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Contact: Eileen Mielenhausen, Blue Hill Heritage Trust, 374-5118

Farmland Forever: Growing Food for Future Generations

by Eileen Mielenhausen, Membership Coordinator

Plant. Eat. Preserve.

Blue Hill Heritage Trust and the Blue Hill Co-op are teaming up again this summer to present their popular farm tour series to engage with our communities about sustainable farming. The tours give people an opportunity to see some family farm operations up close and to ask questions about processes and production, seed, soil, animals and equipment.

Besides being community-minded and membership supported, both the Trust and the Co-op value preserving farmland to secure high-quality food for Peninsula families for generations to follow. Of the 6,900 acres of land throughout the Blue Hill Peninsula which the Trust currently owns or holds conservation easements on, about one third is farmland. Conserving farmland provides many benefits to our communities, such as securing a sustainable source of healthful food, boosting the local economy, and offering beautiful landscapes and a variety of wildlife habitat.

Animal, Vegetable, Mineral

On a farm tour at King Hill Farm last summer, Paul Schultz pointed out the seemingly endless rows of veggies and herbs and the fallow rows which were resting as part of their 4-year crop rotation process. He said they replant with alfalfa and oats, which their cows will eat and then, in turn, will fertilize the soil. King Hill is a diversified, organic farm on Rt. 199 in Penobscot. According to owners Schultz and his wife Amanda Provencher, the farm's diversity allows for a closed system: the fields and gardens are fertilized with homemade compost, and they raise all their own hay. Besides fully mineralized, organic vegetables, they raise a variety of grass-fed, free-range livestock.

Known for their fall root crops, King Hill Farm produces over 20 varieties of organic vegetables, as well as beef, pork, turkey, and chicken. Besides supplying their CSA members and local markets, Schultz said they also provide farm produce for Tree of Life, Healthy Acadia, and Healthy Peninsula's Magic Food Bus program.

Blue Hill Heritage Trust (BHHT) holds an agricultural easement on the property, ensuring it will stay farmland forever. Former owners Dennis King and Jo Barrett sold the farm to Paul and Amanda with the easement already in place.

In addition to King Hill Farm, BHHT holds agricultural easements on the following farm properties: Homewood, Ken-Rose, and Old Ackley farms in Blue Hill; Blue-Zee, Horsepower, and Quill's End farms in Penobscot.

Food Security, Safety, and Sustainability

With an abundance of area farmland in conservation, our communities can develop long-term relationships with farmers, getting to know who produces their food and the methods they use. Many of the farms conserved in our Farmland Forever program are valued suppliers to the Blue Hill Co-op and other local markets or restaurants. "They are the backbone" of our produce department, according to Co-op General Manager Mark Deeney.

Supporting Local Economy

Another community benefit to conserving farmland is that money spent by consumers on the Peninsula stays on the Peninsula when the products are produced locally. Having local working farms adds to the diversity of our local economy.

Local farms also help create community – go to the Blue Hill Farmer's Market on Saturday morning or a grange event and you'll see. Good food attracts crowds!

Growing More Farmers

Farms not only grow food but raise new generations of farmers. For example, Paul Birdsall, founding board member of BHHT and our Farmland Forever program, placed his 383-acre Horsepower Farm into conservation easement with the Trust in 1997. Horsepower is now farmed by three generations of the Birdsall family – with more young farmers coming through the ranks. Paul has also helped young farmers acquire land of their own.

The first farm tour of the summer is scheduled for Wed., June 25 from 3:30-5:30 pm at King Hill Farm in Penobscot. Please call the Trust office at 374-5118 to pre-register or for more info. The tour is free, family-friendly, and open to the public. A full calendar of BHHT events is listed on our website: bluehillheritagetrust.org.

For more information about the Trust, conserving land, becoming a member, or participating in our programs, please contact us at info@bluehillheritagetrust.org or 374-5118.

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