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Farmland lock

Key Points

- Tom Dixon chose a local land trust to preserve 312-acre farm.
- Repeated efforts to enroll in the Ohio AEPP were unsuccessful.
- Dixon saw development as a threat to the farmland's future.

By **TIM WHITE**

SUSAN Rieman says her memory of childhood is a blur of dirt and dust. She started helping her dad, Tom Dixon, on the farm at the age of 7. As she got older, she plowed the fields even though she had to look through the steering wheel of their IH tractor to see where she was going.

"Plowing is what kids are for," Dad said," she recalls. "All I know is, it takes forever." But she loved every minute of it.

"I gave up cheerleading and gymnastics and all that stuff. My friends would ask me, 'Where do you go after school?' My sister, Jennifer, and I were over at the farm for hours."

Now Rieman and her husband live on that farm, and through an agricultural conservation easement, her father has ensured the 312-acre parcel will remain farmland for the foreseeable future.

"I've worked this farm since I bought it in 1968," says Dixon. "Both my daughters helped me through the years, and we got up to 800 acres, but I started from scratch on my own. I want my farm to stay a farm."

The ground is rented to a



PRESERVATION PILGRIMS: Susan Rieman and her dad, Tom Dixon, with Spike, are proud to know their land will remain in farming.

local farmer. Dixon, 72, still farms 10 acres at his home in nearby Pataskala. A new housing development close to that farm led him on a preservation pilgrimage.

"The land around the area I'm farming was all supposed to be green space, and the township had regulations, but when the big corporations got to the county, it all changed. Now I have homes within 50 feet of

mine," he says. "It just made it even more important to me to save our good farmland."

With the help of the Fairfield Soil and Water Conservation District, Dixon applied for the Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program in 2004. He was not accepted, but continued to apply four years in a row. During that period, only 8% to 10% of about 200 applications a year were accepted.

Each time, Dixon's plan was not among them.

Finally, he turned to the Fairfield Land Preservation Association, a land trust dedicated to preserving farmland and scenic and historic sites in Fairfield County.

"Tom Dixon was determined that his land would remain in agriculture," says Jonathan Ferbrache, adviser to the trust. "We were new to the process,

but were happy to help him achieve that goal. He was not interested in the money [from the AEPP]; he just wanted to protect the farm. Tom felt it was important to have farmers in the future."

"People have to eat," Dixon says. "We will always need farmers, but they can't do anything without the land."

■ **Read more on Page 6.**

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