

#FridaysOnTheFarm: Preserving a Family Legacy

Meet John Wolchesky, Jr., a Connecticut farmer managing the same land his family has worked since 1924. John partnered with USDA to protect his land through an agricultural easement that became official in December 2018. Today, he grows vegetables and hay on the land he knows can never be developed.

Memories of Farm Life

John remembers his father, John Sr., sharing stories about growing up on his family farm. Stories about clearing the land with little more than bow saws and horses; growing up with cows and pigs for playmates; fishing the family pond; and of unforgettable family get togethers.

These stories, and his love for the land, instilled a burning desire in John to someday carry on the family's farming tradition.

The Beginning of a Family Legacy

John's grandparents, Alexander and Stephanida, immigrated from Russia in the early 1920's with a dream for a better life.

Having farmed in their native Russia, the couple yearned for a more rural life. Working day and night, they saved every penny they could until in 1924, when they were able to purchase their own piece of paradise—a 120-acre farm in Pomfret, Connecticut.

With 11 children, the Wolcheskys lived an idyllic life, growing their own food, raising cows, and selling milk.

After Alexander and Stephanida passed away, the land was divided several times and was eventually owned by 14 separate family members.

Taking the Land Back

Since the 1970's, John was determined to reunite the entire farm back under one parcel. In 2003, after years of planning and negotiating, John finally became the sole owner of all 120 acres that his grandparents had worked so hard to acquire.

John knew he couldn't risk the possibility of his land ever being developed or used for anything other than farming.

Forever Protecting a Legacy

John approached the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to see if a permanent easement was available to protect his property for perpetuity. CDA reached out to the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) about their [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) to see if the program would work for John, and ultimately to share the cost of creating the agriculture easement between the two government agencies.

The ACEP easement allows John to keep ownership of the land, while the government partners hold the developmental rights to maintain the property in agriculture forever.

“Our conservation easement program is tailor made for people like John,” said NRCS Connecticut State Conservationist Thomas Mogart. “He wanted to restore his grandparents’ legacy with the intention of ensuring it could never be sold for development and we were able to help bring John’s dream to fruition.”

Conservation Ethic

Further working with NRCS, John implemented brush management and delayed mowing to restore the fields to grass – keeping invasive plants under control and protecting any ground nesting birds that may be using the fields.

John later worked to minimize soil compaction, and provide food, shelter, and habitat continuity for pollinators on more than half an acre.

The Wolchesky Farm Today

Today, John Wolchesky enjoys his retirement growing vegetables and hay on the land he knows will never be developed. He dreams of someday growing hops and maybe starting a small brewery. He likes to think that his grandparents would be proud of all he has done to bring the land back together and preserve it forever.

John’s farm is in an important area of the state, known as the Last Green Valley. It is a National Heritage Corridor, which remains 77 percent forest and farmland—the last swath of dark night sky in the coastal sprawl between Boston and Washington, DC.



More Information

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center.](#)

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Credit: NRCS, John Wolchesky