

FARMING TRADITION

Glastonbury's proud tradition as a farming community is represented on the mural with the rolling hills, fruit farms, and the Old Cider Mill in South Glastonbury. The Connecticut River and its spring floods have always provided excellent soil for cultivating crops. The Wangunk people taught early colonists about the crops which grew best in this area, and the Glastonbury meadows were used as farmland by residents of Wethersfield as early as 1639.

In the 1880s, mill and factory owners across New England needed more workers for their growing businesses. They encouraged people, especially from Italy and Ireland, to emigrate to America. Many of those Italian families moved to Connecticut, and some were recruited to help build the new trolley lines extending from Hartford into the suburbs. Young Italian men worked cutting timber and laying track until the trolley lines were completed in South Glastonbury, and they then looked for new opportunities for work and a place to settle. J.H. Hale owned large peach and apple orchards in Glastonbury and was seeking employees. It has been said that the gently rolling hills and rows of fruit trees reminded some of these men of their home in Italy. Many saved their money or borrowed from other farmers, worked together, and began to buy land and start their own farms in South and East Glastonbury. The work to turn the land from vine-covered, rocky scrub and trees into tillable farmland took the efforts of everyone in the farming community, but they worked together to remove stones, cut down the trees and create the picturesque, vibrant farm fields that exist today.

Their efforts were not without personal struggle as well. Newspaper headlines in the late 1800s and early 1900s often made anti-immigrant statements such as "Aliens invasion of Connecticut farms." There were signs in businesses stating that no Italians needed to apply for work at that site. The immigrant families persevered, and as the years passed, headlines changed with more welcoming titles such as "Italians work miracles on cheap farms."

Today, many of the descendants of these early farm families remain on this land and provide local residents and visitors alike with the opportunity to enjoy fresh farm products and the beautiful landscape of Glastonbury.

Information contained herein was compiled by the Historical Society of Glastonbury for the Glastonbury MLK39 Mural Project dedicated in September 2024.

