

# A YEAR OF PLANTING



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ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 2019



# THANK YOU FOR ANOTHER GREAT YEAR!

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Your support helped us expand the community orchard and provide educational, hands-on experiences for Island youth, residents, and visitors.

Our passion is providing access for all to healthy food and opportunity on agricultural land. There are so many delights when working with nature and we love to share that joy!

We are excited for 2020. In May, we will host the Island School for our second annual Gathering Ground Day, in which students work, play, and learn in our vineyard and orchards. This year, Hotel Washington will provide lunch that includes vegetables grown by students in raised beds (donated by One Small Garden) at the school. Students will also meet Gathering Ground's newest guests: six White Dorper hair sheep! These critters will be roaming the grounds all season long adding fertilizer and keeping the weeds at bay.

When we look into the future, we see the grounds developing into an edible botanical garden with strolling paths and gathering places for play and meditation, with extensive educational programming open to all. To get there, we need your support.

Please consider Gathering Ground in your year-end giving. Your donation is tax-deductible, and it makes our work possible.

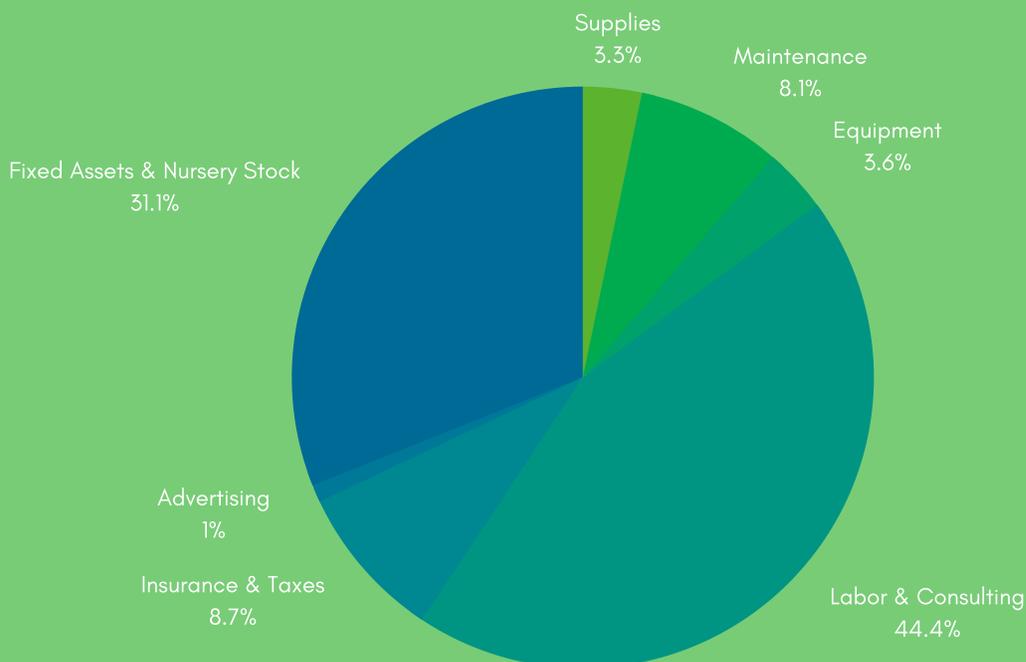
**RUSSELL ROLFFS**

Board President and Farm Manager

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Through private donations and various fundraisers, like the Dinner in the Vineyard and the Packers football raffle, we raised a total of \$16,000. We spent a total \$13,409.72, with the majority going to expanding and caring for our vineyard and orchards.

In 2020, we are going to focus on applying for grants to increase our capacity for programs and plantings.



**FIGURE 1.**

*We spent a total of \$13,409.72 in 2019. With the majority going toward labor and nursery stock for the vineyard and orchards*



# 2019 BY THE NUMBERS



## We planted 120 trees.

Expanding our community orchard to a now total of two acres of apples, pear, chestnut and butternut trees. These trees will produce food while building soil and locking carbon underground!



## We planted 300 fruiting shrubs.

In a rare pocket of acidic soil we found on the Grounds, we planted blueberries and lingonberries. Fruiting to begin in 2021!



## We grafted 80 vines.

We are transitioning some vines to a new disease-resistant grape called Itasca that should produce a chardonnay quality wine.



## 500+ Volunteer Hours

From the Island and from around the state, 90+ volunteers donated more than 500 hours planting, pruning, grafting and sharing knowledge at Gathering Ground.



## 65 Youth Visited

On our first annual "Gathering Ground Day" with the Island School, Island students learned, worked, and played in the sunny outdoors and helped in the vineyard and berry patch. In summer, other students from off-island also came to help in our vineyard.



## 14 businesses donated to Dinner in the Vineyard.

72 guests enjoyed a meal crafted by 14 restaurants, farms, brewers, artisans, makers and bakers from the Island and Door County. 50% of the guests were from off-Island.

# LOOKING TO 2020

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## Sheep in the Vineyard

In April, 2020, we will be welcoming six White Dorper hair sheep to Gathering Ground. We couldn't be more excited. A big part of our motivation is to experiment with using the sheep to keep the weeds in the vineyard and orchards at bay, and to offer their gift of fertilizer to the ground to help our plants grow strong. No doubt, we will have a lot of experimenting to do to see what works and what doesn't, but can't wait. Also, school students will be involved in the design and build of a structure for the sheep to shelter in at night. Look forward to their handiwork at Gathering Ground this April! If you want to get involved and help us tend our sheep, please let us know! We are also looking for donors to help us with purchasing portable fence for the sheep.

## Community Compost

We will begin to accept compost materials at a new three-bin collection site located at Gathering Ground. Stay tuned for more information in the spring. While we need a tractor to adequately manage a compost program of some size, we will keep the bins small for the first year which will allow it to function with a little muscle alone. (Cont next page]



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A tractor is needed to turn compost, which helps speed up the decomposition process by allowing oxygen to infiltrate more easily and exposing unprocessed material to the center of the pile where there is adequate moisture of microbes to much away. Gathering Ground believes that the Island will benefit greatly from a compost program, especially when you consider that we ship off food scraps at our expense when, with just a little effort, we can save ourselves that expense and make tremendous soil for our gardens in the process. Win win!

## Building a Pavilion

Gathering Ground is excited about building a pavilion that will serve as a site for our educational programs and as an outdoor classroom to augment the Island School's experiential education. We are grateful to Washington Island Women's Club and the Detroit Harbor Ladies Aid, both of which gave donations earmarked for the pavilion.

## Raised Beds at the School

This spring, Gathering Ground will be working with Jessica Dennis at the Island School to get some early season vegetables sprouting up in the raised beds behind the school. The beds are masterful creations donated by One Small Garden a business operated by Juliann and Ted Gardener. Two of the beds have plastic covers on top to warm the soil up early in the spring, so we are excited to see what crops we can plant and harvest by the end of the school year. All the gardeners on the Island know that it is a challenge to harvest much of anything before late June, but the greenhouse effect in the raised beds will allow us to get the soil heated up a lot faster!



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# Chestnut Orchard

2019 was an exciting year for the chestnut orchard. We planted 70 additional chestnut trees, bringing the total to 100 trees. It was very promising to see that some of the trees planted in the spring of 2018 grew six feet in one season! A handful of trees are already pushing eight feet in total height with only two seasons in the ground.

Chestnut trees produce edible nuts that can be eaten raw or dried to make flour, and a mature orchard can produce 4,000 pounds per acre. If successful, the trees we are planting now will feed generations of Islanders as the trees are known to live well over one hundred years. While Washington Island is at the northern edge at which chestnuts are typically grown, they have a good shot. Plus, they like the soil at Gathering Ground, so we will continue planting chestnuts in 2020.

## Vineyard Update

It was a year of challenges in the vineyard. The grapes had a hard time ripening due to the cold spring, and the lack of heat and sunlight made for grapes that were low in sugars and high in acid. Nevertheless, we harvested 500 pounds late October (after all the leaves on the vines had fallen) and pressed them with the help of Don Grasse and his small vineyard near Gills Rock, and then fermented the juice with Bob Purman of Island Orchard Cider. Bob reassures us that if the juice doesn't make good wine, it will make great vinegar.

Read more at

[www.gatheringgroundwi.org/category/annualreport2019/](http://www.gatheringgroundwi.org/category/annualreport2019/)



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# The Amazing Butternuts

Did you know that butternut trees were once one of the most common trees growing in the understory of the forests on Washington Island? The wood is highly prized and the nuts are great for baking and fresh eating. Sadly, most of them were killed by a fungus that causes cankers on the stem of the tree. In fact, I have only seen one butternut growing on the Island, but would love to hear about any trees you are aware of, especially if they are mature trees! The good news is that a stand of butternut trees in Ontario, Canada were identified to have resistance to the disease, and we are beginning to grow several of these trees at Gathering Ground. We dream of the day when butternuts are reestablished on the Island. Imagine how happy the wildlife will be, as the nuts are a great food source for many a creature. We hope to plant another 25 butternut trees (\$12 each) at Gathering Ground this year. Please donate to help us pay for these trees.

Read more at

[www.gatheringgroundwi.org/category/annualreport2019/](http://www.gatheringgroundwi.org/category/annualreport2019/)





**A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE  
GATHER TO CELEBRATE, LEARN  
ABOUT AND PRACTICE  
REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE**

**Gathering Ground educates youth and adults in sustainable agriculture and promotes economic development through agriculture, and strengthens the health of individuals, the community, and the environment.**

**Give online through Facebook or send a check to 2162 Swenson, Washington Island, WI, 54246.**

**THANK YOU!**