



From Tobacco to Alpaca

Kim Stewart on the History of Her Land, and Why You Should Plan for Yours

By Amanda Murphy, Director of Communications


The following is an interview with Kim Stewart, NCFCA landowner member, chair of the Franklin County Farm Bureau Women's Committee and member of the NC Farm Bureau Women's Committee and Forest Advisory Committee. She is also an ambassador for the American Farm Bureau Agriculture Foundation and co-owner of Hardly Farm LLC.

Several members of the NCFCA team joined me to visit Kim Stewart's farm in September. This was a first-time visit to an alpaca farm for most of us, so we were very excited for the opportunity.

To get to Hardly Farm in Castalia, NC, you drive away from civilization, much like visiting most of the NCFCA forest landowners. We pulled up as the fog was beginning to lift. Kim's family greeted us, welcomed us into their home, and then the tour began.

Chris Sullivan, Kim's son-in-law, was especially excited to share his experience in building everything needed for the farm. Lauren Sullivan, Kim's daughter, is the social media/marketing manager, as well as the animal caretaker on hand to help with keeping the animals healthy. And Emilene Sullivan, Kim's granddaughter, was right there in the middle of all of it, telling us about the animals and taking us down into the back of the farm to see the forest.

When you visit Hardly Farm, it is evident how much this family loves their land and is committed to the community and the sustainability of forestry.

 Above: Kim Stewart stands outside her farm, reflecting on her plans to ensure that the land her father gave to her stays in her family. She prioritizes educating her children and grandchildren on the importance of keeping forests in forests. Inset: Kim Stewart poses in front of the barn at Hardly Farm with her daughter and son-in-law, Lauren and Chris Sullivan, and their daughter Emilene.

Q: Tell me about yourself. Our records show you've been an NCFA member since 2021.

A: I'm from Northeastern Franklin County and have lived all my life in the community of Castalia, NC. This year, I've become the co-owner of Hardly Farm along with my daughter, Lauren, and son-in-law, Chris.

Q: What was your original reason for joining the NCFA?

A: I joined the NCFA after I attended a Farm Bureau Forest Advisory Committee meeting and met [Executive Director] John Hatcher. He made the value in joining clear. I have been involved in other advocacy organizations in the past, and I know the value they bring to grassroots folks. The work the NCFA does with education, communication, and advocacy at the state and national level is similar to the dibble bar in forestry. Farmers use long-handled dibblers of metal or wood to plant crops, called a dibble bar. I oversee 175 acres of land, passed down for generations in my family. I can hear the ding from the dibble bar from rocks and stones while workers are planting trees. The way I see it, the dibble bar digs in the ground to get information out to people, and to plant knowledge with legislators about the forestry industry's value locally and at the state, national, and even at the international level.

Q: What is the history of your forestland and why do you own it?

A: My daddy was in World War II. When the war ended, he came home and farmed the land, predominantly harvesting tobacco, soybean, and wheat. As him and my mom got older, tobacco farming started to have issues, so he took the tobacco buyout and converted the land to tree farms. With rapidly declining quotas, tobacco producers were increasingly willing to forgo the tobacco program — and increased their efforts to get a buyout. He made the decision to purchase additional land to plant trees, loblolly and hardwoods, for harvest. He saw the value in the buyout for him in that he didn't need equipment and saw the option as a great way to carry on for the next generations of his family. He passed in 2019, and mom died about a year later, at which point the land was distributed to their four children, with one large tract



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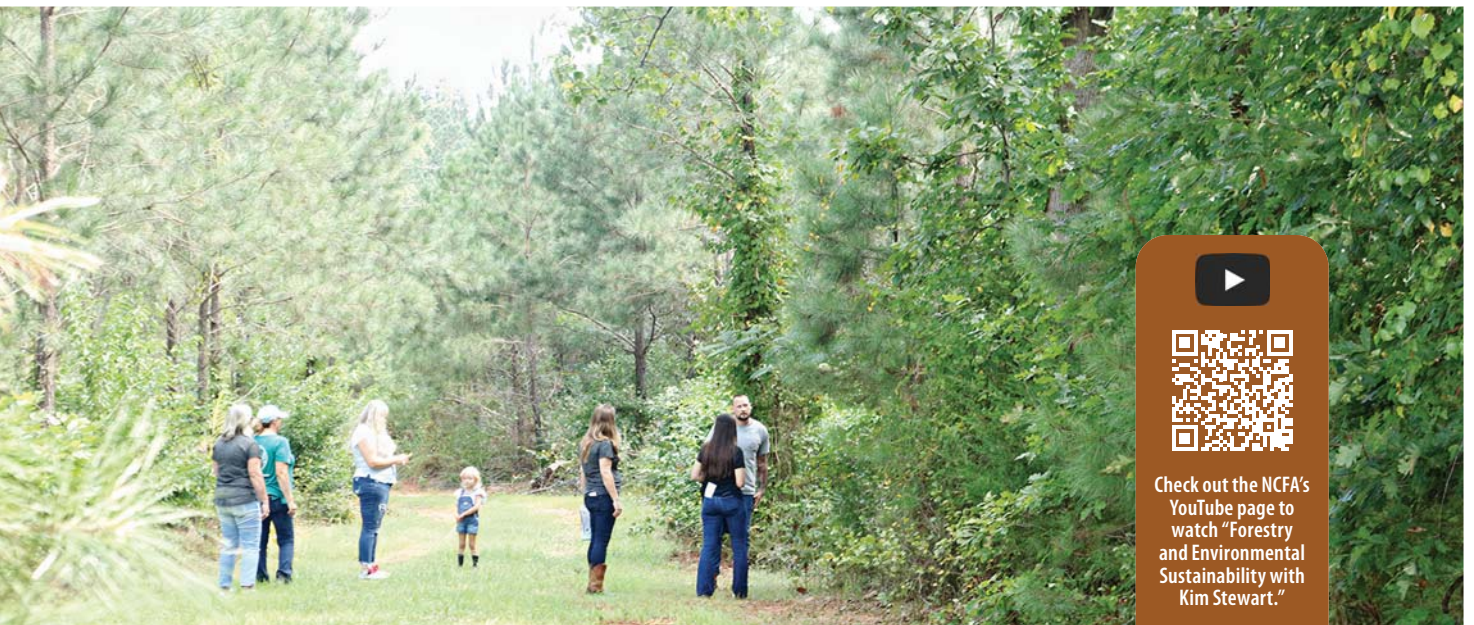
passed down to four grandchildren. Before they passed, they had a family meeting to discuss their decision on how the land would be passed down, with roughly 600 acres shared equally. My encouragement to landowners is that they sit down and have these conversations with their families. In the long run, it makes sense for folks to have estate planning to protect the land and families, and keep forests in forests.

Q: How do you manage your land for future generations? And what does sustainable forestry mean to you?

A: For me, managing the land has been a process of creating a will and also educating my child and grandchild. One thing I'm really glad I did was to reach out to the Franklin County Cooperative Extension Director, who sent me a list of forestry consultants to consult with on land management. From that list, Kent Fulbright of GFR Forestry Consultants met the qualifications my farm needed. He has been a great mentor, advisor, and



 Jessica Ireland makes friends with one of the many alpacas at Hardly Farm. Top: Kim shows off her felting soap she created and branded for the general store. Below: Emilene leads the way on a tour of the family's Tree Farm.



Check out the NCFA's YouTube page to watch "Forestry and Environmental Sustainability with Kim Stewart."

friend, providing me with the resources and reassurance for forestry sustainability now and in the future. I wish I'd had these conversations with my own dad before he passed away. Hiring a forestry consultant has been invaluable to me. I've intentionally included Lauren in that conversation so we make sure she's informed on things I wish I had asked my dad about. These conversations are important for managing the land for the future, including balancing the plan for wildlife, water, the forestry community, family, and future generations. The word sustainability means "keep it" to me. We're in forestry, so we also replant and keep the land in trees. I made up an acronym for FAMILY I want to share with your readers: Forestry Always Manifests Increasing Loyalty Year-round.

Q: How do you support the local community?

A: Hardly Farm, our new endeavor, is planted right now in an isolated, rural community. We don't have a ton of opportunities for cultural activities where the community can come together. Our farm is a place where folks can come to celebrate life, trees, alpacas, and spend time together. My goal is to build community with art classes, yoga with alpacas, and felting soap classes. We sell several items that I've knitted in our store, pumpkins and hats out of alpaca fiber, as well as books educating children (and their parents) about the forestry industry. I'm passionate about inclusion, especially for people with disabilities. We want our farm to be a place where all people feel welcomed and enjoy the fresh air, beauty, and wonder that this outdoor environment provides. I also will talk to visitors about Tree Farm and the NCFA.

Some other ways I'm involved in the local community include donating knitted hats to a local fire station for their annual fundraiser. I've volunteered at my church for 48 years, as a pianist and recently as the choir director. When COVID happened, I started to volunteer at the senior center for "Crafting with Kim" and I focus on an agriculture craft each month celebrating a commodity.

I've partnered with the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) through my work with Farm Bureau on a STEM activity at Royal Elementary School in Franklin County. The NCFS brings their truck and demonstrates how drones are used in forestry. ■

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