

# ASA to Celebrate 20 Years of Farmland Conservation!

## A Look Back at our Major Milestones

“I have had the privilege and pleasure of watching how the earliest landowners’ commitment to conservation has inspired and given others the confidence to join in the effort. What a long way we have come! Happy 20<sup>TH</sup>, ASA! —Kate McQuerrey, former ASA president

### In the Beginning, There Was a Vision...

It is hard to believe that just 20 years ago the notion of farmland protection was a new idea here in upstate New York. Fortunately for us, there were visionaries in our community who were concerned about the loss of farmland due to new development pressure from the Capital District. The question was, what could be done?

The search for an answer to that question brought together three Washington County landowners of different backgrounds: George Houser, a dairy farmer active in land use planning in Easton, Jim Perry, a White Creek farmer and soil conservationist, and Pam Cali, a community activist who “felt thrown out of paradise” as a child when her grandfather lost his farm. After months of work, the group concluded that establishing a private local land trust was the best way to address the issues of farmland protection.

### A Land Trust Is Born

Pam Cali served as the first president of the ASA Board of Directors from 1990 to 1996. She recently told us, “What we were attempting was unprecedented. We met 4 to 5 times a week for more than a year and wrestled to get the non-profit status required to accept easements.”

ASA was officially launched in 1990, becoming the first land trust in the Northeast to focus specifically on farmland conservation. During the early years, most conservation easements were donated and Board members handled every aspect of the intricate process from their homes.

*20 Years of Farmland Conservation*, continued on page 6



## Local farms are vital to our future

The Agricultural Stewardship Association is a non-profit land trust founded in 1990 by local farmers and conservationists to protect land for agricultural and forestry uses in Washington and Rensselaer counties. Our goal is to ensure that farms and forests will continue to be a part of everyone's lives for many generations to come. To date, we have assisted landowners with the conservation of 9,896 acres of farm and forestland.

ASA receives funding from its members and supporters, Castanea Foundation, The Conservation Fund, the New York Conservation Partnership Program (administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York) and the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, among others.

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## From the Executive Director



Next spring marks our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Looking back through our history, I am humbled and inspired by the vision of our founders whose respect for the agricultural traditions and rich farmland of our region led them to take action. Because ASA was the first agricultural land trust in New York, and one of the first in the country, they were breaking new ground as pioneers of farmland conservation.

I first got to know ASA while working on my master's thesis and had no idea at the time how much the mentoring I received from Pam Cali, George Houser, Jim Perry and others would shape the course of my career and life. I was later commissioned to develop an agricultural and farmland protection plan for Washington County and was then hired by American Farmland Trust to write similar plans for Saratoga and Rensselaer counties.

While at AFT, I kept in touch with ASA and watched as Bill Eberle and Kate McQuerrey established the PDR partnership with Washington County and won funding to protect two farms the first year grants were made available through the state. Under David Horn's leadership, it was decided that an all-volunteer board needed help with the demand for conservation assistance and I was fortunate to land a job I love with an organization I had long admired.

Since I started in 2003 we have focused a tremendous amount of our resources on growing the PDR program. All together, we have secured more than 10 million dollars in state, federal and private funding to pay farmers for limiting their development rights to ensure their land is forever available for farming.

In 2006 we adopted our first farmland conservation plan and set ourselves the ambitious goal of conserving a total of 15,000 acres by the end of 2010. Thanks in large part to the outstanding success of the PDR program, we are on target to meet this goal.

However, state budget constraints are jeopardizing the program at a time when the dairy industry is under siege. At the same time, we have more landowners asking for our help and a tremendous opportunity to conserve land.

Funding for this program is critical if we are to continue at our current pace of conservation. I urge all of our members to contact our legislators and let them know what a difference this program makes to the future of farming and our community. We are truly grateful for the visionaries who started us on this path, the many talented people who have helped us get this work done and you, all of our supporters, who we know we can count on to carry conservation into the future. —Teri Ptacek

## Inspired to Conserve

### Mahoney Family Protects Historic Farmstead in Jackson

Mark T. and Quimby Mahoney have lived for many years in southeastern Massachusetts, where Mark has a carpentry and construction business. They wanted to retire to this area to be nearer to one of their daughters and her family, and their search for a new home ended when they found the former Ed Levin property.

The parcel includes a beautiful historic house and cluster of barns, as well as 47 acres of undulating farmland which is leased to a neighboring dairy farmer for crop production.

The Mahoneys had been involved with the Bourne Conservation Trust on Cape Cod where development has forever changed the landscape, and they were eager to take steps to protect their new land. "We wanted to be sure it could never be chopped up into housing lots," Mark said.



*Mark & Quimby Mahoney and their daughters and families*

ASA was delighted to work with Mark and Quimby to achieve their conservation goals. Their land is adjacent to another 155 acres of conserved farmland belonging to the Hanf family, adding up to over 200 acres of protected land on Route 61 in Jackson.

Currently the Mahoneys are pouring considerable energy into the renovation of their new home and farmstead. While they do not yet have plans for filling the barns, they have settled on "October Farm" as the name for their new home.

ASA extends a warm welcome to Mark and Quimby Mahoney, as well as a sincere thank you for the donation of the development rights on this property.

## Thank You, Summer Volunteers

**ASA benefitted this summer from the help of two outstanding new volunteers, Rachel Skellie and Carolyn Braun.**

Rachel is a recent graduate of the University of Rochester who grew up on a Jackson dairy farm. She was able to bring ASA further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by creating a Facebook page for the organization. Check it out and become a Fan of ASA!

Carolyn is a White Creek native with farming in her blood. She is currently a sophomore at Cornell University, majoring in Animal Science (dairy) and Applied Economics and Management. She hopes to have a dairy farm some day with one of her brothers. Carolyn spent many hours helping ASA staff in the office, and also accompanied Janet Britt on a number of annual visits to conserved farms.

Thank you, Rachel and Carolyn.



Rachel Skellie



Carolyn Braun

# A Conservation Leader Realizes his Vision

George C. Houser Jr. Conserves the Final 302-Acre Portion of the 1,030-Acre Brotherhood Farms in Easton



If it weren't for George Houser, there might not have been an Agricultural Stewardship Association. As one of ASA's founding members, his determination to protect his own land from development led to the birth of ASA and inspired many of his neighbors along the Route 40 corridor in Easton to conserve their land as well. With this last 302-acre parcel, which has been in the family for at least 205 years, the Housers have completed protection of their 1,030-acre farm. As George's wife Earline explains, "Conservation is in George's DNA".

Growing up, George lived with his parents in Boston and spent summers working on his grandmother's dairy farm and apple orchard with his uncles. He graduated from Harvard with a degree in government but decided he'd rather go back to Easton and help run the farm.

Earline was also from an Easton family who owned land in Barker's Grove. Her father worked as a dairy trucker and got to know George while picking milk up at the farm. He sent her over to buy apples so she could meet George. When they hit it off, George, in turn, started coming around to buy eggs from Earline's mother.

They married at her home in 1962. Their son, George Houser III was born a year later on their anniversary and daughter Charlene came along soon after. From the time he was two and a half and escaped the yard to follow a cow path through the field and across Route 40 to the farmyard, Earline knew that George III was a born farmer.

George and Earline have always been committed to their community. Earline worked as a teacher at Greenwich Junior High, is Easton's town historian and an author. With his background and interest in government, George was a founding member of Easton's planning board and throughout the years, served on many committees dedicated to developing agriculture in Washington County.

Along the way, George met Pam Cali, and Jim Perry, a farmer. At the time, development pressure from the Capital region was growing and they shared the belief that protecting valuable farmland from encroaching development was essential if we were to ensure a future for farming in the county. With

help and guidance from George Allen and Amy Stott, they worked for a year and half, four to five evenings a week, to get ASA incorporated as New York's first local agricultural land trust.

George conserved his first piece of land with American Farmland Trust. In 1996, after helping ASA get started, he donated conservation easements to ASA on two more parcels of land. Each subsequent piece of land he inherited or bought to support his dairy operation he conserved in turn.

In 2008, George Houser asked ASA to help him realize his conservation plan and protect the final portion of Brotherhood Farm. The Castanea Foundation provided funding to purchase a conservation easement on the final 302-acres, and a grant from the Historic Saratoga-Washington on the Hudson Partnership Program covered transaction

costs. Today, the entire 1,030-acre farm is protected, ensuring that this productive land will always be available for agriculture.

George and Earline feel very strongly that they have done right by their family, community and the land that they love. George explains, "It's beyond personal. People have to have food and the land to grow it. Together, I feel like we accomplished a great thing."

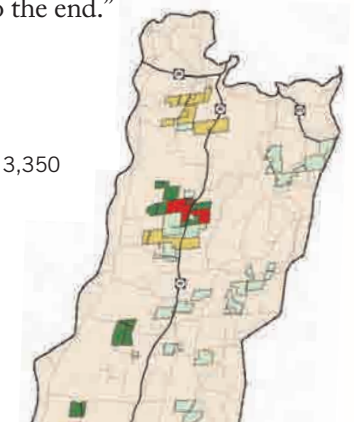
For Earline, it is also a very personal matter. "George and I were so fortunate to have a close family. His uncles and grandmother lived out their lives on the farm and could see it being farmed every day out their window. George still feels connected to my departed father and we are so proud to see our son care for the same land. For me, it is about caring for the family and the land right to the end."



George & Earline Houser

George C. Houser Jr. led the way as a conservationist, inspiring many of his neighbors. Today, more than 3,350 acres have been conserved in Easton, and another 975 acres are in the process of being protected.

- LATEST HOUSER EASEMENT
- HOUSER PROPERTIES WITH CONSERVATION EASEMENTS
- ASA CONSERVED PROPERTIES
- PROPERTIES IN PROCESS OF CONSERVATION
- LAND CONSERVED BY AFT



### Developing Conservation Options

To make it possible for more farmers to protect their land, it became clear that we needed an option that would pay farmers for the value of their development rights, allowing them to extract capital from their land while continuing to farm it. This option is called Purchase of Development Rights, or PDR.

As a new Board member, Bill Eberle was a conservation convert. "I was at first skeptical, but as the work took me throughout the county and I met a wide diversity of farmers, my appreciation of the issue grew." During his term as president from 1996 to 1998, he became a champion of the PDR option, recognizing it as an essential tool for protecting working farms.

### Establishing a New Program

The difficulty for ASA in implementing the PDR option was access to sufficient funding. When Washington County became eligible to apply for state farmland protection grants, ASA's Board proposed a partnership with the county to establish a PDR program. According to Kate McQuerrey, president from 1998 to 2000, "This public-private partnership was unique at the time and helped strengthen our ability to compete with other counties for the limited state funds."

By the following year, two projects in Washington County were awarded funding in the first round of state grants.

### Building ASA's Capacity

At the beginning of the new millennium, the pace of farmland conservation was picking up and it was evident that ASA would have to build its capacity to meet the increasing demand. Under the leadership of Dave Horn, president from 2000 to 2006, the first step occurred in 2002 when the organization finally got its first office space, computer, telephone line, and paid employee.

Then in 2003, funding was secured to hire Teri Ptacek as ASA's first full time executive director. Dave Horn said, "We believed in her and her vision of ASA." With professional staff in



place, the Board was able to focus more of its attention on fundraising and strategic planning. "We all had a passion for ASA's mission, but passion without funding is not sustainable. By surrounding ourselves with great people and being relentless in our fundraising, we were able to help ensure that ASA would be meaningful in perpetuity."

### Expanding to Rensselaer County

At the request of landowners, ASA began working on farmland conservation projects in northern Rensselaer County in 2003. "Agriculture is a regional enterprise," says Seth Jacobs, current ASA Board president. "The farming community does not stop at the county line." Because of the success of these early projects, in 2007 Rensselaer County asked ASA to administer PDR projects throughout the county.

### 20 Years and Growing

ASA's success over these 20 years stems from the foresight of our founders, the leadership of our Board presidents, and the dedication of the many individuals and organizations that have contributed to our accelerating growth. We continue to be inspired by the vision of our predecessors, and excited by the growth in our community of supporters.

From the solid foundation built in its first two decades, ASA now looks to the years ahead. President Seth Jacobs says, "Farmers are asking for our help in protecting their land in record numbers. As a community we have

a tremendous opportunity to permanently protect our rich agricultural soils and enable a future for farming in the region." Please join us as we move forward into the next 20 years.

## Take a Walk on the Wild Side

This summer ASA organized two walks showcasing the natural bounty of conserved properties. Farms and forests are an important resource, providing watershed buffers, habitat for native plants and wildlife, and other benefits. Those attending the walks learned more about the natural world directly from the two knowledgeable scientists who served as guides.

**Meadows and Ponds** In July a group of children and adults joined naturalist **Howard Romack** for an exploration of the wild side of the conserved Elihu Farm in Easton. The group tramped across a grazed field to a large pond, and then to the edge of a marsh, stopping frequently to admire and discuss the small wildlife of each habitat as they were captured and then released. Later on, Mr. Romack introduced everyone to his portable collection of native snakes, turtles, and insects.



**Mushrooms** In August, noted mycologist **Sue Van Hook** led a large group on a Wild Mushroom Hunt in the conserved Klein forest in Jackson. Edible mushrooms proved elusive in spite of the wet summer, but many other kinds of fungus were

found and discussed. Several attendees had brought along their own mystery mushrooms for identification, and Sue also showed examples of recently collected local fungi.

**More Walks Coming** Plans are underway to expand the Walk on the Wild Side series, so that more people can have the opportunity to experience the natural side of farmland. Please watch for announcements of upcoming events on our website [www.agstewardship.org](http://www.agstewardship.org) and in local newspapers, and join us the next time ASA goes wild!



## Ways to Help!

In these challenging times, ASA must count on you as never before. As we face reduced state funding, crisis in the dairy industry, and development pressure spilling over from Saratoga County, we are relying on our stalwart supporters to see us through. Here are some of the ways you can help:

### Make a Donation

In addition to the direct financial help, your contribution also demonstrates community support for ASA's conservation efforts, which in turn helps us leverage funding from grants and private sources.

### Volunteer

ASA needs volunteers to help with organizing outreach events, implementing membership mailings, and providing expertise in professional and technical matters.

### Be a Conservation Leader

You can show others your commitment by protecting your land and ensuring that its valuable attributes will remain intact for future generations.

### Host a neighborhood gathering

Introduce your friends and neighbors to land conservation by hosting an informational gathering with ASA staff and Board members.

### Make a bequest

Consider making a lasting impact by leaving a gift of land or other property to ASA in your will. A bequest can reduce your estate taxes while helping ASA achieve its vital long term goals.

For more information about ways you can help, please contact ASA at (518) 692-7285 or by email at [asa@agstewardship.org](mailto:asa@agstewardship.org).



## Hogan Barn Dance and Pig Roast a Big Success

In September ASA teamed up with the Pember Library & Museum to host a barn dance and picnic on Hogan Hill in Hampton. Richard Hogan donated a conservation easement on his 271-acre property in 1997, and generously opened his beautiful new barn for this well-attended community event. Thanks to Bliss and Robbie McIntosh, the Cambridge Dance Orchestra and caller Paul Rosenberg for getting the party swinging!



## ASA Welcomes New Board Members

Joining ASA's Board of Directors this year are two individuals with quite different life stories, but with at least three important things in common: dairy cows, Cornell University, and a concern for farmland conservation.

### Eugene Ceglowski

Gene Ceglowski grew up on a farm in Rupert, Vermont where his parents milked a small herd of Guernseys. He attended Salem Central School and went on



to Cornell University for his B.S. and later for his DVM.

Returning to his childhood farm, Gene began a large animal veterinary practice that has kept him busy for over 40 years. He also raises registered Guernseys and puts up 120 acres of hay every year. Gene is also active with the Rotary Club and has served on the Rupert School Board and as the Rupert Town Moderator.

Gene has been interested in farmland conservation for many years. He served on the steering committee of the Mettowee Valley Conservation Project, a Vermont land trust affiliate, helping to get the organization up and running. In 2003, the Ceglowski family donated the development rights on 160 acres of their farmland, and they plan to do the same for another 110 acres in 2010.

As a large animal vet, Dr. Ceglowski visits farms all over the area in both Vermont and New York. He believes that Washington County is the key to maintaining a viable agricultural base in the surrounding area, and welcomes the opportunity to take an active role in farmland protection by serving on ASA's Board of Directors. ASA is fortunate to have Dr. Ceglowski as a new member of the Board of Directors.

### Stuart Ziehm

Stuart Ziehm is an energetic young dairy farmer, one of three brothers who make up the new generation of Tiashoke Farms. He went through the Cambridge school system, and on to Cornell University where he earned a degree in Animal Science. Stuart also has training in business management and as a mechanic, skills which come in handy every day on a dairy farm. Tiashoke Farms has two locations, multiple partners and employees, and a total herd size of over 1,000, all of which constantly test Stuart's talents for communication and multi-tasking.



Like other members of his family, Stuart has a well-developed sense of civic responsibility and a desire to give back to his community in meaningful ways. He is a member of the Cambridge Town Planning Board and is active in Farm Bureau. His connection to ASA goes back to 2004 when the Ziehm family made the decision to conserve their 244-acre Buskirk dairy farm. Then in 2008, the three brothers purchased and promptly conserved their 343-acre Easton farm,

"As farmers, we are in the business of growing food and we need to be serious about protecting the land that feeds us," Stuart explained. He added that he is "glad to have the opportunity to serve on ASA's Board, and be part of an organization that feels as strongly as I do about the future of farming."

## Landscapes Show Generates Landslide of Support



The historic barn at Maple Ridge in Coila was the scene for the 8th annual

Landscapes for Landsake art show. Over the three day Columbus Day weekend, more than 900 people passed through the doors to enjoy the array of art being offered by 28 accomplished local artists. Fifty-one works were sold, with half of the proceeds benefitting ASA's land conservation work.

ASA Executive Director Teri Ptacek said, "We are fortunate to live in an area where the combination of hard working farmers and natural topography has resulted in scenic landscapes at every turn. We are also fortunate to have so many talented individuals who can capture the beauty that surrounds us in distinctive works of art." By sharing their work at ASA's Landscapes show, these artists are helping ensure that the land can remain just as beautiful and productive in the future.

Heartfelt appreciation goes to this year's artists, all those who purchased art at the event, hosts Larry Sconzo and Laurie Simon, curator Donna Orlyk, our generous sponsors, and the many volunteers whose efforts brought this show to life.



### Many Thanks to Everyone Who Helped Make the 2009 Landscapes for Landsake a Great Success!

#### Major Sponsors

The Chazen Companies, The Fort Miller Group, Agard and LaPan Land Surveying PLLC, Owl Pen Books, the Charles R. Wood Foundation, and Whiteman Osterman & Hanna LLP.

#### Artists

Corrina Aldrich, Constance Alexander, Paul Baker-Porzinski, John Begin, Michael Burke, Valerie Craig, George Dirolf, Kathryn Edwards, Stu Eichel, Dominick Guida, Clarence King, Karen Koziol, Dona Ann McAdams, Leah McCloskey, Virginia McNeice, Susan Harding Merancy, Bob Moylan, Harry Orlyk, Leslie Parke, Leslie Peck, Barbara J. Sussman, Brian Sweetland, Mark Tougias, George Van Hook, Laura Von Rosk, Lawrence White, Regina Wickham, and Corbin Hunter whose art was exhibited in his memory.



#### Volunteers

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**Hosts** Larry Sconzo and Laurie Simon.

**Curator** Donna Orlyk.

**Caterers** Thomas Christenfeld and Nancy Brown.

#### In Kind Services

Peckham Industries, Hudson River Tractor, Consider Bardwell Farm, Tiashoke Farms and Paul Baker-Porzinski

# Thank You.

Your Support Makes Farmland Protection Happen.

ASA would like to express heartfelt gratitude to our wonderful community of supporters. In these challenging times, your generous contributions and the spirit they reflect mean so much to us. You are simply the best!

The following lists include contributions made between April 15, 2009 and October 15, 2009. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information. Please contact us at (518) 692-7285 to note any changes that should be made for the next issue of our newsletter.

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