

The Alamance SWCD Case Study

Compiled by Phil Ross - District Conservation Administrator, Alamance SWCD, 2009

Citizen concerns about the loss of farmland and the rural way of life in Alamance County were first recognized by the county when work on the Alamance County “Destination 20/20 Plan” started with public hearings in 2002. The County had already adopted the Voluntary Agriculture District Ordinance in 2001. This program was very successful because farmers were starting to become concerned about the loss of land due to the surge of homebuilding and developments moving into rural areas of the county. Alamance County at that time and through the present day does not have countywide land use regulations such as zoning. Because of this lack of zoning real concerns arose about the future of land use in the county.

The Alamance County Voluntary Agriculture District Board and its cooperating county agricultural agencies decided that creation of a Farmland Protection Plan would give the county a direction for the future of agriculture and farmland in the county and be a good addition to the County Land Use Plan that was being created by the County Planning Department. One of the main concerns was that this plan needed to be a working document, one that would not just be written and left to sit on a shelf. This plan would give guidance to the county agricultural agencies and the citizens of the county well into the future.

In December 2006 the Voluntary Agriculture District Board received a grant from North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund to create this plan. The grant funds received for this project hired a consultant that we feel made the whole process go very smoothly in our county. This consultant having done similar projects in other states with agricultural operations was very familiar with the pressures facing the agricultural community due to rising land prices and equipment and labor costs. The total cost for hiring a consultant was \$11,061. The low cost of this consultant was due to the significant local staff time that was used to coordinate meetings with landowners, farmers and industry related people in the county. This staff time was provided by the Alamance Soil and Water Conservation District, Cooperative Extension and the American Farmland Trust.

Additional funding for this project came from local organizations consisting of the Alamance County Cattlemen Association, Alamance Farm Bureau, Alamance Farmers Mutual Insurance and Carolina Farm Credit. These organizations contributed \$1800 toward this project.

The final draft of the Farmland Protection Plan was approved by the Alamance Voluntary Agricultural District Board on October 4, 2007. This Plan was sent to the NC Department of Agriculture for review on November 2, 2007. Final comments were received on December 17, 2007 and the plan was approved by the Alamance County Commissioners in January of 2008.

This plan was made available by NC Department of Agriculture as a model for other plans across the state and will be a working plan that will set the groundwork for farmland protection and agricultural economic development for the future of the agricultural industry in Alamance County.