

# field, forest & fen

Summer 2008

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tion, local hiking groups use the Conservancy's trails, about 750 of its acres are managed for sustainable forestry, and another 75 acres are farmed for hay.

Thayer Farm, another of the Land Trust's conservation easements, also exhibits a combination of these traditional and somewhat less conventional "working" values. The 256-acre farm was willed to SUNY Oneonta's BFS by Rufus J. Thayer, and, like Greenwoods Conservancy, has served as a research site for water quality monitoring as well as fish, aquatic invertebrate, and bird surveys. The Upland Interpretive Center, located on the farm, "is the hub of our pre-college environmental program," says Matt Albright, where the Field Station hosts educational field trips for school groups. The BFS also recently joined New York's Onsite



Cranberry Bog, Greenwoods Conservancy

Wastewater Treatment Training Network. "Locally, septic systems are a big issue," says Albright, who has done extensive research on water quality in Otsego Lake. "We'll have modular units on Thayer Farm, partly buried, to provide hands-on installation training for engineers and contractors," he explains. Jim and Steve Bartlett, who currently farm the land, planted 825 trees last year at field edges to protect the

farm's streams and ponds from agricultural run-off. Farming will remain active on the property for the next 50 years, according to a provision Rufus left on his will. "Hopefully we'll be able to continue that long," says Jim Bartlett,

who has baled hay, chopped silage, and made maple syrup on the farm with his brother since 1984. "Rufus and my dad were old time farmers; they grew up together," Bartlett recalls. "He liked to see the farm being used, and I know he would be happy to see it preserved now."

By ensuring the continuance of an agricultural lifestyle and the health of the land, every one of these "working landscapes" serves to preserve Otsego's economy, community, and thus its inherent rural character and beauty for all to enjoy.

<sup>1</sup>Jack, K., Bills, N., & Boisvert, R. (1996). Economic Multipliers and the New York State Economy. Policy Issues in Rural Land Use, 9(2). Cornell Cooperative Extension: Department of Agricultural, Resource, and Managerial Economics.

## Land that Earns its Keep

"We have loved almost every minute of living here—calving in below zero weather and mud season being exceptions," Mary Ellen "Robi" Zeiner chuckles. Although the retired couple currently maintains a herd of a dozen cows, they once ran a much larger beef cattle operation on Dimmock Hollow Road in Morris. Back then, Mr. Zeiner served as president of the New York Beef Cattlemen. "Fred and I wanted this farm to remain as it has been for well over one hundred years. We knew we would keep it open and undeveloped, but the future was too nebulous to predict, and obviously someday we would be gone and someone else making decisions." Now, thanks to their conservation easement with Otsego Land Trust, the agricultural future of Dimmock Hollow Farm's 191 acres is ensured.

The protection of farms like the Zeiners' becomes increasingly critical as agricultural lands in our area disappear. "The more land we lose, the less chance we have for a viable farming community," explains Chris Harmon, Director of the Center for Agricultural Development and

Entrepreneurship (CADE). Agriculture relies heavily on local businesses and services for support, and this infrastructure—such as salesmen, trucking, distributors, and suppliers of feed, fertilizer, equipment, and tractors—provides local employment and income. It follows naturally that as farms decline, so does the agricultural infrastructure. This creates a downward spiral in the industry—"If there is not enough infrastructure left locally, it becomes too costly for farmers to get supplies" says Harmon.

## Keeping Local Economies Strong

The decline of agriculture is of special concern to our area because it has considerable impact on rural economies. A 1996 study by Cornell Cooperative Extension<sup>1</sup> determined that "a direct increase in income or employment in the agricultural sector will lead to larger total income and employment within the local economy than would a corresponding increase in nonagricultural sectors"—industries such as retail and wholesale trade, nonfood manufacturing, and finance, insurance, and real estate. And this is without considering another highly influential source of commerce: "The number one industry in Otsego County is tourism," Harmon emphasizes, "and farming is what makes it beautiful. Without it, we wouldn't have the same openness, pastoral scenery, or quality in the community" to attract travelers. Thus, for the multiple conservation values, Otsego Land Trust preserves the "working landscapes" of our region.

## Connecting the Dots

In recent years, the Land Trust has made it a strategic priority to protect



Fred and Robi Zeiners

interconnecting lands, thereby preserving larger areas as a whole. For example, a corner of the Zeiners' Dimmock Hollow Farm borders the 1,100-acre General Jacob Morris State Forest. Similarly, an actively farmed easement owned by Peter Farmer and Abigail Armstrong in Phoenix Mills is adjacent to the Clark Foundation's 600-acre "Grasslands" farm. "My folks bought the property in 1953, so I grew up here," says Farmer. "It's a sensitive area," with its 1,000 feet of frontage on the Susquehanna River, oxbow slough wetland, and farmed acreage. The Huntington family of Cooperstown Holstein Corporation have grown alfalfa and corn on that land since the '70s. Remnant hops still grow on the back side of the easement, a tribute to the property's agricultural history. "We wanted to keep it this way in perpetuity," explains Farmer, so under the easement document, the couple allows "unrestricted farming" on their three parcels.

## Land for Teaching

The 1,200+ acre Greenwoods Conservancy, in the town of Burlington, is also contiguous to

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## Land protected in 2008:

|                   |                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Butternut Valley: | Lynne Tanner, 64.3 acres          |
| Otsego Lake:      | Jerry Raymond, 2 acres            |
| Charlotte Valley: | Peter and Elaine Velsko, 11 acres |



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Otsego Land Trust protects the distinctive rural character of the Otsego County area by securing lands and waters of significant scenic, historic, and ecological value, including forests and farmlands.

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## Field Notes

Haying. Planting. Spreading manure. Milking. Vaccinating. Sugaring. Calving. Picking. Logging. Shearing. Weeding. Lambing. Repairing. Curing. Baling. Mowing. The To Do list of those who work the land is endless, and endlessly varied.

At Otsego Land Trust, we know how important agriculture is to the character and economy of Otsego's towns, villages, and hamlets—and to its people.

For generations, agriculture and forestry have been the economic lifeblood of our communities, whether producing food for our tables or timber for construction, or by maintaining the open space, wildlife habitats and scenic beauty that attract so many visitors. The land is our heritage, our livelihood and our hope for the future. We work with individual landowners to design a conservation plan that reflects their vision for the future of their land.

As fuel and transportation costs soar, increasing local production of life's necessities will strengthen our local economies and draw our communities closer. Without open space, growth in the local agricultural economy, as well as in related industries that serve agriculture, would be impossible. In 2008, Otsego Land Trust's commitment to

preserving the rural character of our region is evidenced in our expanded farmland protection program. By partnering with local farmers and County and State officials to secure cash payments in exchange for development rights, we help sustain a viable agricultural economy.

On August 23, we hope you'll join us for our 20th birthday party by celebrating our agricultural heritage! At Thayer Farm from 5:00 to 8:00 pm, the festivities will feature local meats, cheeses, vegetables and fruits, as well as exhibits of photography of our cherished local landscapes and drawings of Leatherstocking Falls created by local children. We'll have music, party hats, and cake and ice cream! Please join us as we toast our friends, supporters and easement donors, and drink to another 20 years of preserving our region's most valuable resource, its working landscapes.

This issue of *Field, Forest & Fen* highlights only a few of our community's working landscapes. There are many more, and with your help Otsego Land Trust can protect them in the years to come!

Peter Hujik  
Executive Director

Harry Levine  
Chairman

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a large tract of protected land—the 1,242-acre Hartwick State Forest. Owned by the Peterson family, Greenwoods Conservancy was the second conservation easement donated to the Land Trust. “As a kid, I was always out in the woods, so I wanted my children to have this outdoor experience,” says Peterson of his original 200-acre property. The remaining 1,000 acres included in the Conservancy today were added on through twelve separate purchases aimed at complete protection of Cranberry Bog's watershed. This 70-acre wetland “is an unusual and rich resource for the study of indigenous water plants,” says Peterson, as it remains unscathed by invasive species. In fact, Greenwoods Conservancy as a whole boasts an impressive array of “working” conservation values. SUNY Oneonta's Biological Field Station (BFS) uses the property as a research facility, and has completed numerous studies there, such as those on plant succession on the Marcy South right-of-way, white-tailed deer management, relationships between native plant species in Cranberry Bog, and surveys on mosquitoes, birds, aquatic invertebrates, fish, and amphibians. Biological surveys have also been conducted by the DEC and the Audubon Society, and the easement's conference center is used by conservation groups for lectures and meetings. In addi-

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## Protecting Farm Land a High Priority

This year Otsego Land Trust saw record participation among local farmers in New York's statewide grant program for farmland protection. About thirty people representing fifteen farms attended information seminars this spring at Thayer Farm in Otsego and the Butternut Valley Grange in Gilbertsville. The strong turnout marks an increase over last year's grant round, which resulted in a substantial award to a farm in northern Otsego County, the Land Trust's second such award. Peter Hujik, Executive Director, is pleased with the response. “The growing interest among farmers is encouraging. Farmland protection is a major priority for Otsego Land Trust.”

The Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program (FPIG), begun in 1996 by New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, allows for the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) of active, viable farmland. In 2007, a record \$35 million in FPIG funds were used to protect 13,299 acres of prime farmland across New York. Selection criteria for eligible farms include soil quality, economic viability of the existing farming operation, and location—partic-

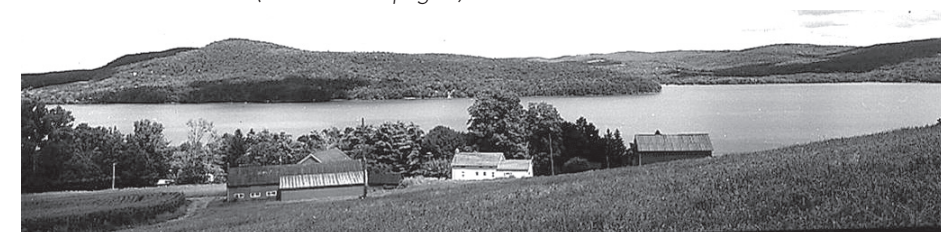
ularly proximity to development and the threat of development. Indeed, growing local interest in the FPIG program comes at a time when Otsego County farmers are faced not only with the ubiquitous problems of rising fuel, feed, and seed costs, but with development pressures unique to our area. In 2002 the American Farmland Trust highlighted the Route 20 Corridor, including much of northern Otsego County, as some of the state's most threatened farmland.

Under the NYS FPIG program, the farmer is paid 75% of the assessed value of his land's development rights, with the remaining 25% considered a charitable contribution eligible for federal tax benefits. This payment both frees up some of the intrinsic value of the land without liquidation of property, while supplying unrestricted capital to reinvest into the farm. The farm's development rights, finally owned by the Land Trust, are then extinguished through a deed of conservation easement, much like any Land Trust-protected property. The terms of the deed ensure that the land remains open, active farmland for future generations.

Encouragingly, two outstanding local proposals were recently selected for competition at the state level. The farms, totaling 1,500 acres, encompass a substantial swath of Springfield's Route 20 corridor. The success of last year's proposal, along with the high quality of this year's candidates make Hujik hopeful. “The program has the potential to be an effective tool for protecting some of the best farmland in Otsego County.”

**To Join the Party, call 547.2366!**

Otsego Land Trust is partially funded by the New York Conservation Partnership Program administered by the Land Trust Alliance Northeast Program with support from the State of New York. A copy of Otsego Land Trust's annual financial report may be obtained upon request from our office or from the New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau, ATTN: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.



Thayer Farm, Town of Springfield