



STEWARDS OF THE LAND

A publication for owners of land conserved with the Vermont Land Trust

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VLT's Farmland Access Program Grows with Gifts of Land

BY LIZA WALKER

For more than 35 years, Vermont Land Trust supporters have been vital to our success protecting Vermont's farms and forests. It should come as no surprise that those who make a special kind of contribution—gifts of land—could have an exciting role to play in our Farmland Access Program, an initiative launched in 2004 to address one of the most vexing problems in agriculture today: affordability. “The biggest obstacle many young farmers face is access to land,” said Jon Ramsay, who directs the Farmland Access Program. While there is plenty of farmland for sale in Vermont, it is priced for house lots, rather than the income a farmer can generate growing crops or raising cattle.

Our Farmland Access Program connects farmers with high quality, affordable farmland for purchase or lease. By getting more farmers on the land, we can support Vermont communities, local food production, and the long-term productive use of farmland. As part of the program, we will sometimes purchase farms for sale, conserve them, and resell them at an affordable price to farmers who submit detailed business proposals. The program also uses approaches such as the sale of conservation easements and help with business planning and legal issues.

The number of farmers seeking affordable land continues to grow. For every farm purchased by VLT and offered for sale to the farm community, 10 to 20



Thanks to a generous gift of 87 acres in Norwich recently made by Charlotte Metcalf, a dedicated friend of VLT, we were able to complete an additional Farmland Access project this year.

farm seekers will submit proposals, hoping to be the one selected. “So often we get many excellent, well-thought-out proposals for a single property,” says Jon Ramsay. “Choosing the best candidate is often a very difficult decision.”

A New Approach in Norwich

We can do only a small number of Farmland Access projects each year because of the high costs of purchasing land and holding onto it while we go through the conservation and proposal process, and because of limited public grant funds for conservation easements. Thanks to a generous gift of 87 acres in

Norwich recently made by Charlotte Metcalf, a dedicated friend of VLT, we were able to complete an additional Farmland Access project this year. Her gift made all the difference for farmers Nora Lake and Chris Polashenski, who are establishing an ambitious new farm operation on the land.

Charlotte is no stranger to conservation. Her land stewardship began with her purchase of 15 acres with a house and some old barns. “I fell in love with farmland all around me,” Charlotte said. “I ended up buying parcels to keep them from being

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developed.” She donated a conservation easement to VLT on 177 acres of this land in 2007; she also conserved additional land with the Upper Valley Land Trust.

While Charlotte was not a farmer herself, she leased her land and delighted in learning through experience. Over the years, while meticulously restoring the functionality of the farm buildings and the productivity of the land, Charlotte considered the future of the farm. With her three children settled elsewhere and her leasing arrangement coming to an end, the farm was facing a transition. “I knew that I wanted it to continue to be a farm, but I didn’t know how I was going to do that. Then I found out about the Farmland Access Program at VLT,” Charlotte said.

Charlotte worked with VLT throughout the process of finding new farmers for the land. We received 17 proposals from farm seekers. In the end, Chris and Nora’s proposal to run a vegetable and meat operation was chosen. The couple is now in the final stages of purchasing the affordable, conserved land from VLT.

Thinking Creatively About the Impact of Land Gifts

Our purchase and resale of nearly 20 farms has led to the establishment of new dairy, vegetable, berry, and meat-producing operations—all important sources of locally grown food for communities. Farms have included the Elmer Farm in Middlebury, Wild Shepherd Farm in Athens, Deep Root Farm in Weathersfield, Little Lake Orchard in Wells, Stony Pond Farm in Fairfield, and Bread and Butter Farm in South Burlington and Shelburne.

As the program grows, so does the list of those looking for farms to buy, but we are limited in the number of projects we can do in a year. Generous gifts of land, such as Charlotte’s, could make a huge difference in the impact in getting more new farmers onto their first farms.

Land gifts have been an instrumental source of support for VLT since the organization’s beginnings. In 1977, we had one staff member and a shoe-string budget. The first land gifts included a six-acre parcel in Hartland, followed by 41 acres along the Appalachian Trail in Barnard, which VLT later sold to the United States Forest Service. These early gifts helped to keep the office lights on, while also introducing Vermonters to the urgent need to protect our state’s



Tyler and Melanie Webb were able to purchase additional farmland because of the Farmland Access Program. The land will allow them to expand their organic dairy and beef operation in Fairfield.

rural and agricultural character from rapid unplanned development. Decades later, with six offices coordinating conservation work across the state, donations of land continue to impact our capacity to achieve our goal of protecting Vermont’s working landscape for future generations, a goal embodied by the Farmland Access Program.

Today, Charlotte Metcalf may be a pioneer, leading the way for others interested in making a personally gratifying gift of farmland that would

Learn More about Leasing Land to a Farmer

The majority of Vermont’s farms, from third-generation dairies to emerging diversified operations, rely on land they do not own. Making a hayfield or pasture available to a neighboring farmer is a Vermont tradition, akin to the ethic for access to private land for hunting, hiking, or snowmobiling. As development pressures increase in Vermont, the availability of lease land is diminishing.

As a part of the Farmland Access Program, we are matching farmers with landowners interested in making their land available to a farmer for lease, or possibly for purchase. Gifts of land to VLT also create new lease opportunities for farmers who are still building the equity to make their first investment in land ownership. Lease “agreements” have traditionally consisted of a handshake or an understanding that has been passed down for generations, often with no money changing hands.

Addressing issues such as liability, infrastructure, tax concerns, and specific uses of the land can make a difference in the quality of the lease arrangements and the relationship between farmer and landowner. We can

provide information and access to other professionals who can guide non-farming landowners and farmers through the process of crafting an agreement that meets the needs of both parties.

To learn more about leasing, contact Jon Ramsay at jramsay@vlt.org or call (802) 533-7705.

Leasing Your Land to a Farmer: An Informational Workshop for Landowners, Farmers, and Community Groups

Saturday, July 21, 2012

*3pm - 6:30pm at the Big Picture Theater,
48 Carroll Road, Waitsfield, Vermont*

A panel of experts from VLT, Land for Good, and UVM’s New Farmer Project will address ways you can support a beginning farmer’s enterprise and increase the agricultural productivity of your land. For more information, contact Liza Walker at (802) 496-4323 or visit www.vlt.org/events.

be life-changing for a rising Vermont farmer. "I'm thrilled that the person who is buying the farm has the vision that isn't far from what I had way back when I was restoring the big barn and thinking of how to use the facilities," said Charlotte. "The Land Trust was wonderful at assessing what was right for my land and provided me with an opportunity to achieve my goal."

Interested in Making a Gift of Land?

Charitable donations of land provide a unique giving opportunity for landowners who can receive significant tax benefits while simultaneously supporting land conservation. Christa Kemp, our director of donor relations works closely with donors to explain planned giving options, which include outright gifts, bequests, or gifts of remainder interests. Remainder interests can be a favored approach as landowners receive the immediate tax benefits of the gift while continuing to live on their land. Gifts of land received by VLT are usually protected by a conservation easement before being resold, unless the gift is primarily a residence. Landowners interested in learning more should contact Christa at (802) 262-1229.



Corie Pierce and Adam Wilson's Bread and Butter Farm has become a community gathering place in addition to a supplier of local food. Corie and Adam were able to buy their farm through the Farmland Access Program.

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Found on VLT-Conserved Land

Our Stewardship Crew Works with Southern Vermont Landowners to Stem Infestation

By Pieter van Loon, Stewardship Forester

For years, the stewardship crew at VLT has been educating landowners about the threats of invasive insects and plants to Vermont's forests. This year we were able to offer a screening for the invasive Hemlock Woolly Adelgid to owners of VLT-conserved land in Windham County. The insect is native to Asia and has been detected in many towns in southern Vermont.

Unfortunately, while helping landowners with resource issues we sometimes end up being the bearer of bad news. Ten percent of the 150 landowners in the county took us up on the offer. Of the nine surveys we've done so far, we have found HWA on three properties.

One of the first properties to be looked at is owned by Greg Moschetti and Connie Baxter, in Dummerston. Greg had previous experience with HWA from living in the suburbs of New York City, where he sprayed for the insect annually.

Because of that experience, Greg and Connie were anxious to have their property surveyed. Given the land's remote location on a dead-end road, we didn't expect to find HWA. "I was pretty certain we'd be clean because we are so

far from other houses and bird feeders other than our own," said Greg.

Unfortunately, this was not the case. We initially found just a few HWAs on a small tree next to the driveway. A few minutes later we found a large, heavily infested tree on the edge of a field. After that, we found it just about everywhere we looked. It made those of us doing the survey a bit sad that we had uncovered such bad news, but we had some recommendations to help them start to control the infestation.

Greg stayed upbeat, but his reaction was similar to ours. "[I was] surprised and disheartened, but also ready to fight it," said Greg. "I removed the infested branches over the next few days and burned them. Since then, I look for it when I'm out in the woods."

VLT is keeping abreast of all the news related to HWA and possible control options. Among these is a native fungus being researched by a UVM professor and a push to get field insectories (nurseries for bugs) established to augment attempts to rear beetles that are predatory to HWA.

To learn more about the HWA visit www.vlt.org/invasives.

Landowner Greg Moschetti inspects an infected branch with VLT's Jonathan Decker (left) and Pieter van Loon (right). HWA infestations are difficult to spot because the insect is so small. Infested trees often have a 'snowy' appearance from the white fluff exuded by the adults, which live on the underside of the needles.

