



## PRESERVING WORKING LANDS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

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## A Message from our Executive Director

Shed of summer's verdure and with autumn's grandeur cast in corners and strewn on forest floors, the earth is still and intimate. Skies are bright over the stubble fields, but the air is cool and our walks in the forest rattle over-loud in the leaves, rudely breaking the silence. The land and we brace ourselves for winter. The holidays will soon be here but as November begins, we take a breath – and take in some good news:

At Connecticut Farmland Trust, the harvest is in. We are pleased and proud to announce that both the McCaw and Beltane Farm projects will close before the end of this year. With Szegda Farm, 2013 will see three Connecticut farms permanently protected.

Both McCaw and Beltane have been in the works for some time and we are thrilled to have them cross the line this year. You have all contributed to that success and I can't thank you enough.

In this issue you will also have a chance to hear from former CTNOFA board member Sven Pihl on breaking new ground and Susan Mitchell will

introduce the New Connecticut Farmer Alliance, with whom we are proud to partner.

This has been a year of great transition. In place of our longstanding Celebration of Connecticut Farms, we've reached out to you in a number of new ways: we held three farm tours around the state, hosted a volunteer picnic in partnership with Southbury Land Trust, and welcomed Chef Michel Nischan and 50 guests to Chamard Vineyards for a wonderful dinner in October.

Throughout it all, your support for our mission has made the difference. I can't thank you enough for your commitment to the protection of Connecticut's agricultural heritage: Please consider the protection of Szegda, McCaw and Beltane farms an early present to all. Stay warm, be well.

Yours in the land,

James K. Gooch, Executive Director

## Collaboration Protects Szegda Farm in Columbia

Entering Columbia from the west on Route 66, a rolling vista of pastures and fields greets the visitor; Ron Szegda's family farm has marked the gateway to the town for more than a century. This 109-acre farm has been protected by the joint effort of the

Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DoAg), the Town of Columbia, the Joshua's Trust, and the Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT). The agricultural easement is jointly held by DoAg, the Town of Columbia, and CFT and ensures that,



## Collaboration Protects Szegda Farm in Columbia

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while the land may change hands many times in the years to come, it will always be available for agriculture.

Farmed by the Szegda family since the early 1900s, the family made the switch to more viable dairy cattle in the 1950s.

Ron Szegda has lived on and farmed the land there for his entire life. Concerned that the land might be lost to development and worried that he would have to sell out when he could no longer farm, in 2006 Mr. Szegda began searching for a way to protect his family's legacy. But it wasn't until 2010, when Mr. Szegda caught the attention of DoAg's Farmland Preservation Program, that things began to come together.

"The Szegda Farm development rights purchase preserves local history, scenic views, the town's rural character and local agricultural resources. Columbia's border with Hebron will forever more be a beautiful gateway to our special town. Columbia thanks its local and state taxpayers, the Connecticut Farmland Trust, Joshua's Trust, and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program." – First Selectman Carmen Vance, Town of Columbia

"These things can take time," said Jim Gooch, Executive Director of CFT. "The family wants the best outcome – for their land and for their own future – the State and the Town need to be cautious about spending the people's money. Even CFT needs time to raise funds and do our due diligence. But at the end of the day, we all want the same thing: ensuring the future of Connecticut agriculture by protecting the land it relies on."

With the State providing lead funding and the Town of Columbia and Joshua's Trust committing



Above: Southerly hilltop view of the Szegda Farm fields.  
At right the Szegda Barn a New England classic.




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***"...we all want the same thing: ensuring the future of Connecticut agriculture by protecting the land it relies on."***

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funds to the deal, CFT contributed both privately-raised capital and a double-layer of protection: "We will visit this farm every year, just to be sure the land is being well-used.

That's an obligation we legally assume forever," said Gooch.

Szegda's land was a priority because of the high quality of its soils. Connecticut's farms are home to some of the world's best growing soil, and protecting that resource for the future is the aim

of DoAg's Farmland Preservation Program and CFT. Today, that land supports Szegda's dairy operation with hay and corn production. When the Szegdas no longer farm it, that land will serve the next farmer, and the next.

Directly across the road from the 40-acre Robinson farm (also protected by DoAg), and within two miles of over 600 acres of active farmland, the Szegda farm is a key parcel in a patchwork of thriving agricultural production. "CFT intentionally works to foster agricultural nodes," said Gooch. "The more robust farming activity there is in a place, the healthier the agricultural economy of that place will be."

As for Ron Szegda, the satisfaction is personal. ***"I am happy to preserve the land," he said, "because if I didn't, I'd have to sell it. Continuing to operate my small dairy in my retirement brings me great joy."***



PHOTO: PATRICK LEE



## New Connecticut Farmer Alliance: Connecting the Next Generation of Farmers Across Connecticut

As a farmer-led and farmer-driven group, we are all incredibly busy during the growing season months of April through November. Thankfully we have the slower winter months (or not so slow if you are also in winter production) to meet and plan the course of action for the coming year ahead. It was last winter that we approached CFT with the idea of becoming our fiscal sponsor so that we could continue to support the growing needs of the young and beginning farmer community in a meaningful way. We are incredibly thankful and excited to now be working alongside our state's only land trust dedicated to farmland protection, a resource terribly important to beginning farmers who often find farmland very difficult to access in this state.



Our small organization began in the fall of 2010 when a group of three farmer-friends all asked the same question; "Where are all the young farmers in Connecticut?" At that time, I was new to the state, working in my first season here, and didn't know a soul. Looking around at the existing landscape, we saw no group focusing on the specific needs of young and beginning farmers so we decided to take on the task ourselves. In February of 2011 we held the first event of the New CT Farmer Alliance (NCTFA), a summit at the Auer Farm in Bloomfield which brought together of 50 young farmers from across the state along with a few hand-picked service providers. This event proved to us that there was an interest within the beginning farmer community to socialize, network, share resources, discuss challenges, and galvanize our energy.

Since this point we have slowly been growing, in an organic fashion. We created a website; developed a listserve so that folks across the state can talk to each other easily; hosted farm tours and potlucks at our member farms; organized a Farm Bill chat; presented at conferences at Stone

Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, AGvocate events, and the recent Farmland Access and Affordability Forum; and became an affiliate of the National Young Farmers Coalition. As our presence within the state grows, we have been successful in working with our agricultural partners so that together we can help to promote a more vibrant and accessible agricultural community for the next generation of growers. These farmers are often not from farm families, do not have easy access to farmland, do not rely on the income from off-farm jobs (for themselves or their partners), and are often not native to Connecticut, but they are devoted to create a livelihood growing food for their community. This next generation is small in scale, diverse in production (often growing a mix of vegetables, fruits, and livestock), focused on the use organic and sustainable growing practices, and market direct-to-consumer. This is the new face of agriculture in Connecticut, hence the name, the New Connecticut Farmer Alliance. Thank you for welcoming us into your community.

Susan Mitchell

on behalf of the NCTFA Steering Committee



Susan Mitchell

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***"Where are all the young farmers in Connecticut?"***

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## The Farm Bill Question

For several weeks, American farmers have been living under a regulatory regime that is over 50 years old. When the current Farm Bill expired, all that remained was “permanent law;” provisions of Agriculture policy that were established around World War II with no expiration date.

The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) and our partner-advocates in Washington have been pressing for a new 5-year Farm Bill for months. With the shutdown behind us things are again in motion.

On October 30, the proposed Farm Bill – with versions from both the Senate and the House – went into Conference. Legislators from both bodies will begin the touchy process of reconciling those versions. The road is far from over, but there are some notable changes that affect our work directly.

A mainstay of CFT’s conservation funding, the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), is slated to be combined with the Grasslands Reserve Program into a new “Agricultural Land Easements Program” (ALE). The LTA has endorsed the new structure and is advocating to see it fully funded.

We are also advocating for some substantive changes that could help us improve the pace and quality of conservation. Among them are:

- FRPP (and now ALE) funds to require a cash match. We would like ALE to recognize landowner donation of easement value as part of that match. The owner is giving up something real, but permitting that donation to count as match dollars

would increase the incentive and lessen the burden on groups like CFT to find additional funding.

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- Streamline the appraisal process. Appraisals for FRPP funding can cost as much as \$20,000 and the review process is time consuming – many months. Sometimes, by the time the appraisal is reviewed the appraisal itself is out of date.

- Streamline the application process. Oftentimes, the principal benefit to the landowner of involving CFT in the deal is our ability to guide them through the application.

- Under current FRPP guidelines, the final easement holder (CFT, e.g.) cannot be in the chain of title. That means it is currently impossible for CFT to purchase the land from a farmer, fund half the cost of the conservation easement with Federal money and then sell the underlying land to a new farmer. Changing that rule would provide us with a great deal more flexibility and enable us to work much faster.

Farm Bill conservation programs are some of the best investments our government makes. Protection of farmland protects our agricultural economy by securing the transition of the land base from one generation of farmers to all future communities. By deploying groups like CFT to help achieve these ends, the FRPP/ALE doubles the value of public investment and the impact on local economies is significant: every dollar spent on locally produced food produces two dollars in local economic activity.

Over half of the easements CFT now stewards were funded in part by FRPP.

LTA and our partners in Washington have been fighting for over two years for a new, 5-year Farm Bill. This year, you can have an important impact: **Senator Chris Murphy serves on the Senate Agriculture Committee. Your calls and letters to him in support of these measures will make a difference.**



## Sven Pihl's Story: How Permaculture Reshaped My Life

***In June of this year, Sven reached out to CFT after a blog post we wrote about the barriers to entry for young farmers in Connecticut. We were impressed with his story and want to share it with you.***

I grew up in rural Guilford on the Connecticut shoreline. As a child I ate from the family vegetable garden, and had grandparents that made Concord Grape and Crabapple Jelly from the vines and trees on our property. This “food” had a distinct difference from the slop served in school, which I never ate.

At 17, I entered the US Navy and was stationed in Key West, FL with people from all over the country and the world. These connections furthered my enjoyment of food, and deepened my discerning palate. After leaving the Navy, I lived in New Haven, the Food Mecca of Connecticut for seventeen years.

I jerked coffee, bounced at bars, was a building superintendent, and eventually took jobs in manufacturing. I worked my way up from the shop floor to Machine Designer, to Manufacturing Engineer and eventually managed manufacturing software implementations, upgrades, and management. This movement up the ladder was not smooth. I experienced what many others in the manufacturing industry had: layoffs. And like many others experiencing job losses in manufacturing, I started a successful home improvement business to get by. I bounced from engineering to remodeling depending on which market was more stable. My last position was writing work instructions to rebuild helicopter rotor assemblies on aircraft returning from Afghanistan.

In January of 2008 the nation experienced what I believe was a preventable economic disaster. I could say that I was one of its victims, but in reality, for me, it created an unprecedented opportunity for personal growth. At the time, the business sector was hemorrhaging 650,000 per month (13,000 per state by capita). By all accounts, there were no jobs to be had and I survived on unemployment benefits.

I began this new adventure by separating my wants from my needs. My fiscal needs, rent, utilities, car insurance, would be covered by unemployment benefits – but my nutritional needs would be ignored. Being a nature boy, a geek and an autodidact, the situation provided the opportunity to learn to provide for myself.

Shortly after this endeavor began, I was explaining my transformation to a friend. She asked me if I had ever heard of the practice of Permaculture – I went home, looked it up online, and found my Holy Grail. According to its founder, Bill Mollison, “Permaculture is about designing sustainable human settlements. It is a philosophy and an approach to land use which weaves together microclimate, annual and perennial plants, animals, soil, water management, and human needs into intricately connected, productive communities.”

After much trial and error, (and four years later) I became relatively self-sufficient. I grew everything I ate (less meat, grain, and dairy) in a 500 square foot garden and a 150 square foot food-forest, in New Britain, essentially making me a subsistence farmer. I had plenty of surplus food which I shared with neighbors or preserved.



*Sven Pihl's New Britain garden.*

Today, I am a Certified Permaculture Designer and Teacher. I have worked for several farms in

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*The Stuart Family Farm.*



*Hayride at Stuart Family Farm Picnic.*



*Jim Gooch and Michel Nischan at Chamard Vineyard event.*

# CONNECTICUT FARMLAND TRUST



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*(LEFT) Mildred the pig and farmer Bill Stuart.*



*(RIGHT) Mildred and Deb Stuart.*



*Southbury Land Trust and Connecticut Farmland Trust joint volunteer picnic at Lovdal Farms.*

SIX PHOTOS TO THE LEFT AND ABOVE COURTESY OF COLLETT ROY



SEVEN PHOTOS TO THE LEFT: PATRICK LEE

## Sven's Story

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Connecticut and I have served on the Board of Directors for CT NOFA (Northeast Organic Farming Association, Connecticut). Currently, I serve in working groups for P.I.N.E (Permaculture Institute of the Northeast), New Haven Food Policy Urban Agriculture, Connecticut Food System Alliance, and I administer the Connecticut Permaculture Guild on Facebook and Meetup.com.

I operate CT Edible Ecosystems and work with clients to harmoniously integrate their site, dwelling, food production, outbuildings, livestock, and wildlife. My projects include Permaculture Site Design, Edible Landscape Design, and Homestead Planning. An ongoing project is tracking the seasonal aesthetics of useful functional plants (edible, medicinal, insectary, etc.) so they can be incorporated into sustainable residential landscapes.

I teach Heirloom Skills, Sustainable Living and Self Sufficiency, Environmental Stewardship, Gardening, Farming, Permaculture, and the use of digital tools such as CAD for site planning and environmental design. I am actively engaged in educational food programs, school gardens, Community Resilience, and the local food and farming movement, including urban farming, in Connecticut and throughout the Northeast and believe in teaching through example.

I am currently working on a project assisting two farmers in design and build infrastructure on their 240-acre farm in Kent, Connecticut and consulting the New Britain High School on an Aquaponics Greenhouse.



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

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Stuart Family Farm	Bridgewater

If you are interested in learning more, please call us!  
Jim or Collette would be happy to talk – (860) 247-0202

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# CFT NEWS Fall/13

