

Ohio Conservation Farmer Works to Sustain His Community

A simple motto guides Larry Klco's decisions for his Lake County, Ohio pick-your-own farm: "If you want to buy it, I'll grow it." That concept has helped Klco, a first-generation farmer, build a successful specialty operation that delivers fresh, locally grown fruit and vegetables to 125 farmers' markets in eastern Ohio each summer.

The range of crops is amazing. Last summer, Klco and his family produced six types of tomatoes, six melon varieties, 10 different squashes, cucumbers, carrots, onions, cauliflower, cabbages, sweet corn, Asian greens, and more. He recently began growing herbs, a small orchard, and thornless blackberries on a specially designed trellis to make picking easier for consumers.

When local Croatians complained they couldn't find a specific pepper that is popular in their homeland, Klco went through the seed books with them to find the right pepper. This year, he will raise 5,000 of his "sweet Croatian peppers" because of consumer demand.

Customers influence more than Klco's choice of crops. When he began thinking about preserving the 30 acres he owns, his number one question was how customers would react if he accepted tax dollars for preserving his farm.

According to an American Farmland Trust study, Lake County, just east of Cleveland, is one of the highest risk areas in the nation for loss of farmland to urban sprawl.

As Klco looked into the issue, he found a survey that showed local people wanted their community to remain rural. He developed an application to the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program that factored in the benefits to area residents of his pick-your-own and farmers' market operations. He persuaded two farming neighbors to join him in preserving a combined 100 acres.

Ultimately, he convinced village officials that the cost of matching federal conservation funds to save the land would be far less than the cost of supplying local services if the land were to be developed. Klco ultimately qualified for the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program funds—and found that his customers were delighted.

Type of Operation: vegetables, herbs and berries

Land in Agriculture: 30 acres

Greatest Challenge: Making farming profitable enough to ensure a future for agriculture

Program Participation: Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Current Unmet Need: Capital gains exemption for farmers who practice conservation techniques



TINA KLCO

"I can't tell you how many people stopped to thank me for preserving the farm."

— LARRY KLCO

"I can't tell you how many people stopped to thank me for preserving the farm," he says. His only regret about protecting his land came this year when he sat down with his tax advisor.

"I don't think a landowner who preserves his property should pay taxes on that payment [for preservation] because of what they're giving up. We don't get the one-time capital gains exemption. I think that's wrong, and it should be changed. I know that holds other farmers back from preserving their land."

Klco, however, is still glad he preserved the farm, and he has more ideas to serve his customers, especially with education about cooking their purchases. He is optimistic about the future, citing the growing public interest in eating fresh produce, new research on health benefits, and the redesign of USDA's food pyramid to emphasize fruits and vegetables.

"I'm confident that specialized agriculture has a very bright future, but it's very high management, very hard work, and very high risk. My concern is whether we can make it profitable enough for the next generation to come back to the farm."

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Established in 1980, American Farmland Trust is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting our nation's farm and ranch land. AFT's mission is to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment. AFT works at the federal level to effect farm policies and with states and local communities to enact strategies to save their land.

Why Save Farmland?

We rely on our best farmland to feed America and much of the world. In addition,

- Farmland provides more than 70 percent of the habitat for America's wildlife. Developing that land puts America's biological diversity at risk.
- America is becoming more dependent on imported food, some from countries with less stringent environmental and safety regulations.
- When farms and ranches are pushed off the most fertile soil, farmers are forced to rely more on fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation to do what the best land does naturally. Farmland loss has visible environmental impacts.
- The cost of basic services (schools, fire, police and maintenance) skyrockets in communities across the country that sacrifice farmland to uncontrolled growth. Scattered development increases taxes and makes services more costly.
- Agriculture provides millions of jobs both on the land and in secondary services. Farmland protection is an investment in the backbone of our economy.

We're Saving America's Farmland—where the need is most urgent and where success can have the greatest impact through a three-pronged strategy of:

- Protecting the Best Land by advancing conservation easement programs that allow farmers and ranchers to permanently keep their land in agriculture.
- Planning for Agriculture by developing and implementing sound community planning that achieves a balance between sensible growth and thriving agriculture.
- Keeping the Land Healthy by fostering the best farming practices and guiding farmers and ranchers to adopt these practices.

2007 Farm Policy Campaign

Convinced that strong federal farm policy is the key to saving farm and ranch land, AFT has launched an aggressive campaign aimed at policy change for the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill. We are working to transform U.S. farm policy to a system that links financial support to environmental stewardship and rewards farmers for producing healthy food, clean air and water, wildlife habitat and open space. A diverse and growing consensus is emerging among farmers, ranchers, conservationists, fiscal conservatives and public interest groups to create a new system. Our work on farm policy is rooted in our mission to protect farmland, ensure a future for agriculture and improve stewardship.

