The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

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PRESS RELEASE 13 APRIL 2009

Chestnuts for Future Forests

Hybrid Chestnuts Planted at Griswold Research Center

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PRESS RELEASE: The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station plants chestnuts for future forests.

New Haven, Conn., April 13, 2009--The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) announced their most recent effort to return chestnut trees to the Connecticut forest and landscape. A seed orchard of 780 timber-hybrid chestnut trees was planted at the Experiment Station's new Griswold Research Center (the former CT DEP State Tree Nursery) in Griswold, CT. The trees were part of a long-term breeding program currently led by CAES scientist, Dr. Sandra Anagnostakis. The seed orchard trees are the fourth generation in this program. They are hybrid trees with northeastern American chestnuts selected for disease resistance and good timber form as parents. The breeding program at CAES began in 1930, with crosses between disease resistant Chinese and Japanese chestnut trees and native American trees that were susceptible and fell victim to the devastating fungal disease, Chestnut Blight. In order for chestnut trees to compete in New England forests, they must grow quickly, and initially put most of their energy into vertical growth. These trees need to grow tall enough to become part of the forest canopy so they can capture full sun. Once they are mature, at about 10 years, they will begin to produce small, nutritious nuts. The seed orchard trees will be evaluated as they grow and any trees that fail to measure up to the standards for timber-form and disease resistance will be removed. The remaining trees will produce seed that will be grown into trees for planting in Connecticut forests and landscapes. Once planted, they will increase the genetic diversity of chestnuts in the forest population. They will also serve as a source of

food for many kinds of wildlife and a source of valuable lumber for our state. "This long-term research project is making great progress and is a good example of how scientists from different states can work together," said Dr. Louis A. Magnarelli, Director of CAES.

Figure 1. Dr. Sandra Anagnostakis prunes the root system of a hybrid chestnut sapling prior to planting in the seed orchard at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station's Griswold Research Center.