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CONSERVATION PARTNERS PROTECT FARMLAND TO HONOR JOHN OGWOSKI

DRACUT, Mass, November 17, 2003—Federal and state agricultural officials and the Dracut Land Trust have announced the permanent protection of 33 acres of farmland in Dracut as a living memorial to former American Airlines pilot John Ogonowski.

At a ceremony at the Ogonowski family farm, federal, state and local officials and others paid tribute to Ogonowski and his contributions to agriculture. Ogonowski died on September 11, 2001 when terrorists commandeered his plane and crashed it into the World Trade Center’s North Tower. Before his death, Ogonowski, a Dracut farmer, was a founder of the Dracut Land Trust, designed to save farmland in the town. The parcel will be preserved in perpetuity through Massachusetts’ Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program with funding from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). NRCS contributed funds toward this project through its Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

“We are not only preserving the land to John’s memory, but preserving a piece of our rural and agricultural heritage,” said R. Mack Gray, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment. “This is truly an impressive accomplishment by the Dracut Land Trust and the State of Massachusetts’ Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program to make this happen. USDA is proud to have played such an important role through FRPP.”

FRPP, a voluntary program, helps landowners keep their land in agriculture. It provides matching funds to purchase conservation easements on prime agricultural land. Participating landowners agree not to convert their land to non-agricultural uses and to develop and implement conservation plans for any highly erodible land covered by an easement.

Conservation easements only affect the development rights of the land; it does not affect ownership. Thus, participating landowners can sell their land, but all future owners are subject to the development restrictions of the easement.

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Ogonowski FRPP Event

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“I heard John say it many times: when you plant a building in a field, it’s the last crop you’ll ever grow there,” recalled John’s brother, James Ogonowski.

Other speakers at the event include Congressman Marty Meehan; Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey; Ellen Roy Herzfelder, Secretary of Environmental Affairs; Commissioner Douglas Gillespie, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources; James Little, Administrator, Farm Service Agency, USDA; American Airlines representatives, George Malonis, President, Dracut Land Trust; Cecil Currin, State Conservationist, NRCS, MA. Aides of Senators Edward Kennedy and John Kerry were expected to attend. The Dracut High School Band provided the music.

Ogonowski’s agricultural accomplishments extended beyond farmland protection. He worked to preserve a tradition of opportunity for immigrant farmers through USDA Farm Service Agency’s New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. He supported these farmers who used his land to successfully grow, market and sell crops native to their home country. Ogonowski, the son of Polish immigrant farmers, made land available to about a dozen Cambodian immigrant families because he wanted to offer an opportunity to farmers from overseas who loved agriculture as much as he did.

“Even when he was seven miles in the air, he was always a man of the earth,” said Captain William Bronson, Chief Pilot for American Airlines in Boston, of John Ogonowski.

During the event, USDA’s Gray presented the Ogonowski family and the Dracut Land Trust with a “big check” for \$690,000, the cost of the easement.

Senator Kennedy and Congressman Meehan were instrumental in adding a provision in the 2002 Farm Bill that directed USDA to work with the Dracut Land Trust to preserve the land.

For more information about the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program or other NRCS conservation programs in Massachusetts, please visit www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

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