



# SAVING AMERICA'S WORKING LANDS

A National Conference Hosted by American Farmland Trust

**DALLAS, TEXAS | APRIL 23-25, 2025**

## **Field Trip #1: Improving the Resilience of Urban and Small Acreage Farms**

Join AFT's Regional Texas team and Grow North Texas for a behind-the-scenes tour of small acreage and urban farms in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Tour the Owenwood Farm and Neighbor Space, a collaborative project to repurpose seven acres within Dallas city limits. Next, visit Eden's CSA Farm thriving on the urban edge despite development pressures from Dallas-Fort Worth. The motivations and challenges for protecting these farms are vastly different than for large acreage rural working lands and often require innovative solutions. Participants will have the chance to discuss with producers and community leaders planning approaches to support urban-edge agriculture, tools for protecting these working lands, such as Buy-Protect-Sell, and the needs and challenges facing small acreage farms and ranches.



### Agenda

10:00 – Depart from *Fairmont-Dallas*

10:30 – Arrive at *Grow North Texas* & tour the Farm (Susie Marshall)

11:00 – Panel Discussion: Approaches to Support Urban and Urban-edge Agriculture (Facilitator, Julia Freedgood | Panel, Jesse Herrera, Megan Nuebauer, Mitch Hagney)

12:00 - Get lunch and settle in (lunch is provided)

12:30 Panel Discussion: Challenges and Opportunities for Urban/ Urban-Edge and Small Acreage Farmers over the next 5-10 Years (Facilitator, Hyait El-Jundi | Panel, Lisa Attaway, Michael Jimenez)

1:30 – BREAK

1:45 – Depart from *Grow North Texas*

2:15 – Arrive at *Eden's CSA Farm*

2:30 – Tour the farm

3:30 - Discussion: What's next after the farm? Succession Planning for Small Acreage Farmers (Facilitator, Susie Marshall | Panel, Alison Volk, Marie Tedei, Michael Brooks)  
4:30 – Depart *Eden's CSA Farm*  
5:00 – Arrive back at the Fairmont-Dallas

## **SPEAKERS**



**Jesse Herrera**  
Executive Director  
COACT

Jesse Herrera is the Founder & Executive Director of CoAct. He is a passionate problem solver that utilizes design as a framework to create equitable solutions towards today's most pressing social challenges.



**Mitch Hagney**  
Director of Food System Resiliency  
San Antonio Food Bank

Mitch Hagney farms on 75 acres of urban land as Director of Food Resilience for the San Antonio Food Bank. He has operated a hydroponic farm and food hub in downtown San Antonio called LocalSprout for 12 years. He served as President of the Food Policy Council of San Antonio, helping change backyard poultry rules, ease urban farm zoning restrictions, and plant food forests on public parks



## **Hyiat El-Jundi**

Farmer

Veteran Coalition of Texas

The Farmer Veteran Coalition of Texas provides support to over 4,800 farmer veterans in the Lone Star State. Our mission is to mobilize veterans to feed Texas. We cultivate a new generation of farmers and food leaders, and develop viable employment and meaningful careers through the collaboration of the farming and military communities. We believe that veterans possess the unique skills and character needed to strengthen rural communities and create sustainable food systems. We believe that agriculture offers purpose, opportunity, and physical and psychological benefits.



## **Michael Jimenez**

Founder / CEO

JMZ Farms

Michael Jimenez is a 23-year-old first-generation Hispanic farmer and the founder and CEO of JMZ Farms, an organic pasture-raised egg farm based in Bridgeport, Texas. Michael began his farming journey at just 12 years old with one chicken in his mom's backyard. Inspired by regenerative agriculture legend Joel Salatin and self-taught through countless hours on YouTube, he turned a childhood passion into a fast-growing business. Today, he operates a thriving 25-acre farm, delivering fresh organic eggs directly to families and restaurants through a subscription-based model. Michael is driven by faith, purpose, and a vision to become one of the most influential Latino figures in agriculture while inspiring others to dream big, start small, and never give up.

**Lisa Attaway**

Production Site Specialist

Green City Growers

Lisa Attaway has spent nearly a decade on small-scale vegetable and livestock production farms throughout central Texas, western Massachusetts, and now the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex. She has been a farm volunteer, worker, apprentice, and manager, and she currently runs a small vegetable production site with Green City Growers at a corporate campus in Westlake, Texas. She is passionate about creating effective and beneficial systems for the growing spaces, communities, and workers involved in our local food system.

**Marie Tedei**

Owner/Founder

Eden's Organic Garden Center

**Greg Joel**

Farm Manager

Unity Unlimited, Inc. / Opal's Farm

Gregory Joel is the Farm Manager for Opal's Farm, an urban farm named after the "Grandmother of Juneteenth and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Dr. Opal Lee, as well as a Board Member for Unity Unlimited, Inc. a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. He has worked with several local non-profits as a writer, consultant, and is currently an instructor for the "Taste the C.U.R.E (Community Urban ag Resource Education)" program partnering with Tarleton State University and Unity Unlimited, Inc./Opal's

Farm. He is a community activist, farmer, writer, and teacher, but most important - husband, father, grandfather, and pet parent.



**Alison Volk**

Director of BPS and Easement Acquisitions  
American Farmland Trust

Alison coordinates all aspects of new easement acquisitions across the country. Prior to joining AFT, Alison worked at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection for ten years. For five of those years she oversaw the Department's farmland preservation program, which included the state's agricultural conservation easement program. She earned a Juris Doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she studied land use law and policy and focused on agricultural land preservation tools including conservation easements.



**Michael Brooks**

Urban Conservationist  
FPAC-NRCS, Dallas Urban Service Center

Michael Brooks is the Urban Conservationist, Dallas Urban Service Center. A native Texan, Mr. Brooks was reared in Freestone County Texas, on his family ranch near Wortham, Texas. He is a graduate of Wortham High School. Mr. Brooks started his career in Freestone County as a Student Educational Employment Program (SEEP) employee. He worked two summers prior to graduating from college. Mr. Brooks graduated in 1997 from Prairie View A&M University with a bachelor's degree in animal science. Upon graduation, he was offered and accepted a full-time position with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Michael has been employed by NRCS for 28 years. During those years, Michael worked as a Soil Conservationist at the Fairfield, Angleton, Richmond, Athens, and Denton Field offices. Also, as a District Conservationist in the Arlington Field Office. Currently, Mr. Brooks is working in the

Urban Service Center located in the Uptown area of Dallas, Texas as the Urban Conservationist. Michael is a proud husband and father to his spouse Chinae Griffin-Brooks of 23 years and two children: Miles (22) and McKenzie Brooks (19). Mr. Brooks and his wife Chinae lives in Cedar Hill, Texas and enjoys traveling and spending time with family and friends. Mr. Brooks is a proud member of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity.



### **Julia Freedgood**

Senior Fellow and Senior Program Advisor  
American Farmland Trust

Julia is a prominent national expert in farmland protection, land tenure and access, agricultural viability, and food system planning. As Senior Fellow and Senior Program Advisor at American Farmland Trust, she focuses on the planning and policy framework required to support the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers, and to advance equitable and just regional food systems to increase food security and combat climate change. Currently writing a book on this subject, she also is involved in other research, extension, and community engagement projects at AFT. Julia is the author or co-author of many articles and reports, recent ones include “Cultivating the Next Generation: Resources and Policies to Help Beginning Farmers Succeed in Agriculture,” “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States,” “Fail to Include, Plan to Exclude: Reflections on Local Governments’ Readiness for Building Equitable Community Food Systems,” and “Growing Local: A Community Guide to Planning for Agriculture and Food Systems.” She has many professional affiliations. Among them, she is a long-time member of the American Planning Association, a founding member of North American Food Systems Network, and serves on the Advisory Board and Editorial Committee of the Journal of Agriculture Food Systems and Community Development. She has served on USDA’s Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program Grant Review Board and USDA-Secretary Vilsack’s Land Tenure Advisory Committee. She holds a M.A. in Urban and Environmental Planning and Policy from Tufts University.





### **Sarah Fulton-Smith**

Texas Regional Director

American Farmland Trust

Sarah leads AFT's programs in Texas and joined AFT in March of 2023. As a seventh-generation Texan, she is excited to expand AFT's presence in Texas, and to work with partners across the diverse landscape of the state to address the urgent need to protect land and promote environmentally sound farming practices. Sarah has worked at the intersection of agriculture and climate change issues throughout her career as a policy advocate, a researcher and a landowner/ operator. For the last several years, she has been operating her own farm and small business in Maryland where she collaborated with local partners to permanently protect the farm and implemented several conservation agreements. Previously, she worked at the UN Foundation and the UN FAO, focusing on sustainable land use, bioenergy, and other agriculture/ climate change issues bringing together stakeholders to advance policy. Sarah holds an MPA from Columbia University, and a BS in Bioenvironmental Sciences from Texas A&M University. She is a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University in Soil and Crop Sciences studying the contribution of crop residues and roots to soil organic matter formation and carbon sequestration.



### **Susie Marshall**

Executive Director

GROW North Texas

Susie Marshall is founder and Executive Director of GROW North Texas, a Dallas-based nonprofit that cultivates healthy food communities by strengthening local food production and improving access to fresh, nutritious food. She has nearly two decades of experience working with food systems, food producers, and food assistance programs distributing

surplus fruits and vegetables. Susie is past president of Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association and has been involved since 2010. Susie has degrees from Texas Wesleyan University, Texas A&M – Commerce, and Perkins School of Theology at SMU. Susie does what she does because she truly believes that we can change systems, bend the arc of justice faster, and make the world a better place.





## Field Trip #2: Stewardship in Action: 77 Ranch Tour

Join us just fifty miles south of Dallas to witness a model for environmental stewardship! Hosted by the Texas Agricultural Land Trust, this exclusive experience takes you to Gary and Sue Price's renowned 2,500-acre beef cattle operation, *77 Ranch*. Enjoy an immersive tour, a delicious lunch, and engaging discussions covering ranch land protection, succession strategies, and quantifying the vital ecosystem services that ranch land provides.

Gary and Sue Price are "Flagship Farmers" with McDonald's. [Read their fascinating case study](#) for more information about them, The 77 Ranch, and more.



### SPEAKERS



#### Gary Price

Owner

The 77 Ranch

We started the ranch 42 years ago from scratch, with nothing but the desire to succeed. We want to leave the ranch to our son, Gary Lee, who wants to build on what we have started and to be his best. We love ranching... it's our life.



## **Gary Lee Price**

Rancher

Prairie Grove Ranch

Gary Lee Price is a rancher who manages the Prairie Grove Ranch, a commercial cow-calf and hunting operation in the Cross Timbers brush country of North Texas, and is the son of Gary and Sue Price, who own and operate 77 Ranch in the Blackland Prairie region. Prairie Grove Ranch focuses on improving rangeland through rotational grazing and brush control, and they market high-quality, weaned, preconditioned calves that are USDA Process Verified as non-hormonally treated and all-natural through the Angus Link program.



## **Jeff Goodwin**

Director

Center for Grazinglands and Ranch Management

Texas A&M

Jeff Goodwin, Ph.D., is the director of the Center for Grazinglands and Ranch Management within the Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management. Goodwin brings more than two decades of nationally recognized rangeland conservation and outreach to the center. He previously worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service throughout Texas, eventually holding the position of state rangeland management specialist. In 2014, he received the agency's national Rangeland Conservationist of the Year Award. Following his tenure with the agency, Goodwin joined the Noble Research Institute, located in Ardmore, Oklahoma, as conservation stewardship lead and senior rangeland and pasture consultant. In addition to Goodwin's prolific peer reviewed articles, popular articles and

technical reports, he has presented extensively across the nation on subject matter related to ecosystem services, soil health and carbon sequestration on grazing lands, prescribed fire and managing grazing land systems. Goodwin's research interests include the economic and ecological impacts of grazing strategies, sustainable grazing management and ecosystem services. He has held and continues to fill multiple leadership roles with the National Grazing Lands Coalition, Texas and Oklahoma Grazing Land Coalitions, Society for Range Management, as well as the Texas Section – Society for Range Management.



### **Andy James**

Director of Additive Conservation  
Texas Agricultural Land Trust

Andy James' natural resource career got started at a very tender age. At a time when many teens are slinging burgers at a fast-food joint, Andy James was conducting vegetation transects with Texas A&M graduate students for a research project at Fort Hood. "I got involved in 4-H as a kid, and really got into plant identification," recalled James. "The local plant identification team in my hometown of Gatesville competed all over the state and we were pretty good." The team's reputation caught the attention of a Texas A&M professor, who asked James' 4-H coach if he might want a part-time summer job helping grad students. That's how James' conservation career was launched when he was just 15. That high school connection led to a Bachelor of Science degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management at Texas A&M, followed by a master's degree in Natural Resource Management at the Borderlands Research Institute at Sul Ross State University. His first full-time professional job was at the Natural Resources Conservation Service, where he learned the ins and outs of natural resource management and all about the many programs available to landowners. He also met Chad Ellis there, who would later go on to become the CEO of the Texas Agricultural Land Trust, and the two kept in touch over the years. In 2014, James accepted a position at Texas A&M's Natural Resources Institute, which conducts extensive research about Texas land trends. That work involved him in all aspects of the tools being used to conserve agricultural land in Texas, including the work of the Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT). "I've always been interested in conservation and agricultural easements to protect working lands, and it was great to see TALT's evolution from a fledgling organization to an entity that is

really making a difference on the landscape of Texas,” he said. In 2019 he earned his real estate license, which further enhanced his portfolio of skills. In late 2020, Chad Ellis asked James to join the TALT team on a part-time basis to assist with conservation easement transactions, as well as many other aspects of TALT’s work. In September 2021, James came on board fulltime as TALT’s Land Transaction Manager. “It all came together and this new position is allowing me to use every skill I’ve learned along the way to further TALT’s mission of keeping Texas big, wide and open,” said James. “It’s a great opportunity and I am really happy to be part of the TALT team.”



### **Brenna Gaik**

Director of Operations

Texas Agricultural Land Trust

Brenna Gaik has been immersed in agriculture her entire life. Growing up in both Western New York and the Ozarks of Missouri, she was surrounded by farming and ranching as her dad managed a dairy and hog operation, and her family was actively involved in the rodeo business. With deep roots in Texas as well, Brenna has always been connected to the land and those who steward it. Brenna earned a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and Agribusiness from the College of the Ozarks, a unique institution that charges no tuition for full-time students due to its student work program. She worked alongside fellow students to cover her education costs, gaining hands-on experience through the college’s dairy farm, beef operation, and processing plant—graduating debt-free and well-prepared for a career in agriculture. In 2014, Brenna joined the Noble Research Institute in Ardmore, Oklahoma, where she played a key role in community advancement and education programs. She coordinated the Lloyd Noble Scholars in Agriculture and developed train-the-trainer courses for NRCS, honing her skills in audience engagement and educational outreach. Since March 2022, Brenna has served as the Director of Operations at the Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT), where she continues to support conservation efforts and agricultural stewardship across Texas.



