

Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board

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Jefferson County Farmland Protection Program Wraps Up 2011 with 36 Farms

Charles Town, WV – In December 2011, the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board concluded the year's work by completing easements on four working farms. In 2011 the Board welcomed 12 new farms into the program, the most easements it has ever completed in a year since the program began in 2002. The Board will begin the New Year in partnership with 36 Jefferson County landowners, protecting 3,486 acres of working farmland, forest, waterways and scenic and historical landscapes.

The Board spent a total of \$558,500 for the four easements. The Board's money was matched by \$523,500 from the USDA/Natural Resource Conservation Service and \$185,500 from the NPS/American Battlefield Protection Program. Two of the landowners donated a total of \$327,500 by selling their easements through a bargain sale. Landowners donated 20 percent of the easement value of \$1,595,000 for the farms.

Three of the four easements completed in December were funded through the County's Farmland Protection Program and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, including Jack Burch Sr.'s 185 acre beef operation in Kearneysville, the Gray family's 60-acre property in Shenandoah Junction, and John Writt's 69-acre property in the Shepherdstown district. The Board purchased one of the easements through a bargain sale. The agricultural pastures and cropland on these farms are now protected in perpetuity by the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board. The Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle serves as a co-holder of the easements.

John Writt remarked, "My farm has been in the family since 1939. I am thankful to have it in the Farm Land Preservation program. Now I can rest assured that the farm will not be developed in the years ahead, so it can continue on within the family, going to my children and then my grandchildren to carry on."

The fourth easement was completed on the WilBob Farm in Kearneysville. It is administered by the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle with the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board serving as a co-holder. The American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) funded the easement with a match from the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Program and a substantial donation from the landowner. More than half of the land lies in the core of the Civil War's Smithfield Battlefield. Fighting occurred there in

August 1864, at the beginning of General Sheridan's Shenandoah Valley Campaign, when two Confederate infantry divisions crossed Opequon Creek and forced a Union cavalry division back along what is now the Middleway Pike, necessitating use of a Union infantry division to stop the Confederate advance.

This is the seventh easement funded by the ABPP in Jefferson County, protecting a total of 593 acres.

Mr. Henshaw remarked, "Placing an easement on my farm has helped me accomplish important family estate-planning goals. Through this program, I have been able to prepare for the transfer of ownership and management of our family land and farm operation, minimize income and estate taxes, and ensure financial security and peace of mind for future generations."

To date, the Board has preserved 3,486 acres of farmland in Jefferson County and has secured commitments and funding for 147 additional acres that are currently in the process. Another 966 acres are in application for the 2012 funding cycle.

A conservation easement is a flexible legal tool that enables landowners to permanently protect the agricultural, natural, scenic and historic values of their property from development and subdivision. Property owners retain full use and ownership of the land. Because an easement is perpetual, it is transferred with the property when the property is sold, thereby forever protecting it. Easements have become a key tool for protecting important farmland in communities across the country.

The Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board was established under a state law passed in 2000 that allows West Virginia counties to levy a transfer tax on real estate to purchase development rights from landowners who wish to protect their land for agricultural purposes. "Protecting our farmland in perpetuity secures productive farmland, protects water supplies and wildlife habitat, strengthens the viability of farming in the county and maintains the rural working landscape that makes Jefferson County such a beautiful place to live and visit," said Elizabeth Wheeler, Administrator for Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board.

Grant Smith, President of the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle, said "We were pleased to join with the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board in completing so many easements this year. We welcomed the decision by several of the landowners to donate a portion of the easement value, thereby stretching the Farmland Protection Board money to cover more easements, and hope that this trend will continue in 2012."

To learn how the Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board can help you protect the land you value, contact the board at: 304/724-1414 or farmlandprotection@jcda.net.