

# SPEAK FOR THE LAND

## KEEPING FARM LAND A LIVING LEGACY

On an open field set against a background of bright blue sky and distant mountains, Gerald Frye stands beside a concrete feeding pad recently installed on his cow-calf farm. The 206-acre Frye Farm spans Lincoln and Cleveland Counties and is in the final stages of being permanently protected through a conservation easement made possible in partnership with Catawba Lands Conservancy.

"I used to roll my eyes at the thought of driving around the farm and checking on the cows," said Leslie, who now calls herself the "nurse" of the husband and wife team. She shares stories of bottle-feeding newborn calves, naming the farm's bulls for their peculiar personalities, and the awful experience of losing several heifers in a lightning storm.

Gerald, who is an active member of the regional Cattlemen's Association, said he learned a lot in the early years of the farm, and was well-supported by his local agricultural cooperative extension and the Cattlemen. The land was an abandoned wheat farm, which the Fryes have turned into a growing cattle operation through a firmly-held commitment to farming best practices.



*The Fryes are committed to rotational grazing on their cow-calf farm*



*Gerald Frye, owner of a 206-acre farm spanning Lincoln and Cleveland counties*

The Fryes came to farming later in life. Gerald had no background in farming, while his wife Leslie's family had a cattle operation when she was a child.

Like the new feeding pad, which makes it easier to collect manure as fertilizer and prevents it from running into the nearby streams, Gerald points to other farming

practices they depend on to sustain a healthy farm. He is diligent about rotating the cows in grazing fields and providing water for the cows away from the streams to prevent erosion, among other best practices.

"What's good for the environment is also good for the cows, and when your cows are healthy, you're more profitable," said Gerald. "Other ways of farming might be easier in the short term, but in the long term, taking shortcuts is going to cause problems."

The benefits of farming best practices such as rotational grazing and using water and feeding stations, include improved water quality, wildlife habitat and nutrient-rich soils. But the conservation value of the land was not the only factor driving Gerald and Leslie to pursue an easement on their land.

"After a while, it felt like none of what I was doing to make the farm better would matter in the long run," said Gerald. "I always thought, 'when I'm gone this will just be another development.'"

Gerald had heard about conservation easements, and was put in touch with Catawba Lands

Conservancy. Gerald and Leslie met with the Conservancy's land protection team and decided to pursue an easement on their property. Once the easement agreement was in the pipeline, Gerald saw his work on the farm in a whole new light.

"Now, the farm is something much bigger than me. It will outlast me and the next farmer and it will still be a farm," said Gerald. "It is incredibly fulfilling to be a part of something that is lasting like that. For me, that has been the greatest gift in getting the easement."

The Conservancy is in the process of finalizing the purchase of a conservation easement from the Fryes with the help of matching funds from the Walmart Foundation State Giving Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and the North Carolina Environmental Enhancement Grants Program.

"We could not have done this without the Conservancy," said Gerald. "It's a complicated process, and we're so grateful that the land protection team has been our guide in making this possible."