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'Working the Land' Documentary Released on DVD

Multimedia project explores past, present and future of Connecticut agriculture

Moodus, Conn. (January 22, 2007) – We were once all farmers. Today, hardly any of us are. Yet, Connecticut farmers and the farming way of life helped to build the state, give sustenance to millions, and provide residents with a special sense of place.

That history and an intriguing look at the state of Connecticut farming today are the focus of *Working the Land: The Story of Connecticut Agriculture*, a new documentary by three-time Emmy Award winning documentary filmmaker and Moodus resident Ken Simon. Acclaimed actor and Connecticut resident Sam Waterston narrates the 90-minute program.

Working the Land has been released on DVD, prior to its spring broadcast. The DVD is available statewide at food stores and other outlets, and on the Web at www.WorkingTheLand.com.

Despite Connecticut's rich agricultural tradition, many observers say that the future of agriculture in the state is at great risk. As noted in the program, farming in Connecticut is much diminished from what it once was, a situation that is due to many factors, including changing lifestyles and a food system that favors regional commodity specialization, factory-farming, and the convenience of supermarket shopping. The number of farms and farmers in the state has plummeted. In 1944, there were 22,000 farms in the state. Today, there are 4,200.

Most worrisome to many observers is that in recent years, Connecticut lost the highest percentage of its farmland to development than any other state in the country. That trend shows no signs of slowing down.

Yet, despite these discouraging statistics, agriculture is still a significant part of the state economy, generating about \$2 billion annually with about 50,000 people working in the sector. There are still successful egg, dairy, vegetable, fruit and tobacco farms in Connecticut, some farmed by the same family going back generations. They are joined by a new breed of farmer -- from small-scale part-timer to multi-million-dollar operator -- who pursues innovative ways to grow, harvest, make and sell an increasingly diverse array of farm products.

In addition to more traditional farm products, today's Connecticut farmer might provide consumers with plants, organic produce, gourmet vegetables, wine, cheese, grass-fed lamb or beef. Direct marketing and agri-tourism are two other fast-growing aspects of state agriculture. The documentary depicts these trends as well as how economic and social factors affect state agriculture and what role public policy plays in its future prospects.

More than 30 Connecticut farms and the farmers who work them are featured throughout *Working the Land*. In addition to interviews with state farmers, another 21 agriculture experts, policymakers and historians were interviewed for the program.

Nearly 1,000 archival photographs from around the state were acquired during production for use in both the program and its companion website. The best of these evocative photos and old film have been combined with newly shot footage of state farmers, farming procedures and agricultural landscapes to bring the story to life.

The DVD release of *Working the Land* is the first stage of an unprecedented multimedia project focusing on Connecticut agriculture and its critical role in the state's economy, food system, and culture. The project's website – www.WorkingTheLand.com – is being positioned as the major consumer portal for state farming, with dozens of full-length interview transcripts, extensive links to state farms and farm products, an archival photographic database, exclusive video footage, and numerous interactive features. The program Website is online now, with new material regularly uploaded. It will officially “go live” in February. The documentary will be broadcast in early spring on Connecticut Public Television.

Working the Land is produced, written and directed by Ken Simon, executive producer at SimonPure Productions in Moodus. The program is Simon's 21st program to explore Connecticut history, public policy and culture.

Working the Land is a co-production of SimonPure Productions and Connecticut Humanities Council. Lead underwriting for the project was provided by Connecticut Farmland Trust, with major underwriting from Connecticut Farm Bureau and Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

Production Credits

Producer, Writer, Director: Kenneth A. Simon
Executive Producers: Kenneth A. Simon (SimonPure Productions)
Bruce Fraser (CT Humanities Council)
Narrator: Sam Waterston
Original Score: Steve Evans