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Family Farm Protected Forever

Freedom Township, Michigan – June 9, 2023 – A scenic 226-acre family farm bisected by Pleasant Lake Road in western Washtenaw County is now permanently protected by Legacy Land Conservancy.

Locust Hill Farm, conserved thanks to the efforts of siblings from the Kress family, consists of idyllic farm fields, a classic German style dairy barn, a picturesque farm house, and forest with rolling hills. One of the siblings, Joe Kress, currently lives on and farms the property.

“All of us had ridden a tractor by the time we were five and we spent most of our childhood helping dad on the farm,” Joe said. “Knowing we banded together to permanently protect the farm would make him proud.”

Originally established by the Dresselhaus family, the Kress family has cared for and cultivated the land since 1920. After the passing of their parents, the Kress siblings—Joe, Jean, Jeff, Jana, and John—began working with Legacy in 2017 to secure a conservation easement on the farm, which ultimately, helped keep the farm in the family.

At 226 acres, Locust Hill Farm is larger than the average size farm in Washtenaw County and it is one of Legacy’s biggest projects to date. The cost to purchase the development rights from the Kress family farm was over half a million dollars. Legacy worked over multiple years to secure a myriad of funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Washtenaw County Parks & Recreation Commission (WCPARC), and other private entities.

During this time, the Kress family also exuded extreme patience and commitment to the project as we jointly worked through above average slow-downs that were a result of the pandemic, and a title issue discovered during routine due diligence work.

Encountering title issues—like a blanket pipeline easement on the Locust Hill Farm property—during the conservation easement process is not uncommon these days. But, in order to permanently ensure and uphold conservation value of the property, it required lengthy and extensive negotiations between Legacy, our legal team, the Kress family, and the pipeline company. Eventually, the company agreed to remove its right to maintain, remove, and replace infrastructure within the entire parcel and narrow it to a smaller corridor surrounding the pipelines.

“Legally, a blanket pipeline easement, gives the company the right to use the entire property. This conflicts with the goals of the conservation easement,” Sandra Sorini-Elser, attorney and Legacy trustee said. “Legacy can’t commit to conserving these rich farm soils forever if another company could put infrastructure anywhere on the property.”



Despite all the challenges over the last six years, it is extremely rewarding to complete the Locust Hill Farm project.

“It’s been a long journey together, but we are pleased to see this through,” Joe said. “I’m proud to keep the family farming tradition going.”

Joe currently raises sheep on the property, mostly breeding bucks to sell, as well as hay, corn, wheat, soy, alfalfa, and clover.

“We’re thrilled to protect another piece of local farming history,” Legacy’s Executive Director Diana Kern said. “Family farms are increasingly disappearing as farmers age out of their work and sell their land to developers, making preserving farmland a critical part of land conservation. To help the Kress family continue their family farming tradition is a wonderful feeling.”

History of the Kress Farm

According to the Washtenaw County German Heritage Tour, the farm was established by the Dresselhaus family, who arrived from Germany in 1842, and purchased by Frank and Christina Kress (grandparents of the Kress siblings) in 1920. James and Geraldine Kress (parents of the Kress siblings) added to the original acreage in 1958. The farm supported sheep, cattle, hogs, and a dairy operation throughout the Kress family’s ownership, with corn, soy, wheat, alfalfa, and oats grown in the fields. The barn on the south side of Pleasant Lake Road was erected in the 1860s.

About Legacy Land Conservancy: Founded in 1971 as Michigan’s first local land trust, Legacy is a nonprofit conservation organization that protects land in southern Michigan. Legacy’s mission is to secure for current and future generations a land base for nature, agriculture, fresh water, and recreation in Jackson and Washtenaw counties and beyond. Legacy has helped to protect more than 10,000 acres of land (including seven nature preserves open for all to enjoy) that enhance our community’s quality of place by safeguarding water quality, conserving working farms, and protecting places to play. In a testament to over 50 years of successful voluntary conservation, Legacy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission for adhering to a set of standards designed to ensure the organization’s work will endure forever. Legacy is based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. For more information, visit www.legacylandconservancy.org.

About U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): For more than 80 years, NRCS and its predecessor agencies have worked in close partnerships with farmers and ranchers, local and state governments, and other federal agencies to maintain healthy and productive working landscapes by delivering conservation solutions. Through financial and technical assistance programs, NRCS helps America’s farmers, ranchers and forest landowners conserve the nation’s soil, water, air and other natural resources benefiting both the landowner and the environment. For more information, visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/ale-agricultural-land-easements>

About Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission (WCPARC): WCPARC’s mission is to enhance the quality of life in the County by promoting a healthy lifestyle, efficiently providing high quality facilities and programs reflective of current and anticipated recreational needs of County residents and visitors—with particular emphasis on preserving fragile lands, water quality, wildlife habitat, creating pedestrian and greenway connections, and providing high quality services to those of all backgrounds. WCPARC manages Washtenaw



County's Natural Area Preservation Program (NAPP) which was established in 2000 by the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners through an ordinance that provides procedures and standards for purchase and protection of natural areas and agricultural land by the County. In 2010, and again in 2020, voters chose to renew the county-wide millage that funds the program. For more information, visit <https://www.washtenaw.org/939/Natural-Areas-Preservation-Program>

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