



SUMMER 2025
agstewardship.org

Forever Farmland

IN THIS ISSUE Seeds of Conservation: How ASA Took Root 35 Years Ago **PAGE 3**

Farming with Forever in Mind *conserving land, water, and wildlife* **PAGE 6**

SLACK HOLLOW FARM
Argyle, NY

honoring our past, conserving our future



THIS YEAR ASA TURNED 35! We enjoy celebrating this shared achievement with you throughout the year at our events and programs. There are many people to thank and toast to honor our past while embracing new visions to ensure our future. ASA will be embarking on a strategic planning process to define our priorities for the next 5 years and we'll be looking for your input. Your feedback and perspective are especially important to us as ASA heads into the next few years. Please be sure to take our survey.

With the passing of milestones, it is a good time for reflection. Many nonprofits have similar beginnings. A grassroots initiative starts with conversations at a kitchen table; although in ASA's case, it was more often in barnyards and the basement of a veterinary clinic. A group of people see a concern on the horizon, band together, and make a decision. They can decide to be proactive, seek opportunities, and change the trajectory, or they can be reactive and try to minimize the impact.

We were fortunate to have the foresight and perseverance of our founders George Houser, Jr., Pam Cali, and Jim Perry, along with early assistance from George Allen, who collectively did not want to see our area's productive farmlands at risk, so they chose to be proactive. They rolled up their sleeves and got to work. The result, of course, was creating a nonprofit, community-supported land trust in the spring of 1990. They said the organization was "designed by local farmers for local farmers interested in farmland retention and agricultural stewardship." Jim Perry and George Allen recently shared their reflections on those early days as well as their thoughts on the future. You can find the article on Page 3.

In reviewing ASA's history, I'm not only struck by the growth of the organization since its inception but also reassured that we have stayed true to our roots. ASA remains focused on serving our agricultural communities. The representation on the board and ever-growing list of completed conservation projects reflect that core value. Nonetheless, we adapt and innovate to find tangible ways to accomplish our mission, so everyone understands the importance of working lands.

If there is one thing that we have learned in our 35 years, it's that we are not alone in this quest to protect working lands in Washington and Rensselaer counties. Many others are standing with us to buck the trend of New York State losing farmland at a rate of 50 acres every day. We have farmers stepping up to voluntarily conserve their lands for future generations.

We have communities and partner organizations that assist with projects. We have supporters, volunteers, and ambassadors also rolling up their sleeves to dig into the work that needs to be done. For that, we toast all of you and 35 amazing years!

With an abundance of gratitude,

RENEE J. BOUPLON
Executive Director

WE NEED YOUR INSIGHT!

As we create a new strategic plan to guide our work over the next several years, your insights are vital. We're asking community members to take a 10-minute anonymous survey to help us better understand what matters to you—the challenges you see, what is important to you, your experiences with ASA, and what you'd like to see in the future.

Please scan this QR code or visit ASA's website to take the survey. We'll be collecting input over the next couple of weeks. Thank you!

www.agstewardship.org



A VISION

35 Years and Over
33,000 Acres Conserved

2025 MARKS THE 35TH YEAR of land conservation for ASA. As proud as we are of having conserved over 33,600 acres, we're keenly aware that none of it would have been possible without the vision and commitment of the founding members and supporters. Earlier this spring, we invited two of the original four visionaries to our offices to share some of the original thinking and inspiration that led to the creation of ASA. We're so grateful to George Allen of Allenwaite Farm in Easton and Jim Perry of Perry's Orchards in Eagle Bridge for having the foresight, courage, and determination to protect our working lands.

Q: What experiences or events inspired you to pursue farmland conservation?

JP: For me, it started in college. I found out I liked farming and came home to farm. I saw how much hard work my forefathers did to clear land and to see houses go up on so much of it really burned me up.

GA: I spent a summer during college working at the NYS Assembly with Frank Whatley, one of the main sponsors of the agricultural district law that aimed to protect and promote agricultural land and offered benefits and protections to farmers. I did a lot of the research to bring the law to debate and eventually see it pass.

That experience along with the knowledge I gleaned from George Houser, an ASA co-founder, about the intricacies of ag law was also instrumental in sparking my interest.

We spent a lot of time talking about how to leverage the ag district law. At the same time, there was an influx of people moving north and building second homes.

Farms were struggling and we knew efficiency wasn't going to save us ... you need a critical mass to maintain an ag infrastructure that includes veterinarians, suppliers of fertilizers, machines, and refrigeration. We talked about having a land base that is more devoted to agriculture. We could see that if Washington County were to succumb to development, farming would be done in the region.

JP: I was also talking to town boards about the true cost of development. Everyone's going on about how 'they'll pay taxes' but there are other costs. I would show them the numbers, but nobody would believe it.

Continued on page 4



Q: How did the idea of forming an association transpire, and what were the priorities?

GA: We, being me, Jim, George Houser, and Pam Cali, spent many, many hours meeting late into the night at the Battenkill Veterinary offices, made available to us by Dave Horn. I'm not sure we knew exactly where things were going or what we could do, but we knew something was needed.

JP: I worked for NYS Soil & Water Conservation so I was familiar with our natural resources. I realized that out in the Midwest they had lots of land. But, they also had tornadoes, floods, and droughts that could wipe out a crop. We might get a drought or a flood but you always have production. I think we all agreed that we needed to protect the land. We probably talked about how to do that for a couple of years.

GA: Pam Cali was the one who initially stated a land trust was the way to go. And, Jim's right. We agreed that we wanted to do more than preserve views. We wanted to protect the land that supports agriculture ... Pam spent a LOT of time perfecting the 501(c)3 application, so it did what we wanted it to do. When it was done, we found ourselves thinking 'I guess we're an organization. What do we do next?'

JP: What we did know was that no matter what we did, we didn't want to deviate from our primary objective of protecting the land resources and building the critical mass necessary to support it.

Q: How did you go about acquiring the first lands, and what were the challenges?

JP: The first people to conserve were the true believers in what we were doing and the stewards. The first 14 properties were donated conservation easements to ASA, including a parcel my father donated. I'm not sure if he convinced our family or if we convinced him, but we were happy to have him donate the rights.

GA: As far as challenges go—and there were many—the first being money and the second being the term 'perpetuity' in our mission. It was our lodestone and our albatross.

People operated their farms like their bank accounts. They planned to sell their assets to fund their retirement, so it wasn't easy to convince them that conservation was a viable strategy.

JP: We had to convince some larger dairy farmers this was the way to go. They weren't necessarily stewards of the land. We had to demonstrate that we had funding and that they didn't have to sell the rights to a developer. They could place a conservation easement on their land while still owning and working the land. That was really appealing to them. Once we got one or two of them on board, the understanding spread and it became easier. But, it was a hill to climb at first.

GA: The whole money issue became a lot easier when Dave Horn stepped in to help. He knew the right people and he knew how to ask for money. That was a turning point.



THANK YOU TO ASA'S SEASONAL STAFF MEMBERS!

Our interns and program coordinator brought energy, curiosity, and fresh ideas to ASA and our community this season.



SG Groat
Program Coordinator



Kordehlia Koopmann
Invasive Species
Researcher Intern
SUNY Albany, Senior



Rachel Entin-Bell
Outreach Coordinator Intern
Skidmore College, Junior



*ASA founders
Jim Perry and
George Allen*

*Pam Cali
First ASA board
president,
1990-1996*

*George Houser, Jr.
and his son,
George Houser III*

Q: When did you begin to feel like ASA was truly viable?

GA: For me it was when we worked with the Open Space Institute (OSI) and American Farmland Trust on a conservation project negotiation with what was then Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation. OSI is all about land protection and had been working at it for much longer than we had. But through the four years of working together on that project, they came to appreciate the value of protecting a working landscape. So much so, that when all was said and done, they transferred the development rights and administration to ASA, a much smaller and less visible organization. To me, that was an indication that our work was legitimate and valued.

JP: The other thing is that the county now looks to ASA as a resource and expert in understanding the mechanics and costs of development. They come to us for information or to be part of a program. That indicates that people recognize our expertise and value what we bring to the table.

Q: How do the accomplishments of ASA today align with what you set out to do?

GA: I'm not sure I ever put a number on how much land we wanted to conserve. Honestly, I thought getting it off the ground was a miracle.

It's stayed very true to Jim's initial vision of protecting land resources and that's what matters most.



Video excerpts of their remarks will appear on our website and on social media throughout the year.



SLACK
HOLLOW
FARM

SLACK HOLLOW FARM
Argyle, NY

Conservation Project Brings Peace of Mind to Longtime Land Stewards

By their own admission, Seth Jacobs and Martha Johnson's start in farming wasn't easy. As transplants to Argyle in 1983 with a desire to grow produce for the local market, Martha says, "Not having a farming background, we learned everything—growing, marketing, and business—the hard way."

Despite a few bumps along the way, Slack Hollow Farm became a sought-after supplier of greens, carrots, herbs, tomatoes, alliums, beets, hemp, CBD, and more at markets from Glens Falls to Albany.

The couple credits much of their success to using the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's soil maps to identify a property with the best soils in the county for growing crops.

"When we were looking for properties back in the early 80s," recalls Seth, "we knew we wanted to either be at the upper part of a watershed or, if in a valley, on a significant body of water or stream. The fact this 140-acre property had four watersheds draining off it and borders a kettle-hole bog with 30 acres of surface water was a big selling point."

The near-perpetual access to water allowed the farm to keep its 15 acres of cropland and 4 greenhouses in production throughout even the most severe droughts.

Considering the growing impact of climate change, Seth anticipates their resilient land—and all farmland—will only become more prized and sought after. "So much of the planet's future is uncertain," he says, "but, one thing we know will be true is that productive farmland will become more valued than ever."

A long-time ASA champion

In addition to managing and growing a farm and family with Martha, Seth spent 18 years serving on the board of ASA; five of them as the chair.

He says, "ASA's mission is very much in line with my perspective on landowners' rights. Our legal system grants landowners the right to determine our land's present and future use. This includes mineral and water rights, the right to sell and transfer land, the right to develop and improve the land, and, in some towns, the right

to farm. The transfer of development rights to an entity such as ASA gives landowners the option—and opportunity—to maintain the current character of the land into the future.”

While the couple was always interested in conserving their farmland, for many years the property didn’t meet the criteria for a state-funded Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) project. “In the early years,” Seth explains, “the state was only interested in the largest properties with the largest swaths of good soil. Our 140-acre farm with just 30 acres of good soil was not yet a high priority for the New York State PDR program.”

However, as ASA and New York State made strides in fulfilling their mission by successfully conserving some of the largest farms and swaths of land in the area, interest in smaller operations grew. In 2022, Slack Hollow Farm became the first state-funded PDR project in the Town of Argyle.

Regarding the benefits of a PDR, “Our hopes,” says Seth, “are to use the financial benefits of the PDR to further develop and secure the water resources of the farm and strengthen other aspects of the farm’s infrastructure—including ponds, buildings, and roadways—for the future.”

Martha adds the land conservation isn’t just about the Jacobs-Johnson family. “We share the farm with a vibrant community of plants and animals that we treasure. The biodiversity of the kettle-hole bog and surrounding wetlands is wondrous. From the purple pitcher plant, swamp milkweed, water willow, milkweed, and asters, to scores of turtles, hundreds of frogs, great blue and green herons, American bitterns, pileated woodpeckers, and many, many songbirds, we’re in good company. A conservation easement ensures a future home for them all as well as land for humans to practice agriculture.”



Kettle-hole bog offers vibrant biodiversity on Slack Hollow Farm

“*We share the farm with a vibrant community of plants and animals that we treasure. The biodiversity of the kettle-hole bog and surrounding wetlands is wondrous.*”

— MARTHA JOHNSON



The Jacobs-Johnson family
Adin, Kalon, Seth and Martha



DUELL
HOLLOW
FARM

Third-Generation Farmer Conserves the Land for the Next Generation

Having lived his entire life on Duell Hollow Farm in Cambridge, John Peabody's connection to the land runs deep.

"I started working the dairy operation alongside my father in my early teens," he recalls. "I've been here through the good years, the lean years, the transition years, all of it. At this point, I'm not sure if I'm part of the farm or the farm is part of me."

Trials and transitions

Situated on 200 rolling acres, the Peabody family took over the Duell Hollow Farm dairy operation in the 1960s. Initially purchased by John's grandfather, the farm eventually passed to John's father Henry, and recently, upon Henry's passing, to John and his wife Ruth.

Throughout the years, the size and focus of the operation varied, responding to market demands.

"For years, my grandfather, father and I operated as a dairy operation with 200 head at our peak," says John. "Then, when milk prices dropped, we switched to beef in 2013. We kept a few dairy

cows for the kids to raise and show, but beef is what kept the lights on for nearly a decade."

With the help of their five children, John and Ruth managed a herd of 125 beef cattle, selling feeder calves and natural beef to a distributor in New York City. Ruth adds, "We did some direct-to-consumer sales on the farm but that's never predictable."

Things became even less predictable when COVID hit. John recalls, "The New York beef market just dried up. And, honestly, things haven't improved much. It's remained hard to find a way to market and even to just get into a USDA facility to get the beef packaged."

A return to the farm's roots provides hope for the future

Throughout the highs and lows of Duell Hollow Farm's 'beef years,' the family held tight to its dairy tradition.

"Our youngest son, Preston, is a true dairy cattleman," says Ruth. "We've hauled cows as far as Louisville, KY and Madison, WI for him to



DUELL HOLLOW FARM
Cambridge, NY



Ruth and
John Peabody

show. We've even stopped along the highway to milk and then kept going so we could get there in time."

What some might view as a hobby has actually been good business for the farm. "We have some high-pedigree lines that get a lot of attention at shows," says John. "We love our cows, but we're also happy to sell them for the right price."

Considering their son's keen interest in dairy and the slumping beef market, the Peabodys recently decided to revert the farm to dairy. They expect to be fully operational by mid-summer 2025 and have already lined up distribution through the Dairy Farmers of America.

As with all their previous herds, the anticipated herd of 20 heifers will largely be fed on hay grown on the Peabody's land and 72 acres leased from their neighbor Bob Odess.

"Bob," says John, "is more than a good neighbor. In a way, he's helped shape the future of the farm."

Partnering with neighbors

Like anyone who works the land for a living, the Peabodys hold a deep regard for the property that's sustained their family for generations. Toward that end, they discussed a conservation project with ASA for many years. Finding the right funding source proved to be challenging.

But, with the passing of John's father, the stars aligned, and they became eligible for a Farm Operations in Transition grant through the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets.

"I happened to mention the grant application to Bob," recalls John. "He said he had always wanted to do something like that to protect his land but couldn't as it wasn't an active farm. As it turns out, the fact that we leased his land for grazing and hay production made it eligible. Better yet, the addition of his acreage directly adjacent to ours is what allowed us to get the grant."

Together, the neighbors' combined easements protect over 272 acres of farmland.

"It doesn't matter what kind of farming you do, land is your greatest asset," says John. "I'm so happy to be able to work with ASA to make sure our land will forever be available to my kids, or whoever comes next, to farm it. For us, it was the surest way to ensure the land would never be developed. The application process takes time, but the upsides are more than worth the effort."



Jim Bogue and
Bob Odess (L-R)

"I've been here through the good years, the lean years, the transition years, all of it. At this point, I'm not sure if I'm part of the farm or the farm is part of me."

— JOHN PEABODY



BENTLEY FARM
White Creek, NY

The Bentley family
Bryan, Derek, Shae, and Larry (L-R)



Ensuring the Future of a Fifth-Generation Farm

When the rains came late in 2000, Larry Bentley knew the family farm was in trouble.

“We spent the summer hoping for rain,” he says; “but when the pasture dried up and I was forced to feed cows hay we’d put up for winter use, I knew something had to change.”

The change Bentley, a fourth-generation dairy farmer raised on the land he works today, undertook was a big—and expensive—one: A transition from dairy to beef.

Providing a future for the farm and family

While Bentley spent most of his 50 years on Bentley Farm managing a herd of up to 37 milking cows, there were always a few beef cows in the mix. That experience allowed him to be realistic about what a transition would require.

“We’ve got nearly 150 acres, some of which is within the village limits, and I know every inch of it. Now, I don’t have to worry about it being paved over or developed”

— LARRY BENTLEY

“We started with five Holstein holdovers and added 20 beef cows,” he explains. “That gave us some time to make adjustments around the farm. We needed new fences, corrals, a squeeze chute, a surround tub, a round baler, and more. Conserving the land is what made all that possible.”

It also allowed Bentley’s nephews Bryan and Derek, both of whom work full-time jobs, to take on bigger roles at the farm. Together, they manage 75 head of Hereford, Angus, and Charolais, which are fed on hay grown on the farm and rented lands.

“At this point,” he jokes, “I’m unpaid labor. It’s their operation.”

Protecting land and a legacy

In addition to making the transition from dairy to beef possible, Bentley credits working with ASA to protect the valuable farmland. “We’ve got nearly 150 acres, some of which is within the village limits, and I know every inch of it. Now, I don’t have to worry about it being paved over or developed. And, the boys know the land is theirs to farm as long as they want or to pass to another generation of Bentleys in the future.”

Ambassadors for Conservation

Celebrating ASA Volunteers Meg and Rob Southerland



Rob and
Meg Southerland

At the heart of Salem’s rolling farmland, Meg and Rob Southerland nurture MacClan Farm. This fertile, 300-acre slice of the Washington County landscape is known as Gardenworks – a destination where agriculture, art, health, and community thrive together. From seasonal berries and organic vegetables to local meats, cheeses, handcrafts, and fresh-cut flowers, Gardenworks is a celebration of everything local and rooted in the land.

Meg’s deep connection to this special place began as a child, growing up on the very same farm where her parents milked 200 cows and raised 50,000 chickens. “We learned to value the farm as a resource and a way of life,” she reflects. That legacy lives on today in the bustling greenhouse blooming with robust annuals, perennials, herbs, and vegetable plants; a colorful farm store, and the welcoming spirit that defines Gardenworks.

In 1992, Meg and Rob made a conscious decision to return to the farm, embracing a rural, agricultural lifestyle and expanding the operation to include specialty crops like berries, pumpkins, Christmas trees, and greenhouse plants. Their passion for farming is

matched by their commitment to community and healthy living.

Despite the busy rhythms of farm life, Meg and Rob make time to give back as dedicated volunteers with ASA. Their support stems from a shared vision of protecting farmland and the rural character of our region. “ASA is instrumental in planning for the future growth in Washington and Rensselaer counties and in protecting the agricultural community and economy long term,” says Rob.

Meg adds, “We’re so thankful for the vistas that surround us—and for the ability of our farmland and forests to be protected through ASA’s work.”

You’ll often see the Southerlands lending a hand at ASA’s biggest events, from the *Forever Farmland Supper* in August to *Landscapes for Landsake* in October. “Both events draw people from many different backgrounds,” Meg says. “I love hearing guests share their connections to farming and why they support conserving working lands. Those conversations are inspiring.”

Rob especially appreciates the professionalism he sees in ASA’s team. He offers, “ASA is a high-profile organization with strong leadership. The staff and board are deeply committed, and it feels good to contribute what I can. I encourage others to get involved, too.”

The Southerlands have each served on ASA’s Board of Directors. Today, Rob continues his involvement as a member of the Land Project and Stewardship Programs Committee.

This summer, you saw them once again pouring drinks and welcoming guests at the *Forever Farmland Supper*. We thank them for all they do – not just for ASA, but for the entire community. Their generosity, energy, and love for the land are truly inspiring.

BOARD UPDATES

Thank you to Sarah Ashton, Megan Harris-Pero, Cody LaPage, and Lauren Williams for their years of service on our Board of Directors.

In April we welcomed three new board members:



Delia Neese



Sean Quinn



Renée St. Jacques



Agricultural
Stewardship
Association

2531 State Route 40
Greenwich, NY 12834



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Drake McDonough
Stewardship Manager

Sean Murphy
Stewardship Assistant

Kara O'Malley Scieszka
Community Engagement Manager

Reuben Todd
Director of Operations

Alexander Warshal
Project Manager

SAVE THE DATE

Landscapes for Landsake

24TH ANNUAL ART SALE & EXHIBIT
Maple Ridge Gallery
172 State Route 372, Cambridge, NY



OPENING RECEPTION: Saturday, October 11 Noon – 5 pm / \$10 admission

FREE OPEN GALLERY: Sunday, October 12 Noon – 4 pm / FREE

SHOP ONLINE: October 13 – November 15 / LandscapesForLandsake.com

ASA's Landscapes for Landsake celebrates both the agricultural heritage and stunning landscapes of the Upper Hudson Valley. This show draws thousands of visitors from all over the Northeast, from professionals (gallery owners and museum curators) to art lovers of all ages. Participating artists generously donate 50% of their proceeds to support ASA's conservation work. Many of the artists are on hand to discuss their work during the in-person event.

2025 Featured Painting: *South Cambridge, Gouache on Paper, 23" x 30"*
by Robert Moylan

We Conserve Good Farmland
For Good. **Forever.**



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PHOTOGRAPHY: Olivia Fuller, Jeremy Green, Brian Haynes, Kalon Jacobs Johnson, Drake McDonough, Kara O'Malley Scieszka, Alexander Warshal **GRAPHIC DESIGN:** Kate Hocker

33,693
ACRES OF FARM AND
FOREST LAND CONSERVED!

The Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA) protects our community's working farms and forests, connects people to the land, and promotes a vibrant future for agriculture and forestry in the region. To date we have assisted with the conservation of 33,693 acres of productive land in Washington and Rensselaer counties.

ASA receives funding from its members and supporters, which include the New York State Environmental Protection Fund and PCLB Foundation, among others.