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The Grand Strand has so much to offer its residents and tourists. We have a warm climate, abundant golf courses, beautiful beaches, state parks, tourist attractions, and outlet malls. But do people realize we have land ideal for farming?

We are here today to discuss an amazing gift that has been bestowed upon our community. We've been given several hundred acres of land and it's our responsibility to decide its fate. Do we, as a community, want to use this land for a golf course, a shopping mall, a paper mill, a computer landfill or a grazing field? Only one of these options can help the environment, our health, our local economy, and save the land for generations.

While golf courses retain the natural essence of the land and may add to the economy of our community, do we really need to add another to the eighty-five plus courses we already have on the Grand Strand?

A shopping mall may have economic value, but we already have plenty along with numerous vacant stores waiting to be rented. Malls add no environmental value to our community. Land is cleared and paved creating an impermeable surface that doesn't allow water to soak naturally into the soil to become groundwater or be absorbed by plants. In turn, this can cause flooding and change stream flows, causing stream banks to erode and destroy fish habitats. The runoff carries pollutants such as oil, heavy metals, bacteria, sediment, pesticides and fertilizers. Is this what we want to happen to our community?

Paper mills are not as economically advantageous as they've been in the past- our society is relying less on paper and more on technology for communication. Paper mills are one of the most polluting industries, emitting the fourth highest level of carbon dioxide among manufacturers and production uses about 200 chemicals. We have a mill in our neighboring

county 20 miles away, yet we can smell its pungent stench and see billowing smoke shrouding our beautiful seaside landscape. Additionally, chemicals and sludge ooze into our tributaries and other bodies of water. To build this paper mill, we would have to knock down the oxygen making trees only to pollute the very air we breathe!

A fourth option is to create an electronics landfill. In 2011, Governor Sanford signed House Bill 4093 banning e-waste from being disposed of in landfills. If e-waste in landfills is so dangerous, why would we want to create a landfill specifically made for these toxic materials? We will be stockpiling outdated machines filled with heavy metal pollutants that will permeate our soil, water, and air. Why would we want to use this land for hazardous chemicals that can cause cancer, lead poisoning, and other diseases?

The fifth option- the option for our future- is to use this land for an open grazing field. All of our options have advantages and disadvantages; however, the pros of a grazing field greatly outweigh the cons. We can make a lot of revenue by selling this land to a developer, but by keeping this a pasture the long term benefits for our health and the environment are invaluable.

Organic farming has become one of the fastest growing areas of agriculture in the US. Grass-fed beef is more expensive than factory farmed beef. However, cows are meant to eat grass, not corn, hormones and antibiotics fed to them on feedlots. Cows living out their lives as nature intended will live longer and healthier than the cattle that are raised on factory farms. Dr. John Andrae and Dr. Susan Duckett from Clemson University studied how to raise grass-fed beef. Their research revealed that grass-fed beef has twice the amount of the cancer fighting compound called conjugated linoleic acid and higher concentrations of desirable fatty acids and

antioxidants. Dr. Duckett discovered that the climate and rainfall in our region allow forage to grow almost twelve months of the year. A grazing field in our community would yield healthier cattle and allow them to graze freely “for free”.

Proper grazing management requires planning and investment. Implementing a system of rotation grazing allows cattle to graze in sections of land versus free roaming. Rotation grazing is more costly, requiring more workers to manage livestock by moving them to different grazing locations as well as a greater cost in fencing to divide the land into sections. Water tanks throughout the pastures would be needed for the animals to decrease contamination of the water supply. In contrast, fertilizers, feed, and water are inexpensive to the farmers. Since grass-fed cattle are healthier, antibiotics are rarely needed. To offset expenses of running and maintaining a farm, our farmers can take advantage of South Carolina’s tax relief programs for property and sales tax.

There are a multitude of environmental advantages to pasture grazing. Grazing fields represent the single largest watershed cover type in the US. Riparian buffers reduce water pollution, filter runoff, and trap bacteria nutrients and sediment that would flow into fields. Fencing these buffers would help keep animals out of the water. Rotational grazing prevents overgrazing and barren land. It also allows for animals to naturally fertilize and improve the quality of the soil. A permanent vegetative cover reduces erosion and protects streams. The native grasses remove carbon dioxide from the air where the carbon is stored in the soil as organic matter fueling plant growth, reducing greenhouse gasses and global warming. In addition, field grazing reduces the use of fossil fuels in farming practices.

There are health, economic, and environmental benefits of free range farms using rotational grazing. If we're worried about neighbors opposed to a farm, South Carolina's Right to Farm Law will protect against nuisance complaints. By taking advantage of the Agricultural Conservation Easement and creating a trust for our land, we will protect the grazing fields from subdivision and non-agricultural development ensuring the sustainability of the pasture. It's time we become stewards of our land and reclaim it for the future of our community.

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