



## Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program



# Whittier Farms grows into fifth generation of dairy farming with assist from APR program

SUTTON, MA – Sam had just turned 18 when her parents sat her down to help them make a decision that would determine the future of their family's dairy farm.

Sam was seated at her dining room table, alongside her teenage brother and younger sister in their farmhouse in Sutton. She listened as her father Wayne Whittier and mother Mary explained that they had uncovered major debts incurred by a previous generation of the family's farmers.

Furthermore, Wayne had recently received some big money offers from housing developers to sell their land, leaving the family in a quandary.

The Whittier Farm had been in continuous operation since 1945, when Sam's great grandfather Harold first bought two prized Holstein Dairy cows. What started with a simple farmstead, grew over the decades into one of the largest and last remaining dairy farms in the Sutton area.

Wayne wasn't going to make any major decision on the future

of the farm without consulting the potential fifth generation of farmers -- his children.

Aside from selling to the developers, there was one more option to help settle their debts. Wayne had heard from an associate about a program through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that pays farmers to permanently restrict their land for farming.

Wayne explained to his family that the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program offers to pay farmland owners the difference between the "fair market value" and the "agricultural value" of their farms in exchange for a permanent deed restriction to retain the land for farming. That would mean that the kids would have the opportunity to continue their way of life on the farm.

Wayne phoned up the APR program and told them that his family had made the decision to apply. The town of Sutton supported the Whittier's application, and later made a financial contribution to the APR, helping preserve the scenic farmland and its local food supply.



"The APR program more or less helped save our farm," says Wayne.

"The developers were throwing numbers that were big, that we thought we couldn't turn down. The APR program allowed us to bridge that gap and invest that payment into our business to make it sustainable," added Wayne.

Whittier Farms has grown since Sam's great grandfather Harold bought his first two Holsteins. Their livestock now includes 50 milking cows, 150 heifers, 20 beef steers, two ponies, and their infamous dogs.

The Whittiers now have 380 of their total 500 acres protected through APR. They are seeking to add an additional 79 acres through the APR program, which would make 97 percent of the land protected for farming in perpetuity.

Just off the APR property, the Whittiers operate The Milk Store, a year round farm store, featuring cheeses from Cabot Creamery Co-operative (of which Whittier is a member), tomahawk steaks, and fresh vegetables.

"It's full circle from growing to selling the final product," says Sam. "We have regular customers that are neighbors, and people who come in once a year for special events."

Now an experienced farmer and businessperson in her own right, Sam handles marketing for Whittier Farms and The Milk Store, coordinating educational tours and media relations -- including a profile with WCVB-TV's 'Chronicle'.

"There are many young people interested in farming land," says Sam. "But if we don't protect our farms, we just have houses, and every house has a family in it that needs to eat."

As strong proponents of sustainable energy, the Whittiers are proud to show off their 150kW solar array, which soaks up sunlight over an unproductive piece of land off the APR.

The solar powers 90 percent of the farm and help pays down the cost of the project though solar energy credits redeemed from the utility.

As Whittier has continued to expand and innovate, Wayne engages his field representative from the APR program, Michele Padula, with questions. "We have had great interactions with the APR team," says Wayne. "They help you find a way to mitigate issues and if you need something, you just pick up the phone and call."

As to what the future holds for Sam and the next generation at Whittier Farms?

"I would love to see this farm continue," says Wayne. "My kids have always been very close, whether its sitting on hay bales, or working in the store. We are giving them more and more responsibility and watching them grow and thrive with their own spouses and families now contributing."

Sam remembers a day when a hay baler on the farm broke down and her dad and brother had to fix it before storm clouds approached. Rather than eat dinner separately, the family ordered pizza and ate together in the fields by the baler.

"When I think about the impact of the APR program, I think about this moment," says Sam. "Because the APR program is so much more than development rights and money, it's an opportunity to preserve this way of life for farm families."



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