

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Rockingham County Agricultural Advisory Board



**PROJECT FUNDED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION TRUST FUND**

2010

Authored by: ACDS, LLC

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was funded by the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the Rockingham County Voluntary Agricultural District Board, Rockingham County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Rockingham County Commissioners. The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Rockingham County Government or the Rockingham County Voluntary Agricultural District Board.

County Project Leaders

*Kevin Moore
Rockingham County Soil and Water Conservation District*

Study Team Leader

J. Philip Gottwals, ACDS, LLC

Study Team Members

*Reuben Hermoso, ACDS, LLC
Daniel Drigatti, ACDS, LLC*

The researchers and authors of the report owe a debt of gratitude to the many organizations and individuals who participated in interviews and focus groups for this project.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan has two purposes: 1) to analyze and understand the foundation of the agricultural economy in Rockingham County (“the County”); and 2) to create a forward looking plan that not only addresses a suite of issues facing farmers and citizens in the County today, but also *sets the stage for agricultural growth*.

The final recommendations of this report encourage long-term policy formation in support of agriculture. To achieve this, a specific short-term framework and transition plan will help guide local programs on agricultural economic development and land use initiatives. This process culminates in a series of twenty-one recommendations for action relative to agricultural business and land use conditions.

Agriculture and forestry are the largest land uses in the County, accounting for nearly 80 percent of land cover. One of the leading drivers of the agricultural industry’s success is the large concentration of high quality agricultural soils in Rockingham County, many of which are concentrated in the Southern portion of the County, bordering Guilford County.

Agriculture in Rockingham County, North Carolina is a recovering industry consisting of 863 farm enterprises. Farm receipts amounted to nearly \$32 million in 2007 and is led by \$21 million in receipts from crop production. Cash receipts have been declining due to weakening crop sales. Since its recent high of \$35 million in 1997, crop sales have been declining and have since only averaged \$21 million. An improvement in tobacco markets has fortunately prompted a slight recovery from a low of \$20 million in 2005.

Approximately 75 percent of crop receipts are from tobacco sales. Tobacco receipts totaled \$13 million in 2007, which is half of 1997 sales levels. The decline is the result of the continued drop in the consumption of tobacco products, combined with the effects of the federal tobacco quota buyout and a shift in tobacco production to eastern North Carolina.

Table E-1: Summary of Agricultural Economic Indicators

Indicator	1997	2002	2007	Change 1997 to 2007
Total Cropland (Acres)	137,109	136,120	117,113	-15%
Total Sales	\$37,172,000	\$28,555,000	\$31,868,000	-11%
Cattle (including Dairy and Milk)	\$3,985,000	\$3,503,000	\$4,597,000	15%
Poultry and Eggs	\$1,091,000	Not Disclosed	\$2,549,000	134%
Hogs and Pigs	Not Disclosed	Not Disclosed	\$2,707,000	Unknown
Tobacco	\$26,483,000	\$16,602,000	\$12,575,000	-53%
Grains and Oilseeds	\$1,303,000	\$872,000	\$1,296,000	-1%
Nursery & Greenhouse	\$1,670,000	\$3,650,000	\$5,430,000	225%
Government Payments	\$201,000	\$314,000	\$425,000	12%
Equine (Source: 2009 North Carolina Equine Survey)	2009 Inventory	8,260	2009 Value	\$50,193,000

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Agricultural Development Needs

Agriculture is in a significant transitional phase, moving from a tobacco base to a more diversified one. During this time, it is critical to support the industry's economic and business development needs. Articulating these needs within a coherent action strategy can be complicated by a series of regulatory, environmental, finance, and cultural issues that will require a concerted effort by industry, government, and community to overcome. It is also important to recognize that the industry's development needs do not impact all sectors in the same manner. The following recommendations begin to address these needs.

- 1) **Support development of agricultural and experiential tourism opportunities.** Leverage the natural and cultural assets of the region to improve income and job creation in tourism through marketing activities, project development, and farmer/landowner training programs.
- 2) **Encourage the development of a food and agribusiness cluster in Route 220 Corridor.** Pursuant to goals of the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, attracting new agricultural and forestry-related industry sectors should be targeted in cooperation with neighboring counties.
- 3) **Expand business incubation services to include “concept” incubation activities.** Encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship will be essential to the continued growth and expansion of agriculture in the county.
- 4) **Create a public outreach and marketing campaign.** Public support for agriculture is critical to its future success, whether it motivates the consumer to buy local agricultural products or encourages local government to buy development rights, reduce property taxes, or craft farm-friendly local laws.
- 5) **Develop a youth entrepreneurship academy.** A general concern among farmers and agribusiness owners is the lack of youth involvement and interest in agriculture. Improving youth participation in agribusiness activities, particularly transitional and entrepreneurial activities, is essential to long-term growth in the industry.
- 6) **Explore development of an Agricultural Center to coordinate training, education, mentorship, outreach, and community relations.** The creation of an Agricultural Center would serve as a means to bridge the gap between agriculture and the broader community by making agriculture more accessible to residents, students, and prospective farmers through at-place programs, training, markets, and special events.
- 7) **Support development of a Rockingham County Livestock Quality Initiative.** Livestock sales provide consistent sales and transition opportunities for local farmers. This recommendation suggests the creation of cooperative marketing, genetic improvement, grouped sales, and similar activities to expand this industry.
- 8) **Develop industry-specific short courses to support workforce development.** Replacement of the current workforce with one that is properly trained and prepared to work in agriculture is critical. It is recommended that industry-specific short courses be developed to facilitate this change.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Agricultural Protection Needs

Despite limited population over the last decade, the citizens of Rockingham County are being affected by the loss of farmland and its associated benefits of job creation, economic stabilization, protection of the environment, and enrichment of the quality of life. Suburban sprawl-type development is the most common threat to farmland and its effects are highly dispersed across the county. Small-lot subdivisions and rural developments and their associated infrastructure needs are often incompatible with agriculture. Many times, they leave farm operators vulnerable by limiting access to fertile lands, making equipment transportation difficult, and creating a hostile environment through trespass and nuisance claims.

Developing responses to these issues will require tailoring existing land preservation programs to the specialized needs of the County, including:

- 9) **Create a county farmland preservation program.** Demand for a suite of land preservation programs is high in Rockingham County, particularly for use in farm transition planning and for farmland acquisition. If the County is to compete successfully for State and federal funds and meet constituent demand, new programs and funding sources may be required.
- 10) **Enhance the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program to incentivize participation.** Rockingham County must strengthen the VAD to be a powerful focal point of education for the real estate community, the general public, and local elected officials about the benefits and needs of agriculture in their communities.
- 11) **Create a county Right-to-Farm law. Farmers feel strongly that they may need additional** protection from possible nuisance suits as development sprawls from the County's municipal centers. The current Right-to-Farm law does not provide adequate protection and does not apply equally to farm operations.
- 12) **Develop a regulatory action plan in cooperation with agricultural industry partners.** As regulations are adapted to meet new community conditions, the needs of agriculture will not be in the forefront of policy development unless affirmative action is taken.
- 13) **Conduct outreach and education events on a periodic basis.** Many farmland preservation and protection tools are currently available to landowners in Rockingham County, but seem to be poorly understood. This recommendation intends to help bridge this barrier.
- 14) **Explore options for privately funded agricultural and environmental conservation programs.** As regulations such as "Cap and Trade" are promulgated to reduce air and water pollution, it is likely that a broader base of conservation funding opportunities will open up for communities and landowners.
- 15) **Develop a farmland exchange database. It is recommended that a database of available land be** developed and maintained by the VAD as a means to report cost and availability of properties.
- 16) **Develop a farm transition program.** The majority of farm owners in the region are over 55 years old. In many cases the next generation is not planning to take over the farming business.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Land Use Controls Needs

One of the main issues facing the County and local farmers in dealing with Rockingham County's future development is that current trends represent a redistribution of housing throughout the County that is defined by slow or negative growth in municipal centers (.27 percent aggregate growth) and sprawling growth in outlying areas (1.09 percent aggregate growth). Such a development pattern can have a negative impact on County fiscal conditions as more expensive rural service demand increases while existing, urban oriented services go underutilized. Increased rural housing demand can also cause parcelization of farming operations, increase the potential for use conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors, and stretch infrastructure capacity, such as roads and schools. By example, this development pattern is reputed to cause transportation challenges in Rockingham County, due to the rising number of egress/ingress points, road shoulders choked with mail boxes, and high volumes of traffic during commuting hours making roads impassable for slow moving farm equipment.

The impact of development has been felt most substantially in the southern region of Rockingham County. Huntsville and New Bethel represent almost 30 percent of new building permits between 2000 and 2005. However, the balance of the County is not immune to the effects of development pressure from the Piedmont Triad or even the Danville area. The resulting land use pattern, if not managed, will increase the difficulty with which farm operations may conduct business. The current low-density pattern tends to encourage more small-lot subdivision on the road front, leaving little future infill capacity.

- 17) **Explore enhancements to transportation, zoning, and subdivision codes.** Rockingham County has laid the foundation for improvements to land use and transportation code in its 2006 land development plan.
- 18) **Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) expansions.** Expansion of ETJs is a serious concern for farmers.
- 19) **Create an agriculturally friendly cluster subdivision.** Clustering of development is envisioned as one of the primary growth controls in the Land Development Plan, but its implementation at the landowner level is low. Improving landowners' understanding and promoting incentives may help invigorate this land management tool.
- 20) **Seek Commissioners' support to improve integration of agriculture and forestry in the secondary educational system.** Bridging the gap between farming and the general population can be achieved by introducing high school students to agriculture, forestry, and related industries through both the curriculum and employment counseling.
- 21) **Provide support to the Upper Piedmont Agricultural Research Station.** The Upper Piedmont Agricultural Research Station is an integral part of the County's agricultural economy and supports the County's two largest industry sectors. Farmers would like to see greater integration between farms and the research center as a means to enhance their income opportunities; however, the center is encountering almost annual cuts to budget and staff, making this a challenge.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Implementation of the Plan

The intent of the Rockingham County Voluntary Agricultural District Board in developing this plan was to create a living document to be used by both the agricultural industry and local government to implement economic development programming, improve public policy, and create a generally supportive environment for agriculture in Rockingham County. Implementing the recommendations included in this plan and future plan updates will be at the discretion of the parties involved in its creation, and determined by factors as varied as the County's annual farmland preservation work plan, funds availability, and priority of issues facing both the industry and the county.

Table E-2: Implementing Farmland Protection Plan Recommendations			
Recommendation	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Agricultural Development Recommendations			
Support development of agricultural and experiential tourism opportunities	√		
Develop industry-specific short courses to support workforce development		√	
Encourage the development of a food and agribusiness cluster in Route 220 Corridor		√	
Expand business incubation to include "concept" incubation activities	√		
Create a public outreach and marketing campaign	√		
Develop a youth entrepreneurship academy		√	
Explore development of an Agricultural Center to coordinate training, education, mentorship, outreach, and community relations		√	
Support development of a Rockingham County Livestock Quality Initiative	√		
Agricultural Protection Recommendations			
Create a county farmland preservation program		√	
Enhance the VAD program to incentivize participation	√		
Create a county Right-to-Farm law	√		
Develop a regulatory action plan in cooperation with agricultural industry partners		√	
Conduct outreach and education events on a periodic basis	√		
Explore options for privately funded agricultural and environmental conservation programs			√
Develop a farmland exchange database	√		
Develop a farm transition program	√		
Land Use Control and Policy Recommendations			
Explore enhancements to transportation, zoning, and subdivision codes			√
Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating ETJ expansions	√		
Create an agriculturally friendly cluster subdivision		√	
Seek Commissioners' support to improve integration of agriculture and forestry in the secondary educational system	√		
Provide support to the Agricultural Research Station	√		

Success in protecting agricultural resources requires long-term support and funding at the county and State levels. Given the large fiscal requirements for programs like purchase-of-development rights and agricultural development oriented loan funds, the County will likely require outside funding support to implement most of the initiatives outlined. Typically, this funding would be supported through State and federal grants and match programs; however poor fiscal conditions make this unlikely in the near term. The result is that Rockingham County must rely on non-traditional sources of funding and partnerships to implement its programmatic intent.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	1
Executive Summary	2
Table of Contents	7
Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County.....	8
Purpose of the Plan	8
Integration with other Plans and Policies	8
Vision of Agricultural Development	8
Overview of Agricultural Resources	9
Characteristics of Agricultural Viability	12
Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool	18
Agricultural Economic Development Needs	18
Applicable Tools and Programs	19
Recommended Actions	24
Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit	28
Agricultural Land Protection Needs.....	28
Applicable Tools and Programs	31
Recommended Actions	35
Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls	39
Land Use Controls and Conditions	39
Applicable Tools and Programs	41
Recommended Actions	45
Section 5: Implementing the Farmland Protection Plan.....	47
Implementing the Plan	47
Creating and Updating Annual Work Plans.....	48
Integrating the Rockingham Farmland Protection Plan with Other Plans.....	48
Developing Long-Term Support and Funding.....	49
Enhancing Partnerships	50

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Purpose of the Plan

The Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan has two purposes: 1) to analyze and understand the foundation of the agricultural economy in Rockingham County (“the County”); and 2) to create a forward looking plan that not only addresses a suite of issues facing farmers and citizens in the County today, but also *sets the stage for agricultural growth*.

The final recommendations of this report encourage long-term policy formation in support of agriculture. To achieve this, a specific short-term framework and transition plan will help guide local programs on agricultural economic development and land use initiatives. This process culminates in a series of twenty-one recommendations for action relative to agricultural business and land use conditions.

This study adopts a broad definition of agriculture to include all aspects of the cultivation and production of plant material and animal products, as well as the marketing, processing, and distribution of these products, and other secondary on-farm activities (e.g., agricultural tourism, forestry, and aquaculture).

This project was funded through the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (NCADFPTF).

Integration with Other Plans and Policies

The Farmland Protection Plan (the “Plan”) is not intended to supplant or replace any other planning initiatives that have taken place in Rockingham County. Instead, the Plan is intended to support and integrate with existing plans, such as the 2006 comprehensive plan entitled, “A Land Use Plan for Managing Growth: Rockingham County,” which comprises the critical path thinking that guides County policy formation. Summaries of the five land development plan conclusions include:

1. Rockingham County is positioned for future economic and residential growth.
2. County and community plans highlight common needs for facilitating economic transition, improving cooperation, enhancing quality of life, and improving community appearance.
3. Growth management should act to moderate population growth and support economic diversification.
4. Growth will be encouraged at a higher density to limit unrestrained land and natural resource consumption.
5. The community appreciates and wishes to maintain its rural character, open space, water resources, and farms.

Vision of Agricultural Development

Based on the input received through this study, as well as an examination of other publications relating to the growth and development of the County, the following plan vision is offered:

Agricultural Development Vision

*To enhance the economic viability of Rockingham County’s working lands
in a manner consistent with community character, the County’s development needs, and industry growth requirements.*

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Overview of Agricultural Resources

Agriculture in Rockingham County, North Carolina is a recovering industry consisting of 863 farm enterprises. Farm receipts amounted to nearly \$32 million in 2007 and is led by \$21 million in receipts from crop production. Cash receipts have been declining due to weakening crop sales. Since its recent high of \$35 million in 1997, crop sales have been declining and have since only averaged \$21 million. An improvement in tobacco markets has fortunately promoted a slight recovery from a low of \$20 million in 2005.

Approximately 75 percent of crop receipts are from tobacco sales. Tobacco receipts totaled \$13 million in 2007, which is half of 1997 sales levels. The decline is the result of the continued drop in the consumption of tobacco products, combined with the effects of the federal tobacco quota buyout and a shift in tobacco production to eastern North Carolina.

Given the large role that tobacco plays in the local economy, the effects of the Tobacco Buyout program may be the most prominent. Buyout payments, which are scheduled to end in three years, have been used to finance a range of agricultural endeavors, such as expansion in tobacco production, diversification of crop and livestock base, and investment in on-farm infrastructure (e.g., barns and irrigation). Once payments end, additional impacts, such as the disposal of farmland at bargain prices, may be experienced.

Production trends, led by the loss of tobacco, have led to a widening gap between (per capita) farm income and non-farm income. In 1997, per capita non-farm income exceeded farm income by \$3,000. As of 2007, annual per capita non-farm income in Rockingham County totaled \$11,600, compared to \$6,200 for farm income.

Rockingham County's agriculture sector has been experiencing a period of consolidation. Farm real estate values have nearly doubled from 1997 to 2007, but there was a loss of 52 farms and 11,635 acres. A general picture of the agricultural economy, including the effects of the quota buyouts, is presented in Table 1 below. Additional information can be found in Appendix A, "Agricultural Trends Profile for Rockingham County, NC."

Table 1: Summary of Agricultural Economic Indicators

Indicator	1997	2002	2007	Change 1997 to 2007
Total Cropland (Acres)	137,109	136,120	117,113	-15%
Total Sales	\$37,172,000	\$28,555,000	\$31,868,000	-11%
Cattle (including Dairy and Milk)	\$3,985,000	\$3,503,000	\$4,597,000	15%
Poultry and Eggs	\$1,091,000	Not Disclosed	\$2,549,000	134%
Hogs and Pigs	Not Disclosed	Not Disclosed	\$2,707,000	Unknown
Tobacco	\$26,483,000	\$16,602,000	\$12,575,000	-53%
Grains and Oilseeds	\$1,303,000	\$872,000	\$1,296,000	-1%
Nursery & Greenhouse	\$1,670,000	\$3,650,000	\$5,430,000	225%
Government Payments	\$201,000	\$314,000	\$425,000	12%
Equine (Source: 2009 North Carolina Equine Survey)	2009 Inventory	8,260	2009 Value	\$50,193,000

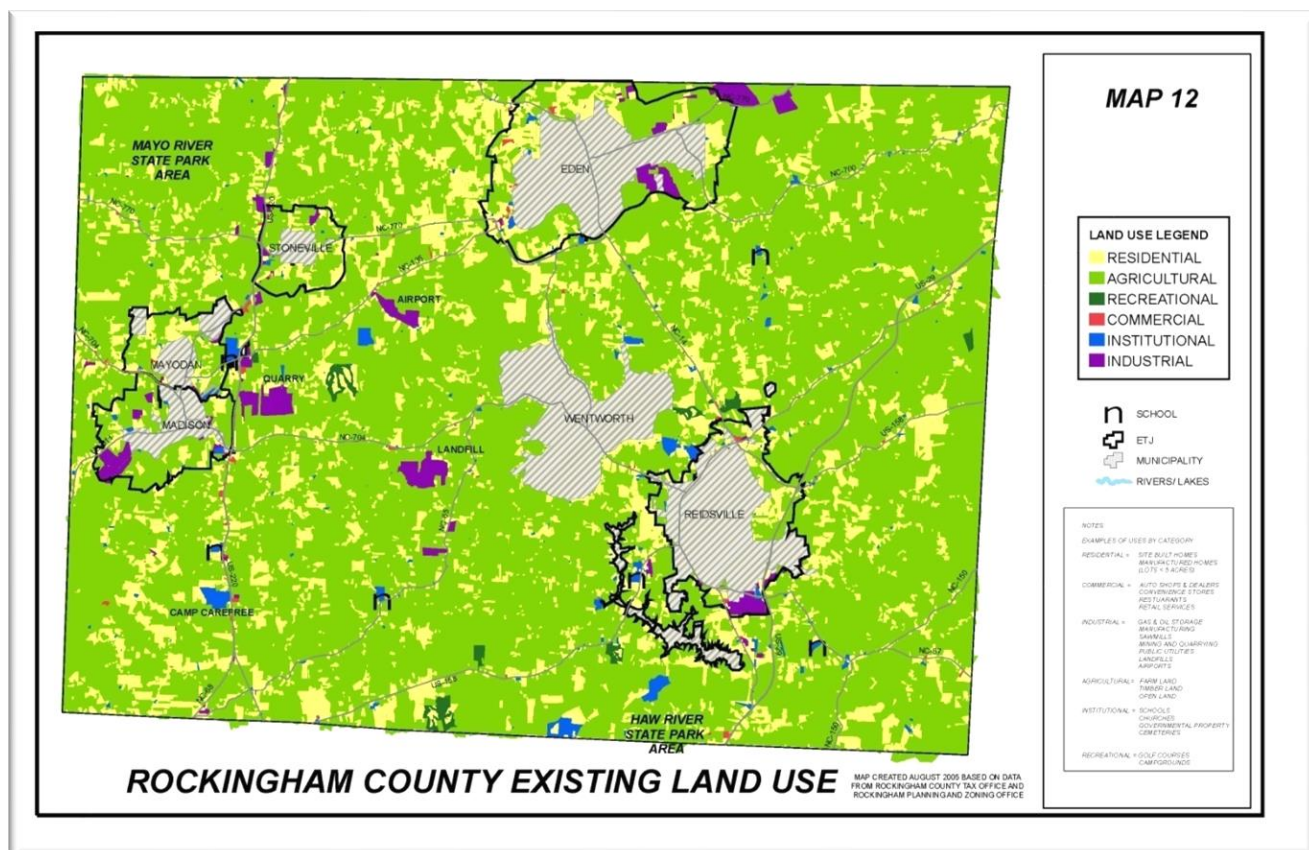
Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Much like agriculture, the input and output industries surrounding agriculture have maintained a presence in Rockingham County and the region even though they have undergone significant transitional pressures. Beyond the basic marketing infrastructure, growth in output industries has been disappointing. Because of this, attracting food manufacturing and distribution is a priority for the region, as is maintaining a local service and supply network.

Agriculture and forestry are the largest land uses in the County, accounting for nearly 80 percent of land cover. One of the leading drivers of the agricultural industry's success is the large concentration of high quality agricultural soils in Rockingham County, many of which are concentrated in the Southern portion of the County, bordering Guilford County. Prime Soils, which are the most productive agricultural soil types, account for 67.3 percent of the County's land area and are highlighted in the accompanying soils map.

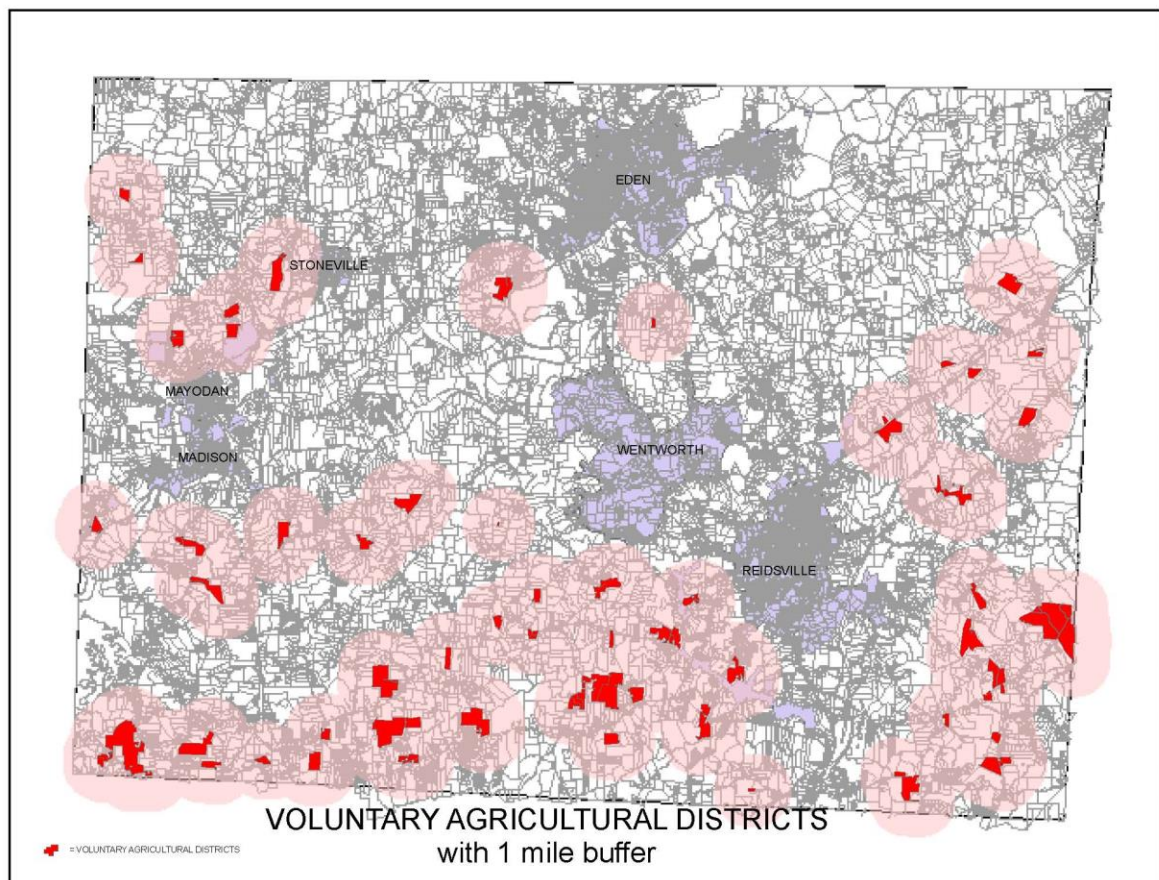
Prime Soils, while a critical asset for maintaining a productive agricultural base, are also important developmental assets. The very characteristics that make these soils good for farming, e.g., low slopes and well drained, make them ideal for residential development. Other important soil types (listed as Soils of Statewide Importance) are found in equal abundance in the County, and contribute to the success of the tobacco and produce industries.



Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Protection of Rockingham County's agricultural assets has become the primary focus of the newly created Rockingham County Agricultural Advisory Board, which administers the VAD program. This program began in June 2004 with the adoption of a VAD ordinance. It includes a standard VAD program, but does not offer an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District (EVAD) program. Since its inception, the Rockingham County Voluntary Agricultural District Program has enrolled 10,913.54 acres with a clear emphasis on agricultural areas in the southern areas of the County where development pressure is highest and the agricultural soils are concentrated. Any approved district must meet minimum standards (five acres for horticulture use, ten acres for agriculture use, or twenty acres for forestry use) and must be in one of three agricultural areas defined by the statute.



Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Characteristics of Agricultural Viability

A thorough analysis of the agriculture in a community incorporates both land use and industry economics. Background information was collected and assembled from published sources, as well as from interviews with farmers and agribusinesses. Results of the agricultural resources review are summarized below, using a strategic planning tool known as SWOT analysis: strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats. This SWOT analysis pulls together the land use, demographic, and economic conditions to provide a snapshot of the industry at a particular time.

SWOT analysis is a tool used by strategic planners and marketers to assess the competitive environment of a region, industry, business, or product. The SWOT technique evaluates issues facing agriculture in Rockingham County by asking the following questions to farmers, landowners, and those with secondary agricultural functions, including processing, supplies, and distribution:

1. What are the advantages of engaging in production agriculture in Rockingham County?
2. What unique local conditions support the agricultural industry?
3. What do Rockingham County farmers do well?
4. What do Rockingham County farmers do poorly?
5. What can be improved in Rockingham County's agricultural community?
6. What are key regional/industrial trends?
7. What are the options and obstacles facing Rockingham County farmers?
8. How does agriculture fit within the regional context?

For the Rockingham County Agricultural Development Plan, the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats were assessed for the agricultural industry overall, including production agriculture and agricultural support industries. The SWOT criteria identified are drawn directly from the study team's interviews with the agricultural industry. As such, this analysis should be considered an industry self-assessment.

SWOT factors are used to identify the key issues facing an industry. These issues are then incorporated into the design of programmatic and policy responses, as explained in Sections 2 through 4.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Strengths

Overall, the strength of Rockingham County agriculture derives from physical, human, demographic, cultural, and economic resources unique to the County and the Piedmont region of North Carolina and Virginia. These resources are summarized below.

Market Access – Rockingham County agriculture has the enviable position of being located within the Piedmont Triad and adjacent to the Raleigh-Durham metropolitan market place. This immediate market access is enhanced by proximate access to the Charlotte, NC market area. Collectively, these three markets represent approximately 7.5 million consumers and more than \$10 billion in food sales, of which nearly 10 percent is serviced by out-of-market supply.

Diversification – Despite a heavy reliance on tobacco, Rockingham County’s agricultural economy is shifting to a more diversified base. This diversity manifests itself in the many small operations throughout the County that produce supplemental income through agritourism, nursery production, fruit and vegetable production, cattle, and alternative livestock production. This diversification is driven, in part, by the needs of regional direct marketing opportunities and must be supported through additional public and private investment to affect long term change.

Access to Natural Resources – Access to natural resources, such as wells for livestock and irrigation and a solid inventory of Class I – III soils and Soils of Statewide Importance, is widely available. Rockingham County, by virtue of its location in the Piedmont, is somewhat challenged in topography, making it more suitable for small farm operations.

Transportation Infrastructure – Rockingham County’s transportation infrastructure is widely diversified, ranging from major arterial highways to small rural roads. This infrastructure adequately supports the unique mix of agricultural and forestry operations; however, moving equipment through the current system can be a challenge. Planned upgrades of major corridors to Interstate status and condition will further enhance the development capacity of the County.

Public Sector Support – Rockingham County has a supportive public sector that recognizes the importance of agriculture to the County. This support is embodied in the VAD ordinance and subsequent success in VAD enrollment.

Location – Rockingham County is well served by major transportation corridors, as it is located in the Interstate 785 corridor and is within a one-day drive of major east coast markets and southeastern markets.

Sales Growth – Farm receipts in Rockingham County have grown each year since 2002. The increase is mainly due to the continuous growth in livestock receipts and nursery/greenhouse operations. Equine is an important growth sector in the County that is expected to contribute nearly \$15 million in tourism related economic activity once the County’s Equine Park is operational.

Direct Market Innovation – Rockingham County has been central to the development of Piedmont Local Foods, a cooperative for small farmers seeking to develop logistics and marketing relationships with high value, urban clients.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Weaknesses

In planning the industry's economic future, weaker elements of Rockingham County agriculture must be addressed. As is becoming common in suburban areas, some of Rockingham County's most significant weaknesses count among its strengths.

Sprawling Development – Rockingham County is expected to experience very low population growth and high levels of out migration over the next two decades. Out migrations is expected from established, high density communities. such as Reidsville, while offsetting growth is expected to be commuter oriented, low density growth that will be accommodated in new, transit oriented developments. This is expected to result in the conversion of farmland in the southern regions of the County, particularly in the I-785 and 220 corridors.

Land Fragmentation – The high level of parcelization in certain areas of the county make it generally difficult for agricultural operations to expand to adjacent or nearby parcels of sufficient size to be economically viable. Parcelization also increases the “zone of conflict” between agricultural uses and potentially incompatible retail/commercial uses. Farmland fragmentation is caused by local development patterns and high levels of competition for Prime Soils. The effect is to stretch limited farm resources and add to operational inefficiency.

Regulatory Burden – State and local regulatory structures have an impact on farming. For instance, the expansion of extraterritorial jurisdictions may place additional controls on farms that are intended to restrict or control residential and commercial development. Because of this, the code does not differentiate between agricultural activities and residential activities, offering a conflicting regulatory environment. An additional area of concern is the transportation code, which affects the ability of farmers to safely move equipment.

Limited Transition Options – Rockingham County's farmers have an average age of 56 and are aging at a faster rate than they are being replaced by a younger generation. This indicates that Rockingham County may face a significant issue regarding farm transition. Land values, estate planning issues, and the general health of the agricultural economy are all concerns facing the next generation of farmers .

Low Levels of Agricultural Entrepreneurship – As is common in areas with strong textile and tobacco industries, there seems to be low levels of interest among farmers in seeking entrepreneurial solutions to difficult transition issues. This can lead to low levels of investment and innovation as the community follows, rather than leads, trends.

Transportation Corridors – The County road infrastructure consists of several main arterial roads and a wide system of secondary roads. As commuter density and farm equipment sizes have changed, several issues have surfaced. Main arterial speeds and traffic volumes are restricting farm equipment access. Secondary roads and rural bridges are in some cases restrictively narrow, have improper weight limits, or lack adequate shoulders.

Labor Availability – Agricultural labor is available, but the work force is aging or difficult to obtain. The uncertainty surrounding immigrant labor regulations is another factor causing concern for producers. Farmers generally feel that labor force training is a critical factor for success.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Opportunities

The long-term success of the industry is dependent upon its ability to recognize the opportunities presented by changes in the business environment and its ability to react appropriately. The industry must be willing to look for opportunity in those situations that seem to be threats and challenges.

Industry Consolidation – Historically, agribusiness industry consolidation is viewed as a negative element for local farmers and small agribusinesses. However, consolidation, on the input and output side of agriculture, has also created successively larger, underserved niche markets. This opportunity is perhaps best recognized in food processing, where consolidation has led to homogeneity in product offerings. This homogeneity creates locally and regionally significant pockets of underserved consumers and opportunities for aggressive marketers of food products.

Development Infrastructure – Both Rockingham County and the region have significant vacant industrial properties, as well as industrially oriented infrastructure, that can be immediately employed to support growth. There are additional adaptive re-use capacities in many areas that are suitable for milling, food manufacturing, and distribution.

Public Education – The region's changing demographics present an opportunity to turn new, non-agricultural residents into supporters of agriculture. Proactive public education efforts in other parts of the country show the positive benefits of explaining the fiscal, economic, environmental, and social values of agriculture. Specific benefits include: 1) greater market share for local agricultural products; 2) better farm/non-farm neighbor relations; and 3) greater policy support for agriculture.

Labor Force Development – Rockingham County does not exist in a labor vacuum. The regional agricultural industry is suffering from the same labor issues as other industries of limited availability and declining quality. Many farmers and ACDS, LLC believe that a concerted regional effort to expand and train skilled agricultural labor will uplift the entire industry and provide the region and Rockingham County a competitive advantage over other states and regions.

Consumer Demand – The current climate in which consumers are changing their purchasing power and food buying habits may yield an expanded level of direct marketing opportunities and product development opportunities locally. An example is the recent growth in demand for local food products by major retailers, which is on pace to outstrip growth in organic and other specialty markets.

Regional Population Growth – Regional population growth is expected to be high over the next two decades, particularly along the I-85 corridor between Wake and Mecklenburg Counties and including Forsyth. This growth in consumer base is easily accessible to County farmer, without causing the same land demand issues that have plagued counties like Guilford and Forsyth.

Leadership Development – In order to build and maintain a strong and supportive policy infrastructure that benefits agriculture, the farming community should seize the opportunity to identify and develop new industry leaders. Eastern North Carolina is still a place where agriculture has a voice, but this voice will only be heard through continual development and invigoration of leadership skills and access.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Threats

Threats represent those elements of the business environment that offer the greatest challenges to long-term survival of the agricultural industry. Many threats are beyond the control of the industry and frequently require additional resources.

Regional Development Patterns – Land use patterns in the region are changing rapidly as the suburban reach of the Raleigh-Durham metropolitan area and Piedmont Triad places pressure on land resources in counties that are critical to maintaining a healthy agricultural infrastructure. This development manifests itself as low-density, residential development and attendant retail-commercial development. The threat posed by this development is four-fold.

The first threat comes from the nature of conflicting land uses. Agriculture, despite providing a pleasant and pastoral landscape, is a commercial and industrial land use that produces dust, odors, slow moving traffic, and other conditions that conflict with residential use. There are true economic costs associated with managing farm operations, especially livestock operations, in close proximity to rural residences. In addition to the direct costs associated with operational changes, there are additional social costs that include neighbor in-fighting, nuisance suits, and crop damage.

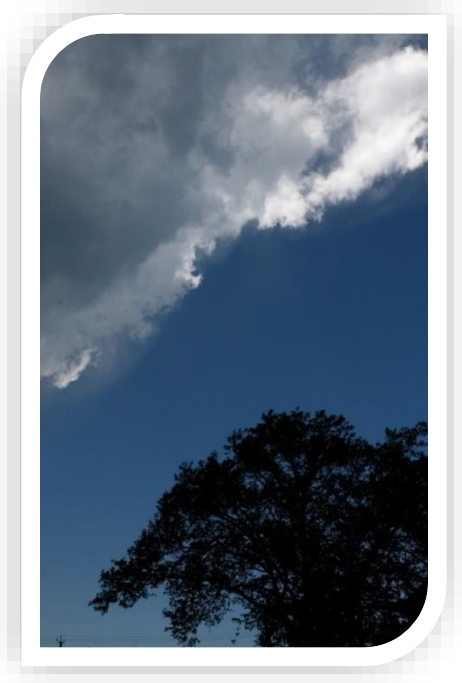
The second threat from the patchwork of development that is common in the region involves the high level of road frontage parcelization. As developed parcels leapfrog existing farms, they limit the expansion capability of existing operations, while impacting successful intergenerational transfers. In addition, the patchwork of farms requires farmers to travel greater distances between parcels, increasing both the time and expense of farming.

The third issue involves the quality of land resources being consumed by development. To put it simply, the best soils and topography for farming are the easiest lands to develop and generally the first to convert. This is particularly true in southern Rockingham County, where pressure from Guilford County is already limiting the efficiency of farming by creating traffic congestion and causing parcelization and high land values.

The fourth issue centers on the increase in land value due to low density development patterns. As a result of increased demand for land, farmers are forced to compete for land at higher prices.

This impacts both operational costs as well as farm transition.

Limited Capital Investment – In order for an industry to remain competitive, it must make capital investments in plant and equipment. Current economic conditions, combined with issues of impermanence and lack of a next generation, are slowing the rate of these investments. This is especially true for the agribusiness sector which, outside of integrator systems, is making fewer local investments.



Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Rockingham County

Loss of Critical Mass – North Carolina is leading the nation in farmland loss, which has an effect on all facets of agriculture statewide. Most important is the effect of lost economic activity necessary for supporting healthy input and output industries, as well as infrastructure investment. While the ACDS study team does not believe that the regional agricultural economy is approaching a loss of critical mass in the near term, it is affecting nearby counties, such as Guilford, Forsyth, and Alamance. Rockingham County itself feels the pressure of farmland loss as low density sprawl is taking farmlands out of production.

Labor Availability – Labor is a fundamental production input for most regional agricultural industry sectors, such as tobacco, dairy, fruit, vegetable, nursery, greenhouse, and equine, and it is in short supply. Regionally, farmers note labor as one of the most pressing management concerns, and a primary limiting factor in farm business expansion. In addition to availability, labor is also limited by quality. Some farmers advertise outside of the region to find qualified labor outside of the H2A program. As the labor pool gets tighter, it will become more important for farmers to have access to adequate training opportunities and retention strategies. This last issue is becoming more important as H2A costs continue to rise.

Loss of Agricultural Infrastructure – Consistent with previous trends, the region's agricultural infrastructure is deteriorating as agriculture shrinks in importance relative to other economic uses. For Rockingham County, this means that local farmers will have to travel longer distances to go to markets or get supplies, services, parts, and equipment from an ever-shrinking base of input and output industries. Poor infrastructure access is complicated by the transitional forces on agriculture caused by the decline of tobacco. In addition, public sector infrastructure, such as extension services, regional research and development, and other farm support programs, are under budget pressures.

State and County Fiscal Conditions – Poor fiscal conditions will impact the development of local and regional agricultural development initiatives. Many government officials are currently considering cuts to existing programs, a condition that will likely be in place for the next two to three fiscal cycles. To receive serious consideration in this environment, new initiatives must demonstrate a clear linkage to overarching economic development goals, such as increasing tax base or employment.

Drain of Management Skills – Given the better economic returns in other industries, many farmers in the region fear a drain of the best skilled managers and operators. Increasing the professionalism of operators and increasing the bottom line returns of agriculture are potential solutions to this threat.

Urbanization – Over six million people live within a hundred-mile radius of Rockingham County. Most reside in urban settings within the Charlotte, Raleigh/Durham, and Piedmont Triad regions. This market area includes three of the ten fastest growing cities in the United States. With this level of urbanization, the rural culture that has dominated the region's policy making is quickly swinging to a more urban- and suburban-influenced pattern.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Agricultural Economic Development Needs

Given the fact that agriculture is currently the County's largest economic contributor, it is critical to support the industry's economic and business development needs. Rockingham County is well situated to benefit from the leveraging influences of the industry on upstream and downstream employment, value-added activities, and output.

Articulating these needs within a coherent action strategy can be complicated by a series of regulatory, environmental, finance, and cultural issues that will require a concerted effort of industry, government, and community to overcome. It is also important to recognize that the industry's development needs do not impact all sectors in the same manner. A highlight of the industry's needs follow:

- Development pressure, land fragmentation, and competition for land with non-operating uses put a premium on agricultural land that makes it less profitable to farm and difficult to expand. As a result, there is direct pressure for farms – particularly new and expanding farmers – to grow their operations elsewhere.
- Workforce conditions must improve for agriculture to expand over the long term. It should begin with educating and training agricultural entrepreneurs and the agricultural workforce.
- Increasing land values combined with the end of tobacco buyout payments increases concern about farmland transition and points to the need for education on transition issues.
- Crop damage from trespass and wildlife is a growing concern that calls for policy change.
- Increased intermixing of residences within agricultural production areas creates the possibility for increased nuisance claims against farmers, which can have negative impacts on earnings. Increasing communication and understanding of agriculture, in addition to increased legislative action, are immediate needs.
- Marketing infrastructure needs to be improved. This includes a combination of an economic development attraction effort, on-site development, modernization, and scale-up.
- Diminishing numbers of forest products operations and growth in invasive species threaten the future of the forest products industry and the value of standing timber.
- Tax policies at the local, State, and federal levels influence landowner decision making significantly, particularly during intergenerational success planning and during investment decision making. For many local farms and forest stands, this results in a short-term planning horizon or increased pressure to transition out of the industries.
- Regulatory structures, particularly in transportation and development policy, need to be more farm-friendly.

With that in mind, none of the proposed responses are a “silver bullet” that ensures the continuation of agriculture. An integrated strategy combining land preservation techniques, regulatory changes, and market opportunities is essential. Communities with the most success in protecting their agricultural industries are those that combine these tools in a timely way with a vigorous regulatory and agricultural economic development program. These topics will be discussed in Sections 3 and 4 of this report.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Applicable Tools and Programs

Local communities often benefit from structured economic development support provided to regionally important industries. Agriculture is no exception. In fact, public policy efforts to protect the farmland base, such as land use planning and purchase of development rights, are often more effective when combined with economic development programming. Providing this level of support for agriculture in Rockingham County is critical to a continued and successful economic transition for the industry and the economy as a whole.

Given its strong agricultural assets, natural resource base, and committed corps of producers, Rockingham County is well situated to leverage growth. In addition, the County has proximity to a large population base in North Carolina. But, supporting this industry through the many transitional forces affecting it requires careful use of the scarce tools and resources available to the County and industry alike. Encouraging market viability in all components of agriculture, forestry, food processing, distribution, biotechnology, and related industries is particularly important in Rockingham County, due to the industries' strong positive linkages to indirect job creation.

Effective economic development tools generally concentrate on supporting the private interest of the industries (i.e., the profit-making potential of individual firms within an industry sector) while providing a clear public benefit, such as employment creation, infrastructure improvement, wealth generation, and quality of life enhancement. In the case of agriculture, the greatest public benefit may be the stability of the working landscape and all of the secondary benefits that follow. These tools are highlighted on the following pages.

Strategic Marketing

Strategic marketing is the means by which a community conveys its economic development mission to its various stakeholders, both internal and external. These programs can utilize a wide variety of media and carry a diversity of messages, but all strategic marketing plans must have two key features. The first is a means to reach the constituent base of the community with a message that keeps the broader community, and therefore policy makers, engaged in economic development. At a minimum, this message must convey the community benefit of the economic development and seek continued/sustained support. Second, the message must reach the intended industry markets in a meaningful way. In other words, a strategic marketing campaign must reach a market that has a willingness to respond to the message, or the message will be lost. Even if the public constituency has bought into an economic development campaign, it will be ineffective if the market does not respond. Similarly, an effort to recruit businesses can be very successful in terms of deal flow, but will fail if the community is not willing to support that type of business or industry. This focus is currently carried out both individually by Rockingham County and jointly with Guilford County to market specific real estate assets. However, there is no specific means to attract an agribusiness or food cluster.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Infrastructure Development

A community cannot be effective in retaining or attracting industry if its basic infrastructure, such as water and sewer, cannot accommodate industry needs. When planning infrastructure, accounting for the current and future needs of industry is key to good economic planning. This is doubly important when a community is engaged in a Business Retention Expansion and Attraction (BREA) effort (or business cluster development), which requires the development or enhancement of specific infrastructure, such as redundant broadband access. Rockingham County has engaged in a BREA process, which led to the creation of a technology-led economic development strategy.

Infrastructure development generally applies to upstream and downstream agribusinesses. For example, Sandpoint, Idaho expanded its sewer and water capacity to accommodate the development of a new dairy processing facility. Currently, such capacity exists in the region as it was a necessary component of much of the former industry needs in the region. Additional capacity is planned in the 220 corridor.

Real Estate Development

In today's corporate environment, many relocation decisions are made and implemented with very short development cycles. Communities that have worked with the real estate development industry to pre-position built capacity and/or pad sites often have an advantage in attracting and retaining businesses. As with other economic development tools, the target industries must be clearly understood and a marketing strategy must be in place for this tool to be effective. Otherwise, real estate investments may go un-recovered or moved at fire-sale rates.

While modern facilities are not abundant in Rockingham County, planned and in-place infrastructure is designed to create employment-related real estate development capacity within existing town centers and along planned Interstate routes.

Regulatory and Policy Guidance

As the regulatory environment at the local, State, and federal levels becomes more complex, compliance becomes more costly across all sectors. Many communities have developed responses to this issue through their economic development offices, streamlining processes and improving efficiency in both the development process and in on-going corporate operations. Tools such as one-stop licensing, regulatory ombudsman, and specialized training of enforcement officers have proven both inexpensive and effective.

Some communities, such as Saint Mary's County in Maryland, utilize economic development staff to act as regulatory ombudsmen on behalf of farmers. According to local farmers, this process can significantly shorten the development cycle and provides an important feedback loop to politicians regarding the agricultural impact of regulations. This explicit function does not currently exist in Rockingham County.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Business Cluster Development

The United States has experienced a trend of concentrated clustering of industries during the last several decades. This trend was driven by access to key infrastructure, workforce characteristics, concentrations of wealth, advances in information technology, and enhanced telecommunications capacity. Communities have responded by developing targeted strategies to enhance lifecycle development (lifecycle development includes companies at all stages of development, from start-up to mature) of companies within a business cluster (a business cluster includes a primary industry sector, as well as its input, output, and support sectors). Because business cluster development is industry-specific and generally forward-looking, it requires, as a precursor to industry development, significant community resources that are speculatively dedicated to targeted assets currently in place. In order for this type of development to be successful, the area must support, or have the capacity to support, at least the minimum needs of the target industry. Otherwise, business cluster development will likely fail.

As a business, agriculture is prone to clustering due to efficiencies of scale and the industry's propensity to spin off new ventures. This is especially true in relation to upstream and downstream industries and marketing. As an example, Lancaster County in Pennsylvania has been successful, through its Chamber of Commerce, in attracting a strong agribusiness cluster. This cluster continues to grow in strength despite high growth pressure in the area.

Work Force Enhancement

Work force enhancement programs recognize that businesses and economies cannot function without a well-trained and available workforce. When companies, no matter the industry, seek to relocate or expand within a market place, work force conditions, both current and future, are among the first tier of criteria they examine. Communities often seek to address workforce development from a global, economy-wide, or firm level. At the economy-wide level, communities use public financing through the school system, primarily through higher education, to reinforce the skills sets that are required by that community's industrial base. In transitional economies, such as Rockingham County, work force development issues are likely to focus on new job classifications rather than historic job classifications. Firm-level work force development assistance is typically used to assist at-place and relocating employers with discrete training needs and is often supported through loans and grants.

Recent collaborations between agricultural industry associations and community colleges have led to the development of distance learning programs to educate field workers. For example, the Advanced Technology Center for Agriculture at Carroll Community College in Maryland developed a CD-ROM based training program in English and Spanish to teach laborers field identification of plants.

Adult education and workforce training programs of this type are currently offered by the Rockingham Community College and the Business and Technology Center. The College also offers small business development and entrepreneurship courses and business assistance.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Business Development

Business development programs focus on supporting the needs of small businesses (generally fewer than 500 employees) by addressing specific needs, such as access to financing or technical and professional services. Nationwide, the U.S. Small Business Administration leads efforts to support small business development through its lending programs, as well as through technical and grant support. In addition, most U.S. counties are supported by technical and professional counseling and mentoring services through a Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). These services are generally offered through a local community college, as is the case in Rockingham County.

In addition to the basic services noted above, some communities choose to provide more directed support to small businesses. Often, these services are designed to fill a critical local gap in service provision or are designed to support the unique needs of targeted industry sectors. Examples of this type of enhanced business development programming include:

Business Incubators – Business incubators generally provide flexible real estate and business service solutions for selected small businesses. Business service solutions are generally targeted to the needs of high growth industry sectors and may include professional assistance from attorneys, accountants, and marketing specialists; technical assistance from product developers, laboratories, and engineers; as well as administrative assistance with secretarial duties, personnel, and bookkeeping. Business incubators are costly and technically challenging to implement, but when successful, have a proven track record of accelerating small business growth and keeping those businesses in the community. Agribusiness incubators are employed for a variety of uses, ranging from developing biotechnology products (e.g., Monsanto’s incubator in Missouri) to supporting value-added food products (e.g., Unlimited Future, Inc. in West Virginia). Such support is available to small businesses in Rockingham County through the Business and Technology Center.

Entrepreneurship Training and Support – Entrepreneurship training and support is very similar to business incubation in that it provides support services to start-up and early-stage companies that generally have a high need for specialized technical and professional services. However, these programs often support a wider array of business sectors, ranging from agriculture to retail and high technology. These programs rarely offer real estate options or day-to-day business support and are therefore much less expensive to operate versus a business incubator. Agribusiness entrepreneurship training and support programs are becoming popular across the United States including Cornell University’s NxLevel cohort program. The Rockingham County Community College has similar business support programs and capabilities.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Small Business Support Networks – Small business support networks tend to be informal, peer-based systems where small businesses counsel one another. These systems are often sponsored, but not operated, by an agency or organization, such as an economic development office or industry association and rely on participating businesses to direct their programming. Agribusiness roundtables are popular in many areas of the United States as a means to improve network development among farmers, as well as upstream and downstream industries.

Business Finance – Small business finance programs generally target gaps in private sector funding, such as limited access to equity capital, within a region or specific industry sector. Most programs are oriented toward providing revolving credit and include provision of capital for early-stage businesses, farm ownership, interest rate buy-downs, loan guarantees, down payment loans, and operating capital. One of the greatest challenges in making finance programs work is developing enough deal flow to cover the costs of operations. Agricultural finance programs, such as Aggie Bonds, are used nationally to improve farmer access to development capital and to enhance capital availability to new farmers. More recently, Real Estate Investment Trusts are becoming active in agricultural investments, which may prove beneficial to farmers in Rockingham County.

The following section recommends means for integrating elements of the above into an effective agricultural development strategy.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Until market viability is assured, even the best regulatory and legislative encouragement will fail to support agriculture. Rockingham County is ideally positioned to create strong market opportunities utilizing its agricultural resources, which are in viable proximity to a large population and strong food markets. It also has abundant natural assets and an existing core of committed farm leadership on which to build the following recommendations.

Recommended Actions

- 1) **Support development of agricultural and experiential tourism opportunities.** The natural and cultural assets of the region should be leveraged to improve income and job creation in tourism through marketing activities, project development, and farmer/landowner training programs.
 - a. **Goal:** To support development of an agritourism cluster to include the development of destination agritourism venues that integrates with other cultural and natural resources in the County. The ultimate goal would be to create a new and vibrant industrial sector that leverages job growth and attracts new dollars to the community.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Support development of regionally attractive projects, such as the Rockingham County horse park in conjunction with developing trail systems, creating targeted tour guides/maps, supporting coordinated festival development, and training tourism venue operators. Operator training, development assistance, and challenge programs may also be necessary.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Initial funding through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, Golden LEAF Foundation, or the Economic Development Administration should be sought to create the program. Cooperation with Chamber of Commerce, Office of Economic Development, main street programs, and community foundations is necessary.
- 2) **Encourage the development of a food and agribusiness cluster in Route 220 Corridor.** Pursuant to goals of the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, attraction of new agricultural and forestry-related industry sectors should be targeted in cooperation with neighboring counties.
 - a. **Goal:** To develop new agricultural and forestry-related industrial sectors that leverage existing and emerging clusters in the region, such as agriculturally related biotechnology, alternative energy, tourism, and food manufacturing.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** A regional development partnership funded through the Economic Development Administration is recommended. This partnership should explore targeting economic development tools to attract the above clusters, as well as others using a mixture of incentives, investments, and land use controls. Industrial development should be targeted in core growth areas to limit development impact on agricultural soils.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Initial project funding should be sought through the Economic Development Administration, using technical assistance and economic adjustment funds. Such funds should target both physical plant development, as well as directed technical assistance. Additional fundraising will leverage private sources of capital and grant funds to support discrete project activities. Depending on the project, funds may be made available through the NCADFPTF, Golden LEAF Foundation, USDA Rural Development, Department of Commerce, and others.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

- 3) **Expand business incubation services to include “concept” incubation activities.** Encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship will be essential to the continued growth and expansion of agriculture in the County. However, low levels of participation in entrepreneurial programs, such as the Business and Technology Center, may indicate the need for a more aggressive approach to incubation. Concept incubation offers such an approach by having the incubator fully participate in the business formation process.
 - a. **Goal:** To create an entrepreneurial culture in and around agriculture while supporting leadership development in agribusiness.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Support expansion of Business and Technology Center activities to include agribusiness concept formation of youth oriented business. The Center would be encouraged to support one or two new concept business formations in the program’s first eighteen months with the intent to transfer ownership fully to the youth entrepreneurs involved. Concept businesses should be related to clusters identified/supported in Recommendation 3, and integrate with on-going and planned activities, such as the Piedmont Local Foods, the proposed Cattle Quality Initiative, Ag Center, Youth Entrepreneurship Boot Camp, and others, to develop core businesses as a means to teach business development through experience.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Additional funding for the Business and Technology Center will be required to support this activity and may include funding through the US Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration; Golden LEAF Foundation; USDA Rural Development; and others.
- 4) **Create a public outreach and marketing campaign.** Public support for agriculture is critical to its future success, whether it motivates the consumer to buy local agricultural products or encourages a local government to buy development rights, reduce property taxes, or craft farm-friendly local laws.
 - a. **Goal:** To initiate a campaign to formally bridge information gaps between farmers and the general community. The outcome should be goal congruence between the economic use of working landscapes and quality of life desires of an expanding North Carolina metropolitan region that now stretches from Johnston County to Mecklenburg County. Stronger relationships between these interests should be capitalized upon to enhance regional marketing opportunities and to create a positive policy climate for agriculture.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** In light of the widespread interest in this issue, a broad-based partnership effort among groups, such as the Agricultural Advisory Board, Land Trusts, Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension, Farm Credit, agricultural associations, the Soil and Water Conservation District, and local governments, should move this forward. Outreach samples can be found in Appendix B.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** A small annual public outreach budget and limited staff time should be allocated to this project. Grant funds through the NCADFPTF may be available to initiate the public outreach program.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

- 5) **Develop a youth entrepreneurship academy.** A general concern among farmers and agribusiness owners is the lack of youth involvement and interest in agriculture. Improving youth participation in agribusiness activities, particularly transitional and entrepreneurial activities, is essential to the long-term growth in the industry.
 - a. **Goal:** To promote youth involvement in agribusiness activities and encourage entrepreneurial activity. Secondly, to increase youth leadership skills and integrate more youth into agribusiness leadership positions.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Work with Rockingham County Community College, Rockingham 4-H, NC State, and agriculturally related youth programs to develop/adopt a curriculum such as NxLevel to teach basic entrepreneurship and business management skills. Develop a mentor/intern program that encourages long-term interaction between youth and agribusiness/farming entrepreneurs. This program can be modeled after the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Farm Internship Curriculum (attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/internships.)
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Program sponsorships should be sought for seminars and mentorship programs. Initial funding may be available through grants from NCADFPTF and the Golden LEAF Foundation. Private sector sponsorships should also be sought as well as working relationship with the Kaufman Foundation's youth entrepreneurship training programs.
- 6) **Explore development of an Agricultural Center to coordinate training, education, mentorship, outreach, and community relations.** Much of the population in the County and region is disconnected from agriculture in fundamental ways. The creation of an Agricultural Center would serve as a bridge to make agriculture more accessible to residents, students, and prospective farmers through at-place programs, training, markets, and special events.
 - a. **Goal:** To create a center of activity for community events, training, school programming, product development, and visiting research. Improve general population's understanding of agriculture and its role in supporting the community, environment, and economy.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Identify private and public partnerships interested in supporting an Agricultural Center modeled on the Intervale Center. (See Appendix C.) The possibility of linking such a center within the working activities of the Upper Piedmont Research Station is advised.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Funding requirements for start-up and operations will vary greatly, but are expected to be significant. Similar development in New York, Maryland, and North Carolina can provide capital and operating budget guidance. Capital allocations between \$1 million and \$2.5 million dollars and operating budgets of \$175,000 to \$500,000 should be expected. Most Ag Centers use a combination of foundation and government funding to get established.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

- 7) **Support development of a Rockingham County Livestock Quality Initiative.** Livestock sales provide consistent sales and transition opportunities for local farmers. Sales value, however, is limited by the volume and quality of cattle produced. Improving this condition could lead to both absolute growth in this sector as well as a general improvement in profitability.
 - a. **Goal:** To improve cattle marketing opportunities through herd and management practice enhancements.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Develop a cattle quality program in cooperation with the Cattleman's Association and modeled after similar programs in Kentucky and Virginia. Basic elements would include aggregation facilities, cost-sharing of on-site/genetic improvements, bull testing, cost-sharing vaccination and tagging programs, providing mobile cattle infrastructure (e.g., chutes, corrals, scales, etc.), and assisting with finance and mentoring of start-up operations.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Development of this opportunity will require funding support from the industry, as well as grant resources. Grant resources may be available from USDA Rural Development, Golden LEAF, or other similar resources.
- 8) **Develop industry-specific short courses to support workforce development.** Replacing the current workforce with one that is properly trained and prepared to work in agriculture is essential. It is recommended that industry-specific short courses be developed to facilitate this change. Such courses should target all levels of the workforce.
 - a. **Goal:** To encourage better workforce performance and greater attraction of quality workforce to the agricultural industry. Ultimately, an improved workforce should lead to an improved bottom line.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Develop a partnership with the Rockingham Community College to identify and/or develop needed curriculum. Curriculum targeting management should include the following training: Food and Drug Administration (FDA) compliance, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) compliance, technology skills, Spanish language, risk management, finance, and labor management/regulations. Programs targeting the workforce should include both on-site and distance modules to include machinery repair, plant and insect identification, registration and licensing training, animal husbandry primers, basic farm English, and others as identified through surveys and outreach to the farm and farm worker communities. Examine possible partnerships with secondary schools and the Business and Technology Center to develop on-farm and agribusiness internship opportunities.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Programs generally require operational support for curriculum development and for initial operations until they reach operational self-sufficiency. Sources may include the USDA's Rural Development office, the US Department of Labor, NC Department of Commerce, and similar organizations.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Agricultural Land Protection Needs

Despite limited population over the last decade, the citizens of Rockingham County are being affected by the loss of farmland and its associated benefits of job creation, economic stabilization, protection of the environment, and enrichment of the quality of life. Suburban sprawl-type development is the most common threat to farmland and its effects are highly dispersed across the County. Small-lot subdivisions and rural developments and their associated infrastructure needs are often incompatible with agriculture. Many times, they leave farm operators vulnerable by limiting access to fertile lands, making equipment transportation difficult, and creating a hostile environment through trespass and nuisance claims.

The state of North Carolina, Rockingham County, and other governmental and non-governmental structures have created programs to provide assistance to landowners in dealing with the above issues. These programs and regulatory structures come in many forms, but all are anchored by North Carolina's 1985 Farmland Preservation Enabling Act, which set forth the concept of "voluntary agricultural districts" as an effective and politically viable way to protect North Carolina farmland. Voluntary Agricultural Districts foster partnerships between farmers, county commissioners, and land use planners to promote and protect agriculture as an integral part of the County. The law's purpose is to provide local, non-regulatory mechanisms for keeping land in agricultural production and is currently the primary farmland protection tool in North Carolina.

Since 1985, half of North Carolina's 100 counties (including Rockingham County) have passed ordinances establishing VADs. In so doing, commissioners appoint a local board to oversee the program. This board determines eligibility and guidelines for enrollment, specific to each county. The program preserves and maintains agricultural areas within the County by:

- informing non-farming neighbors and potential land purchasers that the participating farm may emit noise, dust, and smells (which may help prevent conflicts between neighbors and potential nuisance claims).
- providing the farming community a stronger voice in Rockingham County policy affecting farmland.
- assuring farmers that participation in the program is voluntary and that farmers may terminate their participation at any time.
- requiring the Rockingham County Commissioners to use farmland "as a last resort" if they are attempting to condemn county lands.
- protecting green space and natural resources as the county's population and development expands.
- maintaining opportunities to produce locally grown food and fiber.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

An agricultural district is initiated when interested landowners submit a proposal to the Rockingham County Agricultural Advisory Board. The district shall contain a minimum of five acres for horticultural use, ten acres for agricultural use, and twenty acres for forestry use. This includes leased and/or rented land.

In keeping with the intent of the above, Rockingham County is working with agricultural landowners and operators to determine if the protections and land preservation techniques currently provided through the various Agricultural Districts Laws are sufficient to meet their needs. These needs were assessed via focus groups and interviews conducted in the spring and summer of 2010. The land preservation issues highlighted during these fact-gathering initiatives are as follows:

- The VAD is a useful, but limited tool for farmland protection. It does not offer affirmative right-to-farm protections and is not widely understood by the agricultural community.
- Land fragmentation is a significant issue in conducting farming operations. Land prices make it difficult to consolidate blocks of land.
- Few farmers understand the current land conservation programs. Farmers frequently confuse habitat oriented conservation easements with working lands easements.
- Purchase-of-development right is considered a valuable tool for the County, recognizing that it only applies to areas with high development pressure.
- Easement payment options should fit the tax and financial planning needs of landowners.
- Financing intergenerational farm transition is a threat to the continuity of farming operations. Current farmland protection program design does not easily support farm transition options, particularly for intergenerational transfer. Simple changes to approach and design in a purchase of development rights (PDR) program can increase its effectiveness as a financing tool for estate planning.
- Development pressure, land fragmentation, and competition for land are placing a premium on land sales and land rental.
- Conflict with neighboring, non-farm uses is an issue for many farmers that limits investment and transition considerations.
- Low-density road frontage development has multiple negative impacts on agriculture. Mailbox placement and low overhead wires that impede equipment transportation, conflict over agricultural practices, and trespass are all significant issues.
- Competition for high productivity soils is high, particularly with non-farm uses. Protection of this resource is required if farming is to continue.
- The expansion of ETJs is considered a serious threat to farming in areas around municipalities and impacts on-farm investment.
- Road corridor development along Interstate 785 and Route 220 is expected to contribute to additional land development pressure on high value soils and key farm operations.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Agricultural land is expected to provide a host of public benefits for which farmers are not compensated, including provision of viewsheds, protection of water resources, wildlife habitat, and cultural preservation. While farmers generally support these protections, they are concerned about the possible equity impacts of policy changes focused on those protections.

In order for Rockingham County to develop effective tools for the protection of farmland, the above issues must be incorporated into programmatic responses that fit both the local need and the County's capacity to implement and manage such policy enhancements and program developments.

None of the potential responses offered in the following recommendations should be considered a "silver bullet" that ensures the continuation of agriculture. An integrated strategy combining land preservation techniques, regulatory changes, and market opportunities is essential. Communities with the most success in protecting their agricultural industries are those that employ a combination of these tools in a timely way, as well as vigorous regulatory and agricultural economic development programs.



Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Applicable Tools and Programs

Given the diversity of agriculture and the various governmental structures found in North Carolina, protection of agriculture and farmland takes many forms. Most often, preservation efforts require land use regulations, agricultural economic development initiatives, and purchase-of-development rights to permanently secure a land base for the industry. The communities around the nation making the greatest strides are those employing some combination of the tools. This section highlights those elements that specifically address the protection of working landscapes outside of the land use regulatory structure.

In this section, land use planning techniques are discussed, as well as programming considerations for Voluntary Agricultural Districts, Purchase of Development Rights, and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). The current menu of options made available to jurisdictions and landowners by the state of North Carolina to help protect agriculture in their communities can be found in Appendix D.

Table 2: Farmland Protection Tools

<i>Protection Tool</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	<i>Applicability to Rockingham County</i>
Agricultural Tax Benefits	Taxation of farmland based on its agricultural use rather than its development value.	Modest incentive to keep land in commercial farming.	Also benefits land speculators waiting to develop land. Recent changes to the law have called into question the value of long-term easements, given that PUV is not guaranteed.	Tax benefits through Present Use Valuation (PUV) are available to farmland owners in Rockingham County. There are specific requirements on ownership, size, income, and management requirements to participate in the program. Additional tax benefits and incentives are available for estates. The donation or sale of an agricultural conservation easement usually reduces the land value for estate tax purposes.
Agricultural Districts	Designation of an area of viable agricultural land. Initiated and self-selected by landowners, adopted by county. Eligibility and minimum acreage is determined by each county. Land can go in and out at any time.	Farmed land within district is provided a minimum level of protection from nuisance claims and public condemnation processes. Enhanced districts allow for additional benefits, including a higher level of protection.	Area defined by willing landowners and has no real longevity as a protection tool.	Rockingham County has enrolled in the VAD program. Landowners receive a set of benefits in exchange for a restriction on developing their land for 10 years or until the landowner withdraws. In 2005, the General Assembly authorized an Enhanced VAD that would offer landowners an additional set of benefits if they were willing to waive their right to withdraw from the VAD program. Rockingham County does not have an EVAD.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

<i>Protection Tool</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	<i>Applicability to Rockingham County</i>
Right-to-Farm Laws	In NC for land in ag district: 1. definition of agriculture 2. one-year of operation 3. sound ag practices determination	Strengthens the ability of farmers to defend themselves against nuisance suits. Shields farmers from excessively restrictive local laws and unwanted public infrastructure. Available to all farms in the state.	Not meant to shield from all legal disputes with neighbors. Does not stop complaints from non-farm neighbors. May not protect major changes in farm operations or new operations.	These protections are afforded to all farms in the state under North Carolina State Law. Other protections include notice of proximity provisions for farmers in a VAD program and the pre-litigation mediation of farm nuisance disputes. Rockingham County, with State authorization, may adopt a more stringent Right-to-Farm Ordinance to protect against specious nuisance claims. (See Appendix E)
Agricultural Conservation Easements	Voluntary separation and sale of the development rights from land in exchange for a permanent conservation easement. Easements can be donated or landowners can be paid the difference between restricted value and fair market value. Land remains in private ownership and on tax rolls.	Provides permanent protection of farmland. Donated easements allow a low-cost preservation option and landowners can capture benefits through tax shelter effects. Purchased easements put cash into farm and farm economy.	Public cost may be high. The voluntary nature may make it difficult to protect a critical mass of farmland. If a county is limited to donated easements, it may be difficult to attract landowner participation.	House Bill 607, passed in 2005, revamped and revived the Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFPTF) to expand the range of conservation agreements and enterprise programs for long-term farming. The ADFPTF gave out \$2.4 million between 1998 and 2002 to protect 4,412 acres, but had received minimal appropriations until House Bill 607's passage. The program does not currently have a dedicated funding source. Planners, farmers, and local officials can create local PDR easement programs.
Mitigation Techniques	Requires that a loss of an asset during development be replaced by a like kind and like quality asset. Such techniques may apply to assets such as Prime Soils.	Ties the impact of development directly to the solution. Uses private sector funding to achieve program goals.	County does not have direct control over site selection, which can cause scattered protection problems. Rules can be difficult to develop and enforce.	Mitigation techniques can be used to protect specific agricultural assets, such as soils, and provide a level of protection that matches development pressure. Mitigation may be used to deal with specific issues, such as the loss of Prime Soils in high development pressure areas. This technique may also be integrated within the land use categories suggested in the Land Use Plan. Mitigation may require State authorization.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

<i>Protection Tool</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	<i>Applicability to Rockingham County</i>
Transfer of Development Rights	Voluntary separation and sale of development rights from land in one part of a jurisdiction to be used to increase density in another part (receiving area). Conservation easement placed on sending parcel.	Developers compensate farmland owners. Creates permanent protection of farmland and shifts some costs to private sector.	Difficult to establish and administer. Opposition by landowners in receiving areas. Needs to be an integral part of a jurisdiction's growth management strategy at a time that sending area resources are relatively intact and intensification of receiving areas is feasible.	Under the new Rockingham Land Use Plan, the suggestion of new land use categories provides a conceptual means to assign receiving and sending areas. However, the market does not exhibit the necessary liquidity features without additional regulatory controls and specific legislative authorization. Creation of such regulatory controls is unlikely to be popular with farmland owners.
Lease of Development Rights (LDR)	A voluntary mechanism to temporarily suspend the development of agricultural real estate for a definitive time frame in exchange for some consideration.	Allows time for the planning process to catch up with development pressures while providing an incentive for farmers to maintain farm real estate in agricultural use. LDR can be used to provide economic and business development incentives.	Leasing of Development Rights, if improperly designed, can encourage speculative development in land by reducing the holding cost of highly developable lands. Pricing of LDR also presents a significant challenge as there are few acceptable pricing models available to determine value.	LDR can be attractive when the goal of the program is not solely to preserve agricultural real estate. LDR agreements can be well employed in conjunction with farm viability programs. Coupling a relatively short-term period (less than 20 years) with the objectives of the county's Land Use Plan can be used to affect short- and medium-term preservation goals, particularly during periods of high development pressure. It may be difficult to get public buy-in for using LDR given the lack of easement permanence.
Private Land Trusts	Local non-profit 501.c (3) corporations designed to identify resources to be protected, accept permanent conservation easements from landowners, and monitor their provisions through time.	Can provide permanent land protection. Can forge public-private partnerships. Greatly facilitates the donation of conservation easements from landowners able to benefit from income tax benefits.	Private land trusts rarely have funds to buy easements. May create islands of protection, rather than a critical mass of contiguous lands due to focus on donations. Unless specifically designed for agricultural protection, farming may not be the focus of a land trust's easements.	The Piedmont Land Conservancy is currently managing several easements in Rockingham County and is the only active Land Trust in Rockingham County. Rockingham County may choose to leverage a county-based land preservation program by partnering with PLC or Soil and Water to manage and monitor easements until the County is fully able to fund its own program.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Applicable Tools and Programs

Rockingham County faces four special challenges in protecting its land base: 1) development pressure consisting of highly dispersed small unit developments; 2) the County has well developed rural water systems which may encourage rural development; 3) the County's population base is stable despite high regional population growth; and 4) development is sprawling as older downtown areas are abandoned for new, commuter-oriented developments. Collectively, these issues indicate that no one program may effectively keep pace with the changes in land use and, therefore, no one program can achieve critical affect. A multi-tiered preservation program approach, using the set of common tools described below, makes sense for the County. The intent of these tools is to encourage more compact rural development in rural areas, while protecting farmers' ability to operate in an increasingly suburban environment.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Recommended Actions

- 9) **Create a county farmland preservation program.** Demand for a suite of land preservation programs is high in Rockingham County, particularly for use in farm transition planning and for farmland acquisition. Given the current state of funding at the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the ability of Rockingham County to compete for funds may be stymied both by the limited funding of the program statewide, as well as by the criteria by which priority is given to funding individual easement projects. If the County is to compete successfully and meet constituent demand, new programs and funding sources may be required.
- Goal:** To improve landowner options for financing intergenerational transfers and enhancing the ability of young and beginning farmers to acquire land.
 - Implementation Strategy:** Implementation of a farmland protection program is a long-term proposition that takes significant commitment from all parties involved. A specific program of work should be developed (see box below).
 - Funding Considerations:** Initial activities will require a limited budget, but significant staff time. It is recommended that farmland preservation coordinator position be created and funded by the County. A sufficient budget should be made available to support three grant applications per year to the NCADFPTF or the USDA Farm and Ranch Land Preservation Program.

Suggested Farmland Protection Action Items

- Create a Farmland Preservation Coordinator position in Rockingham County Cooperative Extension or the Rockingham County Soil and Water Conservation District.
 - Conduct educational seminars with public officials and landowners in cooperation with local land trusts and the NCADFPTF.
 - Examine county funding options to support the position (e.g., PUV rollbacks are used in Alamance County to support PDR).
 - Develop a farmland protection program of work.
 - Introduce program and policy ideas to the community.
 - Work with agencies and industry to implement protection programming.
- Enable the creation of a county PDR program specifically authorizing both purchase and lease of development rights options.
 - Develop a preservation target set as a function of acreage and land quality.
 - Develop an application and screening process.
 - Develop a sample easement contract as exemplified by the Alamance County PDR contract. (http://www.alamance-nc.com/fileadmin/alamance/Commissioners/Ordinances/Farm_Preservation_Ordinance.pdf)
 - Create a valuation and parcel ranking procedure.
 - Offer priority ranking to parcels that leverage young/beginning farmer participation.
 - Offer priority ranking to parcels that meet county and municipal planning objectives.
 - Target priority agricultural areas as identified by the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
 - Explore local funding options, such as an examination of soil mitigation fees.
- Create flexible easement payment terms to meet landowners' needs.
 - Support lump-sum payments.
 - Implement Installment Agreements to encourage participation from tax-motivated landowners.
 - Develop a revolving loan fund to facilitate cash-motivated transactions and support young farmer access.
 - Prepare materials directed at landowners explaining agricultural conservation easements.
 - Explore contract management with existing, experienced contractors, such as a land trust or Soil and Water District.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

- 10) Enhance the Voluntary Agricultural District program to incentivize participation.** Rockingham County has taken the important first step of implementing a VAD as a countywide initiative. As noted earlier in the report, the VAD is a vital first step in protecting agriculture in a rapidly growing area, but it is no substitute for a viable agricultural industry. If strengthened, however, the VAD has the potential to be a powerful focal point of education for the real estate community, the general public, and local elected officials about the benefits and needs of agriculture in their communities.
- a. Goal:** To enhance participation in the VAD by increasing the benefits of participation. Adding an EVAD is intended to increase landowners' options, securing additional benefits in exchange for more dedication to a land preservation program.
 - b. Implementation Strategy:** Amend VAD ordinance to adopt the EVAD; take affirmative annual notification actions; provide incentives for participation in economic development/finance programs; create condemnation policy as it relates to VAD/EVAD; and apply right-to-farm protections to VAD/EVAD properties. Develop a countywide ordinance to protect agricultural water rights for qualifying district properties, based on agronomic and livestock requirements. May include provisions to allow for lateral connections to service livestock and crop needs. Some enhancements may require State authorization.
 - c. Funding Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment.
- 11) Create a county Right-to-Farm law.** As development sprawls from the county's municipal centers, farmers feel strongly that they need additional protection from possible nuisance suits. The current Right-to-Farm Law does not give adequate protection and does not apply equally to farm operations.
- a. Goal:** To develop a Rockingham County Right-to-Farm Law that provides additional protections to VAD properties.
 - b. Implementation Strategy:** Review similar laws in places such as Carroll County, Maryland (See Appendix E) and adopt protections, such as an annual notification of properties location within affected areas; an agricultural arbitration agreement to be signed at settlement when transferring real estate in a VAD notification area; requirement for a settlement document acknowledging the needs of agriculture in a rural setting; and establishment of a sound agricultural practices procedure. Legislative authorization may be required for establishment of a sound agricultural practices procedure.
 - c. Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

12) **Develop a regulatory action plan in cooperation with agricultural industry partners.** As regulations are adapted to meet new community conditions, the needs of agriculture are often not at the forefront. In Rockingham County, this has influenced agriculture's ability to effectively operate, particularly as it is affected by tax and transportation policy.

- a. **Goal:** To improve local- and State-level policy makers' understanding of agricultural issues. To seek immediate relief of issues related to tax policy, transportation, and land use.
- b. **Implementation Strategy:** Conduct annual survey of producers and agribusinesses to determine most critical issues to address in a given year. This process will allow the development of an annual or biannual work plan to address State- and County-level regulatory issues. Such a work plan should include regularly scheduled meetings and training sessions with elected and agency officials, as well as a biannual report on agricultural conditions. Initial action items can be found in the text box.
- c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment and a modest annual budget for surveying and meetings.

13) **Conduct outreach and education events on a periodic basis.** Many farmland preservation and protection tools are currently available to landowners in Rockingham County, but seem to be poorly understood.

- a. **Goal:** To enhance rural landowners' understanding of the programs and approaches available to them.
- b. **Implementation Strategy:** Develop brochures, mail inserts, and speaker's notes about existing and future land protection programs, as well as tax management and estate planning assistance. Integrate delivery of this message within community and industry meetings.
- c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment and a modest annual budget for printing and meetings.

Suggested Regulatory Action Items

- Develop a policy action program to improve agricultural economic viability and public health
 - Ensure continuation of PUV taxation
 - Develop additional PUV outreach materials.
 - Integrate PUV within Section 2 training programs.
 - Extend PUV rights to all properties with permanent working land easements. (N.C. General Statutes 105-277.2 through 105-277.7)
 - Explore amendments to EEP program to include agricultural soil (Prime and Productive) protection.
 - Explore amendments to state health code and local zoning ordinances to expand on-farm processing capacity (<http://www.state.me.us/agriculture/qar/laws-rules.html>).
- Review NCDOT transportation policy related to rural roads and the impact of new development on agriculture.
 - Address highway infrastructure development, road speed, volume, shoulder width, and tagging and overweight limits for agriculture and forestry uses.
 - Seek re-examination of road weight limits relative to agricultural vehicles.
- Conduct periodic regulatory compliance workshops to ensure that farmers have the most up-to-date understanding of DOT law, FDA regulations, EPA guidelines, etc.
- Seek changes to wildlife control regulations to allow antlerless harvest and collection on crop damage permits under the supervision of DENR.
- Seek improvements to trespass laws.
- Encourage County and State incentives to improve harvest of invasive woodland species, such as ailanthus, while encouraging better use of biomass for energy.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

14) Explore options for privately funded agricultural and environmental conservation programs.

As regulations such as “Cap and Trade” are promulgated to reduce air and water pollution, it is likely that a broader base of conservation funding opportunities will open up for communities and landowners. This recommendation encourages the County to participate in the regulatory process and maintain close relationships with power producers, such as Duke Energy, to be prepared to adapt to the changing regulatory structure.

- a. **Goal:** To place the County and local land trusts in a position that capitalizes on possible changes in regulatory structure relating to air and water pollution.
- b. **Implementation Strategy:** Explore possible land conservation program financing through developer agreements with power companies and others with air discharge permitting issues as a means to proactively address possible mitigation, banking, and offset requirements. Such an effort should explore means to integrate land based energy production such as biomass to fuel, biomass to energy, wind, and solar projects as a components of the project.
- c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require a modest staff commitment.

15) Develop a farmland exchange database. A common concern of farmers and landowners are the related issues of parcelization of land and difficulty/cost of access. It is recommended that a database of available land be developed and maintained by the VAD as a means to report cost and availability of properties.

- a. **Goal:** To improve returns to farmland rental, while providing greater access to land availability information.
- b. **Implementation Strategy:** Develop a land exchange program to include basic rental and availability information that may be linked to stewardship programs (e.g., <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/hunterAccess/hunterLandowner/>)
- c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment and a modest annual budget for software development.

16) Develop a farm transition program. The majority of farm owners in the region are over 55 years old. In many cases, the next generation is not planning to take over the farming business.

- a. **Goal:** To provide financing support (as detailed in Section 3) and to make available a greater level of transition support to new farmers, retiring farmers, non-farm landowners, and others with an interest in protecting their assets or preserving farmland for future generations.
- b. **Implementation Strategy:** Adopt programs that include mentoring, specialized skills training, estate planning, and farm management from land grant universities, American Farmland Trust, Farm Credit, and others.
- c. **Funding Considerations:** Program sponsorships should be sought for seminars and mentorship programs. Initial funding may be available through grants from NCADFPTF and the Golden LEAF Foundation.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

Land Use Controls and Conditions

At the county and municipal levels, planning and zoning are important farmland protection tools. When a local area strives to sustain its agricultural economy and protect farmland, these tools are often reflected in the planning and zoning process. The most commonly used tool for expressing the intent of a community to implement such actions is the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Rockingham County completed its plan, “A Land Use Plan for Managing Growth: Rockingham County,” in 2006.

This plan sets the general policy direction to be used by the County in developing new zoning code, amending subdivision regulations, and planning infrastructure. From a farmland protection standpoint, this plan highlights the County’s land use priorities through 2016. Elements of the plan affecting agriculture are highlighted below as components of the plan’s key growth management strategies. The general theme of these strategies is to encourage more intensive and appropriate growth where infrastructure is in place or planned, while protecting the valuable contributions of rural industries, such as agriculture and forestry, from the negative effects of uncontrolled development.

1. Maintain moderate growth along the County’s southern tier.
2. Establish and prioritize areas where water and other utilities should be upgraded and extended.
3. Determine appropriate methods to preserve agricultural lands while protecting private property rights.
4. Identify key growth corridors and interchanges where non-residential development should be prioritized and planned.
5. Strengthen municipal commercial centers to provide more in-county retail opportunities.
6. Promote growth in and around municipal centers and targeted growth areas.
7. Develop and refine detailed countywide design standards for non-residential development.
8. Develop residential design alternatives to limit suburban sprawl while allowing developer flexibility to meet market demands.
9. Encourage use of community design standards that utilize elements of “new urbanism” and “neo-traditional design.”
10. Establish access management standards to facilitate the safe flow of traffic and efficient use of transportation investments.
11. Incorporate land use policies that diversify the economy while strengthening and retooling the existing industrial base.
12. Provide a wide range of housing opportunities.
13. Examine the relationship between residential development and the long-term costs of servicing such development.

Many of the elements in the Land Use Plan are conceptually supportive of agriculture and can be used to support initiatives in the Farmland Protection Plan. These include maintaining a fiscal balance by protecting agricultural and forestry uses as net contributors to the tax base and attracting supportive industry clusters, such as tourism and food processing. Specific policy tools are included in the Plan and can be found on the County’s website at

[www.co.rockingham.nc.us/ Planning/landusedisc.htm](http://www.co.rockingham.nc.us/Planning/landusedisc.htm).

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

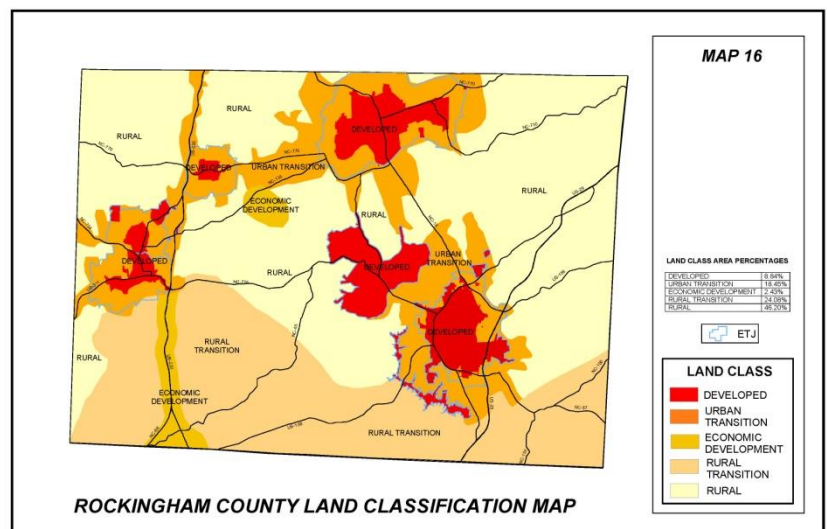
Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

One of the main issues facing the County and local farmers in dealing with Rockingham County's future development is that current trends represent a redistribution of housing throughout the County that is defined by slow or negative growth in municipal centers (.27 percent aggregate growth) and sprawling growth in outlying areas (1.09 percent aggregate growth). Such a development pattern can have a negative impact on County fiscal conditions as more expensive rural service demand increases while existing, urban oriented services go underutilized. Increased rural housing demand can also cause parcelization of farming operations, increase the potential for use conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors, and stretch infrastructure capacity, such as roads and schools. By example, this development pattern is reputed to cause transportation challenges in Rockingham County due to the rising number of egress/ingress points, road shoulders choked with mailboxes, and high volumes of traffic during commuting hours making roads impassable for slow moving farm equipment.

The impact of development has been felt most substantially in the southern region of Rockingham County. Huntsville and New Bethel represent almost 30 percent of new building permits between 2000 and 2005. However, the balance of the County is not immune to the effects of development pressure from the Piedmont Triad or even the Danville area. Outside of a few areas oriented toward major roadways, the small nature of development activities may make it difficult to successfully employ growth management techniques, such as transfer of development rights, cluster subdivision, or planned unit development.

The resulting land use pattern, if not managed, will increase the difficulty with which farm operations may conduct business as the current low density pattern tends to encourage more small lot subdivision on the road front leaving little future infill capacity.

To effectively employ the tools of the Rockingham County Land Use Plan, a modified version of the North Carolina Land Classification System was employed to direct growth in the County over the next 20 years. From an agricultural protection standpoint, this new land classification system is critical, as it defines those areas of the County that are targeted for some level of conservation protection over the next twenty years. These classifications are "Rural" and "Rural Transition" and largely correspond to those lands that are currently in agriculture or forestry activities.



Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

Applicable Tools and Programs

Land use controls have been developed in each and every county in North Carolina to respond to a particular set of local conditions that may or may not be related to agriculture. Most commonly, these controls manifest themselves in Land Use Plan language, adoption of zoning code, or the development of subdivision regulations that are intended to manage residential, commercial, or industrial uses of land. With the focus driven to these uses, agriculture is often omitted from specific inclusion in plans and codes as a land use in and of itself. This means that agriculture is often an ancillary use defined within a code that specifically addresses other land uses. Most commonly, and as is the case in Rockingham County, this “other” land use is residential. As may be well understood, it is often difficult to maintain a focus on agricultural needs when the underlying code/plan is addressing a use other than agriculture.

This section of the plan highlights some of the common land use control tools used to support agriculture with a specific, but brief, discussion of its use or applicability in Rockingham County. A more complete description of these issues can be found in Appendix D.

Table 3: Land Use Controls

<i>Protection Tool</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	<i>Applicability to Rockingham County</i>
Comprehensive Plan	Guiding vision of what a community wants to be in the future, and a strategy for achieving it.	An organized way to identify productive farmland, and to set growth and protection goals. Serves as basis for land use regulations.	Not legally binding. May be changed or ignored by officials as they rule on development proposals.	Rockingham County has recently prepared and adopted its 2006 “A Land Use Plan for Managing Growth: Rockingham County,” which incorporates agricultural protection language. It also employs Smart Growth principles by encouraging development where it is already concentrated.
Overlay Zones	Can be used to direct development away from prime farmland (or other resources, including gravel); generally used to trigger other performance standards, such as cluster zoning.	Overlay Zones can be highly targeted to specific areas or assets. Overlays can be used to protect other resources, such as forests and minerals. Overlays typically include performance standards to allow greater flexibility in land use than is usual.	Generally regulate how- not if- farmland is developed. Can reduce property owners’ equity, if improperly applied.	Overlay zones can be used in conjunction with other tools recommended in the Land Development Plan to encourage soil protection or higher density development. Overlay zones can also be used to maintain access to mineral and forestry resources and may be appropriate for consideration in protecting agricultural and forestry resources in areas subject to subdivision regulation.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

<i>Protection Tool</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	<i>Applicability to Rockingham County</i>
<i>Extra-Territorial Jurisdictions</i>	Under NCGS 160-A-360, the area beyond a municipality's corporate limits in which the municipality may enforce land use regulations including zoning, subdivision regulation, and building inspections. ETJs may extend up to three miles, based on jurisdictions size.	Allows a municipality to extend certain jurisdictional controls into areas that it intends to annex. This allows for better planned and coordinated growth.	Extension of land use controls through an ETJ may have unintended negative effects on agriculture, including restrictions on livestock practices, time of day operational controls, and an increase in property valuation.	Rockingham County does not currently review agricultural impacts as part of the ETJ approval process. Farmers fear that further expansions of ETJs may negatively impact vital farming operations as urban-oriented land use laws are applied to agricultural operations. ETJs may also effect enrollment in the VAD program.
<i>Mitigation Ordinances</i>	A "no net loss" approach to farmland protection. Land taken out of agricultural use and/or zoning must be replaced with either new land of equal size and productivity being brought into agricultural use or a fee paid by a developer to permanently protect acreage elsewhere.	<p>Maintains base of agricultural land.</p> <p>Provides funding for conservation programs.</p> <p>Protect soils of like kind and like quality.</p> <p>Protects economic viability of agriculture by preserving a critical mass of productive land.</p>	<p>Mitigation fees must match market realities for programs to be successful.</p> <p>Mitigation easements can allow the market to redirect growth patterns without normal public process.</p> <p>Farms and farmland covered by mitigation may not be like kind and quality.</p> <p>Preservation is not directed.</p>	Mitigation is currently employed for wetland loss mitigation in highway projects through the Environmental Enhancement Program (EEP) program, but is not utilized for farmland protection through wetland banking requirements. In fact, the EEP program may be contributing to farmland loss. State ordinances could easily be adapted to protect high quality soils.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

<i>Protection Tool</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	<i>Applicability to Rockingham County</i>
<i>Agricultural Zoning</i>	Typically low density zoning, such as one unit per 20 acres in a predominantly farming area.	Limits non-farm development in areas intended for agricultural use. Can protect large areas of farmland at low public cost. Agricultural zoning often allows all agricultural production and marketing activities as a matter of right.	Local government can rezone land. Landowners may complain about loss of “equity value” if land values have begun to escalate due to development pressure. May create a “Constitutional Taking” unless a system is in place to reward the landowner for the loss of development rights.	There is currently low interest among operating farms for the additional protections offered by large-lot zoning. Farmers are, however, interested in the additional protections afforded to production agriculture within an Agricultural Zoning category, such as Right-to-Farm protections.
<i>Cluster Subdivision / Zoning</i>	Cluster zoning ordinances allow or require houses to be grouped close together on small lots to protect open land. They increase density on part of a parcel while leaving the rest undeveloped.	Allows more compact land use while encouraging greater use of public infrastructure. Maintains open space with a focus on developing lower quality soils. Reduces road frontage development.	Does not change density. Does not protect highest quality land. Open areas must be maintained in perpetuity. Open space is not always appropriate for agricultural uses. Requires sufficient development pressure to warrant major development projects.	Cluster zoning is a keystone recommendation of the 2006 land development plan, but has not been fully implemented in part due to the low development rate and regional change in land economics. This tool, and its private and social benefits, is not fully understood by landowners and additional education relative to its use and application may be necessary.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

<i>Protection Tool</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Drawbacks</i>	<i>Applicability to Rockingham County</i>
<i>Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances (APFO)</i>	Limits development to areas with adequate public facilities that exist or will be provided concurrently with new development.	Ensures that services are adequate for new development and provides a basis for regulating the timing of development.	Requires clear level of service standards and up-to-date capital improvement program. Can create incentive for development in remote areas.	<p>The 2006 land use plan recommends the adoption of APFOs as a means to direct growth, particularly in pressured areas, such as southern Rockingham County. APFOs must be carefully planned to complement existing or planned infrastructure development.</p> <p>APFOs are allowed under the General Statute, but require specific regulatory authorization to be implemented. APFOs are most commonly associated with impact fees; therefore, their application is limited in North Carolina. Can be used to slow growth when applied to issuance of building permits, making them useful in TDR programs.</p>
<i>Public Service Delineation Areas</i>	Water and sewer policy that establishes an envelope beyond which water and sewer service is not to be provided except under very limited circumstances.	<p>Directs growth to areas where infrastructure exists or is planned.</p> <p>Allows for effective, long-term CIP planning.</p>	<p>Zoned capacity must match water and sewer capacity to fully utilize the asset.</p> <p>Water infrastructure for public safety uses outside of the service area must be provided.</p>	2006 land use plan identifies water and sewer provision as a primary tool for directing growth. However, no systematic plan for service provision or coordination of resources has been undertaken with farmland protection goals incorporated. Also, concerns over expansion of water and sewer lines without such a plan may encourage more sprawl in the Rural Transition area.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

Recommended Actions

This section of the Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan highlights the needs of local landowners and farm operators for access to improved land use controls that permit continued farm production, adhere to the community's development values, and are within the enforcement capacity of the County.

- 17) **Explore enhancements to zoning, and subdivision codes to increase agricultural protection within Subdivision Zoning Districts.** Rockingham County has laid the foundation for improvements to land use and transportation code in its 2006 land development plan.
 - a. **Goal:** To explore and enact changes to County code that are consistent with agricultural land preservation needs of farmers and the 2006 "A Land Use Plan for Managing Growth: Rockingham County."
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** The County and municipalities should seek supportive land use controls and incentive-based protocols to encourage economic and housing development in appropriate transportation corridors with existing water and sewer capacity. In-fill development, industrial redevelopment, and cluster subdivision should be encouraged. Exploration of enhanced buffer zones and setbacks in rural lot standards should be encouraged to reduce the impact of new development on farming practices. Improvements to transportation policy should include development of rural road standards and improvements to subdivision code (encouraging wider hard shoulders, turnouts, and ingress-egress lane standards).
 - c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment and a modest annual budget for research and code writing.
- 18) **Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating ETJ expansions.** Expansion of ETJs is a serious concern for farmers.
 - a. **Goal:** To limit the extent to which ETJ expansions can negatively impact agricultural operations in and around the County's municipalities.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Refer all ETJ expansion requests to the Agricultural Advisory Board for agricultural impact analysis. By policy, limit ETJ expansions in areas where there are active VAD properties or key agricultural infrastructure unless, by inter-municipal agreement, the extending jurisdiction agrees to permit continued operations under County ordinance. It is also recommended that further ETJ expansions be limited until the municipalities have adopted the County VAD program and provided a third-party audit of the impact of municipal regulations on agricultural operations. Additionally, no additional ETJ expansion is recommended outside of defined growth areas pursuant to the current Land Development Plan.
 - c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require limited staff commitment.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

- 19) **Create an agriculturally friendly cluster subdivision.** Clustering of development is envisioned as one of the primary growth controls in the Land Development Plan, but its implementation at the landowner level is low. Improving landowners' understanding and promoting incentives may help invigorate this land management tool.
- a. **Goal:** To improve the use of cluster development through enhancements to land use regulations.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Create an incentive-laden cluster subdivision ordinance that encourages compact development away from prime agricultural soils. Incentives may include reduced or abated water and sewer hook-ups, smaller minimum lot sizes (where public or private sewer is provided), or formulaic density increases for using "best practice" conservation subdivision tools. Development of a basic package of conservation subdivision code may be enhanced following the sample codes provided in Appendix F.
 - c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment to review precedent and develop new subdivision code language.
- 20) **Seek Commissioners' support to improve integration of agriculture and forestry in the secondary educational system.** Bridging the gap between farming and the general population can be achieved by introducing high school students to agriculture, forestry, and related industries through both the curriculum and through employment counseling.
- a. **Goal:** To improve understanding of agriculture and forestry in the general population and encourage youth to think about employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in these fields.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Seek a letter of support from the County Commissioners to the School Board to encourage integration of agriculture in the curriculum. Work with Ag in the Classroom and similar programs to offer training and course development support to administrators and teachers. Seminars should be developed to train administrators and teachers on employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and forestry.
 - c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require limited staff commitment to write grants for courses development and to conduct seminars for teachers and guidance counselors.
- 21) **Provide support to the Upper Piedmont Agricultural Research Station.** The Upper Piedmont Agricultural Research Station is an integral part of the County's agricultural economy and supports the County's two largest industry sectors. Farmers would like to see greater integration between farms and the research center as a means to enhance their income opportunities; however, the center is encountering almost annual cuts to budget and staff, making this a challenge.
- a. **Goal:** To increase integration between local farms and the research center.
 - b. **Implementation Strategy:** Seek a letter of support from the County Commissioners to North Carolina State University to continue operations of the research center. Work with the VAD and Center Management to develop a work plan and funding sources for more locally committed projects, such as support for the youth entrepreneur program (recommended previously) and training and research programs, as need is identified.
 - c. **Funding Considerations:** Initial funding through USDA Rural Development, Golden LEAF Foundation, or the Economic Development Administration should be sought.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 5: Implementing the Farmland Protection Plan

Implementing the Plan

The intent of the Rockingham County Agricultural Advisory Board in developing this Plan was to create a living document to be used by both the agricultural industry and local government to implement economic development programming, improve public policy, and create a generally supportive environment for agriculture in Rockingham County. Implementing the recommendations included in this Plan and future plan updates will be at the discretion of the parties involved in its creation, and determined by factors as varied as the County's annual farmland preservation work plan, funds availability, and priority of issues facing both the industry and the County.

Table 4: Implementing Farmland Protection Plan Recommendations

Recommendation	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Agricultural Development Recommendations			
Support development of agricultural and experiential tourism opportunities	√		
Develop industry-specific short courses to support workforce development		√	
Encourage the development of a food and agribusiness cluster in Route 220 Corridor		√	
Expand business incubation to include "concept" incubation activities	√		
Create a public outreach and marketing campaign	√		
Develop a youth entrepreneurship academy		√	
Explore development of an Agricultural Center to coordinate training, education, mentorship, outreach, and community relations		√	
Support development of a Rockingham County Livestock Quality Initiative	√		
Agricultural Protection Recommendations			
Create a county farmland preservation program		√	
Enhance the Voluntary Agricultural District program to incentivize participation	√		
Create a county Right-to-Farm law	√		
Develop a regulatory action plan in cooperation with agricultural industry partners		√	
Conduct outreach and education events on a periodic basis	√		
Explore options for privately funded agricultural and environmental conservation programs			√
Develop a farmland exchange database	√		
Develop a farm transition program	√		
Land Use Control and Policy Recommendations			
Explore enhancements to transportation, zoning, and subdivision codes			√
Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating ETJ expansions	√		
Create an agriculturally friendly cluster subdivision		√	
Seek Commissioners' support to improve integration of agriculture and forestry in the secondary educational system	√		
Provide support to the Agricultural Research Station	√		

Short-term projects are those that should begin within the next 18 months; medium-term projects should begin within 19 to 36 months; and long-term projects are those that should take shape after 36 months. This chart does not make any statement about the expected useful life of the programs or their priority.

While all elements of the Rockingham County are considered important to the continuation of agriculture in the county, not all share the same level of importance at this time. Setting priorities for implementation is necessary for many reasons, including relevance to need, program cost, County capacity, and funding opportunity. For this reason, prioritization should occur at the time annual work plans are developed.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 5: Implementing the Farmland Protection Plan

Creating and Updating Annual Work Plans

It will be the responsibility of the Agricultural Advisory Board to work with partner agencies to develop an annual work plan. This work plan should focus on identifying key implementation targets for an annual calendar or fiscal cycle and setting specific actions, deadlines, and responsibilities.

Once approved by the Rockingham County Commissioners, the first year action plan will include:

1. Month One
 - a. Present the plan to the Farm Bureau and interested agricultural constituencies.
 - b. Prioritize elements of plan for short-term implementation.
 - c. Identify stakeholder groups and representatives in certain implementation efforts (defined in 1.b.).
 - d. Post plan on County's web-site.
2. Months Two to Four
 - a. Complete VAD work plan for first 18 months of plan implementation.
 - b. Identify lead agencies.
 - c. Develop program area budgets.
 - d. Prepare fundraising and grant application plans.
3. Months Five to Seven
 - a. Begin implementing prioritized elements of Farmland Protection Plan.
 - b. Continue fundraising and grant writing efforts.
 - c. Conduct outreach with elected officials.
4. Months Eight to Twelve
 - a. Develop public outreach and education materials (e.g. brochures, packets) called for in the plan.
 - b. Conduct farmer meetings to introduce PDR funding opportunities.
 - c. Review and update work plan.

Developing a process to accommodate change while keeping the Plan relevant will be critical to the success of farmland protection efforts in Rockingham County over time. Future work plans will include specific actions to be taken, a budget note, staffing requirements, and other information, as needed.

Integrating the Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan with Other Plans

The Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan is intended to provide policy and programmatic guidance to local, county, and state agencies and to elected officials. It should thereby be integrated with or within other plans and policy guidance documents (as appropriate) and include the Rockingham County Land Use Plan and its subsequent updates.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 5: Implementing the Farmland Protection Plan

Developing Long-Term Support and Funding

Success in protecting agricultural resources requires long-term support and funding at the County and State levels. Given the large fiscal requirements for programs like purchase of development rights and agricultural development oriented loan funds, the County will likely require outside funding support to implement most of the initiatives outlined. Typically this funding would be supported through State and federal grants and match programs; however, poor fiscal conditions make this unlikely in the near term. Rockingham County must rely on non-traditional sources of funding and partnerships to implement its programmatic intent.

Table 5: Funding Opportunities and Sources						
	USDA – FRPP	USDA – RD	USDA – FMPP	Golden LEAF Found.	ADFP Trust Fund	Other *
Agricultural Development Recommendations						
Support development of agricultural and experiential tourism opportunities		√		√	√	√
Develop industry-specific short courses to support workforce development		√				√
Encourage the development of a food and agribusiness cluster in Route 220 Corridor		√		√	√	√
Expand business incubation to include “concept” incubation activities						√
Create a public outreach and marketing campaign				√	√	√
Develop a youth entrepreneurship academy				√	√	√
Explore development of an Agricultural Center to coordinate training, education, mentorship, outreach, and community relations			√			√
Support development of a Rockingham Co. Livestock Quality Initiative						√
Agricultural Protection Recommendations						
Create a county farmland preservation program	√				√	√
Enhance the Voluntary Agricultural District program						√
Create a county Right-to-Farm law					√	√
Develop a regulatory action plan in cooperation with agricultural industry partners						√
Conduct outreach and education events on a periodic basis		√			√	√
Explore options for privately funded agricultural and environmental conservation programs			√		√	√
Develop a farmland exchange database					√	
Develop a farm transition program		√			√	√
Land Use Control and Policy Recommendations						
Explore enhancements to transportation, zoning, and subdivision codes						√
Advocate for a County process for evaluating ETJ expansions						√
Create an agriculturally friendly cluster subdivision						√
Seek Commissioners’ support to improve integration of agriculture and forestry in the secondary educational system	√			√	√	√
Provide support to the Agricultural Research Station		√		√		√
* Other includes privately-raised funds, County agency funding, State agency funding, appropriation items, earmarks, and other grant programs.						

Funding and support must be sought on a project-by-project basis and will require significant investment in grant writing and relationship building.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

Section 5: Implementing the Farmland Protection Plan

Enhancing Partnerships

If it is to positively influence the future of the agricultural industry, Rockingham County will require support and cooperation from its farmers, agribusinesses, neighboring jurisdictions, and many others. Such support will come in many forms, ranging from funding to technical services. The Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan provides a framework for developing these needed partnerships.

Rockingham County Farmland Protection Plan

This Page Intentionally Blank