

# AMERICAN FARMLAND

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## To See the Sea

An aerial view of Wolfe's Neck Farm in Freeport, Maine, protected by American Farmland Trust in 1985 and now a center for agricultural education and research.

PANORAMA BY JACOB T. BECK

Decades after the Smith family donated their spectacular Wolfe's Neck Farm to American Farmland Trust, this Maine farm is a model of agricultural innovation and education.

Down a wooded road on a rugged peninsula in Freeport, Maine, past fields and tall pine trees that occasionally part to reveal the rocky shores of Casco Bay, you arrive at Wolfe's Neck Center

for Agriculture and the Environment, where bleating sheep fill a barn and brown Jersey milk cows lie in the sun.

It's a place for the public to come and camp, hike, and learn how food is grown. But it wouldn't still exist as a farm if not for the vision of Eleanor Smith, who bought this land with her husband Lawrence over 70 years ago.

The couple, natives of Philadelphia, acquired Wolfe's Neck Farm in 1947 as a summer retreat

where they raised organic beef and practiced sustainable farming. For the next 40 years, they watched as neighboring farms on the peninsula went up for sale. Rather than let them go out of business and be developed, they bought them.

As the Smiths got older, they began thinking about how they could protect their 600-acre property forever—to make sure their unspoiled land would be available for future generations

**WOLFE'S NECK FARM**, continued on page 2

## A TIMELINE OF WOLFE'S NECK FARM



- 1666** Thomas and Ann Shepherd settle in the area.
- 1688** War with Native Americans breaks out; Freeport is abandoned.
- 1717** Henry Wolfe and his wife Rachel Shepherd reclaim her family's land and name it Wolfe's Neck.
- 1733** Henry Wolfe receives a land grant of 67 acres on the waterfront in Freeport. His descendants remain on the land for generations.
- 1947** L.M.C. and Eleanor Smith buy Wolfe's Neck Farm. They begin tree farming and sustainable farming practices.

- 1952** The Smiths buy their first Black Angus cattle. They start to buy additional land nearby and grow their herd to more than 300 cows.
- 1963** The Smiths open a campground as a gift to the community.
- 1969** The Smiths give 200 acres to the state for Wolfe's Neck Woods Park, one of the most visited state parks in Maine.
- 1973** The farm buys the first round-hay baler in Maine. The Smiths continue to foster agricultural innovation, pursuing organic methods.
- 1975** L.M.C. Smith dies.

- 1985** Eleanor Smith gives the farm to American Farmland Trust. AFT protects Wolfe's Neck with permanent conservation restrictions.
- 1987** Eleanor Smith dies. The University of Southern Maine operates the farm, experimenting with agriculture techniques and establishing an education program for children.
- 1997** Wolfe's Neck Farm Foundation assumes management of the farm from USM. Its natural beef business booms.
- 2002** The farm begins a lease arrangement with L.L. Bean to operate a kayak/canoe training and demonstration program.

- 2014** Wolfe's Neck Farm Foundation launches a master planning process in conjunction with AFT to guide the development of the farm's infrastructure and programming.
- 2015** The farm launches an Organic Dairy Research and Farmer Training Program in partnership with Stonyfield.
- 2016** AFT approves plans for the historical renovation of the Little River Farmstead that serves as the farm's headquarters and staging area for many of Wolfe's Neck's activities.
- 2017** Wolfe's Neck Farm becomes Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY WOLFE'S NECK CENTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring is wondrous. In Maine, where I’m from, the first wildflowers sprout in the woods almost as soon as the snow melts, and we begin to see vegetables at my town’s farmers market in early June. Spring is a time of renewal and hope.

I hold onto that optimism throughout the year as I work with American Farmland Trust staff and members to address the challenges facing our nation’s farmers and ranchers—including the alarming loss of our best farmland.

AFT’s “Farms Under Threat” report, which you’ll read about on page three, documents how America is losing farmland at a rate of one and a half million acres a year—that’s the equivalent of all the farmland in Iowa in a 20-year period! On top of that, there exists a serious shortage of affordable land and opportunities for would-be farmers.

Yet we also see signs of hope. Around the country, we find vibrant farmers markers, a growing appreciation for local farms and food, and no lack of beginning farmers who will start farms of their own wherever they can secure affordable land—as land trusts across the nation increasingly make possible with new farmland protection projects.

Although we are not yet protecting farmland at the pace that’s needed, we are making progress. AFT recently updated our count of how many acres have been placed under permanent conservation easements—and that number has increased from 5 million to 6.7 million in about five years. That’s 6.7 million acres of good land that



“We will only save our land and rebuild our soil if we have farmers to steward that land,” said AFT president John Piotti at the Seattle Food Tank Summit in March. Food Tank is a global community dedicated to the seven billion people who need to eat.

will be forever available to raise crops and livestock. Though we must do far more, we are clearly moving in the right direction.

I also feel hopeful about the future of farming when I think about all the heroes of the farmland protection movement. Eleanor Smith, who you’ll read about in this newsletter’s cover story, is one of them.

Eleanor realized almost 35 years ago how important it is to protect farmland for future generations—and she worked with American Farmland Trust to make it happen. Her farm, Wolfe’s Neck, is now enjoyed by thousands of people every year

who learn more about nature and agriculture by visiting the farm’s fields, barns, woods, and treasured coastline.

Wolfe’s Neck utilizes smart farming practices that take carbon out of the atmosphere and put it back in the soil. Increasingly, we will need our farms not just to grow food, but to combat climate change.

I believe that our farms are our future. That gives me great hope. America is blessed with farmers and ranchers who care deeply about the land. America is further blessed with enough bountiful land to nurture generations not yet born—provided that we take the right steps now.

AFT is fortunate to have members like you, who are as committed as I am to our future and to saving farmland and supporting our hard-working farmers and ranchers.

Thank you. Your support makes a world of difference!

John Piotti  
President & CEO  
American Farmland Trust

**WOLFE’S NECK FARM**, continued from page 1 to enjoy. Although the concept of farmland protection was not well known in 1985, the Smiths decided to donate their Freeport landmark to American Farmland Trust, to make sure the farm would never be developed.



Visiting Wolfe’s Neck Farm

184 Burnett Rd, Freeport, ME 04032  
(207) 865-4469

The mission of Wolfe’s Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment is to transform our relationship with farming and food for a healthier planet. The center is free and open to the public every day from dawn to dusk. The new Wishcamper Livestock Education Barn is home to sheep, goats, chickens, and ducks. The Farm Store sells organic produce and pasture-raised meats. The center has more than three miles of hiking trails open to the public. In the summer, children can take part in a week-long Farm Camp. And over 130 pet-friendly campsites can be booked along the shoreline and through forests and fields. Learn more at [www.wolfesneck.org](http://www.wolfesneck.org).

Announcing the gift, Eleanor said, “This place has just got to stay this way forever. It’s terribly important for people to see the sea across fields.”

Once in AFT’s hands, ownership of the farm was first conveyed to the University of Southern Maine and then to a new non-profit organization, the Wolfe’s Neck Farm Foundation, that over the years has taken on bigger and bigger challenges. Just last year, the farm was renamed the Wolfe’s Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment—a name befitting its increasing role as a climate change research hub, educational center, and training ground for next-generation farmers.

“Mrs. Smith was really visionary, and she wanted to see this be a forever farm,” says David Herring, the center’s executive director. “With everything we do, we try to look back at the intent of the original gift, and make sure we stay true to that spirit.”

Wolfe’s Neck is deeply involved in tackling two of the most pressing issues that farmers face today: transferring their land to the next generation, and addressing soil health and climate change.

Five budding dairy farmers live on the farm, learning all aspects of an organic dairy operation through Wolfe’s Neck Center’s

Organic Dairy Farmer Training Program, a pioneering program launched in partnership with Stonyfield Organic. These types of apprenticeships are especially important given that, nationwide, the average age of dairy farmers is approaching 60 and the number of farms producing milk is in decline.

“Too few young people are entering the dairy industry,” says Herring. “Farming is a long-term endeavor, and the importance of the institutional knowledge that a farmer needs cannot be overstated.”

Wolfe’s Neck also plays an important role in studying how regenerative farming methods—such as managed grazing, composting, use of cover crops, and no-till systems—rebuild organic matter in the soil. On a large scale, this can help fight climate change by pulling excess carbon out of the atmosphere. By serving as a research hub, Wolfe’s Neck is bringing together farmers in Maine and beyond to measure and share data on climate change and healthy soils. “What we learn here can be a benefit to the world,” says Herring.

AFT has worked with Wolfe’s Neck Farm Foundation on a multi-year master plan that guides the future of the property. “We’ve been able to achieve real conservation impacts

**WOLFE’S NECK FARM**, continued on page 4



Not only were [the Smiths] tremendous stewards of the land during their lifetimes, they made sure their land ethic would last for generations to come. Thanks to our partnership with AFT, we know this farm is going to be here forever.

— DAVID HERRING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WOLFE’S NECK CENTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT



# Farms Under Threat

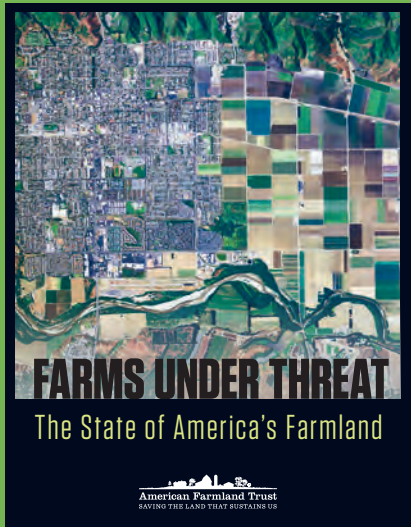
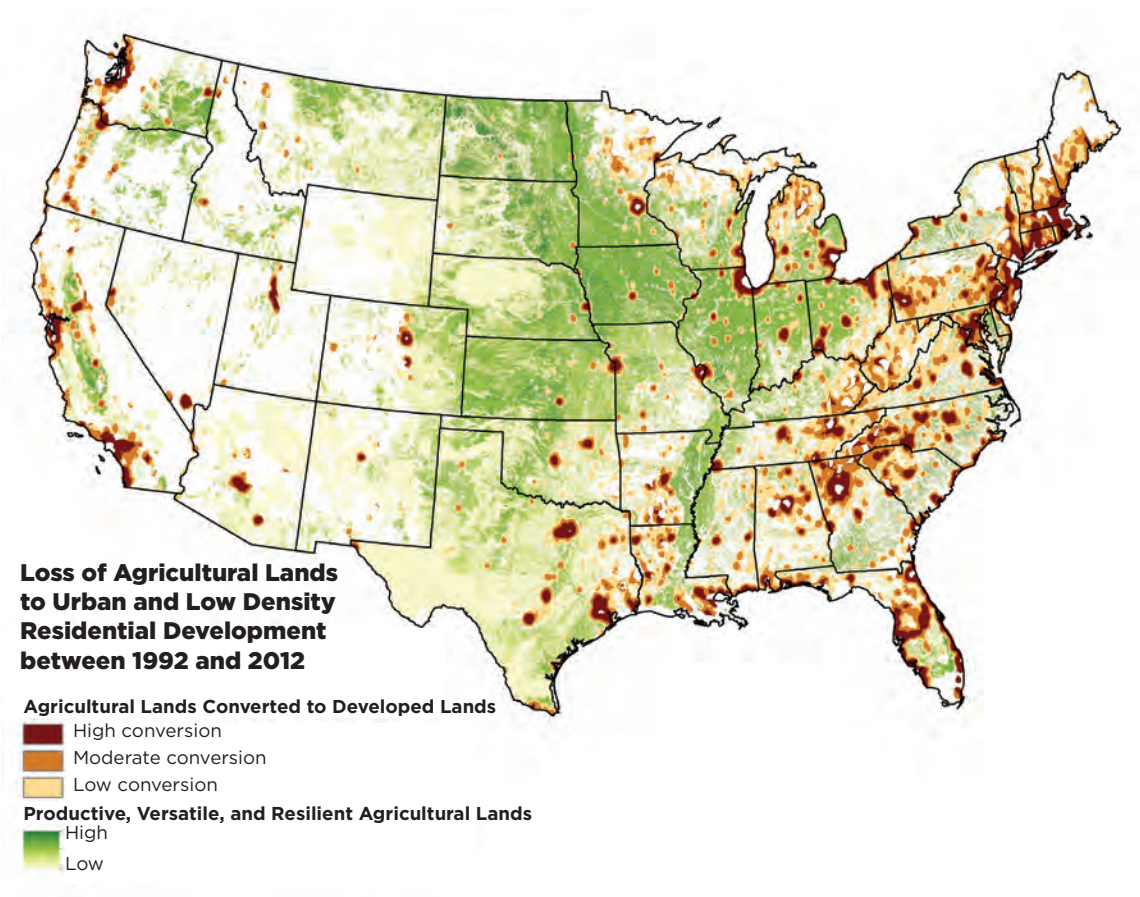
## THE STATE OF AMERICA'S FARMLAND

In May, AFT released the first findings from *Farms Under Threat: The State of America's Farmland*, the most comprehensive assessment ever undertaken of the loss of U.S. farmland and ranchland. The results were eye-opening. Here are five key findings:

- America's farmers and ranchers manage a diverse agricultural landscape covering over **55 percent of the land** in the continental United States. Combined, farmers and ranchers manage over one billion acres.
- Almost **31 million acres of agricultural land** were irreversibly lost to development between 1992 and 2012—nearly double the

amount previously documented. That's equivalent to losing an amount of farmland the size of Iowa.

- Only **17 percent of the land** (324,103 million acres) in the continental United States has the right soils, climate, and growing conditions to produce crops with the fewest environmental impacts.
- In less than one generation, the United States lost nearly **11 million acres of our best land** for growing food and crops. This is equivalent to losing 95 percent of California's Central Valley or 47 percent of the state of Indiana.



It is time for the United States to recognize the strategic value of our agricultural land and step up our efforts to protect it.

—AFT'S *FARMS UNDER THREAT: THE STATE OF AMERICA'S FARMLAND* REPORT

- Over **70 percent of urban development** and about **54 percent of low-density residential development** occurred on agricultural land. Too much of our development is occurring on cropland, pastureland, and forestland.

Future reports will break the data down by state and use housing density scenarios and climate projections to forecast what could happen to the nation's agricultural land by 2040 unless we act soon.

Visit [www.farmland.org/farms-under-threat](http://www.farmland.org/farms-under-threat) for updates and to view the full report, which includes maps and a list of recommendations.

### AGRICULTURAL LAND PROVIDES BENEFITS BEYOND FOOD



open space and scenic views



biodiversity and wildlife habitat



fire suppression, floodplain management, and carbon sequestration



recreation

### FARMLAND LOST TO DEVELOPMENT, 1992-2012



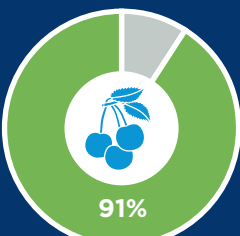
**All farmland lost:** almost 31 million acres (nearly equivalent to the land mass of New York state)



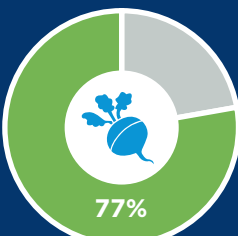
**Some of our best farmland was irreversibly lost:** almost 11 million acres (equivalent to 47% of the land mass of Indiana)

### FOOD IN THE PATH OF DEVELOPMENT

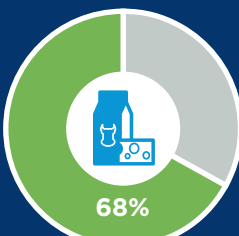
Farmland on the urban edge supplies the majority of domestically produced:



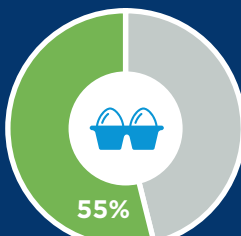
fruits, tree nuts and berries



vegetables and melons



dairy



poultry and eggs



# What you put on your fork matters.

That's the message behind American Farmland Trust's eighth annual Farmers Market Celebration, which launches in June. The annual celebration encourages market customers, farmers, and others who believe their community has the best farmers market in the country to endorse that market and encourage fellow consumers to support local farms and food. When you shop directly from local farmers, you help to keep them in business, which can have the following benefits:

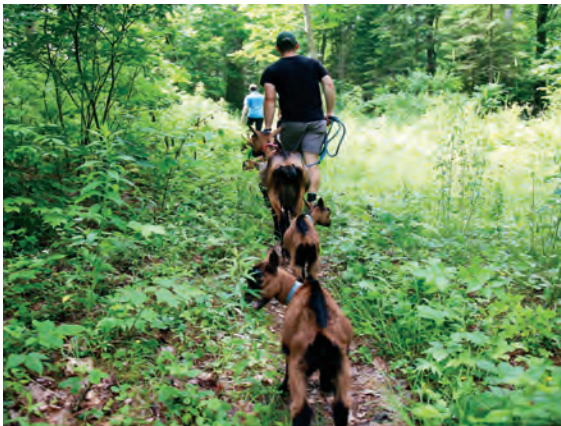
- Boosts the local economy
- Protects farmland and the environment
- Maintains community access to healthy local food
- Increases opportunities for new and beginning farmers

Join the celebration online by visiting [markets.farmland.org](http://markets.farmland.org)!



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO/SENIOR AIRMAN NICOLE LEIDHOLM

**WOLFE'S NECK FARM**, *continued from page 2* and continue to do so more than 30 years after Mrs. Smith's gift. As much as the farm has grown and diversified, it still reflects her original vision for the property's sustainable agricultural use," says Ben Kurtzman, AFT's senior manager of stewardship and law.



This place has just got to stay this way forever.

— **ELEANOR SMITH** ON CONSERVING WOLFE'S NECK FARM

It's a legacy that would make the Smiths proud. "Not only were they tremendous stewards of the land during their lifetimes, they made sure their land ethic would last for generations to come," says Herring. "Thanks to our partnership with AFT, we know this farm is going to be here forever."

For more information about leaving a gift of land or other options for your farm or ranch, please contact **Jerry Cosgrove**, AFT's Farm Legacy Director at **(518) 281-5074** or [jcosgrove@farmland.org](mailto:jcosgrove@farmland.org).



For information on donating a conservation easement, contact **Ben Kurtzman**, Senior Manager of Stewardship and Law, **(413) 586-9330 ext. 12** or [bkurtzman@farmland.org](mailto:bkurtzman@farmland.org).



FROM LEFT: *Hikers wander Wolfe's Neck's trails; Farm Camp nurtures a sense of wonder for the natural world; the Community Garden brings people together.*

**American Farmland Trust**



**AMERICAN FARMLAND**

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

## RHUBARB SALSA

### FARM FRESH RECIPE

Salsa without tomatoes? Take advantage of the return of rhubarb this spring. Jennifer Filipiak, AFT's Midwest Regional Director, says you won't miss the tomatoes here. You can blanch the rhubarb, but it's fine raw. The lime juice tenderizes the rhubarb. Vary the ingredients according to taste. Happy spring!

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>2 cups sliced or chopped rhubarb</b><br>(red or green)  | <b>½ cup chopped fresh cilantro</b><br>(stems and leaves)             |
| <b>1 small red onion</b><br>(about 1 ½ cups, chopped)  | <b>1 Tablespoon brown sugar</b>                                       |
| <b>1 green bell pepper</b>   | <b>Juice of two limes</b>   |
| <b>2 yellow, orange, or red bell peppers</b><br>(all three bell peppers combined should be about 3 cups chopped) | <b>1 teaspoon of salt</b> (start with 1 tsp., but add more if needed) |
|  | <b>1 teaspoon cumin seeds</b>   |

**To make:** Mix everything together in a large bowl and let sit for at least an hour. Store the salsa in the fridge in an airtight container. The longer it sits, the better it tastes!