



ASA

# Notes from Slack Hollow Farm

By Seth Jacobs and Martha Johnson

For our farm, and other farms growing vegetables as we do, this has been a very challenging year: May was cold; during June, July and August we experienced consistent record breaking heat; and when the rains came this summer they fell hard and fast. Now the fall is turning out very wet. As I write this in late October, hurricane Wilma is coming up the east coast and over the next few days we'll see lots more rain, high winds, possibly snow, and then more rain. The fall harvest season is being cut short, some crops still in the fields are in jeopardy, plans for fall fieldwork are being set aside until spring. Such are the perennial difficulties of farming. But each year the land produces, sunlight is transformed into food, and we are nourished.

Though the agricultural landscape of our region may seem quiet at this time of year, it is not a slow time for farmers. We all have repairs, maintenance, and improvements to catch up on, livestock producers are fencing and moving animals out to fall pastures, and on the 250 or so dairy farms which milk through the winter the calving season is in full swing. In addition, for many of us, active preparation for the next growing season has already begun. Next year's fields and crops are already taking shape in our minds.

If the region's present agricultural landscape will continue to be shaped by farmers, the community as a whole has some planning and work to do as well. We are experiencing rapidly increasing pressure on our farmland from residential development and its attendant economies. A good deal of excellent farmland is in jeopardy. Farm economics are notoriously cyclical and sometimes tenuous, but the availability of quality farmland in the future will ultimately determine how much food production remains a part of our regional economy, landscape, and culture.

ASA hopes to be a catalyst in efforts to protect productive, quality farmland. What we achieve, and the extent to which we succeed, will represent the vision and determination—and actions, of those of us who live here at this point in time.

Seth Jacobs has been active in ASA for over eleven years. He currently serves as Board vice president and chairs the monitoring committee. Seth and Martha have been growing vegetables at Slack Hollow Farm for over twenty years.



The view from the upper fields.



Inside the greenhouse.

TOTAL LAND  
CONSERVED BY ASA:

4410  
ACRES

“We believe having local farms and farmland is vital to our future.”

The Agricultural Stewardship Association is a non-profit land trust founded in 1990 by local farmers, agribusiness representatives, and conservationists to protect land for agricultural use in the Washington County, New York region. We accomplish this mission through our land conservation and stewardship programs and public education efforts. To date, we have protected over 4,400 acres of farmland in Washington and northern Rensselaer counties.

ASA receives funding from its members, The Conservation Fund, the New York Conservation Partnership Program and private foundations. The New York Conservation Partnership Program is administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York.

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Agricultural Stewardship Association

28R Main St. • Greenwich, NY 12834  
518-692-7285 • Fax: 692-7720

asa@agstewardship.org • www.agstewardship.org

## a message from the President



With Thanksgiving upon us, I am reminded that ASA has a lot to be thankful for. My tenure as president will end next April, and I am passing the torch to a very competent board at one of the most exciting times in ASA's history.

We have an amazing staff of dedicated employees, which includes Teri Ptacek, Maria Trabka and Meegan Finnegan, and we receive valuable support from Kerri Culhane. We have a large number of projects in the works that should add over 2,000 acres to our easement base. ASA is on good financial footing having received grants and donations from major donors. We work in a community that appreciates and supports our efforts with memberships, donations and attendance at our events. ASA also has a tremendous board of directors and officers that volunteer their time, working hard to ensure ASA's future.

Most importantly, ASA works with a farming community that is strong and adaptable. Farmers are making plans to ensure their future and the future of agriculture in the Washington county region. The local economy is supported by the hard work of farmers. Their hard work provides much of the inspiration for our board and for our supporters.

I want to thank all of the farmers and landowners who support farming, especially those that donated or sold easements to ASA. There is no greater vote of confidence in the future of ASA, and agriculture in general, than to place an easement on your own farmland.

I hope that farmers, as they continually create and re-shape the landscapes, can inspire you to support ASA. We need your support to keep ASA's efforts going. If you own farmland, please consider placing a conservation easement on your land. If you care about farming and the beautiful Washington County region, please consider ASA in your year-end giving. You can make a difference in the landscape forever.

Again, thanks to all of you for your belief in the future of farming and in ASA.

David Horn, DVM  
Board President

## a message from the Executive Director



To the non-farmer, farming in Upstate New York seems more high profile during the summer and early fall. The landscape is in full-bloom, we spend more time out doors, and we see more of the fruits of farmers' labor, either in the fields or at the farmer's market. But we can't forget that even when the ground is frozen, farming is a full-time job. Cows don't stop producing milk and farmers don't stop milking just because it's cold. Vegetable growers weather the Upstate elements in their greenhouses, and meat, cheese and egg producers tend their animals no matter what the weather brings. As we give thanks for the bounty of food we typically enjoy during the holiday season, let's offer special appreciation for the bounty of locally-produced food available year-round, and a special thanks to the hardworking farmers who make it possible.

Farmers are hard at work all year, and so are we at ASA. In fact, winter is often our busiest season as we work toward closing many of our land projects by the end of the year. Since August, we've welcomed two new staff members, project manager Maria Trabka and project assistant Meegan Finnegan, who have stepped into their respective roles with ease and ambition. With this expanded, experienced staff—and with the continued support of you, the community, we look forward to increasing our pace of land protection here in the beautiful and productive Washington County region.

Thank you for your continued support of ASA, our mission, and our local farms.

Teri Ptacek  
Executive Director

## New Staff!

### Meet Maria Trabka, ASA's New Project Manager



ASA has achieved remarkable organizational growth and conservation in its 15 years. It has protected 4,400 acres of farmland, one farm at a time. With 20+ years experience in community-based conservation and a love of Washington County, I hope to be able to contribute to ASA's momentum to help it achieve its goal of protecting another 8,000 acres by the end of 2010.

Since joining ASA's staff in early October, I have been busy building a case for why additional investments should be made to purchase development rights on Washington and northern Rensselaer County farms for the next round of funding from NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets.

What I enjoy most about conservation work is working with families to craft a conservation plan that allows them to meet their goals for their land and for themselves. Once this year's funding applications have been submitted, I am looking forward to getting out of the office, touring properties, and meeting landowners to discuss tools and options for conserving their pieces of the world.

I view every individual tract of land as a single unique patch in a quilt. Each patch is important, but only by stitching multiple patches together will the quilt be strong enough and large enough to blanket the landscape and create a truly resilient environment and economy. I feel blessed to have the chance to work with ASA to offer this opportunity to landowners and to the community.

—Maria

### Meet Meegan Finnegan, ASA's new Project Assistant.



I grew up on a small farm in Massachusetts and spent my high school and college years working on local farms and taking produce in to Boston to sell at the farmer's markets. I have always been interested in farming and even though I was a literature major at UMASS Amherst, I enjoyed several great organic gardening classes through the Stockbridge School of Agriculture.

I was very sad to see developmental pressure change my home town from rural to suburban in the space of a generation. Most of the farms I remember are now tract housing developments for people commuting to Boston and have cute country names like "Apple Blossom Lane" instead of actual orchards. I missed the people and culture that an aggregate of farms creates.

My family moved to Cambridge several years ago and after many great visits, which included last year's Landscapes for Landsake show, I fell in love with the area too. I felt so lucky to find a job with ASA because their mission is dear to my heart. I've worked in publishing and higher education doing marketing and publicity work and am excited to use those skills to further ASA's goal to conserve farmland. Since joining ASA's staff, I've worked on coordinating this year's Landscapes for Landsake art show. I was really moved by the enthusiasm and appreciation this community has for its farmers and rural heritage. I've just bought a house in Cambridge Village and am happy to be raising my son Aidan in the kind of place I grew up in.

—Meegan

## Landscapes for Landsake 2005



A large and festive crowd turned out at Maple Ridge on a blustery, rainy Saturday in October to show its support for ASA at our annual Landscapes for Landsake art show and sale. Now in its fourth year, Landscapes for Landsake has proven "an important opportunity for the community to come together and show its support for our mission," according to board president Dave Horn. "The wide variety of artistic interpretations represented are a testament to the beautiful and inspirational local landscape—you can better understand the artwork if you appreciate the landscape that inspired it."

Larry Sconzo and Laurie Simons of Maple Ridge were our gracious hosts for the fourth year in a row. We appreciate their consistent generosity and support. We thank all our sponsors, especially The Fort Miller Group, The Chazen Companies and Alan Brown Realty. A group of dedicated volunteers kept the cheese and wine flowing. Janine Lazarus curated the show. We thank all of the artists who contributed artwork to the show and all the patrons who purchased art. A special thanks goes to the artist Stephen Alcorn, who created the limited edition print "Mother Earth" for the show, and also entertained the crowd along with his musical ensemble, Cantaluna.

Copies of the limited edition print "Mother Earth," created for Landscapes for Landsake 2005 by noted artist Stephen Alcorn, are still available for sale through the artist's studio in Cambridge. T-shirts bearing the Landscapes for Landsake 2005 image are available through the ASA office.

**Missed the show?** All of the artwork is available for viewing through our website, [www.agstewardship.org](http://www.agstewardship.org). If you are interested in purchasing art that you view online, please contact Meegan in the ASA office at (518) 692-7285.

# PDR Successes

ASA is pleased to announce the upcoming closing on two important Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) projects in the Route 40 corridor of Easton: the Anuszewski Farm and part of the Houser/Brotherhood Farms. Together, these farms contain 470 acres of high quality farmland that will forever be available to farm. “The Route 40 corridor is a significant farming ‘district’ for Washington County. These newly-conserved lands more than double the amount of land protected by farmers and ASA in this agriculturally important area,” states Teri Ptacek.

ASA has three other major PDR awards that we are working towards closing on. The 649-acre Richlands/Hi-Brow Farms project along the Battenkill in Jackson, Salem & Greenwich; 313 acres of the Weir Dairy Farm on the Hoosic River in Schaghticoke; and the most-recently awarded, the 244-acre Tiashoke Farms on the Hoosic in Cambridge. All of these projects received funding from the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets (NYSDAM) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Conservation Fund (TCF) is also working with ASA to complete the Weir, Richlands and Hi-Brow transactions.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) is a great way for farmers to get equity out of the land without having to sell off

parcels—PDR can make it possible to conserve your land base and make it pay at the same time. “Financial compensation is an essential tool for helping farming families to protect their land,” states Maria Trabka, ASA project manager. The proceeds are used to buy additional land, to allow an older generation to retire and a younger generation to transition into the owner/operator role, to reduce debt, to update equipment or herds, or to strengthen the farm’s long-term viability in other ways. The state funding that farmers receive may be matched by federal or private sources or by donations made by the farmers themselves. Soils, farm history, farm sustainability and development pressure are some of the types of information used to build a case for state funding.

While there is limited funding available for PDR, ASA has been consistently successful in getting PDR grant awards for local farms. ASA administers the PDR program for Washington County, and in this role, we work closely with eligible farmers to complete PDR applications for state and federal funding.

**Winter is the time to start thinking about PDR.** If you’d like to find out how you can participate in the PDR process, PDR informational meetings will be held around the county in early spring. Look for notices in the Cornell newsletters and local papers starting in February. Or you may call the ASA office and speak with Teri or Maria to find out more about the program and its requirements. **The pre-applications are due to ASA by June 1st.**



**Agricultural Stewardship Association**  
28R Main St.  
Greenwich, NY 12834



**The 213-acre Anuszewski Farm on Rt. 40 in Easton is being conserved with PDR funding.**