

Letter to the Editor of the Vineyard Gazette

August 19,2020

To the Editor,

We're writing to express our deep disappointment with the Edgartown Conservation Commission's notice to terminate The Trustees' lease on Katama Farm. Since 2016 when The Trustees merged with The Farm Institute and took on the management of Katama Farm, they have gone to great lengths to invest in and improve the farm in meaningful ways, including building a new teaching kitchen, adding a new roof to the barn, and improving the soil quality so that it can successfully support healthy livestock.

The Trustees has been responsive and committed to a successful partnership with the Town and has taken steps to address any concerns that have been raised. The basic disagreement about the core use of the Farm has been a dividing point, and The Trustees has sought to submit a financially viable plan for the Commission's consideration but has not received the opportunity to have that discussion. Prior to The Trustees' stewardship of Katama Farm, many past efforts to make this important place into an economically viable agricultural model have failed. The Trustees remain committed to the future of The Farm Institute and to Katama Farm and believe that they can make it successful.

The Trustees provides a number of civic-minded benefits to the Edgartown community, including offering farm-based education experiences that have connected over 5,000 island resident students and families with their local food source and sustainable farming. The Saltonstall Education program serves Island youth from every school. Over the past year, The Farm Institute donated 137 pounds of beef raised on the farm to the Island Food Pantry and Helping-Hands MV.

We urge the Edgartown Conservation Commission to rescind its notice of termination and to enter into discussions with The Trustees to find a solution that will work for both parties. We all want what's best for the Edgartown community, Katama Farm, and all of Martha's Vineyard, and we believe that means allowing The Trustees to modify its operations in a mutually agreed-upon manner and to continue doing what they do best – to bring sustainable agriculture at an appropriate scale to the public and to continue serving this community that they have invested in for more than 60 years.

Phyllis Yale, Chair, Trustees MV Advisory Group
Jeremy Henderson, Trustees MV Advisory Group
Jeff Fager, Trustees MV Advisory Group
David Foster, Trustees MV Advisory Group
Sam Feldman, TFI Founder
Mike Kidder, TFI Founder
Jonathan Chatinover, Former TFI Board President