

Article 9: The View from the Board. Published 19 June 2016

“Good farmers, who take seriously their duties as stewards of Creation and of their land's inheritors, contribute to the welfare of society in more ways than society usually acknowledges, or even knows. These farmers produce valuable goods, of course; but they also conserve soil, they conserve water, they conserve wildlife, they conserve open space, they conserve scenery.”

— **Wendell Berry, Bringing it to the Table: On Farming and Food**

This article in the ongoing series introduces the 7 members of the Berkeley County Farmland Protection board of directors, a small but dedicated group who believe deeply in the mission of the program, and its lasting benefit to Berkeley County.

For 3 board members, all early adopters of the program, serving on the board is a way of giving back.

Chairman Floyd Kursey serves in order to keep the open space and agricultural movement alive in Berkeley County. He recognizes that our rural setting is why people come to live here - “to be able to look out across open space and fields, whether they are in crops or livestock. This program is an opportunity for people who would like to know that those fields will be there in 100 years. It’s a way to meet great people, and help secure a future for agriculture and open space.”

Vice-Chair Dan Lewis echoes those sentiments. “In Berkeley County we are lucky to have a way to protect forever land designated as farmland. My farm is protected by Berkeley County Farmland Protection. I feel that by serving on the board, I can help others protect their farms.”

Secretary Susan Whalton said “Farmland Protection gave us an opportunity to protect our farm without giving up ownership of the farm, or our enjoyment of it. I serve because I want to tell other people about this great opportunity.”

County Councilperson Elaine Mauck sees the value of the program in terms of its benefit to the County’s health, vibrancy, prosperity, and identity. “Historically, farms and orchards were the backbone of Berkeley County. Protecting them increases and enhances our quality of life.”

Barbara Bratina is the Board’s “city mouse”. She and husband Bill Caldwell own LA Roberts Jewelers, and Barbara taught at Martinsburg High School. But her roots are rural, growing up on a farm in Leetown, “Prato Rio”. Barbara’s contributions reflect an appreciation for the rich and diverse fabric of life in the Panhandle. But she knows that maintaining those values takes work, and commitment.

No one understands that better than Treasurer Carla Kitchen, who owns and manages Kitchen’s Orchard and Farm Market, an 800-acre operation in Falling Waters. Kitchen knows that the County cannot rely on only the largest farming operations to maintain the balance that is needed. “For the County’s agricultural future to be preserved, to protect water, and to maintain a continuing source of

healthy food and produce, we need to conserve as many of the remaining farms as possible. We need to see them as a living network of co-supporting, co-sustaining parts of a whole - each parcel contributing to the health of the other. Just as farmers cooperate as a community, so does the land."

Susan Whalton witnessed first hand how quickly and irrevocably farms and open spaces can disappear due to development. "I have lived where that happened. It happened bit by bit - and one day everything was gone - the fields, the farms, the trees - all the old landmarks and beautiful views. I learned never to take our natural surroundings or farms for granted."

Sandra Hamilton, interim Director for the Berkeley County Development Authority, brings a unique perspective to the Board. Hamilton grew up on the old Bishop Baden farm in south Berkeley, where some of her best memories were playing with her sisters. "We had a great garden, cows, a horse. We played in the outbuildings and pretended they were different things - one was a store that we ran, one was our house. We had nothing costly or "plugged in" to play with - just our imaginations. There was a stream with huge rocks and a willow tree, and I would go out there with a stack of books and read for hours. It breaks my heart to go back there now and see how much of the land is cut up with lots and houses."

While Hamilton acknowledges that some people might see her roles in both economic development and land protection as a conflict, she asserts, "It's not a conflict at all. We can coexist and be good stewards of what we've been given." In fact, Hamilton says "it is critical as we bring in new businesses that we also maintain our land for agricultural purposes and beauty, and that we preserve it, and have a balance for generations to come."

There is a sense of urgency felt by all Board members, as the old guard of Berkeley County farmers look towards the uncertain future of the land that they and their families have worked for generations. Said Bratina, "None of us can know what farming will look like in 100 years, but we do know that through Farmland Protection, the land, streams, forests and wildlife can be preserved, and be here for everyone to enjoy. And there can be peace of mind for farmers in knowing that long after they are gone, their farms and legacies will be sustained and protected."

For information on the Farmland Protection Program, Board members invite you to call them at 304-260-9250.

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