

Rye's historic Goss Farm growing a new future

'Old-timers' will grow potatoes in bid for grant

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RYE — A few locals are ready to roll up their sleeves and dig down into the soil in an effort to revive the Goss Farm on Harbor Road.

The town purchased the nearly 10-acre property for \$1.3 million from members of the Goss family in November and placed a conservation easement on the parcel in the hands of the Rockingham County Conservation District. Since then, Conservation Commission members and other locals have worked fervently on restoring the site, which has not been managed in more than 20 years.

The purchase was in part supported by a \$637,000 Farm and Ranchland Protection Program grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. A selectmen-approved land acquisition fund paid the remainder, according to Jim Raynes, chairman of the town's Conservation Commission.

Raynes said he and a few other "old-timers" are looking forward to this summer, when they hope to grow enough potatoes to raise \$1,000 as part of a requirement for a "high tunnel" greenhouse grant through the NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The aim is to have the farmland ready for a community garden by 2012, Raynes said.

According to the NRCS Web site, the grant provides financial assistance for a maximum of 2,178 square feet of greenhouse per agricultural operation. To be eligible, growers must have cropland, control of the land and produced or sold at least \$1,000 of agricultural products in the past year. Seasonal high tunnels help farmers increase the availability of locally grown produce, and officials estimate they would get several additional months of growing out of the greenhouse.

Raynes talked with excitement about the farm's future prospects. Those involved envision having trails open for use, plots of land available for schools and community members to grow what they would like and a portion reserved for a Community Supported Agriculture farmer.

According to the USDA, Community Supported Agriculture consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production.

"It's going to be a beautiful place," Raynes said. "It's going to be good farmland for gardening and things like that. I don't know about livestock — chickens maybe. We might even be able to raise some beef and pork, who knows?"

There is much work to be done before the town has a bustling, working farm on Harbor Road. The most immediate necessity is to remove invasive species from the property. A major one is bittersweet, a vine that has plagued the farm's apple trees.

"The pile of invasives we get out of the tree are as tall as the tree," said Sally King, chairwoman of the Goss Farm Subcommittee. "We don't know how many apple trees we'll be able to save."

Tracy Degnan, a Rye resident and grant writer at the Rockingham County Conservation District, has been working with the town to secure grant funding for farm projects. One such grant is a \$25,000 Moose Plate Grant for site work and invasive species removal. The grant has already been awarded but still requires approval from the governor and Executive Council, Degnan said.

A far more extensive project is renovating the barn, which was built in the mid-1800s and is the only structure still standing on the site.

A fire leveled the Goss House farmhouse in March 2009. Officials estimate repairing the dilapidated barn is a three-year process.

Degnan said the conservation district applied for and received notification that the barn is eligible for listing on the state Register of Historic Places. That designation allows them to apply for another conservation license plate grant for barn rehabilitation, she said.

The town was also awarded a barn assessment/survey grant by the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, and recently Bill Coleman, a barn contractor from Pelham who calls himself the "barn whisperer," evaluated the site.

Coleman said the barn needs a new roof and timber work, as well as repairs to the underpinnings, which must be dug deeper because frost heaves have pushed them out.

According to Coleman, the barn was originally an English model that in the late 19th century was converted into a Yankee barn with large doors on the gable ends. He said that in his opinion, the barn qualifies for the historic register since it likely represents one of the last remaining late English-style barns.

"It represents a building that has evolved from a family farm to a commercial endeavor," he said. "When it was first built, it was a hay barn and they kept a couple of cows in there, and a horse, and their wagons, and that helped support the family."

Degnan said they await Coleman's full report, which will detail necessary work and cost estimates. Repairs are likely going to be more expensive than originally thought because they may have to restore the old asphalt shingle roof rather than replace it with a metal roof, officials said.

Degnan said they likely will tarp the roof for the first year and focus on ground-level repairs, which could still cost up to \$16,000 in the first year. The conservation grant would provide \$10,000 for the endeavor, but there is "severe competition" for the funds, she said.

"It's great for the environment; it's great for the kids," she said. "It's an awesome project. It's a conservation property that is leaving a legacy that is unbelievable."

Farm aid

For more information on Goss Farm, e-mail thegossfarm@gmail.com or see the Conservation Commission page on the town Web site, www.town.rye.nh.us.

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