

## 2023 SAWC Essay Contest

### Treasure Our Lands

Hello everyone, my name is Sandra Carlson and I'm not sure if I've ever written an essay before. If I have, it was more than 55 years ago in high school. I was very lucky to grow up on a 50 acre apple orchard in central Massachusetts and so, my essay will be about farming and land use.

The name of my family's farm was Ramshorn Orchards. It was an established orchard comprised of 15 acres of MacIntosh, Cortland and Delicious trees, 20 acres of older MacIntosh trees and 15 acres of Baldwin, Gravenstein and peach trees.

We were surrounded by 4 dairy farms and one vegetable farm with lots of farm animals. All were self-sufficient, carefully planted, maintained, harvested and with the farmers always relying on the agricultural extension service for guidance. Most of the farmers were avid fishermen and hunters, their bounty never taken for granted and which better enabled them to feed their families. Two of the dairy farms were retired years ago, one sold to a developer, the other put into a Land Trust.

I worry that so many of these small to moderate farms are disappearing from our landscape across much of New England and beyond. After nearly 20 years, with tears in their eyes, my dad and uncle were forced to sell our beautiful orchard, sadly to a developer because no one else wanted to farm it.

There had been no market for our apples because shiploads of apples and fruits from other countries flooded the east coast markets. We ended up selling most of our entire crop to a cider mill at \$2.00 a bushel. We were out of business in two weeks flat. Similar scenarios have happened to many, many farmers. The dairy industry very hard hit by many other factors

As our population continues to grow, we have less and less land on which to grow food to feed them all. And with fewer people wanting to learn how to become farmers, I'm concerned that we could one day face a food insecurity crisis. Related to this thought is that the 'damp lands', the meadows, bogs, marshes, ponds and low land wood lots with brooks and streams running through them, are being dried out and bulldozed to make room for more houses.

The wildlife that the farmers' land had protected must find other lands. The beavers have less lands to maintain and live on and so too, must move on. It's likely that without damp and swamp lands, flooding is more likely to occur in these areas. The damp and swamp lands would have held the heavy rains' runoff until the water was able to naturally seep underground and fill the aquifers below.

All across our country towns and cities need to have and enforce strict land use rules to protect us all. Drought, flooding and '100 year' storms have become common. We think of ourselves as living in the 'land of plenty'. This thought will only continue if we all help to maintain it. Due to drought, this past year's wheat crop was down a few percentage points. The wheat looks lovely in the vast fields but, not every pod had a wheat kernel in it.

In closing, we can all brighten Earth's future. We can install solar panels, collect rain water, and help keep the ground damp by using 'pretty mulch' in some areas and spreading grass clippings or leaves in areas not needing to be pretty, allowing grass clippings to settle in the lawn will help keep the ground moist thereby improving the lawn and reducing the need for irrigation.

I'd like us all to be mindful and supportive of the beautiful world we live in.

Thank you,

Sandra Carlson

Note: Research, Scientific American Magazine

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