



# THE Spruce

## SPRING 2017 NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 2276 ▪ Huntington Station ▪ Shelton, Connecticut 06484



### Announcing the SLCT Annual Meeting

**Annual Meeting  
Dedicated to our  
Local Farmers**

We are lucky to have such a great interest in locally grown food and products to keep our farmers working the land. SLCT values the work of our local farmers and the farmland they keep open for our community to enjoy. SLCT is pleased to announce the Annual meeting of the Shelton Land Conservation Trust will be held at the Plumb Memorial Library on Wednesday, April 19 at 7 pm. The meeting is dedicated to our farmers past and present. SLCT will be showing *The New Farmers Voice* a short documentary by Shelton residents Beverly and Sean Corvino. The *NEW Farmer's Voice* short is about a young couple's desire to successfully work a family farm in Scotland, CT. Erica and Chris Andrews have received enthusiastic support from their neighbors for their diverse products. They are using the CSA model (Community Supported Agriculture) to provide locally-produced food for their community--meat, vegetables, honey, eggs, maple syrup and more! Andrews family as they describe how fulfilling it is to be NEW farmers, raising a family and working the land on Hurricane Farm.

**Plumb Memorial Library on  
Wednesday, April 19 at 7 pm**

## The Nicholdale Odyssey

by Terry Jones

The seeds of the Nicholdale Farm preservation were sown on the morning of August 2, 1990. At 5:00am, I was in my farm truck driving to check the irrigation pump watering our crops at our Valley Farm (part of Jones Family Farms.) Out of habit, I flicked on the radio – Iraq's Saddam Hussein had invaded the Kuwait oil and gas fields!

Hearing this news was like being struck by a lightning bolt. I knew the Iroquois gas pipeline many of us had tried to keep from slicing through our Means Brook valley would quickly be elevated to a high priority in the interest of our national energy security. And indeed, FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) soon thereafter gave it "fast track" status.

By nature, farmers are pragmatic. If the weather turns against us, we often must change strategy quickly to bring a crop to success. I said to my wife, Jean, later that day, "The gas line will be built and it will be built quickly!" To paraphrase William Shakespeare, I asked, "how can we 'find sweetness in the uses of adversity?'" Or to put it frankly, let's figure out how to make something positive out of this unexpected turn of events.

Our family had always dreamed of preserving the natural beauty and environmental qualities of the remaining undeveloped 2000 acres of the Means Brook Valley. In 1990, the owners of this watershed were the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company, Shelton Land Trust, and about a dozen farm families along with some City of Shelton open space.

But a wide corridor along Route 110 had been zoned for light industry and plans for an industrial park at the 52-acre Nicholdale Farm (Nichols Family) along the highway had already been laid out.

Meanwhile, Iroquois engineers had already mapped the right-of-way through the valley and land agents had begun making offers to reimburse the owners for easement rights.

My father, Philip, and I brainstormed and concluded if the Means Brook Valley had any chance of preservation, building an industrial park on Nicholdale Farm should be averted.

Sitting together on our hilltop one day, Philip and I looked out across the valley – a beautiful panorama of farms and forest. "Our Shelton Land Trust should buy Nicholdale," Philip said. "With what!" I replied.

Then, like a bolt of lightning, an idea struck me. All along the gas line corridor, landowners were being paid for easement rights. Why not appeal to them to pool their easement money and buy Nicholdale for the Shelton Land Trust? It could become a nucleus to which, in time, the trust could add and preserve additional parcels!

"We will appeal to some of the landowners including the Land Trust (which

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## Odyssey cont. from page 1

owned the George Willis woods) and call our group the 'Partners in Protection,'" I said. Philip liked the idea.

After Christmas tree season in 1990, I worked almost daily for three months to bring Partners in Protection to fruition. To this day, it remains one of the greatest learning experiences of my lifetime.

One by one, I convinced several partners to join in the venture. In addition to the Jones Farm, the partners were the City of Shelton, Bridgeport Hydraulic Company (now Aquarion), Iroquois, the Nichols Family, and of course, our Shelton Land Trust. A special advisor and precious citizen of our community, Attorney John Welch, volunteered countless hours to guide me through the legal intricacies. Bob Reid, President of Iroquois, was also committed to our success from "day one". He ensured that his staff helped to overcome many challenges. In the end, their special LPEP (Land Protection and Enhancement Program) grant of \$970,000 brought us to the \$1.3 million goal.

Later in 1992, our project won honorable mention in the prestigious, national Alexander Calder Conservation Award for excellence in a public/private partnership for outstanding land conservation.

But the greatest prize of all is knowing Nicholdale and its beauty are protected forever. I am proud of the land stewardship that Shelton Land Trust leaders have brought to Nicholdale and the recreational use citizens and scouts are enjoying.

Nicholdale has indeed become the 'crown jewel' at the heart of the Means Brook Valley.

## Shelton: a growing community – comments from the SLCT President.

No one likes change, especially for many land trust members it hurts us to see farmland and woodlands lost to development. The unfortunate reality is both our organization and the City have limited funds and it would be economically impossible to purchase all land that we would ideally like to see added to our open space inventory that comes on the market, (as much as we would like to). We know each landowner has the right to do what they choose with their property but every well planned community places restraints upon those desires with a thought out plan of zoning. The one problem that seems to happen more and more in Shelton is the recent use of zone changes known as the Planned Development District ("PDD"). Many feel this right is being abused with the ability to seek a PDD change in the current zoning plan solely to increase density. Lately, with each recent approval of a PDD, the end result appears to be the over development of property with little public benefit or account for natural resources that would be observed under a traditional zoning application. By not following the City's Plan of Conservation and Development, projects will continue to be approved haphazardly and without proper consideration of their long term impact upon our community. While it is easy to blame the property owner or developer, they are only proposing what they feel they can get away with based upon a flawed zoning loophole. SLCT hopes that our current Planning and Zoning and Wetlands Commissions look at the big picture of community, environment, and overall quality of life not just promises of tax dollars generated from mega complexes. It is time to figure out the best way to grow our community and we can only hope elected boards maintain a balance and listen to the folks in the community whom they represent and listen to residents' concerns about how proposed projects would negatively impact our quality of life in the place we call home, Shelton CT.

~ Joseph Welsh

## Reasons to Support Local Farming

(which includes maple syrup, honey, fishing, alpaca/lama farms, orchards, flowers and shrubbery, meat/poultry for human consumption, eggs, dairies, tobacco and more)

Part of substantiality

Support local and state economy

Works with habitat and biodiversity

Protects air and H2O

Promotes flood and water protection

Scenic beauty

Recreation

Maintains cultural resources

Cuts down on invasive species

Cooling effect in summer

Enhances preservation and conservation

Saves on development costs (which over time raise education, fire/police depts. , municipal services etc.)

Leads to less processed foods

Health benefits of fresh products

Quality of products is higher than trucked in (less traffic and pollution too)

Less risk to national security with an available local supply

Uses less commercial energy

Can you add more to this list from your personal experience right here in Shelton?

We look forward to seeing you on the 19th at the library.

# **PRESERVING CONNECTICUT FARMLAND:**

SLCT values the role of the Connecticut Farmland Trust, CFT for short. Formed to protect farmland and farmers throughout Connecticut, we are pleased to share some more about this great group. We hope the following information will provide a little more information about this wonderful organization that since 2002 has worked to permanently protect forty one farms throughout the state. A job well done!

## **CFT Mission**

Connecticut Farmland Trust is a statewide nonprofit organization working to protect farmland from the constant threat of development. Keeping land in farms helps to establish a local, sustainable food system, supports our economy, and contributes to improving the quality of land, air and water. Our goal is to make working lands available to Connecticut farmers for the indefinite future.

## **CFT History**

Since 2002, Connecticut Farmland Trust has partnered with farm owners and organizations throughout the state to procure agricultural conservation easements on 41 farms. So far, we've ensured that over 3,000 acres of farmland will remain farmland forever, and we're constantly working to save more.

## **CFT What We Do**

You can't live without the land that grows your food. Once it's turned into a subdivision, it's gone forever. We work to make sure that farmland will be there forever, so that the next generation of farmers will always have fields to sow and our children will have local produce on their plates.

## **CFT Partnership**

Working together with statewide organizations, state and federal governmental agencies, municipalities, and local land trusts, we bring together funds to procure agricultural conservation easements on active farms. As stewards of the land, we hold these easements in perpetuity – so the farms will stay farms forever.

## **CFT Easements**

What is an agricultural conservation easement, you ask? Agricultural conservation easements are voluntary, legal agreements that permanently protect farmland by restricting non-agricultural development on that land. The landowner willingly gifts or sells his or her right to develop their land for non-agricultural use. Farmers retain ownership of the land, as well as the rights to sell, gift, transfer, or lease it. Meanwhile, they can also reap the financial benefits of an easement sale and gain the peace of mind knowing that their farm will never become a subdivision. Easements allow land to be sold at its "use value", rather than its "fair market value" or "highest and best use value". This enables new and expanding farmers to acquire affordable farmland.

## **CFT Stewardship**

There's more to protecting farmland than promising not to pave over fields. An easement is a landowner's promise to care for the land. The goal of stewardship is to ensure that the terms of the easement are abided by. We make sure that if the land changes hands, the new landowners understand the terms of the easement. Baseline documentation is established and yearly inspections are enacted to monitor changes and to keep track of new issues or concerns.

## **CFT Why it Matters**

Over 50 acres of U.S. farm and ranch land are lost every hour. The nation lost a million acres of farmland in 2015. Once that land is gone, it's gone forever. When we protect a farm, we also guard our heritage and our commitment to a sustainable future.

## **CFT Food Security**

About 90% of New England's food comes from outside of the region. Unfortunately, total local food self-reliance is unrealistic. A New England Food Vision, a collaborative report considering the future of sustainable food production throughout the region, explores New England's potential to produce 50% of its food by 2060. Reaching this goal would require New England to dedicate six million acres to producing food. That's three times as much land as is currently engaged in agricultural production. Protecting farmland ensures that it will be available to feed future generations.

## **CFT Land, Air, and Water**

The quality of the natural world around us benefits from farmland protection. Preserving farmland protects wetlands and watersheds, water quality, and provides protection from flooding. Farmland is an important source of habitat for birds and wildlife.

## **CFT Economy**

Farmland generates more funds in local property tax revenue than it demands in government services. According to a UCONN study, the agricultural industry has an impact of up to \$3.5 billion on the state economy, and generates approximately 20,000 jobs statewide.

## **CFT Accreditation**

Connecticut Farmland Trust strives for the highest standards in land conservation. In 2012 we were awarded accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, a national program led by the Land Trust Alliance. Accredited land trusts have demonstrated their commitment to national quality standards for nonprofit management and land conservation. The rigorous accreditation program verifies that the land trust has systems in place to ensure the promise of land protection is a permanent one.

More information on how you can support CFT be found on their website [www.ctfarmland.org](http://www.ctfarmland.org)

## **Backyard Conservation - tips for environmentally friendly living at home from SLCT.**

### **Composting 101:**

Compost is organic material that can be added to soil to help plants grow. Food scraps and yard waste currently make up 20 to 30 percent of what we throw away, and should be composted instead. Making compost keeps these materials out of landfills where they take up space and release methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

### **Composting Basics:**

All composting requires three basic ingredients:

- Browns - This includes materials such as dead leaves, branches, and twigs.
- Greens - This includes materials such as grass clippings, vegetable waste, fruit scraps, and coffee grounds.
- Water - Having the right amount of water, greens, and browns is important for compost development.

Your compost pile should have an equal amount of browns to greens. You should also alternate layers of organic materials of different-sized particles. The brown materials provide carbon for

your compost, the green materials provide nitrogen, and the water provides moisture to help break down the organic matter.

Benefits of Composting:

- Enriches soil, helping retain moisture and suppress plant diseases and pests.
- Reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.
- Encourages the production of beneficial bacteria and fungi that break down organic matter to create humus, a rich nutrient-filled material.
- Reduces methane emissions from landfills and lowers your carbon footprint.

### **Backyard Composting:**

- Select a dry, shady spot near a water source for your compost pile or bin.
- Add brown and green materials as they are collected, making sure larger pieces are chopped or shredded.
- Moisten dry materials as they are added.
- Once your compost pile is established, mix grass clippings and green waste into the pile and bury fruit and vegetable waste under 10 inches of compost material. Mix regularly.
- Optional: Cover top of compost with a

tarp to keep it moist. When the material at the bottom is dark and rich in color, your compost is ready to use. This usually takes anywhere between two months to two years.

### **What to compost:**

Fruits and vegetables, eggshells, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags, nut shells, shredded newspaper, cardboard, yard trimmings, grass clippings, house plants, hay and straw, leaves, sawdust, wood chips, cotton and wool, dryer and vacuum cleaner lint, hair and fur, fireplace ashes.

### **What not to compost and why:**

Coal or charcoal ash, dairy products (e.g., butter, milk, sour cream, yogurt), diseased or insect-ridden plants, fats, grease, lard, or oils, meat or fish bones and scraps, pet wastes (e.g., dog or cat feces, soiled cat litter), yard trimmings treated with chemical pesticides.

The above information was provided by US EPA. A variety of compost bins can be made from recycled material such as wood pallets, chicken wire, or garbage cans with plenty of holes drilled about 6 inches apart. Start composting today, your plants and vegetables will never be happier.

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# **Shelton Land Conservation Trust, Inc.**

**P.O. Box 2276 • Huntington Station • Shelton, Connecticut 06484**

### **President**

Joseph Welsh

### **Vice President**

Edward McCreery

### **Secretary**

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### **Board Members**

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Robert Liddel

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Lynn Todd Reid

## **2017 General Meetings 2nd Wednesday of the month.**

**April 19 (Annual Meeting)**

**May 10**

**June 14**

**July 12**

**August 9**

**September 13**

**October 11**

**November 8**

**December 12**

**All general meetings will take place at the**

**Shelton Community Center**

**41 Church St.**

**Shelton, CT 04484**

To be better informed about Land Trust activities and local conservation issues, why not join the Trust's email alert list? To be added, simply send an email to [slctjoew@sbcglobal.net](mailto:slctjoew@sbcglobal.net)

