

CCFT Strengthens Stewardship

Trust Taps ClearWater Conservancy

To strengthen its stewardship program and fulfill its mission, the Centre County Farmland Trust has contracted with ClearWater Conservancy for conservation support and services.

Nearly 30 years since its 1994 founding, Trustees spotted a need to improve stewardship practices.

“We have recognized that turnover in our own board and in ownership of preserved lands requires that we adopt a more thorough approach

to monitoring and documentation,” says CCFT President Dan Guss. “ClearWater has been very helpful in allowing us to utilize their professional resources to address this need.”

Conservation Collaborators

ClearWater, a locally formed, nationally accredited land trust in State College, is advising and assisting the Farmland Trust with training, education and easement monitoring to ensure



Suzy Yetter, an ecologist with ClearWater Conservancy, snaps photos during an easement monitoring visit.

consistency with Land Trust Alliance standards and practices.

“This partnership helps

build momentum for the connection of open space and wildlife corridors in

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Historic Barn Saved

CCFT Upholds Hodges’ Easement



Two years ago, an owner of the preserved Hodge Farm in Spring Mills approached the Trust with a dilemma: He had a huge, historic barn in need of costly

repairs and a good offer from a reclaimed barn wood company to demolish it and sell the wood for a luxury home in Colorado.

CCFT’s Board of Trustees decided to help in this special case. While the Trust preserves farmland and not barns, the Hodge conservation easement — in

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Thanks to you, we can do our work. CCFT celebrates, preserves and stewards farmland — the “gift of good land” that provides our community with an excellent quality of life.

• 93 unique donors gave \$8,343 during May’s 36-hour Centre Gives community fundraising event. Thank you donors and Centre Foundation.

• Thank you to the Happy Valley Adventure Bureau and Centre County Commissioners who awarded a \$5,000 tourism grant to support CCFT’s Centre County Farm Routes outreach.



Saving a Gem, Upholding an Easement (cont.)

2003 the Trust's first — is the only one that includes a barn. The late Hugh and Barbara Hodge were teachers who loved the land and donated a conservation easement on 150 acres and their historic barn.

Iconic, Historic Barn

The barn is an architectural gem. Often photographed and represented in art, it was awarded a 2004 Historic Preservation award by the Centre County Historical Society.

“There’s no other barn like it in Centre County and probably in the state of Pennsylvania,” says Trustee Catherine Smith, who championed the project to help current owners Samuel and Esther Stolfus save the barn.

It is a double bank barn. Built in the 1830s and 1840s, bank barns allowed farmers to drive wagons loaded with grain up a dirt platform or bank, unload, and back out. George Gentzel (1789-1854) had an innovative design for this barn he built in 1832. He added the second bank allowing wagons to enter and leave

the barn without turning and backing after unloading.

“Every architectural detail had to be re-thought to get this to happen,” says Smith. The barn measures 60 feet in height by 120 feet in length. The roof spans 38 feet from edge to ridge on each side.

Time Capsule of Penn’s Woods

Based on the quantity and size of logs required, the yellow pine trees harvested to build this barn began growing in the late 1600s, prior to industrial demand for lumber that cleared nearly all of Pennsylvania’s forests. “This is yet another of the local old barns that have Penn’s Woods in them,” says Smith.

Fulfilling the Trust’s responsibility to uphold its first easement took collaboration and a financial commitment. Although it is not the practical barn they need, the Stolfuses refused the offer to demolish the barn and agreed to repair it. A missing section of roof on the north side had allowed water damage, compromising the structure.

“I respect the barn,” says Samuel Stolfus. “I allow



Teachers and soulmates who loved the land, the late Hugh and Barbara Hodge (top) donated an ag conservation easement in 2003 on their 150 acres and historic barn. The double-bank barn as it looked in September 2021 (above) and being repaired in May 2023 (left).


historians, architects, photographers and artists to visit and document it.”

Community Collaboration

Smith spearheaded the project. She secured a \$2,500 grant from the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation. The Trust donated funds for the rest of the \$14,300 roof repair — which Sam’s Custom Carpentry from Aaronsburg completed in May.

The Stoltzfuses will soon replace the guttering, downspouting, and large doors on the weather-susceptible north side. This was a proud moment, says Smith, as the Trust honored the values of the first people who donated the first easement to the Farmland Trust.

“Time passes,” says Smith. “The ownership of land changes. Easements are in perpetuity and it’s our organization that must negotiate all the changes that come with passing time and ownership.

We did that magnificently in this case.” 

Stewardship (cont.)

our region,” says Deb Nardone, ClearWater’s executive director.

“Working together we can expand local conservation efforts to protect the farmland and forests people and wildlife rely on for a healthy and resilient future.”

Keys to Farmland Preservation

As a land trust with a mission to preserve farmland, the Centre County Farmland Trust must steward its conservation easements on 1,483 acres among 17 preserved farms in Centre and Blair Counties.

To preserve land, owners donate the development rights. The Trust pays the costs of securing the easement then holds, stewards and enforces the easement into the future.

For example, in 2022, the Trust worked with Ryan Hamilton, ClearWater’s land conservation manager, to advise and help execute David Litke’s donation of a conservation easement on his 55 acres in Bellefonte.

An easement donation is the first of many steps needed to preserve the land.

“Signing a conservation easement is just the beginning of our role,” says Jennifer Shuey, CCFT Treasurer and past president.

Partners in Conservation

Stewardship means becoming a partner in conservation with the owners of the land bound by CCFT conservation easements. Some owners are the original donors of the easement, so clearly understand its goals.

Other owners have acquired farms with conservation restrictions in place. CCFT’s job is to meet these new owners, teach them what their conservation easement means, become their partner in conservation and serve as a resource for their questions and concerns.

“We need to ensure that even though ownership and environmental threats change through the years, our continuing stewardship anchors the conservation of the land in our trust,” says Guss.

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You might enjoy...

We thought you might enjoy some of our favorite artistic expressions of love of land and life in agriculture.

Don't miss a chance to see work by our partner organization the **Farmland Preservation Artists!**

FPA work will be on exhibit:

- at **Kish Bank in downtown State College July and August.**
- at the **Capitol Rotunda in Harrisburg during most of October.**

We'll share selections that resonate with our Trustees — who share a passion for the work of farmland preservation. **Linda Friend** picked "Houses in the Fields" by John Gorka from his 1991 CD *Jack's Crows*. The lyrics include:

They're growing houses in the

fields between the towns

And the Starlight Drive-in movie's closing down

The road is gone to the way it was before

And the spaces won't be spaces anymore.

Writes Linda: "This song spoke to me from the beginning. While living in Philly, I'd travel to listen to Gorka perform whenever possible, harboring my own determination to move to a rural location.

Gorka observed this happening to rich farmland in eastern Pa.

Here, too.

This spring, I noticed a bulldozer created a road up a hill that last summer grew crops. This song is even more poignant to me now that I live my rural dream in Centre County amid productive farm fields 'growing houses.' "



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Stewardship (cont.)

Learning Best Practices

ClearWater staff members Suzy Yetter, ecologist, and Danny Brumbaugh, land steward assistant, are helping CCFT Trustees with annual monitoring visits to eight properties with CCFT easements and the documentation required to maintain easements. They are also training CCFT Trustees during the visits and via three training sessions per year.

With support from ClearWater, the Farmland Trust published a guide for volunteers on how to conduct annual visits at preserved properties, and held a training for Trustees in March on how to

properly do this important work.

Leadership

CCFT Trustee Catherine Smith (pictured above) leads the stewardship program. Smith lives near Spring Mills on land that was farmed for two centuries. She and John Smith manage their 68 acres, Chicory Lane (chicorylane.com) for ecology, diversity, habitat and waterway protection, and aesthetic appreciation as guided by goals set in a conservation easement held by ClearWater Conservancy.

