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SECTION M



**Waiting for the next crop of visitors**

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## 15th Montgomery tour takes visitors up close

By Charles Hoskinson

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GERMANTOWN -- Houses grow like summer corn on most of the land Jean Phillips' family once farmed here on Schaeffer Road. All that's left of a local farming tradition rooted in five generations of her family is a produce stand, a pumpkin field and a petting zoo on 12.9 acres.

"To keep a real farm going here would be almost impossible," she says.

The Washington area's rapid urban growth has eaten much of what was a flourishing agricultural economy. Some farmers, however, have adapted to the new reality, aided by government programs to preserve agricultural land and help them market their products.

One such program is the annual farm tour, which seeks to bridge the gap between the urban and rural lifestyles that still coexist in some stretches of the metropolitan area.

Here in Montgomery County, the tour is in its 15th year. On July 24 and 25, visitors can drop in on the Phillips Farm and 11 others, including a winery, an animal sanctuary and the county's agricultural history farm park.

Visitors to most of these farms can mingle with the animals, ride in a hay cart, have lunch by a pond, or buy fresh fruits, vegetables, flowers and plants. Some farmers, such as Ms. Phillips, like to guide children around their places and talk to them about their farm's history.

Other fast-growing areas, including Calvert County in Maryland and Virginia's Loudoun County, also offer farm tours.

Calvert's, coming up this Sunday, celebrates the county's 350th birthday with a day at Wilson and Kim Freeland's White Cliff Farm in Prince Frederick. Loudoun's tour in May covered 26 farms, ranches and wineries; for October, the county has scheduled a fall color tour of 20 farms, orchards and vineyards.

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The farm tour represents one side of a strategy in Montgomery County to help farmers survive in one of the nation's fastest-growing urban areas, providing a market for products grown on 93,000 acres -- about one-third of the county's land area -- set aside in 1980 as an agricultural zone where development is severely restricted, says Jeremy Criss, manager of agricultural services for Montgomery County.

"What we're trying to do is develop relationships between the farmers and their customers," he says. "We are in the business of preserving farmland and farmers simultaneously. You can't do one without the other."

The Montgomery tour brings in between 5,000 and 10,000 visitors to participating farms, depending on the weather. "The farm tour represents the busiest days of the year on their farms," Mr. Criss says.

The reasoning is the same in other rural counties. Farmers and county officials across the area say the idea of farm tours sprouted from fading memories of the agricultural life in the minds of most metropolitan-area residents.

"There is a great disconnect between people who live in the city and people who live on



the farm," says Warren Howell, agricultural marketing manager for the Loudoun County Office of Rural Economic Development.

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Ben Allnut has farming in his soul. His 230-acre Homestead Farm is on land his family has tended since 1763 near Poolesville. Now 52, Mr. Allnut is the last of his family still in the farming business.

"When I was 18, I didn't want to farm. I just wanted to go away to college and whoop it up," he says.

However, after three years as a landscaper, he came back. "You grow up doing it, and you find that you're good at it," he says.

For decades, farms in the Washington metropolitan area have been under pressure from rapid urbanization and rising land values. Counties around the nation's capital have the highest growth rates of any in Virginia and Maryland.

Loudoun County, for example, is sixth on the list of the nation's fastest-growing counties. Its population nearly doubled between 1990 and 2000 to 169,599, according to U.S. Census data, and has grown another 20 percent since then.

A byproduct of the growth is the explosion in land values that makes farms more valuable as real estate than as places to produce food.

From 1997 to 1992, the amount of land in Loudoun County used for farming declined from 196,012 acres to 164,753 acres, but the total value of farmland rose from \$1.054 million to \$1.323 million. Even with special, lower tax rates for agricultural land, the lure of easy money still beckons, Mr. Howell says.

"As a practical matter, we are seeing a serious shift in land tenure" from farm families to developers, he says.

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Farming also doesn't blend well with the more structured rhythms of urban life. Ms. Phillips says development on the land sold by her family has forced her to grow most of the vegetables and fruits she sells on a farm in Frederick County, farther from the city.

"These people do not like to hear tractors going at 6 o'clock in the morning," she says.

Ms. Phillips' family, the Kings, have been farming in Maryland for 350 years and ran farms all over Montgomery County. A cousin of her father's owned the famed King Farm in Rockville, now a 430-acre housing development.

Recently, Ms. Phillips had to bring a tractor to her Germantown location from the other farm through crowded commuter thoroughfares. "I acquired a few fingers, some shaking fists and a horn," she says.

Ms. Phillips, 61, tried the urban life for a time, working as a teacher and then as a research immunologist before returning to her family's dairy farm, where she worked for 14 years before founding Phillips Farm in 1990.

The farm tours help to reintroduce city dwellers to the idea that fruits such as apples and cherries, or vegetables such as peppers and tomatoes are only available at certain times of the year, Mr. Allnut says.

"A lot of people don't really march to the seasons anymore," he says.

Mr. Howell says the tour also helps create a retail market for the fruit, vegetables and other products grown on local farms by bringing in customers. With the right kind of products and promotion, the thousands of new residents can help keep what's left of the county's farms profitable.

"By producing consumer goods, farmers can make more money," he says, giving them less incentive to sell out to developers.

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Mr. Allnut's Homestead Farm is an example of the kind of operation that can survive development pressures. From May strawberries to October pumpkins, the farm grows more



Photographs by Astor Flecken/The Washington Times

than a dozen different fruits and vegetables that visitors can pick as they ripen. This diversity, he says, helps provide a steady income over a longer period of time compared to traditional commodity farming.

"That's one thing you have to remember in farming. You have to save some seeds for next year, and you have to save some money to spend in the winter," he says.

The farm also offers entertainment, including a 6-acre corn maze, hayrides, and a display of animals, including sheep, goats, calves, chickens and pigs.

"We have a lot of customers that support us, and I tell them if they keep coming, then we'll stay here," Mr. Allnut says.

Christina Meister is one of Homestead Farm's regular customers. She recently brought her two daughters, Nadia, 4, and Helena, 2, to the farm to pick fresh flowers, peaches and corn.

"We come out here to pick, and we like the animals," says Mrs. Meister, a preschool teacher. "And then we'll go home and make cobbler."

Ms. Phillips' pumpkins are what bring her customers back year after year, searching for just the right one to carve for Halloween and carrying it back on a hayride.

"Pumpkins are one of your really big moneymakers," Ms. Phillips says.

Her collection of goats, sheep, cows and ducks also attracts neighborhood children such as Ethan Goldspiel, 13, who came over one afternoon to feed the animals and enjoy a hayride.

"It's something that a lot of people don't have a chance to do," he says. "I find it cool."

Still, even with the people drawn by convenience or the farm tour, the futures of Mr. Allnut's and Ms. Phillips' farms are far from secure. Time is another enemy to farm preservation.

Mr. Allnut's two sons "don't want anything to do with it," he says. When asked what will happen to his farm when he retires, he replies: "I don't know."

Ms. Phillips' oldest son, Russ, worked with her on the farm until a few years ago, when he left to become an aerospace engineer because there wasn't enough income to give him a decent salary, she says.

"This is a lot of physical work for someone my age," she says.

"When I retire, I would imagine this ground would go to housing like everything else around here."

### **What you'll see in Montgomery County**

Montgomery County's 15th annual farm tour takes place July 24 and 25. Twelve farms will be open both days and seven on July 24 only.

The Montgomery County Department of Economic Development suggests that visitors start their day at 8 a.m. with a low-priced country breakfast at the Agricultural History Farm Park (No. 1 on the map), and go on from there to the participating farms.

This is a rain-or-shine event, but if it does rain, some scheduled events and activities may be delayed or canceled.

Don't bring pets. None is allowed, except seeing-eye dogs.

For more information, call 301/590-2823 or 240/777-2000 or see [www.farmerlink.com](http://www.farmerlink.com) and scroll down the page.

Here's a map of the Montgomery County farms:

Open July 24 and 25

18410 Muncaster Road, Derwood. Opens at 8 a.m. July 24 and 25 for country breakfast. See agricultural machinery and implements that span two centuries and an agricultural implement timeline. There are no animals or fruits and vegetables at this location. 301/670-

Sunflowers add a splash of yellow to the rainbow of colors on the Homestead Farm in Poolesville, western Montgomery County (left, above). The farm's goats entertain Maryland schoolchildren as the animals make their way across an overhead track (above). Helena Meister, 2, and her sister Nadia, 4, of Germantown, make a bouquet from flowers at Homestead (left). Arielle Tycko, 3, of Bethesda, (left, bottom) seems to have a handle on how to choose ripe tomatoes.



4661 or [www.montgomeryparksfnd.org/fg-aghist.htm](http://www.montgomeryparksfnd.org/fg-aghist.htm).

2. Butler's Orchard: The Butler Family, 22222 Davis Mill Road, Germantown. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24 and 25. Billed as the top pick-your-own farm in the county. Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, corn, tomatoes, jams, fruit spreads and an assortment of handcrafted gifts and goodies available in the farm market. Refreshments for sale. 301/972-3299 or [www.butlersorchard.com](http://www.butlersorchard.com).

3. Catocin Vineyards Inc.: Robert Lyon, 805 Greenbridge Road, Brookeville. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24 and 25. Tour state-of-the-art wine production facility. Taste award-winning fine table wines, all for sale at \$5 to \$15 a bottle. Fruits, vegetables, flowers and dried flower arrangements also for sale. Winery open for tours, tasting and sales, noon-5 p.m. 301/774-2310.

4. Homestead Farm: The Allnut family, 15604 Sugarland Road, Poolesville. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24 and 25. Family-owned farm and orchard. Pick-your-own peaches, blackberries, tomatoes. Corn, peppers, melons, more for sale in the market. Barnyard animals. Walk through the apple orchard, bring cutters and bucket for the flower garden. Food, drinks, fresh produce and fresh fruit, ice cream sundaes for sale. 301/977-3761.

5. King Barn Dairy MOOseum: Barbara McGraw and Carol English, 18028 Central Park Circle, South Germantown Recreational Park, Boyds. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24 and 25. Learn about the importance of dairying to Montgomery's history and early economic development. Tour the 1930 barn, dairy and silos. Peek inside the 1926 fully furnished farmhouse replica. Continuous videos teaching the dairy story. Storytelling and craft projects. Dairy-themed gift shop. 301/528-6530.

6. Phillips Farm: Jean Phillips, 13710 Schaeffer Road, Germantown. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24 and 25. Free hayride, haystack to climb, farm animals to pet, pony rides, 1-acre maze. Sweet corn (white, yellow or bicolor) picked each morning, as well as tomatoes, peppers, squash. Pick your own flowers. 301/540-2364 or [www.phillipsfarmproduce.com](http://www.phillipsfarmproduce.com).

7. Rock Hill Orchard: Dick and Nancy Biggs, 28600 Ridge Road, Mount Airy. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24 and 25. The Maryland Two-Cylinder Tractor Club's display of antique farm equipment. Free hayrides through apple, peach and cherry orchards. Cut your flowers, pick your own blackberries and green beans. Fresh fruits, vegetables, jams, jellies and ice cream topped with peaches for sale at farm market. 301/831-7427.

Open only July 24

8. Camp Olympia: Celeste McGee, 5511 Muncaster Mill Road, Rockville. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24. A Montgomery County tradition for 46 years. Year-round horse center, year-round preschool/kindergarten, summer sports day camp. See sports and riding demonstrations by campers and staff. Different demonstrations will be offered every hour. Pony rides throughout the day. 301/926-9281

9. Jehovah-Jireh Farm: Myron and Cathy Horst, 19815 Martinsburg Road, Dickerson. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24. Working family farm. Baby chicks, hens, broilers, calves, sheep, cows, beef steers. Barbecue chicken lunch featuring our pasture-raised chickens. Hike to the creek and twin ponds. Minicart rides for children available. Pasture-raised chicken, brown eggs for sale. 301/349-4721 or [www.jehovahjirehfarm.com](http://www.jehovahjirehfarm.com).

10. Linden Farm: Sugarloaf Citizens Association Inc., 20900 Martinsburg Road, Dickerson. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24. Pony rides, hands-on activities for children. Hog house, bank barn, newly renovated board and batten house. Air-conditioned dairy barn. See how composting and recycling work. Stuffed farm animals. Refreshments for sale. Sales benefit nonprofit farm fund. 301/349-4889.

11. Poplar Spring Animal Sanctuary: Teresa Cummings and Dave Hoerauf, 15200 Mount Nebo Road, Poolesville. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24. 400-acre farm on the C&O Canal and Potomac River, an animal refuge dedicated to the protection of wildlife and the rescue of abused and abandoned farm animals. Horses, cows, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens, turkeys.



Astrid Becken/The Washington Times

**Emma Khasin, 5, (right) and Elizabeth Khovayko, 5, try to get a calf to nibble on their offerings during a visit to Homestead Farm.**

Hayrides. Refreshments, crafts for sale to benefit the nonprofit sanctuary. 301/428-8128.

12. Red Wiggler Community Farm: Woody Woodroof, Ovid Hazen Wells Park, 23400 Ridge Road, Cedar Grove. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. July 24. Artfarm's 15th anniversary reunion as Concerts in the Country invites back its artists in dance, theater, music, puppetry, photography, environmental sculpture, etc. Meet them, explore the barn, silo and stream, "do-art-yourself." Hayrides. Vegetables for sale. 301/916-4133 or [www.redwiggler.org](http://www.redwiggler.org) or [www.concertsinthecountry.org](http://www.concertsinthecountry.org).

### **Animals and artisans on the White Cliff tour**

Coming up this Sunday afternoon: Calvert County's tour of one of its finest and most venerable farms. Wilson and Kim Freeland, owners of Here's some of what awaits visitors to White Cliff Farm this Sunday:

- Birds and animals: Barn owls, kestrels, pot-bellied pigs, llamas, ponies and pony rides, a petting farm.
- Artisans and their work: Demonstrations by blacksmiths, bird carvers, makers of soaps and lotions and spinners of sheep and llama wool.
- Displays: Farm equipment, exhibits on county history, displays of native plants, exhibits by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Soil Conservation District and the Calvert Farmland Trust, the American Chestnut Land Trust and the Southern Maryland Agriculture Commission.
- Talks: Local archaeology and geology.
- Other activities: Making scarecrows and thumbprint animal bookmarks.
- Fresh produce for sale.

According to a history prepared by the Calvert County Department of Economic Development, White Cliff Farm dates from the 1700s. It has one of the largest collections of historical barns and outbuildings in Calvert County. Two barns, several outbuildings and a portion of the farmhouse are over 200 years old. The farmhouse was renovated in the 1930s.

Owner Wilson Freeland is a fourth-generation farmer. The farm has been in the family since the early 1930s, when Mr. Freeland's great-grandfather acquired 114 acres along the Chesapeake Bay. The owners' sons will become fifth-generation farmers when they take over stewardship.

The farm's principal crop was once tobacco. In the mid-1980s, production switched from tobacco to corn, soybeans, small grains, produce and hay. There are 45 acres in active production today. The farm maintains active soil conservation, nutrient management, wildlife management, and forestry plans.

There are two gravesites on the property from the previous owners, the Dorsey family. Archaeological surveys have been performed and research continues by the University of Delaware and the Smithsonian Institution. Today, fossils and Colonial and American Indian artifacts are still found on the property.

White Cliff Farm is at 130 Goldstein Road, but visitors are asked to park at Calvert Elementary School at 1450 Dares Beach Road in Prince Frederick, and use the free county shuttle buses to visit the farm. The farm is 3 1/2 miles from the school.

To reach the school, take the Beltway to Route 4 east (Pennsylvania Avenue eastbound). Continue on Route 4 to Dares Beach Road (Route 402). Go east on Dares Beach Road about 1 1/2 miles to Calvert Elementary School, on the left.

For more information call 410/535-4583 (TDD 800/331-9771), e-mail to [info@ecalvert.com](mailto:info@ecalvert.com), or see [www.calvertag.com](http://www.calvertag.com), which offers a downloadable brochure.

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