



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contacts:

Elisabeth Moore, Connecticut Farmland Trust, Executive Director, Emoore@ctfarmland.org
and

Rebecca Murphy, CT DoAg, Marketing & Inspection Rep 2, Rebecca.eddy@ct.gov
and

Carolyn Miller, Visual Information Specialist, Carolyn.miller@ct.usda.gov

Lakeview Orchards, 37-acre Farm Protected in Fairfield County

[HARTFORD, CT] July 23, 2021 - Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT) and Connecticut Department of Agriculture (CT DoAg) are pleased to announce the preservation of Lakeview Orchards, a historic 37-acre farm in the town of Easton. The farm was preserved in collaboration with the Town of Easton, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRSC), CT DoAg, and CFT.

"We wanted to [preserve the farm] because it's good for the community as a whole," said Joan Barney, who owns the farm with her brother, David Barney.

"I just couldn't imagine all the fields and all the apple trees that my father planted, everything that we did there being cut down and going to waste," she said. "...so, this is a way to make a positive mark. This is something we could do for the greater good."

Lakeview Orchards has been supplying the community with fresh produce from its farm stand in nearby Monroe for over 60 years. The farm itself, which was started by the Barneys' grandfather Nicolas, has been in production for three generations now. Most of the orchard was planted in the 1940s by the Barneys' father Alfred, who invented some of his own farm equipment and held a patent for an apple-picking machine.

"Lakeview Orchards is a valuable farm in Easton's farming community," said CFT Executive Director Elisabeth Moore. "Preserving this farm was possible because of Joan and David's commitment to honoring their late father's wish to see his family's farm protected. Thanks to the town, Department of Agriculture, and USDA, the orchard will continue to be a benefit to the Easton community for generations to come," she said.

"We're especially excited because this is our first farm preserved in partnership with the Town of Easton, and our second protected farm in Fairfield County," she said.

The Easton Agricultural Commission has been working for the past 10 years to support farmers in town and help connect them with preservation opportunities.

"We really have a value in town for open space and farmland preservation. It's written into the very fabric of the town," said Jean Puchalski, a member of the Easton Agricultural Commission.

There are over 22 farms in the town of Easton. Several years ago, the whole town was surveyed for locally important soils by the USDA. The official designation is necessary for farms applying for conservation funding under the state Department of Agriculture's Community Farms Preservation Program. With the official designation in place, Lakeview Orchards was ready when it came time to start the preservation process.

Throughout the process, the stakeholders worked together discreetly to preserve the farm. "We just really appreciate everything that's gone into it to allow us to preserve the farm, from the Connecticut Farmland Trust to the town and the federal and state partners," said farm owner Joan Barney.

"We're really thrilled about this," said Jean Puchalski of the Easton Agricultural Commission. "Our outcome here is to help farmers understand what succession looks like and to help them stay on their land...We at the Agricultural Commission are dedicated to helping our farmers understand the preservation stories and connect them with the resources they need. We want the farmers to know that there are possibilities other than development."

"People don't always think of agriculture in Fairfield County," she continued, "but when you walk into Easton, you feel that you're in a place where farmland matters."

Preserving farmland in highly developed Fairfield County is meaningful to all the stakeholders. Fairfield County has lost 75 percent of its farmland over the last century. Land prices are especially high, making it harder for new farmers to acquire land and more enticing for farmers to sell their working lands for development.

"Placing these almost 38 acres of the Lakeview Orchard under a conservation easement through our Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is another important step in our mission to protect the state's valuable working lands," said Thomas L. Morgart, Connecticut State Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"Especially in this part of the state where open space is more often than not sold for development," he said. "Almost 98 percent of this protected property is prime, statewide, and locally important farmland soils. Permanently protecting it and its high-yielding soils are of major importance in meeting Connecticut's – and the nation's – short- and long-range needs for food and fiber."

"We are grateful to work with the Barney family to permanently protect nearly 40 acres of prime and important farmland soils in Easton," said Connecticut Department of Agriculture Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt. "It has been more than 20 years since a farm has been protected in Fairfield County and wouldn't have been possible without collaboration among federal, state, town, and non-profit partners."

With this valuable farmland under conservation easement, it will always be available for future generations of farmers. Agricultural conservation easements prohibit development for residential or industrial purposes so farmland stays in production and farms can change hands without the threat of development.

Conservation easements can also lower the total cost of the land, making it more accessible to beginning farmers. This is especially important in Connecticut, which has some of the most expensive farmland in the country.

CFT is the only land trust in Connecticut that focuses solely on preserving agricultural land. The organization is a private, accredited 501(c)(3) that relies on support from Connecticut residents. Lakeview Orchards is CFT's 63rd preserved farm, bringing the organization to a total of more than 4,700 acres preserved in all eight counties across Connecticut. Learn more at CTFarmland.org.

###