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Local Farming In Stonington And Connecticut

"We Are What We Eat"

By [Bree Shirvell](#) | [Email the author](#) | April 21, 2011

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Nestled along Al Harvey Road in Stonington is a farm that doubles as an educational program. Full of fresh food, fun and learning, Stonington's sustainable [Terra Firma Farm](#) is one of a number of farms in Connecticut producing local food in a sustainable way.

On Friday, April 22, the U.S will celebrate the 41st Earth Day—a day designed to raise our awareness of the environment that surrounds us. This is something that Terra Firma farmers Brianne Casadei and Ethan Grimes have been doing in Stonington for the past seven years.

They established the farm at a time when the local food movement was just beginning to grow. Since then the local food movement has taken off—the term *locavore*, established in 2005, has become common, farmers markets have grown 115 percent from 1999 to 2010 according to the Working Farms Alliance, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, where people pay a certain amount for a weekly share of fresh produce, have grown from an estimated 10 farms in 1999 to 102 farms in 2007, the last year numbers are available for from the USDA.

But while the local farm movement has been growing, farmland has disappeared.

Founded in 2002, Connecticut Farmland Trust is a non-profit organization in Connecticut that works to raise awareness about local farms and also to protect farmland.

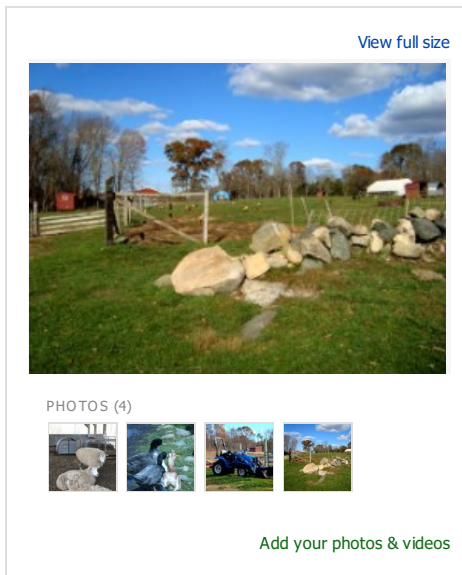
According to Henry Talmage, former Executive Director of Connecticut Farmland Trust, who was recently named Executive Director of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, Connecticut loses between 7,000 and 9,000 acres of farmland each year and the trend is towards losing significant amounts of land.

"A great deal is unprotected. Farms go out of business some farms are bought by other farms and consolidated," Talmage said.

Still, in the past five years, Talmage said more people have become aware of the importance of saving farmland and have celebrated the land from the perspective of the food.

"Connecticut agriculture has a lot of diversity. We have specialty cheese farms, dairies, whole bunch of produce, every farm is different," Talmage said.

Terra Firma is part of that diversity. The Stonington farm isn't your typical working farm or CSA program though. It adds educational activities, such as this week's April Vacation Week, where children can attend either the entire week or a day program, such as today's *All about Rabbits & Bunnies* where campers visit the new bunnies and dogs and learn about the rabbits and bunnies.



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Casadei credits the combination of the working farm with its educational side for the success the farm saying she didn't think one would survive without the other in this area.

The idea to combine a farm with educational programs came in part from how much she learned working on a farm while she was in college.

"I learned so much, I wanted to give that opportunity to others," Casadei said.

Casadei said she hopes the farm and others like it offer their communities the opportunity to learn about how farms raise animals and to connect with the people who grow their food.

"We are what we eat," Casadei said, adding it seems like everyone is eating bad things.

In addition to their educational programs the farm was recently Animal Welfare Approved making it one of one of only six in the state. And it is one of three in southeastern Connecticut. Cedar Meadow Farm in Ledyard and JW Beef in Stonington are the other two.

Animal Welfare Approved, founded in 2006, audits and certifies family farms that raise and slaughter and produce animal products in humane ways. According to their website Animal Welfare Approved requires animals to be raised on pasture or range, prohibiting dual production, awarding approval only to family farmers, charging no fees to participating farms, and incorporating standards for high welfare of farming. In 2008 the first farm in Connecticut, Stuart Family, became Animal Welfare Approved.

"We don't hide what happens to the animals," Casadei said of letting the children know what happens on the farm. "We say we hope they have the best possible life with the exception of 1 bad hour."

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