



2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship Award Nomination

Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina

Section 1—Description of Operation

Linda E. Fisher
11901 Cooper Road
Nashville, NC 27856
252-813-2210
252-443-4439



Nature of Business—

The farm is a cow/calf beef cattle operation producing primarily Angus cross Gelbvieh feeder calves. They are marketed in early fall at 600 lbs. in uniform truck-load lots in an alliance with two neighboring farms. A group of heifers are selected, developed, and bred artificially for marketing as replacements annually. Hay, pumpkins, and gourds are also grown. This farm hosts 2,000 school children each year from a six county region for a tour of the Fisher Pumpkin Farm. The emphasis is on agricultural education including North Carolina crops and pastured animals.



Fisher Farm Angus-Gelbvieh Feeder Steer

History of Business—

Grandfather, A. Jack Fisher purchased the farm in the early 1900's. He was a pioneer in beef cattle selection and development in the area. Purebred bull selection was his emphasis in the early years. Father, R. Sullivan Fisher instilled his love for the 500-acre farm and his cattle. He was the Jay-cee's National Young Farmer of the Year in 1958. In 1970, faced with tobacco mechanization, Sullivan rented out his allotment and devoted all his energy to cattle. At this time, Charolais then Simmental bulls were introduced to the Angus stock. This assured thick growthy, medium framed calves for area feeder calf sales.

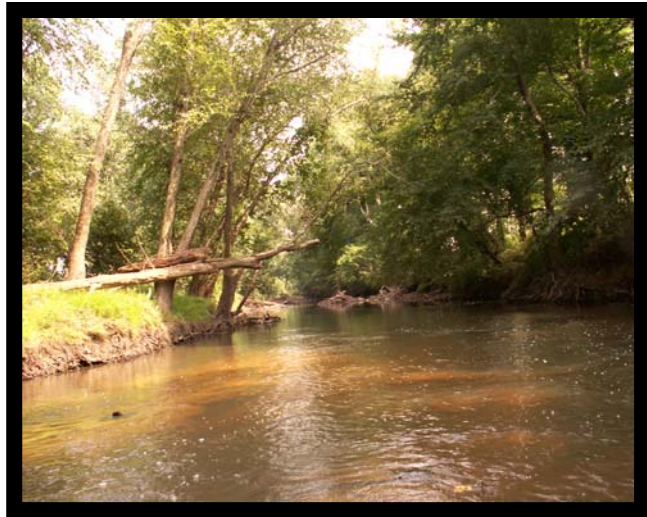
Daughter, Linda E. Fisher, left teaching high school history in 1984 to farm full-time. She bought the herd in the 1980's, continuing to produce quality crossbred calves for regional feeder calf sales. In 1997, County Agent Mark Hucks inspired a move to market in truck-load lots off the farm. Primary emphasis was placed on producing moderate frame, deep bodied calves of the Angus-Gelbvieh breed. The calving season was tightened to reduce weight variations primarily through the introduction of cottonseed as a cow supplement prior to breeding season. Bull soundness tests became routine. By 2007, the calves were shaping up in more uniform weight, size, and color. Seventy percent of the cows calved in the four weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas in 2008. Presently Fisher Farm has 150 brood cows, 30 newly calved heifers, and 30 yearling heifers. Fisher Farm currently consists of 700 acres of owned and leased pasturelands in four locations in Nash and Halifax counties. These include facilities at Red Oak, Halifax, Castalia, and Hilliardston.



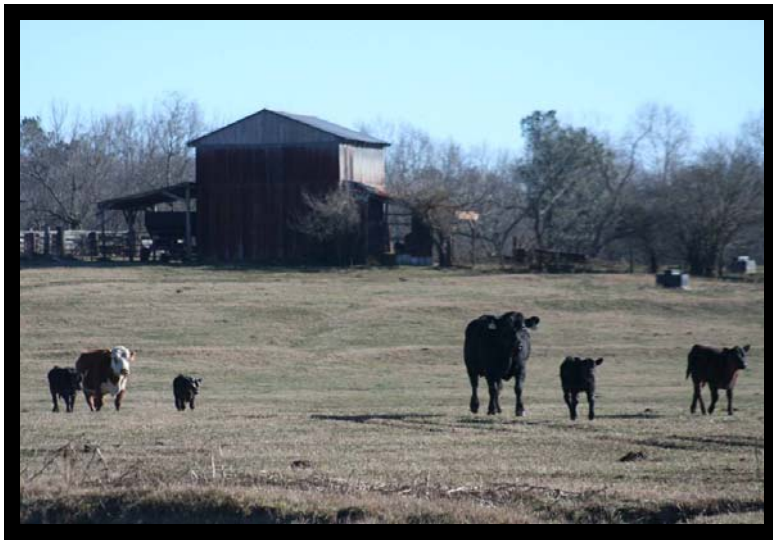
2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship Award Nomination Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina

Natural Resources on Fisher Farm—

Fisher's pasture land is located in the Tar River Basin with some Coastal Plains sand and some Piedmont (hills & clay). Primary grasses are Fescue and Coastal Bermuda. Dallis grass overtook many acres of fescue in the wake of the 2007 drought. Fescue is being reseeded. As part of the grazing plan recommended by the NRCS for the Red Oak farm, native grasses are being introduced with Gamma grass being the first. Little Fishing Creek "horsehoes" around the Halifax County pasture with a mile of creek frontage. The creek has Tar River Spiney Mussel colonies, a federally endangered species.



Little Fishing Creek at Fisher Farm
Contains Large Colonies of Spiney Mussels



Fisher Farm at Halifax -

A fall zone farm, terrain varies from flat Coastal Plains at Red Oak to rolling Piedmont Hills.

Organizations Interacted with in Environmental Efforts -

- US Fish & Wildlife Services
- NRCS
- USDA
- NC Cooperative Extension Service
- Franklin County Cattlemen's Association
- Nash & NC Farm Bureau
- Tar River Land Conservancy
- NC Forage & Grasslands Council
- Red Oak Land Use Advisory Committee



2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship
Award Nomination
Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina

Section 2— Stewardship Practices and Achievements.

In cooperation with NRCS, a **heavy use area** was built that enables the farm to precondition, weigh, and sort calves. Manure from the area is spread on nearby fields, based on soil sampling/waste analysis reports.



Fisher Farm Heavy Use Area at Hilliardston



Fisher Farms Bulls in Heavy Use Area at Hilliardston



2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship Award Nomination Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina

Fisher Farms Heavy Use Area

Note the concrete feed trough and automatic watering system. Geo-textile fabric underlies gravel to provide a good base for the pens.





2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship
Award Nomination
Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina



**Little Fishing
Creek in Halifax
County**

The Federal Fish & Wildlife Service partnered with the farm in fencing off one mile of creek frontage on Little Fishing Creek.

A wetland/ grassland area, also known as a Riparian buffer, was fenced off with this project, protecting the watershed and the endangered Tar River Spiny Mussel colonies.

Lespedeza was planted where the fenceline was cleared to go through the woods, providing food for wildlife.

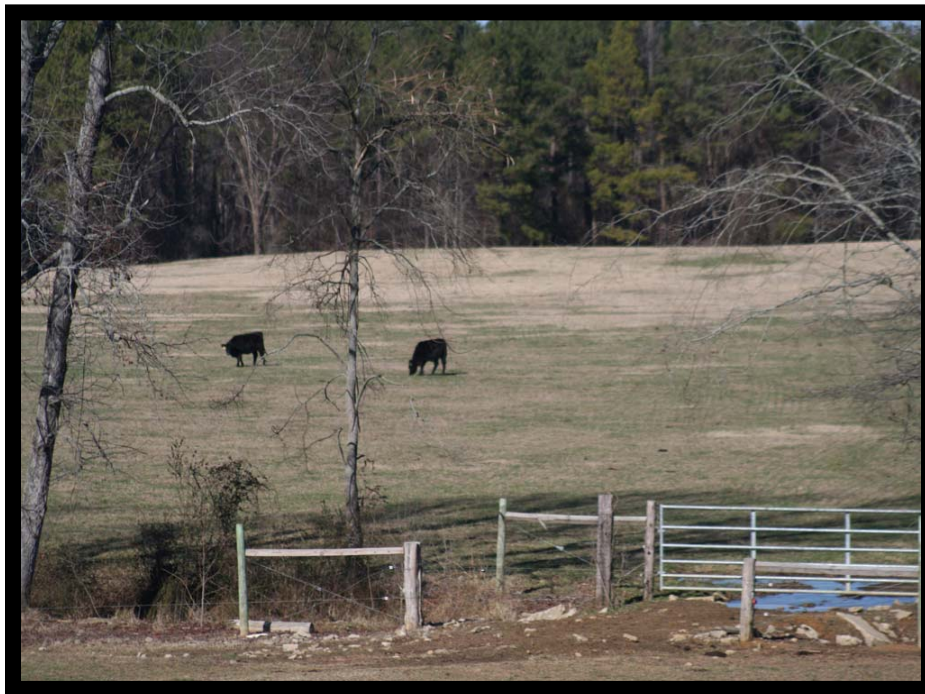
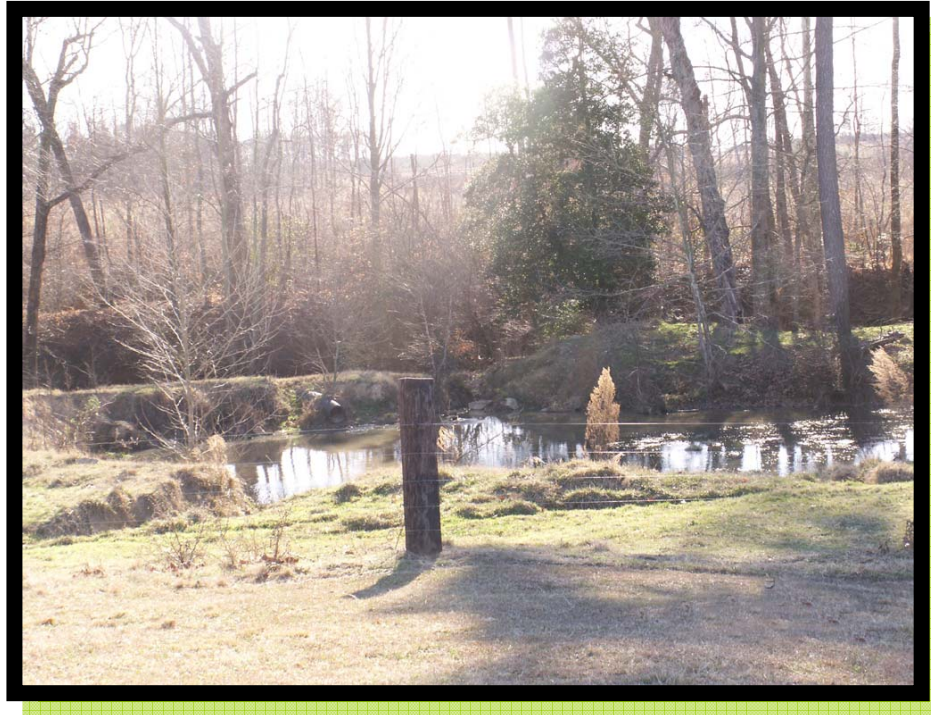




2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship
Award Nomination
Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina

Fisher Farms at Halifax

Critical wetlands/
spring fenced off to
protect water quality
with grant from US
Fish & Wildlife.



**Fisher Farms at
Halifax**

Fencing off the
old ditches di-
vided the pasture
into seven subdi-
visions for better
rotational graz-
ing and a cleaner
watershed.

The Fescue pas-
ture was com-
promised by the
drought of 2007.
Reseeding in
process.



2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship
Award Nomination
Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina



**Water Tank Supplied by Solar
Powered Pump**

Fisher Farms at Halifax—

An EQIP project helped finance a well, solar powered pump and fence charger along with eight gravity fed waterers.



Fisher Farms at Halifax—Gravity Fed Waterer



**Solar Powered Panels for Water
Pump**



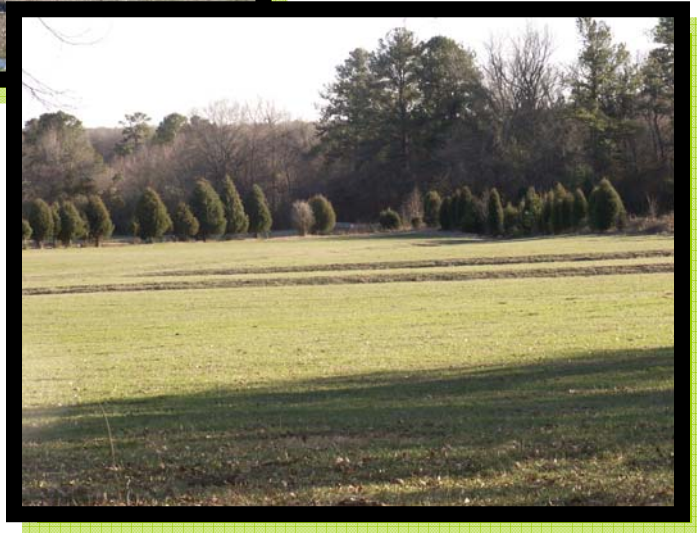
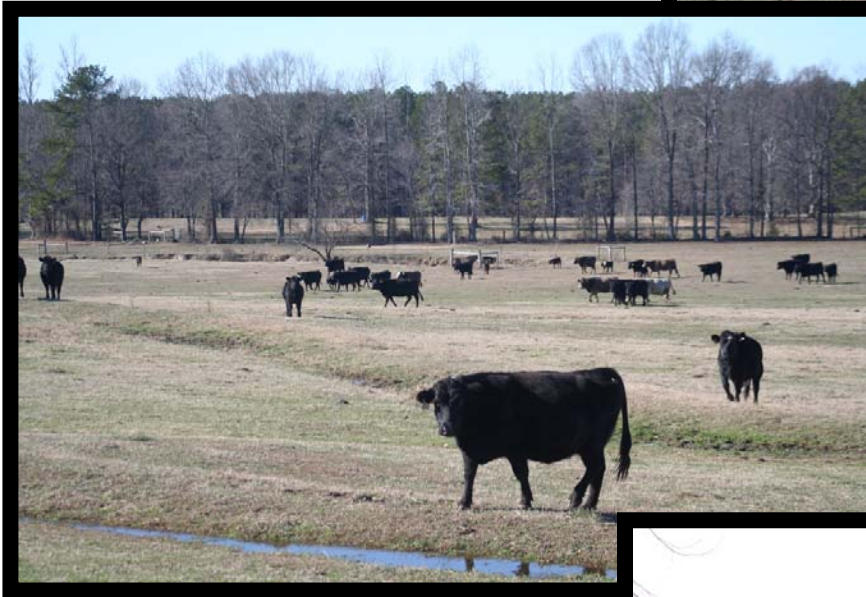
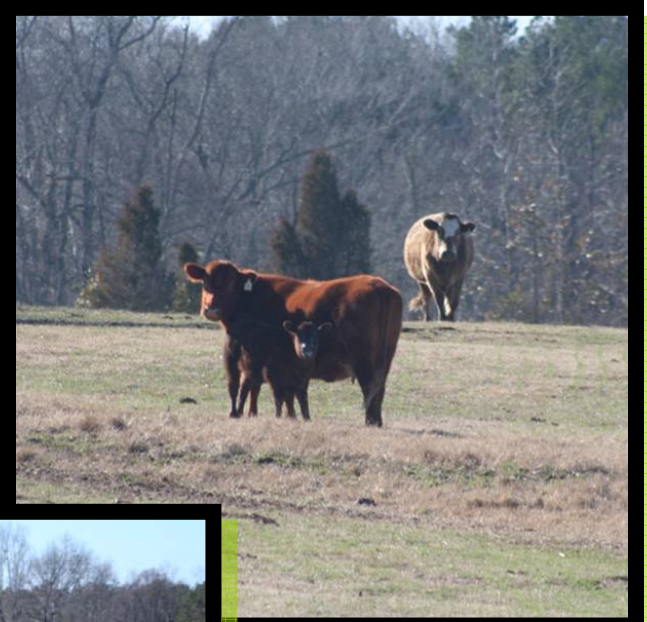
2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship Award Nomination

Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina

Terraced Pastures-

In 1992, a shared project with NRCS established grassland waterways and terraces on all cultivated land to reduce soil erosion and filter water for nearby Swift Creek.

The photos from this page show the resulting terracing at different locations around the farm.



Water Quality Testing—

Water entering and leaving the pastures on all farms were tested in a beef cattle water testing study with the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association. Sampled water was good or better leaving the farm as entering in on the test study. Nearby Swift Creek has a "high quality water" designation.

Fisher Farms at Hilliardston—Terracing



2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship Award Nomination Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina



Overseeded Rye on Bermuda Grass-

Every fall, a Tye no-till drill is used to overseed rye and ryegrass in coastal Bermuda for winter grazing.

Rotational grazing practices are implemented to reduce stresses on pastures throughout the year.

Grasslands Preservation-

In 2007, Fisher Farms enrolled the fifty acre Red Oak pastures into the USDA Grasslands Reserve Program. This will protect these acres from development and conserve the pastures for future generations.



Red Oak Grasslands Reserve Acres

In 2005, twelve acres of farmland were also enrolled into the Quail Habitat Buffer Management Program providing needed habitat for Quail and other bird species.



2009 North Carolina Environmental Stewardship
Award Nomination
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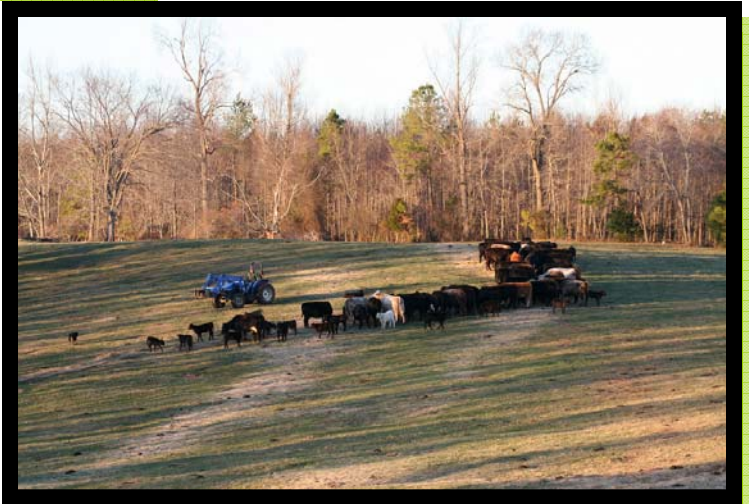


Hay Management—

Most of the hay crop is stacked and covered with plastic to maintain nutritional quality.

Winter Feeding Practices—

Round bales are rolled out for better access for the herd, providing all cattle with opportunity to feed. In addition the practice allows better distribution of manure in the pasture. This is not done near streams or ditches.



Ideally, the farm is working toward year round grazing through the re-establishment and stockpiling of fescue pastures and the use of drilled rye and ryegrass. In addition the farm utilizes cotton seed, gin trash, and corn gluten as supplements.



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Fisher Farms of Nashville, North Carolina



Section 3— Educational Outreach-

The Fisher Pumpkin Farm and the Nash County Heritage Days, are part of public outreach for Fisher Farms. Thousands of people, many of whom would have no other access, are introduced to the animals and concepts of farming. Visitors learn that the farm animals can live in a natural setting compatible with the environment. Such exposure may lead to a better appreciation and understanding for all.



Rocky Mount Agricultural Fair-

Linda Fisher established and organizes annually the Junior Heifer Show at the Rocky Mount Fair. This event provides educational opportunity for young people.





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Youth Education—

This Fisher Farm steer was the top Performance Index Steer for North Carolina 2008. He was shown at the Eastern Carolina Meat Animal Show by A. J. Strickland. The steer gained 4.27 pounds per day.

Linda Fisher has historically held clinics at Fisher Farm to help youngsters prepare their steers for shows of this type.

Additional Environmental Stewardship Practices:

- A conservation plan written for the Red Oak pastures will divide a 30 acre field in hay, fence off two water holes, setup a well with automatic waterers, and establish twelve acres of native grasses.
- Negotiations are currently underway to establish a conservation easement of a riparian buffer along Little Fishing Creek with the Tar River Land Conservancy.
- This producer's philosophy toward environmental stewardship is to leave the land as good as or better than it was when it was entrusted to her. Environmental improvements should be voluntary enhanced by cost-sharing or grants rather than regulatory. The historical use of the property should be honored.
- The Tar Pamlico river Basin Rules in 1999 presented ambiguous rules that were not applicable to pastured animals. Linda Fisher was part of a mediation group organized by the late Senator James Speed and the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association that met with the Legislative Review committee to make the rules more relevant.
- Linda Fisher is currently chairman of the Nash County Farm Bureau Committee which advocates the establishment of Voluntary Agricultural Districts in Nash County which will help protect and preserve Nash County Farmland. She presented the proposal to the Nash County Commissioners but the current political circumstance is not favorable. Work will continue in this area.
- Linda Fisher has volunteered to be stream tester for pollutants with the Tar-Pamlico Foundation. Her membership with this organization has provided several liaisons between the water quality advocacy group and basin cattle farmers.

This farm's future as well as others will depend on coalition between environmentalists and farmers. It is Linda's viewpoint that this may create enough voice to preserve our farmlands and our environment..