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Owner/operators of Bumble Organic Farm: Abby and Jeff Fischer, Ben Whalen, and Melissa Law. Photo credit: Bumbleroot Organic Farm.

Windham Organic Farmer Joins National Fly-In to Protect Farm Program Funding
Melissa Law of Bumbleroot Organic Farm asks congressional appropriators to support conservation, local/regional food, and beginning farmer programs that help producers thrive

Washington, D.C., March 28, 2019 – Beginning farmer Melissa Law, in partnership with fellow owner/operators Ben Whalen and Jeff and Abby Fisher, are now entering their fifth growing season at Bumbleroot Organic Farm. By leveraging support from farm bill programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP), and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, Law has been able to enhance Bumbleroot’s production of organic vegetables, flowers, and herbs by increasing both sustainability and profitability. This week, Law joined eleven other farmers and advocates from across the country in the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition’s (NSAC) farmer fly-in event in Washington, D.C.

“If our representatives in D.C. don’t understand the positive impact these programs have for farmers, then they won’t support them,” said Law. “And if they don’t support programs that train beginning farmers and help us build viable businesses, then our food system will be in jeopardy. I came to D.C. as part of this farmer fly-in event because I wanted my representatives to meet someone who benefits from these programs, I wanted to be able to tell my story face-to-face.”

In 2014, Law and her husband moved to Buxton, Maine to join Jeff and Abby in starting Bumbleroot Organic Farm. Together, the team grew vegetables and flowers on their small plot of land for two years. In 2016, the four were able to purchase an 89-acre farm in Windham, where they grow a wide variety of organic products.

“We moved to Maine to start the farm and be closer to family, but also because we heard that there are many great service providers in Maine and that the State has a strong agricultural community,” said Law. “I’m glad to say that the rumors were definitely true, and we’ve been supported so many Maine organizations, including Maine Farmland Trust, from whom we purchased our land, Coastal Enterprises Inc, which helped with the financing, and the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), who is our organic certifier and has provided countless educational opportunities for us and our peers.”

To learn the skills and access the resources they needed to get their farm started, Law and her partners took part in MOFGA’s Journeyperson and Farm Beginnings programs. The training programs were both made possible thanks to support from BFRDP, and taught Bumbleroot’s owners how to approach the business aspects of being a farmer and how to make a holistic plan that worked for their families and their values.

“Those programs were really important for us because none of us came to farming with a background in business,” said Law. “We learned how to make our farm into a sustainable business enterprise that would be able to support our families.”

Bumbleroot Organic Farm has also utilized the EQIP program to build high tunnels and extend their growing season – which is crucial for a farm that does most of its business through local and direct marketing channels – and is participating in a SARE grant project trialing cover cropping and tarping techniques.

“Our mission is to connect people with the land and food that sustains them,” said Law. “Our goal is to feed our community, and these farm bill programs help us to do that.”

With the 2018 Farm Bill signed into law in December of 2018, farmers and food/farm advocates are now turning their attention to the farm bill’s implementation phase, and to the annual appropriations process. While many farm bill programs receive mandatory funding through the legislative process, those programs can also receive additional discretionary funding through the annual appropriations process. For FY 2020, Law and NSAC asked congressional appropriators to support the following:

- Protect vital conservation programs: NSAC urges Congress to make NO cuts to mandatory funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), or other USDA conservation programs.
- Provide \$10 million for the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program, which houses the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program.
- Increase funding for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension (SARE) program to \$45 million.

“America’s family farmers made many of the historic victories of the 2018 Farm Bill possible,” said NSAC Interim Policy Director Juli Obudzinski. “Through all the delays and setbacks, they stuck with us and continued fighting for the programs and policies that matter to them, and now they’re continuing that advocacy into the appropriations process. We’re grateful to have had Melissa and our eleven other farmers and food advocates join us this week in asking Congress to build upon the success of the 2018 Farm Bill, and ensure that critical food and farm programs receive the funding they need to succeed.”

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About the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC)

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is a grassroots alliance that advocates for federal policy reform supporting the long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources, and rural communities. Learn

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