

2020 Cooperator of the Year

Wingate Farm of Hinsdale, NH

Each year the Cheshire County Conservation District honors an individual, business or organization with the “Cooperator of the Year” award. This is done to celebrate the efforts the recipient has undertaken to steward the natural resources on their land in cooperation with the Conservation District and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This year we are happy to announce Wingate Farm of Hinsdale, NH as our 2020 Cooperator of the Year.

Wingate Farm is owned and operated by Olivia Pettengill and Susie Parke-Sutherland. They have been operating the diversified farm business and stewarding their 60 acre property since 2014. They graze 1,000 hens on 14 acres of pasture, have 1.5 acres of vegetable production, and 1 acre in pollinator habitat.

Olivia grew up on the land which is now home to Wingate Farm and has spent her whole life gardening and farming in the Connecticut River Valley. She has a deep family connection and strong commitment to her ancestral land and local community. She wants to ensure this land is stewarded for future generations to enjoy.

Susie grew up in central Missouri spending all her free time outdoors. She had no exposure to agriculture in her early years but started farming in New England in 2007 upon her college graduation. She has been farming ever since and wouldn't want to see it any other way. Susie takes



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inspiration from her role on the farm as a mentor to youth who are looking for a safe and joyful space to explore who they are, their role in agriculture, and the natural world. Agriculture is often a male dominated field and she and Olivia appreciate the opportunity to work with young women to empower them to discover their interests and passion.

Both Olivia and Susie share a deep passion for hard work, being in nature, and continually seeking improvement in their farm systems. Their dedication has been fruitful in creating a business that supports their livelihood and offers a good quality of life.

Their primary product is pasture raised eggs that they produce through intensely managed rotational grazing. The hens are moved daily to optimize pasture and animal health and vigor. They also sell vegetables and flowers at Farmers Markets in Brattleboro, Vermont and Northampton, Massachusetts. Their main egg market channel is community supported agriculture (CSA) shares. These are sold through partnerships they have built with produce CSA farms in the region. When the COVID 19 pandemic hit in 2020 they felt it was critical to find a safe way for the community to access their farm food. Olivia and Susie were quick to adapt and innovate by creating a “Fresh Food Pick-up” option for retail customers interested in ordering online and getting their products delivered to one of four drop locations. This has become a great way for customers to feel secure in their food purchasing and to connect directly to the farm.

Caring for the natural resource base of their property is the foundation for their work. In August of 2015, the Pettengill Family, working with Mount Grace Land Trust, placed a Conservation Easement on the farm. This will ensure that the property is forever protected from development and will remain farmland in perpetuity. This was done with the USDA NRCS Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. Wingate Farm has also worked with USDA NRCS through their Environmental Quality Incentives Program to improve soil health, water quality, efficiency of water usage, and wildlife habitat through implementing the following practices: High Tunnels, Irrigation, Wells, Cornell Soil Health Assessments, Cover Crops, Crop Rotation, Mulching, Pollinator Plantings, Forest Management Plan, Stream Habitat Improvement & Management, Tree & Shrub planting, Riparian Forest Buffer, and Critical Area Planting.

Olivia and Susie are committed to improving their pastures for the health of

their birds and the future of their farm. To improve the forage quality and quantity they use manure and wood ash on the fields and work to diversify their pastures through the use of a no-till seed drill. They are committed to using reduced tillage practices in their vegetable operation to retain and build soil organic matter.

“Susie and Olivia show a level of dedication to stewardship, quality, and animal welfare that go well beyond best practices. They are examples of how to run a small diversified farm that just about anyone could learn from and be inspired by. They are keen students of agriculture, and are always looking for ways to do a better job,” shared Bill Fosher, Cheshire County Conservation District Board Member.

When not found working on the farm there is a good chance you will find Olivia and Susie cooking, enjoying, and sharing the bounty of their harvest. Together their hard work and stewardship has created a safe and supportive place for youth, a thriving agricultural business on healthy pastures, and a place that will continue as productive agriculture for generations to come. It is with great honor that the Cheshire County Conservation District presents Wingate Farm with the 2020 Cooperator of the Year Award!

