

Madison-Morgan Conservancy

Newsletter
Fall, 2024

Protecting Farms, Forests, and Front Porches for Future Generations



Letter from the Executive Director

Driven to Grow the Land Trust

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STAFF, P.3

Georgia is losing farmland faster than almost any other state. So what's our answer? And with Morgan County facing a threshold—fall below 75,000 acres of farmland and forestland, and the businesses that support agriculture here will start to vanish—what's our plan? Permanent land protection? Farm-friendly zoning? Or maybe a blend of both, guided by solid data.

That data comes from the Critical Mass of Farmland Study and the Cost of Community Services Study. Together, these studies reveal something powerful: Morgan County urgently needs to preserve 20,000 acres of farmland to balance the development coming from every direction. And contrary to public opinion, farmland contributes far more in taxes than it costs in services, effectively subsidizing other land uses in the county.

With facts on our side, the Conservancy collaborated with the Morgan County Board of Commissioners to create Georgia's third county-funded farmland protection program. This initiative allows local landowners to tap into millions in federal and state funding now available to buy conservation easements from farmers. The goal? To reach a critical mass of protected farmland that will secure the future of agriculture and the quality of life in our community.

For over 20 years, the Conservancy has worked tirelessly to protect natural, agricultural, and historic resources. We've been turning the flywheel—educating, protecting, educating, protecting—until today, with 6,000 acres secured in conservation easements and a well-informed community, we stand on the verge of

something transformative. Morgan County is ready to establish its own land trust.

The stakes are high, and it's time for us to go further to accelerate the pace of conservation here. We can either meet this moment or be swept away by the sprawl that's consuming rural America. We believe you agree that we can't let Morgan County become just another statistic.

So, we're stepping up. We've expanded our team (see page 3 to meet our new staff), we're applying for Land Trust Accreditation, and we're working with the County to purchase conservation easements from local farmers. All of this on the eve of our 25th anniversary.



Next year, as we celebrate 25 years, we'll share *25 Ways to Engage in Conservation*, host events, and protect even more land. Members will get early registration access to the events, so please consider renewing or joining us for the

first time. Your annual dues will support the Conservancy's mission to protect land forever. This year, might you consider increasing your support to multiply this impact?

There's still time to keep Morgan County productive, wild, and beautiful. It's going to take each of us, a touch of magic, and the commitment of the best little land trust in Georgia. Let's do this thing together.

Sincerely,

Christine Watts, Executive Director

What is a Land Trust?

A land trust is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to protecting land by holding, monitoring, and defending conservation easements in perpetuity. Landowners still own the land - the land trust simply enforces the easement restrictions to protect the land's conservation values.

The Conservancy was incorporated as a land trust and, for the last 20 years, has been working alongside some of Georgia's most respected easement holders to conserve land.

We've helped landowners identify conservation priorities on their properties, determine how many building envelopes to retain, and connect with the experts—lawyers, appraisers, and land trusts—needed to establish easements.

Acting as the landowner's advocate, we didn't initially see a need to reinvent the process of holding,

Of GA's 159 counties in 2022, Morgan County ranked 34th in Total Farmgate Value (a \$500 million agricultural industry in Morgan County alone), and was home to 4,655 ag-related jobs, Production output here outranks most counties in the state for these products:

- 1st in Christmas Trees
- 2nd in Horses – Boarding/Breeding/Training
- 2nd in Field/Tree Nursery
- 2nd in Silage
- 3rd in Pork – Farrow to Finish
- 3rd in Total Livestock
- 3rd in Straw
- 4th in Dairy
- 4th in Greenhouse
- 4th in Hay
- 4th in Total Ornamental Horticulture
- 4th in Quail
- 4th in Turkey Hunting Leases
- 6th in Beef Cows
- 7th in Wheat
- 8th in Miscellaneous Row and Forage Crops
- 10th in Deer Hunting Leases
- 14th in Turfgrass

monitoring, and defending easements.

But now, times are different. There is a growing demand for conservation easements, both donated and purchased, and our community's trust in the Conservancy has led landowners to request that we hold their easements.

And for landowners to access the funding available for selling conservation easements (development rights) on their land, a land trust is required. With more funding now available for purchasing conservation easements, the Conservancy is committed to securing those dollars for Morgan County landowners, ensuring that our local landscapes are protected for generations to come.

Check out Morgan County's ag production rankings. Your local conservancy is here to help protect this level of production for years to come.

Community Outreach

Meet Senator Brian Strickland

Growing up in Henry County and being the son of one of the last row croppers in that county, Senator Strickland is intimately aware of the pressures on farmland and farmers in Metro Atlanta. Since protecting Georgia's #1 industry, agriculture, is a priority, protecting the farmland that is the asset base of that industry is also a priority.

Senator Strickland has been super supportive over the last year of our efforts here in Morgan County to protect a critical mass of farmland. The State's new Farmland Conservation Program is also important to him and will allow the state to leverage federal dollars to fund the protection of Georgia's most important farmland.

On October 3, Senator Strickland joined the Conservancy of a tour of Morgan County farms and met generations of farming families and county leadership to discuss how to protect Morgan County from losing too much farmland.

A big thank you goes out to Bill Kurtz (County Commission Chair), Ben Riden (Bostwick district Commissioner), Tricia and John Bostwick (Mayor of Bostwick), Lucy Ray (Morgan County Extension), and Victoria Prevatt (Conservancy's Director of Philanthropy), who met us for lunch at Morgan's own Market 83 for local beef hamburgers and great conversation. It was a day to feel the momentum.



Growing Capacity

In order to grow the Conservancy's land trust capacity, and in order to conduct the 200+ real estate transactions required to protect an additional 11,000 acres by 2030, the Conservancy's organizational capacity needs to expand. In that vein, meet the growing Conservancy team - the best of the best for Morgan County.



Christine Watts, Executive Director:

I am honored to have worked with this organization for almost 25 years and am most proud of the board and their vision and governance, of the 6,000 acres of permanently protected land, of our Endangered Properties Revolving Fund work, and of our Junior

Conservancy. The breadth and depth of this organization's work has made a mark here by retaining farms and farm life; protecting streams, forests, and wildlife habitat; helping save and restore so many important historic places; and preserving some of those beautiful views you see as you drive the county roads. But there is so much more to do to keep Morgan County Morgan County, and we need to grow to get it done. I hope you will enjoy meeting the rest of this amazing staff. Come visit us at the Seedhouse.



Wynn Howard, Land Protection Specialist:

I am thrilled to be serving as Land Protection Specialist with the Madison-Morgan Conservancy, an organization dedicated to preserving the heritage and natural landscapes of my hometown. Being born and raised here, my deep-rooted connection

to the community fosters my passion for safeguarding our county's invaluable assets for future generations. My excitement also stems from the enriching experiences I gained during my tenure with the Junior Conservancy in 2017-2018. I look forward to protecting and stewarding this beautiful county as I continue contributing actively to the Conservancy's mission. If you would like to explore permanent land protection of your property and its potential financial compensation, please contact me.



Ashley Hawk, Business Administrator:

I am a life-long resident of Morgan County, a graduate of Morgan County Highschool, and I earned my undergraduate degree from the University of West Georgia. Before I joined the Conservancy team as Business Administrator in August, I worked for the City of Madison for 11 years where

I served in several capacities including Business Services Specialist and City Clerk. As business administrator for MMC I now maintain the membership database, assist with financial duties, and coordinate the Land Trust Accreditation process. My husband, Brad Hawk, and I reside in Morgan County with our children Peyton, Dylan, Mason and Kennedy. In my free time I enjoy playing tennis, date nights, time spent with friends, and a good concert!



Maryann Dartnell, Junior Conservancy Director:

I am a 25-year resident of Morgan County, educator, avid vegetable gardener, environmental champion, and healthy lifestyle advocate. I earned a BS in marine biology from the College of Charleston and an MEd in secondary science education from UGA. For 17

years, I shared my passion for science and the environment as a science teacher at MCHS and most recently worked as a Manager at the Georgia BioScience Training Center in Stanton Springs. Since retiring last spring, I am enjoying a new grandbaby and spending more time with my family. During my first term on the Conservancy Board, I was tasked with helping create the Junior Conservancy program and have been involved ever since. I am thrilled to be growing this program and working with these amazing students.



Victoria Prevatt, Director of Philanthropy:

After years of working in the world of nonprofits, I noticed a need for accessible and affordable nonprofit guidance and counsel, specifically at the crossroads of fundraising, storytelling and board engagement. I have been working with the Conservancy for about a year now and believe the growth I

see happening here bodes well for the future of private land conservation in Georgia. I am excited to help the Conservancy grow a culture of philanthropy to support this very important work for years to come.



Nancy Nolan Kuperberg, Event Planner:

I grew up in Morgan County and now raise my family with my husband, Ken, in Madison. Our children, Samuel, Will, and Lady, are all pursuing their education and careers. After running No Regrets Events for over 20 years, I recently started Nolan Interiors. Now, as the new Conservancy event planner, I

look forward to organizing events for our 25th anniversary. I see my role as a link between the organization and the community, and I am committed to fostering relationships and connecting with new people.

3rd County-Funded Farmland Protection Program in Georgia

Let's do it. Really do it. Actually protect a critical mass of farmland to retain Morgan County's agricultural industry. Let's keep sprawl at bay. Let's not have terrible traffic. Let us and future generations enjoy this beautiful place and quality of life forever. Some say it's impossible, but we know better. And we're working to prove it.

The County Commissioners are committed, too. They have recently created and funded Georgia's 3rd county-funded farmland protection program designed to leverage federal and state funding to purchase conservation easements (development rights) from farmers.

This program is a great way for farmers to sell development

rights and still retain ownership of their land. Landowners can still farm, forest, hunt, fish, and enjoy the land. They give up the right to subdivide and develop. For ca\$h.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, Agricultural Land Easement (ACEP-ALE), is a federal program that pays farmers for voluntarily giving up some of their development rights, which very well may be one of the keys to protecting Morgan County from the sprawl moving into Morgan County from every direction.

Join us in applauding the Board of Commissioners for taking this very important step and the Malcom and Hunter families for being the first ACEP applicants in Morgan County!

What is ACEP-ALE?

The Agriculture Conservation Easement Program, Agriculture Land Easement (ACEP-ALE), is a voluntary program that pays farmers for voluntarily giving up some of their development rights by executing a conservation easement.

The U.S. Farm Bill program is overseen by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered by the

Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) with the purpose of paying farmers to protect their privately owned agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural uses.

The Conservancy has officially submitted its first two ACEP-ALE projects for the fiscal year 2025! If funded by NRCS next year, these easements will protect 168 acres of prime farmland.

ACEP-ALE - Malcom

This past summer, the Malcom Family Farm voluntarily decided to permanently protect 100 acres of their farm to ensure the land remains in agriculture and does not succumb to future development pressure. Located just outside the Bostwick city limits, the Malcom Family Farm is made up of a total of 147.95 acres and has been owned

and operated since the land was purchased in 1930. Today, the farm supports 100 head of cattle and contains some of the



most vital prime agricultural soil in the state. The soil on the farm is used to grow hay, which serves as a secondary food source for cattle when grass becomes scarce during the winter months.

If selected and funded by NRCS, the conservation easement placed on the Malcom Family Farm will only remove development rights – the Malcom's will continue to own the land. The ACEP program will allow the family to continue farming as usual while ensuring the land stays in agriculture, securing a home and livelihood for future generations.

ACEP-ALE - Hunter



Following the Malcom Family Farm's decision, the Hunter Farm began expressing interest in the ACEP program. The Hunter Farm is made up of 68.39 acres and resides in the northern part of Bostwick, adjacent to Jack's Creek Farm, which is also permanently protected by a conservation easement. The Hunter Family decided to place all 68.39 acres into conservation, ensuring that

the farm will never be subdivided and will operate as a farm for years to come. The Hunter Farm currently has 29 head of cattle on the land and is growing hay.

The owner of the Hunter Farm attended our most recent Land Stewardship Workshop Series back in February where we discussed all things ACEP. The ACEP program peaked the landowner's interest, and it has now become a vital tool that he is using to protect the 68.39 acres that has been owned since 2002. Success was achieved this year with the ACEP program here in Morgan County. If NRCS decides to select both projects, a total of 168.39 acres of open space and viable agricultural land will be permanently protected in our county and the landowners who voluntarily gave up their development rights will be compensated for doing so.

Revolving Fund Making an Impact

In 2018, the Conservancy launched a capital campaign to raise funds for the Endangered Properties Revolving Fund. Spurred to action by the need to save a few endangered historic buildings and thousands of acres of land at risk of subdivision, we raised \$1 million to fund a buy-protect-sell revolving fund.

The Revolving Fund's first project was the Foster-Thomason-Miller House, a success by every measure. The home is now fully restored, and the visibility of the project made a name for the organization locally and statewide. Most important, the Conservancy fully revolved its investment into the next projects.



In its first five years, the Revolving Fund saved three historic buildings and permanently protected 191 acres of farmland, forestland, wildlife habitat, and park/trail land. In those first five years, the fund also grew 30% in total assets.

Today, the new owners of the most recent Revolving Fund project, the Fairplay School, are lovingly adapting the historic school into a residence, subject to our preservation agreement, which requires them to rebuild the belltower and restore the front and side facades. Stay tuned for updates on the rehabilitation of one of Morgan County's last remaining historic schoolhouses.

Membership

Support Georgia's Newest Land Trust

Permanent land protection coupled with farm-friendly zoning is the only way to manage sprawl. If you agree and want to help keep Morgan County productive, wild, and beautiful, you can support the Conservancy by joining, renewing your membership,

or donating to the mission. We will need all the help we can get and all the funding we can find to protect an additional 11,000 acres by 2030. It's a lofty goal, a stretch, and we are actively working toward it. We would love your help!

Join or Renew Your Membership Today!

Madison-Morgan Conservancy
P.O. Box 752, Madison, GA 30650

706-818-8046 | www.mmcGeorgia.org | info@mmcGeorgia.org

- Daniel Morgan Society - \$5,000+ (Watershed Donor Level)
- Sustainer - \$2,500+ (Watershed Donor Level)
- Benefactor - \$1,000+ (Watershed Donor Level)
- I would like to contribute an additional: \$ _____ to the Endangered Properties Revolving Fund.
- My Company has a matching gift program. Please send me information about matching gifts.
- Please send me information about including the Madison-Morgan Conservancy in my will.
- I would like to volunteer.

- Supporter - \$500
- Donor - \$250
- Preservationist - \$100
- Conservationist - \$50
- Naturalist - \$25

Name(s) as it should appear on the Membership list:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Email 1: _____

Email 2: _____

Monthly Giving

It's all about cash flow. If you would prefer to give monthly, it's easy to do online. Just go to the Membership page on our website, www.mmcGeorgia.org/membership, click the "Monthly Membership" button, and fill in the monthly amount you'd like to contribute. Monthly giving is a win-win:

- You can spread your contribution over 12 months.
- Monthly membership income helps the Conservancy budget for the year.

Daniel Morgan Society \$5,000+ | Monthly = \$417

Sustainer \$2,500+ | Monthly = \$209

Benefactor \$1,000+ | Monthly = \$84

Supporter \$500+ | Monthly = \$42

Donor \$250+ | Monthly = \$21



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June 2023 - June 2024

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New Members (green)

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June 2023 - June 2024

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MADISON-MORGAN
CONSERVANCY

PROTECTING FARMS, FORESTS, AND
FRONT PORCHES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Madison-Morgan Conservancy
P.O. Box 752
Madison, GA 30650

(706) 818-8046

www.mmcGeorgia.org



Return Service Requested

Need to Renew? Check Your Mailing Label:

The date printed above your name on the mailing label is the last date on which you paid your annual membership dues. Please renew your membership annually to support the Conservancy's work and to expand its land trust.

Fall 2024

This newsletter is printed on 100% post-consumer waste recycled paper.

Save the Date

25th Anniversary Derby Day
Saturday, May 3, 2025



25 Ways to Engage in Conservation
Throughout Our 25th Year

Details to be announced in January 2025!

Join us for a hike, a book club, a film screening, a wild game supper, and other events to help us celebrate our 25th Anniversary!

Join us for "the party of the year" to support the protection of farms, forests, and front porches for future generations!

Hosted this year by Dan Belman and Randy Korando at their beautifully restored historic Madison home, you won't want to miss this one!

Early event registration will be available for members and sponsors.

Want to sponsor? Contact us today!

25th Anniversary
Membership Supper
Date to be Determined



Something extra special may be happening! Early event registration will be available for members and sponsors.

Want to sponsor? Contact us today!