

Farm Stewardship Committee

Spotlight on Obligation Farm's Conservation Efforts

By Katherine O. Rizzo with photos from Emily Wilson

Obligation Farm in Anne Arundel County has been owned and operated by three generations of the Wilson family. It was first purchased by Dr. Emily Wilson in the 1940s. "My grandmother had to do a lot of renovations as the property is very old," current owner Emily Wilson stated. "There is even a historic house on the property that dates back to the 1740s." Wilson was named after her grandmother and has continued her grandmother's efforts to keep the farm both functional and beautiful.

"I grew up on the farm with everything from pigs to cows to even peacocks," she added. But when it came time for her to get her first pony, she boarded it nearby as there were no horse facilities on the property at the time. "We then decided to renovate one of the cow barns into an eight stall barn and I moved my pony home," Wilson said. She took on a few boarders to fill the rest of the barn and the farm started to make the switch from other livestock to horses.

"The business is Obligation Farm but it runs across two properties," Wilson explained. Obligation Farm is the original property and consists of 220 acres. Etowah Farm is adjacent to Obligation and was owned by Wilson's cousins. Both properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program.

"Etowah is 95 acres and we started to expand into that property for more pastures and another barn." The current business is a boarding and training business with Deana Tice running her En-tice-ment Stables' lesson, camp and showing business from the property too.

"One of the things that is so great about this farm is that you don't only have 300 acres to ride on, but we back up to lots of trails between various horse properties so people can trail ride for miles. I used to get lost as a kid!" Wilson said with a laugh. "It is a great community of horse people here."

In order to preserve the natural beauty of the farm, Wilson has gone above and beyond with many conservation efforts. "I'm kind of big on this," she said, adding that education is also the key to conservation success. "I really try to teach our clients to respect the farm and the nature around them. I want them to enter the farm drive and take a breath, relax and just enjoy the beauty around them."

All fields at Obligation Farm have automatic waterers that are placed in areas with footing that can withstand heavy use. "This way when the horses are gathering at the water like they tend to do, they aren't creating muddy



areas in the pastures." Wilson explained that the waterers they use fill two gallons at a time, so the horses constantly have fresh cool water (and warm if needed in the winter). "It also makes things way easier to clean and maintain as you aren't dumping huge gallons of water when cleaning," she added.

"We also oversee our pastures and compost the manure on the farm as our manure management plan," Wilson said. Obligation also uses LED lights and has solar panels on the indoor roof that power the whole farm. "We also created berms in some of the more hilly pastures to help with water flow during storms," she said.

Wilson is always looking ahead and actively works with the Anne Arundel Soil Conservation District and Maryland Department of Agriculture to continue the farm's conservation projects. "We are currently working on fencing out water areas, including streams and ponds, while also increasing buffer areas," she explained. Wilson also plants native species to attract native wildlife and support bee hives. "We also have a wood duck box up at the pond and two others between the two farms," she added. There are also blue bird and bat boxes around the farm.

"And we are looking into a better storm water management project for around the barn areas," Wilson added. These systems will include purposeful drainage and berms to catch water. "We are just always looking ahead!"



From left: One of the historic houses at Obligation Farm, solar panels on the indoor, concrete manure holding area, automatic waterer and gravel area, stormwater drain.