“Ken Smith and his family’s Cool Lawn Farm operation are a great example of how agriculture and land conservation go hand-in-hand to build a vibrant rural economy,” says Mike Kane, conservation director for The Piedmont Environmental Council.

When Smith, a fourth-generation dairy farmer, bought his father’s Remington dairy farm in 1992, Cool Lawn Farm was about 270 acres and 110 cows. Since then, Smith has expanded the operation, where he now milks more than 1,000 cows daily, owns over 1,000 acres and leases another 1,900 acres in the area. Smith says one key to his success has been his conservation of 620 acres of farmland.

“Ken values land conservation because he understands working farms can’t grow if farmers don’t have access to land. And when it’s conserved farmland, as much of Cool Lawn Farm is, the provisions in conservation easements protect the soils, drinking water and other natural resources,” Kane said. “On top of that, a critical mass of viable farm operations supports a whole host of other businesses and industries and benefits the community as a whole.”

Smith estimates that for every 100 to 150 cows, a farmer puts back about $1 million a year into the local economy at the hardware store, feed store, vet, buying farm equipment, putting up fencing, and so forth, usually all within 25 miles of their farm. According to Ray Pickering, director of Fauquier County’s agricultural department, a Cost of Community Services study done by the county in 2015, found that agricultural land and open space are the most tax-positive land use for the county, above both residential and commercial/industrial land, which come with financial impacts of public services, schools and other support infrastructure.

Smith has been able to marry conservation and farming through Fauquier County’s Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, which pays landowners for the development rights on their land and then extinguishes those development rights with a conservation easement on the land. By buying development rights directly from landowners—in 2020, Fauquier County paid $25,000 per right—PDR programs open up land conservation for folks who find that tax incentives associated with a more traditional donated easement are not an

Interested in Protecting Your Land?
The Piedmont Environmental Council’s conservation staff can help you explore your options. For more information, please contact your local PEC land conservation staff member.

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pecva.org/conservation
A conservation easement is an agreement between a landowner and a private land trust or a governmental conservation agency that limits future development on a property. Its purpose is to protect that property’s conservation values, whether that be its farm, forest, water, habitat, scenic or cultural attributes. Restrictions in easements run with the land and apply to all future landowners. With an easement, you can protect the land you love for the benefit of current and future generations.

Conservation easements offer flexibility, and each one is unique. The terms of an easement and the protections placed on the property are negotiated between the landowner and the conservation organization. Typically, those terms:

- Limit the amount of subdivision and development allowed on the property;
- Protect important natural resources, including streams, productive agricultural soils, forests and natural habitat areas;
- Limit dumping, mining, grading, blasting on the property;
- Allow continuation of productive rural uses, such as agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing.

The landowner who donates the easement continues to own, use and control the land subject to the terms of the easement. The landowner still decides who has access to the property and for what purpose, just as before. The conservation organization is responsible for enforcing the terms of the conservation easement.

Landowners who donate conservation easements make a difference in shaping the future of their communities. Their actions also foster land and resource stewardship that benefits all of us with clean water, productive farm and forestland, thriving natural habitats, climate resiliency, and beautiful vistas.

Because of these benefits, charitable donation of an easement may qualify landowners for some tax benefits. Some counties have PDR (Purchase of Development Rights) programs, in which the county buys development rights from a landowner and then places an easement on the land. You can read more about this option in the cover story on page 1.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more, please reach out to The Piedmont Environmental Council and visit www.pecva.org/easements. PEC is a private nonprofit land trust, and our knowledgeable staff can guide you through the easement donation process and provide you with up-to-date information on tax incentives or other tools available to help protect your land!
What Is a Conservation Easement? And is it right for me?

Land Conservation in Virginia's Piedmont

In total, conservation easements in Albemarle, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange and Rappahannock counties protect approximately:

- 1,766 miles of streams
- 10,431 acres of wetlands
- 26,836 acres adjacent to scenic rivers
- 201,496 acres of prime farmland soils
- 201,461 acres of forests
- 111,935 acres along scenic byways
- 127,117 acres in the viewshed of the Appalachian Trail
- 133,949 acres in historic districts
- 30,585 acres of battlefields

A CONSERVATION EASEMENT is an agreement between a landowner and a private land trust or a governmental conservation agency that limits future development on a property.

### Acres protected in 2020 by Conservation Easements*

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<th>County</th>
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| REGIONAL | 426,657 |

*Totals do not sum due to rounding.
"A conservation easement allowed us to stay on the farm and keep it in the family and keep the land open, intact and beautiful. “You take care of the land and the land takes care of you.”"

-Dean and Carina Elgin, Mountain Hollow Farm, Fauquier County dairy and cattle operation, Virginia Century Farm.