

# ANNE ARUNDEL

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AMY DAVIS : SUN STAFF PHOTOS

Former state Sen. James Clark Jr., strolling past a field of wheat on his 548-acre Ellicott City farm, is planning to open a farming education center on his land. The venture, Clark's Elloak Farm, will be run by the former staff of defunct Cider Mill Farm.

# Making plans for a crop of tourists

**Farm:** Defunct Cider Mill's educational activities that exposed many to farm life will find a new home on nearby preserved land in Howard County.

By JAMIE SMITH HOPKINS  
SUN STAFF

The popular hands-on farm that was one of the most visible symbols of agriculture in suburban Baltimore — and in its recent demise, a potent reminder of the seeming inevitability of development — is springing back to life eight miles from its origins.

In an unexpected twist, the family of former state Sen. James Clark Jr. will announce today that they're bringing in Cider Mill Farm's manager to recreate the agritourism activities on part of their 548-acre Ellicott City cropland.

Clark's Elioak Farm is expected to open Sept. 7 with the same staff, same hours, same educational programs and the same "Goat World."

Manager Cheryl Nodar was devastated when Cider Mill closed abruptly in March to make way for developers, who are planning to build 94 houses on the Elkridge land. Now she's busy working out the details for her second chance at a job she loves, this time starting from scratch.

"At this point, all I have is a green pasture out there," she said, laughing. "You have to visualize, 'This is going to happen in four months.'"

The Elioak operation — which takes its name from the immediate neighborhood — won't have a cider mill, but it will offer something Cider Mill Farm did not. Clark still farms, selling produce from a stand at Route 108 near Centennial Lane. Fields of sweet corn will act as a back-



Sheep graze on part of James Clark Jr.'s farmland. Agritourism plans for his preserved land include a petting zoo for children.

drop to Elioak's site of about 20 acres.

The 85-year-old Cider Mill Farm once had apple orchards, but deer troubles persuaded later owners to import fruit for their mill.

After reinventing itself as an

agritourism spot, Cider Mill became a touchstone for people across the Baltimore region who wanted to experience a day on a farm. Nodar estimates that more than 50,000 people visited every year.

In the

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# Howard farm will grow into a tourist spot

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spring, kids trooped in to milk a cow, pet a chicken and feed the goats. In the fall, thousands passed through to learn about Pilgrims, make scarecrows and settle in for a family hayride.

Nodar is glad those activities are finding a new home in Howard's crowded eastern side, where land is at such a premium that the public school system has a hard time finding space, let alone farmers.

## A family mission

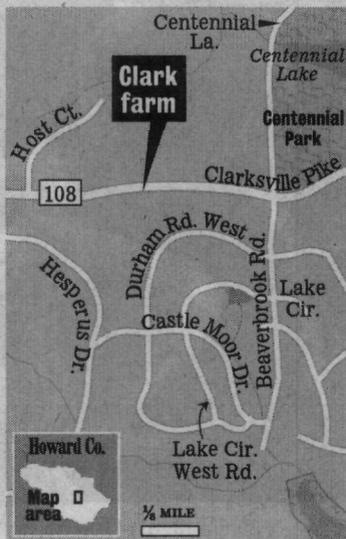
Martha Clark, the senator's daughter, thinks her family's land is an appropriate place for reasons beyond geography. The Clarks had wanted to branch out into agritourism even before Cider Mill closed, she said.

"We've been farming in Howard County — the Clarks have — for over 200 years, so agricultural history and education is just very important to us," she said. "Our whole mission is to expose people to farming and farm life and animals and the connection to the land."

The people at Christ Memorial Christian Nursery School in Columbia were excited to hear about the plans for Elloak Farm. Every year, the school's 3-year-olds visited Cider Mill in the spring and its 4-year-olds visited in the fall.

"The kids enjoyed going there a lot, so we'll be back," said Marjay Laske, the school's director.

Cathy Hudson, who's lived in Elkridge since 1961 and remembers visiting Cider Mill Farm as a child, is also pleased. But she's still hoping someone in the neighborhood with a little land will offer hands-on farm experiences to fill the gap left when Ci-



SHIRDELL MCDONALD : SUN STAFF

der Mill shut down.

"It's really being mourned," she said.

Nodar had thought the farm would be open for at least one more season after its owners worked out a development deal. When it closed unexpectedly — after schools and nursery groups had booked trips for the spring — she couldn't do much more than suggest people head west to Sharp's at Waterford Farm in Brookeville.

Now she's planning a mailing to all the Cider Mill regulars to get them back.

## No worries

Nodar hopes this will be her last job, one that won't disappear in a puff of bulldozer smoke.

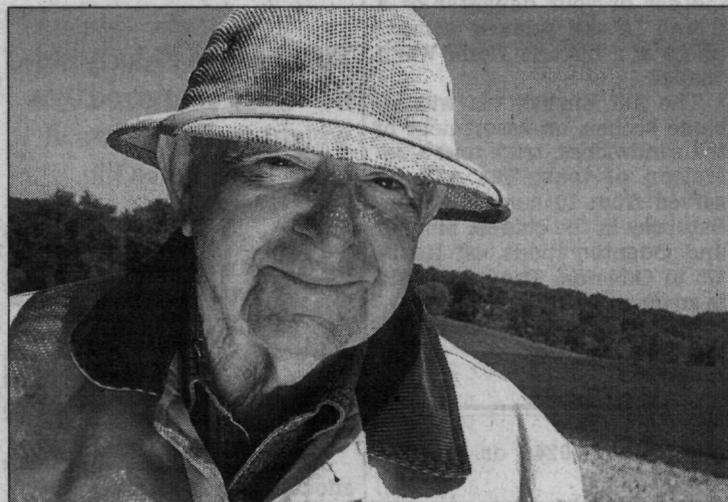
She said the location encourages her; this time, she'll be running a farm business on preserved land.

"I won't have to worry about developers," Nodar said.



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In the distance sits the Clark farmhouse. The family is said to have farmed in Howard County for more than 200 years.



James Clark Jr., 83, grows corn and wheat, among other crops, and raises several types of animals on his farm.