

Farmland Preservation in Haywood County

Compiled by Leslie Smathers, District Director, Haywood SWCD, 2009

In Haywood County landowners have four options to protect their land from encroaching development:

1. Voluntary Agriculture District
2. Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture District (10 years)
3. Term Easement (longer than 10 years)
4. Permanent Working Lands or Forever Wild Easement

The Haywood Soil and Water Conservation District partnered with the Cooperative Extension Service, Farm Services Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, North Carolina Farm Bureau and the North Carolina Forest Service – and of course, the landowners – to convince the Haywood County Commissioners to pass the Voluntary Agriculture District ordinance in 1994. This was very successful and when it became available the County Government, with the help of the afore-mentioned partners, amended the Voluntary Ag District ordinance to include the Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture District Ordinance. Due to the pressure from development, this program has also been very successful and we continue to utilize all four options for preserving land in Haywood County.

The District has the lead role in Haywood County land preservation because of the many things we are empowered by law to do that other agencies cannot do. On November 26, 2003, the District accepted its first easement, a riparian area along a long reach of stream on a farm that was then transitioning into a development.

Following that first easement we have partnered with Haywood County Schools and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to hold easements on School property as well as other landowners' property. We also have landowners that have given the District permanent easements on their whole farms. On these we at least try to find grant money to pay the transition costs. Thus far we have used grant funds from the Bethel Rural Organization, the County Government and others to pay these costs. We also hold some long term agreements (30 years) and are in the process of getting two Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund term easements on over 600 additional acres.

The latest piece of the Farmland Preservation puzzle is the development and passing of the countywide Farmland Protection Plan (November 2008).

Since the District believes that farming is a way of life in Haywood County, we will continue to explore every avenue to provide resources and aid landowners who need help.