CONNECTICUT FARMLAND TRUST | FALL/WINTER 2026



Keeping Farmland in Farmers' Hands. For Generations to Come.

The Freund family is once again leading the way in Connecticut, helping ensure that future generations can own and work quality farmland.

This fall, the Freund family of North Canaan, Connecticut, took an important step to ensure that the land their family has farmed for generations will remain in farmers' hands far into the future.

Working with Connecticut Farmland Trust, the family added a second layer of protection to farmland they had conserved decades ago. The new agreement, called an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV), helps keep farmland available to working farmers at a price based on its agricultural value.

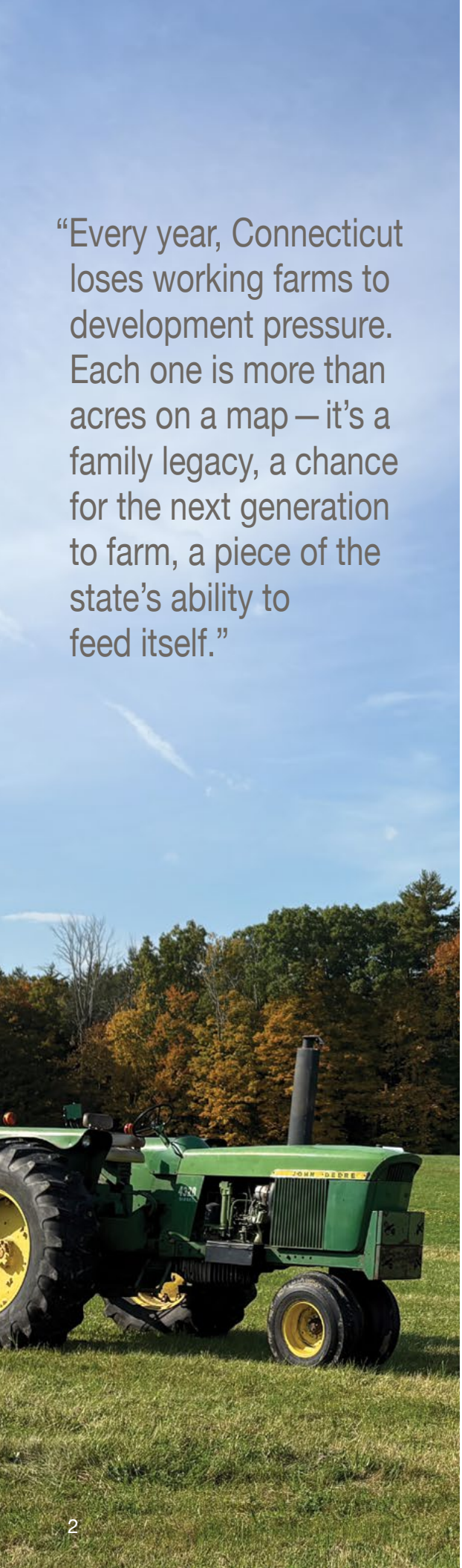
While this approach is new to Connecticut, it isn't a new idea. Vermont and Massachusetts have used OPAV agreements for decades to help keep conserved farmland in farming. And once again, the Freund family is helping lead the way in Connecticut.

A Family Committed to Farming

The Freund family's commitment to farming began in 1949, when Eugene and Esther Freund established their dairy farm in North Canaan. Today, four generations have built an agricultural enterprise that includes dairy farming, a popular farm market and bakery, and CowPots, which turns cow manure into biodegradable planting pots.

Innovation has always been part of the family's approach. In the 1970s, Esther experimented with an early methane digester. The family later pioneered soil nutrient testing and introduced robotic milkers, an anaerobic digester, and other technologies that make farming more efficient while caring for the

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The Last Field on a Connecticut Road

Picture a farmer standing at the edge of a field that’s been in his family for five generations.

His grandfather cleared it by hand. His father carried it through periods of plenty and periods where they struggled. Now, with no one in the next generation ready to take over, costs rising and many external pressures, he faces a brutal choice: sell to a developer or find another way.

The developer’s offer is tempting — enough to retire comfortably, more than the land would be worth if used only for farming. But it would also mean the end of a working farm. Orchards become cul-de-sacs. Productive soil disappears under the pavement, forever.

This is where Connecticut Farmland Trust changes the outcome.

Through a conservation easement, a farmer can permanently protect their land from development while still owning, farming, or selling it. The land remains farmland. The family gets financial stability. And years later, a young farmer might lease that same property to start a vegetable operation, while the original owner still walks the fields on a summer morning, watching new crops grow from soil his family once tended.

Every year, Connecticut loses working farms to development pressure. Each one is more than acres on a map — it’s a family legacy, a chance for the next generation to farm, a piece of the state’s ability to feed itself.

As the new Executive Director of Connecticut Farmland Trust, I’ve already met landowners who are wrestling with exactly this choice. Their commitment to what happens to their land after they are gone is what drives me to do this work. But the work needs more than just me and my team — we need people like you to make it possible.

If you want to be part of keeping Connecticut’s farms in Connecticut’s hands, here’s where to start: donate today or connect with our land protection team — because the next field on the chopping block might be one you drive past every day, and we’d rather it stay working lands.



Warmest Regards,

Michelle Gittlen
Executive Director
Connecticut Farmland Trust

Massaro Community Farm

The Next Generation of Farming

Connecticut is losing farmers faster than replacing them. The average American farmer is now in their late 50s, and for every young farmer entering agriculture, several are retiring.

The barriers are steep: farmland prices that favor developers over growers, equipment and startup costs beyond reach for most twenty- and thirty-somethings, and — perhaps hardest to replace — no family farm to inherit and no one to teach the trade. Massaro Community Farm's history offers a working answer to that crisis, because the farm has solved this problem before.



When Tony and John Jr. Massaro took over their father's farm in 1947, they faced their own version of a succession problem: neither brother had children to carry on the family farm.

Their solution was to recruit local teenagers, giving them real, hands-on experience with thousands of chickens and dozens of dairy cows. Those teenagers weren't just seasonal labor. They were an informal pipeline of people who understood, from the inside, what it takes to keep land in production.

Rather than depending on a single family's succession, the farm's future has been secured by a conservation easement and a lease with the Town of Woodbridge running through 2049 — a horizon long enough to actually train new farmers, not just employ them for a season.

Its on-farm educational programs put children and adults in the field every year, building the same lived knowledge Tony and John Jr. once passed informally to the teenagers they recruited. It is Community Supported Agriculture, a farmstand, sales to restaurants and farmers markets, and a 10% commitment to hunger relief — model the kind of resilient, multi-channel business a young farmer needs to see to believe a livelihood in agriculture Is possible.

This is what it looks like to keep working land working across generations: not preserving a farm in amber, but treating it as a living classroom.

Every visitor who walks the nature trail, every child who learns where food comes from, every young adult who gets real-time in the field is a small bet against the odds facing the next generation of farmers. The Massaro family made that bet in 1947. Massaro Community Farm is still making it today.

"It is critical that we support the next generation of farmers through thoughtful farm succession planning that takes into account the many barriers facing beginning farmers today."

– **MC Whelan**
Massaro Community Farms
Connecticut Farmland Trust Board Member

Both photographs by Casey McManus

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land and water. The Freunds have also adapted their dairy operation, selling their cattle to another farmer who now leases the land and buildings, another way of keeping farming viable as circumstances change.

Their commitment extends beyond their own businesses. The Freunds believe farming is essential to a healthy community, providing local food, livelihoods, and connections between people and the land.

"Healthy food is a critical resource for Connecticut," Ben Freund says.

Protecting the Land and the Opportunity to Farm

The Freunds were early participants in Connecticut's farmland conservation efforts, protecting land through agricultural conservation easements beginning in the 1980s. But Ben and his family wanted to take that commitment further. Protecting farmland from development is essential, but future farmers also need to afford to own and work it.

The family's concern is personal. In 1985, Ben and his brother Matt purchased land from their retiring neighbor, Howard Wentworth. Ben remembers Howard traveling the local roads in a donkey cart on Sundays, a familiar reminder of the area's farming traditions.

> "Healthy food is a critical resource for Connecticut."
>
> **– Ben Freund**

The brothers wanted to honor Howard's commitment to farming, just as they hoped future generations would honor their family's care for the land.

Working with Connecticut Farmland Trust, the Freunds considered how an OPAV could accomplish that goal. They wanted an agreement that would keep the land in farmers' hands while allowing future agricultural businesses to evolve, build necessary facilities, and respond to changing opportunities.

After all, farming in 2050 may look very different from farming today.

The Freund family's new agreement demonstrates how two conservation tools work together. The original agricultural conservation easement protects the land from development. The OPAV helps ensure that when ownership changes, the land remains available to farmers at its agricultural value.

Together, they offer a model for other Connecticut farm families who want their land to remain productive and accessible to future generations.

For the Freunds, it's about more than their own family's future. It's about ensuring that young and beginning farmers have opportunities to build their livelihoods, that communities benefit from local agriculture, and that Connecticut retains the land and people needed to produce food.

We look forward to working with other farmers and landowners to ensure that their commitment to farming, like the Freund's, can help shape Connecticut's agricultural future for generations to come.




Casey McManus

How We Keep Farmland Protected and Affordable

Agricultural Conservation Easement

- An agricultural conservation easement is a voluntary, permanent agreement that keeps farmland available for farming. A farmer or landowner agrees to limit future development, preventing the property from becoming a housing development or other non-farm use. The agreement stays with the land, even when ownership changes.
- Landowners may receive payment for giving up incompatible development rights or choose to donate the easement, potentially receiving income tax benefits.
- The land remains privately owned, stays on local tax rolls, and can be farmed, sold, or passed on to future generations. The result: Farmland stays protected for agriculture, forever.

Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV)

- An OPAV helps keep protected farmland affordable for future generations of farmers and can be added after a farm has already been conserved through an agricultural conservation easement. In some cases, this additional agreement may provide the landowner with another payment or potential income tax benefits.
- When a farm with an OPAV is offered for sale, the agreement gives a land trust or other designated organization certain rights to help ensure the property is sold at its agricultural value rather than a higher market price.
- This helps make it possible for the next generation of farmers to afford the land. The result: Protected farmland remains affordable for farmers.

Think of it this way: An agricultural conservation easement protects the land, while an OPAV helps future farmers afford to own it. Together, they help keep farmland protected, affordable, and in farming for generations to come.

Is Conservation Right for You or Someone You Know?

For aspiring farmers and families thinking about the future of land they love, farmland conservation can offer a way forward.

If you or someone you know is considering conserving farmland, we're here to talk through the possibilities. High-quality agricultural soils are central to our farmland protection projects, and every farm and family situation is different.

With a conservation agreement (conservation easement), you can continue to own and manage your land. You can also sell it, give it away, or pass it on through your will, knowing that the agreement will remain with the land forever.

If you'd like to learn more about your conservation options, please contact Michelle Gittlen for a confidential conversation at michelle@ctfarmland.org or 860-247-0202 x224.

What's on the Horizon

Helping More Connecticut Families Conserve the Land They Love

Across Connecticut, more families are beginning conversations about the future of their farmland. Several have recently reached out to Connecticut Farmland Trust to explore whether conservation might be right for them.

These properties include high-quality agricultural soils, productive fields, and woodlands that have been part of family farms for generations. Each property is different, and so are the hopes of the families who own them.

For some, conservation offers peace of mind. They want to know that the land they love will remain available for farming, no matter who owns it in the future. For others, conserving the farm can make it easier for the next generation to inherit the property and continue farming.

Sometimes these conversations begin years before a family is ready to make a decision. That's why it's so important that we are available to answer questions, explain the options, and help families find an approach that works for them.

Families want to know that the land they love will remain available for farming, no matter who owns it in the future.

We're also working with other land trusts across Connecticut to identify opportunities and challenges in conserving both rural and urban farmland, including community gardens.

Whether it's a family farm in a rural town or a community garden in the heart of a city, access to fresh, locally grown food matters. So does keeping land available for people who want to grow it.

With your support, we can continue helping families explore their options, build partnerships, and conserve more of the farmland that Connecticut communities depend on.



Farmland Protection that Lasts

Every acre we protect moves through two phases: working with landowners to conserve their land and then working in partnership with them — and future landowners for generations to come. As we start the new year, here's a primer on both.

Exploring Conservation Options

Working to conserve the land is the front-end process of identifying, evaluating, and establishing a conservation easement in partnership with the landowner.

1. **Identification & Outreach** — Prioritizing land based on agricultural value, soil quality, development pressure, and fit with regional conservation goals; connecting with interested landowners and clarifying their conservation goals.
2. **Due Diligence** — To ensure the conservation agreement is appropriate, we undertake title review, appraisal, survey, and environmental assessment.
3. **Drafting the Agreement** — Working with the landowner (and funders, where applicable) we clarify the easement's specific terms: permitted uses, building envelopes, and reserved rights and create supporting documentation.
4. **Project Completion** — Finalizing funding, recording the easement, and transferring responsibility to the stewardship team. Each new project becomes a permanent, perpetual obligation for the land trust and future landowners.

Easement Stewardship: Keeping the Promise

Once an easement is completed, we initiate a long-term partnership with the landowner, often referred to as easement stewardship.

- **Monitoring** — Regular site visits, usually once or twice a year, confirm the land stays true to the easement terms, answer landowner questions, and document changes.
- **Upholding the easement** — If a violation of the terms of the easement arises, we work with the landowner to resolve them — from conversations with the landowner to legal action if necessary — to uphold our long-term responsibly.
- **Landowner Relations** — We are committed to building long-term relationships with those who own and farm conserved land. This means staying connected: onboarding new landowners, explaining easement terms, and processing approvals for permitted changes like new structures or minor boundary adjustments.



Thank You to Our Business Partners in the Community

"Supporting organizations like Connecticut Farmland Trust isn't just good corporate citizenship — it's an investment in the community where our employees live and work."

– Diana J. Sutcliffe
The Walker Group

We're proud to spotlight The Walker Group, a Hartford-based technology and benefits consulting firm, as one of our longtime corporate champions.

the Walker Group
high tech, human touch

For years, The Walker Group has stood behind Connecticut Farmland Trust's mission — not just through sponsorship, but through genuine partnership in building a stronger Connecticut. We're grateful for partners like The Walker Group who show that local business and community impact go hand in hand.

Interested in joining our growing network of corporate sponsors? Reach out to Michelle Gittlen, michelle@ctfarmland.org to learn about partnership opportunities for 2027.

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You'll read breaking news, updates on farmland conservation, and information about upcoming programs and events.

Sign up at CTFarmland.org

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PRESERVING CONNECTICUT FARMLAND FOR FARMERS

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If you love farms and farmland, there are many ways to help them thrive

You don't have to be a farmer to care deeply about Connecticut's farms. Maybe you love stopping at a farm stand, knowing where your food comes from, or simply seeing fields and pastures remain part of the landscape.

Whatever draws you to Connecticut's farms, there are many ways to help keep them thriving for generations to come. Make a gift that works for you.

A one-time donation or monthly gift helps Connecticut Farmland Trust work with farm families who want to conserve their land. Every gift, whatever its size, makes a difference.

Before you write a check, consider giving stock. Donating appreciated stock directly may help you avoid capital gains taxes while making a greater difference for farmland conservation.

You can also make a gift through your donor-advised fund or, if you're eligible, directly from your IRA.

Give a gift that lasts for generations

Including Connecticut Farmland Trust in your will is a meaningful way to help ensure that future generations will have farms, fresh local food, and opportunities to make their living from the land.

Share your love of Connecticut Farms

Introduce a friend to Connecticut Farmland Trust, share our stories, attend a program, or invite someone to learn about the farms we're helping conserve. You can also encourage your business to sponsor an event or newsletter.

By choosing to participate, you're helping create a future where Connecticut Farms and farming families can thrive.

Explore ways to give and get involved at ctfarmland.org