



## **#FridaysOnTheFarm: Cullipher’s Travels Established Dual Legacies**

This Friday meet Louis Cullipher and his son Michael, owners of Cullipher Farm in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Not only does Louis farm specialty crops, but he also – for most of his life – balanced farming with a full-time job at the USDA.

### **Keeping it in the Family**

Farming was always a way of life with the Culliphers.

Louis brought his son Michael into the farming business and together they grow 12 varieties of fruits and vegetables on two parcels totaling 230 acres in the southern part of Virginia Beach. It was an easy decision for Michael to reach out to NRCS for conservation assistance on the farm.

“In a lot of ways, we are still and have always been an NRCS family,” said Michael.

While most of their neighbors grow soybeans, corn, wheat, and other crops associated with the area, the Culliphers have established their farm as an agritourism destination, allowing visitors to harvest their own strawberries, blueberries, pumpkins, and apples.

Yellow buses are often parked out front as the farm is a popular site for school field trips. Pre-picked items such as sweet corn, tomatoes, and melons are also available for purchase. Additionally, five acres of grapes are being phased into the “you-pick-it” menu.

The Culliphers’ ideas for the farm and their agritourism came to them over late-night dinner conversations. Start-up expenses included \$35,000 for a shelter and almost as much for a custom wagon used for hayrides and farm tours.

“We can’t just sell strawberries,” said Louis. “We need to sell the strawberry experience.”

### **Conservation Close to Home**

Louis worked for USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and its predecessor agency, the Soil Conservation Service, for more than 41 years. As a soil conservationist, Louis worked with farmers in southern Virginia to help them plan and implement conservation practices on their farms and working forests.



Naturally, Louis – an NRCS soil conservationist by trade –brought conservation practices to his farm. He and his son purchased their first [high tunnel](#) through NRCS' [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) to expand their growing capabilities. High tunnels are enclosed structures that cover in-ground crops, protect them from harsh weather, and extend the growing season.

The Culliphers have also worked with NRCS to manage for [pollinator habitat](#), plant cover crops, and install wind breaks, as well as incorporating soil sampling, precision seeding, and low-drift spraying.

The Culliphers work closely with Jake Browder, the district conservationist for Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach

“What I tend to do is call Jake whenever I have an issue or a need,” said Michael. “If it fits into one of NRCS’ programs, he lets me know and we get started.”

Michael has since brought his own son, Jeb, into the family business and put him in charge of the new vineyard and apple orchards. Jeb is now a part of carrying on the family’s farming legacy.

### **Meeting the Chief**

During Louis’ career, he had never met a chief of NRCS, the head of the agency, but he finally had that opportunity earlier this year, when he met NRCS Chief Matt Lohr, who is also a Virginia farmer.

Louis and Matt’s paths crossed in March when Chief Lohr visited Cullipher Farm.

“I don’t think there is any way to fully explain why the Chief’s visit meant so much to my dad and to our family,” concluded Michael. “You would have to know my dad, and how he felt about his work with NRCS to fully appreciate it.”

### **More Information**

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center.](#)



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