



# Mashantucket Pequot Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program



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EXTENSION



Mashantucket Pequot  
Tribal Nation

# Presenters

Shuresh Ghimire

Associate Extension Educator- Vegetable Specialist, UConn

Principle Investigator for FRTEP

[Shuresh.Ghimire@uconn.edu](mailto:Shuresh.Ghimire@uconn.edu)

Jeremy Whipple

Farm Manager, Meechook Farm

Founding Director, Mashantucket Pequot Department of Agriculture

[jwhipple@mptn-nsn.gov](mailto:jwhipple@mptn-nsn.gov)

Marissa Turnbull

Director, Mashantucket Pequot Department of Agriculture

[MATurnbull@mptn-nsn.gov](mailto:MATurnbull@mptn-nsn.gov)



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# Land Acknowledgment

We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the territory of the Mashantucket Pequot, Mohegan, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Lenape Peoples, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations. We thank them for their strength and resilience in protecting this land, and aspire to uphold our responsibilities according to their example.



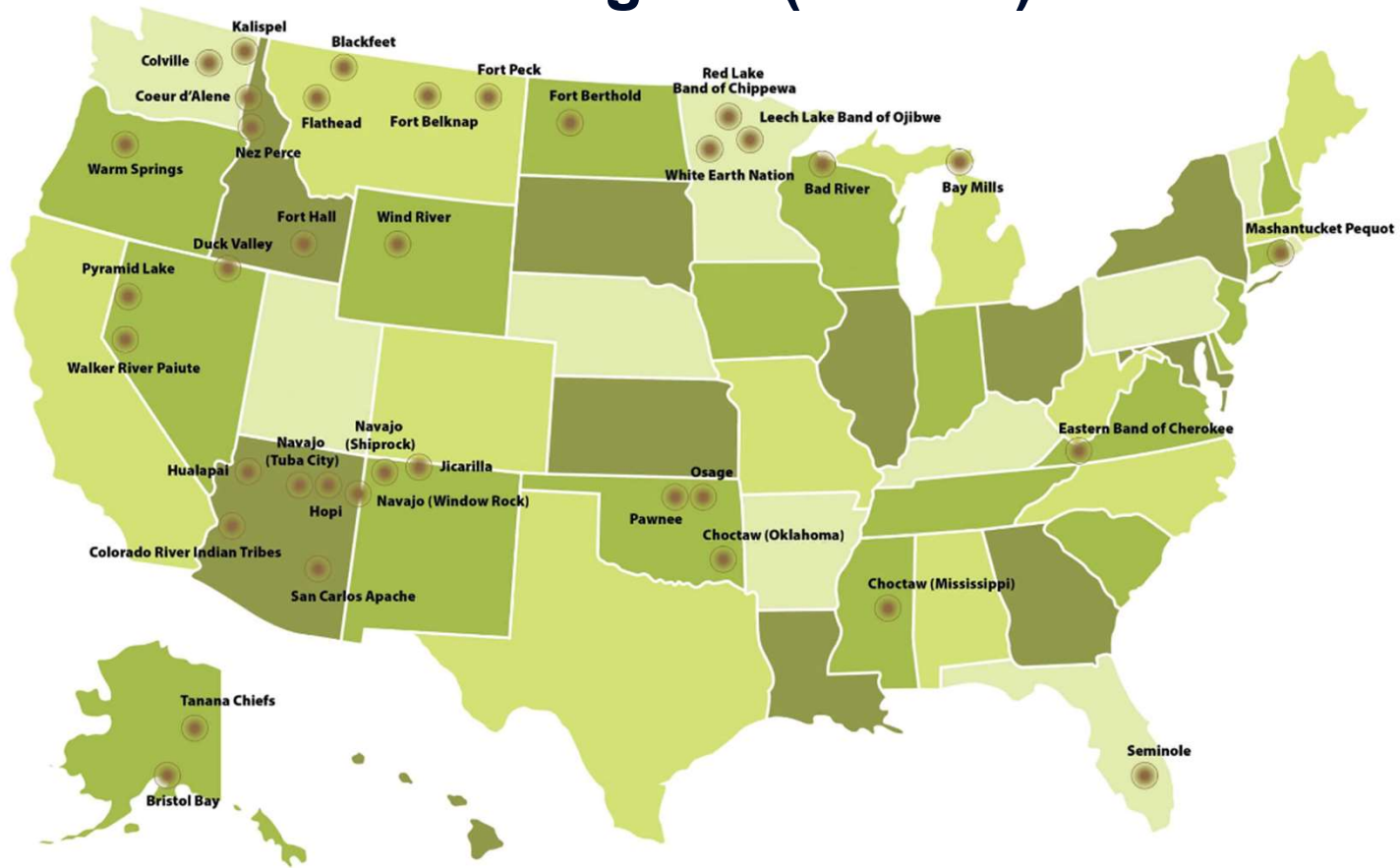
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# Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP)



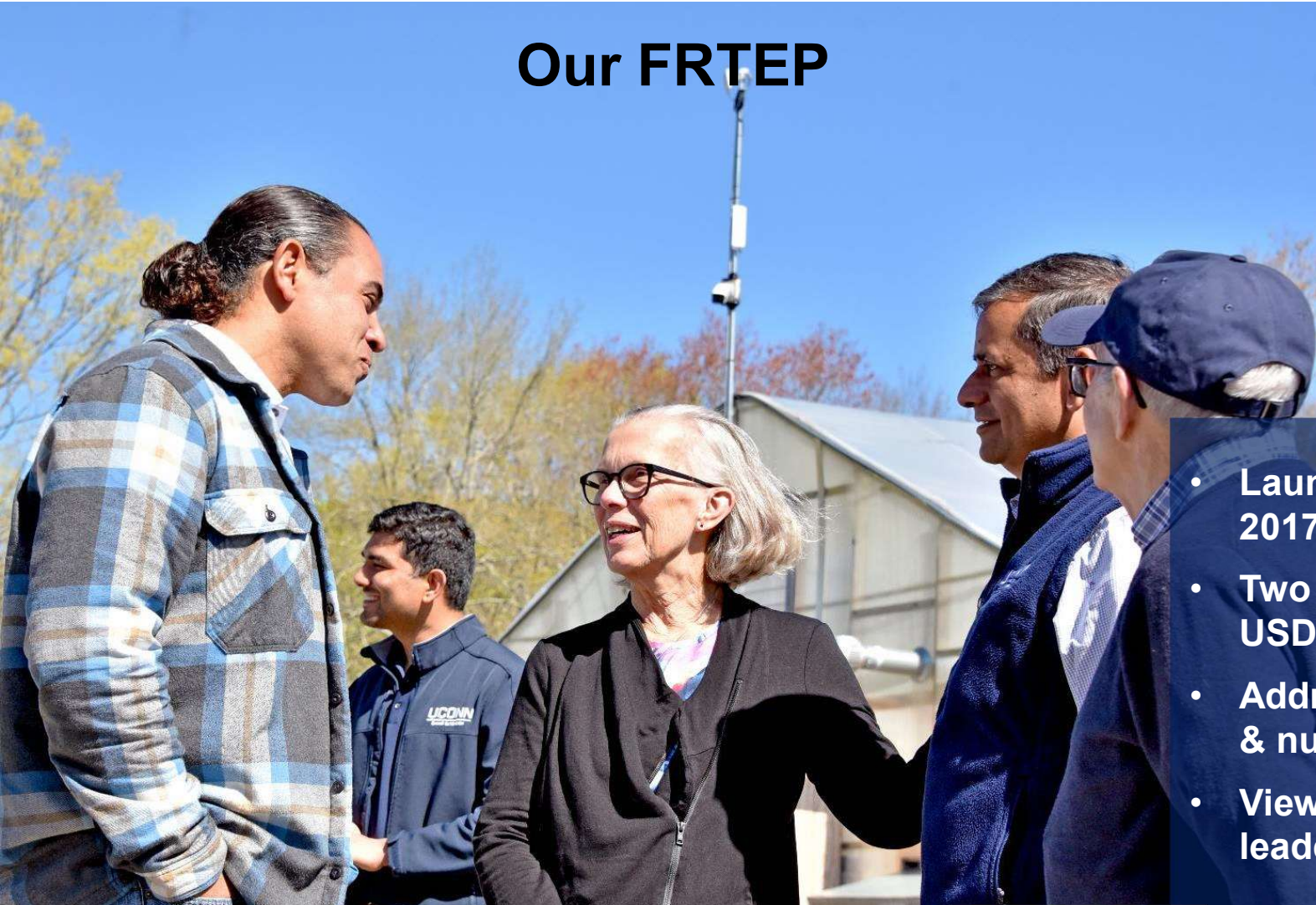
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# Our FRTEP



- Launched partnership in 2017
- Two successive awards from USDA
- Address need for agriculture & nutrition within MPTN
- Viewed as a national FRTEP leader



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## **Background**

- Good land base and natural relatives
- Growing need to enhance food security and sovereignty within the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation
- Need to reduce rates of childhood and adolescent obesity and Type II diabetes within the tribe
- Opportunity to provide health and nutrition education
- Opportunity for youth development program to help develop life skills
- Opportunity for marketing and revenue



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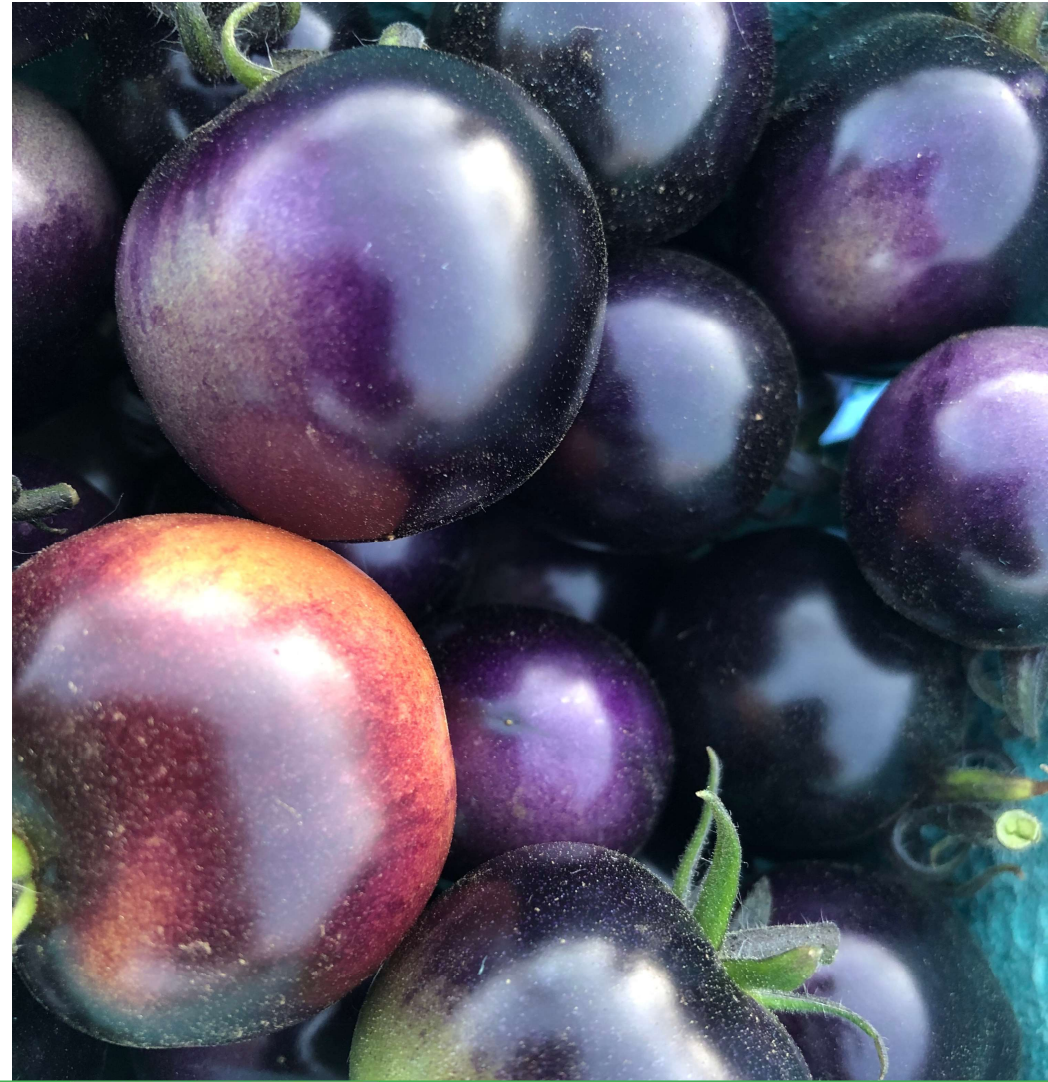
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## Objectives

- Increase capacity of agricultural enterprise on Tribal land
- Provide workforce development training for Tribal members
- Provide youth development program
- Deliver health and nutrition education to reduce obesity and diabetes in young people



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## Expected Outcomes

- Increased production and consumption of healthy, nutritious, and safe foods
- Establishment of a farm and sustained farm profitability
- Increased backyard and community gardening
- Leadership skills, public and interpersonal communication skills among youths
- Improved food security and sovereignty
- Decreased rates of childhood and adolescent obesity and Type II diabetes



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# Timeline



**2017**

## FRTEP INITIATION

Need assessed and prioritized:

- Food sovereignty
- Health
- Youth engagement

**2018-20**

## MEECHOOK FARM

- Vegetables grown and harvested in open field

**2021-23 DEPT OF AG**

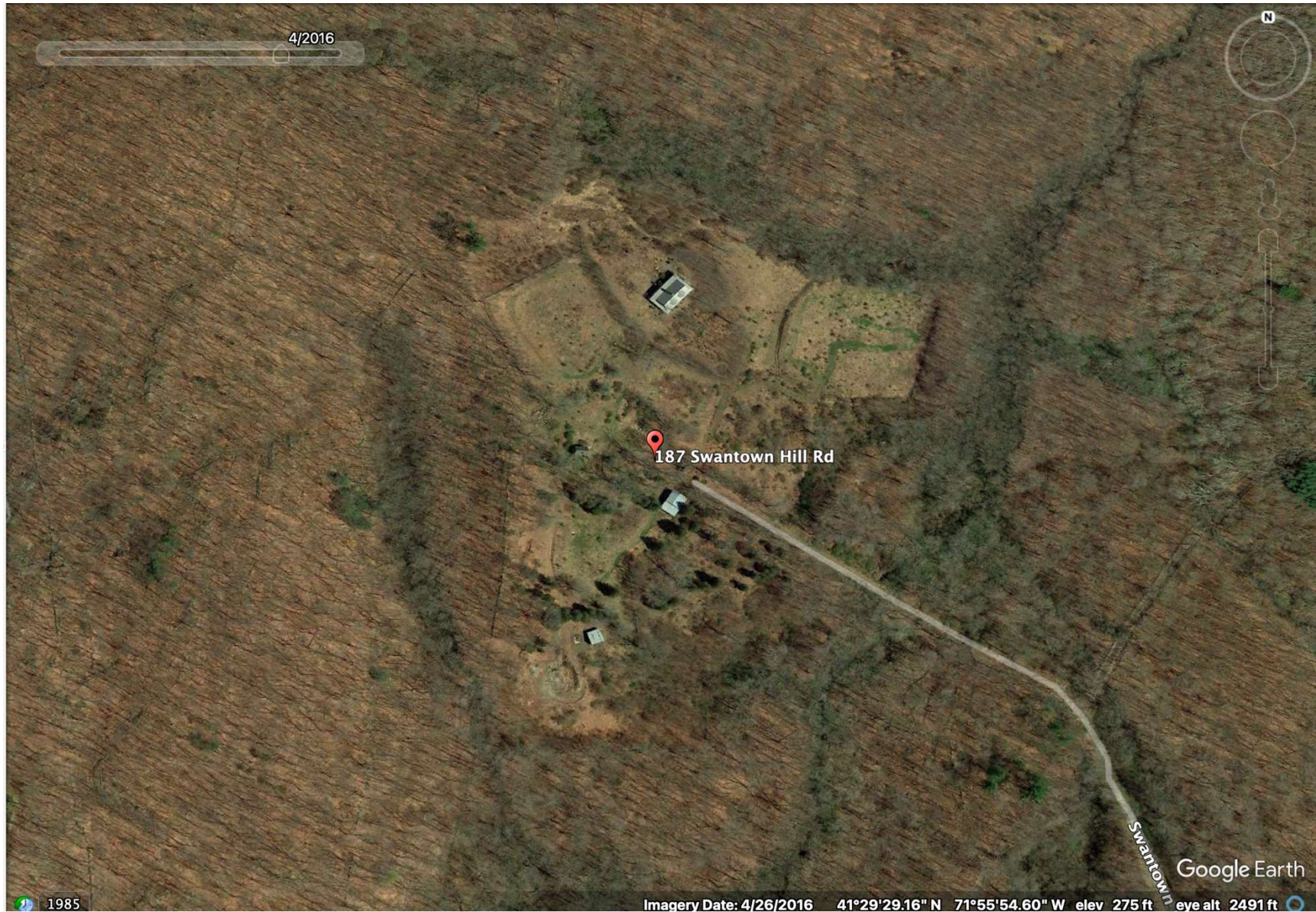
- 2021 Creation of MPTN Dept. of Ag
- Food box program for the community (LFPA)
- Produce prescription (FoodRx)
- Freight Farm
- Farm stand
- Scale-up production

**2024 SCALING UP**

- Additional Freight Farm
- More high tunnels
- More field production
- Diversified marketing: Farm to Schools and Farmers market

Youth development activities; health and nutrition education

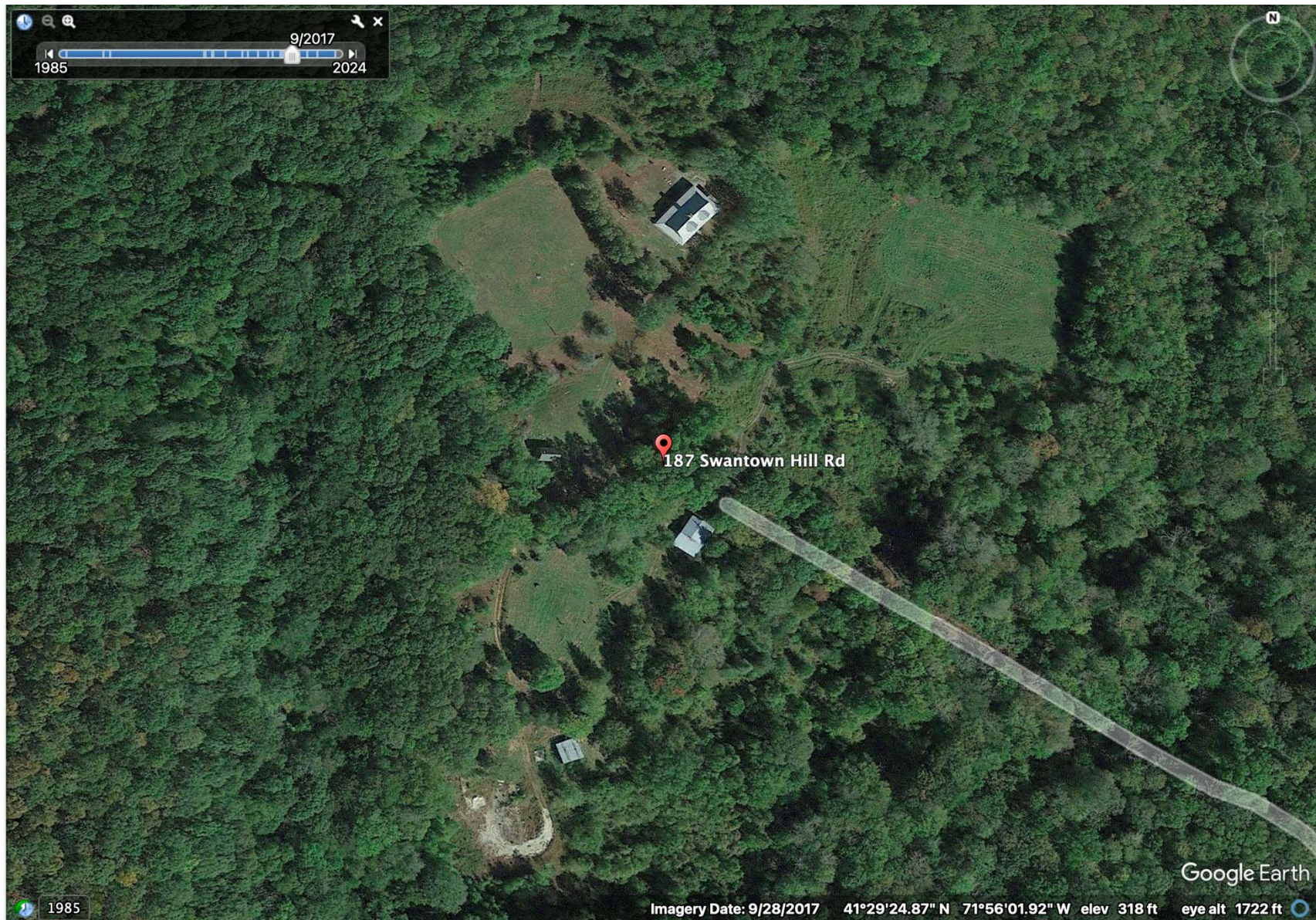
2016



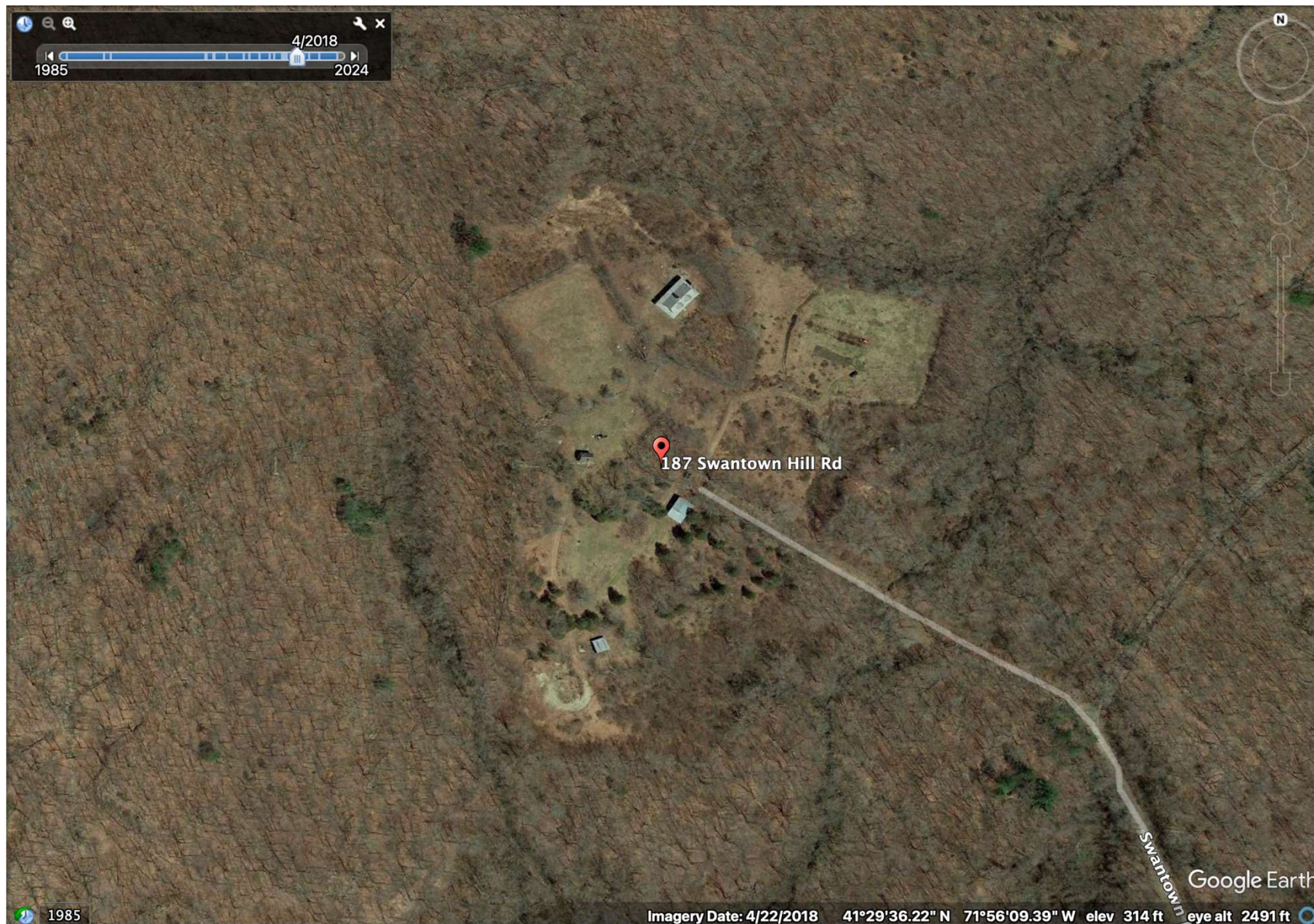
2016



2017



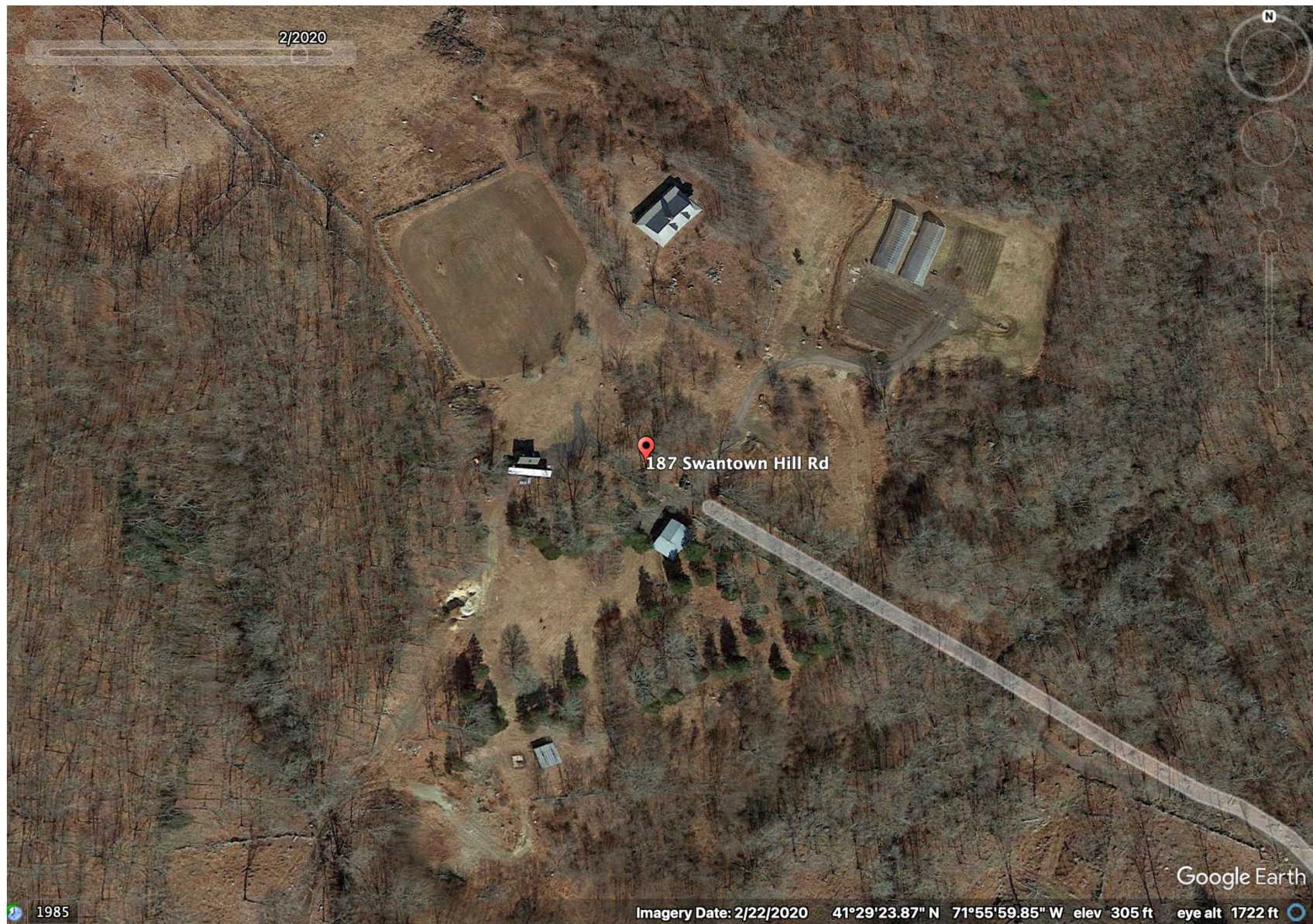
2018



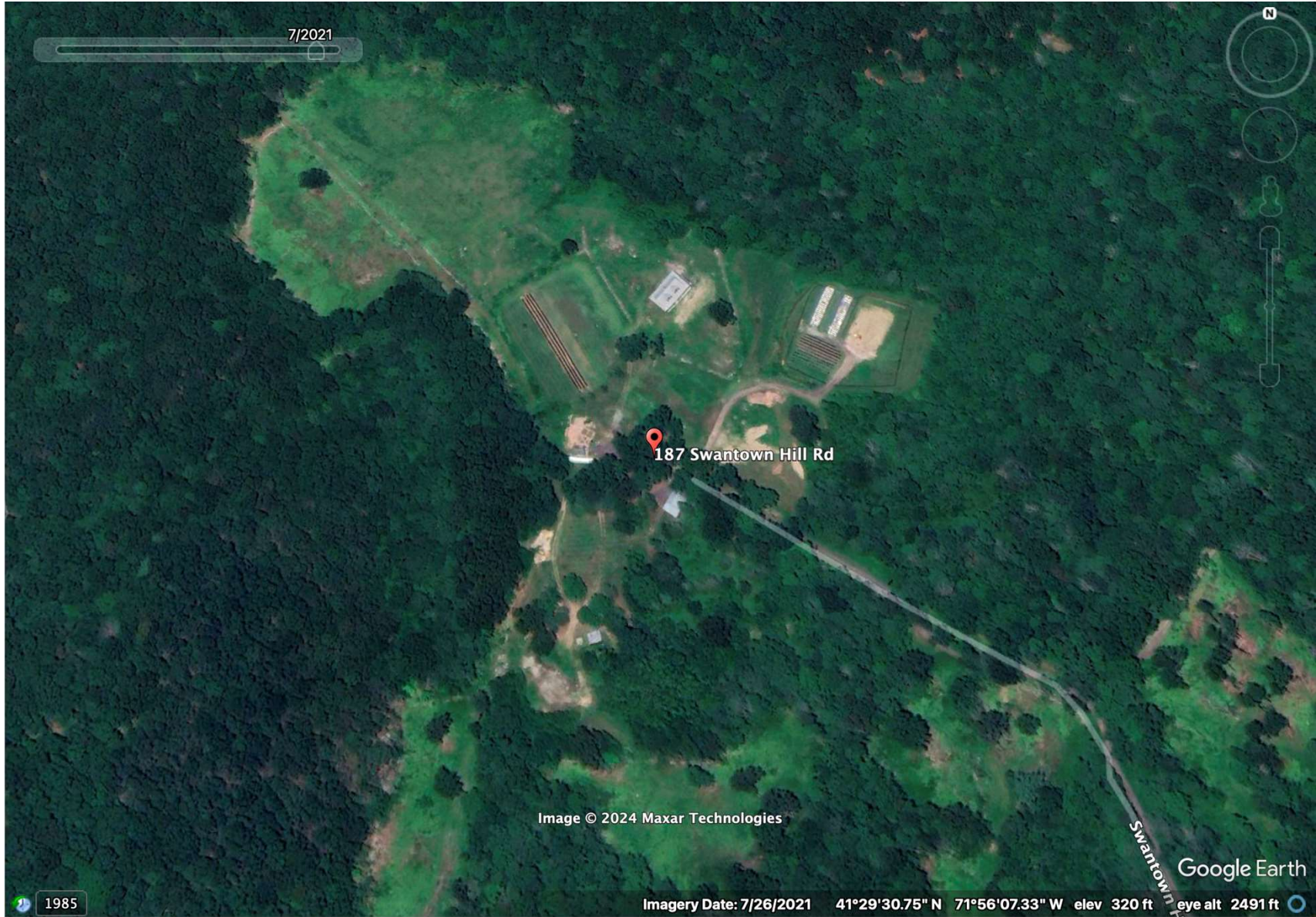
2019



2020



2021





2022



2024

3/2024

187 Swantown Hill Rd



## Extension Program Development

- Training program on vegetable production – open, high tunnel, hydroponics
  - Basics in vegetable production 2018-2019 winter- total 10 class, 6-10 members
  - Intensive 3-day hydroponic greenhouse by University of Arizona 2022 (online) – 6 members
  - Intensive 3-day hydroponic greenhouse by University of Arizona 2022 (in person) - 2 members
  - Hands-on training on hydroponic production, 2023-2024, 6-14 members



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## Extension Program Development

- Fruit production
  - On-site consultation
  - New plantings – blueberry, raspberry, strawberry
- Integrated pest management- fruit and vegetable
- Farm business management class series and finance training on the reservation in 2017-2018
  - Write and update farm business plans
- Produce safety training/BMPs
- Worker protection training
- Servsafe food handler/manager training
- Cooking workshops
- Youth development activities
- 2 grant-supported Tribal youth as employees



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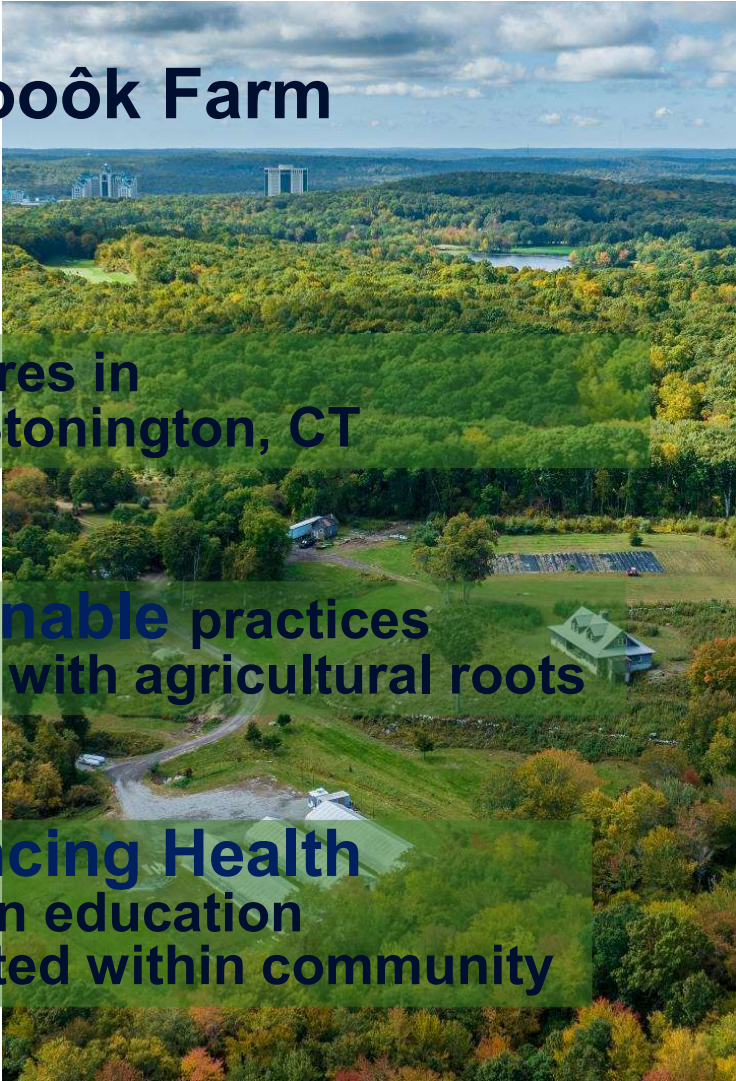
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# Meechooôk Farm



**600 acres in North Stonington, CT**

**Sustainable practices aligned with agricultural roots**

**Enhancing Health nutrition education integrated within community**



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## Outcomes

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**Food sovereignty and security** improved, along with health of tribal members

Up to **180** tribal members received meat and produce since 2022

**30** diabetic patients prescribed produce as part of FoodRx

**2021** Creation of MPTN Department of Agriculture



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# Produce harvest

2022

- 40,000 heads of lettuce
- 250 lbs tomato
- Summer squash, pumpkin, winter squash, cucumber, watermelon, basil, chard, and strawberry

*“It’s important because it’s part of our culture,” Whipple says. “Teaching the principles of the Seven Generations, that’s what we’re doing it for.” - [UConn Today](#)*



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# Produce harvest

## 2023

- 1,900 lbs of GH hydroponic lettuce
- 1,400 lbs of lettuce from Freight farm
- 900 lbs hydroponic tomato
- Summer squash, pumpkin, winter squash, cucumber, basil, chard, and onions

Total: 9,600 lbs of vegetables



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## Produce harvest

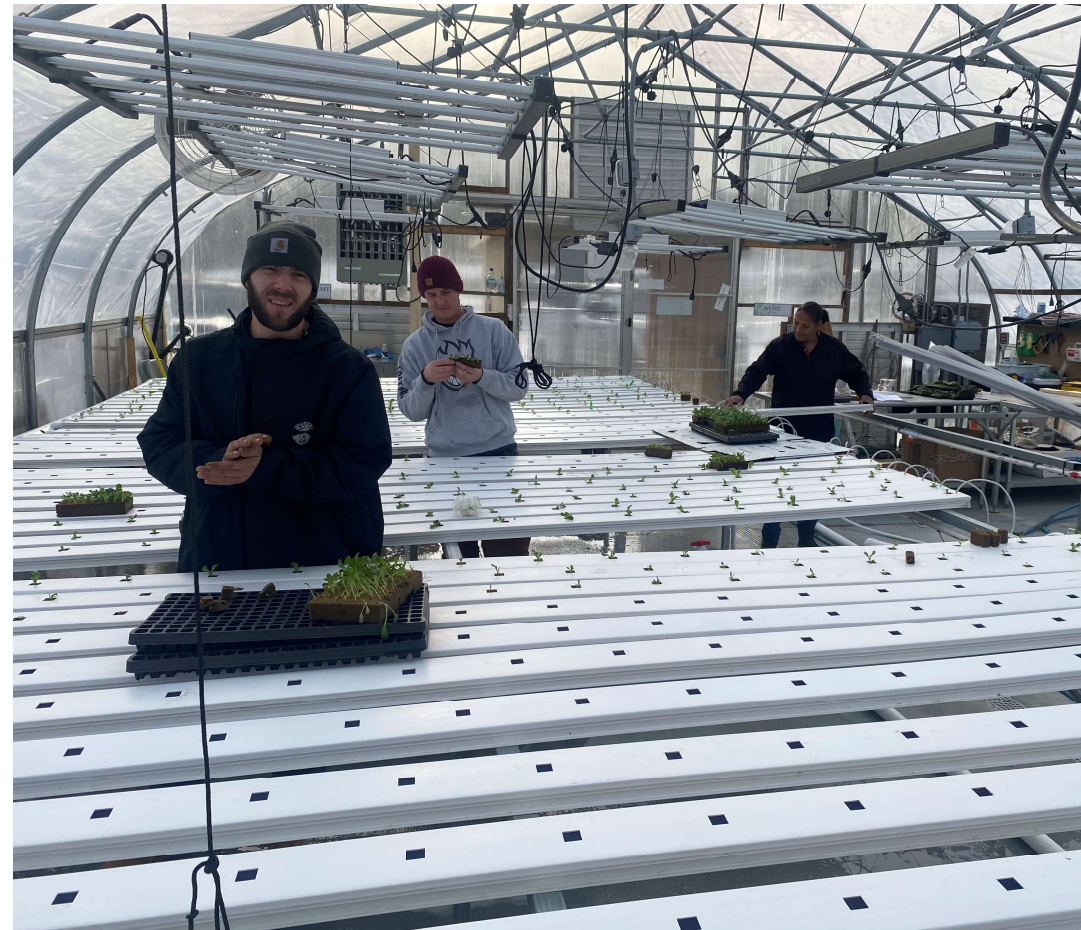
**2024 (as of July 20<sup>th</sup>)**

- 1,600 lbs of GH hydroponic lettuce
- 3,700 lbs of lettuce from Freight farm
- 1,260 lbs hydroponic tomato
- Summer squash, pumpkin, winter squash, cucumber, basil, chard, and onions

Total: 7,600 lbs

## Food distribution and marketing

- Produce & meat distribution
- Foxwoods Resort and Casino
- Local supermarkets
- Farmers' market



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## Challenges faced

- Changing climate
  - Crop disease, pest, physiological disorder
  - Increased production costs
- Delay in launching of 4-H club
  - Lack of adult volunteer(s)
- High grant-paid employees' turnover



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## Moving forward...

- Additional Freight Farm
- More high tunnels in production
- More field production
- Diversified marketing



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# Press

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## [Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation Establishes Tribal Department of Agriculture](#)

*“UConn Extension offers assistance in developing sustainable agriculture and community education”*

## [Respecting Roots and Growing for the Future with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation](#)

*“A partnership between UConn and local tribes led to the development of Meechooôk Farm and other programs that strengthen the tribal community, their land-base, and self-sufficiency”*

## [Tribal members aim to cultivate healthy future with gardens](#)

*“In his mind’s eye, Daniel Menihan Jr. sees a time when backyard vegetable gardens dot the Mashantucket Pequot reservation, their yields nourishing healthy tribal families...”*

## [Growing Food and Health with the Mashantucket Tribe](#)

*“There has been a substantial gain in the knowledge and skills regarding growing food, writing a business plan, nutrition, and health,” says Jeremy Whipple, a MPTN member...”*



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# Videos

Respecting Roots and Growing for the Future with Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation



UConn Extension is Growing Food and Health with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation



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April 24, 2024 | Briana Huett, Associate Director of Outreach and Engagement

# UConn Provost Announces Awards for Excellence in Community Engaged Scholarship

The Provost's Awards for Excellence in Community Engaged Scholarship (PAECES) recognize scholarly activities that integrate community engagement with research, creative work, and teaching



## Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN)

### Community Partner Award

The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) began a close partnership with UConn through the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP), a USDA-NIFA funded project initiated in 2017 as a response to the need to enhance food security and sovereignty within the MPTN while also reducing rates of childhood and adolescent obesity and Type II diabetes within the tribe. The program was designed with specific objectives to increase the capacity of the agricultural enterprise on Tribal land, to provide workforce development training for Tribal members, and to deliver health and nutrition education to reduce obesity and diabetes in young people.



Tribal needs for Extension programming in agriculture, workforce development, youth development, nutrition, health, Pequot language, and cultural preservation were identified and prioritized through multiple meetings, interviews, and a focus group discussion. Tribal leaders, members, and the UConn FRTEP team (including crop specialists, 4-H, nutrition Extension educators, and business planning and evaluation specialists) participated.

The FRTEP project has achieved several measurable outcomes since 2017. The project goal to improve food security in the MPTN was accomplished by establishing a *meechoók* farm and cultivating more land. Since 2022, the *meechoók* farm-grown produce and meat have been distributed to 180 Tribal community members (15 percent of the MPTN population) every other week in food boxes. Additionally, 30 diabetic patients have been prescribed fresh produce from the farm since 2022, supported by the Food Rx Program. Over 8,000 lbs. of produce were harvested in 2023, and farm products are being sold at the Foxwoods Resort and Casino and local supermarkets. Additionally, the project has encouraged more households to start their backyard gardens.

The FRTEP project has significantly strengthened the relationship between UConn Extension and MPTN. The FRTEP grant has built on the relationships and infrastructures that have enabled MPTN to secure additional funding from other agencies, including USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Native American Agricultural Fund. The project's success has led to the creation of the MPTN Department of Agriculture in 2021, which



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# USDA Recognition



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# **Thank you!**

**This project has greatly benefited from the contributions of the following people as well as many other men, women, and children.**

Jeremy Whipple, Bryan Holder, Mike Martins, Matt Daggett, Charlene Jones, Stormy Hay, Candyce Testa, Gary Carter, Jr., Nakai Northup, Setu Vora, Cassius Spears Sr., Darian Allen, Noah Cudd, Ernest Pompey, Misquashim Zamora, Jason Harris, Amir Smith, Khiyra Becton-Eleazer, Daniel Menihan, Jr., Rodney Butler

Joe Courtney & Cathy Osten

Shuresh Ghimire, Joseph Bonelli, Michael Puglisi, Robert Ricard, Erica Benvenuti, Sara Tomis, Mary Concklin, Miriah Kelly, Stacey Stearns, Bonnie Burr, Indrajeet Chaubey

*Financial support for this work was provided by the USDA NIFA Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP Awards 2017-41580-26950 and 2022-41580-37944)*



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# Social Media

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Thank you!



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# Questions & Discussion

Shuresh Ghimire

Associate Extension Educator- Vegetable Specialist, UConn

Principle Investigator for FRTEP

[Shuresh.Ghimire@uconn.edu](mailto:Shuresh.Ghimire@uconn.edu)

Jeremy Whipple

Farm Manager, Meechook Farm

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