

MEETING NOTES

Catawba County Farm & Food Sustainability Plan

Working Committee

May 24, 2012

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Martha Green, Kristie Gilbert, Nathan Huret, Barbara Beatty, Clarence Hood, Tom Kenney, Mike Burris, Al King, Julie Lehmann, Jeff Carpenter and Der Xiong.

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

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

STAFF PRESENT:

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

WELCOME AND REVIEW OF INTERACTIVE EXERCISE

Mary George welcomed those in attendance and asked that members reintroduce themselves. She informed the group that today's meeting would include an overview of agriculture in Catawba County by Jeff Carpenter, Director of Cooperative Extension, and a look at Catawba County's Agriculture statistics by consultant John Bonham.

Mary gave the group a brief summarization of the Committee's visioning exercise results from the 4/19/12 meeting. The following three questions were explored:

1. What agricultural program/idea that you heard about in the County is successful to help sustain agriculture?
 - The group ranked Foothills Fresh as the most beneficial program, followed by the agri-tourism event and farm tours.
2. What agricultural program/idea that you have heard about elsewhere would help sustain agriculture in Catawba County?
 - The group ranked food processing centers for value added products, school to farm field trips, and local produce to local supermarkets as the most helpful. These suggestions were followed by Pilot Mtn. Pride, and mentor/match to

match potential farmers with existing farmers as being the second most helpful of ideas.

3. Who are people that we need to reach out to as part of the planning process and what is their connection to sustainable agriculture?
 - The group ranked grants to pay for GAP certification as the most important connection, followed by students (especially high school) to transition farms to next generation, and locally owned restaurants.

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

Jeff Carpenter, Catawba County Cooperative Extension, informed the Committee about farming trends and programs in Catawba County. Farm income almost doubled over the last three years, increasing from approximately \$30 million in 2007 to \$55 million in 2010. Livestock accounts for approximately \$40 million and crops about \$15 million. There are 737 farms in the County with a total value of about \$517 million (including both land and buildings). The County currently has three active dairies and three active farmers markets. Contract poultry operations are increasing with approximately 100 broiler houses in the County. Two poultry integrators are contracting with County farmers: Case and Tyson. Eight-thousand acres of farmland are enrolled in the Voluntary Agricultural District program which was formed in 2008. Vocational agricultural programs are offered at four of the County's high schools: Bandys, Fred T. Foard, St. Stephens and Bunker Hill.

A more in-depth view of Catawba County's food production, consumption and comparison rankings with other NC counties can be found on Catawba County's website. The link to Jeff's presentation is: <http://www.catawbacountync.gov/planning/Sustainability/AgOverview.pdf>.

CATAWBA COUNTY AGRICULTURE STATISTICS

John Bonham, Agricultural Economic Consultant, informed the Committee about agricultural statistics in Catawba County. The following information is based on the 2007 Census of Agriculture statistics which is the most recent available data. The term farmland is "land which is part of a commercial farm operation" according to the agricultural census information. Of the 71,906 acres of farmland in the County, approximately half of the land is cropland. Woodland and permanent pasture uses roughly share the remaining lands. The smallest farms, those between one and 49 acres account for 52% of all farms, and 12% of all farmland in the County. The largest 1% of the farms, those with 1,000 acres or more, account for 12% of all the farmland. During the last 19 years (1978 to 2007) the number of farms increased by 104 to a total of 737 farms (16%), while farmland acreage decreased by 14,726 acres to a total of 71,906 acres (17%).

According to annual NC Agricultural Statistics, broilers generated the most sales in 2010 (\$30.3 million) followed by ornamentals with \$9.2 million. Field crops generated \$5.2 million and sales of cattle and calves generated \$4.2 million. It should be noted that figures involving sales from broilers are based on the final sales dollars generated, not the amount of money the farmer receives. This is due to the fact that the broilers on the farm are on contract with the integrators, not owned by the farmers, and the sale dollar figure is based on the value of the birds when they leave the farm. Statistics show that three percent of the farms accounted for 62 percent of the sales, with each having sales of more than \$500,000.

Small family farms make up a large majority of farms in the County, comprising 695 farms and 56,002 acres. Residential/lifestyle farms form the largest group of farms in the small family farms category in terms of both number and acres of farmland. At 77 acres per farm, they are relatively small in size, but combined they account for 33% of all the farmland in the County. In 2007, the average age of principal farm operators was 58 years.

A more in-depth view of Catawba County's agricultural statistics as presented by John Bonham can be found on Catawba County's website. The link to his presentation is:
<http://www.catawbacountync.gov/planning/Sustainability/CountyAgStatistics.pdf>

FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled to take place June 14, 2012. Consultant Quint Redmond will be at the meeting to discuss national trends and case studies on sustainable agriculture.

Community input meetings will be scheduled during the weeks of July 9th and July 23rd.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Ballbach, Recording Secretary