

## **FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN HAYWOOD COUNTY A NEED FOR ACTION**

Today, many Americans are searching for a higher quality of life. Society has changed drastically, even over the past twenty-five years. Americans seem to be busier and dealing with stress-related illnesses more than ever before. Many people are leaving the concrete jungles of big cities in search of a more rural and slower paced lifestyle. Some of the wealthier citizens are even purchasing multiple homes to live in and enjoy during peak seasons. The South is a place where the price of housing and land is generally less than that found in other regions of the U.S. Moreover, it is an area where small communities and a rural lifestyle still thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is no wonder that many of our rural counties in the South attract newcomers and are the target of urban and suburban development. Problems occur when these small communities and rural landscapes experience population booms, become littered with rooftops, endure the stresses of traffic, lose farmland and open space, experience environmental problems, and eventually lose their unique characteristics that originally shaped these communities.

Haywood County, North Carolina, has long been an attractive area to residents and visitors. Its mild climate, pristine and abundant natural resources, rural lifestyle, and natural scenic beauty attract many tourists and newcomers to this part of the state. Located in the Blue Ridge of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, Haywood County contains diverse and dramatic topography with beautiful river valleys and overwhelming scenic vistas from high mountain peaks. Amazingly, the bulk of the county's land base is located within a single watershed. As a result, the county is surrounded by high elevation mountains including the Great Smoky Mountains to the north, the Newfound Mountains to the east, Pisgah Ridge to the south, and the Balsam Mountains to the west (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997).



Haywood County encompasses approximately 355,168 acres, or 546 square miles. Elevations range from about 1,400 feet at Waterville along the Pigeon River to 6,621 feet at the top of Mount Guyot. The county has 19 mountain peaks at elevations above 5,000 feet and is thought to have the highest average elevation of any county in the eastern U.S. (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997). Below the rugged mountains are fertile valleys and intermountain hills that have provided productive farmland for centuries.



*Productive farmland surrounded by mountainous terrain. -Meggan T. Graves*

Haywood County has a rich public land base that affords vast outdoor recreational opportunities. Approximately 61,225 acres of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP), which is the most visited national park in America, is located in Haywood County. Furthermore, about 68,175 acres of Pisgah National Forest is located in the county. Another 3,588 acres of Haywood County is part of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which is the most visited National Park Service site in America (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997; Free, pers comm., 2007). Other public lands, primarily state game lands, combine with these federal reserves to produce an enormous public land base which enhances public appeal along with scenic values, and provides diverse opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Located a short distance from Asheville, North Carolina, and with Interstate 40 running through the center, it is not surprising so many people are attracted to visiting or living within Haywood County. For these reasons, Haywood County is a prime target for large-scale development, which can easily overwhelm a county without many local development regulations. Plans are currently in motion to construct a large-scale commercial and residential development in the Jonathan Creek area of the county (The Mountaineer Publishing Company website, 2007). This type of development will forever change the dynamics of Haywood County without careful planning and implementation of strict local regulations.

The state of the farm in Haywood County in 2007 is marked by both rapid change and stubborn persistence. Burley tobacco, once a major crop in Haywood County, has all but disappeared since the tobacco buyout. Tomato farmers, once numbered in the hundreds and working more than 300 acres, now number less than 20 and work less than 100 acres. More than 80% of the county's prime farmlands have been lost to development. Nevertheless, Haywood County farmers are not giving up. They remain dedicated to full-time farming, with more full-time farmers now than 20 years ago. Haywood County landowners lead the state in participation in the Voluntary Agricultural District program; and farming remains a key part of the county's economy (Golden Leaf Grant Application, 2007).



*A burley tobacco field in Haywood County, a rare sight today. -Meggan T. Graves*

Agriculture currently makes a major contribution to the well-being of residents in Haywood County. The agriculture community provides direct benefits to residents who live within and outside the county's cities and towns. In addition to direct contributions to the local economy in the form of product sale receipts and expenditures on farm services and inputs, along with employment on farms, farm support businesses and fresh food, farmers also make significant contributions as stewards of the remaining amounts of undeveloped land (often called "open-space") in the county. Their stewardship protects the county's soil and water resources, recharges groundwater and abates storm water runoff, maintains floodplains and their flood storage capacity, provides wildlife habitat, and safeguards the scenic and historic resources that have defined the county's character. Therefore, it is in the county's interest to promote the local agricultural community and protect farmland. Supporting active farmers is a cost effective way of maintaining the quality of life of everyone in Haywood County. The scenic values provided by farm landscapes and other associated amenities alone are a main attraction for many tourists and newcomers to Haywood County. As proof, the county hosts the Blue Ridge Parkway and three state scenic highways: highways 215, 276, and 209. And, only the rural sections of these scenic highways garner this rare designation.

As demonstrated by data supplied below, Haywood County is losing farmland. Farming faces a unique set of stresses, some of which the county can help to mitigate with thoughtful action. To better understand these stresses and the steps the county can take to reduce them, it is helpful to first understand the history, geography (including the soil resource), economic trends, and regulations governing farming. It is also important to understand the values and concerns of the farmers themselves.

## HAYWOOD COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY

### A. Agricultural Production

Haywood County's family farms produce a diverse array of agricultural products. Furthermore, Haywood County ranks high among the 100 North Carolina counties in many of the agricultural commodities produced within the county (Figures 1-4; USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). The most common crops grown in the county are tomatoes, peppers, and corn for silage. Most of the cultivated land is located in the floodplain along the Pigeon River and its major tributaries. A smaller portion of farmland exists on the intermountain hills between Waynesville and Canton, and in the community of Ironduff (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997). Although farm income from burley tobacco decreased from 2004 to 2006, income generated from fruit and vegetable production has increased significantly during this time frame (Table 1). Fruits and vegetables that largely contributed to these estimates were tomatoes, peppers, and some apples. Combined, they generate the most farm income in Haywood County.

Due to the climate, soils, and location of Haywood County's fertile valleys, farmers are able to produce excellent tomatoes and peppers. These crops have withstood the test of time and have become Haywood County's leading agricultural crops (Table 1). The locally grown tomatoes and peppers have largely been shipped off to other markets up and down the Eastern Seaboard, which left western North Carolinians little access to these fresh, locally grown vegetables. Today, many Haywood County farmers are still committed to producing these products and have even banded together to develop and strengthen local markets for their farm products. The campaign project is called "Buy Haywood" and many strategies are currently being implemented to encourage businesses, residents, and visitors to take advantage of these fresh, locally grown crops (Discover Haywood County brochure, 2007).

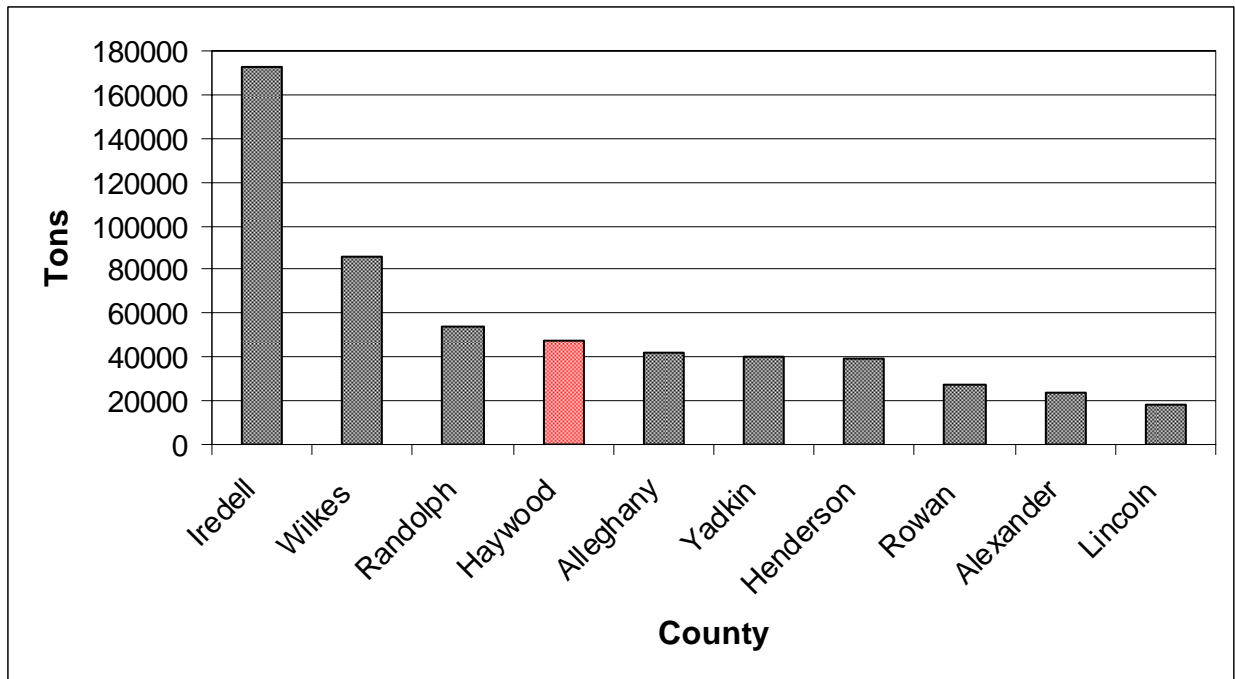


Figure 1. Top ten North Carolina counties based on production of corn for silage, 2006.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

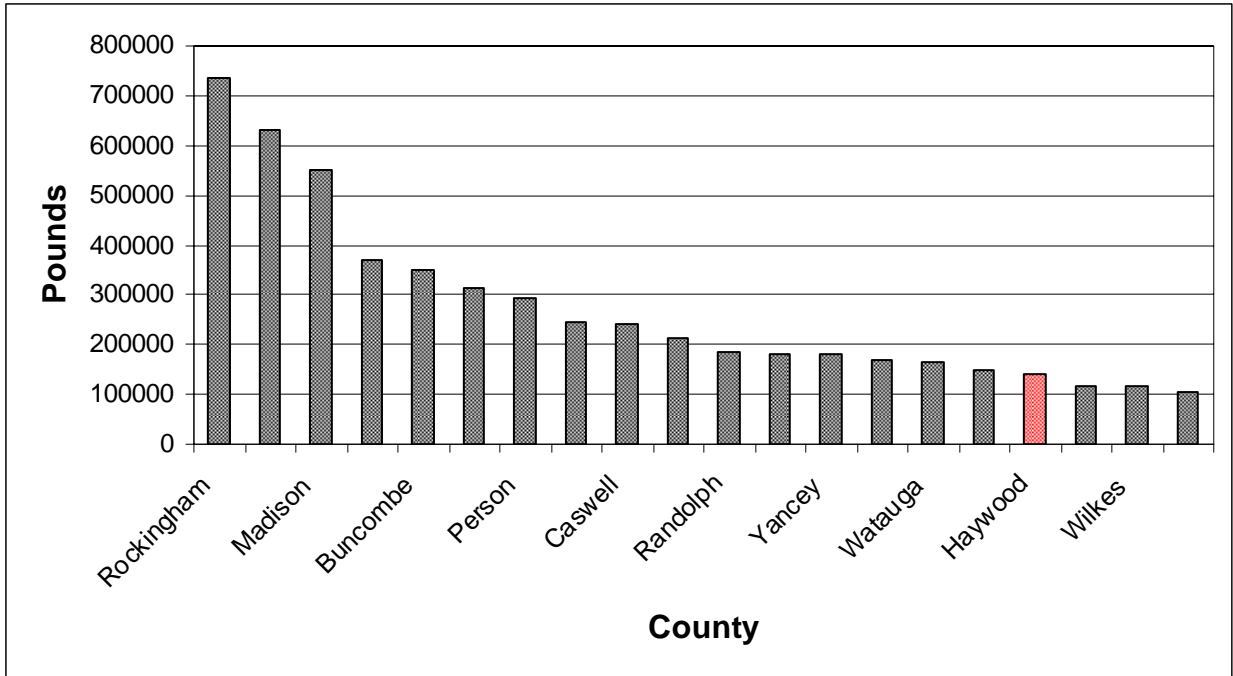


Figure 2. Top twenty North Carolina counties based on production of burley tobacco, 2006.

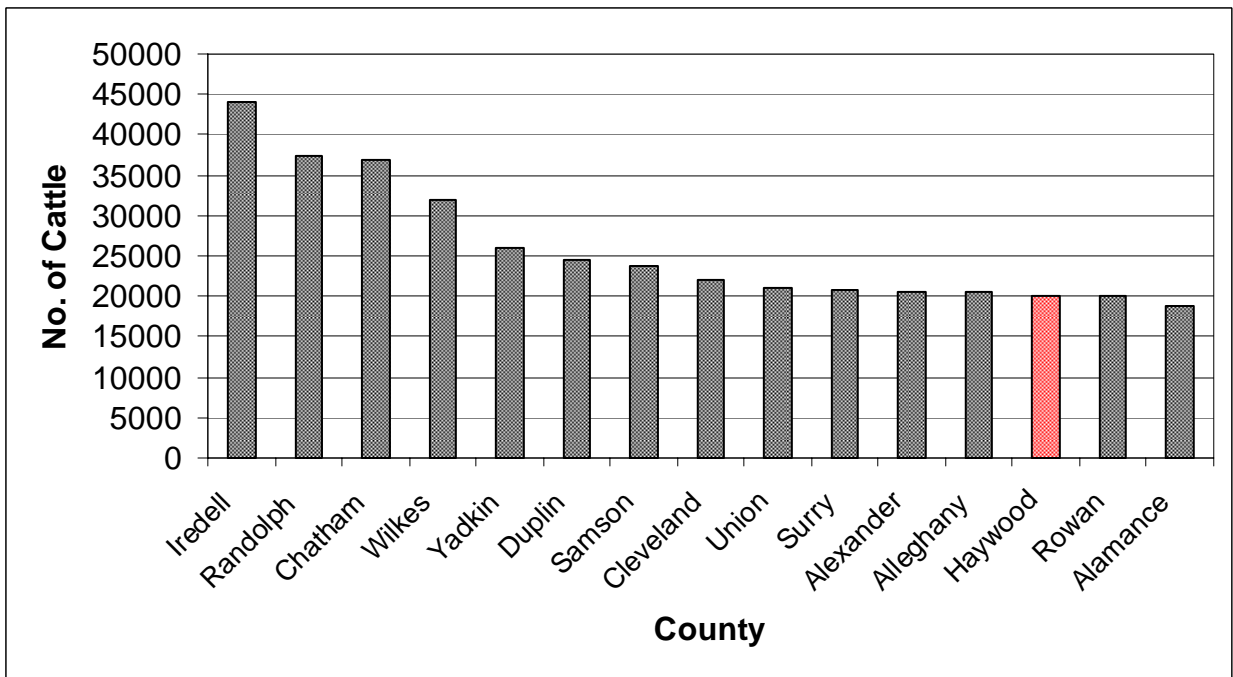


Figure 3. Top fifteen North Carolina counties based on number of cattle, 2006.

Haywood County ranks 31st in North Carolina based on hay production.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

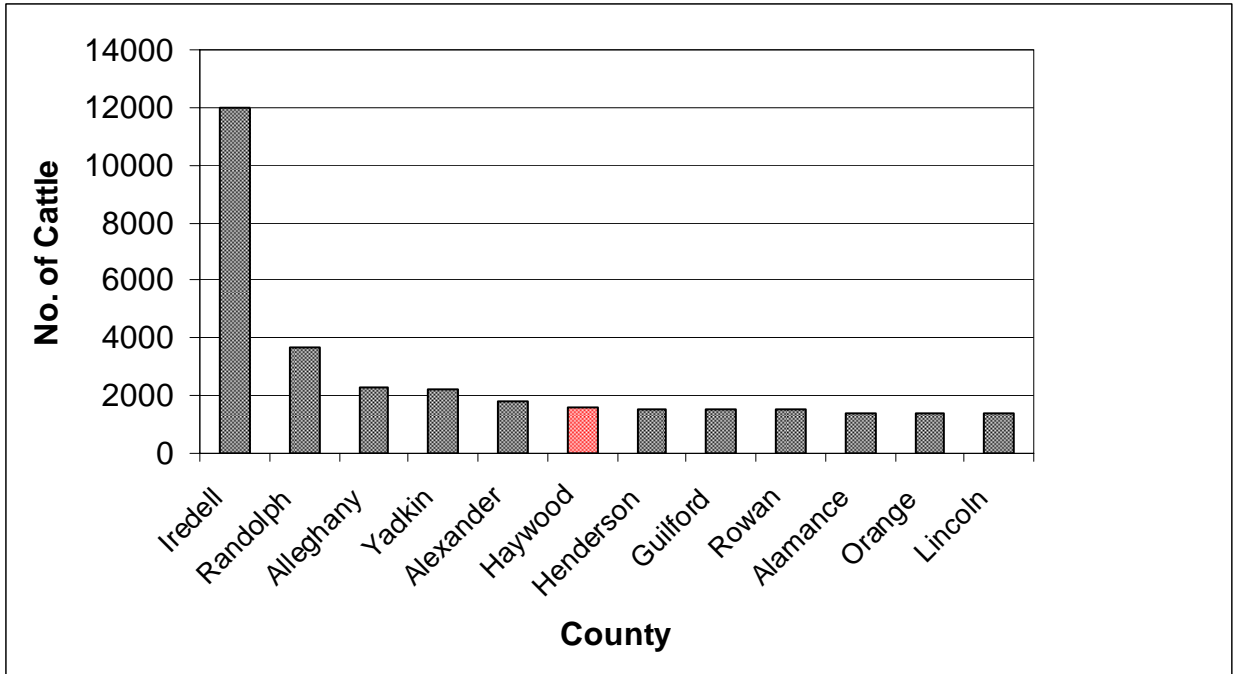


Figure 4. Top twelve North Carolina counties based on number of dairy cows, 2006.

Haywood County ranks 17th in North Carolina based on number of beef cattle.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

ESTIMATED INCOME FROM SALE OF FARM PRODUCTS & GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS

HAYWOOD COUNTY			
WESTERN DISTRICT			
COMMODITY	2004	2005	2006
TOBACCO-BURLEY	\$1,214,157.00	\$396,640.00	\$374,625.00
CORN	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
SWEET POTATOES AND POTATOES	\$14,726.00	\$77,000.00	\$84,890.00
FRUITS & VEGETABLES	\$4,945,552.00	\$6,077,765.00	\$9,027,345.00
GREENHOUSE & NURSERY	\$3,390,000.00	\$4,095,000.00	\$4,095,000.00
HAY & OTHER CROPS	\$24,970.00	\$26,400.00	\$31,900.00
FARM FORESTRY	\$3,392,395.00 @	\$10,210,000.00 @	\$3,468,000.00 @
<b>TOTAL CROP INCOME</b>	<b>\$12,981,800.00</b>	<b>\$20,882,805.00</b>	<b>\$17,081,760.00</b>
<b>HOGS</b>	<b>\$213,129.00</b>	<b>\$233,900.00</b>	<b>\$234,880.00</b>
<b>CATTLE</b>	<b>\$1,083,480.00</b>	<b>\$1,172,719.00</b>	<b>\$1,096,001.00</b>
<b>MILK</b>	<b>\$5,304,050.00</b>	<b>\$4,890,775.00</b>	<b>\$4,493,192.00</b>
<b>OTHER LIVESTOCK &amp; LS/PRODUCTS</b>	<b>\$17,446.00</b>	<b>\$29,352.00</b>	<b>\$29,097.00</b>
<b>TROUT &amp; CATFISH</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00 *</b>
<b>TOTAL LIVESTOCK &amp; LS/PROD INCOME</b>	<b>\$6,618,105.00</b>	<b>\$6,326,746.00</b>	<b>\$5,853,170.00</b>
<b>TOTAL FARM INCOME</b>	<b>\$19,599,905.00</b>	<b>\$27,209,551.00</b>	<b>\$22,934,930.00</b>
<b>FEE FISHING (TROUT &amp; CATFISH)</b>	<b>\$139,750.00</b>	<b>\$139,750.00</b>	<b>\$0.00 *</b>
<b>NON-FARM FORESTRY</b>	<b>\$1,580,000.00 ‡</b>	<b>\$1,640,000.00 ‡</b>	<b>\$490,000.00 ‡</b>
<b>HORSES, PONIES, MULES</b>	<b>\$169,000.00</b>	<b>\$254,550.00</b>	<b>\$253,470.00</b>

\* COUNTIES MAY NOT ADD TO TOTALS TO AVOID INDIVIDUAL DISCLOSURES.  
 @ FARM FORESTRY - FOR 2005 AND 2006, FARM FORESTRY INCLUDES ALL FORESTED LAND IN A COUNTY EXCEPT FOR PUBLICALLY OWNED TRACKS (LOCAL, STATE, FEDERAL). THUS, 2005 AND 2006 VALUES ARE NOT COMPARABLE TO 2004.  
 ‡ NON-FARM FORESTRY - FOR 2005 AND 2006, INCLUDES ONLY PUBLIC LANDS (LOCAL, STATE, FEDERAL).

Table 1. Estimated farm income from sale of farm products and government payments in Haywood County, North Carolina. Data provided by NC State Cooperative Extension, 2007.

Apple orchards were at one time fairly common across the county landscape, but are now much less common due primarily to urbanization. Apple trees grow best on deep, well drained soils that have a loamy subsoil (USDA Soil Survey). Still today, apples are an important cash crop to some Haywood County farmers and contribute to the large income estimate under the fruits and vegetables category (Table 1).

Pastures for livestock grazing and hay production are still common in Haywood County and play a significant role in producing three of the county's top agricultural commodities including beef, milk, and hay. The best soils for pasture are on uneroded side slopes and ridges that have slopes of less than 30%. In addition, soils on stream terraces and in coves support good pastures (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997). Farm income from hay production is important, but income generated from cattle and milk production is even more noteworthy (Table 1).

Haywood County currently has 18,200 head of cattle. The bulk of these are beef cattle, and the beef farms in the county generally average less than 30 head. There are approximately 1,900 dairy cows in Haywood County, and the dairies average about 240 producing cows per unit. Approximately ten years ago, the county had 50% more dairies, but due to urban pressures, government regulations, and a lack of anyone to take over farm operations, many operators either closed altogether or changed their operation (Smathers pers comm., 2007). Cash receipts for livestock operations currently total \$11,600,000.00.



*Beef cattle grazing a field in Haywood County. -Meggan T. Graves*

Ornamental crops include, but are not limited to, Christmas trees, mountain laurel, rhododendron, hemlock, ginseng, and other native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants used in landscaping. The production of Christmas trees is an important industry in Haywood County and the surrounding counties (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997). North Carolina ranks first in the nation in Fraser fir production and second in Christmas tree production behind the Pacific Northwest. North Carolina accounts for 15% of the nation's Christmas trees (NC State Cooperative Extension website, 2007). Haywood County ranks eleventh among North Carolina counties in Christmas tree production (NCDA website, 1996). Fraser fir is native to the highest elevation mountains in western North Carolina, southwestern Virginia and eastern Tennessee (NC Cooperative Extension website, 2007). They are best adapted to cool sites at elevations generally above 3,000 feet, containing well drained, loamy soils that have a high content of organic matter in the topsoil (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997). These sites are abundant in Haywood County and many landowners have taken advantage of this agricultural opportunity. Income derived from greenhouse and nursery operations are significant and are just behind milk production (Table 1).



*Boyd Christmas Tree Farm, Haywood County. -Kara Cassels*



North Carolina presently ranks second in the U.S. in commercial trout production, all of which occurs in western North Carolina (NC State Cooperative Extension website, 2007). There are approximately five commercial trout farms and fee fishing businesses in Haywood County that produce whole trout, filets, and eggs used for caviar. Trout production makes it evident that Haywood County is an area with diverse agricultural options. Several other farming practices in the county generate significant income from other crops and livestock (Table 1).



*Raceways at Sunburst Trout Company, Haywood County. -Kara Cassels*

Approximately 20,000 acres of Haywood County's forestlands are located on farms, and these forests are one of the most important resources in the county (Figure 5).

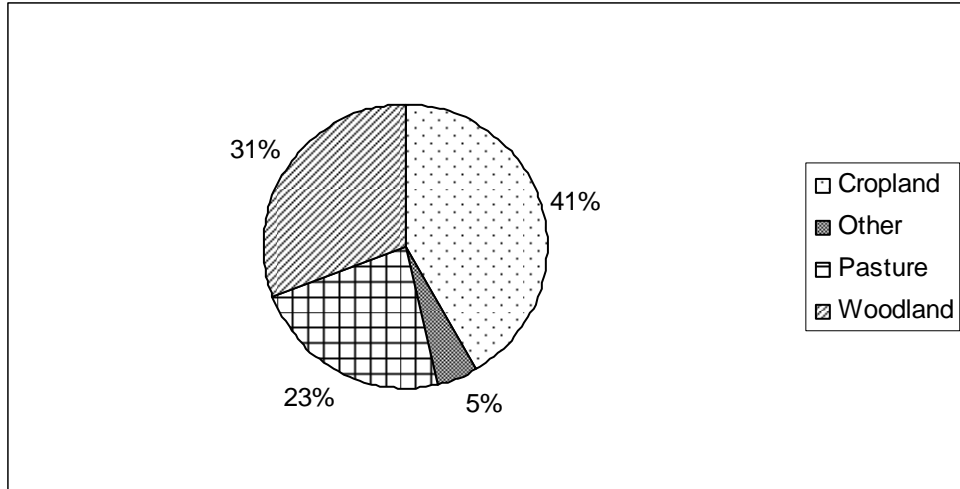


Figure 5. Type of land found on farms in Haywood County, North Carolina, 2007.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

They provide a large number of benefits to people including heating fuel, wood products such as those used for paper and building construction, food and medicine, scenic beauty during all seasons, fish and wildlife habitat, cooler and cleaner air, minimize flooding, and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and nature study. Additionally, forests help protect water quality by controlling erosion and sedimentation, and they also minimize noise (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997). Forest management generates significant income for farm and non-farm forest landowners alike (Table 1).



Extracting timber from a farm in Haywood County. -Haywood Community College

Haywood County's farm and forested landscapes significantly enhance scenic beauty and provide a means of escape for a more urbanizing society. Undoubtedly, the amenities they provide are a main attraction for tourists and newcomers to the area.

### Economic Impact of Agricultural Production

Agriculture is Haywood County's third largest industry (Haywood County Chamber of Commerce website, 2007), accounting for \$12,259,000 in gross sales annually (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). In 2002, Haywood County agricultural producers realized \$1,255,000 in cash receipts, with farm production expenses of \$9,681,000, illustrating agriculture's importance to the local economy. Agriculture is much more than farming in that a substantial number of non-agricultural businesses supply the needs of farmers. These include processors, vehicle and equipment dealers and other enterprises. For example, Haywood County farmers purchased over \$440,000 of petroleum products, \$1,577,000 of feed, \$1,933,000 of hired farm labor and approximately \$3,963,000 of other products and services from Haywood County and other nearby enterprises, many of which would not be considered farm supply businesses (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). For these businesses to survive and prosper, a core critical mass of farmers must be preserved and vice-versa. Though difficult to measure, these many businesses supporting agriculture undoubtedly account for a significant portion of Haywood County's employment base.

Farming activity enhances the local economy in various other ways. Viable agricultural communities set Haywood County apart from other popular southern counties that have been spoiled by poorly planned development and urbanization. Also, many agricultural areas help minimize property destruction and loss of life during flood events by protecting floodplain areas and minimizing stormwater runoff. In many cases, farm scenery and farming activities provoke fond memories for people. The resources and opportunities farms provide, such as enhanced scenery, pristine and bountiful natural resources, and agritourism opportunities help retain local residents, attract newcomers, and boost tourism in the county. As a result, commercial businesses and industry generally thrive. The economic impacts are thus far greater than those listed solely from an agricultural production standpoint. The agriculture community of Haywood County obviously provides direct and indirect benefits to its citizens and visitors.

### Family Farm Statistics

Family farms make up the majority of agricultural production in the county. Haywood County's agriculture community consists of predominately family owned businesses with approximately 95% of farms owned by individuals or families. Partnerships and family corporations account for approximately 5% of the remaining farms (Mills pers comm., 2007). In 1987, there were 912 farms reported in Haywood County and by 1992, there were 812 (Figure 6).

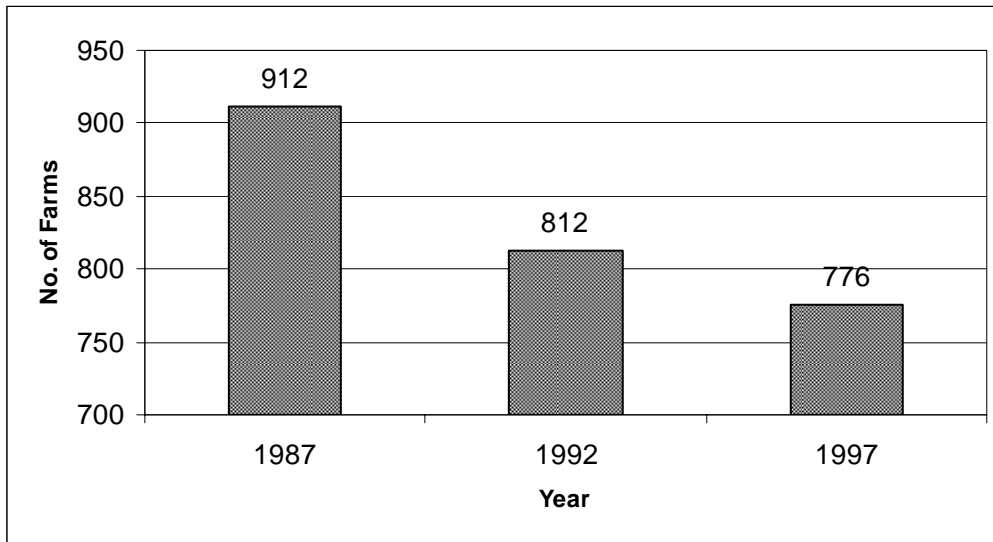


Figure 6. Number of farms in Haywood County from 1987 to 1997, under the old survey method.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

During this five-year span, Haywood County lost approximately 100 farms and over 9,700 acres of productive farmland (Figure 7) (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). The USDA data collection procedures before 1997 did not account for farm owners who did not report and thus, Haywood County likely lost more than 100 farms and 10,000 acres of productive farmland during this time frame. The new survey procedures account for those farms who do not report to USDA surveys. Under the old procedure for data collection, Haywood County had 776 farms that reported to USDA in 1997 (Figure 6). Under the new procedures, in addition to the old format of reporting, Haywood County had 962 farms, or 186 more farms captured under the new survey methods during 1997 (Figure 8).

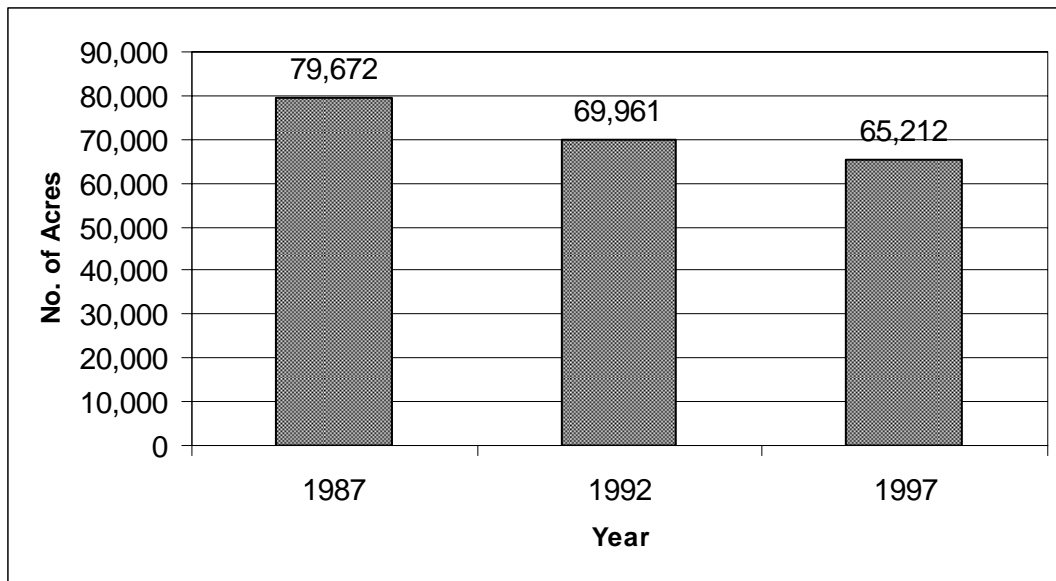


Figure 7. Total amount of land in farms in Haywood County, North Carolina, from 1987 to 1997.

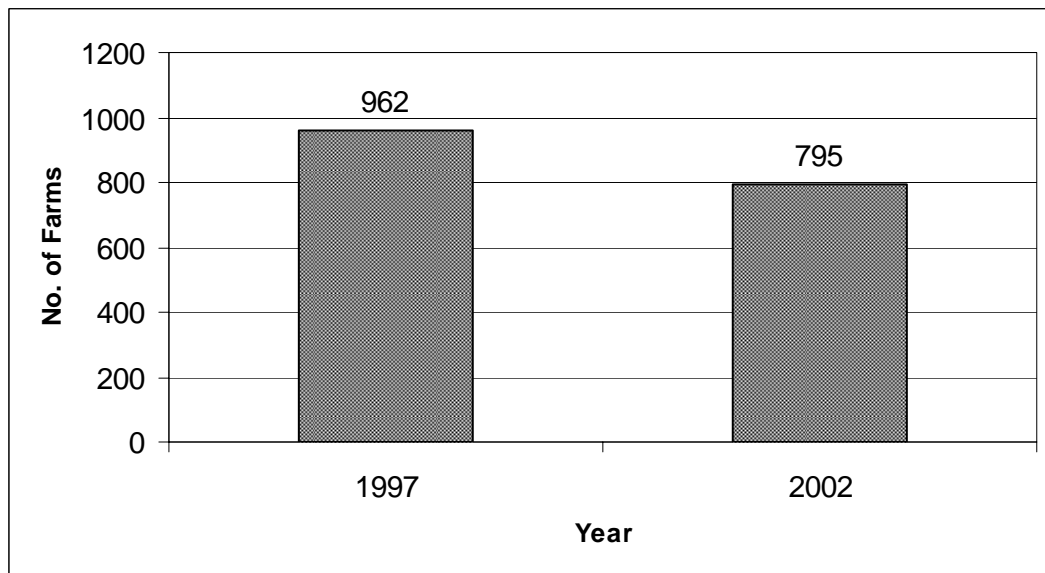


Figure 8. Number of farms in Haywood County from 1997 to 2002, under the new survey.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

The USDA Farm Service Agency also maintains some county data on farms. By utilizing data provided by the Haywood County Field Office, it is clear that the number of farms in Haywood County have been on a steep decline since 1987 (Figure 9). Even more alarming than the time span between 1987 and 1992, Haywood County has lost 1,423 farms from 2002 to 2007.

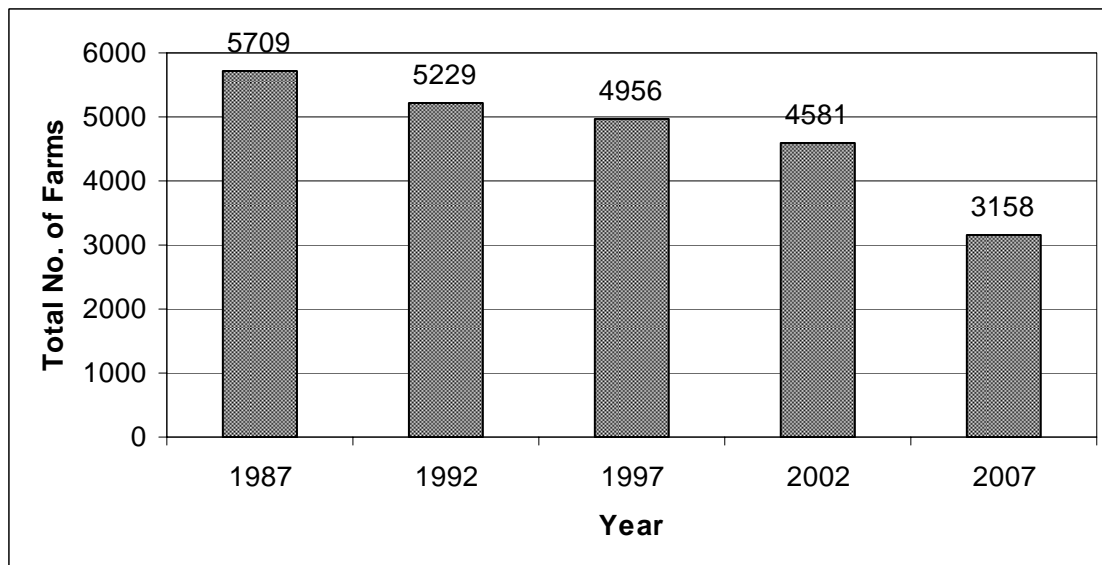


Figure 9. Number of farms in Haywood County from 1987 to 2007.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-Farm Service Agency

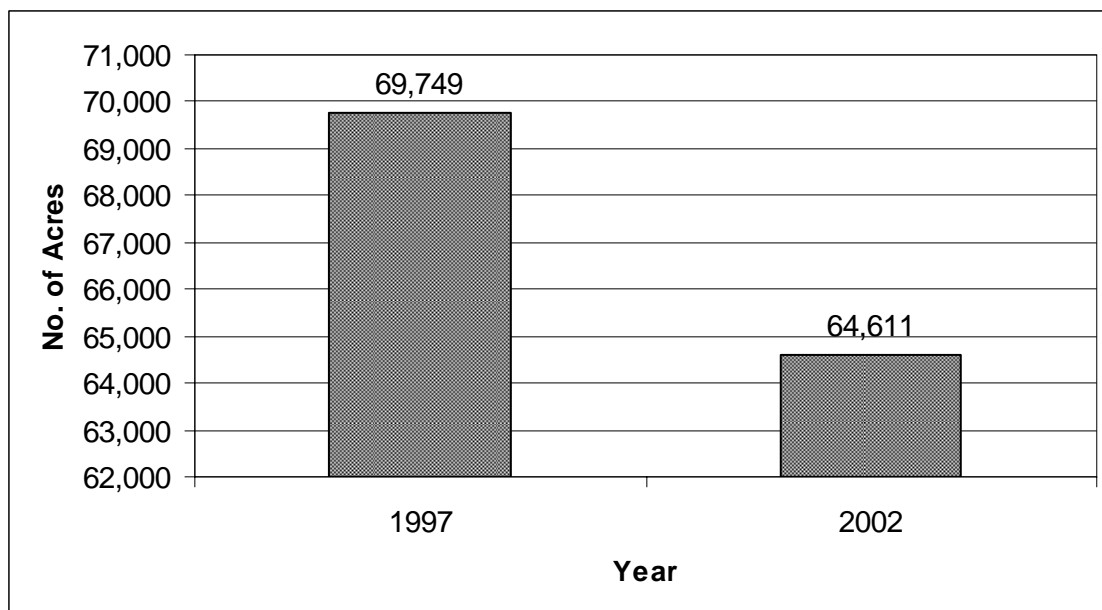


Figure 10. Total amount of land in farms in Haywood County, North Carolina, from 1997 to 2002.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

The average farm size remained fairly stable from 1987 to 1997 (Figure 11), but average farm size increased significantly from 1997 to 2002 (Figure 12).

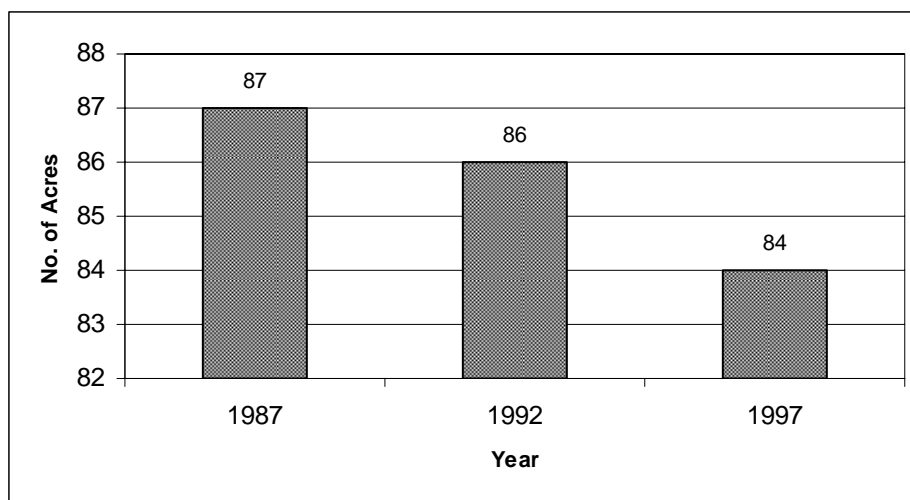


Figure 11. Average farm size in Haywood County, North Carolina, under the old survey method.

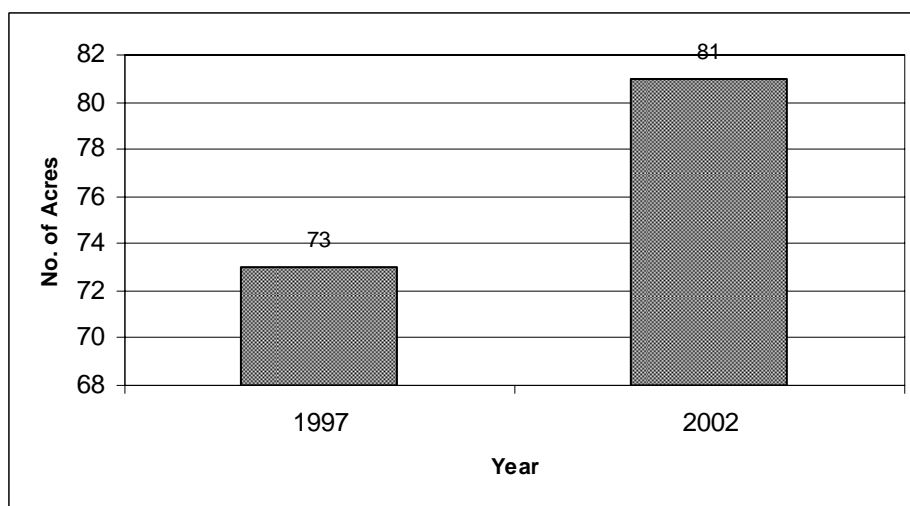


Figure 12. Average farm size in Haywood County, North Carolina, under the new survey method.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

Farms of all sizes, except for two categories, have decreased since 1987 (Table 2). A greater decline in the number of farms has occurred with landowners who farm less than 500 acres. This indicates that many of the smaller farmers in Haywood County have likely sold their land or converted it to different uses.

In 2002, 55% of Haywood County farmers considered farming to be their principal occupation, an increase from 35% from 1997 (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). Today, there are a larger percentage of full-time farmers in Haywood County than there was in 1997.

Table 2. Total number of farms by size in Haywood County, North Carolina, 2007.

# of Acres	1987	1992	1997	2002
1-9	166	155	132	105
10-49	326	305	307	363
50-179	302	258	246	248
180-499	102	77	74	62
500-999	10	12	12	12
1000+	6	5	5	5

### Farm Land Use Trends

According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, Haywood County had 64,611 acres in farms, representing approximately 18% of the total county land base, or almost 29% of the private land base (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). These lands included 26,869 acres of total cropland, with 11,083 acres harvested, 14,828 acres of pastureland, 19,855 acres of forestland, and 10 acres of land enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (Figure 5). In the 1997 Census, the county had 69,749 acres in farms or 19.68% of the land base, which indicates a loss of approximately 7½% of Haywood County’s farmland over the five year period between surveys (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). If this trend continues, a viable agriculture community would be challenging to maintain and unlikely in the long-term.

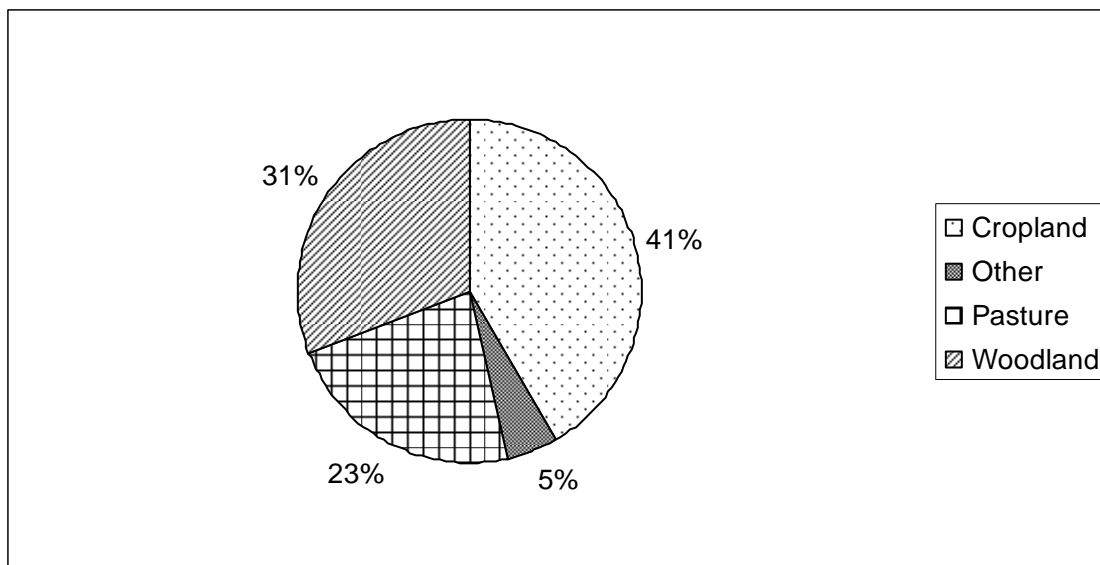


Figure 5. Type of land found on farms in Haywood County, North Carolina, 2007.

\*\*\*Statistics were provided by: USDA-National and NC Agricultural Statistics Service

## **Agricultural Soils**

The federal designations of prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance are used to identify those lands that are critical in the production of food, fiber, forage, feed, and oilseed crops. The criteria for prime farmland designation are based upon the combination of physical and chemical characteristics of the soils for producing these commodities. Slopes range from 0 to 8 percent. In addition to excellent soil quality, prime farmlands also have the growing season and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Farmland of statewide importance includes those that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some may produce as high a yield as prime farmlands if conditions are favorable. Slopes range from 8 to 15 percent (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997). Both prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance in Haywood County are depicted in Map 1 and in Table 3a.

Unfortunately, the properties and qualities of prime and statewide important farmlands that make them highly valued for agricultural production are also the same characteristics that make them highly desirable for development. Therefore, high quality farmland is often the first land to succumb to urban development due to the ideal soil properties and flat topography that facilitate conventional engineering designs. As this high quality farmland becomes threatened and is converted to urban development, its loss to those uses puts agricultural production pressures on marginal lands, which are generally more erodible, droughty, less productive, and not easily cultivated (Soil Survey of Haywood County, 1997).

According to the Haywood County Soil Survey, much of the acreage of the county's important farmland lies within 3 general soil associations: 1) the Evard-Cowee-Hayesville-Trimont association which lies mainly in the central part of the county, extending east to Buncombe County, and north to Crabtree, Iron Duff, and Fines Creek; 2) the Dillsboro-Dellwood-Braddock association, which occurs along the Pigeon River and its tributaries; and 3) the Saunook association, which is found in large coves adjacent to the other two associations. Map 1 represents these soil associations and depicts the bulk of Haywood County's important farmland. The Important Farmlands list for Haywood County is found in Table 3b.

Another federal designation, farmland of local importance, may be used where there is concern for certain additional farmlands for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops, even though these lands are not identified as having national or statewide importance. Where appropriate, these lands are to be identified by the local agency or agencies concerned. In places, additional farmlands of local importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by local ordinance. Presently, no locally important farmlands are recognized in Haywood County.

In Haywood County, approximately 26,600 acres of soils meet the criteria of prime or statewide important farmland. This accounts for only 12% of the non-federal land in the county. It is important however, to include the three soil associations that combine to produce additional high productive farmland in Haywood County (Map 1). Since this highly valued resource is so critical to our local agricultural economy, it is imperative that local, state, and federal agencies, along with private citizens, work together to protect these remaining productive farmlands. Based on soils and current agriculture activity in the county, key farm areas to protect include, but are not limited to, Bethel and Cruso, Upper Crabtree, Fines Creek, Hyatt Creek, and Iron Duff.





*Fertile soils in the floodplain of the Pigeon River. -Kara Cassels*

*Table 3a. Prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance found in Haywood County, NC 2007.*

<b>Map Symbol</b>	<b>Map Unit Name</b>	<b>Farmland Classification</b>
BkB2	Braddock clay loam, 2-8% slopes	All areas are prime farmland
DsB	Dillsboro loam, 2-8% slopes	All areas are prime farmland
HaB2	Hayesville clay loam, 2-8% slopes	All areas are prime farmland
RoA	Rosman fine sandy loam, 0-2% slopes	All areas are prime farmland
ScB	Saunook loam, 2-8% slopes	All areas are prime farmland
SuA	Statler loam, 0-3% slopes	All areas are prime farmland
BkC2	Braddock clay loam, 8-15% slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
BsC	Brasstown-Junaluska complex, 8-15% slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
DsC	Dillsboro loam, 8-15% slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
HaC2	Hayesville clay loam, 8-15% slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
HmA	Hemphill loam, 0-3% slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
SdC	Saunook loam, 8-15% slopes	Farmland of statewide importance

\*\*\* Information taken from USDA-NRCS Soil Data Mart.

*Table 3b. Soil associations that contain productive farmland in Haywood County, NC 2007.*

Evard-Cowee-Hayesville-Trimont
Dillsboro-Dellwood-Braddock
Saunook

## CHALLENGES TO AGRICULTURE IN HAYWOOD COUNTY

Surveys of Haywood County farmers and other owners of farmland identified some of the strengths of county agriculture as well as its challenges. While the agricultural industry remains an important part of Haywood County's economy, both farmers and farmland owners believe that rising taxes, low commodity prices, environmental regulations, development pressures, complaints from non-farm neighbors, vandalism and trespassing are having a significant impact on the future of agriculture within the county. To help address the challenges facing agriculture, Haywood County farmers and farmland owners either participate or are interested in participating in a variety of local and state programs. The following are some of the specific challenges farmers face in Haywood County.

### **Falling Prices and Low Profitability.**

Low commodity prices, coupled with rising costs of production, have resulted in low profitability and inadequate farm income for farmers across North Carolina. This situation 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. Haywood County farmers have identified low prices as well as the rising costs of taxes, labor, regulatory compliance requirements and utility expenses as factors affecting their bottom line.

### **Aging Farm Operators.**

In North Carolina, the average age of a farm operator is 55. In Haywood County, the average age of a farm operator is 56, or, on average, around 12 years older than the general public (Haywood County Chamber of Commerce website, 2007; USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service website, 2007). North Carolina farmers are aging and there are less young people interested in taking over the family farms. With fewer younger farmers willing or able to take over production on 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, which is an invaluable asset to the local agricultural economy.



*Rogers Farm. The property has been in the family since 1860, and the current operator is 90 years old. The family is interested in a conservation easement. -Kara Cassels*

### **Rising Property Values and Taxes.**

As suburban development increases in rural areas, land prices invariably increase, which has been the case in Haywood County. State price of land increase over the past 10 years here... Increasing land prices restrict a farmer's ability to purchase more land on which to operate, thus restricting his or her flexibility to change their agricultural operation or otherwise produce more farm products to increase their income.

**Conflicts with Non-Farming Neighbors.**

Haywood County farmers have indicated that conflicts with non-farming neighbors are increasing. As residential development moves to the farm’s edge, new neighbors find themselves faced with the realities of agricultural production processes including dust, smoke, livestock smells, noise from machinery, and slow moving farm equipment on roadways. Complaints create a hostile operating environment, can result in costly litigation, and at worst, result in curtailing a farmer’s ability to operate his or her farm.

**Loss of Local Farm Services.**

As noted above, a significant amount of Haywood County businesses support agriculture enterprises, and in turn, count on agriculture as a large portion of their service base. As farms cease to operate, local businesses depending on that revenue close or relocate further away from agricultural production areas. With the loss of these support businesses, farmers incur rising costs due to delays in their own production due to the lack of an urgently needed service (such as tractor repair) that only a nearby business can provide in the critical amount of time, or they may have to travel further for needed services adding time and travel expenses to their operation. Additionally, farming is a unique business, and the loss of support businesses, particularly in the financial sector, means a drain from the county service providers who understand the unique needs of agricultural producers.



*Tomato crates from J.W. Johnson Tomato Company’s packing house in Haywood County. This is the only packing house left in the mountain region of North Carolina. -Meggan T. Graves*

**Fractured Infrastructure from Poorly-Planned Residential Development.**

Time is a very important asset in agricultural production. The ability to achieve certain goals within certain windows of weather and season are critical to successful farming. Often these schedules are based on the farmer’s reliance of corridors of transportation between fields, services, and markets. As poorly-planned development encroaches into farming areas, these corridors between fields or other necessary destinations can be disrupted, increasing farmers travel time and operating costs. Also, increased traffic in these corridors imposes similar costs.

## **HAYWOOD COUNTY RESIDENTS CARE ABOUT AGRICULTURE AND STAYING RURAL**

In the spring of 2006, the Richard L. Hoffman Center for Assessment and Research Alliances (CARA) at Mars Hill College was contracted by the Haywood County Board of Commissioners to conduct a random telephone survey of residents and landowners in the Upper Pigeon River Valley area, generally defined as the Bethel community. Using contact information supplied from voter registration files, teams of students from Mars Hill College and Duke University successfully completed 273 surveys. Survey results clearly indicate that the community of the Upper Pigeon River Valley firmly supports the rural character of the area in general and of farmers in particular. Some specific survey results are provided below:

1. "Would you like to see Bethel continue to be a rural agricultural community?" 93.8% Yes
2. "Do you think it is important for the issue of development and rural character to be addressed?" 93.7% Yes
3. "Do you think it is important to help farmers protect their land from development if they wish to do so?" 98.5% Yes
4. "Would you support some type of public funding to help Bethel remain a rural community?"  
Nearly 2 out of 3, Yes
  - Given this overwhelming support for helping farmers protect their land, are residents prepared to invest in public funding to help Bethel remain rural? Almost two-thirds (65.7%) responded that they were prepared to do so, with 18.5% responding "no" and 15.9% saying they were uncertain.
  - Among those who earn income from farming or forestry on their own land, support for funding was particularly strong, with 80.8% saying "yes" and only 3.8% responding "no."
5. 100% of those who've lived in the Pigeon River Valley their entire lives would like to see Bethel continue to be a rural agricultural community, with all other categories of longevity very largely in agreement.
6. "Do you think it is important for the issue of development and rural character to be addressed?," responses were consistently in favor, regardless of how long the respondent had lived in the Pigeon River Valley – over 90% in each category

It seems clear from the results of this survey that while many residents of the Pigeon River Valley recognize that some development is inevitable, the rural character of the valley is something that a great majority wish to preserve, and a clear majority are in favor of backing their support for farmers with public funding (Bethel Telephone Survey, 2006).

## OPPORTUNITIES TO SUSTAIN AND ENHANCE AGRICULTURE IN HAYWOOD COUNTY

### Education

*Foster greater recognition and public support for agriculture by educating the public on agriculture's economic, community and environmental benefits.*

1. Haywood SWCD and its partners will continue to educate Haywood County residents (students and adults) and visitors about the environment, land management, and farm benefits through a variety of programs such as:
  - Conservation Field Days for 5th graders
  - FFA Land Judging: District-sponsored competition
  - Resource Conservation Workshop at NCSU: Two students sponsored each year
  - Youth Environmental Stewardship (YES) Camp for middle school students
  - Annual Poster, Essay and Speech Contests for students in grades 3-8
  - Conservation Teacher of the Year
  - Envirothon teams for middle and high school students
  - Educator workshops such as Food, Land and People (FLP), and Project WET
    - \* The mission of FLP is to “develop citizens literate about the relationships between agriculture, the environment and human populations.”
    - \* FLP's Resources for Learning offers fifty-five lessons designed for PreK-12
  - Field Days: Held at the Mountain Research Station with a focus on agriculture
  - Resource materials such as posters, bookmarks, and educational booklets
  - Rolling Library and/or resource materials from the Haywood SWCDs lending library
  - Newsletter for educators
  - Soil and Water Stewardship Week
  - Enviroscope: Non-point source pollution and BMP's

Haywood SWCD and its partners have partnered with all local schools in the area for field days and job fairs, and have also provided volunteer opportunities for students

2. The Bethel Rural Community Organization received a grant through the NC Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, to develop a 'Buy Haywood' campaign program. Many local tomato farmers and the Bethel Rural Community Organization are currently working together to develop and implement a strong educational campaign to strengthen local markets for their farm products. Educational brochures have been developed and distributed across the area, and billboards of local farmers are displayed in strategic locations across the county emphasizing the importance of buying local produce. Now in its first year, the Buy Haywood Market Development Project is developing stronger markets for Haywood County farm products by (1) organizing farmers and providing extensive training in key marketing issues; (2) testing the market potential of various Haywood County farm-related products; and (3) increasing sales of basic and value-added products by developing relationships with local and regional retailers (grocers), restaurants, stores, consumers, and others. Efforts began by building on a solid base of tomato and pepper production. As those efforts continue, investigating the sales potential of other farm-related products such as nursery and greenhouse items, beef cattle, and tomato-based sauces are being explored. Buy Haywood is a joint effort of the Haywood County Economic Development Commission, the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, NC Cooperative Extension, NC State University, the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, the Bethel Rural Community Organization, local growers, the local packing house, and many others. The most direct benefit will be to Haywood County farmers by expanding their markets and sales. In turn, these stronger markets will help retain and increase the number of local jobs, and benefit local residents and visitors by providing them better access to fresher produce and high-quality products. This project has the potential to touch nearly everyone in Haywood County and nearby areas (Golden Leaf Grant Application, 2007).



*Tomato farming in Haywood County is big business. -Meggan T. Graves*



*Buy Haywood Campaign. -Don McGowan, Earth Song Photography*



*Buy Haywood Campaign. -Don McGowan, Earth Song Photography*

3. Haywood SWCD and its partners should educate local governments, businesses, residents, and visitors on the association between a healthy local agricultural economy and the lifestyle many have sought to achieve by locating to Haywood County. These efforts will include:
  - Building upon the Buy Haywood campaign efforts through:
    - \* Enhancing the website and printing additional and/or new publications,
    - \* Working with local and regional retail stores and restaurants to purchase and promote products grown locally in the county;
    - \* Working with local institutions such as schools and state offices to purchase locally grown food;
    - \* Expanding cooperative efforts with neighboring counties to create a regional identity that includes promotion of agriculture;
  - Working with the organizers of the local farmers markets and assist with their marketing efforts where possible; and
  - Sponsorship of festivals, farm tours and other public recognition
  
4. Haywood SWCD and its partners will continue to educate consumers and elected officials on the relationship between a healthy local agricultural economy and the public benefits working farms provide. Members of the Haywood SWCD and the NRCS Field Office have met with County Commissioners on a regular basis to provide updates on the VAD and EVAD programs. The Agricultural Advisory Committee attends many community meetings and workshops to promote agricultural activities in Haywood County, such as the Tomato Grower's Association, the Beef Cattlemen's Association, and the Dairymen's Association. The Haywood Cooperative Extension Office has developed a coalition of interests to support agricultural and farmland protection efforts, with the support of the Haywood SWCD and NGO's such as Bethel Rural Community Organization. Many of the local resource management agencies have successfully reached the non-farming community through farmers' markets, farm events, and educational workshops. The Haywood SWCD and its partners should continue to unite the farmland protection interests of farm and non-farm community members in Haywood County.
  
5. Haywood SWCD will continue to work with the NC Cooperative Extension Service to disseminate published materials on agricultural business issues to area professionals to expand their knowledge of agriculture, thus increasing their ability to assist farmers.
  
6. Haywood SWCD and its partners will continue to offer workshops to farmers on business planning and development, research, marketing, financing, conservation funding, and estate planning.
  
7. Haywood County will continue to foster dialogue between non-farmers, government officials, and the agricultural community by delivering community meetings and the overall Farmland Preservation Program.
  
8. The Haywood SWCD and its partners should cultivate local and state media coverage of the benefits of agriculture to the well-being of the county, and should regularly communicate with media about achievements reached under this plan. Haywood SWCD has developed relationships with reporters/editors at three local newspapers:
  - *The Mountaineer*
  - *Asheville Citizen Times*
  - *The Smoky Mountain News*
    - \* Newspapers are also receptive to articles written by District staff members
    - \* Media are invited/made aware of all events that involve the public

9. Develop stronger connections between schools and local farms. Schools offer an excellent opportunity to educate students and their parents about the importance of local farms.
  - Encourage local farms and orchards to offer tours to school students, and make schools and teachers aware of available educational tours for students by distributing materials to area schools at the beginning of each school year.
  - Coordinate with the North Carolina Farm Bureau's *Ag in the Classroom* program
  - Encourage school administrators (or the county school board) to purchase local produce for county schools
  
10. Haywood County has done a wonderful job targeting agriculture with economic development and marketing initiatives, including agritourism development. There are several local farmers who offer agritourism opportunities including U-pick farms, Christmas Tree Operations, and a local Corn Maze.
  
11. Develop a public education campaign to tie consumer support of local agriculture with open-space, clean water and air benefits, floodplain protection, and enhanced wildlife habitat working farms and forestlands provide. Include input from the Haywood SWCD, the Southwestern Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), and area land trusts on specific farm-related conservation projects they have worked on. Tie the education campaign to specific initiatives under this plan to build public political support for protection tools such as funding for a PACE program.
  
12. This plan should serve as an educational tool to local government and landowners on planning techniques and tools that reduce pressures on farming operations. Through all of the local efforts toward protecting farmland in Haywood County, on top of developing innovative approaches to planning, the Haywood SWCD and its partners will continue dialogue with the local government and landowners on conservation planning at the county level. Additional efforts should include:
  - Offer officials and landowners training in quality growth techniques and infrastructure planning.
  - Continue efforts to keep members of the agricultural community involved in local government and planning.

## **Cooperation**

1. Haywood SWCD and the NRCS Field Office have taken the first steps toward building a coalition of organizations and citizens to promote awareness of local, state, and national issues affecting Haywood County agriculture. Those agencies include, but are not limited to, Haywood County Government, US Department of Agriculture (Natural Resource Conservation Service), NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, NC State University, Rural Development, RC&D Council, Farm Service Agency, Bethel Rural Community Organization and Haywood Community College. All have participated in many community meetings on Farmland Preservation and contributed to this document.
  
2. Haywood County will continue to encourage inter-municipal cooperation. Since farming spans municipal and county borders, farmland protection requires cooperation between town and county government. Successful conservation of farmlands and natural resources in Haywood County will involve joint planning efforts among all levels of government in the county. The Haywood SWCD has made great efforts to educate both town and county government about the Farmland Preservation Program and goals for future protection.
  
3. The Haywood County Agricultural Advisory Board should continue to represent the farming community in matters before the county government and should foster communication among farmers and agribusinesses in the agricultural sector. Actions could include:
  - Encourage farmers to use the website established by the Haywood SWCD to participate in a discussions about joint marketing opportunities.
  - Develop a regional-level farm transition program, which may include programs where older farmers transition skills to younger new farmers.



## **Existing Farmland Conservation Efforts and Agricultural Protection Tools**

1. County Voluntary Agricultural District Program. The North Carolina General Assembly enables counties to adopt Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) ordinances to effectively create areas “to increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life and to increase protection from nuisance suits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.” Farmers, by enrolling their farm in a VAD via entering into a revocable agreement with the county to forego developing their land for a period of ten years, enjoy certain protections of their operation, including 1) waiver of sewer and water assessments, 2) record notice to non-farm neighbors of proximity to a farming operation, and 3) public hearing before condemnation of farm property by eminent domain.

Haywood County landowners currently have two options under the VAD ordinances. They include 1) Voluntary Agriculture District and 2) Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture District (EVAD). The major difference between these two is that the EVAD ten year conservation agreement cannot be revoked. Haywood County is the second county in North Carolina to pass the EVAD. Below are details about the VAD and EVAD ordinances for Haywood County.

Voluntary Agriculture District established for Haywood County on August 11, 1994: *Established to preserve and protect farmland, forestland and/or horticultural land from non-farm development*

Eligibility:

- the land must be part of the present use value taxation program or be determined eligible for present use value;
- the land must be managed in accordance with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service guidelines with respect to highly erodible land; and
- the land must be subject to a conservation agreement between the landowner and the county that prohibits non-farm use or development for a 10-year period, except for the creation of not more than three lots that meet applicable county zoning and subdivision requirements

Benefits:

- educational signage to publicize the land’s VAD status;
- increased protection from nuisance lawsuits;
- waiver of sewer and water assessments if the property is not connected to county sewer and water systems;
- required public hearings for proposed condemnation; and
- eligibility for farmland preservation funds

2. Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture District established for Haywood County on March 19, 2007: *Same eligibility requirements and benefits as the VAD, but also includes:*

- the 10-year conservation agreement between the landowner and the county cannot be revoked;
- automatically renewed every 3 years;
- the landowner may receive up to 25% of gross sales from the sale of nonfarm products and still qualify as a bona fide farm; and
- the property is eligible to receive a higher percentage of cost-share funds under the Agricultural Cost Share Program – up to 90% cost-share assistance

Other Benefits:

- an opportunity to stabilize the use of the land while considering longer-term options, such as permanent working land conservation easements;
- fewer unsolicited requests from developers to sell the property due to the 10-year irrevocable conservation agreement;
- protecting the county’s rural economy and rural heritage;
- maintaining scenic views; the availability of fresh produce, flowers, and other local farm products; wildlife habitat; clean air and water; lower levels of traffic; and
- a reduced infrastructure burden on county government

Pursuant to the VAD ordinances, an Agricultural Advisory Board was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to represent agricultural interests in the county. While the VAD ordinances encourage investment in agriculture, they do not represent a permanent land protection measure as these districts rely heavily on voluntary enrollment and allow for withdrawal. VADs and EVADs are useful tools to encourage voluntary protection of agricultural lands, and these provisions must be maintained as part of an effective county farmland protection plan. Locations of VADs and EVADs in Haywood County can be found on Map 1.

3. Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) Program. The North Carolina Farmland Preservation Enabling Act enables counties to purchase agricultural conservation easements on qualifying farmland with the voluntary consent of the landowner. Under such a program, the county could pay farmers willing to accept a permanent (or temporary) easement to limit subdivision of their land for residential development. The amount would be the difference between the value of their land for development and the value for its use as farming. Payment options could include lump-sum payment or annual payments over a set period. In other areas around the country this type of program has been funded through municipal and county bond issues, a percentage of real estate transfer tax or mortgage tax revenues, or as a regular budget line item. Easements 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 easements. By North Carolina statute, “such easements may permit the creation of not more than three lots that meet applicable county zoning and subdivision regulations, and shall be perpetual in duration provided that at least 20 years after the purchase of an easement, the county may agree to reconvey the easement to the owner of the land for consideration, if the landowner can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the county that commercial agriculture is no longer practicable on the land in question.”
4. Haywood County Land Conservation Foundation. During a work session on April 27, 2006, the Haywood County Commissioners established an ad hoc committee to make recommendations related to the possible establishment of a county-sponsored land conservation foundation. The committee consisted of local residents, representatives from several non-profit organizations, and federal agencies. There are existing land trusts in the region and state that occasionally work with landowners and communities in Haywood County to achieve conservation goals. The county is undergoing rapid changes in land use, and Haywood County residents and decision makers are primarily concerned about mountain-side and top development and associated impacts such as the degradation of scenery, water quality, and public safety issues. Also, recent floods have indicated a need for improved floodplain management, and much of these floodplains are prime farmlands that are quickly being converted to other uses. Many stakeholders are interested in maintaining working farms in Haywood County to sustain a healthy and diverse economy, water quality, scenery and rural character, fish and wildlife habitat, and protection from flood events. An organized, local effort to establish a county conservation foundation would have the ability to obtain grant funding and donations from a wide variety of outside sources and focus specifically on local issues such as those listed above. All of these factors led the committee to conclude that a locally focused land conservation effort would meet a real need and provide significant long-term benefits. The organizational structure for such an effort could be a new foundation, or it could be organized and managed within the existing county government infrastructure. The committee recommended that Haywood County work quickly to adopt a local land conservation foundation (Nov 2006 Report from George).

## 5. State Conservation Funding Tools

- NC Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFPTF). The North Carolina ADFPTF is created by statute “for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements” in transactions with both governmental and private non-profit organizations. These monies, when available, can be matched with certain federal funds described below. Or, matching funds can come from other sources such as state and local governments or private funding sources. The ADFPTF is administered by the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services or its designee.
- Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF). The North Carolina CWMTF 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 trust fund monies for sale of the development rights to their land under certain guidelines and qualifications. These funds can be combined with certain federal conservation funds listed below.
- Division of Soil and Water Conservation Agricultural Cost-Share. This program is administered by the Division of Soil and Water Conservation in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. It is delivered at the local level by 492 elected and appointed volunteer District Supervisors who are assisted by a cadre of experts. Participating farmers receive 75% of predetermined average costs of installed best management practices (BMPs) with the remaining 25% paid by farmers directly or through in-kind contributions. Landowners within EVADs in Haywood County are eligible to receive 90% cost share. Some applicants may be eligible to receive as much as \$75,000 per year. Also, the program provides local Districts with matching funds (50:50) to hire personnel to plan and install the needed BMPs, including riparian buffers, strip cropping, and grassed waterways.
- Natural Heritage Trust Fund. Like the ADFPTF and CWMTF, this fund may be available to purchase development rights on properties with outstanding natural or cultural values.
- North Carolina Conservation Tax Credit. North Carolina law allows a credit against individual and corporate income taxes when real property is donated for conservation purposes. Interests in property that promote specific public benefits may be donated to a qualified recipient. Such conservation donations qualify for a substantial tax credit.

6. **Federal Conservation Funding Tools.** Below are some of the voluntary federal programs that are part of The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (commonly known as the 2002 Farm Bill) and administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). They are designed to compensate farmland owners for the conservation value of their land. Like local PACE programs, they have the dual effect of safeguarding the environmental benefits of farmland as open space while injecting dollars into the local economy via the farmland owner.
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program provides federal funds to help purchase development rights, keeping productive farmland in agricultural use while compensating the farmland owner for the conservation value of his or her land. FRPP matches state and local PACE programs up to 50% of the easement purchase price, working through state, tribal, and local governments and land trusts. Haywood County is working toward piloting this program in North Carolina.
  - Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The Conservation Reserve Program reduces soil erosion, protects the nation's ability to produce food and fiber, reduces sedimentation in streams and lakes, improves water quality, establishes wildlife habitat, and enhances forest and wetland resources. It encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips, or riparian buffers. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract.
  - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This program provides financial incentives for many landowners who desire to implement conservation practices on their farms. The program offers technical, financial, and educational assistance in designated priority areas to install or implement structural, vegetative, and management practices called for in five, eight, or ten year contracts for most agricultural land uses.
  - Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). This program encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations of national, state, tribal and local significance by providing technical and financial assistance to landowners and others to develop upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas on their property.
7. State Right-to-Farm Law By statute, North Carolina farmers are granted the right to farm without legal interference from non-farm neighbors and local governing bodies, subject to certain limitations. Pre-litigation mediation of farm nuisance claims is mandatory.
8. Present Use Value Property Tax Working farm, forest, and horticultural lands by state statute are afforded a property tax assessment based on their agricultural working value, as opposed to the value of their land for industrial or residential development. A working farm must earn \$1000 in gross sales annually to qualify for this differential assessment. This assessment affords farmers some amount of cost control that would otherwise limit their ability to farm profitably.
9. Diversify the agricultural production base. (Co-op Ext.- add those outreach efforts here- like goats, organics, Christmas trees, ornamentals, blueberries)
10. Haywood County continues to support programs that reward farm practices that maintain and improve water and air quality, and wildlife habitat through existing cost share programs administered through state and federal agencies. The Haywood SWCD works hard to identify grants that install conservation practices on the land to help protect resources, while working towards a whole-farming protection planning approach. The Haywood SWCD and NRCS Field Office develop conservation plans for each landowner requesting assistance that addresses all of their resource concerns on the farm. These plans become extremely important when landowners are deciding on best management practices for their farms.

11. Identify productive areas of agricultural land, and direct residential and industrial growth away from productive agricultural areas to avoid disruptions to agricultural operations (Map 1). The map provides best farming locations in Haywood County based on soil types and conditions.
  - Develop a county conservation bank to house and provide funding for the protection of critical lands in perpetuity (e.g. prime farmland, critical corridors, and/or threatened ecosystems or scenic vistas)
  - Charge an impact fee for developments on prime farmlands, and redistribute those funds to protect other prime farmlands in the county
  - Provide landowners a tax incentive to not develop prime farmland areas.
  - Reduce the threat of fragmentation through the development of urban growth boundaries around existing municipalities and their services
  
12. Encourage protection of farmland located in public water source areas, including reservoirs, streams, and floodplains. Rural preservation creates several positive hydrological impacts by minimizing impervious surfaces and maximizing the natural or semi-natural function of the hydrological system. As a result, more land is available to absorb heavy rains and store floodwaters during major storm events, and water quality is enhanced. However, development pressures threaten these benefits of rural lands, while at the same time, greatly increasing flood frequency, height, and duration not only in rural areas, but also in urban communities downstream.
  - Haywood County has three areas currently being used as a public water supply source: Waynesville, Maggie Valley, and Canton.
    - a. Waynesville's watershed has no farms and very little floodplain. It should be noted however, that the area is primarily forested, and the town of Waynesville began acquiring private property in the watershed in 1913. Their primary objectives were to create a reservoir that would supply the town with high quality water for residential and commercial needs, and for flood control. The Waynesville Watershed occupies approximately 8,600 acres. In 2005, the Town of Waynesville conveyed a working forest conservation easement on approximately 7,340 acres of the property. The easement was conveyed to forever prevent residential and commercial development within the watershed and provide other public benefits through conservation and forest management efforts (Watershed Report). The remaining portion of the watershed area is primarily federally owned lands with the Blue Ridge Parkway containing the headwaters of the watershed. The entire watershed above the Town of Waynesville is largely protected from any types of development. Remnant private lands that are not protected by a conservation easement are currently being pursued the Town of Waynesville. These conservation efforts will likely help maintain a class WS-I designation for the waters within this watershed.
    - b. The Town of Maggie Valley obtains their municipal water from intakes on Campbell Creek and Jonathan Creek. The state has designated this municipal supply watershed as WS-III. And unlike the Waynesville water supply, this watershed is privately owned. There are currently only a few farms above the intakes. The bulk of the watershed is currently forested, but urban development pressures are threatening this portion of Haywood County. There is a currently proposal to develop around 4,500 acres in the north end of Jonathan Creek. The development is projected to include homes, hotels, golf courses, shopping areas, and more (Moutaineer Dec 6, 2007). This development project will likely result in major environmental degradation in the Maggie Valley area of Haywood County. This large-scale endeavor could also have negative impacts on taxpayers and lands within other portions of the county without proper planning and actions.

- c. Canton has many farms and lots of floodplain above their intake on the Pigeon River. The Town of Canton also has the Rough Creek watershed that has a conservation easement on it, but the town still has the right to use the water for a public water supply. Canton's main water supply, the Pigeon River basin, is a class WS-II watershed. This watershed contains a large number of private farms, and many landowners and residents who are interested in preserving farmland and the rural character of the area (Opinion Survey). There is currently a large multi-agency, organization, and landowner effort to preserve the watershed of the Upper Pigeon River. As part of its work under the Hurricane Recovery Act of 2005, the North Carolina Division of Water Resources (DWR) launched a community-based flood recovery study of Canton, Clyde, and the Upper Pigeon River watershed. As a result of these meetings and discussions, DWR's final report included a recommendation for a two-phase, \$120,000 grant to (1) create a plan identifying for protection those lands in the Upper Pigeon River watershed that would best absorb and hold heavy rains and floodwaters, and (2) begin protection of priority lands. Through various studies, discussions with the leadership of the Bethel Rural Community Organization, and several public opinion surveys, Haywood County and the Bethel Community have begun to focus on rural preservation as the primary tool to maintain the character of the Upper Pigeon River Valley, while also supporting the positive economic impact of rural farms and forests.
13. The goal of this plan is to target agricultural and farmland protection initiatives and work to conserve large blocks of viable farmland in the county. Haywood County has been actively working to promote protection initiatives that include:
  - Leveraging cost share programs for landowners to protect and improve soil and water resources, and enhance wildlife habitat
  - Establishment of VADs and EVADs
  - Soliciting grants to provide funding for purchase of conservation easements on individual farms. The local government has invested time and money into several whole-farm conservation easements that are held by the Haywood SWCD.
  - Land use planning by Haywood County, in cooperation with the Haywood SWCD and the NRCS Field Office, to identify farmlands that need immediate attention for protection and areas that are within an impaired watershed or that have streams on the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Water Quality 303(d) list. The streams are listed on the impaired list due to high amounts of sediments and fecal coliform bacteria resulting from poor land management practices such as road construction activities and poor farming practices. The goal is to de-list those streams and provide unification of farmlands.
14. Haywood County SWCD is in the process of examining the long-term cost effectiveness of financial 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. The Haywood SWCD and its partners should work with the County Planning Office and County Manager to acquire such information.
15. Haywood County hopes to develop land use policies and zoning ordinances that work with the agriculture community. Conventional "large-lot" zoning is ineffective because it accelerates residential development and converts agricultural areas into lots that are too small to farm. This plan is the first step toward addressing such needs.

16. Encourage Local Land Use Policies that Support Agriculture and Protect Farmland. How a county plans for growth will greatly impact the viability of its agricultural economy. The county should, through its land use planning (or review of its Comprehensive Land Use Plan) develop policies with take into consideration agricultural production and development. The planning board should include input from the Agricultural Advisory Board in the planning process. Such policies and actions can include:
  - Incorporate elements of this plan in the Comprehensive Plan.
  - Develop model zoning and subdivision ordinances or principles and distribute to towns for use in their local planning.
  - Tailor zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations to guide growth away from floodplains and other farming areas, and buffer farms from neighboring land uses.
  - Require buffers between residences and farm fields and buildings as part of new residential subdivisions
  - Implement development guidelines that include soil classifications as criteria for prioritizing agricultural land
  - Add steep slopes info, pre-development
17. Promote Tax Relief Incentives: The county should undertake to ensure that county tax assessors have knowledge of the state's Present Use Value statute with continuous training as necessary, and should undertake to educate farmland owners on the program, and how to apply and comply with present use valuation of farmland.
18. The Agricultural Advisory Board should work with partners to promote educational programs for county farmland owners. The Haywood SWCD and its partners should make farmers aware of the various conservation funds available for easement purchases, the tax benefits of donated easements, and basic principles of estate planning with conservation options.
19. To meet the challenges outlined above, farmers need more access to business development assistance, particularly as traditional agricultural markets fade and alternative enterprises are needed. This assistance includes business development and planning, market research and communication, and financing opportunity. Efforts to increase assistance include:
  - Establishing a business development program specifically targeted at agricultural businesses, consisting of a network of business consultants, small business development counselors, and attorneys familiar with small business and agricultural law who are willing at a lower cost or volunteer basis (depending on how program is set up) to provide assistance.
  - Provide grant-writing assistance for federal, state and other non-profit funding opportunities to assist with diversification, etc.
20. Traditionally, farmers have relied on off-farm distributors to handle marketing and price negotiation for their products. Increasingly, farmers will recognize the value of direct marketing their products to county residents as they diversity and specialize their production. In addition to the steps outlined above, this item could include
  - Formation of new generation farm cooperatives for marketing purposes, financing of new ventures and purchasing of raw materials, such as fuel and electricity, or formation of less formal bargaining groups to jointly purchase farm supplies, cooperatively advertise farm products, provide better outlets for all livestock and facilitate use of custom service.
  - Develop marketing workshops with input from farmers from other counties who have successfully diversified and direct-marketed their production.

**SCHEDULE TO IMPLEMENT THIS PLAN**  
*First Year Action Steps*

1. December 2007-January 2008
  - a. Submit plan to NCADFPTF for approval
  
2. January-March 2008
  - a. Identify stakeholder groups and their representatives
  - b. Schedule meeting of stakeholder groups and Agricultural Advisory Board and prioritize elements of plan approval and implementation
  - c. Secure approval of plan from Haywood County Commissioners
  
3. April-July 2008
  - a. Begin implementing prioritized elements of Farmland Protection Plan
  - b. Schedule countywide meeting of farm and agribusiness operators and elected officials to discuss Farmland Protection Plan
  - c. Develop schedule of needed workshops on marketing, business and state planning, farm ownership transition, etc.
  
4. August-December 2008
  - a. Develop additional written materials
  - b. Enhance information on county website
  - c. Begin implementing workshop schedule



## **KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR ROLES IN IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN**

1. *Town Governments:* Several issues affecting agriculture such as land use planning and zoning actions within a town's extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ), municipal service plans and local business promotion are best addressed at the municipal level.
2. *County Government:* By adopting the plan, the county Board of Commissioners has made agricultural protection official county policy. The county, through the Agricultural Advisory Board, has committed to take the lead role in implementing this plan and drawing together the key players to coordinate its efforts and policies. The county Board of Commissioners bears the responsibility for approving funding to help implement this plan.
3. *State Agencies:* Some key agencies providing assistance to agricultural producers in the county are North Carolina Cooperative Extension and the Haywood Soil and Water Conservation District. NC Cooperative Extension generally provides outreach and education, in addition to technical assistance to landowners. The Haywood Soil & Water Conservation District provides technical support and cost-share funding to farmers for adopting certain conservation and water quality improvement practices. The NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services provides data on Voluntary Agricultural Districts and EVADs throughout the state, as well as administers grant programs for agriculture and agriculture related entities, and provides marketing advice to agricultural producers.
4. *Federal Agencies:* USDA has a strong presence in Haywood County with its NRCS and FSA local field offices. NRCS administers financial and technical assistance programs for farmland protection and conservation initiatives, including grants for BMPs, habitat improvement, and purchase of development rights. FSA lends money to operators and provides credit counseling and farm business consulting.
5. *Business and Industry:* Participation of local farm businesses in this plan is critical to its implementation. Private industry, both farm supply and nonfarm businesses, and the Chamber of Commerce play an important role in promoting the agricultural sector of the county's economy. These organizations should also help in developing new markets such as tourism that will benefit agricultural producers.
6. *Non-governmental Organizations:* Bethel Rural Organizations such as land trusts, grant-making foundations, historic preservation groups, and groups dedicated to assisting agriculture provide necessary advocacy and other services necessary for implementation of this plan.
7. *Residents:* The success of this plan ultimately relies on the participation of county residents in the local agricultural market. The proximity of their purchases to the producers ensures that more of each dollar paid for an agricultural item will return to the farmer, thus increasing his or her profitability and increasing the likelihood that he or she will continue to farm their land. Residents of the county can also recognize the importance of working farms to the local economy and environment and heritage of Haywood County by supporting an effort to establish and subsequently support funding for a purchase of agricultural conservation easements program.

## CONCLUSION

Haywood County's agriculture community is a vital component to both the economy and quality of life for local residents, North Carolinians across the state, and visitors alike. Haywood County had an estimated population of 56,662 residents in 2006 (Haywood Chamber of Commerce website, 2007). Like many other counties in the South, Haywood is experiencing a significant population increase. Furthermore, land designated for rural uses will likely be converted to urban uses faster than the human population will increase. The rapid rate of agricultural land converted to development is unnecessary. Over the past 20 years, the average acreage per person for new housing almost doubled (American Farmland Trust website, 2007).

With this plan and the efforts of federal, state and local governments, along with cooperation among local land-owners and businesses, Haywood County has an excellent opportunity to preserve the agriculture community in the county. Well planned and strategic conservation measures can save the remaining important farmland in Haywood County. These efforts would solidify that Haywood County decision makers are setting a high standard for quality growth measures in the county and are sponsoring proactive conservation efforts. By protecting the agriculture community in Haywood County, local economic health and diversity would prosper. Based on current issues with America's need for the oil resource from overseas, it seems every American would have a great interest to protect our best farmlands. If we continue to destroy prime farmland, then we will ultimately destroy America's ability to feed and clothe its people. As a result, America will become more reliant upon other countries for farm products and services.

Haywood County plans to integrate economic development with farmland protection. Keeping farms viable is as important as protecting the resources essential for farming and it is more cost efficient. American Farmland Trust conducted a recent study that showed for every dollar in taxes received from working lands, only 34 cents in services is paid by the government. Service paid by the government for residential development showed an average of \$1.15 per dollar of taxes received (NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2007). Therefore, it is a net gain of revenue for the tax base and thus an economic benefit for any county to preserve working lands. This is especially true in Haywood County since farmlands encompass just over 64,000 acres and contribute over 17 million dollars to the local economy.

Based on this plan, Haywood County residents should better understand the local agriculture community and the amenities that farmlands provide residents and visitors. Since population growth and urbanization are almost certain, efforts should be made to ensure Haywood County preserves its most productive farmlands. It is important that the focus areas mentioned in the text be protected as contiguous tracts so that farm production can be maintained at current levels. Additionally, the public lands should be buffered in an effort to protect their scenic and ecological integrity. By protecting the farming communities of Haywood County and the public land base, Haywood County should be well on its way to becoming a conservation success story.

Haywood County is ready to take agriculture and conservation to the next level. The county has proven to be interested in its rural character and conservation of its farmlands by leading the state in the VAD and EVAD programs. Haywood County is actually the leader in the state with having the most amount of acres enrolled in the Voluntary Agriculture District. We are fast approaching as the leader in the state under the EVAD. The Haywood SWCD and its partners have developed ranking criteria for farmers interested in competing for conservation easement funds (Appendix A). This approach will facilitate a non-biased format to protect the most critical farmlands in Haywood County. There has been a tremendous amount of interest in conservation easements for Haywood. Using this ranking tool enabled us to prioritize which properties would be appropriate for easement funding through the 2008 NC Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.

The Agriculture Advisory Board, Haywood Soil and Water Conservation District Board and County Commissioners have all supported the mission towards preserving Haywood's farmland. They understand the need for a good plan to be in place in order to identify action steps to protect the property for future generations. Haywood plans to evaluate this plan once a year and make improvements where needed to ensure its accuracy. The cooperators on this project believe this plan will efficiently serve the community's needs for farmland preservation.

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