



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Murphy announces funding to permanently preserve Stuart's Fruit Farm

TERRENCE MURPHY May 3, 2016



GRANITE SPRINGS, NY - State Senator Terrence Murphy today announced the award of a \$1.84 million dollar grant to preserve Stuart's Fruit Farm in Somers from future development and maintain the land's use for agricultural purposes. This unprecedented commitment comes from the state's first-ever regionally targeted farmland conservation grant program, the Hudson Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program, which Murphy helped create last year.



"From the days of my

childhood, I can remember visits to Stuart's farm with my four siblings," Senator Murphy said "It has been a part of our community for generations. This has been a decade in the making and I am proud to partner with the Westchester Land Trust and the Town of Somers

to finally deliver this farmland protection grant. The preservation of Stuart's Farm was of the highest priority and we now have ensured it will remain as one of the most important agricultural, environmental and economic resources in the lower Hudson Valley."

Without protection, Stuart's Fruit Farm could have been converted to a subdivision of more than 50 houses, putting pressure on the schools, infrastructure, and watershed. A conservation easement on the farm will be now held by the Westchester Land Trust, ensuring that the land stays available for agricultural use in perpetuity, and its conservation values are preserved forever.

The cost of this project is estimated to be approximately \$3.0 million, with an additional funding coming from acquisition funds of the Westchester Land Trust (\$25,000), Somers Land Trust (\$3,000) and Scenic Hudson (\$370,000), plus \$400,000 from Westchester County, and \$300,000 from the town of Somers. Senator Murphy worked closely to establish a public-private consortium with representatives of the Westchester Land Trust, the Westchester County Soil and Water Conservation District and Somers Supervisor Rick Morrissey to see the project to fruition.

Lori Ensinger, president of the Westchester Land Trust said, "Farms remain an important part of the landscape and economy of Westchester County and one of the features that make our region so special. The selection of Stuart's Fruit Farm for a 2016 Hudson Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program Award enables the Westchester Land Trust (WLT) and its partners to work with the Stuart family to permanently conserve a threatened resource. First and foremost we recognize Bob Stuart, Mary Lee Stuart Gerlach and the entire Stuart family for their commitment to responsible husbandry of their land and its protection forever. We also thank our project partners - Westchester County, the Town of Somers, Scenic Hudson, and the Somers Land Trust, who have all made preserving this historic farm

a priority. This grant award from NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets is recognition of the importance of this farm to the broader community and deeply gratifying to us all."

Stuart's Fruit Farm is the oldest working farm in Westchester County and holds great historic and ecological significance. The funding will facilitate the permanent protection of the 172 acre farm and will be used to purchase the development rights to the farm, thereby safeguarding its continued agricultural viability into the future.

The 2014 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan names the farm as a high priority farmland protection project due to the confluence of public benefits including the protection of critically important watershed identified by NYC DEP, and its proximity to other working farmland as well as crucial protected wildlife corridors.

According to the Hudson Valley Foodshed Conservation Plan produced by Scenic Hudson, the Farm is "highest priority" for protection of rapidly dwindling agricultural land in the lower Hudson Valley to maintaining access to secure, local fresh food for Westchester and the greater New York City metropolitan area.

Stuart's Fruit Farm welcomes more than 20,000 visitors each year from Westchester County and beyond, who pick their own fruit, purchase produce at the Farm and visit nearby restaurants and local businesses. The farm also serves as an experiential educational destination for thousands of school children who visit the farm to learn about agriculture, local history, and the importance of local food production.

The funding which Senator Murphy helped secure from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets comes from the new Hudson Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program, which provides funding to local partners, such as municipalities, counties, soil and

water conservation districts and land trusts, to help landowners in the region protect viable farmland from being used for purposes other than farming. It will protect more than 5,600 acres of active farmland.

State Agriculture Commissioner Richard A. Ball said, "Preserving farmland in the Hudson Valley is particularly important because of its proximity to the world's largest market place, New York City. This grant program is essential to ensuring food security for the millions of people living there. It also builds on the success of the Farmland Implementation Grant Program which has already helped safeguard thousands of acres of agricultural land across the state."