Henderson County
Farmland Preservation Taskforce

Monday, June 10, 2024 - 6:00 PM
King Street Meeting Room
100 N. King Street, Hendersonville, NC 28792

Agenda

1. Call Meeting to Order
2. Adjustment and Approval of Agenda
3. Public Comment
4. Approval of May 30, 2024 Meeting Minutes
5. Guest Speakers
   a. Ariel Zijp, Farmland Preservation Manager – Buncombe County Soil & Water
      i. Avni Naik, Farmland Preservation Coordinator – Buncombe County Soil & Water
   b. Ryan Manning, Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator – NC Foundation for Soil & Water Conservation
5. Continued Discussion – Taskforce Goals & Outcomes
7. Next Meeting: July 8, 2024
8. Adjourn
Henderson County
Farmland Preservation Taskforce: May 30, 2024

The Farmland Preservation Taskforce held a meeting on May 30, 2024, at 6:00 PM in the King Street Meeting Room located at 100 N. King Street.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taskforce Member</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioner Rebecca McCall, Chair</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commissioner David Hill, Chair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunter Marks – Planning Board</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danny McConnell – Soil &amp; Water Conservation District</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Steiner – NC Cooperative Extension</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>Jimmy Cowan – NC Farm Bureau</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joffrey Merrill – AgHC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Randy Newman – Hendersonville Board of Realtors</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jason Edney – At large</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Patwin – At large</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Linda Pryor – At large</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Ward – At large</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle McCall – At large</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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</table>

Also present:
Chris Todd, Business & Community Development Director
Autumn Radcliff, Planning Director
Liz Hanson, Planner I
Jonathan Wallin, Soil & Water Conservation District
April Hoyt, Soil & Water Conservation District
Dr. Terry Kelley, NC Cooperative Extension
Kieran Roe, Conserving Carolina
Tom Fanslow, Conserving Carolina
Jeffrey Darnell, NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services

Commissioner Rebecca McCall, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Adjustment and Approval of Agenda:
Commissioner David Hill requested Agenda Item C and B switch order. Taskforce member Randy Newman moved to approve the minutes as amended. Motion carried.

Public Comment:
There was no public comment for this meeting.

Adjustment and Approval of May 13, 2024, Meeting Minutes:
Taskforce member Randy Newman moved to approve the May 13, 2024, Meeting Minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Discussion:
The Taskforce heard from several guest speakers during the meeting.
The Task force had previously requested Evan Davis from the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NC DACS), to attend as a guest speaker. Mr. Davis provided a presentation (virtually) on Agricultural Conservation Easements and the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFPTF). Mr. Davis provided a comprehensive overview of how Agricultural Conservation Easements function and the role of NC DACS and the NC ADFPTF in preserving agricultural land throughout the state of North Carolina. After Mr. Davis’s presentation the Taskforce had the opportunity to ask questions and gain more information. Mr. Davis remained on the Microsoft Teams call for the duration of the meeting to be available for any more questions from the Taskforce.

The Taskforce also previously requested representatives from Conserving Carolina to present on their expertise and experience in Conservation Easements. Tom Fanslow, Land Protection Director for Conserving Carolina, presented first, followed by Kieran Roe, Executive Director of Conserving Carolina. Mr. Fanslow provided an overview of Conserving Carolina as an entity, their service area, past conservation projects, and their role in Agricultural Conservation Easements. An example budget for an Agricultural Conservation project, led by Conserving Carolina, was also presented to the Taskforce. Taskforce members had an opportunity to pose questions to Mr. Fanslow and Mr. Roe after their presentations.

Commissioner Hill suggested continuing the remaining agenda items at a future meeting due to time constraints.

**Next Meeting:**
The taskforce will meet on June 10th at 6:00 PM in the King St Meeting Room at 100 N. King Street. The Taskforce requested Staff to arrange guest speakers from the Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District and the NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation, to present at the June 10, 2024, meeting.

Commissioner Hill motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:58 PM. Motion carried.

Commissioner Rebecca McCall, Chair and Commissioner David Hill, Chair
Henderson County Farmland Preservation Taskforce
Farmland Preservation Taskforce

June 10, 2024
6:00 PM

100 N. King St
Hendersonville, NC
Agenda

01 Call to Order
02 Approval & Adjustment of Agenda
03 Public Comment
04 Approval of May 30th Minutes
05 Guest Speakers
06 Continued Discussion
07 Adjourn
Guest Speakers
Ariel Zijp
Farmland Preservation Manager
Buncombe County
Soil & Water Conservation District

Avni Naik
Farmland Preservation Coordinator
Buncombe County
Soil & Water Conservation District
Buncombe County
Farmland Preservation Program

Presented by

Ariel Zijp & Avni Naik
Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District
Buncombe County Agricultural and Land Resources Department
History of the Program

• 1989 - Farmland Preservation Ordinance
• 1989 - Farmland Preservation Program
• 2005 - County budgeted funds for easements
• 2007 - Farmland Protection Plan adopted
• 2008 - County hired a Farmland Preservation Coordinator
Guiding Plans That Support Our Work

- **Farmland Preservation Ordinance** - guiding document that allows for the:
  - Creation of the Agricultural Advisory Board that oversees the Farmland Preservation Program
  - Rules and processes around our programs (easements, VAD/EVAD, etc.)
- **Farmland Protection Plan** - allows for local leaders to set priorities and goals for farmland preservation (update every 5-10 yrs)
- **Strategic Plan** - justify budget tied to goals
- **Comprehensive Plan** - helps plan future land use
Buncombe County Ag & Land Resources Department

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Agricultural Advisory Board - Evaluates FPP conservation easements and makes recommendations to Commissioners

BCSWCD Board - Holds FPP conservation easements

Land Conservation Advisory Board - Formed by BOC to evaluate and make recommendations for land trust easements (not always ag-related)

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Farmland Preservation Program – Staff Responsibilities

- Two full-time staff
- Landowner outreach & field visits
- Conservation easement management
  - Grant applications for easement funding
  - Coordinate contractors & all easement due diligence
  - Recording keeping – landscape, etc.
  - Annual monitoring
- Board coordination
  - Agricultural Advisory Board
  - Land Conservation Advisory Board
- Facilitate VAD/EVAD program
  - Annual renewals & keeping data up to date
- Agritourism programs
- Agricultural community events
- Facilitate Open Space Bond easement funding

Avni Naik, Farmland Preservation Coordinator

Ariel Zijp, Farmland Preservation Manager
**What type of property do we conserve?**

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We have an evaluation system for AAB Projects & a system for LCAB projects
# Two Types of Easements

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<th>Donation Easement</th>
<th>Grant Funded Easement</th>
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<td>• Landowner donates 100% of the Easement Value</td>
<td>• Bargain sale easement purchase with grant funding compensates for a portion of the easement value, but landowner still donates 25-50% of the easement value.</td>
</tr>
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<td>• No cash compensation</td>
<td>• Apply for grant funding to provide a portion of the value of the development rights. The other portion is considered a landowner donation. Grant funding is competitive statewide</td>
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<td>• Project timeframe = 1-2 years from the time we start the project (not from the time you apply)</td>
<td>• Project timeframe = 2-5 years from the time we start the project (not from the time you apply)</td>
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<td>• Landowner still owns property and is responsible for all management decisions and costs</td>
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How do we fund our easement projects?

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<th>Easement Acquisition Funds</th>
<th>Transaction Costs</th>
</tr>
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<td>• Grant Funds – • NCDA ADFPTF • USDA ACEP ALE</td>
<td>• Buncombe County • NCDA ADFP for supplemental costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• County Funds – • County budget • Open Space Bond</td>
<td></td>
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Funding source is determined after considering:
• Bargain-sale vs. donation
• Grant eligibility/competition
# Common Transaction cost amounts

$35,000 - $65,000 in Transaction costs per project

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<th>Types</th>
<th>Costs</th>
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<td>Pre-appraisal for funding</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>$5,000 - $10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>$12,000 - $45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline Documentation Report</td>
<td>$3,500 or in kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Management Plan</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Assessment</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Fees</td>
<td>$4,000 - $7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Costs</td>
<td>$500 - $1,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Buncombe County, NC
Conservation Focus Areas

Consider: Which areas do we want to focus our conservation efforts on? Where is our agriculture concentrated vs. where does it make sense for development to occur?

Commissioners
2022 Goal:
“Buncombe County will help conserve 20% of the county’s total acres by 2030.”
Other tools to protect farms and agricultural viability:

- Education & Business Support
- Land Access
- Conserve Land
- Succession & Estate Planning
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<th><strong>Education &amp; Business Support</strong></th>
<th><strong>Land Access</strong></th>
<th><strong>Conserve Land</strong></th>
<th><strong>Farm Succession Planning/Estate Planning</strong></th>
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<td>Workshop series to inform ag community - easements, tax programs, cost-share etc.</td>
<td>NC Farmlink</td>
<td>Conservation easements</td>
<td>Encouraging farmers and landowners to plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New landowner guide - PUV</td>
<td>Incubator Farm</td>
<td>VAD/EVAD</td>
<td>Cost-share Program for professional services (ASAP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Agriculture Events</td>
<td>Partnering protecting lands with local land trusts</td>
<td>Increasing funding sources – open space bond, Agricultural growth zone</td>
<td>Becoming Certified Farmland Succession Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment rentals &amp; Equip Demos</td>
<td>Buy-protect-sell model</td>
<td>Prioritizing regions &amp; types of parcels for conservation</td>
<td>Succession/Estate Planning Workshop Series</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Recommended Next Steps for Henderson

• Create a full-time Farmland Preservation Coordinator position
• Put reoccurring easement funding into your county budget for transaction costs
• Apply for Grant funds
• Update Farmland Protection Plan
• Create Conservation Focus Areas to prioritize funding
• Act Now! With significant Farmland loss there isn’t much time to waste
Questions?

Ariel Zijp, Farmland Preservation Manager
Ariel.zijp@buncombecounty.org
828-250-4794

Avni Naik, Farmland Preservation Coordinator
Avni.Naik@buncombecounty.org
828-250-4792
Ryan Manning

Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator

NC Foundation for Soil & Water Conservation
Preserving Farmland with Conservation Easements

NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation
NCDA-ADFPTF
Threats to Farmland

- By 2040, NC is 2nd in the nation for loss of farmland-AFT
- NC loses about 55 acres a day
- NC is on track to lose over 1 million acres, roughly 12%
- 48% of the conversion on Henderson’s most productive land
- Henderson stands to lose:
  - Best Case Scenario-7,600 acres=23%
  - Worst Case Scenario-16,900 acres=51%
  - Most Likely Scenario-13,200 acres=40%
Ag Census-2017 to 2022

- 2017-Henderson:
  - 455 farms
  - 41,099 acres
  - Average Farm Size=90 acres
  - Total MV of Ag $77,375,507

- 2022-Henderson:
  - 520 farms
  - 32,743 acres
  - Average Farm Size=63 acres
  - Total MV of Ag $103,390,000
  - Domestic Tourism (2020)- $253,700,000
Why We Need Ag

- Preserve rural character and lifestyle
- Local food production, supply, and access
- Open and green space
- Diverse economy and workforce
- Lower cost of community services and utilities infrastructure
- Natural resource conservation
- Wildlife habitat
- Carbon sequestration
- Less impervious surface/flood resiliency
Question: What can be done about it?
Answer: Farmland Preservation

- VAD/EVAD
- Conservation Agreements
- PUV
- Term Easements
- Permanent Easements
- Cost-Share programs
- Buy/Protect/Sell Programs
- Farm Succession Sessions/Estate Planning
- Farmland Protection Plan
- Ag Growth Zones
Why Conservation Easements?

- Agricultural easements are a tool to help farmers stay viable
- Agricultural easements tend to increase surrounding property values, thereby adding to the tax base
- Agricultural easements generally do not remove property from the tax base anymore than the property being in PUV does
- Agricultural easements are a nice middle-ground of limited development, agricultural operations, land conservation and financial compensation
- 2008 COCS showed that for every $1 spent on residential areas, the county receives $0.86, a net loss
- Same study showed that for every $1 spent on agricultural areas, the county receives $1.03, a net gain even in spite of PUV
How to Establish a Farmland Preservation Program

- Decide who is going to be doing the work—County, SWCD or Land Trust?
- If not the county or SWCD, what role, if any, will you play?
- If the county or SWCD, create a new position or use existing resources?
- How will it be funded? How much will it be funded?
- Legal representation/legal defense fund? Stewardship?
How to Establish a FP Program cont’d

- SWCD
  - G.S. 139 empowers districts to hold easements
  - Numerous districts statewide hold easements
  - Cost-share programs are somewhat like “temporary easements”
  - Have existing relationships with farmers
  - Has the conservation/agricultural expertise
  - Local board can set direction for land protection priorities
  - Establishing a dedicated position for FP is one thing all of the successful programs have in common
  - Examples: Buncombe, Polk, Wake, Cabarrus, Hyde
Haywood Farmland Preservation Program 2008-2023

- 2008-Participated in ADFP Cycle II, participated in every subsequent cycle
- 2008-County funds established to support FP program
- 2008-Farmland Protection Plan
- 2011-Developed ranking form as interest exceeded applicant spots
- 2015-Part time FP position established
- 2017-Full-time FP position established
  - Position was responsible for VAD/EVAD program, CE program through NCDA/NRCS, CE programs otherwise, grants for FP
- 2023-21 closed easements with ADFP/NRCS-7 easements under contract-5 easements applications approved
- 32 easements-2,398 acres-$5.6 million grant funds
Haywood Cont’d

- Open application period until October
- Ranking through October
- Presentation of results to Ag Advisory Board in early November
- November to December deadline, submission of applications
- Generally, ADFP only, 3 NRCS apps through the years
- District was responsible for BDR, EA, Stewardship, all admin
- District would split funds for project appraisals percentages
- County attorney for legal representation
- Haywood had no stewardship fund*
How to Establish a FP Program cont’d

- Other county departments-Parks and Rec, Environmental, etc
  - Counties can of course hold easements; many already hold an assortment of them
  - Keeps direction of priorities local
  - A number of counties statewide hold ag easements
  - Allows for some costs to be incorporated into existing position’s responsibilities
  - Examples: Chatham, Orange, Durham
How to Establish a FP Program cont’d

- **Partnerships**
  - By partnering with a land trust or other non-profit a county can create a program to share the responsibility and workload.
  - Qualified non-profits can and do hold easements statewide:
    - Working Lands Trust-33 easements, 18,000 acres approx.
  - Wealth of experience and expertise by land trust staff.
  - Partners can potentially bring other private funders to the table.
  - Have the capacity and time to administer the program.
  - Examples: Chatham and Union.
  - Working Lands Trust, Conserving Carolina, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, etc.
Funding Methods Throughout NC

- COUNTY ALLOCATION
- BONDS
- PUV ROLLBACK
- PARTNER FUNDERS
County Allocations

- Numerous counties statewide fund programs through staffing and budget appropriations
  - Alamance-supporting funding through SWCD staff
  - Buncombe-staff and county funding
  - Cabarrus-staff
  - Chatham-staff and county funding
  - Haywood-staff and county funding
  - Hyde-special revenue fund
  - Orange-staff and county funding
  - Polk, Rockingham, Wake, Johnston, Union and others
Bonds

- Buncombe-2022 passed a $30 million-dollar Open Space Bond, a portion of which is dedicated to conservation easements
  - $750,000 annually
- Chatham-2020 Article 46 local sales tax passes, established the Chatham County Agricultural Preservation & Development Trust Fund
  - $325,000 annually
PUV Rollback

Alamance- $167,000-$186,000 annually

Cabarrus- $125,000 annually

Harnett- None currently, though planning for PUV rollback

Johnston- FY2025 will be the first year, amount unknown

Wake- $4 million last couple of years, on track for the same amount FY2025

Union- $960,000 FY2024, another $960,000 due in FY2025
Independently and through joint projects, these and other agencies partner with the land trusts to fund the acquisition of conservation easements to conserve high-priority lands across the state.
Common Concerns and Questions

- What’s the nature and cost of the easement holder’s obligations?
  - How to provide for this?
- What happens if the easement holder folds?
- What happens if an easement is violated?
- Eminent domain?
- What’s the stewardship aspect?
- What’s the timeline look like?
Cont. Taskforce Goals
Taskforce Goal Topics

- Conservation Easements
- Succession/Estate Planning
- Seller & Buyer Connections
- Financial Information
- VAD Expansion
- Farmer Resources
SIGNIFICANT ISSUES:

1. Decrease in Operating costs and anticipated Revenues due to grant funding received in FY24

UNFUNDED BUDGET REQUESTS:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Request</th>
<th>$ REQUEST</th>
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<tr>
<td>NEW Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator - Salary &amp; benefits</td>
<td>$76,051</td>
<td>$0.00031</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vehicle for Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator</td>
<td>$51,824</td>
<td>$0.00021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equipment / additional costs for Farmland Preservation Program Coordinator</td>
<td>$29,250</td>
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PLANNING

115491

MISSION: To plan for growth to sustain and enhance the quality of life for Henderson County residents.
Looking ahead….  
July 8, 2024

- **Loren Hendrickson**, Farmland Preservation Coordinator – Wake County Soil & Water Conservation District
- **Chris Hirni**, Land Conservation Manager – Orange County Natural & Cultural Resources Division
Thanks!

Next Meeting:
July 8, 2024 @ 6:00 PM
King Street Meeting Room

Liz Hanson
ehanson@hendersoncoutnync.gov
Adjourn!
Buncombe County Farmland Preservation Program

Presented by

Ariel Zijp & Avni Naik
Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District
Buncombe County Agricultural and Land Resources Department
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Avni Naik, Farmland Preservation Coordinator
Ariel Zijp, Farmland Preservation Manager
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have an evaluation system for AAB Projects & a system for LCAB projects
## Two Types of Easements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donation Easement</th>
<th>Grant Funded Easement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Landowner donates 100% of the Easement Value</td>
<td>• Bargain sale easement purchase with grant funding compensates for a portion of the easement value, but landowner still donates 25-50% of the easement value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No cash compensation</td>
<td>• Apply for grant funding to provide a portion of the value of the development rights. The other portion is considered a landowner donation. Grant funding is competitive statewide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project timeframe = 1-2 years from the time we start the project (not from the time you apply)</td>
<td>• Project timeframe = 2-5 years from the time we start the project (not from the time you apply)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Landowner still owns property and is responsible for all management decisions and costs</td>
<td>• Landowner still owns property and is responsible for all management decisions and costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do we fund our easement projects?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easement Acquisition Funds</th>
<th>Transaction Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Grant Funds –</td>
<td>• Buncombe County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• NCDA ADFPTF</td>
<td>• NCDA ADFP for supplemental costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• USDA ACEP ALE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• County Funds –</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• County budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open Space Bond</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Funding source is determined after considering:
• Bargain-sale vs. donation
• Grant eligibility/competition
## Common Transaction cost amounts

$35,000 - $65,000 in Transaction costs per project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-appraisal for funding</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>$5,000 - $10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>$12,000 - $45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline Documentation Report</td>
<td>$3,500 or in kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Management Plan</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Assessment</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Fees</td>
<td>$4,000 - $7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Costs</td>
<td>$500 - $1,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Commissioners 2022 Goal:**

“Buncombe County will help conserve 20% of the county’s total acres by 2030.”

Consider: Which areas do we want to focus our conservation efforts on? Where is our agriculture concentrated vs. where does it make sense for development to occur?
Other tools to protect farms and agricultural viability:

- Education & Business Support
- Land Access
- Conserve Land
- Succession & Estate Planning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Education &amp; Business Support</strong></th>
<th><strong>Land Access</strong></th>
<th><strong>Conserve Land</strong></th>
<th><strong>Farm Succession Planning/Estate Planning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop series to inform ag community - easements, tax programs, cost-share etc.</td>
<td>NC Farmlink</td>
<td>Conservation easements</td>
<td>Encouraging farmers and landowners to plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New landowner guide - PUV</td>
<td>Incubator Farm</td>
<td>VAD/EVAD</td>
<td>Cost-share Program for professional services (ASAP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends of Agriculture Events</td>
<td>Partnering protecting lands with local land trusts</td>
<td>Increasing funding sources – open space bond, Agricultural growth zone</td>
<td>Becoming Certified Farmland Succession Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment rentals &amp; Equip Demos</td>
<td>Buy-protect-sell model</td>
<td>Prioritizing regions &amp; types of parcels for conservation</td>
<td>Succession/Estate Planning Workshop Series</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommended Next Steps for Henderson

- Create a full-time Farmland Preservation Coordinator position
- Put reoccurring easement funding into your county budget for transaction costs
- Apply for Grant funds
- Update Farmland Protection Plan
- Create Conservation Focus Areas to prioritize funding
- Act Now! With significant Farmland loss there isn’t much time to waste
Preserving Farmland with Conservation Easements

NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation
NCDA-ADFPTF
Threats to Farmland

- By 2040, NC is 2nd in the nation for loss of farmland
- AFT
- NC loses about 55 acres a day
- NC is on track to lose over 1 million acres, roughly 12%
- 48% of the conversion on Henderson’s most productive land
- Henderson stands to lose:
  - Best Case Scenario-7,600 acres=23%
  - Worst Case Scenario-16,900 acres=51%
  - Most Likely Scenario-13,200 acres=40%
Ag Census-2017 to 2022

2017-Henderson:
- 455 farms
- 41,099 acres
- Average Farm Size=90 acres
- Total MV of Ag $77,375,507

2022-Henderson:
- 520 farms
- 32,743 acres
- Average Farm Size=63 acres
- Total MV of Ag $103,390,000
- Domestic Tourism (2020)- $253,700,000
Why We Need Ag

- Preserve rural character and lifestyle
- Local food production, supply, and access
- Open and green space
- Diverse economy and workforce
- Lower cost of community services and utilities infrastructure
- Natural resource conservation
- Wildlife habitat
- Carbon sequestration
- Less impervious surface/flood resiliency
Question: What can be done about it?
Answer: Farmland Preservation

- VAD/EVAD
- Conservation Agreements
- PUV
- Term Easements
- Permanent Easements
- Cost-Share programs
- Buy/Protect/Sell Programs
- Farm Succession Sessions/Estate Planning
- Farmland Protection Plan
- Ag Growth Zones
Why Conservation Easements?

- Agricultural easements are a tool to help farmers stay viable
- Agricultural easements tend to increase surrounding property values, thereby adding to the tax base
- Agricultural easements generally do not remove property from the tax base anymore than the property being in PUV does
- Agricultural easements are a nice middle-ground of limited development, agricultural operations, land conservation and financial compensation
- 2008 COCS showed that for every $1 spent on residential areas, the county receives $0.86, a net loss
- Same study showed that for every $1 spent on agricultural areas, the county receives $1.03, a net gain even in spite of PUV
How to Establish a Farmland Preservation Program

- Decide who is going to be doing the work-County, SWCD or Land Trust?
- If not the county or SWCD, what role, if any, will you play?
- If the county or SWCD, create a new position or use existing resources?
- How will it be funded? How much will it be funded?
- Legal representation/legal defense fund? Stewardship?
How to Establish a FP Program cont’d

- SWCD
  - G.S. 139 empowers districts to hold easements
  - Numerous districts statewide hold easements
  - Cost-share programs are somewhat like “temporary easements”
  - Have existing relationships with farmers
  - Has the conservation/agricultural expertise
  - Local board can set direction for land protection priorities
  - Establishing a dedicated position for FP is one thing all of the successful programs have in common
  - Examples: Buncombe, Polk, Wake, Cabarrus, Hyde
Haywood Farmland Preservation Program 2008-2023

- 2008-Participated in ADFP Cycle II, participated in every subsequent cycle
- 2008-County funds established to support FP program
- 2008-Farmland Protection Plan
- 2011-Developed ranking form as interest exceeded applicant spots
- 2015-Part time FP position established
- 2017-Full-time FP position established
  - Position was responsible for VAD/EVAD program, CE program through NCDA/NRCS, CE programs otherwise, grants for FP
- 2023-21 closed easements with ADFP/NRCS-7 easements under contract-5 easements applications approved
- 32 easements-2,398 acres-$5.6 million grant funds
Open application period until October
Ranking through October
Presentation of results to Ag Advisory Board in early November
November to December deadline, submission of applications
Generally, ADFP only, 3 NRCS apps through the years
District was responsible for BDR, EA, Stewardship, all admin
District would split funds for project appraisals percentages
County attorney for legal representation
Haywood had no stewardship fund*
How to Establish a FP Program cont’d

- Other county departments-Parks and Rec, Environmental, etc
  - Counties can of course hold easements; many already hold an assortment of them
  - Keeps direction of priorities local
  - A number of counties statewide hold ag easements
  - Allows for some costs to be incorporated into existing position’s responsibilities
  - Examples: Chatham, Orange, Durham
How to Establish a FP Program cont’d

- **Partnerships**
  - By partnering with a land trust or other non-profit a county can create a program to share the responsibility and workload.
  - Qualified non-profits can and do hold easements statewide:
    - Working Lands Trust-33 easements, 18,000 acres approx.
  - Wealth of experience and expertise by land trust staff.
  - Partners can potentially bring other private funders to the table.
  - Have the capacity and time to administer the program.
  - Examples: Chatham and Union.
  - Working Lands Trust, Conserving Carolina, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, etc.
Funding Methods Throughout NC

- County Allocation
- Bonds
- PUV Rollback
- Partner Funders
County Allocations

- Numerous counties statewide fund programs through staffing and budget appropriations
  - Alamance-supporting funding through SWCD staff
  - Buncombe-staff and county funding
  - Cabarrus-staff
  - Chatham-staff and county funding
  - Haywood-staff and county funding
  - Hyde-special revenue fund
  - Orange-staff and county funding
  - Polk, Rockingham, Wake, Johnston, Union and others
Bonds

- Buncombe-2022 passed a $30 million-dollar Open Space Bond, a portion of which is dedicated to conservation easements
  - $750,000 annually

- Chatham-2020 Article 46 local sales tax passes, established the Chatham County Agricultural Preservation & Development Trust Fund
  - $325,000 annually
PUV Rollback

Alamance- $167,000-$186,000 annually

Cabarrus- $125,000 annually

Harnett- None currently, though planning for PUV rollback

Johnston- FY2025 will be the first year, amount unknown

Wake- $4 million last couple of years, on track for the same amount FY2025

Union- $960,000 FY2024, another $960,000 due in FY2025
Funding Partners

- NCDA - Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund
- USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
- US Department of Defense
- Private Funding

Independently and through joint projects, these and other agencies partner with the land trusts to fund the acquisition of conservation easements to conserve high-priority lands across the state.