

# FARMS: Conservation easements protect nearly 2,000 acres

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veloped," he said of the Jefferson City property. "Saving good land for agricultural production will become more and more important as time goes on."

Hugh J. Moser participated in the 1974 panel with Wendell Berry. The Mosers, like Berry, agreed that while this season farmers are growing crops, over time they are growing good soil.

"When you have good soil, you have to treat it right and leave it better for the next generation," Moser said.

He uses no-till methods and cover crops. This year, he has 1,000 acres of corn and 1,000 of soybeans.

"Both look good right now. The rain has been good. But we're going to need some July rains too. We don't mind if it rains about an inch every week."

The Southeast is already a corn deficit area, so Moser takes seriously the need to maintain production.

"It makes a big difference where you grow," he said. "A college friend, just visited me, who has 10,000 acres of corn in Illinois. He sells his corn for 10 cents per bushel under the market. We sell ours here for \$1.20 over."

Moser's neighbors, Larry and Mary James Musick, also have a conservation easement on their 265-acre farm, which has been in her family for five genera-

tions. That means the land along Old Andrew Johnson Highway east of Jefferson City will remain in agricultural production even as development occurs around it.

"We also feel strongly about preserving agricultural land and not having it developed," said Larry Musick. "It was important to us to see the farm remain in the family. The courts have never allowed a land trust to be broken, so that makes us feel good about the future."

The James Family bought the land and the 1850 Fairview house in 1890. The house was designed by William Strickland, who also designed the Tennessee Capitol Building.

Moser and Musick both said assistance from the Conservancy and the Trust made the process go smoothly.

Bill Clabough, executive director at Foot hills, said he believes "the conservation easement is the greatest tool we have to protect farm and open land. It's a contract between the land owner and the land trust to protect it in perpetuity. The owner can continue to farm, but development is restricted."

One benefit of the agreement can be a significant income tax deduction, he said. To be eligible, it must meet the "qualified conservation contribution" requirements of the IRS Code.

Clabough and the Conservancy recent-



The Isaac McBee House, owned by Jack and Beverly Kramer, is situated on a 120-acre farm above the Holston River in Strawberry Plains.

ly helped Jack and Beverly Kramer with an easement on their 120-acre farm overlooking the Holston River in Strawberry Plains. Jack's interest in land conservation goes back decades. He was a board member of the French and Pickering Conservation Trust in Pennsylvania before he and Beverly moved to East Tennessee.

Clabough said the Kramer farm is a "jewel" that not only includes agricultural land but also natural areas filled with native plants and wildflowers.

The Kramers bought

the 1850 Isaac McBee House and surrounding farmland in 2000 and spent just under a decade restoring it.

Standing on the hill on Day Road next to the Kramers' home, it's not hard to imagine how Jefferson County looked a century or more ago. Looking north, you see a stretch of the Holston, clothed in sycamores, and 244-acre McBee Island, and in the distance, the Clinch Mountain Range – more specifically, the section called Sleeping Lady, the curves of her body distinct enough to reveal how lonely the man who

first named her must have been.

Clabough said he finds that conservation easements often become more popular in local areas as neighbors spread the word. Foot-hills has helped preserve more than 140,000 acres in the Southeast.

"We've really enjoyed working in Jefferson County and have helped preserve some unique land," he said. "We're working right now with another Jefferson County land-owner who is interested."

During his visit in 1974, Berry talked about ways to preserve Je-

fferson County's farm heritage and the need to balance individual rights with the responsibilities of citizenship.

"Men cannot be independent of nature," he writes in an essay. "In one way or another, he must live in relation to it, and there are only two alternatives: the way of the frontiersman, whose response to nature was to dominate it, to assert his presence in it by destroying it, or the way of Thoreau who sent to the natural places to become quiet in them, to learn from them, to be restored by them."



Photo courtesy A. Hertz, University of Massachusetts Boston

A juvenile eastern newt (*Notophthalmus viridescens*) traversing the Appalachian landscape. Eastern newts are among the most susceptible species tested to Bsal chytridiomycosis.

## Fungal pathogen could be devastating

Consequences of introduction could be severe to native species

KNOXVILLE – New research indicates the fungal pathogen *Batrachochytrium salamandrinovorum* (Bsal) could be devastating to amphibian biodiversity if introduced to North America. Nature Communications published the findings June 5 from a group of researchers at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, the University of Massachusetts-Boston and Washington State University.

"We could see over 80 species of salamanders in the United States and 140 species in North America experience population declines if Bsal is introduced," said Matt Gray, the lead author and professor of wildlife health in the UT School of Natural Resources. Amphibians are an important form of natural mosquito control in our environment. They are also important to medical research because of their ability to regenerate limbs and the natural analgesics, or pain killers, they produce. Some of the peptides from their skin can actually deactivate some viruses detrimental to humans, including

HIV.

However, Bsal erodes and destroys the skin of amphibians. The fungal pathogen was discovered 10 years ago in fire salamander populations in Europe but has not yet been detected in the western hemisphere. The article's authors began experiments evaluating the risk to North American amphibians in 2016.

"Some of our most common salamander species, like the eastern newt, could be wiped out," Gray said. The research predicts the greatest declines could be seen in the Appalachian Mountains and Pacific Northwest, where climate conditions are ideal for Bsal and salamander numbers are the greatest.

"Many of the salamanders in the Smokies are lungless and breath entirely through their skin," said co-author Debra Miller, veterinary pathologist with the UT One Health Initiative. "So a fungus that destroys the skin can affect their ability to respire and maintain healthy levels of important electrolytes in their bodies." In a separate

publication, Miller and colleagues reported that changes in skin function and electrolytes in the blood from Bsal infection can lead to paralysis, which is often seen in sick animals.

In the Nature article, the authors encourage the U.S., Canada and Mexico to consider developing a healthy trade certification program that promotes the sale of amphibians that are not infected by chytrid fungi and ranaviruses.

The article says wildlife trade involves more than 180 nations and generates \$300 billion annually.

In another study published in June in Business Strategy and the Environment, Kevin Cavasos, of the UT One Health Initiative; Gray and colleagues report the majority of U.S. businesses support a healthy trade certification program. Neelam Poudyal, professor of natural resource policy in the UT School of Natural Resources, said, "Our initial surveys of pet amphibian owners suggest they are concerned about these pathogens and may be willing to spend approx-

imately 75% more for amphibians that are not infected."

Gray, Poudyal and others recently began a study supported by the National Science Foundation to investigate pathogen movements in pet amphibian trade and the willingness of the industry to adopt healthy trade practices.

Gray said, "Wildlife trade can contribute to the global spread of various pathogens, even those that can cause disease in humans. It is important to support healthy trade programs to reduce business losses and threats to our native biodiversity and safeguard public health."

More information about Gray and Poudyal's healthy trade research as well as opportunities for U.S. pet amphibian businesses to receive free pathogen testing can be found at [healthyamphibiantrade.org](http://healthyamphibiantrade.org).

## AEF program accepting new applications

Deadline to apply is July 10

NASHVILLE – The Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) is accepting applications from agricultural, food, and forestry businesses to receive cost-share funding through its Agricultural Enterprise Fund (AEF) program.

The program supports Governor Lee's and TDA's priorities for rural counties. Grants are awarded to starting or expanding businesses in Tennessee that demonstrate a strong potential for impact on local farm income, access to markets, increased capacity, or agricultural innovation.

"The AEF program has awarded more than \$8 million to agricultural, food, and forestry businesses and nonprofits since 2017," Commissioner Charlie Hatcher, D.V.M. said. "Innovative agricultural

projects and those that positively impact local farm income or increase access to markets are targets for the program. Projects that take place in economically at-risk or distressed counties will be given priority."

The application for the AEF program can be found online at [agriculture.tn.gov/AEF/AEF\\_Application/Create](http://agriculture.tn.gov/AEF/AEF_Application/Create), and the deadline to apply is July 10, 2023.

Businesses must include proof of financing and a business plan with their application for it to be considered.

In total, the Agricultural Enterprise Fund has awarded more than \$8.4 million in funding to Tennessee businesses, leading to more than \$122 million in private investments from agriculture and forest-product business development since the program's launch in 2017. More information about the Tennessee Agricultural Enterprise Fund can be found at [www.tn.gov/aef](http://www.tn.gov/aef) or by emailing Rachel Sullivan at [Rachel.L.Sullivan@tn.gov](mailto:Rachel.L.Sullivan@tn.gov).

### MARKET REPORT

Following is the report for the Wilson Livestock Market sale, held each Saturday in Newport.

Results are from June 24, 2023.

#### Good Calves

Steers and bulls: 350 pounds, \$170-\$200; 450 pounds, \$160-\$190; 550 pounds, \$140-\$170; 650 pounds, \$120-\$150; 750 pounds: \$120-\$150;

#### Plainer Calves

Steers and bulls: 350 pounds, \$150-\$200; 450 pounds, \$150-\$200; 550 pounds, \$140-\$180; 650 pounds, \$130-\$160; 750 pounds: \$120-\$140;

Heifers: 350 pounds, \$175-\$220; 450 pounds, \$175-\$220; 550 pounds, \$165-\$215; 650 pounds, \$155-\$205; 750 pounds: \$150-\$180;

Slaughter cows: \$77 to \$119;

Slaughter bulls: \$100 to \$134;

Bred Cows: \$850 to \$1,100.