



Kuss Farms, Bethlehem

PRESERVING WORKING LANDS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Love of the Land, Hope for the Future: Two Litchfield County Farms Preserved

Over a busy and exciting 48 hours this summer, Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT) and its federal and state partners protected two prominent farms in southern Litchfield County.

Gustafson Orchard and Farm, Watertown

For Gustafson Orchard and Farm of Watertown, preservation with CFT is the culmination of a decades-long process to safeguard the 301-acre family farm. Nearly 20 years ago, Alan Gustafson started meeting with the Housatonic Valley Association to discuss conservation options for the farm that his extended family has stewarded since 1907.

After Alan passed, his daughter Katie Barnosky was surprised to learn that her late father had been quietly gathering information on how to protect the land. She and her cousins knew that the previous generation had the right idea--they wanted to hold on to their family's farm and begin thinking about preservation.

Katie, one of the co-owners of Gustafson Farm, and her cousins Frank Gustafson, III and Kristie Weidemier applied to the State of Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program to protect the 301-acre orchard and farm. CFT and the State jointly applied for funding from USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service to conserve the property. After three years of effort, the State and CFT secured the purchase of agricultural conservation easements on the farm.

Now, the land will always be available for the next generation of farmers. The large farm was preserved in three pieces to give the family flexibility when it comes time to sell or transfer it.

The farm's scenic orchard was a popular fall destination for area families for many years and now

the land is known for its bucolic hayfields and acres of grazing beef cattle. With the farm now preserved, the family is looking towards restoring the orchard to active production.

"We didn't want to see [the land] developed because my family worked so hard to keep the farm," said Katie. "We think that the neighbors and the town [of Watertown] will be happy to see the farm stay. We hope to provide for the town and make our family proud of us."

Kuss Farms of Bethlehem and Woodbury

Neither Dick nor Peggy Ann Kuss come from farming backgrounds, but with lots of determination they made a mid-life career change from owning a school bus company to fulfilling their dream of becoming farmers.

When the couple initially made the leap, they kept the school bus company for some time to ensure that they would have additional income to buy more

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Aerial view of Gustafson Orchard and Farm.

PHOTO: WENDY CARLSON PHOTOGRAPHY, HVA

**More than 92%
of the farms
that CFT has
protected
produce food.**

Continued

acreage. "From a young age, I knew that I wanted to farm," shared Dick this summer. "My wife loves gardening and we both like open spaces. I'd say that is why we became farmers. My wife and I are eighty now, and we have forty years on the farm."

In those 40 years, they have built their farm into the third-largest hay operation in the state, selling high-quality hay to farms throughout the region. The farm also grows sweet corn, pumpkins, and vegetables for its roadside stand in Woodbury.

The Kusses are dedicated to conserving their family farm one large parcel at a time. Dick and Peggy Ann have already preserved two parcels of their 450-acre property through the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program.

When the Kuss family applied to the State to preserve this parcel, the State reached out to CFT to be a preservation partner. CFT and the State jointly secured matching funds from the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service to purchase an easement on the 61 acres.

"We want to keep farmland open like this," said Dick of the 61 acres of farmland newly protected by CFT and its state and federal partners.



Dick Kuss at work on his farm in Bethlehem. PHOTO: CT FARMLAND TRUST



Kuss Farms' country farm stand on Rt. 132 in Woodbury.

Elisabeth Moore, CFT's Executive Director, said, "Thanks to the Kusses and their decision to protect their land, another portion of a key Bethlehem farm will be available for the next generation of farmers and a beautiful part of that area of the State will remain open."

The Kusses will continue to raise hay and vegetables for the foreseeable future. When asked about what's next for the farm, Dick said, "There are a lot of young people with an interest in farming, but they can't farm because there is no land available for them. Maybe young people can use this farm in the future."

With more of the farm safely preserved, it will be there for young farmers for generations to come.

Just before going to press, CFT protected two more farms in 48 hours. Watch for news about these farms and four others we expect to protect by Dec. 31.

Check out CFT's 2019 Annual Report online in our Information Center.

Do You Want to Double Your Impact on Connecticut Farmland Conservation?

We have an opportunity to unlock a \$10,000 matching gift from the MFUND Foundation to jumpstart the creation of our first Strategic Conservation Plan. Will you help us?

Strategic Conservation Planning is a process to guide CFT in identifying, prioritizing, and protecting the highest-quality farms in Connecticut and preserving more farmland overall. When completed, the plan will give CFT a method to evaluate current and potential farmland preservation projects, be more strategic in its work, and provide targeted outreach to agricultural communities.

Help us jumpstart our Strategic Conservation Plan and preserve even more farms for future generations.

If CFT raises \$10,000 by December 1, 2020, then MFUND will contribute \$10,000 to the initiative. In total, you will help us raise **\$20,000 to increase our pace of farmland conservation.**

Please consider a special gift this year, in addition to your regular giving, in any amount that is right for you. Help us enhance our capability to preserve farmland by doubling your impact today!

If you would like to help us kick off the special initiative with an extra gift, please **write Match 2020 in your check's memo**, or call us to say if you wish for your online gift to be noted as such.

Thank you.



Cooper, apprentice farmer at Long Table Farm.

PHOTO: LONG TABLE FARM

The Evolution of Long Table Farm

The transformation of New Mercies Farm in Lyme, protected by Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT) in 2017, to Long Table Farm involves three different farm names, two different couples, and one happy community.

Deborah and Rod Hornbake founded New Mercies Farm in 2012 on the site of a former colonial-era homestead. The couple bought the land to conserve it and create a farm where one had not been before. They wanted to preserve the land for agricultural use, provide wholesome food for the community, and create opportunities for young farmers.

The Hornbakes honored that mission by leasing the land to a young farming couple in 2016. Baylee Drown and her partner Ryan Quinn have since bought the farm with the help of a CFT conservation easement. “We could not afford to purchase New Mercies without the easement,” said Baylee. Now, she and Quinn are heading up a thriving farm business on the land.

From Upper Pond to Long Table

Baylee Drown grew up on a conventional dairy farm in Michigan. While earning her BS in Animal Sciences, she took an animal ethics course that changed her life course from conventional farming of animals to a deep dive into organic, sustainable plant-based farming.

Baylee came to Connecticut to take a job as a farm manager and ended up leasing the land to start her own business, Upper Pond Farm, in 2013. Baylee and her partner Quinn chose to manage the new fruit and vegetable farm with sustainable, holistic methods. Families quickly signed up for seasonal, weekly CSA boxes (also known as community supported agriculture subscriptions) and the happy customers kept on coming!

Quickly, Baylee and Quinn realized that they needed more land with housing for the venture. “We started to look for a farm that we could afford to buy in the Old Lyme region,” said Baylee. When they were introduced to the Hornbakes by chance at a farm

dinner, the two couples quickly saw the potential for collaboration. In 2017, Deborah and Rod donated a conservation easement on their 4.6-acre farm to CFT. The preserved acres comprise the smallest farm CFT has protected to date.

Once New Mercies Farm was officially preserved, the Hornbakes began the process of selling the farm to Baylee and Quinn. Access to land is a major challenge facing beginning farmers and conservation easements help them meet that challenge. By prohibiting nonagricultural development, conservation easements reduce a property’s value and make the land more affordable for beginning farmers.

After they completed the purchase of New Mercies Farm in 2019, Baylee and Quinn asked the 250 families who have a CSA subscription with the farm to vote on a new name for the entire business. Long Table Farm, covering both the Upper Pond and New Mercies plots, and two Lyme Land Trust properties, was born later that year.

Baylee and Quinn invest in the care of the land and in the quality of food that they produce. In turn, the people of their community invest in them – as it should be. The future of Long Table Farm is bright, and as a CFT supporter, you should be proud that you have helped to make this evolution possible.

See the expanded version of this story at www.ctfarmland.org/site/notes-from-the-field/.



Owners Baylee Drown and Ryan Quinn in front of their new sign.

PHOTO: LONG TABLE FARM

“We are actively engaged in the community – woven into the community. They appreciate the sustainability of the farm and want us to stay.”

— Baylee Drown, owner of Long Table Farm

Can CFT Help Protect My Farm?

CFT has created a step-by-step guide to help you learn more about the process of conserving your farmland with CFT. Check out the **CFT’s downloadable Farmland Protection Steps** document on our website at: <http://ctfarmland.org/site/resources/>



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