

Connecticut Farmland Trust

Spring 2013 Newsletter



Photo courtesy of T.W. Henrey

CFT To Protect 130 Year Old Family Farm in Tolland and Vernon

We are excited to start off 2013 with great news: all of the funding needed to permanently protect the 22.3-acre Gunther Farm in Tolland and Vernon has been confirmed. Working with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), CFT assembled funding from DEEP's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program and the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program at NRCS to cover 100% of the \$700,000 purchase price. The project will close by the end of the year.

"As budgets get smaller we need to be creative," said CFT's Executive Director, Jim Gooch. "Our Director of Conservation, Elisabeth Moore, deserves kudos for seeing how the pieces might fit together and then going out and making it work."

In addition to having the best agricultural soils, Gunther Farm boasts important grassland habitat, the flood plain of Gages Brook, and endangered wildlife habitat -- all of which will be permanently protected. The farm is adjacent to the Tolland County Agricultural Center (TAC), whose mission is to "provide an environment for agricultural production education, ecological landscape education, and leadership education for all ages, for all citizens of the state of Connecticut." TAC will

use the farm's fields and woodlands to expand its agriculture and environmental education programs and to create an incubator farm.

Gunther Farm's XX acres of fields and woods will be added to TAC's existing XX-acre property. Surrounded by commercial development in an expanding area just off Interstate 91, TAC has very few options for expansion. Acquiring Gunther Farm, which TAC has used for various events over the years, is the only opportunity TAC has to add prime, active farmland to its complex.

The Gunther family has owned the farm since the late nineteenth century. Similar to many Connecticut farms, the property has changed uses several times in those 130 years. Operated by the family as a dairy farm until the late 1980s, the farm then transitioned to raising cattle and other livestock. A local beef farmer now hays 15 acres of the former pastures. Ellen Rodzen, the eldest of the Gunther children, said, "The land has been in our family since the 1890s and had been farmed continually by the family up to my dad's death in 1983. With this much farming history invested in the land, it just did not feel right to consider development of these acres."

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Letter from the Executive Director

It's been a strange winter. In spite of nature's latest convulsion, the overall lack of snow will hurt springtime's water table. The warm days will allow invasive bugs and weeds to live through months that used to keep them south. I have a suspicion that what we're calling "strange" will soon be ordinary.

Yet every day on my drive home, the western sky is just a bit lighter. Before long, I'll be able to see to the back of the orchard along the roadside, before long, I'll actually be able to do a little yard work in the evening. Maybe even after dinner.

We've been trying to decide where the coop should go -- we're going to get chickens this spring. And maybe a puppy to take the place of our old boy who left us in November. I suspect you all have spring on your minds, too.

Before we get there, though, I'd like to thank you for a fantastic winter. Thanks to you, CFT closed its first decade in sound financial shape. I'd like to say that's due to exceptional management. **But the truth is that it's you:** you've propelled us into our second decade with great confidence in our mission.

The sluggish winter has mirrored our sluggish economy, but as the days grew shorter, you came alive. Thank you -- your conviction and support are launching CFT's 2013 in fine style.

Enjoy the newsletter -- there's great news about Gunther Farm, an update on the Farm Bill, and a profile of a very special volunteer, John Weedon.

We'll be in touch throughout the year -- join our emailing list for news and updates. And mark your calendars: the **Celebration of Connecticut Farms will be held on September 8th** at the farm of Hotchkiss School in Sharon.

Yours in the land,



Business Partners In Support of CFT

In an effort to build awareness of our mission statewide, we started an outreach program that focuses on partnering with local agricultural businesses, including the following:

Easton - Aspetuck Valley Apple Barn; Silverman's Farm; & Snow's Farm LLC

Redding - Warrup's Farm; & Little River Farm

Monroe - Benedict's Home & Garden; The Apple Place; & Lakeview Orchards

Thompson - Fort Hills Farm, LLC

Bethel - Holbrook FarmMarket & Bakery

Pomfret - Vanilla Bean Cafe

If you would like to learn more, please contact us at info.ctfarmland.org or at 860-247-0202.

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Gunther Farm *(continued from page 1)*



Photo of Gunther Farm, adjacent to TAC courtesy of T.W. Henrey

Doris Ostrowski, Ellen's sister, concurred, "The family all agrees that placing Gunther Farm under protection and keeping it as open space is the right thing to do."

TAC is not eligible to apply for land conservation funding from government programs, so CFT stepped in to orchestrate the deal. When negotiations for the conservation easement terms with the state and federal agencies are complete, CFT will purchase the farm and then sell the restricted land to TAC for \$1. This project is CFT's first "buy-protect-sell" deal, and one of the few farm protection projects to receive

funding from DEEP. The Open Space Acquisition Program administered by DEEP assists the purchase of conservation land using state bonds and funding from the 2005 Community Investment Act – **money that your calls and letters helped to protect last fall.**

"This is a deal only CFT could – or would – orchestrate," said Gooch. "This doesn't happen without Elisabeth to structure the deal and find the money; and it couldn't have worked without CFT as a conduit for those funds. Because we are qualified to apply for that funding, we were able to act in the interests of TAC and then turn the land over to them. The family's farm is protected, TAC can expand, and we've fulfilled our mission – it's a win, win, win."

SAVE THE DATE: 2013 Celebration of Connecticut Farms

**September 8th at Fairfield Farm
at The Hotchkiss School in Sharon.**

Fairfield Farm was acquired by the school in 2003 to serve as both an outdoor classroom and a source of organically grown food for the School Dining Hall.

**We hope
to see you there!**



(photo of fairfield farm)

Volunteer Spotlight: John Weedon

The past two years have been full of changes at CFT: New leadership, Accreditation, and a slow economy challenging our core work of conservation. Throughout it all, John Weedon has been a steadfast and selfless volunteer – even using his vacation time to help out during the final push of our Accreditation application. We'd like you to meet him:



John Weedon at his family's dairy farm in Ohio

"The gate to the barn was open and I could see cows coming up the drive towards the house." John was only six. "I remember being very scared and worried that the cows would escape so I tried to close the gate but was too small to make it budge! Mary Ann, the farmer's wife, saw me struggling and came to help. She closed the gate with ease and told me I did very well to try closing it on my own."

That first memory of farming is one of many that John made during his childhood in Geauga County, Ohio (just outside of Cleveland), where his family runs "Reservation Farm," a 286-acre dairy farm.

About 65 head of Holsteins and Jerseys live on the farm and they keep approximately 30 replacement heifers on hand. "This practice of keeping our heifers cuts down on disease rates since we know the stock of the calves and the lineage. Knowing what you are getting in advance is a luxury in farming!"

"My family has owned the land since 1948 and have partnered with an Amish family since 1968 – with the Weedons providing the land, buildings, and machinery and splitting the ownership of the cows. Many will be surprised to know that Northeast Ohio was known as a 'Western Reserve,' or land set aside for Connecticut's losses during the Revolutionary War. A legacy of that is in NE Ohio -- non Amish are referred to as Yankees. On the farm, when I get called a Yankee, they just mean I'm a non-Amish person."

John lives in Manchester with his wife, Virginia, and his son who is a Junior in high school. Their daughter is a sophomore at SUNY Albany. They've been living in CT for five years.

In 2011, John worked with his mother to help her place an agricultural conservation easement on the family's farm. "No matter what happens in the future, it will always be protected," he says. Full of pride and satisfaction, having protected his own land, Weedon began looking to work locally with a land trust that specialized in preserving farmland. He wanted to help other farmers protect their land. He found CFT.

Mr. Weedon's background is library sciences; however, he is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Science at the University of Illinois. When asked what his main reason for working with CFT, he said that "working with a land trust prevents development of strip malls and housing sprawl was very important to me."

John has worked on all aspects of our mission, but he says that his time stewarding CFT's easement properties has been the most rewarding. **"Working with the landowners to educate them on the land trust's shared responsibility to ensure that the agricultural values of the land are preserved in perpetuity is immensely rewarding.** Establishing a relationship with the landowners is particularly important when we are working with second generation landowners who didn't initiate the easement but bought the land after the fact."

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Volunteer Spotlight, continued

"We have a sacred obligation to live in balance with nature because we are merely temporary stewards of the land," said John. "As such, we have a responsibility to ensure that we view ourselves as members of the land and not owners."

As for what he predicts in the next 10 years for CFT, he said that he sees "phenomenal growth! As we continue to reach out to stakeholders and partners in this extremely important effort to protect the remaining farmland in Connecticut, I believe CFT can be a leader in expanding the conservation community beyond farm owners to include municipalities, other conservation organizations, and community planners. We all have a stake in this effort."

On behalf of the staff and board of CFT, we thank John for all his hard work. Without him, the "phenomenal growth" of our organization could not come to pass!

Foundation Support



Little Pond Farm, Stonington, protected in 2010

In 2012, CFT was fortunate to have the support of several outstanding foundations. Late in the year, the **Bafflin Foundation** graced us with a significant contribution to our acquisition fund. Their support will ensure the preservation of three farms in Eastern Connecticut.

Please join us in thanking them, and these leading Foundation contributors:

Hugh Trumbull Adams Fund
The Geoffrey C. Hughes Foundation
MJPM Foundation
Diebold Foundation
PCLB Foundation
1772 Foundation
The Barnwood Foundation
The Woodward Fund

Washington and Hartford Legislative Update

There is a great temptation to inveigh against the Congress, and not without reason. As 2012 was drawing to a close, hope still remained that an intelligently negotiated Farm Bill might pass in both the House and the Senate. When that hope faded, a reasonable compromise to extend the expired 2008 law with important improvements was crafted. Many of these changes were forward-thinking and some were clearly aimed at a new and sustainable agriculture policy.

There was bi-partisan and bi-cameral support for paring back direct subsidy for commodity crops as well as providing funding for beginning farmers, rural economic development, and agricultural research. It re-opened the Conservation Stewardship Program to enrollment by farmers (which had been accidentally closed). It largely preserved funding for farmland conservation. It even went a small step in the direction of rationalizing dairy policy.

The so-called "Fiscal cliff" trumped that good policy. As part of the Biden/McConnell deal to delay sequestration and its mandated across-the-board cuts, only selective sections of the 2008 Farm Bill were extended (including commodity subsidies) and most of the nuanced compromises were deleted.

The fiscal cliff looms again in March, and everything will once again be on the table. Also in March, the Congressional Budget Office will issue a new baseline for the Farm Bill, altering the amount of money available for different portions of any new bill – and we expect both the House and the Senate to generate new Farm Bill legislation some time this spring.

In Hartford, similarly difficult budget decisions abound. Thanks to your help we and our conservation partners around the state were able to reduce the amount of money swept from Community Investment Act funds last fall. Reduce, but not eliminate. *This is especially disturbing since that money was collected expressly to invest in Connecticut's natural resources and is now headed to the general fund.*

Your calls and letters to representatives at all levels have helped immensely. The Federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) will continue untouched until at least 2014; the Connecticut Department of Agriculture will continue to operate both its Farmland Preservation Program and its new Community Farm Protection Program. All of these are key partners in our efforts.

Getting the Government You Deserve: CFT Goes to Washington, D.C.

On March 12th and 13th, CFT will join the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) to participate in Land Trust Advocacy Day. There will be a briefing from LTA staff on the pertinent issues and we will visit with members of Connecticut's delegation to inform and educate them about the ways they can help us in our work – and why they should.

LTA has invited only 40 land trusts to participate because of the importance those delegations have to pending legislation. CFT is thrilled to have been selected from Connecticut, and will be represented by Executive Director Jim Gooch and Board Member Dawn Adiletta.



Capitol Building in Washington D.C.

Cold Spring Brook Farm



Farmed continuously for over 300 years, Cold Spring Brook Farm in Berlin is a jewel in our protected farm portfolio. Tom Nielson and Steve Bengtson are cousins and co-owners of the farm; they grow beautiful flowers, bedding plants, and vegetables in their fertile fields and spacious greenhouses.

Permanently protected by CFT in 2004, this farm is one of several that operates a seasonal farmstand. The early February blizzard damaged many of the farm's greenhouses, leaving only four useable for this season. Similar devastating losses occurred around the state due to the storm.



Cold Spring Brook Farm co-owner, Tom Nielson

Find them on Facebook to see more amazing pictures (all the ones on this page are courtesy of Cold Spring Brook Farm) and stay up to date on what they have in the market this year!

www.coldspringbrookfarm.com

Best,

Collette



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Using your smart phone,
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 up to date on important
 news concerning CT
 agriculture!

To further this mission, Connecticut Farmland Trust:

- Works with Connecticut farmers to protect their land for agricultural use by acquiring agricultural conservation easements and farmland;
- Shares our expertise and technical knowledge to assist landowners, land trusts, town officials, and state agencies in protecting agricultural land; and
- Promotes farmland preservation education through presentations and outreach.

OUR MISSION: To permanently protect Connecticut's working farmland.