



BAKER FARMS

Two Families,
Two Farms,

more than
Two Centuries
in Agriculture



Shenandoah County Supervisor Steve Baker grew up on his family's farms near Conicville with a few cows, a few pigs and an extraordinary legacy. His mother's family had been farming there for more than 250 years, while his father's family had been farming across the road for a nearly a century.

This remarkable length of family ownership earned the Baker family two designations in the Virginia Century Farm Program. Established by the General Assembly, the Virginia Century Farm Program recognizes family farms in operation for at least 100 consecutive years and currently includes 35 farms in Shenandoah County and 1,301 across the state.

Certificates signed by the Governor and the state Commissioner of Agriculture honor "the generations of Virginia farm families whose diligent and dedicated efforts have maintained these farms, provided nourishment to their fellow citizens and contributed so greatly to the economy of the Commonwealth." The program proudly notes that "today, descendants of these first farmers continue to produce food and fiber on the same land as their forefathers."

Steve Baker is a direct descendant of John Dodson, who received a land grant of 400 acres from Lord Fairfax in 1756. About 33 acres of this original farm remains in the family. The neighboring farm was purchased by Baker's great aunt in 1911. Together, these two farms total 44 acres.

When Baker raised his first hog as a 4-H project 50 years ago, he was starting the journey that ensured future prosperity for his family land. As owner/operator of Baker Farms Inc., he manages 700-800 head of hogs including 90 breeding sows. He has diversified and expanded the hog operation as markets demanded. Baker Farms was one of the first meat producers to sell alongside fruit and vegetable markets at farmer's markets locally and in Northern Virginia. His parents were his top market sales personnel for more than 14 years.

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Forum Seeks To EXPAND Family Farm Designation

About 33 acres on Steve Baker's farm qualifies, along with a half dozen other farms in Shenandoah County, for bicentennial status, honoring continuous family ownership for at least 200 years. But the Virginia Century Farm program currently recognizes only 100-year tenure.

To honor the extraordinary achievement of the families on bicentennial and tricentennial farms, Shenandoah Forum has asked program officials to consider expanding recognition in the Virginia Century Farm program to bicentennial and tricentennial farms. See the current list of Virginia Century Farms at www.vdacs.virginia.gov/century.



Seth Coffman
Shenandoah Forum
Chairman

A Message from Shenandoah Forum's Chairman

We all recognize the treasure that is Shenandoah County. The mountains, the river, and the farms all contribute to the beautiful landscape we call home. A large piece of what makes Shenandoah County a great place to live is the sense of community and most important to that is the people. It's you, it's me, and it's our neighbors caring enough about our way of life and the future of this county to be engaged in issues and decisions that are important in Shenandoah County. One of the things that makes Shenandoah County unique is the high level of involvement our citizens have on county government committees, commissions, and advisory boards. Dozens and dozens of volunteers willingly give their time and talents to serve on committees such as the Water Resource Advisory Board, Conservation Easement Authority, and as highlighted in this newsletter the Citizen's Advisory Committee. In today's world of smart phones and constant access to technology, it seems like we never truly stop working at the end of the day and as result have very little time for anything else. And it's true everyone is busy these days and no one has the time for extra responsibilities, but people who care deeply about an issue make time. To all those who serve on county level volunteer committees, boards, and commissions I say thank you for making time. Your hard work does not go unnoticed or unappreciated and brings to mind a quote from Theodore Roosevelt, "Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, 'Certainly I can!' Then get busy and find out how to do it."

County Relies on Citizens to Revise Land Use Plan



Shenandoah County supervisors once again endorsed the hard work of county residents in updating the county's Comprehensive Land Use Plan. At its September meeting, the Board of Supervisors commended the Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) for its recent revisions to the plan, which guides future land use and development in the county.

Most Virginia counties hire outside consultants or direct local planning staff to update the comprehensive plan every five years, as required by the state. Shenandoah County does it differently. Starting in 1991 with the second comprehensive plan revision, the county has engaged and involved its citizenry to craft policies and goals for the future.

The committee was created by the board in 2005, shortly after a new land use plan was adopted. It has worked continuously to update the plan, chapter by chapter. While committee members have changed throughout the years, the progress and commitment of the group remains strong.

The quality of the CAC's work, and officials' trust in citizens to plan for the future, was reflected in September when county supervisors expressed unanimous support for the CAC's revision of Chapter 3.

This chapter reflects goals endorsed in the Shenandoah County 2005 Comprehensive Plan and 2010 Community Planning Project (also known as the rural areas plan), including:

- Direct most new residential, commercial and industrial development to Shenandoah County's historic towns and surrounding growth and public service areas.
- Support joint land use planning with towns.
- Support agriculture and compatible rural economic development.

See the update at: www.shenandoahcountyva.us/citizens-advisory/



KATHERINE MANN Joins Forum Board

Shenandoah Forum welcomes Katherine Mann of Fort Valley to our Board of Directors. Katherine and husband Todd manage Passage Creek Farm, which produces soups, salads and Firefly Hot Sauce for the Harrisonburg Farmer's Market and other local venues. Katherine also teaches at Central High School in Woodstock. Katherine said she supports the Forum's work "to preserve the beauty and agricultural heritage of Shenandoah County. I want to know that my son, Elliot, will grow up enjoying all the county has to offer as well."



ISLAND FARM Protected At Last!

Congratulations to the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation for an extraordinary conservation achievement announced late September – securing a permanent conservation easement on the 179-acre Island Farm near Strasburg and adjacent to the Cedar Creek & Belle Grove National Historical Park.

Island Farm gets its name from an oxbow curve on Cedar Creek that was long ago cut off from the main water channel. The uplands to the west and south form a natural visual boundary, shielding the town's subdivisions from visitors to the park, its core battlefield area and land protected by the Battlefield Foundation. Plans call for one day building a link across the farm for the Battlefield Foundation's 12-mile Valley Pike and Fisher's Hill hiking/biking trail.

Island Farm also is rich in natural resources. The oxbow holds perennial streams and extensive riparian areas, which run nearly 3.9 miles around and through the property. Wetlands comprise about four percent of the acreage and the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage has identified significant aquatic and terrestrial communities in the watershed. The easement will protect water quality and related resources with requirements for riparian buffers and farm best management practices (BMPs). About 86 percent of Island Farm is classified as prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance and produces corn, hay and pasture for cattle.

The Battlefields Foundation and the Town of Strasburg will co-hold the conservation easement, which was partially donated and partially sold by landowner Doug Boyd of Strasburg.

The Island Farm easement eliminates the threat of a controversial 230-unit housing development, protects an array of natural resources and preserve views of the historic landscape enjoyed by visitors to the Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park.

County Approves Easement Funding

The Shenandoah County Board of Supervisors approved a dedicated funding source for permanent land protection in September, a tool critical to supporting the county's agricultural economy and land use goals.

A majority of supervisors approved the request from the Shenandoah County Conservation Easement Authority to dedicate \$50,000 per year in rollback taxes to the purchase development rights (PDRs) on working farms and forests. Rollback taxes are collected when a farm property receiving preferential land use tax treatment is taken out of the program and slated for development.

Shenandoah Forum supports this funding source as a fair and equitable way to put public funds generated by development to use to preserve farm vitality and the rural economy. The \$50,000 allocation is a base amount.

The small investment of county funds can pay big dividends through matching grants, with potential to leverage up to \$10 for each dollar spent. Since Shenandoah County's conservation easement program was

launched in 2012, the county has spent just .005 cents per acre to extinguish \$1.5 million in development rights on prime farmland.

The Easement Authority's two PDR projects to date also preserved features of great value to many county residents. These include scenic rural vistas on the Tom's Brook Battlefield, the North Fork of the Shenandoah River and other important tributaries.



Baker Farms (Continued from page 1)

"We could do more, but we just don't have enough people to go around," Baker said. "Bigger isn't necessarily better. We're just trying to find that balance." Baker plans to open an on-farm production processing facility in 2015 to further sustain his farm production and grow the product line.

The challenge now is to keep the farms in family ownership. Baker, 56, said recently, "We have no children, so I'm hoping my sister's children will want to carry on the legacy."

Shenandoah Forum Board of Directors

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INSIDE:

Century Farm Expansion
Land Use Plan Revised
Island Farm Preserved
PDR Funding

Shenandoah
FORUM



**STUDENTS
AWARDED**

**Forum
Scholarships**

ARE OFF AT SCHOOL!

from the top:

Hailey Shoemaker is attending
Lord Fairfax Community College.

Christopher Plaughter is attending
Virginia Tech.

Kathryn Flynn is attending
Dickinson College.



SHENANDOAH GROWN

**Farm guide companion website
to be launched soon!**

***Pick up your Shenandoah Grown
Farm Guide at the county
office building, town offices,
libraries and other businesses
throughout the county.***