

BREAKING NEWS: Aspetuck Land Trust Buys Gilbertie's Farm



EASTON, CT- April 30, 2020-Aspetuck Land Trust today announced the acquisition of Gilbertie's Farm, a picturesque 34-acre working organic farm adjacent to the land trust's Randall's Farm Preserve on Sport Hill Road in Easton. Gilbertie's Farm will anchor Aspetuck Land Trust's (ALT) larger vision to create a multi-town Green Corridor involving a 40,000-acre belt of land in Easton, Weston, Redding, Wilton, Westport, and Fairfield.

Gilbertie's Farm is the largest certified organic greenhouse operation in the Northeast and a staple in the Fairfield County food system for many decades. The land trust intends to keep this property as a working farm in perpetuity and is exploring ways the farm can be more accessible to the community.

In a closing on April 24, ALT was able to acquire the farm for \$2 million from its owner, Dan Levinson of Westport, and his partners. In 2013 Levinson organized a group to purchase the farm when its bank threatened foreclosure and development.

Levinson has given the land trust a mortgage on the farm and made a generous financial gift that reduced the purchase price significantly. In addition, thanks to donations by

land trust members, Aspetuck Land Trust was able to contribute significant funds to complete the transaction.

“Our intent from the outset was to support Sal Gilbertie and save his farm from development, and we are thrilled to now put it in ALT’s hands for the long term. We strongly support ALT’S vision of the farm as a transformational open space centerpiece for their Green Corridor Initiative,” Levinson added.

Sal Gilbertie, who will continue to farm the land, and will lease the property from ALT said: “We want to thank Dan Levinson for his help and Aspetuck Land Trust for purchasing the farm and preserving Gilbertie’s Organics forever and allowing us to continue to grow and serve our communities with quality herbs, vegetables and Microgreens.”

Dina Brewster, executive director of the CT Northeast Organic Farming Association said, “I can think of no more valorous investment in the future of our children than the protection of their natural resources through the safekeeping of productive organic farms.”

“We are pleased to be able to make this announcement in this very difficult economic and public health environment. That said, we continue to need funds to protect other parcels in the Green Corridor that are at clear risk for development,” said Bill Kraekel President of Aspetuck Land Trust. “For us to succeed in keeping Fairfield County’s serene pockets of rural beauty which we know and love, we will need more people to step forward as Dan has done to make this financially possible.”

ALT said it is in the process of raising additional funds to help with the acquisition, including submitting a grant application to the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, and said it will keep the public informed as plans for enhancing the property unfold.

“There is still much to do,” said David Brant, executive director of the land trust.

“Despite the challenges we face, we are happy to share this positive news. Our mission is protecting open space. Land doesn’t save itself. Saving a working farm today will have benefits for many generations to come.”

Elaine Mintz, vice president of Fairfield County’s Community Foundation said, “Saving this farm is a perfect example of impact philanthropy teaming up with strong non-profit partners to bring a challenging and complex project to fruition.”

The law firm of Cohen and Wolf provided pro bono support advising ALT and creating necessary legal documents.

Aspetuck Land Trust is a non-profit land conservation organization founded in 1966 to preserve open space in the towns of Westport, Weston, Fairfield and Easton. Over the years, the land trust has protected 150 properties on over 1,900 acres of land and recently launched a Green Corridor initiative to save more land and increase biodiversity in the landscape.

For more information visit www.aspetucklandtrust.org



Sal Gilbertie with his organic Petite Edibles microgreens. — Photo Courtesy of Sal Gilbertie