

Two New Conservation Easements Donated to MFT



PHOTO BY FRANK MILES

182-acre Stearns Hill Farm in West Paris provides beautiful views across prime farm fields. The easement allows for very limited development while protecting the property's agricultural values and prime soils.

Farmlands in West Paris and Cornville Now Permanently Protected

MAINE FARMLAND TRUST has recently received two donations of conservation easements protecting a total of 196 acres of farmland. These generous donations by visionary farmland owners serve as a fine example for landowners concerned about keeping their land available for agriculture in the future.

Bill and Jane Gibson are sixth-generation owners of Stearns Hill Farm in

West Paris. Bill notes that his forebears were hardworking farmers. All the while maintaining a small dairy herd, they went from logging in the winter, right on to sugaring, then to planting the fields, haying, harvesting the fields, gardens and orchards, and right back into logging. Farming was intensive work, but it was a satisfying way of life and a way of staying connected with the land and community. While

Bill and Jane have not farmed the property as actively as their predecessors, they have continued to produce high quality hay, maple syrup, and timber for some thirty years, as well as providing hand-somely for themselves with

produce from their gardens and fruit trees.

Stearns Hill Farm, with its prime soils, spectacular 360-degree vistas and beautiful fields gently sloping to the south, would have made many desirable residential lots. Indeed, what were neighboring farms on both sides are now small lots and residential devel-

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PHOTO BY FRANK MILES

Bill and Jane Gibson, sixth generation owners of Stearns Hill Farm.

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Lakeside Orchards Protected by Land for Maine's Future

On May 22, 2002, Penny and Reed Markley conveyed a conservation easement on Lakeside Orchards in Manchester to the Department of Agriculture as a key farmland project in the state's Land For Maine's Future program. This successful project has demonstrated the link between farmland protection and farm viability.

The effort began two years ago, when the Markleys began considering whether the Land for Maine's Future [LMF] Program could help them accomplish their goal: to retire and sell their 195 acre orchard to another farmer. Working with Maine Farmland Trust and the Department of Agriculture, they prepared an application and in early 2001, their project was selected as a finalist by the LMF Board.

The Markleys had potential buyers, Steven and Marilyn Meyerhans, who at the time were leasing and operating the orchards. The orchard was doing well, but the market price of the land

was an obstacle—it was highly valued for home sites, being located on a major highway and overlooking Lake Cobbosseecontee. While the Markleys did not want to see their land taken out of agriculture and developed into residential lots, they needed to get their equity out of the land. But the Meyerhans could not afford to invest in farmland at a “house lot” price. Nor did the community want to see this local orchard disappear!

Fortunately for all concerned, the project was a good match for the use of farmland protection funds from the Land For Maine's Future program, augmented by federal farmland protection dollars. These funds made it possible for the State to purchase a conservation easement that permanently restricts development and preserves the land for agricultural

use. The Meyerhans were then able to buy the orchard at its farm value. Now they are busy selling apples in their first season as owners of this protected property.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAINE DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Reed and Penny Markley protected Lakeside Orchards through the Land For Maine's Future program.



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About Land for Maine's Future

2,744 acres protected to date

The Land for Maine's Future Program was created in 1987, initially in response to concerns over the loss of critical natural areas and wildlife habitat along with traditional access to undeveloped lands for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation. The Program now also specifically includes farmland protection. To date, 2,744 acres of working farmland have been protected through the support of Land for Maine's Future. Working with other state

agencies, including the Maine Department of Agriculture, and numerous local governments and charitable nonprofit groups, the Land for Maine's Future Board adheres to a “willing seller only” policy. The bulk of the funding for these land protection projects comes from a \$50 million bond, overwhelmingly approved by Maine voters in 1999. Up to \$5 million of this bond was earmarked for purchase of development rights on farmland.



Protecting
Maine's
farmland,
now and for
the future...

MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

We're the only statewide land trust devoted exclusively to farmland protection. Please join us. With your help, we can meet the challenge.

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

Name _____

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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 \$ _____.

Please mail with your check to:

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

New Initiative Focused on Waldo County in Partnership with Unity Barn Raisers

Maine Farmland Trust is teaming up with a local community organization based in Unity to help preserve farmland in western Waldo County. MFT has hired George Maendel of Montville to contact landowners, put together applica-

tions to state and federal agencies, and to help develop farmland protection strategies for this region. George will be assisted by a local committee recruited by the partnering organization, Unity Barn Raisers. farming remains economically important, and where farmland protection is critically needed, but where there is not yet a history of this sort of activity. One goal is to provide needed services to a region; another goal is to develop a model for engaging and coordinating community support to effect local projects. MFT hopes to take what it learns from this initiative in western Waldo County and apply it elsewhere in Maine. Funding for the initiative is being provided primarily by a third project partner, Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), through its Maine Farms Project.

There is not yet a history of farmland protection in this area.

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The plan is to help "make deals happen" in a region where

For more information, George Maendel may be reached at (207) 948-2205, or call LouAnna Perkins, (207) 469-6465.

Farmland Protection, Bluegrass Style!



Never let it be said that farmland protection is all work and no play! This summer, Alison Dibble, president of Blue Hill Heritage Trust, composed a bluegrass song intended to get toes tapping while listeners were being reminded of the challenges of dwindling farmland. "Surely if we put our hearts and minds together, we can think of how to save farms here," sang Dibble, in harmony with MFT's LouAnna Perkins and Cass Crain at the annual meeting of Blue Hill Heritage Trust. The trio also performed the song at Perkinstock Bluegrass and Old-Time Music Festival.

How do we help retiring farmers meet their financial goals, and get new farmers onto affordable farms?

Last week Paul Birdsall stopped in to see me. That day I was preparing to show some land to Tom, a prospective farmer. Paul commented that in the 1970's, farms were practically being given away, but that now it's hard for farmers to afford farmland in his community or almost anywhere in Maine. At Tom's pained look, Paul added optimistically that good opportunities still can be found.

One of the things I've learned during my first six months with FarmLink is that those opportunities, as Paul pointed out, are truly hard to come by and getting harder all the time. In Maine, we have many farmers who are ready to retire, often without family members who want to take over. We also have a solid group of individuals who want to farm. The missing link, in my mind, is this: how do we help retiring farmers meet their financial goals, and get new farmers like Tom onto affordable farms?

Many Maine farms that are up for sale will not remain farms without our help.

We are starting to protect good farmland, thanks to people like Paul, and to Maine Farmland Trust, the Land For Maine's Future program, and some local land trusts. State and federal agencies, Cooperative Extension and local community groups are also tackling this challenge, and the general public is demonstrating increasing support of local farmers. These are wonderful initiatives that we need to build on. However, there still are many farms for sale in Maine and most of them will not remain farms without our help.

Perhaps the most important step is to reach out to farm and farmland owners and encourage them to work with MFT and FarmLink. If you know of anyone who is thinking of moving

on from farming or selling, or if you yourself are, please contact me at FarmLink (207) 568-4160 or LouAnna Perkins at MFT (207) 469-6465.

Maine FarmLink, funded by MFT and co-sponsored by several organizations, is a program that connects farmers seeking farmland with retiring Maine farmers and farm owners who wish to see their agricultural lands remain active.



WOODCUT BY GABE MCPHAL

Two New Easements

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opment. Determined to protect their land prior to passing it on to the next generation, however, Bill and Jane decided on an agricultural conservation easement. The easement is designed to encourage broadly defined agricultural activities while preventing the prime areas of the farm from being divided and sold for house lots. The existing historic barn and residence are part of the defined "farmstead area" where additional structures relating to agricultural use may also be built, so that the farm may grow and change with the times.

Some residential development is allowed under the easement. Recognizing that future housing may be a need, the Gibsons reserved the right to allow the construction of no more than three single-family dwellings, which will include a new residence for themselves. The locations for potential development were selected such that there would be minimal impact on the farm's agricultural resources. The potential house lots certainly do not have the spectacular views that other locations would have afforded, but the Gibsons were steadfast in their determination to protect the best farmland for agricultural use. How for-

tunate for the community that Bill and Jane Gibson took steps to insure that such prime farmland will remain available for farmers in the future, and the views enjoyed by passers-by in all seasons will remain unspoiled!

A desire to protect an unusual land resource

Another landowner, who prefers to remain unnamed, has demonstrated a similar commitment to permanent land protection on a small but significant parcel of family land in Cornville. This land features an unusual natural resource: a native American Chestnut tree which has withstood the ravages of the disease known as the "chestnut blight" for most of this century. Desiring to protect this tree, as well as to ensure that the land remains undivided and available for farming and forestry in the future, the landowner conveyed a conservation easement to Maine Farmland Trust, in the hope that by doing so, others might also be inspired to think about protecting what is precious about our rural communities. Here again, future generations will benefit by the vision and generosity of a landowner dedicated to protection of Maine's precious natural resources.

From the President's Desk:

Where's the Money?

This is the essential question for almost all non-profits. In order to exist, non-profit organizations have to have money, and most of us spend a lot of time seeking grants and asking members and other supporters for funds.



Frank Miles

What's the need?

During Maine Farmland Trust's first two years we survived on several "start-up" grants. Last year we began to seriously seek new members. As of September 1 this year, we have 142 individual or family members, as compared to less than 50 a year ago. But funding for our annual operating budget of \$57,000 is as yet provided primarily by those initial grants, whose funding cycles are coming to a close.

To insure a stable financial base, we need to increasingly shift from reliance on grants to reliance on our members and generous donors. When one of our major grants expires after this year, we must make up the difference with in-

creased members and larger gifts. Replacement of a \$15,000 grant requires some equivalent combination of \$1,000 to \$10,000+ gifts to keep us secure and moving ahead with our mission.

What are we doing now?

We are working to increase our membership and also to find major donors who are as passionate about saving farmland as we are. We continue to mail membership-prospecting letters to selected lists and key individuals. Each new \$25 member pays for an hour of staff time. We are also using ideas and referrals from members to find potential donors.

You can help!

- Keep your membership current
- Contribute generously
- Bring in your friends
- Spread the word about MFT
- Buy from local farmers



Of course, it is crucial to make sure that you, our members, renew your memberships. Thus you get reminders before your membership expires. (And if your membership lapses, you'll get another reminder!) We also have our annual end-of-the-year fund drive, which is very important to us even if you simply make a small or modest contribution. This year's budget target for membership and annual fund totals \$11,000, in addition to \$30,000 anticipated budget for large gifts. It's a big challenge!

What can you do?

First, for sure, *renew* your membership each year.

Second, give as generously as you can at the end of the year when you get our annual fund letter.

Third, give us a hand finding new members. Phone (469-6465) or e-mail (mft@midmaine.com) to advise us of potential friends of farming and farmland. If we can use your name in a letter to your friend, it's a more effective letter. (Rest assured, we do not hound people. We send one prospecting letter with membership materials and may follow some prospects up with a newsletter, but then we let it rest.)

Fourth, "sell" Maine Farmland Trust and farmland protection whenever you have a chance. Talk to others about our mission, and let them know why it's important to support our efforts.

Finally, support your local farmers at their farms, farm stands, and farmers' markets. If we have prosperous farmers, we protect farmland in the best way possible.

Don't miss the 5th Maine Farmland Forum on December 7, 2002: Fair Taxes for Maine Farmers

Taxes are a vital issue for farmers.

**How can we use the state's existing tax policy more effectively?
What changes should be made to better support Maine farms?**

Maine Farmland Trust and Maine Farm Bureau will co-sponsor an all-day conference on farm tax issues. There will be an overview on taxes, followed by a panel discussion, "Working Towards Solutions" and break-out sessions on topics such as:

- Using the Farm and Open Space Law
- Farm Transfers
- How to Work with your Local Assessor
- Effective Lobbying
- Business Tax Strategies
- Basic Estate Planning

This conference is a must for farmers and farmland owners.

Takes place at Kennebec Valley Technical College in Fairfield.

Registration fee is \$20 if received prior to Nov. 23; \$25 at the door.

8:30 AM to 3:30 PM ■ Buffet lunch included.

To register or for more information call Maine Farmland Trust, 469-6465.



P.O. Box 1597 • Bucksport, Maine 04416
207-469-6465 / e-mail: mft@midmaine.com

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.

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Maine Farmland Trust presently has projects in 16 communities.



We've tripled our membership, and we're still growing. We're working with state and local groups, and with individual farmers to protect land and keep it producing.



Read about our latest successes inside!



Meet Board Member Paul Birdsall— for 25 Years, A Horsepower Farmer and Land Protection Activist

As you drive down Route 15 toward Blue Hill it is hard to miss the sign for Horsepower Farm in Penobscot. Situated on one of the fertile glacial outwash ridges of the peninsula, Horsepower Farm was combined from two abandoned farms which Paul and Molly Birdsall discovered when they sailed into Blue Hill Bay in 1972.

Moving onto the land in 1973, Paul bought his first workhorse and has been working the land, selling the produce locally, ever since. He

now partners with his sons, who live nearby, assisted by apprentices who come to live and learn on the farm. "Before Molly died, she always said our most important function was education," Paul says. 130 apprentices have spent time with the Birdsalls over the past 25 years.

Paul became active in farmland preservation over 25 years ago, first with his involvement with Hancock County Regional Planning Commission, and then with the local Soil and Water Conservation board,

working to identify farmland that was at risk of development. Paul also joined the board of the Blue Hill Heritage Trust. "They were protecting viewsheds and shorefront property," Paul says. "I just wanted to make sure they knew about the need to protect farmland, too." BHHT has since been very successful in permanently protecting hundreds of acres of farmland in the area, including Horsepower Farm.

Paul has been active in Maine Farmland Trust since its inception. We are very fortunate to have a board member with his depth of commitment to farming and to farmland protection.

...I just wanted to make sure they knew about the need to protect farmland, too.