

ThorNox Farms: 420 prime acres protected in Thorndike, Knox

Known locally as “the Bessey farm,” ThorNox Farms is a prime piece of working, agricultural land that spans 420 acres on both sides of Route 220, in Thorndike and Knox. Owned by siblings Roy Bessey, 82, a farmer and farrier by trade, and Shirley Bessey, 78, a retired educator who moved back to the family farm in 1985, the farm consists of more than 100 acres of tillable, sustainably farmed fields and some 320 acres of woodland, including a large wood lot that Roy has carefully pruned, trimmed and harvested on a sustainable-yield basis. In summer, Roy’s Herefords graze in prime pastureland—a sweeping vista that follows the gentle contours of a wide fertile plateau. That’s just the way the Besseys wanted to keep it—unspoiled, undivided farmland.



“The Besseys have set an example in deed and action about the importance of farmland and of Maine’s farms,” said George Maendel, MFT’s farmland protection coordinator at its Western Waldo County office. “Now, their work can be carried out on the land by future generations, and they can rest assured that their prime fields and woods will not grow houses.”

PHOTOS BY PEGGY MCKENNA



Roy Bessey



Shirley Bessey

This past April, the Besseys signed a conservation easement which will forever protect the farm’s agricultural values. “It was the only way to save it. If you put it on the market, it would all be house lots before the dust settled,” Roy said. “I think people are waking up to the fact that land isn’t going to last forever,” he added. “We’ll need it sometime, I would think. We get more

people every year, and less room to raise food.”

Shirley and Roy were born and raised on the farm, located a mile or so north of Knox Ridge, a heritage that goes back to their grandparents, Elijah and Annie Bessey. Having produced various field crops through the years, the farm’s main agricultural enterprise since the mid-1950s has been beef cattle. “Right now I’ve got about 40 mother cows and 12 calves,” said Roy recently. There’s about 60 or so, altogether, if you count the yearlings.” Roy has usually kept a few horses as well.

The Bessey homestead consists of a 2-story 1817 farmhouse, with a black

walnut tree growing in the dooryard’s ell, a 42-by-80-foot barn of the same vintage, and other farm outbuildings. “This is the first framed house in this area,” said Shirley Bessey, a Colby College graduate with a doctorate

Continued on page 5

In this issue:

- Land for Maine’s Future—3 farmland projects completed
- Farmland Stewardship: An easement is just the beginning
- Unity Barn Raisers: A proactive partnership
- Turkey Hill Farm—Back in production
- Meet Susie O’Keeffe, Coordinator for Maine FarmLink

Land For Maine's Future — 3 Farmland Projects Completed: A Blue Hill vegetable farm, and two parcels on Clarry Hill

Development rights on three parcels of farmland were purchased recently, thanks to funding from the **Land For Maine's Future Program**, the **Federal Farmland and Ranchland Protection Program**, and contributions from local land trusts. Maine Farmland Trust assisted as project coordinator.

In Blue Hill, a partnership between visionary landowners, new farmers, Maine Farmland Trust, and the local land trust resulted in the permanent protection of a 116 acre parcel of farmland in Blue Hill. Former owners, Paul and Ann Brayton, were looking to sell their farmland, but wanted it to remain available for agricultural use. The land, having beautiful vistas across the Blue Hill Peninsula, was worth considerably more as developable residential land than as farmland, but the Braytons wanted to see it farmed, if possible. Robyn and Noah Lorio, young farmers looking for affordable farmland in Hancock County, wanted to buy the land, but couldn't afford full market price. After consulting with Maine Farmland Trust, the Braytons arranged with **Blue Hill**



PHOTO BY FRANK MILES

Farmland in Hancock County: From left to right, Paul and Ann Brayton, Commissioner of Agriculture Robert Spear, Attorney Colleen Tucker and farmers Noah and Robyn Lorio with daughter, Zeaya, gather for the LMF closing on the Lorio Farm project.

Heritage Trust [BHHT] for the sale of development rights prior to transferring the land to the Lorios.

BHHT Executive Director Jim Dow stated, "This project continues our **Farmland Forever** program which seeks to protect the agricultural lands along the Route 15 corridor from North Blue Hill to Orland. These lands have the best agricultural soils in Hancock County, and they also pro-

vide scenic views and wildlife habitat. We are pleased that the importance of this work is recognized by our state and federal partners." The Lorios will grow vegetables for local retail markets.

Also protected by purchase of development rights were two parcels of farmland on Clarry Hill in the Union / Waldoboro area, thanks to the proactive efforts of **Medomak Valley Land**



PHOTO COURTESY OF MVLIT

Clarry Hill: An aerial view of the west slope in the Union/Waldoboro area. Important blueberry land and hayfields have been protected as part of an initiative by Medomak Valley Land Trust, funded partially by the Land For Maine's Future program.

Trust [MVLTL]. In March 2001, MVLTL submitted a multi-parcel farmland project to the LMF Board for consideration. Two of those parcels are now protected. The former Boyington parcel (now owned by MVLTL), approximately 25 acres, is a blueberry field that has been in active production for close to 100 years. The Jackson parcel is a historic family farm of nearly 300 acres consisting of hay fields, blueberries, and woodlot. While Clarry Hill provides public access to magnificent views and important nesting habitat for upland sandpipers and vesper sparrows, it is significant that this project went forward as an important farmland project. Clarry Hill is the largest contiguous tract of managed blueberry land in midcoast Maine, and makes a large contribution to the local economy. In addition to federal and state funding for the purchase of development rights, the Clarry Hill project is receiving support from many other partners, including individual donors, Maine Farmland Trust and MBNA Community Foundation.



Sign of the Times

The installation of our new sign on Main Street in Bucksport signifies our transition to a full-time office. For the past three years, Executive Director LouAnna Perkins balanced a part-time law practice with her work for Maine Farmland Trust. Now, LouAnna and office assistant Kristin Varnum will focus their energies entirely on farmland protection.



Coming to a meeting near you...

We're taking our show on the road! This year, instead of holding our annual statewide conference on farmland protection, Maine Farmland Trust will present programs all over the state for local organizations of farmland owners. Our executive director, LouAnna Perkins, will be joined by Stephanie Gilbert of the Maine Department of Agriculture to speak at county Soil and Water Conservation District annual meetings, various commodity associations' annual meetings (Beef Producers, Potato Growers, etc.) and similar groups whose members are interested in hearing about options and strategies for farmland protection. For information about a meeting in your locale, call LouAnna at 469-6465.

Membership News:

Maine Farmland Trust membership has grown to over 400. "We're seeing a wide variety of folks supporting farmland protection," says MFT membership administrator Kristin Varnum. "All walks of life – farmers, other rural residents, city-dwellers – they all want to help." Volunteer worker Lori Jablon recently told us, "I'm glad to find an organization that is working in so many ways to keep farmland available for the future. If we don't do it, who will?"

Planned Giving: Include MFT in your will.

A bequest to support farmland protection is a great way to leave an important legacy.

For more information, contact
LouAnna Perkins,
MFT Executive Director
at 207-469-6465.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Frank Miles, President
Cape Elizabeth
- John Piotti, Vice President
Unity
- Steve Page, Secretary
Searsmont
- Chris Hamilton, Treasurer
Whitefield
- Douglas Albert, *Fryeburg*
- William Bell, *Hallowell*
- Paul Birdsall, *Penobscot*
- Neil Crane, *Exeter*
- Bambi Jones, *Alna*
- Russell Libby, *Mt. Vernon*
- Susan Morris, *Waldoboro*
- Adrian Wadsworth, *North Turner*
- Executive Director**
LouAnna C. Perkins

A Great Fit: Unity Barn Raisers and Maine Farmland Trust

Last fall, Maine Farmland Trust announced the launching of its Western Waldo County Initiative, in partnership with Unity Barn Raisers [UBR]. Now one year into the Initiative, UBR staff member Polly Shyka reports from the her organization's perspective:

Unity Barn Raisers, a local non-profit organization engaged in innovative community and economic development, is delighted to be partnering with Maine Farmland Trust on its Western Waldo County Initiative. This partnership has been a great fit, as UBR has a strong interest in supporting local farms and nurturing farming as an economic base for the area. Though we clearly see the need for preserving the region's agricultural land, we have no expertise in farmland protection.

The most important role for Unity Barn Raisers in this partnership has been to establish local priorities and guide the work of Maine Farmland Trust's project coordinator, George Maendel. Initially, a committee of UBR board members and local citizens began working to identify essential farming corridors and neighborhoods and to formulate a ranking system for prioritizing farms, which, due to their size, prime soils, existing farm infrastructure or proximity to other farmland make them key properties in the region's economic vitality and rural heritage. The committee's work has



PHOTO BY DOUGLAS ALBERT

Unity Barn Raisers has a strong interest in supporting local farms and nurturing farming as an economic base for the area.

now expanded to include meeting with area farmers to discuss and devel-

sulting from those meetings.

The advisory committee also serves as a sounding board for George's successes and challenges and helps connect him with farmers who may be interested in protecting their land with donated agricultural easements, or in selling their development rights through state or federal farmland protection programs. One goal of the Western Waldo County Initiative is to protect 1000 acres of farmland in three years. From what George has accomplished so far (see ThorNox Farm article on page 1), it looks as though we're well on our way to meeting that goal.

One goal of the Western Waldo County initiative is to protect 1000 acres of farmland in three years.

op community strategies for enhancing farm viability as well as farmland protection. Our recent "sign project" (see box) was one of the first steps re-



Volunteers for Unity Barn Raisers recently implemented a massive sign project, an idea conceived by local farmers, intended to deliver a message to Common Ground Fair-goers as well as local residents. "Many people live in or enjoy driving through this area because of the agricultural landscape," says Polly

Shyka, the project's coordinator. "But the open views, green fields and grazing animals only exist because farm families milk cows, grow vegetables, and harvest hay here. We saw this as an opportunity to remind 50,000 people that Maine farmers, and specifically Maine's dairy farmers, deserve their support."

Wish List

Are you a graphic artist?

Want to use your talents for a great cause? Good news...

Maine Farmland Trust needs a volunteer website designer!

Call LouAnna at 207-469-6465.

Bessey Farm

Continued from page 1

from Boston University. "The house is in Knox, and Roy's trailer is in Thorndike." The easement allows for additional farm buildings and a residence to be built within a defined 10-acre farmstead area, as well as the potential creation of a single family dwelling on a small lot adjacent to similar abutting lots at the western boundary of the property. The rest of the land is reserved strictly for agricultural and forestry use.

George Maendel, MFT's farmland protection coordinator at its Western Waldo County office, worked with the Besseys to develop the specific terms of the easement. Lissa Widoff, a close friend of the Besseys and active member of **Freedom Land Trust**, acted as a volunteer adviser during their decision-making process. "Roy would lose more sleep worrying about the future of the farm than about his own future," Widoff said. "He and Shirley really wanted to see the farmland protected. Neither of them has any heirs."

The project was also assisted by the **John Sage Foundation**, which made a contribution on behalf of the Besseys to Maine Farmland Trust's Stewardship Fund, to support the Trust's ongoing obligation for monitoring of the protected property.

How do we measure success?

Bringing Turkey Hill Farm back into production

*Notes from Susie O'Keeffe,
Maine FarmLink Program
Coordinator*

Maine FarmLink is much more than simply a matchmaking service, since we work individually with landowners and prospective farmers to help them refine and define their goals and needs as part of the overall farm transfer process. So, success might be a farm family's discovery, in thinking through the issues, that they're not sure they want to transfer their farm after all. Or, success could be a prospective farmer's realization that while she is not yet in a position to purchase or lease a farm, she has learned what she needs to do to get there. That being said, when a "link" actually results in the transfer of a farm, that really feels like success!

Over the past year, FarmLink has had three completed links and has connected many, many more prospective farmers with farm owners. Finding the "right fit" is not as easy as it might seem, so each link is personally satisfying. This summer I was able to share the joy felt by John Bliss and his partner Stacy Brenner as they negotiated a lease on a farm in Cape Elizabeth.

Searching for farmland

Like many of our prospective farmers, John and Stacy were not financial-

ly in a position to purchase a farm. And Stacy's work as a nurse/mid-wife dictated that they must remain close to Portland where, unfortunately, farmland prices are very high. After over a year of searching, Turkey Hill Farm became available—25 fertile acres of fields and woodland, and a beautiful 200 year-old farmhouse. Cautiously excited, they wondered

how they might be able to take over this farm. Fortunately, owners Peter and John Eastman, neither of them farmers but both committed to seeing their family land put back into production, wanted to do all they could to help.

Trying to make the arrangement as affordable as possible for the new farmers, the Eastmans offered a very generous five-year lease, just enough to cover the taxes on the land. This way, John and Stacy will need to invest only a modest amount in the farm each year, leaving them

with enough money to buy the necessary equipment, tools and hoop house to get started.

Over the lease period, the Eastmans will work with Cape Elizabeth Land Trust to permanently protect the farm through an agricultural conservation easement. During that time, John and Stacy will be farming Turkey Hill and evaluating what kind of longer-term arrangement will suit their needs.

Now, that really feels like success!



*John Bliss and Stacy Brenner
were in no financial position
to purchase a farm...*

*...and the Eastmans wanted
to see their family land put
back into production.*

Farmland Stewardship – People Taking Care of Places

This newsletter, like previous editions, highlights exciting news—more farms coming under permanent protection through conservation easements. But as writer Therrien points out in the following article, an easement is just the beginning of the stewardship process for Maine Farmland Trust. Ms. Therrien, a former MFT board member, works for the Land For Maine's Future Program in the State Planning Office.



PHOTO COURTESY OF R. C. THERRIEN

By Rachel Collin Therrien

Since the 19th century, the encouragement of land stewardship has involved both the public sector and the non-profit community. Leadership in the private conservancy movement was first provided by a group of American women who created the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union to purchase and protect George Washington's home in 1858, pre-dating the American National Park Service by 58 years. Their effort involved both preservation (of a historical monument) and stewardship of the estate farmlands for the benefit of future generations.

Each of us has the opportunity to be good stewards of any land we use or occupy...

The word "steward" derives from the old Norse word *sti-vadr*, meaning "keeper of the house." Within the field of conservation, stewardship generally means people taking care of the land. It refers to the human use of land in ways that preserve its value for future generations and takes into account the needs of non-human land users. Most of Maine's rural landholders — farmers, forest owners, indigenous people, rural residents — have an intimate connection to the land they occupy. When a farm family takes good care of its land so that the soil will be healthy for generations to

The look of an agricultural landscape can reveal the depth to which human interaction and investment of energies has taken place.

come, that's stewardship. Land stewardship requires humans to be responsible for the ways in which we use the land. Each of us has the opportunity to be good stewards of any land we use or occupy.

And just what is it that we are stewarding? Land stewardship has a complexity to it, but the concept rests on the recognition that caring for working landscapes may be as important as protecting pristine wilderness. The immediate landscape characteristic, the "rural landscape," has several aspects. It is at once the nature of the land's surface, the plant life that covers it, and the structures that humans place on it. The look of an agricultural landscape can reveal the depth to which human interaction and investment of energies has taken place. The association forged between people and place is the most elusive quality of the landscape to define, measure, conserve and protect.

Land trusts have always recognized that stewardship is a critical piece of the land protection effort. It is also perhaps the most challenging part of land conservation. Landowners and

land trusts work in partnership to develop an appropriate conservation mechanism, to better enable the landowners to achieve their own long-term stewardship goals. Typical conservation mechanisms include the outright donation of land, the donation or sale of a conservation easement, or a bargain sale of the property. Whatever the chosen mechanism, once it is formally completed, the land trust's stewardship activities begin.

Generally, this stewardship process centers on the following tasks: administering the conservation easement, completing baseline documentation reports, conducting an annual monitoring and enforcement of the easement, and engaging education and outreach efforts to owners of conserved lands about methods for better land management. All throughout the process, it is critical for us all to remember first and foremost that each completed land protection project is a demonstration of mutually shared interests and understandings, a transaction completed in partnership. An essential element of successful stewardship is maintaining the positive relationships that will continue in partnership for truly stewarding the land. In other words, land trusts and landowners alike, we are people taking care of the land.

MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

We're the only statewide land trust devoted exclusively to farmland protection. 95% of our budget is funded by individual donors/members. Please join us. With your help, we can meet the challenge.



Membership Categories:

- Individual..... \$25
 - Family..... \$45
 - Sustaining..... \$100
 - 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 _____

Please mail with your check 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: Good Stewardship — Managing Our Funds Well

Stewardship. As noted in the article by guest columnist Rachel Collin Therrien, Maine Farmland Trust's land stewardship responsibilities lie in its maintaining good relationships with landowners whose land is protected by the easements we hold, and in careful monitoring of those lands to ensure the terms of the easements are followed. In a broader sense, though, good stewardship also must underlie everything we do here at Maine Farmland Trust, including managing our financial resources in a way that will ensure the long-term viability of the organization.

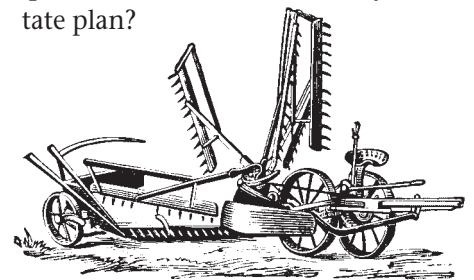
Of course, we have a General Operating Fund, from which our day-

to-day expenses are budgeted. In addition, our Easement Stewardship Fund was established when we accepted our first conservation easement, and that fund continues to grow with contributions from easement donors and others interested in stewardship of our protected properties. This Fund can be used for monitoring costs and keeps money available, if and when necessary, to pay for any actions necessary to address easement violations.

Recently, the Board of Directors adopted a very forward-looking approach to stewarding the generous contributions of our supporters by formally establishing three additional funds: an **Operating Endowment**

Fund, to be invested for the long term health of the organization, a **Land Opportunity Fund** specifically for project transaction costs, such as appraisals, legal work, options, and rights of first refusal, and a **Revolving Loan Fund**, from which we can "borrow" in order to take advantage of unique land protection opportunities, and then repay through fund-raising for the particular project.

These special funds will provide supporters with additional choices as to how they might help save farms and farmland. We invite you to "try out" these funds! Why not make a special gift now, and/or include a bequest to one of the funds in your estate plan?



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.

**At MAINE FARMLAND TRUST,
we're weighing our
successes, working
on challenges.**

Read all about it inside!



PHOTO BY DOUGLAS ALBERT

Meet Susie O'Keeffe, working with passion, finding hope

"I learned that helping local farmers prosper was the best way to protect the things I care so much about."



FarmLink Coordinator Susie O'Keeffe grew up on her family's 90 acre farm in New York State, right next to her uncle's Black Angus farm. "It was a great way to grow up," says Susie, "It nurtured my passion for animals, farm work and rural community that is still central in my life today."

After graduating from college Susie worked in international environmental policy. "I figured we could stop what was happening to the farms, local communities and

the environment by simply changing the laws. A few years in policy cured me of that delusion!"

Susie then moved to the French Alps to work with a local farming community. "It was much more rewarding to be working directly with people to help them protect and celebrate their communities, land and lifestyles," Susie says about her work in France. "This work also inspired me to look more closely at the connections between agriculture, community and wildlife. The

French don't always separate their farms and their parks. There were some interesting conflicts, but also inspiring compromises. I learned that helping local farmers prosper was the best way to protect the other things I care so much about."

Susie says she loves working as Coordinator for Maine FarmLink. "I came to Maine because there's such a great group of people working to save farming here. I really wanted to be part of that effort. FarmLink is tangible. I'm directly involved in keeping farmland active and helping people get started on their own farms. It gives me hope and feels great!"

Susie lives in Freedom, Maine. In her spare time she's learning to work with draft horses and is looking for her own farm. Susie is also very interested in dream research, and is an avid telemark skier.