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Farmland preserved in Shelton

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SHELTON — City officials were joined Monday by U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays to hail the conclusion of a nearly four-year effort to secure development rights that will preserve 31 acres of farmland.

A combination of local, federal and private contributions funded the \$645,000 purchase of rights to develop the Shelton Family Farm. The purchase keeps the land in private hands while preserving the farm as open space.

"That's what I call a good buy," said Shays, R-4.

"It's a win-win situation for us," said Mary Beth Banks, Shelton Land Trust president.

Straddling the Shelton-Monroe border in the northwest section of the city, the Shelton Family Farm is one of the oldest farms in Fairfield County to remain in the hands of the same family, according (to) Conservation Commission member Terry Jones.

Formerly a dairy farm, the operation continues as a working farm by growing sweet corn and harvesting timber trees. The land is about 50 acres in total, according to Jones, with about 20 acres in Monroe.

Currently, the farm is owned by the Shelton Family Trust, managed by Phillip and Lisa Pane.

The project began as an application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's farmland preservation program. A federal grant through the program provided \$182,900 toward the purchase. The city put up \$382,600, while the owners gave \$77,500 and the Shelton Land Trust another \$2,000.

The purchase brings the city's inventory of open space to more than 2,000 acres, or about 10 percent of the city's total area. Ultimately, the city hopes to preserve 15 percent of the city for open space.

"We think it's not only significant, but consistent with our approach to our community's commitment to open space," said Mayor Mark Lauretti.

While praising the efforts to purchase development rights of farmland, Shays said that the federal program faced challenges by representatives from Western states, where the government owns huge tracts of land.