



Yadkin County Farmland Preservation Plan

2015

Preserving Our Family Farms and Agricultural Heritage

Acknowledgements

Funding for the Yadkin County Farmland Preservation Plan was provided by the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.



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CHAPTER 1

Executive Summary

A. Introduction

Agriculture defines life in Yadkin County for many of its citizens. The county is fortunate to have abundant agricultural resources, including rich farmland soils, plentiful streams, the Yadkin River, and a generations-old farming heritage of caring for the land. Agriculture is a vital part of Yadkin County's local economy, generating more than \$111 million in cash receipts in 2012¹.

Yet many farmers are struggling to make a profit, trying to adapt to changing markets, and looking for ways to add revenue to their operations. Many are planning for retirement, often without a younger generation to take over farming operations. At the same time, Yadkin County is growing and will most likely continue to grow as it is at the edge of a major urban area in North Carolina.

North Carolina farmers have traditionally produced commodity crops. With improvements in transportation technology, the dismantling of trade barriers and the resulting increase in global competition, North Carolina farmers have increasingly struggled to compete. The keys to ensuring a healthy future for agriculture in Yadkin County is to help farmers diversify operations and look for opportunities for value-added products and niche markets, including local food markets, and attracting a new generation of farmers.

The purpose of this **Yadkin County Farmland Preservation Plan** is to help citizens understand the importance of agriculture in the county and to address the challenges facing the agricultural community. This plan can help leaders make informed decisions by providing the tools necessary to ensure and enhance the long-term viability of agriculture in the county. **To be eligible for preferential funding from the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, counties must have adopted farmland preservation plans.**

Productive farmland is a finite and irreplaceable natural resource and can be threatened if care is not taken as the population grows and spreads increasingly into rural areas. Yadkin County is acting now to proactively protect its valuable agricultural resources.

B. Authority for County Action

In 1986, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the North Carolina Farmland Preservation Enabling Act.² The stated purpose of this Act is “to authorize counties to undertake a series of programs to encourage the preservation of farmland as defined herein.”³ In addition to enabling counties to create Voluntary Agricultural District ordinances, the Act also created the North Carolina Farmland Preservation Fund and enabled counties to develop purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE) programs. By later amendment, the General Assembly created a matching mechanism for distribution of Farmland Preservation Trust Fund monies, with preference to counties adopting a countywide farmland preservation plan.⁴

The Yadkin County Farmland Preservation Plan includes the following elements:⁵

- Overview of agriculture in the county, including economic impact and other benefits;
- Challenges to agriculture;
- Description of existing agricultural production;
- Prioritization of agricultural lands important for economic vitality and open space protection;
- Opportunities for enhancing local agricultural economy;
- Action steps to ensure a viable agricultural economy;
- Implementation plan with action steps and stakeholders responsible; and
- Agricultural protection tools, partners and potential funding sources.

C. Why Protect Farmland in Yadkin County

Farms and farmland provide more for their communities than food or commodities. All Yadkin County citizens will benefit from a comprehensive farmland protection plan for agricultural land and a healthy agricultural economy in many ways:

- 1) **Rural character and heritage** – Agriculture is a distinctive part of Yadkin County’s cultural heritage, and farm families are most often the anchor of rural communities.
- 2) **Economy** - Agriculture is a significant contributor to Yadkin County’s overall economic health. In 2012, agriculture generated over \$111 million in cash receipts. The largest source of farm income is poultry and egg production, followed by beef and dairy cattle and traditional row crops, including tobacco.⁶
- 3) **Positive impact on tax base** – Privately-owned working lands provide fiscal benefits, helping keep property taxes low due to minimal demand for public services. Studies conducted nationwide and in North Carolina indicate that even under the Present Use Value program, farmers pay more in taxes than the value of the public services they receive. Agriculture,

therefore, is a wise investment. Table 1.1 reports the results of North Carolina counties which have conducted such studies, called *Cost of Community Services Studies*. As shown for Yadkin County, for every dollar spent on public services, the County receives only \$0.89 in revenue from residential properties as compared to \$1.63 in revenues from agricultural properties.

4) **Recreation and Tourism** – Visitors are attracted to Yadkin County’s open scenic landscape; the many vineyards; parks including Lake Hampton and Yadkin Memorial Park, Styers Mill Park, the Yadkin River section of Pilot Mountain State Park; river access points at Shore, Shoals, Donnaha and Huntsville (all managed by the County except Shoals which is part of the State Park); attractions such as the events at the Lone Hickory Arena; classes, exhibits and performances at the Yadkin Arts Council Center; the Amish community and Shiloh General Store; historical sites such as the many Civil War Trail Markers; and the Barn Quilt Trail; and more.

5) **Environment** – Approximately 83% of Yadkin County land is managed for agriculture or forestry.⁷ All citizens depend on farmers to be good stewards of these large areas of open space and scenic landscape, protecting the county’s soil and water resources, and wildlife habitat.

6) **Local foods** – Consumers are increasingly interested in local products as a source of fresh, safe and healthy food. The growth in farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and farm-to-school programs around the state provide increasing opportunities for agricultural counties such as Yadkin to expand its reputation as a regional source for farm fresh, local foods.



**Table 1.1 Results of Cost of Community Service Studies
in North Carolina⁸**

County	County tax revenues received from each sector for every dollar the county spends on public services		
	Residential	Agricultural	Commercial/Industrial
Catawba (2013)	\$0.81	\$1.34	\$1.87
Davie (2014)	\$0.88	\$1.50	\$2.01
Durham (2010)	\$0.87	\$1.70	\$3.03
Guilford (2010)	\$0.74	\$1.62	\$3.44
Pitt (2013)	\$0.77	\$1.62	\$2.76
Yadkin (2011)	\$0.89	\$1.63	\$2.63

D. Agriculture in Yadkin County – A Summary

Yadkin County is an active agricultural county with approximately 83% of the county’s land area in agriculture or forestry.⁹ Agricultural uses include row crops, livestock, and specialty crops. The production of poultry and eggs are the top overall agricultural income generators for the county, followed by dairy, milk cows, and grape production. As of 2012, among North Carolina counties, Yadkin County ranks: ¹⁰

- 1st for eggs and layers;
- 3rd for dairy and milk cows;
- 6th for beef cattle;
- 7th for hay.

Over the last 20 years, Yadkin County farmers have increased livestock production and reduced tobacco production as a result of the tobacco buyout. Row crops and hay have generally remained steady, with some increase in small grain crops to replace tobacco. Poultry and egg production has seen the largest increases. In recent years, agriculture has diversified in Yadkin County through production of grapes and seasonal vegetables.

Over this same time period, Yadkin County’s population has grown from 30,488 in 1990 to 38,406 in 2010, an increase of 26%,¹¹ most of which has been concentrated in the eastern side of the county and around Jonesville. Yadkin County remains a primarily rural county,

Agriculture in North Carolina

At the statewide level, agriculture agribusiness is North Carolina's top industry, generating \$77 billion per year. That is 17.5% of the total state product. Together these employ 642,000 of North Carolina's 3.8 million workers. However, from 2000 to 2010, North Carolina lost 4,600 farms, an 8% decrease. In addition, farm acreage decreased by 6.5%, a total loss of 600,000 acres. (*NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund 2013 Annual Report*).

Most of this loss was likely due to residential development to accommodate the growing population in North Carolina – one million new residents since 2000. Projections call for North Carolina's population to grow from 9.5 million to 13.5 million, an increase of four million people by 2030. With 90 percent of North Carolina land in private ownership, quality farm and forest land will be increasingly under threat as more people move here.

with 84.7% of the population living in unincorporated areas.¹² Since 2002, the county has lost approximately 14% of its farmland, from 117,105 acres in to 100,483 in 2012¹³.

Development has been slow during the recent years of recession, but residential development is likely to increase again in the future. During the same time period, the number of farmers who farm full-time declined by 30%.¹⁴ Also since 2002, the age of farmers has increased by an average of over two years, as the number of young farmers under 55 years of age decreases and the number over 55 years of age increases.¹⁵ With substantial decreases in the number of younger farmers who enter the field, aging farmers look towards retirement often with no clear opportunity to transfer their farm operations to the next generation.

E. Strengths and Challenges to Agriculture in Yadkin County

Farmers, government officials and citizens, through interviews, surveys, and public meetings, contributed to the following list of Strengths and Challenges to Agriculture in Yadkin County in Table 1.1 (*a more comprehensive list is in Chapter 2*). There are many positive attributes to agriculture in Yadkin County, including, the strong history of farming, the favorable political environment, good natural resources, agency programs, and some strong local markets. The challenges are common across North Carolina, where high population growth and volatile markets have strained the profitability of farming, making it more difficult for the next generation to become farmers.

Table 1.2 Strengths/Challenges to Agriculture in Yadkin County

Strengths	Challenges
High quality land	High cost of farming – start up and input costs and resulting lack of profitability
Favorable political environment	Fewer people coming into farming; aging farmer population
Local livestock market	No comparable replacement for tobacco as the primary cash crop
Agencies work well together	High land values making it difficult to find affordable land to purchase or lease
Increased awareness of farmland preservation	Long distance to many markets
Growing non-traditional agricultural base (vineyards, etc.)	

F. Summary of Recommendations

This section outlines recommendations for protecting the land resources of Yadkin County vital to agriculture as well as ways to protect and enhance the local agricultural economy. Recommendations include supporting policies that encourage agricultural activities, educating the farming and non-farming public about the importance of agriculture, encouraging opportunities for new farmers and steering growth away from the most important active farming communities. **The long-term viability of agriculture in Yadkin County depends on keeping productive soils in agricultural use, making farming more profitable and producing new farmers and farm operations.** A more detailed listing of recommendations is in Chapter 4 along with an action plan for implementation.

1. Public Policy and Planning

Work to ensure land use planning programs and policies work for agriculture, protect critical resources, and mitigate negative impacts.

- a. Formally adopt this Farmland Preservation Plan as County Policy and officially include it as part of the Yadkin County Land Use Plan.
- b. Establish a Yadkin County Farmland Preservation Program that focuses on acquisition of agricultural agreements and education.
- c. Update the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) ordinance to include Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD).
- d. Mitigate the potential for conflicting land uses and nuisance suits by educating the public and realtors about farming.
 - Continue policy for a one-half aerial mile notification zone in the county GIS system to notify buyers and inform them of VAD participation.
 - Notify realtors/public about the availability of new GIS information.
- e. Work with municipalities to integrate agriculture into land use decisions.
 - Provide maps and GIS data to municipal officials that designate priority agricultural areas and the location of productive farmland with the goal of better integrating agricultural interests in municipal planning.
 - Work with municipalities to consider establishing municipal VAD/EVAD ordinances.
 - Encourage municipalities to continue to allow farming as allowed use in annexed areas.
 - Encourage municipalities to adopt zoning ordinances that allow farmers to change and modify operations.
- f. Consider agriculture when making land use planning decisions, particularly in areas of prime soils and productive agriculture or along the scenic byway.
- g. Incorporate agriculture into infrastructure planning by informing the Soil and Water Conservation District, Cooperative Extension, and the Agricultural Advisory Board of infrastructure projects affecting agricultural enterprises.

2. Agricultural Development and Marketing

Promote agriculture as a viable part of Yadkin County's economy and support the establishment of additional markets for local products.

- a. Improve regional branding of Yadkin County products.
- b. Expand opportunities to publicize "Food with a Story."

- c. Establish a county “Value-added Processing Center,” possibly at the new Agricultural Center.
- d. Support efforts to establish an additional regional meat processing facility with greater capacity. Currently, the only nearby USDA facilities include M.L. Mitchell & Son in Walnut Cove, Thomas Brothers in Wilkesboro and Wayne Mays in Taylorsville).
- e. Support establishment of a fine dining option for agri-tourism visitors
- f. Encourage development of local entrepreneurial talent to provide technical assistance to agri-tourism businesses in the county.

3. Education and Training

Foster greater appreciation for agriculture among residents and government officials, and help educate farmers about options to improve operations or protect their resources through education and outreach efforts.

- a. Re-establish an Agribusiness Program at Surry Community College’s Yadkin Center or at the main campus in Dobson.
- b. Publicize land conservation strategies with farmers.
- c. Educate farmers and rural landowners about opportunities to qualify under the Present Use Value and the Wildlife Conservation Land tax relief programs.
- d. Expand agricultural education in schools through Cooperative Extension and develop an agricultural Youth Leadership Program through Future Farmers of America or the Farm Bureau’s Young Farmers and Ranchers group.
- e. Continue to promote the understanding and appreciation of agriculture to the public by working with the Yadkin County Chamber of Commerce and the Yadkin County Economic Development Council.
 - Continue to publicize regular feature stories in the media about the importance of agriculture.
 - Continue to publicize the economic, environmental and cultural benefits of Yadkin County farms.
 - Continue to develop county brochures that highlight agri-tourism businesses and events available for the public including farmers markets, restaurants that serve local foods, seasonal roadside stands, wineries, etc.
- f. Hold periodic Ag Forums on current issues, programs and policies.
- g. Continue the education of county and municipal officials and planning board members on farming issues.
- h. Highlight agriculture in the Chamber’s “Leadership Yadkin” program so program participants fully understand the importance of agriculture to Yadkin County’s future.
- i. Develop periodic farm tours to showcase heritage, innovation and success on select Yadkin County farms.

- j. Continue to support development of new specialty crops (niche markets), such as hops, specialty grains and shiitake mushrooms.
- k. Promote among Yadkin County farmers the marketability of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) to nearby urban populations.
- l. Utilize space in the new Agriculture/Education Center at the Surry Community College Yadkin Center for expanded farmer education and networking meetings.
- m. Establish a demonstration garden operated by the Master Gardeners.
- n. Continue to educate farmers on crop diversification, rotational grazing, agri-tourism and other farming opportunities.
- o. Provide farmers with information on business planning, direct marketing, and financing assistance.
- p. Work with farmers who have lost tobacco buyout funds to help transition to alternative agricultural activities.
- q. Increase farm acres enrolled in the VAD program, targeting communities with high concentrations or prime soils.

4. Farm Transition

Help make agriculture achievable for the next generation of farmers.

- a. Create a bi-annual “Planning the Future of Your Farm” workshop to focus on the importance of estate planning with Farm Bureau.
- b. Enroll new members in the N.C. Century Farm Program.
- c. Continue to share materials about farm transition planning to aging farmers, and share NC Farm Link information.
- d. Promote N.C. State University’s Agricultural Institute 2-year Associates Degree program as well as community college programs as alternatives for post-secondary education.

5. Financing

Improve access to financing and capital.

- a. Publicize Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan programs.
 - b. Develop additional ways to expand opportunities for financing new agricultural operations or expansion of existing operations.
- Publicize Young and Beginning Farmer Loan Program available through FSA.

Guiding Principles of Farmland Preservation

1. **Integrate economic development with farmland preservation.** Keeping farms viable is as important as protecting the resource base essential for farming and it is more cost efficient.
2. **Target agricultural and farmland preservation initiatives** toward blocks of viable farmland.
3. **Educate consumers and elected officials** on the relationship between a healthy local agricultural economy and the public benefits working farmland provides.
4. **Acknowledge farmers for the benefits** their stewardship of the land provides the non-farm public.
5. **Consider the long-term cost effectiveness of incentive programs** that compensate farmers for not developing their land. By combining tax, spending, and regulatory programs, local communities can strongly support agriculture and meet budgetary needs.
6. **Develop land use policies and zoning ordinances** that work for agriculture.
7. **Encourage inter-municipal cooperation.** Since farming spans town and county borders, farmland preservation requires cooperation among levels of government. Efforts to promote development in one town can derail farmland preservation efforts in the surrounding areas.
8. **Reach out to non-farmers** through farmers markets, farm events, and workshops. Unite the farmland preservation interests of farm and non-farm community members by protecting farmland that provides scenic views, includes important water resources, or preserves historic landscapes.
9. **Promote thoughtful land use planning** to prevent conflicts between farmers and neighbors by managing residential growth in farming communities and buffering farms from neighboring large-scale residential developments.

CHAPTER 2

The State of Agriculture in Yadkin County

Agriculture has always been a part of Yadkin County's history and continues to be one of the county's top economic sectors. Over time, agriculture in Yadkin County has responded to changes in technology, demand and climate, and with its good soils and plentiful supply of water, Yadkin County has the natural resources to remain a top agricultural producer in North Carolina.

Almost 47% of Yadkin County's land (105,170 acres of farmland out of 214,289 total acres) is dedicated to agricultural production on approximately 952 farms.¹⁶ Agriculture employs approximately 3000 people, making it the largest employer in the County.¹⁷ The largest agricultural sectors in the county are traditional farm crops and livestock. There has historically been little value-added production, although in recent years, examples include wine and specialty crops. Agriculture, however, includes much more than farming alone in that a substantial number of non-agricultural businesses supply the needs of farmers. These include processors, vehicle and equipment dealers and other enterprises.

Traditionally agriculture in Yadkin County ranks high among North Carolina counties (*NC Agricultural Statistics 2013 data*):

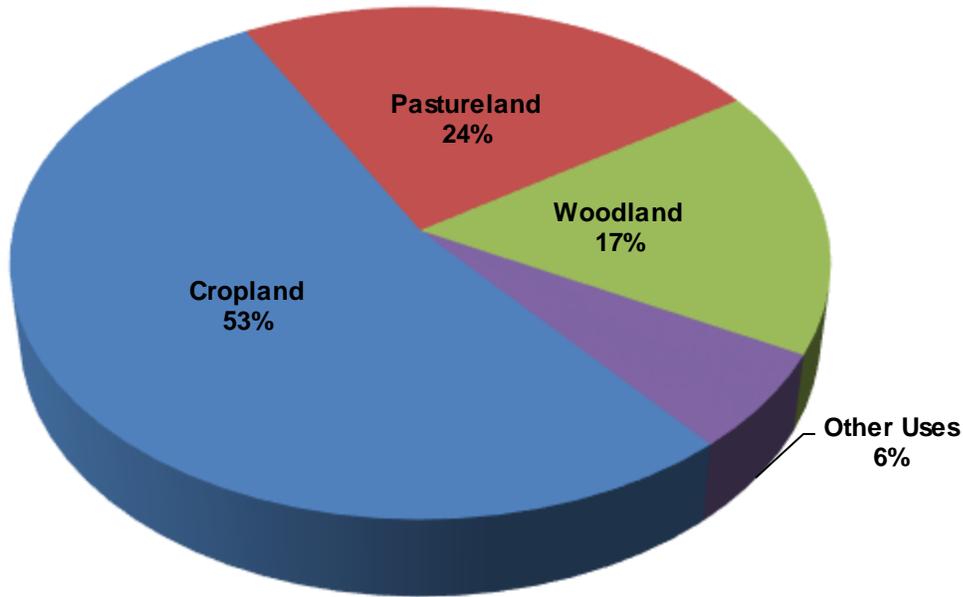
- 1st for eggs and layers;
- 3rd for dairy and milk cows;
- 6th for beef cattle; and
- 7th for hay

Forest products also account for a significant part of the economy, creating over \$5 million in cash receipts during 2012.¹⁸



Figure 2.1 Farm Land Types of Use 2012

(2012 US Census of Agriculture)



A. Overall Land Use and Character of the County

With a location of 20-30 minutes from downtown Winston-Salem and even closer to the fast growing suburbs of western Forsyth County, Yadkin County offers its residents access to the amenities and attractions of urban areas, while retaining its rural character and charm.

The County covers 337 square miles, most of which lies in the Piedmont Plateau with the exception of the small area in the west that contains the Brushy Mountains. The County's main river tributaries are Logan, Forbush, Deep, North Deep, South Deep, and Turner Creeks, all draining to the Yadkin River which creates the County's border to the north and east.¹⁹

Yadkin County also enjoys a very strategic location for distribution of produce and other manufactured goods. At the center of the East Coast, it is about halfway between New York and Miami. With I-77, US 421 and US 601 inside the county boundaries and located less

than 20 minutes from I-40 and US 52/I-74 in Winston-Salem, produce and other goods can be distributed by truck to over half the US population in one day or less.²⁰

B. Agriculture Statistics

The following statistics represent an overview and inventory of the agricultural sector of the county:²¹ (unless otherwise noted)

- Total land in county: 214,289 acres
- Total land in farms: 100,483 acres
- Percentage of Yadkin County land in farm land: 47%
- Percentage of Yadkin County land in forest land: 17%
- Number of farms: 952
- Average farm size: 106 acres
- Average age of farmers: 56.9 years of age
- Cash Receipts and Rank (2012)²²:
 - Livestock, Dairy and Poultry: \$83,762,000 (26th)
 - Field Crops: \$21,784,000 (53TH)
 - Government Payments: \$5,936,663 (29^{thj})
 - Total Cash Receipts: \$111,482,663 (31st)

1. Farm Types and Trends in Farm Acres/Sizes

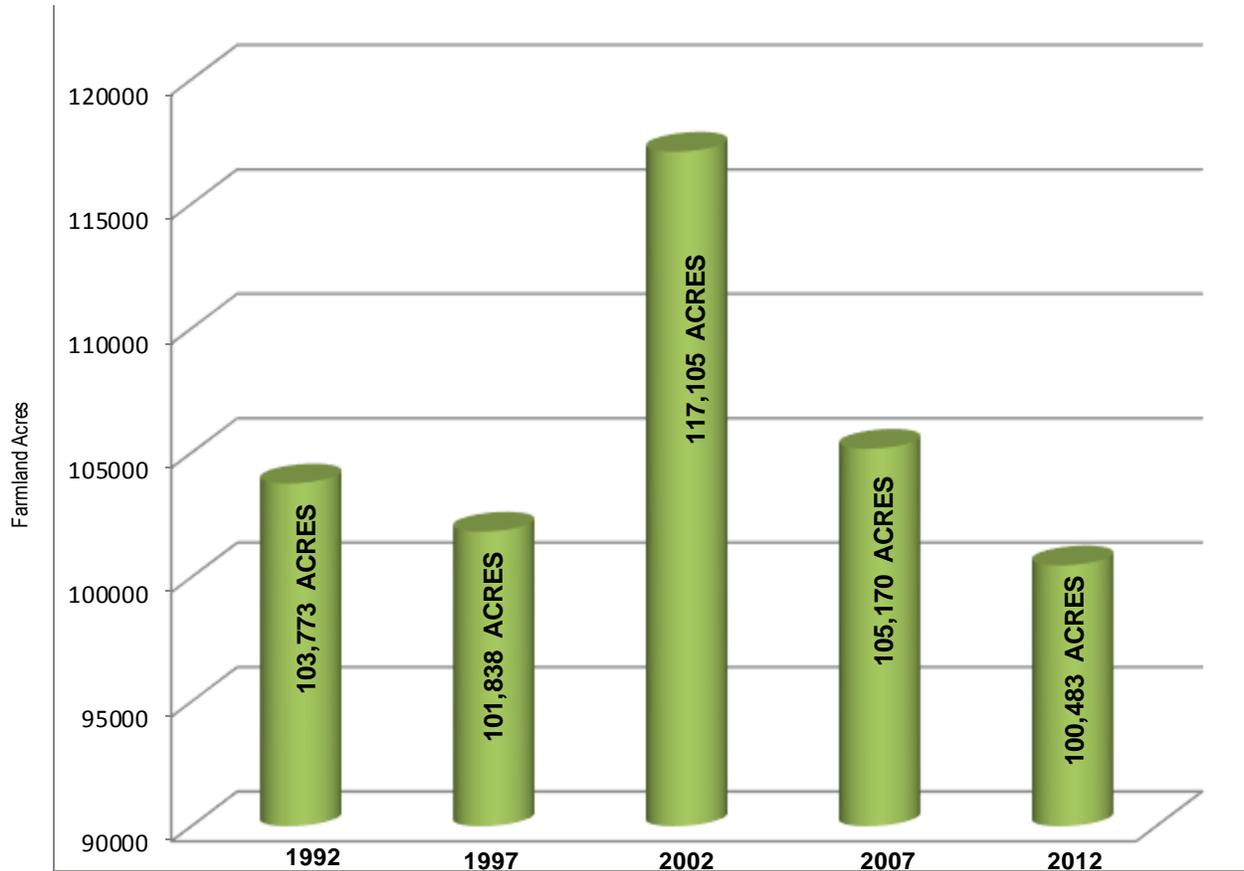


Yadkin County agriculture is diverse, and includes many different types of crops, including wheat and soybeans, livestock and specialty crops, with poultry, eggs, grapes, cattle and row crops accounting for the primary farm types.

Although farmland losses in recent years in Yadkin County have

not been as great as some more urban North Carolina counties, statistics show a decrease of over 14% since 2002 (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Total Farmland Acres
(1992-2012 US Census of Agriculture)



From 2002 to 2012, the number of farms decreased from 1,044 to 952, a loss of nine percent. (Figure 2.3). The average acreage of a farm has decreased by nine acres, from 115 to 106 since 1997 (Figure 2.4). The Present Use Value Program began in 2000 for both forestry and agriculture and now includes 4,612 parcels for 2,696 different landowners, encompassing 126,349 acres²³, which indicates the strength of agriculture county-wide (Figure 2.5).

There are 33 farms in Yadkin County that have been designated by the State as Century Farms, meaning that these farms have been kept in the same family for at least 100 years (see full list on page 19).

Yadkin County Century Farms

- **J. Timothy Baity, Julia Weatherman Baity (1887)**
- **Barron Farms: Michael K. Barron (1820)**
- **John L. Bray Jr. (1894)**
- **Anne Elizabeth Cain (1877)**
- **Lenuel F. Chamberlain (1908)**
- **E. H. Cooper, Betty Poindexter Cooper (1851)**
- **Barry Crissman (1908)**
- **Vicki H. Davis, Mary H. Brownlee (1870)**
- **Fannie S. Doub**
- **Timothy S. Doub, Brenda Doub (1892)**
- **Hope J. Hardy (1895)**
- **H. Lee Hines, Phyllis Pardue Hines (1846)**
- **Zack F. Ladd (1840)**
- **Matthew Errol Long (1910)**
- **Michael Matthews (1853)**
- **Miller Tree Farm: Lester G. Miller, Gerrie Miller (1876)**
- **Williams Family Farm: Bonnie Williams Morrah (1855)**
- **Spring Valley Farm: Brenda Ireland Pardue, Phillip Dale Pardue (1894)**
- **Mann Farm: Dorothy Mann Patterson, Donald Mann, Terry Patterson, Paula Patterson Jones, Franklin Patterson (1906)**
- **W. Bryce Reavis**
- **Max J. Reinhardt (1908)**
- **Flora B. Scott, Ozell Dellinger**
- **Yadkin Shore River Farm: Henry Fleming Shore (1894)**
- **Jack Flemming Shore, Martha Shore, Tommy Shore & Louis M. Shore (1887)**
- **John W. Shore, Jr. (1894)**
- **Neil Arnie Shore (1877)**
- **Bobby Lee Smith (1889)**
- **James H. Smith (1889)**
- **Jimmy C. Turner, Inez B. Turner (1875)**
- **Mark & Leah Williams Mark E. Williams (1899)**
- **Paul Windsor**
- **Thad A. Wiseman, Claude G. Wiseman**
- **Major Woodruff, Allen Woodruff (1820)**

Figure 2.3 Number of Farms
(1992-2012 US Census of Agriculture)

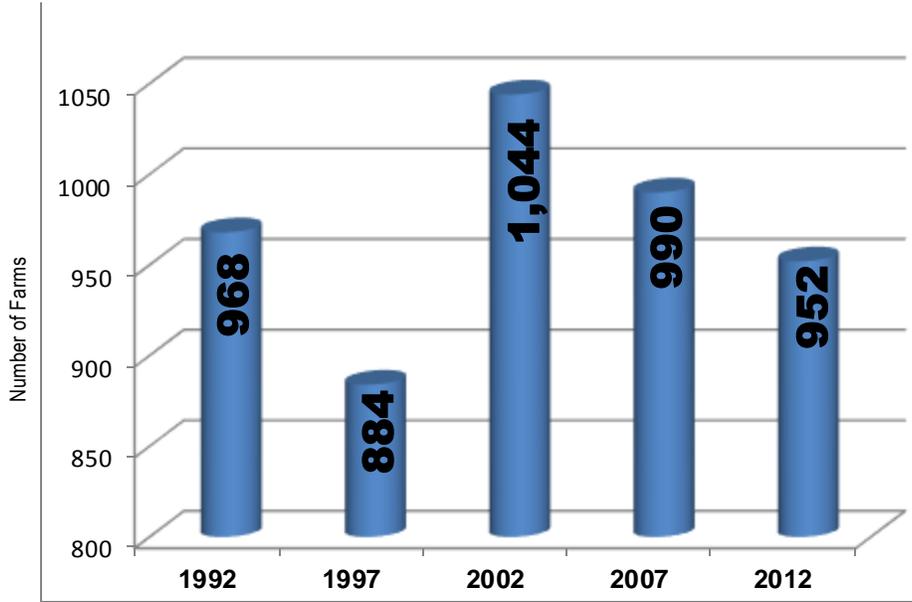
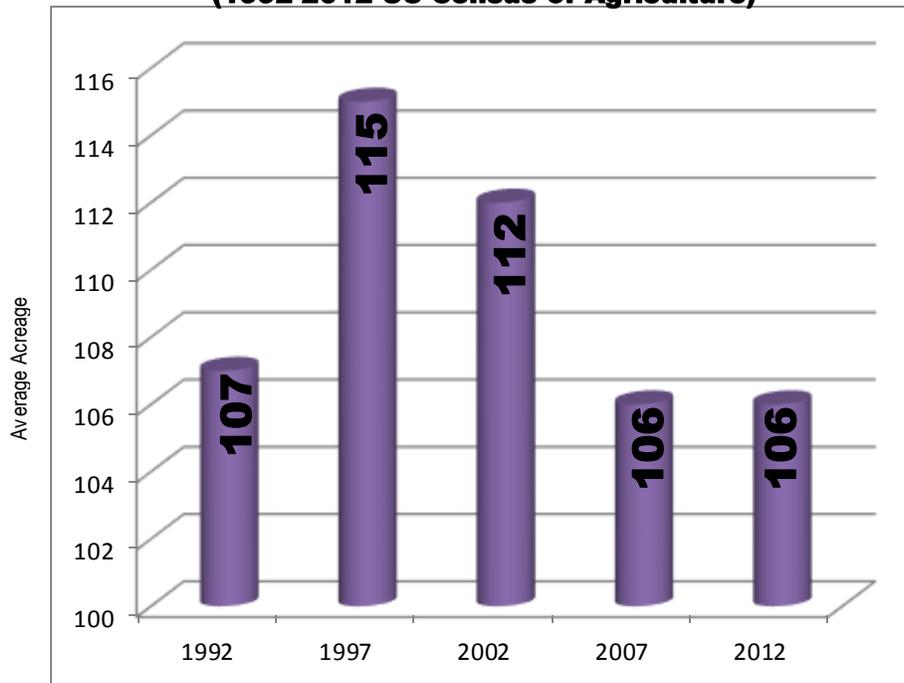


Figure 2.4 Average Acreage of a Farm
(1992-2012 US Census of Agriculture)





North Carolina Present Use Value Program

Property that qualifies for present-use value classification is assessed at its present-use value rather than its market value. When land becomes disqualified from the present-use value program, the deferred taxes for the current year and the three previous years with accrued interest will usually become due and payable. To qualify, there are minimum size, income (agriculture and horticulture only) and sound management practice requirements. There are three different classifications:

- Agricultural Land/Horticultural Land Present Use
- Forestland Present Use
- Wildlife Conservation Program (different qualifications)

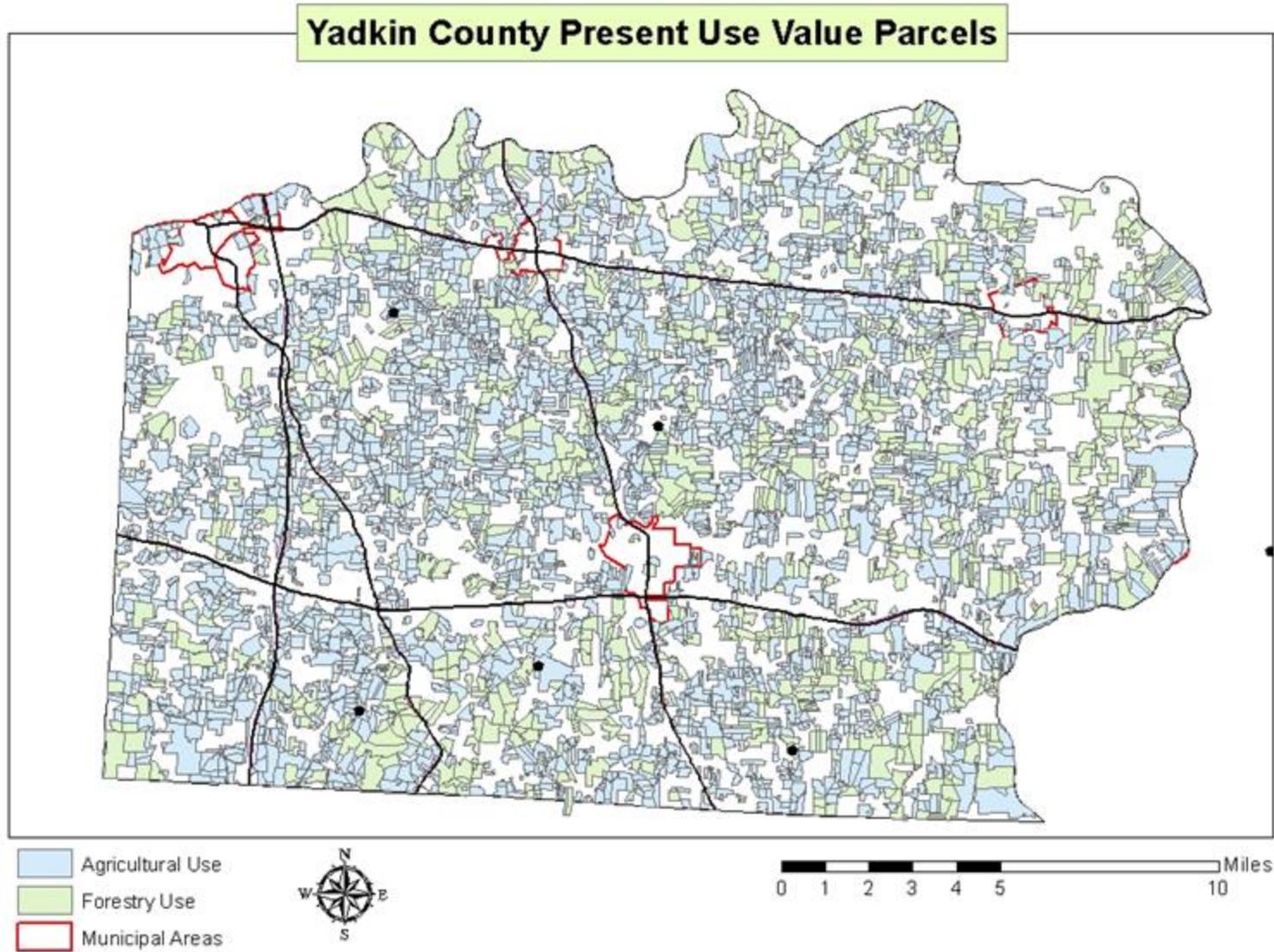
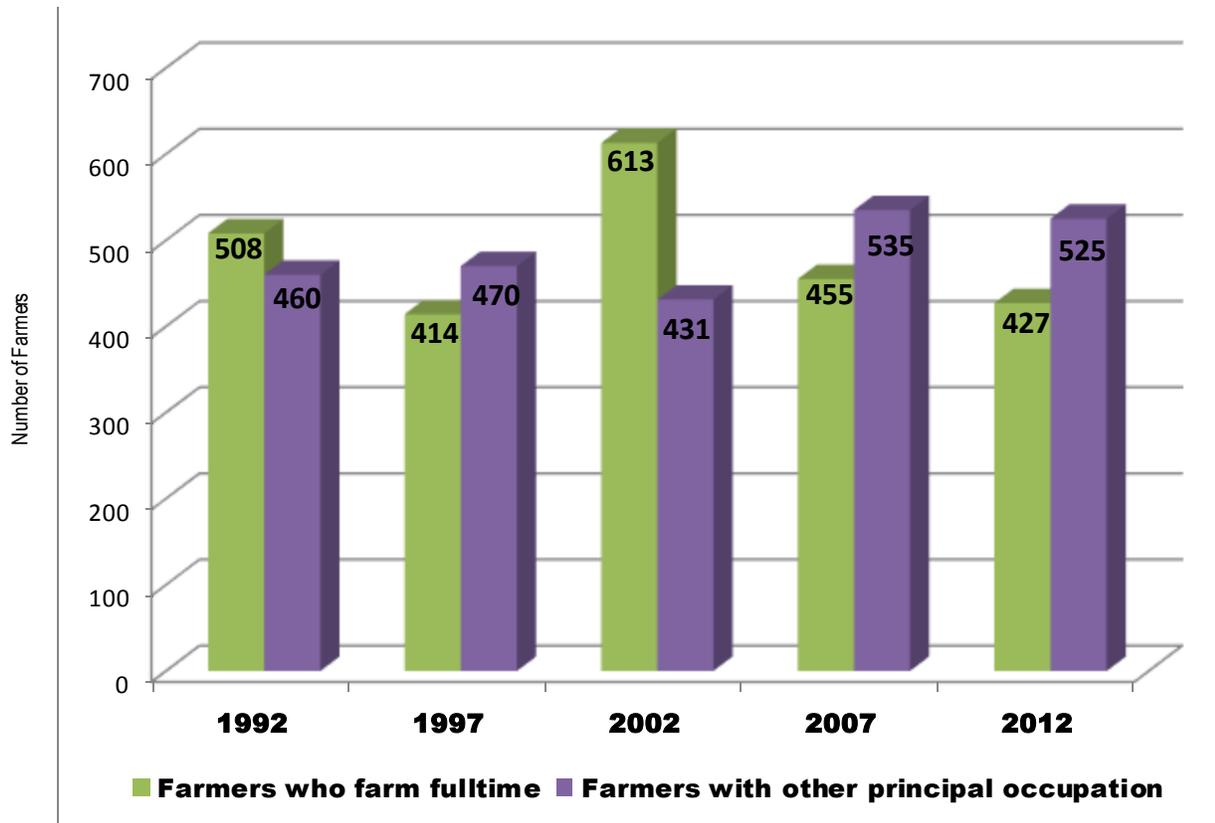


Figure 2.5

2. Trends in Farm Operators

Yadkin County has primarily always been farmed by families, with no large corporate farms present; however, as shown in Figure 2.6, many farm families depend on off-farm employment, presumably to offset the frequently unpredictable profitability of agriculture.

**Figure 2.6 Principal Occupation of Farm Operators
(1992-2012 US Census of Agriculture)**

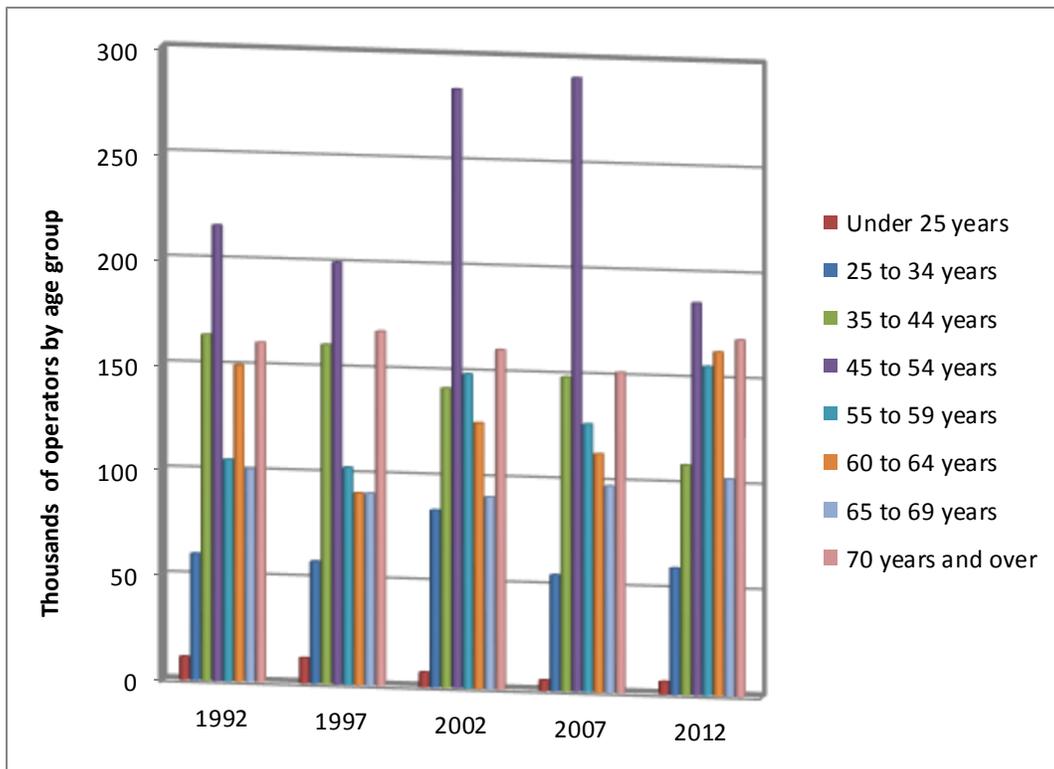


The average age of a farmer continues to increase, from 54.8 in 2002 to 56.9 in 2012.²⁴ Many farmers interviewed as part of the process of developing this plan indicated that there is often no next generation to take over farming activities when they retire. This indicates that a large transition will take place over the next 20 years, and with fewer younger farmers available to take over production on these farms, many may fall out of production and be divided up and sold through estate settlement processes. Additionally, generations of farming expertise may be lost, an invaluable asset to the local agricultural economy (See Table 2.1 and Figure 2.7).

Table 2.1 Average Age of Farmers²⁵

	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012
Average age of farmer	52.8	54.1	54.4	55.6	56.9
<i>Number of operators by age group:</i>					
Under 25 years	17	17	2	8	6
25-34 years	130	100	78	58	60
35-44	256	225	250	213	109
45-54 years	281	262	336	329	186
55-59 years	140	147	148	178	156
60-64 years	140	147	127	117	163
65-69 years	123	104	131	141	103
70+ years	182	192	193	214	169

**Figure 2.7 Average Age of Farmers
(1992-202 US Census of Agriculture)**



Young Farmer and Rancher Program

The Yadkin County Farm Bureau started a local chapter of the national Farm Bureau's Young Farmer and Rancher Program. The program is for young women and men between 18 and 35 years of age to provide leadership development opportunities, enhance public speaking skills and increase exposure to current issues in agriculture from state and national leaders.



The future of farming in Yadkin County depends on preparing a new generation of trained farmers, through education, hands-on training, and creative financing to overcome start-up costs. Successful farmers can pass their knowledge onto the next generation, and public agencies can provide assistance and training.

C. Economic Impact of Agriculture

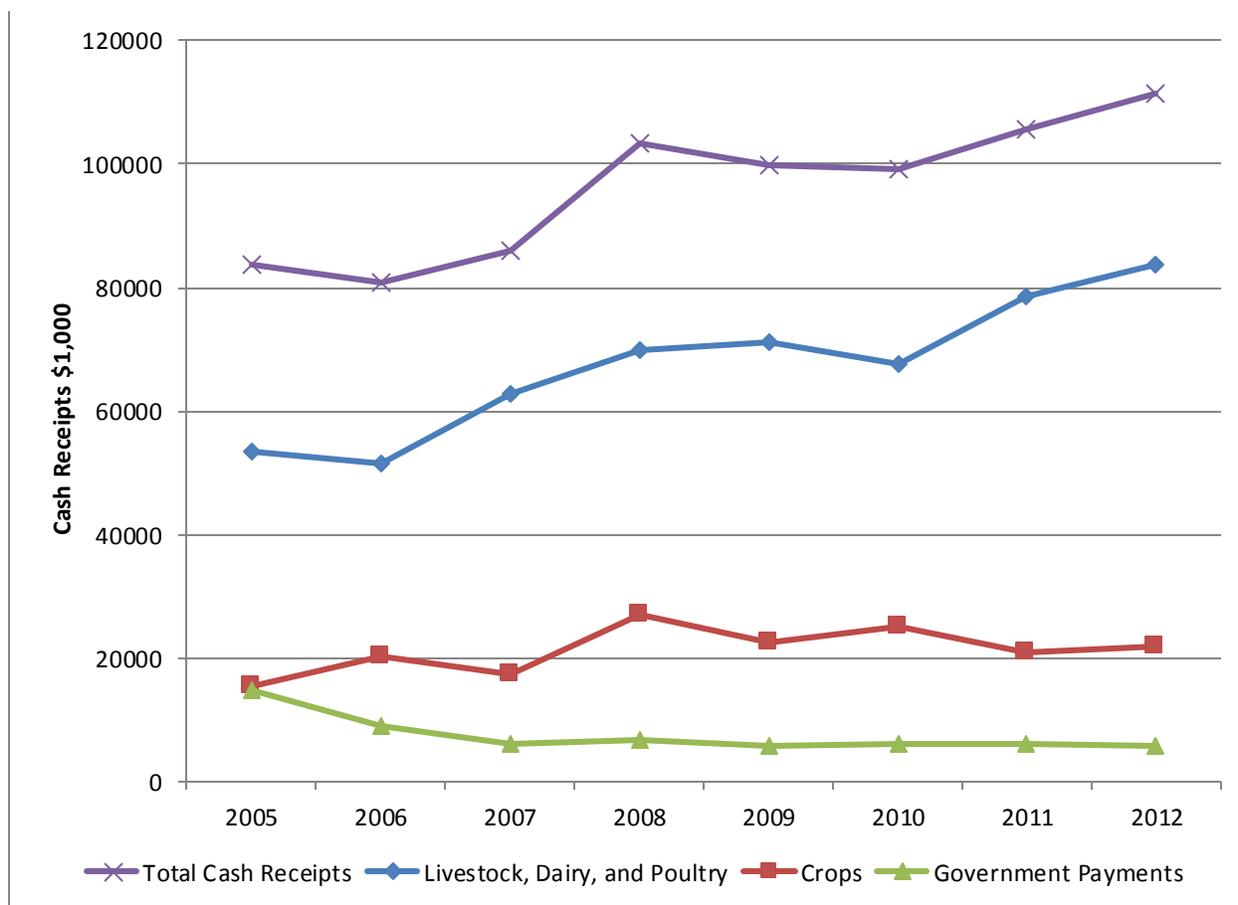
Agriculture is an important part of Yadkin County's economy. In fact, agriculture employs more people than any other industry in the County²⁶. In 2005, total cash receipts from Yadkin County farms were almost \$83.7 million, and this number increased to more than \$111 million by 2012.²⁷ Livestock, and poultry and their products, accounted for about 73 percent of the market value of total agricultural products sold in 2012.²⁸

1. Traditional Agricultural Sector



The traditional agricultural sector includes tobacco, row crops, and livestock. As shown in Figure 2.8, total cash receipts from livestock, dairy, and poultry have risen significantly while receipts from crops have remained steady and government payments have decreased.²⁹ This reflects a general trend of higher returns from livestock as well as a shift from row crops to livestock, possibly as farmers have aged and are cutting back, or as a replacement for tobacco. There is an increase in hobby farms which often include some animals and may also help account for this trend.

Figure 2.8 Total Cash Receipts
(2007-2013 NC Agricultural Statistics)



a. Livestock

Yadkin County has always had a strong livestock sector, and today confinement poultry and cattle are the largest producers of income. As the top county in NC for layers, poultry accounts for the highest market share. Yadkin County ranks #6 in NC for beef cattle and #3 for dairy cattle (there are a couple of larger dairies in the county).³⁰ There are a few farms with goats and only a one hog producer.

b. Tobacco and Row Crops

Tobacco has traditionally been and still remains an important cash crop in Yadkin County, but the acreage is less than half of that in production about twenty years ago. In 1992, there were 4,632 acres of flue-cured tobacco being grown in the county, but by

2012 only 2,269 acres were still in production.³¹ The 2004 Federal Tobacco Buyout Program ended in 2014, resulting in a significant reduction in income for many families.

Tobacco, however, remains the County's most significant row crop because it is still the most profitable cash crop. Most tobacco is grown under contract with some on the open market. The other significant row crops are soybeans, corn and wheat.³²

c. Supporting Businesses

The traditional agricultural sector is supported by businesses that serve local farmers with equipment, supplies and processing services. There are no local USDA meat processing facilities, so farmers rely on facilities in nearby Wilkes, Alexander and Stokes Counties. Deep Creek Grain processes and markets grains and fertilizer. There are several farm supply stores that provide fertilizer, seed and other necessary materials.

2. Other Agricultural Production

Non-traditional agricultural production is a small, but growing sector, including vegetable and specialty crops, popularized by the growing sustainable agriculture movement. Vegetable crops and small fruits have been on the rise in recent years, in part as a replacement for tobacco production. Backyard flocks are more popular, farmers are raising beef for local markets, and there are currently at least two "pick-your-own" business with potential for more in the County. Yadkin County is a major producer of grapes, ranking in the top 10 counties in NC.



3. Vineyards

Yadkin County's mild winters, soil composition and the microclimates of the protected river basin make this area notable for producing quality wine grapes. The current era of grape production in Yadkin County began when Frank Hobson, Jr., inspired by nearby Shelton Vineyards in Surry County, began to plant grape vines in 1999 as a way to diversify from tobacco, resulting in the establishment of Rag Apple Lassie Vineyard. Others followed and currently there are 15 active vineyards in Yadkin County, many producing award-winning wines (*see Figure 2.10*).

The federal government officially designated the Yadkin Valley American Viticulture Area (AVA) in 2003 in recognition of the region's combination of soil, climate, elevation and identifiable regional wine character. The Yadkin Valley AVA was North Carolina's first, consisting of over 1.116 million acres located in Surry, Yadkin, Wilkes, Davie, Davidson and Forsyth counties. The Swan Creek AVA was designated as North Carolina's second area in 2008, consisting of 96,000 acres located in Wilkes, Yadkin and Iredell counties. Over 57,000 acres lie within the geographical boundaries of both viticultural areas. In addition, a number of wineries in close proximity have banded together to form marketing associations. While not federally-designated AVAs, a handful of wineries formed the Shallowford Wine Trail, the Yadkin River Wine Trail, and the Upper Yadkin Wine Trail. There are several more wine trails in the works, all within and encompassed by the Yadkin Valley Wine Trail.

Yadkin County vineyards attract thousands of visitors a year, with the majority of them coming from the Charlotte metropolitan area, contributing to the local economy.

4. Agri-tourism

In addition to vineyards, wineries and wine tours, the County also has other agri-tourism-related attractions, including the Lone Hickory Indoor Arena (established in 2010), featuring rodeos, horse and livestock shows, and other related family-friendly events: roadside stands; u-pick fruit farms; Shallowford Farms popcorn farm; Alpha & Omega corn maze; trekking with llamas; riding a hot air balloon; Belle House Bed and Breakfast; Green Mesa hunting preserve; a zipline at Sanders Ridge and their Thursday night family dinners; shopping in the old-time Shiloh General Store; canoeing or tubing on the Yadkin River (four river access points); driving the Leaf-to-Vine Scenic Byway; the annual Yadkin County Harvest Festival and the Yadkin Valley Grape Festival; and the Barn Quilt Tour (featuring 28 unique and colorful quilt patterns to discover throughout the county).

Vineyards in Yadkin County 2014



Figure 2.9



— Scenic Corridor



5. Youth in Agriculture

One of the primary challenges to the sustainability of agriculture in Yadkin County is the difficulty of attracting young people to farming, for many reasons, including, high start-up expenses (unless joining an established family business), attractiveness of more urban jobs, and the desirability of “easier” jobs. Yadkin County has a number of successful programs to better cultivate and engage young farmers, including the NC Farm Bureau’s Young Farmer and Rancher Program, Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Program, and active chapters of the Future Farmers of America (FFA) at Forbush and Starmount High Schools.

The Farm Bureau established their Young Farmer and Rancher program in 2012, targeting young farmers ages 18-35. They host programs and social events and focus on policy and leadership training, as well as empowering young farmers to become an effective voice for agriculture.

Cooperative Extension’s 4-H program has evolved over the years, shifting its focus to outreach and education through school enrichment programs. The annual Yadkin/Davie Livestock Show at Lone Hickory Arena is a highlight for area 4-Hers, giving youth from five area counties a chance to demonstrate their animal handling skills. With annual programs including Ag Awareness Day for all county 2nd graders at Lone Hickory Arena and opportunities for livestock showing and judging, there is strong local support for encouraging youth interest in agriculture.

Another obstacle to youth in agriculture is N.C. State University’s higher freshman admissions standards, which negatively impact rural youth more than urban youth. An alternative to this barrier is to direct agriculturally oriented youth to NC State’s Agricultural Institute, which provides a 2-year Associates Degree.

Further, Surry Community College should provide more agriculturally-oriented programs, such as agricultural business and value-added production.

6. Markets

Yadkin County farmers have traditionally relied on regional wholesale markets for their commodity products. These markets include the Harward Brothers Livestock Market in Turnersburg, the Wilkes Livestock Exchange in North Wilkesboro, Mt. Airy livestock market, Kernersville tobacco auction, Boonville grain market, and the Raleigh soybean market.

7. Commercial Forestry

Yadkin County has a very active forestry sector, with 13,234 acres currently participating in the Forestry Present Use Program (this number consistently grows). Rates of harvest are market driven. There are two small mills in Yadkin County, Blue Ridge Lumber and Scott Saw Mill, but many operations use larger mills in neighboring Surry and Wilkes Counties.

D. Agricultural Resources

Yadkin County is rich in agricultural resources, with abundant prime soils, plentiful water, gentle slopes and a favorable climate.



1. Soils

Prime farmland soils are located throughout the county. Nearly 41 percent of the total acreage, or 87,675 acres³³, meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s soil requirements for *prime farmland*. In some areas, land that does not meet the criteria for prime farmland may be considered to be “farmland of statewide importance.” This means it may be suitable for agriculture and includes soils that nearly meet the requirements for prime farmland and that can economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some areas may produce as high a yield as prime farmland if conditions are favorable.³⁴

Yadkin County has over 64,000 acres (almost 30% of all soils) that are classified as farmland of state or local importance.³⁵ (See *Figure 2.10*.) The loss of prime farmland to other uses, such as industrial, commercial or residential development, puts pressure on marginal lands, which generally are more erodible, susceptible to drought, and less productive and cannot be easily cultivated.

The USDA definition of Prime Farmland:

"...land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It could be cultivated land, pastureland, forestland, or other land, but it is not urban or built-up land or water areas. The soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply are those needed for the soil to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when proper management, including water management, and acceptable farming methods are applied. In general, prime farmland has an adequate and dependable supply of moisture from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, an acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. The water supply is dependable and of adequate quality. Prime farmland is permeable to water and air. It is not excessively erodible or saturated with water for long periods, and it either is not frequently flooded during the growing season or is protected from flooding. Slope ranges mainly from 0 to 6 percent."

Yadkin County Prime and Important Farmland Soils

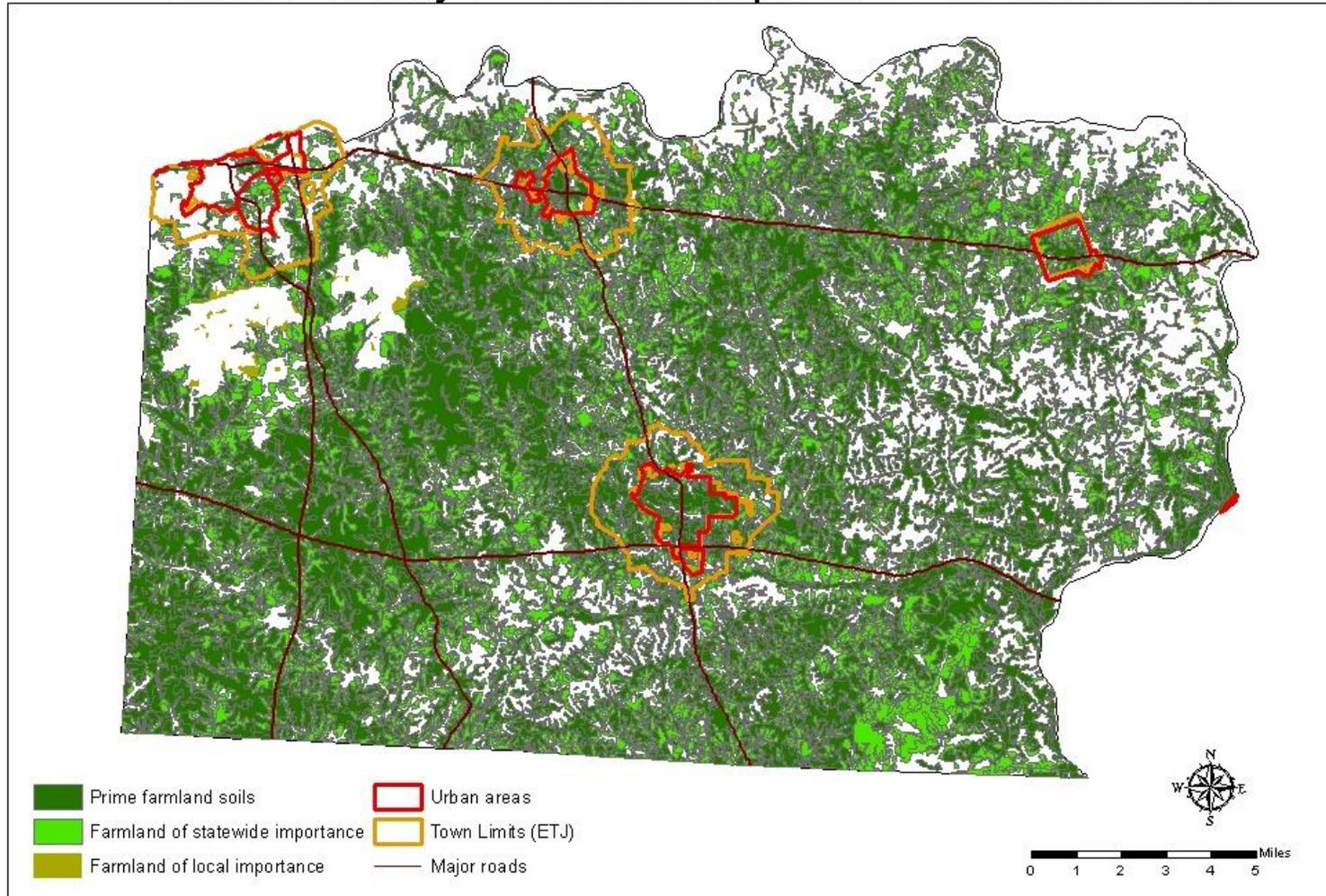


Figure 2.10



2. Water

Yadkin County farmers usually have ample supplies of water with adequate rainfall (an average of 44.75 inches of rain annually³⁶) and a number of streams flowing through the county. All of Yadkin County lies in the Yadkin River watershed, with several major tributaries, including Deep Creek, Forbush Creek, Logan Creek, Hunting Creek, and Rocky Creek (*see Figure 2.11*). Most farmers rely on ponds and river water for irrigation, while many are either using wells or moving to wells for cattle. Through NC Agriculture Cost Share Program, the Yadkin SWCD offers financial assistance to farmers to provide alternative watering sources and fencing to keep livestock out of streams and rivers. This practice protects the water quality for the county's water supply, recreation, and wildlife habitat. There are portions of the County that are not in any currently designated water supply watershed (*see Figure 2.12*).

Yadkin County Streams

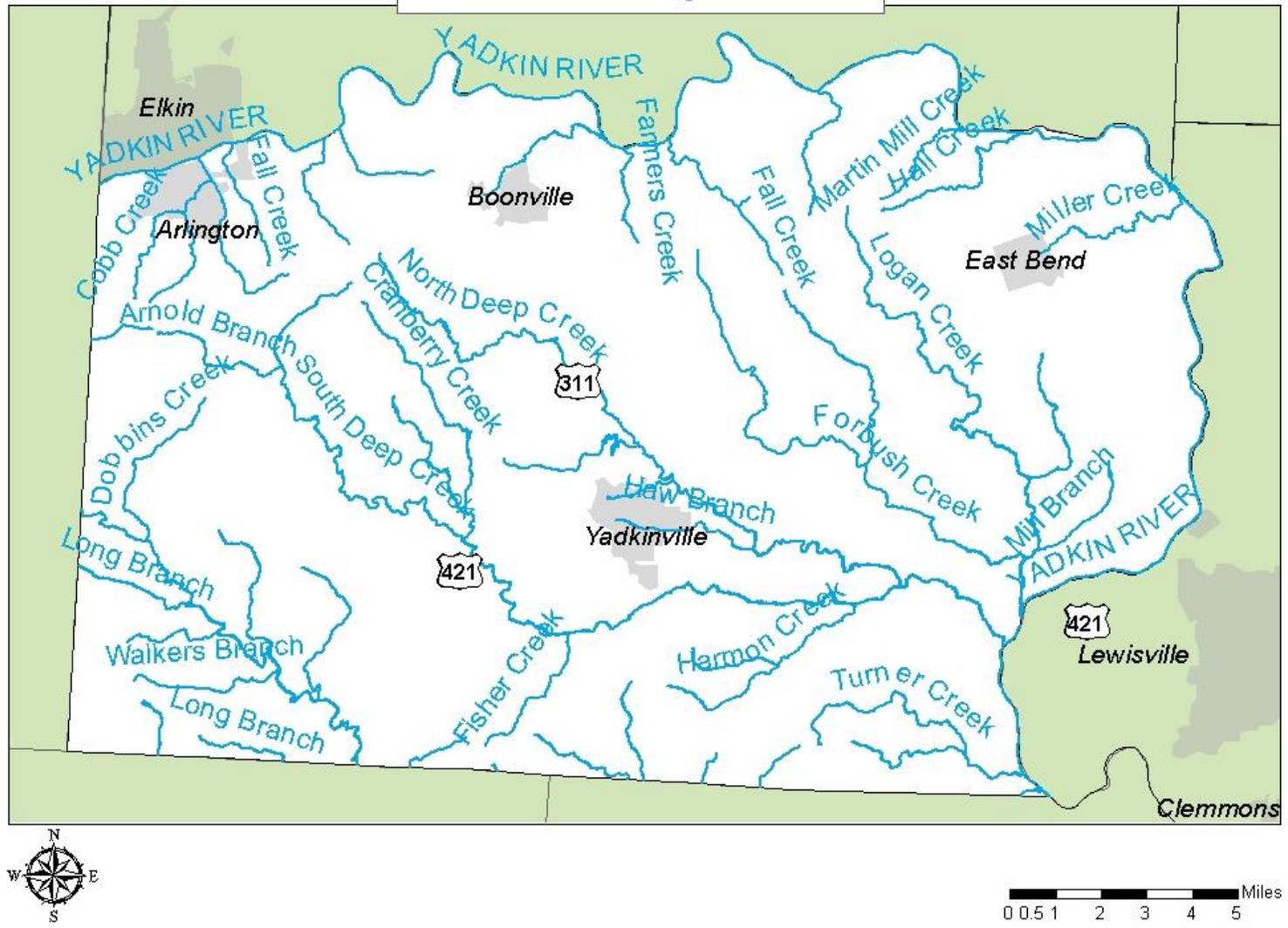


Figure 2.11

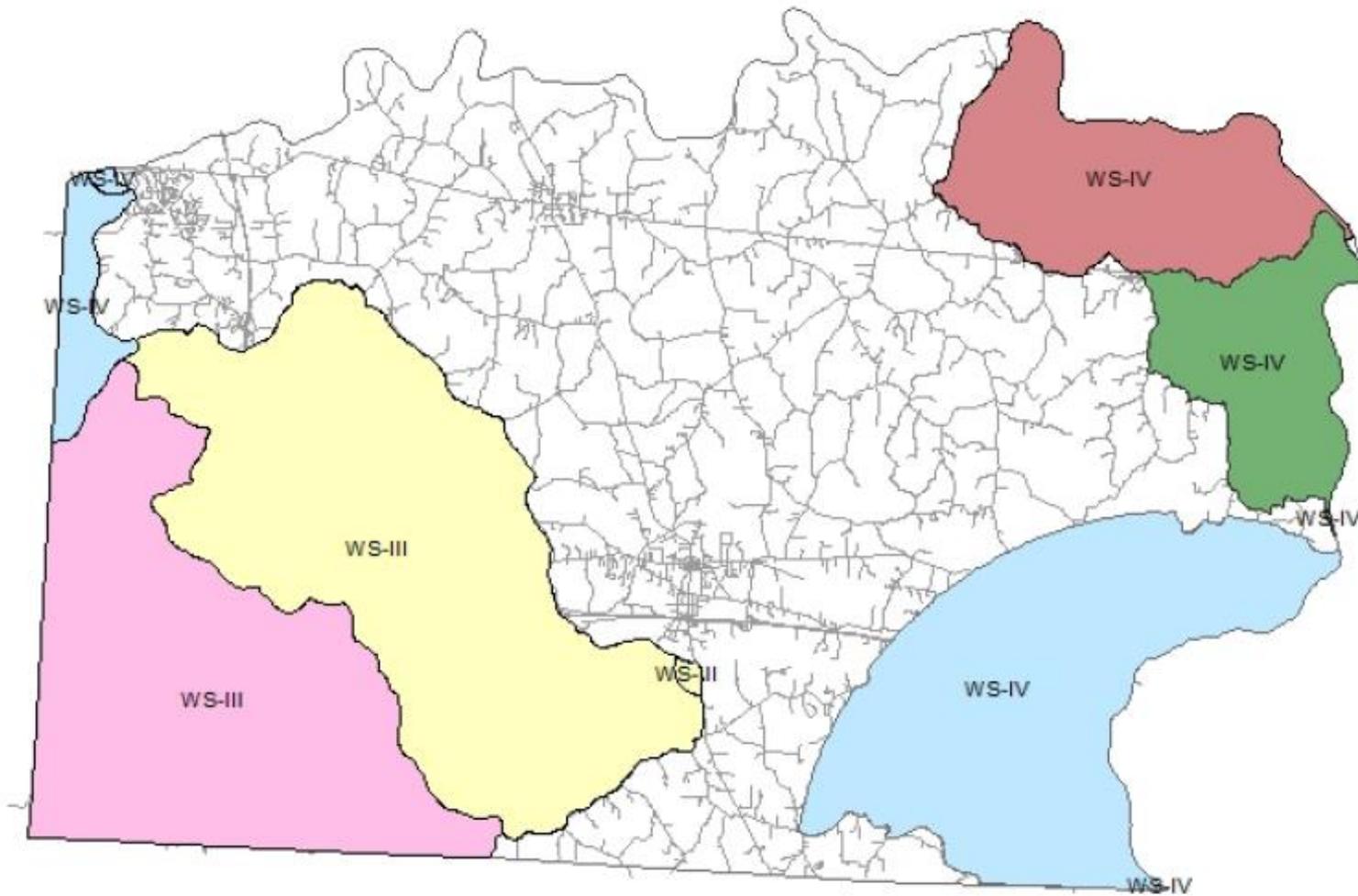


Figure 2.12 Watersheds of Yadkin County

E. Population Growth and Development Pattern

Yadkin County remains a primarily rural county, with 84.7% of the population living in unincorporated areas.³⁷ From 1990 to 2010, Yadkin County's population grew from 30,488 to 38,406,³⁸ an increase of 26%. Under the Yadkin County Land Use Plan 2011, land is designated into six categories of land use:

- **Primary Growth Areas** — Lands located within and adjacent to existing municipal corporate limits, with likely access to urban infrastructure services. Predominantly mixed use and include residential, commercial and industrial uses.
- **Secondary Growth Areas** — Areas where infrastructure and services necessary for development may or may not be in place, but could be provided within the next 10 – 20 years if cost effective.
- **Rural/Agricultural Areas** — Lands characterized by traditional agricultural operations, pasture land, forestry, rural residential subdivisions and scattered non-farm residences on large tracts of land. Growth management goals in these areas include sustainable rural economic growth, environmental protection, and rural quality of life.
- **Community Service Areas** — Areas suitable for clustered, mixed land uses to help meet the shopping, employment and other needs of rural communities.
- **Economic Development Areas** — Locations where significant industrial or other job-creating activities are located and where additional industrial/commercial activity may be encouraged, in close proximity to major thoroughfares.
- **Conservation Areas** — Areas which illustrate the natural, productive, scenic, cultural, and recreational features that make the county a desirable place in which to live, work and visit. Conservation areas should either have limited or no development depending on the resources present.
- **Agri-Tourism Areas** — Located in the vicinity of vineyards, wineries, equestrian centers, and other agri-tourism attractions. These areas are primarily intended for agricultural uses that maintain the County's rural character, but are also appropriate for limited commercial uses that support and complement agri-tourism attractions.
- **Scenic Corridor** — The Scenic Corridor connects several agri-tourism areas in the western part of the County and is part of the state designated Leaf-to-Vine Scenic Byway. Low density residential and agricultural development is encouraged in this area to preserve the natural vistas and scenic views.
- **Special Planning Areas** — Areas with unique planning needs due to rapidly changing land use patterns, infrastructure improvements, deterioration of resources, or significant natural or cultural features that warrant further study and possibly a more detailed and focused planning effort in the future.

- **Lake Hampton Planning Area** — Centered around the County’s future drinking water supply reservoir on South Deep Creek. This area includes a large conservation area and will include recreational amenities and residential uses, in addition to limited commercial uses.



Future intensive growth and development in Yadkin County will be encouraged within designated growth areas and corridors, so as to direct it away from sensitive agricultural areas to the extent possible. Given Yadkin County’s geography, in the future, there will likely be pockets of development, with the greatest growth pressures most likely on the eastern side of the county and near larger municipal areas including Jonesville, Booneville and Yadkinville, but agriculture will likely be the prevailing land use throughout the county. Yadkin County’s Land Use Plan recognizes agriculture as an important part of its heritage, local economy, and scenic landscape, and acknowledges farmland as a highly valued asset by citizens. Preserving farmland and open space was identified as a top priority for the County. A future vision of Yadkin County as an “Agricultural Center” earned the most votes among citizen polls. The Plan emphasizes careful planning to protect working lands.

Yadkin County Future Land Use

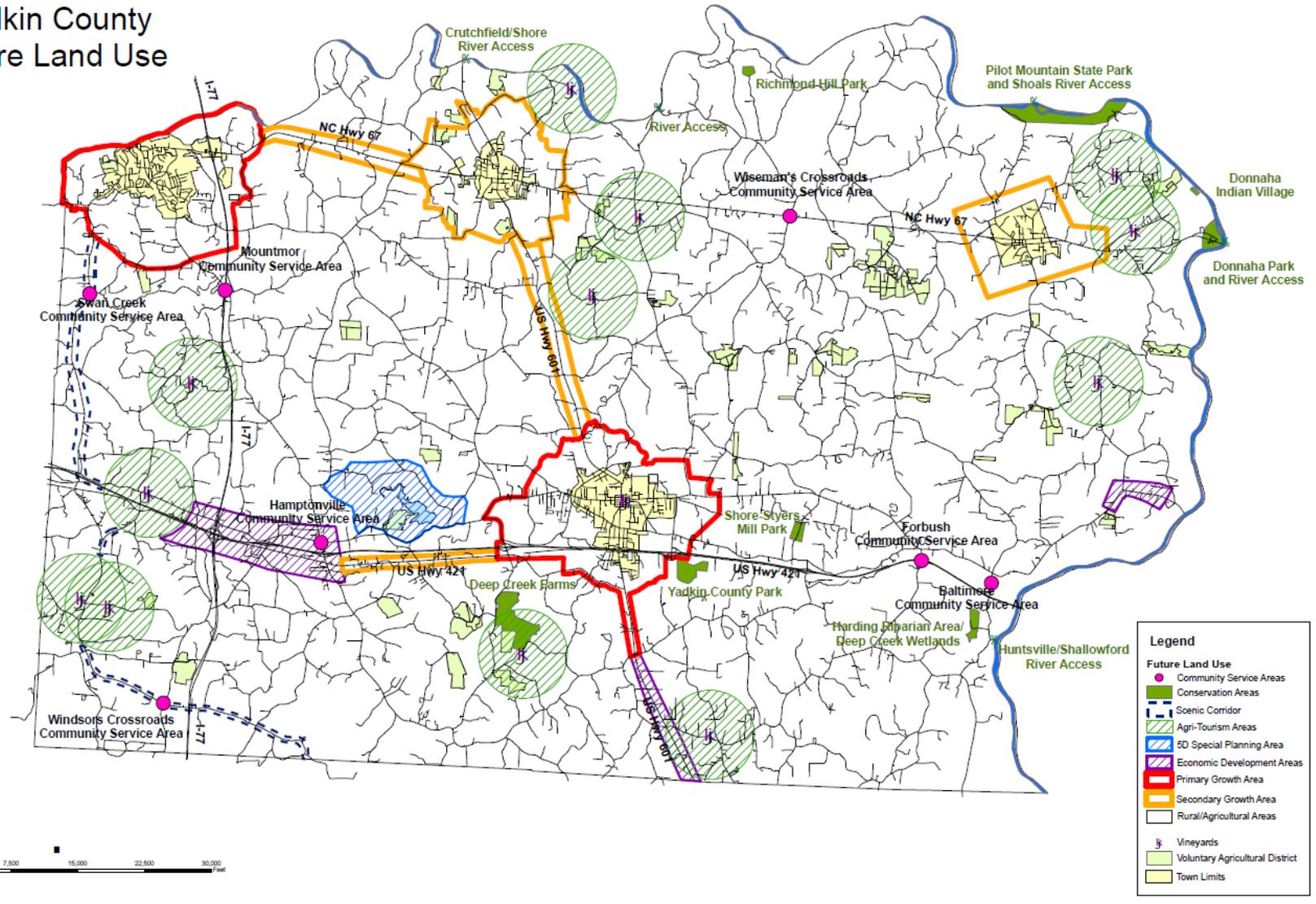


Figure 2.13

The Yadkin County Land Use Plan 2011 recommends that the County preserve agriculture and family farms, as well as the agricultural heritage of the County with the following strategies:

- 1. Preserve rural areas lands having a high productive potential, to the extent possible;*
- 2. Work with land conservancies and other regional organizations to conserve green space and working forest and farmland;*
- 3. Continue to support the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program;*
- 4. Encourage innovative and flexible land planning techniques, such as conservation and cluster subdivisions;*
- 5. Discourage urban development that is incompatible with preferred rural uses;*
- 6. Encourage light industrial use harmonious with rural and agricultural uses;*
- 7. Build a sustainable local foods economy (farmer's market, local food bank, etc.).*

F. Strengths/Opportunities/Challenges

Agriculture in Yadkin County faces many challenges in the future, some similar to other rural North Carolina Counties and others unique to Yadkin. At the same time, there are many unique strengths and opportunities to protect and enhance agriculture in the county. These strengths and challenges are summarized in Table 2.2 below and represent citizen comments from public meetings, farmer interviews, and additional meetings with county officials.

Table 2.2 Yadkin County Agriculture Strengths/Opportunities and Challenges

Strengths/Opportunities	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality land • Geographic location – close to population centers and other states, especially for specialty crops like hops and shiitake mushrooms • Good transportation routes • Plentiful water • Good farm economy • Politics favorable to farming • New Agriculture building to be complete in 2016 • Good livestock markets in Turnersburg, North Wilkesboro, and Mt. Airy • Good fertilizer dealers • Large poultry industry • Potential for branding Yadkin County products • Scenic benefit of Yadkin County farmland • Agri-tourism – people want to come out to rural lands for experiences – increased opportunities to market the land • Wine industry brings tourism, new producers • Property values are steadily increasing • Comprehensive land use planning at county level • Regional planning – Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor greenway planning • USDA’s Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) buffer program along creeks • Hunting opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population of farmers • Few of the next generation can afford to farm (farmland and equipment are extremely expensive) • Few new people coming into farming • Younger generation not as connected to the land, prefer higher income producing uses of land (i.e., development) • High cost of starting a farming operation • Difficult to get financing for new and existing farmers (FSA funding for loans decreasing) • High land values, making it difficult for new farmers to purchase farmland • Limited availability of rental land • Cost of operation – equipment, fuel, inputs • Farmland conversion to low density residential use • Nuisance complaints from people moving in closer to farms • Difficult to find quality labor and the regulatory burden of maintaining labor • Surry Community College no longer offers Agricultural Business program • Educational system can do more to promote farming and awareness of farms • Regulatory compliance • Lack of USDA livestock processing facility (closest one is in North Wilkesboro, Wilkes County) • Lack of local markets for some crops • Greatly reduced federal funding for agricultural support programs • Volatile commodity prices • Liability insurance for agri-tourism activities • Need for hands-on training for new vineyard operators

Primary Strengths:

1. Construction of New Agriculture Center

A new agriculture center is slated to be completed in 2016 on the Yadkin County campus of Surry Community College just north of Yadkinville. This center has been in the planning stages for many years and is a much-needed facility to consolidate and update facilities for all of Yadkin County's agriculture agencies.

2. Productive Natural Resource Base

Yadkin County has plentiful natural resources for productive agriculture, with the widespread presence of prime soils, good transportation routes and abundant water supplies.

3. Favorable Political Environment

Yadkin County's political structure currently is very supportive of agriculture and recognizes agriculture as an important part of the County's economy. Strong political support can lead to advancing policies favorable to agriculture preservation.

4. Strong Planning Tradition

Since establishing zoning regulations in the late 1990s, and as evidenced in its recent Land Use Plan, Yadkin County has a strong tradition of land use planning that will help the county plan for future agricultural use, while supporting growth and development.

Primary Challenges:

1. Rising Property Values and Taxes

Increasing land prices restrict a farmer's ability to purchase more land on which to operate, thus restricting flexibility to change his or her agricultural operation or otherwise produce more to increase farm income. The land leasing market in Yadkin County is especially tight for farmers seeking more land to rent because land is either unavailable or too expensive.

2. Aging Farm Operators

As farmers age in Yadkin County and with fewer young people going into farming, a large transition will take place over the next 20 years. Many farms may fall out of production and be

divided up and sold through estate settlement processes. Additionally, generations of farming expertise may be lost, an invaluable asset to the local agricultural economy.

3. High Input Costs and Unpredictable Profitability of Farming

Fluctuating commodity prices, coupled with rising costs of production, have resulted in low profitability and inadequate farm income for farmers across North Carolina. This affects the farmer's cash flow, receivables, return on investment, and incentive and ability to invest in continued operations, thus making the farmer's hold on his or her business untenable. In Yadkin County, farmers have identified low prices as well as the high costs of taxes, labor, regulatory compliance requirements, and fuel and fertilizer expenses as factors affecting their bottom line.

4. Conflicts with Non-farmer Neighbors

There are more incidences of conflicts with non-farming neighbors as more people move into rural areas. New neighbors find themselves faced with the realities of agricultural production processes: dust, livestock odors, noise from machinery, slow-moving farm equipment on roadways, etc. Complaints create a hostile operating environment, can end up in costly litigation and, at worst, can result in curtailing a farmer's ability to operate his or her farm.



CHAPTER 3

Farmland Preservation Tools

There are a number of tools and policies that encourage preservation of agricultural resources. These tools include a variety of voluntary policies and programs, such as tax policies, and land use planning policies and programs, implemented for the most part through public agencies and nonprofit organizations. An effective farmland preservation program must include a wide variety of programs and strategies. Yadkin County already has several of these programs and policies in place, and should consider additional tools to strengthen efforts. Public and private sector collaboration can help Yadkin County achieve farmland preservation goals and ensure a healthy future for agriculture.

A. Tax Policies

Tax policies help ease the tax burden on farmers and, at the same time, can help make farming more affordable as well as help create capital for investment in farm operations that otherwise would not be available.

Table 3.1 Farmland Preservation Tools

1.	<u>Tax Policies</u>
	Present Use Value Program (PUV)
	Wildlife Conservation Land Program
	Sales Tax Exemption
	Income Tax Incentives
	<u>Land Use Policies</u>
	Voluntary Agricultural District/ Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District
	Agricultural Conservation Agreements
	Farm Friendly Land Use Planning
	Agricultural Economic Development
	Farm Transition Planning
	<u>Collaborative Planning</u>

Present Use Value Tax Program (PUV)

The Present Use Value (PUV) program,³⁹ administered by the county tax assessor, allows for qualifying property to be assessed, for property tax purposes, based on its use as agricultural, horticultural, or forest land. Qualifying property is assessed at its present-use value rather than its potential commercial, residential or industrial development value, and therefore, property taxes are reduced for the landowner. A working farm must earn \$1,000 in gross sales annually to qualify for this differential assessment. The tax office also maintains a market value for the land, and the difference between the market value and the present-use value is maintained in the tax record as *deferred taxes*. When land becomes disqualified from the program, i.e., is no longer in agricultural, horticultural or forestry production or becomes otherwise disqualified, three previous years of deferred taxes, including interest, become payable and due (frequently referred to as “rollback” taxes).

Benefits: This program is a very important tool for farmers and landowners to keep valuable land in production. Lower property taxes keep farming more affordable. In particular, landowners can continue to lease land to farmers at an affordable rate since taxes are reduced. In addition, lower land values make the purchase of farmland more affordable for the next generation when the original farmer retires or sells. Lower property values can also help lower estate taxes, which force some families to sell farmland for development. As mentioned earlier, farmers report that one of their greatest challenges is a lack of available land to affordably lease or buy for agriculture. The PUV program helps address this challenge.

2. Wildlife Conservation Land Program

The Wildlife Conservation Land Program (WCLP) is a new State program established in 2008 that allows landowners who have owned their property for at least five years and want to manage for protected wildlife species or priority wildlife habitats to apply for a reduced property tax assessment. Only land with protected wildlife species or priority habitats will qualify.

The WCLP is similar to the PUV program in that landowners must still apply to their county tax office for a property tax deferment, but the WCLP is a completely separate program and is not part of PUV; however, wildlife conservation land must be appraised and assessed as if it were classified under PUV as agricultural land.

Benefits: This program may enable farmers to place additional lands not cultivated into Use Value, providing additional tax relief.

Recommendation: *Need to educate landowners about opportunities to qualify for this program.*

3. Sales Tax Incentives

Farmers (commercial loggers included) have traditionally been exempt from sales tax on certain items that are used to support farming operations. Under new tax laws, farmers will continue to be exempt provided they meet established income levels. Farm and logging machinery, containers, tobacco-drying equipment, grain-storage facilities, fuel, potting soil, feed, seed and fertilizer are also exempt from state and local sales taxes provided farmers meet certain criteria. Those applying for an exemption must obtain an exemption number and forms from the NC Department of Revenue.⁴⁰ This is a critical policy for farmers given the high cost of farm machinery and other inputs.

4. Income Tax Incentives

Farmers use IRS schedule F to report agricultural income. Significant savings are available with a thorough understanding of deductions and depreciation. Donated conservation agreements also offer significant federal and state income tax deductions and credits.

B. Land Use Policies

1. Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD)

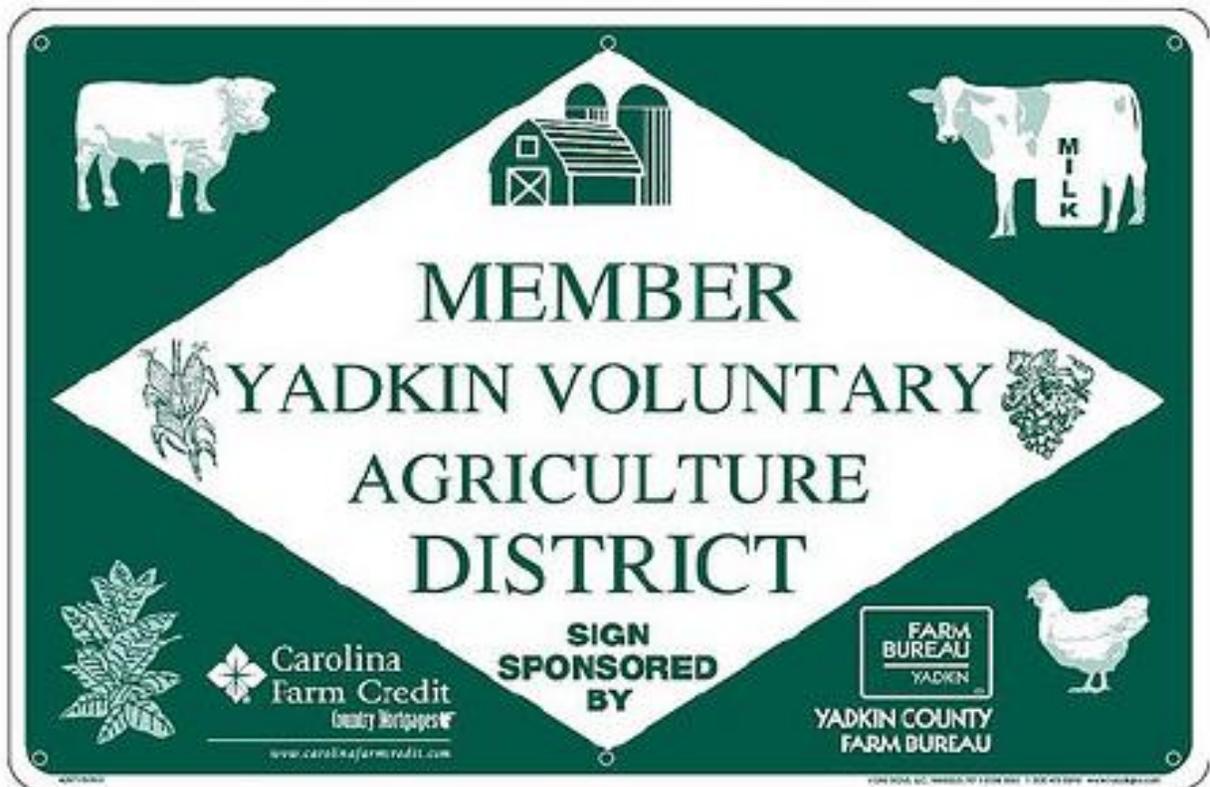
Yadkin County adopted a Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance on November 18, 2002, and amended the ordinance on May 20, 2013.⁴¹ The Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) is a North Carolina program that allows counties to form areas where commercial agriculture is encouraged and protected from non-farm development. VADs provide a number of benefits to farmers willing to restrict non-agricultural development for a period of 10 years.⁴²

In addition, VADs raise public awareness about agriculture, support the continued viability of local agriculture and help the government identify active farming communities. Participating farms may opt out of the program at any time. As of February 2015, a total of 61 landowners were enrolled in the County's VAD program which included 8,881 acres.⁴³ (*See Figure 3.1.*)

The primary benefits to participating farms include:

- Recognition and public education about agriculture (participating farms are given signs to post);
- Increased protection from nuisance suits;
- Waiver of water and sewer assessments;
- Public hearings are required in cases of condemnation of farmland;
- Representation by an appointed board regarding concerns on threats to the agricultural sector;
- Potential eligibility for farmland preservation funds;
- VAD Advisory Boards can set up ways to raise money for Farmland Preservation Plans and monitoring costs of VADs;
- If NC Department of Transportation (DOT) is considering a road through a VAD, an alternate has to be considered first; and
- Subdivision plats have to determine how they will affect VADs.⁴⁴

Recommendation: *Expanding the VAD program in Yadkin County can help with nuisance problems, one of the primary issues facing agriculture as more people move into rural areas. Municipalities can also adopt VAD programs to provide additional protection to agricultural operations within municipal boundaries.*



Yadkin County Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Participants

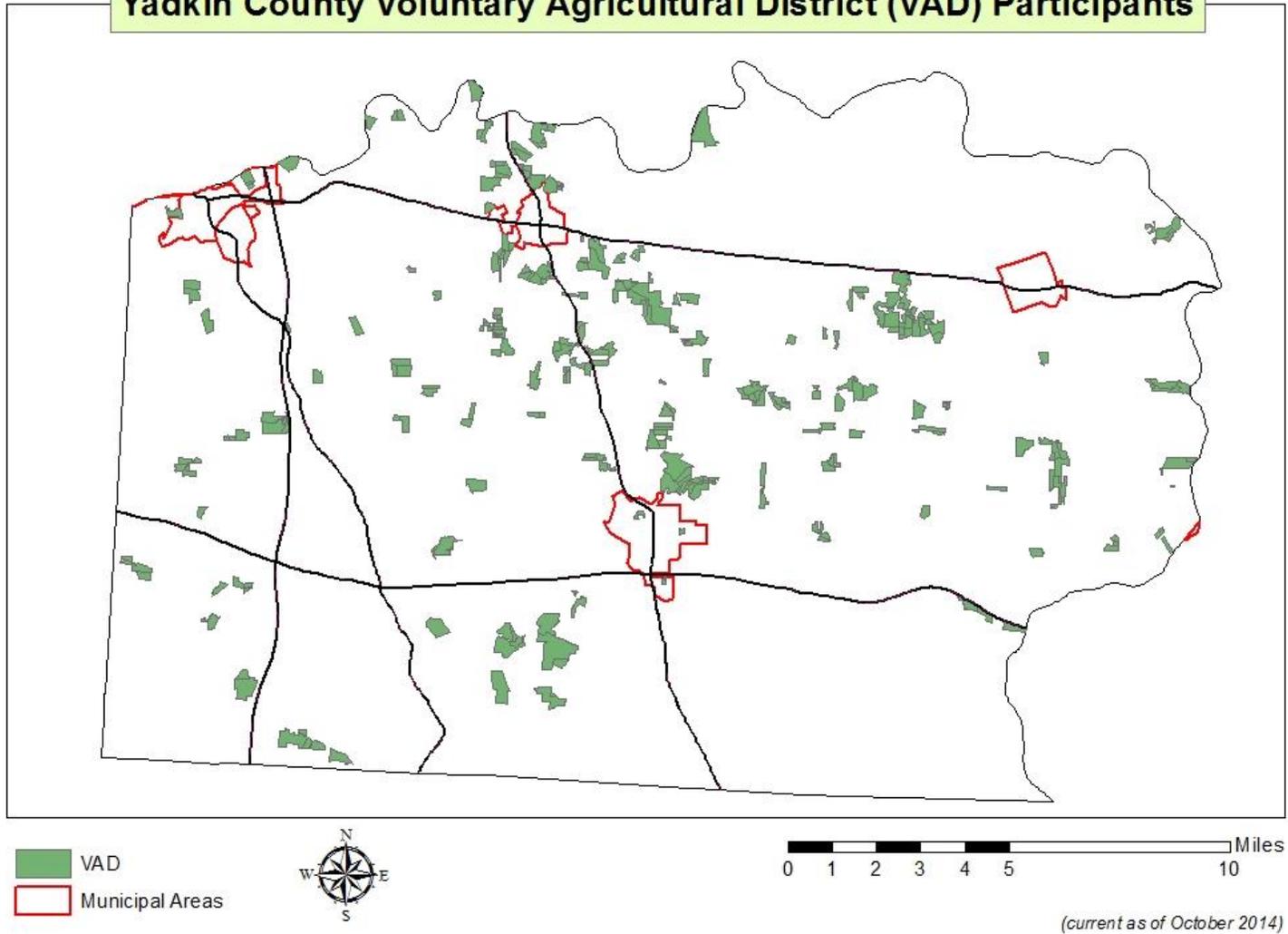


Figure 3.1

2. Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD)

In 2005, the North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation authorizing a new Enhanced Agricultural District (EVAD) option.⁴⁵ The EVAD option created a new tier of benefits for landowners willing to waive their right to withdraw from the VAD program at any time. Landowners willing to commit to a 10-year agreement to limit non-farm development receive additional benefits, including eligibility to receive a higher percentage of cost-share benefits from USDA and North Carolina farm programs, (up to 90 percent) and qualification as a bona fide farm with up to 25 percent of gross sales from the sale of non-farm products (and therefore be exempt from zoning regulations). Authorizing an Enhanced Agricultural District Program will strengthen Yadkin County's farmland preservation program. As of August 2014, twenty-three North Carolina counties have adopted EVAD ordinances.

Recommendation: *Yadkin County should consider adoption of the EVAD program as a way to strengthen farmland preservation.*

3. Agricultural Conservation Agreements

Agricultural agreements (also referred to as agricultural easements) are another available tool to protect farmland. An agricultural conservation agreement is a written contract between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization or public agency which keeps the land available for agriculture, while restricting future subdivision, non-farm development and other uses that are incompatible with commercial agriculture. Agreements under the program can be drafted to offer farmers maximum flexibility to continue to profitably work their land, and change their operation as their needs dictate, as long as they meet the requirements of state law regarding the purpose of agricultural conservation agreements. Agricultural conservation agreements can be permanent or valid for a specified period of time, and are either donated by the landowner or purchased by the agency or conservation organization working with the landowner (or a combination of both). Agreements are voluntary and tailored to each property according to the agricultural resources to be protected and landowner needs. Property under such agreements remains private and landowners can continue to farm as they choose. Land can change hands, but future owners are subject to the terms of the agreement. Agreements may be held by public agencies, such as the Yadkin SWCD, or a private conservation organization, such as the Piedmont Land Conservancy.

- **Permanent Conservation Agreements**: Agreements are made in perpetuity and are recorded with the property deed and will remain valid with future owners. Participating landowners are eligible for state tax credits and federal tax deductions.
- **Term Conservation Agreements**: Also called Agricultural Agreements, these agreements are similar to conservation agreements, but apply for a finite period of time agreed to by the landowner and conservation partner. Tax benefits are not available for term agreements. However, participating landowners may qualify for funding under certain state and federal programs.

Recommendation: *Yadkin County should consider holding agricultural agreements as an important component of its farmland preservation program.*

4. Farm-Friendly Land Use Policies

Local governments have the authority to use a variety of flexible land use policies that can be tailored to provide special protection for productive farmland. Using these types of policies for farmland preservation requires municipalities to identify agriculture as a priority and a critical part of its future landscape.

a. Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is a useful tool that a community uses to establish goals and identify ways to achieve those goals. **Yadkin County Land Use Plan 2011** is designed to guide physical growth and development over the next 15-20 years. Under this plan, Yadkin County recognizes agriculture as an important part of its heritage, local economy, and scenic landscape, and acknowledges farmland as a highly valued asset by citizens. Preserving farmland and open space was identified as a top priority for the County and a future vision of Yadkin County as an “Agricultural Center” earned the most votes among citizen polls. The Plan emphasizes careful planning to protect working lands, including the following specific development strategies, summarized:

- *Preserve agriculture and family farms, as well as the agricultural heritage of the County;*
- *Preserve rural areas lands having a high productive potential, to the extent possible;*
- *Work with land conservancies and other regional organizations to conserve green space and working forest and farmland;*

- *Continue to support the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program;*
- *Encourage innovative and flexible land planning techniques, such as conservation and cluster subdivisions;*
- *Discourage urban development that is incompatible with preferred rural uses;*
- *Encourage light industrial use harmonious with rural and agricultural uses;*
- *Build a sustainable local foods economy (farmer's market, local food bank, etc.).*

The plan directs future intensive development to Primary and Secondary Growth Areas, Economic Development Areas, and Community Service Areas, and also identifies strategies for the Leaf-to-Vine Scenic Corridor and Agri-Tourism areas, both compatible with preservation of agricultural lands. The zoning ordinance, originally adopted in 2002, provides a strong framework to implement proposed development strategies. The plan also identifies specific recommendations for farmland preservation,

Recommendation: *As this plan is revised and updated in the future, attention should be placed on identifying specific areas of agricultural importance for concentrated preservation efforts and should include by reference the farmland preservation tools and recommendations described herein. Towns in Yadkin County can adopt comprehensive plans that address farmland preservation within their jurisdictions and immediately surrounding areas.*

5. Right-to-Farm Laws

North Carolina has a right-to-farm law⁴⁶ that protects farm and forestry operations from being declared a nuisance as long as they have been in operation for at least one year and are operated properly and without negligence. Other state protections include the *Notice of Proximity Provision* which is provided as a benefit for participants in a VAD program, and the pre-litigation mediation of farm nuisance disputes. With state authorization, counties have the power to adopt stronger right-to-farm laws.

Recommendation: *Evaluate Yadkin County's Right-to-farm laws to see if they are adequate.*

6. Zoning

Zoning is a common land use planning tool and can be used positively to protect farmland. Yadkin County established partial zoning in 1989 and adopted county-wide zoning in 2003. Yadkin County's zoning ordinance does not apply to bona fide farms and does not regulate in any way croplands, timberlands, pasturelands, or orchards, including idle farmlands. The ordinance does not control farmhouses, barns, poultry houses or any farm buildings, including tenant and labor housing owned by and located on the farm. The current ordinance designates much of the county as Rural/Agricultural Areas, designed to protect agricultural areas from incompatible uses, in particular, large-scale developments. There are no formal recommendations in this plan to make any zoning changes because Yadkin County's current ordinances seem to adequately protect agricultural activities.

a. Extra-Territorial Jurisdictions

Towns in Yadkin County have responsibility for land use decisions, including zoning decisions, extending one mile outside of the legal town limits. This extra-territorial jurisdiction can be used to protect farming adjacent to Yadkin County's more urban towns through zoning or small area plans.

Recommendation: *Municipalities should consider including farming as an allowed use in their zoning districts covering agricultural areas and provide flexibility for farmers to expand or change their operations in the future. Municipalities should also consider adopting VAD ordinances as appropriate.*

C. Collaborative Planning

Collaboration among various agencies and programs can result in some creative ways to encourage farmland preservation.

1. Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor Master Plan (2009)

Thirty-one organizations in Caldwell, Wilkes, Surry, Yadkin Counties formed the Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor Partnership to provide regional leadership to preserve, protect, enhance, sustain, and promote the cultural, natural, historic, and recreational assets of the region. In Yadkin County, the plan focusses on two planning sectors: (1) Rockford/Richmond Hill/Barney Hill; and (2) East Bend/Shallow Ford. One of the goals of the Plan is to encourage and promote

conservation and preservation of scenic landscapes, natural resources, and open spaces, including farms.

Recommendation: *Continue to work with the Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor Partnership to encourage conservation of agricultural lands throughout the planning area.*

2. Leaf-To-Vine Scenic Byway

The State-designated Leaf-to-Vine Scenic Byway, which stretches 65 miles along the scenic western side of the county, connects local vineyards, historic sites, and recreational areas.

Recommendation: *Emphasize conservation efforts along the Byway to preserve the agricultural heritage of this area.*

3. Agricultural Economic Development



Agricultural economic development includes programs and policies designed to expand existing agricultural enterprises and encourage the development of new ideas. Yadkin County is fortunate to have officials and policy makers who are aware of the tremendous value agriculture has for the county. Increasingly across North Carolina, along with the diversification of the

farm economy, local governments consider agricultural enterprise development to be a vital component of local economic development. Examples in Yadkin County include collaborative web promotion of county attractions, such as the *Visit Yadkin* web site.

Recommendation: Continue to work to include agricultural attractions in tourism and marketing materials, including special farm events and farmers markets. Develop a branding tag line and logo highlighting local products.

4. Farm Transition Planning

As our farming population ages and passes on, farmland is often sold out of the family for non-farm use, because converted uses will maximize income for the estate or because there is no interest in farming by the younger generation. Helping families plan for the future of their rural lands can help provide options that



keep land in agricultural use while ensuring income to the heirs. NC A&T State University is working with the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, and WNC FarmLink to develop “NC Farm Link”, a web-based tool to connect individuals and organizations *statewide* in the pursuit of keeping land in the hands of farmers. It not only links farmland seekers to landowners, but it links both of these groups to service providers and resources that exist to support the transition process.

Recommendation:

In Yadkin County, Cooperative Extension can offer information and resources from NCSU on estate planning to farmers and help connect them to estate planners to address this need. Promote the new NC Farm Link website on local agency websites and promotional materials.

CHAPTER 4

Recommendations for Enhancing Agriculture in Yadkin County



Yadkin County has a strong future in agriculture, given its natural resource base, rural character, political support for, and long history of agriculture. The long-term viability of agriculture in Yadkin County depends on keeping productive soils in agricultural use, making farming more profitable and producing new farmers and farm operations. The following recommendations provide a

plan for achieving these goals. Recommendations include steering growth away from the most important active farming communities, supporting policies that encourage agricultural activities, educating the farming and non-farming public about the importance of agriculture, and creating opportunities for new farmers.

North Carolina farmers have traditionally produced commodity crops. With improvements in transportation technology, the dismantling of trade barriers and the resulting increase in global competition, North Carolina farmers have increasingly struggled to compete. In the future, to be more competitive, farmers could consider more opportunities for niche markets, direct sales and value-added products, given the county's proximity to large urban areas and accessibility to transportation networks. Farmers could develop stronger partnerships with regional retailers, similar to the model of Handmade in America based in Asheville, North Carolina.

A. Public Policy and Planning

Work to ensure land use planning programs and policies work for agriculture, protect critical resources, and mitigate negative impacts.

- a. Formally adopt this Farmland Preservation Plan as County Policy and officially include it as part of the Yadkin County Land Use Plan.
- b. Establish a Yadkin County Farmland Preservation Program that focuses on acquisition of agricultural agreements and education.
- c. Update the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) ordinance to include Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD).
- d. Mitigate the potential for conflicting land uses and nuisance suits by educating the public and realtors about farming.
 - Continue policy for on-half aerial mile notification zone in the county GIS system to notify buyers and inform them of VAD participation.
 - Notify realtors/public about the availability of new GIS information.
- e. Work with municipalities to integrate agriculture into land use decisions
 - Provide maps and GIS data to municipal officials that designate priority agricultural areas and the location of productive farmland with the goal of better integrating agricultural interests in municipal planning.
 - Work with municipalities to consider establishing municipal VAD/EVAD ordinances.
 - Encourage municipalities to continue to allow farming as allowed use in annexed areas.
 - Encourage municipalities to adopt zoning ordinances that allow farmers to change and modify operations.
- f. Consider agriculture when making land use planning decisions, particularly in areas of prime soils and productive agriculture or along the scenic byway.
- g. Incorporate agriculture into infrastructure planning by informing the Soil and Water Conservation District, Cooperative Extension, and the Agricultural Advisory Board of infrastructure projects affecting agricultural enterprises.

B. Agricultural Development and Marketing

Promote agriculture as a viable part of Yadkin County's economy and support the establishment of additional markets for local products.

- a. Improve regional branding of Yadkin County products.
- b. Expand opportunities to publicize "Food with a Story."
- c. Establish a county "Value-added Processing Center," including a community kitchen, possibly at the new Agricultural Center.

- d. Support efforts to establish an additional regional meat processing facility with greater capacity. Currently, the only nearby USDA facilities include M.L. Mitchell & Son in Walnut Cove. Mays Meats in Taylorsville and Thomas Brothers in Wilkesboro.
- e. Support establishment of a fine dining option for agri-tourism visitors.
- f. Encourage development of local entrepreneurial talent to provide technical assistance to tourism businesses in the county.

C. Education and Training

Foster greater appreciation for agriculture among residents and government officials, and help educate farmers about options to improve operations or protect their resources through education and outreach efforts.

- a. Re-establish an Agribusiness Program at Surry Community College's Yadkin Center or at the main campus in Dobson.
- b. Publicize land conservation strategies with farmers.
- c. Educate farmers and rural landowners about opportunities to qualify under the Present Use Value and the Wildlife Conservation Land tax relief programs.
- d. Expand agricultural education in schools through Cooperative Extension and develop an agricultural Youth Leadership Program through Future Farmers of America or the Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers group.
- e. Continue to promote the understanding and appreciation of agriculture to the public by working with the Yadkin County Chamber of Commerce and the Yadkin County Economic Development Council.
 - Continue to publicize regular feature stories in the media about the importance of agriculture.
 - Continue to publicize the economic, environmental and cultural benefits of Yadkin County farms.
 - Continue to develop county brochures that highlight agri-tourism businesses and events available for the public including farmers markets, restaurants that serve local foods, seasonal roadside stands, wineries, etc.
- f. Hold periodic Ag Forums on current issues, programs and policies.
- g. Continue the education of county and municipal officials and planning board members on farming issues.
- h. Highlight agriculture in the Chamber's "Leadership Yadkin" program so program participants fully understand the importance of agriculture to Yadkin County's future.
- i. Develop periodic farm tours to showcase heritage, innovation and success on select Yadkin County farms.
- j. Continue to support development of new specialty crops (niche markets), such as hops, specialty grains and shiitake.

- k. Utilize space in the new Agriculture/Education Center at the Surry Community College Yadkin Center for expanded farmer education and networking meetings.
- l. Establish a demonstration garden operated by the Master Gardeners.
- m. Continue to educate farmers on crop diversification, rotational grazing, agri-tourism and other farming opportunities.
- n. Provide farmers with information on business planning, direct marketing, and financing assistance.
- o. Work with farmers who have lost tobacco buyout funds to help transition to alternative agricultural activities.
- p. Increase farm acres enrolled in the VAD program, targeting communities with prime soils.

D. Farm Transition

Help make agriculture achievable for the next generation of farmers

- a. Create a bi-annual “Planning the Future of Your Farm” workshop to focus on the importance of estate planning with Farm Bureau
- b. Enroll new members in the N.C. Century Farm Program.
- c. Continue to share materials about farm transition planning to aging farmers, and share NC Farm Link information.
- d. Promote N.C. State University’s Agricultural Institute 2-year Associates Degree program and local community college programs as alternatives for post-secondary education.

E. Financing

Improve access to financing and capital.

- a. Publicize Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan programs.
- b. Develop additional ways to expand opportunities for financing new agricultural operations or expansion of existing operations.
- c. Publicize Young and Beginning Farmer Loan Program available through FSA.

Table 4.1 Implementation Plan for Recommendations

	Recommendation	Action Step(s)	Timeline	Responsible Parties
Public Policy and Planning	Make Farmland Preservation Plan official county policy	Formally adopt Farmland Preservation Plan	2015	SWCD, Cooperative Extension, County Commissioners
	Establish a Yadkin County Farmland Preservation Program	Develop program structure based on this Farmland Preservation Plan, including an option for SWCD to accept and hold agricultural agreements	2015	SWCD, Cooperative Extension
		Adopt program	2016	SWCD, Cooperative Extension, County Commissioners
	Establish EVAD program	Adopt EVAD ordinance	2015	Agricultural Advisory Board
	Mitigate potential for nuisance problems	Continue to notify buyers within ½ mile of VAD farms	On-going	County Tax Office
		Notify realtors/public about GIS information	On-going	SWCD, Cooperative Extension, County Tax Office

	Work with municipalities to integrate agriculture into land use decisions	Encourage municipalities to continue to allow farming as allowed use in annexed areas	On-going	Planning, SWCD, Cooperative Extension
		Provide maps and GIS data to municipal officials that designate the location of productive farmland	On-going	Planning, SWCD, Cooperative Extension
		Encourage municipalities to adopt VAD/EVAD ordinances	2016-2017	Agricultural Advisory Board
		Encourage municipalities to adopt zoning ordinances that allow farmers to change and modify operations	On-going	Planning
	Consider agriculture when making land use planning decisions, particularly in areas of prime soils and productive agriculture or along the scenic byway		On-going	Planning, SWCD, Cooperative Extension
	Incorporate agriculture into infrastructure planning	Inform SWCD and Agricultural Advisory Board of proposed infrastructure projects affecting farms	On-going	Municipal officials, Planning

Agricultural Development and Marketing	Improve regional branding of Yadkin County products	Develop marketing plan	2016-2017	Cooperative Extension
		Develop tag line and logo for Yadkin County products	2016-2017	Chamber of Commerce
	Publicize "Food with a Story"	Publish in regional media outlets two stories a year that focus on local product	On-going	Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce
	Establish a county "Value-Added Processing Center" and a community kitchen	At new Agriculture Center	2017-2018	Cooperative Extension
	Support efforts to establish a regional meat processing facility		On-going	Cooperative Extension
	Support establishment of fine dining option for agri-tourism visitors		On-going	Chamber of Commerce
	Encourage development of local entrepreneurial talent to support marketing of agri-tourism and value-added operations		On-going	Chamber of Commerce

Education and Training	Re-establish an Agribusiness Program at Surry Community College	Encourage Community College Administration to increase class options	2016-2018	Surry Community College
	Publicize land conservation strategies with farmers	Develop and distribute brochures; hold workshops	On-going	SWCD, Cooperative Extension, Piedmont Land Conservancy
	Publicize PUV and Wildlife Conservation Land Program	Develop and distribute brochures; hold workshops	Ongoing	SWCD, Tax Office, NC Forest Service, WRC
	Expand agricultural education with young people	Expand Cooperative Extension programs in schools	Ongoing	Cooperative Extension
		Develop Youth Leadership Program through Future Farmers of America	Ongoing	FFA
		Expand Young Farmers and Ranchers Association	Ongoing	Farm Bureau
	Foster greater appreciation of and public support for agriculture	Publicize the economic, environmental and cultural benefits of agriculture through media stories; heritage events	2015 - ongoing	Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce

		Further develop brochures highlighting agriculture in Yadkin County, including agri-tourism businesses and events	Ongoing	Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce,
	Hold periodic Ag Forums on current issues, programs and policies		On-Going	Cooperative Extension, SWCD, FSA
	Continue to educate public officials on farming issues	Include agriculture updates as periodic agenda item; distribute regular communications on agriculture; continue to highlight agriculture as part of the Chamber's Leadership Yadkin programs	2015 - ongoing	SWCD, Cooperative Extension
	Develop periodic Farm Tours	Identify farms and plan tours	On-going	Cooperative Extension, Chamber of Commerce
	Support development of new specialty crops, such as hops, specialty grains, shiitake, etc.	Plan and host workshops, develop newsletters to attract farmers to try new crops	2016-ongoing	Cooperative Extension
	Host networking meetings in new Agricultural Center		2017-ongoing	Cooperative Extension

	Establish a demonstration garden operated by the Master Gardeners		2017-ongoing	Cooperative Extension
	Increase farm acres enrolled in the VAD program	Target communities with high concentrations of prime soils and soils of statewide or local importance	On-going	Agricultural Advisory Board
	Continue to provide critical information to farmers to improve production	Continue to educate farmers on crop diversification, improved production techniques, and alternative opportunities, such as agri-tourism	2015 - ongoing	SWCD, Cooperative Extension
		Develop workshops on business planning, direct marketing and financing assistance	2015 - ongoing	Cooperative Extension, FSA
Farm Transition	Create bi-annual "Planning for the Future of Your Farm" workshop to focus on the importance of estate planning		2016 - ongoing	Cooperative Extension
	Enroll new members into the Century Farm Program		2015 - ongoing	NCDA&CS
	Promote NC Farm Link		2015 -	Cooperative Extension

	to connect retiring farmers with new farmers		ongoing	
	Promote NCSU Agricultural Institute's 2-year Associates Program and community colleges		2015 - ongoing	Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension, FFA, SWCD
Financing	Improve access to financing and capital for new and existing farm operations	Publicize Farm Service Agency loan programs	2015 - ongoing	FSA, Cooperative Extension, SWCD
		Develop new opportunities for financing, including grant opportunities	2015 - ongoing	FSA, Cooperative Extension, Economic Development

CHAPTER 5

Available Funding

Successful farmland preservation programs use a variety of sources to achieve goals and finance activities. Listed below are known available sources. State and federal funds for farmland preservation have been very limited in recent years and are expected to be limited into the next few years due to budgetary constraints. Having an approved farmland preservation plan in place, however, prepares counties for funding cycles and improves opportunities for success for competitive grant programs.

A. State Programs

North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation

Trust Fund - N.C.G.S. § 106-744(c) established a trust fund to be administered by the Commissioner of Agriculture. The purpose of the trust fund is to provide monies to purchase agricultural conservation agreements and to fund programs that promote the development and sustainability of farming and the transition of existing farms to new farm families. Counties and nonprofit conservation organizations can apply for grants for these purposes. In 2014 the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund awarded nearly \$2.3 million in grants across the state to protect farmland and promote agricultural enterprises.

www.ncadfp.org

North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program (NCACSP) is a water quality program that has been assisting farmers and landowners in Yadkin County since 1989. The program is designed to promote conservation and water quality Best Management Practices (BMPs) by offering financial as well as technical cost share assistance for the implementation of these practices. The program is designed to pay 75% of the average cost of BMP's, while the landowner cover the remaining 25% of the average cost. This cost share assistance allows farmers and landowners the opportunity to install BMP's that would not have been installed without financial assistance. Along with the financial assistance, technical assistance is provided in order to ensure that the practices meet standards and specifications to improve water quality.

www.soilandwater.nc.gov in the Agriculture Cost Share Program (ACSP) section).⁴⁷

North Carolina Forest Stewardship Program, administered by the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources, provides assistance to forest landowners in developing stewardship management plans for timber production, wildlife management, recreational opportunities, water quality and natural beauty.

(www.dfr.state.nc.us/stewardship/forest_stewardship.htm)

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a joint effort of the North Carolina Division of Soil and Water Conservation, the North Carolina Water Management Trust Fund, the Ecosystem Enhancement Program, and the Farm Service Agency to address water quality problems. (www.enr.state.nc.us/dswc/pages/crep.html)

Golden Leaf Foundation funds projects in tobacco-dependent regions of North Carolina to improve local economies. In Yadkin County, Golden Leaf funds have supported a number of projects including the new agricultural center, educational programs, the Yadkin Cultural Arts Center and more. (www.goldenleaf.org)

Tobacco Trust Fund also funds projects to enhance the agricultural economy of North Carolina, targeting individuals affected by the decline of the tobacco market. Locally funded projects include a new hops farm, the new Farmers Market and the new agricultural center. The Tobacco Trust Fund has distributed grants for farmers markets, research to improve agricultural crops, and others. (www.tobaccotruffund.org)

Clean Water Management Trust Fund is a voluntary, incentive-based water quality program to help local governments, state agencies and conservation non-profit groups finance projects to protect and restore surface water quality. Farm and forest land owners are eligible to receive monies for sale of the development rights under certain guidelines and qualifications. These funds can be combined with certain federal conservation funds. (www.cwmtf.net)

NC AgVentures Grant Program awards up to \$15,000 to agriculturally dependent farm families in select counties (including Yadkin in 2014) for innovative project ideas to diversify, expand or implement new entrepreneurial plans in their farm operations.

(www.yadkin.ces.ncsu.edu/2014/11/new-nc-agventures-grants/)

Agricultural Water Resources Assistance Program (AgWRAP) offers cost share opportunities to increase water efficiency, availability and storage for agricultural purposes and BMPs to conserve and protect water resources.

(www.ncagr.gov/SWC/costshareprograms/AgWRAP/)

B. Federal Programs

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to encourage farmers to convert highly erodible cropland and other environmentally sensitive land to vegetative cover such as wildlife-friendly cool season grasses or native warm season grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips, habitat buffers or riparian buffers. Authorized by the 1985 Farm Bill, the CRP is one of the nation's oldest conservation programs. Participating landowners receive annual rental payments for the term of their 10- to 15-year contracts. The CRP provides cost-share funding for the installation of approved vegetative practices on eligible cropland. Landowners also may receive funding to fence streams that exclude livestock and to build grass waterways. In 2014, Yadkin County Farmers received \$20,796 through CRP. (www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/crp)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) pays approximately 75 to 90 percent of the cost for producers to implement conservation practices (structural and/or management) on eligible agricultural land. The higher cost share rate applies to limited resource, beginning (in business less than 10 years), and historically underserved groups. Authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill, EQIP is open to any producer engaged in livestock, forestry, or crop production on eligible land. EQIP provides technical and financial assistance for planning, designing, and installing conservation practices such as animal waste storage facilities, livestock watering systems, stream bank stabilization, grassed waterways, and energy conservation practices. A Local Work Group composed of representatives from local agricultural agency representatives and other interest groups help decide local priorities for this work. In program years 2013 and 2014, EQIP provided a total of over \$1.1 million to Yadkin county producers. (www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip)

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (2014 Farm Bill) provides matching funds for qualified farms to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and rangeland in agricultural uses. Managed by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), this program partners with State, tribal or local governments and non-

governmental organizations to acquire conservation agreements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the conservation agreement. There are specific conditions for farms to qualify, including being large enough to sustain agricultural production. (www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp/)

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) was authorized by the 1996 Farm Bill to provide landowners with technical and financial assistance to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. Landowners can receive as much as 100 percent of the appraised agricultural market value of the property for permanent conservation easements or 75 percent for 30-year easements. They also can participate in a restoration cost-share agreement. These 10-year agreements pay for 75 percent of the cost of restoration activities and do not place an easement on the property. Eligible land includes wetlands cleared or drained for farming or pasture and must be restorable and suitable for wildlife. The NRCS accepts applications for the WRP on a continuous basis. (www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp)

Conservation Stewardship Program encourages land stewards to improve their conservation performance by installing and adopting additional activities, and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities on agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land. The NRCS will make CSP available nationwide on a continuous application basis. NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to eligible producers to conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land.

(www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp)

Debt for Nature Program is available to landowners with Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans secured by real estate. The program reduces a borrower's debt in exchange for a conservation contract with a term of 10, 30 or 50 years. Participants may not develop land placed in the Debt for Nature Program, use it to raise livestock, or for agricultural production. Eligible lands include wetlands, highly erodible lands and areas of high water quality or scenic value.

(www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/newsReleases?area=newsroom&subject=landing&topic=pfs&newstype=prfactsheet&type=detail&item=pf_20070525_consv_en_dnp07.html)

Forest Land Enhancement Program is a voluntary program for non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners. It provides for technical, educational and cost-share assistance to promote sustainability of non-industrial private forest lands. In North Carolina, the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) reimburses 40–60 percent of the cost of specific forestry and wildlife habitation improvement practices. It is unique among other forestry cost-share programs in that it emphasizes practices that will improve the condition of an existing forest stand. Such practices can include pre-commercial thinning, prescribed understory burning, and release of seedlings from vegetative competition. Any individual who owns at least 5 acres of forestland and is not principally engaged in the processing of wood products, or engaged in fee hunting operations, is eligible to participate. Cost sharing is based on approval by the NC Division of Forest Resources of a forest management plan that explains the need for the proposed practices. A maximum of \$10,000 annually may be received by any landowner. (www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/comments_flep.shtml)

USDA Rural Development funds a broad array of programs in rural communities through grants and loans that include economic development, technical assistance, and essential services. (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/nc/>)

USDA Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education (SARE) Program funds research and projects in many areas related to agriculture including: on-farm renewable energy, pest and weed management, pastured livestock and rotational grazing, no-till and conservation tillage, nutrient management, agroforestry, marketing, crop and livestock diversity, and systems research. Grants are awarded to farmers, extension agents, educators, researchers, nonprofits and communities. (www.sare.org)

Appalachian Regional Commission funds projects in targeted counties in the Appalachia region, which includes Yadkin County, to increase job opportunities, strengthen the capacity of the people to compete in the global economy, and develop and improve the region's infrastructure to make the region economically competitive. (www.arc.gov)

C. Local Opportunities

Financing farmland preservation programs at the county level is limited to local appropriations. Some counties have received special authority from the General Assembly for municipal bonds and taxes (such as a hotel tax or small increase to property taxes). Most state and federal programs now require local matches. Since private funding for farmland preservation is very limited, a dedicated local funding stream is the most effective way for conservation partners to strategically and predictably plan projects and be competitive for limited state and federal funds.



CHAPTER 6

Farmland Preservation Partners

A number of different public agencies and organizations work to protect natural resources in Yadkin County. Effective farmland preservation is a collaborative effort among different agencies and organizations by bringing unique technical skills together. Collaboration helps to develop creative strategies to protect farmland, as well as helps leverage state and federal funding. This chapter describes farmland preservation partners in Yadkin County.

Soil and Water Conservation District and Board (SWCD)



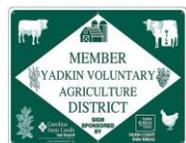
Yadkin County's SWCD manages numerous programs that provide technical assistance, education outreach, and financial incentives for landowners using county, state and federal resources. SWCD staff work closely with landowners and have a very thorough understanding of issues affecting agriculture in the County. (*Jason Walker, District Director (336) 679-8052, Extension 3, jwalker@yadkincountync.gov, www.yadkincountync.gov.)*)

Cooperative Extension



The NC Cooperative Extension Service provides unbiased, research-based information through educational programs, publications and consultations on a wide variety of issues relating to agriculture, food and youth as a way to share university research and expertise from North Carolina's land grant universities, NC State University and NC A&T State University. (*Colleen Church, County Extension Director, (336) 679-2061; colleen_church@ncsu.edu; <http://yadkin.ces.ncsu.edu>.)*)

Agricultural Advisory Board



The Agricultural Advisory Board is a locally appointed group of citizens responsible for implementing the Voluntary Agricultural District program with support from the SWCD and Cooperative Extension staff. The Board is also responsible for sharing information on local issues impacting agriculture and

providing feedback to the County Commissioners on ways to strengthen agriculture. (Contact NC Cooperative Extension – Yadkin County Center or Yadkin County Soil and Water Conservation District – see previous contact listings.)

Farm Service Agency (FSA)



The FSA assists farmers with a variety of conservation and financial services addressing farm income, land and water conservation, credit for new or disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and recovery assistance to farms following disasters. The FSA is the umbrella agency for many federal programs (CRP, CREP, ECP, EFRP, etc.), including the Tobacco Transition Payment Program. ((336) 679-8821; www.fsa.usda.gov.)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)



NRCS is a federal agency with field offices serving every county that works with landowners to enhance and protect natural resources through conservation planning, technical assistance and training, and grant and cost-share programs. (Rick Bailey, District Conservationist, 336-386-8109, extension 3; rick.bailey@nc.usda.gov; www.usda.gov)

Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC)



Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC) is a grassroots non-profit land trust dedicated to protecting natural and scenic lands, farms, and green spaces in the Piedmont of North Carolina to enrich the quality of life for our communities today and tomorrow. To achieve this mission PLC builds partnerships with local, state, and federal government entities, organizations, communities, and landowners to identify areas to protect. Working with willing landowners, PLC permanently protects land through either fee-simple acquisition or voluntary conservation agreements. As of September 30, 2014, these projects have protected a total of 22,145 acres in the nine counties in which PLC works: Alamance, Caswell, Forsyth, Guilford, Randolph, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin.

In Yadkin County, PLC has been fortunate to work with private landowners and the Yadkin SWCD to protect a total of 1,050 acres on six projects in Yadkin County. (Kevin Redding, Executive Director, 336-691-0088, Extension 103; kredding@piedmontland.org; www.piedmontland.org)

North Carolina Forest Service



The North Carolina Forest Service, now part of the NC Department of Agriculture, helps private landowners manage their forestlands for timber production, wildlife habitat and recreational use, including assistance with developing forest management plans. The NCFS assists landowners in many cost shared programs that convert agricultural lands back to sustainable woodland, enhance water quality through assistance with reforestation and harvesting timber, utilizing sound best management practices and forest practice guidelines. The agency also provides assistance in forest stewardship, wildlife enhancement, insects & disease, invasive control, tree farms, needle production, natural disasters, fire control, prescribed burns, timber stand improvements, information and education, and training (*John Kessler, Yadkin County Ranger, (336) 679-8941; yadkin.ncfs@ncagr.gov; www.ncforestservice.gov.)*

North Carolina Farm Bureau – Yadkin County Chapter



The Yadkin County chapter of the NC Farm Bureau is a non-profit organization that promotes the agricultural industry and needs of farmers at the county, state and federal level. Previously funding came from the State, but now is provided by the county and the local chapter has a budget to advocate for agriculture. The Farm Bureau also manages Yadkin County's Young Farmers and Ranchers Association. ((336) 679-8858; mbx-yadkin.soots@ncfbins.com; www.ncfb.org.)

Yadkin County Cattleman's Association



Yadkin County Cattleman's Association is an active group managed by Cooperative Extension.

End Notes

¹ USDA & NCDA&CS 2013 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics
<http://ncagr.gov/stats/2013AgStat/AgStat2013.pdf>

² NCGS §106-735 et seq.

³ NCGS §106-735(b). "Qualifying farmland" is defined in §106-737.

⁴ NCGS §106-744 (c)(1).

⁵ Per the requirements of funding received from the North Carolina Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (NC ADFP)

⁶ USDA & NCDA&CS 2013 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics
<http://ncagr.gov/stats/2013AgStat/AgStat2013.pdf>

⁷ Piedmont Triad Regional Council of Government (PTRCOG), An Overview of the Aging Population and Individuals with Disabilities (Yadkin County), September 2012.

⁸ Dr. Mitch Renlow, NC State University Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, *The Cost of Community Services* (www.cals.ncsu.edu)

⁹ Piedmont Triad Regional Council of Government (PTRCOG), An Overview of the Aging Population and Individuals with Disabilities (Yadkin County), September 2012.

¹⁰ USDA & NCDA&CS 2013 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics
<http://ncagr.gov/stats/2013AgStat/AgStat2013.pdf>.

¹¹ Yadkin County Land Use Plan 2011

¹² NC Department of Commerce, Thrive in North Carolina, Yadkin County, June 2014.

¹³ 2012 US Census of Agriculture

¹⁴ 2012 US Census of Agriculture

¹⁵ 2012 US Census of Agriculture

¹⁶ 2012 US Census of Agriculture

¹⁷ Yadkin County Annual Report, 2013

¹⁸ 2013 USDA & NCDA&CS Agricultural Statistics

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- ¹⁹ Yadkin County Land Use Plan 2011
- ²⁰ Surry County Economic Development Partnership Inc. (<http://www.surriedp.com>)
- ²¹ 2012 US Census of Agriculture
- ²² 2013 USDA & NCDA&CS Agricultural Statistics
- ²³ Yadkin County Tax Department, December 2014
- ²⁴ 2012 US Census of Agriculture
- ²⁵ 2012 US Census of Agriculture
- ²⁶ Yadkin County Annual Report, 2013
- ²⁷ 2005-2013 USDA & NCDA&CS Agricultural Statistics
- ²⁸ 2012 US Census of Agriculture
- ²⁹ 2005-2013 USDA & NCDA&CS Agricultural Statistics
- ³⁰ USDA & NCDA&CS 2013 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics
<http://ncagr.gov/stats/2013AgStat/AgStat2013.pdf>
- ³¹ USDA & NCDA&CS 2013 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics
<http://ncagr.gov/stats/2013AgStat/AgStat2013.pdf>.
- ³² USDA & NCDA&CS 2013 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics
<http://ncagr.gov/stats/2013AgStat/AgStat2013.pdf>.
- ³³ USDA NRCS Custom Soil Resource Report for Yadkin County, NC October 8, 2014.
- ³⁴ Soil Survey of Yadkin County, North Carolina 2007, USDA and NRCS
- ³⁵ USDA NRCS Custom Soil Resource Report for Yadkin County, NC October 8, 2014.
- ³⁶ 2014 US Climate Data (<http://www.usclimatedata.com/climate/yadkinville/north-carolina/united-states/usnc0774>).
- ³⁷ NC Department of Commerce, Thrive in North Carolina, Yadkin County, June 2014.
- ³⁸ Yadkin County Land Use Plan 2011
- ³⁹ As defined in N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 105-277.2 to .7

⁴⁰As defined in N.C. Gen. Stat. 105-164.13

⁴¹ North Carolina County and Municipal Land Preservation Ordinances and Programs, Land Preservation Notebook, <http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/wq/lpn/ncordinances.htm#ordinances>, updated December 31, 2013.

⁴²As defined in N.C. Gen. Stat. §§106-737 through 106-744 and Chapter 153A

⁴³ Colleen Church, Yadkin County Extension Director, North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

⁴⁴ VAD Workshop, Lee County Extension Service Office, 2/16/2011

⁴⁵ As defined in N.C.G.S. §§ 106-743

⁴⁶ As defined in N.C. Gen. Stat. §§106-700 to 701

⁴⁷ North Carolina Agriculture Cost Share Program brochure published by the U.S. EPA through a Section 319 Grant