

Long Valley farm sold for nearly \$5.3 million

WASHINGTON TWP. — The largest preserved farm in Morris County has found two buyers.

The historic Scott Farm in Long Valley has been sold in two parcels to Dr. Ronald Weiss of Guttenberg and British investor Sean Campbell for nearly \$5.3 million.

Weiss, a New Jersey native who purchased 348 acres of the 740-acre property for \$2.525 million, plans to establish a health clinic where patients can eat an exclusively farm-grown diet. Campbell paid \$2.750 million for 392 acres where he will manage an apple orchard and bring his love of European hard cider to the Garden State.

Both buyers say they were drawn to Scott Farm's bucolic setting.

"It called me there," said Weiss, a practicing doctor for 23 years.

Weiss discovered Scott Farm 25 years ago while conducting research for medical school.

"I thought western Morris County was a sanctuary of rural and agricultural beauty," he said. "The area has great character and the local people have put a lot of effort into preserving their land."

While establishing his enterprise Weiss hopes to move into the 1836 federal-style home on the property with his wife and two small children. There he will delve into his first love and interest: plants.

"I have been fascinated with plants since I was a small child and I always wanted to be a farmer," he said. "I believe that plants are the basis of human health and I try to demonstrate this in my daily practice."

For this reason, Weiss is going back to the roots of medicine. "My approach is 'new' but it is really thousands of years old," he said. "Medical training has lost the focus on using plants to prevent and reverse disease."

Weiss plans to convert the historic crown jewel of the property — a stone barn from the early 1700s — into a wellness center with an open kitchen and studio space. There patients will learn how to treat and prevent illnesses.

To achieve his goal, Weiss teamed up with

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local architect and food innovator Ben Walmer. The two met through a chance connection on the Morristown Green when a mutual acquaintance spotted Weiss's "No Farms No Food" bumper sticker.

"The first day I met Ron was a moment of clarity," Walmer said. "To me this project represents a third wave of an ongoing agricultural renaissance in Long Valley."

Walmer, who grew up on an apple farm in Adams County, Pa., also will work with Campbell to produce hard cider. "Campbell is really pushing a boutique kind of space," Walmer said. "The cultural production and educational experience in agritourism is central to keeping small farms alive."

Agritourism

Campbell found the possibilities for agritourism alluring. He settled on the bucolic Scott Farm after looking at 30 other properties in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

"There are a lot of pleasant farms out there, but they didn't have the quaintness I was looking for with the proximity to Manhattan," he said.

America's cider industry waned during prohibition, Campbell said. "After 1920 more than 336 cideries went out of business. I want to bring back great cider to the U.S. I want to show people how cider is made and how it should taste."

Campbell will produce two labels of cider:

an American-style cider called "Wild Boar" and a champagne cider, "Vixen." He plans to import 6,000 French cultivars — young apple trees — from the Brittany region that will arrive in time for spring planting.

"I have a background in making and formulating cosmetics, so this is a big stretch from what I was doing," the London-based director of Syence Skin Care said. For that reason, he said, French growers will visit the farm in February to consult about the growing process. The trees will take five years to mature so he will make juice in the meantime.

Campbell plans to live in the on-site cottage part of the week and will convert the original farmhouse to a Chateau with Sonoma-style tasting.

Changed hands

Maxx Spann Sr., owner of Max Spann Real Estate & Auction Co. who brokered the sale, has watched the farm's legacy unfold

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before him and says he is “very pleased” with the transaction.

Spann has seen the farm change hands several times. The property was run by the Scott family for generations as a dairy farm and was sold to Jacob “Jack” Borgenicht, Long Valley’s legendary philanthropist and mountain climber in 1978. It has been preserved under the state’s Farmland Preservation Program for more than 20 years.

When Borgenicht’s estate rejected a \$5.5 million bid in 2006, the farm was put back on the market as four separate parcels of land. Spann then made the decision to sell two tracts of land as Farm 1 and Farm II. “We finally found two people ideally suited for Scott Farm and the type of soil and area it’s in,” Spann said.

Scott Farm is along West Mill Road and features working farmland, barns, pastures and a cell tower. The land is legally protected from development — although Spann said the law does not prevent agricultural buildings on the land. Small portions of the property are exempt from the preservation restrictions, and houses could be built on some small parcels, as long as they conform to local zoning.

“We are excited to see these two new and unique farming enterprises in Morris County and the benefits they will provide to county and state residents.” Katherine Coyle, director of the Morris County Development Board, said.

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