

Prior to the farm's preservation, developers slated a 1,066-unit housing project to be built on this and four other adjoining farms, totaling 608 acres. The farmland is largely comprised of "prime" soils—those most conducive for a wide variety of farm uses and also prized for development. Faced with this alarming proposal, some Chesterfield residents began evaluating options to block it.

A preservation deal that included financial contributions from the state, Chesterfield Township and Burlington County was orchestrated. The five farms were purchased from the developer in 1985, had deed restrictions placed on them, and were then sold at public auction under a sub-program of the farmland preservation program now known as the fee simple program. These were the first farms to be preserved using funds from the state's newly created program. The auction drew about 300 onlookers, but when the bidding was over, four of the farms had been sold to land speculators, not farmers, with the fifth sold to a commercial pilot.

In 2003, Sherry and Jim discovered those first five farms preserved in Chesterfield. They ultimately entered into sale negotiations with a landowner of one of the five original farms (the farm purchased by the commercial pilot at the 1985 auction). In 2007, Farmer Jim purchased the farm. In the original plan for the housing development, this farm was to be the wastewater treatment facility and the plan included applying biosolids onto the farmland!

The farm is a total of sixty-nine acres, forty tillable, and the balance is wetland and woodland. Blacks Creek is its northern boundary. The farm is exceptional wildlife habitat, and we have had one sighting of a bald eagle, and many sightings of raptors, songbirds, turkey, ground hogs, red fox and, of course, white-tailed deer.

One of Jim's first tasks was to renovate the old dairy barn, which was in disrepair, and to stabilize the circa 1750 farmhouse. A new tin roof was put on the house in 2011 by an Amish roofing company and the interior has been upgraded using new innovative, eco-friendly products. A geothermal heating/cooling system has also been installed in home.

Over three years, we converted the farmland, formerly planted in grain, to an organic produce farm. This farm had been conventionally farmed for many years prior to Farmer Jim's purchase, and there was a need to restore soil fertility. Winter cover crops, including yellow blossom sweet clover, winter rye and vetch are grown and disked in for improved soil health, and compost has also been applied to help restore soil fertility. Interns and volunteers planted fast growing trees around a portion of the perimeter to buffer the farm from neighboring farms and residences. Deer fencing has also been installed to minimize deer browsing on crops and trees. Pick-your-own fields, including small fruits, herbs and flowers, have been established. This farm was certified organic in 2010.

In 2008, we purchased another preserved farm in Chesterfield. This farm is located at the intersection of Crosswicks-Ellisdale and Harker Roads and is 118 acres. Known locally as the "Wilson" farm, it is comprised of wooded and tillable acreage, has two streams and a pond, which hosts many migrant and resident birds. Up until the 1980s, the Wilson family raised laying hens here and sold farm fresh eggs out of the basement of the circa 1710 home. Once the Wilsons ceased egg production, local vegetable farmers leased the farmland for over twenty years, growing a variety of produce.

After purchasing this farm, we spent considerable time and expense addressing the soil erosion problems we inherited. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”) is assisting us in this continuing effort. To date, we have installed grass waterways which are designed to allow surface water to drain without causing soil erosion. We’ve also planted fertile cover crops on this land to enhance fertility, which has also provided bird habitat in spring. In 2013 we installed deer fencing on this farm as well, with the assistance of a special program offered through NRCS for certified organic farmers. This farm has been certified organic since 2011.