



PERRY THORSVIK: SUN STAFF

**Back to the land:** Former Sen. James Clark Jr., 80, spends most of his time working his 548-acre farm at Clarksville Pike and Centennial Lane but still finds time to wage a political battle now and then.

# Ex-senator still a force

■ **Farmer:** James Clark Jr.'s 28-year political career ended in 1986, but he has never abandoned public service or the political arena.

By CHRISTIAN EWELL  
SUN STAFF

In his current life as an Ellicott City farmer — dependent upon fate — former state Senate President James Clark Jr. prays for rain. Not much, just the inch per week the crops on his 548-acre spread demand.

"If we have as dry a season as last year," he says, "it'll be a disaster."

That's how Clark spends most of his time these days — fretting over his sweet corn. But 13 years after he ended an extensive legislative career, his political instincts remain sharp. There are still times when Clark



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**New leader:** James Clark Jr. is sworn in as Senate president in 1982. During his 28-year legislative career, he was the driving force behind Program Open Space.

takes matters into his own hands, calling in markers of political influence.

He did so twice in April, weighing in against a church's plan for townhouses next door and a gas

station in Marriottsville. How much influence can he possibly have? Well, when people keep calling him senator, it's an indication of the sway he holds.

"I've never gotten over

calling him 'senator,'" says Del. Elizabeth Bobo. "It's not because he's stuffy, and I'm not a formal person myself, but the words just go together to me."

"He is a great foe, a great politician, and he's been doing it a long time," says the Rev. Darrell Baker, associate senior pastor of the Covenant Baptist Church, which lost a 5-0 Howard County Planning Board vote.

Baker has said he wants to sell a portion of the church's property for development of townhouses, a project Clark opposes, as he does an Exxon station at Warwick Way and Marriottsville Road. "He's a former state senator; he knows government, knows the system and he works through it," Baker says.

Mostly, the 80-year-old statesman manipulates the land. He takes care not to step on the tomato plants when walking to the rows in which he will plant gladioluses. He [See Clark, 4B]



# Back on the farm, Clark keeps his political edge

[Clark, from Page 1B]

tends to the cattle. He rides the tractor.

Each morning, he wakes up shortly after dawn. He reads *The Wall Street Journal* and eats breakfast in preparation for his 7 o'clock meeting with George Pendleton, his assistant for 40 years.

"Time marches on; it doesn't stop," says Clark, driving through the farm, in much the same condition it has been in since 1951, save for a few houses built for family members. He ticks off the names of the trees, some of them obscure to all but the most ardent arborists: paulownia, sassafras, tulip poplar.

Besides the trees, there are more than 100 cattle, a handful of horses, a few hundred sheep, 22 acres of sweet corn divided between Silver Queen and Silverado, and a few rows each of tomatoes, okra and string beans.

## Worried about corn

Clark's main concern is the sweet corn. It stars in the vegetable stand he runs on Route 108, but it needs more rain.

"It takes a lot of water to raise corn. This year, we're doing all right," he says. "But if we don't get a lot of rain in June or July, we'll be sunk. Farming's a tough business. There's no control over the weather, and no control over the prices you sell stuff for. And those are two of the main things."

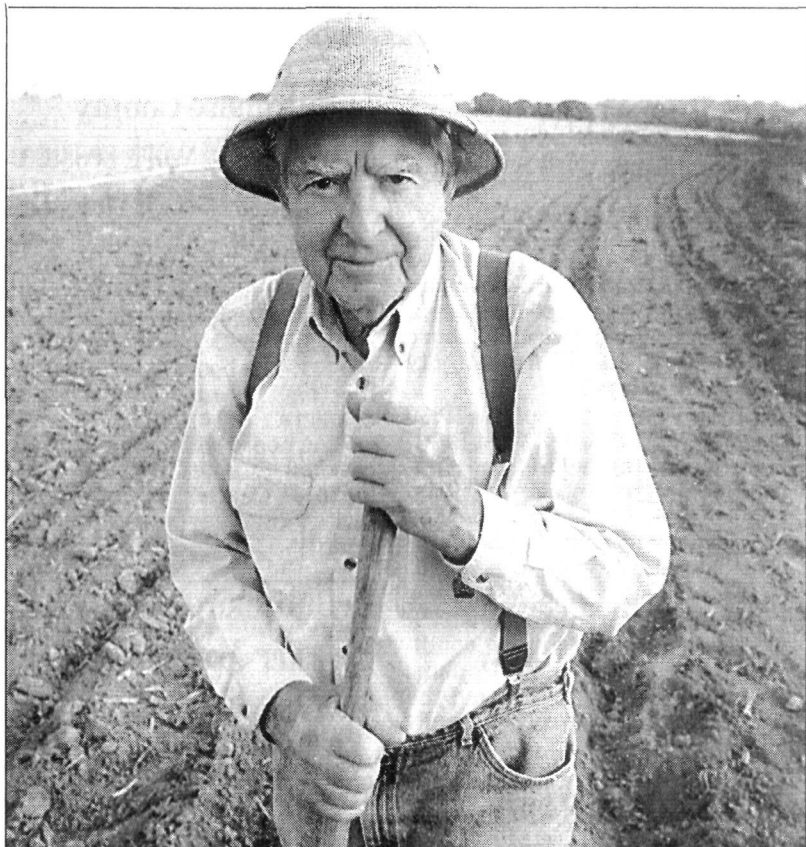
He's aware that he could have gotten a lot of money for selling his land, at the northern edge of Columbia. But he says he never will — his family worked too hard to obtain it in the first place.

The resolve is hard to appreciate until he roams into the western part of the county. Driving on Route 99, Clark looks to his left and sees bulldozers laboring over land near the proposed Exxon.

"Oh, my goodness, look at what they're doing there," he says, stifling the alarm, but too late. "If you want to buy a house, it's a good thing, I guess."

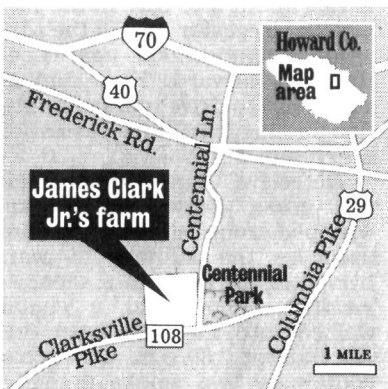
## Staying involved

The choices he makes regarding causes he champions do not



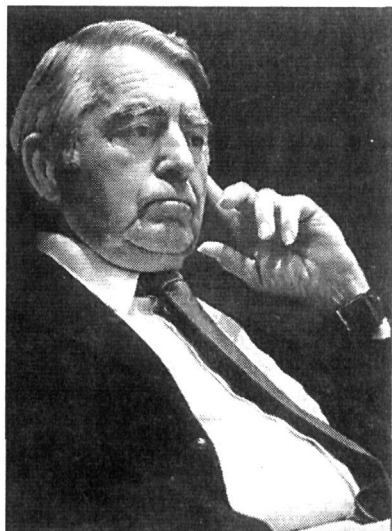
PERRY THORSVIK : SUN STAFF

**Hoping for rain:** These days, former Sen. James Clark Jr. usually worries more about his corn crop than about Annapolis goings-on.



JENNIFER IMES : SUN STAFF

George Howard lived. "The county has an obligation to protect it. Anybody who drives at all goes by a lot of filling stations in the matter of a week. You can say you have to have one right here, but that doesn't make it essential."



SUN FILE PHOTO

**Taking it in:** James Clark Jr. listens to Senate testimony in 1984.

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Since leaving Annapolis in 1986, Clark has been part of the Maryland Environmental Trust, Land Trust Alliance, Howard County Farmland Preservation Board, Mosquito Control Board, Thistle Control Board, Howard County Conservancy and the Howard County Sesquicentennial Celebration.

## Legacy of service

"I think he's incredible," says his daughter, Martha Clark Crist, who has a house on the farm and co-wrote the memoirs that Clark will release next month. "Jim Clark: Soldier, Farmer, Legislator" will be published by Gateway Press of Baltimore.

His involvement in the community "shows that his public service has had an impact and that he hasn't just done it while he was in the Senate. It's something that has been important to him and continues to be," she says.

The book chronicles nearly every aspect of his life, starting from a one-room schoolhouse in Ellicott City and continuing through the European theater, where he served in World War II, and his career as a public servant that included a four-year stint as state



SUN FILE PHOTO

**Taking it in:** James Clark Jr. listens to Senate testimony in 1984.

Senate president and hasn't stopped yet.

But people he has worked for — including the past two county executives, Charles I. Ecker and Bobo — say he minds his business.

"He doesn't force himself in, but with his knowledge and expertise people seek him out," says Ecker, who sought Clark's help on the Farmland Preservation Board, and for mosquito and thistle control. "He's been able to accomplish a lot for himself in a low-key manner. He can be a fighter when he needs to be, but he became the Senate president and wielded a lot of power with a laid-back approach."

## Enough influence

For the most part, however, Clark has had more than his fill of power, or influence, or adoration, which is why he devotes most of his time these days to his farm and his wife of 53 years, Lillian.

Looking back, he says there was little left to accomplish as a senator so he retired, three years after being ousted from the state Senate presidency.

Clark's main achievements were in the same areas he is involved with today: the land and environment.

John Surrick, spokesman for the Department of Natural Resources, says nearly all Marylanders live within 15 minutes of recreational space, a luxury paid for by a Clark creation known as Program Open Space, in which real estate taxes fund parks and agricultural preservation programs.

"Other people voted for it, but he was the driving force behind that incredibly important piece of legislation," Surrick says of the program that came from a bill passed in 1969. "It is a part of his legacy that Maryland is looked up to around the country for land preservation efforts."

Clark says, "I'd been there for 28 years. I thought that was enough. I thought I'd done all that I could do and left the state in pretty good financial shape."

Asked how much he misses politics, he responds, "I don't miss it at all. I enjoyed it. I took a big part in it, but I don't miss it."

## Passion for the farm

Clark had to get back to the farm, cared for since 1972 by his son Mark. The elder Clark was a farmer before he was a glider pilot in World War II and well before he introduced any bills in the General Assembly.

Chances are, he won't stop soon.

"I've had a passion for farming since I was a child," he says. "I loved the livestock. I also like the risk associated with it, too. Every morning's different. That's why I love it."