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.

One 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.

**A TIMELINE OF WOLFE’S NECK FARM**

- **1666** Thomas and Ann Shepherd settle in the area.
- **1888** 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.
- **1723** 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-balers in Maine. The Smiths continue to foster agricultural innovation, pursuing organic methods.
- **1975** L.M.C. Smith dies.
- **1987** Eleanor Smith gives the farm to American Farmland Trust. AFT protects Wolfe’s Neck with permanent conservation restrictions.
- **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.
Spring is wondrous. In Maine, where I am 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 markets, 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 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.

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 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 career, 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.

“With the Smiths, we knew we had the chance to make this happen,” says Herring. “We’re thrilled 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

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From the President, continued from page 1

To honor Mrs. Smith’s vision, Wolfe’s Neck was donated to the American Farmland Trust to make sure the farm would never be developed.
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

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.

- 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 for updates and to view the full report, which includes maps and a list of recommendations.
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!

ANTHONY REZCEK/ALAMY

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!

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

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!

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