

FARMS NOT LAWNS

Defense against divisions in your own back 40 BY SHANNON FINNELL

Homes and gardens (and farms) aren't just about building and expanding. They also play a role in preserving the environment and the way of life of the family farm.

When Larry Bangs thought of his century-old family farm and what might become of it in the future, he didn't like what he envisioned. "I look around us and I see a lot of the small farms turning into housing developments," Bangs says. "Our place has been in the family for 107 years now, and I just couldn't bear to see it turn into houses."

Without a family member likely to take up the plow, Bangs looked in a different direction to ensure that the 82-acre property would be used for farming for generations to come. Eventually he settled on a partnership with McKenzie River Trust. Bangs donated a conservation easement on his farm along the Fern Ridge Reservoir. It is still owned by the Bangs family, but it's protected from future development and dedicated to farming and nature simultaneously.

Twelve wooded acres are protected from any significant deforestation, but the provisions in the easement allow for firewood gathering and harvesting wood for small projects. The largest portion of the easement, about 62 acres, will be used for agriculture, and two areas with houses are to remain residential.

Bangs and MRT agreed on development restrictions, conservation plans and some rules for limiting pesticides, though Bangs says that he won't have to make any adjustments to the way he runs his farm now to comply with the terms of the easement. "They retain a fair bit of latitude," Ryan Ruggiero, land protection manager with MRT, says, "as long as they're doing it in a way that doesn't compromise or destroy the area."

Although MRT has a few other conservation easements in the area, Ruggiero notes that the Bangs property is the first farm they've worked with in this part of the Willamette Valley — and as a part of the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Century Farm Program, which honors farms more than 100 years old, it's a historical partnership, too. Ruggiero says that working on the Bangs Farm conservation easement emphasized to MRT that farms can play an important role in conservation. "That's a new

thing for us, but we think it's important to recognize the value of agricultural land and its status as a Century Farm," he says.

About four years passed between Bangs' decision that he wanted an easement and the drying of the ink on the contract. "I've worked really closely with McKenzie River Trust, and McKenzie River Trust has been a good outfit to work with," Bangs says.

Bangs' satisfaction with MRT and the easement comes partly from the time they took to work out all the details of the plan. Some ideas that MRT proposed, like allowing wetlands to reclaim some of the land, didn't sit well with Bangs, who sees them as purposeless space on the farm. Bangs and MRT discussed it, and wetlands weren't included in the final plan. Preserving the farm as an agricultural property was Bangs' focus, but he likes the idea of helping out the many animals that thrive on the

property as well. "We have an abundance of wildlife," Bangs says, "and I think we owe them a place to live, too."

Animals thrive in the area surrounding the Bangs' Farm, which sits on Fern Ridge Reservoir. "It's a dramatically altered landscape and an artificially created body of water, but it should be borne in mind that it is now a very important body of water," Ruggiero says. The farm is located on the Pacific Flyway, a vital route for migrating birds. Other wildlife such as elk, fox and acorn woodpeckers also live in the area.

As the Bangs family continues to farm their land, Ruggiero says he's looking forward to being "a partner to them and a resource." He appreciates how important it was for Larry Bangs to see the farm preserved not only as a tribute to conservation and the history of the area, but also for his family.

"It was a tremendous gift," Ruggiero says, "and I hope he felt a sense of relief and that his ancestors would have been proud to see it preserved." **EW**

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— LARRY BANGS



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