

Larry and Cindy Custis donated a conservation easement on their 77 acre farm, Cedar Grove Farm, in 2013. The farm is located in Pungoteague, Va. on the north side of Nandua Creek. It's a working farm with an old farm house, a single family home, a barn, and grain bins. The property is adjacent to White Hall, a VES Land Trust held conservation easement.

Larry Custis is the third generation to farm the property. His grandfather bought the farm in 1943. When he was 18 months old, Mr. Custis moved to Cedar Grove. He grew up in the old farm house that still stands by the creek. Sixty-eight years later, he is still living on and actively farming the property himself. Mrs.

Custis is from Hacksneck, Va., just down the road that winds past the farm, and has lived on the farm for 22 years. The home they share was built in 1977.

The Custis family raised livestock and grew crops on Cedar Grove Farm. They raised hogs for 53 years and kept around 260 sows. They used the waste to fertilize the fields.

Occasionally, a hog would fall into the waste pit. "We couldn't get into the pit because of the methane gas. We had to get a lasso around the body of the hog and pull it out. It took two people. We always got them out," Mr. Custis remembered. The family also raised around 40 head of beef cattle, using Cedar Grove for winter pasture. Six years ago Mr. Custis transitioned away from livestock, but the old hog house stands about halfway up the drive near the grain bins.

The family grew white potatoes, corn, and rye. They planted corn in between the rows of potatoes. When the potatoes were dug, dirt would pile up on

the rows of corn. Mr. Custis had to walk the rows uncovering the young corn plants. For a long time, the family planted the crops around Larry's father's training race track. "I never saw my dad's horses race. Dad would leave me on the farm with the tractor." The race track lasted 35 years, but now the field is all planted. Mr. Custis plants corn, wheat, and soybeans in rotation. He farms 640 acres total, 42 of which are on Cedar Grove Farm. Mr. Custis also provides custom work (planting, harvesting, etc.) on 1000 acres.

When asked what their advice was for landowners considering a conservation easement, Mr. Custis said, "Do it." Mr. and Mrs. Custis decided to place

a conservation easement on their farm because, "**We just don't want to see the farm developed. There is too much good farm land developed already** and somebody is going to wake up hungry one day." They also wanted to protect the family legacy. Although Larry's father didn't know about conservation easements, his wish was to keep it a farm. Mrs. Custis added, "**We want to**

**protect creeks and water and really want to see farmland farmed.** As farmers we try not to pollute and to comply with all regulations."

As our conversation came to a close in the late afternoon, Mr. Custis prepared to head back to the fields. At 70, he still works hard, a trait he must have inherited from his father. His father once broke his knee but continued to drive the tractor day in and day out. He would have the kids drive him to the tractor in the morning take the crutches and leave him until lunch. It's this deep dedication to the land and way of life that fuels farmland conservation.



Cindy and Larry Custis on their farm, Cedar Grove Farm.