A 100+ YEAR LEGACY OF FARMING
Protecting 540 Acres of Farmland in St. Johnsville

“It gets in your blood, especially if you're born and raised on the farm.”

Sitting on his front porch on a July morning, Richard Triumpho was remembering his family’s long history of farming in the Mohawk Valley. Sparrows, goldfinches, and chickadees chattered outside, flying between red maple branches as Richard described the Triumpho family’s journey to St. Johnsville. “My family has been on this farm since 1917. My grandparents came from southern Italy, from a poor mountain-farming village above Salerno. Grandfather arrived in 1892, got a job on the New York Central Railroad, and in 1894 he sent for my grandmother and my father.

Dad and my grandfather worked together for 20 years as laborers on the railroad. During that time, Dad met and married my mother. By 1917, my father and grandfather saved enough money for a down payment on this farm. They bought the farm and became dairy farmers. After 10 more years, an adjoining farm came up for sale and they bought it. Grandfather moved his family there; Dad remained here with his young family, but Dad and Grandpa worked both farms together. Ever since then, we’ve owned and farmed this land.”

When asked about his vision for the farm’s future, Richard replied: “I want this land to always be devoted to agriculture. I’d like to see a farm family here.”

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Change is afoot this time of year. As we leave behind fall colors and head into winter landscapes, we reflect on the sunny days gone by and look toward the next season of growth. Perhaps no one is more aware of seasonal changes than the farmers who are attuned to the land they work on year-round. Here at MHLC, we are also focused on changes in the land. In this newsletter, we speak with Richard Triumpho, who has worked the rolling farmlands of the Mohawk Valley for his entire life. Richard is conserving his land with MHLC to preserve a legacy of family farming. Our hope is that through land conservation we can play an important part in maintaining the pastoral, agricultural landscapes which define upstate NY and the Mohawk Valley. The next time you drive or walk by a lovely farm scene, take a moment to look closer.

Consider that this scene is maintained by a farmer working among a myriad of obstacles. Agriculture is under tremendous pressure in New York. Farmers face huge challenges of declining prices, climate change, regulation, and the many costs of running a business. MHLC helps farmers by keeping land available for farming to continue. Without land to farm on, we face a future of distantly produced food, often from massive corporations. We have an alternative: buying locally sourced foods and protecting local farmland are small steps with far-reaching implications.

The Triumpho farmland is our last big land project in 2018: thanks to your support, we’ve conserved hundreds of acres this year, including the Fisher Boulevard Property! Read through this winter newsletter to learn more about our successes this year and our hopes for the future. As always, thank you for supporting your local land conservancy!

MHLC offered over twenty outdoor events in 2018, from our Summer Hike-a-thon to a new Reading the Landscape workshop with Ondatra Adventures. These events are a big part of our work in connecting people to nature, and we were thrilled to see many new faces! Images, from left to right: A young hiker inspects a salamander during our July 21st Hike-a-thon. Guests at Under the Stars, MHLC’s Fall Fundraiser, enjoy a ride on the historic carousel at the NYS Museum. Participants in our Reading the Landscape Workshop on a private tour of a conservation easement in Scotia, NY. Volunteers help clean out litter at MHLC’s Earth Day Clean-up in Cosymans.

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A Legacy of Farming, continued

Richard has lived on this land for most of his life. His parents had eleven children and put them all through college using the profits from the farm.

There was no electricity on the farm until the late 1930s. “My father milked our Holsteins by hand, and sold the milk in the village. He had big cans of milk on a wagon with horses and would drive to town every day. Folks would come out with their cans, and he’d dip the milk into them,” Richard explained. In 1936, during the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act. “When the power lines reached our area, life on the farm changed dramatically. We got inside plumbing for the house. Dad bought milking machines for the barn, and added more cows, since he no longer had to milk by hand. For the milk house, he installed an electrical refrigeration tank to cool the milk cans, replacing the old water trough, where floating blocks of ice formerly did the cooling.”

Richard’s father died in 1956, and his brother kept the farm running for four years. Richard quit his job as a surveyor for the New York State Highway Department and returned. “I couldn’t wait to take over the farm,” he said. “It gets in your blood, especially if you’re born and raised on the farm.”

In 2018, Richard still lives in the farm house and leases land to other dairy farmers for pasture. He has retired from dairy farming, but has a vision for the future of the farmland. In the late 1980s, developers began to buy up land around the Triumpho farm. A land speculator bought a struggling farm up the road and sold the land as a housing development. “There are now four houses on what was once farmland,” Richard said. “That’s what made me want to put an easement here. I didn’t want to have this farm broken up into lots or a shopping center. I could have sold maybe a dozen of lots over the years because the farm has a great deal of road frontage and is in quite a scenic area. If I did that, it would destroy the farm bit by bit!”

Richard began to research his options for protecting the land. He read about a man in the Finger Lakes who had worked with a local land trust to protect his farm. “I realized, if he could do it, maybe there was something in this area. I got on the internet and searched for conservation easements in New York. Eventually, I hit upon the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy. That’s when I called Mark King and he came to see me.”

MHLC Executive Director Mark King drove up to St. Johnsville and spoke with Richard about the farm and the possibility for protecting it. “He asked me what my sentiments were and I explained that I wanted to keep the farm from being developed after I die. I want to keep it preserved as agricultural land so someone in the future can continue farming it. I want this land to always be devoted to agriculture.” A few weeks later, Mark returned with Conservation Director Sarah Walsh to begin the process of documenting and protecting Richard’s land with a conservation easement.

Now, MHLC is raising funds to complete the easement, and we have raised over half of our $20,000 goal! These funds help us cover the legal, monitoring, and surveying costs associated with the farmland easement. Our job is to protect this land forever, and we plan for the future: year after year of monitoring, stewarding, and protecting this farmland.

We asked Richard how he would describe the easement process to another farmer. “It’s a satisfying and pain-free process. It’s straightforward. If any farmer feels the way that I feel about preserving their farm as agricultural land forever, approaching the Conservancy is probably the best step they would ever make. If you’re concerned about the future of your farm, the thing to do is to make a thorough inquiry now, before it’s too late.”

We also asked: “What do you think your father and grandfather would think of conserving the land with an easement today?”

Richard responded: “I think they’d be all for it, because they loved the land. They loved the farm.”

Read more about Richard and the ecological features of his farmland on our website. With your help, we can ensure these 540 acres remain open and farmable—forever!

Find out more:

mohawkhudson.org/triumpho-farmland

To donate:

Go online or fill out and mail this form to our office.

The effort to conserve the Triumpho family farmland has taken months of hard work on the part of many partners. The Triumpho farm project is supported with funding from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program (NYCAPP) and New York’s Environmental Protection Fund. The NYSCPP is administered by the Land Trust Alliance, in coordination with the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

According to the American Farmland Trust, 3 acres of farmland are lost every minute in the United States.

MHLC is fighting back: we’re on a mission to save farmland in our communities. Working landscapes are one of our priorities, and we believe that farmlands need to be conserved now and forever.

We’ve partnered with farmers across our service area to save local farmlands. You can help us give the gift of local, fresh food to future generations.

Protecting land requires many resources. Together, we can protect local farmland—forever.

Thank you!

Name: ____________________________
Address: ____________________________
Phone: ____________________________
Email: ____________________________

A check payable to MHLC for $ ________ is enclosed. I/we would like to give $ ________ via credit card.

Circle one: VISA   MC   AMEX   DISC

$ ________ Circle one: Single gift   Monthly   Quarterly

Card #  CVC #

Expiration  Authorization Signature

Mail this form and your payment to: Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy 425 Kenwood Ave, Delmar, NY 12054
or donate online at: mohawkhudson.org/triumpho-farmland

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The Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy has received a generous year-end challenge from an anonymous donor. If we raise $55,000 in donations by December 31st, the donor will match it dollar-for-dollar.

This doubles the impact of your gift!

This holiday season, please give the gift of local, healthy lands—and foods—to future generations. Please send your gift today. We are counting on you for your support.

Right now, MHLC is poised to stem the loss of natural lands for residents of the Capital Region. But we need your help. Our work is never done—as soon as we complete one conservation project, two new ones take its place. And this work is urgent—once these green spaces are gone, they’re gone forever.

It takes many hands to conserve the Capital Region’s natural lands and heritage—please lend a hand by contributing what you can, and by telling your friends to do the same. Every dollar matters. Every dollar makes a difference—today and for future generations.

Saving Land, Saving Home

Today, across the Capital Region, natural lands and open spaces are being lost... for forever.

But the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy is fighting back! We have a vision of connecting the Catskill Mountains to the Adirondacks through a corridor of protected land, forever preserving the character of our region, protecting our food and water sources, fighting climate change, and providing green spaces for future generations.

We currently have projects under way that could result in the permanent conservation of thousands of acres of working and natural lands in Albany, Schenectady, and Montgomery counties over the next few months. These landscapes represent a broad swath of properties resulting from our efforts to preserve working farmlands, wildlife habitat and stunning vistas, and the last remaining open spaces in the highly developed areas of our region.

We need you

We are counting on you for your support.

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Thank you!

Mail this form and your payment to: Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy 425 Kenwood Ave, Delmar, NY 12054
or donate online at: mohawkhudson.org/donate-now
Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy
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VIEWPOINTS

540 Acres of Farmland in the Mohawk Valley
Art, Nature, and a Sense of Place
Fisher Boulevard and More:
The Lands We Have Saved (So Far!) in 2018

A winter view of the Helderbergs from the Bennett Hill Preserve.