

25th Annual North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival: 25 Fun and Behind the Scenes Facts

- 1) The festival was started by five neighbors (artists and farmers) and twenty bucks each over a summer potluck dinner in 1998.
- 2) The first festival was held in 1999 on a back field in the woods at Seeds of Solidarity, two weeks after a hurricane.
- 3) Currently, there are over 30 people that make up the festival committee-- all volunteer, all still friends after all these years, powered by love, magic, hard work, and dedication.
- 4) Festival year two and onward has been held at Dorothy Forster's historic family dairy farm. Dory's father used to deliver fresh milk to the local schools.
- 5) Year one there were about 10 exhibitors and 600 attendees. Now there are over 100 artist, farmer, community organization and food vendors, and upwards of eight thousand attendees.
- 6) Our youngest exhibitors started when they were 9. Our eldest is now 96. All are still rockin' it.
- 7) In 2004 organizers set up for and held the festival -- then a one day event -- during a hurricane. The next day was beautiful. That's when and why we moved to a two-day event in 2005.
- 8) Every exhibitor contributes to a set up or clean-up day, or makes a meal for one of these crews. This unique model keeps exhibitor fees low, and builds community. Each year exhibitors collectively contribute about 400 hours to help create the festival village, along with countless hours contributed by the organizers. We start setting up a month in advance.
- 9) In addition to the committee (and exhibitors), over 150 people volunteer on the festival weekend. A bread oven on-site built by neighbor Doug Feeney is popular among volunteers, who receive a special treat (for volunteers only) during their shift.
- 10) Some of the volunteers are community groups who do parking (under the guidance of steadfast, superhero parking captains) in exchange for a donation from the festival to their cause. We've had high school sports teams, motorcycle clubs, theater groups, a prison birth project, college service organizations and more over the years.
- 11) The festival produces only 2 large bags of trash each year for about 8,000 people.
- 12) Over 150 bags of compostable materials used by food vendors each year are transformed into fertile soil for local gardens at Clearview Compost in Orange. Over the festival years, this equates to about 200 yards of finished compost, or over 10 dump trucks full of nutrient rich compost for gardens, not garbage in landfills.
- 13) The first music stage was a hastily built platform of pallets. The second was haybales on a trailer. There are now three performance areas. Committee members have built all of the stages as well as the dining area tables, all of local or repurposed wood (the wood for the table legs

were donated by a local casket company). The largest and main music stage is built on a foundation of local black locust piers. (That was a project!)

- 14) There are over 50 performances and free workshops for attendees over the festival weekend. Plus a free kids art making tent. And free drinking water for all.
- 15) The most garlic cloves ever eaten by a contestant in the raw garlic eating contest is 48. One of our top winners over the years was breastfeeding a child at the time of her garlic eating accomplishment. (A very healthy child!)
- 16) Over 25 years, millions of dollars in exhibitor sales have been made at the festival. These directly support the livelihoods of local artists, farmers, and food producers, and boost the local economy as it keeps circulating within our region.
- 17) Festival t-shirts are U.S. made and the annual design is done by area artists with the most frequent designer being local tattoo artist Mike Williams.
- 18) A garlic cookbook (and a yearly brochure) with recipes from our chef tent, and a book of collected writings featuring spoken word stage performers are among the publications.
- 19) Committed to conservation and renewable energy, a solar electric system helps to power the festival music stage. In our electric vehicle tent, experience electric cars, trucks, and bikes.
- 20) One year we did pee cycling with the Rich Earth Institute and collected hundreds of gallons that were then naturally sanitized and used to fertilize VT hayfields. We are hoping to get them back again (they've been busy and we don't want you to hold it in)
- 21) All gate and exhibitor proceeds are used to cover public safety, infrastructure, promotion, and entertainment costs of the all-volunteer run festival (totaling about \$45-50,000 a year) as the festival is fully volunteer with no paid staff.
- 22) The festival participates in Card to Culture, and is free to families who receive EBT, WIC, or ConnectorCare health insurance, and free for kids. We halved the weekend general admission from \$10 to \$5 to celebrate our 25th year.
- 23) The festival operates as a non-profit under the fiscal umbrella of Seeds of Solidarity Education Center, part of whose mission is to create resilient lives and communities.
- 24) The festival has never had any corporate or business sponsors.
- 25) Over the years, the festival has donated more than \$60,000 in mini-grants to local groups and organizations that promote food and farms, climate resilience, the arts, and health and wellness. We've also made several no-interest loans to support cooperatively run businesses. We recently donated \$5,000 to support two regional farm relief efforts after 2023 flooding devastated crops and livelihoods.