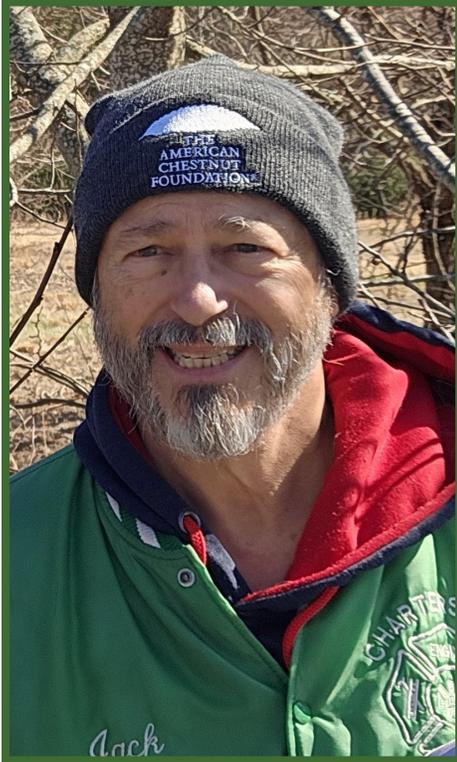


## President's Letter



2025 was a year full of change for TACF and our Connecticut chapter. We began the year without a New England Regional Science Coordinator, and then in February came the announcement that our prior CEO, Will Pitt, resigned. TACF Board member Bruce Levine stepped in as interim CEO to help stabilize our foundation while a new CEO was being recruited, and eventually Michael Goergen was hired in early summer. Meanwhile, a New England Regional Coordinator was also recruited and hired in the spring, bringing back a familiar face to the fold. Deni Ranguelova worked with

Kendra Collins for several years as an intern and continued working on several side projects for TACF afterwards while she was completing her Master's degree. The change in the RSC position also required a new office and lab location and TACF negotiated with the CT Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) to house the new New England office in available space at the Griswold Research Center. We were also able to include an office location for the CT Chapter as well. While we had worked closely with Kendra and Deni when they were located out of Burlington, VT, having the new office location in Connecticut gives us an opportunity to work closer on regional projects based out of the new lab.

In addition to the new office space mentioned above, our chapter also experienced some new opportunities during the field season. With our breeding program transitioning from the Backcross program to the Recurrent Genomic Selection (RGS) program, we were able to perform our first controlled pollinations on some of our best performing trees in our backcross orchards (See Article on page 4). With Deni just getting started in her new role with TACF, we were able to use the grant funding traditionally used for a New England Regional Intern to hire an intern for a specific project within Connecticut. The project focused on

cataloging the many chestnut hybrid trees at CAES' Lockwood Farms and Sleeping Giant orchards, and enter them into the TACF chestnut database, Dentatabase, so they may be more easily referenced for potential future breeding with our RGS program. Odeth Sandoval worked throughout the summer and into the fall, learning the different species crosses and plots of chestnut trees at the orchards in Hamden, but was also able to help us when things got busy during the pollination season (See Article on page 6).

With much more emphasis on making controlled pollinations for the RGS program, we only were able to do a couple of wild American controlled pollinations. The time required to harvest the RGS crosses also took away from some of our opportunities to harvest wild American nuts in the fall. We were still busier than the squirrels in late September and were able to obtain nuts from 10 new sources of American chestnut trees. Our Germplasm Committee is still doing great work following up on reports of chestnut trees and searching out additional locations where the potential for flowering trees is greatest. We look forward to spring time when we will be busy planting all the harvested nuts in our orchards. Watch for our springtime listings of volunteer events to see if you can help.

**Jack Swatt**  
President, CT-TACF

# Welcome to... the Chestnut City!

Partial reprint from the *New Haven Independent* article by Allan Appel with additional content by Rachel Jeffrey



Derek Faulkner, Rachel Jeffrey, Josh Hays, Alina Tran, and Dana Cody looking to grow a more resilient chestnut tree - Photo by Allan Appel

The long empty and frequently flooding Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) grassy field adjacent to the Ethnic Heritage Center at 270 Fitch St. is empty no longer.

Last Spring, it was planted with eight little seeds that students and staff hope will grow into mighty chestnut trees as part of a new “demonstration orchard.”

That “demonstration orchard” is one of a handful in a project coordinated by the local chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF). The goal of the project is to create an American chestnut that will be resistant to a fungus that is still so virulent. There are perhaps only 1,000 American

chestnuts left in Connecticut, and they are isolated and struggling.

That’s why beneath a bright sun on Tuesday morning, SCSU biochemistry professor Rachel Jeffrey, who leads the project, was calling out to a half dozen students and staff to “bring out the babies.”

The botanical infants in question were eight or so chestnuts harvested from Salem, Niantic, and elsewhere around the state out of which a tiny curving pale green shoot, which with luck and watering, and if the voles can be successfully deterred by stout plastic grow tubes and fencing, will one day transform into the trunk of a mighty tree.

Helping her in the planting of the seeds were SCSU students Josh Hays and Alina Tran whom Jeffrey and SCSU Special Project Coordinator Derek Faulkner and the offices of sustainability and research and innovation at the school helped connect to the foundation for fascinating field work last summer. 🌱

Continue reading at [newhavenindependent.org](http://newhavenindependent.org)



# Essex Land Trust & Chestnut Orchard at Cross Lots Preserve

By Pam Peters, *ELT Orchard Steward*

The Essex Land Trust (ELT) is an independent, non-profit organization founded in 1968 and is accredited by the national Land Trust Alliance. ELT acquires, preserves, and manages its open space to protect the environment and small-town character of the villages of Centerbrook, Essex, and Ivoryton for current and future generations. ELT provides our community with recreational and educational opportunities through strategic acquisitions and responsible stewardship of properties with significant environmental value. This all-volunteer and donor supported organization owns 25 preserves amounting to 770 acres, 66% of the open space in Essex!

In 2022, ELT partnered with TACF to plant an American Chestnut Orchard at the Cross Lots Preserve. The orchard is also home to four transplants from other Essex Land Trust Preserves. One from the 'Pond Meadow Preserve' and three from the Ingham Hill Road section of 'The Preserve'. Our transplants range in height from 2.5' to 5'.

This is a growth update on how the nuts handled their 5 year old birthday! 🌱

[More info at essexlandtrust.org](https://www.essexlandtrust.org)



## 2022 - Year 1

Planted 50 nuts, 10 each of five strains.



## 2023 - Year 2

42 of 50 sprouted buds with sapling heights ranging from 9" to 48".

8 one year old saplings were planted to replace those that failed.



## 2024 - Year 3

45 surviving saplings ranged from 2.5' to 13'.



## 2025 - Year 4

Our tallest trees are over 15'. Three bloomed (male flowers).

## 2026 - Year 5

This summer, we are looking forward to pollinating any trees in the orchard that will be producing female flowers.



Photos of planting day in 2022

# Chestnut Breeding Program Update

By Jack Swatt

This past year marked a dramatic change in our Chapter's chestnut breeding program. For decades we planted nuts from American chestnut trees in Connecticut which were pollinated with back cross hybrid pollen from TACF's Meadowview Research Farms. Those trees were then challenged with blight and the trees showing the most resistance were saved to produce nuts for our next generation Seed orchards. Several of those back cross orchards are still waiting to be culled and have the nuts from the best trees harvested for planting. But recently TACF has shifted its science plan away from breeding open pollinated B3F3 nuts to doing controlled crosses with only

those trees that have shown the best resistance, as well as American timber form. The "Best by Best" plan is now being called Recurrent Genomic Selection, or RGS. This plan not only selects the most resistant trees in our orchards, but uses genetic testing to help predict which crosses, and subsequent seedlings will show the most promise for improved resistance. So far 30 of the trees in 4 of our Backcross Orchards have been selected for this new breeding program, but we still have 2 orchards awaiting final determinations.

As early as last winter, we have been working with the TACF Science staff to help determine which crosses can be performed on our selected

trees. Rather than crossing these trees with pollen from other trees in Connecticut, the crosses are planned with trees throughout the northern breeding range which includes trees up to Maine and as far west as Pennsylvania. Since the timing of controlled pollination is very specific, we needed to be ready to bag the female flowers, and then later pollinate them, on very short notice. We also needed to work out the logistics of obtaining and storing pollen from trees in other states to be able to use for the controlled crosses. As spring sprung we began to examine which of our selected trees looked healthy enough to produce the most female flowers and came up with a short list of trees to work with this season. Our Regional Science Coordinators worked out a plan to obtain pollen from some of the early flowering trees and rapidly transport it to the locations expecting to utilize it. But, being our first year of doing RGS crosses, we did encounter a lot of unpredicted challenges.

In our first week of bagging, a heat wave struck the northeast with temperatures in mid to late June exceeding the 100 degree mark. Some of the trees in the southern orchards in our state advanced their flower maturation rapidly due to the extremely high temperatures. We bagged our Woodbridge orchard starting at 6 AM and were done by 9 AM to avoid the excessive temps later in the day. Some of the tree's flowers had advanced too far so that it was too late to even try and protect them from stray pollen with the bags. The peak of the heat wave broke and we proceeded to bag some of our other orchards, again finding many tree's flowers had advanced considerably quickly, but we were



Litchfield Hills Audubon and CT-TACF volunteers helping with bagging and pollinating the Wigwam Brook Backcross Orchard. Lisa Roberge on ladder. Left to right below: Jack Swatt, Kathy Zibell, Fred Behringer, and Jane Golding (hidden behind the branch of bagged flowers, notice the black boots).

able to place bags on flowers that had not yet reached the maximal point of maturation. Surprisingly, in the northwest corner of our state, our Litchfield orchard had a mix of trees that were too far developed, as well as some that were underdeveloped. This required a second visit just to bag the underdeveloped flowers after they had matured to the appropriate stage of maturation. Each orchard is planted with nuts from several crosses and it was noted that trees in the same family matured at the same rates, so taking notes on when the flowers developed will help us predict when the flowers will mature in subsequent years.

After the hectic bagging sequence, the pollen transfers all went off without any difficulty and our volunteers returned to apply the appropriate pollens to the maturing female flowers. Fall came in due time and we returned to the orchards to harvest the developing chestnut burs in late September. One tragedy occurred in Litchfield as a tree that we had pollinated lost two of its three limbs to the blight and all the bagged burs on those limbs were underdeveloped. We were able to salvage the burs from the healthy limb, but only obtained four fertile nuts. When all the burs were shucked and the nuts were counted, we had some

disappointingly low numbers of nuts from some crosses. It was noted one pollen source may not have remained viable in the transportation process. Other trees yielded variable amounts of fertile nuts, but only one cross resulted in a number of nuts above 150 which is the number targeted for an RGS cross. These seeds will be genotyped, tested and planted with other RGS crosses in regional seed and progeny test orchards rather than remaining in a state level orchard. This first year was a year of trial and error, but the learning experience will get us better prepared for next year's pollination season. 🌿

## A Lifelong Passion for The American Chestnut *By Laura Munson*

As the branches of the American Chestnut once spread throughout our landscape, so does Ellery Westwood Sinclair's passionate knowledge of the iconic tree. My father, fondly known as "Woods", took his wife, three children and family dog into the woods each year as the leaves colors changed, to visit and harvest nuts from the few trees that remained at the foot of Canaan Mountain in Falls Village.

As we grew up the only signs left were stumps and root sprouts and his focus turned to collaborative planting and maintenance of an American Chestnut Orchard at the base of that same mountain where he adventured as a child and with his own young family.

Woods provides an informative walk and talk in the two acre orchard that he has nurtured for over two decades. In this Heritage Walk Woods shares with audiences facts about the American Chestnuts benefits to our forest ecology while it thrived and the ecological effects of its dramatic decline.

Guests also learn, through Woods and invited speakers, about the American Chestnut Society members and volunteers efforts to restore this magnificent tree to our forests. 🌿



## CT Chapter's 2025 Intern, Odeth Sandoval

By Jack Swatt

This past year, Odeth Sandoval worked with our chapter and our New England Regional Science Coordinator to undertake an extremely complicated, but beneficial assignment to catalog the many hybrid chestnut trees at the CT Agricultural Experiment Station's (CAES) orchards and enter them into our chestnut database, Dentatabase. Some of the trees at CAES's Lockwood Farms, and the nearby Sleeping Giant Orchard were planted as far back as the 1930's, and the older trees were used as parents in controlled crosses to make more complex hybrids through the years. Two of the trees that were used to start our Backcross Breeding Program, the Graves tree and grafts of the Clapper tree, are located within those orchards. Thanks to the records kept by CAES Scientist Dr. Sandra Anagnostakis, the pedigree and sources of the majority of those trees are still available today.

Odeth's first tasks were to identify the locations of the trees according to the plot, row and tree locations assigned when they were planted and learn the tree breeding nomenclature for interspecies crosses. Then came comprehensive training in Dentatabase so the information gathered could be entered. To give

her a break from all the mundane computer work, Odeth also helped us greatly during the weeks of chestnut pollination in late June and early July.

"It was a true privilege to work alongside Jack Swatt and Deni Rangelova, whose knowledge and dedication made this experience especially meaningful," says Odeth Sandoval. "Prior to this past summer, I was largely unaware of the rich history, ecological significance, and cultural importance of the American Chestnut tree. As a recent Biology graduate with a strong interest in conservation ecology, this experience was both eye-opening and professionally formative."

"My time with The American Chestnut Foundation provided me with invaluable, hands-on experience in real-world ecological restoration efforts, allowing me to connect academic concepts to practical conservation work. Contributing to the restoration of such an iconic species deepened my appreciation for long-term conservation initiatives and reinforced my commitment to this field. I am incredibly excited and hopeful for the future of the American Chestnut tree and grateful to have played a role in its restoration."

Having the CAES chestnut hybrid



*Odeth Sandoval performing controlled pollination at an American chestnut tree  
Photo by Jack Swatt*

trees in our database, and adding phenotypic, genotypic and resistance information, will help our Science Team identify potential new sources for use in our Recurrent Genomic Selection (RGS) Breeding program. The chestnut trees at the CAES orchards can help diversify our breeding stock, increase both blight and Phytophthora Root Rot resistance genes from other Chinese crosses as well as looking into resistance in other chestnut species. The vast array of hybrid chestnut trees at the CAES orchards are an important collection of work done by earlier blight resistance scientists and the effort that Odeth made will greatly enhance our ability to work with these trees for future research into American chestnut restoration. 🌿

## TACF Honors the Winners of the 2025 Volunteer Service Awards



*TACF President and CEO Michael Goergen interviewing Florian Carle during the December 2025 Chestnut Chat*

**Dr. Florian Carle, CT Chapter  
Nominator: Jack Swatt**

"Florian is one of those volunteers who seems to elevate everything he touches. As Research Coordinator in the CT Chapter, he has strengthened local research efforts, supported community science, and helped bring in new members—especially students and

early-career scientists. He also has a true gift for sharing what he’s learning, from field notes to opportunities to get involved. His enthusiasm, organization, and willingness to jump in make him an invaluable part of TACF and the CT Chapter’s chestnut community.” Florian celebrated the award with many chestnut treats: a chestnut-chocolate Yule-log, chestnut tea, candied chestnuts, and of course, a chestnut-based gin! 🌿

## Volunteer Opportunities *By Jack Swatt*



### HELP WANTED

We are looking for a volunteer to fill the office of Secretary on our Board, as well as someone who can keep our webpage up to date.

Contact us at [CTChapter@tafc.org](mailto:CTChapter@tafc.org) if you are interested in these positions or for any other volunteer opportunities.

*TACF table at the 2025 Flower and Garden Show in Hartford. Like Antonio Rivera, Jack Swatt, and Fred Behringer, you could help us engage with the public and show them our work! - Photo by Kate*

In 1991, a group of Connecticut volunteers joined together to form the second state chapter of TACF. This year marks the 35th Anniversary of our chapter that has been lead entirely by our Connecticut volunteers. I can’t express enough our gratitude for all the volunteer efforts that our members have contributed to get us to where we are now.

As the science and experiments expand thanks to a deeper understanding of chestnut science, more than ever, we are relying on our volunteers to help TACF and

our chapter grow. Volunteers are needed throughout the state to help monitor chestnut trees for flowering to determine the optimal time for pollination. In the fall, help is also needed to organize and perform harvesting of the nuts. When springtime comes around we also rely on volunteers to help us plant the germinating chestnuts into our orchards. Members with good organizational skills can help us with leadership on our Board of Directors. We organize many outreach events throughout the year that rely on

volunteers to help, and even the newsletter that you are now reading was created by volunteers.

For 2026, we will continue to offer opportunities for all our members and volunteers to help further progress towards chestnut restoration.

Find opportunities to take action on our TACF website, ncluding volunteering at our upcoming exhibit at the CT Flower and Garden Show in Hartford. Look for the VOLUNTEER page under the ENGAGE tab. We hope to see you soon in our orchards or at our activities! 🌿

<h3>CT-TACF Officers and Board of Directors</h3> <p><u>Officers</u>          President – Jack Swatt          Vice President – Fred Behringer          Treasurer – Dr. Jack Ostroff          Secretary &amp; Research Coordinator – Dr. Florian Carle</p>	<p><u>Board of Directors (term ending)</u>          Renée Allen (2026)          Dr. Phill Arnold (2026)          Dr. David Bingham (2026)          Casey Cordes (2027)          Jim Gage (2026)          Jerry Graham (2027)          David Liedlich (2026)          Dr. Bert Malkus (2026)</p>	<p>Jack Morris (2026)          Dr. Lindsay Rush (2027)          Mark Vollaro (2026)          E. Woods Sinclair (2027)</p> <p><u>Contact</u>  <b><a href="mailto:CTChapter@tafc.org">CTChapter@tafc.org</a></b></p>
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CT Chapter of TACF  
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## Upcoming Calendar of Events

All of the events scheduled are subject to possible change. Please check our online calendar at [tafc.org/ct](http://tafc.org/ct) for any updates.

### **CT Flower and Garden Show, Hartford**

*February 19-22, 2026*

Stop by our table in the CT Federated Garden exhibit to see the work of the Foundation.

### **TACF at the Annual Connecticut Land Conservation Conference**

*March 21, 2026*

Join us at the Connecticut Land Conservation Conference, the state's premier one-day gathering for land trust professionals, community stewards, agency leaders, volunteers, and advocates. Our chapter is one of the sponsors of the conference.

### **Annual Membership Meeting, Rockfall**

*March 29, 2026 - 9 AM - 2 PM*

Join us for our Annual Membership Meeting in person, at the Connecticut

Forest & Park Association in Rockfall/Middletown, featuring a talk by Deni Rangelova. This meeting will be followed by our board meeting.

### **Orchard Plantings, throughout CT May, 2026**

We will need volunteers to help with planting American chestnut seeds in several new Germplasm Conservation Orchards throughout the state. Details will be made available as it gets closer to planting season.

### **Chestnut Hikes**

*June/July, 2026*

Late June and early July are great times to look for chestnut trees when their fragrant cream-colored blooms make the trees more visible. A schedule of hikes will be sent via chapter email and posted on our website as it gets closer to that time. If you would be

interested in leading a hike to known or potential chestnut locations, contact us at [CTChapter@acf.org](mailto:CTChapter@acf.org).

### **CAES Plant Science Day, Hamden August 5, 2026**

Join us at the lovely Lockwood Farm in Hamden for the 116<sup>th</sup> CAES Plant Science Day where we will welcome you with an exhibit on the Foundation work, surrounded by a wide variety of chestnut trees!

### **Exhibit at the Durham Fair**

*September 24-27, 2026*

The Durham Fair is one of the largest fairs in CT. We host an exhibit educating people about the American chestnut and our mission in the Discovery Center. Stop by, shuck chestnuts harvested a few days before the fair, and come ask all your questions!