



## Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy

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### Press Release

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#### **Farm Providing Local Foods Now Permanently Protected through a Conservation Easement**

**Buncombe County, NC** — The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy permanently protected 290 acres in Fairview, part of which is a working farm. Hickory Nut Gap Farm, one of the region's most historic and scenic farms, providing locally and sustainably grown food for the community, was protected through a conservation easement with the support of the N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, Buncombe County, and private donors on December 19, 2008.

The Trust Fund, run by the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, awarded Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy \$703,500 to match contributions from Buncombe County, private donors, and from the landowners to protect Hickory Nut Gap Farm. "The public is benefited in many ways, especially because it is so scenic and beautiful and is the gateway for driving from Asheville to Chimney Rock and other new State lands in Hickory Nut Gorge," said John Ager, husband of Annie Clarke Ager.

The farm straddles the designated Drovers Road scenic highway. Travelers of the road lodged at Sherrill's Inn, the centerpiece of the farm. The historic Sherrill's Inn resides next to the land under conservation easement, but is not currently protected. "By resolving questions about how the land will be managed going forward, the stage is set for working together to protect Sherrill's Inn and the other cultural and historical resources," said Ager.

The Clarke family faced a tough decision, as the property is in a prime spot for development, which could be lucrative for the family. "But we looked at that and said, 'no, we don't want to do it,'" said Annie Clarke Ager, one of the landowners. "The Clarke Family is very grateful to the citizens of North Carolina and NCDR for making it possible for us to keep our family farm into the future. We have great respect for the citizens of NC and appreciate Commissioner Troxler's and the Buncombe County Commissioner's vision for the future of North Carolina."

One of Annie's passions at Hickory Nut Gap is her herd of 24 horses. Between organizing weekly riding lessons, private trail rides, and a summer camp she tends to stay pretty busy. The summer camp, featuring art, drama, and horseback riding takes place on the farm for two months in the summer.

The six living children of the late Jamie and Elspie Clarke, whose parents purchased the land in 1916, own the farm under the name McClure Clarke Family Limited Partnership. Hickory Nut Gap Farm's history dates back to the first settlers crossing the Blue Ridge after the Revolutionary War. "The Clarke Family members are honored to have this opportunity to preserve this large amount of land for the use and benefit of future generations and for the residence of Buncombe and Henderson counties," said Jim Clarke, part-owner of the property.

"We are so appreciative of the support we have received from Commissioner Steve Troxler, the North Carolina Dept. of Agriculture, Buncombe County Commissioners, and generous individuals in putting this conservation easement on our family farm," said Doug Clarke, part-owner of the property. "Hickory Nut Gap Farm is a unique and storied place, serving as a landmark for travelers and holding a special place in the hearts of the many people who have worked, visited or grown up here. This conservation easement was the only option our family had to keep our farm and forestland intact for future generations."

The Trust Fund prioritizes working farms with creative enterprises, such as Hickory Nut Gap Meats and Flying Cloud Farm, two businesses that operate on Hickory Nut Gap Farm. The business owners, Jamie and Amy Ager and Annie Louise and Isaiah Perkinson lease from their family members who own the land — the children of the late Jamie and Elspie Clarke. The operations provide fruits, vegetables and meat to 7 grocers, 14 restaurants and many individuals in Asheville and the surrounding area.

"The conservation easement is beneficial for family relationships because it settles important previously unanswered questions about how the family property will be managed and used in the future," said Ager. It benefits the land itself and use of the land because it enables current and future generations of family members to farm the property and manage it in a useful productive way. It is a place that has touched so many people's lives, as the quote from Elspeth Clarke demonstrates 'If I don't share this beautiful place with all the people I know then God will take it away from me.'"

"It's extremely gratifying to have a role in conserving an important working family farm and forestland that will have a positive impact on current and future generations," said Carl Silverstein, SAHC Executive Director. "Closing this transaction was a historical day for the future of agriculture and for the future of natural resource conservation in North Carolina. This could not have been done without the vision of Commissioner Steve Troxler and the creation of the NC ADFP Trust Fund, the foresight of Buncombe County Commissioners, and the generosity of private donors. Working with the experienced staff of the Trust Fund to successfully close this transaction was a delight, and we are excited about the prospect of conserving more family farms in 2009."