

# AFOOT IN THE FIELD



Resource for Conservation Landowners in the Finger Lakes Region

SUMMER 2022

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I'm one of those old-school guys who still would rather read a book made from paper, than read on a screen, and still subscribes to an actual newspaper (even if it is thin). Recent headlines from that newspaper, related to environmental issues, are pretty depressing – a mega-drought out west, numerous intense wildfires, rollbacks of protections for water and endangered species, record deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, more and more impacts from climate change, and the world population about to reach 8 billion people.

At the local level, there are also significant problems, such as harmful algal blooms in our lakes and non-native insects and pathogens killing trees in our forests. However, there are many environment-related things in our local region that we can all be happy and hopeful about. An abundance of forests, meadows, and wetlands – much of it protected – provides habitat for healthy wildlife populations. We are fortunate to have trails and places to enjoy nature. Farmers benefit from some of the best soils, a more stable climate than in many other places, and access to markets.

Another bright spot are the young people who value the rural character of the Finger Lakes region and hold conservation of land and natural resources in high regard. Among these is the next generation of farmers. Conservation Easement Steward Hailey Nase invited some young farmers who live and work on land that is conserved and protected by conservation easements granted to FLLT to be interviewed for this issue of Afoot in the Field. She asked them what drew them to farming, what challenges they face, and what keeps them excited and engaged in the profession. Thank you so much, Eric, Porter, Tim, and Mary Ella for taking time out of your busy summer farming schedules to share your thoughts and stories.

Chris Olney  
Director of Stewardship



## Monitoring Season:

The summer monitoring season is ramping up!

I'm excited to begin my first full monitoring season with FLLT. After joining in September of 2021, I've met many landowners and I am looking forward to meeting more landowners and exploring all of FLLT's conservation easement properties.

Have a question about your conservation easement property? Want a map of your property? Have a story about your property you want to share? Want to join for your property visit? Email me: [hailey.nase@fllt.org](mailto:hailey.nase@fllt.org) I would love to chat!



Hailey Nase  
Conservation  
Easement  
Steward

Photo By: Jill Ketchen

## FLLT Protected Farms:

Farmland protection is one of the conservation priorities of the FLLT. Through programs with New York state like the Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program, the FLLT has helped to conserve thousands of acres of farmland. Protecting farmland is greatly beneficial; it allows farmers to keep their land in production longer, assists in feeding the community, and encourages best management practices for the land.



45 conservation easements with agriculture land



21 Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program (FPIG) projects



Over 3,000 acres of prime farmland soils protected



Over 6,000 acres of active agriculture protected



Photo of Wyffels Farm By: Hannah George



Photo of Birdsall Farm By: Matt Champlin

# Next Generation of Farmers

The USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture reported that the nation's average age of farmers is 57.5 years old. New York's average is only slightly lower, at 55.8 years old. With an aging farmer population, how will the next generation of farmers fair?



**1**  
ACCESS TO LAND

**2**  
STUDENT LOAN DEBT

**3**  
LABOR

**4**  
HEALTH INSURANCE

[youngfarmers.org](http://youngfarmers.org)

Although many farmers are retiring, there is also a rising force of new and younger farmers. Producers under the age of 35 increased by 11% between 2012 and 2017. In 2017, New York State had 6,718 producers under the age of 35. However, there are major hurdles for new farmers with large upfront costs for land, equipment, storage, livestock, and new crops.

The National Young Farmers Coalition, in a 2017 survey, found that land access is the top challenge for, both first-generation and multi-generational farmers.

The price of farmland has significantly increased as development pressure on farmland skyrockets. According to the American Farmland Trust's *Farms Under Threat* report, they found that 253,500 acres of New York's agricultural land was converted into highly developed and low-density residential areas between 2001-2016. As farmland is converted to commercial and residential lots, it fragments the agricultural lands, making it harder for farmers to access land and making large pieces of farmland extremely valuable.

This up and coming generation of farmers is often using less intensive and more environmentally conscious agricultural practices. In surveying farmers, the National Young Farmers Coalition found that young farmers were more likely to farm on fewer acres, have a large diversity of crops, sell directly to the consumer through community-supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers markets, and implement sustainable, organic, or holistic management practices. Nationally only 1% of farms are certified organic but 17% of young farmers reported being certified organic. This stresses the importance to protect farmland for this new generation of innovative and environmentally conscious farmers.

**CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARMS**



Sources: (1) USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017 Census of Agriculture (2) National Young Farmers Coalition, 2017 Young Farmers Survey, *Building a Future with Farmers II* (3) American Farmland Trust, 2020 *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*

# Farmer Profiles

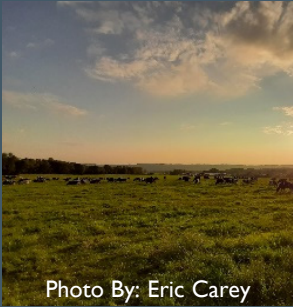


Photo By: Eric Carey

## Eric Carey

Carey Farm Inc.  
Groton, NY

5<sup>th</sup> Generation Dairy  
Farmer

30 years old

300+ dairy cows

>600 acres of  
farmland



Photo By: Annabel Roberts-Michael

Eric Carey is a 5th-generation dairy farmer at the Carey Farm which was started in 1899. Growing up on his family's farm in Groton, NY Eric took an interest in working with dairy cows.

Eric attended Cornell University to further his education in agriculture. During his time at Cornell and through an internship at a dairy farm in Maine he solidified his desire to return to his family's farm.

Today, the Carey Farm is a 300 dairy cow operation with over 600 acres to support rotational grazing of the cattle and growing crops such as corn, grass, and alfalfa for the cows during the winter months.

In 2021, Eric purchased a property with a conservation easement held by FLLT. The Carey Farm had been renting the property from Katharine Sutphin, the previous landowner, for years before the sale. These 93 acres, 6.4 of which consist of prime agricultural soils and 26.2 acres of statewide significance soils, are now protected from development.

Eric graciously made time in his busy schedule to speak with Hailey about the farm:

### **What advice do you have for younger farmers?**

Be willing to work hard. Find something you are passionate about and put in a lot of time. Also, have a good business plan that is realistic and sustainable. Discover your niche. You don't have to be the biggest farm, you just need a product that has a market and find ways to grow and adapt.



Photo provide By: Eric Carey

## **What has been the most rewarding aspect of farming?**

Seeing the fruits of your labor pay off. Sometimes it takes years to feel the effects of your hard work or reap the benefits of small changes you make. For example, I took over cow reproduction about 4 years ago. Just in the last year or two, I'm starting to see the differences in breeding with new bulls. It takes a while, 9 months before the calf is born, and another 2-3 years before they are a part of the milking operation. My dad also started adopting minimal and no-tillage practices. It took a while to learn the ins and outs of no-tillage and to learn from our past mistakes. After some trial and error, we now benefit from the nutrient-dense soils.

## **What has been the hardest aspect of farming?**

It requires a lot of time and energy but if you love it, then it's not hard. The worst is probably when you put in a lot of time and energy and the project fails. It can be very challenging being forced to restart.

## **What is the biggest challenge to farming today?**

Development pressure from solar companies. Prime farmland is being bought by solar companies. A lot of times farmers don't have the next generation to take over the farm, therefore selling the farm to the solar companies becomes their new retirement plan.

## **What are your long-term goals for your farm?**

Staying in business, remaining profitable, and adapting to new technologies. The goal is to be able to pass along a thriving farm to the next generation. In order to do that we must keep the property well maintained with high-yielding crops and nutrient-dense soils.



During the end of 2020, Eric created a podcast where he interviews professionals in agriculture.

He created the podcast to have fun with friends and to share information from the farmers, in an easy, digestible way.

Learn about new agricultural technology and ins and outs of running a farm.

Find the podcast, *All Things Agriculture*, on any podcast streaming platform.





Photo Provided By: Porter Hunt

## Porter Hunt

Hunt Heritage Farm  
Livonia, NY

1<sup>st</sup> Generation

27 years old

Grass-fed beef & pork

14 cattle herd

Porter Hunt is a 1<sup>st</sup> generation farmer. In 2020, Porter purchased a 78-acre property, with a conservation easement held by FLLT, to farm. Porter specializes in heritage breed animals such as Scottish Highland cattle and currently has a herd of 14, with a calf due any day. Before starting his farm, Porter was the farm manager at the Abbey of the Genesee's farm in Piffard, NY. Fortunate timing allowed Porter to buy the cattle from the Abbey Farm when it came time to start his current herd.

### **What are your favorite parts of farming?**

My favorite part is the beginning of spring, watching everything start to grow and all the calves and piglets being born. Also how tangible the work is. I'm not working for someone else. I'm directly producing a product for the customer and I can see all the impact of my work.

### **What drew you to farming?**

I always knew I wanted to work outside. I love being in nature, being around animals, and growing my own food.

### **What is the biggest challenge to farming today?**

Access to land and the price of land is one of the biggest hurdles. Without a family farm to inherit, finding affordable quality land is difficult. Another challenge is showing that small-scale farming can be profitable. There are great ways, such as rotational grazing, that are both economically and environmentally sustainable.

### **Why did you choose to purchase the land with a CE?**

I read the conservation easement and it fit my vision for the farm exactly. I want to create a full eco-system service farm and protect the bio-diversity of the property.

### **What are your future plans for the farm?**

In the future I plan to increase the size of the herd to around 25-30 cattle, introduce poultry, and expand my produce production.



Photo Provided By: Tim Stryker

## Tim Stryker

Kim-Mar Farms  
Canandaigua &  
Hopewell, NY

2<sup>nd</sup> Generation  
Farmer

21 years old

Corn, wheat,  
soybean, & hay

1,350+ acres of  
active farmland  
(owned & rented combined)

Tim Stryker is the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation working on his family's farm. His parents protected the farm with FLLT and the state's Farmland Protection Implementation Program (FPIG) in 2021. Tim is extremely proud of this parent's accomplishment of protecting the farm, stating, "preserving farmland creates a better future."

### What made you want to become a farmer?

I grew up working on my parent's farm and developed a love and appreciation for the land. I enjoy that farming is an exciting and adventurous career. It can be very stressful and challenging at times, but I am proud to be a part of the agricultural industry.

### What is the most rewarding aspect of farming?

Farming is more than just a job, it is a part of who I am. The goals we set to improve our land are not just business goals but personal goals. When we improve the land we improve our crop yields, but also we enhance the soil health and health of surrounding lands. Leaving the farm better than we found it, has been a driving focus for my parent's 30+ years of hard work on the property. I plan to continue their work in adopting more environmentally friendly practices.



Photo of Zeiset Farm By: Sandra Bonanno

Matthew & Mary Ella Zieset are 2<sup>nd</sup> generation farmers. They own a 50 acre conservation easement property. The property helps supports the dairy farm that is owned by Matthew's parents.

### What made you want to become a farmer?

Matthew always liked to farm and with limited other job options, it was an easy choice to continue working with his dad on the farm.

### What is your primary crop?

The primary field crops are corn, hay, and soybeans to support the dairy cows.

### What is the biggest challenge you face farming?

Keeping insects at bay, each crop has a different pest depending on the year. As an organic farm, there are always weeds and pests to manage.

## Matthew & Mary Ella Zieset

Zeiset Dairy  
Farm  
Rushville, NY

2<sup>nd</sup> Generation  
Farmers

Both 22 years old

Field crops for  
dairy cows



Photo of Valley View Farm By: Matt Champlin



Photo of Barber Farm By: Chris Ray



Photo of Suwinski Farmstead By: Chris Ray

# Thank you!

Much appreciation to our volunteer monitors! Collectively they spent over **100** hours this past year helping us monitor our conservation easement properties. We appreciate their dedication and commitment of time and energy.

Although we are not seeking more volunteers to monitor conservation easements, you can learn about other ways to volunteer at: [fllt.org/volunteer](http://fllt.org/volunteer)

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The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a member supported non-profit conservation organization that works cooperatively with landowners and local communities to conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone.

Afoot in the Field is provided for landowners in the Finger Lakes region who own conservation easement properties, or who are otherwise committed to land conservation and wildlife habitat protection. For questions regarding your conservation easement, please contact: Chris Olney, Director of Stewardship at (607) 275-9487 or [chrisolney@fllt.org](mailto:chrisolney@fllt.org) OR Hailey Nase, Conservation Easement Steward at (607) 275-9487 or [haileynase@fllt.org](mailto:haileynase@fllt.org)