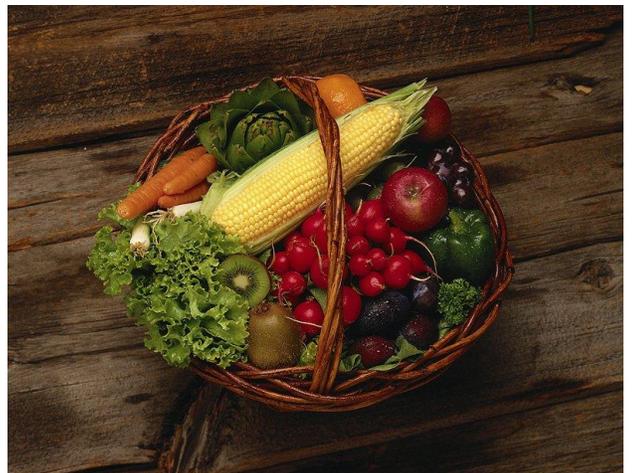
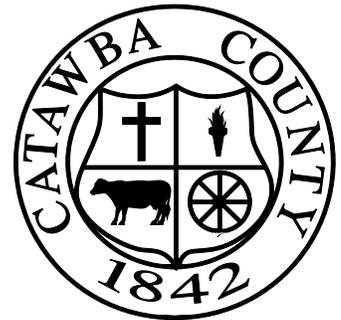
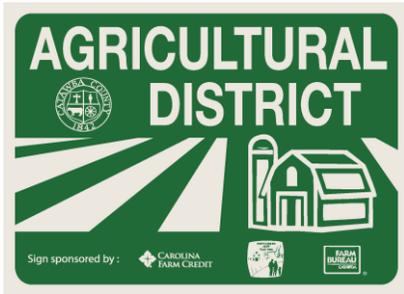


# CATAWBA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD

## 2015 Annual Report



*"Keeping the Spirit Alive Since 1842!"*

## **Catawba County Board of Commissioners**

C. Randall Isenhower, Chair  
Barbara Beatty, Vice-Chair  
Kitty W. Barnes  
Dan Hunsucker  
Sherry Butler

## **Catawba County Agricultural Advisory Board**

Clarence Hood, Chair  
David McCart, Vice-Chair  
Ken Arrowood  
Jeff Elmore  
Steve Killian  
Jeremy Lee  
Susan Proctor

## **Staff to the Agricultural Advisory Board**

George Place, II, Cooperative Extension Director  
Randy Willis, Conservation Services Supervisor  
Susan Ballbach, Senior Planner



## **CATAWBA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD ACTIVITIES**

### **Background**

As a rural area, Catawba County is highly recognized for its farm operations. Farms are a cornerstone in the community as they provide economic vitality and food for residents. Lands comprised of farms also contribute to maintaining a healthy wildlife habitat, adequate open space, and ground water recharge areas. Together, these things enhance the community's overall quality of life, which is what local administrators, farmers, and businesses strive for and what current and prospective residents seek in an ideal livable community. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA) reports that agriculture farm cash receipts from products in 2014 reached over \$13.1 billion. When including agribusiness activities, total cash receipts were \$76 billion. In 2015, total receipts rose to \$84 billion, making agriculture/agribusiness the largest industry in NC. The industry employs 686,200 people, or 17% of the NC workforce. Though agricultural production has seen continued prosperity, the State lost 600,000 acres to development in the last decade. The Voluntary Agricultural District was adopted by the Catawba County Commissioners in October of 2008 in an attempt to mitigate the loss of farm area. Farmers began enrolling their land shortly thereafter.

In examining the revenue/expenditure ratio for the residential land use category, it was found that for each dollar in property tax and other revenues generated by residential land uses, the county spends \$1.23 to provide services. The residential sector is on balance a net user of local public finances. On the other hand, commercial and industrial land use categories are the largest net contributors to local fiscal resources, contributing \$1.87 in revenues for each dollar of publicly provided services. The revenue/expenditure ratio for agriculture indicates that revenues substantially exceed expenditures for this land use category. Despite being taxed on the basis of current land use, property in agricultural land use is found to be a net contributor to the local budget, generating \$1.34 in revenues for every dollar of public services that it receives. (Source: The Cost of Community Services in Catawba County by Dr. Mitch Renkow, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, North Carolina State University, September 2013)

*“Despite being taxed on the basis of current land uses, property in agricultural land uses is found to be a net contributor to the local budget, generating \$1.34 in revenues for every dollar of public services that it receives.”*

### **Voluntary Agricultural District Promotion**

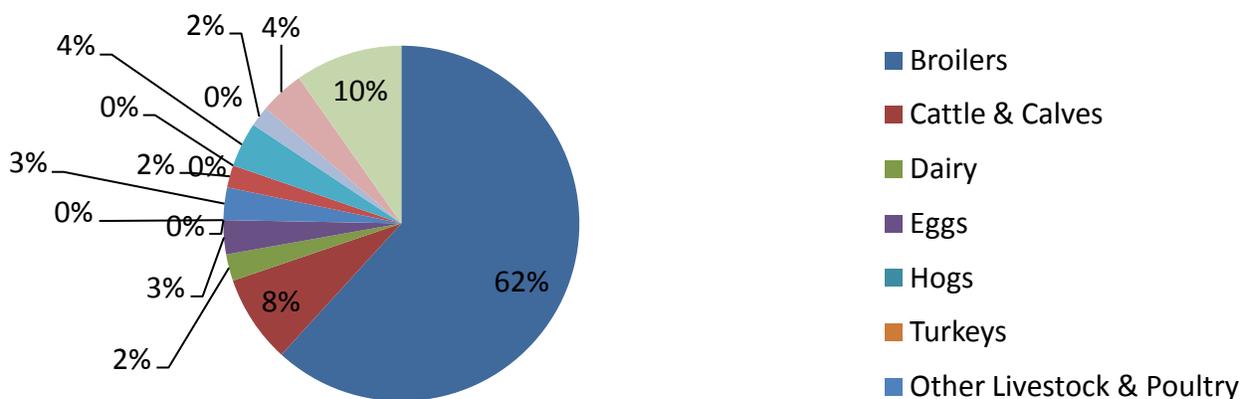
Efforts continue to be made to publicize and expand Catawba County's Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program. During 2015, 88.11 acres were added to the program, bringing the total area in the district to 10,231.61 acres. This represents approximately 15% of the total acreage (67,098 acres) of farmland in the County.

In November 2015, a mailing was sent to all owners who had land in the Voluntary Agricultural District or in the Present Use Value Tax Program. It was sent out at no cost to taxpayers, courtesy of Farm Bureau. Included in the packet was a letter, applications for the Voluntary Agricultural District and Enhanced VAD, and a brochure describing benefits of the programs. The letter invited people to join the VAD, and also introduced recipients to staff available for help with farm related questions. A map was included showing current VAD parcels. (See attached letter, map, and brochure). The mailing was considered highly successful, as an additional 1,921.63 acres of farmland were added to the VAD in the first four months of 2016—increasing total participation in the program to 12,153.24 acres.

**Source of Farm Receipts**

In 2014, at over 62%, the majority of Catawba County’s cash receipts from agriculture stemmed from the raising of broilers. The County saw little to no revenue from the cash receipts of hogs, turkeys, cotton, peanuts, and tobacco. Total agricultural revenues amounted to \$86,517,688, ranking Catawba County 45<sup>th</sup> in the State compared to other counties.

**Source of Farm Receipts, Catawba County, 2014**  
 (2015 data is not available at this time)



## Awards

Two Catawba County young farmers, Russell Hedrick and Lucas Richard, who had previously received statewide recognition for their efforts in agriculture were once again rewarded for their commitment. This time they were recognized by the Catawba County Board of Commissioners. Hedrick had previously received the Innovative Young Farmer Award, and Richard took home the Young Farmers and Ranchers Award.

**Russell Hedrick** a 29 year old Hickory, N.C. native, received the first annual Innovative Young Farmer Award which was sponsored by the Tobacco Farm Life Museum and Farm Credit Association of NC.

A full-time firefighter, Mr. Hedrick is the owner and operator of JRH Grain Farms, LLC. He has approximately 275 acres in production of soybeans and corn and is planning to grow his operation to 500 or 600 acres over the next few years. Hedrick is a demonstrated leader in the agricultural community in Catawba

County where he works very closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Catawba County Soil and Water to ensure he is a good steward of his farmland. He hosts cover-crop field days at his operation, in conjunction with these agencies so other farmers can benefit from this methods. As an innovative role model for cover-crop rotations, Russell works with individuals from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA) to track results and production patterns associated with this technique.

**Lucas Richard** operator of L.F.R. Farms and Greenhouses, Inc. was honored as the recipient of the Young Farmers and Ranchers Award sponsored by Farm Bureau (NCFB). An award that recognizes farmers between ages 18 and 35 that have excelled in their farming/ranching operations. The Achievement Award Program is designed to commemorate the leadership abilities that lead to production efficiency, innovation, improvement, environmental stewardship and financial progress of their operations.



*From left to right: Catawba County Commissioner Barbara Beatty and Russell Hedrick*



*From left to right: Catawba County Commissioner Dan Hunsucker and Lucas Richard*

L.F.R. Farms and Greenhouses, Inc. continues the positive trend to grow and purchase grain from NC and surrounding states, transport and store in excess of a million bushels of product annually. L.F.R. grows and sells a wide variety of plants including: strawberries, tomatoes, annuals, ferns, hosta, flowers, wheat, cotton, corn, soybeans, field-crop seed, chemicals, and fertilizers. The reinvesting techniques instilled in him at a very young age allowed him to achieve the growth he has accomplished over the past 15 years.



**Susan Proctor** received the prestigious Farmer of the Year Award for her farm operations on November 24, 2015 during the Farm/City Banquet at the Catawba County Country Club. Susan owns and operates Windy Wool Windings, which she said would not be possible without the support of her family. It all started at a young age on her family's beef and quarter horse farm in Macon County.



*Susan Proctor (front) with her family*

Susan continued her niche for farm operations at North Carolina State University, where in 1975 she completed two years of study in the Animal Science program. After returning to Catawba County, Susan worked on the family's dairy farm, and in 2007 began her own sheep farm, Windy Wool Windings. The farm

began with two bred ewes from Oregon and has immersed into a dual purpose flock mix of 140 quality Montadale and Romeldale sheep.

Though raised and experienced in traditional farming, Susan is also a liaison of modern day farming practices, farming solar energy. In 2012 she established a partnership with Apple Industries where she created a successful rotational grazing program on their solar fields. She also works with site managers to develop educational materials for sustainable grazing programs on other solar sites.



In addition to working with well-known private sector companies, Susan contributes to the local farming community as a member of the Voluntary Agriculture Board. She also participates in two local farmers markets and has established a working relationship with Food Matters, a local grocery store which promotes and sells locally produced products.



In 2015 Susan and her sheep also took the award for Superior Fleece and Superior Ewe at the Fiber Festival held in Fletcher, North Carolina. The win was a repeat performance from the prior year.



## Significant Agricultural Related Events in 2015

<p>March 18, 2015</p>	<p>The NC Department of Agriculture held its Ag Day event on the Capitol Grounds in Raleigh, where the festivities were attended by over 500 people across the state. State Governor, Pat McCrory, along with Agricultural Commissioner, Steve Troxler, were in attendance and spoke to the audience. The duo stressed how the economy benefits from agriculture. The purpose in gathering for the event was to educate the legislature to make them aware of those benefits. Following the formal presentation of the event, Catawba County farmers met with NC General Assembly member Mitchell Setzer and Senator Andy Wells to discuss farm dealings, obstacles, and endeavors.</p>
<p>June 19, 2015</p>	<p>As part of Catawba County's Eat Drink and Be Local (EDBL) week, which ran from June 15<sup>th</sup> through June 20<sup>th</sup>, three sites were toured. The first stop was to view the Gruver Homestead Aquaponics System in Hickory which includes a synergistic greenhouse and fish farm. The second stop was at JRH Grain Farms LLC in Hickory where owner Russell Hedrick explained the benefits of no-till farming combined with cover-cropping to reduce soil erosion and absorb carbon. The final stop was at the Sohudaya Farm in Conover which promotes health benefits of locally produced food and grows Indian vegetables to combat diabetes and overall wellness.</p>
<p>August 4, 2015</p>	<p>The Farm &amp; Food Sustainability Implementation Team met at the Agricultural Resources Center to discuss the plan's Action Items. Prior to the meeting, each organization was asked to review items assigned to them and report on task progress. It was determined that the group should focus priorities on training and encouraging young people to become involved in agriculture.</p>
<p>October 5, 2015</p>	<p>The Catawba County Agricultural Advisory Board meeting was designed as an educational session for members. Karyn Yaussy, Catawba County Emergency Management Coordinator, updated members on the Avaiian Influenza and precautions to be taken to keep the disease from spreading in NC. Alan Royal and John Shrell gave an update on the present use program to include rearing and training of horses, and the tax ramifications of solar farms.</p>
<p>October 19, 2015</p>	<p>Farm Bureau Annual Meeting was held at Newton Expo Center (PIN Station), in Newton. Catawba County Field Representative, Luke Beam, spoke on benefits of a Farm Bureau membership, the annual convention, and policy requests. Officers were also elected.</p>

October 24, 2015	The Catawba Valley Cattlemen’s Association (CVCA) held its annual Fall Beef BBQ fundraising event at the Hickory American Legion. The Association is credited with awarding five college scholarships through fundraisers such as the annual BBQ. The funds are also used to assist the 4-H Livestock Club.
November 16, 2015	The Catawba County Board of Commissioners recognized and awarded Russell Hedrick and Lucas Richard for their demonstrated agricultural efforts within Catawba County.
November 20, 2015	A mailing was sent out to all landowners in the VAD or Present Use programs. More details can be seen under the “Voluntary Agricultural District Promotion” heading above.
November 24, 2015	<p>Catawba County held its Farm/City Banquet Week at the Catawba County Country Club. Harvest Moon Grill’s Chef Cassie Parson was the key speaker at the event. Cassie grows her own vegetables and raises her own livestock. Harvest Moon Grille has been recognized by many as one of Lincolnton, North Carolina’s hottest restaurants. Cassie also stressed peoples’ increased desire of wanting to know where their food originates because of health implications associated with freshness.</p> <p>The annual prestigious Farmer of the Year Award was given to Susan Proctor for her farm operations. Susan owns and operates a sheep farm, Windy Wool Windings, located in Vale, N.C. She is also an active member of the Catawba County Agricultural Advisory Board</p>
Future Plans	A Farmland Preservation Workshop is being planned for February 2016 at the Newton Expo Center (PIN Station). The Young Farmers & Ranchers of Catawba County Farm Bureau and the University of Mount Olive Agribusiness Center are orchestrating the event; Farm Bureau is funding the event. An invitational flyer will be mailed to all VAD and present-use farmland owners in the county.

## 2015 ANNUAL VAD PROGRAM STATISTICS

Approved in 2015					Cumulative in Program (as of 12-31-15)		
Program Type	Jurisdiction	# of Landowners	# of Acres	# of Parcels	# of Landowners	# of Acres	# of Parcels
Voluntary Program	Catawba County	3.00	88.11	4.00	86.00	9,315.67	221.00
	Catawba	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Claremont	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	55.55	4.00
	Hickory	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	35.30	3.00
	Maiden	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Newton	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	105.65	1.00
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>88.11</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>91.00</b>	<b>9,512.17</b>	<b>229.00</b>
Enhanced Program	Catawba County	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.00	650.84	22.00
	Catawba	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	68.60	3.00
	Claremont	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Hickory	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Maiden	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Newton	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>11.00</b>	<b>719.44</b>	<b>25.00</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>ALL</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>88.11</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>102.00</b>	<b>10,231.61</b>	<b>254.00</b>



## VOLUNTEER AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT GROWTH BY YEAR

