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CHRISTINA ASBURY

Planting Success

NAVIGATING THE UNIQUE WORLD OF FARM SALES



BY LEE NELSON

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In the dynamic world of real estate, adaptability is key. For Christina Asbury, navigating the diverse landscapes of farms and coastal properties means her office extends far beyond traditional walls. With her trusty four-wheel drive truck and boat serving as mobile headquarters, Christina embraces the rugged terrain with a pair of muck boots always at the ready.

“A pair of heels have never sold a property for me,” states Asbury, a broker at Coldwell Banker Sea Coast Advantage, Sneads Ferry.

From survey tape to bug spray, and even a machete, her toolkit is as diverse as the landscapes she navigates. Vick’s Vapor Rub serves a unique purpose, masking the pungent odors of the outdoors, while pantyhose provide protection against pesky chiggers and ticks when traversing through tall grass. “They don’t get through the pantyhose,” she says.

Selling farmland is an entirely different market and somewhat a different way of life for REALTORS®. “The demand in farmland has increased since COVID, and the value of farmland is at record highs,” Asbury says.

THE EDUCATION FOR LAND SALES

Asbury served several terms as president of the Carolinas Chapter of the REALTORS® Land Institute (RLI), a commercial affiliate of the National Association of REALTORS®. She also served with the National RLI in various capacities and earned her Accredited Land Consultant (ALC) designation, with only 45 in her state and 690 in the nation. She also teaches land classes to other REALTORS®.

To earn the ALC, you must finish six courses, receive two letters of recommendation, pass a final exam and submit a sales portfolio demonstrating you have achieved a minimum of 25 land transactions or \$10,000,000 in land sales within the last five years. Some people accomplish this in a year, while others take a few years.

“It’s not an easy designation to get, and they just raised the requirements as well,” comments Eric Andrews, principal broker and principal auctioneer at Realty World Carolina Properties, Pittsboro. He has been president of the Carolinas Chapter of the RLI since 2021. He also serves as chairman of the Future Leaders Committee at the organization’s national level. “It’s interesting to network with other land brokers with different issues in different parts of the country,” Andrews says. “But we do have something in common. Buyers are looking for acreage, open space and freedom.”



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THE NECESSITIES OF THE JOB

Andrews says that selling a farm takes a different set of knowledge, tools and equipment than selling a home.

“As a broker for farms, you have to realize the deep roots and connection that the heirs or owners of a farm have. It’s not about the money for them, most of the time,” he adds.

For sellers, parting with a farm can be challenging because it holds sentimental value, often serving as the backdrop for family gatherings and cherished memories. It’s where they raised their calves for the State Fair or grew their own pumpkins.

In addition to emotional considerations, other essential skills for farm brokers include the ability to interpret plat or aerial and topographical maps and a thorough understanding of local zoning regulations.

Asbury expresses that as a farm broker, your awareness must encompass drainage and easement issues, available conservation programs, pasture management considerations, tree and soil varieties, road systems and watering sources like creeks or springs.

You must walk the property and examine the inside and out of barns, sheds and a home, if there is one.

“Sometimes, you have the farmhouse that has never been renovated,” she remarks. “You have to make sure you know the zoning restrictions and other ordinances that will govern how much you can renovate.”

Asbury and Andrews say it’s necessary to utilize advanced mapping technology to accurately determine property boundaries and identify flood zones, ponds and other land features.

“It’s not easy to find 50 acres in the middle of nowhere when it’s adjoined by other 50 to 100 acres,” he states.

THE PEOPLE (AND ANIMALS) THEY MEET

When Andrews met a retired banker who turned private zoo keeper, he faced the unique challenge of selling a zoo. The woman had acquired numerous

animals, including zebras, kangaroos and emus, and transformed her 100-acre property into a nonprofit zoo. She would extend invitations to school children to visit and learn about the animals, making the venture profitable.

“However, COVID-19 hit, and none of the kids could visit, and she couldn’t keep her staff. It became too much,” he states.

While inspecting the property, Andrews had a face-to-face encounter with a male kangaroo.

“He rarely saw someone taller than him. I’m 6 foot 4 inches, and he’s 6 feet,” he laughed. “He tried to box me because he was angry.”

Despite the challenges and strange encounters, the property included a very nice home, many barns and outbuildings and fenced-in pastures and shelters. Andrews leveraged his ALC designation to facilitate the sale to a nonprofit organization specializing in wild horse rehabilitation.

The organization, which assists veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, now utilizes the property to train and rehabilitate horses sourced from Colorado and Wyoming.

THE CHANGING FACE OF FARMING

In her role, Asbury handles a variety of land types, including oceanfront lots. She takes potential buyers

on her boat to see the view from that side of the property. She maintains strong relationships with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and local extension service representatives to offer insight into available opportunities, including loans for prospective buyers.

Over the years, Asbury has met many older farmers who wanted to send their children to college so they didn’t have to work so hard for their money. “Now, the parents are getting older, and the younger folks aren’t interested in coming back to farm,” she adds. “It’s almost like we are helping in estate planning. There’s a lot of guilt when they go to sell the farm that their grandfather farmed.”

Additionally, brokers sometimes face uncertainty regarding the target demographic for a particular listing. For instance, Andrews recently marketed a 100-acre property featuring 32 ponds.

“We put it in a few fishing magazines and got an unbelievable response. You don’t want to exclude anyone,” he adds.

As the dynamics of farming and land sales continue to evolve, Asbury, Andrews and their fellow real estate professionals remain steadfast in their commitment to navigating these changes with positivity and determination, ensuring a bright future for the industry.



BUYERS ARE LOOKING FOR ACREAGE, OPEN SPACE AND FREEDOM

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