The crisp air of fall reminds me of trips to harvest festivals when I was a child. Back then I didn’t comprehend the amount of work that goes into farming. This summer I finally got the opportunity to experience the hot summer farm work that provides bountiful autumn harvests.

The farms that I worked at represent a cross section of agriculture in the Quiet Corner, including a small market garden, a large horse-powered vegetable and beef farm, and a one-hundred acre orchard.

My first three weeks were spent at Abington Grown, where Erika Marczak and Sam Rich continue the century-old farming tradition of the Rich family. They use draft horses for many of their tasks: cultivating, plowing, seeding, and even logging.

When I drove the horses I experienced why they choose to farm the old-fashioned way—there is a sense of unity between you, the horses, and the ground. You feel as if you are all all mutually involved in the most basic endeavor: producing food.

For the last six weeks I alternated back and forth between two farms: Buell’s Orchard and Cranberry Hill Farm.

The QCI creates partnerships that expand the educational and research opportunities for students and faculty at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, while supporting the work of private landowners, natural resource managers, and forest industry professionals in and around the Yale-Myers Forest. The QCI supports strengthened local livelihoods, increased forest health, and rural economic development for the long-term benefit of the land and those that live on it by providing knowledge, energy, and expertise to our partnering landowners and organizations.

CULTIVATING YOUNG FARMERS IN THE QUIET CORNER

Adam Houston, Yale College ’18
Buell’s Orchard is a northeast Connecticut institution. I spent my time there planting strawberries, thinning apples, picking peaches, and learning about the complexities of growing fruit in the Northeast.

At Cranberry Hill Farm, a small market garden and poultry farm, I got a taste of farm planning. There, I learned about holistic management, a model that helps to incorporate traditional profit-based models with personal moral beliefs and land management.

My summer in the Quiet Corner was full of new experiences. I lived at the Yale-Myers Forest among a welcoming community of graduate student researchers and workers. I did hard physical labor and loved it. I learned how to drive both horses and stick shift pickup trucks. I saw how hard farming is, and how much joy the farmers get from their labor and sharing their harvest with others—which strengthened my conviction to become a farmer.

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GET A MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR YOUR LAND
Thinking of stepping up your game in your woodlot? Curious to learn about the ecology and history of your woods? Consider working with Yale F&ES forestry students to have a management plan prepared for your property.

Getting a management plan is an opportunity to crystalize your land management and conservation goals, and get free professional-grade advice on ways to achieve them. It is also a chance for Yale F&ES foresters to put their educations into practice. Interested, or have questions? Please contact the Yale School Forests Manager, Julius Pasay, at julius.pasay@yale.edu.

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THE NATURE OF CONSERVATION
Rebecca Terry, Master of Forestry ’17

In early October, the Forest Stewards Guild regional conference drew a crowd of practicing foresters, natural resource professionals, and woodland owners. The meeting centered on using sustainable forestry practices to promote wildlife conservation in the Northeast.

The conference began by looking at several different approaches to conservation, ranging from forestry to regional partnerships. Representatives from CT DEEP, CT Forest and Parks Association, and a few local land trusts celebrated the importance of protecting forestland to achieve conservation goals. The Quiet Corner Initiative was highlighted as an example of how to engage landowners, another main theme of the conference. What makes the QCI unique from other programs in this region is that it pairs graduate students with landowners who have similar interests, providing an engaging and hands-on experience for everyone involved.

The second day of the conference shifted the focus to stewardship practices, with a tour of the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary in Monson, MA. We were able to observe the sanctuary’s forestry practices, which include maintaining early successional habitat and structural variation to support wildlife. Founded in 1939 by Arthur Norcross, the sanctuary has grown to 8,000 acres of woodlands with the sole purpose of wildlife habitat conservation. This self-sustaining organization provides educational programs to school groups and the public, loans and grants to NGOs, and miles of trails open to the public. I encourage you to spend an afternoon exploring Norcross if you haven’t already.

During the conference we were asked what “conservation” and “stewardship” mean to us. These themes were at the very heart of the conference, and everyone had a slightly different perspective.

The most traditional definition of conservation centers on the idea of managing land and resources sustainably for future generations. I also believe that stewardship involves educating others so that they can become stewards of the land, too. What do conservation and stewardship mean to you?
I have read many definitions of what is a conservationist, and written not a few myself, but I suspect that the best one is written not with a pen, but with an axe. It is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or while deciding what to chop. A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land.

—Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac

A favorite among woodsmen, Aldo Leopold's adage still strikes a cord today. The sentiment guides many of us to the woods and not a few of us to the halls of F&ES. Yet like conservation, the education of a forester is not with pen and paper alone, but with boots on the ground and a Biltmore stick in hand.

The Yale Apprentice Forester Program, or Crew, offers such an opportunity. Situated on the 7,860-acre Yale-Myers Forest, the apprenticeship is a 12-week intensive program in forest management.

The Yale Forest Manager, Julius Pasay, and Director, Professor Mark Ashton, provide space and guidance for students to learn, make (a lot of) mistakes, and eventually excel in their capacity as professional land managers. The first ten weeks cover forest chainsaw safety, road maintenance, boundary surveying, biophysical inventory, silvicultural prescriptions, and—a crew favorite—timber marking.

Environmental film screenings, bi-monthly seminars, and field trips also punctuate the summer. This past summer included a trip to the Providence Water Authority, a seminar on bats, bird ecology and call identification, alpine ecology in Maine, and numerous interactions with local landowners. Each highlighted the importance of ecosystem diversity, resilience, and rural livelihoods. Each clarified our role as foresters to promote them.

At the conclusion of ten weeks, the apprenticeship puts the crew to the test. Relocating to one of Yale’s northern forests, the crew is tasked to replicate and execute everything they learned during the prior 10 weeks—this time on their own. And by the end, Professor Ashton gleefully notes, “The crew graduates from their nappies” and into realm of professional foresters.

Yet, the summer’s greatest reward is not the program’s completion. Instead, it is the opportunity to be a part of the Yale School Forests narrative. It is the knowledge that past crews shaped the landscape of today, and the present crew helped paint its future. In this sense, the crew actively lives Leopold’s quote, only with paint guns to mark timber in place of an axe.
On an early autumn evening the sounds of live bluegrass and lively conversation, and the smells of roasting venison and freshly pressed apple cider, wafted through the eastern Connecticut woods. The occasion was the Quiet Corner Initiative’s second annual Harvest Festival, a gathering that brings together F&ES students, faculty, and local landowners at the Yale-Myers Camp for an evening of good cheer.

This year’s Harvest Festival was a tremendous success, and would not have been possible without the generosity of our neighbors. People brought delicious food and potluck contributions of all varieties. A spectacular antique cider press was loaned for the occasion by local landowner Richard Deszo, and churned out gallons of tangy cider over the course of the evening. The camp classroom was converted into a bee-keeping demonstration, where everyone enjoyed honey processed on site from a local honeybee colony.

From overheard conversations about local bear sightings to the chance to sweat side by side at the cider press and the crosscut saw competition, the festivities proved more than memorable. For the hundred or so F&ES students in attendance — hailing from as near as Massachusetts and as far as India — the evening was a highlight of the fall season.

At its core, the Harvest Festival is a chance to celebrate the human side of conservation.

Along with its games and activities, Harvest Fest is living testament to the fact that a shared meal and the good will it fosters can be as powerful as a well-crafted cutting plan or a carefully executed species survey. It is among the most important of the lessons that students at Yale F&ES will learn, and one which could not be taught without our friends and neighbors in the Quiet Corner.