

An Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan for Buncombe County

**Compiled by Sam Bingham
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Article I – Statement of Need for Action

Buncombe County, (pop. 222,174) holds a unique place in the economy and culture of Western North Carolina. Its urban hub, Asheville, (pop. 72,789), dominates the whole mountain region as center of transportation, markets, and services. It also enjoys some of the flattest topography between the Blue Ridge and the Smoky Mountains, which accounts for its early importance as an agricultural center and, ironically, now, for an urban sprawl that threatens to overwhelm what remains of its rural heritage.

Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway have redeemed much of our wilder land from the rapacity of the timber boom of the early 1900's, but Asheville's housing boom continues to chip away at the working private land on which the harmony of the whole depends.

The Buncombe County Farmland Protection Plan reflects a vision of interdependent urban and rural landscapes, which both enjoy and profit from the natural beauty and fertility of the land itself. The plan looks to sustaining an increasingly diverse, educated, and cosmopolitan community through a dynamic mix of enterprises of which a major proportion will be, directly or indirectly, land-based. These include not only agriculture in the narrow sense of producing crops, livestock, and timber, but also all enterprises that benefit from clean air and water and appealing rural scenery.

The tourism and recreation industries have long played a key role in our mountain economy, but now a wide array of "footloose" businesses are relocating to the mountains for the quality of life here. Dynamic sectors include professional services, information technology, specialty manufacturing, arts and crafts. The Asheville Chamber of Commerce reports that between May of 2006 and May of 2007 the County lost 900 manufacturing jobs but added 1,200 new positions in professional services – about the number of farmers, total, remaining in Buncombe.

The Asheville Merchants Association, by a grant of \$58,000 to support this Buncombe County Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan, has also recognized the contribution to our prosperity of agrarian landscapes that remain, fertile, biologically diverse, uncluttered to the eye, and productive enough to support the people who work them.

The pressure to convert such land to commercial and residential use is common to all urbanizing areas worldwide. Especially in developed countries land prices have become so high on all but the most marginal land that no legal farm crop will pay the interest on a mortgage big enough to purchase them. In most cases the return on farming will not even pay the property tax, if levied on the market value of the land. Thus, agricultural land and other open spaces disappear quickly without political intervention through purchases, subsidies or restrictions of some kind.

In North Carolina, the availability of "Present Use Valuation" to mitigate the tax pressure on existing farms reflects a political consensus that farmland warrants such special protection, even though arguably farmland deserves the break because it demands less in municipal services than



Leicester – A sign of changes to come

developed land. Present Use Valuation, however, only protects existing, working farms. It does not help younger farmers wishing to buy in or lower the incentive for retiring farmers (Average age 58+ in the County) to sell their land to non-agricultural interests.

Thus, as aging farm owners look toward passing on their assets, the future of farmland has become extremely unstable.

Nevertheless, the threat to the land base of our local economy has risen as a political issue to the degree that the Buncombe County commissioners have in the last two years allocated \$4 million and successfully solicited matching funds of \$2.74 million to preserve farmland through purchase of development rights on land that otherwise would probably sell for residential or commercial use. Over the last 3 years 2,555 acres have been protected for farming through the purchase of easements; however, this tool has limited use where land prices have become excessive.

South Buncombe County has already lost nearly all its farmland, and what remains is almost out of reach. Just over our southern boundary in Henderson County, a 63 acre “farm” boasting one 1,400 square foot cottage and a small horse barn went on the market in the fall of 2007 for \$3.4 million (\$54,000/acre) thanks to “multiple ridge-top building sites.”

In the Sandy Mush township of west Buncombe, the County recently negotiated an easement for just over \$1 million on 517 acres at roughly \$4,200 per acre, but this window is closing swiftly.

Unfortunately, the sellers’ market for farmland is not the only general economic force driving the conversion of agricultural land beyond the point of the healthy balance that our county’s particular economy requires. Preserving farmland is hard to justify, if farmers still can’t make a living on it. Because of the topography Buncombe County farms tend to be smaller and steeper than those outside the mountains. They compete poorly against bigger, flatter, farms in production of bulk commodities.

Except for a vestigial tobacco market and one creamery, no markets or processing of nationally traded commodities survive in the County today. Thus, marketing against highly organized national distribution systems is difficult. Many specialty crops that might sell well are labor intensive, and legal labor costs have risen. Since the Asheville stockyards closed in 2004, the nearest places to buy and sell animals are outside the region.

Producers who want to sell USDA inspected meat locally have another obstacle. The nearest independent poultry processing is 200 miles away in Siler City, North Carolina. Red meat producers truck their animals 273 miles to Taylorsville, Tennessee, and haul the product back.

Thus, any farmland protection plan must reinforce two links simultaneously – land preservation to defend the very possibility of keeping an agricultural landscape, and farm profitability to keep the present generation on the land and draw in new blood to secure the future. The Buncombe County Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan treats both of these paths of action while honoring the format prescribed in the North Carolina Farmland Preservation Enabling Act of 1986, as amended.



Leicester – The housing boom

In terms of operational priorities, however, the Buncombe County Farmland Protection/Advisory Board, has set protecting farmland against conversion to other use as its first priority. A lengthy discussion at the September '07 meeting of the board confirmed this point of view while recognizing that the Cooperative Extension Service and non-profit institutions such as the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) have taken prime responsibility for supporting farm profitability.

Article II: Authority for County Action

In 1986, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the North Carolina Farmland Preservation Enabling Act.¹ 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.” In addition to enabling counties to create Voluntary Agricultural District ordinances, which Buncombe County has adopted, 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 protection plan. The act declares that a countywide farmland protection plan shall:

1. Contain a list and description of existing agricultural activity in the County.
2. Contain a list of existing challenges to continued family farming in the County.
3. Contain a list of opportunities for maintaining or enhancing small, family-owned farms and the local agricultural economy.
4. Describe how the County plans to maintain a viable agricultural community and shall address farmland preservation tools, such as agricultural economic development, including farm diversification and marketing assistance; other kinds of agricultural technical assistance, such as farm infrastructure financing, farmland purchasing, linking with younger farmers, and estate planning; the desirability and feasibility of donating agricultural conservation easements, and entering into voluntary agricultural districts.
5. Contain a schedule for implementing the plan and an identification of possible funding sources for the long-term support of the plan.

The sections that follow cover these points, although the categories differ slightly. Articles III and IV below treat points one and two above while points three and four are covered by Articles V, VI, and VII. This reflects the intent of the Buncombe County Farmland Protection / Advisory Board to use The Plan as a vehicle for initiating public discussion of new approaches to the challenge of rapidly changing land use.

¹ NCGS §106-735 et seq.

NCGS §106-735(b). “Qualifying farmland” is defined in §106-737.

NCGS §106-744 (c)(1).

NCGS §106-744(e)(1-5)

Such a plan might also be formulated by a planning agency or other advisory board such a soil and water conservation district that has responsibility for land preservation in the county.

The Board recognizes the importance of reinforcing both areas of policy implied in the statutory guidelines above – *mitigation and control of the economic forces currently driving the conversion of farmland* **and** *enhancing the profitability of farming itself*. However, the latter is generally accepted by the public requires only finding support for specific steps such as establishing a livestock market and promoting direct sales of produce to bulk buyers, whereas the land preservation policy side of The Plan introduces concepts relatively new to the political discourse in the County.

Therefore, Section V below treats land preservation efforts currently accepted and underway. Section VI then presents the array of tools from which the County might develop a more extensive and multi-faceted program. Section VII focuses on the more familiar subject of “opportunities for maintaining or enhancing small, family-owned farms and the local agricultural economy” defined in point three of the statutory guidelines above.

Finally, Section VIII reflects this division of emphasis by including a number of action steps aimed at promoting and informing public discussion approaches to land preservation that are new to this region.



Leicester – A new development across the branch

Article III: Overview of Buncombe County Agricultural Activity

A Sector in Transition

Even relatively flat Buncombe County never had many large farms or large fields of row crops, and, with the exception of Burley tobacco and milk, no significant production of major commodities. A trend toward smaller farms, part-time farming, and less organized marketing, evident since World War II, has accelerated in recent years.

Nevertheless, a new farm model based on specialty marketing to local markets is growing year by year and promises to restore vitality to the farm sector. Also complementary land enterprises such as agro-tourism, hunting, and horse breeding, training, and riding show signs of promise.

Statistics based on 2002 census data² for the main commodity crops amply document the decline of the old but fail to measure well the advance of the new. Between 1997 and 2002, the market value of agricultural production fell 38% from \$35.2 to \$21.8 million. Average gross receipts per farm fell from \$27,732 to \$18,314. Nearly 70 percent of the 1192 farms in the census grossed less than \$5,000. A recent report by the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project claims that more than half of the 12,000 farms in their 23 mountain county study area operate at a loss. (page 18) In 2002, the average Buncombe County farm went about \$1,700 into the red.

If total farm acreage has declined only slightly, use patterns continue to change. For instance, the Census reported 2,164 acres of corn for silage and 13,342 acres in hay and other forage crops in 2002. In 2005 the North Carolina Department of Agriculture estimated only 900 acres in corn for silage and 15,500 in hay and forage. Of the 15,000 acres of pasture reported in 2002 (many no doubt also mown for hay) an informal observer would conclude that a significant fraction is under-utilized and in danger of being lost to brush encroachment.

It is worth noting here, that a major effort by local farmers in the 1960s and 70s to join the national march toward highly-capitalized, high-volume production models, generally failed in the mountain counties. Abandoned chicken houses of great size and expense and empty milk parlors witness to the attempt all over the region. Too much feed had to be imported. The markets were too far, the competition too stiff. A subsequent campaign to substitute tomatoes for tobacco as a small farmer's mortgage-payer also collapsed in a squeeze between an unsympathetic market and labor costs. Much pasture that had supported a low cost, grass-based livestock production model was abandoned and reverted to forest during this period.

There is ample evidence that, given accessible sales and processing facilities, animal production from grass will, as of old, prove the most profitable, most ecologically sustainable, and financially least risky way to use steep mountain land.

² NASS Website <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census02/profiles/nc/cp37021.PDF> Note: Most date cited in this plan is based on U.S. Census data for 2002. Extrapolations by Federal, State, and local agencies vary greatly in detail, although trends are generally the same.



Fairview – Ramsey Farm Holsteins

Estimated Income from Sale of Farm Products			
Buncombe County			
Commodity	2002	2003	2004
Tobacco-Burley	\$2,364,379	\$1,595,092	\$1,518,660
Corn	\$0		\$0
Potatoes	\$32,520	\$33,984	\$41,880
Fruit & Vegetables	\$3,962,760	\$5,270,900	\$2,312,660
Greenhouse/Nursery	\$21,590,000	\$39,500,000	\$7,638,000
Hay & Other Crops	\$500,500	\$828,630	\$937,200
Farm Forestry	\$5,197,415	\$3,008,043	\$2,583,251
Total Crop Income	\$33,647,574	\$50,236,649	\$15,031,651
Hogs	\$17,502	\$36,163	\$35,911
Cattle	\$7,431,439	\$8,410,696	\$6,148,403
Milk	\$6,528,973	\$6,713,700	\$5,699,000
Poultry & Eggs	\$1,734	\$1,551	\$1,485
Other LS & LS Prod.	\$310,135	\$343,745	\$303,096
Livestock Income	\$14,289,783	\$15,505,855	\$12,187,895
Income from Farming	\$47,937,357	\$65,742,504	\$27,219,546
Horses/Ponies/Mules	\$1,629,500	\$1,551,850	\$1,564,700
Non-Farm Forestry	\$1,234,568	\$2,129,006	\$2,017,000
Income from Land	\$50,801,425	\$69,423,360	\$30,801,246
Net of Greenhs./Nurs.	\$29,211,425	\$29,923,360	\$23,163,246

The big drop in the greenhouse and nursery category in 2004 reflects the failure of a major operation in late '2003, although sales still topped all other categories. New owners increased sales in following years. The Extension Service has targeted horticulture for promotion in this plan.

Dairies have declined but there is some evidence that other forms of livestock production have potential. Improved handling, processing and marketing facilities could contribute much to future growth

Forestry also shows up as an important element in the farm economy. USFS statistics for 2002 show 258,000 acres of largely high quality oak-hickory and poplar forest of which 164,000 acres (63%) under private ownership.

About 26 million board feet of saw timber was harvested, equal to half the annual growth. Thus the resource is increasing.

Planners can take solace, in the fact that certain farm models are indeed thriving and show promise for expansion. Nursery plants, for example, greenhouse production of flowers and ornamentals compete well in markets beyond the mountain region and account for a significant portion of total farm income. The chart above of Estimated Income from Sale of Farm Products³ for the years 2002, 2003, and 2004 compiled by the Cooperative Extension Service illustrates the complexity of the Buncombe County farm economy as well as the difficulty of drawing firm conclusions from the available statistics.

To their credit, mountain farms also have a history of flexibility, because they have always operated on the margins of the larger farm economy and half a century of production restrictions on the region's major cash crop, tobacco, encouraged a high degree of diversity and openness to change.

The decline of earlier forms of agriculture overlaps the rise of new opportunities. In a study entitled *Growing Local*⁴ the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) conducted an extensive survey of food buyers in the mountain region and from their data in combination with no less than 23 similar surveys by other organizations. Although the numbers are regional,

³ *Estimated Income from Farm Production and Government Payments by County, Extension District, and State for 2002, 2003, 2004*; as estimated by county extension agents, compiled by the Dept. of Agricultural and Resource Economics, N.C. State University, October 2005.

⁴ Laura D. Kirby, Charlie Jackson, and Allison Perrett; *GROWING LOCAL: Expanding the Western North Carolina Food and Farm Economy*, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, Asheville, August (2007)



Fairview – Row crops at Flying Cloud

Buncombe County represents a large portion of these markets, and the potential growth of 250 percent indicated by the chart applies here.

Large-Scale Market Potential for Local Produce in Western North Carolina (Chart excludes meat and dairy)		
	Current Spending	Desired Spending
Full service groceries	\$5,100,000	\$13,500,000
Specialty food stores	\$100,000	\$234,000
Full-service restaurants	\$117,000	\$760,500
Summer Camps	\$27,500	\$51,840
Public Schools	\$19,000	\$139,230
Colleges/Universities	\$18,450	\$169,000
Hospitals	\$25,600	\$289,536
Total wholesale spending	\$5,407,550	\$15,144,106
Direct Sales	\$3,100,000	\$6,200,000
Total	\$8,507,550	\$21,344,106
<small>Source: Growing Locally, ASAP p.46, from several surveys & reports</small>		

A similar chart for meat and dairy products would probably show higher numbers and greater potential but the complexity of the production and marketing chains make it difficult to track local products. The dairy farms, once a mainstay of the local farm economy, have declined drastically nationwide, and only 10 remain in Buncombe County out of 75-80 only 30 years ago.

There is good evidence, however, that with some changes in the health regulations, which put excessive demands on small operators and cheese-makers, plus the restoration of facilities for the sale and processing of livestock, meat and dairy production could again contribute mightily to the profitability of local farms. Hormone-free production from grass works well in steep country. The success of Spring House Meats, discussed below, indicates a strong market, as does the fact that the gourmet kitchens on The Biltmore Estate promote grass fed local beef and lamb, from their own herds and from Spring House and other suppliers, as signature specialties.

The Estate also grows much of the produce consumed by guests and has the potential and desire to assume an important role in future efforts to brand and market local production.⁵

The attraction of George Vanderbilt’s grand house notwithstanding, the Biltmore Estate derives a significant part of its profit margin directly or indirectly from the 7,000 acres of land around it. In addition to livestock, produce, horticulture and of course grapes and wine are recreation opportunities including a summer camp, class in 4-wheel driving and fly fishing, mountain biking, major equestrian competitions, trail riding, among other activities.

For smaller producers, too, the broadest path points toward low-capital, intensive management of specialty products closely associated with service and non-horticultural enterprises, such as grass-fed livestock, selective logging, agri-tourism, hunting, recreation, and even residential development *in a manner that preserves an agrarian ambience as a major selling point.*

Pieces of this model already exist here and there throughout Buncombe County. For the sake of example, we may consider the 200-acre Hickory Nut Gap Farm in the Fairview Community and the aggregation of adjacent properties owned by cooperating family members and friends.

⁵ Interview with Biltmore Estate Farm Manager Ted Katsigianis, October 25, 2007



Fairview – Spring House Meats Farm Store

Thanks in no small measure to a landscape defined by this farm and several others, acreage in Fairview tops the market in the County, and the development pressure is extreme. At a point of generational transition, the heirs hired a professional planner to determine their most lucrative option. He sketched out a major high-end development in which agriculture would play no part. After emotional debate, they left the proposal on the table, determined to take from their land what their land had already proven able to give.

The current picture couldn't look more different than the professional planner's vision. The historic farmhouse, built around 1820 as a drovers' inn, now hosts weddings and dances. The orchards supply lively roadside cider, apple, and historic house tour enterprise during the color season. Two of the County's most dynamic direct market farming operations, Flying Cloud Farm (vegetables, herbs, berries, and flowers) and Spring House Meats (cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry) intensively manage arable ground and pastures. Capital investments, energy, and chemical inputs are kept minimal and aggressively controlled. Much labor is supplied by volunteers and interns who pay for the privilege.

A portable band mill delivers custom-cut timber. A trail-riding and riding instruction enterprise plus a summer day camp join the Flying Cloud Community Supported Agriculture group in holding the support of families from Asheville and beyond. Hunting, skeet shooting, and a corn maze are under study.

AND, 200 acres of steep forestland adjacent to the farm have been developed as Drovers' Road, one of the County's first "conservation developments." High-end housing sites are clustered in discreet locations in the lower portion, while the steeper land (roughly half the total) is protected by a conservation easement. Proximity and access to the farm, the historic farm house, and an extensive network of trails dramatically increased the value of Drovers' Road lots.

Hickory Nut Gap farm enjoys assets, including being effectively debt free, that make it difficult to replicate fully elsewhere. It nevertheless illustrates a host of possibilities, and it undeniably benefits not only the Fairview Community but the whole county in the precisely ways that healthy, beautiful farmland should. Without doubt, to subdivide and develop it in the customary way would adversely affect the very land prices in Fairview that threaten it now.

Greenhouses and nurseries

Horticulture, greenhouse production, and nurseries represent another growth path. Particularly bedding plants and ornamentals more than hold their own against national competition. Relatively sunny days year round, cool summer temperatures and relatively warm winters combine to lower the cost and difficulty of controlling temperatures in greenhouses. As the chart on page 5 indicates, this sector returns by far the most income among all agricultural categories and appears to have a bright future.

From the standpoint of land preservation, however, it is difficult to say that putting dozens of acres of bottom land into hydroponic production under glass meets all of the goals of a farmland protection program despite its profitability. Greenhouses that enable farmers to extend their growing season already contribute much to profitability in, direct marketing operations.



Barnardsville – Sign of the times

Forestry

The 42,769 acres enrolled as forestland accounts for 46 percent of all land taxed a Present Use Value in the County, and sustainable forest management could play a more important role in the working landscape in the County. Buncombe County trees now grow about twice much saw timber a year as the 26 million board feet currently harvested, as reported in the U.S. Forest Service publication, *Forest Statistics for North Carolina, 2002*.

Assistant District Forster Curtis Jessen, based in Buncombe County with the State Division of Forestry, believes that supplemental income from private land can and will become a more important factor on integrated farms. PUV taxation requires a management plan certified by a licensed forester. Monitoring and enforcement of plans has never been strict, Jessen sees steadily increasing recognition of the economic return on following them.

Much local wood now goes into low-end products such as pallets, but there is a lively and growing market for custom cut wood as well, ranging from beams for timber frame houses to high value hardwood for cabinetry. Several “horse loggers” in the area will drop your \$5,000 walnut tree for you and haul it out of the woods without tearing up your rhododendron thicket.

Non-timber exploitation of forests, including herb gathering (ginseng, goldenseal, etc.), hunting, and recreation have not been methodically studied but have an established history. They are all recognized as important uses and are likely to become more significant.

Unexplored potential may lie in promoting cooperatives among owners of contiguous parcels as timber harvesting, recreation, and hunting enterprises become more profitable as the acreage under management increases.

Article IV: Challenges to Continued Family Farming

The real estate market is the primary force eroding the position of agriculture in Buncombe County. Pressure on farms from growing populations and urban/suburban growth occurs worldwide. Buncombe County farm owners experience it acutely, because, according to the Chamber of Commerce, 95 percent of our population growth comes from in-migration, much it by wealthy people seeking an ex-urban lifestyle.

As Hickory Nut Gap farm and other, similar, operations illustrate, mountain land will generate enough cash to support a family seeking a working rural lifestyle, but no combination of multiple home enterprises and directly marketed crops will pay off a mortgage on the market value that the wider society sets on that land just because it is pretty.

Many of the “challenges” to preserving farmland are symptoms of this fact. The average age of a Buncombe County farmer is over 58, because their children, who have sought their fortunes elsewhere, want the farm to stay in the family but can’t afford to buy it. At 58, most farmers look forward to retirement rather than launching new enterprises, so they don’t seize opportunities to change. Younger farmers with new ideas and energy can’t get into the business.

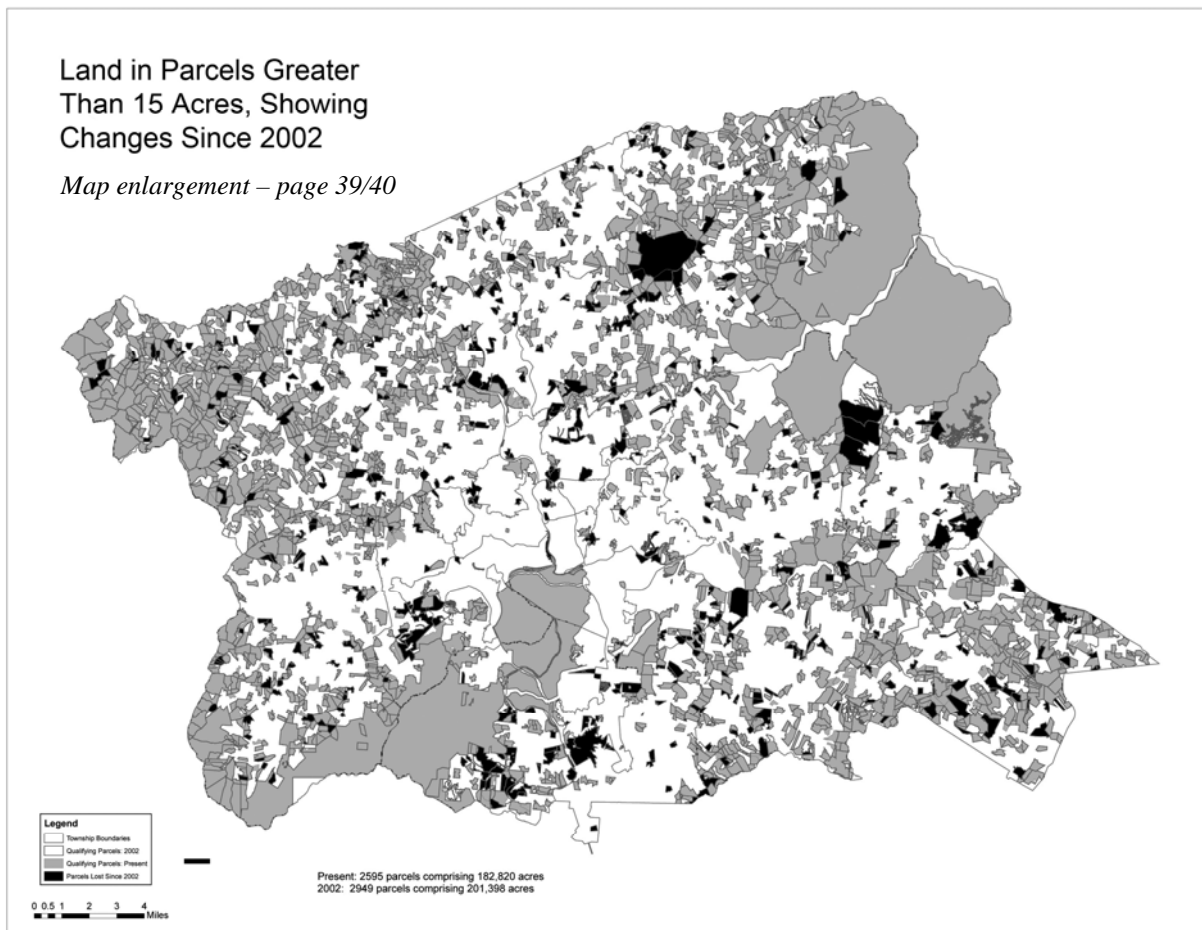


Barnardsville – A little bit further on

The money involved and the difficulties of planning transitions among multiple heirs make liquidation the most efficient way to settle an estate. The enormous profit margins realized on subdivisions over several decades of a rising market have created a strong political resistance to regulations on land use. The fragmentation of farming communities by random development undermines networks of cooperation and infrastructure and increases friction over tractors on the highway, barnyard smells, the bawling of weaned calves, and the like.

The maps accompanying this plan tell a graphic story of the conversion of farmland to other uses and the ongoing fragmentation of larger tracts of land, even in the areas where agricultural land use still predominates.

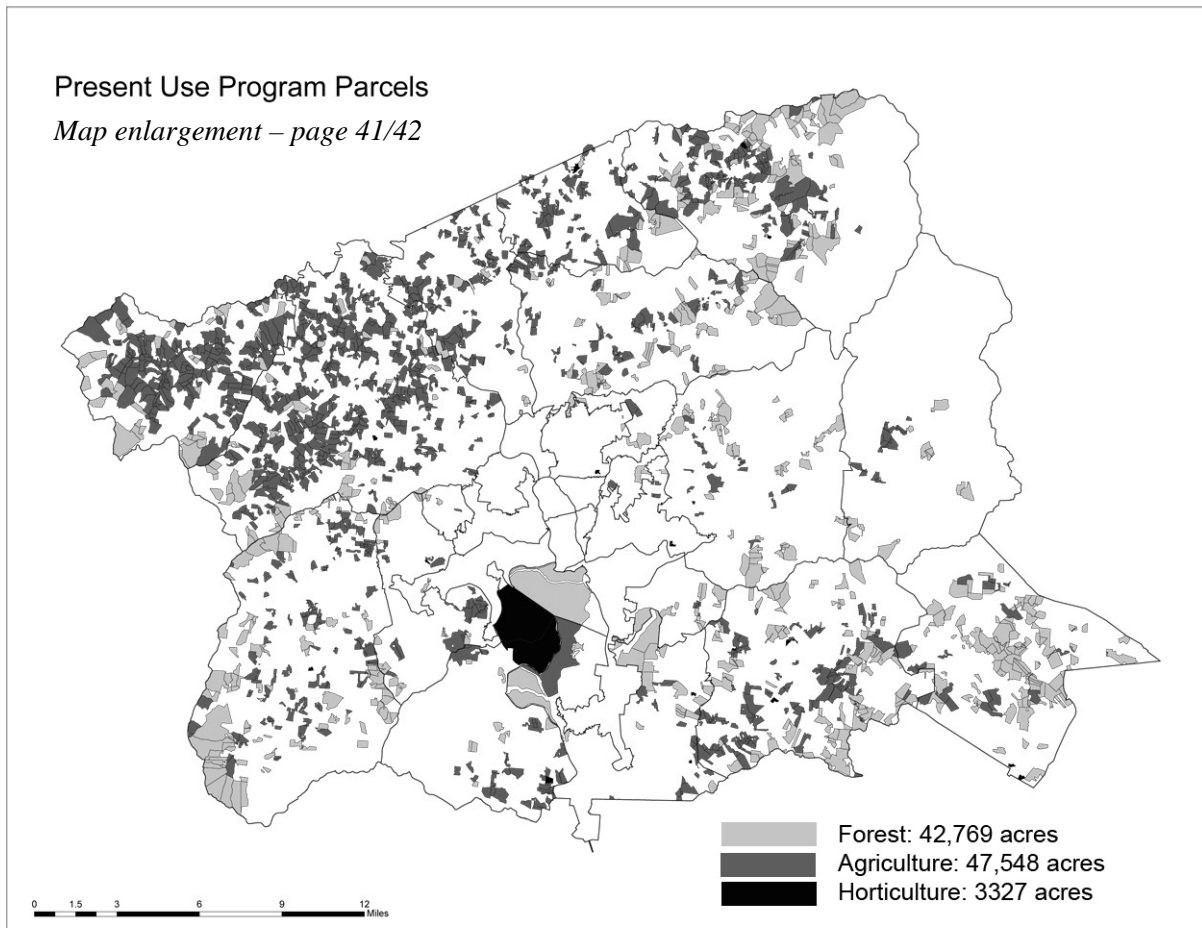
This shows all parcels of land greater than 15 acres as of October 1, 2007. The black areas represent 18,578 acres of land that has fallen out of this category since 2002 – 9.2 percent of all land in parcels of greater than 15 percent, including the National Forest and The Biltmore Estate.



The map on the following page shows farmland and forest land that Buncombe County taxes at Present Use Value – a good indicator of the most active agricultural zones. Given that in the areas of greatest concentration, active farmland was nearly contiguous as recently as 20 years ago, two points stand out on this map. Fragmentation is well advanced, and much land in larger parcels is no longer farmed and is thus ripe for subdivision.

Present Use Program Parcels

Map enlargement – page 41/42



The darker areas represent cropland and horticultural production, the lighter areas forestland. The large concentration south southwest of the center is the Biltmore Estate.

Article V: Farmland Protection Approaches Presently Practiced

Land Use Stabilization

The Buncombe County Farmland Protection Board, which also serves as the Farmland Advisory board has set protection of land against conversion to non-farm uses as its first priority. According to 2002 statistics, the total amount of farmland declined only slightly in the previous five years. Nevertheless, a number of large and conspicuous developments since, the rapid filling in of much remaining non-farm open space in South Buncombe, and a housing boom that affected previously untouched areas, created a general public awareness that a big piece of our economy and its supporting environment, once taken for granted, has become both threatened and vulnerable.

In the County, both public and non-profit entities currently employ a variety of tools to slow the conversion of farmland to other use. These include, purchase of development rights, “present use valuation” that keeps property tax rates low, voluntary donation of easements in return for

income tax benefits, establishment of Voluntary Agricultural Districts which carry certain “right to farm” protections, various environmental programs such as Conservation Reserve designation and the certification of stream buffer zones, and zoning.

A variety of other approaches applied in other counties and in other states may prove useful if the political climate proves favorable.

Easements

Easements restricting land use to conservation or agriculture constitute the most secure and permanent instrument for protecting land against conversion and subdivision. Landowners reporting a high taxable income may benefit from the deductions inherent in donating easements to a land trust. Some 7,522 acres in the County now enjoy such protection.

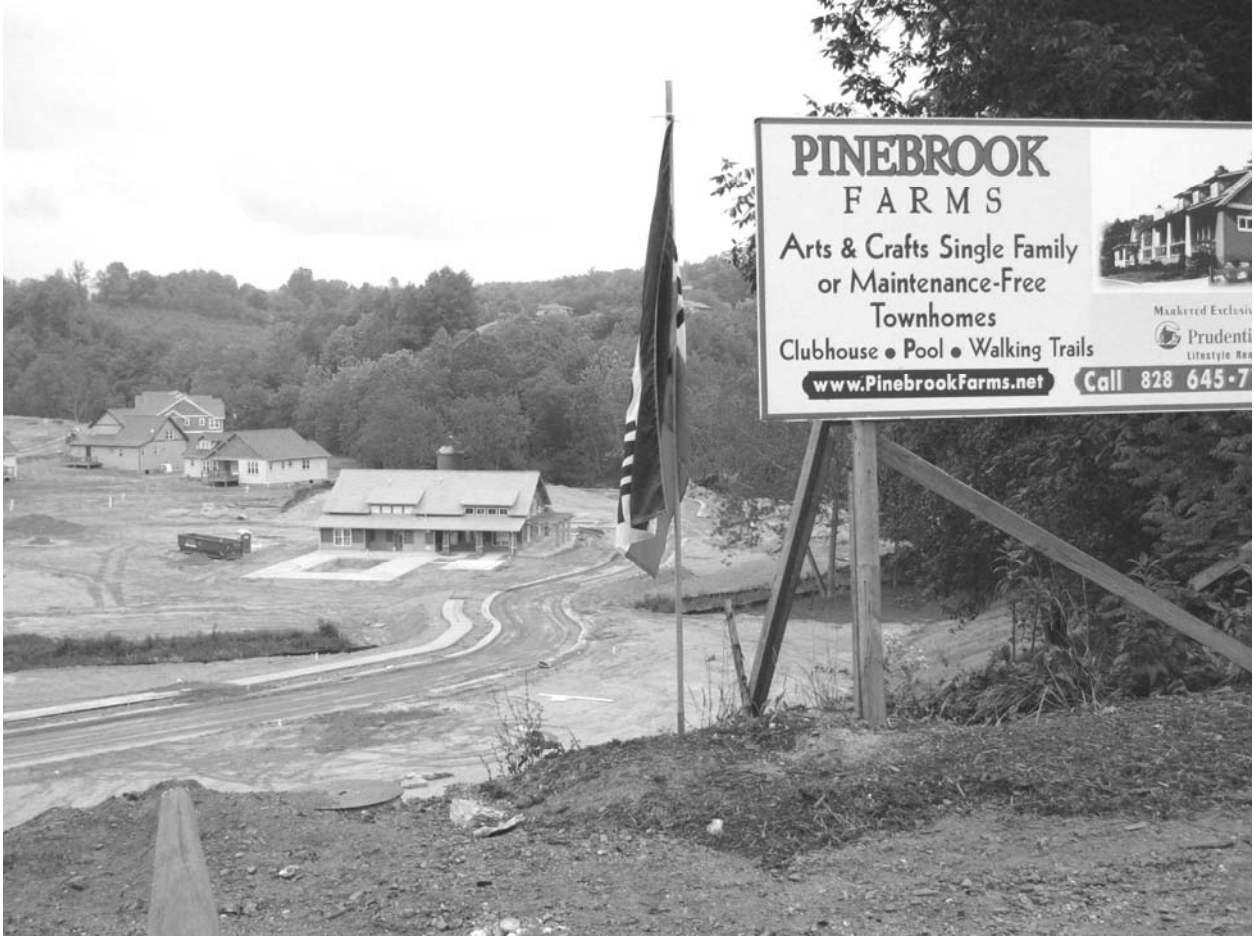
In recent years the County has been able to purchase easements totaling 2,555 acres. A County budget allocation of \$2 million in 2007 leveraged through donations of \$2.5 million from a private foundation have greatly assisted this program. Another \$2 million allocation in the 2008 budget will further this program. Selection is based on a ranking system that considers parcel size, location, soil type, cost, and several other factors. (See full text on page 40)

Two factors limit the impact of this approach.

Land prices in some areas such as Fairview and Reems Creek, where development pressure threatens to eliminate farm landscapes altogether, have risen to the point where easements simply cost too much. Typically costing 50 to 60 percent of the value of unrestricted land, a \$1 million easement will only protect 67 to 80 acres at \$25,000 apiece. In the white areas of the map, which have already become heavily subdivided and commercialized, land may sell at multiples of two or three times that, depending on location.

To date, all but 511 acres of the 2555 protected through the purchase of easements have been in the Sandy Mush /Upper Hominy area, where property combining arable and forest land costs less than half as much as in Fairview on the other side of the County.

The cost, difficulty, and time involved in negotiating either the gift or sale of an easement raises another obstacle. Even where land ownership is simple and the parties willing, surveys, appraisals, and attorney’s fees, can easily run to \$35,000, and more where multiple ownership is involved. The process can take over a year, and such tax benefits as may provide an added incentive only accrue over time. The landowners who have carried through on transferring an easement have all displayed a keen desire to conserve land for its own sake in addition to any financial interest. Most conservation easements are in fact purchased through *bargain sales*, in which landowners accept less than the full market value of their development rights, combining some cash compensation as well as the income tax benefits from the donated portion. This allows county funds to leverage state and federal incentives to stretch the local investment in farmland protection.



New Stock Road – The Country Life

Buncombe County has been fortunate that private contributions and the support of the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy have assisted in mitigating both obstacles. The following chart witnesses to a level of commitment to conserving key assets that is almost unique in the state.

Donations of the full value of an easement occur seldom as only owners with a high income can benefit from the income tax deduction. The typical farmer who is land rich and cash poor gains little from the trouble and expense involved in donating an easement.

2004 Conservation Easements in Buncombe						
Location	Acres	Co. Transaction Cost	County	Private*	Holder	
Fairview	82.12	\$17,640	\$0		\$0County	
2006 Conservation Easements in Buncombe						
Location	Acres	Co. Transaction Cost	County	Private*	Holder	
Swannanoa	70.16	\$21,214	\$0		\$0County	
Sandy Mush	54.63	\$10,283	\$0	\$186,000	SAHC	
2007 Completed Conservation Easements						
Location	Acres	Co. Transaction Cost	County	Private*	Holder	
Sandy Mush	137.63	\$31,707	\$320,000	\$350,000	SAHC	
Sandy Mush	428	\$38,991	\$425,000	\$425,000	SAHC	
Sandy Mush	62.44	\$30,000	\$120,000		\$0SAHC	
2007 Proposed Conservation Easements						
Location	Acres	Co. Transaction Cost	County	Private*	Holder	
Cane Creek	80	\$29,050	\$360,000		\$0CMLC	
River District	?	?	?		\$0River Link	
Sandy Mush	517	\$53,000	\$542,500	\$542,500	SAHC	
Broad River	63.3	\$17,000	\$75,000		\$0CMLC	
Sandy Mush	74.87	\$14,000	\$0?		SAHC	
Swannanoa	46.47	\$14,000	\$0		\$0SAHC	
Black Mountain	169.09	\$15,000	\$0		\$0SAHC	
Proposed 2008 Conservation Easements						
Location	Acres	Co. Transaction Cost	County	Private*	Holder	
Sandy Mush	500	\$49,000	\$750,000	\$750,000	SAHC	
Sandy Mush	72	\$35,000	\$108,000	\$108,000	SAHC	
Upper Hominy	200	\$34,000	\$500,000		\$0CMLC	
Sandy Mush	80	\$35,000	\$110,500	\$110,500	SAHC	
	2555.59	\$444,885	\$3,311,000	\$2,472,000		
				Total expenditure	\$6,227,885	

* A private family foundation

Map information from Buncombe County Planning Dept. and Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy.

Present Use Valuation

Enabled by state legislation, the program allows the County to collect property taxes based on agricultural land use rather than the so-called “highest and best” use. Different rates govern

three land categories: Forest, Agricultural, and Horticultural, each category further broken down by soil type and land class.

Most farmers attest that they could not stay in business without this tax structure. Many studies claim that it is revenue neutral or even positive for the County, as farms typically demand far less in county services than residential areas.

Polk County, also in Western North Carolina, is considering offering tax incentives that go beyond the state schedule, but has not actually done so. Most other states offer tax programs for agriculture, though the formulas differ.

The PUV program is the bedrock of farmland stabilization as long as a farm stays active and ownership does not change, but it does not reduce the incentive to sell the farm at the “highest and best use” price.

Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) and Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts

In return for a pledge not to change the use of the land for ten years, an owner receives protection from assessments for sewer lines implicit in any nearby subdivision, a voice on a Farmland Advisory Board, protection against complaints concerning standard agricultural practices that may come from non-farming neighbors, plus some other, largely symbolic recognitions. The agreement is non-binding.

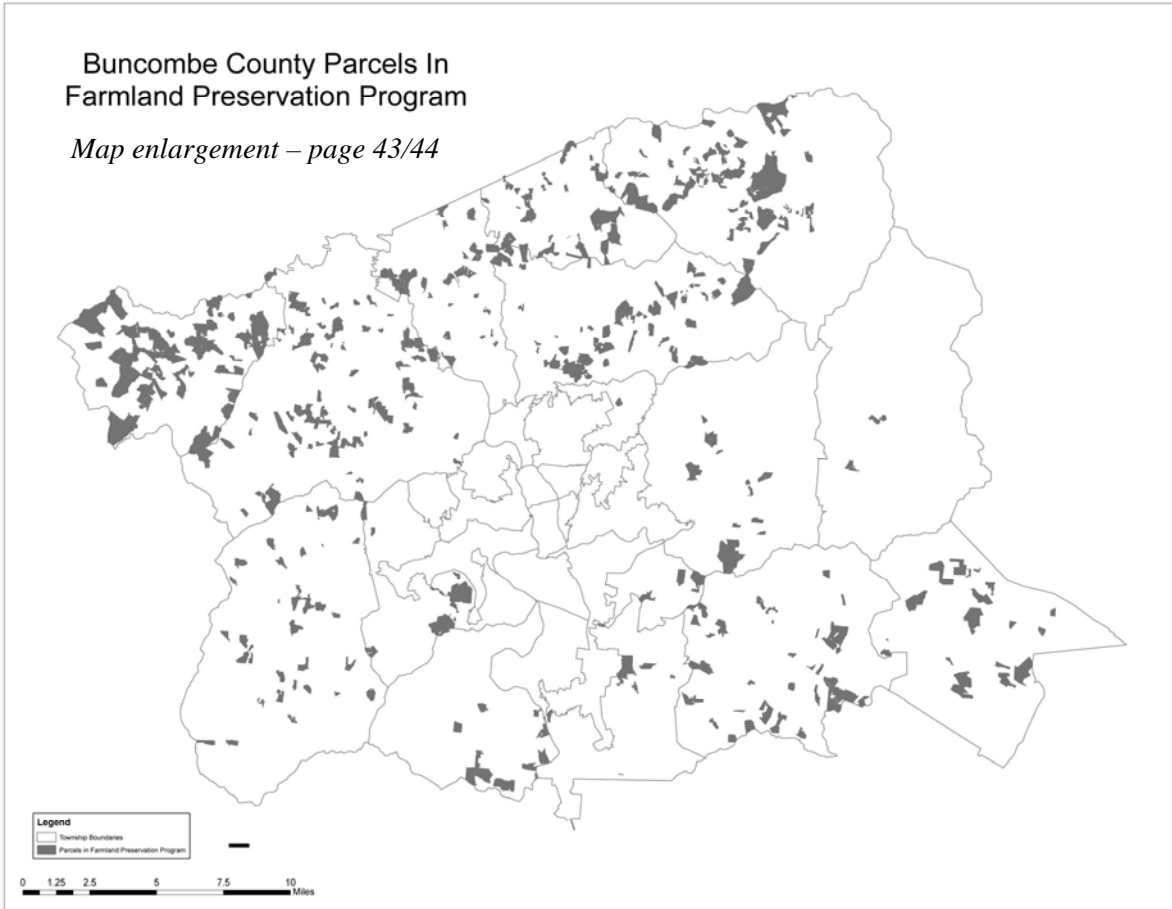
An “Enhanced” VAD program (EVAD) is binding for 10 years. It offers more protection against assessments for infrastructure projects, but Buncombe County has yet to authorize this.

The map on page 25 shows participation in the VAD program in Buncombe County. Planners here and in other counties consider the EVAD a significant tool in slowing down conversion of land where pressure is high, but is not a long term solution to underlying problems.



Buncombe County Parcels In Farmland Preservation Program

Map enlargement – page 43/44



Conservation Reserve and Stream Buffers

These are primarily environmental programs that contain remove marginal and sensitive land from production in order to protect water quality and wildlife. Large-scale producers of commodity crops such as wheat have often found the CRP a handy way to reduce risk, work load, and operating expense, while maintaining an adequate income. Unfortunately these advantages don't apply to the average small mountain farm. In many cases a regulation stream buffer would reduce an arable strip of bottomland too warrant farming it. Participation in Buncombe County is minimal.

Article VI: Tools for Protecting Farmland Against Conversion to Other Uses

Land protection tools fall into three categories:

- Securing development rights.
- Financial incentives/penalties (including taxes, loan programs and cost-sharing),
- Legal restrictions (zoning, special districts, density rules, etc.).

The details vary widely among programs nationwide, as do the results. Fortunately, North Carolina State law gives county governments a range of options for employing all three approaches as particular cases may require.

That said, experience in all states leaves no doubt that any program must meet three criteria to succeed:

- *It offers clear economic advantages to all parties involved, in both long and short term.*
- *Procedures are simple, transparent, inexpensive, and quick, so protecting farmland becomes the default option when the new program comes online.* Merely legalizing or even subsidizing a choice that remains “non-conforming” and thus requires extra planning and review seldom produces major changes.
- *It has broad political support.* Humanity has shed more blood over land use policies than any other issue, including religion.

Development Rights

The County Pays – *The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)* will ever remain a key instrument for stabilizing critical elements of farm communities and landscapes. Buncombe County stands out for its commitment to underwriting the purchase of development rights, as described above. It has been creative in the use of private and other government funds for leveraging the power of county appropriations. The rating formula governing the selection of land factors in size, agricultural value, price and location (including proximity to other protected land) assures maximum impact.⁶

Although rising land prices continue to limit the reach of this program, the public understands it, and it enjoys broad political support. It fairly represents a political consensus that the public should compensate farmers for the contribution they make to the beauty of the area and the general quality of life.

In addition to allocating significant resources for the actual purchase of easements, the County recently created the full-time position of Farmland Conservation Specialist, whose prime function will be to help landowners navigate the currently complicated and expensive process of defining, appraising, and transferring an easement.

Leased Development Rights (LDR) do not protect farmland permanently but have the advantage of being less costly and less difficult to arrange. Typically the County pays the “rent” by reducing or waiving taxes or other fees. As farmland commonly demands less in county services than developed land, an LDR program might work well in an area such as Buncombe that does not depend heavily on a farmland tax base. North Carolina’s Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program (EVAD), mentioned above, suggests a legal framework, although the ramifications remain to be fully explored. The EVAD program invites counties to offer

⁶ **County Ordinances on Planning and Development, Chapter 58, Article III, see website:**
<http://www.municode.com/resources/gateway.asp?sid=33&pid=12776>

landowners benefits in addition to the fairly minimal ones outlined in the legislation in return for signing an irrevocable agreement not to take their land out of agricultural use for 10 years.

North Carolina law apparently forbids offering explicit reductions in property taxes beyond those allowed under the Present Use Value rules; however, Polk County, and perhaps others, are exploring ways to craft lease agreements that would have much the same effect. Such a program could focus on defined zones or soil types, parcels greater than some minimum, or some other criteria.

Cumberland County has established a good example: The County developed a unique solution that offers all landowners with five-acre tracts a compensation payment equivalent to a percentage of their property taxes, in exchange for five or ten year conservation agreements to limit urban and residential development. County Commissioners noted that since they provide economic development incentives to other businesses, it made sense to support farming operations that were compatible with the needs of the military installation.

Cumberland County's first agreements, covering about 1,500 acres, were with McCormick Farms, a 100-year-old diversified agricultural operation that farms several thousand acres adjoining Fort Bragg. McCormick Farms was interested in the conservation of land and supporting the mission of the base, but it wanted flexibility in an agreement that would allow it to develop new farming activities and enterprises over time; its ultimate goal was to pass along a viable operation to the next generation.

Cumberland County attorney Grainger Barrett and Tom Brooks of McCormick Farms developed an agreement that allows all manner of agricultural and silvicultural activities, including retail and processing facilities, as long as they are associated with the farming operation.⁹ The county is currently negotiating agreements with other landowners, realizing that each individual has specific objectives for the future of his or her property.

The experience of the town of Perinton in Monroe County, is cited in a Farmland Enhancement Plan for Yates County, New York.

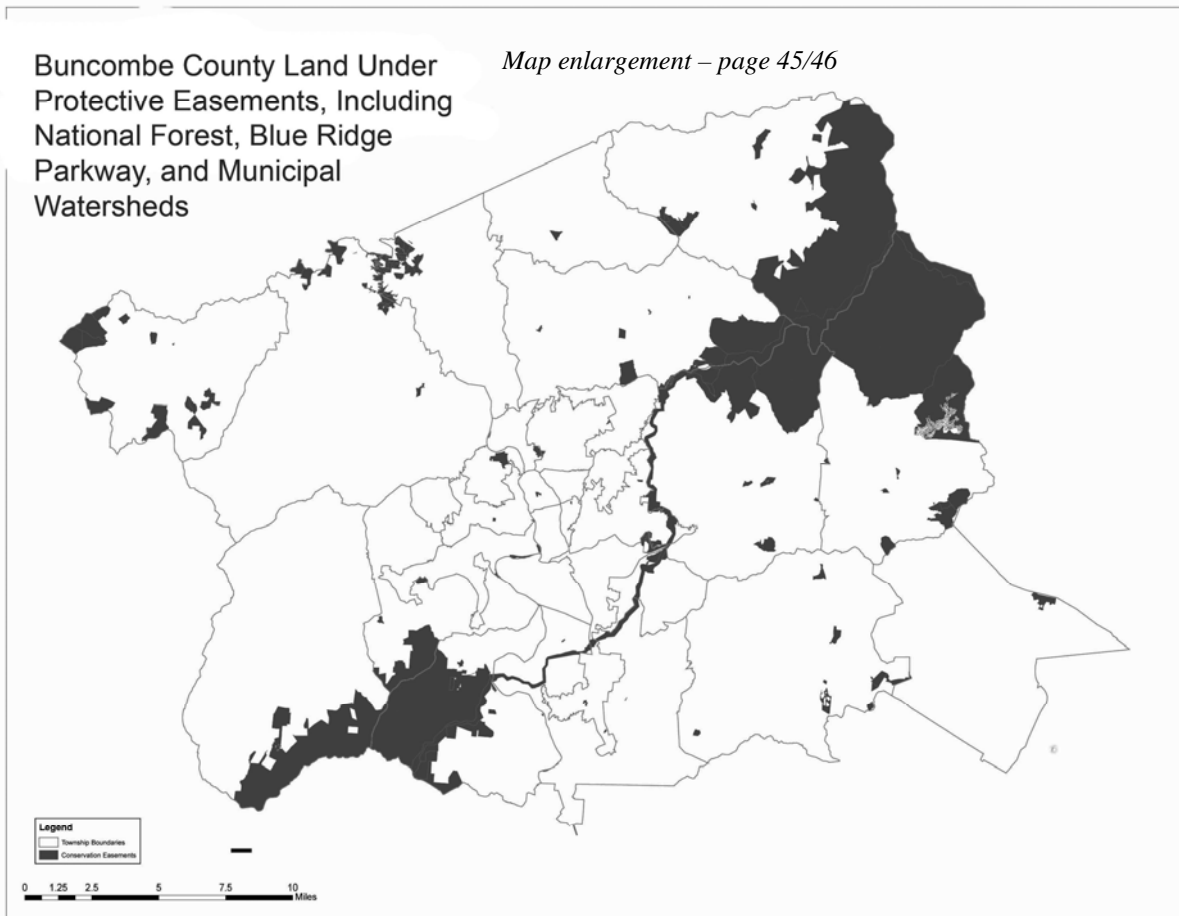
The Town has exercised its authority under § 247 of the NYS General Municipal Law to acquire conservation easements on farmland and other open spaces, paying for those easements with preferential tax treatment. Landowners apply for the program and the decision to accept or reject the application is made on the basis of benefit to the Town. These applications are reviewed by a Conservation Board and are subject to a public hearing. The owners are also required to principally and actively use the property for "bona fide agricultural production" for the term of the easement. Easements can be cancelled through a similar application but penalties apply. The proportion of pre-easement property value remaining subject to taxation varies depending on the length of the easement, ranging from 40% for 5 year easements (the minimum length accepted) to 10% for agreements of 15 years or more.

This program has existed since the 1970's. A total of 81 farming easements (62% of all open space acquired under the program) were in effect as of 2000 with some 3,034 acres of farmland protected. This represented 13% of the Town land area. Perinton, however, is self-described as a suburban Rochester community desiring to preserve remaining open spaces. It is, at over 46,000 persons, larger than many rural counties. The key to the success of this program (rated "fabulous" by the assessor's office) is that it lowers the assessed value well below agricultural value and renders agricultural assessment meaningless. There have been very few cancellations by farmers. This means that it should work just as well in areas where there is a

small differential in agricultural and development value. It is also politically appealing due to the flexibility offered to both farmer and municipality. The difficulty with it, of course, is in paying for the lost taxes in communities where there is not a large non-farm base to carry the load. This might be addressed with State assistance or by applying the program across a wider geography.

The Farm Owner Pays - *Soliciting and facilitating the donation of easements* is another job for the new Farmland Conservation Specialist. Many of the easements acquired in Buncombe in fact include some percentage of donated value. Donating an easement to the County or to a land trust or SAHC returns substantial benefits to landowners who can benefit from the tax deduction on a large, independent income. Help through the process will certainly make this option more attractive.

It is also politically neutral, but obviously cannot form the basis of a broad strategy in an area where the average farmer is land rich and cash poor. Non-profit land trusts such as the American Farmland Trust generally assist in the processing of a donation but usually require a cash donation to “endow” the oversight of the easement in perpetuity.



Map information from the Buncombe County Tax Department

The map above shows parcels of land presently protected by restrictions of some kind. Unfortunately most of the purchased and donated easements on farmland appear as isolated flecks between the two large aggregations representing the Pisgah National Forest, and several

municipal watersheds. The ribbon connecting the big blocks of public land is the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Developer Pays – *Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)* programs derive from the argument that developers who convert farmland or open space to commercial or higher density residential use should offset the loss of its intangible benefits to the larger community. This does not differ in principle from the suggestion that they contribute up front to the schools, security, and infrastructure investments that the community will have to provide for the development.

The histories of the several variations on this theme illustrate the need for extreme care in crafting TDR programs to fit local circumstances and in promoting them to stakeholders.

Classic TDR programs seem to work best where a zoning ordinance and a comprehensive development plan are in place before pressure to convert land becomes extreme. In order to exploit the potential of “receiving” areas planned for high density, a developer must buy and transfer development “units” from low density “Sending” areas. In theory, this assures that landowners in both areas profit equally from a boost in land values that would otherwise come only to the receiving area.

TDR programs in Montgomery County, Maryland, and Kings County, Washington, have succeeded famously, and a few others as well, but calibrating the numbers to reflect market realities in a changing economic or environmental context is not easy to do or to promote.

*Mitigation requirements*⁷ might achieve much the same ends as classic TDR in a much simpler way. Yolo County, California, home to California’s primary agriculture school at Davis, is a prime example. In this scenario, a developer who converts a significant parcel of farmland or other open space (Criteria explicit in the county ordinance), would have to mitigate the impact by purchasing and donating an easement of requisite size from a landowner or from a “bank” of easements already purchased by the county.

Through interest rate or tax incentives or a significant reduction in paper work and transaction costs a developer may be encouraged to buy, at a premium, easements currently leased by the county. There are many interesting parallels in wetlands mitigation requirements around the country.

Conservation Development applies to an array of strategies stemming from the work of a landscape architect named Randall Arendt. Arendt also deserves credit as the spirit behind the New Ruralism Movement, which complements the New Urbanism, in vogue among city planners. His guiding concepts are:

- Jurisdictions that want to maintain a rural atmosphere and economy should first invoke both professional and community input to inventory and map their landscape resources (soils,

⁷ Rules allowing a developer to mitigate for destruction of stream banks and wetlands by restoring or protecting a qualifying environment in another location have created a market for “wetlands credits.” A landowner who restores a wetland and protects it through an easement in a “wetlands bank” can sell the credits for often substantial prices while retaining ownership and non-destructive use rights such as hunting and even moderate grazing.

views, special places, hunting areas, water resources, historic buildings, critical infrastructure assets, etc.) Such a map would become the basis for negotiations with developers BEFORE they submit detailed plans for acquired land.

- Strong incentives should favor development plans that leave a high percentage of the land open (typically 50 percent or more) and honor the priorities expressed on the inventory map. For example, instead of cutting the 200-acre farm into 40 five-acre lots according to a zoning ordinance, a developer could cluster 60 units on 80 acres and leave 120 acres in open space or agriculture.

Local authorities would *require* a Conservation Development proposal as the default option. Cutting the whole farm into 40 lots would be considered non-conforming and require detailed proof that it would return more to the investors and not place significantly greater demands on the county for roads and utilities.

Several early examples of Arendt's ideas in Maryland and Pennsylvania have ripened well, even as neighboring areas have succumbed to sprawl.

Even without requirements and incentives, Conservation Developments have become somewhat popular in their own right. Two or three in Buncombe County appear to be thriving, including Drovers Road in Fairview and Ox Creek Valley in North Buncombe.⁸ Conservation Developments don't necessarily perpetuate farming, but agricultural incentives might be built in.

The political climate for conservation development varies. Polk County recently passed a "cluster ordinance," that gives no incentives. It simply allows clustering as long as the total zoned density is not exceeded and more than 50 percent of the land remains open. Madison County has had such a rule for some time. Response has been minimal. Jackson County is considering an ordinance that would require clustering and 50 percent open space for development in certain areas.

Taxes

Present Use Valuation (PUV) is the mainstay of farm preservation in North Carolina, as it is generally by other names in other states. Under PUV, land used for farming, forestry, or

⁸ Posted on the website of Stephen A. Towe & Company (real estate brokers) in October, 2007 - *Exclusive and coveted Ox Creek Valley in North Buncombe. What a treasure! A four acre wooded site overlooking the community owned and protected 57 acres of pastures, garden, and woodland - \$226,500. Ballard Branch Land Co., a forward thinking group of visionaries purchased a large tract of land exclusively for the limited number of residents fortunate enough to live here, and protected the balance as community common area. Nestled beneath tall mountain and minutes from Pisgah National Forest. Less than 5 minutes from the Blue Ridge Parkway---one of our nations most beautiful and exciting National Parks--this South facing 4 acre homesite is blessed with large trees, and a good building site. Perfect for active or passive solar design.*

horticulture is taxed at lower rates than land taxed according to its market value. The fact that farmland generally requires far less in terms of County services than developed land supports a good argument that PUV is almost revenue neutral. Virtually all serious farmers participate, of necessity (see map above).

Voluntary Agriculture Districts (VAD), a category created by North Carolina statute, confer a small packet of benefits on farmers who make a non-binding pledge to keep a designated piece of land in agriculture for 10 years. Among these are exemption from assessment for sewer lines (often a byproduct of development) and better terms on certain cost sharing programs.

Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture Districts (EVAD) allow counties to offer even further tax exemptions in return for an irrevocable 10-year agreement. This could be defined as a *Leased Development Right* program, but also responds to the opinion that Present Use Valuation does not always go far enough to fully compensate farmers for the intangible value their land contributes to the public good, nor does it go far enough toward keeping farms profitable. As mentioned above, unexplored potential lies in the fact that counties may customize the EVAD through extra incentives.

Buncombe County has yet to authorize EVADs. The off-the-shelf version of the program has sparked little interest elsewhere, but one spiced by extra incentives or configured as a lease program might do well. (See example from Monroe County, N.Y., above).

Restrictions

Zoning has always been a divisive issue in Buncombe County, and typically does not protect farmland against conversion. Density restrictions in customary practice mean lot size, which encourages cutting land into the maximum number of lots without regard to open space, not to mention farmland. Most zoning ordinances include reference to a comprehensive plan of some sort, but where such exist, they are often allowed to become obsolete. Variances are easy to arrange.

Nevertheless, the presence of a zoning ordinance indicates some political openness to land use regulation and a structure to administer it. As Randall Arendt and others point out, creative interpretation of existing rules may favor results that satisfy multiple interests without violating the spirit of the ordinance. Enforcing overall density rather than lot size to promote conservation development is one example.

Local resistance to zoning notwithstanding, strictly zoned agricultural districts have been standard practice in some parts of the country for many years. The example below from Shrewsbury Township in York County, Pennsylvania, also cited in the York County Farmland Enhancement Plan, is indicative of what special districts entail and how they function. The “farm districts” currently under discussion in Jackson County share some features of this approach.

The Township has used its general authority under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code to "preserve prime agriculture and farmland" by creating an agricultural zoning district that limits

development on prime agricultural soils. Dwelling numbers are limited on the basis of a sliding scale that allows reasonable amounts of development on smaller tracts of land (1 unit for 0-5 acres) but restricts larger parcels to agricultural densities (no more than 7 units for 120-150 acres). There is also a prohibition against subdividing farm parcels into new lots of less than 50 acres each. Similar zoning districts are found in various areas of Pennsylvania (mostly in the Lancaster-York area but also in less pressured areas such as Crawford and Lycoming Counties). Large buffers, maximum building lot sizes, agricultural nuisance notices, design review guidelines, deed restrictions on remaining land and provisions allowing B&B's, farm stands and other ag-related businesses are also common in these districts.

The Township's agricultural zoning district was created in 1976. It covered 12,442 acres or two thirds of the Township in 1994. Shrewsbury had a population of 5,947 persons in the year 2000, a density of over 200 persons per square mile. This is a community that is, therefore, urban in some respects but it has many prime farmlands and may have struck a balance between the two. The district was challenged but upheld by the State's highest court in a 1985 case that validated the large lot sizes and low densities on the basis of "extraordinary justification" related to the high quality of the farmland within the district. The ordinance is supported, however, by Pennsylvania's extensive PDR program, which tends to insulate the regulations from farmer challenges. It was enacted, nonetheless, before that program was created. An analysis of development patterns before and after the district's creation (up to 1981) suggested it reduced the rate of development within the district by two-thirds and increased it outside fourfold.

Building Restrictions have sparked hot discussion all over Western North Carolina, ever since the passage of a "Ridge Law" restricting high-rise buildings on prominent ridges in 1983. A proposal for statewide regulation on steep slope development died in the legislature in July, 2007. Nevertheless, several mountain counties, including Buncombe enforce steep slope ordinances, percolation standards for soils, etc. Development restrictions on prime agricultural soils in designated farm districts would probably have a precedent in law.

Article VII: Priorities for Enhancing Farming as a Viable Enterprise.

Pursuing easements is good, but maybe not good enough, as Kenneth Reeves sees matters. Reeves now heads the Cooperative Extension Service office in Buncombe. He grew up on a farm in Sandy Mush, which remains one of the County's most vital farming communities.

He writes, "We, and especially I, have contended that we will never have enough dollars available soon enough to slow the loss of farmland and that the most effective way to preserve farmland is to keep these farms in business."

The Extension Service leads the crusade for farm viability, though a number of non-profit organizations rank as essential collaborators, in particular the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, ASAP. The combined strategy has four themes.

Traditional technical support for farms in transition. This includes advice on new crops and techniques through on-farm consulting by extension agents, organized seminars, and facilitating communication among farmers.

Promoting direct sales so that more of the retail value of production comes back to the farm. This not only includes encouraging Farmer's Markets but also promoting and organizing sales to local bulk consumers including institutional buyers such as schools.

The Mountain Tailgate Market Association (MTMA), a grant supported collaboration between ASAP and the Extension Service, runs seven tailgate markets in Buncombe County and two more in neighboring Madison and Yancey Counties. The Western North Carolina Farmers' Market, one of five in North Carolina owned by the State, of course also offers a year round outlet in Asheville for local producers.

Improving infrastructure, again so that producers can keep control of their product through more stages of the marketing process. Ready examples would be Blue Ridge Food Ventures, an incubator for value-added enterprises, where a producer can rent access to kitchen and other processing equipment for canning, baking, juicing, rendering, etc. Coordination with Madison Farms for cleaning and packaging vegetables also represents this approach. The Madison Farms facility in adjacent Madison County is the initiative of the Extension Service there. ASAP and Extension have also helped establish Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) arrangements to help small farmers finance their production.

The Buncombe County Extension office looks forward to a major push to establish sales and processing facilities for livestock, coordinated with neighboring counties lies in the future.

Assistance to individuals seeking land and capital to start farming, will be a major focus of the Extension Service's recently hired small farm specialist. Among other responsibilities, she will create a clearinghouse for prospective farmers seeking land to lease, including of course protected land, and she will broker lease agreements crafted for particular circumstances.

Article VIII: Action Priorities

The following matrix, which represents a consensus of the Buncombe County Farmland Protection Advisory Board, specifies areas for action relating to both the protection of land and the enhancement of farm profitability. In a number of cases a concrete product, action, and date are given. In others the commitment is to explore untried possibilities as a board and provide information and background to the county commissioners and other decision-makers. The Board assumes the responsibility in recognition of the fact that developing new approaches to farmland protection and building a political consensus to support them is a protracted process involving many factors beyond the Board's control.

Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Plan - Implementation Matrix

Recommendation	Current Activities	Partners	Milestones	Dates
Expand the securing of easements	Land Conservation Board has list of current applicants. Scoring system is in ordinance. VAD board pays transaction costs for donated easements. Land Conservation Board does bargain sales with SAHC. New position in county to coordinate.	SAHC, Planning Office, Land Conservation Board, VAD Board, County Commissioners, Local community organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain/increase county funding levels. • Streamline process to overcome legal and administrative barriers • Communicate with current applicants on the need to voice support for easement funding on the local, state, and federal level. • Solicit new applicants through letter to current VAD membership • Assure new position is funded by county by July 1st • Conservation hall of fame celebration at Hickory Nut Gap June 12th • Organize more community events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 08 • Dec. 08 • May 08 • May 08 • June 08 • June 08 • Ongoing
Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Program	Examples in other counties/states: rebate on property taxes, help for implementation of farm management plans, mandated buffers on neighbors land, etc.	VAD board, American Farmland Trust (AFT) , County Commissioners, Farm Bureau, Extension, SWCD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass amended farmland preservation ordinance to include EVAD option within 1 year. • Explore potential benefits to add to the EVAD menu to make the program more attractive, working with other counties and AFT • Participate in state-level advocacy, if new state authorization is needed for any of these benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 09 • Throughout 08 • Jan 09 state legislative session

<p>Make inventories of conservable agricultural lands and resources for public awareness and strategic planning</p>	<p>Several agencies and NGOs have good data relating to this, and community interest is widespread. Should focus on working land – farms, forests, soils, support infrastructure</p>	<p>Parks and Rec, Planning, SAHC, VAD Board, Land Conservation Board, Tax Office, UNCA Farmland Values Project, Community organizations, SWCD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use new county easement staffer to convene committee from different offices, sharing data layers and maps. • Create draft map of conservation priorities (see MD Farms for the Future project and NCADEFP map projects). Produce maps and graphics to show urgency of issue. • Develop community feedback loop and revise map 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aug 08- Aug 09 • Aug. 09 • Sep 09 – Dec. 09
<p>Explore new land planning tools</p>	<p>Past experience with zoning and eminent domain have created strong political resistance to land planning; however, new approaches are in use in other states that respond to many of the issues that currently block discussion</p>	<p>Planning office, LOSRC, SAHC, AFT, Municipalities, planning offices of adjacent counties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring in outside speakers to share their experiences; regional seminar thru LOSRC? • Assemble information packets on tax credits, conservation development, farmland mitigation, and Transfer of Development Rights, leased development rights, etc. • Coordinate with municipalities and other counties. • Prepare presentation for county commissioners' October retreat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan. 09 • Dec. 08 • May 08- July 09 • Sept. 08
<p>Public dissemination of plan</p>	<p>Awaiting final plan completion and approval by county commissioners</p>	<p>AFT, VAD board, Extension, Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau, Farmland Values Project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive adoption of plan by county commissioners • AFT to draft brochure, website, powerpoint • Publish plan and develop media campaign • Speaking schedule at farm and civic group events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 08 • April 08- May 08 • April 08 – Dec 08 • May 08 – Feb 09

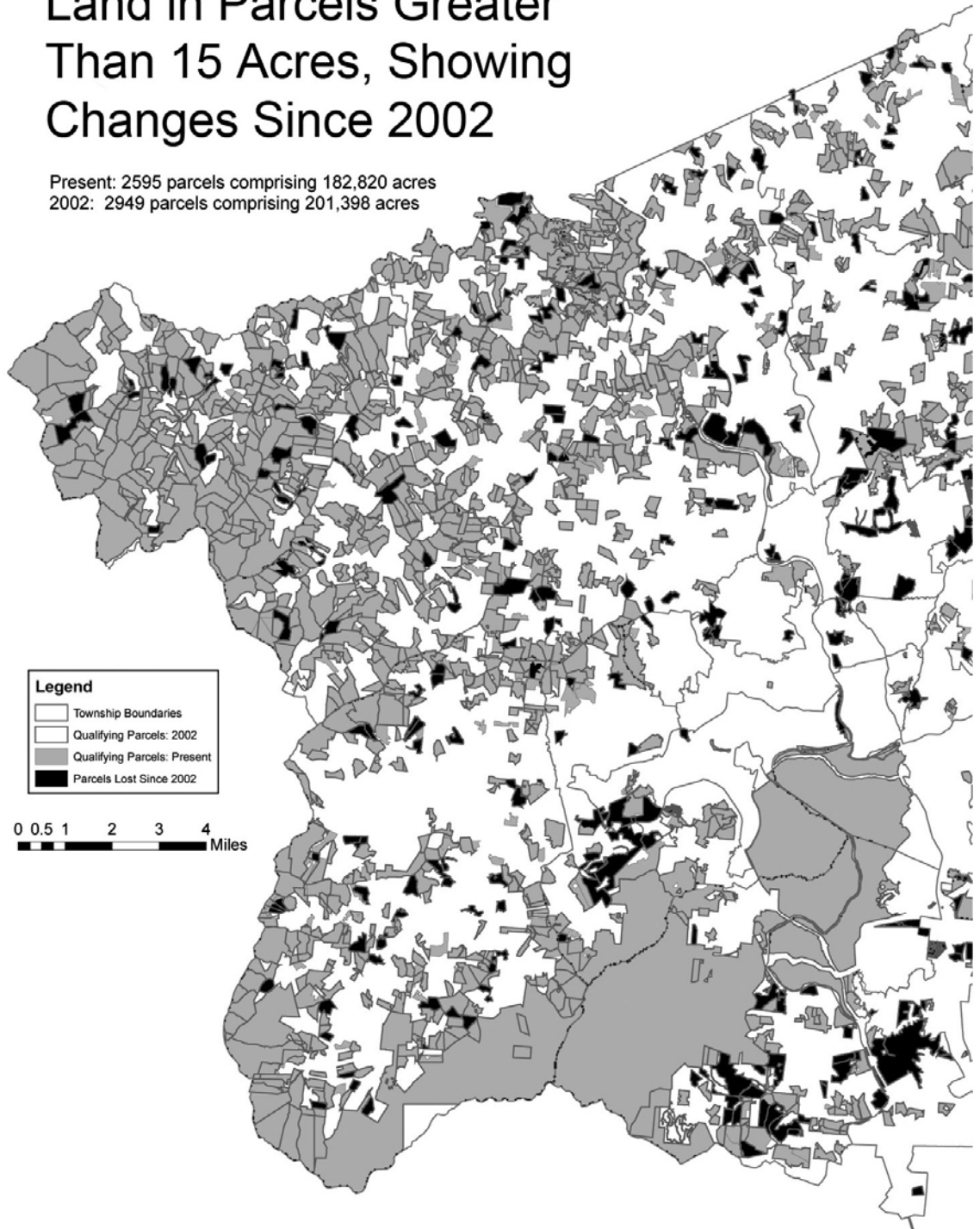
Livestock sales facilities	Livestock sales and marketing facility feasibility study underway in Haywood. Renewed private interest in leasing existing facilities in Haywood and Buncombe Counties	Extension, SWCD, George Ivey (Haywood County consultant), Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be active participants in Haywood efforts (both reopening of Canton facility and feasibility study). • Participate on WNC Livestock Market Working Group and provide feedback, assuring these meet needs of Buncombe producers • Help with grant writing and fundraising as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • Ongoing • Ongoing
Marketing education and connecting farmers with value-added and market opportunities	ASAP, Cooperative Extension Small Farms Initiative, Asheville City Market, Tailgate Markets (10), CSAs, sales to small and large grocers and Biltmore Estate	Extension, ASAP, Biltmore, School system, hospitals, supermarkets, local restaurants and B&B's, Asheville, Blue Ridge Food Ventures, and Madison Farms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include tracks on institutional buying in ASAP conference and organic grower schools • Organize/encourage Buncombe growers to use Madison Farms facilities for freezing/packing/ joint sales. • Participate in development of Asheville City Market • Conduct feasibility study on local milk processing/marketing of a local brand. • Consider development of a local brand • Explore linkages between businesses and institutions for local buying, joint marketing (needs active organizer) • Seek expanded sales with hospitals, schools, supermarkets, etc. • Help Buncombe growers to use Blue Ridge Food Ventures more for adding value to farm products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feb. 09, March 09 • Ongoing • Ongoing • Winter 09 • Winter 09 • Winter 09 • Ongoing • Ongoing

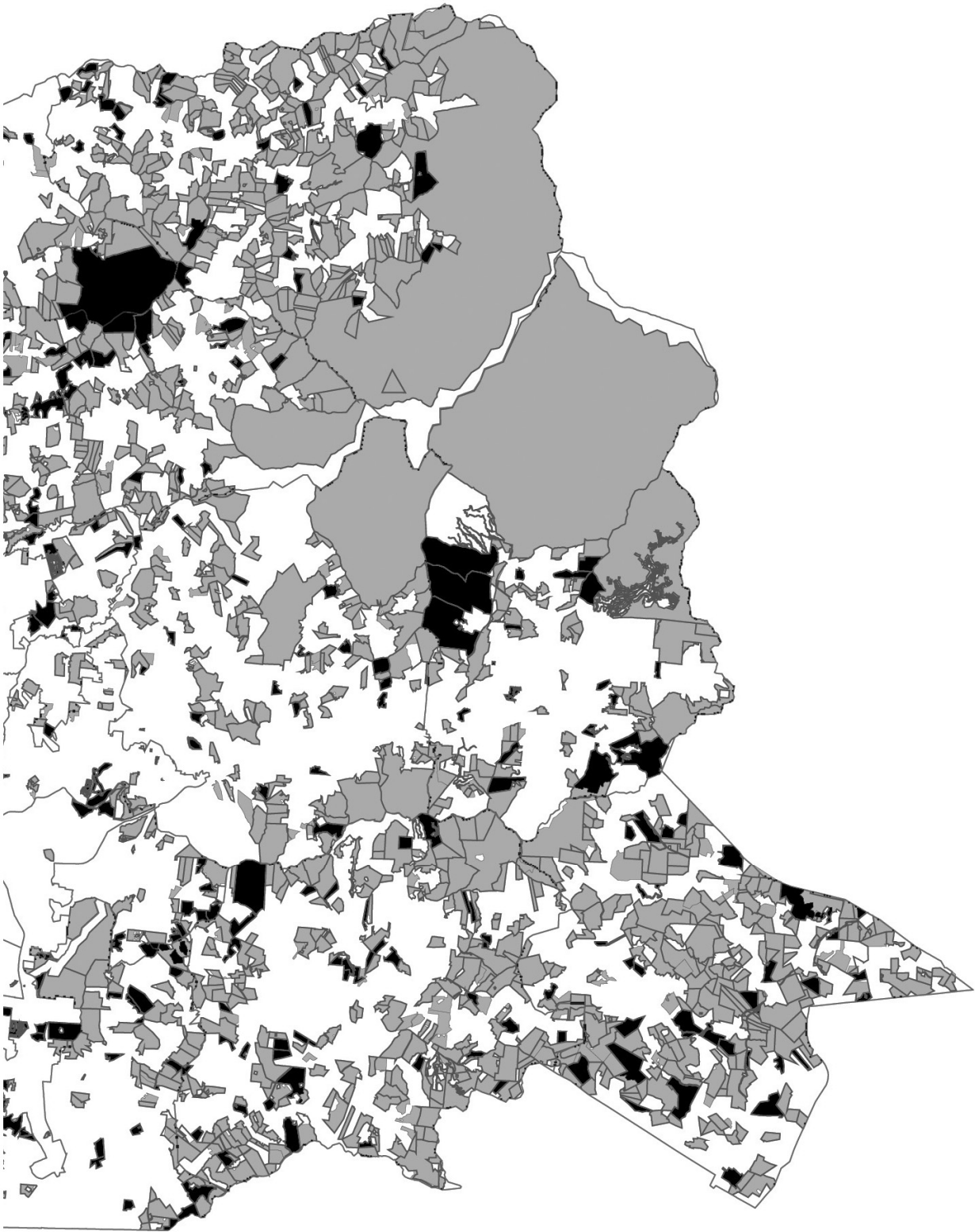
Match aspiring farmers with land-owners	New linking initiative in extension, NCFTN online listing and resources, ASAP proposal to ADFPTF	Extension, ASAP, NCFTN. SWCD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth of local extension database • Production of locally oriented materials for landowners and aspiring farmers • Individualized support and consultation • Reach out to absentee landowners with opportunities • Identify barriers to newcomers: housing, credit, equipment, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 08 – April 09 • Fall 08 • Winter 09 • Fall 08
Processing facilities for livestock	Poultry and rabbit coop development in McDowell County (ISAMPA-NC), Extension workshops on rabbit production and newsletter. Buncombe Cty. Cattlemen's Assoc. is discussing plans for a local large animal facility	Extension, Economic Development, Smithson Mills (Tobacco Trust) Thomas Beckett, Cattleman's Assn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in ISAMPA and Cattlemen's Assn amongst Buncombe producers • Assign liaison between ISAMPA and VAD • Assign liaison between large animal slaughter group and VAD • Fundraising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • April 08 • May 08 • Ongoing
Enhanced management of private forest resources	Strong evidence of enterprise opportunity in small scale logging and processing but little organized promotion or official support. Little support for owners of land assessed as forest to actually implement required management plans for profit.	County Forestry Office, Extension, SWCD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify innovative foresters and loggers who work in the region • Show models of private small holder cooperative ventures • Put on workshop highlighting creative opportunities. Invite all forestry PUV landowners. • Expand services to landowners in non-timber forest products, such as herbs and wild plants, recreation and hunting • Assist in updating forest mgt. plans • Include forestry staff in VAD meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer/Fall 08 • Winter 09 • Winter 09 • Ongoing • Ongoing • May 08

Maps




Land in Parcels Greater Than 15 Acres, Showing Changes Since 2002

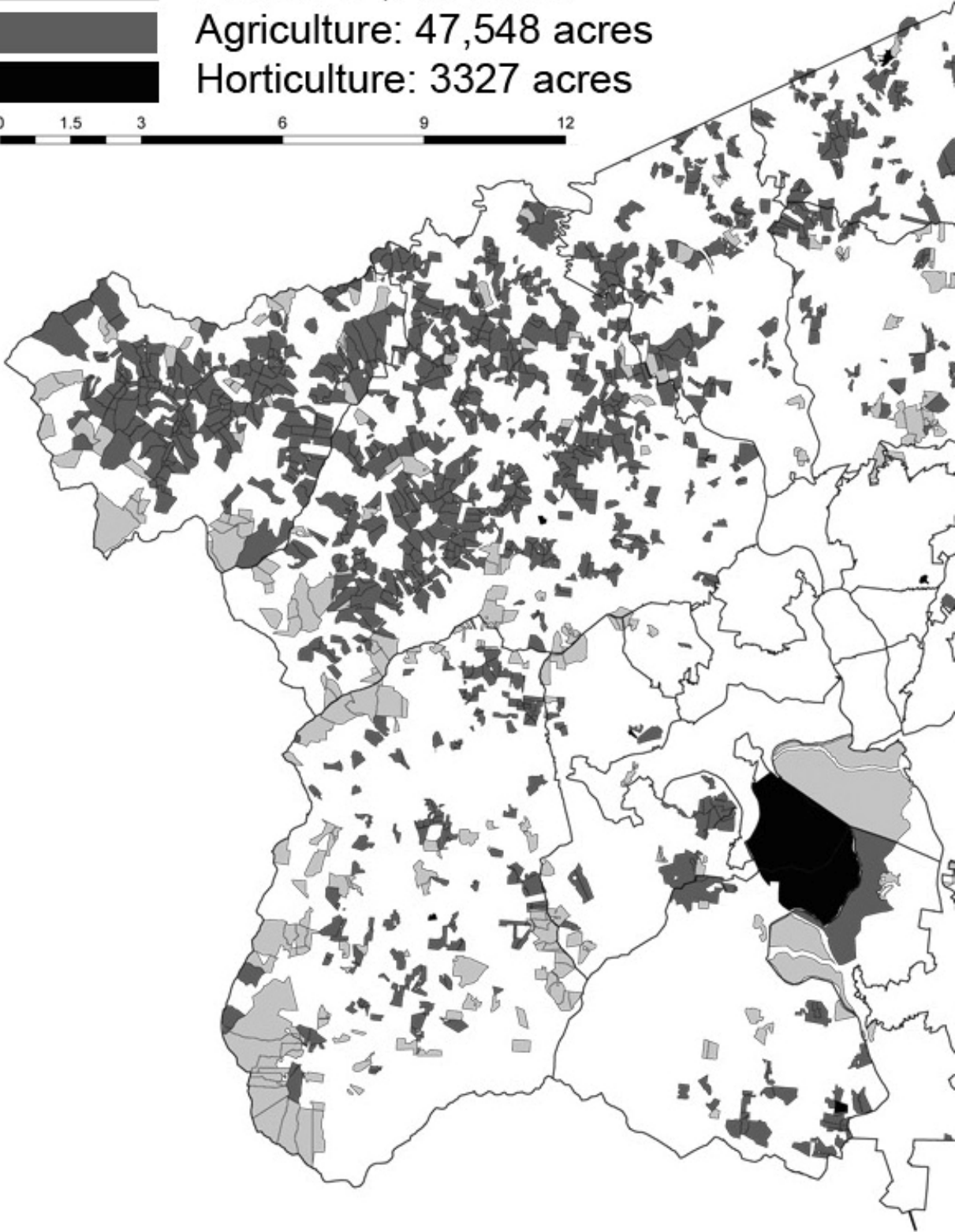
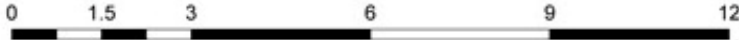
Present: 2595 parcels comprising 182,820 acres
2002: 2949 parcels comprising 201,398 acres





Present Use Program Parcels

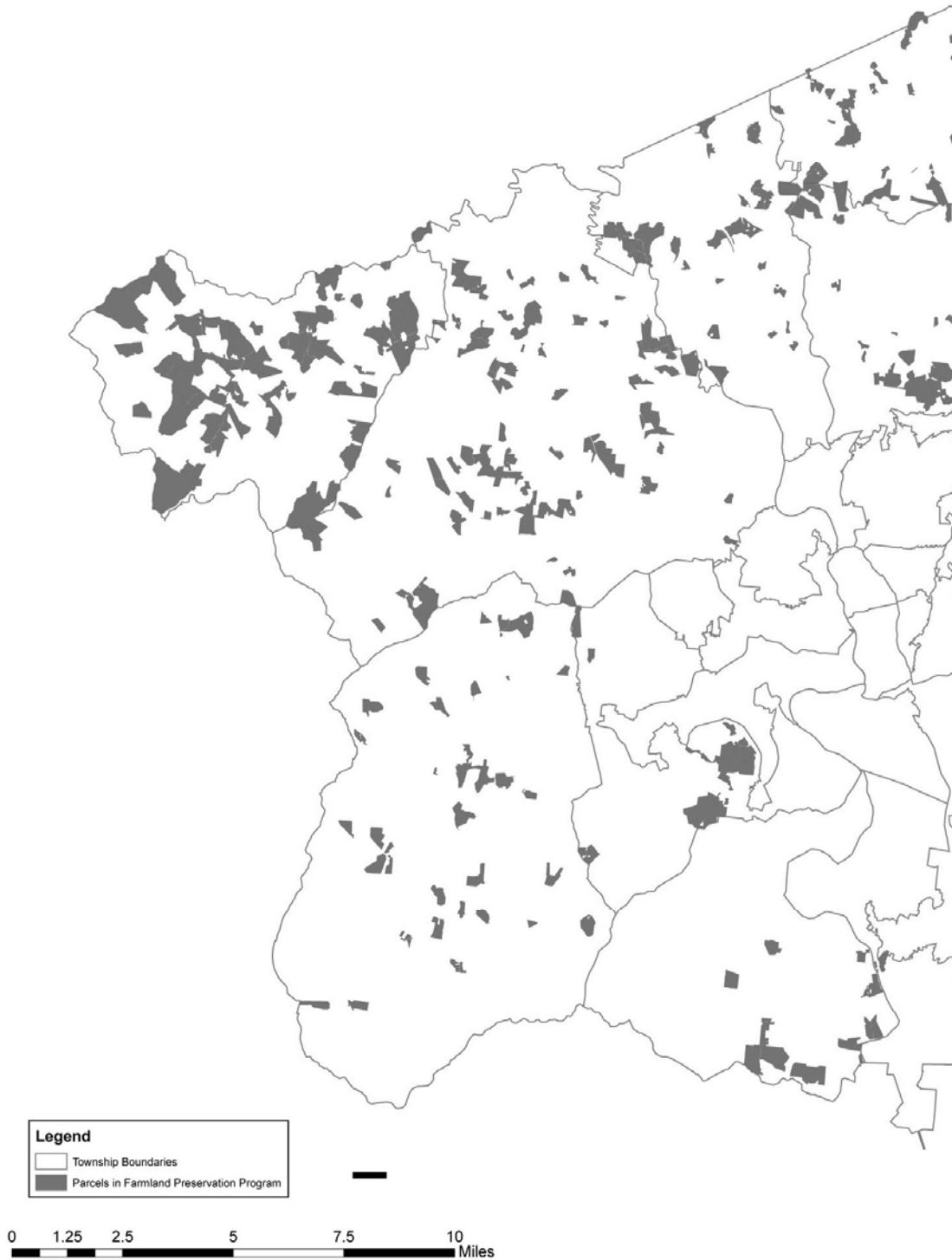
 Forest: 42,769 acres
 Agriculture: 47,548 acres
 Horticulture: 3327 acres





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Buncombe County Parcels In Farmland Preservation Program



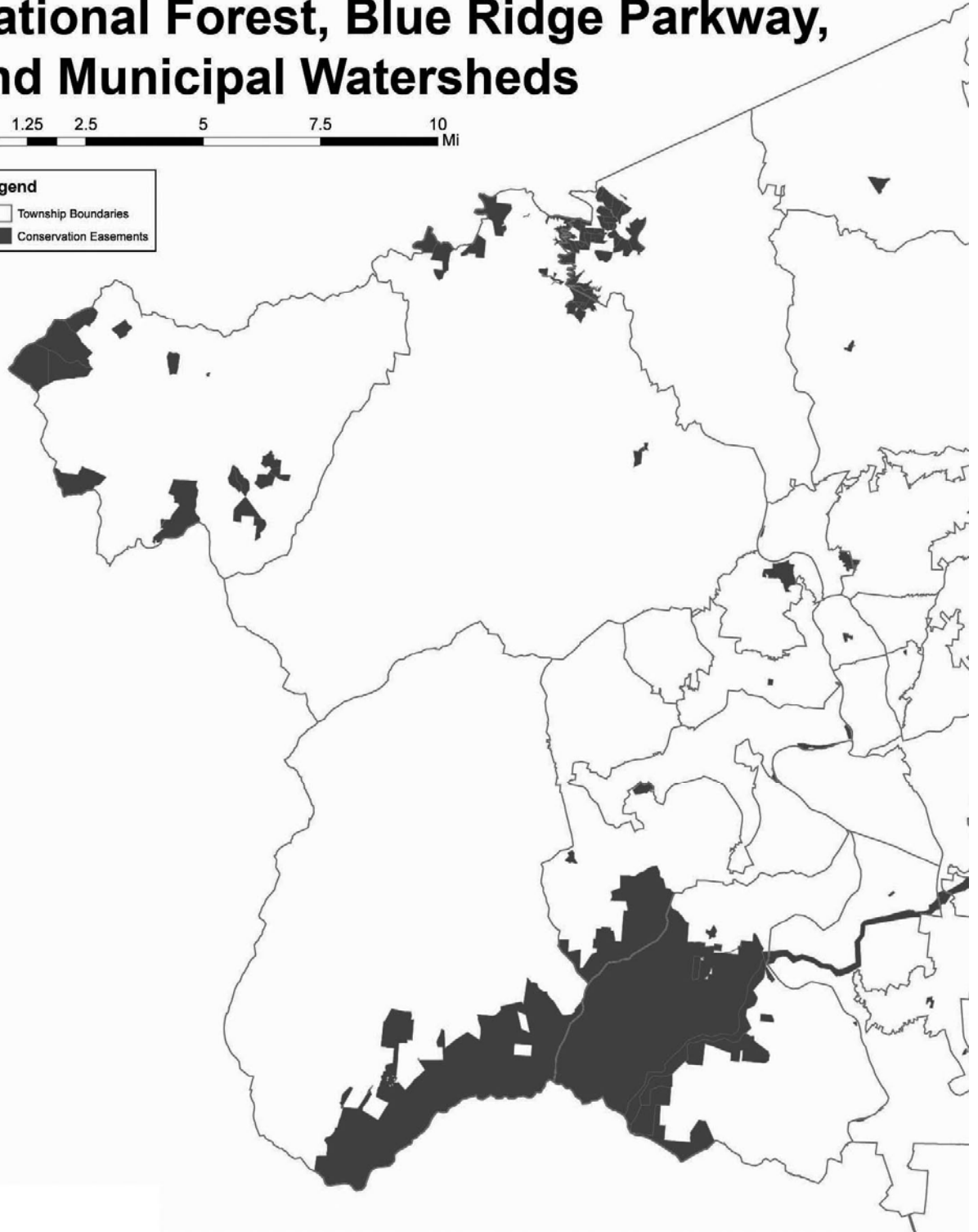


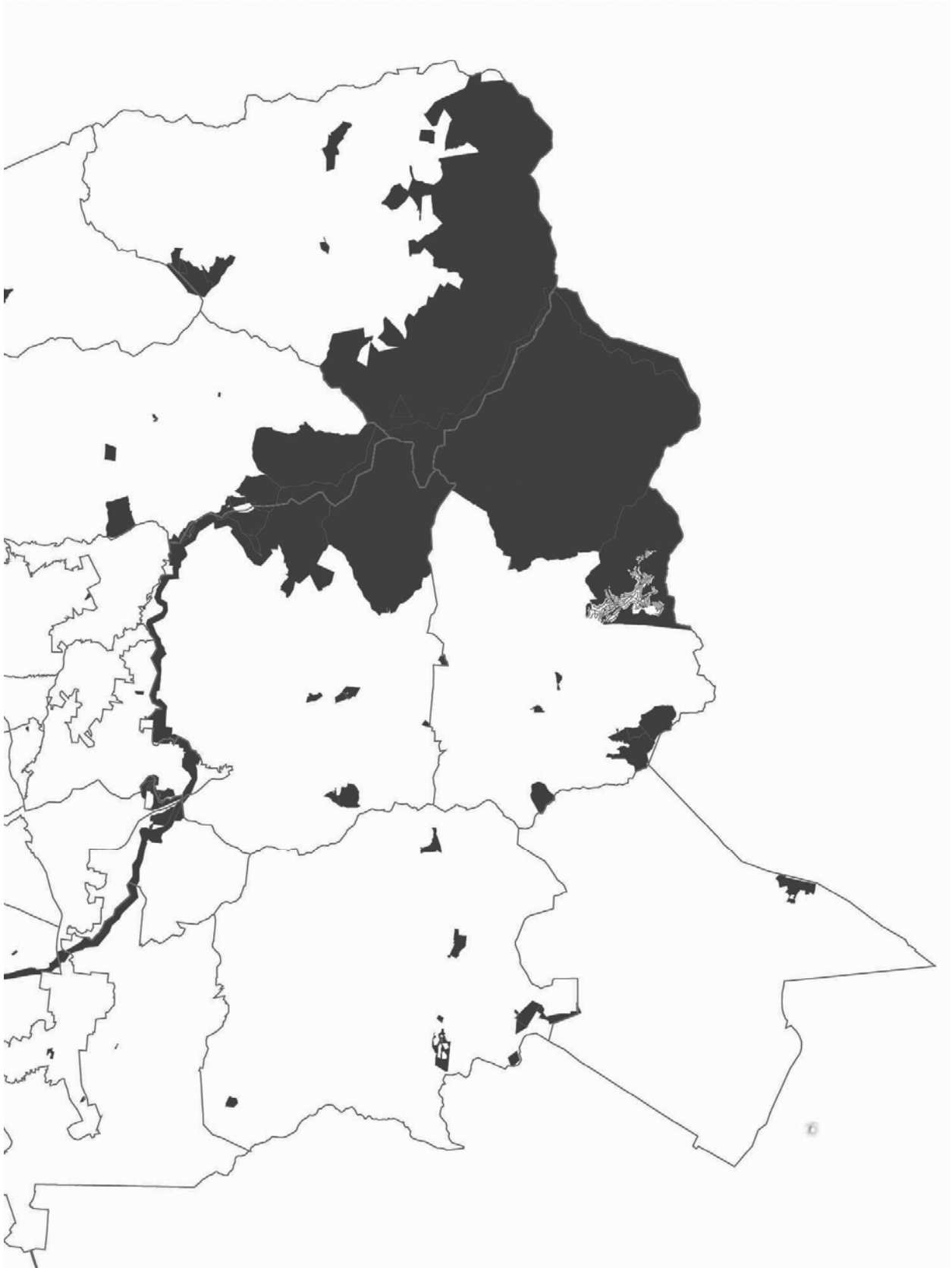
Buncombe County Land Under Protective Easements, including National Forest, Blue Ridge Parkway, and Municipal Watersheds

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Legend

- Township Boundaries
- Conservation Easements







Sandy Mush – Making Hay