



SOUTH HERO LAND TRUST

Newsletter

Fall 2019

A New Life at the Landon Farm: Pigasus Meats Puts Animal Welfare First



Farmer Kelsey O'Connor looks across the fields to the movable chicken tractors with dogs Potato and Jenny nearby

Farm dogs Potato and Jenny greet visitors arriving at Pigasus Meats, Potato barking to alert the farmers that company is here. Two other dogs, Hank and Malia, are hard at work in the fields, guarding chickens. It's been three growing seasons since farmers Phelan and Kelsey O'Connor moved to the conserved Landon Farm, as part of South Hero Land Trust and Vermont Land Trust's efforts to match young and innovative farmers with affordable farm land. We thought it was time to check in and hear their latest news. Guy visited the farm in September, where Phelan was hard at work washing 1,800 fresh eggs, despite a newly broken foot. With 2,000 laying hens, 58 pigs, 4 dogs, and a herd of visiting cattle to care for, nothing is slowing down these young farmers!

Putting Animal Welfare First

As Kelsey and Phelan put it, "the health of the livestock is our first, second, and third priority on the farm. We want to give them a wonderful life, make sure they are happy, comfortable, and free throughout their life." As former vegans and vegetarians, Phelan and Kelsey didn't expect to be raising pigs and laying hens one day. But when they learned about sustainable meat production and how

"The health of the livestock is our first, second, and third priority on the farm. We want to give them a wonderful life."

*~Kelsey and Phelan O'Connor
Pigasus Meats*

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SOUTH HERO



LAND TRUST

a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the farmland, woodland, natural and recreational areas, and open spaces which give South Hero its distinctive quality of life

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Reflections of a Naturalist



Master Naturalist candidates teach each other about the natural history of Round Pond

Our Master Naturalist Program wrapped up this summer with a day of learning at Round Pond Natural Area and volunteer projects in the community. New Master Naturalist Julia Lynam shared this reflection on being inspired to watch spring slowly unfold at a pond near her house, through a “sit-spot” activity during the program.

On my daily visits I heard gradually more and more different birds singing, saw the willow buds put out their golden catkins, eventually squandering their pollen on the breeze, and the maple buds swell and burst into tiny leaf.

The painted turtles emerged, first one, then another—as many as 14 of them sitting, like me, with their backs to the early Spring sun, basking in its rays. Then, as Spring progressed, the water itself warmed up and became alive: tiny stickleback fish flickered around its margins, and huge bullfrog tadpoles splashed away from the shallows as I approached.

To the background music of honking geese and crying seagulls, the magic of Spring unfolded, sharing its secrets with me as I sat in silence at the edge of the pond.

~Julia Lynam

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agriculture can be regenerative for the earth, they were excited to explore new models of farming that included raising animals.

They make sure their animals enjoy happy lives and have a net positive impact on the health of the land, water, and climate. Slaughtering time is always difficult, but they see this as a good thing. In fact, they've said from the beginning that if they ever stop feeling uncomfortable with the end of their animals' lives, they'd stop raising them.

Their commitment to animal welfare also influences their decision not to be certified organic. As they say, "we care about the health of our animals, the soil, the plants, but it comes to a head when it comes at the cost of animal welfare. We want to be able to give antibiotics to an animal if it's sick." Phelan and Kelsey think that giving a sick animal antibiotics is a far cry from treating them continuously and preventively, as some factory-style farms do. But it can be difficult to explain this. They say, "the important thing is that you know your farmer and talk to them about their methods."

Phelan added that they name the largest pig each year Henry, so this year they have Henry the 5th roaming the fields.

Looking Out for the Environment Too

Phelan and Kelsey see their farm as part of a larger ecological system. As they put it, "one of our main goals for the farm is to manage animal manure so that it gets incorporated into the soil, which keeps runoff from going into the lake, and sequesters the carbon in the manure into the soil, rather than letting it escape into the air and contribute to climate change. These actions help the environment and our bottom line, because they contribute to soil fertility. When the soil is more fertile, it grows back faster, and we are able to have more animals on the same land base. The animals get more value per bite of forage, and the consumer also gets a more nutritious and tasty meal from it. The more life we generate on the farm, in terms of grasses and then animals, and then sequester back into the soil, the better the health of the farm and the planet."



The pigs happily root and dig in the fields, turning over the soil.



Farmer Phelan O'Connor washes eggs. Pigasus Meats has about 2,000 laying hens.

One of their big upcoming projects is building a compost barn. This barn will store solid manure rather than liquid, and any runoff will be captured in a big tank. The liquids can be incorporated into the soil. The dry manure can be used as bedding to keep the animals warm in winter and then become fertilizer in the spring.

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The focus on soil and water has already begun to pay off. As the chickens and pigs have been grazing the land, Kelsey and Phelan have seen an uptick in soil fertility and forage species.

Essential Support for Young Farmers

As young farmers, one of their biggest challenges has been access to capital. They need infrastructure and specialized equipment to grow a sustainable business. As first generation farmers, they've started from scratch when it comes to land, equipment, experience, and knowledge. They've also had to learn a lot of business skills. Help from local service providers, like Sam Smith from the Intervale Center, has been a huge help, as was the Farm & Forest Viability Program at the VT Housing and Conservation Board, and Vermont Land Trust's Farmland Access Program. South Hero Land Trust regularly partners with each of these organizations to provide land access and business planning tools to farmers.



Chickens on pasture at Pigasus Meats

Not only are Kelsey and Phelan caring for this beautiful land and growing a strong business, they are providing food for our community and have just hired their first year round staff. Looking for great local pork or eggs? Visit Pigasus Meats at the Burlington Farmers' Market or check them out online!

Volunteers Get Trails Ready: Tracy Woods Trails to Open this fall



Building split rail fence along the trail entrance at Tracy Woods

Local volunteers have been working hard with staff from South Hero Land Trust and Lake Champlain Land Trust- getting the new community trails at the conserved Tracy Woods ready for their grand opening!

We are excited to be hosting a special ribbon cutting and trail walk to open the trails on October 12th. Join us from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM for the ribbon cutting, some treats, and a fun walk along the trails. Get the details and RSVP (appreciated but not required) by visiting www.shlt.org/events.

Tracy Woods was conserved by SHLT and Lake Champlain Land Trust in 2018, with funding from the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board and many local donors.

Food and Fun: Kids in the Garden

Kids from the Champlain Islands Parent Child Center summer camp grew tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, and peas in the Folsom School & Community Garden this summer. After learning about planning, planting, and caring for the garden with SHLT staff Guy Maguire, the kids visited the garden almost every day—watering, weeding, and harvesting! They made meals from the produce they harvested, and used the garden space for art, music, and other activities.

Volunteers cared for the rest of the summertime garden, growing and donating 60 lbs of vegetables to Food for Thought and 15 lbs to the Grand Isle Food Shelf. Fall harvests are going to students at the school for snacks and school lunches.



Folsom middle school students harvested vegetable for the school lunch program

Up in the Garden, Down in the Woods: Story Walk at Round Pond



Reading aloud from Up in the Garden, Down in the Dirt during a guided story walk

For the second summer in a row, we partnered with the South Hero's Worthen Library to create a pop-up "storybook walk," this year at the conserved Round Pond Natural Area. Up in the Garden, Down in the Dirt, (written by local author Kate Messner and illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal) was divided up into individual pages placed along the trail with the help of volunteers. Visitors made their way through the book as they walked from the trailhead to the lake.

In May, we hosted a story walk at Round Pond to coincide with the kickoff of the Library's Summer Reading Program. Kids enjoyed taking turns reading the pages aloud to their friends and families at each stop, rushing between each one

and waiting (almost) patiently for the adults to arrive. As they walked down to the lake through the meadows and forests, the book took them on a journey through 4 seasons in a garden, ending as they rounded a corner with a sunny view of the lake.

A Lesson in Giving Back: Middle School Day of Service

For the third year in a row the middle school at Folsom partnered with South Hero Land Trust to host a day of service. Middle school students chose from one of four projects: trail maintenance on the Water Wiggles Learning Path or Round Pond Natural Area, bench art in the Folsom School and Community Garden, and gleaning at Pomykala Farm in Grand Isle. Students did great work and learned a lot about tool use and giving back to their community. Here are a couple of photos from the day and letters from two students about their experiences.



Dear Guy Maguire and DR Hobbs
Thank you for the fun time we had
grooming and fixing the board walk
and lone pine trail. I for one thought
it was a very fun experience we all enjoyed
what we did on the trail. So we all thank
you for the awesome fun and we thank you for your
time spent with us.

Many thanks Leila McMillian
Leila McMillian



Dear Guy and Dr. Hobbs,

Thank you for taking time out of your day to work with us on the water wiggles trail. I had a fun time trimming and raking with you and my friends! Thank you for teaching us how to use the different tools correctly. I really liked learning about the different kinds of plants along the way!

Thank you!

sincerely,
Lyannah
Lyannah Nase

Exploring the World Together: Backpack Toolkits Make it Possible!



Local kids explore Round Pond Natural Area during a SHLT program

While the great outdoors isn't far away in South Hero, many barriers can get in the way of kids exploring the natural world. From increased pressure of homework and screens, to a lack of adult companionship outdoors, kids often spend the majority of their time inside. South Hero Land Trust is working with two new partners to change that for kids in Grand Isle County.

The Grand Isle County Mentoring Program pairs students with community mentors in all five County towns. The pairs meet weekly at their local schools to read, play games, work on projects, and learn together. The Champlain Islands Parent Child Center provides early education for young children and an after-school/summer program for school-aged

children. Both programs were looking for ways to lead more hand-on activities outside, and were excited to join our Young Explorers Project this summer.

The collaboration with Land Trust began when some of our mentors expressed a desire for more hands-on outdoor activity choices during the school year. With South Hero Land Trust's long history of getting students outside, active, and exploring the natural world it seemed like a perfect partnership for our program.

~Liese Reagan, GIC Mentoring Program Coordinator

As part of our Young Explorers Project, SHLT built special backpack toolkits for each program (with partial funding from RiseVT). Themes range from pond or forest exploration to gardening and healthy eating, and the kits include books and tools specific to those themes. We developed trainings to empower teachers and mentors in each town to enjoy outdoor activities in learning, play, and exploration.

Exploring the outdoors with a parent, teacher, or mentor is often the first step is a child's lifelong enjoyment of the natural world. We are excited to see local children and their adult companions on many adventures outside. If you are interested in your own outdoor adventure, visit the Worthen Library and check out one of their Young Explorer kits!



Mentors were trained by SHLT staff Guy Maguire at their annual gathering

FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER



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Join us to

CELEBRATE
the conservation of Tracy Woods
and our new Community Trail!

Saturday, October 12
10:00 AM-12:00 PM

Tracy Woods
43 Tracy Road, South Hero

Ribbon cutting, local treats, guided
walks, and more!

Get the details at www.shlt.org. RSVP appreciated
but not required. Contact Guy at guy@shlt.org with
questions or to let us know you'll be there.

