



## Round the Bend Farm: How this nonprofit is making an impact with agriculture

When Desa Van Laarhoven and Geoff Kinder founded Round the Bend Farm: A Center for Restorative Community (RTB) in Dartmouth, they were moving on a mission that went beyond running the farm. The goal? To create a truly sustainable property that is self-contained, serves the regional population, and educates the population on the future of farming through a unique “agripreneur” program.

The pair had for years nurtured their vision of bringing a working model of restorative living to the northeast. With the support of the Marion Institute and the Bromley Charitable Trust (a private foundation), the two began to bring that vision to life.

The result is a 39-acre farm to be protected in perpetuity, designed to support the dual goals of educating the local community while creating a viable and sustainable farm. Getting to that point was a long and winding road; even if a nonprofit starts as a small, down to earth operation, there are myriad land use and legal issues to navigate. RTB’s path called for resolve, creative thinking, and legal expertise from advisors at Hemenway & Barnes (H&B).

### From concept to non-profit reality

Through her work as Executive Director of the Marion Institute and in roles with other nonprofits, Desa had plenty of experience in guiding an organization. She knew that launching RTB as a 501(c)3 called for a rigorous application process and could take significant time. One of the major hurdles was to craft documentation that conveyed her vision in a way that government officials and supporting Board members would understand and embrace.

She looked to H&B for support and found that the process was smoother and faster than she anticipated. The team took a holistic approach, understanding that helping RTB required crossing over disciplines and having a grasp on the full scope of the mission. H&B attorneys visited the farm in order to literally understand the lay of the land and the challenges posed



by topography and access issues. Combining that firsthand experience with their legal knowledge helped them marry the mission with the technical issues necessary to clear hurdles. The firm's wide-ranging expertise helped create connections between the various organizations involved to ensure that RTB maintained its tax-exempt status, was positioned to comply with local zoning regulations, and was working within the deed restrictions.

## Property management

Having obtained its nonprofit status, RTB quickly established its ambitious mission and what it would need to grow toward the vision. While potential existed in the great work of the farm itself, to become even more self-sufficient meant expanding the infrastructure.

The organization moved to construct three new buildings: a teaching commercial kitchen and processing kitchen, the offices, and an educational facility – all with the intention of being as restorative and sustainable as possible. RTB sought approvals from the town, with help from H&B's team. The partners worked to ensure that the educational nature of the charity was well-defined and the project fell within statutory exceptions to the zoning rules.

On the horizon is the potential purchase of an additional 55 acres of farmland, which would allow RTB to function as a fully operational farm and education center. The expansion would generate significantly larger yield and give them room to demonstrate best practices on a grander scale, with rotational grazing areas for livestock and full crops on display as live teaching aids.

## A community partner

Of paramount concern to the farm was being a valued and trusted member of the community. The mission appealed to many, but some residents were naturally skeptical of RTB's intentions and the potential for negative effects such as noise pollution, traffic, issues with livestock, and property easements. Legal concerns can often breed animosity, and RTB hoped to nurture a positive relationship with everyone involved.

Whether easing the minds of concerned residents or vying for permits specific to the nature of the property, H&B attorneys prioritized the need to negotiate with a light touch. While Desa and Geoff led the local charge with open houses, barn raisings and transparent one-on-one conversations with community members, the legal team was also careful to listen and respond to concerns voiced by area residents. In the end, presenting the situation gracefully was just as important as filling out the right forms.

There is more to come for RTB. They have their eyes set on being truly interwoven into the fabric of the community, showing that restorative and sustainable living is a staple of a



healthy local culture. With the right support and continued dedication to the mission, RTB stands to change the role agriculture plays in its community.

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