



**Whiteface Mountain (left) and Moose Mountain (right) dominate this view above Donnelly's Corners.**

► ► purchased earlier in the year by two local real-estate developers, Chris Alcocer and Eric Holmes.

The APA permit establishes no-cut zones around the building sites to ensure that the houses won't be visible from the road, and the APA received no letters of objection from neighbors or the conservation community. Still, given the precarious state of family farms in the Adirondacks, it could be an ominous sign of things to come.

Peter Donnelly owns the imposing white dairy (and popular ice-cream stand) at the junction of state Routes 86 and 186, known as Donnelly's Corners. The family shut down its Crystal Spring Dairy two decades ago, after 67 years in business. Donnelly now raises soy, but he complains that deer ate about three-quarters of last year's crop. He's unsure how much longer he can continue.

"You've got to work land to make scenery," Donnelly said. "If it wasn't for the farms, there wouldn't be any. Fifty years from now you won't see any scenery in Gabriels." If the farms go out of business, the fields presumably would be developed or grown up into woods.

There are state programs to help farmers, but they are overstretched, according to David Haight, director of the Agriculture Farmland Trust in New York, which helps farmers sell conservation easements. Such easements forbid development. In exchange, farmers get an infusion of cash and an annual tax break. But the state earmarked only \$28 million for agricultural easements last year, Haight said.

"New York has made some great strides, but we have a long way to go," he said. "Three-quarters of applications are rejected because of a lack of funding."

Adirondack Council spokesman John Sheehan says the state ought to purchase scenic easements as it has along parts of the Adirondack Northway. "The state essentially pays to preserve the view," he said.

Even if state funds were available, the independent-minded farmers along Route 86 would be reluctant to sell away their development rights. They argue that the money would not ensure their long-term survival.

Tom Tucker and his brother, Steve, run a 450-acre farm that grows potatoes and vegetables near Gabriels. (In fall, they operate a corn maze as a tourist attraction.) Tom says the restrictions that come with an easement would inject an outside element into a farm that has been operated by the family since 1865.

"I don't think I would want somebody else or the government to have control of the land," Tucker said. "You wouldn't be able to hand it down to the next generation. I don't know what the next generation is going to want to do."

Nevertheless, he's no fan of development. "It's too bad to ever see land developed, because it would never go

back to the way it is now," Tucker said.

Donnelly said he's looked into developing his land but concluded that unless a landowner has his own money to invest, it's the developers who pocket most of the profit. "Everybody makes money except the guy that originally owns the land," he said.

The good news for open-space advocates is that APA zoning regulations limit the development that can occur along this stretch of Route 86. Much of the land is classified as Resource Management, the agency's strictest land-use category. As such, the average lot size in any project must be 42.7 acres, which translates to a maximum of 15 new homes per square mile.

The regulations would therefore allow a number of new homes to be built on the Tucker and Leavitt farms, which could spoil the vistas. APA spokesman Keith McKeever said the agency cannot stop development, but it can take steps to protect scenery. In an earlier case along Route 86, the agency floated balloons behind a hill to ensure that the roofs of any homes in a four-lot subdivision would not be seen from the road.



**Steve, Ben and Tom Tucker with an antique farm tractor.**



**Harrietstown Cemetery on Route 86.**

Peter Bauer, who served until recently as executive director of the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks, questioned whether the APA will be able to protect the vistas, especially inasmuch as the town of Brighton, where much of the land lies, lacks a land-use code.

"The Park Agency doesn't have strong authority when it comes to protecting scenic areas," Bauer said. "It's a scenic, spectacular part of the Park, and it would be a shame to let it slip away."

Art Leavitt says he understands why landowners sell. Family farms are struggling. Leavitt Farms, for example, is only breaking even. "I have an outside job, my son has an outside job, my nephew has an outside job, and you shouldn't have to do that," he said.

Haight, the director of the farmland trust, sees the same problem all over the state. "Without some financial incentives, landowners—even the ones that are really committed to their land—aren't in a situation to protect their land," he said. ■