

Our Goal: Preserve 100,000 Acres in 5 Years

Maine Farmland Trust has helped preserve over 9,500 acres of Maine farmland over the past seven years – a notable achievement. But given current trends, so much more is needed.

MFT estimates that as much as 250,000-400,000 acres of Maine farmland will be in transition in the next 10-15 years, as aging farmland owners sell or die. Without some kind of intervention, much of that land will be lost to development.

In response to this challenge, MFT's Board of Directors has set an ambitious goal: to preserve 100,000 acres of Maine farmland in the next five years.

Though ambitious, the goal is also grounded in reality. Each of MFT's four major programs is well poised to meet a share of this goal.

■ **Donated Easements.** With recent changes in federal tax law, it has never been more advantageous to consider donating an easement on farmland. MFT expects a large increase in donated easements, and has recently added staff to handle new demand.

■ **Purchased Easements.** The political climate seems right for new bond funding for the Land for Maine's Future program (LMF) and for renewal of the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. Both programs



MFT aims to significantly increase its impact. Shown here (in Somerset, Cumberland and Lincoln Counties), three of the dozens of farms already preserved.



earmark funds to purchase agricultural easements.

■ **FarmLink.** MFT has recently secured grant funds to expand this proven program, which connects landowners selling farms with farmers seeking land. Increasingly, MFT sees opportunities to preserve farmland as part of FarmLink deals.

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■ **Buy/Protect/Sell.** This newly-launched program (see story on page 2) could help MFT protect as much as 10,000 acres a year.

A key to MFT's ability to realize its goal is to continue to expand its membership, so that more people become aware of MFT's vital mission and lend support wherever they can.



Buy/Protect/Sell

New Program Targets Most Vulnerable Farms

MFT recently launched a new program through which it will buy farm properties, place agricultural easements on them, and then re-sell them to new farmers (at “farmland” prices, rather than development prices).

The idea behind “Buy/Protect/Sell,” as MFT calls this program, is not new within the land conservation community; but the concept has not been systematically applied to farm properties across Maine, as MFT is now beginning to do.

This program allows MFT to preserve farms that owners want to sell. These are arguably among the most vulnerable farm properties that exist, because they are either on the market or about to go on the market.




MFT's new program will enable it to buy and protect key farm properties before they are sold or subdivided.

MFT will choose which properties it buys strategically, with an eye toward what farmers are looking to buy. Through its FarmLink program, MFT already maintains a database of farmers who are seeking new land. FarmLink thus gives MFT a clear advantage in implementing a program of this sort.

To date, MFT has purchased one farm property, has two others under contract, and is trying to negotiate an

option to purchase a fourth.

Funds to cover program operations have been generously provided through the Maine Community Foundation and the Davis Conservation Foundation.

MFT is still seeking capital funds, as are needed to cover the cost of land acquisition until properties are re-sold. MFT is seeking investors looking to support a worthy cause. Contact MFT's offices for more information. 

Sabans Preserve Their 128-Acre Farm in Palermo

A 128-acre farm in Palermo belonging to Millard and Colleen Saban will be permanently protected from commercial or residential development. The Sabans recently donated an agricultural conservation easement to Maine Farmland Trust.


MFT is very grateful for the Sabans' generosity and vision. This easement ensures that this land will stay in farming forever.

Millard Saban said that he began thinking about putting his farm under easement two years ago when he was concerned about high property taxes for farmland. But in the end, Saban placed an easement on his property for a wide range of reasons, the most important being his commitment to keep his land in agriculture.

The Saban easement exempts a 450'x980' parcel for the current farmhouse and barn, and allows the construction of an additional single-family home within the farmstead area.



PHOTOS BY NINA YOUNG

MFT's agricultural easements are designed to provide flexibility. The goal is to keep farmland working. MFT crafts easements that protect the land without burdening the farmer. 

Millard and Colleen Saban grew corn, bean and hay crops for their dairy herd, which was housed on another farm nearby.

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Staff Update

NINA YOUNG of Belfast joined the staff in January. She comes to MFT with experience in real estate, conservation-based development, and local planning. She will manage a portfolio of land projects and help support MFT's new Buy/Protect/Sell program.

DENIS THOET of West Gardiner left regular employment at MFT in January. He had ably supported MFT's development efforts over the past two years. He plans to devote more time to his farm, but remains committed to MFT and is willing to help out where he can. We thank Denis for all he has done!

MFT Prevents Unity Subdivision

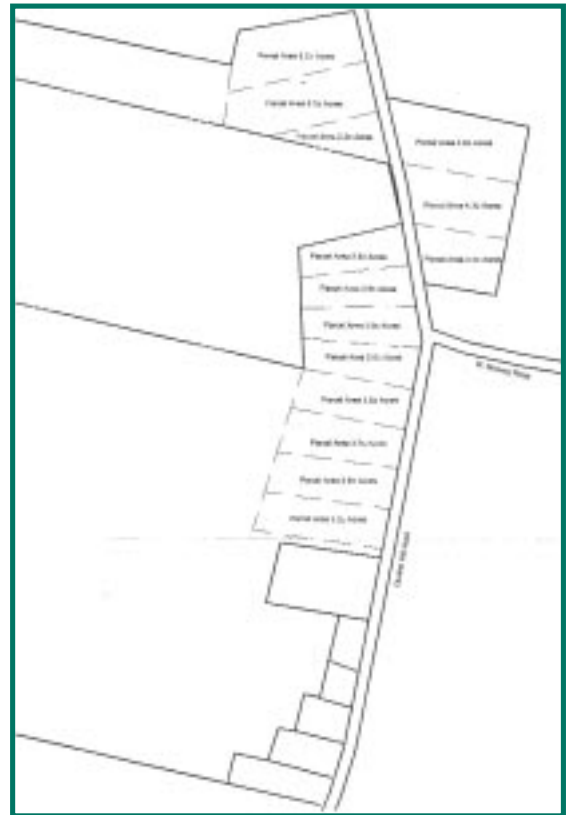
It was everything you fear. A developer snatched up a large piece of farmland within hours of it coming on the market, and then submitted a proposal for a major subdivision to the local planning board. And the subdivision was the worst imaginable, laid out with no regard for the farmland.

Located in Unity, the 230-acre property contains about 100 acres of farmland, which for many years had been informally "leased" to a local dairy farmer. The proposed subdivision would not only have resulted in the loss of good farmland, but hurt the dairy farm.

Most people don't realize it, but many farmers rely on the use of land they do not own. It is estimated that Maine's dairy farms alone utilize over 150,000 acres in this way. This land is often critical to a farm's financial viability; but unfortunately, this land is also highly vulnerable to development. Because much of this land is owned by retired farmers or other elderly persons, it will soon be in transition. Its future is uncertain.

That was the case with the property in Unity. The land recently passed on to the next generation and was put on the market. It sold almost immediately to a developer.

Fortunately, Maine Farmland Trust was familiar with the property, because it lies within the target area for its "Fields & Forests Forever" project (see story on page 5). MFT immediately contacted both the developer and a local couple it thought might be inter-



Phase 1 of this subdivision proposed cutting up good farmland into thirteen 3-5 acre house lots. Through MFT's efforts, this land will now be preserved.

ested in buying and protecting the land.

The story took many twists and turns, but finally resulted in the couple buying the property from the developer. They are now working with MFT to permanently preserve the farmland through an agricultural easement.

In the end, the entire property will be preserved, except for a small "farmstead" area where the couple will make a home and begin to do some farming. And most of the land will continue to be available for use by a local dairy farm.

This story has a happy ending. But for every happy ending, there are hundreds of farm properties needlessly chopped up. That is exactly why MFT is working hard to expand its programs, membership, and fundraising.



Farmer on Preserved Land Tackles Barn Next

by Ellen S. Gibson

My aunt and uncle, Jane and Bill Gibson, donated an agricultural easement on Stearns Hill Farm in West Paris to Maine Farmland Trust in December 2002. As with all easements, it was a negotiated agreement between the Gibsons and MFT for their mutual benefit. They found their goals were similar — to keep farmland in farming.



PHOTO COURTESY THE BETHEL CITIZEN

The Stearns Hill barn will once again be a vital part of a working farm, thanks to a grant from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

My husband and I have since purchased this farm. Has the easement changed our operations? Altered our future outlook? Limited our options? Not at all! What it has done is emphasize our role as *stewards* of the property. Our family now represents the eighth and ninth generations of continual ownership. We look forward to taking care of the land, secure in the knowledge that after our tenure its fields and forests will remain intact.

At the same time, we struggle with the financial reality of bringing our plans into action. A big concern has been the barn on the property. Barns loom large on the landscape, reminders that agriculture once played a much larger role in Maine life. Not so long ago, everyone had to have a barn. Today they are falling down at an alarming rate, succumbing to economic shifts and disuse.


But barns were always adapted to

keep up with changes in agriculture, and they can still be adapted. Last summer we applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission to make repairs to the foundation and stabilize the structure. Receiving the grant was

a direct outcome of talking to many contractors and barnwrights, taking time to document the barn's condition with photographs, and learning how the barn has changed over time. The process of adaptations continues

as we decide how best to use the space.

My experience with our barn has spawned the "Barn Story" project where we hope to encourage others to save barns. The first step is documenting the current state of the barn with photographs. This leads to understanding more about the history of the barn. Old-timers in your community may have memories about the structure that will add greatly to your

knowledge. This process can work with your own barn or one you'd like to save in your community. The sheer size of a barn can be intimidating, but these gentle giants have wonderful stories to tell. Those stories increase awareness to the plight of these beautiful buildings and their importance on the Maine landscape. 

Ellen S. Gibson created the "Save the Barn on Stearns Hill Farm" 2007 calendar to raise matching funds for a \$10,000 grant. The calendar can be viewed through the farm's website: www.stearns Hill farm.com.



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 the Maine Farmland Trust office at 207-338-6575.



FarmLink Quiz

You may know that FarmLink connects prospective farmers seeking land with other farmland owners who want to sell and wish to see their agricultural lands remain active.

But how much do you really know? Take the quiz and find out.

1 The best way for a retiring farmer to maximize his return is to sell his land to a developer.

FALSE: Many sellers will lose sizable portions of their price in capital gains. But a strategy that preserves the farmland and then sells it to an interested farmer creates a combination of tax benefits and income that can equal the value of selling to a developer (while simultaneously saving the farm and helping out a new farmer).

2 Most of the people seeking land through FarmLink are young and inexperienced.

FALSE: Only about a third of our applicants need to gain more experience. Another third are young but have considerable experience. And the final third are experienced farmers seeking new land.

3 The majority of the people seeking land through FarmLink cannot afford most properties.

FALSE: Though some of our applicants have limited funds, we are currently working with several people who can pay market value.

4 The only way you can transfer a farm is by selling it.

FALSE: There are many other tenancy options, including long-term lease, lease with option to buy, and gradual transfer through partial ownership.



PHOTO COURTESY THE TIMES RECORD

We call it “speed dating.” At January’s Agricultural Trade Show, FarmLink put a dozen retiring farmers in a room with people seeking to buy farmland, then organized 10-minute one-on-one conversations. It proved a good first step in expanding FarmLink’s activity and impact.

Fields & Forests Forever


First-of-its-kind LMF project proves its worth

Four years ago, MFT began investing time in a region of central Maine where farming remains active, but where development pressures were beginning to mount, and where there was no local land trust or history of farmland preservation. MFT’s focus area — which included portions of eastern Kennebec County and western Waldo County — overlapped with “Unity Wetlands,” a 50,000 acre region of bogs, marshes, woodland, and working farms that is relatively undeveloped and unfragmented by roads.

Through MFT’s presence in the region, local farmers began to consider preservation options in ways they had never before. Beyond this, MFT partnered with Unity Barn Raisers, a local community group, to help catalyze the creation of Friends of Unity Wetlands, a

new local land trust. This all led to the submittal of a first-of-its-kind application to the Land for Maine Future program (LMF).

The LMF application was novel in that it focused on a region, rather than an individual farm property. This has given MFT and its local partners great flexibility to negotiate with farmland owners, and to substitute new properties — where warranted — without delays. The regional approach has also resulted in broader local support, an enhanced ability to piggyback on federal preservation programs, and the donation of several additional easements.

Entitled “Fields & Forests Forever,” this project is expected to be complete in late 2007. MFT expects that this effort will permanently preserve over 2,000 acres of working lands in central Maine. 

When this project is complete in late 2007, over 2000 acres of working land will be preserved forever.

Without viable farms, kiss Smart Growth goodbye

JOHN PIOTTI, MFT's executive director, wrote this article for *GrowSmart Maine*, summer 2006. In addition to his work with farmers, John has been active in local and regional planning issues for almost 20 years.

Let me be blunt. The only way we can ever hope to prevent sprawl in many rural areas is to build an economically viable farm sector. Profitable farms provide an economic check against various types of development that no other actions will ever prevent. We can work doggedly to create new land use ordinances that restrict development outside village centers, but local people will think these changes unfair, and never enact them, unless they feel that outlying farmland can be profitably farmed. We can talk 'til the cows come home about how farmland is a precious resource that must be saved for the future, but there will never be enough public funding to permanently preserve more than a small percentage of Maine farmland unless farming is viewed as a critical business sector, not only important today, but poised for significant growth in the future.

In much of Maine, it's farmland that gets chopped into houselots or paved over. If we are serious about changing that, we need to change our perceptions about farming.

Contrary to popular opinion, farming in Maine is not dead or even dying. In fact, Maine is one of the few states where the number of farmers and acres in production have both grown in the last decade. That's not to say that some farms aren't struggling, or that others haven't gone out of business, including many dairy and potato farms that sell to commodity markets. But at the same time, there are great and growing opportunities

for farms that have developed local markets, countering the loss in commodity production. And there exist hundreds of prospective farmers who are ready, willing, and able to keep Maine farming vital for another generation. (At Maine Farmland Trust, we maintain a large database of such farmers.)

Despite all this good news, there remains a public misconception that farming has no future. Unfortunately,



PHOTO BY NINA YOUNG

this has the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophesy.

If farming is viewed as dying, communities will increasingly make misguided decisions that adversely burden farmers (such as running sewer lines past farm fields). If farming is viewed as having no future, far fewer public funds will be earmarked for farmland preservation. In both instances, farming's viability will diminish. A once profitable farm may become unprofitable if neighboring development forces taxes too high or restricts when a farmer can run equipment or spread manure. And many profitable farms will not survive a transition to a new owner if the farmland is not first permanently preserved.

This last point requires more clarification. Permanently preserving farmland is not the full answer to keeping

farming viable, but it is part of the answer. Once protected, farmland will be sold as its value as farmland, rather than as developable land. This will allow many more prospective farmers to begin new enterprises, and make it economically possible for far more farmland to stay in production after it is sold.

For the past decade I've worked at a state-wide non-profit that has helped over 400 Maine farms become more profitable (through business planning and market development services). But I've recently left to join Maine Farmland Trust, because it has become so clear to me that all of the positive strides Maine agriculture has taken in the past few years will be lost, if Maine does not significantly increase the amount of farmland that is permanently preserved. (Currently at less than 2%!)

The severity of this pending crisis cannot be overstated. So many farmland owners are of a certain age that a huge portion (perhaps 35%) of Maine farms will be sold in the next 10-15 years. When that happens, many farms that are now profitable will cease to be so, because the new owners will have to pay such a high price for the land that farming will not be a viable option. Preserving this land is the only practical way to keep sale prices down and future farm operations profitable.

Any analysis of the future of farming is complicated and conflicting. On the one hand, Maine has done so much to create a new agricultural economy. We are the envy of many states, and are well poised for the future. On the other hand, farming is threatened by public misconceptions that undermine needed support, and by a looming crisis (due to aging farmland owners) if we don't greatly boost

Continued on next page

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.



PHOTO BY KIRSTEN LINDGREN

Membership Categories:

- Basic (e.g., Student) \$20
- Individual \$30
- Family \$50
- Contributor \$100
- Life \$1000
...or you can make payments toward your life membership
- (4 payments) \$250
- (2 payments) \$500
- Additional donation \$ _____.
- Please contact me about protection options for my farm property.

Name _____

Address _____

Town, State, Zip _____

Telephone _____

e-mail _____

PAYMENT: CHECK ENCLOSED VISA MASTERCARD

Credit Card No.: _____ Exp. _____

Signature: _____

Mail to: Maine Farmland Trust, 97 Main St., Belfast, ME 04915.

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

Smart Growth *Continued from page 6*

efforts to preserve farmland.

But not everything is unclear. We do know that viable farming could be a great positive force within rural Maine, economically and environmentally. And we also know that our actions will make the difference. Simply put, the future of farming is in our hands.

Here's what you can do to help:

- **Buy local:** Contribute to the growing success of Maine farms.
- **Talk up Maine farming:** Persuade others that Maine agriculture can have a bright future. (And call MFT if you'd like someone to talk to a group.)
- **Support farmland preservation:** Join in helping Maine do far more in this area, which is so necessary to attract new farmers and to keep farms profitable.
- **Connect farming and smart growth:** Spread word that a vibrant farm economy is needed to help prevent sprawl. Profitable farms will not only provide an economically viable alternative to development, but create a climate where communities become willing and able to make better land-use decisions.



2006 FINANCIAL REPORT

Income	
Contributions	\$151,572
Grants	\$187,500
Program Fees	\$1,725
Other Income	\$2,788
Total Income	\$343,585
Transfers from prior year contributions	\$ 1,640
Transfers from Board Restricted Funds	\$18,250
Total Income and Transfers	\$363,475
Expenses	
Program	\$244,021
Management	\$10,415
Fundraising	\$16,584
Total Expenses	\$271,020
Transfer to Stewardship Account	\$5,500
Transfer to Unexpended Grant Funds	\$74,000
Transfer to Temp. Restricted Account	\$10,045
Total Expenses and Transfers	\$360,565
Net	\$2,910
Account Balances	
Board Restricted Funds	\$173,344
Unrestricted Funds	\$67,532
Net Assets	\$240,876

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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.

72

Number of farms that MFT has protected or is in the process of protecting

14,711

Number of acres these farms represent

Read more about our work inside!



PHOTO BY DOUG ALBERT



From the Field: Notes from our Executive Director

A great start: New programs, members and funds

Nine months into my tenure as MFT's Executive Director, I could not be happier with the progress we've made. We have vastly expanded our programming, practically doubled our membership, and raised far more money (from both foundations and individuals) than ever before. We have a great staff and board, and an ever-increasing network of partnerships with other organizations. Our mission is critically important. We are exceptionally well poised to make a real contribution to the future of Maine.

I believe that the keys to our on-

going success will be vision, boldness, and engagement.

We must continue to articulate how Maine agriculture is not just important in and of itself, but critical to the future of our state's economy and quality of life. We must be willing to think big (really BIG), because the need for farmland preser-

vation is so great. And we must reach out to everyone we can — across all of Maine and beyond — to engage them in our cause.

Your role is crucial to our efforts. Please help spread word wherever and whenever you can! With your help, we can work wonders.

—*John Piotti*



PHOTO BY NINA YOUNG