

Conserving the Gross Farm

East Street, Petersham

The former Fred and Ethel Gross property is approximately 235 acres on East Street in Petersham, at the southeast corner of Quaker Drive and East Street intersection. The property includes a 4,000 sq. ft. barn near the road intersection. The East Quabbin Land Trust and Town of Petersham are engaged in conserving the property because the land includes many natural, historic and aesthetic resources, such as:

- The land sits in the designated agricultural corridor in Petersham and the 30 acres of fields are scattered along East Street creating scenic views for passersby;
- Portions of Cardinal Brook and Moccasin Brook bisect the land as they flow into the Swift River and Quabbin Reservoir. Further downstream Moccasin Brook supports rare aquatic species, increasing the importance of high-quality water for wildlife and drinking water;
- The wooded slopes of Chimney Hill and adjoining wetlands are known to be an important wildlife corridor; and
- The fields include prime agricultural or statewide important soils that are excellent for crops or pasture.

The Town of Petersham has the opportunity to conserve this important property to benefit the community. **At fall Town Meeting there will be a request to the citizens of Petersham to support the purchase of a conservation restriction on the 235 acres, which will include the ability to build a single-family home in the future.**

The East Quabbin Land Trust purchased the property from the Gross family to give the Town of Petersham the opportunity to conserve the land. Important steps in the conservation process include:

- Apply and receive (we hope) a Commonwealth of Mass. L.A.N.D. grant to provide 64% of the purchase expenses.
- Raise additional funds from individuals, businesses and foundations to cover 36% of the purchase expenses.
- Confirm the Town's interest in conservation of the land and an active farmstead through support at Town Meeting to appropriate the funds;
- Distribute a Request for Proposals to purchase the property for use as an actively managed farm and identify the future farmers or farm family for the land.

At the end of this process, (likely by June 2016) the Town of Petersham Conservation Commission will hold the conservation restriction on the land and a new farm family will own the property. The future owner's long-term land stewardship goals must match the values proscribed in the conservation restriction. With a conservation restriction in place, the property value becomes affordable and the private owners will continue to pay annual property taxes. The conservation restriction will allow hunting at the owner's discretion and the ability for the Town to collaborate on walking trails to allow public access.

The warrant article does not obligate the Town of Petersham to purchase the conservation restriction until the funding is available. The Town of Petersham's appraisal determined the conservation restriction as \$375,000. Costs to complete the acquisition are estimated at \$15,000.

The East Quabbin Land Trust is working with the Petersham Conservation Commission and Selectboard to facilitate conservation of this critical property. Private contributions made to the East Quabbin Land Trust for the Gross Farm Conservation Initiative will directly support purchase of the conservation restriction.

The mission of the East Quabbin Land Trust is to foster the sustainable use of our natural and historic resources for the benefit of all generations through the conservation and stewardship of the farmlands, woodlands and waters in our region of Massachusetts. All contributions to the East Quabbin Land Trust are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.