



Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

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Press Release

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Claxton Farm Easement Permanently Conserves Iconic Working Farmland

Buncombe County, NC- The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy's (SAHC) Farmland Preservation Initiative grows with the addition of Claxton Farm to 3,000 acres of SAHC-protected working farmland. SAHC has partnered with landowners Porter and Martha Ann Claxton to permanently conserve 480 acres of their 550-acre property through a working lands conservation easement.

"SAHC has been talking with the family for almost three years about options for placing their farm under conservation," said Carl Silverstein, Executive Director of SAHC, "Claxton Farm is a landmark, a place that's visited and enjoyed by many people. This easement assures that it will be there to be enjoyed for future generations."

Claxton Farm holds the largest intact breeding herd of registered Polled Herefords (beef cattle) in western North Carolina and is one of the best examples in the area of a modern, viable farming enterprise. The farm incorporates traditional farming including cattle and hay productions along with cutting edge agri-tourism. Weddings and other special events are held frequently at Claxton Farm. The events venue boasts 360 degrees of unobstructed mountain views which draw over 11,000 visitors each year. A diverse assortment of livestock such as ILR registered llamas, AMHA registered miniature horses, camels, donkeys and sheep attracts school groups from the surrounding communities.

"We want to share our farm and enjoy having people come visit to see the animals, walk the trails and share their special occasions," said Martha Ann Claxton. "There is a location on the farm, a spot in nature, we like to share where you don't see any other buildings just mountain sides and pastures with animals grazing on the hillsides."

Located in the Brittain Mountain region of Buncombe County's Flat Creek Township, Claxton Farm rests in an area designated by the Buncombe County Land Conservation Advisory Board (BCLCAB) as a high priority for protection efforts. This is the first project of the BCLCAB in the northern part of Buncombe County. The property is near 418 acres of conservation easements held by SAHC and is also adjacent to the 1,900-acre YoungLife tract.

The conservation easement was appraised at six million dollars, and the Claxton family donated 84% of the easement value. The Buncombe County Land Conservation Program provided a \$769,000 grant to cover the purchase price and transaction costs. Commissioner of Agriculture, Steve Troxler, and the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund awarded a \$200,000 state grant to SAHC to match the county's contribution to the purchase price.

"The Claxtons are known for their generosity and their love of our mountain community," said Meridith Elliott Powell, member of the BCLCAB. "Years ago, they made the decision to open their farm for special events, and this decision has given thousands of people the opportunity to experience the pristine beauty of our mountains and the mountain lifestyle. As residents of WNC we are lucky that this land will be forever protected and enjoyed for generations."

The property contains working farmland, a variety of healthy forest types ranging in age from 30 to over 100 years old, significant wildlife habitat and 13,950 feet of tributaries of Flat Creek as well as portions of the creek itself. Flat Creek is a tributary of the French Broad River. The tract also boasts a rich diversity of native plant species and encompasses its own watershed. Claxton Farm also includes a prominent ridgeline that can be seen from Interstate 26 where it intersects Flat Creek at Exit 17.

Beginning with 60 acres in 1976, the Claxtons converted the farm from commercial cattle to a registered Polled Hereford operation certified and accredited by the state of North Carolina and the United States Department of Agriculture. The cattle operation has Beef Quality Assurance certification which ensures safe beef products through the implementation of proper management techniques and humane animal treatment. The Claxtons have partnered extensively with the Buncombe County Soil and Water District to implement a number of Best Management Practices on their farm, and in 2000 Claxton Farm was given the River Friendly Award for their effort in improving water quality in the Upper French Broad Watershed.

The farm has made headlines recently with the loss of its historic tobacco barn which burned to the ground in November after 14 years of hosting events and over 80 years of standing on the site. Plans are underway to rebuild the barn with its completion projected for April 2010. The new building will be constructed using timber harvested from the farm.

“The Claxton family has made an enormous contribution towards preserving Buncombe County’s rural character and natural heritage,” said William Hamilton, SAHC Farmland Program Director. “The farm is a beloved scenic landmark in the community and incorporates sound and sustainable farming techniques that preserve the integrity of the land, water and rural community. The Claxtons have a keen understanding of the value in protecting our state’s working landscapes, especially given the rapid rate of development and loss of farmland in recent decades.”

SAHC is a non-profit, charitable organization whose mission is to protect the world’s oldest mountains for the benefit of present and future generations. The land trust works with individuals and local communities to identify, preserve and manage the region’s important lands. This year SAHC and its 1,500 members will reach the milestone of protecting 50,000 acres throughout the mountain region, including key sites adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, along the Blue Ridge Parkway, in the Highlands of Roan and in the Sandy Mush farming community. The SAHC headquarters are in Asheville. To learn more about SAHC and how to join the effort to protect the future of the southern mountains visit www.appalachian.org.