

MEETING NOTES

Catawba County Farm & Food Sustainability Plan Working Committee April 19, 2012

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Elaine Frazee, Martha Green, Jeremy Lee, Kristie Gilbert, Fred Miller, Jeff Elmore, Nathan Huret, Barbara Beatty, Clarence Hood, Tom Kenney, Mike Burris, Danny Montgomery, Jeff Carpenter and Der Xiong.

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

John Kinley, Town Of Catawba Planner; and Chris Bartleson, City of Newton Planning Director.

STAFF PRESENT:

Mary George and Susan Ballbach, Planning, Parks, and Development.

FARM AND FOOD SUSTAINABILITY PLAN DISCUSSIONS

Mary George welcomed those in attendance and asked that everyone introduce themselves, identify the group they represent (production, education/outreach, policy, distribution/food access or public health), and share their interest in agriculture and desired outcomes of the Plan. Responses included the following:

- Enable farmers to sell their produce to a distribution center like MDI, and find other outlets for products that the distribution center cannot accept. This might include selling fresh produce to County residents and employees to give them more healthy food options.
- Find ways to reach and educate more people in productive growing techniques and healthy eating habits.
- Encourage an increased number of farmers markets.
- Increase children's awareness of where food comes from—it doesn't start at the grocery store. Give them a tour of a working farm; let them talk to a farmer to see what his/her job entails; teach them how food is grown, and set up gardens at the schools so students can actually grow vegetables. (Bunker Hill High School has a garden for this purpose.)
- MDI would like assistance in finding area growers so food can be produced and sold to local families and restaurants.

- Give information to farmers so they can explore options on conservation easements. Give them guidance so they can determine if a conservation easement would help them meet their individual needs and objectives.
- Educate farmers on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, and help them attain GAP status. Catawba County Schools bids and purchases children's meals to meet nutritional standards, but products can only be purchased from GAP certified farmers. The closest GAP certified farm is in Taylorsville; it would be nice to be able to purchase Catawba County produce.
- Creation of the Plan will help glean information that can assist producers and consumers.
- Nutrition Core Department at Catawba Valley Medical Center would like to include local food in the cafeteria.
- The farming industry is instrumental in contributing to the economic wellbeing of the County. In May, over \$50 million came from agricultural activities, more if value added is included.
- Make people more aware of how to grow their own food. Cooperative Extension has a demonstration garden to visually educate the public.
- Build upon the goals of the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program to help farmers make their farms more profitable. To date 8,500 acres are enrolled in the VAD program to protect agricultural land. In the last few years, about 10,000 acres of agriculture land was lost to development each year. We need a plan to promote and retain agriculture in our area.
- All of the members see the benefits of agriculture and many grew up on farms or have relatives living on farms.

OVERVIEW OF AGRICULTURE IN CATAWBA COUNTY AND THE FARM & FOOD SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Mary updated the Committee on farming in Catawba County. The Voluntary Agricultural District Program was formed in 2008, and Agricultural Advisory Board Members feel it is important to sustain agriculture and build an agricultural economy. The average farmer is 58 years old, who may or may not have children that want to continue farming. A goal of the Plan is to link retiring farmers and farms to a new generation of potential farmers.

The County received a NCADFP Trust Fund grant to do the Farm & Food Sustainability Plan. This is the third grant received from NCADFP. We will have two consultants assisting County staff in developing the plan:

1. Quint Redmond: Mr. Redmond (from Colorado) is the originator of the Agriurbia concept which combines agrarianism and contemporary design within environmentally sound real estate development, and builds the infrastructure for the next generation of

farming. During the housing development boom, many of the people that wanted to live near golf courses did not play golf. They wanted to live near the green space the golf course offered. Since people like to live near open space and rural landscapes, Mr. Redmond decided to begin designing communities with farm/garden opportunities within the development. Not only does this provide the atmosphere people are seeking, it also provides fresh food for residents. When the housing bubble hit, Quint redirected his attention to getting local foods into the schools and promoting school gardens. He will provide insight into national trends, case studies and non-traditional funding options.

2. John Bonham: John Bonham (from Asheville, NC) specializes in agriculture economics. He has been involved with incubator farms and food processing facilities. He will provide State and County analyses for the Plan.

PLAN CREATION LOGISTICS

The NCADFP Trust Fund grant we received from the State will pay for the consultant fees. Together we will explore ways to enhance farming opportunities through marketing, diversity, and education. It is very important to get as much public input as possible to identify key issues. Committee members are asked to identify key issues to promote/enhance sustainable agriculture, reach out to others for ideas and participation at community meetings, and provide input on recommendations. During the process, we will most likely want a survey and a website. Jeff Carpenter will be Chairperson for the creation of the Plan, which is anticipated to take approximately one year, and then be brought to the Board of Commissioners for consideration of adoption/acceptance. Jeff said that about one-third of NC counties have an adopted Farmland Preservation Plan; we are happy Catawba County's plan can have a large sustainability component in addition to preservation. We want to go the next step and link farms and food together.

TENTATIVE PLAN SCHEDULE

2012

April – Convene Working Committee

May – Presentations on County and National agricultural trends and case studies. Begin planning for community meetings

June – Current agricultural initiatives. Community meeting planning

July – Three community input meetings

August – Discuss community input

September through December – Draft plan recommendations and implementation strategies

2013

January – Three community review meetings

February – Review community comments and final plan recommendation

March – Present to Planning Board

April – Present to Board of Commissioners for consideration or adoption/acceptance.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Meeting attendees were divided into groups where they were asked to provide input on three questions. After gathering all the ideas, each individual in the group was given the opportunity to vote for their five favorite concepts. The three questions and voting results are shown below.

What agricultural program/idea that you heard about in the County is successful to help sustain agriculture?

- Foothills Fresh – 3
- Agri-tourism event (ex. petting zoo, Buffalo Beals, Hart Square) – 2
- Farm tours - 2
- Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) - 1
- Farmers Markets - 1
- High School Future Farmers of America (FFA) & 4H – 1
- Fair – 1
- Conservancies/Land Trusts – 1
- Agricultural education in high schools – 1
- Community gardens
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Soil & Water
- Agricultural Day at Bandys High School
- Chamber of Commerce/farm tours
- Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training
- Conover farmers market – school visits by farmers
- Conover farmers market – producer only
- Hickory farmers market
- Grant for cattle farmers to expand marketing

What agricultural program/idea that you have heard about elsewhere would help sustain agriculture in Catawba County?

- Food processing centers for value added products - 4
- School to farm field trips – 4
- Local produce to local supermarkets – 4
- Pilot Mtn. Pride - 2

- Mentor/match to match famers with potential farmers (like FFA) – 2
- Completed conservation easements – help keep land available for farming – 1
- Post harvest centers for storage/cooling – 1
- Booklets with free advertising – made free to public (ex. Appalachian Sustainable Agricultural Program) – 1
- SARE program, ATTRA, outstanding young farmer, farm fresh – 1
- Charlotte on-line restaurant order site (from farms) – 1
- “Red Apple” program – 1
- Farm days/camps for youth - 1
- Production planning (variety) – 1
- Poultry processing center with inspections availability (ex. Marion and Cabarrus County)
- Harvest Moon Grill/Grateful Growers Farm – farm to restaurant
- Farmstead camp
- Community school gardens with taste samples
- Farms value added programs (ex. ice cream sales at farms)
- Use existing storage for summer produce (ex. schools)
- Local meat market

Who are people that we need to reach out to as part of the planning process and what is their connection to sustainable agriculture?

- Grants to pay for GAP certification - 7
- Students, especially high school; transition farms to next generation - 4
- Locally owned restaurants - 4
- Help for farmers for legal issues, i.e. estate planning - 2
- Farmers – to encourage GAP certification - 2
- School administration – need to understand value of agriculture; agriculture should be more important in schools - 1
- Vendors - 1
- Corporate - 1
- Leadership of minority groups
- Farmers both full-time and part-time and also small acreage farms
- NC Cooperative Extension Service
- NCDM Marketing Division
- Civic clubs – broad range of people
- Transportation industry – transportation costs
- Agricultural-related agencies
- Publicize cooking/canning seminars for ECCM patrons and public
- Farm Bureau
- Teachers to encourage farm presentations
- Flea market
- Ethnic markets
- Foothills Fresh

- NRCS/SWCD/FSA/Forestry/Wildlife
- Average citizens
- Restaurants
- Schools/hospital
- YMCA/Recreation
- Children/schools/daycare

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled to take place during the week of May 21. Mary asked attendees, and will contact members that were unable to come to the meeting in order to find the best time of day for future meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Ballbach, Recording Secretary