

■ **CLC's Summer Membership Meeting 7 PM, Wed., August 8**

FARMING: A WAY OF LIFE



Dale and Carol Bahr with Shep

Continuing a farming tradition

Owners of one of the last working farms located within Cincinnati's city limits, Dale and Carol Bahr have grown crops and raised cattle since 1972. Their 32-acre farm and home are located on the south side North Bend Rd., just west of Winton Rd.

The gently rolling land has been in the family since 1916, farmed by Dale's parents and grandparents before him. Most of the land is planted in crops, and there is fenced pasture for a herd of 10 cattle to graze.

The Bahrs want the land to stay a working farm when they retire. "It's an 18-hour a day job," cautioned Dale. He recently served an 8-year term on the Board of the Hamilton County Farm Bureau.

Using traditional farming practices, the Bahrs grow seasonal crops of herbs, greens and lettuce for distribution to local wholesale markets. Last year they harvested 3600 lbs. of herbs (basil, chives, dill and mint), among other crops.

They share their knowledge of agriculture with students of Cincinnati Waldorf School, a private elementary school located in nearby Winton Place. On land provided by the Bahrs, students tend and harvest a vegetable garden.



Chris, Micky and Malachi Heath

Creating a farming network

As co-creators and managers of the newly established Lugh Luna Educational Family Farm, Chris and Micky Heath's main commitment is to provide networking for farmers, and agricultural land for growing vegetable crops. Their home and four acres of farmland are located on the north side of North Bend Road, west of Winton Rd.

The Heaths lease an acre of farmland to EarthSource, a Community Supported Agriculture operation (CSA) farmed by Leslie Markworth and Matt Tomaszewski. At the start of each season, Leslie and Matt sell "shares" of their harvest of vegetable crops. Members then receive their share of each week's harvest of freshly picked vegetables, and also share in the risks that can affect the harvest — such as unpredictable weather.

"This way people get a variety of fresher, healthier produce," explained Chris, "and they are supporting their local foodgrowers, too."

Lugh Luna provides hands-on experience in sustainable farming methods. Workshops, open to the public, are held in an outdoors shelter. Courses in "permaculture," gardening with wild-flowers, building a hemp greenhouse, and planting a native edible forest garden are offered this summer and fall at Lugh Luna.

When the land is your legacy—

Farming is a way of life for two Hamilton County families who earn their livelihood from the land. They will share their experiences, challenges and hopes for the future at CLC's Summer Membership Meeting.

The meeting will be held **Wed., August 8 at 7 PM** outdoors at Lugh Luna Educational Family Farm, 1008 North Bend Rd. in Finneytown, west of Winton Rd., between Ridgefield and Greenfield Aves. (Parking is available next door at 1016 North Bend Rd.)

After the presentation by the Bahrs and the Heaths—and a tour of Lugh Luna farm—we will tour the Bahr farm (about an eighth of a mile away.)

Why preserve farmland in Hamilton County?

There are economic, environmental and aesthetic reasons to preserve farmland. —First and foremost, farming is a chosen way of life and livelihood for many families. —Local farmland produces food that contributes to the economy.

—In addition, farmland is a source of tax revenue that does not demand many public services. In fact, farms pay more in local tax revenues than it costs local government to provide services to their properties.

Residential land uses, in contrast, are a net drain on municipal coffers: it costs local governments more to provide services to homeowners than they pay in property taxes.* —Farmland, open space and natural resources are all "quality-of-place" amenities. Their preservation is considered key to future economic development of a region.

(*Source: 1993 Cost of Community Services studies by American Farmland Trust and Lake County, OH Soil & Water Conservation District.)

CLC Makes First Land Purchase

I-74 Greenway preservation is a priority

In June, CLC reached a milestone with the purchase of five acres of wooded land along the I-74 Greenway in Green Township. (CLC holds a conservation easement on nearby land.) This is a first step in what CLC hopes will be a successful effort to preserve the scenic landscape along I-74 between Mt. Airy Forest and Miami-Whitewater Forest.

"These wooded hillsides provide a landmark greenway through western

Hamilton County," said Tim Mara, CLC's Vice President. "Its year-round beauty is nothing short of spectacular. But if we don't act soon, many of these hillsides will be flattened for development. We can't save it all, but we are committed to do our best."

The newly acquired land, on the south side of I-74 between North Bend Rd. and

Continued on back . . .

Majestic beech trees thrive in CLC's new 5-acre preserve along the I-74 Greenway in Green Twp.



DOES FARMING HAVE A FUTURE IN HAMILTON COUNTY?

by Clare Johnson, CLC Board Member

At CLC's Summer meeting on August 8 at Lugh Luna Farm, two families will share their experiences. The Bahrs, who have devoted their lives to farming, and the Heaths, who bring a new perspective to farming, have each found a successful niche that promises to sustain them in their commitment to the land.

A snapshot of farming in Hamilton County

Times have changed for farming in Hamilton County. Fifty years ago, almost half of the county's land was in farming (116,698 acres). Today less than 29,000 acres remain in farming, according to the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Ohio Agricultural Statistics Service.

Hamilton County is not alone. Other Ohio counties have also lost significant farmland acreage. Between 1950 (when Ohio had 21 million acres in farming) and 1997 (14 million acres), Ohio lost almost 7 million acres of farmland, according to USDA figures.

The loss of so much farmland, mostly because of development pressures, can be considered an inevitable fact of life — or it can be an alarming statistic, and a call for action.

Statewide crisis gives life to Office of Farmland Preservation

The State of Ohio responded in 1997 when then-Gov. Voinovich, concerned about the trend of farmland loss in the state, established the Office of Farmland Preservation.

In his executive order creating the office, he admitted that many state policies—including financial assistance for infrastructure development—were contributing to the loss of farmland.

He also noted that continued farmland loss could undermine the economic vitality of Ohio's agriculture and food processing industry. As Ohio's largest industry, agriculture and food processing added \$56.2 billion to the state's economy in 1997. (Source: The Ohio State University)

State provides new farmland preservation tools

Legislation was passed in 1999 to provide new tools that Ohio's state and local governments can use to encourage farmers to keep their fields in agriculture. One tool is the agricultural easement, or "purchase of development rights" program, proven successful in 18 other states. Farmers receive compensation (the difference between agricultural and development value) to permanently restrict their land to farming. They continue to own and farm their land — earning their usual income— and can sell it, or pass it on to heirs.

\$25 million slated for farmland preservation

The future started looking brighter for farming in Nov. 2000, when Ohio voters approved a \$400 million bond fund — \$25 million of which is earmarked for farmland preservation efforts over the next four years. Counties will compete for funds from a 75% matching grant program to purchase agricultural easements from 30 - 40 farms a year. A 25% match will be required from local partners.

Land use planning options

Planning tools to determine future land uses are available to local governments in Ohio, if they choose to use them. Based on the community's vision of a desired future, the Comprehensive Plan can determine future residential, industrial, commercial — and agricultural uses.

But not all communities are concerned about farmland preservation. A recently adopted Comprehensive Plan for rural Harrison Township, which currently has more than half of its land mass in farming, has no farmland preservation goals!

Farmland gets a property tax break ...

Thanks to a longtime state policy, all qualifying farmland in Hamilton County gets a property tax break under Ohio's *Current Agricultural Use Valuation* (CAUV) program. Land is taxed for its agricultural value, not its development value—a significant difference. **...but no commitment to preservation**

To date in Hamilton County, there are no public policies or initiatives to encourage preservation of the county's remaining farmland, or plans to provide the 25% match for Ohio's new farmland grant program.

Unfortunately, there is a public policy to encourage development of farmland. Infrastructure is being extended into largely undeveloped areas in western Hamilton County, where most of the remaining acres of farmland are located.

Conservation organizations willing to do their part

Conservation efforts by the Hamilton County Park District have protected over 900 acres of wetlands that remain in private ownership, of which 700 acres are farmed. (The Park District purchased the development rights from the owners.)

Private nonprofit conservation organizations — such as Citizens' Land Conservancy and other land trusts in Hamilton County — can hold donated conservation and agricultural easements, and can work with landowners to apply for state matching funds.

Can farmland preservation happen here?

Don't write off Hamilton County farmland. Farming is a way of life for those who choose to earn their living from the land. Its future is important to all those who value "quality of place." It will take an informed public—and enlightened public officials—to make farmland preservation a priority in Hamilton County.

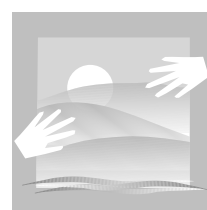
CLC's First Land Purchase (continued from front) I-74 Greenway preservation is a priority

Race Rd. was purchased in part with a donation from the Dent-area citizens' group *Safe, Clean, Green Township*, who asked that the funds be used to purchase land in Green Twp. Even with this contribution, CLC had to borrow funds to make the purchase.

CLC's Land Protection committee is identifying and contacting landowners along the I-74 Greenway to negotiate and purchase conservation easements. **Donations, which are tax deductible, to CLC's I-74 Greenway Preservation Fund are welcome!**



Farmland in Crosby Township



CITIZENS' LAND CONSERVANCY

OF HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO, INC.

TEL (513) 574-1849 FAX (513) 574-2981
WEBSITE www.clchc.org
5200 RACE RD., CINCINNATI, OH 45247

CLC is a nonprofit, member-supported land trust, founded in 1999 to help families preserve their lands. CLC informs the public about how land conservation protects the quality of life in Hamilton County.

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