

[The following three-part series appeared in Wintonbury Land Trust newsletters in 2013-2014.]

New Life for an Old Farm

Part 1 of 3 – History and New Partnership

Did you know that the Wintonbury Land Trust owns a 12.2 acre parcel on Old Day Hill Road in Windsor?

Winstanley Properties donated this parcel, Thrall Farm, to the Land Trust in December, 2007, as part of the ING development project. The parcel includes about 8 acres of prime farmland soils, a farm pond, and wetlands at the rear of the property. There are also 2 historic barns – a rare 2-story potato barn dating to the early 1940's and an older tobacco shed.

Through Windsor land records, property ownership can be traced back to 1918. The Thrall family acquired the land in 1943, building the 2-story barn for potato storage shortly thereafter. Growing a food crop during WWII allowed the Thralls, who mostly grew tobacco, to obtain rationed fertilizers. The Thralls also used the farm for their Fleetwood Dairy. Here's a Fun Fact - the property was used for concluding scenes in the 1961 Warner Brothers film "Parrish." A still from the film shows how the barns and farm pond appeared in 1961.



When the Land Trust accepted the donation in 2007, the land was completely overgrown and the barns had not been maintained for many years. In spite of emergency repairs to the potato barn roof in 2011, we still literally had to bail out the barn after hard rains.

Fortunately, the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation recognized the value of preserving this historic barn by awarding us one of its prestigious 2012 Barn Grants. Wintonbury Land Trust was one of only nine recipients of this grant, receiving the maximum amount of \$5,000. We used the grant plus private donor funds to replace the south side roof this past January. The (now dry) Potato Barn with its shiny new metal roof is shown below.



The broader concern, of course, is determining an appropriate use and stewardship plan for an old overgrown farm. We determined that a good plan - drum roll, please - is to partner with a local farmer to return the site to productive use as a farm. After a year of getting acquainted, we signed a contract with the Sedor family of Newgate Farms in August. The Sedors will use Thrall Farm to expand their Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) business, where individuals pre-purchase shares of the farm's produce. They are currently distributing shares from a tent at their nearby "Home Farm" on Prospect Hill Road, so they are quite excited about Thrall Farm's potential, for both the additional farm acreage and the historic barns. As part of our partnership, we will also re-establish and maintain a walking path around the property perimeter, providing public access to this old farm with a new life.

Part 2 of 3 – Meet the Sedors; Farmland Restoration Grant Award

Last month we shared a brief history of “Thrall Farm”, Wintonbury Land Trust’s 12.2 acre property with two historic barns located in Windsor, CT. WLT is partnering with the Sedor Family of Newgate Farms to return this site, with its prime agricultural soils, to productive use as a farm. The Sedors will use Thrall Farm to expand their Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) business model, where individuals pre-purchase shares of the farm’s produce. This month, we will introduce you to the Sedors, and describe our recent success as joint recipients of a State of Connecticut Farmland Restoration Grant Award.



So, who are the Sedors, and what is their story? Newgate Farms has been family-owned for five generations, beginning in 1933 with their “Home Farm” on Prospect Hill Road in Windsor. They also have agricultural lands in Suffield and East Granby, for a total of about 50 acres. They sell their vegetables, fruits, and value-added goods (jams, maple syrup, baked goods) at Farmers’ Markets throughout Connecticut. They added a CSA component to their business in 2012, which grew from 30 members in the first year to 85 members this past season. They are currently distributing CSA shares from a tent at the Prospect Hill location, about a mile away from Thrall Farm. The Sedors have done renovation work on other farms, and are enthusiastic about revitalizing Thrall Farm, for both the additional farm acreage and the historic barns.

The three partners in the Farm, today, are Judi and Stan Sedor (3rd generation), and their son, Don. Additionally, Judi and Stan’s children, Amanda, Michael, and John, and grandson Alex (5th generation) regularly help with the Farm business. Collectively the family members bring a wealth of farming and construction-trades background to this project, including 105 years of farming experience, 65 years of plumbing & electrical work, and 45 years of earth excavation/site re-grading. Three generations (left-to-right: Stan, Judi, Children Michael, Amanda, Don, and Grandson Alex) are pictured below in front of the Potato Barn.

WLT and Newgate Farms were jointly awarded a \$20,000 Farmland Restoration Grant by the CT Department of Agriculture this year. This matching grant will partially fund the cost of clearing the 8 acres of tillable land, addition of soil amendments, and well installation. The Sedors began land clearing in September and have made great progress – the property looks like a farm again! They’ve also cleaned out both barns and repaired doors on the Potato Barn. This activity has prompted many drivers to detour and to ask what’s happening on the land – everyone’s thrilled to learn that the old farm is being restored. The photograph below is of Stan Sedor over-seeding rye grass around the cleared area near the farm pond (visible in the “Parrish” still photograph shown in last month’s story).



Newgate Farms is currently accepting Summer Share applications for the 2014 season. If you’re considering a CSA membership for yourself or as a gift, check them out at <http://www.newgatefarms.com/>.

Part 3 of 3 – What’s next at Thrall Farm, and how can you help?

In our November newsletter we shared a brief history of Thrall Farm, Wintonbury Land Trust’s 12.2 acre property in Windsor, CT, and described how WLT is partnering with the Sedor Family of Newgate Farms to return this site to productive use as a farm. In December, we introduced you to three generations of the Sedors, describing their extensive farming and construction-trades experience. We also told you about WLT’s and Newgate Farms’ Farmland Restoration Grant award from the State of Connecticut, and that the Sedors had made great progress clearing the tillable acreage.



We’re pleased to report that Stan Sedor, with sons Michael and Don, finished clearing the 8 tillable acres before the December holidays. As you can see below, they did a great job! This view is from the vantage point of the Potato Barn, which sits at the highest elevation on the property. Stan made a point of saving the maple tree in the foreground – it beautifully sets off the Potato Barn, especially at the height of foliage season.

So, what’s next in the latest chapter of Thrall Farm’s story? WLT and Newgate Farms have developed a multi-year work plan to restore the tillable land and the two historic barns. For 2014, the Sedors will finish all work associated with the Farmland Restoration Grant, which includes installation of two wells to supply potable water for the operation. WLT and Newgate Farms are jointly pursuing funding to further renovate the Potato Barn exterior and to begin retrofitting the interior lower level for a Farm Store. We will also continue to consult Windsor Town Staff on this project – they’ve been very supportive, and have provided good advice. If all goes according to plan in 2014, crop production could begin on the newly renovated land in 2015, and the Sedors would move their Summer CSA distribution from their current Prospect Hill location to the Potato Barn. Additionally, they’ll maintain a walking path around the property perimeter to provide public access to the 4 acres of wetlands at the rear.

We’ll provide periodic updates on the Thrall Farm project as we have more news to share. Apart from keeping your fingers crossed, what can you do to help? Support Connecticut farmers by buying produce locally at farm stands or by purchasing a CSA membership at a farm near you. Support the Wintonbury Land Trust by renewing your membership, and, if you’re able, contributing your time and/or dollars to the projects you care most about.

Our “parting shot” for this 3-part series is of a hawk perched near the Farm Pond; it was taken the same day as the land-clearing photograph above. We’re happy to report that this bird appreciates the new improved view at Thrall Farm, too!

