

VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Spotlight on Board Member</i>	2
<i>Foothills Fresh</i>	2
<i>Farmland Preservation</i>	3
<i>Upcoming Activities</i>	3
<i>Agri-Tourism Event</i>	4
<i>Congress Renews Tax Incentive</i>	4
<i>VAD Map</i>	6

Agricultural Advisory Board Members

Clarence Hood, Chair—
Startown/Newton

Dave McCart, Vice-
Chair—Maiden/
Startown

Ken Arrowood—
Oxford/Catfish

Ira Cline—St.
Stephens/Conover

Joe Devine—Newton/
Maiden

Jeff Elmore—Balls
Creek/Bandy

Susan Proctor—Vale/
Jacobs Fork

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

BY CLARENCE HOOD

On behalf of the Agricultural Advisory Board, I want to thank you for enrolling your farmland in the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Program. We extend our thanks to Jeff Carpenter, Cooperative Extension Director, and Mary George, Assistant Planning Director with the Planning, Parks and Development Department, along with their staff, for their dedicated support of the VAD program. Since we started taking VAD applications in July of 2009, we have enrolled over 7,900 acres and our goal is to increase this number to

10,000 by the end of 2011. We would appreciate your help in contacting other farmers in your neighborhood to encourage them to enroll their property in the VAD program. Calling Cooperative Extension at (282) 465-8240 is the best way to begin the enrollment process.

Agriculture Growth in Catawba County

The latest data from the publication "North Carolina Agricultural Statistics" shows that total cash receipts from farms in the county grew from \$42.1 million to \$53.4 million from

2008 to 2009. Our most rapid increase in growth is in poultry. Based on information from area poultry integrators, in the years 2009 and 2010 producers constructed 37 new broiler houses and retrofitted 13 and constructed 2 breeder houses for a total infrastructure investment of \$8.16 million. While the general economy has not shown growth in recent years, we can be proud of the positive growth in farm income in the county. State-wide, agribusiness remains the number one industry contributing \$74 billion to the State's economy.



VAD Program By the Numbers



	# of Landowners	# of Acres	# of Parcels
General Program	55	7,294.68	159
Enhanced Program	9	612.41	18
TOTALS	64	7,907.09	177

SPOTLIGHT ON BOARD MEMBER - DAVE MCCART



Dave has been an initial Agricultural Advisory Board member and Vice Chair since the Board was established in 2009. Dave is very supportive of the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program, having placed 142 acres in the program himself. His reason for participating in the VAD program is that he wants to see the land preserved since he has no heirs to pass the land to. He believes it's important to preserve land since it is a limited product. Dave says: "I want to help preserve open space, farmland in particular." Dave has a degree from Virginia Tech in crop/turf management and is owner of Piedmont Turf Farm, Inc. in the Startown community.

FOOTHILLS FRESH: LOCAL FARMS, LOCAL FOOD, LOCAL FUN!



Foothills Fresh was established to connect consumers in Alexander, Burke, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston and Lincoln counties with local farmers and farmers' markets. It was developed because many farmers were not skilled in direct marketing products. Agents recognized the growing interest in local food. Data from "Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina" revealed that at least 62% of each county's adult population was overweight or obese and only 16 to 24% of adults ate five or more servings of fruits/vegetables daily. The Extension team believed that with marketing assistance, farmers could increase their farm income by reaching the growing communities of individuals who needed to eat more fruits and vegetables.

Foothills Fresh has helped market an identity for the region's agriculture. With input from local agricultural leaders in January 2006, the Extension team launched Foothills Fresh by recruiting farmers, developing a website (www.foothillsfresh.com) and creating a logo. Initially, a Small and Part-Time Farm Grant of \$9,000 was secured for promotion and educational activities including nutrition and food safety booklets and a professional display with photo panels.

By fall 2007, 46 locations were participating including

six farmers' markets, vineyards, Christmas tree farms, vegetable producers, orchards, agricultural festivals, pasture-raised meat producers, and ostrich ranches. Farm tours were organized in the summer and fall of 2006 and again in the fall of 2007. A new farmers' market opened, and a weekly e-mail on farmers' market offerings reached 200 addresses. For 2011 there are 58 members with 11 from Catawba County. They range from agri-tourism enterprises, pick your own fruits and vegetables to local meat producers.

Foothills Fresh appeals to diverse audiences. By using concepts of social marketing, agents have made eating more fruits and vegetables and buying local farm products appeal to the public. They promote local farms and food along with fun. Foothills Fresh also works within the framework of making healthy environmental choices, of curbing suburban sprawl, of stimulating the local economy, and of teaching children about farming heritage. With agents in different counties and disciplines including it in their repertoire, Foothills Fresh has reached special interest clubs, county commissioners, professional chefs, the NC Fruit and Vegetable Symposium, child care providers, churches, Rotary, local food aficionados at Alice Waters' lecture, hospital staff,

commodity organizations, and Master Gardeners. The successful Foothills Fresh partnership has included farmers, local Chambers of Commerce, public information officers in participating counties, master gardener volunteers, and a local elementary school.

Foothills Fresh has helped publicize the region's small farms and agricultural bounty and emphasize the connection to NC Cooperative Extension. Articles have appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* (205,000 circulation), *Charlotte Parent Magazine* (57,000), *Lake Norman Magazine* (90,000), and *Perspectives* (35,337) - the magazine of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at NC State which is distributed statewide.

There are several measures of success for Foothills Fresh. Farmers recognize the value of this marketing effort and realized that they did not have the resources individually to reach the greater public to (cont. on page 3)



Farmers Markets are a great source of local food products

FARMLAND PRESERVATION WORKSHOP A SUCCESS

Last August, a Farmland Preservation Workshop was conducted to educate landowners about the County's VAD program and other farmland preservation tools. Information was shared about conservation easements, farmland tax incentives, estate planning and succession planning.

Over 80 individuals attended the workshop. Feedback was very positive with many folks wanting to have the educa-

tional workshops continued. This newsletter is a way to provide additional education and outreach to meet the needs of the County's farmers. In addition, the newsletter helps keep the VAD program participants engaged after they have been approved in the program.

Anyone who was unable to attend the August workshop and would like copies of the information shared can con-



tact Mary George at the Planning Department (828-465-8264). Also, if you are interested in finding out more about conservation easements, you may contact the Foothills Conservancy at (828) 437-9930

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

As indicated at our Summer 2010 workshop, farmers wanted to be made aware of upcoming issues or forums. Following are several initiatives that are ongoing or are scheduled in the next several months.

A workshop was held in October 2010 for cities interested in participating in the County's VAD program. Currently, only farmland outside the cities corporate limits and ETJ can

participate in the County's program. To date, Claremont and the Town of Catawba have agreed to participate in the VAD program. The other cities have expressed interest and are in the process of approving the program for their jurisdiction.

A Farmland Preservation and Agricultural Development Forum is in the process of being planned for December 1, 2011 at the Civic Center in

downtown Lincolnton. The forum will be an interactive day for participants to identify strategies to address farm transitioning, marketing/profitability and how to effect local policy.

Catawba County will be preparing a farmland protection plan during the upcoming year. Watch for announcements on community meetings in your area. Your input is greatly needed.



Do you recognize this farm that is participating in the Voluntary Agricultural District Program? (see page 4 for the answer)

FOOTHILLS FRESH (CONT.)

this extent. Farms report new visitors, repeat customers, and an increase in sales as a result of the Foothills Fresh farm tours. The public touring the farms report an increased awareness of local food venues, the importance of local farms, and desire to purchase local food. NC Cooperative

Extension has benefited from Foothills Fresh. The public's calls requesting local farm products and agricultural tourism have multiplied. Extension offices are better able to answer questions on local food sources by using the directory and website; this is especially helpful for support

staff. Furthermore, agents are working more closely as a team to achieve the goals of Foothills Fresh to the benefit of the region's physical and farm health.

Team members from Catawba County are Jeff Carpenter (CED) and Glennie Daniels (FCS).

AGRI-TOURISM EVENT

Saturday, June 18 was Catawba County's first Agri-Tourism Day. By all accounts, the day was a great success with over 800 visits to the 9 participating farms. Families came to learn about sustainable agriculture and purchase local food products to support the participating farmers. People not only came from Catawba County to visit the

farms but from far away as Florida, South Carolina and eastern North Carolina.

Farms participating in the day included:

- Windy Wool Windings
- LFR Farms & Greenhouses
- Ira Cline
- Shady Oaks
- Sipe Angus
- Buddy Farm Apiary
- Red Wolf
- Buffalo Beals
- Bird Brain Ostrich Ranch

Thank you to those who participated and especially those who made their farm available free for the day so visitors could learn about agribusiness in the County.

Other agricultural-related events were also enjoyed by participants. These included the local farmers markets, Take-A-Kid Fishing, local parks, Catawba Valley Youth Beef Expo, and the Hickory Crawdads game.

The day was very educational for those that participated. It was shared that even a 4-H'er who has been around farming on a small scale their entire life had no idea that there were these types of farms so close by.

If you are interested in being a participating farm next year, please contact the Planning Department at (828) 465-8264.



A young visitor at the Bird Brain Ostrich Ranch

The VAD sign is located on Joe Johnson Road and is on the farm owned by John and Phyllis McAuley. Thanks for the beautiful display!

CONGRESS RENEWS A TAX INCENTIVE TO HELP YOU CONSERVE YOUR FARM

Foothills Conservancy, your local land trust serving Catawba County, shares time sensitive news for farmers and landowners who may be interested in making a gift or partial gift of a conservation agreement on their productive farm and forestland. Enhanced incentives to the donor increase the financial benefits for landowners who wish to permanently conserve their working farm while continuing to own the land, use it productively, and pass it down to children or heirs. Foothills Conservancy is glad to discuss farm easement projects with interested and willing

landowners as the next step from Catawba County's Voluntary Agricultural District Program.

Congress recently renewed, through 2011, an incentive that enhances the tax benefits of protecting your land by donating a voluntary conservation agreement. If you own land with important natural or historic resources, donating a voluntary conservation agreement can be one of the smartest ways to conserve the land you love, while maintaining your private property rights and possibly realizing significant federal tax benefits.

These new incentives make it easier for average Americans, including working family farmers and ranchers, to donate the development rights on their land. The incentives include:

- Raising the maximum deduction you can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from **30%** of your adjusted gross income (AGI) to **50%**;
 - Allowing you to deduct up to **100%** of your AGI if you qualify as a farmer or rancher; and
 - Increasing the number of years over which you can
- (cont. on page 5)

CONGRESS RENEWS A TAX INCENTIVE (CONT.)

take deductions **from 6 years to 16 years.**

These changes allow many modest income landowners to deduct much more than they could under the old rules, bringing increased fairness to the tax code.

Unless Congress acts, these enhanced tax benefits will expire December 31, 2011.

What do you need to know to enter into a voluntary conservation agreement? Here are the facts:

- A voluntary conservation agreement, also known as a conservation easement, is a legal agreement between a landowner and a nonprofit land trust, like Foothills Conservancy, or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect important conservation values. It allows you to continue to own and use your land and to sell it or pass it on to heirs.
- When you enter into a voluntary conservation agreement with a land trust, you give up some of the rights associated with the land. For example, you might give up the right to subdivide your land or build additional houses, while retaining the full right to grow crops. Future owners also will be bound by

the agreement's terms. The land trust is responsible for making sure the terms of the agreement are followed.

- If a conservation agreement benefits the public by permanently protecting important conservation resources and meets other federal tax code requirements, it can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation. The amount of the donation is the difference between the land's appraised value with the agreement and its value without the agreement.
 - To qualify as a charitable donation, a conservation agreement must be permanent and meet other specific requirements discussed at: www.lta.org/incentive-faqs. A landowner should get professional financial planning and legal advice before making such a major donation.
- If you pay state income tax, then your easement gift can also qualify you for the N.C. Conservation Tax Credit according to the following:**
- Charitable donations of land or easements in North Carolina meeting established conservation purposes can qualify for a state tax credit of 25% of the donated property's or property interest's value. The tax credit is



capped at \$250,000 for individuals and \$500,000 for corporations. Visit <http://www.onencnaturally.org/pages/ConservationTaxCredit.html>

o r g / p a g e s / ConservationTaxCredit .html

To learn more about protecting your farm with a voluntary conservation agreement, and the enhanced federal tax benefits for gifts on land you continue to own and use, call Tom Kenney or Andrew Kota at Foothills Conservancy at 828-437-9930.

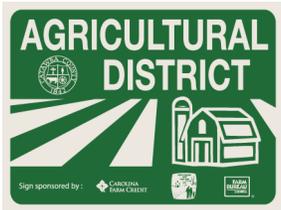


Remember — your conservation easement is valid for 10 years. If you are in the general program, it may be revoked upon your request; however, if you are in the enhanced program, the conservation easement is irrevocable for 10 years

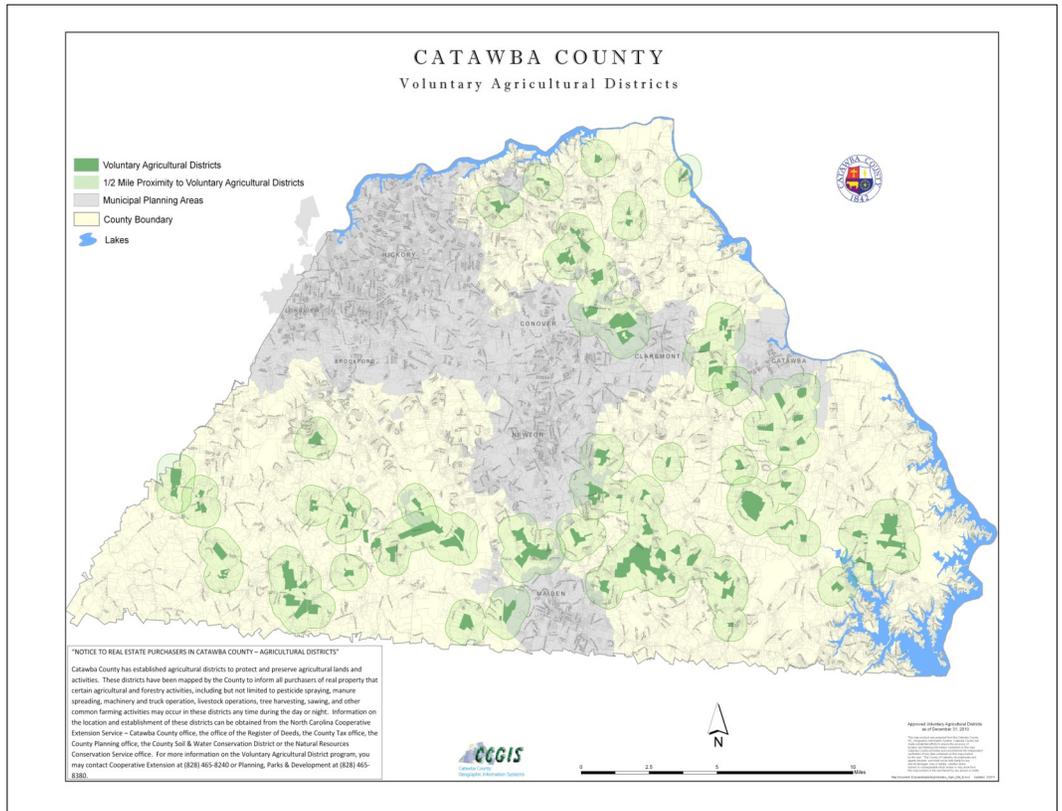
**Catawba County
Voluntary Agricultural
District Program**

A joint effort of:
Catawba County Planning, Parks &
Development
and
Cooperative Extension

Planning: 828-465-8264
Cooperative Extension: 828-465-8240



Funding for this newsletter
has been provided by the
North Carolina Agricultural
Development & Farmland
Preservation Trust Fund



Map of VAD Program participants
The dark green areas represent those properties enrolled in the VAD program.
The lighter green areas represent a 1/2 mile around the farms. Can you find your land?