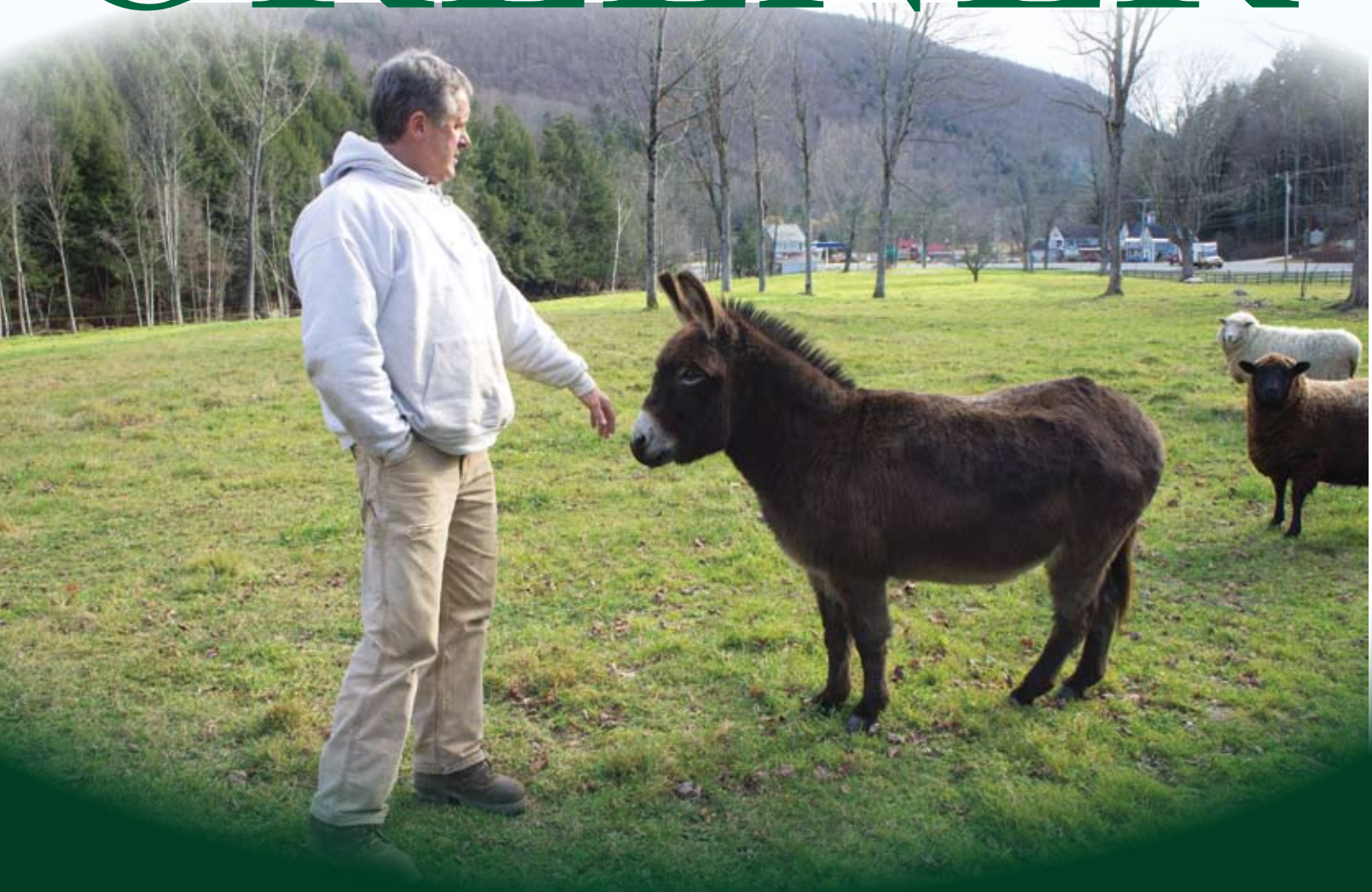


GREENER



PASTURES

BY *Kim J. Gifford*

KILLINGTON EXCAVATOR CRAIG MOSHER RECOVERS FROM IRENE

Today, although it is early November, the pasture beside Craig Mosher's excavating business is surprisingly green. His donkey, Pedro, rescued several years ago from a horse trailer in which he was living, and his two sheep companions, Byron and Jessie, are grazing nearby. If it weren't for the demolished country store next door, some noticeable openings in the trees by the river, and a flag marking the high water line hidden in the trees, one might never know of the devastation caused by Tropical Storm Irene about 18 months ago.

That is, unless you happen to be a fan of Big and Rob, Mosher's approximately 1,800-pound Scottish Highland cattle, a popular pair with tourists traveling the Route 4 corridor through Killington. The pair presently remain missing from this bucolic scene. Fortunately, they are safe in a nearby field on Mosher's property, but on August 28, 2011, Irene hit Vermont, plugging the river with gravel and caus-

ing it to jump its banks and take out five acres of Mosher's pasture land, also relocating the small barns that Pedro, Big and Rob called home. Twelve thousand yards of gravel were left in the storm's wake and what had once been a tranquil green field became a barren dirt deposit.

That was then, this is now. Today, thanks to the efforts of Mosher and his partnership with Resource Manage-

ment Inc., (RMI), a recycling company handling organic waste or carbon-based materials and byproducts, the same pasture is green and prospering. Located in Holderness, N.H., RMI produces manufactured topsoil known as Heart & Soil NutraSoil, which Mosher used to reclaim and recover his field. They manufactured 3,000 yards of the NutraSoil to put back over Mosher's field, a process completed



LEFT: Craig Mosher greets Pedro while sheep Byron and Jesse look on in the newly reclaimed field in Killington. PHOTO BY KIM J. GIFFORD; ABOVE: Tropical Storm Irene devastated Craig Mosher's field and the adjacent Blackie's Deli at the junction of Routes 4 and 100. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CRAIG MOSHER



shortly after the one-year anniversary of Irene.

“The rule of thumb in nature is it takes 500 years to make one inch of topsoil,” says Charley Hanson of RMI. “We went in there and in a couple of weeks, [Craig] had nine inches of topsoil that is now growing grass. By the second week of May next year he is going to have a lush field and no other natural field had to be stripped to replace it.”

RMI’s salesperson, Bill Patten, sought Mosher out after Irene in the hopes that he would try their product. At first Mosher was too busy to return his calls. An affable man with more than his fair share of brotherly kindness, Mosher went right to work after Irene, using his excavating equipment to clear away mud and rubble and help make roads in the region — cut off like an island — once again passable. But when Patten and he finally connected, Mosher was quick to seize on the idea, seeing the potential to reclaim his pasture in an environmentally friendly way.

THE STORY OF BIG AND ROB

It seems Mosher is often quick to seize on good ideas. In business since 1979, Mosher worked building ski trails all over New England. His was the last bulldozer down Bear Mountain in 1979, he boasts. He built his present office in 2000 and rents out the attached farmhouse. He owns 28 acres of surrounding land and purchased the five acres of pasture damaged in the storm approximately a decade ago. He decided to purchase this land as “protection” when he heard some people were interested in building a bed and breakfast there. Realizing that the “24/7” buzz of his business might be a distraction to such an enterprise, he purchased the land, deciding to turn it into pasture. “It seemed like the right thing to do,” he said. “I bought it to protect my investment here, but I like open land and I like animals.”

The animals came next. “Another good idea,” Mosher jokes. He inherited Big and Rob in a trade for two truckloads of firewood. “Why not, right?” he laughs.

He soon found himself rescuing Pedro and acquiring Byron and Jessie to keep Pedro company. Little did he know how beloved these animals would become.

“People stop by to say ‘hi’ and get their picture taken with them,” Mosher offers. He recalls one memorable encounter with a couple that produced Scottish Highland clothing. They ended up doing a photo shoot for their clothing line on the spot. Among the most meaningful encounters for Mosher was with a lady who stopped to tell him that visiting with his cattle was the highlight of the trip for her son whom she took to chemotherapy in Lebanon several times a week. “Sometimes we ask why we do the things we do, but you can’t put a price on touching someone’s life in that way,” he said.

Mosher’s menagerie has become so popular that it is not unusual for him to receive calls from friends inquiring about his pets. “How’s the donkey? Pedro looks sad!” one said. When Irene wreaked her havoc, many people expressed concern



The process of reclaiming the field involved applying the RMI product (LEFT) to create a layer of topsoil where grass would grow.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY TIM SINK AND CRAIG MOSHER



about the animals, worrying when they did not see Big and Rob in their usual place alongside the road. Yet, not only did the animals end up safe, but Big and Rob also had their own adventure, wandering loose for days. When they made their way up to Mosher's ex-wife Nancy Schmitt-Mosher's house and were messing in her driveway and eating apples off the neighbor's apple trees, she finally got a switch and escorted them back down the hill to land near the offices. There, friends eventually helped secure them.

Mosher reports that when Irene hit, he made an effort to move the animals to high ground. Since the cattle were used to going to their shed, they started walking downriver once the storm began. At one point, Mosher spotted Big sideways in the water. Rob was on higher ground "mooring like crazy" and Mosher, who spied Big's leg wobbling, feared he might fall over. He located a bucket and tried to lure him in the right direction, but noted that as a five-foot tree floated by, Big

stopped "to have a salad."

Mosher also rescued his pigs, which were out back swimming in their pen by the time he found them. The water in his pasture reached approximately four feet high. Pedro, it turns out, was hiding in his shed, which eventually washed away to the other side of the road.

RECLAIMING THE LAND

"I know how fortunate I am to have come out the other end," said Mosher. "I feel fortunate that Resource Management stopped and asked me to team up with them. It's all about alternative uses for materials that get them out of our landfills and keep options alive."

RMI manufactures the NutraSoil used on Mosher's field from paper fiber created at Putney Paper Company in Putney, VT. They have a contract to recycle the paper, pulling out the paper waste and mixing it with a recipe of bio-solids and an equal amount of sand or other low-grade fill to create the topsoil.

"Once this would have been a waste product they dumped into landfills," said Mosher. Instead, RMI began using their product to create vegetative caps to close these same landfills. Because the landfills tended to have steep grades, the manufactured soil with "its superior erosion resistance," proved the perfect product, said Hanson.

RMI has used its NutraSoil for other solutions. In 2005, when a terrible flood hit Alstead, N.H., they applied it as topsoil on seven acres of devastated agricultural land, an experience that proved helpful in tackling Mosher's project. They also have plans to help another farm, Evening Song Farm in Cuttingsville, VT.

"From an environmental standpoint it's a win-win-win," says Hanson. "Instead of robbing Peter to pay Paul, we're keeping our prime farmland what it is — prime farmland... We're tickled pink to be doing this in Vermont. Vermont is a leader as a green state and from an environmental standpoint, this is a great fit."



Craig Mosher and Rob
 PHOTO BY KIM J. GIFFORD

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Mosher thinks so, too. He has plans to build a new and larger barn for Rob and Big and ceremoniously march them back to greener pastures next summer. Mother Nature may have waged her war, but it looks like Mosher, who as an excavator is used to manipulating the ground and making it do his bidding, may have just hit back with a little help from RMI. And now, thanks to their efforts, travelers through Killington can expectantly await the return of two large, but friendly Scottish Highland cattle – the popular Big and Rob.

Freelance writer Kim J. Gifford resides in Bethel, VT with her pugs Alfie and Waffles. Kim is also a memoir writing instructor at Lebanon College in Lebanon, NH and produces her own line of pug-related greeting cards. She also has a new website devoted to these photogenic canines: www.pugsandpics.com

Craig Mosher and office manager, Stacy Hatt



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