ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

Background

The Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan has two purposes: 1) to analyze and understand the foundations of the agricultural economy in Edgecombe 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 encourage long-term policy formation in support of agriculture. In order to get there, a specific short-term framework and transition plan will help guide local programs on agricultural economic development and land use initiatives. The result of the process is a series of seventeen recommendations for action relative to agricultural business and land use conditions.

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 Edgecombe County’s working lands in a manner consistent with community character, the County’s development needs, and industry growth requirements.

According to the Edgecombe County Economic Development Department, agriculture is the County’s largest economic contributor and it is also the County’s largest working landscape use at 103,000 acres. The 300 farm enterprises operating in the County produced $146 million in farm gate sales in 2007. Of this, $77 million, or 53 percent, was generated from livestock sales demonstrating a significant balance in crop and livestock activities in the County.

This balance in crop and livestock operations is seen as a critical element in monitoring the health of Edgecombe’s agricultural sector, particularly as many operations have transitioned from quota driven production systems for tobacco and peanuts in the last ten years and now operate under new market rules. Since these changes, the tobacco and peanut sectors have seen volatility that was uncharacteristic prior to these changes in market structure.

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Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Agricultural 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. Given the industry’s high multiplier effects\(^1\), Edgecombe 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 will 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. The following recommendations begin to address these needs.

1.) **Create an agricultural entrepreneurship academy.** Improved training and access to business support networks by creating an agricultural entrepreneurship academy in cooperation with regional partners is necessary to ensure a future for the industry.

2.) **Develop industry specific short courses to support workforce development.** When the current workforce retires it will be necessary to replace it with well qualified and well trained employees that possess skills for the future. It is recommended that industry specific short course be developed to accomplish this at all levels of the workforce.

3.) **Support creation of alternative financing vehicles to enhance agriculture.** Improved access to risk capital will provide for needed capital expansion for projects in agriculture in the region.

4.) **Advocate for Improved Agricultural Education in Secondary Schools.** Part of the farmer and farm labor shortage is created by a lack of preparatory classes and basic agricultural education. Reinstating programs such as FFA in high schools and developing targeted vocational and professional training is therefore critical.

5.) **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 whether it encourages a local government to buy development rights, reduce property taxes or craft farm-friendly local laws.

6.) **Enhance farm transition programming.** The majority of farm owners in the region are over 55 years old and in many cases the next generation is not planning to take over the farming business.

7.) **Improve marketing of industrial infrastructure and real estate to attract agribusiness cluster.** Agriculture requires healthy input and output industries to survive. Attracting such industrial support requires concerted efforts to market the local business opportunity, develop real estate options, train and make available a workforce, and install necessary infrastructure.

8.) **Develop a regulatory action plan.** Since many economic viability concerns stemmed directly from regulatory issues, the creation of a regulatory action plan is critical to the long-term success of agriculture.

\(^1\) For every two jobs created in agriculture another job is created in the general economy according to ACDS, LLC analysis.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Agricultural Protection Needs

Despite negative population growth, the citizens of Edgecombe County are being affected, to varying degrees, 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 given its highly dispersed effects. These developments and their associated infrastructure are incompatible with agriculture; they leave those pursuing agriculture in a vulnerable position from a zoning, land acquisition, and production point of view by limiting access to fertile lands, making equipment transportation difficult, and creating an environment of conflict through trespass and nuisance claims.

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

9.) **Create a county farmland preservation program.** Demand for a suite of land preservation programs is high in Edgecombe 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.) **Create an agricultural soil mitigation policy to apply in agricultural areas of the County.** In order to protect the County’s highly productive agricultural soils from permanent loss due to development or other non-agricultural development purposes, it may be necessary to develop a “no net loss” approach to soil protection in areas where farming remains viable.

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 give adequate protection and does not apply equally to farm operations. This recommendation support seeking State authorization to create a County Right to Farm Law.

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 in the forefront of policy development. In Edgecombe County, this has influenced agriculture’s ability to effectively operate, particularly as it is affected by transportation policy.

13.) **Conduct outreach and education events on a periodic basis.** Many farmland preservation and protection tools are currently available to land owners in Edgecombe County, but seem to be poorly understood. This recommendation is intended to help bridge this barrier.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Land Use Controls Needs

One of the main issues facing the County and local farmers in dealing with Edgecombe’s future development is that current trends represent a low level redistribution of housing throughout the County rather than growth oriented development. The impact is that municipal centers are abandoned in favor of small lot, road frontage type subdivisions in rural areas. This development pattern causes traffic problems due to the number of egress/ingress points, chokes road shoulders with mailbox placement, and creates a climate of potential conflict between agricultural and residential uses. Road frontage development most often occurs on agricultural parcels on lots of 30,000 square feet or larger as required by zoning. This lot size is designed to support well and septic on site, but may create unnecessarily large lots given the presence of countywide water.

This condition has created widespread road front development with little infill capacity to create density in growth nodes. The pattern and scale of development make it difficult for land owners to plan cluster developments and the market, which focuses on affordable housing, encourages developers to take the lowest engineering cost development approach. This means limiting early development expenses and avoiding private road development; creating common water and sewer services; and avoiding the costs of managing community open space. All of which explains why cluster subdivision and transfer of development rights programs have little impact in Edgecombe.

If development pressures rise and create the economic imperative to use cluster development and other such conservation tools, the County has positioned itself to implement such programs. The following recommendations are intended to support this transition in land use code.

14.) Develop an agricultural overlay zone to cover critical agricultural resource areas outside of growth areas. Development of a floating zone is a means to create a regulatory structure to encourage agricultural development and protection without changing the underlying zoning.

15.) Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) expansions. Expansion of ETJ’s is a serious concern for farmers, particularly in western Edgecombe County.

16.) 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 understanding and incentives may help invigorate this land management tool.

17.) Conduct landowner seminars on conservation development options. Limited land development following a traditional pattern of carving out road frontage to sell off in small numbers is common in Edgecombe. However, little is understood about how conservation designs can be used to accomplish the same effect with lower impact on farm operations.
Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Implementation of the Plan

The intent of the Edgecombe 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 Edgecombe 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.

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<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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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 Edgecombe must rely on non-traditional sources of funding and partnerships to implement its programmatic intent.
# Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan

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Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe County

Purpose of the Plan

The Edgecombe Agricultural Development Plan has two purposes: 1) to analyze and understand the foundations of the agricultural economy in Edgecombe 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 encourage long-term policy formation in support of agriculture. In order to get there, a specific short-term framework and transition plan will help guide local programs on agricultural economic development and land use initiatives. The result of the process is a series of seventeen 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 (NCADFPFT).

Integration with Other Plans and Policies

The Agricultural Development Plan is not intended to supplant or replace any other planning initiatives that have taken place in Edgecombe County. Instead, the Plan is intended to support and integrate with existing plans such as the 2007 Edgecombe County Land Development Plan. The five goals of the Land Development Plan are enumerated below:

1. Provide areas for growth and development while protecting rural character.
2. Encourage economic development to diversify industrial base and provide employment opportunity.
3. Protect Edgecombe’s high quality of life.
4. Preserve open space for working land, recreation, and environmental conservation activities.
5. Develop effective and efficient transportation corridors.

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 Edgecombe County’s working lands in a manner consistent with community character, the County’s development needs, and industry growth requirements.
Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe County

Overview of Agricultural Resources

According to the Edgecombe County Economic Development Department, agriculture is the County’s largest economic contributor and it is also the County’s largest working landscape use at 103,000 acres. The 300 farm enterprises operating in the County produced $146 million in farm gate sales in 2007. Of this, $77 million, or 53 percent, was generated from livestock sales demonstrating a significant balance between crop and livestock activities in the County.

This balance in crop and livestock operations is seen as a critical element in monitoring the health of Edgecombe’s agricultural sector, particularly as many operations have transitioned from quota driven production systems for tobacco and peanuts in the last ten years and now operate under new market rules. Since these changes, these sectors have seen significant volatility that was uncharacteristic prior to changes in the marketing system.

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 such as barns and irrigation.

A general picture of the agricultural economy, including the effects of the quota buyouts, is evidenced in Table 1 below. Additional information can be found in Appendix A, “Agricultural Trends Profile for Edgecombe County, NC.”

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Much like agriculture, the input and output industries surrounding agriculture have maintained a presence in Edgecombe 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, the attraction of food manufacturing and distribution is a priority for the region.
Overview of Agricultural Resource (Continued)

One of the leading drivers of the agricultural industry’s success is the large concentration of high quality agricultural soils in Edgecombe. Prime Soils, which are the most productive agricultural soil types, account for 46 percent of the County’s land area and are highlighted in the accompanying soils map, as included in the 2007 Land Development Plan. 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.
Protection of Edgecombe’s agricultural assets has become the primary focus of the newly created Edgecombe Agricultural Advisory Board which administers the Edgecombe Voluntary Agricultural Districts program. This program began in July 2008 with the adoption of a Voluntary Agricultural District ordinance which includes both a standard Voluntary Agricultural District program as well as an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Program. Since its inception, the Edgecombe County Voluntary Agricultural District Program has enrolled 10,913.54 acres within its five agricultural regions.
Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe County

Characterization 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 interviews with farmers and agribusinesses. Results of the agricultural resources review are summarized below using a strategic planning known as SWOT analysis – **Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats** – which 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 Edgecombe 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 Edgecombe?
2. What unique local conditions support the agricultural industry?
3. What do Edgecombe farmers do well?
4. What do Edgecombe farmers do poorly?
5. What can be improved in Edgecombe’s agricultural community?
6. What are key regional/industrial trends?
7. What are the options and obstacles facing Edgecombe farmers?
8. How does agriculture fit within the regional context?

For the Edgecombe Agricultural Development Plan, the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats were assessed for the agricultural industry overall to include production agriculture as well as 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 in the identification of the key issues facing an industry. These issues are then incorporated in the design of programmatic and policy responses in Section 2 through 4.
Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe County

Strengths

Overall, the strength of Edgecombe County agriculture is driven by physical, human, demographic, cultural, and economic resources unique to the County and eastern North Carolina. These resources are summarized below.

Physical Environment: Edgecombe County is typical of many eastern North Carolina Counties in that its soils and topography make it highly suited for both agricultural and forestry activities. Prime Soils account for 46 percent of the County’s land area which gives producers a unique ability to support many different types of agricultural production. The County also has abundant water resources to support irrigation activities. This combination of physical assets helps to maintain Edgecombe County as one of the top producing agricultural counties in the State.

Economic Strength: Edgecombe County’s agricultural strength relies heavily on the diversity of its industry and the health of its key industry players. Currently, the production mix of vegetables, tobacco, poultry, cattle, and field crops has helped the County maintain a higher than average net return to the farm throughout commodity pricing cycles. It also helps to keep the agriculture and agriculturally related industries the predominant economic engine in the County (nearly 30% of County tax base). A strong production cluster also supports a strong, though declining, base of input and output industries that support local and regional farm operations.

Public Sector Support: Edgecombe County has a supportive public sector that recognizes the importance of agriculture to the County. Uncharacteristic to many North Carolina jurisdictions, recognition of the industry flows through to economic development staff which can translate to involvement in agricultural development and finance programs.

Agricultural Region: Eastern North Carolina maintains some of the strongest agricultural industries and support infrastructure in the Mid-Atlantic. This base is highly diversified and scale efficient.

Location: Edgecombe County is well served by major transportation corridors and is within a one-day drive of major east coast markets and Midwestern markets.

Low Development Pressure: While regional land pressure is growing and impacting Edgecombe’s neighboring jurisdictions, the sprawling effects of Rocky Mount and Greenville are only marginally felt in the County as reflected by low building permit rates and negative population growth.

Diversified Production Base: Edgecombe’s agricultural base has maintained an historical balance between livestock and field crop operations. This mix provides an economy wide risk diversification measure and adds to the overall stability of the market. However, sector distribution has been changing to favor livestock and poultry production in large part due to the structural changes in federal programs for tobacco, cotton, and peanuts over the last decade. A revival in crop production may follow the expansion of vegetable production in the County.

Stable Crop Land Base: Edgecombe is experiencing only modest decreases in crop land base, due in part to development or land going into recreational uses. This is counter to the trend in North Carolina.
Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan

Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe County

Weaknesses

As with any industry, region, or product, Edgecombe County agriculture has weak elements that must be addressed while planning for the industry’s economic future. Ironically, some of Edgecombe’s most significant weaknesses count among its strengths as well.

Land Fragmentation – The high level of parcelization in parts of the County make it generally difficult for agricultural operations to expand to adjacent or nearby parcels that are 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 transportation code which affects the ability of farmers to safely move equipment.

High Tax Burden – Farmers are generally concerned that the property tax assessments in the County jeopardize their ability to access land. This is particularly true for rented lands that may not be in the hands of farmers and are not enrolled to receive Present Use Value taxation.

Next Generation – Edgecombe may have a significant issue regarding farm transition. Land values, estate planning issues, and the general health of the agricultural economy are all reasons cited for the concern that a next generation of farmers may be difficult to find.

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 success factor in moving forward, but that private and public training infrastructure has been slow to adapt to this need.

Risk Capital / Development Funding - As the level of consolidation, entrepreneurship and innovation rises in Edgecombe County, access to risk capital (equity and equity/debt hybrids) is limiting local development options.

Land Competition - The County is fortunate to have a high quality land base and expanding agricultural operations. However, this is causing competition for land base. In some areas, the competition for the resource is between agricultural and non-agricultural uses. In other areas, this competition is between competing agricultural uses.

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.
Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe 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, a rapidly growing trend during the last decade, has also created successively larger, underserved niche markets. This opportunity is perhaps best recognized in food processing where consolidation has lead to homogeneity in product offerings. This homogeneity creates locally and regionally significant pockets of underserved consumers and opportunities for aggressive marketers of food products.

Product Development/R&D: Changes in consumer purchasing power and food buying habits, opportunities in agricultural biotechnology, industry consolidation, and regional demographics yield an expanded level of marketing and product development opportunities by which farmers can capture a larger share of the value-added mark-up.

Labor Force Development: Edgecombe County does not exist in a labor vacuum. The regional agricultural industry is suffering from the same labor issues 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 lift the entire industry and give the region and the County a competitive advantage versus other states and regions.

Finance: The need for risk capital and R&D support has been identified as a key internal weakness of the County. However, addressing this problem on a regional basis offers a great opportunity for industry enhancement that cannot be achieved at the County level.

Regional Land Use: Regional land use patterns may allow Edgecombe the opportunity to plan and finance agricultural support and land preservation programs before land use pressure puts strain on the industry. As development expands from the Raleigh-Durham and Greenville market areas, Edgecombe may face a rapid increase in development, making it difficult to react. The key is to take advantage of the trend before it becomes a problem.

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 maintained through continual development and invigoration of leadership skills and access.

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.
Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe 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 market 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 to this conflict that include neighbor infighting, nuisance suits, and crop damage.

The second threat from the patchwork of development that is common in the region is due to 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 western Edgecombe where pressure from Nash County is already limiting the efficiency of farming.

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, the industry 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 at which these investments are made.
Section 1: Agricultural Development in Edgecombe County

Threats (Continued)

This is especially true for the agribusiness sector which, outside of integrator systems, is making fewer local investments.

**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 which is necessary to support 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 Wake and Nash. Edgecombe itself feels the pressure of farm dislocation, as farms are squeezed out of other areas and relocate to Edgecombe for its good soils and market access. In many cases, these farmers are willing, or able, to pay more for land than are local farmers, putting upward pressure on land values.

**Labor Availability** - Labor is a fundamental production input for most regional agricultural industry sectors, such as 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 with some farmers advertising outside of the region to find qualified labor. As the labor pool gets tighter, it will become more important for farmers to have access to adequate training opportunities and retention strategies.

**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 Edgecombe, 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. 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 2 to 3 fiscal cycles. In this environment, new initiatives must demonstrate a clear linkage to overarching economic development goals such as increasing tax base or employment in order to be given serious consideration.

**Drain of Management Skills** – Given the better economic returns in other industries, many farmers in the region fear that there may be a drain of the best skilled managers and operators. Increasing the professionalism of operators and increasing the bottom line returns of agriculture are seen as the answer to this threat.
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. Given the industry’s high multiplier effects, Edgecombe 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 will 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 can be found in the bullets below:

- Development pressure, land fragmentation and competition for land with non-operating uses puts 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 which will begin with educating and training agricultural entrepreneurs as well as 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 will need policy change to fully address.
- 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 is an immediate need to fill this gap as is increased legislative action.
- Marketing infrastructure needs to be improved which includes a combination of an economic development attraction effort as well as on-site development, modernization, and scale-up.
- The high tax burden places direct conversion pressure on farmland, particularly in poor performing economic cycles which may contribute to farmland loss. Furthermore, the Present Use Value tax is poorly understood by many non-farm land owners.
- Competition for high productivity soils is high among farmers keeping pressure on rental rates. This makes it difficult for young farmers to get a start.
- Regulatory structures, particularly in transportation and development policy, need to improve to be more farm friendly.

With that in mind, none of the potential 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 employ a combination of these tools in a timely way as well as a vigorous regulatory and agricultural economic development programs. These topics will be discussed in Sections 3 and 4 of this report.
Applicable Tools and Programs

Local communities often benefit by providing structured economic development support 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 Edgecombe County is critical to support continued growth in the County’s number one industry sector.

The County is well situated to leverage growth given its strong agricultural assets, natural resource base, and committed corps of producers. In addition, the County has proximity to a large population base both in North Carolina and along the I-95 corridor. 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 Edgecombe 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. Depending on the messages and the audiences, these programs can utilize a wide variety of media and carry a diversity of messages. Despite this, all strategic marketing plans in economic development 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 by the Carolina Gateways Partnership, which does not specifically address the attraction of agribusiness or food cluster businesses.
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. Good economic development planning makes sure that the current and future needs of industry are accounted for as communities plan infrastructure. This becomes doubly important when a community is engaged in a Business Retention Expansion and Attraction (BREA) effort, or business cluster development, activity that requires the development or enhancement of specific infrastructure such as redundant broadband access.

Infrastructure development generally applies to upstream and downstream agribusinesses and includes such examples as Sandpoint, Idaho expanding 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.

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 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 Edgecombe County, it does offer a wide range of existing facilities as well as Greenfield sites, particularly along the Route 64 corridor and in the vicinity of Tarboro. Several certified sites are also available.

Regulatory and Policy Guidance
As the regulatory environment at the local, state, and federal level becomes more complex, compliance becomes more costly across all sectors. Many communities have developed responses to this issue through their economic development offices as a means to streamline processes and improve efficiency in both the development process as well as on-going corporate operations. Tools such as one-stop licensing, regulatory intermediaries and specialized training of enforcement officers have proven both inexpensive and effective.

Some communities, such as Saint Mary’s County Maryland, utilize economic development staff to act as regulatory intermediary 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 the County.
Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Applicable Tools and Programs (Continued)

Business Cluster Development
The United States has seen a trend toward concentrated clustering of industries during the last several decades led 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, many of which are highlighted in this section, 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 that significant community resources be speculatively dedicated to targeted assets in-place as a precursor to industry development. 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.

Agriculture is a business, especially as it relates to upstream and downstream industries and marketing, which is prone to clustering due to efficiencies of scale and the industry’s propensity to spin-off new ventures. For example, Lancaster County, 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. Because of this, communities often seek to address work force development from a global, economy-wide, or firm level. At the economy 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 Edgecombe, 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 Edgecombe Community College. The College also offers small business development and entrepreneurship courses and business assistance.
Applicable Tools and Programs (Continued)

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. Nationally, the U.S. Small Business Administration leads efforts to support small business development through its lending programs as well as 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 Edgecombe 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).

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.
Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

Applicable Tools and Programs (Continued)

**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 Edgecombe.

The following section recommends means to integrate elements of the above into an effective agricultural development strategy.
Section 2: Using Agriculture as an Economic Development Tool

The best regulatory and legislative encouragement will fail to support agriculture without first supporting market viability. Edgecombe County is ideally positioned to create strong market opportunities utilizing its agricultural resources. Its resources are in viable proximity to a large population and strong food markets, it has abundant natural assets and an existing core of committed farm leadership on which to build the following recommendations.

Recommended Actions

1.) **Create an agricultural entrepreneurship academy.** Improved training and access to business support networks by creating an agricultural entrepreneurship academy in cooperation with regional partners.
   a. **Goal:** Improve survival rate of minority, start-up, and transitioning farms by providing structured training and support. Provide a system to continually update the business and financial management skills that are crucial to the long-term success of the region’s farms.
   b. **Implementation Strategy:** The Agricultural Advisory board should seek partnerships with local colleges, land grant universities and professional societies to offer, or develop, certified courses. An initial partnership with Farm Credit should be sought to leverage training opportunities with Dr. David Cole. Expansion should include involvement of a regional Angel Capital Network to enable farm operations access to additional sources of investment capital and improve financial literacy and discipline in the industry.
   c. **Funding Considerations:** Initial funding through USDA Rural Development, Golden LEAF Foundation, or the Economic Development Administration should be sought to create the program. On-going funding should be sought through corporate sponsorships and course revenue.

2.) **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 inevitable. 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:** 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 Edgecombe Community College to identify and/or develop needed curriculum. Curriculum targeting management should include the following training: FDA compliance, EPA compliance, Computer 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.
   c. **Funding Considerations:** Programs such as this generally require operational support for curriculum development and for initial operations while they reach operational self-sufficiency. Sources such as USDA’s Rural Development office, the US Department of Labor, NC Department of Commerce, and similar organizations.
Recommended Actions (Continued)

3.) **Support creation of alternative financing vehicles to enhance agriculture.** Improved access to capital will provide for needed capital investment in agriculture in the region.
   
   a. **Goal:** Develop debt and equity tools to broaden access to capital including a regional bridge loan program like the Carroll County Critical Farms Fund that can bridge financing for acquisition of critical farms, PDR settlements, conventional debt, and lenders of last resort. Additional programming may include credit enhancements such as loan guarantees and linked deposits. In addition, creating a link, such as an agricultural “Angel” network, that bridges the gap between the region’s high wealth individuals and farmers/agribusinesses will improve access to much needed risk capital.
   
   b. **Implementation Strategy:** A regional partnership effort is needed to create a Critical Farms Fund and a more effective Agricultural Angel Capital Network to enable farm operations access to additional sources of investment capital. Funds may be used to target special needs groups such as minority farmers, expanding farms, and farms adjusting to changes in tobacco buyout payments.
   
   c. **Funding Considerations:** Establishing a “Critical Farm” loan program should target an initial capital level of $2 million to $8 million. Fundraising through the leveraging of private sources is possible and grant funds to support these activities are available through the NCADFPTF, Golden LEAF Foundation, USDA Rural Development, Department of Commerce, and others.

4.) **Advocate for improved agricultural education in secondary schools.** Part of the farmer and farm labor shortage is created by a shortage of preparatory classes and basic agricultural education. New farm labor and farm owner training needs to be reinforced through programs like FFA as well as curricula designed specifically to prepare future agriculturalists.
   
   a. **Goal:** Reintroduce FFA and general agricultural curriculum to the secondary school system and increase basic preparedness of the workforce to engage on-farm jobs.
   
   b. **Implementation Strategy:** Seek County Commissioner support to add specific vocational and life skills training to the school system that meets the needs of the local agricultural base. Also, support FFA programs at County high schools as well as training the school systems’ guidance counselors on the opportunities available to students in modern agriculture.
   
   c. **Funding Considerations:** Additional funding will be required to support expansion to the school system’s curriculum and should be discussed with the school board prior to advancing this recommendation. Some grant resources may be available to start programs, but are unlikely to support on-going operations.
Recommended Actions (Continued)

5.) **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 whether it encourages a local government to buy development rights, reduce property taxes, or craft farm-friendly local laws.
   
a. **Goal:** Initiate a campaign to formally bridge information gaps between farmers and the general community. 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 used to enhance regional marketing opportunities and 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, NC 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.

6.) **Enhance farm transition programming.** The majority of farm owners in the region are over 55 years old and in many cases the next generation is not planning to take over the farming business.

a. **Goal:** In addition to providing financing support as detailed in Section 3, a greater level of transition support should be made available 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:** Borrow programs from land grant universities, American Farmland Trust, Farm Credit, and others to develop a regional program to include mentoring, specialized skills training, estate planning, and farm management. Special emphasis on limited resource and minority farmers may be necessary and may require adjustment to existing programs to cover elder law issues.

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.
Recommended Actions (Continued)

7.) **Improve marketing of industrial infrastructure and real estate to attract agribusiness cluster.**
Agriculture requires healthy input and output industries to survive. Attracting such industrial support requires concerted efforts to market the local business opportunity, develop real estate options, train and make available a workforce, and install necessary infrastructure. Given the prior industrial base, Edgecombe has many of the necessary industrial and infrastructure assets in place, particularly in the Route 64 corridor. What it lacks is a clear plan to market these assets.

   a. **Goal:** Make Edgecombe County a known destination for locating forest product and agriculturally related businesses such as food manufacturing, milling, distribution, finished product assembly, and others by working within existing economic development support structures. Outcome should be measured by established job growth and firm attraction targets by NAICS code.

   b. **Implementation Strategy:** In order to properly implement this recommendation, the Agricultural Advisory Board should work with the Carolina Gateway partnership to create a targeted marketing strategy for forest product and agricultural service businesses. At a minimum, the Plan should develop a targeted marketing plan focusing on strategic advantages of Edgecombe County to include the existing core of transportation and logistics businesses; top agricultural production sectors; industrial infrastructure; policy and environmental assets; availability of a qualified workforce; and the supportive public sector. The Plan should also assess existing incentives, economic development programs, and real-estate suitability for sectors outlined for recruitment and development. Identify key marketing partners and conduct outreach with generators of agribusiness deal flow partners. These will include site location consultants and real estate brokers; business park developers; NC Department of Commerce; NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Carolina Gateways Partnership; trade associations; and agricultural industry associations. The plan process should include marketing collateral and disseminate information through direct mail, industry ambassador programs, brokers tours, etc.

   c. **Funding Considerations:** Targeted marketing plans such as that described above should be allocated sufficient resources to be professionally completed (approximately: $25,000 to $35,000) and managed on an annual basis (approximately: $10,000.) Grant funds may be available through the NCADFPFTF or USDA Rural Development.

8.) **Develop a regulatory action plan.** Since many economic viability concerns stemmed directly from regulatory issues, the creation of a regulatory action plan is critical to the long-term success of agriculture.

   a. **Goal:** Improve understanding of agricultural issues by local and state level policy makers. Seek immediate relief of policy issues related to point-source pesticide regulation (Clean Water Act), tax policy, and transportation.

   b. **Implementation Strategy:** Conduct an annual survey of producers and agribusinesses to determine critical issues. This will inform an annual or biannual work plan to address State and County level regulatory issues. The work plan may include regular meetings and training sessions with elected and agency officials as well as a biannual report on agricultural conditions.

   c. **Funding Considerations:** A limited budget for survey development and analysis is required as well as a small budget for tours and educational events.
Agricultural Land Protection Needs

Despite negative population growth, the citizens of Edgecombe County are being affected, to varying degrees, 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 given its highly dispersed effects. These developments and their associated infrastructure are incompatible with agriculture; they leave those pursuing agriculture in a vulnerable position from a zoning, land acquisition, and production point of view by limiting access to fertile lands, making equipment transportation difficult, and creating an environment of conflict through trespass and nuisance claims.

The State of North Carolina, Edgecombe County, and other governmental and non-governmental structures have created programs to provide assistance to land owners in dealing with the above issues. These programs and regulatory structures come in many forms but 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 (VADs) form partnerships between farmers, county commissioners, and land use planners in order 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.

Half of North Carolina’s 100 counties (including Edgecombe County) have passed ordinances establishing VADs since 1985, and in doing so, 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;

- The program informs non-farming neighbors and potential land purchasers that the participating farm may emit noise, dust, and smells (this feature may help avoid conflicts between neighbors and potential nuisance claims);
- The program gives the farming community a better voice in Edgecombe County policy affecting farmland;
- Farmer participation in the program is voluntary and the farmer may terminate his/her participation at any time;
- The program requires the Edgecombe County Commissioners to use farmland “as a last resort” if they are attempting to condemn county lands;
- The program would provide green space and natural resources as the County’s population and development expands;
- The program maintains opportunities to produce locally grown food and fiber.
Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Agricultural Land Protection Needs (Continued)

An agricultural district is initiated when interested landowners submit a proposal to the Edgecombe County Agricultural Advisory Board. The district shall contain a minimum of 5 acres for horticultural use, 10 acres for agricultural use, and 20 acres for forestry use. This includes leased and/or rented land.

Authorized in 2005, Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD) created a new category that offers landowners an additional tier of benefits, if they are willing to waive their right to withdraw from the VAD program at any time. Edgecombe adopted the EVAD at the same time as the VAD program with the following benefits:

- Enrolled farms can receive up to 25 percent of revenue from the sale of other non-farm products, while still retaining their bona fide farming exemption from county zoning.
- Enrolled farms would have lower cost-share requirements for NC Agricultural Conservation Cost Share funds.
- Counties and cities may hold all utility assessments in abeyance for any enrolled farms that choose not to connect to the utility lines.
- State and local agencies are encouraged to tie additional future benefits and funding priority to participants in the EVAD, given their commitment to maintain their farms.
- Municipalities are explicitly authorized to adopt their own VAD ordinances, including the EVAD option.
- Cities are authorized to amend their zoning ordinances to provide greater flexibility and stability to farming operations.

In keeping with the intent of the above, Edgecombe County is working with agricultural landowners and operators to determine if the protections and land preservation techniques currently provided through the various Agricultural Districts Law are sufficient to meet their needs. These needs have been assessed during this process through focus groups and interviews conducted in the winter of 2010. The land preservation issues highlighted during these fact gathering initiatives are outlined as follows:

- The VAD and EVAD are useful tools, but are not universally known or understood through the agricultural community.
- Few farmers understand the current land conservation programs. Farmers frequently confuse habitat oriented conservation easements with working lands easements.
- Farmers are generally interested in agricultural conservation programs, but generally prefer term easements to permanent easements.
- Purchase of development right is considered a valuable tool for the County with the recognition that it only applies to areas with high development pressure.
- Easement payment options should be available to fit the tax and financial planning needs of land owners.
- The difficulty in financing intergenerational farm transition is a threat to the continuity of farming operations.
Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Agricultural Land Protection Needs (Continued)

- Current farmland protection program design does not easily support farm transition options, particularly for intergenerational transfer. Simple changes to approach and design in a PDR program can increase the effectiveness of PDR 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.
- The high tax burden places direct conversion pressure on farmland, particularly in poor performing economic cycles which may contribute to farmland loss.
- Recreational land uses are becoming a competitor for land access.
- Low density road frontage development has multiple negative impacts on agriculture to include impeding equipment transportation due to mailbox placement and low overhead wires, conflict over agricultural practices, and trespass.
- 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 ETJ’s is considered a serious threat to farming in areas around municipalities and impacts on-farm investment.
- Poor development planning generally has a negative long-term effect on farming.

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 Edgecombe 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.

With that in mind, none of the potential 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 employ a combination of these tools in a timely way as well as vigorous regulatory and agricultural economic development programs.
Applicable Tools and Programs

Given the diversity of types of agriculture and the various governmental structures found in North Carolina, protection of agriculture and farmland takes many forms. Each form taken should be ideally suited to the local conditions that they must address. Most often, preservation efforts take 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 (PDR) 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 C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protection Tool</th>
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<th>Drawbacks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agricultural Tax Incentives</strong></td>
<td>Taxation of farmland based on its agricultural use, rather than its development value.</td>
<td>Modest incentive to keep land in commercial farming.</td>
<td>Benefits land speculators waiting to develop land.</td>
<td>Tax benefits through Present-Use Valuation are available to farmers, forest landowners, and horticultural operations in Edgecombe County, and must be applied for. There are specific requirements for ownership, size, income, and management. 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agricultural Districts</strong></td>
<td>Designation of an area of viable agricultural land. Initiated and self-selected by landowners, adopted by county. Eligibility, minimum acreage is determined by each county. Land can go in and out at any time.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Area defined by willing landowners and has no real longevity as a protection tool.</td>
<td>Edgecombe County has enrolled in the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Program. Landowners receive a set of benefits in exchange for a restriction on developing their land for 10 years. 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. Edgecombe participates in the EVAD.</td>
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## Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

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<tr>
<td><strong>Right to Farm Laws</strong></td>
<td>In NC for land in ag district:</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>These protections are afforded to all farms in the State under North Carolina State Law. Other protections include the notice of proximity provisions for farmers in a VAD program and the pre-litigation mediation of farm nuisance disputes. Edgecombe County, with state authorization, may adopt a more stringent Right to Farm Ordinance to protect against specious nuisance claims. (See Appendix D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agricultural Conservation Easements</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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 purchase of development rights easement (PDR) programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mitigation Techniques</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Ties the impact of development directly to the solution. Uses private sector funding to achieve program goals.</td>
<td>County does not have direct control over site selection which can cause scattered protection problems. Rules can be difficult to develop and enforce.</td>
<td>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 effects of field application of non-hazardous commercial wastes on Prime Soils. This technique may also be integrated within the regulatory structure.</td>
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## Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

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<td><strong>Transfer of Development Rights</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Developers compensate farmland owners, Creates permanent protection of farmland and shifts some costs to private sector.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>With rising development pressure, there is justification to explore the creation of a county-wide TDR. As well, there are natural sending and receiving areas. Currently no real means to assign TDR without specific State authorization. Furthermore, with Rocky Mount driving development pressure, may require inter-municipal agreements to be effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lease of Development Rights (LDR)</strong></td>
<td>Leasing of Development Rights (LDR) describe a voluntary mechanism to temporarily suspend the development of agricultural real estate for a definitive time frame in exchange for some consideration.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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 easement value.</td>
<td>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 County’s Comprehensive 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Land Trusts</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>The Tar River Land Conservancy is currently managing several easements in Edgecombe County and is the only active Land Trust in Edgecombe. Edgecombe County may choose to leverage a county-based land preservation program by partnering with TRLC or Soil and Water to manage and monitor easements until the County has been able to fully fund its own program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applicable Tools and Programs

Edgecombe County faces three special challenges in protecting its land base: 1) development pressure consists of highly dispersed small unit developments; 2) the County has exceptionally limited resources; and 3) the County’s population base is contracting and aging more quickly than other areas. 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. With this in mind, a multi-tiered preservation program approach makes sense for the County using the set of common tools as examined below.
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 Edgecombe 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 Edgecombe 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.

   a. **Goal:** Improve land owner options for financing intergenerational transfers and enhancing the ability for young and beginning farmers to acquire land.

   b. **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 as highlighted in the text box below.

   c. **Funding Considerations:** Initial activities will require a limited budget, but significant staff time. It is therefore recommended that farmland preservation coordinator position be created and funded by the County. Further, 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.

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**Suggested Farmland Protection Action Items**

- Create a Farmland Preservation Coordinator position in NC Cooperative Extension or the Edgecombe 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. (See Appendix F for a discussion of PDR program options and Appendix G for a discussion of Lease of Development Rights.)
  - 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](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 land owners needs. (See Appendix H for additional information.)
  - 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.
Section 3: Integrating Agricultural Land Preservation Tools into the Conservation Tool Kit

Recommended Actions

10.) Create an agricultural soil mitigation policy to apply in agricultural areas of the County. In order to protect the County’s highly productive agricultural soils from permanent loss due to development or other non-agricultural development purposes, it may be necessary to develop a “no net loss” approach to soil protection in areas where farming remains viable.

a. Goal: The initial goal of this recommendation is to develop a farmland protection tool that will protect highly productive agricultural soils from degradation and loss due to the land application of petroleum distillates and similar industrial wastes. This recommendation may help create the conceptual framework for other rights trading programs such as a county TDR program.

b. Implementation Strategy: Identify areas of the County in which to protect Prime Soils and Soils of Statewide Importance, such as zoning category AR-30. Within such an area, 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 via a fee paid to a fund that will permanently protect acreage elsewhere using a sliding scale that provides disincentives for permanently removing soils from agricultural use. This helps to create a privately-funded market for the protection of high-quality agricultural soils using a soil definition that meets the unique nature of agriculture in the County.

c. Funding Considerations: Program sponsorships should be sought to fund seminars and mentorship programs. Initial funding may be available through grants from NCADFPTF and the Golden LEAF Foundation. On-going funding will be provided through a fee in lieu option.

11.) Create a county Right to Farm law. Farmers feel strongly that they need additional protection from possible nuisance suits as development sprawls from the County’s municipal centers. The current Right to Farm law does not give adequate protection and does not apply equally to farm operations.

a. Goal: Develop an Edgecombe County Right to Farm law that provides additional protections to Voluntary Agricultural District properties.

b. Implementation Strategy: Review similar laws in-place such as Carroll County Maryland’s (See Appendix D) and adopt protections such as an annual notification of properties location within affected areas; creation of an agricultural arbitration agreement to be signed at settlement when transferring real estate in a VAD notification area; and the establishment of a sound agricultural practices procedure. Additional State authorization may be required.

c. Financial Considerations: Implementation will require significant staff commitment.
Recommended Actions

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 Edgecombe County, this has influenced agriculture’s ability to effectively operate, particularly as it is affected by tax and transportation policy.

   a. **Goal:** Improve understanding of agricultural issues by local and state level policy makers. 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 land owners in Edgecombe County, but seem to be poorly understood.

   a. **Goal:** Expand the understanding of rural landowners of the programs and approaches available to them.

   b. **Implementation Strategy:** Develop brochures, mail inserts, and speaker’s notes to educate rural landowners 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.
Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

Land Use Controls and Conditions

At the County and municipal level, planning and zoning are important farmland protection tools. When a local area strives to sustain its agricultural economy and protect farmland, these objectives are often reflected in the planning and zoning process. The most commonly used tool for highlighting the intent of a community to implement such actions is the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Edgecombe County recently completed its plan, which is entitled the “Edgecombe County Comprehensive Land Development Plan, 2007 - 2017.”

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 for the coming ten years, including key environmental protection items. Elements of the Plan are highlighted below as components of the Plan’s 5 key goals.

1. Provide areas for growth and development while protecting rural character.
   a. Encourage more intensive growth around municipalities and growth areas. (See map on next page.)
   b. Direct growth to crossroad communities and areas with existing infrastructure.
   c. Discourage road frontage development outside of growth areas and on secondary roads.
   d. Develop an agricultural land preservation program to protect rural areas.
   e. Encourage better neighborhood design and use of cluster subdivision.
   f. Review the process for granting ETJ expansions based on a municipality’s ability to service the ETJ.

2. Encourage economic development to diversify industrial base and provide employment opportunity.
   a. Encourage economic development along transportation corridors and within business parks.
   b. Encourage resource based tourism.
   c. Expand internet access.

3. Protect Edgecombe’s high quality of life.
   a. Encourage compact development.
   b. Designate areas for protection using tools like VAD.
   c. Encourage development away from sensitive environmental areas.
   d. Cooperate with municipalities in developing grants to encourage greater density development, infill, and affordable housing options.
   e. Collaborate with the school system to improve primary and secondary education.
   f. Expand public water and sewer throughout the County to encourage smaller lot sizes.

4. Preserve open space for working land, recreation, and environmental conservation activities.
   a. Develop a countywide recreation system to encourage watershed and environmental protection.

5. Develop effective and efficient transportation corridors.
   a. Develop a transportation plan that provides for wider setbacks for future road widening, encourages shared driveways, and minimizes traffic conflicts.
   b. Incorporate the transportation plan with other plans to enhance coordination.

Many of the elements in the Land Development Plan are conceptually supportive of agriculture and can be used to support initiatives in this Plan. However, issues, such as encouraging development away from environmentally sensitive areas, must be monitored to ensure that their implementation does not negatively influence agriculture.
Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

Land Use Controls and Conditions

One of the main issues facing the County and local farmers in dealing with Edgecombe’s future development is that current trends represent a low level redistribution of housing throughout the County rather than growth oriented development. The impact is that municipal centers are abandoned in favor of small lot, road frontage type subdivisions in rural areas. As noted in the prior section of this report, this development pattern causes traffic problems due to the number of egress/ingress points, chokes road shoulders with mailbox placement, and creates a climate of potential conflict between agricultural and residential uses. Road frontage development most often occurs on agricultural parcels and in land units big enough to support well and septic which generally consumes more land than is required under the 30,000 square foot lot requirement.

This condition has created wide spread road front development with little infill capacity to create density in growth nodes. The pattern and scale of development make it difficult for land owners to plan cluster developments and the market, which focuses on affordable housing, encourages developers to take the lowest engineering cost development approach. This means limiting early development expenses and avoiding private road development, community sewer service, and avoiding the costs of managing community open space. All of which explains why cluster subdivision and transfer of development rights programs have little impact in Edgecombe.

If development pressures rise and create the economic imperative to use cluster development and other such conservation tools, the County has positioned itself to implement such programs. The growth area map from the 2007 Land Development Plan depicts how this development is envisioned to occur in areas where transportation corridors, water/sewer infrastructure, and demand will be focused, leaving large blocks of agricultural land available for agricultural industry purposes. In fact, this map sets up de facto sending and receiving areas for a potential TDR program, if demand is strong enough.
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 Comprehensive 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 Edgecombe, this 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.

The purpose of this section of the Plan is to highlight some of the common land use control tools used to support agriculture with a specific, but brief, discussion of its use or applicability in Edgecombe County. A more complete description of these issues can be found in Appendix C.

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<td><strong>Comprehensive Plan</strong></td>
<td>Guiding vision of what a community wants to be in the future, and a strategy for achieving it.</td>
<td>An organized way to identify productive farmland, and to set growth and protection goals. Serves as basis for land use regulations.</td>
<td>Not legally binding. May be changed or ignored by officials as they rule on development proposals.</td>
<td>Edgecombe County has recently prepared and adopted its 2007 Land Development Plan which incorporates agricultural protection language. It also employs Smart Growth principles by encouraging development where it is already concentrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overlay/ Floating Zones</strong></td>
<td>Some communities use agricultural overlay district to direct development away from prime farmland (or other resources, including gravel). Are generally used to trigger other performance standards, such as cluster zoning.</td>
<td>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 typical.</td>
<td>Generally regulate how- not if- farmland is developed. Can reduce property owners’ equity, if applied in a means that restricts land use rights or serves as a de facto down zoning (See Agricultural Protective Zoning on page 42.)</td>
<td>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 could also be used to maintain access to mineral and forestry resources. Legislative action may be necessary to adopt overlay zones.</td>
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### Applicable Tools and Programs – (Continued)

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<td><strong>Extra-Territorial Jurisdictions (ETJ)</strong></td>
<td>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. ETJ’s may extend up to three miles based on jurisdictions size.</td>
<td>Allows a municipality to extend certain jurisdictional controls into areas that it intends to annex. This allows for better planned and coordinated growth.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Edgecombe County does not currently review agricultural impacts as part of the ETJ approval process. Farmers fear that further expansions of ETJ’s may negatively impact vital farming operations as urban oriented land use laws are applied to agricultural operations. ETJ’s may also effect enrollment in the VAD program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mitigation Ordinances</strong></td>
<td>Mitigation techniques applied to high quality farmland refer to 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 fee paid by a developer to permanently protect acreage elsewhere.</td>
<td>Maintains base of agricultural land. Provides funding for conservation programs. Protect soils of like kind and like quality. Protects economic viability of agriculture by preserving a critical mass of productive land.</td>
<td>Mitigation fees must match market realities for programs to be successful. Mitigation easements can allow the market to redirect growth patterns without normal public process. Farms and farmland covered by mitigation may not be like kind and quality. Preservation is not directed.</td>
<td>Mitigation is currently employed for wetland loss mitigation in highway projects through the EEP (Environmental Enhancement Program) 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.</td>
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### Applicable Tools and Programs – (Continued)

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<td><strong>Agricultural Zoning</strong></td>
<td>Typically low density zoning, such as one unit per 20 acres in a predominantly farming area.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster Subdivision/Zoning</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Cluster zoning is a keystone recommendation of the 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

Recommended Actions

This section of the Edgecombe Agricultural Development 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.

14.) ** Develop an agricultural overlay zone to cover critical agricultural resource areas outside of growth areas. ** Development of a floating zone is a means to create a regulatory structure to encourage agricultural development and protection without changing the underlying zoning.
   
   a. **Goal:** Extend additional protections to agricultural operations such as agricultural soil mitigation, protection from ETJ expansion, and Right to Farm protections while preserving underlying densities.
   
   b. **Implementation Strategy:** Based on current conditions in Edgecombe County, overlay zones could be most effectively employed to protect high value agricultural soils non-compatible land uses such as land application of petroleum residues. Within targeted overlay areas, this activity would be subject to soil mitigation that would require the permanent protection of high quality soils subject to land applications. Mitigation would occur either on site, or off-site, and would require a permanent agricultural conservation easement. It is recommended that an agricultural disclosure statement be required for all land transactions within the overlay area. The intent of the disclosure is to ensure that new residents understand that they are locating within an active agricultural production area which includes both industrial and commercial uses. Additional incentives to encourage use of clustered subdivision are recommended to include assistance with water/sewer hook-ups as well as density enhancements. This would provide an additional level of Right to Farm protection. Zones would roughly coincide with AR-30 areas outside of proposed growth areas as depicted on the map on page 39.
   
   c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment and a modest annual budget for printing and meetings.

15.) **Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating ETJ expansions.** Expansion of ETJ’s is a serious concern for farmers, particularly in western Edgecombe County.
   
   a. **Goal:** 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 an agricultural impact analysis, and 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.
Section 4: Articulating the Needs of Agriculture in Land Use Controls

Recommended Actions

16.) **Create an agriculturally friendly cluster subdivision.** Clustering of development is envisioned as one of the primary growth management tools in the Land Development Plan, but its implementation at the landowner level is low. Improving understanding and incentives for use may help invigorate this land management tool.
   a. **Goal:** 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 E.
   c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require significant staff commitment to review precedent and develop new subdivision code language.

17.) **Conduct landowner seminars on conservation development options.** Limited land development following a traditional pattern of carving out road frontage to sell off in small numbers is common in Edgecombe. However little is understood about how conservation designs can be used to accomplish the same effect with lower impact on farm operations.
   a. **Goal:** Improve the use of conservation design and cluster development by educating landowners and engineers on the implementation of these practices in small unit subdivisions such as those proposed by architect Randall Arendt.
   b. **Implementation Strategy:** Work with the University of North Carolina Department for City and Regional Planning and the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association to develop short courses for land owners, engineers, and planners on implementing rural scale conservation developments. The focus of the courses should be maintaining the economic integrity of the development, rather than strictly focusing on the conservation element, to ensure that landowners view the training as a true option to the current development system.
   c. **Financial Considerations:** Implementation will require limited staff commitment to write grants for courses development and conducting initial seminars.
Section 5: Implementing the Development Plan

Implementing the Plan

The intent of the Edgecombe 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 Edgecombe 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Implementing Agricultural Development Plan Recommendations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Agricultural Economic Development Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create an agricultural entrepreneurship academy</td>
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<td>Develop industry specific short courses to support workforce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support creation of alternative financing vehicles to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocate for improved agricultural education in secondary</td>
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<td>Create a public outreach and marketing campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance farm transition programming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve marketing of industrial infrastructure and real</td>
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<tr>
<td>agribusiness cluster</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a regulatory action plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agricultural Protection Programs</td>
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<td>Create a county farmland preservation program</td>
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<td>Develop a regulatory action plan in cooperation with</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct outreach and education events on a periodic basis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land Use Regulatory Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an agricultural overlay zone to cover critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agricultural resource areas outside of growth areas</td>
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<td>Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating</td>
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<td>Conduct landowner seminars on conservation development</td>
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</table>

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

While all elements of the Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan 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.
Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan

Section 5: Implementing the Development 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 be enacted following Commissioner approval of the plan and will focus on identifying the key implementation targets for an annual calendar or fiscal cycle and include specific actions, deadlines, and responsibilities.

The first year action plan, as proposed by this plan includes:

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 who will serve as representatives in certain implementation efforts defined in 1.b.
   d. Post plan on County web-site.

2. Months Two to Four
   a. Complete VAD work plan for first eighteen 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
   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 under 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 Edgecombe 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 Edgecombe Agricultural Development Plan with Other Plans

The Edgecombe County Agricultural Development Plan is intended to provide policy and programmatic guidance to local, county, and state agencies and elected officials. It should therefore be integrated with or within other plans and policy guidance documents as appropriate to include the Edgecombe County Comprehensive Land Use Plan and its subsequent updates.
Section 5: Implementing the Development 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. The result is that Edgecombe must rely on non-traditional sources of funding and partnerships to implement its programmatic intent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Funding Opportunities and Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USDA – FRPP</td>
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</table>

| **Agricultural Protection Programs** |
| Create a county farmland preservation program | √ | | ∨ | ∨ |
| Create an agricultural soil mitigation policy to apply in agricultural areas of the County | | | | |
| 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 | | | | |

| **Land Use Regulatory Structure** |
| Develop an agricultural overlay zone to cover critical agricultural resource areas outside of growth areas | | | | ∨ |
| Advocate for development of a County process for evaluating ETJ expansions | | | | ∨ |
| Create an agriculturally friendly cluster subdivision | | | ∨ | |
| Conduct landowner seminars on conservation development options | ∨ | ∨ | ∨ | ∨ |

* 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.
Enhancing Partnerships

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