

Chapter 7. Agriculture

7.1 Current State of Agriculture in Madison County

The following section on farming and Cooperative Extension programs provides a finer level of detail and probably a more accurate picture of the current state of farming in the County than does the Census data. These data and observations were provided by Ross Young, Madison County Extension Director and David Kendall, Madison County Extension Agent.

Over the past ten years, the face of agriculture in Madison County has changed significantly. Ten years ago, this county boasted over 2,500 burley tobacco farms with gross receipts of \$6.2 million. There were 680 farms that had livestock, primarily cow-calf operations, contributing \$2.5 - \$3 million annually. Lots of other commodities were produced, including a wide variety of vegetables, trellis tomatoes, Christmas trees, nursery crops, fruits, and forages. The marketing system for most of these commodities was the wholesale market. Roughly \$15 million in farm income was received by farmers operating in a traditional, wholesale system.

Over the past 10 years, a number of factors have drastically affected Madison County agriculture: farmers aging out and retiring; land prices skyrocketing, resulting in some farms being sold for development; increased property taxes; increased fuel prices; and increased fertilizer prices. Each of these factors has worked against the sustainability of the traditional agriculture system enjoyed by farmers for almost a century. However, two additional factors had more of an impact to the change than the others combined: (1) the tobacco buyout program; and (2) a two-year drought.

The tobacco buyout, in essence ended a "franchise" that almost every farm in the county "owned," and opened the door for burley tobacco to enter the free market. Prior to the buyout, each farm within the burley belt had a designated quota dictating the number of pounds of tobacco that a farm could sell. Farms without an allotment and counties and states outside the burley belt were not allowed to raise tobacco. Although the buyout paid farmers for their "franchise," the compensation was not equivalent to the income they would have received if they had continued growing tobacco.

A two-year drought that began in the fall of 2006 has made it difficult for many farms but particularly the livestock farmers. A normal cow-calf operation was sustained 7 or 8 months out of the year by grazing on pastures. Supplemental feed, primarily hay, was harvested from designated fields that were not pastured. Farms that did not designate hay land bought hay from other producers at a relatively cheap price. This hay was used to feed cows through the winter. With the drought, very little grazing has been available to the cattle through the spring, summer, and fall. Farmers have been forced to feed hay to their cows during months that they would normally be grazing. This used up any winter supplies of hay that they had. Since the entire region experienced the drought, hay prices quadrupled all over the southeast. Available hay at reasonable prices had to be transported such long distances that the price for transportation made hay costs increase fourfold. As a result of all these factors and especially

the last two, many traditional farms have either gone out of business or drastically reduced their production.

Today, the annual farm receipts for Madison County are still roughly \$15 million. The difference is that the majority of that income comes from a very different agricultural system. The new system has a much greater emphasis on direct marketing as opposed to wholesale. The face of agriculture in Madison County today still has some remnants of the traditional make-up with approximately 50 tobacco farms producing \$2.5 million and 200 cattle operations generating about that same amount. The difference is made up by a very wide variety of commodities including but not limited to: commercial vegetables; organic vegetables; Christmas trees; nursery plants; greenhouse operations; hydroponics; agri-tourism; cut flowers; eggs; shiitake mushrooms; culinary herbs; medicinal herbs; pick-your-own berries; transplant operations; fruits; melons; cheese; meat goats; meat sheep; poultry; and a wide variety of specialty items that enter the realm of "value added" (e.g., jams, jellies, corn meal, dried items, and the like).

The skill set required for many of these new enterprises is much different than what was needed for traditional farmers. Marketing, packaging, delivering, websites, trade shows, tailgate markets, creating marketing brochures, public relations, and food safety are just a few examples of the new needed skills.



Shiitake mushrooms and sheep meat are two of the many newer commodities.

7.2 Historical Context

Madison County has been losing farmland at an increasing rate over the past 25 years. According to the Agricultural Census, in the twenty year period from 1982 to 2002, Madison County lost a little over twenty percent of its farmland and 34% of its farms. Then, in only five years – from 2002 to 2007 – it lost another twenty percent of its farmland (see tables below). As of 2007, the latest year available from Agricultural Census, 66,734 acres were reported as farmland, representing just 23% of the County’s total land area.

Farms and Farmland in Madison County (1982-2002)	1982	1992	2002	Change 1982-2002	Percent Change
Number of Farms	1,481	1,178	973	-508	-34.3%
Acres in Farms	106,550	93,320	84,053	-22,497	-21.1%
Percent of Land in Farms	37.0%	32.4%	29.2%	-7.8%	
Average Farm Size (acres)	72	79	86	14	19.4%

Source: USDA Agriculture Census

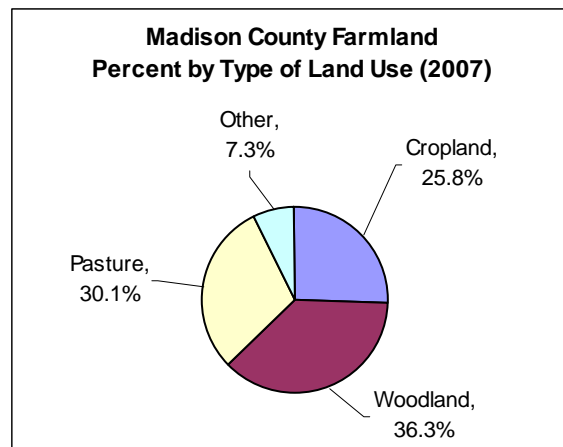
Farms and Farmland in Madison County (2007)	2007	Change 2002-2007	Percent Change
Number of Farms	801	-172	-17.7%
Acres in Farms	66,734	-17,319	-20.6%
Percent of Land in Farms	23.2%	-6.0%	
Average Farm Size (acres)	83	-3	-3.5%

Source: USDA Agriculture Census

Although the average farm size of 83 acres sounds large for Madison County, over half the farms are less than 50 acres in size (2007 Census). Across North Carolina, about half of the farms are also less than 50 acres, but due to some very large farms in the state, the average farm size for NC is 160 acres.

Across the U.S., the majority of farms are small (i.e., reporting less than \$10,000 in revenues from agricultural products) and a little less than half show a positive cash flow from farming. Also, most farmers report another occupation as their primary occupation. Fifty-five percent of farmers in the U.S. and sixty percent in Madison County, report something other than farming as their primary occupation.

Of all the farmland in Madison County in 2007, a little over a third was forest land, almost a third was pasture, one-fourth was cropland and the remainder was other types of farm use. These general percentages are probably still about the same in 2009. There were some shifts between 2002 and 2007: both cropland and woodland decreased significantly and total



pasture land almost doubled (11,850 acres to 20,087 acres of pasture).

The Agricultural Census also reports on some characteristics of farmers. The average age of farmers in Madison County is 58. This is very close to the average age of farmers in North Carolina and the U.S. (57.1). The average age of farmers in the U.S. has been steadily increasing for the past 25 years, from 50.5 in 1982 to 57.1 in 2007. Across the U.S. in the five years from 2002 to 2007, the number of farm operators 75 years and older grew by 20 percent, while the number of operators under 25 years of age decreased 30 percent.

7.3 Current Programs Supporting and Promoting Local Agriculture

Farmers themselves warrant the most credit for the transition that has taken place. However, other groups, agencies and organizations have made significant contributions to aid the transition.

The **Madison County Center of the NC Cooperative Extension** has had this transition as a primary educational element and as a primary focus throughout its programs. The following programs are all examples of existing and planned efforts focused on transition issues:

- Alternative Agricultural seminars;
- Business Planning sessions;
- Estate Planning sessions
- Marketing seminars;
- Organic farming practices seminars;
- Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs);
- Agri-tourism efforts;
- Value Added Demonstrations; and
- the development of Madison Family Farms Inc. – a program that provides a website, a value added center, and a total marketing program for farmers.

Madison County Center staff also have provided one-on-one consultations and farm visits throughout the transition phase. Center staff support the Madison County 4-H program, which serves youth aged 5-18 through clubs, special programs, & summer activities. Some of the 4-H activities and events teach agricultural skills.

Madison Family Farms is a nonprofit organization that “works to enhance and improve small family farms and the agricultural business climate in Madison and surrounding counties by providing basic facilities and services, information and education, marketing and public relations” (www.madisonfarms.org). Madison Farms was created in 2006 as a collaboration between Madison County farmers and Cooperative Extension in response to the aftermath of the 2005 Tobacco Buyout. It was created to serve as a resource for farmers who were transitioning from tobacco to a wide variety of crops. Farmers use Madison Farms Value-Added Center, co-located with the Cooperative Extension office, to process, package, store and distribute food to schools/colleges, hospitals, grocery stores and restaurants. The facility provides space for educational programs and includes in-line walk-in chillers and freezer; a value-added kitchen with food dryers, lettuce spinner, commercial grade food processor, boiler

and stove for canning, vacuum packer; outside shed with vegetable wash line and herb dryer; ice maker and scales. Truck loading docks provide for bulk delivery of feeds and fertilizers.

The **Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)** is a regional non-profit organization with a mission to “collaboratively create and expand regional community based and integrated food systems that are locally owned and controlled, environmentally sound, economically viable, and health-promoting.” A complete listing and description of their programs and related resources is available on their website (www.asapconnections.org). Some of their programs are:

- Appalachian Grown™ – ASAP certifies food and agricultural products grown or raised on farms in Western North Carolina and the southern Appalachian Mountains. Certified products may be labeled with the Appalachian Grown logo, to show consumers, retailers and wholesalers they are local agricultural products.
- Growing Minds (ASAP) – This is a program that works with schools to teach children about where their food comes from and to introduce them to gardening and local farms. It also works to get more local food into the school cafeterias.
- Mixing Bowl (ASAP) – a new program to connect farmers to chefs

Mountain Valleys Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. is a regional organization serving an eight-county area (Madison, Buncombe, Henderson, Transylvania, Polk, Rutherford, McDowell and Cleveland). The organization receives direct assistance from the USDA **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**, which provides a Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Coordinator, office space and related support. The RC&D program seeks to encourage wise use of our natural and human resources as well as economic development that is balanced with the natural environment. Citizens representing each of the counties make up the Council, which is the governing body for the organization. The Mountain Valleys RC&D Council is a 501(c)3 non-profit, action-oriented organization which has over the past 30+ years, provided local project sponsors and partners with grant writing and project assistance on numerous projects. The Council’s office is in Marshall, on Highway 25-70.

NRCS provides staff support for the County’s farmland preservation programs and shares an office with the RC&D Council staff. The

Mountain Valleys RC&D Area Plan for 2008-2013 has four main elements:

- *Community Development* activities to promote balanced economic development, environmental education, recreation development, natural and heritage resource preservation, and alternative energy.
- *Land Conservation* activities to achieve improved soil erosion control and soil health.
- *Water Management* activities to promote watershed planning, reduction of agricultural pollutants and control storm water and flooding.
- *Land Management* activities to moderate the impact of land development on water resources, enhance preservation of farm and forest lands and improve land use planning to address steep slope development and other resource concerns.

County has a **Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD)** program and an active **Agricultural Advisory Board** that administers and oversees the VAD program. NRCS staff provide support and technical assistance to the Agricultural Advisory Board.

All counties in North Carolina have **Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)**. District Board members are appointed and elected and. The District office has a couple staff members who assist private land owners with conserving their soil, water and other natural resources. They provide education, information, technical assistance, and economic incentives to county citizens and establish new programs in concert with other appropriate agencies and organizations to meet changing needs. Many of the programs and funding are through a partnership with USDA's Natural Resources and Conservation Service.

The **Farm Service Agency (FSA)** is an agency of the US Department of Agriculture. The FSA administers and manages farm commodity, credit, conservation, disaster and loan programs as laid out by Congress through a network of federal, state and county offices. These programs are designed to improve the economic stability of the agricultural industry and to help farmers adjust production to meet demand. Economically, the desired result of these programs is a steady price range for agricultural commodities for both farmers and consumers. State and county offices directly administer FSA programs. These offices certify farmers for farm programs and pay out farm subsidies and disaster payments. The FSA office that serves Madison County is located on Highway 25-70 in Marshall. For more information, see www.fsa.usda.gov.

The **North Carolina Farm Bureau** is a private non-profit, grassroots organization that actively promotes farm and rural issues through legislative, marketing and service programs. It is a membership organization, with over 490,000 members in NC. Members are eligible for many insurance programs and discounts on a variety of products and services. The Madison County office is located on Highway 25-70 in Marshall.

Programs offered by other agencies/organizations related to agriculture:

- Future Farmers of America – a program offered at Madison County High School, to provide training and opportunities to young people interested in farming.
- Organic Growers School (www.organicgrowersschool.org) – an annual conference held in the spring that offers educational sessions and workshops on all aspects of organic farming and gardening, for all types and scales of gardeners and farmers.
- Madison County Farm Day – an annual event held in October.

7.4 Future Vision for Agriculture and Rural Community Life in Madison County

*This section is based on community input collected from individuals and community meetings held throughout the county during the planning process. **It describes a collective vision of agriculture in Madison County in twenty or so years.***

In the year 2025, agriculture is very visible throughout Madison County. Farming is a respected and viable way of life and way to make a living - this includes commercial and subsistence farming. Farming and local agricultural products have been successfully promoted in and out of the county so that Madison County is known as a county with strong agriculture communities and quality agricultural products. The number and types of products continues to expand and diversify, and more and more local products are available to residents through markets, restaurants, schools and other businesses and organizations. There is strong support from local residents, businesses and public and private institutions for agricultural products.

The average age of farmers continues to drop as young people enter farming in increasing numbers. The local food movement has brought new status to farming as agricultural commodities are widely sought after and farmers are honored for their contribution to the community. Award-winning vocational agricultural training at Madison High feeds into a two-year degree in Sustainable Agriculture at A-B Tech that also offers a four-year NC State agricultural degree via distance learning. Food and farming internships provide labor for local farmers and provides practical training to new farmers. These new farmers are remarkably entrepreneurial as they exploit niches where they can gain a competitive advantage over large farms in the deep south, Midwest and California.

Over the last 20 years the cost of transportation has steadily risen so local agricultural products have more and more of an advantage in the local marketplace. “Fresh” and “local” are continuing to grow in popularity. Much of the irrigated agricultural land in the western U.S. is experiencing severe long-term drought as well as competition with growing populations for water. Agriculture is losing water rights to cities as farmland is taken out of production there, making it increasingly important that we retain our critically important agricultural land base here.

Consumers are increasingly willing to pay a little more for local agricultural products, allowing an improved profit margin for our farmers. Our farmers are also developing more efficient production practices, allowing them to produce more high quality products with fewer inputs and less cost. This improved margin is allowing more and more growers to forego “public work” and make their living full-time on the land. Group efforts to secure benefits packages customized to the needs of farmers have also supported this trend. While paid vacation is rare, at least health insurance is available to farmers at an affordable rate.

There are now many programs that support farmers and promote farming and farm products, such as:

- Education/training on sustainable farming practices, including organic farming.

- Education on various “new” agricultural products and services.
- Marketing and business training programs.
- Farm-related tourism and rural recreation, successfully promoted by a combination of the Madison County Economic Development and Tourism Development Boards in partnership with the Madison County Chamber of Commerce.
- Local food promotion programs through Madison Farms, ASAP and other organizations.
- 4-H programs and Future Farmers of America for youth to learn more about farming.
- Local food processing and distribution facilities – for fruits, vegetables, animal products (meats, eggs, cheese, etc.) and value-added products (jams, sauces, prepared foods, etc.).
- Tax incentives/reductions for farmers.
- A Farmland Protection Plan has been adopted and is being implemented.
- Capital for improvements and operations is available via the purchase of development rights, to preserve farmland for future generations.
- County zoning and land use regulations support and encourage farm and agritourism uses of the land.

The rural communities continue to be strong communities. Traditions, history, and culture are passed on to young people and are a strong part of community life. More children who grow up in Madison County are choosing to live, work and raise their families in the county. In most areas, the rural character of the county and the communities has also been preserved. Madison County has become a desired destination for farm tours, rural scenery, and celebrations that draw tourism dollars to farmers and rural entrepreneurs. Farming and rural recreation provides a healthy living standard and remains the primary source of income for residents of the county.



Spinning Spider Creamery (left) and Sunset Valley Farms (right) on a farm tour day.

The **Farmland Values Project** collected, analyzed and communicated the many values that people have for farmland in four WNC counties, including Madison County. Over 1100 residents in Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson and Madison counties participated in a survey, focus group or mapping exercise and 307 visitors completed surveys. 173 Madison County residents participated in the survey, conducted in Fall 2007.

Survey Results for Madison County Residents:

- Farmland is very important to residents and their quality of life
 - Top five benefits of farmland to county residents were locally produced food, a link to our agricultural heritage, scenic beauty, wildlife habitat and open space.
- 76% of resident respondents are concerned about the loss of farmland.
- 69% of resident respondents believe their community needs to be doing more to protect farmland in the area.
- Residents and visitors showed willingness to make voluntary donations (annual average of \$185) if the funds went directly to protecting farmland.
- 59% of respondents from Madison County said they would pay more for food if the increase in price went directly to protect farmland.

For more details including interviews, photos, data and more, see www.unca.edu/farmlandvalues.

7.5 Issues and Opportunities – Current and Emerging

Many issues about the current state of farming and agriculture in Madison County are mentioned in this chapter. These issues along with opportunities inside and outside the county shape the recommendations related to agriculture. Current key issues related to farming and agriculture are:

- Farmers are making a transition from cattle and tobacco to new crops and must learn about how to grow and process the new crops as well as ways to market and distribute them. These new crops are particularly attractive to entrepreneurial growers and those that enjoy engaging new groups of customers.
- Traditional crops like beef or potatoes can be marketed for a higher return if growers work with marketing specialists who provide an entrepreneurial dimension to their evolving enterprises.
- Training is not always offered in ways that farmers find appealing (e.g., time or place may be inconvenient). Announcements about training do not always reach farmers in a timely or efficient manner.
- Farmers would like to find better ways to communicate amongst themselves and often benefit from working together on marketing and distribution.
- Multiple organizations are working on various aspects of support and promotion for agriculture; more coordination and communication amongst these efforts is needed.

- It is getting harder for local people to continue to afford to live (and pay taxes) in Madison County, with the increased land values and sales prices for land and homes. People are also concerned about the increased amount of real estate speculation occurring in the county, which drives up the price of land for farm and forest operations.
- Agriculture is a significant part of Madison County's culture and heritage and residents want it to continue to be significant into the future.

Some of the opportunities that farmers and the County can take advantage of, to help grow and sustain agriculture are:

- Consumers' growing interest in local food and in supporting local farmers;
- Aging consumers are showing more interest in fresher local food;
- Increasing number of farmers markets in the region and coordinated advertising for these markets;
- Changing demographics with increased numbers of more affluent homeowners and retirees with more disposable income;
- Promotion of healthier food choices by public health agencies;
- Creating additional non-traditional opportunities that provide income, like agriculture-based tourism, fishing/hunting guide services, leasing hunting or farming rights, etc.;
- Higher fuel and transportation costs, which will help make local products more affordable than products that travel far distances and also provide opportunities for alternative fuel development including biofuels;
- Mars Hill College, Asheville-Buncombe Technical College and the County School System are large institutions which could purchase a significant amount of food and other products from Madison County suppliers.

7.6 Recommended Strategies to Sustain Agriculture in the County

Growing and sustaining agriculture in the County will take actions, communications and cooperation and collaboration from a number of public and private organizations. The County can take a lead role by convening these groups, facilitating discussions and encouraging collaboration and partnerships. The County can also lead by adopting policies and taking actions which support farmers and farming. Specific recommendations are listed below and grouped under three objectives: (1) Protecting Farmland; (2) Ensuring farm operators are available to take over farms in the future; and (3) Ensuring viable future farm enterprises by supporting existing and future farmers with policies and opportunities for business development.

(1) PROTECTING FARMLAND

7.6.1 Create and adopt a countywide Farmland Protection Plan (FPP).

The County should develop and adopt a farmland protection plan that is strategic and action-oriented. It should incorporate and expand upon the recommendations in this chapter. One benefit of having an adopted FPP that satisfies the state's requirements (see NC G.S. 106-744(e)) is that counties with these plans are given preference when the state allocates funds from the state Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.

The County will direct the Agricultural Advisory Board, in partnership with the Planning Board, to oversee the development of a Farmland Protection Plan. A steering committee should be formed to provide input and direction to the plan that includes representatives from a variety of related interests: farming/agriculture; land conservation; economic development; education; and other.

7.6.2 Consider providing property tax reductions/incentives for active agricultural producers and enforce the use of the Present Use Value program.

Some farmers are enrolled in the Present Use Value assessment and taxation program (see NC G.S. 105-277) which provides some tax relief by valuing the property for tax purposes based on its present agricultural use rather than with a potential use that would yield a higher assessed value. Farms and land owners must meet certain criteria to qualify for this program and the land must also be actively managed for agricultural use. Small farms, under 10 acres for most farming uses and under 20 acres for forestry uses, do not qualify under the current legislation. *The county should seek an amendment to solve this problem for smaller producers.*

The County should also:

- Consider providing tax or other financial incentives to farmers who are actively farming, including those on small farms less than 10 acres, to lower their tax burden.

One example of an innovative financial incentive is being used by Cumberland County, NC to limit development around Fort Bragg. The county developed a unique program that offers all landowners with 5-acre (minimum) tracts that are within a mile of the base's borders a compensation payment equivalent to a percentage of their property taxes, in exchange for 5- or 10-year conservation agreements to limit urban and residential development. County Commissioners likened this incentive for farming to incentives they offer for other types of economic development. For more details, see the American Farmland Trust report and related links: *Planning for an Agricultural Future: A Guide for North Carolina Farmers and Local Governments* (2007), http://www.farmlandinfo.org/farmland_preservation_literature/index.cfm?function=article_view&articleID=31721

- Monitor properties enrolled in the Present Use Value (PUV) program to ensure property owners are fulfilling their responsibilities under the program. Some people have expressed concerns that PUV is being abused by some land owners who are not abiding by their farmland/forest protection plan or actively farming. The Agricultural Advisory Board could be directed to monitor and report on lands with Present Use Value status and encourage compliance.

7.6.3 Consider implementing land use and development policies and/or regulations that support and encourage agriculture.

North Carolina state law exempts “bona fide farms” from county zoning (NC G.S. 153A-340 (2006)). The state statute defines bona fide farms purposes to include:

“... the production and activities relating or incidental to the production of crops, fruits, vegetables, ornamental and flowering plants, dairy, livestock, poultry, and all other forms of agricultural products having a domestic or foreign market.”

Several court cases have clarified certain types of farming and farming issues related to this definition. For example, greenhouse production is considered to be farming, but dog kennels are not. Livestock operations are generally exempt from county zoning, but large swine production (facilities designed to handle over 600,000 pounds annually) can be regulated by local zoning ordinances. Use of farm property for non-farm purposes can be subject to zoning. Thus a residence on a farm is generally subject to county zoning; however, a residential structure occupied exclusively by temporary farm workers is likely exempt.

Madison County has a Voluntary Agriculture Districts (VAD) program which helps farmers form areas where commercial agriculture is encouraged. This is a farmer-initiated, voluntary program that provides benefits to farmers and also strives to reduce conflicts between

agricultural and non-agricultural land owners and uses. VAD programs help raise awareness about agricultural activity, provide stronger protection to farmers from nuisance complaints/suits, help to influence planning and development near the agricultural districts and provide a few other protections and benefits.

The County should consider implementing the following additional land use planning and policy measures:

- Provide technical assistance to people who are thinking of developing or subdividing their farmland on ways to preserve some of the land for agriculture use as part of the process.
- Identify productive areas of agricultural land and areas that are currently actively engaged in agricultural activities and direct residential and industrial growth away from these areas through zoning regulations.
- Encourage protection of farmland located in public water source areas, including reservoirs, streams, and water recharge areas, by identifying these areas and developing incentives and/or targeting land conservation efforts for these areas.
- Consider adopting an Enhanced VAD program as part of the Farmland Preservation Ordinance. Enhanced VAD programs provide additional benefits to participating farmers and encourage longer term commitments to keep land in farming.

(2) ENSURING FARM OPERATORS ARE AVAILABLE TO TAKE OVER FARMS IN THE FUTURE

7.6.4 Provide education, training and technical assistance to farmers and potential future farmers.

- The County School System should integrate more learning opportunities about agriculture and related skills/information into the curriculum. The schools should also promote local food and agriculture to young people through school promotions and educational programs.
- Expand the educational and experiential programs provided by Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4H.
- Madison County Extension and Madison Farms should expand their educational efforts and provide more support to farmers, including educational programs on new farming practices and products and support programs to help them market, process and distribute their products.
- Encourage potential new farmers by supporting travel experiences to see innovative agricultural businesses.

(3) ENSURING VIABLE FUTURE FARM ENTERPRISES BY SUPPORTING EXISTING AND FUTURE FARMERS WITH POLICIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

7.6.5 Adopt a County policy to purchase local food and agriculture products if available at competitive prices.

- Encourage the Madison County School System to establish an agreement with Madison Farms to purchase local food if and when it is available.
- Permit and formally request county food purchasers to spend up to ten percent more for local products to reflect the benefit to our tax base of supporting those local enterprises. Encourage purchase of local food products and services for meetings, conferences and institutions (e.g., jail, health/hospital facilities).
- Provide incentives for school cafeteria managers to buy and prepare fresh, local food that helps lower obesity and related chronic conditions.

7.6.6 Seek outside funding to support the purchase of local food and food products.

- Work with various private and government organizations to provide sources of capital for agricultural entrepreneurs.
- Actively pursue funding to support the purchase of local food by county government organizations.

7.6.7 Consider infrastructure needed to support agriculture and agricultural products (e.g., facilities, transportation, communications, etc.) when planning for, prioritizing and funding infrastructure projects.

Transportation planning needs to consider and incorporate agriculture’s needs in transportation system and project planning and designs. The transportation system should enable smooth transport of equipment and supplies to farms and farm products to distribution centers and other markets.

More extensive and effective communications infrastructure that includes access to phone and high-speed Internet services is needed to support growth and sustainability of agriculture and agricultural products and services.

Work with the towns to ensure the availability of water for farming operations and rural entrepreneurs.

Encourage local power service companies to give priority to farm electrification needs. Support the use of alternative power sources as a way to increase power availability and reduce the cost of power.

7.6.8 Facilitate the coordination and collaboration of economic development, business, tourism and agricultural organizations for the purposes of planning, marketing and “packaging” a variety of products/offerings, which will bring more revenue to businesses, farmers and the County.

The County should also initiate bringing the Towns of Hot Springs, Marshall and Mars Hill together with the County to discuss and work together on these economic development and tourism initiatives. The County should provide staff, technical assistance and other resources to implement the actions below.

- Direct the Economic Development Board and Tourism Development Authority to coordinate planning and promotion activities with Madison County Farms, Madison County Extension and other interested organizations.
- A Strategic Plan should be developed which brings the organizations and ideas together and contains specific plans on how to implement the planning, communication and promotion activities. A number of ideas have been suggested that relate to the need for coordinated promotion and marketing of agricultural products and related services, including:
 - Utilize the Internet for promotion; provide an Internet presence for farms and farmers
 - Develop better communication channels to spread information on agricultural opportunities and information to farmers and to improve farmer-to-farmer communications
 - Promote existing/current efforts (e.g., Madison Farms, Extension, ASAP programs)

- Focus more promotion within Madison County; emphasize buying local products and supporting local farmers and residents.
 - Develop a Madison County brand.
 - Develop some sort of clearinghouse to connect suppliers/producers with buyers (take a systems approach to addressing this)
 - Develop and post a County Calendar of related events – online and printed in the newspaper.
 - Support events such as product fairs that showcase and celebrate Madison County’s farming heritage and farm and forest products.
- Consider supporting a Madison County store – that sells and promotes Madison County products and services. The County could help get this started and possibly provide a place for the store. It should be near I-26 and be easily accessed from the interstate. TJ’s in Mars Hill is an example of a store that sells primarily local products.



Selected resources:

American Farmland Trust, national organization and North Carolina office (<http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/nc/default.asp>) and a useful report: *Planning for an Agricultural Future: A Guide for North Carolina Farmers and Local Governments* (2007), http://www.farmlandinfo.org/farmland_preservation_literature/index.cfm?function=article_view&articleID=31721.

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (<http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/>). Promotes local and organic agriculture in the Carolinas by inspiring, educating and organizing farmers and consumers.

Chatham County's "Growing Small Farms" program (<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/aboutGSF.html>). Chatham County Center of the NC Cooperative Extension started this program in 1994, to provide staff and assistance to small farms and now the County government fully funds this staff position. The program provides many resources to farmers and consumers through its website and training/marketing programs.

Center for Environmental Farming Systems (www.cefs.ncsu.edu). The Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) was established in 1994 by N.C. State University, N.C. A&T State University, and the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to serve as a center dedicated to sustainable agriculture research, extension, and education.

Community Food Security Coalition's Food Policy Council webpage, <http://www.foodsecurity.org/FPC/>

Counties and Local Food Systems, National Association of Counties (NACo) Center for Sustainable Communities (July 2007). Information and case studies on food councils, farm to school programs, infrastructure for local producers and agricultural conservation easements. http://www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=New_Technical_Assistance&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=24784

Farm Prosperity Project (www.cals.ncsu.edu/specialty_crops//farmprosperity/). The Farm Prosperity Project is made up of seven regional, state and national organizations, led by North Carolina State University, that have teamed together to launch a grant-funded study intended to preserve western North Carolina farmland and farm heritage. The Farm Prosperity Project will identify crops and farmland preservation methods that help sustain farmland in our region. The overarching goal of the project is to save farms and farmland in western North Carolina by directly aiding farmers in increasing their economic prosperity.

Foothills Connect Business and Technology Center and Farmers Fresh Market together utilize high-speed Internet service to connect restaurants, consumers and suppliers to farmers in Rutherford County. Foothills Connect is one of seven business and technology centers in economically distressed areas of the state funded by the e-NC authority and it provides free,

high-speed Internet service to the public and a variety of free and fee-based services to local nonprofits and businesses. It received funding from the NC Rural Center through its Economic Innovations grant program to expand the Farmers Fresh project. See www.foothillsconnect.com and www.farmersfreshmarket.org for more information.

North Carolina Farm Transition Network (<http://www.ncftn.org>). The NCFTN was recently organized through cooperative efforts of a diverse group of state government and non-profit organizations concerned about the continuing loss of family farms in NC. Its mission is to *“ensure that working farms remain in agricultural production by assisting retiring and aspiring farmers in the effective transition of farm businesses.”*

Sustaining Agriculture in Urbanizing Counties (University of Nebraska – Lincoln, 2009. <http://www.farmland.org/resources/reports/Sustaining-Agriculture-in-Urbanizing-Counties/default.asp>) includes case studies in 15 counties across the U.S and suggests policy approaches to sustaining agriculture in the urban fringe. The report’s final chapter closes with seven policy recommendations for promoting viable farming in metro areas:

1. Local governments should aim to prevent conflicts between farmers and nonfarmer neighbors and to resolve those that arise in ways sympathetic to farmers’ interests.
2. Local governments should apply zoning policies (e.g., large minimum-lot requirements, cluster zoning, urban growth boundaries) that help to preserve an adequate land base for agriculture.
3. State governments should enable, and local authorities operate, effective programs for purchasing development rights to farmland, thereby either adding to the land base that agricultural protection zoning supports or achieving what zoning fails to realize.
4. Public and private agencies should encourage farm families to plan for the transfer of ownership and management to their children or other relatives. We found that with family successors lined up, the future of individual farms could look much brighter (e.g., current owners more likely to invest in their land and operators less likely to quit farming in the county prematurely).
5. The same agencies should encourage the launching and sustaining of farm enterprises likely to be profitable on the urban edge. Given the pervasive land constraint, consideration should be given to relatively smaller acreage operations, such as those raising high-value products including specialty crops and livestock. Direct marketing can also add revenue, and assistance programs for it were the second most popular type of help requested by our surveyed farmers—second after the purpose of “diversifying or adding new products.”
6. In geographic areas lacking sufficient farmers to sustain agri-service businesses, policy makers may need to encourage adaptations by both farm operators and suppliers, such as Internet purchasing and “drop-off boxes” for equipment repair.
7. Policy makers should consider ways to provide for adequate numbers of farm workers. One tool urged by interviewed farm operators was to reform the federal government’s guest worker program for migrant labor.