

Barn Raiser



2025

Impact Report

Barn Raiser

2025 Impact Report

April 2024 - March 2025



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Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

In 2022, we founded *Barn Raiser* with the conviction that independent rural journalism provides individuals and social movements with the information they need to meaningfully participate in the democratic process. In 2025, our work is even more essential.

Over the span of 30 months, with your support, *Barn Raiser* has established a national network of dozens of writers and contributors who report through a local lens on the critical issues that rural communities face in common. *Barn Raiser* is proud to be a home for award-winning writers like Wendell Berry, Winona LaDuke and Stephanie Woodard, as well as first-time authors like fourth-generation farmer Mark Peck.

We're thrilled to reflect on the progress you've helped us achieve in *Barn Raiser*'s third fiscal year, April 2024 through March 2025. Support from you and 368 other readers (see list of Barn Raisers on page 10) has fueled our mission to deliver journalism that uplifts rural communities and shines a light on issues too often ignored by corporate media.

From January through March 2025, an average of 33,000 online readers visited *Barn Raiser* each month. This represents an 83% increase compared to that same time period last year.

The growth of newsletter subscribers was similarly robust. Between April 1, 2024, and March 31, 2025, the number of newsletter subscribers grew from 3,253 to 7,283—an 123% increase.

Barn Raiser is also expanding our impact by filling critical gaps in coverage in both the local and national media landscape. Our articles have been reprinted in numerous local outlets and national publications like *Common Dreams*, *Mother Jones* and *Harvard Public Health Magazine*. Our reporting has been recognized by organizations like the PFAS Project Lab, the Ohio AFL-CIO and Farm Action.

Barn Raiser's journalism works to renew the social imagination, build common ground and encourage democratic participation by providing a forum for daring criticism, rational debate and compassionate care.

In their [post-election analysis](#), Jake Davis and Bryce Oates articulated a theme that echoes throughout *Barn Raiser*'s pages: D.C. elites need to take a walk down boarded-up main streets and listen to rural Americans. As Jake and Bryce noted, they would hear about:

“How meatpacker conglomerates like JBS and Smithfield pollute public water supplies and decimate local farmers and rural communities.

“How Big Ag colludes with government-funded carbon pipeline schemes that deplete aquifers and threaten endangered habitats to enrich wealthy CEOs.

“How Big Pharma created an opioid crisis that continues to devastate small towns, while rural hospitals and maternity wards struggle to survive.”

Barn Raiser’s reporting on these and other issues will continue to hold those in power accountable. Our journalism creates a national conversation woven from local perspectives. In pursuit of a more fair and just society, *Barn Raiser*:

- Bridges the urban-rural divide.
- Uplifts rural organizers who challenge the powerful—from corporate interests to venture capitalists and Christian Nationalist extremists.
- Creates a public square where underrepresented voices can be heard, where criticism and dissent are welcome and where every member of the community is able to speak their mind freely and without fear.

The stakes are high. In Washington, policymakers continue to orchestrate the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. Moreover, the current erosion of democratic norms, environmental protections and civil liberties will only deepen the inequality, at great harm to rural America.

Thanks to your support, *Barn Raiser* will continue to be a lifeline for democratic dialogue and civic engagement. On the following pages we chronicle the impact of our work that you helped make possible.

Thank you for helping us raise this barn.

Sincerely yours,



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher



Justin Perkins
Deputy Editor & Publisher

A Year in Review



Special Reports

Barn Raiser [Special Reports](#) highlight a collection of stories that dive deep into underreported topics and urgent concerns facing rural communities.

This year's special reports include:

- **[“Rural Perspectives on the 2024 Election”](#)**: *Barn Raiser* sat down with rural candidates, elected officials, political strategists and organizers to discuss the results of the 2024 election, analyzing what it means for rural communities, and explaining how that knowledge should inform policy and organizing efforts to ensure that rural America thrives.
- **[“The Fight to Prevent PFAS Pollution”](#)**: a series of investigations and articles exploring how PFAS (“Forever Chemicals”) contaminate our water and food—and what to do about it. PFAS are synthetic chemicals that can cause cancer, birth defects, liver problems, damage to the immune system and other serious health problems. They are of particular concern to rural people who get their water from wells and live near military bases, factories that use PFAS, or farmland where sewage sludge has been spread on the land.
- **[“Protecting Rural Public Schools”](#)**: public schools have been under attack from outside groups, often funded by billionaire dark money donors, who profess “parents’ rights” and advocate for “school choice.” This series reported on the leaders of this movement to strangle funding to public schools, using vouchers to subsidize private and Christian schools with taxpayer money. Since 2020, 200 bills have been introduced at the local, state and federal levels aimed at censoring teaching that presents students with critical views of slavery and other forms of racial oppression that are an undeniable part of American history.
- **[“Reimagining Rural Cartographies”](#)**: a collection of essays that create or examine nontraditional and living maps of the Midwest. For example, “Indigenous Artists Give Minnesota a Map Makeover” featured a roundtable conversation with three Native women who are reviving land-based wisdom and history from a Dakota perspective by leading “Bdote Memory Map” tours at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, a place Dakota people refer to as a place of both genesis and genocide.

Covering Democracy Day 2024

Barn Raiser is proud to have received one of the first-ever stipends to support pro-democracy reporting on Democracy Day, September 15, 2024. Nancy MacLean, a Duke University history professor and the author of *Democracy in*

Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America helped *Barn Raiser* plan our coverage, introducing us to experts in the field.

This series highlighted the stakes for the 2024 election by investigating the threats to democracy posed by Project 2025 and how it would transform government agencies that rural and indigenous communities depend on. *Barn Raiser* reported on proposals to turn over federal land to state control that would [vastly transform public lands and their use](#). And we covered how defenders of democracy in rural and small town America are [organizing locally and standing up](#) to Christian Nationalist and authoritarian movements.

***Barn Raiser* launches election newsletter**

Through a marketing campaign that combined list exchanges, Facebook ads and targeted appeals to specific audiences, more than 1,400 new readers subscribed to *Barn Raiser's* weekly election newsletter leading up to and after the 2024 election.

Barn Raiser was part of the Institute for Nonprofit News's first-ever "On the Ground" initiative, which collaborated with *The Associated Press* and 2,700-plus newsrooms across the U.S. to syndicate election related articles. According to an INN report, *Barn Raiser's* journalism was republished more times than any other newsroom across the network.

Barn Raiser's election coverage was informed by Colby College professors Nicholas Jacobs and Daniel Shea whose recent book [The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America](#) argues that the rightward swing of rural voters over the past half-century cannot be explained by demographic indicators like race, age and education (although those are important). Instead, culling hundreds of years of election data along with a recent study of 10,000 rural voters, the largest-ever of its kind, Jacobs and Shea found that a new place-based anxiety and grievance around the "shared fate" of rural communities play a central role in rural politics.

***Barn Raiser* hosts its first webinars**

In October 2024, *Barn Raiser* teamed up with award-winning journalist Kyle Spencer to host a webinar "A Playbook to Stop Project 2025." Spencer provided an overview of Project 2025, the Heritage Foundation's plan to dismantle public institutions and democratic norms, and how it will affect local rural communities. Spencer is the editor of *Reporting Right*, a weekly Substack that supports journalists with easy-to-access information about reporting on anti-democratic movements. As a longtime reporter on right-wing extremism, Spencer offered *Barn Raiser* readers resources, tools and strategies on how they can help their communities understand the threat posed by Project 2025.

In March 2025, *Barn Raiser* and Farm Action, a nonpartisan agricultural watchdog organization led by farmers who oppose the corporate consolidation of the food and agricultural system, jointly sponsored the webinar "[Undoing the Power of Corporate Ag in Rural America](#)." Sonja Trom Eayrs, author of *Dodge County, Inc.*, and Joe Maxwell, co-founder of Farm Action, discussed how

farmers and rural communities across the country can fight corporate power, not only for the sake of land, labor and water, but for democracy itself.

***Barn Raiser* responds to reader suggestions**

Barn Raiser's coverage over the past year has been informed by the results of our 2024 *Barn Raiser* Reader Survey. (An invitation to take the 2025 *Barn Raiser* Reader Survey will arrive in your inbox soon.)

Two things stood out to us in the survey results.

First, *Barn Raiser* readers are civically engaged in their community. We asked readers to “describe how you have taken civic action in the past year.” We found 28% of respondents had worked for a political campaign; 39% had attended a protest; 62% had attended a community meeting; 68% had worked on behalf of a social group or cause; and 78% had donated money to a cause.

On one issue, rural and small town readers significantly diverged from their city and suburban counterparts. Those who lived in rural areas and small towns were 2.6 times more likely to say authoritarianism is one of the three most important issues facing rural Americans. Indeed, 41% of respondents who live in rural areas or small towns feel very unsafe or somewhat unsafe expressing their political views where they live. With that in mind, *Barn Raiser* doubled down on coverage of Christian Nationalist anti-democratic organizations that are part of the MAGA movement, including [Mom's for Liberty](#) and the [New Apostolic Reformation](#).

In every story we publish, in every community we engage, *Barn Raiser* provides journalism that not only reports on the issues, but gives voice to those helping to renew the social imagination and create a rural America where all can thrive.

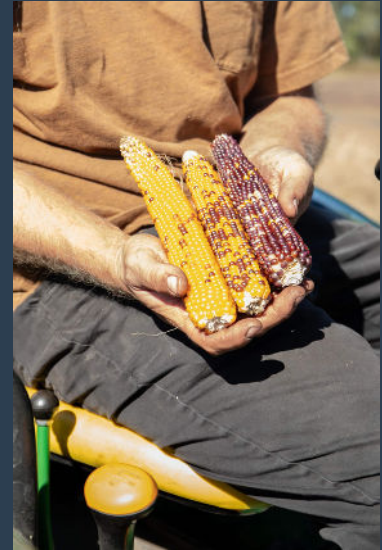


Barn Raiser Top 15

Most-Read Stories
April 2024 - March 2025



1. [**In Red States, Rural Voters Are Leading the Resistance to School Vouchers**](#)
Jennifer Berkshire
2. [**As a Rural Ohioan, I See J.D. Vance for Who He Is**](#)
Melissa Cropper
3. [**The Christian Right's Playbook to Elect Donald Trump in November**](#)
Frederick Clarkson
4. [**How a Young Virginian Kept the Farm in the Family**](#)
Brooks Lamb
5. [**As Goes the Black Belt, So Goes Georgia**](#)
Joel Bleifuss & Justin Perkins
6. [**Immigrants Find a Home in This Rural Minnesota Town**](#)
Andrea Duarte-Alonso
7. [**Indigenous Artists Give Minnesota a Map Makeover**](#)
Sherry Kempf





8. [Private Equity Is Gunning for Wisconsin's County-Owned Nursing Homes](#)

Henry Bleifuss

9. [In a North Dakota Courtroom, the Battle for Standing Rock Continues](#)

Winona LaDuke

10. [The Grassroots Electoral Movement Reshaping Rural Politics](#)

Mason Adams

11. [Where Do Democrats Go From Here? It Starts with Bold Leadership](#)

Jane Fleming Kleeb

12. [What a Leading Epidemiologist Says You Should Know About the Bird Flu](#)

Joel Bleifuss & Justin Perkins

13. [What's Fueling Michigan's Green Energy Backlash?](#)

Roger Kerson

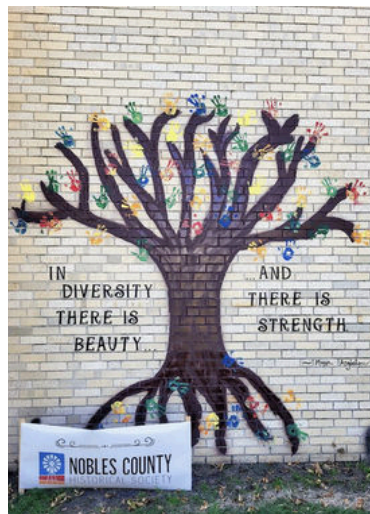
14. [Will the EPA's New PFAS Rules Protect Our Water, Farms and Health?](#)

Laura Orlando

15. [Federal Courts Sentence Native Americans to Longer Prison Terms*](#)

Stephanie Woodard

***Won Indigenous Journalists Association "Best Feature Story" award**



Letter from the CEO

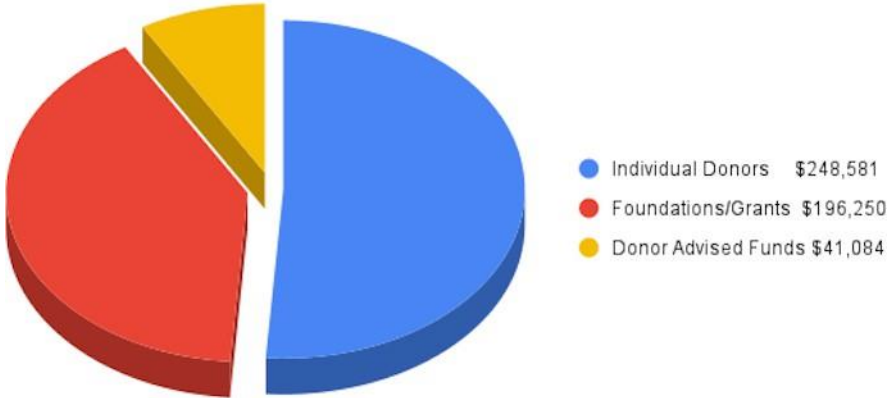
Dear Reader,

Barn Raiser closed its third fiscal year on March 31, 2025, in a strong position and well above projection. We raised \$485,915, a 39% increase from the previous year, while our expenses came in 1% above the prior year at \$412,521. We ended the year with \$73,394 in cash reserves from our end-of-year 2024 fundraising push. This will provide critical support that will carry us through the second and third quarters of the calendar year (the first half of our fiscal year) when foundation and individual receipts are traditionally much slower. Below is a recap of our key indicators and projections as *Barn Raiser* heads into our fourth fiscal year.

Growth from both foundations and individual donors

Funding from foundations more than doubled in the past year. We are grateful for continued support from the Park Foundation, The Puffin Foundation and Rural Democracy Initiative, all supporters since we launched in 2022. We participated in our second NewsMatch end-of-year fundraising campaign, with matching grants from both the Joyce Foundation and Rural Partner Funds (NewsMatch is managed by the Institute for Nonprofit News). We were thankful to receive funding from several new partners in 2024/2025, including a catalyst grant from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation and audience development support from Google News Initiative.

April 2024 to March 2025 Income



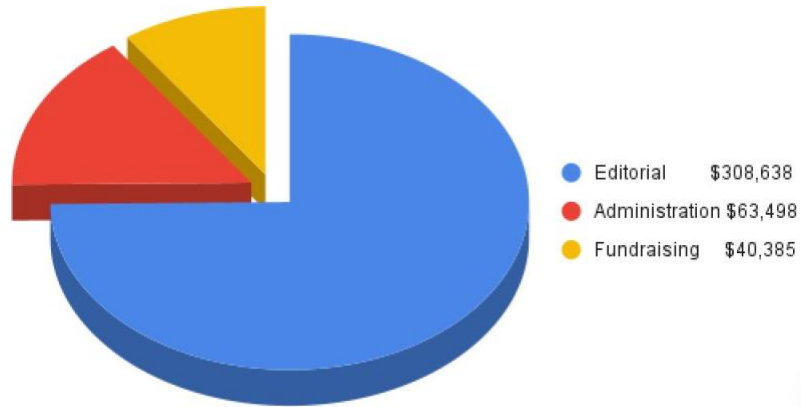
Contributions from individual donors exceeded our projections as well. Over the course of the fiscal year, 368 supporters donated to *Barn Raiser*, with over half sending their contributions in the critical end-of-year NewsMatch period. (See page 10, on which we acknowledge *Barn Raiser* supporters.) We raised nearly \$85,000 in November and December from reader donations matched by NewsMatch, the Joyce Foundation, as well as two generous anonymous *Barn Raiser* donors.

In the 2025-2026 fiscal year we will nurture relationships with our current funders, connect with prospective donors and reach out to new foundations with the help of our new Advancement Associate Jack Pettus. We are optimistic we will reach and exceed our aggressive goals for the upcoming year.

Expenses managed with precision

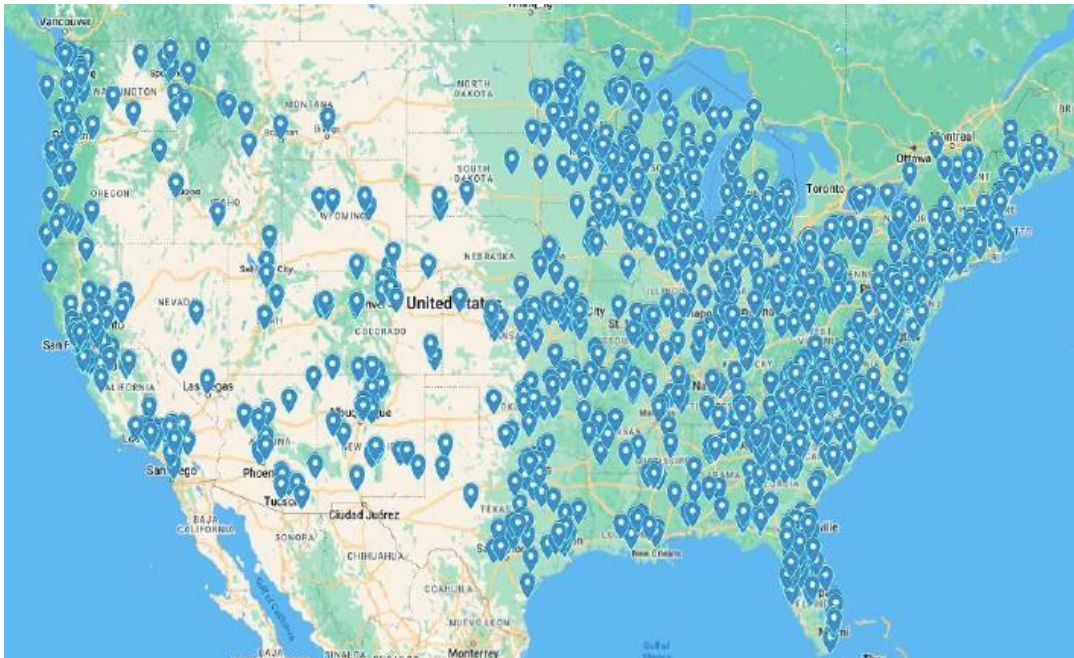
We pride ourselves on running a tight ship, allocating resources to maximize impact, while still setting aside funds to explore and test new initiatives and projects. Last year, we spent \$412,521, with over three-quarters of the outlay invested in editorial production via *Barn Raiser's* website and email newsletters.

April 2024 to March 2025



Administrative expenses align closely with other small-staffed operations like ours, as are the expenses we allocated to fundraising.

We tested new initiatives to grow our audience, thanks to funding from both the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation and Google News Initiative, and engaged Phillip Smith of Journalism Growth Lab, who helped us acquire 3,600 new newsletter subscribers.



Geographic distribution of new Barn Raiser newsletter subscribers.

We are moving into another phase of audience acquisition testing with Journalism Growth Lab, extending the program we kicked off in our 2024-2025 fiscal year.

In addition to growing our newsletter audience, we are investing in a video journalism initiative to broaden our reach that will launch later this year.

You make the difference

We are deeply grateful to all our donors, large and small. Thanks to your support, *Barn Raiser* was able to publish stories about rural America that would otherwise not be told. We more than tripled the number of newsletter subscribers. And we provided needed hope, information and inspiration to civically minded rural readers across the country. We genuinely could not do this without you.

Yours truly,



Anne Mollo-Christensen

Anne Mollo-Christensen
Chief Executive Officer

Barn Raisers

Anonymous (2)	Ewa Bardach	Joanne Brown	Samantha	Edward
Ruth Agar	Lex Barker	Martha Brown	Kooney-	Duhaime
Cynthia Aguilar	Danae Barnes	Paul Joseph	Collins and	David Dunning
Jean Alexander	Paul Beach	Brown	Dan Collins	Deborah Durbin
Ron Alexander	Roger Alan	Amrita Burdick	J.Patricia	Marc Edelman
Karen Allen	Beck	Michael Burns	Connolly	Lauran Emerson
Theresa Alt and	Tammy and Ted	Carolyn Byerly	Margaret and	Joey Esterline
Wayles	Becker	Thomas Cahill	Paul Corona	Erica Etelson
Browne	Edoardo	Barbara Carney	Ronnie Crocker	Neil
Joseph Altura	Bellando	and Paul	Margaret	Fagerhaugh
Stuart Ambler	Lon Berg	Engleman	Davidson	Amy Farnham
Elin Amundson	Diane Berry	David Carr	Kirk Demartini	MaryAnn Feitler
Frank Andersen	Barry Bishop	Doreen and	Anne DeMuth	Charles Feldman
Jamie Anderson	Patti Bleifuss	William Carey	Lisa DePaoli	Robert Ferrell
James Aronson	and	Jackie	Ken Deschere	Shawn Finlinson
Sue Atkinson	Jim Flanagan	Cash-Rolland	Raymond	Charles Firre
Peggy Audley	Ellen Blye	Daniel Casler	Deyoung	Nancy Fitz
Steve Babson	Nieves Bolanos	Merry Clark	Sue Dierksen	Alan Flanagan
Paul Baicich	Chris Bolgiano	Carolyn	Mary Dodd	John Foley
Arlene Baker	Joseph Boyle	Coglianesse	Ellen Duff	Cindy Fountain
James Baldwin	Margaret	Larry Cohen	Curtis Duffield	Susan Fowler
K.A. Balthrop-	Brewster	Perry Cohn	Marie Christine	Susan A. Fox
Lewis	Gerard Britton		Duggan	Janet Fox

Charles Freiberger	Miles Harvey Chris Hatfield	Lisa Korytowski Walt Kosty	Justin Mikulka Janet Susan Miller	Dale Preston Philip Prince
Lisa French	Hans Heaney	Jason Koulouras	Daniel Miller	Alan Przybyla
Charles Gaertner	Lynne Heasley	Bruce Kraig	Dana Miranda	Deepak Puri
Susan Garetz and Matthew Shapiro	Bill Heinrich	Lorenzo Kristov	Dominique Morel	Gordon Quinn
Mary Gebhart	Jamie Hendry	Nancy Krody	and Kevin Hartigan	Paul Ranney
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Neil Gladstein	Louise Howard	Emily Leitzinger	Mike Morton	Maggie Robbins
Norbert Goldfield	David Howe	Luise Levy	Amy Morton and Rob Milburn	Kimberly Roberts
Marty Goldin	Polly Howells	Sandra Lewis	Patrick Murray	Rita Roberts
Herbert Goodfriend	Steve Hudson	Jeffrey Lewis	Marianne Nebel	Abby Rockefeller
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Len Goodman	Donald Huseby	Kay Lillard	Elizabeth Neuse	Joel Rogers
Neva Goodwin	Dan Hyslop	Linda Littrell	Keith Nighthenhelter	Ken Rolling
Suzanne Gordon and Steve Early	Richard Irvine	Tony Litwinko	Bob Nixon	Richard Rosengarten
David Grandgeorge	Rebeca Itzkowich and John Ireland	Rochelle Lodder	Maureen Oates	Gladys Miller Rosenstein
Heather Greenwood	Nancy Jacobson	Otis Maclay	Jane Oitzinger	Neal Rosenstein
Nina Gregg and Doug Gamble	David Johnson	Nancy MacLean	Janet Orjala	Martha Rosler
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Paul Gregor	Kevin Jones	Elisabeth Marshall	Laura Orlando	Clyde Rutan
Gary Grigsby	James Jones	Peter Martinazzi	Wayne Owens	Robert Sala
Hannah Grisham	Douglas Kamholz	Donna Martinson	Adelaide Park Gomer	James Sanders
Paul Gross	Jack Kaplan	Deb Mathiowetz	Pamela Palmer	Henry E. Santana
Alexandra Gruskos	Sarah Kaplan and Leon Steinberg	Nic Mazanec	Carrie S. Pellett	Jay Schaffner
Pamela Haendle	Mary Beth Kelly	Tyler McCann	Rick Perlstein	Laura Schauland
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Patty Hall	Ellen Keneshea	Sue McCormick	Cheryl Kane Piasecki	Gordon Schiff
Bruce Hamilton	Wendy Kennan	Patricia McIntyre	Lesley Pilcher	Liz Schlick and Chris Bleifuss
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Kimberly Harrod		Maria Mendes	William J. Potvin	Eric Sheffield
Emily Harting		Bruce Merrill		Paul Shipman
Mike Hartnett		Jacob Meschke		Daniel Shively
		Richard Metcalf		Alan Shockley
		Susan Metz		Eva Simonsen
		Carolyn Meyer		
		Rose Meyers		
		Sonia Mikolic Torreira		

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Jeanne Smith
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Snelson
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Michael Spry
Emily St. James
Lauren Steiner
Liz Stelk
Claudette Stern
Gilles Stockton

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and
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Mike Zlonis
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Kris Surbaugh
David Sweet
Eve Sweetser
and Alex
Madonik
Warren Taylor

Regi Teasley
Tom Tedeschi
Dian Thomas
Steve Thomas
Charlotte
Thomas
Amy Thornton
Claudia Tienan
Erwin Ting
Cynthia Towne
Bethene Trexel
Mary Troxel
Miguel Ugarte
Kristina Villa

Mary C. Voight
Mary Voight
Carlton Voss
Russell Walker
Ronald Wawrin
Peggy Weaver
John Weiss
Susan Weltman
Laurie Wermter
Anne
Weshinsky
Penelope White
Paul Wilcox
Mark Wilhelm

Willard
Williams
Maria Williams
Julie Green
Williams and
Jon Williams
Emily
Willoughby
Elsa Winch
Kay Wolff
Robert Wolfreys
Jan Worth
Elise
Zelechowski
Rebecca Zorach

Institutional Barn Raisers

Institute for Nonprofit News
Ivywood Foundation
Jonathan Logan Family Foundation
Joyce Foundation
Montclair State University

Park Foundation
Peggy Meyerhoff Pearlstone Foundation
Puffin Foundation
REN Fund at North Star Fund
Rural Democracy Initiative

Barn Raiser Staff



Joel Bleifuss is *Barn Raiser* Editor & Publisher and Board President of Barn Raising Media Inc. He got his start in journalism in 1983 as a feature writer and photographer for his Missouri hometown daily, the *Fulton Sun*. Bleifuss joined the staff of *In These Times* magazine in October 1986, stepping down as Editor & Publisher in April 2022, to join his fellow barn raisers in getting *Barn Raiser* off the ground.



Anne Mollo-Christensen is the Chief Executive Officer and Ex-officio Board Member of Barn Raising Media Inc. Anne was most recently Executive Vice President and Chief Digital and Strategy Officer at Outside Integrated Media, home of *Outside* magazine, Outside Online and the Outside Podcast.



Justin Perkins is *Barn Raiser* Deputy Editor & Publisher and Board Clerk of Barn Raising Media Inc. The son of a hog farmer, he got his start as a writer with his Nebraska hometown newspaper the *Papillion Times*. He has contributed reporting for Rural America In These Times and *In These Times* which led him to recognize the importance of local, independent journalism across rural America and the promise of rural communities uniting together for the common good.



Laura Orlando is *Barn Raiser* Contributing Editor and Board Treasurer of Barn Raising Media Inc. She is Senior Scientist at Just Zero, Adjunct Professor of Environmental Health at the Boston University School of Public Health and a co-founder of the Ecological Health Network. Laura grew up on her family's farm in Benton Harbor, Michigan. Her expertise in ecological restoration, environmental systems and sustainable agriculture deeply informs *Barn Raiser's* editorial mission.



Paco Alvarez is *Barn Raiser* Assistant Editor. He is Associate Research and Engagement Editor at Type Investigations. Previously, he was a staff writer for the immigration newsletter *Migratory Notes*, and a Fall 2020 Civic Reporting Fellow for City Bureau, where he covered the 2020 elections and political participation in immigrant communities.



Jack Pettus is *Barn Raiser* Advancement Associate. He brings a humanities-driven perspective to fundraising. A University of Chicago Divinity School graduate with two years of experience in institutional development, he supports *Barn Raiser* by researching and writing foundation grants, helping secure the resources that sustain our work.

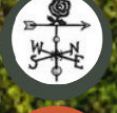


Winona LaDuke is *Barn Raiser* Contributing Editor (Native Life). LaDuke is Anishinaabe, a writer, an economist and a hemp farmer. She is a leader in cultural-based sustainable development strategies, renewable energy, sustainable food systems and Indigenous rights. She is a co-curator at the Giiwedining Treaty Rights and Culture Museum in Park Rapids, Minnesota, and owner of Winona's Hemp.



Bryce Oates is *Barn Raiser* Contributing Editor (Rural Community Organizing) and writes *The Cacklebur* on Substack. Bryce studies how the federal budget affects rural counties, farm and food policy, public lands and conservation issues, climate change, economic inequality, rural demographic data and rural politics. A former farmer, rural economic developer and community organizer, he lives and works in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Barn Raising Media
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THANK
YOU
