

South Acton Neighborhood Perspective

Submitted to the CRC by Clare Siska, July 18, 2011

I asked for this time so that I could speak to the question of *access* to the farm from the perspective of those who are in proximity to it year round.

When considering how safe it is to use this land, I ask that you consider not only the toxicology studies presented, but the rate or frequency of application of those substances. For example, according to the application logs submitted for CY 2010, the field directly behind my house was treated only once, and in that entire growing season, fields were treated on a total of only 4 days.

Please consider also the flora and fauna that are observed on the land on an ongoing basis: Deer, beaver, ducks, geese, herons, fox, possums, woodchucks, owls and hawks are just a sampling of the wildlife that is observed there year round and are a testament to the strength of its ecosystem. In the spring of this year, 42 species of birds were recorded on the Caouette land in 90 minutes, more than on any other Acton conservation land this year. The insect population is another indication of a healthy ecosystem, so this past Saturday, at the height of the growing season, I conducted an informal insect survey in the edge habitat of the farm and observed the following:

- At least 10 different species of dragonflies. The presence of dragonflies alone indicates a rich and lively habitat
- Butterflies mating – another indication of a strong ecosystem
- Bee flies
- Bumblebees
- Common Moths
- Grasshoppers
- Hoverflies
- Lacewings
- Leafhoppers
- Milkweed beetles
- Mud daubers
- Parasitic wasps
- Pollinating beetles
- Scarab beetles
- Stinkbugs
- Tiger moths
- Vespid wasps
- Weevils and
- Wild cockroach

This is just a partial sampling of data that illustrates the ongoing health of the land at the same time that agricultural activities are taking place there, and it suggests that current farming methods are being employed in a conscientious way.

At the public input meeting, on resident suggested that pesticides are causing algae blooms on the pond – but algae blooms can just as easily be the result of natural spring warming, of naturally dying aquatic vegetation, or of fertilizer from geese which frequent the area.

I've reviewed the feedback this committee has received to date and found this:

The committee itself has received 6 emails from the public plus 2 from the farmers. I, personally, received 6 emails that I forwarded to the committee. 14 individuals spoke at the public input meeting; an unknown number submitted input on cards. It's difficult to account for the cards because only 3 names were associated with them, but from the feedback of approximately 30 known individuals, the majority were concerned with being *allowed* to do specific activities, among them hiking, horseback riding, fishing, cross country skiing, dog walking and of course, farming. The Acton Parent Involvement Program would like to “increase local knowledge about native and invasive species” and “are interested in

gardening and agriculture-related programs,” including school field trips and after school classes. No one communicating with the committee requested limits on access.

South Acton residents know this land intimately. With the generosity of the Simeone family, we hike, snowshoe, and cross country ski; we walk our dogs, ride horses, bird watch, experience the change of seasons and the miracle of the land giving back to us in the form of food, nurtured by the farmers. It is that spirit of appreciation that inspired us to work hard to make sure the land was preserved so that those same experiences could be enjoyed by the entire town.

Over 380 people supported this purchase at special town meeting, in part so that they could experience and appreciate the beauty of a working farm: farmers and tractors, laborers stooped over the fields, crops growing from small seedlings to bountiful harvest, THAT is why we THIS piece of land was valued over all others. That’s what makes it unique. We, the neighbors and abutters, don’t want – and in my opinion there is no need -- to send a message that there is any portion of this land that should be avoided except during the times surrounding the application of controlled substances. Dividing this very small parcel into zones any more isolated than what is already defined in the lease would be impractical and contrary to one of the fundamental intents of the purchase – to support a variety of uses and allow people to enjoy the property year in and year out.

In Summary:

- This land was purchased in part in order to provide public access to an historic, working farm
- The evidence shows that the farming methods currently being employed are limited in their impact on the environment
- Pesticides and herbicides are applied only rarely and in minimal amounts
- Residents want access sufficient to allow for a wide range of passive recreational uses, year ‘round

I hope we will make decisions that are in keeping with the taxpayer desire for -- and right to -- access to this property and that any restrictions are consistent with the level of the threat that is present. To protect health and safety I hope we will provide information regarding substance applications in the form of signage when applicable, but otherwise support and promote reasonable access to this valuable community asset.