

UNCAS FARM: Protecting a community treasure



Because they didn't know that the owners intended to preserve their land for farming, neighbors had been saddened to see an ad in the paper: "Thriving 52-acre Whitefield Farm on the Sheepscot River for sale." This family farm had been an integral part of the Sheepscot Valley farm network for more than 30 years. Operated by

Uncas Farm has long served a central role in the Sheepscot Valley farm network. Prior to selling, Austin Moore and Shirley Barlow ensured that it would remain farmland forever.

farmers Austin Moore and Shirley Barlow, Uncas Farm had been an important focal point in the community for many years, especially since daughter Rebecca Haines returned to operate a year-round retail store on the premises. The store carried not only the produce grown on the farm and locally by other farmers, but also a full array of produce from Northeast Coop, as well as crafts made by local artisans. The converted dairy barn (Austin used to milk Holsteins, then Jerseys before turning primarily to vegetables and hay) provided ample space for the store, and its large meeting room was used by the 4H, a youth reading group, play readers, yoga class, and a neighborhood pre-order co-op. It was a great place to meet, catch up with friends and neighborhood events. The farm also offered a CSA, and Austin engaged in maple syruping and forestry activities. The farm truly supported, and was supported by, the community.

their desire to find someone who would keep the land in production. And, they wanted the farm to continue in its service to the community. The property has a prime location near the center of farming activities, Whitefield School and the Town Office, and is adjacent to Happy Farm (an organic dairy farm protected from development, conservation easement held by Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association). Nonetheless, they were reluctant to specify certain restrictions on the use of the land be-

Continued on page 2



Uncas Farm is now operated by new owner Daniel Ridgell, presently producing forage crops for a neighboring dairy.

Austin and Shirley's decision to sell Uncas Farm included

On the inside

- **Guest Editorial:**
Buy Maine Food
- **Maine FarmLink:**
Meserve Farm in Scarborough
Linked to New Farmer
- **Land for Maine's Future**
on Ballot November 8
- **MFT Hires New Development**
Coordinator, Denis Thoet

Uncas Farm: Protecting a community treasure

Continued from page 1

cause they didn't want to handicap purchasers with prohibitions that might become outdated.

Ultimately, with the help of many folks (local community members, local land trust Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association, and Maine Farmland Trust), Austin and Shirley were able to place a simple conservation easement on the property and then sell it to a buyer who not only embraces the restrictions but also hopes to carry on the Uncas Farm tradition.

They clearly articulated their goals in the easement's purpose statement: *"It is the intent of these Grantors... that this farmland be maintained in a condition which allows for the production of food and/or fiber indefinitely. Grantors also intend that the farmland will provide the community specifically and humanity in general, with physical, emotional and spiritual sustenance. Grantors recognize this land as a living organism, and hope that it will be treated as such and afforded all the respect and dignity required of life."*

The Uncas Farm conservation easement was granted to Maine Farmland Trust late last year. It protects the agricultural values of the property forever by permitting only "agricultural, forestry and activities reasonably related thereto" on the 46 acres outside the farmstead/residential area. We applaud and thank Austin and Shirley for their selfless efforts to protect their



Uncas Farm's prime soils will forever grow crops, not houses.

beloved farm where they will continue to live and work on the 5 acres of land they retained. And we welcome Daniel

Ridgell, the new owner, wish him well in his efforts to continue to both work and protect Uncas Farm. 

Four more Maine farms protected this year

In addition to Uncas Farm, Maine Farmland Trust has recently accepted conservation easements protecting several more farms, including:


- **Freeman Ridge Farm** in Freeman Township, Franklin County
- **McDougal Orchards** (Hanson Farm, Inc.) in Springvale / Sanford, York County
- **Five Fields Farm** in Buxton, York County
- **Miller Farm** in Westmanland, Aroostook County

Look for their stories, and more, in our next newsletter!

Austin Moore and Shirley Barlow were able to place a simple conservation easement on the property and then sell it to a buyer who hopes to carry on the Uncas Farm tradition.

Donations received in Bruce Sprague's memory

Maine Farmland Trust wishes to thank the family and friends of Bruce B. Sprague for donations sent in Bruce's memory, following his death February 14, 2005. Bruce B. Sprague lived at Point of Maine in Machiasport for over 30 years, having brought Point of Maine Farm back into his family after World War II.

His protracted struggle in resisting intense pressure from major oil companies to sell off his farm for industrial development is well known in that community. As a result of his visionary efforts, the Sprague land at Point of Maine was permanently protected in 1979 for agriculture and other traditional uses. 

Buying Maine-grown food: a strategy for preserving farmland

By Jean Demetracopoulos

At the Maine Land Trust Network Conference in May, keynote speaker Bill McKibben reported it takes 90 calories of diesel fuel to grow and transport one calorie of iceberg lettuce to our (New England) grocery stores. As consumers, many of us continue to buy iceberg lettuce – trucked all the way from the west coast – even in the summer time, when local farms are producing a variety of lettuces and greens, as well as other fresh produce at far less energy investment. These vegetables also taste better as, over time, sugars in food turn to starch.

Local farms require our support in order to survive. Each of us, as consumers, make daily decisions which impact our local farmers. Do we have milk with lunch, or do we drink soda? Do we buy fresh corn and veggies at a local farm stand to eat with the burgers we got from a local beef producer, or do we go to a fast food chain and get a super burger with fries?

That super burger was grown someplace else, as was the lettuce and tomatoes on it. The apple pie dessert is not made from Maine apples at a Maine bakery.

When we make these decisions, we are exporting local dollars into a national network that does not have local interests. In deciding to buy locally raised produce, we support a local economic infrastructure. We preserve our ability to choose where our food comes from. The alternative is to not have local farms and to pay for those foods to be imported for us. As energy costs increase, this will mean an ever increasing portion of our household budgets will be spent for the privilege of having fresh food.

We hope you will support our local farmers with your purchases, so they can continue to produce quality foods.

Jean Demetracopoulos is on the board of Great Works Regional Land Trust, South Berwick.



Flatbreads benefit for Maine Farmland Trust slated for Dec. 27

Flatbreads, an upscale pizza restaurant in Portland, has offered to donate to Maine Farmland Trust a portion of its sales on Tuesday, December 27, 2005.

The restaurant, located at 72 Commercial Street, will donate \$3.50 for each large pizza and \$1.75 for each small pizza sold between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Bob Morgan, restaurant manager, invited Maine Farmland Trust to augment this fundraising by holding a silent auction, raffle, or other such event at Flatbreads that evening. So, if you're in the area, see you at Flatbreads on December 27th!

PHOTO BY MARIAN MCMAHON



Enjoying the abundance of fresh produce and flowers, shoppers do their part to support local agriculture at Blue Hill Farmers' Market.

Thank You

We thank our special helpers:

Karl Schatz (www.yearofthegoat.net) for volunteer technical assistance with website construction and design

Natalie Lounsbury, summer intern, developing FarmLink service provider list and website

Rebecca Economos, summer intern, conducting feasibility study for Farmer Incubator Project

Marian McMahon, for services as a volunteer photographer.

Land trusts can help make farmland accessible

Notes from Susie O'Keefe, Coordinator, Maine FarmLink, a Maine Farmland Trust program

In our last FarmLink column, we talked about helping the next generation afford the farm, and what farm owners are doing to make this possible. One of our recent links is a great example of what land trusts can do to help make farms and farmland accessible to the next generation.

Our readers in the southern area of the state might know about the **MESERVE FARM** in Scarborough. This 434-acre historic farm includes some of the best soils in Maine. At \$2.5 million, the farm was far beyond a price that a farmer could afford. It seemed inevitable that Meserve Farm was headed for house lots until the **Scarborough Land Conservation Trust** decided it would raise funds to buy the farm and bring it back into production.

With funding assistance from the **Trust for Public Land**, Scarborough Land Conservation Trust purchased Meserve Farm and then sold the development rights through the **Maine Department of Agriculture's Farmland Protection Program**, using both state (**Land For Maine's Future**) and federal (**Farm and Ranchland Protection Program**) funding.

Laurene Swaney, the Trust's president, then contacted FarmLink. Would we come and talk with their board of directors about how they could make this a working farm again? "The whole point of this is to protect the viability and profitability of farming," Laurene explained.

We pointed out the challenges and advantages farmers would face surrounded by suburban development. The services and supplies they need are not easily available. Neighbors

who don't understand farming tend to complain about smells and noises. The price too, even with the property's (residential) development potential extinguished, remained high (\$680,000) relative to what a farm business could support, particularly



Link for Meserve Farm is a great example of what land trusts can do to find creative ways to help make farms and farmland accessible to the next generation.

the Land Trust offer farmers alternatives to direct purchase, such as a lease-to-own or a combination of arrangements that would allow both the land trust and the farmer to meet their respective needs and goals.

Not long after Meserve Farm was listed with FarmLink, we received a call from George Carpenter. His business partner, Valerie Davies, was looking for farmland in Southern Maine to relocate her New Hampshire-based **Heart Song Farm**. Carpenter is a former chef and now runs Kismet Produce Traders, a distribution network that sells fresh locally produced vegetables and meats to restaurants in Maine and New Hampshire through its Farm-2Chef program. Valerie was producing goat cheese in New Hampshire, with Farm2Chef distributing it to local restaurants.

Although Valerie and George did not have the capital to buy Meserve Farm outright, FarmLink suggested that they contact Scarborough Land Conservation Trust. In conformance with the protective covenants, an agreement was reached to lease the farm for a three-year period, after which a lease with option-to-purchase may be offered.

In addition to moving the goat operation to the new location, George



Laurene Swaney (left), president of Scarborough Land Conservation Trust, and Valerie Davies, owner of Heart Song Farm, install sign at former Meserve Farm.

because renovation of the house and infrastructure would also be required.

The good news was that the younger farming generation tends to be focusing on selling locally and regionally. The marketing opportunities in Southern Maine are abundant and growing. So, FarmLink suggested that

Changes in the Wind:

❧ A Note from LouAnna



Just as autumn's falling leaves bring both a reluctant letting go of summer days and a cheerful expectancy of cozy evenings around the fireside, so too do personal life changes bring very mixed feelings. Thus, it's with a combination of regret and anticipation that I have announced my stepping down as executive director, effective at the end of February, 2006, to spend more time with family and to pursue some other interests that have been on the back burner.

My tenure here at Maine Farmland Trust, beginning in August 2000 as sole part-time staff person, has been a rewarding experience, working with a very dedicated board of directors to grow the organization from its fledgling stage to an important statewide voice for farmland. My dream is that the

organization will forge ahead, that the board and new director will shape and carry out an even more ambitious agenda of projects and land protection programs to address the challenges and opportunities at MFT's door.

The board has already articulated its vision for this growth at a board planning retreat last July. I'm confident that the search for a new executive director will lead to just the right person to pick up the reins. (Watch our website, www.maine-farmlandtrust.org for job description and application details.)



Land trusts can help make farmland accessible



Heart Song Farm, the former Meserve Farm, specializes in goat cheese and meat, selling close to 9,000 pounds of cheese a year.

Continued from page 4
has assisted in renovating the farmhouse, which needs plumbing, heating and electricity. "The project is coming together with a combination of Land Trust funds and Uncle Henry's," George explained. Valerie plans to process cheese, operate a farm stand and use the farm as a demonstration site.

When asked about FarmLink's role, George replied that the program couldn't have been more helpful. Valerie commented that she wished the farm list had been available on the web (something we're working on as we write!). Laurene's response was, "FarmLink was exceptionally valuable. I just wish I had more farmland available to encourage new and enthusiastic farmers to Scarborough."



What is FarmLink?

Protecting farmland from development is an important step towards fulfilling the mission of Maine Farmland Trust. But because the majority of Maine farmers are now of retirement age, getting new farmers onto the land is also imperative. Many farmers who wish to retire simply do not have anyone in the family who is interested in taking over the farm. Likewise, many people who want to farm do not have the family or resources to help get them started. Maine FarmLink is a program of Maine Farmland Trust, connecting next generation farmers to the land and resources they need to keep Maine's farms viable now and into the future.

When issues of "Public Benefit" conflict

What is to be done, when the public benefit of protecting farmland conflicts with another proposed use of the land that would provide a different public benefit? This was a question with which Maine Farmland Trust has had to struggle recently.

Many of our readers know that thanks to the forward-thinking and generosity of Shirley and Roy Bessey, Maine Farmland Trust holds an agricultural conservation easement protecting Thor-Knox Farm from non-agricultural development. Known to many as the Bessey Farm, this 420-acre farm has fields of prime soils and well-managed woodland. The farm is situated on both sides of Route 202 in Thorndike and Knox. A portion of the land is adjacent to Mount View School.

At the time the Besseys conveyed the conservation easement, all parties were aware that the school district was considering a new school at the existing site, and that this might mean some expansion. We all hoped that the conservation easement would deter expansion onto the Besseys' farmland, even while knowing there was no guarantee.

Perhaps recognizing the public benefit of Thor-Knox as a protected farm, or perhaps simply because it was a responsible approach, SAD 3 undertook a comprehensive search and analysis of potential sites for the new school that would avoid conversion of farmland, wherever located. Ultimately, however, the district concluded that an expansion including the use of 10 acres of the farm's woodland and 5 acres of field would best meet overall financial and educational considerations.

At a meeting with representatives

of SAD 3, Maine Farmland Trust pressed hard for alternatives that would avoid use of the protected farmland. At that meeting it was clear, though, that the district intended to pursue its course: they would prefer to come to agreement with the Besseys and with Maine Farmland Trust, but would go forward with an eminent domain proceeding, if necessary, in order add the 15 acres to the school site. On balance, argued SAD 3, the public benefit of a new school facility would outweigh the benefit of those acres as farm and woodland.

Shortly after that meeting, even though they were very unhappy with the situation, Shirley and Roy Bessey

elected to enter into an agreement with the school district rather than go through legal proceedings for a "taking." Upon learning of that agreement, Maine Farmland Trust's board of directors voted not to pursue any contested legal action.

In essence, despite our commitment to protecting farmland, Maine Farmland Trust recognized that use of 15 acres of Thor-Knox Farm as a public school would be viewed as a valid "competing" public benefit, and that fighting a condemnation proceeding would likely be unsuccessful.

The board and I are very dismayed that any portion of this fine farm property must be released from the terms of the agricultural conservation easement. Nevertheless, the remaining 405 acres of Thor-Knox Farm still constitute a significant achievement



LouAnna Perkins

Unfortunately, the public benefit of protected farmland must be weighed against the benefit of a new school facility.

in terms of farmland protection for the surrounding community. Moreover, the entire situation has raised awareness of farmland protection in the communities involved, which will hopefully translate into broader recognition of the public value of farmland, as people guide the growth of their towns. Meanwhile, Maine Farmland Trust is continuing to meet with the Besseys and with SAD 3 to pursue ways to minimize the impact of the new school on the farming operation, and explore opportunities to involve students in agricultural activities on the school site.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Frank Miles, *President, Cape Elizabeth*
- John Piotti, *Vice-President, Unity*
- Steven Page, *Secretary, Searsmont*
- Russell Libby, *Treasurer, Mt. Vernon*
- William Bell, *Hallowell*
- Paul Birdsall, *Penobscot*
- Neil Crane, *Exeter*
- Bambi Jones, *Alna*
- Susan Morris, *Waldoboro*

ADVISORY COUNCIL

- Susan Edwards, *Brunswick*
- Christopher Hamilton, *Whitefield and Bahamas*
- James P. Hastings, *Skowhegan*
- Jo D. Saffier, *Pownal*
- R. Collin Therrien, *Augusta*
- Arthur Thompson, *Presque Isle*
- Adrian Wadsworth, *North Turner*

STAFF

- LouAnna Perkins, *Executive Director*
- Denis Thoet, *Development Coordinator*
- Susie O'Keeffe, *FarmLink Coordinator*
- Kristin Varnum, *Administrative Assistant*



Maine Farmland Trust
 P.O. Box 1597
 Bucksport, Maine 04416
 207-469-6465
 e-mail: info@mainefarmlandtrust.org
www.mainefarmlandtrust.org

MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

We're the only statewide land trust devoted exclusively to farmland protection. Our budget is primarily funded by individual donors and members. Please join us. With your help, we can meet the challenge.



Membership Categories:

- Individual \$25
- Family \$45
- Contributor \$100
- Sponsor \$250
- Sustainer \$500
- Patron \$1000
- I would like more information. Please contact me.
- Please contact me about protection options for my farm property.

Additional donation \$ _____.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

e-mail _____

PAYMENT: CHECK ENCLOSED VISA MASTERCARD

Credit Card No.: _____ Exp. _____

Signature: _____

Mail to: Maine Farmland Trust, P.O. Box 1597, Bucksport, ME 04416.

Maine Farmland Trust is a non-profit organization, and membership dues and donations are tax-deductible.



Frank Miles

From the President's Desk:

Land for Maine's Future: Support it on November 8

As many of you are well aware, funding ended in 2004 for the Land for Maine's Future [LMF] program that was overwhelmingly supported by voters in 1999. Now, after much political haggling over bonds in general, the legislature has approved a bond package which includes \$12 million for the Land for Maine's Future program. \$1 million of that bond funding is specifically to limit non-agricultural development on active family farms. If the voters approve the Land For Maine's Future bond in November, we can keep more Maine farms from being developed.

Approving the Land For Maine's Future bond is particularly crucial for

farmland, because it provides dollars to leverage matching federal funding to permanently protect farmland. Since 1999, ten percent of LMF funds have been set aside to conserve productive farmlands throughout Maine. As you've seen reported in our newsletters, farms in places as diverse as Sanford, Manchester, Blue Hill, Cape Elizabeth and Scarborough are being protected. Dairy products, apples, blueberries, and countless other farm commodities are still being produced, even in areas facing development pressure, thanks

to a combination of LMF, federal and local funds used to pay landowners to permanently restrict their farmland. The benefits to the state's economy, local communities, and way of life cannot be emphasized enough.

Of course, it takes a variety of strategies to effectively save Maine's farmland, but funding for the Land For Maine's Future program is a critical component. We know that

If voters approve the bond, we can keep more Maine farms from being developed.

Maine's people care passionately about protecting farms and the rural economy. So... now that the issue is finally on the ballot, we urge you to help get out the vote on November 8 to support the Land For Maine's Future bond.



P.O. Box 1597 / Bucksport, Maine 04416
207-469-6465
e-mail: info@mainefarmlandtrust.org
www.mainefarmlandtrust.org

Established in 1999, the purpose of the Maine Farmland Trust is to permanently preserve and protect Maine's agricultural lands; to assist landowners, land trusts, and municipal and state agencies in identifying and protecting agricultural lands; and to make those lands available to farmers.

PHOTO BY MARY GREENE



**Making
changes.
Meeting
challenges...**

Read all about it inside!

MFT Hires Development Coordinator, Denis Thoet

We must greatly increase the resources for preserving farmland in Maine.

Maine Farmland Trust was happy to find Denis M. Thoet of West Gardiner to fill a new half-time position of development coordinator. Thoet has over 22 years of nonprofit development experience in Maine, including two years at the Maine Center for Economic Policy in Augusta and 12 years as executive director of the Friends of the Maine State Museum. He also served as development director at Maine Audubon Society (1989-92), and the Maine Maritime Museum (1983-89).

MFT was very fortunate to find a well-qualified development person

who also has farming connections. Thoet and his partner, Michele Roy, operate 28-acre Long Meadow Farm, growing vegetables, herbs, berries, and flowers. They also raise Highlander cattle, organic chickens, and Icelandic sheep, and operate a 15-member CSA (Community Supported Agriculture). They are building – with the help of many volunteers – a 26' x 96' greenhouse to increase their production of greens in spring and fall.

“We must greatly increase the resources for preserving farmland in Maine. We are losing farms at much too rapid a rate,” Thoet said. “Maine Farmland Trust is well-positioned to be at the center of a great effort keep Maine people growing their own food. It’s very important that farming remain viable in Maine.”



Thoet came to Maine in 1976 as editor of the Stonington weekly, *Island Advantages*. He left the newspaper in 1978 to become a commercial fisherman, first as a deckhand on a sardine carrier and then as crewman on the dragger/seiner *Duchess II*. His twin daughters, Eleanor and Eliza, were born in Ellsworth in 1979.

