



State of New Jersey

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 28, 2019

Highlands Council preserves unique Hunterdon County orchard *Native NJ apples grown to produce traditional hard cider*

CHESTER, N.J. — The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) has completed a preservation project that permanently protects 93 acres in Alexandria Township, Hunterdon County. The property consists primarily of forested and agricultural lands, with apple orchards and a cider mill that produces “Newark cider,” a traditional form of hard cider using native apple varieties unique to New Jersey. The product is marketed as *Ironbound Hard Cider*.

“The Ironbound Farm sits on property that has been in agricultural use for at least 200 years, but had been left fallow for nearly two decades before the current owner purchased it in 2015,” explained Lisa Plevin, Highlands Council Executive Director. “His vision was to bring it back to a fully functioning farm using sustainable agricultural practices, so we’re delighted to help support this goal.”

The Highlands Council acquired a conservation easement on the property for \$788,000 through the Highlands Development Credit (HDC) purchase program. The property is located entirely within the Preservation Area of the Highlands Region, and more than 80% is mapped as “preservation priority” meaning the lands are some of the most sensitive in the region and should be protected from development.

The property owner will use this funding for continued restoration efforts on the land. The active agricultural portion of the site is being managed using regenerative agricultural practices, which seek to not only produce better crops, but to improve the entire farm ecosystem. A pond and surrounding woodlands on the property are also in the process of being rehabilitated using regenerative practices.

Stormwater on the property is being managed using a system of vegetated berms and swales – landscaping features that help control stormwater flow, preventing erosion and flooding on the site.

A large barn on the site has been renovated to house offices and the cider production facility. A portion of this building was recently converted into a tasting room that is open to the public, and features locally sourced and produced food products. The Ironbound Hard Cider flavors available at the tasting room also boast “hyper-local ingredients capturing the seasonal flavors of the Garden State.”

“What’s particularly special about this acquisition is that the property owner understands and supports the connection between the health of the land and the health of the community and local economy,” says Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman. “This is a great example of farmland preservation in the Highlands.”

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at www.nj.gov/njhighlands.

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Photos courtesy of Kira Buxton, Ironbound Farm.



