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Conservation Commission
Town of Acton
VIA EMAIL

To the Members of the Commission,

It has come to my attention that the Conservation Commission is in the process of renegotiating the terms of use of the Quin Land by Wick and Rita McConnon, the owners of Hybrid Farm.

I believe that the McConnons are doing the town a service in their stewardship of the property on Nagog Hill Road. In keeping the land open for pasture and fields, the McConnons are helping to preserve some of the agricultural character of this town. My family has lived in Acton since the 1700s, and has seen first-hand how the land which was once completely cleared for farm- and pasture- land has disappeared. Some has been sold and developed as housing or shopping plazas; some (as is the case for much of our own property) has reverted to woodland. Open (non-athletic) fields have become increasingly uncommon.

Several years ago my husband and I decided to clear the land around our home for fields and orchards. We took down the trees back to the fieldstone boundary walls. These walls, found deep in the woods, were walls which had originally been constructed (by my family) years ago as the land was cleared for pasture. Prior to beginning the work, I happened to speak to someone from the state Office of Fish and Wildlife about our project. The person I spoke to was pleased at the idea, feeling that there is not enough open field habitat in this area. (In particular, this type of habitat is very important for many species of birds.) My husband and I are still in the process of working with a landscape architect to create our vision, but it is worth noting that even since the cutting took place, the cleared land has already been entirely covered in oak seedlings thanks to two years of substantial acorn crops. The re-establishment of open fields will be an active, not passive undertaking.

The natural tendency of undisturbed land in this part of the country is to revert to forest. Certainly, forests are an important part of a healthy ecosystem, but the existence of open, non-forested land is equally important. The environmental challenge we face now is that land in this area tends to be either developed (houses with yards, businesses with asphalt) or left as undermanaged woodland. To keep undeveloped lands open is no small chore, but it provides a diversity of habitat that is beneficial not only to a large number of animal species, but also to Acton residents.

I feel strongly that the McConnons, in their willingness to keep the land open for grazing and pastureland, are doing us a tremendous favor at no cost to the town. They are helping to actively preserve the disappearing agricultural character of the town, and in doing so are providing us with a more diverse ecological environment. I would hope that the town would continue to allow them to use the property as they have been doing, and would further recognize their contribution to preserving part of Acton's rural and agricultural heritage. They should be commended for their efforts, and encouraged to continue them.

Sincerely,
Phoebe Conant