



BLACKWOOD
EDUCATIONAL LAND INSTITUTE

2018 Annual Report



Blackwood Educational Land Institute is a teaching farm on a mission to model the indispensable role of regenerative food systems in all our lives. By integrating natural systems, healthy communities, and animal welfare, together we can co-create better ways to grow and source food.

As a non-profit we seek to:

- Practice restorative agricultural techniques to inspire and prepare the next wave of farmers and ecologists
- Teach a strong work ethic to youth as they learn where their food comes from
- Provide programming to cultivate awareness about how regenerative food systems are critical to solving our environmental crisis
- Demonstrate the essential balance of food production and land preservation
- Foster the discovery and renewal of relationships with the natural world

Our vision is to create a conscious generation for a regenerative agricultural future.



Blackwood is rooted in the patchwork Brazos Valley along the Texas Gulf Coast. This place of natural ecosystems is the foundation upon which we are building our restorative agricultural programs. The local grounding here has provided us the opportunity to connect with neighbors near and far, as well as embrace our network of friends and family.

Over the past year we have worked diligently and intelligently to move towards a more perennial landscape in our gardens. We hope to watch as the foods we sow today continue to show up and provide year after year.

Restoring our Coastal Prairie ecosystem has been a priority this year, focusing mainly on utilizing Joel Salatin's chicken rotation methods. Additionally, we are working to reseed the area with native grasses and wildflowers.

Regenerative agriculture is an approach to food and farming that aims to regenerate the land's essential topsoil. Our attention for this method is on our most recently acquired ten acres near the southeast edge of the property. The ultimate goal is to increase biodiversity, improve water systems, enhance native biomes, support biosequestration, increase resilience to climate fluctuation and strengthen the health and vitality of our soil.

On the program side, 2018 was a year of great successes for Nature Camp, Overnight School Experiences, and our two newest programs, Farm School and the Blackwood Harvest Hoedown. The Harvest Hoedown was introduced as an annual fall fundrasier to raise sponsorships for our educational programs and provide a fun, family friendly day on the farm. Our initial hope was for 150 attendees and we were overjoyed and grateful to host over 400 guests on the day. The Hoedown provided the opportunity to partner with almost twenty nearby farm friends and vendors across a variety of industries.



Through partnerships like these Blackwood is aiming to create a community of experts for our area and foster an environment of collaboration and support.

We go into 2019 with a great sense of enthusiasm for the future of farming and hope to encourage and inspire farmers of all ages to go forward with renewed optimism for our food systems.

Gratefully,

Cath Conlon
Founder & CEO
Blackwood Educational Land Institute



Farm Highlights

Compost Tea Brewer

We installed our 100-gallon compost tea brewer on the northeast corner of the Hopscotch Field. Once completed, this brewer will be used to amend our soils in both high tunnels as well as the Hopscotch Field. We continue in our microbiology research in order to provide Blackwood students the most current and cutting-edge information regarding the important role microorganisms play in the health of our soils.



Farm Progress

We continue to evaluate the best strategy for Blackwood farm production. This year we successfully increased our use of our fruits and vegetables for in-house production, including school visits, special events, Nature Camp, and value-added production. We will relaunch the CSA program in 2019 and hope to achieve membership of 50 families.

Orchard

We replaced several fruit trees with hardier options better suited for the Gulf Coast climate, such as figs, persimmons, and frost-resistant satsumas.

State of the Soil

Our final soil test of 2018 confirmed that we achieved levels of 8% organic matter in all our cultivated soils, an increase of 6% from our initial 2016 soil test results. This significant improvement affirmed that our current soil management practices are positively affecting soil health across the farm. Therefore, we will continue to apply minimal and no-till practices, augmented with mulching, composting, and compost tea practices, as we expand and grow our farm. This year we expanded from our Kitchen Garden and High Tunnel production to begin crop cultivation in the Hopscotch Field. This expansion integrates annual (vegetable) with perennial (fruit) production and will allow the farm to diversify revenue streams. We planted out two 168 foot rows of blueberry and blackberry shrubs, doubled our strawberry production from the previous season, and opened our new student-run teaching zone. Hopscotch Field has suffered severe water-logging since coming into production due to excessive fall rains. We will continue to improve upon our drainage systems and utilize appropriate minimal-till, mulching, and composting practices to eliminate this concern.



2018 Milestones

700 students served

138 Nature Campers

14 day field trips

12 educational overnight trips

42 days of workshops, retreats, & trainings

\$22,500 in camp scholarships provided

400 Harvest Hoedown guests

\$20,000 raised at the Harvest Hoedown

6 Saturday Morning in the Countrys

2 Farm to Table Experiences raising \$5,000 total



Program Highlights

Blackwood Nature Camp

This summer Blackwood Nature Camp hosted 138 campers over the course of 6 weeks, including a week of high school camp. This number exceeded our goal of 120 and is the largest camp group we've ever had the opportunity to serve. Each year we continually improve counselor training and 2018 was no exception. We worked as a team to create a mission statement specific to Nature Camp and spent time in small groups focused on more comprehensive camp scenarios. We spent two days covering basic first aid and emergency procedures, including search and rescue.



Farm School

We piloted our newest program, Farm School for grades 3rd through 6th this September designed to create an environment for students to live the full cycle of agroecology. The fall session served 7 students with curriculum focused on planting, harvesting, food preparation, carpentry, and small livestock management. We will continue the program into 2019 and look forward to expanding to more age ranges as it grows.

Field Trips & Overnights

We hosted 355 day trip students, ranging from 1st through 12th grade, from fourteen schools across Harris, Washington, Waller, and Montgomery counties. Our educational programming was expanded to appropriately educate specific age groups and expert educators were incorporated to provide in-depth lessons on honey bees, soil microbiology, and more. 324 students stayed on the land for overnight visits ranging from two days - one week. Residential stays incorporate farm related service projects such as building fencing and students receive in-depth farming lessons. To provide a full view of the farm experience, we visited neighboring farms specializing in aquaponics, large livestock products, and honeybee breeding. Additionally, some schools opt to cook their meals directly with our chef, learning knife skills and how to prepare a variety of cuisine.



Program Highlights

Blackwood Harvest Hoedown

The first annual Blackwood Harvest Hoedown was held Saturday, November 3rd and hosted over 400 guests from across Houston, Brenham, Bryan, Waller, and beyond. This family-friendly festival highlighted local food, art and music, celebrating the vibrant connection of food, land, and community. The event was a success, reaching its fundraising goal and raising over \$20,000 for Blackwood's programs through 20 incredible sponsors and ticket sales. We partnered with 19 vendors including local farmers, experts, artisans, musicians, and speakers. This event will continue as Blackwood's flagship fall fundraiser and we look forward to hosting it for years to come.



Morning in the Country

In 2017 we reintroduced Blackwood's Morning in the Country program, providing an opportunity for guests to enjoy a relaxing, educational morning on the farm followed by a delicious farm-fresh lunch. The success of 2017's relaunch led to six 2018 Morning events, including 5 guest chefs and speakers.

Farm Dinner

On December 8th we hosted our second annual Winter Farm-to-Table Dinner, highlighting produce grown on the farm and sourced from nearby farms. We were joined by 50 guests and the event raised over \$5,000 for Blackwood's programs and was the perfect way to wrap up 2018.



Organizational Highlights

Staff Presentations

We have expanded our outreach through speaking engagements and radio interviews. Beginning in January, we spoke at the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences Educator Event regarding Blackwood's educational opportunities and future program pursuits. We discussed our program successes such as students starting school gardens and composting systems with Pat Greer on Eco-ology radio show. The Chappell Hill Historical Society welcomed us to present on the changes our farm is making through no-till methods, reducing soil compaction. The Brenham Rotary Club, comprised of 35 business people, invited us to speak to their community regarding youth and adult programs. As we spread word of our work throughout different communities, we noticed an increase in our social media followers, presence at our events, and request for programs.

Volunteers

This year we began to revitalize our volunteer program, assisting our Farm Team and staff for various events. We are further developing this program to best serve our volunteers and Blackwood will expand volunteer opportunities in 2019.

Apiary

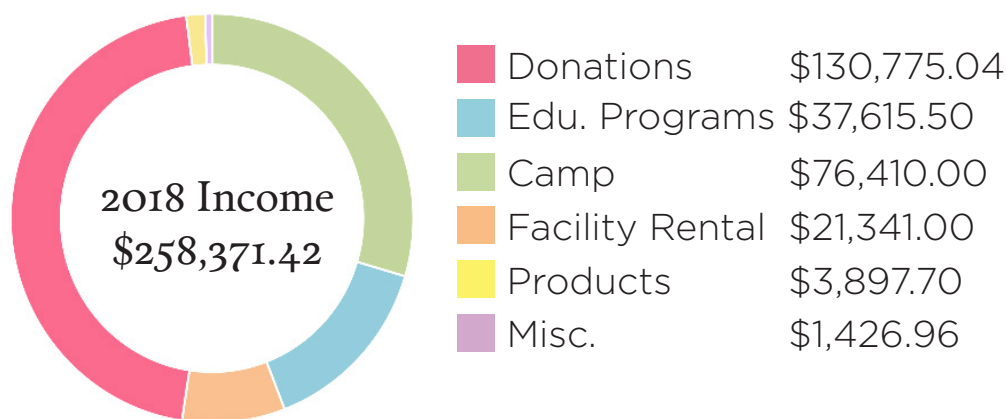
The year began with one active bee hive and by December our apiary grew to ten active hives. We look to harvest from all ten hives in the early fall, with the first harvest resulting in approximately twenty gallons of honey. In addition to hands-on education, we have added an educational resources section to the Blackwood website, including detailing information on our bees and chickens.

Poultry

87 happy hens now reside in the recently renovated mobile chicken coop that resides on the northwest prairie. The coop was built out to include additional room for the chickens to roost and perch and window doors were added to the outside of the coop for easy access to nests. The open space has resulted in a more comfortable and climate suitable home for the girls. The benefit of a coop on wheels is ease of transport to various spots of the prairie, providing the land with rest and fertilization and the chickens with new food sources. During heavy laying season each will produce one egg every other day, resulting in almost 4 dozen a day. We use eggs for our events and value-added products, as well as sell them to restaurants and visitors.

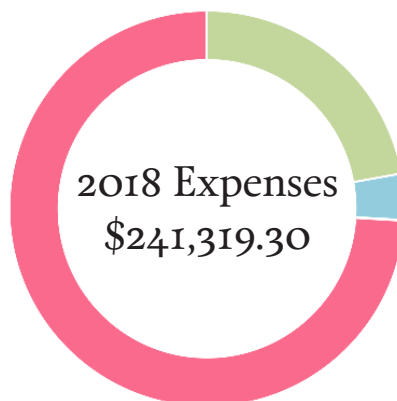
Summary of Financials

INCOME



EXPENSES

G & A	\$178,592.95
Edu. Programs	\$8,988.92
Camp	\$53,505.11
Facility Rental	\$148.19
Products	\$37.83
Misc.	\$46.30



Above figures based on drafted financials.



Staff

Cath Conlon
Founder & CEO

Gabi Graves
Program Director

Rebecca Verm
Farm Director

Phil Gurley
Education Curator

Martha Padron
Facilities Assistant

Jose Munos
Master of Machines

Board of Directors

Star Massing
Board President

LaVerne Williams
Vice President

Sheila Blake
Secretary

**Katherine Sargent
Cairolì**

Chris Cusack

Catherine Delano

Leticia Falick


Paula Fendley

Jeff Kaplan

Megan Parks

Jill McIntyre

Justin Rahman



“No one has yet charted a roadmap to a bright ecological future. If there were one, we would be solving our problems. Only innovative thinkers – those who are willing to venture away from the obvious, who are creative, clever and brave enough to try what seems to be wrong or impossible – will solve our future issues. It is my burning desire to offer young people the encouragement to experiment with what some might consider wrong or impossible, a safe place where they can try, fall, get up, and give it another try.”

– Cath Conlon, Founder of Blackwood

THANK YOU

We are deeply grateful to all our generous supporters. Thank you to our guests, donors, volunteers, board members, and staff. It is because of you that our programs are possible. Gifts from individuals and institutions provide the opportunity for Blackwood to continue working towards creating a conscious generation for a brighter, regenerative agricultural future.

Please accept our heartfelt gratitude.

This report was prepared
February 15, 2019 by Gabi
Graves, Program Director.

PHOTOGRAPHY
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