



A beautiful sunny November day was the perfect time to visit Mr. Jeff Wilson on his farm located on the York and Chester County line. Having just completed the fall farm tours they do for thousands of local school children, the Wilsons were already preparing for winter crop plantings and working hard on their latest project, the production of peach baskets. While discussing the farm and all that its running involves, it is obvious how much this land means to Mr. Wilson and his family.

Could you give me a brief history of the property that is within the conservation easement?

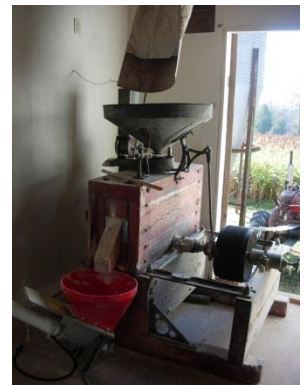
“ Cotton Hills Farm has belonged to the Wilson family since 1882. The farm began as a wedding present to Theodosia Abell when she married Joe Wilson; her father gave the young couple 100 acres of land and a newly built home. Cotton has been grown on the farm every year since, while a variety of crops including small grains, milo, soybeans, corn, peaches, and a large assortment of vegetables have been produced at various times. Today we still grow many acres of cotton; we have expanded our fruits and vegetables to over 150 acres, all of which are under irrigation.



Expansion was necessary after our sons chose to partner with me on the farm following their graduation from Clemson University. We opened a produce market on the farm in 2002 to increase the profitability of our produce crops. In 2010 we built a wholesale/processing facility that supplies both grocery stores (including Earth Fare) and other retail produce stands in our area. We most recently started an entirely new enterprise, in 2012, of making half-bushel peach baskets and are now producing 900 per day. This venture enables us to make use of our large facility during the season when it is not needed for produce, as well as offer employment to our workers year round. My family has established a history throughout the generations of trying new things in order to keep our farm profitable as well as maintaining its status as an asset to the Lowrys Community.”

What is unique about the property?

“Cotton Hills Farm is unique in several regards. Most of the structures, including the home house and large barns that were built in the 1920's, are not only still standing but in use today. In addition to looking like a traditional farm of a bygone period, ours is also a working farm. This combination of a yester-year appearance with modern-day production activities makes a striking impression on the thousands of visitors we have each year. We have been doing field trips in the fall for school children since 2000 and are also open to the public on Saturdays in October, including our Farm Fair on the second Saturday which draws a sizeable crowd. All of our guests are taken on wagon rides which allow them to see the different aspects of our property. Cotton Hills Farm has been managed in such a way that it retains the history of its past while utilizing cutting-edge technology in its production methods--a very special quality that is seldom found in today's competitive agriculture.”





Why did you decide to place the property in an easement?

“Our family felt the need to protect our farm from the encroachment of development we were seeing in the greater Charlotte area. We also had a desire to preserve the great beauty of our property and to share it with others; we have been so gratified by the constant comments from visitors that being on our farm takes them back to a farm they grew up on. I especially had a strong wish to use our farm as a living classroom where the public at large can

learn about how farming is practiced today, and hopefully come to appreciate those of us who provide their food and fiber. The importance of conservation of our resources on the farm and methods used to achieve it are also themes we seek to impart.”

What do you feel will be the benefits to your family and the land in the future from the conservation easement being in place?

“When my wife and I began to explore placing the farm in an easement, we found that our daughter and two sons were in complete agreement with us that any limitations incurred would be a small price to pay to protect this land that we love and that has provided for the needs of our family for six generations. Therefore I would say that the greatest benefit is that the easement has given us a means of preserving the 800 acres we placed in the trust to be passed intact to our family. A very special piece of South Carolina history has been secured for posterity.”



More information on Cotton Hills Farm can be found at www.cottonhillsfarm.com



For more information on conservation easements, please call the Nation Ford Land Trust at 803-547-8140 or visit www.NationFordLandTrust.org.