



WINTER

2011

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From the Easement to the Table



A few years ago, Fred and Christie Huger were at a crossroads. To make a living as dairy and cattle farmers, they were renting land at Mountain View Farm in Rockbridge County. But renting wasn't ideal for their young family. "We reached a point in our lives where we were either going to buy our own farm or we were going to stop farming," Fred recalls.

Around that time, the owners of Mountain View Farm—Walter and Edith Martin—started to think about selling their land. Age was making it difficult to manage the property themselves. Real estate values were high, and they could have made a fortune by selling the 250 acres to developers. But they couldn't imagine such a fate for land that their family had farmed for more than a century. They wanted to see the property remain in agriculture. The Hugers seemed like perfect candidates. Unfortunately, they couldn't pay what the Martins needed.

Then, the Martins learned about conservation easements. By placing an easement on the land, they could ensure the land would remain undeveloped and available for agriculture in perpetuity. In addition, they could receive substantial financial benefits.

Working with VOF, the Valley Conservation Council, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Martins placed an easement on the farm in 2008. Thanks to tax incentives and funds from VOF and NRCS, they were able to get the money they needed to sell the property to the Hugers at a reduced price.

"If it wasn't for the easement, we wouldn't have been able to buy this farm," says Fred. Today, he and his family today distribute their farm products to buyers throughout the state. It's just one example of how VOF easements are helping to sustain farming in Virginia.

MORE EASEMENTS ON MORE FARMS

Since Land Preservation Tax Credits in Virginia were made transferable in 2004—allowing land-rich, cash-poor landowners

to sell credits from the donation of easement—the number of small farms being placed under easement has increased. The county that has recorded the most VOF easements in the last four years is Rockbridge County, and most of them have been on family farms. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, which tracks conservation values being protected by all easements in the state, reports that VOF has protected twice as much land with agricultural value since 2006 as all other federal, state, local, and private entities combined.

PROTECTED FARMS *continued on page 4*

"If it wasn't for the easement, we wouldn't have been able to buy this farm." —Fred Huger, owner of Mountain View Farm in Rockbridge County.



Mountain View Farm, protected by a VOF easement in 2008, sells its meat and dairy products to stores, restaurants, and consumers across the region.

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CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS

Letter from the Executive Director

From the minutemen of the Revolutionary War to today's armed forces, from fire departments and libraries to civic groups and charities, America has been called a nation of volunteers.

In Virginia, approximately 1.7 million citizens contributed 247.6 million volunteer hours of service totaling \$4.7 billion to the state in 2009. In a 2010 Executive Order establishing the Governor's Advisory Board on Volunteerism and National Service, Governor McDonnell said, "Community and national service are vital to the fabric of American democracy. Volunteerism and service are critical aspects of our civic life. It is appropriate that the state and federal governments work together to develop a focal point for these efforts."

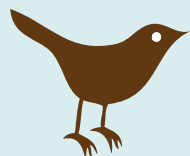
The Virginia's Outdoors Foundation's trustees—who themselves volunteer their time on our board—have taken the Governor's message to heart and asked our staff to expand opportunities for volunteers to assist us with our work. Volunteerism is a key component of the strategic plan the board adopted last year. As a result of the board's leadership, we are developing a new statewide volunteer program that will be rolled out in early 2011.

With roughly 3,000 property owners on 600,000 acres of easement land in 92 counties and 13 cities, the small VOF staff cannot be fully successful without the crucial support of volunteers. We are creating new opportunities for volunteers to help us with monitoring our easements, managing our owned lands, and educating the public about our programs and successes. Not only will a volunteer base enhance the capacity of our professional staff, it will also expand our base of public support. Through volunteerism, Virginians who don't own land but support our mission will have a way to directly contribute to the work we do.

If you would like to learn more about our volunteer opportunities, please call Jason McGarvey, VOF communications and outreach manager, at (804) 786-9603 or e-mail jmcgarvey@vofonline.org. You may also visit our Web site at http://www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/VOF_support-volunteer.php, where you can download a volunteer application.



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VOF Protects 25,185 Acres in 2010; Surpasses 600,000 Total Acres

Despite challenges related to the economy and tax incentives, VOF worked with landowners and partners to protect 25,185 acres across 51 localities in 2010. The easements pushed the total land protected by VOF past the 600,000-acre mark. Here are some of the year's highlights:

- VOF recorded its first easements in Isle of Wight County, Brunswick County, and the City of Hampton. VOF now protects land in 92 of Virginia's 95 counties and in 13 of its 39 independent cities.
- The three counties where VOF protected the most land were Abemarle, Bath, and Smyth.
- The largest new easement was 1,636 acres in Bath County (top-left).
- VOF's trustees designated four new Special Project Areas: Cat Point Creek Watershed in Richmond and

Westmoreland counties; Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor in Augusta and Rockbridge counties (top-center); Front Royal-Luray Corridor in Page and Warren counties; and Spring Valley in Grayson County.

- VOF recorded five new easements on lands owned by local governments: Mill Mountain in the City of Roanoke, Wildwood Park in the City of Radford, Buckroe Beach in the City of Hampton, Leake's Mill Park in Goochland County, and Great Swamp in Isle of Wight County (top-right).

According to the Land Trust Alliance, VOF holds more easements than any land trust in the nation and ranks third in easement acreage. For a complete breakdown of VOF's protected acreage by county and year, please visit our Web site, virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org and navigate to News & Publications > Easement Statistics.

Paint the Piedmont

The Firnew Farm Artists' Circle kicked off the first "Paint the Piedmont" event as a benefit for VOF and the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy at DuCard Winery in Etlan, on December 4. All the paintings were done in conservation areas primarily in Madison and Greene counties. Fifteen of the paintings were selected to be part of a silent auction to raise money for the groups.

"We ought to be able to see the unspoiled landscape in the future," Crowe said about why the group chose to depict easement land. "Once it's paved over, you can't get it back." Some of the artwork can be viewed online at PaintthePiedmont.blogspot.com.

The next "Paint the Piedmont" will be held in the summer at local wineries and include a plein aire painting session for regular and visiting artists. For more information, contact: Trish Crowe at (540) 718-0370 or e-mail TheLegacyoftheLand@gmail.com.



Attendees at the "Paint the Piedmont" event included, from left to right, Peter Rice, Shenandoah National Park; Bob Lee, Virginia Outdoors Foundation; Trish Crowe, Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy; Scott Elliff, DuCard Vineyards; and Sherry Buttrick, Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Photograph by John Mitchell.

PROTECTED FARMS *continued from page 1*

Another indicator of the increase in farms under easement is the use of Preservation Trust Fund money, which VOF grants to income-qualifying landowners to help them with the legal costs of doing an easement. VOF prioritizes farms for PTF grants. Since the fund was created in 1997, VOF has allocated more than \$6.2 million to 213 projects, most of them working farms.

These aren't just ordinary farms, either. Because of VOF's mission to preserve open space with substantial public benefits, the farms generally have additional values such as water quality protection, wildlife habitat, scenic viewsheds, and historic resources (about 60 are designated Virginia Century Farms, having been owned by the same family for more than 100 years). The quality of the farmland is exceptional, as well. More than 175,000 acres on VOF easements are designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as Prime Farmland, and more than 130,000 acres are USDA-designated Soils of Statewide Importance.

The farms are also valuable for their production value. Agriculture is Virginia's largest industry, contributing \$55 billion to the economy annually according to a 2008 report commissioned by the Virginia Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry. Although VOF doesn't collect data about the economic impact of the farms it protects, anecdotal evidence suggests it's substantial.

Take one VOF-protected farm in Rappahannock County, The Farm at Sunnyside. Sunnyside gained national attention

in 2009 when it was visited by First Lady Michelle Obama as part of her campaign to promote local, fresh, and healthy food and to counter childhood obesity. According to owner Nick Lapham, the farm employed 11 full-time and seasonal staff and had gross receipts in the \$100,000 to \$499,999 range in 2010. The farm also spends substantial money on seeds and plants, growing supplies, irrigation equipment, packaging, equipment, maintenance, and construction. All of these expenditures—combined with the multiplier effect that any business has on the economy—sustain jobs and businesses far beyond farming.

Some worry that easements can hurt a farm's bottom line. Lapham hasn't seen it. "Placing the property in easement did not materially affect our business operation," he says. "VOF worked collaboratively with us to ensure that Sunnyside could remain a working landscape while meeting long-term conservation and scenic objectives."

In fact, he adds, "We advertise the easement to our customers as it ties closely to our 'brand' of growing food in a way that protects and even enhances the environment."

PROMOTING SOUND STEWARDSHIP

The growing synergy between the local foods movement and land conservation is central to the business plan at Best of What's Around in southern Albemarle County, a certified organic farm owned by musician Dave Matthews and his wife, Ashley. The farm was placed under easement with VOF in 2003.



The easement's 1,261 acres, which were originally several different properties, were once used primarily for Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), in which consumers buy shares of each year's production in advance of the growing season. Through CSAs, farmers and buyers share in the risks and rewards of farming, rather than the farmer assuming all of the risk. There are scores of CSAs operating across Virginia. Many of them are listed on the state's Virginia Grown Web site, www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown.

In fall 2009, the farm stopped doing the CSA and entered into an innovative partnership with a Charlottesville-area nonprofit called Local Food Hub. Founded in 2009, Local Food Hub supports local agriculture by operating a distribution network for locally grown fruits and vegetables that provides a way for small farmers to access large, institutional buyers while increasing community access to fresh food.


The organization offers a range of services for farmers including production planning; bulk purchasing; access to institutional buyers; educational workshops; and sales, marketing and accounting assistance. "Right now we are working with more than 50 small farms in our area, but with demand for local food consistently outpacing supply, we are always looking for new farms to come on board," says Emily Manley, outreach and communications manager.

Local Food Hub leases 70 acres from Best of What's Around and uses it to run the Educational Farm at Maple Hill. The educational program includes apprenticeships for young adults, high school internships for at-risk youth, and volunteer opportunities. "We want to engage our entire community in the local food movement," says Manley.

Three full-time apprentices live and work on the farm beginning in March of each year and staying through October. They learn all aspects of farm planning and organic vegetable production, while also attending educational workshops and getting to know local veteran farmers.

"We have so many connections with farms in our area that are looking for labor—we're hoping that when our apprentices graduate from Maple Hill, there will be a range of on-farm job and land opportunities out there for them," adds Manley.

In addition to the partnership with Local Food Hub, Best of What's Around continues to raise grass-fed beef and cider apples on the property, which it sells wholesale to local buyers.

"Everything we do here is with an eye toward giving back to the community and taking care of the land," says Chris Schmidt, the farm manager at Best of What's Around. "Some parts of the land are for grazing, some parts are for growing vegetables, and some parts are just left alone for wildlife. The owners believe that balance is important." 

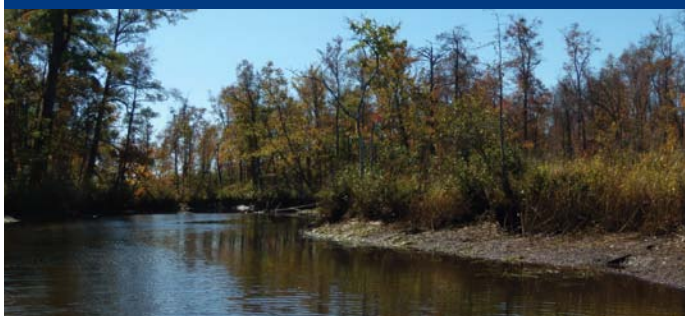
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

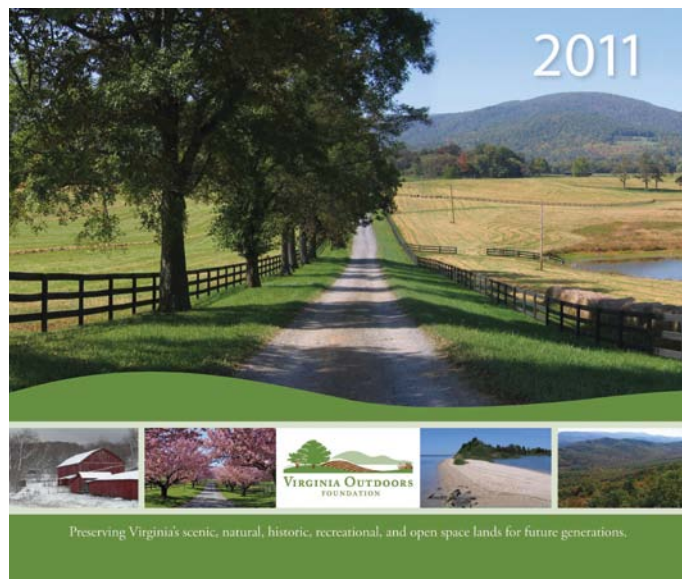


Allison Lohrenz, an urban planning student at Virginia Tech, devoted more than 100 hours to helping VOF stewardship efforts in southwest Virginia this past summer. Allison's contributions included easement monitoring, testing and evaluating GPS equipment, and using her honed research skills to acquire old aerial images of VOF's protected lands. These photos will help VOF staff view changes to these protected properties over time. Also thanks to Allison's efforts, the Blacksburg office was able to verify and update its collection of locality comprehensive plans and maps, which are critical reference materials when evaluating new easement projects.

DID YOU KNOW?

VOF protects more than 12,000 acres, 68 miles of streams, and 20 miles of Rappahannock River frontage in the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge goal is to protect 20,000 acres.





Protect Virginia's Outdoors: Donate Today

By now, you should have received your complimentary 2011 Virginia Outdoors Foundation calendar, which features a dozen easement properties protected by VOF. If you did not receive a calendar and would like one, please call (804) 225-2756.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to help VOF continue to preserve landscapes like those featured in the calendar. Your contribution will support our easement program, the long-term stewardship of these easements, and our threatened lands acquisition initiative. Please consider donating one of three ways:

1. Visit virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org/donate.
2. Call (804) 225-2756 to make a credit card donation.
3. Send a check made payable to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation using the envelope in this newsletter.

WORKING LANDSCAPES GROUP SEEKS LANDOWNERS

Conservationists in the Northern Virginia region have been discussing ways to help landowners with land management issues related to improved grassland management and preservation of habitat and native species. A workgroup, called "Virginia Working Landscapes," has been formed to encourage sustainable use of Virginia landscapes and grasslands for native biodiversity. The member organizations are the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, University of Virginia Blandy Experimental Farm, Piedmont Environmental Council, American Bird Conservancy, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, Environmental Studies at the Piedmont, and the Virginia Native Plants Society. The group has three goals:

- Identify or create demonstration sites that showcase best practices used by farmers and landowners.
- Create a local network to share information between

landowners and state and federal agencies.

- Advance the science of land management and develop best practices that will be relevant to landowners and conservationists.

The workgroup needs the assistance of VOF easement landowners. It is developing a portfolio of lands with sustainable management and selecting lands for free biological surveys. The surveys focus on native grassland species, pollinators, and invasive plants.

The partners are hopeful that VOF landowners will participate in these efforts toward a sustainable Virginia. Please contact one of the following working group representatives to learn more: William J. McShea, wildlife ecologist, Conservation Ecology Center, crcecolgy@si.edu; or Ruth Anna Stolk, strategic development, Smithsonian's Conservation Biology Institute, 1500 Remount Rd., Front Royal, VA 22630, (540) 635-6556.

VIRGINIA TECH OFFERS ONLINE FOREST MANAGEMENT COURSE

Virginia forest landowners looking to gain an understanding of how to keep their woods healthy and productive can do so in the comfort of their own home. Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources and Environment are offering a 12-week "Online Woodland Options for Landowners" course, which runs from March 1 to May 21. The course teaches basic management principles and techniques for both novice and veteran private forest landowners. Materials provided include reference books and CDs in addition to online

reading materials and assignments. Natural resource professionals and experienced landowners will serve as mentors for the students and help with questions via a group discussion board. Participants may also attend an optional end-of-semester field trip. The registration fee is \$45 per family. Participants must have access to a computer with a Web browser and an e-mail account. Access to a printer is strongly recommended. Learn more and register online at www.cnr.vt.edu/forestupdate, or call Jennifer Gagnon at (540) 231-6391.

EASEMENT SPOTLIGHT

The Family That Farms Together ...

By Barbara Bowen

"When milk prices tanked, nobody saw it coming. Instead of using the money to better the farm, we are now using it to buy the farm."

That statement from Rockbridge County dairy owner Linda Leech summarizes the positive impact conservation easements can have on farm families.

Linda and her husband, Charles, are continuing a farming legacy that stretches back generations. Along with their children, Beau and Jennifer, the Leeches own and operate Ingleside Land LLC just outside the City of Lexington.

Farming in the area has diminished from about 28 dairies in Charles' grandfather's time to just seven today. The Leeches are full-time producers who previously rented pasture and crop land for their growing dairy herd. At that time, they simply did not have enough acreage to raise the amount of feed needed for their herd or to provide adequate pastureland for them.

Ingleside Dairy Farm encompassed about 650 acres when the Leeches purchased 168 acres in July 2007. The previous owners are long-time family friends, and Charles knew of their desire to keep the land in agricultural production.

"If we had been the type of people to buy a farm and see how many bucks we could get from it, we would've never gotten this land," he says.

The Leeches worked with VOF and Natural Resources Conservation Service to enroll in the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). To purchase the development rights, FRPP provided 50 percent of the funding, VOF provided 25 percent, and the remaining 25 percent was donated by the family, for which they receive state and federal tax benefits.

VOF is responsible for stewardship of the property in perpetuity. The farm's conservation values include the fact that more than 80 percent of its soils are prime or of statewide importance, it contains historic dwellings dating back to the 1800s, and it contains



Linda, Jennifer, Beau, and Charles Leech—all four graduates of Virginia Tech's dairy science program—placed an easement on their family's farm in Rockbridge County. Ingleside Dairy is one of the county's seven remaining full-time dairies.

substantial frontage along Buffalo Creek, a native trout stream.

All four members of the family are graduates of Virginia Tech's dairy science program, and their decision to protect the farm was made together. Beau summarizes their family's commitment to the dairy business in the simple statement, "That's what we do."

NRCS's Barry Harris, who worked on the easement, says that operations stay afloat these days by "not doing things the same way" and benefiting from available technical advice on conservation practices, such as no till and nutrient management. VOF easement manager Laura Thurman echoes that sentiment, saying that Ingleside is "one of the cleanest, neatest dairies I've ever seen and employs a number of best management practices."

The Leeches say they would recommend conservation easements to other farmers. "You have to think about future generations," adds Linda. "Will they be glad the easement is in place? If so, why not get some monetary benefit from it?"


A longer version of this article appeared in the July 2010 issue of Current Developments, published by Virginia NRCS.



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The Virginia Outdoors Foundation recently protected its 600,000th acre of open space. Thank you to the thousands of landowners and partners who've made it possible.