

Orchard Farm: A Progress Report & Look Ahead

March 2026

Executive Summary

A Generational Opportunity

The purchase of Orchard Farm in 2023 through the School For Our Time Capital Campaign represented a transformative investment in the Waldorf School of Princeton's future. More than land, it offered a platform to integrate education, community, and regenerative agriculture in ways that can shape the School for decades to come.

Laying the Groundwork

Since the purchase, the School has focused on transitioning the farm management from the Phinneys to the School. The Board created a Task Force to set the direction for this period and the group assessed current farm conditions, developed guiding principles for future uses, made recommendations related to governance and staffing, and laid groundwork for early stage initiatives. In 2025, the Board transitioned the Task Force to a working Committee, which has moved key projects forward.

Early Efforts Include:

- **Hazelnut Orchard Planting:** 100 trees planted in partnership with Rutgers partnership, which presents significant potential for research and educational opportunities.
- **Perennial Grain Production:** Emerging partnership with the Land Institute to introduce climate-forward grains in New Jersey.
- **Animal Husbandry:** Small-scale livestock management to be integrated with the Curriculum.
- **Food Security:** Exploration of potential partnerships to support regional needs.
- **Volunteer Days:** Engaging students, families, and community members on the Farm.
- **Farm Market:** Building new models for a community facing market.
- **School Lunch Program:** Piloting lunch programming to add value to the school offering.

These efforts demonstrate that Orchard Farm can support mission-aligned programming and revenue opportunities if supported by appropriate staffing and infrastructure.

Looking Ahead: A Critical Inflection Point

With focused investment, Orchard Farm can become a defining asset for the School, a model for regenerative land stewardship, a vibrant community hub and a sustainable contributor to the School's long-term financial health. This next phase is not simply about maintaining the Farm but about fully realizing its potential as a living expression of the School's values and vision.

Introduction

In Fall 2022, The Waldorf School of Princeton (WSP) launched the School For Our Time Capital Campaign; a defining moment for the School as it looked towards what investments would open the door to new and unique opportunities for its future. The Capital Campaign supported the expansion of Early Childhood classrooms, the development of a Forest Kindergarten, and most significantly for the long term, the purchase of Orchard Farm.

With that purchase, the School secured not just land, but possibility: Fields for cultivation, spaces for commerce and community, and an asset that will help define the School's future. Also, it ensured that the students had continued access to long treasured places like Brown Wood and Bedens Brook. Together, these landscapes form a living environment with extraordinary educational, ecological, and community potential.

The approach to the Farm's acquisition also allowed for WSP and Orchard Farm founders, Caroline and Bob Phinney, to remain in their home and to work with the School to transition farm operations. While this arrangement created short term complexity, the School was committed to ensuring the Phinneys would continue as an important steward of the Farm and valued member of our community.



“Orchard Farm is a generational opportunity. It challenges us to think long-term about how we care for land, how we educate children, and how we sustain community. With the right leadership and support, this Farm can become one of the School's greatest strengths and a living expression of our values.”

Todd Rossi, WSP Board Chair

Laying the Groundwork: Vision, Governance, and Structure

Following the acquisition of the Farm, the School convened a Farm Task Force to assess the current conditions on the Farm and articulate a path forward. This work resulted in several foundational achievements:

- Development of a clear set of Guiding Principles;
- Recommendations for governance and staffing;
- Formation of the Orchard Farm Committee to guide the Farm's future; and
- Clarification of operational realities and transition needs.

While this phase was less visible than planting or harvesting it was essential for laying early groundwork and answering key questions like: What does the land need now? What can the community sustain? What structure will support long-term success?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



1. Community-Centered

Encourage community participation and belonging across generations.
Make space for events, festivals, and workshops that foster joy and connection.



2. Educational Integration

Deepen the Farm's connection to the school's curriculum and pedagogy.
Use the Farm as a site for experiential learning in science, ecology, craft, and culture.



3. Welcoming and Inclusive

Ensure the Farm is accessible and meaningful for diverse people, including those new to the school. Provide spaces for reflection, healing, and quietude as well as action and play.



4. Biodynamic and Regenerative Practices

Treat the entire landscape—fields, woods, streams, and trails—as part of the living farm. Care for the soil, plants, animals, people, and waters as interconnected systems.



5. Multifunctional and Flexible

Create areas for varied uses: food production, education, art, recreation, and community gathering. Include infrastructure for CSA, food prep, farm store, tool storage, and seasonal shelter.



6. Economically Thoughtful

Maintain and grow revenue-generating opportunities. Support educational and community programming through a mix of earned income and volunteer energy.



7. Future-Facing with Firm Roots

Honor the land's history and the memories of those who've cared for it. Stay open to evolving possibilities while protecting the Farm's core identity and purpose.

Transitioning Land Stewardship

One of the most complex aspects of the past two years has been the gradual transition of land stewardship. The Phinneys continue to maintain the farm areas in the front and side of the house as well as their egg CSA, while the School has taken on the planning of the back fields and pasture.

The Farm Committee has been guiding efforts to address some soil erosion in back fields, introduce new crops that promise significant educational value and potential for research funding as well as a “school” garden that could ultimately support a school lunch program. It is also working to secure an arrangement with a local farmer to utilize the back pasture. These early efforts have been essential to setting the course for a sustainable future and ensuring that the farm retains its farm tax assessment.

Also, the Committee has been working to draw the school community into the farm experience. Regular Volunteer Days have brought families, students, and community members together to prepare and plant beds, maintain fencing, establish cover crops and clean and organize farm spaces. These days reflect both the Farm’s community-centered spirit and the desire for hands-on engagement with land.

The experience over the past few years has reinforced a clear conclusion: Land of this scale requires dedicated leadership and support. Volunteer enthusiasm is strong and meaningful, but a successful farm depends on year-round planning and resource management.



Volunteer Days have brought energy and effort to the Farm and have included projects such as orchard planting, seeding of winter produce and cover crops, and weeding (always!).

Pioneering Agricultural Approaches

In addition to stabilizing stewardship, the Farm has begun exploring long-term agricultural models aligned with regenerative principles.

Hazelnut Orchard

In December 2024, the School planted 100 hazelnut trees in the back orchard area of the Farm in partnership with Rutgers University. Rutgers has been leading the reintroduction of hazelnuts to New Jersey and the School took the opportunity to be part of this exciting initiative. Unlike many vegetables, hazelnut trees are harvested in the fall, which will allow for the development of curriculum around this new crop. Also, the orchard reflects a commitment to perennial systems that build soil health and provide diversified production over time. Perennial crops reduce tillage, enhance carbon sequestration, and align with climate-conscious land use.

Kernza and Perennial Grain Exploration

The School also has the opportunity to introduce a groundbreaking perennial wheat called Kernza, representing the first planting of its kind in the state. Working with the Land Institute, a leading innovator in perennial grain production, the School intends to plant the grain in a portion of the back fields with the intent to mitigate soil erosion and introduce this regenerative grain to the area.

Animal Husbandry Potential

The School has been talking with an experienced local farmer about launching a small-scale pasture and animal husbandry program that integrates livestock care with regenerative pasture management and student learning. It would begin modestly, such as raising a limited number of steer, while offering opportunities to connect pasture operations with curriculum, camps, and extracurricular programming. Even at this small scale, it would ensure the School could retain its farm tax assessment status. This kind of programming introduces a complementary revenue stream through agricultural products and educational offerings. More broadly, it positions the School as a regional leader in experiential, land-based education, opening new avenues for community engagement and support.

Food Security Engagement

The Farm Committee has also begun examining how it could contribute to regional food systems and food security efforts, building on relationships and expertise within the broader community. Through targeted plantings and partnerships it is possible for the School to support this critical area of need.

These developments are early but significant. They demonstrate that Orchard Farm is not simply preserving land; it is positioning itself as a site of thoughtful agricultural experimentation consistent with Waldorf values and ecological responsibility.

Reimagining Revenue Streams

A central question since acquisition has been: How can Orchard Farm contribute to the School's future from a revenue generating perspective with consideration for a triple bottom line approach: considering economic, social and environmental impacts. Beyond the potential noted in the agricultural approaches noted earlier, several burgeoning pilot efforts provide insight.

Farm Store and Seasonal Markets

Last fall, the Committee hosted Friday Markets which brought energy and visibility to the Farm. Featuring farm produce, baked goods, and the first WSP-branded tomato sauce, the Store demonstrated community interest and revenue potential. These markets also reinforced the Farm's role as a gathering place, not simply a retail site. The Committee is currently working to build out the market model for the coming year.

School Lunch Program Exploration

Last year, a group of volunteers organized a grade school lunch pilot to demonstrate a proof of concept for this kind of programming. About 75% of grade school students participated in the pilot and there was significant interest in continuing the program and expanding it to include EC families in some way. Currently, the School is investing in a new water system necessary for the Farm to host the lunch program and volunteers have begun to refine their approach for the next phase of the program. The program would serve to integrate the Farm with the School, create a regular connection to farm-grown food, provide a steady internal revenue stream and anchor a kitchen/market space.

Workshops and Community Programming

Community workshops and seasonal events suggest potential for expanded programming in areas such as biodynamic practices, regenerative farm management, seasonal celebrations and agricultural skill-building. These workshops could bolster the educational niche for the School in the region and attract more attention for the core educational mission.

Together, these efforts demonstrate that Orchard Farm can support mission-aligned revenue if supported by appropriate staffing and infrastructure.



Weekly fall markets featured produce grown on the Farm, baked goods donated by School families, and other local products.

Looking Ahead

Orchard Farm now stands at a defining moment. The land has been secured. Governance is in place. Community engagement is growing. Pilot programs have demonstrated appetite and possibility. The next phase requires focused investment.

Sustaining Momentum

The successful continuing transition of the Farm requires dedicated Farm staff, which would:

- Oversee the management of the farm including land and equipment;
- Develop operational plans and budgets;
- Oversee the management of the kitchen and store space in partnership with the Phinneys and volunteers; and
- Supervise and/or support volunteers on specific initiatives.

On the ground leadership is essential to responsibly manage this significant asset for the School.

Catalytic Investment

With staffing secured, the School can fully define and cultivate a variety of programming drawing on the ideas and efforts already in motion. Priority efforts will include:

- Building out new revenue streams;
- Developing educational programming for the School and broader community; and
- Ensuring the property is managed responsibly as an ecological, community and economic asset for the School.

A Critical Inflection Point

The School and the Farm have been intertwined since their first days with the vision and passion of Caroline and Bob Phinney. The School has taken the first steps to ensure this connection not only continues but helps both the School and Farm evolve into their next chapter. The Capital Campaign secured the land and the past two years have clarified vision, governance, and early activation.

The next phase requires leadership, infrastructure, and sustained investment. As Bob Phinney said during a Farm Week Story Circle in 2025, we are “warming up the universe of possibilities” as we transition the Farm to the School. We now have the opportunity not simply to maintain the Farm, but to cultivate its full potential.