The Pennsylvania/New Jersey Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) recently planted a progeny test orchard of 250 of the most advanced, potentially blight-resistant American chestnut seedlings at the Somerset County Park Commission, Lord Stirling Park in Basking Ridge. The seedlings, called Restoration Chestnuts 1.0, are part of a unique breeding program led by The American Chestnut Foundation to restore the American chestnut to the eastern forests of America.

Corporate volunteers from Verizon and Johnson & Johnson helped prepare the area for the planting. Goldman Sachs employees provided labor and funding through the New Jersey Land Conservancy’s Partners for Parks corporate volunteer program.

Once the giants of the eastern forests, American chestnuts stood up to 100 feet tall and numbered in the billions. They were a vital part of the forest ecology, a key food source for wildlife, and an essential component of the human economy. In the beginning of the 20th century the fungal pathogen responsible for chestnut blight was accidentally imported from Asia and spread rapidly through the American chestnut population, killing an estimated four billion mature trees from Maine to Georgia by 1950. Several attempts to breed blight-resistant trees in the mid-1900s were unsuccessful.

In 1983, a group of scientists formed The American Chestnut Foundation with a mission to develop blight-resistant American chestnut trees. Now assisted by nearly 6,000 members, volunteers, and partners, the organization is undertaking the planting of potentially blight-resistant trees in select locations throughout the eastern U.S.

“The Pennsylvania/New Jersey Chapter’s partnership with Somerset County Parks represents a huge step in our chestnut restoration program,” said TACF Regional Science Coordinator Sara Fitzsimmons. “This orchard is the first of its kind in New Jersey, enabling us to test and evaluate our Restoration Chestnuts 1.0...”
for blight resistance and growth characteristics.”


We are very pleased that our location has been selected for the first Restoration Chestnut 1.0 planting in New Jersey. The planting aligns with our mission to educate the public about the importance of preserving our fragile environment.”

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