



Treaster Kettle Farm

A shared vision of harmony with land & forest

For decades, Joseph Griffin believed he would return to his cherished boyhood home and live in the little log house on 14 acres of sloping field and forest next to the Treaster Kettle CCC Camp and a mile from Colyer Lake in Potter Township.

Instead, in 2015, he chose a different peace of mind for his land.

Griffin donated an agricultural conservation easement to the Centre County Farmland Trust and sold the land to a young family (right) who share his land conservation ethic.

Jack Ray and Sarah Decker carved out a farm life and vision to produce a harvest in harmony with the land and forest.

Farming the Forest

Ray and Decker operate the Treaster Kettle Farm. They raise chickens, vegetables and honeybees on a few cleared acres. On the 12 wooded acres, Ray “farms the forest” by cultivating mushrooms and tapping the sugar maples. Farm products include honey and bees-



Jack Ray, Sarah Decker and Sam, 8, on their Treaster Kettle Farm, preserved by CCFT easement donor Joseph Griffin.

wax candles, eggs and chicken meat, wild and cultivated mushrooms

and maple syrup.

“What I see when I walk through these woods

Continued on pg. 2

Building Strength

2023 in Review



Trustees Dave Litke (L), Bob Potter (C) and President Dan Guss (R), visiting a preserved property.

Building organizational capacity to preserve and conserve farmland has been a top priority guiding the 2023 work of the Centre County Farmland Trust.

CCFT President Dan Guss reviewed highlights of 2023 at the annual meeting, held Nov. 16 via Zoom.

“We have made good progress this year in strengthening the organization and improving CCFT’s financial position,”

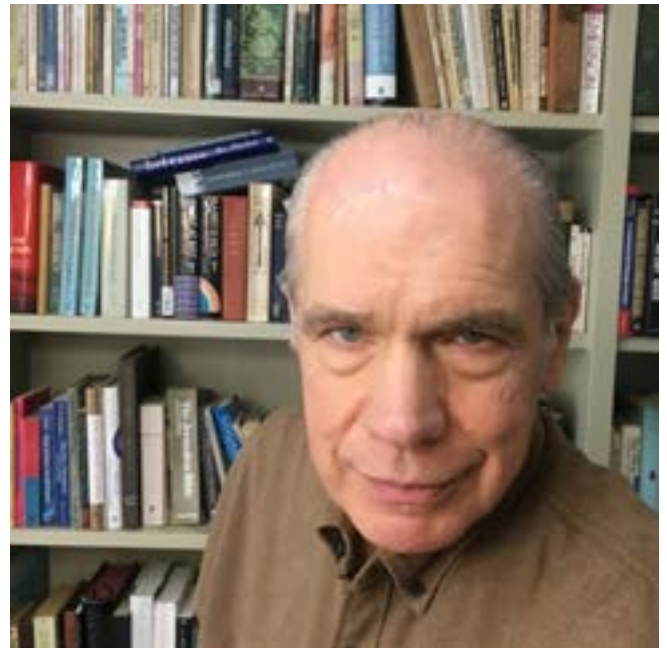
Continued on pg. 4

thankyou

As the Centre County Farmland Trust evolves, we are so grateful for our generous financial supporters and dedicated volunteers who sustain our work.

Thank you for being our partners in farmland preservation. Conserving land benefits us all — and takes many helping hands.

Because of your support, we can keep doing the work of farmland preservation. Please consider an end-of-year gift to the Centre County Farmland Trust. See the enclosed letter for more details on our work this year —and how to help sustain it.



Treaster Kettle Farm *continued*

are the mature oaks and mature maples and because they're mature, I get these wonderful mushrooms," says Jack Ray.

"An acre of woods, in my opinion, can produce more than an acre of field while still serving as part of the ecosystem."

The wild mushrooms foraged on the woodland include chanterelle, trumpet, oyster, chicken of the woods, maitake, morels and lion's mane. Ray also grows shitake mushrooms on logs outdoors. (Ray sells the Treaster Kettle Farm products as a temporary vendor at Titan Market, a year-round, indoor market, and through Centre Markets online farmers market. Or, contact the Farm via its Facebook page.)

A Boy's Paradise

At the time of the sale and easement, new owners Jack Ray and Sarah Decker were expecting their son, Sam — who is now so close in age to Griffin's when his family first moved to this clearing in the woods that Griffin affectionately calls Sam his "replacement."

Griffin, 79, was about 6 when his father bought the property and moved the family to the little house with asphalt siding and an outhouse — but no electricity or telephone service — and decided to

commute to his job in town working for Penn State Extension. Griffin is not sure what prompted his dad to do so, but quickly became enchanted with a spot he describes as "a rural paradise" and "truly bucolic existence."

He remembers lilacs, butterflies, a wild turkey sleeping on the smokehouse roof and the night music of an Eastern Whip-poor-will perched outside his open bedroom window.

"You could just hear the rumbling in the bird's throat," said Griffin. "I swear it was eight feet away."

Securing Land's Highest Value

Then, his father got a new job at General Electric and the family moved to Old Greenwich, Connecticut.

They later returned, and Griffin lived in the log cabin during his years as a high school student and through his college studies at Penn State. He moved to a place in town for graduate school. His parents lived in the cabin at the homestead until their deaths.

Griffin married in grad school. Following graduation, he and his wife began their academic careers in Massachusetts. After serving as Dean of the College at Unity College in Maine, he began following his wife, Dr. MaryAnn Griffin, to where her career took her, first Cincinnati and later Philadelphia, where she served as Director of Falvey Memorial Library at Villanova University from 1984 to 1995.

Looking for a respite from city life, the couple bought



Images, left to right: Looking into the cleared land where Jack, Sarah and Sam grow vegetables, raise chickens and tend honeybee hives (courtesy Sarah Decker); Joseph Griffin, donor of the easement on the land (courtesy Joseph Griffin); fresh eggs harvested on a summer morning & Jack Ray (images by Lisa Duchene).

a 1700s farmstead on 26 acres in Oley, Pa., with a back porch view of a covered bridge and had many wonderful, happy years there until MaryAnn died in 1995 of an aggressive form of breast cancer within six months of diagnosis. They had no children.

Griffin started an organic farm operation on the Oley land and ran it for “10 glorious years” until the operation ran into labor issues and collapsed.

Ultimately, Griffin preserved the Oley farmland, selling the development rights through the Berks County Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

“I like the land and the highest value to me was seeing it not destroyed by houses,” says Griffin.

‘Messy & Joyous’

Jack Ray and Sarah Decker rented the log cabin house from Griffin in 2006, knowing Griffin intended to retire to the farm.

But then — Griffin visited Jack and Sarah at the farm and witnessed what he calls the “slightly messy, joyous existence” of farm life. Friends were visiting. Dogs were running around.

“It seemed like the place would be better served

with them there,” says Griffin, who could not afford to maintain the property but feared selling it would lead to its subdivision for suburban-style house lots. He approached the Farmland Trust about donating a conservation easement, and decided to sell.

The timing was ideal, as Ray and Decker were expecting their son and looking to purchase a property. Ray and Decker had dreamed up a vision of their own for the farm.

All three share a similar life philosophy and land ethic. Ray, the son of wildlife biologists, had been co-director of Penn State’s Institute for Sustainability and was familiar with conservation easements and preservation of agricultural lands.

“That was really, greatly appreciated on our side and a great opportunity,” says Ray, of Griffin’s invitation into the easement process as the new owners.

Often, says Griffin, people are drawn to the country, move, then subdue the land with a huge, manicured lawn and paved driveway — which is not what Griffin envisioned for his boyhood home. Ray and Decker are, instead, responding to the land.

“They’re vibrating in tone with the land. They’re resonating with the land,” says Griffin.



Centre County Farmland Trust

New Logo Features Field & Stream, Ridge & Valley

Behind the scenes, we've been working on a big project to update and integrate our website, document archive and database. We have a new logo, highlighting farmland and woodland in the Ridge & Valley landscape of Centre County.

We still love the historic, iconic Round Barn on Route 45! However, the core mission of the Centre County Farmland Trust is to preserve land through conservation easements and maintain those easements to conserve land, not historic barns or buildings. Our logo featuring the Round Barn will soon be "vintage" and phased out.

Rural Beauty Showcased at State Capitol

CCFT Trustees, lawmakers and state officials gathered Oct. 4 in the main hall of the Capitol Rotunda at the Statehouse in Harrisburg to support farmland preservation and honor the Farmland Preservation Artists of Central Pennsylvania.

Fourteen FPA members exhibited more than 40 paintings and photographs in the Capitol's East Rotunda during October.



Painting by Barb Pennypacker.

Year in Review (cont.)

says Guss. Including:

- strengthening stewardship of CCFT's 17 conservation easements.
- a thorough review of CCFT finances and investments.
- a technology systems project to build a new website integrated with a donor database and document archive.

"The next year marks 20 years

since the first CCFT easement," says Guss. "We're just beginning."

At the CCFT annual meeting, three-year reappointment terms were approved by unanimous vote for Dave Litke, Dan Guss, and Nancy VanLandingham. Litke and Guss are pictured (p. 1) with Bob Potter, visiting CCFT-preserved land.

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