

Alexander County Voluntary Farmland Preservation Program



Tonya S. Mitchell
Alexander Soil & Water Conservation District

Development of VFPP in Alexander County

- Started with SWCD board & staff
- Spoke with counties with established programs
- Looked at all ordinances passed across NC
 - variables included: no. board members/tenure, specified board members & min. acreage required
- **COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES is KEY**
 - Local government agencies, agricultural agencies and farmers

Development of VFPP in Alexander County

- Meeting
 - Cooperative Extension, FSA, FB (regional local), NRCS, Forest Service and County Planning Board
- Farm Bureau (legal aspects)
- Getting the word out to the farmers
 - Individuals
 - Cattlemen's, Poultry Growers Association
 - Display at County Fair
- Official meeting with Farmers

Development of VFPP in Alexander County

- County Manager
 - Power Point Presentation
 - Co. Planning Dept, Water Task Force and Register of Deeds
- County Commissioner work session
 - draft before meeting
- Key Feature of program in Alexander
 - Real Estate Purchaser required to sign form

Purposed Voluntary Farmland Preservation Program



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Overview

- Why do we need to preserve farmland?
- History of Voluntary Farmland Preservation Program
- Enabling Legislation Overview
- Purposed VFP Program ordinance in Alexander County
- Benefits of the program for farm
- Conclusion

Why do we need to preserve farmland?

■ NC Farmland loss

- Statistics 1982-1992 (Source: Sorenson et. al. 1997 "Farming on the Edge" American Farmland Trust.)
 - Lost **935,000** acres farmland/forestland to development
 - Conversion rate 93,500 acres per year
 - 295,000 acres prime farmland
 - Lost over 20,000 farmers
 - Ranked #2 nationally
- Statistics 1992-1997
 - Lost **791,000** acres farmland/forestland to development
 - Conversion rate = 156,000 acres per year
 - Lost 2400 farmers

Why do we need to preserve farmland ?

■ Why should we care about this farm loss?

- Agriculture is NC #1 economic engine
 - 7.4 billion dollars last year (NCDA)
- Agriculture in Alexander County
 - 168,538 acres in county - 59,826 acres in farms = 35%
 - 2000 75 million - Ranked 35 in State (100 counties)
 - Commodity ranking in State

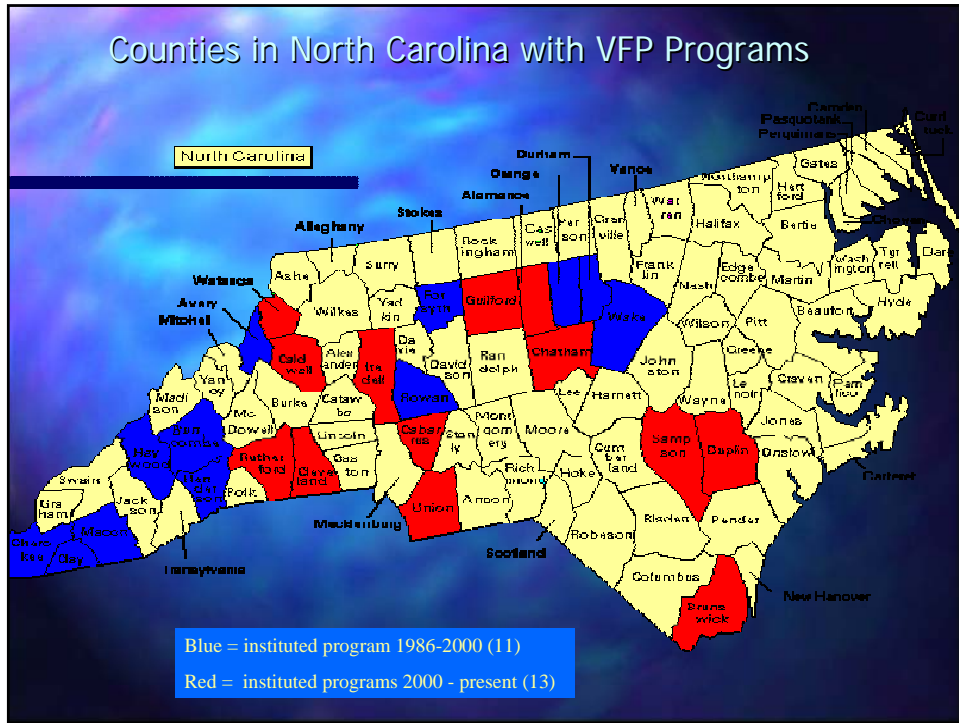
1 Nectarine	5 Milk Cows	14 Beef Cattle
4 Apples	8 Corn Silage	18 Barley
4 Chickens	11 Total Cattle	19 Hay

Why do we need to preserve farmland ?

- Cost to Provide Services
 - Farmland cost the county government less than does residential development as development requires more expense in public service, such as roads, schools, water, sewer, fire and police protection
- Maintain green space & rural beauty of our county
 - Urban Growth
 - Each year approximately 100,000 people move to NC
- Environmental Benefits
 - Wildlife, water quality, recharge of water supplies...etc

History of the Voluntary Farmland Preservation Program

- 1986 NC General Assembly passed the Farmland Preservation Enabling Act
 - NC General Statutes, chapter 106, Article 6
- Has remained obscure until recent years
- Currently 24 counties in NC have adopted the program and several others considering



- ### Enabling Legislation Overview
- Enabling act provides county authority to establish Farmland Preservation Program
 - Enabling act involves 3 components:
 - Establishment of Voluntary Agricultural Districts
 - Agricultural Advisory Board
 - Farmland Preservation Trust Fund

Purposed VFP Program Ordinance in Alexander County

- How we developed this ordinance
 - Model ordinance
 - Worked in cooperation with other agencies
 - Extension, NRCS, FSA, Farm Bureau (local & State) & Alexander Co. Planning Department Staff
 - Meeting with farmers
 - Meeting with Planning Board
 - Register of Deeds

Purposed VFP Program Ordinance in Alexander County

- Purpose: Page 1 Article III:

The purpose of this program ordinance is to promote health safety, rural agriculture values and general welfare of the county and more specifically, increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life; encourage the economic and financial health of farming; increase protection from undesirable development; and increase the protection of farms from nuisance suits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

Purposed VFP Program Ordinance in Alexander County

- Development of Voluntary Agricultural Districts
 - Special areas where agriculture is encouraged
 - Farmland must meet requirements to be part of district
 - Participating in or eligible to participate in farm present use value taxation = Bona fide farm
 - Certified by NRCS as being a farm which at least 2/3's:
 - contains high quality soils that are favorable for crops common to county
 - managed in accordance with accepted NRCS erosion control practices
 - Meet minimum acreage requirement = 10 acres

Purposed VFP Program Ordinance in Alexander County

- Voluntary Agricultural Districts (cont.)
 - Farmer will sign a **VOLUNTARY** conservation agreement for 10 years
 - Once farm revokes agreement will no longer be eligible
 - Signs on property indicating Agriculture District
 - Maps delineating the Agricultural Districts to be placed in the Register of Deeds, Tax Office, Planning and Inspections and the agricultural agencies
 - Notices to be posted in these offices stating.....

Notice to Real Estate Purchasers in Alexander County Agricultural Districts

Alexander County has established agricultural districts to protect and preserve agricultural lands and activities. These districts have been developed and mapped to inform all purchasers of real property that certain agricultural activities, including but not limited to pesticide spraying, manure spreading, machinery and truck operations, livestock operations, sawing, hunting, and similar activities may take place in these districts any time during day or night. Maps and or information on the location and establishment of these districts can be obtained from the Soil & Water Conservation Office, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Cooperative Extension, Farm Service agency, Tax Office, Register of Deeds and Planning and Inspections.

Purposed VFP Program Ordinance in Alexander County

- Voluntary Agricultural Districts (cont.)
 - Real Estate purchasers purchasing a tract of land within 1/2 mile of a District shall sign a form stating:
 - Read the notice
 - Reviewed Ag. District map
 - Noted the proximity of the Ag. Districts to their property

Purposed VFP Program Ordinance in Alexander County

- Agricultural Advisory Board
 - County residents appointed by Commissioners from names submitted by agricultural agencies
 - 7 Members, 5 of 7 actively engaged in farming
 - 6th member : special interest, experience or education in agriculture, education In ag., and/or rural preservation
 - Each established district represented on board
 - Duties:
 - Oversee the program
 - Review applications for District
 - Available to advise commissioners on projects, programs or issues affecting the agriculture

Purposed Program Ordinance in Alexander County

- Benefits to Farmer
 - Some protection for potential nuisance lawsuits
 - Recognition through posted signs
 - Waiver of water and sewer assessment
 - Public hearing required for purposed condemnations
 - Eligibility for Farmland Preservation Funds

Conclusion

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