia, boasts a rich history of agricultural diversity. Originally established as a homestead grant from the federal government, the farm has seen numerous transformations over the years, including functioning as a dairy farm, chicken farm, holly farm, and Angus beef ranch. In the 1920s, the farm was pivotal in providing firewood to local oyster farmers. Recognized for its historical significance, the farm was designated as a "Special Place" for preservation in Thurston County. Kathleen O'Shaunessy and CFLT Board member Pat Labine acquired Oyster Bay in 1990 and farmed there for the next 30 years. Subsequently, Melissa Barker and Nate Lewis, former caretakers of Oyster Bay Farm, purchased the property in 2018.

Oyster Bay Farm stands as CFLT’s first conservation easement and is not a CLT farm. Discussions with the farm’s previous owners unveil the primary objectives behind

establishing this easement with CFLT: to safeguard the farm from development, to secure a life estate allowing Kathleen to reside on the property, and to pave the way for Melissa Barker and Nate Lewis to assume ownership post-retirement. The market value of the Oyster Bay property, the cost of the easement, and the value of the life estate were determined by *Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions*. Pat Labine, former owner of Oyster Bay Farm, explained that a formal appraisal was required since the easement cost was funded through Thurston County's Conservation Futures Fund. Pat adds,

> The cost to Nate and Melissa was simple math: the market value minus the easement value plus the value of the life estate. Since the location of Oyster Bay Farm, waterfront property, near town, made the value of the development rights very high, the reduction in cost was significant. I remember it being just about 50% of the market value.

Melissa and Nate underscore their role as stewards of Oyster Bay, with Melissa elaborating, "We don't see ourselves as owners or masters of this land. I'm just gonna make the farm better than Pat and Kathleen made it, who made it better than the folks before them." Nate added, "Stewardship and cultivating resilience in the farm are our primary goals. We're fortunate to have supplementary income off the farm. It places us in a privileged position to prioritize stewardship and resilience over production and profitability." Their journey to land ownership evolved from their tenure as caretakers on Oyster Bay. Melissa reflected, "We were leasing this farm from Pat and Kathleen. When they decided to retire without a clear plan for the farm's future, we jumped on the opportunity for an easement. This farm is our dream, where our journey together began."

Melissa and Nate bring diverse farming experience and agricultural knowledge to farming operations on Oyster Bay. Melissa started farming after studying two-quarters of ecological agriculture at Evergreen State College in the early 90s. She shared, "After two quarters, I found it so depressing. In Washington in the 80s, everyone was losing their family farm. There was a lot of consolidation of farmland." After finishing her degree, Melissa worked in landscaping before returning to work as a caretaker at Oyster Bay, owned by her former ecological agriculture instructor, Pat Labine. Melissa recalled, "I didn't know anything when I started working here; I just hit the ground running. Then, in 2004, I became the farm manager at Evergreen, which was a huge deal for me." Nate added, “I had zero exposure to agriculture growing up. Then I met Melissa, and you know we fell in love and moved in together, and I started killing chickens. That was sort of a high bar for entry to the relationship." After beginning his career in farming, Nate started working with Washington Farmland Trust, executing conservation easement transactions in western Washington. He explained, "There's been a bit of a shift in our dynamic since getting that position. Melissa is holding down the agricultural production division of our work, and I'm doing more of an off-farm job that's still related to and relevant to agriculture."

CLT GROUND LEASE AND AGRICULTURAL EASEMENTS

CFLT employs both the CLT ground leasing and agricultural easements to offer diverse avenues for farmland access. Three of the four CFLT properties utilize CLT ground leases, while one (Oyster Bay) employs an agricultural easement. While both mechanisms serve farmland preservation goals, they diverge in several crucial aspects:

OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL:

- *CLT Model:* Under this model, the CLT typically holds fee title to the farmland, enabling them to retain control over the property. Farmers lease the land through long-term, inheritable leases, granting them secure access to farmland without outright purchase.
- *Agricultural Easements:* In contrast, landowners retain ownership of the property while consenting to restrictions on land use via a legal agreement. The terms of the easement govern control over the land's future use, and restrict the owners from developing the land, although some “building envelopes” might remain. Each easement is negotiated based on the goals of the landowners and the land trust.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- *CFLT Model:* CFLT secures farmland with grants and donations, striving to minimize farmers' costs. Lease payments to CFLT are typically affordable, facilitating farmland access without substantial upfront capital requirements.
- *Agricultural Easements:* Landowners may receive financial incentives, such as cash payments or tax benefits, for placing an easement on their property. Factors like development pressure and agricultural value determine easement value.

PERMANENCE:

- *CFLT Model:* CFLT commits to perpetually maintaining the land in agricultural production, primarily through long-term lease agreements, ensuring enduring farmland protection.

- *Agricultural Easements:* Easements are enduring and remain attached to the land in perpetuity, even through changes in ownership. The terms of the easement dictate ongoing agricultural use.

EQUITY AND ACCESS:

- *CFLT Model:* Designed to foster equity, the CLT model enables farmers to build equity in improvements they make to the land (e.g. buildings), granting new farmers accessible entry into farming at a feasible price point.
- *Agricultural Easements:* While focused on farmland preservation, easements may not directly address equity and access concerns for new farmers.

Beyond these distinctions, there are also differences in how the land trust manages each approach. Pat Labine highlights the streamlined management provided by easements, emphasizing reduced maintenance obligations. Conversely, Marcie Cleaver praises the flexibility of the CLT model, citing instances where farmers can gradually expand operations as capacity grows. She noted the trade-off between building equity and upfront costs, saying,

> The downside of the CLT model is that farmers with a lease will never build as much equity as landowners, but they also don't have to come up with as much money as it would cost to buy the land. Farmers get to get in there and do their thing without spending a million dollars on the property. You have to figure out what you can live with.

CFLT staff and board members stress that both approaches entail meticulous and time-consuming processes. According to CFLT staff member, Natalie Martzolf,

> It's a complex conversation. It's not like we're just sitting on land waiting for a farmer to show up and ask to farm it. From a land trust perspective,

> we need to find a willing landowner, determine the price of the property, and secure funding before we can even begin looking into recruiting a farmer. There are a lot of reasons why a land arrangement can go south.

Other participants echo Natalie's sentiments, emphasizing that negotiating lease and easement terms is a collaborative endeavor that demands considerable time and effort to finalize.

Affordable lease pricing is a cornerstone of the CLT model, often determined through a deliberate effort to keep lease rates relatively low. Discussions with CFLT Board members showed that CFLT uses a similar method to LCLT for determining affordable lease pricing. The CFLT Board aims to set lease fees that cover land trust expenses, while also remaining affordable to farmers. As Pat Labine put it, "We will hold this land and lease it to you at as low of a rate as possible, as long as it's not costing us out-of-pocket money." CFLT Board members rely on USDA data to gauge local land prices and supplement their analysis by consulting with local farmers. Pat clarified, "Sometimes the USDA rental estimates just don't make sense for us. They're way too expensive; it's nuts. One strategy we use in addition to looking over their data is meeting with other farmers in the region to assess what they're paying in rent."

Interview data indicates that while CFLT leaseholders generally perceive their lease rates as affordable, determining these rates has not been without challenges. Deb Crockett reveals GRuB farm's lease rate: "We pay about $275 per year for our CFLT land. Plus, we pay the property taxes. It is pretty affordable, but it's been a little bumpy over time because there weren't always systems in place to follow what was in the

lease." GRuB staff members elaborate on their understanding of the lease rate review process, noting that an increase is possible every five years. Deb shared,

> Our lease increased in 2020, but there was never any documentation or anything signed; it seemed like it was an informal agreement with the person working with CFLT then. Then, about three years after our lease rate increased, CFLT Board members told us they wanted to increase the rate again.

GRuB staff encountered multiple occasions where they needed to revisit lease terms with CFLT Board members. Deb emphasized, "Once we asked for clarification and reviewed the lease together, they quickly agreed to follow the terms in the lease. I appreciated the responsiveness and commitment to getting re-anchored in our shared goals."

Other interview participants also shared this experience and expressed concerns about the turbulence of lease agreements between themselves and the CFLT Board. This turbulence may be attributed to turnover rates on a working board. One participant explained,

> It's an all-volunteer staff, and sometimes I worry about the level of education needed to pull off some of these projects. Especially for farmers working with them that are in a lease position. Sometimes when new board members come on, and they're like, 'We need more fees, and the going rate of land in Washington is this,' CFLT suddenly thinks they need to charge their farmers more.

Another added,

> My understanding is that the lease rate should be set so that the farmer has enough income to invest in savings and retirement because they're not going to have the benefit of accumulating wealth through land value. If you want to decommodify the land, lease fees should be used to pay holding costs, not as a revenue generator.

Agricultural conservation easements sometimes, but not typically, incorporate affordability provisions. These provisions are designed to ensure that farmland remains accessible to farmers at affordable rates by restricting future land use and development, thereby maintaining the agricultural character of the land and preventing it from being converted for non-agricultural purposes. Oyster Bay Farm has a unique easement situation because its property has a rather complex set of affordability provisions. Nate explains, "There are some affordability provisions in our easement. Basically, we can't sell our property for more than double the median value of a residential dwelling unit (RDU)." The current median RDU in Thurston County is $250,000. This means the Oyster Bay Farm easement dictates that landowners can't sell the property for more than $500,000 plus the other infrastructure's value. Nate added, “We’d essentially be selling 40 acres with two homes plus barns. So, this provision doesn't create affordability, but it stops someone from knocking everything down to build a fancy house to sell for millions.”

Outside of the affordability provisions built into their easement, Nate and Melissa discuss the affordability of their purchase of Oyster Bay. Melissa shared, "We were involved with CFLT way before we had an easement, so the affordability aspect is something we think about a lot. How do we make this something that we are helping to pass on? Pat and Kathleen definitely made it affordable for us." Nate explained, "The previous owners made this farm affordable for us by being open to an easement." Melissa added, "They did little things like taking 100% of the rent we had paid them over

the years off the top of the price of the property. It's all those little creative things that make it more affordable for someone struggling with land prices."

Another critical component of both CLT ground leases and many agricultural easements is stewardship requirements. Farmers at Oyster Bay and GRuB farms share similar stewardship requirements. Pat Labine explained the basic requirements by saying, "Usually, for the kind of farmer that's interested in working with us, the stewardship requirements are easy. Suppose people have organic certification, fine. If you're salmon-safe, that's fine. If they simply have a conservation district plan, that's fine." Farmers at GRuB described their experience with these requirements, stating, "We've found the site visits with the CFLT team always very helpful. They make recommendations, and share their knowledge about conservation practices. They've been generous about lending their expertise around land stewardship." Oyster Bay farmers share that their organic certification meets the fundamental stewardship required by the terms of their easement. Interview participants agree that management of these requirements is fairly minimal. CFLT conducts an annual site visit of each of their farms. Nate described these visits by saying, "They're very mellow. Overall, it's a collaborative relationship; they're not coming to find issues; they're coming by to check in with farmers."

In addition to stewardship practices, CFLT incorporates requirements around local food production into their ground leases. Marcie Cleaver, CFLT Co-Chair, explained this requirement by sharing,

> You have to farm. You have to provide food for the community. So, we say you must sell a certain amount of the food you grow within a 100-mile radius. We want local food, but we do make sure there's an out in our lease. Let's say something comes up one year, maybe a family member is ill, and a farmer just wants to cover crop as much as possible. We just ask that they come talk to us. We have to have a certain amount of trust.

Generally, CFLT staff seems to rely on this trust and communication to navigate lease violations. Marcie added,

> If we notice a violation, we just talk about it with the farmers. Not every violation is a huge deal. We're quite careful in our selection process. We don't want to partner with someone who doesn't have good communication skills. We look for someone with a history in farming and whose practices align with what we're looking for.

ADVICE FOR FARMERS AND CLT STAFF

As discussed in interviews with participants, negotiation and communication are pivotal aspects of the ground lease and easement process. The dynamic of a working board and the frequent turnover of board members underscore the importance of effective communication for CFLT, particularly given the breadth of legal, financial, and ecological expertise required for their operations. While many farmers have communicated effectively with CFLT staff and board members, there are notable instances of conflict.

Melissa and Nate describe their experience negotiating the terms of the easement with the CFLT Board. They hired a lawyer, who had extensive experience with conservation easements, early in the easement process due to their lack of understanding and financial constraints. Despite the substantial cost, they gained valuable insights from the

lawyer, and had hoped to collaborate with CFLT on the easement process. Melissa explained,

> We came into that relationship with rose-colored glasses on. The trust did not like that we hired a lawyer; they called us overly litigious. It honestly went awful. I thought we were all working together on this, and this would be a great thing. Unfortunately, the land trust we're working with had never done an easement before, so they pretty much just wanted to put the same lease agreement they had with others on our property. It was a difficult negotiation process.

Nate echoed her sentiment, adding:

> We had to fight pretty hard to keep CFLT out of our daily life. The land trust does not get to tell us what types of crops we can or cannot grow here. We need to have flexibility. We don't need an outside group dictating our farming operations. That was a reasonable thing to push back on from our perspective. It definitely prompted a reaction, which was really challenging to navigate

In reflecting on their relationship with CFLT, farmers at Oyster Bay urge others in a similar position to do their research before entering any relationship with a CLT. Melissa shared,

> As someone who didn't come from generational wealth, you want to jump at any opportunity for affordable farmland. It's hard because when you're a farmer, or you're in a marginalized space, and money is usually fairly tight, the idea of low-cost land access is so appealing. We've realized all these other bigger implications over the years. Through Nate's work, we've learned so much more.

Nate added, "My advice is to interview the land trust because you will be hitching your wagon to that horse. Just make sure that the land trust aligns enough with your values. Advocate for yourself and your goals. And yeah, legal representation is so critical."

Farmers at GRuB shared similar sentiments in their advice to farmers hoping to work

with CLTs to gain access to farmland. Deb said, "I'm really grateful for the opportunity to work with CFLT. I think that everybody can learn from each other's past journeys in this area to make it clearer how decisions are made and how communication happens.

CONCLUSION

CFLT has played a crucial role in preserving farmland in Thurston County, Washington, amidst rising development pressures. Through a multifaceted approach that leverages both the CLT ground lease model and agricultural conservation easements, CFLT has successfully conserved 216 acres of farmland since its establishment in 1997. Insights from farmers operating on these preserved properties highlight the importance of effective negotiation, communication, and alignment of values when working with land trusts. Melissa and Nate's experience at Oyster Bay Farm underscores the significance of thorough research and legal representation in successfully navigating lease agreements. Similarly, staff members at GRuB farm emphasize the value of learning from past experiences and fostering transparent communication between farmers and land trusts. Moving forward, these insights serve as valuable lessons for farmers and land trusts, guiding efforts to preserve farmland and sustain local food systems.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this research is to provide context for CLT use in agriculture through a review of relevant literature and interview data collected through two in-depth case studies. Initially, I selected Lopez Community Land Trust (LCLT) and Community Farm Land Trust (CFLT) as case studies to focus on two organizations employing relatively similar methodologies to integrate agriculture within the CLT framework in Washington State. Washington State was selected as the study area due to its proximity to my current location in Missoula, Montana, and to provide examples of land trusts in the Western United States applying the CLT model to farmland preservation. This practice is less common in the Western US compared with the East.

During the research process, it became evident that while both LCLT and CFLT employ CLT principles to preserve farmland, their approaches differ. CFLT's objectives are clear: they aim to conserve farmland in Thurston County to uphold local food systems, deter further degradation of precious ecological resources, and enhance access to affordable farmland for farmers. While LCLT shares similar goals, CFLT is exploring diverse strategies for farmland preservation that deviate somewhat from the traditional CLT model, to which LCLT more closely adheres.

LCLT was established in 1989 to address the issue of rapidly rising land prices in Lopez Island, Washington. LCLT's multifaceted approach includes initiatives like affordable housing, rural development programs, and agricultural ground leases. Its organizational structure adheres to the tripartite governance model, where its board of directors is composed of CLT staff members, CLT leaseholders, and allied community

representatives. Over the years, LCLT has achieved significant success in preserving farmland and empowering the Lopez Island community. The organization’s success is reflected in its ability to preserve farmland, manage seven affordable limited-equity housing cooperatives, construction and rural development internship programs, and two agricultural leases. Through its unique approach, LCLT has managed to address the diverse needs of the Lopez Island community, making it a model for farmland preservation and community empowerment.

Since its establishment in 1997, CFLT has preserved four farms with a total of 216 acres of farmland. CFLT utilizes the CLT ground lease model and agricultural conservation easement approach to preserve working farmland in Thurston County. The organization's overarching goals include the permanent preservation of working farmland, supporting farmers' economic sustainability, and raising public awareness about the significance of farmland preservation. CFLT's success is attributed to its dynamic composition made up of a working board of directors, three part-time employees, dedicated volunteers, and a community membership actively contributing support, skills, and expertise.

This discussion chapter delineates key findings, comparing the case studies and prompting inquiries for future research. I also analyze further the data gleaned from each case study to comprehend the potentials and challenges inherent in this approach to farmland protection. This entails spotlighting the organizational hurdles encountered by each organization, examining adaptations of the CLT model, and leveraging insights

from farmers to underscore potential areas for further research and consideration in utilizing the CLT model for agriculture.

CLT CAPACITY

The organizational structure of CLTs is not a one-size-fits-all model. While all entities identifying as CLTs are rooted in a shared set of values, and a basic framework exists for what might be considered a "classic" CLT structure, variations abound within this framework. The flexibility of the CLT model allows for adaptation to diverse contexts and community needs. Through legal innovation and resource management, CLTs navigate their operations and pursue their objectives. Given their resources, CLTs often rely on creative solutions to sustain their operations and work towards their overarching goals.

In the CLT resource manual "Starting a CLT: Organizational and Operational Choices," John Emmeus Davis outlines the classic CLT governance structure and highlights possible variations from the classic structure that may be utilized. The classic CLT board structure suggested in the CLT manual calls for a tripartite governance board (Davis 2012, 24-27). This means one-third of the board consists of leaseholder representatives who advocate for those leasing land from the CLT. Another third represents general representatives from the surrounding community who neither lease CLT land nor reside in CLT housing. The remaining third comprises public representatives, including public officials, local funders, nonprofit housing or social services providers, and others assumed to represent the public interest (Davis 2012, 24-27). This tripartite structure aims to diffuse and balance control of the CLT's board, ensuring that all interests are heard without any single interest dominating.

LCLT employs a board structure akin to the classic format outlined in the Community Land Trust Reader, comprising CLT housing tenants, LCLT staff, and allied community members, each contributing diverse knowledge and skill sets (Witt and Swann 2017, 244-252). Breton Carter, LCLT assistant director, explains that LCLT housing neighborhoods are organized into housing co-ops, with co-op representatives and participating board members serving as points of contact for LCLT staff to address housing tenant needs efficiently. Condensing points of contact for LCLT housing tenants and a robust board of allied community members enable LCLT to maintain extensive programming, nurture relationships with six housing co-ops, and manage agricultural ground leases with limited staffing resources.

Unlike the traditional CLT board structure, CFLT's staff primarily focus on community outreach and fundraising, with limited involvement in farmland acquisition. They rely on a working board of elected executive members to execute farm acquisition projects and manage farmland under CLT ground leases. While this approach may result in some turbulence in board operations, it enables CFLT to pursue farmland acquisition projects and maintain community outreach goals with limited paid staff positions. CFLT has successfully recruited executive board members with the knowledge and availability to regularly participate as working board members to pursue farmland acquisition and management. Still, the challenges associated with asking community members to volunteer a significant amount of their time to unpaid board responsibilities, including frequent turnover and limited availability, are worth noting.

Compared to LCLT, CFLT staff members have little involvement in board operations. Instead, they primarily focus on producing and distributing their annual "Fresh from the Farm Guide" and organizing fundraising events. CFLT staff and board members emphasized the importance of their farm guide and outreach events for fundraising and exposure in the Thurston County community. LCLT Assistant Director Breton Carter also produces a farm guide for farm stands on Lopez Island, though this is not her primary focus as assistant director.

Another comparison between the LCLT and CFLT board structures is farmer involvement in board operations. Despite regular communication with farmers at Stonecrest Farm and Still Light Farm, the LCLT board lacks formal farmer representation. LCLT board members attribute the lack of farmer participation to farmers' limited availability during the growing season. In contrast, CFLT mandates that farmers using a ground lease participate on their board, reflecting their primary focus on agricultural land protection. This requirement ensures farmer involvement alongside community members and staff. However, mandating farmers to join the board presents its own set of challenges. For instance, it may create a potential conflict of interest for farmers serving on the board, as they may need to balance their farming interests with broader community and organizational goals. Moreover, farmers' availability might be constrained, particularly during the critical periods of the growing season, affecting their ability to engage in board activities fully.

Interview data from farmers working with LCLT suggests that staff members' limited knowledge of farming operations can be problematic when negotiating lease terms and monitoring stewardship requirements. Conversely, interview data from farmers working with CFLT suggests that while much of the executive board exhibits in-depth agricultural knowledge, there are concerns over having the legal knowledge necessary and ability to uphold lease terms with a working board that regularly navigates fluctuations in their board membership and operations.

The different organizational structures and operational approaches observed among the CLTs that I studied underscore the adaptability and versatility inherent in this model. While rooted in shared values and guided by a basic framework, CLTs vary and are tailored to their specific contexts and community needs. Navigating within the constraints of limited resources, CLTs often employ creative solutions to sustain their operations and advance their overarching objectives. As the Community Land Trust Reader outlines, the tripartite governance structure is a guiding principle. Still, real-world implementations like those seen in LCLT and CFLT demonstrate the flexibility and innovation within the CLT movement. As these organizations continue to evolve and address the challenges of land access, housing affordability, and community development, their diverse approaches reflect an ongoing commitment to inclusive decision-making and sustainable stewardship of land and resources.

LANDLORD VS. LAND TRUST

Interview data across both case studies revealed that CLT staff and boards adamantly distinguish the role of the land trust from that of a typical landlord. This point relates

back to earlier discussion on power relations outlined in Chapter 1 as there is a distinct contrast on the perception of roles and power between CLT staff and lease holders. Participants who work as CLT staff members highlighted their willingness to negotiate lease terms and their commitment to keeping lease prices as low as possible as significant distinctions. CLT staff also emphasized their dedication to CLT theory and its associated values as further differentiators. Sandy Bishop, executive director of LCLT, explained, "We're operating under a different value system than most landlords. We're not trying to make significant profits." This emphasizes the significant contrast between the goals of the CLT model and other entities driven by capitalist values. While the distinction between CLT staff members and landlords is clear, there is a contrast in the perception of roles and power between CLT staff and leaseholders, which relates to the earlier discussion on power relations.

Lena and Andrew, farmers leasing land from LCLT, discussed the power dynamic with LCLT, stating,

> When we reviewed the sample ground lease, we didn't feel knowledgeable enough to discuss our concerns with the land trust at first. The power dynamic with landlords often feels like 'this is the rental cost, and it's due on the first of the month. If that doesn't work for you, then find somewhere else.' Transitioning to working with LCLT required us to reframe our understanding of that dynamic. We put in a lot of work to initiate conversations and negotiate the terms of our lease. We've been able to negotiate so much of our lease with LCLT, but that power dynamic is never going to be equal.

This input raises an important question: should CLT staff acknowledge and address the power imbalance between themselves and leaseholders? While the roles and mission

of CLT staff differ from those of a typical landlord, inherent power dynamics in any lessor-lessee relationship cannot be overlooked. In other words, regardless of the values upheld within the CLT model or by staff, the CLT ultimately holds a position of power over its leaseholders. This power dynamic may influence leaseholders' willingness to voice grievances to staff or feel confident negotiating lease terms. This is especially true when considering the limited opportunities for affordable access to farmland.

Before signing a lease, farmers often find themselves in a precarious position, eager to secure access to farmland at significantly lower prices per acre than surrounding land prices. This eagerness places them in a vulnerable position, where any missteps in their relationship with the CLT could jeopardize their chance to secure a ground lease, potentially cutting off their access to this essential resource. Once a long-term lease agreement is signed, the threat of losing access to their farmland diminishes significantly. Long-term leases are generally secure and not easily terminated. However, despite this increased security, many farmers still seem to struggle with reframing their relationship with land trust staff and gaining confidence to voice concerns and negotiate lease terms.

In their "theory of access" framework, Peluso and Ribot (2003) discuss the dynamics of power that impact access to natural resources and property, highlighting the various mechanisms, processes, and social relations that influence people's ability to benefit from these resources. This theoretical framework emphasizes how different individuals

and institutions possess and utilize power to influence who can enjoy benefits from resources, and how consent or dissent is manufactured in the quest for land access (Peluso and Ribot, 2003). Ultimately, Peluso and Ribot argue that access to resources is fundamentally relational, with social interdependence shaping all acts related to resource use and enjoyment (Peluso and Ribot, 2003). In the case of CLTs, tenants' ability to benefit from affordable, long-term access to land and property depends on their relationship with CLT staff. Glossing over this imbalance in power could add a degree of inauthenticity in the relationship between CLT staff, board, and leaseholders and ultimately impact the open communication necessary to negotiate the unique lease terms of each agricultural ground lease and maintain a healthy relationship together.

DOG AND PONY SHOW

Interview data shows that several farmers mentioned feeling required to engage in a 'dog and pony show', a term used to describe a situation where one is expected to perform for others' approval, to maintain their relationship with the land trust. This implies a perceived expectation of community involvement on their farms, which can sometimes feel intrusive. It's important for farmers to understand that this expectation is typically not a CLT requirement, and they have the right to set their own boundaries and level of involvement.

Farmers at Stonecrest shared,

> Being leaseholders here, on Lopez Island, it's been really strange. Even though we have a strong agricultural community in Lopez, people don't seem to understand that we have a long-term lease on this property. It's almost like people see us as farm managers rather than owners. The land trust did a lot of fundraising to purchase this property, so there were a lot

> of community events on the farm before we came here. I think those events contributed to community members feeling like our farm is a public space. We've had to put up signs and information on our website to let people know that this is not a community farm, it's not public property, and we've gotten some pushback from that.

Other farmers shared similar sentiments of privacy concerns following participation in CLT events and fundraisers. While these interactions foster community engagement and support, they also raise concerns about boundaries and the impact on farmers' ability to operate independently.

This perception of a loss of privacy on CLT land brings up another important consideration in the use of the CLT model for agriculture: the balance between the common good and the good of the farmer. The CLT model aims to protect the interests of the common good, meaning the community to which the CLT is accountable. This is reflected in ground lease requirements that emphasize selling food within local markets or hosting public events and educational activities on CLT farms. However, what benefits the community might not always align with what is best for the farmers. Farmers might find more profitable opportunities if they have the freedom to pursue markets not specified in their lease. They might also feel a greater sense of autonomy in their operations without the expectation to engage in community outreach events. Farmers interested in working with a CLT should be aware of the trade-offs between the interests of the community and those of the individual farmer within the CLT model.

The struggle to balance community engagement with farmers' autonomy and privacy brings to light the power dynamics within CLT-farmer relationships. While CLTs are instrumental in providing land access for farmers, particularly in the context of affordable and sustainable agriculture, they also have a responsibility to protect farmers' privacy. Though farmers may be willing to host on-farm events to promote agricultural education and outreach, clarifying the distinction between private farm activities and public engagement events hosted on CLT land is essential. CLTs should work closely with farmers to define and communicate these boundaries effectively to the community. Furthermore, it's crucial to respect farmers' autonomy in managing their land within the terms of their leases, while also supporting farmers in meeting their goals to educate their community.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Interviews with farmers revealed a significant gap in their understanding of the CLT structure before entering into their ground leases. This lack of knowledge, coupled with financial constraints limiting farmers' access to land through other channels, led many participants to feel initially concerned about their lack of experience with the CLT model. Despite these concerns, many farmers chose to pursue CLT ground leases, recognizing the unique opportunity they presented. This vulnerability underscores the importance of facilitating affordable land access, communicating effectively, and ensuring farmers are well informed about their role in a CLT ground lease.

Lack of understanding of the CLT model may also have the unintended consequence of serving as a form of exclusion. Explicit forms of exclusion might involve laws or

restrictions that prevent access to a resource, while less obvious forms could include a lack of time or knowledge to pursue access. Unfamiliarity with the mechanisms of the CLT model and the amount of time needed to research and understand these mechanisms, in addition to submitting an RFP and negotiating lease terms, may act as a barrier for many farmers interested in working with a CLT to access a ground lease.

Given the lack of familiarity farmers had with the CLT model before beginning their ground lease, more robust efforts to outline the mechanisms of the CLT model are necessary up front. Interestingly, staff members from both LCLT and CFLT noted that public outreach and education on the CLT model is not a priority. An absence of education on the functions and mechanisms of the CLT model could impact farmers' understanding of the broader social and economic context in which CLTs operate. With robust educational initiatives, CLTs may be able to engage with diverse stakeholders in their community and cultivate a deeper understanding of their mission and objectives. Moreover, it is crucial that educational resources on the CLT model acknowledge its historical roots. The model's origin, rooted in the efforts of Black sharecroppers to gain secure access to farmland, is a significant part of its evolution. By incorporating this historical perspective into their outreach efforts, CLTs can provide a richer context for potential leaseholders. This historical perspective also underscores the model's role in addressing systemic inequalities and empowering marginalized communities through land access initiatives.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

A common thread woven through each significant takeaway from this research is the significance of clear, consistent communication between CLT staff and lease-holding farmers. Both LCLT and CFLT shared similar stewardship requirements in their ground lease, mandating practices such as soil regenerative techniques, restricted use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and compliance with country mandates, such as height restrictions on farm infrastructure. Both organizations rely on annual site visits to each farm to enforce these lease restrictions. While site visits effectively facilitate check-ins with farmers and enable CLT staff to inspect for blatant lease violations, such as unpermitted farm infrastructure, ensuring leaseholders adhere to other stewardship requirements largely hinges on trust.

Staff and board members at both organizations stressed the importance of selecting farmers who align with their shared stewardship values in order to foster trust and minimize the necessity for more frequent site visits and inspections. This careful selection process, based on shared values, not only ensures the farmers' commitment to the lease terms, but also builds a foundation of trust. Moreover, long-term leases like the 99-year lease many farmers working with CLTs hold, necessitate a degree of flexibility. For instance, CFLT leases stipulate that farmers must grow and sell a percentage of food for the Thurston County community. However, CFLT board members acknowledge that leniency on this requirement is necessary when considering the long term, suggesting that they ask farmers to communicate with them if they have a year that they need to focus less on production. LCLT staff echo these sentiments,

sharing that they understand the need for flexibility in their farmers' production schedule.

Communication with farmers is also a crucial aspect of establishing individual CLT ground leases. Interview data reveals that although CFLT and LCLT utilize a sample ground lease as a starting point, lease terms are individually tailored to each farm. Most farmers who were interviewed felt uncertain about their lease terms initially, but through ongoing discussions and compromise with CLT staff and board members, they were able to reach a mutually beneficial agreement. Failure to establish open communication with farmers or reluctance to provide them with external resources, such as legal representation or input from other CLT farmers, can hinder the leasing process and the development of a positive relationship with farmers. This highlights the importance of continuous communication and collaboration, as it helps to ensure a fair lease agreement and fosters an ongoing relationship with leaseholders.

CONCLUSION

The CLT model has evolved over time. Much of the recent expansion in the CLT movement can be attributed to the model's inherent adaptability. While altering fundamental aspects of the "classic" CLT may entail some loss, as each of these features has solid philosophical and practical foundations, there is also the potential for valuable gains. Over time, certain variations may be abandoned, while others could prove highly advantageous, ultimately becoming integral components of the "classic" CLT framework.

The examination of CLT capacity and role division illuminates the adaptable nature of CLTs, showcasing the ability to tailor organizational structures to meet specific community needs. From the traditional tripartite governance structure to innovative board compositions, CLTs exhibit resilience and creativity in navigating resource constraints while advancing their missions. Moreover, the distinction in landlord vs. land trust roles underscores the importance of transparency, communication, and mutual respect within the CLT-farmer relationship.

The organizational structures of LCLT and CFLT also emphasize transparency and communication to navigate power dynamics within CLT-farmer relationships. The struggle to balance community engagement with farmers' autonomy highlights the complexities involved. Clear, consistent communication between CLT staff and lease holding farmers is essential for establishing trust, navigating lease negotiations, and fostering positive relationships. By prioritizing open dialogue, embracing flexibility, and recognizing power differentials, CLTs can continue to serve as catalysts for equitable land access and community empowerment in the realm of agricultural preservation.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

Emerging literature on farmland preservation and land access recognizes the importance of finding dynamic land preservation models that keep protected farmland in agriculture and incorporate affordable land access. As the United States navigates the complexities of the impending generational transition of farmland, high land values, and an increasing demand for development, it becomes evident that the longevity of our agricultural systems hinges on our ability to reimagine traditional land tenure structures. The community land trust (CLT) model represents a departure from the dominant approach to land tenure systems, prioritizing collective ownership structures that uphold community well-being over individual profit. Through collaborative governance and participatory decision-making, CLTs demonstrate their resilience and adaptability, fostering agricultural ecosystems more resistant to market volatilities and speculative pressures.

Ribot and Peluso's "A Theory of Access" (2003) provides a comprehensive framework for examining the CLT model within the broader context of property and access theory. The authors assert that access to resources, such as land, encompasses both the legal right to use them and the ability to derive benefits from their use. An example of this ability in the context of CLTs is the capacity to dedicate the time needed to negotiate and sign a CLT ground lease, thereby securing long-term access to the land. This nuanced understanding of access is crucial for improving land accessibility, as it considers the diverse and multifaceted socioeconomic factors that influence how individuals and communities benefit from resources. Promoting community involvement

and participatory governance is essential for CLTs to create more inclusive and affordable land access pathways.

Lopez Community Land Trust (LCLT) and Community Farm Land Trust (CFLT) are just two examples amongst many in the United States that utilize the CLT model for farmland preservation (Ela and Rosenberg, 2020). By comparing these organizations, I was able to analyze how CLTs of varying sizes, funding sources, and pressures on farmland manage their resources. Through social scientific research methods and analyzing interview data, I examined the operations of each CLT and evaluated key factors contributing to their success. These factors include effective communication with leaseholders and a well-defined mission statement guiding the selection of farmers whose values closely align with the organization.

FUTURE RESEARCH

These case studies raised multiple questions for further research. Due to time constraints and limited resources, the scope of my research was somewhat limited. However, the selected case studies offer a valuable comparison of CLT structures within the same state, shedding light on the adaptability of the CLT model. Further research would be beneficial in expanding analyses of CLTs in agriculture to better understand how the CLT model can be applied to agriculture.

One area that warrants further investigation is case studies of CLTS that have undergone a transition of their agricultural lease. While both LCLT and CFLT have successfully managed multiple ground leases, neither organization has encountered the

transfer of a ground lease from one farmer to another within the CLT framework. Analyzing such transitions would yield valuable knowledge regarding how CLT mechanisms, such as shared equity components and resale values, operate during agricultural lease transitions. Similarly, neither organizations had never terminated a ground lease or had a system for addressing violations of lease terms outside of discussing the violations with leaseholders. Although it's rare for a CLT ground lease to be terminated due to a breach of lease terms, examining such an instance would provide more insight into tenant rights when breaking a ground lease and the process of removing someone from a lease on the CLT staff end. These procedures seem to be a bit unclear based on the data I gathered.

Multiple participants acknowledged the challenges in accessing funding for farmland preservation through the CLT model. Conservation easements are a more widely used and often more familiar method of preserving farmland in the United States. As such, much of the funding available for acquiring and preserving farmland is geared toward securing agricultural easements. Assessing the funding sources available to CLTs hoping to acquire farmland compared to funding for conservation easements would help shed light on the financial factors that limit the application of land preservation models outside of conservation easements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a list of recommendations for organizations interested in implementing the CLT model for agricultural purposes. These recommendations stem from participant feedback. It is important to note that this list isn't exhaustive, as each CLT operates within its own distinct context. Instead, these recommendations provide a starting point, highlighting the fundamental components identified by case study participants that contributed to their success.

1. DEVELOP A CLEAR MISSION STATEMENT: In both case studies, CLT staff and board members discussed the importance of a clear mission statement to provide guiding values in their organization's operations. Such values are essential to guiding CLTs' work and ensuring that the focus remains on promoting active agricultural production and providing affordable land access to farmers.

2. ESTABLISH COMMUNITY PARTNERS**:** The case studies underscore the importance of knowledge sharing in creating an effective CLT ground lease, particularly in agriculture. To this end, CLTs should foster partnerships within and outside their community. The participants in this research highlighted the value of their communication with **Jim Oldham of Equity Trust** in developing their ground lease. The Equity Trust website (https://equitytrust.org) offers resources like CLT publications, a model agricultural ground lease, and links to other organizations engaged in similar work. Collaborating with Equity Trust enabled CLT staff to gain insight into specific lease components. It also facilitated farmers' connections with other farmers working with CLTs, enhancing their understanding before signing their ground lease.

3. ESTABLISH EXTERNAL LEGAL COUNSEL: In evaluating participants' experience developing a CLT ground lease, multiple participants stressed the importance of working with a lawyer with extensive experience in developing land leases. Developing a ground lease is no small feat, especially an agricultural one that requires thinking at least 75 years into the future. As such, it is unlikely that an organization has all of the legal knowledge needed to develop such a lease under one organization. The most significant barrier to establishing legal counsel is often the cost; however, some organizations, like **The Carrot Project** (https://www.thecarrotproject.org), offer support pro bono.

4. OUTLINE CLEAR STEWARDSHIP REQUIREMENTS: A significant challenge for many farmers working with CLTs was the lack of specificity in their ground lease's stewardship requirements. While it's important to avoid over-specifying and overextending CLT input in farming operations, a vague requirement like 'regenerative agriculture practices' does not provide a clear understanding of lease obligations. Many participants expressed a desire to discuss stewardship requirements with experienced CLT staff who could outline preferred farming practices more clearly. This presents an opportunity for CLTs to partner with other organizations to fill any knowledge gaps on farming practices.

5. PROVIDE EDUCATION AND SUPPORT: Providing education and support for farmers new to the CLT model is essential to ensuring that farmers clearly understand their role in their ground lease. This could include speaking to farmers about

stewardship requirements and how they will be measured, the potential fluctuation of their lease prices, or creating clear distinctions between what farmers must do in their ground lease and what is not required.

6. PRIORITIZE AFFORDABILITY**:** One of the main goals of incorporating agriculture into a CLT is to promote equitable access to resources, particularly land. Prioritizing affordability in lease pricing helps provide farmers with affordable access to farmland and upholds the CLT model's core values.

7. ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY: Engaging the community in the CLT's work can help build support and ensure that the organization remains responsive to community needs and preferences. Community outreach and engagement also create more opportunities for fundraising events, which are vital to some of CLT's annual funding and diversifying funding sources.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, The CLT model is an effective tool for removing land from the speculative market. It challenges prevailing ideas about private property and provides access to land for individuals who may otherwise be excluded due to high land prices and other barriers. The CLT model not only democratizes land ownership but also promotes sustainable agricultural practices through ground lease requirements and a shared equity approach that encourages farmers to have an ownership interest in the land they lease. Yet, this paper also indicates that the model can be further adapted and improved to address some identified challenges. Maintaining flexibility in applying the

CLT model is essential to ensure that the model can be adapted to a wide variety of land acquisition projects. The CLT model remains valuable in promoting equitable and sustainable agricultural development, offering a viable solution for future farming communities.

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