

# AMERICAN Farmland

THE MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

## NATURE *at its* BEST

### SANDY & ROSSIE FISHER

AFT'S 2007  
STEWARDS OF  
THE LAND





# 7 Simple Steps to Save Farmland

**LOOKING FOR WAYS TO HELP?** Here are seven easy ways you can help protect America's vital and irreplaceable farm and ranch land.

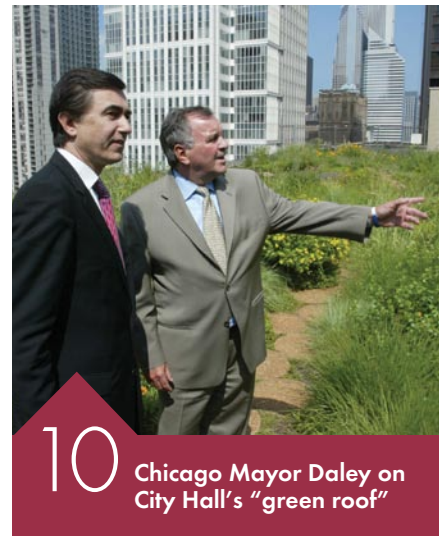
DONE!

1. Make your voice heard by signing up for AFT's Action Network to send important messages to decision makers on urgent policy and planning initiatives. Visit [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org) and click on Action Center. ☐
2. **Shop at farmers' markets.** Buy locally grown produce and encourage your grocer to stock food grown in the United States. ☐
3. **Be attentive to farm and ranch land issues in your area**—and try to have an impact on decisions made by your local zoning board or planning commission. ☐
4. **Write a letter to the editor** of your local paper supporting farmland protection or advocating changes in farm policy. ☐
5. Keep current on AFT's latest activities, farm and ranch land protection, U.S. agriculture policy and more by signing up for AFT's monthly E-News. Visit [www.farmland.org/news](http://www.farmland.org/news). ☐
6. **Spread the word about farmland protection.** Tell your friends and neighbors about the work you're supporting at AFT. Urge your school system to address conservation issues in the curriculum. ☐
7. Support American Farmland Trust. Stay active as a member and help even more through our special campaigns to save the land that sustains us. Ask about gift memberships or join Perennial Partners, AFT's monthly giving club. Find out more about including AFT in your will or other estate plans, for instance by establishing a charitable gift annuity. Visit [www.farmland.org/support](http://www.farmland.org/support). ☐

**Thank you for your interest in our work and for your support of American Farmland Trust!**



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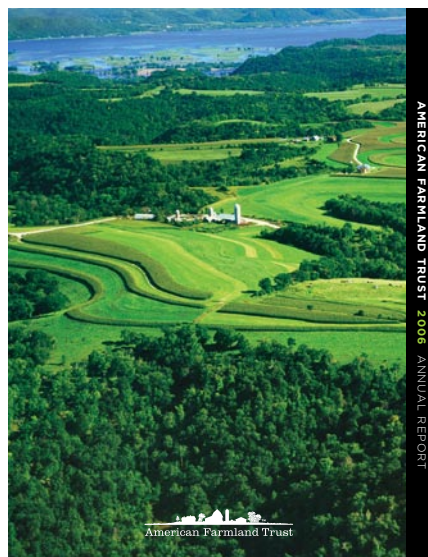


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 2006 ANNUAL REPORT**



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## Note from the Editor

AFT members received this issue of *American Farmland* by mail with AFT's annual report inside. If you obtained this issue of the magazine by another means, the annual report may not be included. However, you may view the annual report online at [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org) or request a printed copy by calling (800) 431-1499.

**ON THE COVER:** *Sandy and Rossie Fisher of Brookview Farm in Manakin-Sabot, Virginia, received AFT's 2007 Steward of the Land Award.*

PHOTO BY SAM KITTNER



ONE OF MY FAVORITE events of the year takes place each spring when American Farmland Trust staff, friends and supporters gather to present our annual Steward of the Land Award to a farmer or farm family who represents everything that AFT stands for—dedication to conservation practices and ideals, on-farm innovation, leadership in the community and a deep commitment to, and love for, the land that sustains us all.

This year, I was proud to present the

2007 Steward of the Land Award to Sandy and Rossie Fisher of Brookview Farm in Manakin-Sabot, Virginia.

When it comes to farming, the Fishers have learned how to meld the best practices of years-afore with new-found innovations that contribute to the farm's long-term ecological and economic sustainability. The Fishers' entrepreneurial spirit combines with their environmental stewardship in the best possible way—not only

does the farm receive income from the sale of grass-fed beef, organic eggs and vegetables in their on-farm store, but they also generate profits from a composting operation that takes tons of leaves from the community, turning the municipal waste into organic fertilizer for their own farm and for others in the community.

Brookview Farm provides a wonderful example of how an environmental by-product, once viewed only as waste to be discarded, could become a valuable resource with a little ingenuity. They are an example of a farm that has never been afraid to adopt new marketing methods or

environmental practices as their operation has evolved over the years. The Fishers represent the kind of entrepreneurship and forward-thinking ecological sense that we should be rewarding through our nation's farm and food programs.

In May, I testified before the U.S. House Agriculture Subcommittee, which is currently deciding not only how conservation programs will be funded for the next five years, but also whether important changes will be made to



**The Fishers represent the kind of entrepreneurship and forward-thinking ecological sense that we should be rewarding through our nation's farm and food programs.**

help farmers address our nation's resource concerns, such as water quality, wildlife habitat and farm and ranch land protection. Given the increased pressure on the landscape that will result from the renewable fuels boom, I testified that now is a critical time for the federal government to increase its investment in conservation.

(Learn more about how you can help us get the message to Congress by visiting our "Action Center" at [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).)

I hope you enjoy reading more about the Fisher family, our inspirational Stewards of the Land, in this issue of AFT's magazine. I also hope you will join with AFT as we continue our fight to make much needed changes to national farm and food policies—changes that will allow farmers and ranchers across the nation to be the best stewards of the land that they can be.

Thank you.

RALPH GROSSI

### AMERICAN FARMLAND

is published four times a year by American Farmland Trust, a nonprofit membership organization founded in 1980 to protect the nation's agricultural resources. AFT works to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment.

Basic annual membership dues are \$25. Membership benefits include a year's subscription to the award-winning magazine, *American Farmland*, and a 10-percent discount on all AFT publications and merchandise. Membership contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

AFT occasionally exchanges its membership mailing list with others. If you wish to be excluded from such exchanges, call Member Services at (800) 431-1499. A copy of AFT's most recent financial report can be obtained by writing to American Farmland Trust, 1200 18th St. NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Web site: [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

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## VIEW FROM THE FIELD



A view of the upper Fetcher Ranch near Hahns Peak, Colorado. Thanks to rancher John Fetcher, a long-time member of AFT, for sending this photograph of his protected ranch in the Upper Elk River Valley.

## THE ART OF CONSERVATION



AFT intern Alison Nihart, a studio art and environmental studies major, designed this sign, which was presented to AFT's 2007 Steward of the Land winners.

## WANTED: Farm Policy that Respects the Land

The enclosed article ["You Are What You Grow," Michael Pollan, *New York Times Magazine*, April 22] describes what is wrong with the old farm bill. In addition, the ethanol craze seems to accelerate the problems, e.g. by stimulating monoculture, price increases for corn, depletion of water resources (for ethanol production). I hope that discussions include all such considerations and wish you success in fighting for a sustainable, not a soil exhausting, agricultural policy which respects the land, not abuses it.

—DOROTHEE AEPPLI, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

**AMERICAN FARMLAND** welcomes letters and feedback from readers. Please send your comments, stories or personal reflections on farm life to Kirsten Ferguson, Editor, American Farmland Trust, 1200 18th St. NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20036, or email [kferguson@farmland.org](mailto:kferguson@farmland.org).



# Around the Country

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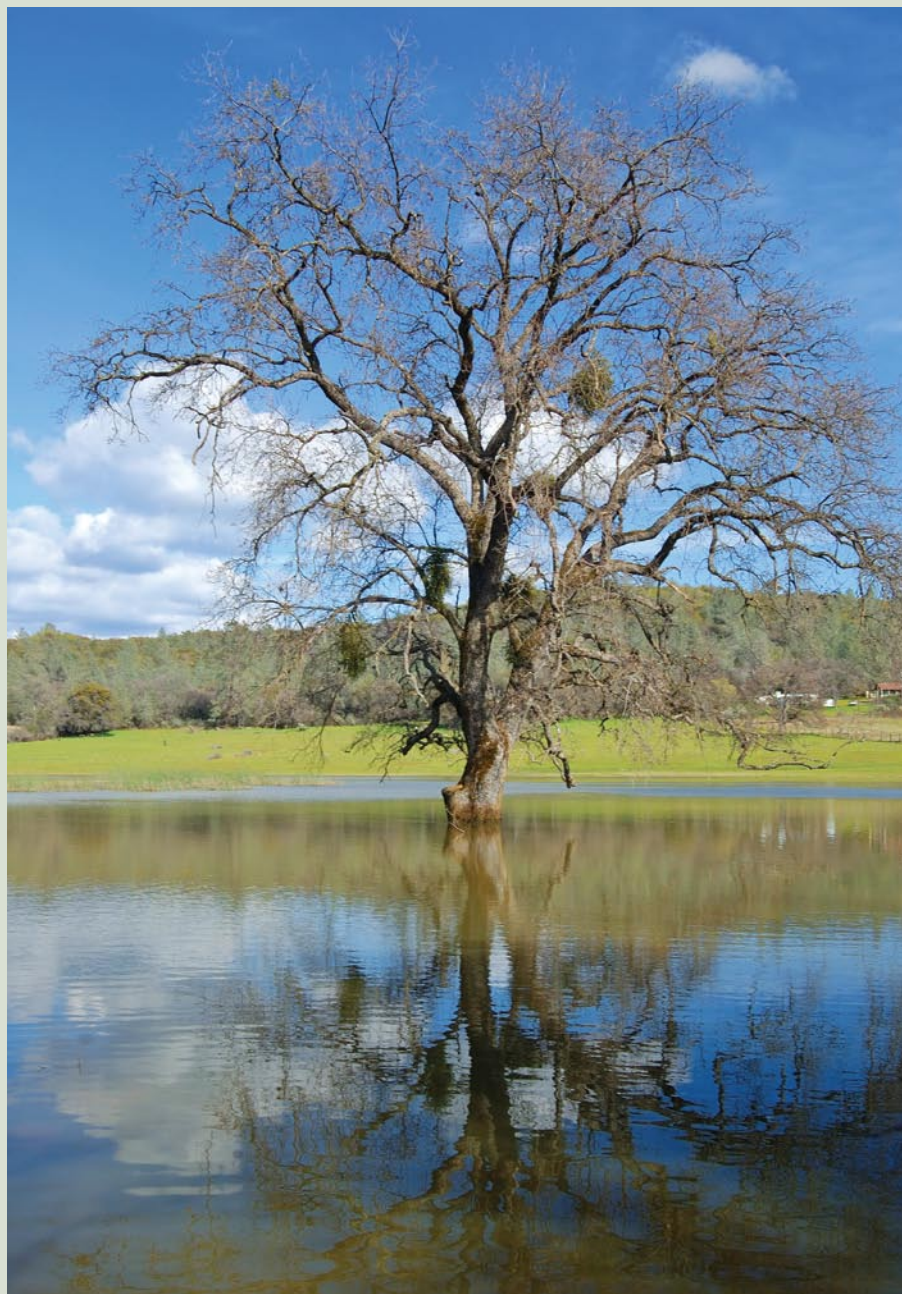
## California Recognizes Agriculture's Role in Reducing Greenhouse Gases

IN 2006, THE STATE of California released "Our Changing Climate," a report warning that climate change could have a significant impact on the state's \$30 billion agriculture industry. In the United States, California is the primary producer of many fruits and crops that would be adversely affected by global warming. Rising temperatures and changes in precipitation patterns, for instance, could reduce the quantity and quality of some of California's most popular crops, in-

### FARM FACT

Agriculture can help slow the pace of global warming by trapping carbon in the soil.

Carbon sequestration is the removal of carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, from the atmosphere into a stable form such as wood or soil organic matter. Conservation practices—including no-till cultivation, new tree plantings, rotational grass-based livestock grazing and vegetative buffers along streams—can help farmers capture and store more carbon in the soil. Eventually, cropland and grassland could store a significant quantity of the carbon dioxide produced in the United States, and markets are already being established to pay farmers and ranchers for storing carbon.



MARK RASMUSSEN/ISTOCKPHOTO

A rise in sea level could render key agricultural areas like the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and the Salinas Valley—the nation's "salad bowl" and source of 90 percent of the world's artichokes—unable to be farmed due to flooding or the intrusion of salts into groundwater.

cluding almonds, cherries, apricots and wine grapes.

But landmark legislation, known as the Global Warming Solutions Act or Assembly Bill 32, was signed into law last September by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, making the state a national leader in efforts to reduce the impact of greenhouse gases on global climate. The legisla-

tion establishes enforceable caps on greenhouse gas emissions, with the goal of reducing them 25 percent by the year 2020.

Agriculture will have a major role to play in the new law's implementation. Although farms emit some greenhouse gases in the form of methane from livestock and nitrous oxide from fertilizers, they also

serve as a major carbon sink since every plant growing on a farm pulls greenhouse gases from the air. It's unclear yet how much farmers stand to gain from the new legislation, but American Farmland Trust's California director Ed Thompson, Jr., believes it will create opportunities for the state's farmers and ranchers to help reduce greenhouse gases in a number of ways. "The legislation could benefit agriculture by creating a market for farm conservation practices, such as no-till farming and rotational grazing," Thompson says.

Protecting farmland from development and keeping it forever green with conservation easements is another way that agriculture can be part of the solution. "Protecting farmland can secure the long-term carbon sequestration benefits of greener pastures and croplands," Thompson says. "And, if strategically planned, the preservation of land can influence the direction and configuration of urban development, resulting in more tightly-knit, livable communities where people don't have to rely exclusively on autos. The preservation of farmland close to cities also keeps open the option of growing food more locally, thus reducing 'food miles' traveled."

For information on how to encourage California officials to pay attention to the role that farmland preservation and agriculture can play in reducing climate change, visit the California page of AFT's Web site at [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).

### How Expensive Is Sprawl? Very, Finds Delaware Study

SPRAWL EATS UP not just productive land but also state budgets, according to a study of growth and spending that AFT presented to Delaware Governor Ruth Ann

Minner and representatives of the state legislature on May 16. Governor Minner said the study confirms, "Sprawl costs taxpayers."

Reviewing land development patterns, AFT found that in its first 300 years—from 1685 to 1984—Delaware developed 125,000 acres to urbanized use. Since then, the state has doubled that development. "This remarkable increase in land consumption resulted not just from population growth but also from an increase in average house lots and infrastructure such as roads and shopping centers," says Julia Freedgood, AFT's director of technical assistance and land protection services. Before 1984, an average new house was built on less than half an acre of land. Between 1984 and 2002, that rate nearly tripled to 1.23 acres.

After World War II, residents flocked to new subdivisions on former farm and forest land in a pattern commonly known as sprawl. In 1940, more than 40 percent of the state's population lived in Wilmington. By

2000, that number had dropped to only about nine percent, with land in farms declining by 344,000 acres over 50 years. As these changes occurred, the state had to build expensive roads and infrastructure to serve increasingly fragmented land development patterns. The study also found that since 1982, auto travel had increased by 79 percent. Adjusted for inflation, school transportation costs increased 335 percent after 1970, even with a 20-year decline in school-aged children.

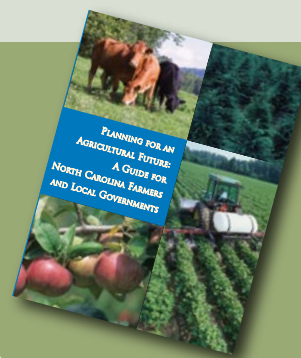
"The trends in state spending mirrored the increases in land consumption, not population increases or even new houses," Freedgood says. "Since 1984, both the land consumption rate and the capital budget per person have tripled. If the historical pattern of land development prior to 1984 had been maintained, Delaware could have saved 72,000 acres by 2002, nearly the number of acres it has protected purchasing agricultural conservation easements."

### New Guide Helps North Carolina Plan for Its Farms

"If you fail to plan, you're planning to fail," writes Gerry Cohn, AFT's Southeast director, in the introduction to a new guide for North Carolina farmers, planners and county commissioners. The publication—*Planning for an Agricultural Future: A Guide for North Carolina Farmers and Local Governments*—covers strategies for supporting North Carolina agriculture, a \$68 billion-a-year industry that employs nearly a fourth of the state's workforce.

The AFT guide discusses ways for North Carolina farmers and communities to positively guide future development and land use with agricultural conservation easements and local planning tools, such as comprehensive plans, zoning, right-to-farm laws and agricultural districts. It also highlights programs available to help farmers protect natural resources, stay profitable and transition the farm to the next generation.

A free version of the guide is available online at [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org) with a resource index and links to sample documents and ordinances. Printed copies of the guide can be purchased at [www.farmland.org/resources/publications](http://www.farmland.org/resources/publications) or by calling (800) 370-4879, ext. 17.





Delaware's Secretary of Agriculture Michael Scuse announced plans to introduce a transfer of development rights measure in June that would discourage development in rural areas not targeted for growth. The measure would allow farmers in rural areas to sell their development rights to builders working in designated growth zones.

AFT's full report is available on the Farmland Information Center Web site at [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org).

### Michigan Highway Project Threatens Preserved Farmland

A ROAD PROJECT IN Kalamazoo County, Michigan, is alarming farm-

land advocates throughout the state, because the land slated to be paved for a three-mile stretch of road is permanently preserved farmland. Larry and Brigitte Leach own the 1,200-acre cash crop and greenhouse operation near Climax, Michigan, which the Kalamazoo County Road Commission is attempting to buy through eminent domain. The Leach family protected 532 acres of their prime soils in 2001 by enrolling in Michigan's Farmland Preservation Program. Next door to their farm is a 600-acre parcel of farmland that was protected by American Farmland Trust.

The landowners, who protected their land in part so their daughter

could have the opportunity to continue the family farm, are not cooperating with the condemnation proceedings. The Michigan Department of Agriculture, which administers the state's farmland protection program and opposes the road project, has asked the Michigan Attorney General to rule on the situation. And Scott Everett, AFT's Michigan director, has spoken out against the condemnation of the protected land.

"We don't want to lose this fight because farmers—whether they have preserved land or not—have a lot at stake in this issue," Everett says. "If the local road commission is able to put a road through a preserved farm, it will make it 10 times easier to take



## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

### Planning for Agriculture in the Connecticut River Valley

**Where is the project?** The Hartford County region—including the city of Hartford and its surrounding suburbs—a crossroads of sprawling housing development and rich farmland soils characteristic of the Connecticut River Valley.

**What kinds of farms are in the region?** Hartford County farms are best known for their quality tobacco leaf, turf and wholesale vegetables. The county also has popular fruit orchards and farm stands.

**What is the project?** AFT and the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities are collaborating on projects that will improve the capacity of local officials to support and sustain agriculture. The *Connecticut Grown Communities Project*, funded by The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, is convening a team of planning and agriculture experts who will develop a new guide for Connecticut mu-

nicipalities interested in promoting farm-friendly local policies. The project also is developing a guide to conservation-based affordable housing strategies and is looking at ways to promote comprehensive planning that considers preservation and rural character along with affordable housing needs.

**Why is the project needed?** Rapid housing development and an increasingly fragmented agricultural industry have left municipalities uncertain about how to ensure the long-term viability of farming. New neighbor complaints about the sights, sounds and smells of agriculture are on the rise, and farm businesses are increasingly challenged by restrictive zoning, changing definitions of agriculture and misunderstandings about agricultural operations.

**Where can I learn more?** For more information, contact AFT's Jiff Martin at (860) 683-4230 or [jmartin@farmland.org](mailto:jmartin@farmland.org).



preserved land in the future. In other states, in order to condemn, there must be no alternatives and some really good reasons to condemn legally preserved farmland. But that is not the case here.”

Part of the problem is the tendency of some developers and officials to think of farmland as vacant land, Everett says. “I’m sure the road commission doesn’t understand that this land is fully developed and active in the business enterprise of farming. And the land’s preservation means that you can’t do anything on it that adversely affects its value as agriculture.” With little legal precedent in Michigan on the issue, the Leaches and farmland conservation advocates are forced to await the attorney general’s opinion.

### Ohio Introduces Transfer of Development Rights Bill

AFT IS BEHIND new legislation in Ohio that, if passed, would allow interested communities to preserve farmland through the transfer of development rights (TDR). The legislation, House Bill 69, would help local governments shift development away from farming areas by encouraging developers to preserve farmland in exchange for being able to develop at greater density in areas designated for growth.

A letter from Brian Williams, AFT’s Ohio director, to the *Columbus Dispatch* in May addressed some of the common misconceptions about the bill, for instance that developers and landowners would be required to participate. “It simply empowers local governments to be creative and to use market forces with willing partners for public benefit,” Williams said. “The bill would only apply to communities that choose to do a transfer plan, and it would work only

## New Mid-Atlantic Director Joins AFT

Jim Baird, an advocate for conservation and agriculture, is AFT’s new Mid-Atlantic States Director. Baird will continue AFT’s long-standing work to advance farmland protection and conservation in the region, while exploring new opportunities for Mid-Atlantic agriculture.

Prior to joining AFT, Baird worked for The Izaak Walton League of America, a national conservation organization with roots in the hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation community. As director of the organization’s Sustainability Education Program, Baird worked on advocacy and outreach related to the conservation of natural resources, open space protection and community sustainability initiatives. Before that, he worked on Maryland agriculture and environment issues as a consultant to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

Baird worked overseas for 12 years, mostly in Africa, on community development, agriculture and natural resource management with the Peace Corps, the Salvation Army and as an independent consultant. He holds a M.S. in Program Evaluation from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a B.A. in History from Middlebury College. He has received additional training in community and environmental decision-making through the Cornell University Program on Environmental Conflict Management and on environmental conflict management and green communities through the USDA and EPA.

The Mid-Atlantic office is located at the national headquarters of American Farmland Trust. Baird can be reached at (202) 378-1235 or via email at [jbaird@farmland.org](mailto:jbaird@farmland.org).



if willing landowners negotiate a mutually acceptable price with willing developers or other buyers of the development rights.”

As Williams stated in the letter, TDR programs have been popular and successful in other parts of the country. In Montgomery County, Maryland, for instance, more than 40,000 acres of land have been preserved through transfers. In the Pinelands area of New Jersey, the figure is over 31,000 acres.

“There is a public purpose to preserving farmland,” Williams said. “And local governments are obligated to meet those public goals at the

lowest cost to taxpayers. It’s highly efficient to encourage developers to pay some of those costs in return for allowing them to develop at greater density in designated areas. The developers more than make up for the cost of development rights by being able to build and sell more homes on smaller parcels, allowing affordable housing with lower infrastructure costs.”

House Bill 69 has near-unanimous support in the House Local Government Committee, but progress has slowed amid efforts to win support from the House leadership and to allay the fears of development interests.

## New Legislation to Benefit Farmers, Consumers and Communities

IN MAY, THE Farm, Nutrition, and Community Investment Act was introduced in both houses of Congress. The bill charts a new direction for U.S. farm and food policies by addressing national priorities in areas such as healthy diets, conservation, farm and ranch land protection, hunger, agricultural viability and innovation, rural prosperity, renewable energy and local food systems.

A growing list of bipartisan Congress members has signed on to the bill, which was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) and in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD).

"The Farm, Nutrition, and Community Investment Act is a major new contribution to the 2007 Farm Bill debate, by addressing the deficiencies in today's farm and food policy in a comprehensive way," says Ralph Grossi, AFT's president. "For instance, the bill proposes a new program to foster farm profitability for all producers. This program would give state departments of agriculture the ability to distribute grant funds based on the priorities and needs identified through state-level strategic plans, with the USDA ensuring program accountability. This is just one of many ideas in this bill that could change the direction of U.S. farm policy for the better."

In addition to the state farm profitability grants program, the Farm, Nutrition, and Community Investment Act provides recommendations to increase funding for, and improve, conservation programs; to reform and adequately fund farmland protection efforts; and to improve and expand crop insurance, renewable

### AFT Honors Congressional Stewards of the Land



In May, Richard Rominger (left), AFT board member, and Ralph Grossi (right), AFT's president, presented an award to Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) for his lifelong support of conservation and America's farms. Harkin chairs the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. In 2002, he helped create the Conservation Security Program (CSP), which provides financial incentives to farmers and ranchers who adopt and maintain sound conservation practices on agricultural land. Harkin also established the first-ever renewable energy title, and he is working to expand and strengthen conservation initiatives in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Earlier in the spring, AFT honored two other U.S. Senators and three U.S. Representatives for their commitment to conservation and farmland protection: Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA), Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) and Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD).

JENNIFER MORRILL

energy and forestry programs. The bill also includes dairy and organic policy recommendations; strengthens the nation's food assistance programs; and supports the production, distribution and access to healthy foods in order to address the country's hunger and healthy diet issues.

"AFT is proud to have worked with Representatives DeLauro and Gilchrest and Senator Schumer to develop a bill that will help meet the unmet needs of farmers, children,

consumers and the environment around the country," continues Grossi. "Efforts such as this represent a new alliance of interests—agriculture, conservation, public health and anti-hunger are coming together to make sure our national farm and food policy is fair, equitable and provides public benefits."

To learn more about the Farm, Nutrition, and Community Investment Act, visit AFT's Web site at [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).



## Jerry Cosgrove Named New York's Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture

AFTER 15 YEARS with American Farmland Trust, Jerry Cosgrove was selected this spring to serve as a deputy commissioner of New York's Department of Agriculture and Markets, where his program responsibilities include farmland conservation, agricultural economic development and dairy issues.

Cosgrove was honored in April by New York's League of Conservation Voters for his achievements in farmland conservation. "I'm excited to be at the Department of Agriculture and Markets. We have the opportunity to take New York's farmland conservation programs and put them at the top of the charts nationwide," said Cosgrove upon receiving the award.

While AFT's Northeast Director, Cosgrove stewarded many key pieces of legislation through the New York Legislature, including the Farmers' School Tax Credit



Jerry Cosgrove with Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), who serves on the U.S. House Agriculture Committee and key-noted the League of Conservation Voters event at which Cosgrove was awarded for his achievements in farmland conservation.

and the state's Farmland Protection Program, which grew from having virtually no funding 10 years ago to receiving \$28 million this year. Cosgrove also established a key partnership between AFT and the Watershed Agricultural Council, forging innovative farm and forest conservation programs in the upstate New York watersheds that

supply drinking water to millions of New York City residents.

"Jerry brought his family farm experience and legal expertise to our organization, where he helped us tremendously in the areas of farm estate planning and educating the farming community to embrace conservation easements," says Bob Wagner, AFT's managing director for field programs. "With his great dedication to farmland conservation and farm viability, Jerry helped to build

the capacity of AFT throughout New York and the Northeast."

David Haight, AFT's New York director, will continue to oversee AFT's New York projects, and Cris Coffin will continue to direct AFT's New England field office.

## Congress Is Debating Farms and Food... You Can Join In!

Many consumers are not aware that the nation's farm and food programs, packaged in the farm bill, influence everything from the food available in grocery stores to food stamp eligibility to what farmers grow and how farmers take care of the environment.

To educate consumers about the importance of the 2007 Farm Bill debate, AFT and Coleman Natural Foods have developed a new brochure and Web site. The "Congress Is Talking About Your Food" brochure and supporting Web site, [www.ourhealthyland.org](http://www.ourhealthyland.org), provide an overview of U.S. farm and food policy and suggest ways for consumers to become involved.

Visit [www.ourhealthyland.org](http://www.ourhealthyland.org) to learn more. To obtain copies of the brochure for distribution, please call (800) 370-4879, ext. 17.

The brochure and Web site are a joint project of Coleman Natural Foods and AFT through the Coleman Eco-Project 2015, a decade-long conservation program created to raise awareness about the link between conservation, healthy land, healthy food and healthy people, and to connect consumers with where and how their food is raised and produced.



## Richard M. Daley, Mayor of Chicago

BY ANNA ROZZI

CHICAGO MAYOR Richard M. Daley has earned a national reputation for innovative, community-based programs that address environmental concerns, land use, access to locally grown food and other challenges facing American cities. A former state senator and county prosecutor, Daley was first elected mayor in 1989 and has been re-elected four times since. He was chosen by *Time Magazine* as one of the five best big city mayors and was awarded the Openlands Project Conservation Leadership Award in 2000.

With 76 percent of Illinois in farmland, and roughly 73,000 farms in the state, Mayor Daley has made great efforts to support agricultural and environmental innovation and protection in and around the Chicago area. By founding the Greencorps program in 1994, Mayor Daley made the first step in bridging the gap between Illinois' large agricultural and urban sectors. The Greencorps program has established nearly 100 community gardens at schoolyards and other locations in the Chicago metropolitan area, while distributing garden materials to over 900 community gardens in Chicago, free of charge.

Mayor Daley also helped to initiate the Harvest Garden program, which teaches participants how to start and maintain organic gardens—increasing access to healthy and fresh food in densely urban areas. In 2005, under the mayor's watch, 50 acres were added to the Chicago Park District holdings, which increased the amount of tree canopy in the city, decreasing the urban heat island effects. Mayor Daley is committed

to making Chicago one of the most environmentally friendly cities in the nation, and with all of these changes, “the Windy City” just may become “the Greenest City.”

**Q. What inspired you to “green roof” Chicago’s City Hall and then launch a green roof initiative?**

**A.** A green roof was installed on the roof of City Hall in 2000 after I took a trip to Germany and observed the use of rooftop gardens to manage storm water and reduce the urban heat island effect. The City Hall green roof is also home to many birds and insects as well as two Italian honeybee hives. More than 250 gardens and green roofs, covering more than 3.5 million square feet, have been constructed—or are underway—on top of public and private buildings, including schools, libraries and fire stations around Chicago.

Developers receive a density bonus for installing a green roof in the downtown area. Educational materials are distributed to developers and builders to teach them about the practical benefits of green roofs—both environmental and economical. Chicago requires green roofs to be installed on buildings of developers that are receiving economic assistance from the city.

**Q. What efforts have been made to make fresh and local food accessible in densely urban areas and in the Chicago school system?**

**A.** Our farmers’ markets are very successful and continue to expand and garner more support and participation from residents and local farmers. A permanent market is being researched. Pilot

programs are underway to integrate organic and locally grown produce and meats into the government-supported meal programs for elderly and low-income youths and adults these programs serve—the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District nature camps, and Meals on Wheels recipients.

**Q. Since the start of these urban agriculture programs, have you seen a change in the way consumers view and make their food choices?**

**A.** Millions of additional dollars are being spent annually in the Chicago region for organic and locally grown foods. The dramatic increase in demand for urban agriculture products demonstrates that fact.

**Q. How has your involvement in land use planning contributed to the protection of natural areas and open space?**

**A.** The city has developed several key land use plans to protect important natural areas and other open spaces. The CitySpace plan identified more than 100 sites in the city that deserved protection or, if they were already in public ownership, deserved more management attention. The Calumet Open Space Reserve laid out a prioritized plan for 3,900 acres of open space amid 3,000 acres of brownfields. Most of these open acres were in the form of wetlands and marshes, and they host dozens of state endangered and threatened species as well as several federally endangered and threatened species. Since I took office, the city has acquired more than 800 acres and placed them into publicly managed and owned open space.

Additionally as part of our efforts to make the modernization of





Mayor Daley gives a tour of the Chicago City Hall "green roof" to a foreign dignitary.

O'Hare Airport environmentally-friendly, we are replacing 154 acres of low quality, inaccessible wetlands currently on airport property with nearly 450 acres of higher quality wetlands, providing a more natural environment for birds and wildlife, and creating new passive recreation space in neighboring communities.

**Q. You have worked to establish neighborhood gardens as well as education programs focused around horticulture. Why are these programs so important to the livelihood of the city?**

**A.** Residents, community organizations and businesses alike understand that neighborhood gardens are an essential part of improving the quality of life in Chicago. Our Greencorps Chicago program educates community organizations and helps to build and improve neighborhood gardens through educational programs, technical assistance, plants and materials distribution. It also trains and places 30–40 ex-offenders in the landscape trade while building those gardens. This

allows us to impact both the environmental and economic needs of local communities.

**Q. In 1993, you established the Chicago Brownfields Initiative. What are some of the successes of that initiative?**

**A.** We have actively pursued environmentally impaired properties and created ways to develop such properties for reuse. We have worked with business owners to either expand at current locations within the city or to look at other locations, specifically properties that have had a history of poor environmental land management and are currently vacant. Various city departments work together to assemble properties, manage onsite environmental issues and create incentives that generate new jobs and return property to productive use.

The city has been able to leverage millions of developer dollars and federal grants to clean up property. To date, the city has returned approximately 1,000 acres back to productive use and has been recognized

for its efforts. In 2002, the city received a Phoenix Award for our Center for Green Technology. The Phoenix Award was created in 1997 to honor the groups that develop significant brownfields sites across the country. The Center for Green Technology was a concrete recycling operation that became an illegal dump and was transformed through environmentally sound "green" design into a state-of-the-art building, which is now a model for sustainable practices. It is the first municipal building in the world to be awarded a platinum rating by the U.S. Green Building Council.

**Q. With Chicago serving as a fantastic model, what advice can you offer other cities looking to establish environmental friendly programs and policies?**

**A.** Lead by example and start small with a few initiatives—research them, test them and if they are proven to be successful in your city's context, begin to recruit voluntary partnerships to expand the use of that particular green technology.

**Q. Looking toward the future, what will Chicago's 2007 Environmental Action Agenda look like?**

**A.** We launched Chicago's Environmental Agenda in 2005 and a revised version was unveiled in 2006. The agenda has laid the foundation for Chicago in terms of our past accomplishments and where we hope to take the city in the future. This past April, we announced the Environmental Pledge and asked every Chicagoan to take five simple actions that will help improve our environment. For cities to be successful with implementing environmentally friendly initiatives, it takes everyone working together.

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# NATURE *at its* BEST

SANDY &  
ROSSIE FISHER

**AFT'S 2007 STEWARDS  
OF THE LAND**

BY DES KELLER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
SAM KITTNER



*Sandy and Rossie  
Fisher, AFT's 2007  
Stewards of the Land,  
combine on-farm  
innovation with their  
love and respect  
for the land.*



*The Fishers have  
blended old-fashioned  
agriculture with some  
new ecological sense.*



**E**VEN THOUGH IT IS MID-APRIL, a nip in the air has generated a scramble to find enough portable lamps to serve as incubators for 150 new baby chicks. As if they had been ordered from the Sears Roebuck catalog a century ago, the chicks arrived in ventilated boxes at the post office nearest to Sandy and Rossie Fisher's Brookview Farm in the tiny community of Manakin-Sabot, west of Richmond, Virginia.

Caroline Ferguson, the wife of farm manager Allen Ferguson, sits on the floor of the 160-year-old brick out-building that serves as the birds' nursery. She has tucked several struggling chicks down inside her jacket for warmth. Sandy Fisher and part-time employee Kyle Kilduff are suspending work lamps a foot above the floor; the chicks are peeping, pecking and huddling in groups under the glow.

Even still, a handful of the new arrivals appear to be waning, so Rossie Fisher ferries them away to the house. There they are placed in a box on top of a warm running clothes dryer, and yet another lamp is fixed above them. Rossie murmurs concern because none of the five look good, but by the next morning all appear fit but one.

Such is life at Brookview Farm, where the Fishers have blended old-fashioned agriculture with some new

ecological sense. If you ask Sandy his favorite location on the farm, he likes to answer: "The compost piles, because that is nature at its best."

As an economic necessity, the Fishers have made their farm into a destination for adults and children who are hungry for a rural experience—to say nothing of the free-range eggs and grass-fed beef for sale. They are doing it in a region of increasing development for planned communities, golf courses, horse farms and mini-country estates.

ABOVE: Sandy Fisher, an inventor, made this egg washing machine from an old Maytag washer.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Brookview Farm cattle, raised outside on grass, enjoy the warmth of the farm's compost leaf piles during the colder months. In turn, the cattle aid the composting process by fertilizing the piles of leaves.







Portable chicken “condos” are moved twice daily to allow the chickens to eat insects and grass without fear of predators.

## Brookview Farm at a Glance

- 1,000 acres, nearly all of it in pasture. Part of the property borders the historic James River. The Fishers’ circa 1840 house was once a plantation overseers’ residence, while the farm store and other outbuildings were slave quarters.
- 50-head cow-calf operation. All calves are raised naturally on grass. Their beef is sold in their on-farm store, to a pair of local health food stores and to a local restaurant. The beef, termed “natural” before, is now certified organic.
- A flock of more than 220 hens that live 365 days per year in more than half a dozen large, movable habitats in the pastures. The birds eat bugs and worms in the grass as well as a feed consisting of corn, flaxseed, ground-up green beans and some alfalfa.
- Six acres devoted to compost piles consisting mostly of leaves, with some cow manure and additional organic waste. Brookview Farm is paid to take tons of municipal leaf waste. Within three years those leaves are turned into compost that they then sell—up to 120 dump truck loads per year.
- On Saturdays year-round, the Brookview Farm store is open to sell eggs, beef, vegetables, caps, and T-shirts in addition to other items. Farm hayride tours are conducted and visitors get to help collect eggs. The Fishers purchase certified organic wheat, which they grind on the farm and sell under their label.





## The Fishers Take Action in the Community

- In 2004, Sandy and Rossie founded the Center for Rural Culture, a non-profit organization to promote sustainable and profitable value-added agriculture in Virginia's Piedmont. The organization works with county governments and landowners on sustainable practices.
- Sandy has served on a committee of the Goochland County Planning Commission to help develop a new Open Space and Forestall Conservation District. The district would be entered into voluntarily by landowners to protect property from excessive development.
- Every year Sandy and Rossie present a program on sustainable profitable agriculture to the Goochland Leadership Enterprise class, which consists of residents who want to learn more about the culture, geography, politics and businesses of the county.
- The Fishers have enrolled 23 acres in the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, or CREP. The Fishers receive payments to set aside land along ponds and streams to help control erosion, create wildlife habitat and improve water quality.

In the early 1990s, the Fishers transitioned to raising grass-fed beef.

Here the market value of land fetches upward of \$20,000 per acre, but it is only worth, at best, \$1,000 per acre for farming.

For their efforts on the land, the education they provide and their involvement in farmland preservation, the Fishers have been named American Farmland Trust's 2007 Stewards of the Land. It is an annual award given in memory of AFT founder Peggy McGrath Rockefeller, honoring an American farmer or farm family who demonstrates great leadership in conserving farmland and caring for the environment. The Fishers received an award check of \$10,000 that they intend to put toward conservation causes.

They know quite a bit about the subject, having placed all 480 acres of their farm into a conservation easement several years ago (they rent an additional 500-plus acres). The easement prohibits the development of their property beyond agriculture for future generations. As part of the incentive that makes such easements attractive in the first place, the Fishers received a sizable tax-deduction for the difference between the land's market value and agricultural value.

"One of the reasons we were interested in buying our farm in the first place is because it was for sale and we didn't want it to be developed," says Sandy. They knew about Brookview Farm because of its location across the road from the farm where Rossie grew up. "The conserva-



tion easement we feel is a benefit to our kids. It takes the pressure off of people always trying to buy the place for development.”

Initially the Fishers found the easement process to be complicated—made more so by the fact that they had a tough time finding responsive expertise in the area. So the couple “walked themselves through the process,” Sandy says.

To help others with this process, the Fishers helped found the Goochland Land Alliance in 2002. The non-profit alliance, named for the county in which they live, educates landowners about easements and provides consultations for individuals who are interested in placing easements on their farms.

While they may ease some long-term estate planning worries, conservation easements don’t guarantee farming profitability today.

Until the early 1990s, the Fishers had run a pretty typical farm with corn, soybeans, hay and cattle. But they eventually came to realize that they couldn’t remain viable at their size operation by raising basic commodities. They had already been weaning themselves from pesticide and commercial fertilizer use and by the middle of the decade were operating an organic farm, in fact they didn’t call it that.

They also moved away from row crops, turning most of their land over to pasture for cattle that are grass-fed

from weaning until they are marketed. That system is in contrast to the one that exists for typical U.S. cattle, which are “finished” or fed grain for a period of weeks prior to slaughter.

Sandy and Rossie were not new to raising cattle on grass. Both had spent several years in Colombia, South America, working on a large cattle and vegetable operation. Grass-fed, rather than grain-fed, beef are predominant in South America. In fact, Sandy had been familiar with the system since he served as one of the first Peace Corps volunteers in that country in the early 1960s.

At Brookview Farm, the Fishers had been noticing the good health and steady weight-gain of their cross-bred

*“The conservation easement  
we feel is a benefit to our  
kids. It takes the pressure off  
of people always trying to  
buy the place  
for development.”*

Rossie Fisher next to the farm’s compost-turning machine, which is used to help transform municipal yard waste into valuable organic fertilizer.





animals on grass and hay. During the early 1990s, they experimented, letting a handful of animals eat just grass. The result was delicious beef that was higher in protein. To help capture the added-value of the beef, the Fishers opened a store on the farm eight years ago. “We had so many people interested in the farm coming around anyhow,” says Sandy. “We thought we’d capitalize on that interest.”

Saturdays are a happening at Brookview Farm, with patrons coming to buy the premium beef or eggs. But the big draw, for children in particular, is to take a hayride and see the hens in the pasture and help collect the beige-colored eggs.



Like big chicken-wire-covered boxes on sleds or wheels, the chicken enclosures house about 30 hens and a rooster each. The portable cages have roosting areas in addition to numerous nesting boxes that can be easily accessed from outside.

The construction of the moving boxes varies, depending on the scrap material available to Sandy. “On farm tours I always like to say that the enclosures are made from 100 percent recycled material,” laughs Rossie. “Sandy says that’s already pretty obvious.”

Rossie confesses that even though they sell at a premium, their organic eggs are not profitable, per se. But the value of the egg operation as a tourist attraction as well as the demand for the eggs’ distinctly rich taste (they easily sell out their production of 168 dozen every week) make it must.

In fact, the morning we visited the Fishers, a local chef stopped by to give them a sample of his restaurant-made pasta. He told them he’d like to make it even better by using their eggs exclusively. He was no fool. Earlier Rossie had made scrambled eggs at the house and the eggs’ deep orange-yellow hue coupled with a creamy earthen taste made them memorable.

LEFT: Sandy Fisher carrying makeshift heating lamps for new baby chicks

BELOW: The Fishers’ circa 1840 farmhouse







Caroline Ferguson, wife of farm manager Allen Ferguson, and their sons gather Brookview Farm eggs.

If you're looking for the best profitability the Fishers can offer, take a walk through the compost piles. Several years ago the family began taking leaves—more than 2,000 tons of them annually—off the hands of a local municipality and a university. In fact, they are paid to take the leaves. They are piled in windrows a hundred yards long or more and turned every so often as they decay to create compost.

When hay is fed during the winter it is laid down between the windrows. The cows like the windbreak and warmth that the piles give off. Additionally, the manure left by the cows is then incorporated into the compost. Eventually half the compost, looking like rich black soil, is sold by dump truck or pickup truck load to commercial landscapers and individuals. The other half is spread on their own pastures as fertilizer.

"Last year the compost passed cattle in profitability," says Sandy. "And composting is way better than making hay as a business for us," he adds.

In the end it really is all about the business. A sustainable agriculture is a profitable agriculture, according to the Fishers. They concede they have plenty of work to do. They want to ramp up their egg production while making it more efficient so it's profitable on its own.

Additionally, they need to add to the number of pastures on the farm. Right now Sandy describes their system as "marginalized rotational grazing" with about 20 separated fields. More segregated pastures would allow for

more grass growth between grazings and more efficient use of the pastures.

They would eventually like to sell more of their own cattle production under the premium Brookview Farm label. "Right now we're bottlenecked by slaughterhouse capacity," says Sandy. They use smaller, independent operations whose schedules can't allow any more than what they do now.

Either way, the Fishers love the connection their farm has with the community. Because of them, literally hundreds of school children have collected eggs on a real farm and learned how chickens improve the pasture for the cows' benefit. Hundreds of adults have now had that experience as well.

As dusk turns to evening, Rossie and Sandy stand side-by-side along a fence looking over their rolling pastures with a pond in the distance. They smile at their general good fortune—and at each other. "It would be a wasted opportunity if there wasn't interaction with the community," says Sandy. "And if we can make some money all the better."

The latter is a constant struggle-in-progress. The former is an unmitigated success.

---

DES KELLER, a freelance journalist based in Charlotte, North Carolina, was an editor of *Progressive Farming* magazine for more than 15 years.



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## Finding the Seasons in the Concrete Jungle

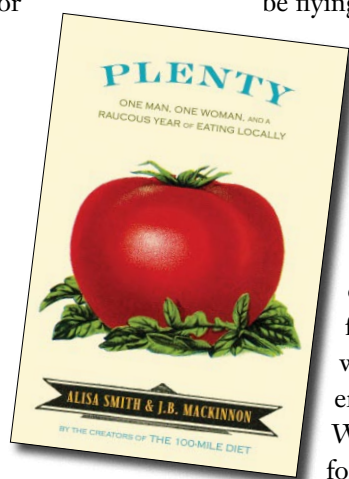
BY ALISA SMITH

EIGHTY PERCENT OF North Americans live in cities now, and this gives us all one thing in common—we have lost touch with nature. Take my friend Karina, who was raised in the Bronx. The first time she went camping was as an adult, but nonetheless she was scared silly. Why? It wasn't the thought of spiders, snakes, or bears. "It was so... dark," she recalled, shuddering.

Now, call me crazy, but I think the Bronx at night is a little more dangerous than the countryside. But what she feared was the unknown.

While living in the outdoorsy city of Vancouver, Canada, I had done my share of camping, but for me too it still belonged firmly to the realm of what's out there. City and country had a firm border between them. My great-grandfather was a farmer in North Dakota, but all that earthy know-how is long gone in my family. In my day-to-day urban life, the seasons meant little more than the time to shift from those cute Italian clogs (summer) to my faux-fur-trimmed wedge-heel boots (fall).

And then I did a crazy thing: at the urging of my life partner, James, I spent a whole year eating foods grown only within 100 miles of my home, an experience that we chronicle in our book *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally*. Our experiment soon became about a lot more than simply food.



Before we started, our motivation was linked to environmental concerns: what's the point of committing ourselves to the inconvenience of public transit to save fossil fuels when we learned that our Brussels sprouts have more frequent flyer miles than we do? The typical produce item has traveled a minimum of 1,500 miles from farm to plate. And that's just something basic like lettuce or potatoes, never mind packaged foods with a laundry list of ingredients. This when, regardless of one's place on the political spectrum, it's a fact that the supply of oil is a finite thing. At the very least, wouldn't you rather be flying to foreign lands instead of your vegetables?

Also, we suspected local food would taste better, and have more, well, meaning, than an anonymous, global meal. Our suspicion was based on a dinner we ate with friends and family at our wilderness cabin in northern British Columbia. We caught a fish, foraged for mushrooms, picked dandelion greens, dug up potatoes, and raided an old orchard. And wouldn't you know, it was the best meal we could remember eating, ever. Both because everything was so fresh and, for the first time, we were a part of the story of our food from beginning to end. Why, we wondered, couldn't we eat like this in the city?

And so it began. You can guess that there were some downs as well as ups to that year. (Trying going seven months before finding flour.) But



*Plenty* authors Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon

since it ended, I have been changed forever, particularly in the way that I experience the world.

Through our year of 100-mile eating we kept a garden religiously, even though we only had a tiny community garden plot, living as we did in a one-bedroom apartment. I felt each shift of temperature and precipitation as much as any farmer, because finally what I did really mattered. If my spring greens were late coming up, that meant that until the farmers' markets started in late May, there were no other greens to buy at all.

I can't claim to have become an expert gardener in the year since, but last summer we gambled on pinto beans, a vegetarian's staple crop that we hadn't been able to find in local markets. And you know what? While the climate here conspired against



my eggplants, pinto beans are the easiest thing in the world. As the September sun and warmth fought off the oncoming seasonal rains, the beans shriveled and browned on the vine, just as they should, and they became dried pinto beans without any effort on my part.

There is a deep and simple satisfaction to such an experience that I would urge anyone to try it. There is no depression, no ennui, no stress, no feeling of inadequacy, as so many experiences in the modern world can offer. For instance, a failure in the workplace can lead to sleepless nights and even self-hatred. Not so the eggplant failure, which I quickly moved away from. All I could think of, with happy anticipation, was what new plant experiment I might try next year. Italian red peppers, perhaps?

For me, now, April is the new Christmas. While I can muster only a little enthusiasm at the sight of wrapped presents under a tree, I quiver with impatience as I flip through the pages of the new year's seed catalogue. While March is a time for some hardy greens and peas to be planted, April is when the possibilities truly open. It is time to start the tomato seedlings indoors. This year I am sharing a seedling tray with a neighbor (as I can only fit about four plants on my balcony); he sent me an excited email message the moment they peeped from the earth.

As I step outside I feel the unseasonable chill in the air with

concern, as it may delay the planting of the lettuce. I can still dream, however, of what new things I might try this year. A storage onion? Sure, they didn't work a couple years back, but we have a new garden plot now. Perhaps it is more favorably blessed by soil nutrients, by sun. We shall see.

I've learned how each season is linked to the future. Spring and summer are the times to prepare for winter, unthinkable winter, so that I can have kale, turnip and the other humble root vegetables ready in their turn. You may laugh to think I could be excited by the idea of a turnip, but to me it speaks to self-sufficiency, and an ongoing conversation with the earth.

I keep a running list in my head of when things are ripe in my corner of the Pacific Northwest: April, asparagus; May the baby lettuce appears; July the field tomatoes hit the market; from then through August, blueberries; September is squash and corn; not till November are the walnuts picked and dried; and certain varieties of apples keep throughout the winter. The medlar, which looks like a shriveled apple and tastes like a date, isn't ripe until after the first frost, usually in November or December.

So, unlike almost any city person in modern North America, for me the year advances through the whims of the seasons, which tell me exactly what I should be eating—and, more importantly, experiencing. It's a simple thing, but it gives life more meaning and pleasure.

---

ALISA SMITH, a Vancouver-based freelance writer who has been nominated for a National Magazine Award, is the co-author of *Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally*.

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# Farm Fresh Recipe

LOCAL FOOD IS miles better, as they like to say at Brookview Farm. Owned by Sandy and Rossie Fisher, AFT's 2007 Steward of the Land Award winners, the farm's mission is to "sustainably produce the highest quality food and farm products in a manner that preserves and enhances our community and natural resources." (Read more about Brookview Farm's ecological and community efforts in the cover story on page 13.)



Brookview raises certified organic beef for local chefs, grocery stores and customers at their on-farm store in Manakin-Sabot, Virginia. The following recipe is a favorite at Brookview Farm for roasting grass-fed beef.



## *farm fresh* **Brookview Roast**

2-4 pounds of roast from Brookview (or another grass-based beef farm)  
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil  
2 cups beef bouillon  
4 onions, quartered  
3 tablespoons fresh garlic  
Any fresh herbs, such as parsley, sage or rosemary  
1 tablespoon unrefined sugar (you may substitute regular)  
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

You may add new potatoes and peeled carrots to the roasting pan with your roast. This enhances the beef's flavor and provides great, easy vegetables to serve with the roast.

### PREPARATION:

1. Rub entire surface area of meat with olive oil to seal in juices.
2. Pan-sear (brown) all sides of beef in medium-high skillet.
3. Transfer meat to a large roasting pan (with sides of at least 2 inches).
4. Place onions, potatoes, carrots and herbs around beef.
5. Pour bouillon over vegetables. Sprinkle garlic, salt and pepper over beef.
6. Cover pan and cook in 300-325° oven for 5 hours or until meat falls apart at the slightest touch. Turn roast midway through and baste with juices occasionally. Add more bouillon if needed. Keep roast moist.



## AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

The mission of American Farmland Trust is to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment. As the nation's leading advocate for farm and ranch land conservation, AFT works with communities and individuals to protect the best land, plan for agriculture and keep the land healthy.

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(413) 586-4593  
[www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org)

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The image shows a black and white speckled chicken with a red comb looking at a laptop screen. The laptop is open and displaying the American Farmland Trust website. The website has a red header with navigation links: Home, Donate, E-News Signup, Site Map, Search, and a page number 60. Below the header is a green banner with the text "American Farmland Trust" and a list of links: Issues & Programs, Services, Resources, News, Support Us, About Us, and Action Center. The main content area is titled "Support Us" and contains several paragraphs of text about the importance of farmland and the organization's mission. There are also four call-to-action boxes: "Join AFT", "Corporate Partners", "Workplace Giving", and "Gift Donations". The laptop is sitting on a bed of straw.

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