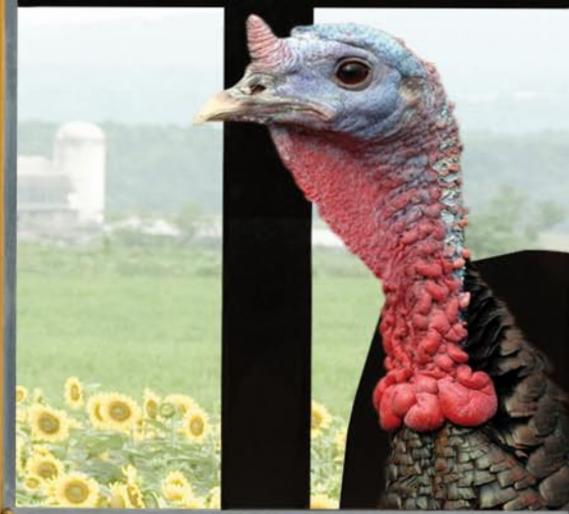


FALL 2007

NORM BERG'S LIFETIME OF CONSERVATION | IN PROFILE: BARBARA KINGSOLVER

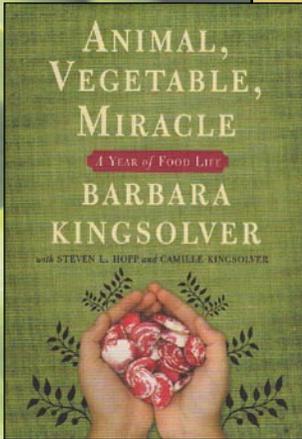
# AMERICAN Farmland

THE MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST



106

## FARMS Go Back to SCHOOL



*“This book tells the story of... how our family was changed by one year of deliberately eating food produced in the same place where we worked, loved our neighbors, drank the water, and breathed the air.”*

*—Barbara Kingsolver in Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*

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Farms grow healthy foods and are educational, too

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*The bestselling author talks about her new book and the necessity of local farms and food.*

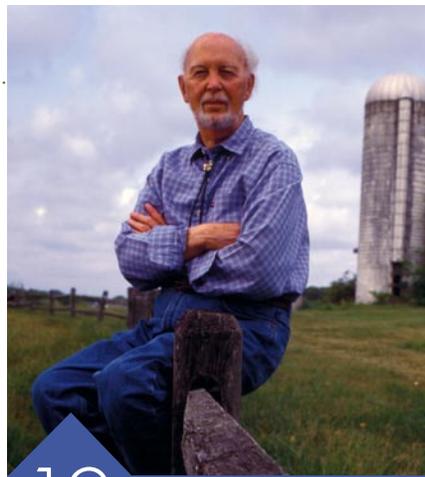
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BY ESTHER JAMES

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**ON THE COVER:** *No animals were harmed in the making of this photo collage: A pig and a turkey ride back to school, so they can teach children about the importance of local farms.*

PHOTO COLLAGE BY DIETRICH GEHRING

“NO NATION IS any healthier than its children,” said President Harry S. Truman upon signing the National School Lunch Act in 1946, which established government support so that none of our nation’s schoolchildren go hungry at lunchtime. When Truman signed the act, he considered the problem of poor nutrition to be an issue of national security. He recognized that our nation cannot be strong as a whole unless all of our citizens have access to nourishing, healthy food. Now, nearly 60 years later, it is crucial that we remember the importance of our nation’s access to healthy foods, especially as Congress finalizes the 2007 Farm Bill later this fall.

The farm bill covers a broad array of farm and food programs that affect our nation’s farmers directly but also greatly impact the health and well-being of our citizens. Beef and chicken farmer Sandy Fisher—AFT’s Steward of the Land Award winner this year—likes to say, “We need more farms and fewer hospitals.” I couldn’t agree more. Our country’s farmers help feed us all, and our federal farm and food policies should be doing more to help our farmers grow the healthiest foods in ways that are best for the environment and best for the long-term prosperity of agriculture.

As you’ll read in this issue of *American Farmland*, a growing movement is underway to help farmers bring fresh whole foods directly to schools in their

neighborhoods, which cuts down on the energy needed to transport the food, helps the farmers make more money, and introduces schoolchildren to an awareness of how much better locally grown foods taste and make them feel. The 2007 Farm Bill can and should do more to support innovative programs like these. That’s why AFT is working to make sure the farm bill supports the producers who grow healthy food and adequately funds the programs that keep our land and citizens healthy.



**Our country’s farmers help feed us all, and our federal farm and food policies should be doing more to help our farmers grow the healthiest foods in ways that are best for the environment and best for the long-term prosperity of agriculture.**

the market. When the U.S. Senate takes up the bill this fall, they have a chance to build on the success of the House but go further in transforming our farm and food policies. At AFT, we will be working hard for a farm bill that is worthy of our farmers—one that conserves our land, respects taxpayers and provides all citizens with better access to healthy foods.

Thank you for your continued support of our work.

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.

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I ENJOYED READING Wendell Berry's poems in the fall [2006] issue. Although you don't often print poetry, I have sent two of my poems for your consideration, should you see your way clear to include additional poems in a future issue.

## Cold Saturday

was the name of a farm somewhere in the first tier of counties to the north or west of Baltimore. The owners doubtless bred something there, but we never knew if they raised lamb or wool, because they never invited us in to shear and dip sheep as we toured the state in a gawky green rig sporting a collapsible ramp attached to a tank welded onto a pickup's chassis which often surprised drivers off the road. After I had sweettalked, cursed and rammed the stubborn, bedraggled sheep to the top and goosed them over the edge, Jack, with his shepherd's crook, dragged them through the reeking vat of milky dip. Although instrumental in implementing federal programs to eradicate scabies mites, we favored hallucinations retched from overtaxed brains which long before then should have been put out to pasture.

I was absorbed by the homemade sign when we rattled through early summer haze into the overwhelming work-week heat which salved us with coats of lanolin, sweat, and manure while we labored among skittish flocks in close, stuffy pens sweltering under tin roofs. Those two, cryptic, simple words hung in space from chains bolted to a crossbeam at the mouth of a gated lane which crooked immediately into woods. Feeling no need to know more, I daydreamed of living specifically there, until time felt compelled to carry me off into space.

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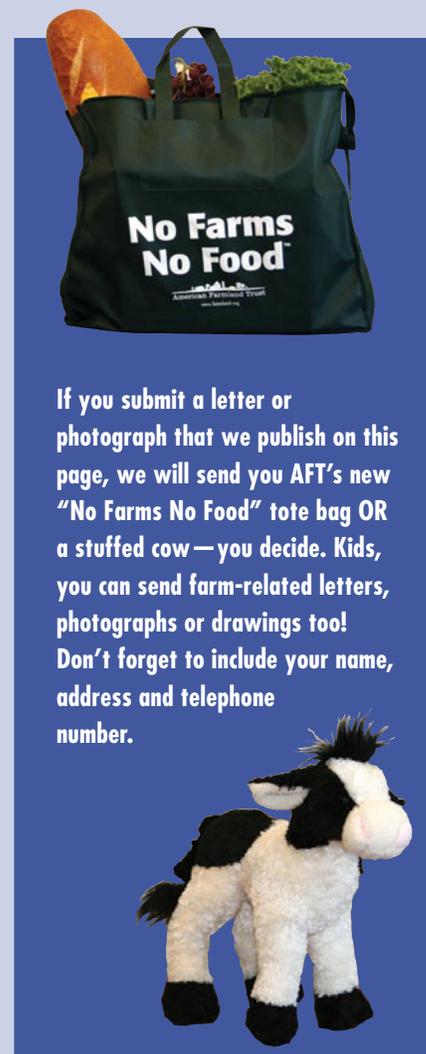
Although I taught in the creative writing program at UNC Charlotte for years, family and the land have constantly urged me back to Maryland and northern Virginia. "Smoke" was triggered by a barn fire near my parents' farm situated a couple of miles from Daisy in Howard County, Maryland. Our farm was enrolled in the land preservation program, but others, including the one cited in the poem, were not so lucky.

"Cold Saturday" was inspired years after the fact by my summer job as a helper for Jack Matthews, of Sparks, Maryland, who sheared and dipped sheep throughout Maryland, lower Pennsylvania, and northern Virginia in the early '60s.

Although it is painful to contemplate all that has been lost already, your organization helps keep hope alive.

—ROBERT WATERS GREY,  
CONCORD,  
NORTH CAROLINA

*The letter writer is a professor emeritus of English from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Only "Cold Saturday" is reprinted here; to read "Smoke," visit [www.farmland.org/resources/aftmagazine](http://www.farmland.org/resources/aftmagazine).*



If you submit a letter or photograph that we publish on this page, we will send you AFT's new "No Farms No Food" tote bag OR a stuffed cow — you decide. Kids, you can send farm-related letters, photographs or drawings too! Don't forget to include your name, address and telephone number.

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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## New Jersey Brings Farms to School

STARTING THIS FALL, New Jersey public schools will conform to regulations that greatly reduce the fat and sugar content of foods consumed by their students. New Jersey's Secretary of Agriculture, Charles Kuperus, led the changes. His initiative, "Healthy Choices, Healthy Kids," removes foods of minimal nutritional value from vending machines, à la carte lines, school stores and fundraisers on school property during school hours. Instead, the schools will make more fresh fruits, vegetables and healthy snacks available.

"There are really three components here," says Kuperus, who grew up on a family dairy farm. "Eating right, more exercise and educating

people about nutrition." Nutrition education is now part of the schools' core curriculum. "Often nutrition programs are disconnected from the agricultural policy discussion. What we're trying to do is keep them connected—we want to shorten the distance between farmers and schools."

The new regulations will benefit state agriculture by emphasizing local—followed by regional—food sources for the schools' healthier products. As a result, farms in New Jersey and neighboring New York are exploring value-added products that can be used year-round in schools, such as quick-frozen blueberries and sliced apples.

## Iowa Farmers Talk Carbon Trading

"FARMERS CAN PLAY a significant role in helping the nation lower its greenhouse gas emissions," says Ann Sorensen, director of AFT's Center for Agriculture in the Environment. "They can generate alternative

energy, reduce their own emissions and manage their land in ways that sequester more carbon."

In July, AFT hosted a listening session with Iowa farmers to talk about their potential role in helping the United States evolve into a low-carbon economy. Currently, approximately 1,000 farmers nationwide—on about one million acres of cropland—sell "carbon offsets" to various industries. The farmers do so by building up crop residues in the soil and leaving their soil virtually undisturbed, or by keeping the land in grass or planting trees—all practices that "sequester" carbon in the soil. Carbon sequestration is the removal of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into a stable form such as wood or soil organic matter.

The Des Moines listening session focused on factors that influence the willingness of farmers to use management practices that sequester carbon. "Overall, participants felt the best way to encourage farmers to store more carbon would be to treat carbon as yet another commodity or crop to be grown, traded and sold," says Sorensen. "In general, farmers indicated they would participate in a carbon market if they trusted the buyers, the practices fit into their operations, they could still make a profit and the contracts were simple."

But farmers also had concerns. By selling their ability to protect the environment to polluting industries, would they become "enablers," letting industries off the hook? And although carbon-trading industries typically pay for environmentally beneficial practices that otherwise would not have been used, participants felt strongly that farmers who were early adopters of conservation tillage and other carbon-sequestering practices should not be penalized



JENNIFER MORRILL

New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Charles Kuperus with AFT's Ralph Grossi. Kuperus led changes to bring local farm foods into public schools.

by being unable to sell their carbon offsets.

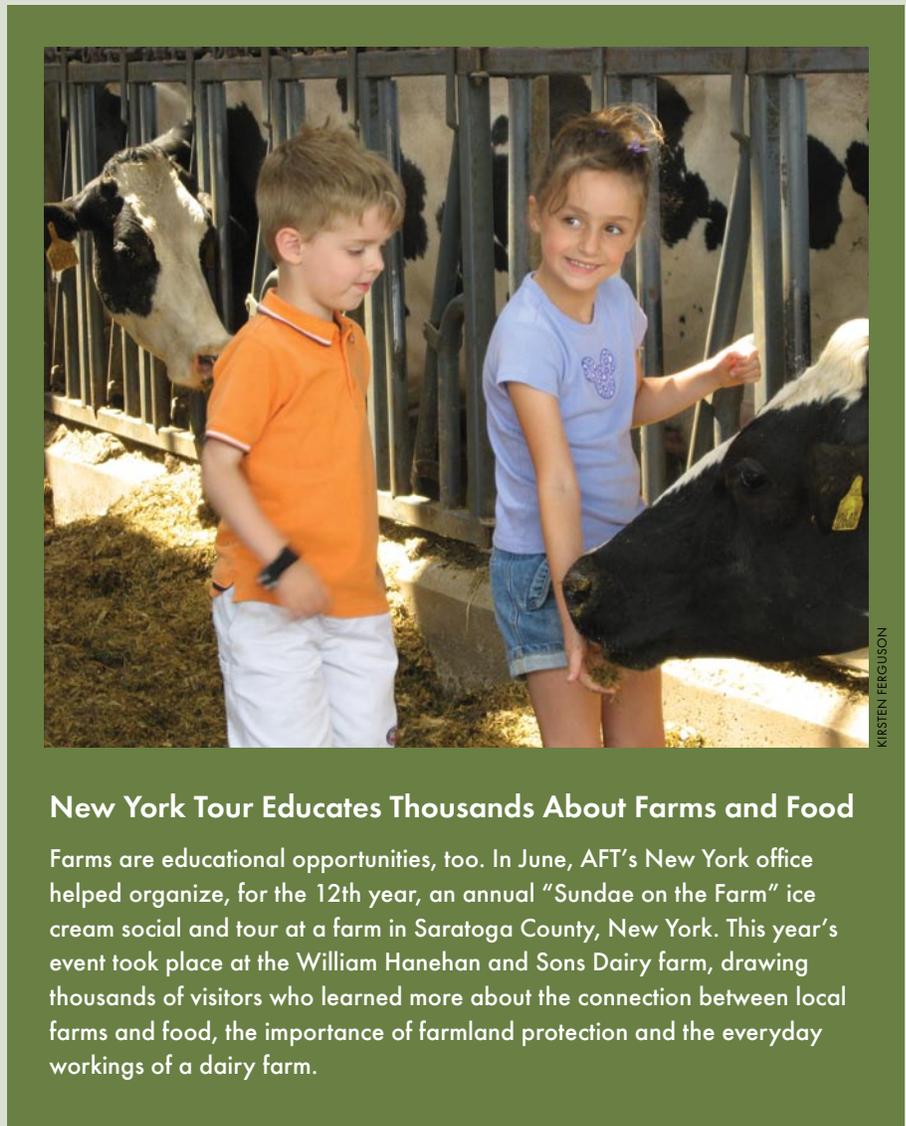
“The challenge going forward is to keep carbon-trading programs simple, easy to understand, transparent and workable for rural America,” says Sorensen. “In the end, our participants unanimously supported our efforts to engage agriculture in discussions about these markets. All agreed that agriculture needs to be at the table because ‘ecosystem services’ will likely be another of the many commodities produced by U.S. agriculture in the near future.”

The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, the Farm Foundation and the USDA’s Economic Research Service partnered with AFT in the listening session. To view the proceedings or for more information on AFT’s work related to ecosystem services, visit [www.aftresearch.org/ecosystems](http://www.aftresearch.org/ecosystems).

### Better Conservation Programs for the Pacific Northwest

THE POPULATION OF the Pacific Northwest is expected to increase by roughly five times over the next century. The growth is already exacting an environmental cost, with many treasured salmon runs on the endangered species list. With nearly half the land in Washington in active agriculture or forestry, private landowners are essential to any efforts to conserve the land.

But the farms and ranches that own these lands face bitter international competition, and increasing the environmental regulations they face is often not the answer. When farms and ranches fail as a result, their lands generally fall to less environmentally friendly uses. “Much of what is needed on these lands cannot be accomplished through



KIRSTEN FERGLISON

### New York Tour Educates Thousands About Farms and Food

Farms are educational opportunities, too. In June, AFT’s New York office helped organize, for the 12th year, an annual “Sundae on the Farm” ice cream social and tour at a farm in Saratoga County, New York. This year’s event took place at the William Hanehan and Sons Dairy farm, drawing thousands of visitors who learned more about the connection between local farms and food, the importance of farmland protection and the everyday workings of a dairy farm.

prohibitory regulation,” says AFT’s Pacific Northwest States Director Don Stuart. “Instead we need positive improvements on the land and sometimes costly investments in environmental infrastructure. Effective and well-funded ‘conservation incentives’ programs are the only workable way to get there.”

Watershed plans are now underway across Washington to address salmon, water quality and other environmental concerns. “Most of these plans depend heavily on voluntary incentives for landowners,” says Stuart. “Yet without adequate funding, those recommendations are

almost certain to be ignored, and regulation will take their place. Should this happen, the financial burdens on agriculture are likely to intensify and more farmland will fall to development.” Stuart notes that is why the official NOAA Fisheries Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan recently concluded that “if salmon recovery is possible in the Puget Sound region, it will be with the help of farms, not in spite of them.”

Last year, AFT launched an effort to improve voluntary conservation programs in the Pacific Northwest, making them more accessible and effective for farmers and foresters. In

## Ohio Pays Tribute to Two Farmland Champions

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS, AFT OHIO STATE DIRECTOR

### Arno Renner: Farmland Protection Advocate

Ohio lost a quiet symbol of farmland preservation in June. In some ways, Arno Renner was simply a resolute man who wanted to farm his 231 acres outside of Marysville, Ohio, 30 miles from Columbus. But in other ways, he and his land were at the very center of local and statewide efforts to preserve farmland. Renner died June 18 at age 88; he was still farming actively a year ago.

His years of determination to get official local support for his donation of an agricultural easement to the state were aimed more at preserving his own farm than at boosting a statewide movement. But his tenacity nonetheless became a symbol—especially after his 2003 easement was threatened in 2005 by a proposed sewer line that would extend Marysville’s sprawl further into the countryside. The Ohio Department of Agriculture drew a line in the soil and said it would challenge in court the city’s threat of eminent domain to dig the line across Renner’s farm.

So the city proposed a compromise that put the sewer line along a roadway instead of across the fields. “It was a milestone in our program,” said Howard Wise, assistant agriculture director at the time, adding that the department’s stand led to an increase in easement donations. “Arno gave the Ohio Department of Agriculture a lot of credibility. An easement is only as good as the holder’s willingness to enforce it. We had to defend that easement.”

While Renner and Ohio Agriculture Director Fred Dailey stood their ground, the head of the department’s Office of Farmland Preservation, Michael Bailey, sat anxiously on the sidelines because of a conflict—Renner was Bailey’s great-uncle. “The preservation of that farm was so rewarding, yet it was so frustrating in a professional capacity to not be able to be involved,” said Bailey. “A lot of people didn’t understand the economic value of what he did.” The easement was appraised at \$3.2 million, but it “wasn’t comprehensible to him” to do anything but preserve the land that had been in his family over 150 years. “He was a quiet man who wanted to preserve his land and be left alone. He died more of a content man knowing that his affairs were in order and that he needn’t fear for the future of his land.”



Arno Renner

Officials in Union County and Mill Creek Township were reluctant to endorse Renner’s plan to donate his easement to the state because they didn’t understand easements and farmland preservation. But farmer Don Bailey—Mike’s father and Renner’s nephew—said his uncle was “uninhibited by what appeared to be an obstacle; he kept at it.” Ultimately, supporters of the easement pushed it as a property rights issue: Renner owned the land, and if he desired to preserve it for agriculture that was his right. Bailey hopes his uncle’s legacy will be a new perception about agriculture—a challenge, given that the road along Renner’s farm is called Industrial Parkway.

“People don’t view farms out here as business,” lamented Jim Mitchell, a farmer who was a county commissioner at the time Renner donated his easement. “They call it undeveloped land. They don’t think about it as an industry—they think of it as something to build on or pave over. In Union County, ag land is designated as ‘U’ for undeveloped.”

“But we consider it highly developed,” said Don Bailey. “Agriculture was here a long time before they started moving the factories in. For hundreds of years, this was cleared by the family, drained, and was productive farmland.”

Peggy Hall, a board member of Land Heritage Trust of Union County, said Renner’s easement raised the visibility of farmland protection. “It seemed Mr. Renner was ahead of so many people in thinking that someday farmland would be less available. His vision of what a community needs in the long run will be something that the community will see in the future.”

### Bob Evans: Farmer and Restaurateur

Two Ohio farmers passionate about the land died within three days in June. After Arno Renner, Bob Evans, 89, died June 21. The better-known and more gregarious of the two was Evans, whose namesake restaurants still flourish in the eastern United States 20

years after he left the company he started. After his retirement, Evans embarked on what he often called “the most important thing I’ve done in my life”—promotion of rotational and year-round grazing, which he said would save the family-run cattle farms in the steep hills around his Southeastern Ohio home. While Evans was not a traditional farmland preservation advocate, he saw his mission as preserving farms and farmers, and he worked tirelessly at it.



Bob and Jewell Evans

May, AFT released a series of public policy recommendations. One of the first, a new statewide conservation incentives clearinghouse, has already been set in motion by the Washington legislature as one of the tasks assigned to the state's new Office of Farmland Preservation (also a product of AFT efforts). AFT is currently working with its partners to identify a list of action items for submission to the 2008 legislative session. The complete AFT report can be found at [www.farmland.org/programs/states/wa](http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/wa).

### Can San Francisco Feed Itself from Local Farms?

THE SAN FRANCISCO Bay Area is one of the world's great metropolitan centers. Like few other cities, San Francisco is surrounded by unique agricultural lands with a mild Mediterranean climate capable

of producing nearly every kind of food consumed and enjoyed in the Bay Area. Within 100 miles of the Golden Gate Bridge—an area encompassing the Napa and Salinas valleys as well as significant portions of the highly productive Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys—California farmers and ranchers produce \$9 billion worth of agricultural products annually.

However, these agricultural lands are threatened by the expanding population that continues to be attracted to Northern California. In the northern San Joaquin Valley alone, 29,000 acres of farmland—approximately the area of the city of San Francisco—were paved over for urban development during the 1990s, and another 23,000 acres were retired from agricultural use in anticipation of future development.

Globalization of the farm economy is also putting pressure on

California growers, who increasingly compete with overseas markets that benefit from cheaper farm labor and relaxed environmental and health standards. Though nearby farmers and ranchers sell \$50 million a year in agricultural products directly to consumers in the Bay Area, they have hardly tapped the potential of the region as a value-added market for local food. To examine that potential, AFT has received a grant from the San Francisco Foundation to study the agricultural products now being produced and consumed within the region. The project will result in a strategy to maximize the potential for the city to feed itself from foods grown on nearby farms and ranches—including the protection of the farmland that the San Francisco “foodshed” depends on.

To advise on the project, AFT has formed a committee including the University of California, Greenbelt Alliance, Roots of Change Fund, San Francisco Food Systems and the San Francisco Foundation. To collaborate, contact AFT's California Director Edward Thompson, Jr., at [ethompson@farmland.org](mailto:ethompson@farmland.org). For more information, visit AFT's California Web page at [www.farmland.org/california](http://www.farmland.org/california).



Vegetables at San Francisco's Ferry Plaza farmers' market. AFT is studying whether the city could feed itself from nearby farms.

### Good News for New England

SEVERAL POSITIVE LEGISLATIVE developments related to conservation occurred in New England over the summer. In New Hampshire, lawmakers restored funding for the state's popular Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP). Created in 2000, the LCHIP program is the primary source of state funding for farmland protection projects, but it has been hampered over the past few years

by a lack of funding. As part of an agreement on the state's biennial budget, the legislature provided \$12 million for LCHIP over the next two years.

In Connecticut, Governor M. Jodi Rell signed legislation in July that will streamline the state's Farmland Preservation Program by providing \$20 million over the next two years (given the State Bonding Commission approves the funding). The measure also creates a 12-member Farmland Preservation Advisory Board to help the state bolster its efforts to preserve farmland. AFT's Working Lands Alliance, a coalition of more than 200 farm and conservation organizations, led the grassroots campaign in support of the bill.

And in an important show of

support for land conservation, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick announced his intent to provide a minimum of \$50 million annually for state land protection programs, including the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program, over the next five years. This funding level represents a 65 percent increase over annual land protection spending during the previous four years. Cris Coffin, AFT's New England Director, says that the administration's announcement is especially welcome news in light of potential increases in farmland protection funding through the farm bill being written this year in Congress, putting the Commonwealth in a better position to leverage the additional federal

## FARM FACT

Five states have each protected more than 100,000 acres of farmland. Of this group, Colorado and Maryland are approaching 300,000 acres, and Pennsylvania is approaching 350,000 acres of protected agricultural land. New Jersey and Vermont are also in the top five. AFT's Farmland Information Center conducts an annual survey of state and local purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) programs throughout the country. The results are available online at [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org).

## THE BMP CHALLENGE

**What is the project?** AFT's BMP Challenge gives farmers a risk-free way to reduce their fertilizer use and employ conservation tillage practices. Participating farmers test "best management practices" (BMPs) that have been developed to save money and maintain optimal yields while protecting the water and soil. The project pays farmers if their yield and income are reduced while using the conservation practices. Nutrient BMP test results on fields in four Midwestern states enrolled in the program showed a reduction in fertilizer use by 24 percent while fully protecting farm income. In 2006 and 2007, a conservation tillage program on thousands of acres in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Ohio reduced greenhouse gas emissions by up to 69 percent and soil erosion by up to 78 percent.

**Why is the project needed?** Fertilizer runoff has been linked to the contamination of local watersheds and to the creation of hypoxic dead zones in rivers, gulfs, bays and oceans worldwide. One of the best ways to shrink the dead zones is by reducing the over-application of nitrogen fertilizers. Conventional tillage methods can also impact air quality and cause soil erosion, while reduced tillage practices burn less fossil fuel, help reduce the release of greenhouse gases by sequestering carbon and stem soil runoff into lakes, rivers and streams.

**What farms are eligible?** Farmers in Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin who grow corn for grain and silage are eligible for the program.

**Where can I learn more?** For more information, contact Brian Brandt of AFT's Agricultural Conservation Innovation Center at (614) 221-8610 or [bbrandt@farmland.org](mailto:bbrandt@farmland.org). Or visit [www.farmland.org/resources/bmpchallenge](http://www.farmland.org/resources/bmpchallenge).

## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



AFT's Brian Brandt

## Farm Bill Debate Continues

DISCUSSIONS OVER THE 2007 Farm Bill continue this fall, with the U.S. Senate debating their version of the bill. Over the summer, the U.S. House of Representatives passed their version with important improvements, including \$13 billion in new funding for conservation, local food systems, energy and fruits and vegetables. The House bill increased overall funding for conservation programs by about 35 percent, including important increases for the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Some much needed changes were not made, however. “Changes should have gone further to reform safety net programs, update direct payments to exclude non-farmers from receiving payments and to reward farmers and ranchers for their environmental stewardship,” noted AFT’s Ralph Grossi. “However, the House bill that passed represented the best chance for agriculture and consumers to continue to work with leadership in the House and Senate to further transform subsidy policies and expand funding for conservation, healthy diets, nutrition programs and local food systems.” (The House and Senate must reach a compromise on the bill later this fall.)

Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) set the stage for that kind of transformation when they introduced the Farm Safety Net Improvement Act of 2007 in late July. “It’s a real commodity reform proposal that AFT has been working on for over two years,” said Grossi. Many farmers are facing yield losses this summer from droughts and floods, but current subsidy programs that only protect against price won’t cover their revenue losses. “The new legislation will fix the holes in the safety net and reduce market and

trade distortions to help the environment and farmers in developing nations. This bill also reduces the need for disaster assistance, freeing up those funds for other priorities. Please contact your Senators and tell them to support reform of commodity subsidies and increased funding for farmland protection, conservation and fresh local foods.”

To find out more, visit [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

## AFT Welcomes New Director of Major Gifts

D. KAY MALONE joined AFT in July as the new Director of Major Gifts. Kay is a graduate of American



Kay Malone

University’s Washington College of Law and practiced law for six years before moving into the field of fundraising. She is the

former director of planned giving and major gifts for the international health education organization Project HOPE. Active in various forms of fundraising as both staff and consultant for more than 10 years, Kay has worked with nonprofits, governmental human service agencies, schools and local coalitions. Kay grew up in rural Indiana, which gave her “a life-long love of all things equestrian.”

## AFT’s Eighth Annual Saratoga Celebration a Success

Horse lovers, farmers and AFT friends and supporters came together in August at the Saratoga National Golf Club in Saratoga Springs, New York, for a celebration of AFT’s work saving the land that sustains us. Funds raised by the event help support the efforts of AFT’s New York office in conserving the state’s farmland. AFT would like to thank board member Julia Harte Widdowson, the event host, as well the silent auction contributors, committee members and attendees for making the evening memorable!

RIGHT: AFT board member and event host Julia Widdowson with AFT’s 2006 Steward of the Land, Tom Hutson



BELOW (LEFT TO RIGHT): AFT board chair Jay Winthrop, AFT president’s council member Buddy Fletcher, AFT board member Iris Freeman, and Tyler Ladner



## Barbara Kingsolver, Author

BY KIRSTEN FERGUSON

BESTSELLING AUTHOR Barbara Kingsolver's latest book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, chronicles her family's year-long experience living off food grown only on their own land or raised by farmers in their southwestern Virginia community. The author of celebrated works of fiction including *The Bean Trees* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, Kingsolver, along with her family, is a member and supporter of American Farmland Trust.

*Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* recounts her family's days filled not only with the tasks of planting, weeding and harvesting, but also with the pleasures of meals cultivated by their own hands, from the first fresh asparagus patch of spring to the summer days-of-plenty when a surfeit of tomatoes and zucchini rains from their garden.

The family's "experiment" of eating only local foods eventually becomes their way of life. Kingsolver

**A.** I've been absolutely astonished. It's such a wonderful reassurance to me that Americans seem to care about where their food comes from. Every time I write a new book, I begin with the feeling that I am going to stretch my readers and their experience; I always set out to go somewhere new. In this case, the audience is not just the readers of my fiction, but the book is reaching other categories of readers. I'm hearing from people in the country and in cities all saying the same thing: I have been moved to eat in a different way. It's so positive.

**Q.** In the past decade, farmers' markets have grown in popularity. Do you think people are starting to catch on to the nutritional, environmental and taste benefits of local food?

**A.** At the time I proposed this book to my publisher three and a half years ago, I did not see a trend coming. I never guess that I am going to be trendy [laughs]. There were people like Alice Waters and famous restaurants like Chez Panisse and the White Dog Café that were famous for their focus on local foods. But now, almost anywhere you go, you find awareness of the local food economy and a celebration of it—that's what's new and how widespread it is. With farmers' markets there has definitely been a groundswell. It's very exciting for organizations like

AFT and others that have been doing this work for so many years.

**Q.** Many people don't have the ability to grow their own food, as your family did. To have the option of eating locally, they must have farms near their communities. Do you think that is one of the most important reasons for protecting farms and farmland?

**A.** Of course. And that option to have local food will continue to exist and expand only as we continue to take advantage of it. It's a circle. I often hear the argument that not everyone can afford local food. That's why those of us who can exercise these options to eat local have a moral obligation to do so, because by strengthening local food systems we help to make local food more available to everyone. We have a habit as Americans of being food cheapskates. We attempt to economize on our food in ways we don't economize in other areas of our lives that are less important to our health and communities. It's about reordering our priorities and helping to strengthen our local food economies for so many reasons: to keep green spaces around our communities, to keep that money in our school districts. The great thing about the food movement is that it involves simple solutions. Just look closer to home. Look at labels and try to find foods that come from your region.

**Q.** Federal farm policy has a lot to do with people's food choices. The 2007 Farm Bill is being debated right now. What types of changes would you like to see to help make more nutritious food available to everyone?

**A.** Everyplace I go, I talk about the farm bill. For the first time in recent history, people are realizing that the farm bill is not some obscure

Local food is a handshake deal in a community gathering place... Local is farmers growing trust.

— *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*

calls the story "about finding a certain path home." Co-written by Kingsolver's husband, biologist Steven Hopp, and daughter, Camille, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* encourages readers to question the environmental costs of their food choices. In an interview with AFT, Kingsolver talks about the importance of supporting local farmers and making sound food choices.

**Q.** Have you been surprised by the success of your book? It's on the bestseller lists, and its messages about the importance of local farms and food seem to really be resonating with people.

piece of legislation; it's about what their kids will eat in school, or why organic foods cost more than fast foods. By rewriting our farm policy, we can get ourselves back to where we should be and we can preserve our farmland. I would like to see more of my tax dollars go to support sustainable agriculture and the production of healthy foods, and less to support commodity crops that will become junk food.

**Q.** This issue contains a feature about farm to school" programs that connect children to

**farms and help bring local produce into schools. Why do you think it's so important to educate children early on about food choices?**

**A.** In schools, we consider the history of the Roman Empire more important than the production of a loaf of bread from field to table. Which of those two things will matter more in the long run? We've raised a generation of kids who haven't a clue where their food comes from. That's not a wise thing. I would like for my kids to have the education and skills to make food in the normal way: the

way humans have lived for most of our history. We do have choices now. We can begin eating in a different way with good results, or we can put it off until we have poor choices left, with our farmland gone and poor options for feeding ourselves.

**Q.** The food system, nationally and globally, is so large. What kind of difference can the average person make?

**A.** Every local food scene is different and unique to the region. What people can do is attend more closely to the sources of their food. That might mean choosing apples from your state rather than from New Zealand. Or concentrating on eating foods that are more environmentally sound in their production. For other people it may involve participation, such as joining a CSA farm. Food is the one consumer choice we have to make every day. Whether you're rich or poor, urban or rural, you have to buy food. Shifting the focus of our food dollars into our local communities will make a difference. It will only happen one consumer at a time.

**Q.** We're proud to have you as a member of AFT. Why did you decide to support us?

**A.** I grew up in a farming community. I have always understood the importance of farmland, farmers and farm communities. It has continued to amaze me that most people don't think about the person who grew their food. The disappearance of farm culture is very important to me. For this reason, AFT is an organization I clearly support. I appreciate the work you all do.



HANK DANIEL

Barbara Kingsolver, with Steven L. Hopp and Camille Kingsolver, co-authors of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*.

Receive an autographed copy of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* when you join AFT's Perennial Partners. To learn more, call (800) 431-1499 or visit [www.farmland.org/kingsolver](http://www.farmland.org/kingsolver).



# A CONSERVATION CALLING

*This fall, American Farmland Trust launched the “Norm Berg Special Collection,” an online archive of speeches and articles by conservationist Norm Berg, whose far-reaching career began in 1943 at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Soil Conservation Service, an agency formed in response to the Dust Bowl. Today, at nearly 90 years old, Berg continues to serve as a senior advisor to AFT and as a representative for the Soil and Water Conservation Society. Max Schnepf looks back at Berg’s career spent saving the soil—and raising awareness about the destruction of the nation’s farmland.*

AT LEFT: Norm Berg in 1998

## Norm Berg’s Lifetime of Saving the Land

BY MAX SCHNEPF

**N**orm Berg rises each morning at 5:30 A.M., just as he did as a teenager on his family’s farm. Age has only strengthened his land ethic. At 89, he actively pursues soil and water conservation efforts in his local community and on the national scene. Three or four days a week, he commutes to the American Farmland Trust office in downtown Washington, D.C., where he advocates for protecting agricultural land and promoting its sustainable use. The word “retirement” rarely comes up. When it does, Berg’s response is short and to the point: “What better things do I have to do with my time at this stage

### NORM BERG YEARS: A LIFE OF CONSERVATION LANDMARKS

◀ Berg with his family circa 1935

**1918**

Norm Berg is born in Burlington, Iowa. He becomes a lifelong advocate of soil conservation and farmland protection.

**1926**

Berg’s family moves to a farm in Grasston, Minnesota, where they weather the Great Depression thanks to their small farm.

**1933**

A severe drought in the Great Plains and decades of farming without conservation practices leads to the Dust Bowl, an ecological and agricultural disaster in North America.



MOLLY ROBERTS



of my life than continue to assist those concerned about future generations?”

## The Roots of a Conservation Ethic

Norman A. Berg was born in Burlington, Iowa, on March 14, 1918, not long after another famous Burlington resident, Aldo Leopold. Like Leopold, who became a national icon in wildlife conservation circles, Berg has become an icon in soil conservation and farmland protection circles.

The son of a railroad machinist, Berg spent his early childhood years playing in the same streets and sledding on the same hills as Leopold. “But,” Berg recalls, “summers were special because of trips to a small farm our father purchased in Minnesota, between the Twin Cities and Duluth.” The elder Berg moved the family to the farm permanently in 1926.

Berg remembers, “Enough cropland had been carved out of the timber to support small numbers of dairy cows, horses, hogs, chickens and geese. We weathered the Great Depression quite well. Butterfat sold to the local creamery became our sole source of income.” Berg and his father also fished from a row boat on a nearby lake. Berg says, “This introduction to farming and the out-of-doors influenced my career choices later in life.”



A poster for the Civilian Conservation Corps

Life became more difficult for the family when Berg’s father died in 1934. Berg was a sophomore in high school, his brother, John, a freshman. While their father had insisted that the boys receive a college education, Berg remained on the farm until his brother graduated in 1937. “I assumed my brother would stay on the farm,” Berg remembers. “Instead, he enlisted in the Civilian Conservation Corps.” Known as “Roosevelt’s Tree Army,” enrollees in the corps worked on conservation programs in rural areas.

A vocational agriculture teacher encouraged Berg to go to college, and he enrolled at the University of Minnesota. An advisor convinced Berg to set his sights on a four-year degree, which would qualify him to work as an Extension Service county agent or a vocational agriculture instructor.

At a Friday night dance during his sophomore year, Berg was introduced to Ruth Askegaard. Like Berg, she attended classes on the university’s farm campus in St. Paul. Berg reminisces, “She became my lifelong partner on November 20, 1941, not long after our graduation from the university and just a couple of weeks before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Ruth and I enjoyed a wonderful togetherness for nearly 70 years. I couldn’t have pursued my career in conservation without her unwavering commitment and support, and that of our four daughters.”

## The SCS Years

After college, Berg applied for a position with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Soil Conservation Service (SCS), a new federal agency. The chance to work directly with farmers on the land appealed to Berg, and when the agency offered him a position in Idaho, he and his wife moved there in 1943. “My area in southeastern Idaho,” Berg relates, “had been home to several Civilian Conservation Corps camps. I also oversaw another former CCC camp west of my area. That land was farmed but never should have been. We converted the area back to grass. Eventually, it became a national grassland.”

### 1935

Congress passes legislation declaring soil and water conservation a national priority. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Soil Conservation Service (SCS) is created.

### 1937

President Franklin D. Roosevelt asks state governors to pass legislation allowing soil conservation districts, local bodies to help landowners manage natural resources.



### 1941

Berg and Ruth Askegaard marry; two weeks later, the U.S. enters World War II.



### 1943

Berg accepts a job offer from SCS and moves to Idaho before joining the Marine Corps.

Berg and a livestock judging team in 1940



## THE NORM BERG SPECIAL COLLECTION

Norm Berg's conservation achievements not only tracked an emerging movement; his leadership charted the movement's course. AFT's Norm Berg Collection—an online archive of documents by and about Berg—makes his wisdom available to future farmland protection advocates.

At the collection's core are nearly 200 speeches and articles written by Berg from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, when he was in leadership at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service (SCS). The papers demonstrate Berg's tireless commitment to farm and ranch land protection, and his role in steering the agency and its partners toward a broader understanding of agricultural

conservation. The collection also includes key laws and reports, biographical sketches and tributes prepared by colleagues and friends.

AFT assembled the collection with help from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly SCS). The archive is housed within AFT's Farmland Information Center (FIC) Web site. The FIC is a fitting home for Berg's works because it was authorized by the Farmland Protection Policy Act, one outcome of the National Agricultural Lands Study launched by the U.S. Department of Agriculture during Berg's term as SCS chief.

To view the collection, visit [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org).

During his first year at SCS, the legendary Hugh Hammond Bennett, considered the “father of soil conservation,” helmed the agency. Inspired by Bennett's dedication, Berg remained committed to conservation even as World War II interrupted his SCS work. In 1945, while stationed with the Marines in Washington, D.C., Berg set out to meet the visionary Bennett. After a couple of failed attempts, he finally succeeded. “We shared backgrounds,” Berg remembers, “and before I left, he admonished me to return to Idaho after I completed my military service and help get conservation districts organized.”

Berg did just that. After three years in the Marines, he returned to Pocatello, Idaho, and attended a reorientation for SCS employees who had served in the war. The training further inspired him to commit his life to conservation: “The soil erosion problems on those long, rolling hills just had to be dealt with. Working in the field, with farmers and ranchers, to improve their operations was a real challenge.”

Berg spent the next 10 years in Pocatello, focusing much of his attention on Bennett's advice to organize conservation districts. During this period, he gained an appreciation for how conservation happens—one farm and one farmer at a time.

### A Growing Concern: the Loss of Agricultural Land

After earning a master's degree in public administration at Harvard in 1956, Berg went to South Dakota, where he served as the assistant state conservationist and continued his work to bolster local conservation districts. He also played a role in saving the groundbreaking Great Plains Conservation Program, one of the first programs to give technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to help them adopt conservation practices.

In 1960, Berg reported to work at SCS headquarters in Washington, D.C., where he became an assistant and congressional liaison for Don Williams, then head of SCS. Throughout the years that followed, as Berg rose through the ranks at SCS, he became increasingly concerned about the loss of agricultural land to development. Co-chairing a national conference called “Soil, Water and Suburbia” reinforced his interest in national land use policy.

A few years later, Berg played a key role in drafting the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA), which gave greater authority over natural resources to the

### 1945

While in the Marines, Berg meets legendary SCS chief Hugh Hammond Bennett, who urges him to return to Idaho after his military service to organize conservation districts.



### 1946

Berg returns to work for SCS in Idaho, organizing conservation districts and working in the field with farmers and ranchers on soil erosion.

### 1955

Berg is accepted for a graduate program in public administration at Harvard University.

### 1956



Berg graduates and SCS leaders select him for the assistant state conservationist post in South Dakota. Legislation creates the Great Plains Conservation Program, which is novel for sharing the cost of conservation measures with farmers and ranchers under a contract.

## A LEADER IN CONSERVATION

- Early in his career, Berg counseled countless farmers on improvements to save their eroding land and was a tireless advocate of conservation districts, formed to help local communities manage their natural resources. He has served on his local conservation district board in Maryland for over 25 years.
- Berg has been a mentor to countless conservationists. At the Soil Conservation Service, he led initiatives to bring greater diversity to the agency and expanded the agency's reach to international conservation.
- At SCS, and then as an advisor to AFT, Berg sounded the alarm early about the nation's farmland loss, advocating for key changes in policies related to conservation, including the creation of a national farmland protection program.

U.S. Department of Agriculture and required the agency to send a national conservation plan to Congress. The bill passed both houses of Congress and was sent to the president for signature in 1976. "But," Norm remembers, "Bureau of the Budget officials read the bill as a national land use planning law and recommended that the president veto it. President Gerald Ford did so. National land use policy had become a hot-potato issue for policymakers in the 1970s."

After he was elected, President Jimmy Carter asked for the bill to be reintroduced. It passed both houses of Congress, and he immediately signed it into law. The act led to USDA commodity program benefits being linked, for the first time, to national conservation goals.

In 1979, President Carter appointed Berg as chief of SCS. That year, Berg oversaw work on the National Agricultural Lands Study (NALS), an 18-month project to

document the extent and cause of the loss of the nation's farmland. "NALS generated many important questions and recommendations about the availability of suitable land for agricultural purposes and the impacts of urban and related development on agricultural enterprises," Berg says. An important result of the study: language in the 1981 Farm Bill authorizing farmland protection efforts by USDA and creation of a farmland information center.

## The AFT Years: A Second Career

Berg served as SCS chief until 1982, when he was forced to retire his post by the Reagan administration, which turned the career civil service position into a political appointment. Within days of his retirement, Berg was asked by leaders at American Farmland Trust, then a fledgling non-profit organization, to come on board as a senior advisor.

Against the backdrop of the National Agricultural Lands Study, philanthropist Peggy Rockefeller and Pat Noonan of The Nature Conservancy had set out to form a national farmland protection organization. Doug Wheeler was selected to head the new organization. Ralph Grossi, a Marin County, California farmer also was part of this group (he later became AFT's president).

"A small grant," Berg says, "enabled us to generate a report in the early 1980s titled *Soil Conservation in America, What Do We Have to Lose?* That report helped set the

*Norm Berg has devoted his life to the conservation of land and water—not only in this country, but all over the world. He has helped thousands of farmers and governmental officials protect and improve the nation's agricultural resources. Thank you, Norm Berg, from one farmer to another, for 50 years of distinguished service to the protection of our precious Earth.*

—President Jimmy Carter in 1991

### 1960

Berg reports to work at SCS headquarters in Washington, D.C.

### 1965

Berg is promoted to deputy administrator for programs at SCS, then to associate administrator in 1969.



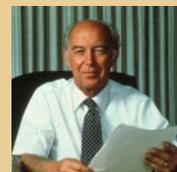
### 1977

President Jimmy Carter signs the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act, requiring USDA to send a national conservation plan to Congress.



### 1979

Carter appoints Berg as the head of SCS. Berg oversees the National Agricultural Lands Study, which sounds the alarm about the loss of the nation's farmland.



# Primer on Prime Farmland



Berg presents results from 1979's groundbreaking National Agricultural Lands Study, which sounded the alarm about the loss of the nation's farmland.

stage for the 1985 Farm Bill debate and the innovative Conservation Reserve Program.”

During this period, Berg also was offered a position as the Washington representative for the Soil and Water Conservation Society, an international scientific organization for conservation professionals. He agreed to split his time between the two organizations. During Berg's “second career” with AFT, he engaged in multiple farm bill debates and advocated for voluntary, incentive-driven conservation programs, including the creation of a national farmland protection program in the 1996 Farm Bill.

“I'm a product of an agricultural background and training,” Berg says, “but I learned early on in my career that urban residents have an important impact on the land and a great deal at stake with what happens in rural America. I've been a long-time advocate, as a USDA employee and since, of a strong national land use policy that recognizes the need to allocate limited land resources among competing uses.”

Berg also saw to it that USDA implemented a key provision of 1981's Farmland Protection Policy Act. The

act aims to minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the development of agricultural land. It also directed the Secretary of Agriculture to create a clearinghouse of information on farmland issues, policies and programs. The agency shelved the law until 1994, when Berg helped win agency support for AFT to create and manage a Farmland Information Center, which it operates to this day. (See page 19 for more information on the FIC.)

AFT President Ralph Grossi sums up Berg's tenure at the organization by saying, “Norm's value to AFT has been felt on many levels. First, he has provided an unparalleled depth of knowledge, both technical and political, about conservation. Norm is a walking library who provides regular counsel to many within AFT—putting issues in perspective and helping sidestep critical mistakes along the way. In very diplomatic ways, he regularly reminds us that our latest idea or concept is not new—usually by pulling out an old article in one of the stacks on his desk!”



## 1980

A group of farmers and conservationists concerned about the loss of farmland form American Farmland Trust.



## 1981

The federal Farmland Protection Policy Act, which passes in the farm bill, aims to minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the loss of agricultural land.

## 1982

Berg is forced to retire his post as SCS chair by the Reagan administration. AFT asks Berg to come onboard as a senior advisor.

## 1985

AFT publishes *Soil Conservation in America: What Do We Have to Lose?*, a report that leads to the creation of the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).





Berg with AFT President Ralph Grossi on the occasion of AFT's 25th anniversary in 2005.

## Wisdom for Future Generations

When asked about the future of conservation, Berg warns that the current competition for land continues to threaten our farmland. “We pushed agricultural production to the fence lines in the past to the detriment of conservation. Now, with the newfound focus on energy production, we may again push the limits of the land to a point that we cannot sustain. We must consider what we leave as a natural resource base for our grandchildren.”

He observes that Europe has moved well ahead of us. “Many European countries have strong land use controls. We shirk from such. We deal with policies on air quality and water quality, but we don’t have policies on soil quality or land use. Eventually, we must face up to this issue. Policymakers and the broader public need to buy into the greening process that has been going on in this country

and share the cost of producing environmental commodities on our farms and ranches.

“The reality today is that farming and ranching remain a risky business, and what happens on the ground is largely up to the individual owners and managers of the nation’s cropland, pasture, rangeland, and forest land. Conservation gets done in an incremental way—from farm to farm and ranch to ranch. Our job is to get the people of this nation, particularly urban interests, to understand how farmers and ranchers contribute to the environmental well-being of us all.”

*A longer version of this article is available as part of the Norm Berg Special Collection at [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org).*

MAX SCHNEPF retired in 2004 after a 40-year career in natural resources, including 27 years as an editor of publications for the Soil and Water Conservation Society.



▲ Berg with Senator Richard Luger

### 1990

Berg is given the Soil and Water Conservation Society’s prestigious Hugh Hammond Bennett Award.

### 1994

AFT creates the Farmland Information Center (FIC), authorized by the federal Farmland Protection Policy Act. The name of the Soil Conservation Service is changed to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

### 1996

The 1996 Farm Bill leads to the creation of a national farmland protection program.



### 2007

The FIC launches a special online collection to honor seven decades of Berg’s conservation work.





# American Farmland Trust's FARMLAND INFORMATION CENTER

## *The Ultimate Resource*

*How can my community help farmers stay in business? How can I protect my farm? How can I make the case for farmland protection in my community?*

These are just a few of the questions answered by AFT's Farmland Information Center (FIC). Through a staffed answer service and a Web site at [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org), the FIC helps people all over the country protect farm and ranch land from future development. The FIC is authorized by federal law and supported by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

### **Research Assistance**

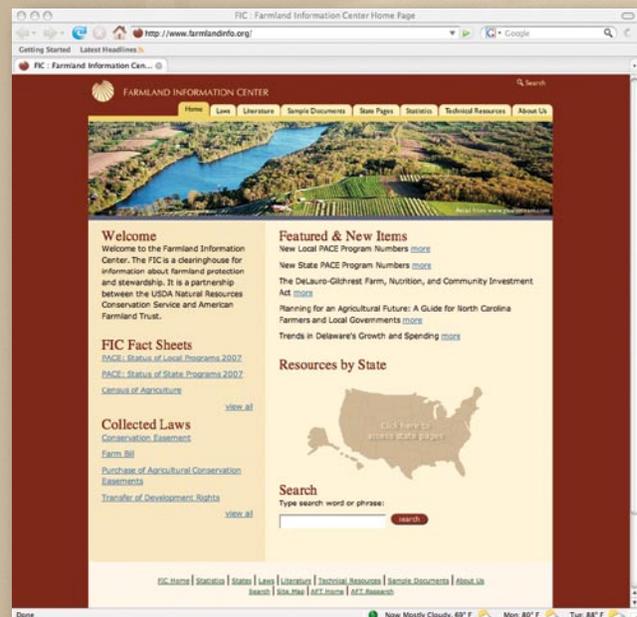
The FIC's answer service, staffed with experts, provides research assistance on issues related to farm and ranch land protection and sustainable agriculture practices. Farmers and landowners, the most frequent users of the FIC, find information about agricultural conservation easements and protecting their own land. Organizations, concerned citizens and policymakers find resources to develop and strengthen local, state and federal policies and programs that protect agricultural land and support agriculture.

### **A Clearinghouse of Information**

The FIC Web site houses a growing collection of literature about protecting agricultural land and supporting the business of farming, including:

- » Fact sheets, articles, reports and speeches
- » Federal, state and local laws
- » Statistics
- » Sample documents and easement language
- » State Web pages with important stats, relevant resources and a summary of legislative activity

The FIC's resources are drawn from agencies, organizations and communities nationwide. They provide field-tested models for individuals working to sustain agriculture.



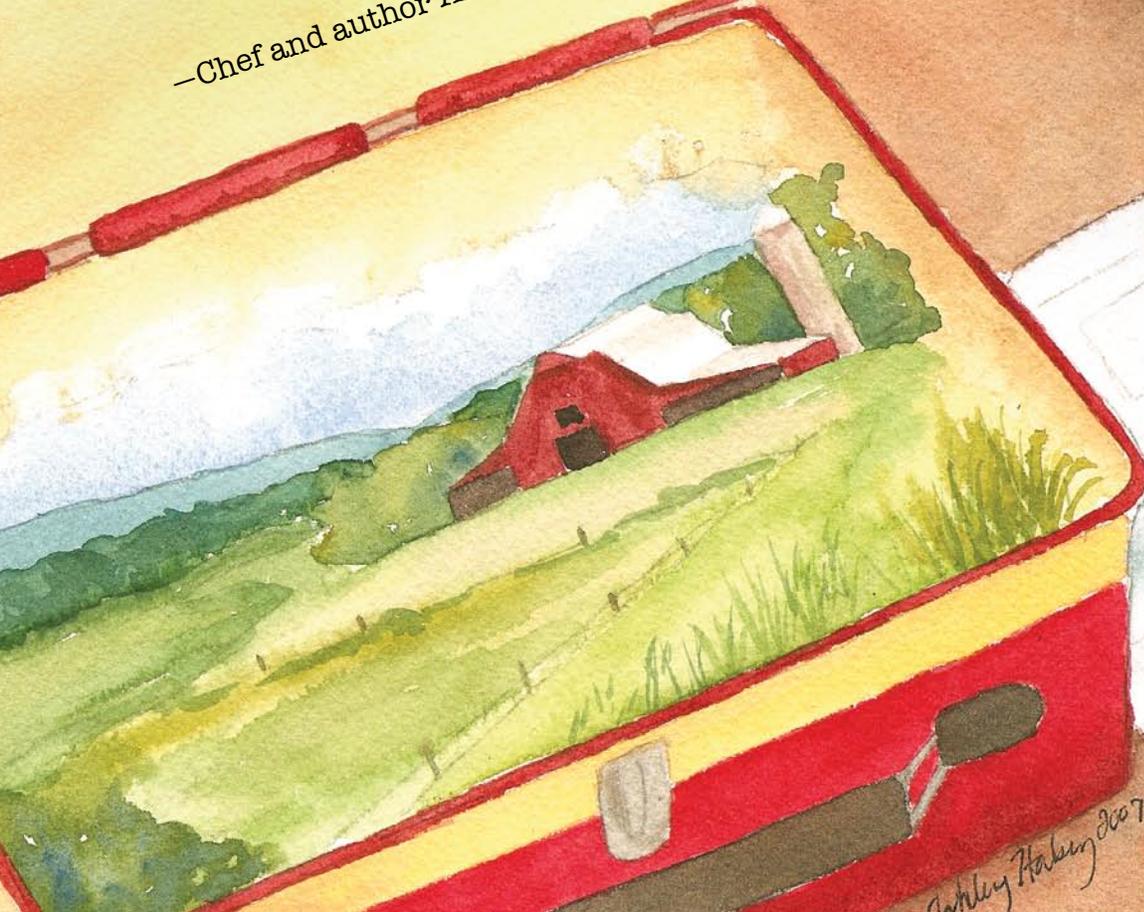
## *How Can I Use AFT's Farmland Information Center?*

For direct assistance, call toll-free: (800) 370-4879. Or visit [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org).

# FARMS Go Back to SCHOOL

“We must teach the children  
that taking care of the land  
and learning to feed yourself  
are just as important  
as reading, writing,  
and arithmetic.”

—Chef and author ALICE WATERS



Ashley Haskins 2007

This fall, children everywhere are heading back to school, where they will learn more than just the basics in math, science and reading. Students also will absorb lessons about food choices, depending on what they find in their school cafeterias. For parents, this could be bad news if unhealthy and processed foods dominate school lunch and breakfast trays. But in a growing number of schools across the country, there is good news: Farmers are also heading back to school. They are bringing their fresh and wholesome foods with them, teaching life-long lessons to children, such as there is more to vegetables than French fries and ketchup. This is not only good news for parents, but for everyone. By selling directly to schools, many farms are becoming more profitable. And by connecting students to local farmers, schools are imparting valuable lessons for whole communities: education about where food comes from and the importance of the farms that feed us all.

ILLUSTRATION BY ASHLEY HALSEY



CHERYL PAQUIN

## Can Farm-to-School Programs Make the Grade?



BY ANNETTE NIELSEN

With childhood obesity and related health problems skyrocketing, a growing number of parents and advocates are turning to farm-to-school programs that bring local, nutritious farm foods to schools.

Not so long ago, Americans enjoyed meals prepared primarily from local ingredients. They knew how to preserve the family farm or garden harvest, and they regularly sat down to eat meals at home. Now we rarely know the farmer responsible for the food we buy in the supermarket. We've lost the connection to our food sources, an important part of our health and well-being.

Against this backdrop, the rising rate of childhood obesity has become a health topic of major concern. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the percentage of overweight adolescents and children has doubled since the 1970s. Some 4.7 million children between the ages of six and 17 are considered seriously overweight, contributing to a host of health conditions that were previously seen almost exclusively in adults, such as Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. Although lack of exercise plays a large role, childhood nutrition is a major contributor to the epidemic. In a 1997 study, the CDC found that more than two-thirds of high school students (71 percent) did not eat the recommended five daily servings of fruits and vegetables.

To counteract this growing problem of poor childhood nutrition, many people are realizing the importance of bringing healthy foods back into our nation's schools, including elected officials, public school administrators, medical professionals, teachers, concerned parents and sustainability advocates. For students from low-income families, especially, schools are a major source of daily nutrition. Major initiatives—such as school gardens and farm-to-school (also



VALERIE STAUS

called farm-to-cafeteria) programs—are now underway to bring fresh healthy foods directly from local farms into schools across the country. These initiatives promote the use of locally produced foods, reconnect students to food sources and often provide education related to agriculture, cooking and nutrition.

### Cultivating a Taste for Fresh Farm Foods

A successful school garden program can be found in Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard in California, which started in 1995. Waters, a cookbook author and chef, is known for her creative use of organic and sustainable ingredients at her restaurant Chez Panisse. Through her Chez Panisse Foundation, Waters collaborated with teachers and community members to bring a garden to an abandoned lot adjacent to King Middle School in Berkeley.

The mission of the Edible Schoolyard is to create and sustain an organic garden that is integrated into the school's curriculum and lunch program. Marsha Guerrero, director of special projects for the Chez Panisse Foundation, says that even if a cafeteria serves good, nutritious food, it doesn't necessarily mean the children will try it. Children need to be participants in the process. If they grow it, they will eat it.

Students at the King Middle School help design and farm the garden, and what they grow reflects the diversity of the school and the community. They learn to prepare the food they've grown in an onsite kitchen and enjoy

eating the fruits of their labor. The learning continues in the classroom, where the students see their work in the garden carried through to history and science lessons. Parents are invited to visit the school, learning more about how the food is grown and prepared. This kind of integrated and cross-disciplinary approach has played a positive role in the willingness of children to try new types of nutritious food in the school cafeteria.

"Ownership is the key to changing behavior and choices that students make," says Rebecca Sparks, the Food Program Coordinator in the Department of Nutrition at New York University. "The more hands-on experience students have with healthful foods, the more likely they are to eat that way. When a child owns the experience of working with food, when they see where their food comes from, either from learning how to cook or garden, they're more likely to eat that food."

### Remaking the Cafeteria Lunch

For many of our nation's students, the school lunch program provides the majority of their day's nutrition. The National School Lunch Act of 1946 initiated a federal role in school lunches, as a national security measure to safeguard the health of American children and encourage the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities. Because school meals are supported by federal tax dollars (over \$5 billion annually), the government has minimized food costs by using surplus commodities and by sourcing foods from numerous locations. This makes the job of school food service directors easier, as they can order from one supplier, and the economies of scale minimize the cost of the food. As a result, many schools supply prepared foods that only need to be heated and served, allowing them to also minimize labor costs.

In contrast, farm-to-school programs work to connect school food service staff with local farms that can directly supply fresh, healthier products. But it's not easy to get such programs started. School cafeterias face budgetary constraints. Food service staff may not have the skills needed to work with raw ingredients, and there may not be adequate equipment and sufficient space within the cafeteria to effectively prep, cook and store these foods. "Probably the most important thing for getting a farm-to-school program going is a partnership of key stakeholders who share a clear understanding of goals and the best strategies for reaching them," says Jennifer Wilkins, who directs the Cornell University Farm to School Program. "The key partners include the food service director (dining director at the college level), area farmers, distributors, school administrators, teachers, parents and students."

Once these partnerships are established, the school food service staff needs to identify the sources of local foods, select recipes and plan their menus to reflect the availability of local and seasonal food, Wilkins adds. However, there are also many logistical details that need to be worked out, such as how farm products will be transported to the school and stored. “For continued success incorporating local foods into the food service, it is important to establish a dependable delivery system, assess the potential impact on labor and market the changes to students” and parents, says Wilkins.

### Making Farm-to-School a Reality

When schools buy their products from local farms, they not only improve the quality of their meals, but they also help to establish important community relationships between consumers, farmers and the land. Marion Kalb, the director of the National Farm to School Program—which offers legal assistance and models for purchasing arrangements—notes that farm-to-school programs first took hold in areas with longer growing seasons, such as California and Florida, but also in areas where processing and storage capabilities existed for farm products. Today more than 200 colleges and 1,000 public school districts in 35 states have initiated farm-to-school programs.

Kalb sees the 2007 Farm Bill as a vehicle for change, where parents and community supporters of farm-to-school programs can play a major role by weighing in with their elected officials. Advocates of healthy diets urge support for pieces in the farm bill that allow geographic preferences in school food purchasing and increased funding for Community Food Projects, a USDA program that helps low-income communities gain access to fresh nutritious food. Farm-to-school programs are often supported with

## Want to help make the farm-to-school connection?

Here are steps you can take.

- 🍏 Ask your members of Congress to support a farm bill that makes fresh and healthy foods available in your school and community. To learn more, visit [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).
- 🍏 Start, or volunteer in, a school, home or community garden to teach children how food makes it from the seed to the table. Ask your school to incorporate lessons about farms and nutrition into their curriculum.
- 🍏 Participate in forming the federally mandated wellness policy at your local school. Ask your school board to adopt a policy of purchasing locally grown foods for school meals and events.
- 🍏 Educate children about where their food comes from by taking them to farm events and tours. Introduce them to farm fresh foods from CSA farms, farmers’ markets and pick-your-own fruit and vegetable farms.
- 🍏 Support legislation that takes junk food and junk food advertising out of schools, replacing it with fresh food from local farms.

this type of one-time grant, but since 1996, funds for the program were capped at \$5 million. A larger allocation in the 2007 Farm Bill would increase the amount of startup funds available for farm-to-school programs across the country.

Parents can also play a major role in demanding change. Amy Kalafa, a filmmaker from Wesson,



Connecticut, and Susan Rubin, a former dentist turned nutritionist, collaborated on a film called *Two Angry Moms!*, which portrays the positive influence that school gardens have and the importance of education in empowering children to make healthful food choices. The duo emphasizes how important it is for parents to get involved. Parents can find out what is being served in the school cafeteria by having lunch with their children, for instance. They should also call on members of Congress to support legislation that takes advertising and junk food out of schools, as well as a farm bill that supports healthy diets.

In 2004, Congress established a requirement for all school districts that participate in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act—schools that receive federal funding for child nutrition programs including school breakfast, school lunch, after-school snack and summer food programs—to create and implement wellness policies by the start of the 2006–2007 school year, adhering to minimum requirements for nutrition and physical activity. This is another vehicle for change, and parents should ask to participate in the process of forming school wellness policies.

Many schools have now adopted policies that address the issue of fundraisers, too. Discouraging fundraisers

that promote low-nutrient foods—replacing them instead with local farm products—is another way for schools and parents to create awareness of local food sources while providing healthy alternatives.

By working together, our nation's parents, citizens and elected officials can help to make farm-to-school a reality for all of our country's students. By making a place for local farms on our school menus, we accomplish many things: fresh and nutritious food for our kids and reliable markets for our farmers and producers. As students eat more nutritious foods, they are healthier and better able to focus on their school work. And as they eat food with better taste that has traveled fewer miles, and they learn about and make a connection to local farms, they gain the ability to make healthful food choices—increasing the chance that they will grow into healthy and productive adults.

*Have a farm-to-school program that works well in your community? Tell us about it: email [kferguson@farmland.org](mailto:kferguson@farmland.org).*

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ANNETTE NIELSEN, a food columnist, was formerly a caterer in New York City and a cooking instructor in Washington, D.C.

# School Rules Farmers Face the Supply Side Issues

BY LAURIE TEN EYCK

Selling directly to schools and other institutions may help farmers to be more profitable, and many farmers think that working directly with schools is the right thing to do. But first there are obstacles to be overcome.

**L**unch ladies beware: A new school day is dawning. The era of canned hamburgers and powdered mashed potatoes is coming to an end. An integral part of the local foods movement sweeping the country, farm-to-school programs are a package deal intended to feed kids with locally grown food, preserve farmland and educate children about nutrition and agriculture. But where do farms fit into the equation?



Workers with freshly picked tomatoes at Full Belly Farm in Guinda, California

“We are very interested in changing the food system,” says Judith Redmond of Full Belly Farm in Guinda, California. “We want to get real good local food available to kids.” Having local farms sell to local schools seems like a no-brainer. But instead of settling back to enjoy a vision of their future customers munching fresh vegetables at the

cafeteria's salad bar, farmers must first focus on the potential trouble spots, such as low prices, small orders and costly delivery runs. Selling produce to schools may be the right thing to do, but is it profitable? After all, keeping farmers in business is one of the goals. "Philosophically I am in favor of schools buying their produce from local farms, but there are a few hurdles," says Richard Ball of Schoharie Valley Farms in Schoharie, New York. "Most of them are on their side."

School lunches generally cost students between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per meal.

Discounted and free meals are available to children from households living at the poverty line, which is mostly made up for by state and federal subsidies. In addition, the federal government provides a certain amount of "commodity foods"—food set aside from agricultural surpluses—to schools depending on the number of meals they serve. Most school lunch programs are self-supporting, meaning the money they take in through lunch sales is the amount of money they have to spend. The \$2 or less from the sale of each meal has to cover not only the cost of the food, but also the food service department labor and the expenses associated with running the kitchen and cafeteria. Even farmers, renowned for their thrift, would be hard-pressed to make a business venture like that succeed.

(The federal government does make an effort to help schools access fresh produce through the Department of Defense's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The Defense Supply Center in Philadelphia runs a nationwide system to purchase produce for military institutions, federal prisons and veteran's hospitals. In 1995, this system was opened up to schools, and school food service buyers are able to allocate a percentage of their commodity dollars to the DoD Fresh program for the purchasing of fresh produce.)

Once they are on board, schools order regularly from their farm suppliers, but the orders tend to be small. Full Belly Farm sells to both the Berkeley school system and the Davis school system. The schools took the initiative to contact Full Belly Farm, and Redmond was glad to do business with them. However, there were drawbacks. "The biggest problem is that the orders are too small,"



Full Belly Farm supplies produce directly to schools in Berkeley and Davis, California.

says Redmond. "Most farms have a volume requirement in order to make a drop. We have to charge more to make a small delivery." The cost of transporting products can be an even bigger problem in states such as Montana where communities are far apart.

"We deliver," says Charles Swanson of Mountain View Orchard in Corvallis, Montana, who sells apples directly to the Missoula County public school system, the University of Montana and the prison system. Swanson charges for delivery because of the distances he must travel. His charge is based on the size of the order and the distance it has to go. Swanson gained his institutional accounts by deciding to cut out the middleman. "Years ago we used to sell to a wholesaler who then sold our product to the schools," he says. "We said, 'Why not go direct?' It saves the schools money and they get a fresher product because they have a direct line to the grower."

Getting produce directly from the farm is not something most food service departments are used to. "School food buyers often don't understand the produce business," says Ball. "They've never been to a market or a warehouse." In the kitchen, many school cafeterias are ill-prepared to work with food fresh from the field. In an effort to cope with budget limitations, food service departments have cut their labor forces down to bare-bones, centralizing their kitchens and relying heavily on prepared foods. "It's a lot more work for them to clean, process and cook all that produce," says Redmond. "Farmers and food service people need to cooperate to overcome these challenges."

Additional funding for school lunches would solve a lot of the problems. "They've been on such a low budget

for so many years,” says Ball. “They’ve got to feed all those kids and break even at \$2.00 a plate.” Roughly half the purchase price of a school lunch goes to pay for labor. That leaves only \$1.00 to pay for the required two ounces of protein, one serving of grain or bread, two servings of fruit or vegetable plus milk. “The school system is so price sensitive they don’t have the money to provide good food,” agrees Redmond. “We have to change our approach to funding school lunches. Right now it’s just pennies. We’ve got to change the equation.”

In many cases, it is unrealistic to expect food service personnel to put together fresh nutritional meals with the money currently available. More funding would allow food service buyers to spend more on fruits and vegetables, which could be purchased from local farmers. More resources also are needed for the training and compensation of food service personnel. In the future, the DoD Fresh

Fruits and Vegetables Program could make it a priority to match schools with local farms to minimize transportation costs. On the farmer’s side, many farmers have been able to approach bigger institutions and achieve higher sales by forming grower cooperatives.

“Farm-to-school is a cooperative effort between parents, food service workers, nonprofit organizations and the farming community,” says Redmond. Any answers to be found will result from the collective efforts of these interested parties. It will take time for things to fall into place, but the goal of feeding children fresh, locally grown food and educating them about where their food comes from couldn’t be more far-reaching and worthwhile.

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LAURIE TEN EYCK helps to operate Indian Ladder Farms, her family’s orchard in New Scotland, New York.

## The Farm Bill and Our Food Choices

The 2007 Farm Bill has a major influence on what our nation’s farms produce, and how easy it is for consumers to access fresh, healthy foods. Currently, U.S. farm policy provides little support for the farms that produce our fresh fruits, vegetables and nuts—even though only 14 percent of our nation’s children consume at least two servings of fruit per day, and only 20 percent consume three or more servings of vegetables.

Most of the farm bill programs that help Americans add more fresh, healthy foods to their diets are under funded. The following programs, in total, receive less than one-fifth of one percent of the billions of subsidy dollars that go to wheat, corn, soy and other commodity producers:

- 🍏 The Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, which supports the creation of farmers’ markets in new areas, receives only \$1 million per year.
- 🍏 The Community Food Projects Program, which supports projects that increase the availability of nutritious fresh food to low-income communities, is funded at just \$5 million per year.
- 🍏 The Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, which provides free fruit and vegetables to schools, reaches only a few hundred schools nationwide with its \$9 million per year funding.
- 🍏 The Farm to Cafeteria Program, created to incorporate locally grown foods into school lunches, install school gardens and expand school nutrition education, currently receives no funding.

This fall, ask your members of Congress to support a farm and food bill that allows schools, low-income communities and all Americans to eat healthier foods. To learn more, visit [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).



# When the Farm Becomes a Classroom

BY ESTHER JAMES



Some farmers host school field trips as a way to stay economically viable. For the kids, farm trips can teach them to better appreciate fresh wholesome foods.

“**F**or two hours every weekday morning in October, the vegetable farm is part theater, part zoo, part nature center. At 9 A.M. we get ready to greet our visitors—we open the stand, bring the tractors and trailers down the hill, pick greens, stock the pumpkin piles. At 10 they arrive. The quiet parking lot fills with mini-vans and station wagons, school buses line the road, and bouncing, cheerful preschoolers swarm all over the pumpkins. The volunteer tour guides wait for their assignments. The first hayride gets loaded. The chickens greet the groups of schoolchildren. The beet patch gets stomped. By noon, the parking lot is empty again. And the farm goes back to its normal, quiet, vegetable-producing ways.”

—Hana Newcomb, farmer, Potomac Vegetable Farms

Every fall, Potomac Vegetable Farms, a Northern Virginia farm devoted to sustainable agriculture for almost 50 years, hosts hundreds of school children. I worked at the farm during summers between college, and it gave me a start down the path of helping to keep farmers on their land by working at American Farmland Trust. I still volunteer at Potomac Vegetable Farms whenever I can, and those fall mornings are some of my favorite times to be here. Last year, while leading a tour for four-year-olds, I recognized their teacher as my own preschool teacher, and she reminded me that she'd taken me on this same tour 25 years ago.

The farm tours are a good way to give kids a much-needed taste of agriculture, while adding a new revenue source for the farm. With only two percent of the U.S.

population in agriculture, too few children know anyone who happens to have a peach orchard, an asparagus bed or a milking parlor. To visit this farm and leave with a little pumpkin, each child pays only a few dollars—but for the farm, the dollars add up. Hosting tours is not for every farmer, though—it takes flexibility and an effusive personality to be comfortable with 500 kids traipsing through your farm in one morning.

Potomac Vegetable Farms has been doing these tours for years, and they run like clockwork. Kids go on the wagons, with teachers and parents on hand to keep them safe. We give a short, slow drive around a few fields of the farm, and then the kids pile out for a walking tour. They always love animals the best, and fortunately there are some placid resident horses as well as a henhouse to show off. The family sometimes borrows pigs, goats and a cow for the fall to add extra animal excitement.

The host farmers will tell you, without any hesitation, that their true audience is the adults in the crowd. The adults need these experiences too, because they are the shoppers and the cooks in their households. The farmers have a mission to teach everyone about the importance of eating local foods and supporting local farmers. On most mornings, the chaperones of the school groups learn as much as the preschool children—and many get to taste a beet just pulled from the ground for the first time in their lives.

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ESTHER JAMES is the Foundations Manager at American Farmland Trust.

## Long Before the First Thanksgiving

BY GARY PAUL NABHAN

TRY TO RECALL the most remarkable lunch you've ever had in a grade school. Mine was remarkable not only because of the food that was served, but also because of the people—both young and old—with whom I ate. It was the people's cultural traditions and their link with their distinctive landscape through food that made the entire experience so memorable.

It happened at a primary school on the Gila River Indian Reservation, where the River Pima currently suffer from an epidemic of obesity and diabetes. But just a few blocks away from the school was a Senior Center, where elderly farmers met. They had grown up in the days when the native desert crops they raised prevented their people from

the suffering associated with diabetes and obesity.

When the school teachers asked for some lessons about the value of fresh, healthy, ethnic foods from the Pima past, I suggested that we invite the elders over to help the students prepare for an old-fashioned Thanksgiving—one in which all foods were locally grown, and were part of the Pima heritage long before the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag shared their first Thanksgiving.

Over the weeks preceding the feast, elders came into the classroom to explain to the students how to harvest and prepare various traditional foods. But they did more than that. Through their stories about the foods, they offered us lessons in agriculture, biology, history, geography,

nutrition, and cultural studies. By the time we celebrated this timeless feast, we had been nourished not only by the foods themselves, but also by the elders' stories and songs, their humor, and their sadness over recent changes in the diet.

Imagine, in your own school, a meal that tastes of the very landscape and watershed in which the cafeteria sits. A meal that tastes of the stories first told by people who farmed or fished nearby, long before the school was built. Imagine a day when each school lunch will be a celebration, a thanks-giving for both nature and culture. Hunger for that taste.

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GARY PAUL NABHAN is a MacArthur Fellow, cofounder of Native Seeds/SEARCH, and author of numerous books and articles on ethnobotany, nutrition, and plant conservation.

"Long Before the First Thanksgiving," by Gary Paul Nabhan is taken from *Thinking Outside the Lunchbox*, an essay series of the Center for Ecoliteracy, [www.ecoliteracy.org](http://www.ecoliteracy.org) © Copyright 2007 Center for Ecoliteracy. All rights reserved. Printed with permission.

# Steward of the Land AWARD



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For more information on how to nominate a farmer or rancher, call (202) 378-1255 or visit [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org).

# Art of Conservation

“MY SUBJECTS LIVE over the hill at a farm,” says Pennsylvania artist Sue Roedder, who captures her neighboring Holstein cows in whimsical oil paintings. “I often go over there during milking and feeding time to take pictures. You go to the fence and first they dance around and act shy, but then they all come over. They die of curiosity.”

Roedder, who has also painted roosters, pigs, landscapes and other rural themes, began depicting the back and white cows on red backgrounds years ago, and they proved to be very popular, selling out at galleries and art shows. “Cows, they make people smile,” Roedder says, discussing why images of cows seem to be so pleasing to people. “I’ve done some reading on that. One article said that cows lower your blood pressure. They’re so calm. But maybe people haven’t seen them kicking up their heels in the field the way I have!”

In a more recent series, Roedder paints the cows against backgrounds from famous works of art, such as Van Gogh’s “Starry Night,” Picasso’s “Le Reve (The Dream),” Da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa” and works from Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock. “It’s a challenge for me,” says Roedder, who faithfully renders the easily recognizable masterpieces.

Many of Roedder’s paintings are framed in wood “German siding board” from old clapboard houses, pieced together by a retired Mennonite farmer in nearby Lancaster County. “He doesn’t have a telephone so either I drive out there with a list for him or he goes to a neighbor and calls me. He’s the only person I know who calls me at a quarter after six in the morning, and he’s surprised when I always know it’s him,” she laughs.

Raised in the farm country of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania,



From a series of cows in a museum: Sue Roedder’s “Passing a Pollock #2”

Roedder now lives among the rolling hills of Berks County, Pennsylvania. But not far from her, “beautiful farmland is being sold for millions of dollars,” she says. “Personally I don’t like to see these farms being developed. I think it’s very important to have small farmers.”

The cows would agree.

---

For information about Sue Roedder’s paintings, please contact the artist at [sueroedder@yahoo.com](mailto:sueroedder@yahoo.com).

Do you know an artist or photographer with a passion for farms and conservation? Let us know! Email [kferguson@farmland.org](mailto:kferguson@farmland.org).



Roedder’s “Passing Picasso’s ‘The Dream’”

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LETTERS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Cold Saturday  
where I am most  
at home with myself  
wherever I am remains  
and becomes an absent  
ageless sweep of Maryland  
countryside in late October  
on the day of the week which  
always wears the most comfortable  
clothes. With still more of my most  
visible breath, I fill the deepest  
pockets of cold air with whatever  
I have kept for sorting and saving  
to help me make sense of it all—  
including the afternoons when twigs  
and evergreen needles raked my naked  
eyes at a downslope-plunging gallop,  
as the leather of an English saddle  
and lather from a thoroughbred's  
ribs sheared my calves of hair  
and skin, yet allowed me, as  
my steaming breath was spent,  
to inhale a breathless  
breathtaking sky.

Cold Saturday  
is the day when  
time is simply a  
measure of nothing.  
Free from having to  
make amends or prepare  
for what will come, and  
while I continue to live  
with choice, conflict,  
and compromise, on any  
day of the week which  
is or becomes a cold  
Saturday, I am sure  
from cell to spirit  
that I am alive.

—ROBERT WATERS GREY

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# Farm Fresh Recipe

ALLYSA TOREY OPENED New York City's Magnolia Bakery in 1996 but left the famed cake shop earlier this year, returning to her home in "dairy country" near upstate New York's Catskill Mountains. There she tends to her gardens, focuses on writing and cooking, and contemplates acquiring her own herd of cows. A devotee of her local farmers' market, where she buys meats and fruits to supplement her own garden-grown vegetables, Torey explains that growing up in a rural area exposed her to the benefits of eating

local. "There are very small supermarkets here," she says. "If it's not in season, chances are it's not here."

Torey first became aware of American Farmland Trust years ago when a magazine article about the organization caught her eye. AFT "sounded like something I wanted to be a part of," she says. She had watched as many of the farms on the New York side of the Delaware River where she grew up "started disappearing," while farms across the river in Pennsylvania, which had programs



TADHG O'MORDHA

## *farm fresh*

### **Pumpkin Ravioli with Corn, Hazelnuts and Asiago**

(Makes 6 to 8 servings)

- 1 pound fresh or frozen pumpkin ravioli (or butternut squash ravioli)
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- ¼ cup minced shallots
- 1 cup fresh or frozen corn kernels, blanched (see note)
- ½ cup coarsely chopped toasted hazelnuts (see note)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh sage
- ½ cup freshly grated Asiago cheese

Put a large pot of water on to boil over high heat. Cook the ravioli according to the package directions; the time will vary depending upon whether you're using fresh or frozen ravioli. Drain the ravioli and set aside.

Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the shallots, reduce the heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the shallots are tender, about 5 minutes. Add the corn, hazelnuts, and salt, and cook for 2 minutes. Add the sage and cook for 1 minute more. Add the ravioli to the skillet, tossing gently to evenly coat.

Divide the pasta among the plates and top with the Asiago cheese. Serve immediately.

*NOTE: To blanch fresh or frozen corn, bring a medium-size saucepan of cold water to a boil. Add the corn and cook until crisp-tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat, drain, and rinse under cold water.*

*NOTE: To toast the hazelnuts, place on a baking sheet in a 350°F oven for 10 minutes, or until lightly browned and fragrant.*

in place earlier to protect farmland, stayed in business. Torey clipped and saved the article about AFT, turning to it several years ago "when the bakery was doing well enough that I wanted to do some sort of donation." As a result, Magnolia Bakery generously began donating a portion of its December cupcake sales to AFT.

This fall-flavored recipe appears in Torey's recent cookbook, *At Home with Magnolia*, a testament to her love for seasonal produce. "This is a little twist on a very traditional Italian recipe," she says. "A pumpkin or squash ravioli is usually done with a plain butter sage sauce. I added corn and hazelnuts with a different cheese. Corn and pumpkins are such a nice combination—it feels like they go together. This dish is nice as an appetizer. It seems so festive but it's so easy to prepare."

JOHN KERNICK

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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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