

Press Statement on Edgartown Conservation Commission's Termination of Lease for The Farm Institute

August 17, 2020

The Trustees was surprised and disappointed to receive notification from the Edgartown Conservation Commission that our long-term lease on Katama Farm had been terminated and that we are requested to vacate the premises in less than a month's time. Over the last few months, Trustees staff have been trying to reconcile the disagreements over the use of the site for farming and educational purposes. Trustees staff have been diligently seeking solutions and Town input on our farming practices and we had been hopeful that we could come to a mutually agreeable solution.

At the core of the misalignment with the Town is the balance of managing both a high-production livestock operation and an educational farm on the same site. In 2016, we inherited a financially non-viable agricultural model and had hoped to find middle ground with the Town on the number of animals in production while also providing more educational opportunities for the public and visitors in farm-based experiences.

There are currently 23 cows on the property and another 20 due to arrive at the end of the month. Their arrival has been delayed by COVID. There are also other animals including 8 pigs, about 100 chickens, sheep, and the goats (referenced in the Commission's letter) currently residing at the Farm. The goats which require a final round of deworming treatment will be removed off the property this coming Wednesday for an ecology grazing program.

In response to the Commission's statement about reallocating farmland use, I wanted to clarify that our ecology staff had discovered the presence of nesting grasshopper sparrows, an endangered species, in the sandplain grassland. We had reallocated some pasture lands to protect those species. We reversed this use, following the Town's request and clarification on the lease's terms.

Since 2016, The Trustees has invested nearly \$2 million in the Farm in both capital investments and operating expenses. During The Trustees' tenure as stewards of the farm, The FARM Institute has hosted nearly 5,000 island resident students and their families as well as hundreds of other families on the island via farm-based educational programs. In just a few short years, we have connected youth to sustainable agriculture and introduced a new generation to an essential appreciation of farming.

We felt that we were working in good faith and significant effort to respond to the Town's concerns. We are, as we have always been, deeply committed to the property's farming heritage as well as our conservation and education mission.

Sam Hart,

Islands Portfolio Director, The Trustees