



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

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Forever Farmland: FLLT–Cornell Partnership Yields Two New Agricultural Easements

In recent years, the Land Trust has worked closely with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Yates County to protect local farms against the ever-increasing pressures of development and to encourage farming families and their traditions in the Finger Lakes.

With funding drawn from the State's Department of Agriculture and Markets Farmland Protection Program (FPP) in 2009 and 2010, the partners helped the Hallpine and Henderson farms near Penn Yan hold on to their land and keep it in agricultural production forever through permanent conservation easements.

Late last year, the Land Trust and CCE announced two new easements on Yates County farmland, a combined 396 acres, bringing the county total to 1,134 acres in three years of cooperation. The new easements protect extensive road frontage, prime agricultural soils, and beautiful views of Keuka and Seneca lakes.

Curtis and Susan Gillette operate a 237-acre, fifth-generation farm in Jerusalem, just southwest of Penn Yan. Perched on gently sloping hills above Keuka Lake, the fields afford sweeping water views. The Gillette "home farm," which

includes the original family purchase of 24 acres in 1922, has a view to Seneca and Cayuga lakes as well. It may be one of the few places in Yates County with a view of three lakes.

For over 86 years, the Gillette family has worked hard to diversify their business to meet the ever-changing farm market. Presently, they grow a variety of field crops—hay, corn, oats, and wheat—while also maintaining 15 acres of grapes and a small herd of beef steer. Produce that isn't used directly at the farm is sold in local markets.

The Gillettes' son Chris has participated in daily farm operations "ever since he could walk," according to his parents. They felt an imperative to continue family traditions by passing the land, and all it means to them, to the next generation, especially as they feel Chris is now ready and able to take over full operation of the farm. "We want to continue

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Chris (left) and Curtis Gillette



MEGAN FENTON

PLEASE
JOIN US FOR
THE...

Land Trust's 23rd Annual Meeting & Celebration

Saturday, May 19th at The Inn on the Lake in Canandaigua. (SEE INSERT FOR DETAILS.)

Though I'm not really much of a fisherman, I remember well the first time I hooked a brook trout, and I still have a faded photo of the fish tucked away in an old scrapbook. It was a humid summer day with a stillness that was broken only by the buzzing of a horsefly intent on biting me. I stood on the bank of the East Branch of Owego Creek in Tioga County, looking out over the lush vegetation of Michigan Hill State Forest.

The trout struck my line and headed for the opposite bank. A kingfisher seemed to look on with interest as I reeled the fish in. It wasn't very big but one look at the sleek lines and speckled flanks of the fish made me realize why so many fishermen are obsessed with the pursuit of this fish. Later that evening, my friends and I savored every bite as we rationed out the fish.

The Eastern brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) is known as one of the premiere freshwater game fish of North America. Its presence in a stream is an indicator of good water quality. Brook trout prefer clear waters of high purity and are sensitive to changes brought on by pollution and the excessive runoff of soil and nutrients. The health of a stream depends on the health of adjacent lands and, indeed, its watershed as a whole.

Over the years, native brook trout have disappeared from many of our region's streams due to the degradation of our local waterways and the

lands that surround them. Fortunately, Owego Creek still supports brook trout, and the Land Trust is partnering with the conservation organization Trout Unlimited to ensure that they will continue to thrive.

The Land Trust is working with private landowners within the Owego Creek Watershed to secure lands that are vital to the health of the creek through the use of conservation easements. Trout Unlimited is supporting this effort by providing grant funds to cover the transaction costs associated with the easement.

Through partnerships like this, and a more sensitive approach to land use and watershed management, we can retain the wild brook trout in our region as well as all the other crustaceans, frogs, insects, small fish, and invertebrates that all rely on the same clean, cold water upon which the brook trout depends.

I look forward to returning to Owego Creek this summer in pursuit of my daughter's first brook trout. Even if we don't catch one, I know that we'll surely enjoy splashing through the creek's sparkling waters in pursuit of other aquatic critters.

—Andy Zepp

McIlroy Bird Sanctuary Grows Through Addition of Wetlands

Located in southern Cayuga County, the Land Trust's Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary is a popular spot for birdwatchers and is, in fact, recognized by New York Audubon as one of the state's Important Bird Areas.

The Sanctuary features hiking trails that wind through an open meadow and mature forests before leading the visitor to an observation area overlooking extensive wetlands along the banks of Fall Creek.

With the recent addition of 15 acres of forested wetlands, the Sanctuary now encompasses almost 200 acres of diverse habitats. This latest acquisition features towering white pines and hemlocks that are rooted in a landscape of vernal pools and hummocks of sphagnum moss.

The property came to the Land Trust through the direction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as mitigation for wetland impacts associated with the construction of the Empire Connector Pipeline in 2008. This 77-mile natural gas pipeline runs between Corning and the Rochester area.

Empire Pipeline donated the land along with a financial contribution to provide for long term management of the site. In addition, the agreement prevents development of an adjacent nine-acre field and allows for its continued agricultural use.



BILL HECHT

Easement Gift Extends Emerald Necklace

Gail Sanford and her family so love the forested solitude of their 47-acre property in the town of Van Etten, southwest of Ithaca on Cornish Hollow Road, that they have named it the “Cornish Hollow Sanctuary.”

“There is so much to love about this land,” said Sanford, ticking off a list of her favorite things: a ¾-mile stretch of McCorn Creek, abundant wildlife (including deer, frogs, beavers, and a variety of songbirds), a diverse hardwood and conifer forest, a small wetland area, and its proximity to Arnot Forest, a wooded conservation and research site owned by Cornell University.



Gail Sanford alongside a stretch of McCorn Creek that flows through her property

To help preserve the land she treasures, Sanford recently donated a conservation easement on her property to the Land Trust. “Our family wanted to do something to preserve and protect forest land, creek, and wildlife,” said Sanford. “With increasing development and the controversies about hydrofracking, I’m thankful to be able to accomplish this.”

The Sanford family bought the parcel in 1984 from Isaac Decker, who built the modest cabin that sits on the property. She lived there with her family for about two years. Although life’s twists and turns took her away from the area—she now lives in Oregon—Sanford remains connected to the land through periodic visits and a friend who stewards the property. “It’s wonderful to

have someone nearby who enjoys spending time on the land,” Sanford noted.

Her property is located within the Susquehanna River Watershed. Approximately 4,000 linear feet of McCorn Creek runs through the property; McCorn joins with several other streams before emptying into the Chemung River, which in turn drains into the Susquehanna River as it makes its way south to Chesapeake Bay (where Sanford recalls waterskiing as a teenager). McCorn Creek has been designated as a trout-spawning stream by the Department of Environmental Conservation and is therefore afforded a measure of state protection.

From the Land Trust’s perspective, the Sanford conservation easement has added importance because of the property’s link to other protected forest land. The parcel is another link connecting woodlands spanning the Connecticut Hill State Forest, Cliffside State Forest, Newfield State Forest, and Arnot Forest. In total, the area encompasses more than 18,000 acres of forest in the Emerald Necklace strung below Cayuga Lake.

For Gail Sanford, however, the easement is simply an ironclad way to protect, in perpetuity, the land that she loves.

—Jeff Tonole

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Virginia Tesi of the law firm Barney, Grossman, Dubow, Marcus & Orkin, LLP in Ithaca and Attorney Stephanie Sechler in Ithaca for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Land Trust Receives Trout Unlimited Grant

We are delighted to report that the Land Trust was awarded one of Trout Unlimited’s first-ever Coldwater Land Conservancy Fund grants.

The fund was established in 2010 to help Trout Unlimited achieve its strategic plan commitment to protect key watersheds and riparian areas on private lands.

This first round of grants was awarded to five conservation organizations in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania and will be used to acquire land and conservation easements that protect native trout habitat in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

A grant of \$12,000 was awarded to the Land Trust to cover land transaction costs associated with a 128-acre conservation easement project on the East Branch of Owego Creek near Richford, NY. The creek lies in a portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed designated as “best for protection” by the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, a collaboration of conservation agencies and non-profits seeking to protect, restore, and enhance brook trout populations throughout their historic range.

“Trout Unlimited has long recognized the importance of private land conservation as a tool to protect coldwater fisheries,” said Elizabeth Maclin, vice president for Eastern conservation at Trout Unlimited. “These grants allow us to put this philosophy into practice throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed, where loss of native brook trout has been particularly severe,” Maclin said.

Trout Unlimited is a non-profit organization with more than 147,000 members dedicated to conserving, protecting, and restoring North America’s trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds.

Enhanced Public Access Planned For Emerald Necklace

Large tracts of public land punctuate the landscape in an arc around the south end of Cayuga Lake from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests in the east. The Land Trust is working to connect these public lands that, when strung together with other conserved lands, will create an Emerald Necklace. Through collaborations with neighbors and public and private partners, the organization is strategically linking existing public land through careful conservation.

In November 2010, the Land Trust purchased a 169-acre property in Dryden, creating an important link in the Emerald Necklace. The parcel connects Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests with the Land Trust's Roy H. Park Preserve and a Cornell Plantations natural area, all together creating an 8,000-acre block of public open space.

During the coming year, the Land Trust will enhance public access to the preserve and adjacent state lands by building a gravel parking area, installing

an interpretive kiosk, and constructing a boardwalk and bridge to cross the property's wetlands and Six Mile Creek. The bridge will feature several overlooks to benefit birdwatchers and those visitors who pause to appreciate the

Cayuga Trails Club.

Though only several hundred yards long, the proposed improvements require an intensive effort. Since the creek varies in depth, and given the presence of beaver in the area, the

bridge will have to be suspended several feet above the waterway.

The Land Trust has signed a contract with Tetra Tech, an engineering firm, to design the bridge and boardwalk. Construction will involve contractors as well as skilled volunteer support. At least a portion of the trail will be designed to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and will host two hand-capped accessible wetland overlooks.

The Land Trust seeks funding to cover the cost of improvements to the property.

If you are interested in helping out, please contact the Land Trust office at 607-275-9487 or visit our website at www.fllt.org

—Kelly Makosch, FLLT Director of Development

site's scenic beauty. On the far side of the creek, the Land Trust's trail will connect to Hammond Hill's 20-mile, multi-use trail system. The Land Trust intends to build the trail in partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Dryden Youth Conservation Corps, and the



Rendering of the proposed boardwalk that will connect the Land Trust's Roy H. Park Preserve to Hammond Hill's 20-mile, multi-use trail system in Dryden, Tompkins County

SAVE THE DATE: Celebrate Cayuga Lake!

Join the Land Trust and other local organizations and businesses at the Ithaca Farmer's Market pavilion on Tuesday, July 17th for a fun and educational afternoon celebrating the lake and the proposed Cayuga Water Trail, a network of shoreline conservation areas and other facilities that will cater to paddlers and boaters. The event will take place from 4:00 to 7:00 pm and will offer something for everyone: the opportunity to try out kayaks, paddleboards, and canoes; the chance to learn about recreational opportunities on the lake; information on conservation programs held within the Cayuga Lake Watershed; and hands-on activities for the whole family relating to the lake and its watershed. There will also be great food and music along the waterfront.

This event will also serve as the kickoff for an intrepid band of adventurers – including several Land Trust staff – who intend to paddle kayaks from Ithaca to Oswego over the course of the following five days to demonstrate the potential of the Water Trail. Check out the Land Trust's web site (www.fllt.org) for additional information about this upcoming event.

The Land Trust is grateful for the support of the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program.





Forever Farmland: FLLT–Cornell Partnership Yields Two New Agricultural Easements

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to be stewards of the land, and keep it in agriculture in order to pass it on," they said.

Over on the west side of Seneca Lake, Eugene and Frances Wilson own a 158-acre farm along SR 14, just north of the hamlet of Dresden, in the heart of Finger Lakes wine country. After a stint in the U.S. Army, Eugene worked at his family's dairy farm in northwest New Jersey. In 1983, feeling that his farming future lay elsewhere than in the New Jersey fields rapidly turning over to housing development, he moved with his family north into Yates County.

Eugene and Frances ran a general cash crop farm until they retired from the operation in 2005. Wanting to see their land continue in agricultural use, they now lease to an organic farmer. They still hold out a possibility that their son, currently living out of state, will want to return to the farm some day, but they're happy with the current arrangement.

The Wilsons' participation in soil conservation practices, and a State program in environmental management, demonstrates their active, responsible land stewardship. The land is currently under transition to organic production, which should

further minimize runoff of sediments and farming-related chemicals into the lake, a mere quarter of a mile away.

With its gorgeous lake view and broad frontage along a major tourism route, the Wilsons, like the Gillettes on Keuka Lake, have been approached many times by potential buyers of an acre here or an acre there as a site for a new home.

"There's only so much lakefront and only so many lake view properties," said Peter Landre, former executive director of CCE in Yates County and former co-chair of the county's Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board. "A lot of the lake view properties are much more valuable in houses than even in vineyards. Along state routes and lake view lands, the development pressures are high, because farm owners can make a lot more money in the short term. You can't really blame them, because in some cases [selling a piece of land] is needed for their business."

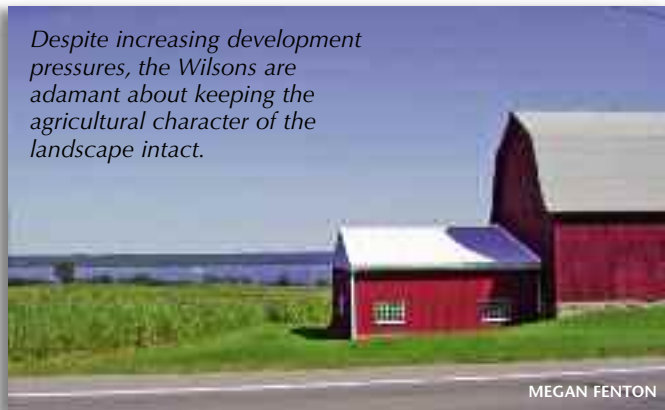
But Eugene Wilson is adamant about keeping the agricultural character of the landscape intact: "We saw what happened [in New Jersey] ... when farms seemed to disappear overnight. We put a lot into our farm, workwise, making improvements every year, and we don't want to see it all go to waste."

Money for farm protection projects like the Wilsons' and Gillettes' comes from the State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and is distributed through the FPP. In recent fiscal years, the legislature in Albany has reallocated a significant portion of these funds to fill budget holes elsewhere. Short of cash to pay farmers already enrolled in the program, the FPP has been forced to slow down the selection of new projects, while it works to catch up with the backlog.

David Haight, New York director of the American Farmland Trust, acknowledges that the current backlog of \$44 million owed to FPP-enrolled farmers is "way too high," but he is nevertheless pleased at the way it has been whittled down from its peak of \$70 million in 2009. The good news, he said, is that last year saw 19 new farmland easement agreements across the state.

New York's commitment to farmland protection has been reaffirmed recently, with the new budget approval of \$12 million for purchases of permanent conservation easements on prime agricultural lands like those of the Gillette and Wilson families.

—Eben McLane



Despite increasing development pressures, the Wilsons are adamant about keeping the agricultural character of the landscape intact.

Additional Protection for Cayuga Lake's Largest Tributary

One of the Land Trust's long-term goals is to ensure water quality throughout the Finger Lakes by identifying and preserving important watershed lands surrounding the streams and creeks that feed the region's lakes. One component of this mission is the Cayuga Watershed Critical Areas Project, which attempts to systematically assess land protection opportunities within the Cayuga Lake watershed.

As part of this ongoing effort, the Land Trust recently acquired a small parcel along Fall Creek, a critical water source and the largest stream in the Cayuga Lake watershed. The property, a triangular 1.5-acre parcel along Upper Creek Road in the Tompkins County town of Dryden, was acquired from the Anne E. Thomas Revocable Trust late in 2011.

Anne Thomas is an Ithaca native who spent much of her adult life as a school teacher in and around the Finger Lakes area. For many years, she lived in a home she built on family land overlooking Cayuga Lake. She is related to the Genung family, whose namesake Land Trust preserve in Freeville is just three miles upstream on Fall Creek from the Land Trust's new parcel.

"Anne treasures the woodlands, wildlife, and Native American history of the area, as well as her own family history and roots on the land," said Jennifer Tiffany, trustee of the Anne E. Thomas Revocable Trust. "Transferring this piece of land along Fall Creek to the Land Trust is one way of acting on [Anne's] values and aspirations."

Anne Thomas acquired the property at a tax auction with the specific intention of protecting it as green space, and the Land Trust's acquisition of the parcel will ensure that it remains that way. The property connects Upper Creek Road with an adjacent 12-acre tract of land along Fall Creek that was donated to the Land Trust by Elizabeth Henderson and Roger Beach in late 2011. Together, these two properties protect approximately 2,000 feet of frontage along the creek.

The acquisition of the Thomas parcel is the Land Trust's 15th land protection project along Fall Creek as it courses into Cayuga Lake.

—Jeff Tonole

SCENES

from Around Our Region...



BETSY DARLINGTON

Ellie Rosenberg and her daughter Irena (age 10) next to a tree with a porcupine den on the blue trail at the Steege Hill Nature Preserve in Chemung County



JIM GRANNEY

Sea Scouts Gordon Beck (left) and Evan Graney constructing steps up a steep slope at the Etna Preserve in Tompkins County

CHRIS OLNEY



One of two new benches at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve in Ontario County recently donated by an anonymous volunteer

Hikers on the Finger Lakes Trail as it winds its way through the Emerald Necklace

RICK LIGHTBODY



Our work is made possible through the generosity of over 1,900 members, volunteers, and supporters. Your commitment to the future of the Finger Lakes has enabled the Land Trust to protect more than 13,000 acres of our region's treasured forests, farmland, wetlands, gorges, and open space lands.

*Thank you to all of our members and supporters and, in particular, those who gave leadership gifts of \$100 or more in calendar year 2011.**

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Did you know that the Land Trust protected 975 acres of land in 2011?



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The Aldo Leopold Society

The Aldo Leopold Society was created in 2006 to recognize Land Trust members who make annual fund gifts of \$1,000 or more. These gifts provide broad-based support for the Land Trust's ongoing conservation work across the Finger Lakes.

The society is named after Aldo Leopold, the late ecologist, writer, and conservationist who is considered to be the "father" of wildlife management. His land ethic expanded the traditional meaning of community to one that includes "soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land."

Carl Leopold, Aldo's son, was the founding President of the Finger Lakes Land Trust and remained very active in the organization during his lifetime. Carl's commitment to the Land Trust continues through the support and dedication of his wife, Lynn.

We would like to thank members of the Aldo Leopold Society for their generosity and commitment to our mission.

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A CLOSER LOOK

The Diversity of Warblers – Spectacle and Science

Every spring, waves of living color unfurl across North America, as warblers return from the tropics to their breeding grounds. This phenomenon is one of the planet's greatest spectacles of biodiversity – and nowhere is it more impressive and accessible than in our own region. Of the continent's more than 55 warbler species, at least 33 occur annually around the Finger Lakes, including 23 that regularly breed here. In May, with effort and timing, one has a good chance of seeing mixed flocks comprising a dozen or more warbler species at once.

Their plumages, especially among adult males, span the spectrum from the brilliant red-orange throat of Blackburnian Warbler, to the pure yellow of Wilson's Warbler and many others, to the sky-blue of Cerulean Warbler, plus white and black and gray and brown, in all manner of combinations and patterns. Their songs also vary widely, from the low churring of the Mourning Warbler to the rhythmic squeaky wheel of the Black-and-White Warbler and the emphatic shee-SHEE-SHWACK!! of the American Redstart.

It's easy to marvel at warbler diversity. But how can we explain it? Why are warblers so diverse, and how did this diversity emerge?

At a basic level, the answer is evident. Warblers are diverse because different species prefer different breeding habitats. We can see such preferences readily by walking through the Land Trust's preserves. In the Roy H. Park Preserve, one first finds Yellow Warblers in the sunny edges by the parking lot. These give way to Prairie Warblers in the young spruce plantation. In the hemlock woods, Prairie Warblers are entirely absent, while Black-throated Green Warblers are everywhere. Finally, descending to Six Mile Creek, one finds a different warbler species, the Louisiana Waterthrush, alone on the rocks and eroded banks.

Cerulean Warblers like large tracts of tall deciduous trees near water, as at the High Vista Preserve. Pine Warblers almost exclusively inhabit pines, as at the Genung Nature Preserve. Worm-eating Warblers nest in the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve on the steep eastern slope of the upper Cayuga Inlet valley. Here, mature but stunted oak-hickory woods allow enough sunlight to support shrubs on the ground. These shrubs catch falling leaves from the trees, creating favored nesting sites for the warblers. This slope is the only known regular breeding location for this species in the Finger Lakes region.

Habitat partitioning among warblers reaches its extreme in the boreal forests. To a casual observer, it appears that Cape May, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped, and Black-throated Green Warblers have indistinguishable ways of life, all together in mature conifers. This observation would seem to contradict the rule of competitive exclusion, which states that multiple species cannot indefinitely occupy the same ecological niche. But in a seminal study in 1958, Robert MacArthur explained that these five species specialize in foraging in different parts of the trees – the Cape May at the crown, the Bay-breasted near the

trunk, the Yellow-rumped on the wide bottom branches, and so on.

Under the direction of Irby Lovette, the Fuller Evolutionary Biology Program at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has recently made further exciting discoveries about warbler evolution and speciation. By examining DNA sequences from all of the world's warbler species, Lovette's team determined which species are most closely related to each other, and in what ways they branched out from common ancestors. This work has led to a thorough redrawing of the taxonomic "tree of life" for warblers, including assignment of many species to new genera.

Remarkably, the work of Lovette's team sheds light on not only the *results* of warbler speciation, but also the very *process* of evolution. In a 2008 paper, graduate student Dan Rabosky and Lovette presented evidence from their molecular studies indicating that warbler speciation took place in a rapid burst several million years ago, when the group was young. Then as more and more species have become established, speciation has slowed down. This evidence is consistent with patterns observed in the fossil record for many taxa. The findings of Rabosky and Lovette support the theory that the trigger for speciation is ecological opportunity. Initially, abundant resources and absence of competitors create favorable conditions for new species to radiate forth from their ancestors. As available ecological niches become occupied and eventually saturated with species, however, the emergence of new diversity declines.

Enjoy the warbler show this spring. As you do, consider that their diversity is more than spectacle and song. It is the reflection, and indeed the result, of the variety and quality of preserved habitats. It is also a story – a dynamic tale of ecology and evolution, competition and coexistence, played out over the ages and now revealed by modern science.

—Mark Chao

Cerulean Warblers prefer large tracts of tall deciduous trees near water, as at the Land Trust's High Vista Preserve in Cortland County.



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Finger Lakes Land Trust

202 E. Court Street
Ithaca, New York 14850
Ph: 607-275-9487
Fax: 607-275-0037
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Please join us for the Land Trust's 23rd Annual Meeting and Celebration at The Inn on the Lake in Canandaigua. *See insert for details.*

PLEASE SEE INSERT FOR THE SCHEDULE OF OUR SPRING 2012 TALKS & TREKS SERIES AND VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS.

See our web site for maps and photos of the preserves.

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