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**Lee Hook Road Dairy Farm**  
*by Nathan Merrill*

Former owners Tom and Carol Morrell and Russel and Kristi Atherton sold their cows and machinery at auction last summer. The Merrills worked with the Ath-Mor partners and a coalition of conservation organizations represented by The Nature Conservancy's Duane Hyde to pull agreements together that will protect the land and continue its use as an active farm.

The 91-acre property located on the banks of the Lamprey River has been a dairy operation for many decades. Prior owners include Ernest Cutter and Charles Brady. Over time, the barns and other facilities expanded to accommodate more cows. At its peak, Ath-Mor Holsteins was home to 180 cows and almost as many replacement young heifers and calves. Both farms have a history of successful farm management and breeding of high quality cattle.

Tom and Carol Morrell have retired and will remain living in their home adjacent to the farm. Russ and Kristi Atherton decided to move onto new adventures, as they construct a new slaughterhouse and butchering business in Barnstead. Tom has remained active at the farm, stopping in to visit and help with reconstruction of the heifer barn. His good-natured smile and assistance are always welcome and appreciated!

Stuart Farm LLC has been leasing the Ath-Mor Farm since September, and purchased the property on December 31st. Partners John and Lorraine Merrill, and Nathan and Judy Merrill plan to continue milking cows, raising heifers, and growing hay and corn for silage on the Ath-Mor land. Former Ath-Mor herdsman Mike Chase continues to work and live at the farm. One thing is different: in addition to black-and-white Holsteins, travelers on Lee Hook Road will now also see Brown Swiss, Ayrshire, and cross-bred cows.

Conservation easement funding came from the Lamprey River Wild and Scenic Subcommittee and the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership. The Nature Conservancy, the project manager for the Partnership, negotiated the terms of the easement with the Merrill families and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF), which will be responsible for holding and monitoring the conservation easement. Ath-Mor Holsteins Inc. sold the easement prior to the sale to the Merrill families in order to make the farm affordable for its continued operation as a dairy. The Town of Lee Conservation Commission donated \$1,000 to help with project costs, and will receive an "executory interest" in the conservation easement, which means that the Town will have the right to enforce the easement should SPNHF fail to do so in the future. All parties worked collaboratively to pull all of the pieces together in a very tight timeframe. We would also like to recognize and thank Laurel Cox from the Town of Lee for her exceptional support and advice throughout the process.

We are excited to see the former Ath-Mor farm remain a farm, and we are pleased to become a part of the fabric of the community of Lee. We appreciate the fact that the citizens of Lee continue to value their agrarian landscape, heritage, and future.