



Athens Land Trust

Newsletter

Winter 2025/2026 • Vol. 28



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Our Board meets on the third Monday of each month at 5:00 pm at 498 Prince Ave. Athens, GA 30601 Meetings are open to the public.

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Executive Director's Note | Demetrius D. Jordan

The Power of Trust

At the heart of every thriving community is one word: **trust**. It's more than just a name for us—it's our identity, our promise, our legacy. Trust is what allows neighbors to build something together that no one person could ever do alone. Trust is the currency of collaboration, the bedrock of belonging.

That's why *Athens Land Trust* isn't just what we're called—it's who we are.

And in this moment, as we look to what's ahead, we're more committed than ever to proving worthy of that trust.

Why Trust Matters Now

Our name isn't accidental. **Land** is the foundation of so many stories—where we plant roots, raise families, dream dreams, and watch them grow. **Trust** is what ensures that land serves people, not the other way around.

For over 30 years, Athens Land Trust has been a trusted partner in stewarding land for the common good—through the development of permanently affordable housing, the conservation of natural places, and the strengthening of our local food systems.

And now, as we stand at a new crossroads for the next thirty years and beyond, we're setting the stage for the future with fresh

vision, new ideas, and a deeper sense of purpose.

This year, with the tireless dedication of our team and board, **Athens Land Trust proudly submitted its third renewal application for Land Trust Alliance (LTA) Accreditation**—a gold standard of excellence, ethics, and enduring commitment in our field.

To put this in perspective: Athens Land Trust was among the first land trusts in the country to achieve this rigorous distinction when it launched in 2008. Since then, we've doubled down on the high bar it sets—ensuring our conservation work meets the strictest legal, financial, and ethical standards in the nation.

This isn't just a seal of approval—it's a promise kept. A verified commitment to stewarding land not just for now, but forever.



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.

From Ben Hill to Athens

I know what land can do. I've lived it. I grew up in a neighborhood called Ben Hill, in southwest Atlanta. My parents were just 23 and 26 when they bought their first home there. It was a bold move—just a generation removed from my grandparents, who had worked the fields of Molena, Georgia as sharecroppers. They didn't own land—they worked someone else's. No path to equity. No way out.

But my parents did what felt impossible. They secured a little piece of the American Dream. And in that home—at the end of a street with a "Dead End" sign—we found everything but a dead end.

We found life.

My friends and I roamed the woods, climbed rocks, skipped stones on Coward Lake, and laid back on sun-warmed boulders dreaming of the future. We were explorers, scientists, adventurers—learning what water moccasins were, and what poison ivy felt like. We breathed clean air under towering pines, with pollen falling like yellow snow. The land raised us. It shaped who we became.

Some of us became doctors, engineers, lawyers, and educators. I became the Executive Director of Athens Land Trust. Every morning, I wake up with the memory of that place in my heart—and a mission to ensure others have the same foundation I had.

A Promise for What's Ahead

This is more than a job. It's a calling.



ALT Executive Director Demetrius D. Jordan (far left), his younger brother (far right), and neighborhood friends in Ben Hill, Atlanta, Georgia, 1980.

And it's why we're looking to the future with energy, intention, and a renewed sense of responsibility. In the months ahead, you'll see us continue to:

- Expand pathways to permanently affordable housing, so families can build security and legacy
- Protect more of the land that gives us fresh air, scenic beauty, and room to breathe
- Strengthen our local food systems, ensuring all people have access to nourishing, healthy food
- Cultivate partnerships, elevate community voices, and invest in the next generation of stewards

We're building the future of this region—together. One home, one acre, one relationship at a time.

Join the Journey

Whether you're a neighbor, a landowner, a donor, or just someone who believes in the power of people and place—we invite you to join us.

Because trust isn't just in our name. It's our way forward.

Let's protect land. Let's preserve home. Let's plant something that lasts.

Together.

Demetrius D. Jordan
Executive Director



The Profile

Georgia Farmers: The GA FarmLink connection on family land, farm business, and farming for the future

Georgia is projected to have the fourth highest farmland loss by acreage in the nation by 2040. Approximately one million acres and four thousand farms could be lost in the next 15 years.

Athens Land Trust launched gafarmlink.org in 2018 to keep farmland in the hands of farmers by helping new farmers find affordable pathways to farmland ownership and to facilitate succession planning for retiring landowners. Since then it has grown into a resource hub to connect farmers to service providers, educational materials, and farm business support.

This is the GA FarmLink connection: ALT's GA FarmLink Farm Business Education program is working

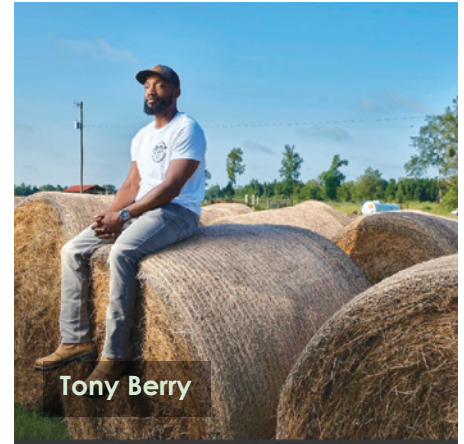
with American Farmland Trust, The Conservation Fund, Georgia Grown Innovation Center, USDA NRCS, and McIntosh SEED to give farmers the tools to ensure the sustainability of their operations and to mentor new cohorts who join the program each year. In September we welcomed cohort three; the program is now working with 18 farmers and ranchers from 17 counties, who are farming anywhere from one urban acre to 400 sprawling acres of pasture. Here are a few of them:

Tony Berry of Berry Family Farms grows veggies on 10 acres in Long County, selling to wholesale buyers, farmers markets, and direct-to-consumers. Tony's farming superpower? "Working with family."

Trinice Holden's 120-acre Poteete's Farm consists of pasture, forest and cropland for vegetables—land that's been in her family since 1873.

Kaneisha Miller of EM Farms grows a plethora of crops on three acres, turning her harvest into pepper jellies, peach preserves, fresh juices and sauces.

Jasmine Herndon, or Healing Hipster, farms 1.5 acres in Atlanta. In addition to eggs, produce and herbs, her offerings to her community include garden education classes for all ages. ♦



Tony Berry



Trinice Holden



Kaneisha Miller



Jasmine Herndon



Living United

ALT's youth programs deliver employment, leadership, and community good

Athens Land Trust is looking forward to continuing our partnership with the United Way of Northeast Georgia (UWNEGA) in 2026 with a Workforce Development Community Impact Grant in support of our three youth development programs.

Workforce development is essential to a community's economic resilience, yet research shows that youth are often overlooked as contributors to local problem-solving.

For Athens Land Trust, investing in youth development is about prioritizing it as a value that strengthens our work across all our program areas--from Housing, to Conservation, to Agriculture. The Young Urban Builders, Young Conservation Stewards, and Young Urban Farmers are

building job skills while meeting real needs in the community.

In the Young Urban Builders (YUB) program, participants receive industry certifications while providing essential repairs and weatherization services to low-income homeowners. *(Take deeper dive into the YUB program on page 8!)*

The Young Conservation Stewards (YCS) restore habitats, maintain trails, and learn about conservation-focused higher education and career pathways.

Through the Young Urban Farmers (YUF) program, youth explore agribusiness, gain hands-on experience in sustainable agriculture, and help grow the food that is filling weekly produce bags for 50 food-insecure Clarke County School District families.

Research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Brookings Institution shows that early work experience—especially programs that include mentorship—significantly increases long-term employment and earnings, particularly for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

ALT's model reflects these best practices by combining on-site training, classroom learning, and strong relationships with community leaders and industry professionals.



UWNEGA's investment will allow ALT to continue supporting young people as they build skills, confidence, and social capital while making a visible impact in Clarke County. We're proud to Live United! ♦



Top: Young Conservation Stewards at an Adopt-A-Stream workshop at Sandy Creek Nature Center in March 2025. Three YCS received certifications in chemical water monitoring macroinvertebrate sampling. Bottom: The Young Urban Farmers toured the ACC Solid Waste recycling line this past spring to learn about the role waste reduction plays in resource conservation.



We joined 31 organizations making a difference in Basic Needs, Early Childhood Success, and Workforce Development across 12 counties at Finished Goods Brew Werks in Winder for the UWNEGA Community Celebration, August 28, 2025.

Feature Story

The Journey to Home

Through ALT's affordable housing model, we walk the path to homeownership together

"I feel blessed."

That's what Joseph Llanos said—his deep Bronx, New York baritone filling the quiet of Blasingame, Burch, Garrard & Ashley law office—as he signed the final document to close on his first home. Outside, Athens, Georgia was scorching. But inside that room, something warmer was rising: the quiet joy of hope fulfilled.

"I feel blessed. It's been a long road," he repeated, turning to Chadsity Young, who sat smiling across the table. "But Athens Land Trust—especially that lady right there—she stuck with me the whole way. Showed me exactly what to do. The only thing bigger than Mr. Llanos' smile was his heart. As the ink was drying, he leaned forward and asked how he could give back.

"I want to talk to the youth," he said. "I want to tell them the things I wish I had learned. I want them to know—no matter their situation—they can make it. That there are people and places like Athens Land Trust to help. And I want to help too."

Without missing a beat, ALT Board Vice President Kierrena Gallagher leaned in. "That's a good thing," she said. "Because we've got some great youth programs you can plug into."



Mr. Llanos (second from left) with ALT board members Chip Brown (left) and Kirrena Gallagher (right), and ALT staff Chadsity Young and Demetrius D. Jordan.

A Journey

Nearly three years ago, Mr. Llanos walked through the doors of Athens Land Trust looking for housing options. He'd heard about our Homebuyer Information Sessions and showed up with cautious optimism. After decades of renting, he wanted stability—but doubted if homeownership was within reach.

That's when he met Chadsity and Angela.

Angela Hurtt was new in her role as ALT's Housing Counselor at the time—and Mr. Llanos was one of her first clients. But from the start, she brought wisdom, grit, and patience. She helped him

build a new financial foundation: credit repair, budgeting, and the basics of homebuyer education.

Chadsity Young, ALT's Director of Housing, saw potential. She presented a unique lease-purchase opportunity—one of ALT's homes that could serve as a stepping stone while he improved his financial position. That's the beauty of the Community Land Trust model: it meets people where they are and walks with them until they arrive where they need to be.

And now, after years of quiet, determined progress, Mr. Llanos holds the keys to a home that's truly his.

When asked how he planned to celebrate this milestone, he smiled.

“No time for celebration,” he said. “This is just the beginning. I’ve got work tomorrow and Sunday. I’m looking forward to making some home improvements. You have to make the most of your situation—and I intend to do that.”

Said ALT Executive Director Demetrius D. Jordan of the first closing of his tenure, “What inspires me most isn’t just that Mr. Llanos now owns a home. It’s that he walked out of that room with a voice to share, a hand to extend, and a desire to lift others as he rises.”

The Land Trust Solution

Shortly before this issue went to press, two more time homebuyers closed on newly constructed Earthcraft certified energy efficient affordable homes in East Athens, with another two entering the lease purchase path to close in the new year.

As work on Dublin St. concludes, ALT is conducting major rehabilitations of two properties that will ultimately become affordable apartments for community members earning less than 50% of the Area Median Income.

The land trust solution means these projects will serve these families—and the community—in perpetuity. The Community Land Trust model is the most reliable way to create lasting change in local housing conditions and



supply -- by keeping affordable neighborhoods intact and creating an equitable path to homeownership when the volatile real estate market is making housing more expensive and hard to achieve.

The Power of Partnership

None of this happens in isolation.

- It takes people like Chadsity, who guide with persistence and care. It takes counselors like Angela, who show up every day with heart and resilience.
- It takes First American Bank & Trust, who provided the mortgage and down payment assistance.
- It takes contractors and vendors who brought the home back to life.
- It takes funders like Athens-Clarke County's Department of Housing and Community Development and supportive ACC Commissioners who believe in this mission.

- It takes a board of directors who govern with courage and vision.

And it takes a community that understands: we are only as strong as the foundation we stand on—and that foundation is land, trust, and each other. ♦

Funding was made available for these affordable housing projects by Wells Fargo, the American Rescue Plan funds allocated for affordable housing by the Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission, and the Department of Housing and Community Development HOME and CDBG Programs of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, an Equal Opportunity Employer. Participants will not be discriminated against based on race, color, religion, disability, family status, or national origin.



Stepping into Solar

ALT's Young Urban Builders program is powering futures

Athens Land Trust and the Solar Knowledge Institute (SKI) collaborated this fall to offer SKI's two-week training program to our Young Urban Builders. The program was designed to open doors for young adults to step into solar, one of the fastest-growing industries in the country.

SKI was founded to close the workforce gap in the solar industry, and was born out of the recognition that solar energy isn't just about technology, but also people and opportunity. Through hands-on technical education and nationally recognized certifications, SKI builds a talent pipeline ready to meet the growing clean energy demand.

This mission aligns perfectly with the YUB program, which has been employing and training youth in construction since 2018. YUB combines technical skills, career readiness and community leadership as youth conduct repair projects for homeowners in West Broad, East Athens, and North Athens.

During the first week in the classroom, the YUB were introduced to solar workplace safety, the basics of photovoltaics, the use and maintenance of solar tools, how to read and understand solar plan sets, solar math concepts, the essentials of solar installation, and solar operations and maintenance. They also explored the business side of



Solar Installer Julian Hoosline (left) and IronRidgeTrainer Spencer Wright (right) with YUB Kevin, Zy, and Tray (in orange), and YUB Coordinator Xavier Coates.

the industry through lessons on solar sales and an overview of the career opportunities in the field.

The second week was when everything came to life. The YUB participated in two full solar installations in their community, applying classroom concepts to real-world projects. Working alongside certified professionals, they installed, wired, and commissioned systems that will continue to generate power for years to come: testaments to the YUB students' achievements and to the value of community-based workforce development.

Five YUB entered the training program, none with prior solar experience or a defined interest in pursuing the field. Yet over the course of two transformative weeks, four graduated with certifications, hands-on installation experience, and a clear sense of purpose for their futures.

Out of the four graduates, three expressed a desire to stay involved in solar, and two voiced an interest in pursuing careers in the field:

- Xavier hopes to use solar energy to power hydroponic farms that provide low-cost food to underserved populations.
- Tray discovered his passion for rooftop installation work and demonstrated skill, drive, and leadership on-site.
- Xy found a calling in technology, aspiring to fly drones for solar site surveys and commissioning.
- Kevin thrived on the ground, ensuring each panel was wire-managed and ready to keep the project flowing efficiently.

The YUB partnership with SKI stands as a powerful example of what's possible when access, education, and opportunity intersect! ♦

ALT partners with The Conservation Fund's Farms Fund

Global Growers' farm acquisition is a first-in-the-nation success story

Georgia continues to lose farmland, forests, and open space to development at alarming rates. For Athens Land Trust, this loss is not just an environmental issue: our pillars of housing, conservation, and agriculture are interconnected.

Affordable housing stabilizes families who steward land and food systems. Conservation protects the open space essential for agriculture and healthy communities. Agriculture sustains economic resilience, health, and local food security.

In August of this year, ALT celebrated a major milestone in our work to protect farmland and support producer communities. Alongside The Conservation Fund, ALT helped secure the long-term protection of the Rockdale Organic Co-Farm. Through this collaboration, Global Growers Network became the first farm in the nation to secure ownership of its permanently protected land through The Conservation Fund's Farms Fund program.

With the acquisition of their 22-acre farm in Rockdale County—now protected by an agricultural conservation easement held by Athens Land Trust—Global Growers Network is positioned to grow its farmer training and incubation programs, increase fresh food production, and strengthen networks of land, resources,

markets, and people across the region. As a hub for more than 200 growers, Global Growers has long been a cornerstone of farmer development in Metro Atlanta.

This work is increasingly urgent. Every hour, 40 acres of farmland are lost to development, with the greatest pressures near cities. As many of today's farmers reach retirement age, a new, diverse generation is eager to step in—but high land prices in metro areas often put farmland out of reach. Without intervention, land is frequently sold to developers and lost forever.

Through initiatives like the Farms Fund, partners can secure farmland on the edges of major metro areas, match it with the right farmers, who lease and steward the land until TCF protects it

with an agricultural conservation easement. Permanently protecting the farm means the land is more affordable for new and growing farm businesses, while keeping it a farm forever.

This creates an affordable pathway to land ownership for new and growing farm businesses, helping build healthier communities with stronger food systems, clean air and water, and greater resilience to climate change.

Athens Land Trust is proud to have placed the conservation easement on the Rockdale farm and to support Global Growers Network as they assume stewardship of this important land. Together, we are ensuring that farmland remains accessible, farming remains viable, and Georgia communities can thrive for generations to come. ♦



Athens Land Trust staff and board members joined those from Global Growers to celebrate the perpetual conservation easement on their farm in Rockdale County, GA, August 22, 2025.

In Remembrance of Lara Mathes

January 27, 1976 — June 28, 2025

Lara Mathes was our beloved friend, colleague, and board member. When she passed away earlier this year we joined others who knew her in marvelling at the legacy such a quiet force left behind.

Lara's presence shaped Athens Land Trust in profound and lasting ways. She joined our board in 2006 and went on to serve for many years on the Executive, Affordable Housing, and Agriculture Committees, and twice as Board President—each time during pivotal periods of growth and transformation. Her leadership was marked by a rare combination of creativity, integrity, and compassion.

Lara's contributions to Athens Land Trust and to the broader Athens community reflected her unwavering belief in equity, stewardship, and shared responsibility. With deep roots in urban planning and land use, she brought both vision and practicality to the work of building community.

She was instrumental in shaping and advancing the concept for what is now Williams Farm, transforming it from idea to approved plan. She also helped establish our beloved Harvest Moon Dinner, which for years served as a celebration of local

food and community, while raising critical support for our mission.

Lara understood that housing, conservation, and agriculture were not separate causes but interconnected threads in the fabric of a just and healthy community. She had the courage to not just speak up but to step in. In her words:

“When the conversation shifts to how to meet fundamental community needs, it's always ‘well, they should...’ It's incredibly rewarding to change the pronoun from ‘they’ to ‘we,’ and to be a part of the effort.”

To honor Lara's extraordinary legacy, Athens Land Trust will dedicate a native tree in her memory — “Lara's Tree” — at every new affordable home we build. Each tree will be accompanied by a letter to the new homeowner, sharing the story of Lara's commitment and care for both people and place. Just as Lara helped plant the seeds of so much good in this community, her spirit will continue to grow and take root in every family we serve.

We are honored to have walked alongside Lara in this work, and we are grateful for the ways her life continues to inspire us. ♦



Thank You To Our Partners, Members, and Donors!

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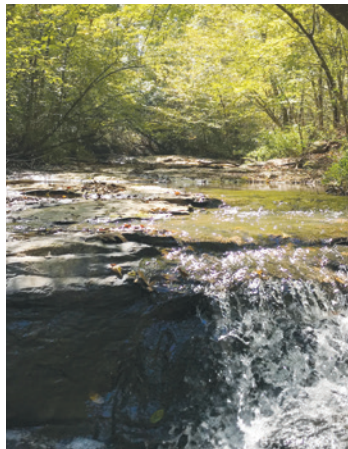
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