

Summary & Resources - Seedleaf's Headwater Farm September 2024 OAK Farmer Field Day



Exploring the Ecosystems of Community and Conservation

Event Summary

In 2017, the Lexington nonprofit [Seedleaf](#) leased two acres of land in Fayette County to serve as an urban farm, creating opportunities for growers to produce nutritious food for the community without worrying about the cost of land. In 2023, Seedleaf acquired 30-acre Headwater Farm to expand their community education and provide more land access to their Market Gardeners, the Refugee Farmers Cooperative (Empucate) and the Nepalese farming organization, Anka. Dozens of local growers, farmers and ag professionals gathered for a recent Field Day to tour Headwater Farm, at the headwaters of the Elkhorn Creek in Northeast Lexington. Participants learned about Seedleaf's community approach to food access and education from Seedleaf staff and Market gardeners, visited multiple sites demonstrating Seedleaf's stewardship of natural and shared resources, and learned more from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff and OAK's Conservation Coordinator about small-scale and whole-farm conservation practices.

Getting to Know Seedleaf

As a community gardening organization, Seedleaf provides horticultural training and supports the practice of gardening and small-scale farming in the urban spaces of Lexington, Kentucky. Their mission supports the development of a robust and healthy local food economy and a just and equitable system of stewardship over urban land. Through their year-long Market Garden Program, Seedleaf guides participating Fayette County residents through basic horticultural practices, food safety and general business planning. Once their instruction is complete, the Market Gardeners are provided land for their own vegetable production at Headwater Farm. Market Gardeners keep all proceeds earned from their efforts.

In sharing land, skills and resources, Seedleaf helps new Market Gardeners take risks, build their brand and learn without the fear of financial ruin or social isolation. Seedleaf Market Gardener Ella Wilson expressed appreciation of the education, support and networking that the Seedleaf program

has offered her, and Jasmyne Horton echoed that the supportive Market Gardener network and the ability to learn in community with others have helped her grow her skills as a gardener.

Small Garden and Whole Farm Conservation

Market Gardeners are allowed use of ½-acre plots at Headwater Farm, and each plot is separated from neighboring plots by a [buffer strip](#). This separating space allows for travel around the beds and a strip of native perennial wildflowers and warm-season grasses for [pollinators](#) and [windbreaks](#). Gardeners use [cover crops](#) within their plots to support pollinators, build soil health and balance soil nutrients, suppress weeds and protect soil against erosion. Soil-building practices like cover crops are part of the instruction that Seedleaf offers as well as the agreement they commit to when growing at Headwater Farm.

As part of their stewardship of the land and waters of the Elkhorn Creek tributary, Seedleaf is working with OAK's Organic Transition Program to incorporate organic practices and with NRCS to develop a whole-farm conservation plan. Market Gardeners are part of the process, recordkeeping and decision-making around these conservation efforts, ensuring everyone understands and implements the developing farm plan and practices.

Similar to the individual plots, Headwater Farm also has cover crops and pollinator plantings - yet on a much larger scale. [Conservation Cover](#) and [Tree and Shrub Establishment](#) provide wind protection and support wildlife habitat, and [Riparian Buffers](#) and [Invasive Management](#) support native vegetation, wildlife and water quality along the wooded creek edges. Recognizing that agriculture can look very different on small-scale garden plots and large-scale farmscapes, NRCS practice standards and resources are offered for a variety of practices, some with financial assistance, based on per-acre or square-foot benefits. (TIP: Reach out to [OAK's Conservation Outreach Coordinator](#) for support in determining which practices fit your land or farm needs - or [contact a local NRCS office](#))

Headwater Farm includes an orchard, planned and planted by Market Gardeners, with hazelnuts, chestnuts, raspberries, blackberries and pawpaw trees. Seedleaf is developing [agroforestry practices](#) to build on these native fruit and nut plantings. Seedleaf staff noted that regenerative agriculture allows opportunities for conservation and land stewardship within cash crop production - and beyond. Whether for wildlife, pollinator support, water quality, crop protection, food production or public education, the whole-farm conservation approach fits easily within the community-minded focus of Seedleaf's mission.

Gratitude

OAK is grateful to Megan Pilsbury, Christine Smith, HP Lovelace and the Market Gardeners of Seedleaf for their time and efforts for this Field Day, to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for providing essential participant support and conservation guidance, and to all the farmers and ag professionals who took time out of their busy schedules to share in the learning and conversation.

This event was supported by a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Related Resource Links:

OAK Resources:

- [Annual Organic Farming Conference](#) - Save the date for OAK's 14th Annual Organic Farming Conference, *Grounded In Organics: From Soil To Market*, January 23-25, 2025, at Kentucky State University's Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm in Frankfort, Kentucky.
- [Soil Health and Climate-Smart Project](#) - Build soil health and improve on-farm resilience. Enrolled farms have access to direct technical and educational resources and receive incentive payments from implemented climate-smart practices. Learn more; stay tuned for future enrollment opportunities!
- [Upcoming OAK Farmer Field Days](#) - Hosted on working farms, these events highlight organic practices used in crop and livestock systems and best practices in production, marketing, business and resilience on Kentucky farms. Register today to learn from and with other farmers!
- [Organic Production Assistance Program](#) - The organic production consultation services provide dedicated organic technical assistance to Kentucky farmers who are currently using or interested in adopting or expanding organic practices.
- [OAK Transition Program](#) - Organic Transition specialists assist farmers who are interested in transitioning to USDA-certified organic production. Organic Specialists are available for one-on-one consultations, providing a personal level of service and technical assistance on-site, at the farmer's convenience.
- [Join OAK today!](#) The sustainable food and farming network in Kentucky is growing, and together, we can create a thriving local food system. Your support and participation helps OAK deliver educational programming, provide community outreach and enhance market opportunities for growers across Kentucky! Receive discounts on OAK events and other member benefits!
- [Sign up for OAK newsletters](#) - For farmers and consumers, OAK offers a variety of regular communications to stay connected to Kentucky food and farming news, research and events.
- [OAK YouTube](#) - View recordings, snapshots and lessons learned from host farmers in past conference and field day playlists.
- [Suppliers and Farm Resources](#) on OAK's Find-A-Farm Directory

Climate-Smart Agriculture Resources:

- [OAK Soil Health and Climate-Smart Project](#)
- [Climate-Smart Practices](#)
- [Seedleaf - NRCS Conservation Practice Document](#)

Soil Health Resources:

- Soul Fire Farm's [How Alive Is My Soil?](#)
- [Cover Crops for Sustainable Crop Production](#) - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)
- [Managing Cover Crops Profitably](#) and [Building Soils for Better Crops](#) - SARE
- [Cornell Soil Health Manual](#) - Cornell University's College of Ag and Life Sciences
- [Building Soil Health in the South](#) - Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF)

Crop Production Resources:

- [General Production Resources | Center for Crop Diversification](#)
- [Organic Agriculture | Center for Crop Diversification](#)
- [Crop Rotation on Organic Farms | SARE](#)
- [Community Supported Agriculture \(CSA\) Production Manual](#) of the Organic Farming Unit at the University of Kentucky
- Post-Harvest Infrastructure: [Shipping Container DIY cold storage](#) - University of Vermont Ag Engineering

Funding /Technical Assistance Resources and Service Providers

- Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development ([KCARD](#))
 - Free [business planning](#) for Kentucky farms and agribusinesses
 - [Funding assistance and grant information](#) (Kentucky and beyond)
 - Sign up under “GET UPDATES” on [KCARD website](#) to receive e-newsletters
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - Read this first! [A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers](#)
 - USDA [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)-Kentucky](#)
 - [How to Start a Farm: Beginning Farmers and Ranchers](#)
 - Find your county’s office in [West Kentucky](#) or [East Kentucky](#)
 - [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)-Kentucky](#)
- Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA)
 - [Organic Marketing Program](#)
 - [Grants and Funding Opportunities](#)
- University of Kentucky:
 - [Extension Publications](#)
 - [Food Connection](#) - Value Chain Coordinators [contact information](#)
 - [Center for Crop Diversification](#)
- Grants:
 - Kentucky Horticulture Council
 - [Small-scale On-Farm Water Management Grant](#)
 - [GAP \(Good Agricultural Practices\) Cost-Share Program](#)
 - [SOAR loan](#) - southern and eastern KY
 - [KSU Small-Scale Farm Grant](#)
 - [County Ag Investment Program \(CAIP\)](#) grant: county-specific! Ask your County Cooperative Extension Agent