

# Tourism News

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## **County Collaborates with Dutchess Land Conservancy: New York State to Preserve Milan Farm – Great Song Farm one of six to be protected through County's Partnership for Manageable Growth this year**

**Poughkeepsie, NY...**Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro has announced the completion of a conservation easement to protect an 87.5-acre farm in Milan owned by Larry and Betti Steel, in partnership with the Dutchess Land Conservancy and New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. The County contributed \$115,750 toward the purchase of the development rights, ensuring the land remains open and available for farming for current and future generations. The Dutchess County Legislature approved funding from the Partnership for Manageable Growth (PMG) Program in March 2016, based on a recommendation from the Dutchess County Planning Board. Funds for the balance of the purchase price and project costs were provided by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and The Dutchess Land Conservancy. The Dutchess Land Conservancy worked closely with the Steels on the planning, implementation and the ultimate protection of the farm.

The Steel property hosts Great Song Farm, a 110-member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) fruit and vegetable operation, a 30 beehive apiary and pasture for free range laying hens and cattle. A farm store provides items from other area farms for CSA members to purchase, including honey, eggs, breads, yogurts, cheeses and more. Anthony Mecca and Sarah Hearn are the farmers at Great Song and are active in the regional young farmers community.

County Executive Molinaro said, "The Partnership for Manageable Growth program allows us to strategically preserve farmlands that are the basis for agriculture which is a vital, diverse and growing economic engine throughout the County. Agriculture has always been, and continues to be, one of Dutchess County's primary industries. Our economy, rural landscape, community character, environment, health and overall quality of life are all positively affected by farms operating here. Agriculture has changed through time and continues to evolve and diversify, it plays a significant role in both the economy and quality of life for Dutchess County residents. Through the PMG and other innovative programs, the County is promoting a vibrant future for agriculture. We are grateful for the partnership of NYS Ag & Markets, as well as Dutchess Land Conservancy in making this latest farm preservation possible."

County Executive Molinaro reprioritized farmland protection when he included PMG funding as part of the 2015 budget, for the first fund allocation since 2008. In March 2016, the County Executive announced awards of \$935,855 to permanently protect six farms. The Steel project is the first of these to be completed and brings the total amount of open space and farmland properties preserved through the PMG to approximately 3,372 acres.

County Executive Molinaro also announced applications for funding are now being accepted through the Partnership for Manageable Growth Program with a deadline of December 5, 2016. More information about the application process is available [here](#).



*Larry and Betti Steel (left) joined Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro and other local officials to commemorate the acquisition of a conservation easement at their farm in the Town of Milan, a project which was partially funded through Dutchess County's Partnership for Manageable Growth.*

County Legislator Gregg Pulver, who represents the towns of NorthEast, Stanford, Pine Plains and Milan, is the chairman of the Dutchess County Legislature's Public Works and Capital Projects Committee, and is a member of the Dutchess County Agricultural Advisory Committee said, "Dutchess County will benefit from preserving the Steel Farm, which will remain farmland and continue to play a vital role in our county's agricultural heritage. County Executive Molinaro and the Dutchess County Legislature have made preserving farmland a priority, as can be seen by the Partnership for Manageable Growth, and this project is a prime example of that commitment. I thank the County Executive, my fellow legislators and our community partners for their dedication to conserving Dutchess County's farms."

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball said, "The State is proud to support these critical preservation projects that not only protect one of our most valuable assets from development and ensure that it remains affordable for current and future farmers, but also help protect the food supply, and strengthen the agricultural economy. I congratulate the Steels for taking this important step to preserve their farmland for many seasons to come."

Selling development rights encourages property owners to permanently preserve their land for agriculture, providing important funds to reinvest in a farm operation or transition a farm to the next

generation. Larry and Betti Steel always envisioned the farm in active production, using sustainable growing methods.

"We are filled with pride and joy when our CSA members and their children come to the farm to pick up their vegetables, walk the land, and visit the cow herd and laying hens. We're not sure if there is any higher calling than growing healthy food and introducing people to sustainable farming methods," said the couple.

The protection of the Steels' property also has advantages for local residents beyond access to fresh and healthy foods. Even after development rights are sold, agricultural lands stay on the tax rolls ensuring that towns can continue to provide critical services. Studies indicate that agricultural lands cost communities significantly less to provide services to than residential lands.

DLC works throughout the county to preserve significant landscapes, including important scenic, agricultural and environmental resources. Since 1985, the DLC has protected almost 40,000 acres of land, which includes approximately 23,000 acres of productive farmland.

"It is very rewarding to work with landowners like the Steels, who have not only ensured that their land stays in agriculture but who have reached out to a new generation by providing an affordable way for Anthony and Sarah to realize their dream of operating a farm. We are thrilled to assist landowners and young farmers through a collaboration with Dutchess County and the State of New York," said Becky Thornton, DLC President.

Created in 1999, the County's Partnership for Manageable Growth grant program has helped to protect almost 3,373 acres of farmland and open space in Dutchess County. Awards are made after thorough review and ranking by the County's Planning Board. The PMG is designed to assist the County and its municipalities in implementing the recommendations of adopted planning documents, including Directions: The Plan for Dutchess County, the Dutchess County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan, Greenway Connections, and the Dutchess County Water and Wastewater Plan.