

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 674

By Hensley

A RESOLUTION to honor and congratulate the owners of the Hester Farm upon receiving the 2009 Century Farm Award from the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should salute that most noble agricultural institution, the family farm, which serves as a cornerstone for our communities while bringing credit and acclaim to this State; and

WHEREAS, one such noteworthy family farm is the Hester Farm, which was recently named as the recipient of the 2009 Century Farm Award presented by the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce; and

WHEREAS, this prestigious award was presented at the annual Ag Week breakfast to several members of the Hester family, including Harvel Hester, Carolyn Hester, Howard Williams, Jo Hester, Mayme Hester, Freda Hester Perry, and Guy and Vickie Hester; and

WHEREAS, the Century Farm Program was established to recognize the dedication and contributions of those families who have retained ownership of the same farm through succeeding generations as they have coped with wars, floods, droughts, economic crises, and other obstacles presented by way of natural and human intervention; and

WHEREAS, in 1915, Alonzo Hammond Hester of Bear Creek, Alabama, traveled to Lawrence County to negotiate the purchase of a 220-acre farm from a Mr. Burch; Mr. Hester had heard stories about the rich Lawrence County soil, that it "didn't need fertilizer to grow fine corn"; and

WHEREAS, Alonzo Hester commissioned one of Lawrence County's finest carpenters, Allen Springer, to erect a new farmhouse on his new property for the large and still growing Hester brood; and

WHEREAS, the following year, Mr. Hester and his wife, Lena, boarded a train for their new home to the north; they brought with them, their six children, Edith, Bernice, Bertie, Hanley, Howard, and Hershel; and

WHEREAS, even though the Hesters were a sizeable clan, they would need all the help the friendly people of Lawrence County could lend; the acreage needed to be cleared of trees and prepared for crops, among other things; and

WHEREAS, the area's newest farm family received all the help they could have hoped for from their new neighbors; local men came from miles around for the log rolling, while plenty of women arrived to cook and watch over the children; and

WHEREAS, Alonzo and Lena Hester had seven more children after they moved to Lawrence County: Hermit, Verna Bee, Vera, Harris, Clarice, Hollis, and Harvel; together with their thirteen children, Mr. and Mrs. Hester shared the work of tending an orchard and raising cotton, potatoes, and corn; and

WHEREAS, in 1933, a terrible pair of tragedies struck the Hester clan; Howard, the second oldest son, died and, just thirty days later, Alonzo Hester, the patriarch of the farming family, passed away at the age of fifty-one, leaving behind a widow and nine young children still at home; and

WHEREAS, although Alonzo Hester died early in the lives of many of his children, all of his heirs, even those who had little chance to know their father, inherited the man's tenacity and work ethic; and

WHEREAS, the Hester sons worked mules in the field until they heard the call of the whippoorwill, while the Hester daughters tended to the abundance of household chores a farmhouse imposes; and

WHEREAS, Alonzo Hester had left his family with a fine farm and fifteen teams of mules, but he had also left them with a significant debt; in the year after Mr. Hester's death, eighty acres of cotton were planted, but a tremendous hailstorm destroyed it; and

WHEREAS, the next year, the Hesters planted potatoes, generating enough money to pay the interest on their debt and hold onto the farm one more year; they then planted more

cotton, more potatoes, and corn, and they milked their cows and sold the milk to Swift Dairy Company in Lawrenceburg for use in making cheese; and

WHEREAS, the construction of Joe Wheeler Dam proved a boon to the struggling Hesters; the men of the family secured a contract for the use of their mules on the massive project, and the money this deal generated allowed the Hesters to pay for the farm; and

WHEREAS, in working together to face the hardest of times, the Hester children developed a deep sense of appreciation for their farm and the life it allowed, and this gratitude lives on today; it continues to tether many members of the Hester family to the Lawrence County farm; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, Lena Hester, mother of thirteen children and widow of Alonzo Hester, passed away at the age of eighty-two; Hollis and Harris Hester bought the “old home place,” where they raised cattle and sold mules for many years; and

WHEREAS, Hollis Hester lived on the farm with his wife, Jo Price Hester, for thirty years until his death in 1998; brother Harris Hester and his wife, Mayme Lyles Hester, lived just across the road on another tract of Hester farm land; and

WHEREAS, when Harris Hester died in 2008, he had lived on the family farm for all but two of his many years; and

WHEREAS, in 2003, Harris, Mayme, and Jo Hester sold the farm to their nephew, Guy, his wife, Vicki Searle Hester, and their two sons, Brandon Hester and Bret Hester; Guy Hester is the son of Hershel Hester, one of the six children who had moved with their parents from Bear Creek in 1916; and

WHEREAS, Brandon Hester is married to Ashley, and brother Bret Hester is married to Jessica; while neither couple lives in Lawrence County, they return most weekends to help their parents run the commercial brood cow operation that includes anywhere from 100 to 120 head of cattle at any given time; and

WHEREAS, the original 220-acre farm now encompasses more than 300 acres; the Hesters also lease over one hundred acres of farmland; and

WHEREAS, the original white farmhouse still stands on the property, and the home is marked by a sign commemorating the year it was built; and

WHEREAS, Guy Hester, along with his brother and sister-in-law, Lonnie and Lenora Hester, and his sisters and brothers-in-law, Carla and John Cribbs, Connie and Jim Fife, and Freda and Donnie Perry, all love to visit with one another at the old home place; together they are still building memories at the farm, which symbolizes hard work and good times for this venerable Lawrence County family; and

WHEREAS, each year, the children and grandchildren of Alonzo and Lena Hester convene at Gum Springs Cemetery for decoration, a custom the family has observed for the last seventy-five years; after decoration, the family gathers for food, fellowship, and memories at the old home place, where they are joined by Clarice Hester Penuel and Harvel Hester, the only surviving children of Alonzo and Lena Hester; and

WHEREAS, the Hester family epitomizes the spirit and commitment that are characteristic of true Tennesseans; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to pause in its deliberations to acknowledge and applaud the Hesters for their dedication to farming, recognizing the importance of the family farm to our communities and the State of Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor and congratulate Lawrence County's Hester family upon receiving the 2009 Century Farm Award from the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce, thank them for all they have done to preserve the Tennessee tradition of family farming, and extend to them our best wishes for every future success.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.