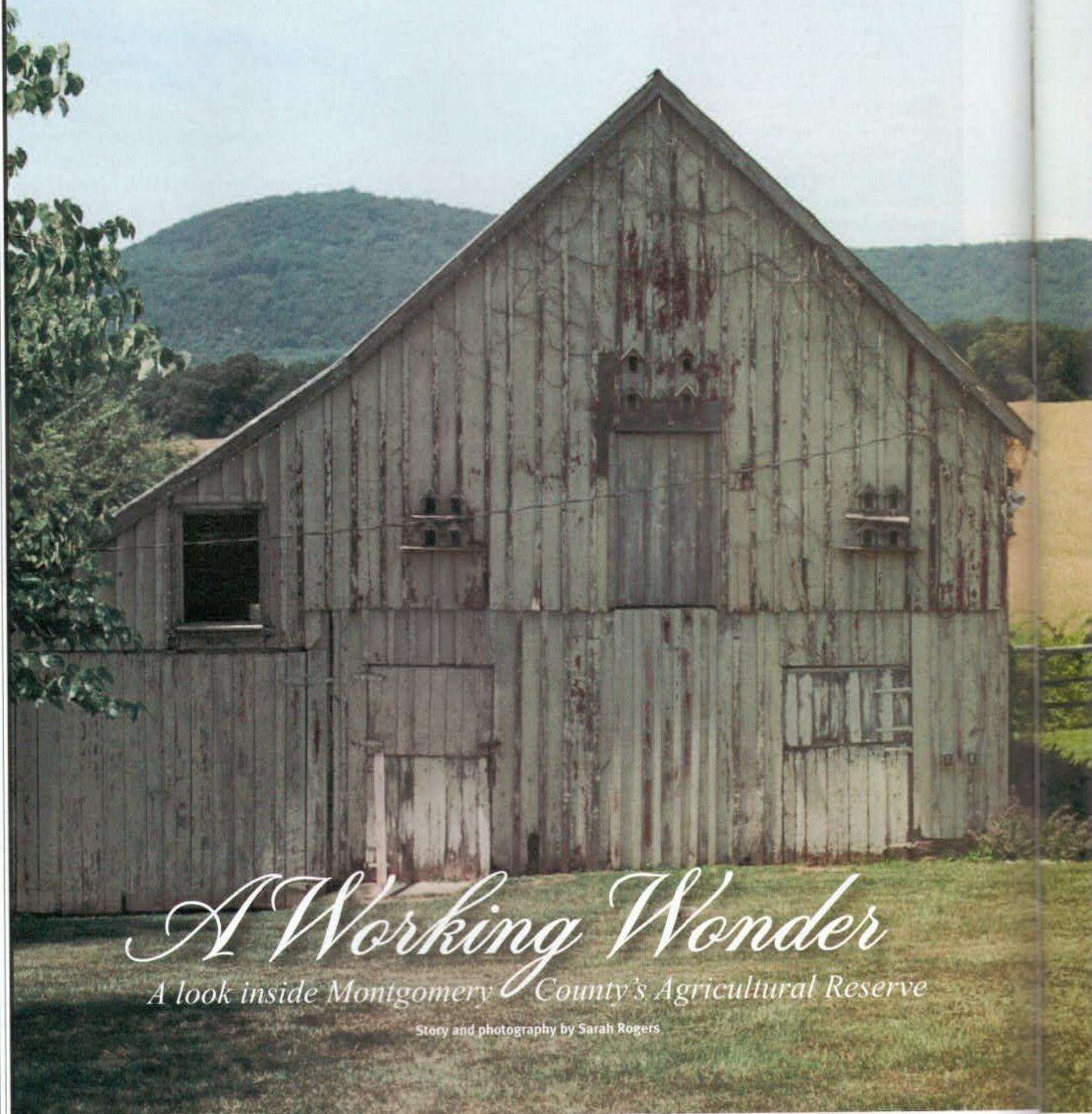


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MONTGOMERY HERITAGE



# *A Working Wonder*

*A look inside Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve*

Story and photography by Sarah Rogers



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ithin a few minutes drive from anywhere in the county you can be in Montgomery County's 93,000-acre Agricultural Reserve. Created in 1980 to preserve historic farmlands, culture and natural areas, the reserve is an award-winning national preservation model. Special zoning and policies are in place to conserve this pastoral, working landscape that incorporates nearly 800 farms, some of which date to the early 1700s. Today, farms vary from small organic parcels to those

specializing in heirloom crops to large corn and soybean operations.

The area's rolling, lush landscape has changed little over the centuries. Originally host to American Indian settlements cultivating corn, beans and squash, it later changed to the crops of European settlers. The latter divided up large land grants into smaller, affordable farms allowing small crossroads communities to spring up. Many of these early small towns are still in existence including Poolesville, Hyattstown and Beallsville, to name a few.

In the 1800s, the C&O Canal and B&O Railroad provided transportation for farm goods to market, encouraging farmers to diversify their products. Many turned to dairy farming and there were approximately 400 dairies in the

county in the early 1900s. Today, the C&O Canal National Historical Park is the ninth most visited park in the national park system. In addition to hiking, biking and kayaking, you can see the engineering marvels of the locks and aqueducts or you can watch the mule team pull a barge or you can stay overnight in a restored lockhouse.

The reserve is home to a number of historic African American communities and most are open for tours and special events like gospel and jazz concerts. The early Quaker communities of Sandy Spring and Brookeville offer walking tours, museums and events. The stories of the Underground Railroad can be found at Button Farm and Woodlawn, while the Agricultural History Farm Park interprets the history of county farming.

Currently, a number of organizations work to preserve and promote the reserve. The Montgomery Countryside Alliance works to conserve the natural environment, open spaces and rural lands while the Rustic Roads and Scenic Byways Program is the steward of miles of winding roads through the pastoral landscape dotted with farms, vineyards and forests. Heritage Montgomery promotes and protects the reserve's historic, natural and cultural resources.

Countryside Artisans sponsors studio tours where visitors can tour galleries showing everything from oil paintings to freshly spun yarn. Farmers markets offer fresh produce with pick-your-own options. Vineyards, breweries and restaurants are great spots to take a break and sample local products.

The Agricultural Reserve is perfect for a day or weekend getaway offering something for all ages. To find out more visit [HeritageMontgomery.org](http://HeritageMontgomery.org) or contact Caroline Taylor [caroline@mocoalliance.org](mailto:caroline@mocoalliance.org).



THE 93,000-ACRE MONTGOMERY COUNTY AGRICULTURAL RESERVE IS FILLED WITH OLD BARNS AND FARMERS WHO STILL WORK THE LAND TO GROW CROPS LIKE CORN AND SOY BEANS.