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PRESIDENT’S LETTER
The Year in Review for the Dutchess Land Conservancy

Dear Friends,

As I look out my office window and see leaves changing to shades of yellow and orange, and think of the snow that may soon be blanketing our land, what comes to mind is: Wow! Where has the year gone? For me, this year brought renewed joy in getting outdoors, as so often I find myself in meetings or at my desk rather than outside enjoying the land. I love meeting with landowners who share their personal stories and speak passionately about how their land is their lifeblood and the place where their family comes together.

This year, we are thrilled that our collaboration with the Columbia Land Conservancy resulted in the protection of the wonderful family-owned Thompson Finch strawberry farm in Ancram. We’ve added 220 protected acres and we are working non-stop to close nine conservation projects to protect more than 1,650 acres. It is my hope that we will break the 45,000-acre mark by the end of the year.

We also learned a lot at the Dutchess Land Conservancy this year. We learned about mountain lions and sheep herding, map making and healthy living outdoors. We learned that threats to our work can galvanize us after a bit of excitement over limiting conservation incentives that would have deeply impacted our work. At the end of the day, good news clarifying that landowners who donate conservation easements in New York can still enjoy federal tax incentives for protecting their land was like opening a door to new beginnings, as people became re-engaged in our conservation work. Our spring dance at the Hitchcock Barns brought more than 300 people out to celebrate the protection of our rural landscape. More than 400 guests attended our fall luncheon at the breathtaking Rosebrook Farm to honor the work of the DLC.

Next year the Dutchess Land Conservancy will celebrate 35 years! Thank you to each and every supporter, contributor and volunteer! As we wrap up another year, I hope you reflect upon the DLC, our work together and how much it truly does mean to all of us. I wish you the best for the holiday season!

With warmest regards and tremendous gratitude,

Becky Thornton

PRESIDENT’S LETTER

LIVING LEGACY

“I only want to be remembered if my example would help motivate others to preserve open land. We had the privilege of receiving it unspoiled from previous owners and we should pass it on that way.” - Marta Nottebohm

Connection to the land is essential to our health and well-being. Taking care of and managing our resources not only for our own benefit, but also for future generations is the guiding spirit behind the Dutchess Land Conservancy’s Legacy Society. If you want to be remembered as someone who cared deeply about the rural nature of this county and its survival, recalled as someone who had the foresight to plan for the area’s protection and not leave it to chance; if you want to be part of a lasting legacy, join Marta Nottebohm and other members of the Legacy Society by including the DLC in your estate planning.

Legacy Society members may take advantage of a variety of financial tools when naming the DLC as a beneficiary in their will or trust. The membership involves no additional dues or obligations. However, the society does allow the DLC to thank and recognize donors for their generosity, which may also serve to inspire others. The most important benefit participants receive is the satisfaction from making a lasting contribution to the protection of the beautiful countryside and valuable natural assets of Dutchess County. By joining the Legacy Society, individuals help protect the land for our children, grandchildren and all forthcoming generations of the community.

Legacy Society Members include all who have named DLC as the beneficiary with a planned gift such as:

- A bequest in a will or trust
- A beneficiary designation in a retirement fund
- A beneficiary designation in a life insurance policy
- An outright gift of life insurance cash value

Whatever the objectives, the DLC will be happy to work with you in planning a bequest that will be satisfying, economical and effective in carrying out specific wishes in our shared mission.

If you would like more information about joining the Legacy Society or have already named the DLC as the beneficiary, please contact us at 845.677.3002. We would like to recognize and thank you for your generosity.

This page, right: Legacy Society member Marta Nottebohm and views from her property. Opposite, from top left: DLC President Becky Thornton, the sweeping vista from Rosebrook in Stanfordville. On the cover: A cross-country skier enjoys the winter season in Dutchess County.

OUR LEGACY SOCIETY MEMBERS
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Ms. and Mrs. Everett Cook
Mrs. David Hathaway
Nancy H. Henze
Fernanda M. Kellogg
Tara Kelly
Mr. and Mrs. George McLaughlin
Charles Milligan
Mrs. Marta Nottebohm
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Eric W. Roberts
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Becky Thornton
Olivia van Melle Kamp
The Weindling Family
Henry H. Westmoreland

MEMBERS
Henry H. Westmoreland

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THE NATURE OF THINGS
By Karissa Stokdal

Please introduce yourself and tell us where you live.
A: Hi, I’m Rufus and I’m a Lyon rufus, but you probably know me as a bobcat. You may not have seen me around, but we bobcats live all over Dutchess County! We prefer areas full of hardwood forests, thick vegetation and swampy areas, making the Hudson Valley an ideal habitat. I live in the woodlands of Pleasant Valley and LaGrange in a territory that spans about twenty square miles.

Q: Who are you most often mistaken for?
A: People often confuse me with my cousin the mountain lion, but as you can see, I am much smaller! Unlike mountain lions, which can weigh up to 200 pounds, I only weigh about 20 pounds. I’m less than double the size of an average house cat. I am also commonly mistaken for the Canada lynx, but the tufts of my ears aren’t nearly as pointy! I also have very visible black spots, shorter legs and smaller paws.

Q: What are your plans this winter?
A: Many animals migrate or hibernate for the winter, but I won’t be doing either. My fur keeps me warm and I can go long periods without food. I am an excellent hunter and mostly feast on rabbits, small rodents and birds. During the winter months, I also hunt deer. Larger prey like this often takes me some time to finish, but I hide my leftovers and come back as needed. I am very shy and elusive, but if you live in a wooded area, maybe you can spot me while I’m out hunting. I become diurnal during the fall and winter seasons, which means I’m most active in the daytime!

Q: What’s your relationship status?
A: I prefer solitude, but by February it will be my mating season and I’ll find a female companion. After a few weeks of traveling together and mating, I will move on in hopes of finding another female. My mate will go through a gestation period of about two months before giving birth to three to six kittens in the spring. I’m not very good with kids, so I won’t stick around for all of that. They’ll stay with their mother for their first nine months and she’ll teach them how to hunt. Eventually, they’ll disperse on their own and their mother will be free to mate again. Because of this long cycle, female bobcats only have one litter per year.

THE EXPLORER’S NOTEBOOK
By Julie Hart, Illustrated By Georgia Plambeck

As winter approaches we all tend to become less active, spend more time indoors and bundle up against the cold. With less access to fresh local food we rely on stored provisions, while some of us just skip the whole season by moving to a warmer location. Humans can rely on grocery stores and central heating to survive the winter, but what about plants and animals? They have a variety of strategies, and some of them may sound familiar…

PREPARE FOR IT As the days grow shorter, animals that will be active during the winter (such as fox, bobcat, beaver and coyote) accumulate fat in their bodies and grow a warmer, more insulating coat of fur. Meanwhile, deciduous trees and perennial plants pull nutrients and food stores from their leaves into their roots for storage. They will remain dormant until spring, when warmer days signal that it is time to grow new foliage for next year’s photosynthesis.

TOUGH IT OUT Finding shelter is a must: owls and squirrels often live in hollow trees, while deer tend to spend more time in conifer forests where they are more protected from the elements. Another strategy is to stock up on food: chipmunks hoard food in their burrows, while beaver gather tree branches and store them underwater near their lodge, so they’ll have lots of tasty inner bark to munch on all winter.

TAKE A NAP When temperatures drop and little food is available, reducing your metabolic rate and taking a long nap is one way to pass the time. In warm-blooded animals such as woodchuck and black bear, we call this hibernation or torpor; winter dormancy in reptiles like turtles and snakes is called brumation; and for insects (who may overwinter as an egg, larva, pupa or adult, depending on the species) this period of inactivity is known as diapause.

JUST SKIP THE WHOLE THING Many birds (and some whales, though you seldom see them around here!) migrate long distances to spend the winter in the tropics, while the white-footed mouse may migrate a short distance (like into your house) to find a warmer winter home. Annual plants such as marigolds and poppies have already dispersed their seeds; though the plants will die with the first hard frost, they have done their best to ensure another generation grows next spring.
THE BOTTOM LINE:  
Business Philosophy at Meili Farm  
By Georgina Schaeffer

“I was my [then] wife’s idea to bring the pigs in. We started with four gilts, little females, and raised them,” begins Craig Meili, as we walk around his farm in Amenia on a brisk November morning. “We got a boar and started breeding. We went up to eight sows, then 16, doubling every year,” he explains of Meili Farm’s local, free-range heritage hog business. Dozens of piglets zoom around the nursing pens, zig-zagging this way and that, their lumbering sows nearby. “Now, we have 45 sows, and that’s where I want to stay because that’s what I can manage myself,” he says. “The most important thing in this business, in any business, is efficiency.” More pens hold weaned piglets and farther in the distance: 49 beef cows graze in a pasture. Polka, a black-and-white cattle dog, accompanies us as we walk around the farm. She herds a group of pigs from behind one of the silos, which stores the feed Craig makes from the non-GMO corn he grows on-site. Chickens pop out from inside a coop, while 15 sheep graze in a meadow as we approach the house. “They mow the lawn for me,” he says with a smile. “I’d like to create a larger area for them next year.”

Two elder draft ponies, Fritz and Elsa, reside in semi-retirement over the hill. It perhaps shouldn’t be surprising, as we sit down at the kitchen table, that almost everything we discuss comes back to basic business principles: capital outlay, product quality, supply chains and cash-flow. After all, the farming business is in the Meili bloodlines. Craig’s father, Joerg, emigrated from Switzerland in the 1950s and settled in Dutchess County, where he worked as the manager of Bel Aire Farms before starting his own dairy operation. “He bought this place in 1966 and added additional pieces of land over time,” Craig says. Today, the Meili family owns and works roughly 225 acres of farmland that straddles the New York-Connecticut border. This year, the family placed almost half the farm under easement with the Dutchess Land Conservancy, working in conjunction with Dutchess County’s Partnership for Manageable Growth, The 1772 Foundation and the Housatuck Valley Association. “We wanted to see this land protected, as well as survive as an operating farm in Dutchess County,” Craig says. From a wildlife perspective, I feel this farm is especially important. The Webutuck Creek runs right through here, which feeds into Ten Mile River, and ultimately, the Housatonic,” he explains. “I believe in open space protection. When I went out west for college, I saw their biggest problem is sprawl. We are 100 miles from a major metropolitan area,” he continues. “I think people living here want to see farms stay open and the land protected.”

While Craig’s brother, Joerg, continued with the dairy operation until he sold the milking herd last year, Craig focused on the pigs: “I am a niche producer for a niche market,” he says of his Tamworth Berkshire cross stock. “They are very hearty outdoor pigs and do well in the free-range environment.” Craig and his now ex-wife, Sophiet, began processing cuts and selling them at local farmers’ markets. “We went to a farmer meet-and-greet at Stissing House and met the people from the Red Devon and they bought our first whole pig,” he recalls. “They called up a few days later and ordered another one. Soon, they were ordering one a week.” This was a pivotal moment for the young couple, as selling whole pigs every week you have a steady cash-flow.” And cash-flow, as with any start-up, is essential. “In the early days, we were putting a lot of money back into the farm,” he recalls of his early infrastructure choices, including top-of-the-line wood feeders from Iowa. The Meilis’ business continued to pick-up steam via word-of-mouth, arguably the best marketing strategy. “A guy from Harlem who was starting a butcher shop came up and looked around, liked how I raised my pigs and ordered two pigs a week,” Craig remembers. “Then a new specialty food store in Brooklyn started with two pigs a week.” In addition, Craig works with Farms2Tables, an online service company in Rhinebeck that connects local farmers with restaurants and caterers. Through this service, he is able to sell his ground beef, produced cuts, as well as whole pigs, to an even wider network of clients. Next year, Craig hopes to start a small free-range chicken operation and sell the meat through the service, as well as for himself. “I would rather focus on doing a few things really well rather than do a whole bunch of things mediocre,” he says of his business philosophy. “We are a farrow-to-finish operation,” he explains. (Farrowing is the process of birthing and breeding pigs.) “A lot of people don’t want to be involved with the farrowing, but it’s probably my favorite part of the business.” But before I can think he’s going a bit soft on me with talk of raising animals, he adds: “But in the end, it’s all about the numbers.” And as any businessman will tell you, you always keep your eye on the bottom line.

The Meilis’ business philosophy is in the numbers. “Not only do you cut down on production costs, but if you move whole pigs every week you have a steady cash-flow.” And cash-flow, as with any start-up, is essential. “In the early days, we were putting a lot of money back into the farm,” he recalls of his early infrastructure choices, including top-of-the-line wood feeders from Iowa.

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On a glorious autumn afternoon this October, over 400 people ascended to the top of Helen and Everett Cook’s spectacular Rosebrook property in Stanfordville to attend the Dutchess Land Conservancy’s 28th Annual Fall Country Luncheon. Guests were welcomed with the Culinary Institute of America’s Mise en Place Wit Beer and Treasury Cider from Fishkill Farms. Patrons enjoyed a truly phenomenal view of the country before continuing in for lunch catered by the Farmer’s Wife. DLC Chairman of the Board Rebecca Seaman and DLC Treasurer Nancy Hathaway honored DLC President Becky Thornton for her 30 years of service. After dessert and the silent auction, Birds of Prey presented “Skyhunters in Flight,” much to the delight of young and old attendees alike.
Trustees of the Land, the DLC’s most ardent supporters, demonstrate their steadfast commitment to land conservation with annual gifts of $10,000 or more.

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About the DLC
Founded in 1985, the Dutchess Land Conservancy (DLC) is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the rural character, important resources and open lands of Dutchess County, New York. We encourage sound, well-planned growth, balanced with the conservation of our important natural resources and working landscapes to ensure healthy and vibrant communities for the benefit of all generations.
Galloping into the New Year!

Photo: Kathy Landman