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'Historic Dirt' Preserved



Aaron Houston for The New York Times

The 740-acre Scott Farm in Long Valley, with an 1836 Federal-style house on the grounds, was divided into two parts and recently sold to separate buyers. The new owners will continue to farm the land.

By ANTOINETTE MARTIN
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LONG VALLEY

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A FARM rich in history, soil and charm changed hands last month in Morris County. In a complex deal more than a decade in the making, the 740-acre property, the Scott Farm, was divided into two parts, both preserved permanently for agricultural use. One was sold to Ronald Weiss, a New Jersey doctor, who will treat patients with a farm-grown vegan diet; the other buyer was Sean Campbell, a British investor, who will grow apples to make hard cider.

"It's really about the dirt," said Dr. Weiss, an internist based in West New York. "This is storied dirt, settled by Germans who came to this valley on foot in the 1700s, and put up the stone buildings that still stand on my farm."

More to the point, he said, "This is also prime soil in great shape for organic gardening."

Dr. Weiss paid \$2.525 million for 348 acres, according to county real estate records. Although in the process of hiring a farmer to do the actual growing, he is to live on the property as well. It is home to an 1836 Federal-style house built over a stream, and he and his wife, Deborah, are working with an architect on plans to make it functional for them

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and their two young children.

A large stone barn with partly collapsed walls, believed to date to the 1700s, is to be turned into a food and wellness center, said Dr. Weiss, who has worked in conventional medicine for two decades, including a stint in the emergency room at Passaic Valley Hospital.

Now, he declared, he intends to follow a dictum of Hippocrates: “Let food be thy medicine and medicine thy food.” Through the office he will establish at the farm, he will pursue the ideal of a “community without disease” — one where illness, if not entirely prevented, is treated with plant-based food.

But like Mr. Campbell, the cider aficionado who will grow apples on the adjoining farm, Dr. Weiss also wishes to attract people to Long Valley as “agritourists.”

Mr. Campbell, a hedge fund manager in [Manhattan](#), is also the director of Syence Skin Care, which is based in London. He said he had chosen his farm for its pastoral “prettiness,” paying \$2.750 million for 392 acres.

“We’re going to have a ‘Sonoma’ tasting area up front near the road,” said Mr. Campbell, referring to the California wine-growing regione. “We plan to reacquaint America with cider” — hard cider, that is, meaning that the juice is fermented and contains alcohol, although usually less than 10 percent.

Earl R. Steeves III, an agricultural real estate specialist with the Max Spann Real Estate & Auction Company, brokered the sale to the two new owners in December. He described the farm as having long been a distinguished property with colorful owner-custodians.

A state and national historic landmark for the last two decades, it is the site of the Neighbor House, now a bed-and-breakfast hotel. The Neighbor family were original settlers in the valley. The Scotts owned the farm for generations, selling the land to the New York garment-business millionaire Jack Bordenicht in 1978, Mr. Steeves recounted.

In the early ’90s, Mr. Bordenicht sold the development rights to the [Morris County Agriculture Development Board](#). Under the state’s preservation program, the rights were then sold to the state with the proviso that no nonfarm development ever be permitted on the land.

Jennifer McCullough, the assistant director of the county’s Agriculture Development Board, said the agency was thrilled with the new uses for the farm. “Agritourism and organic farming are really the growth industries in agriculture,” she said. “These two individuals buying this farm, and having the vision they have, is an extremely exciting development in Morris County.”

She and Mr. Steeves noted that there were already several fresh-food-and-dairy businesses thriving in the area — including the [Long Valley Shepherd Creamery](#) — and that Tewksbury, a quaint community a few miles south on County Highway 517, draws many weekend visitors from Manhattan, an hour away.

Benjamin G. Walmer, the architect working with Dr. Weiss on restoring his stone buildings, is a local resident who often commutes to work in [New York City](#). “There is a growing connection between the Manhattan foodies and Long Valley,” he said.

A “foodie” himself, Mr. Walmer sometimes caters “organic event” meals. Recently, he stopped by the stream on Dr. Weiss’s property, plucked fresh watercress growing on its banks and used it in salad served at a gallery party in Manhattan that evening.

Which seemed an apt harbinger of Dr. Weiss’s stated intention: “I am here to do good with

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food.”

As for Mr. Campbell, he takes his farming inspiration from his home country, which has a long tradition of cider-making as well as the world’s largest production companies. American colonists, even the children, relied on cider as a daily drink until Prohibition put an end to it in the 1920s, Mr. Campbell noted.

He is importing 6,000 young apple trees, or cultivars, from Brittany in [France](#) — “this particular region produces a special, slightly sour-tasting cider,” he said — that will arrive in time for spring planting.

The orchard will take about five years to be fully established. In the meantime, Mr. Campbell said, he plans to live in the 1840 stone house on his land, buy apples grown in New Jersey (already a big producer) and begin cider production in an old warehouse/barn that had been rented to tenant farmers.

His farm-produced cider will carry two labels: “Wild Boar,” for American-apple cider; and “Vixen,” for the champagne cider made from French apples.

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