

MEETING NOTES

Catawba County Farm & Food Sustainability Plan

Working Committee

August 16, 2012

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

John Brzorad, Mike Burris, Jeff Carpenter, Joe Devine, Jeff Elmore, Clarence Hood, Nathan Huret, Tom Kenney, Julie Lehmann, Fred Miller, Danny Montgomery and Der Xiong

STAFF PRESENT:

Mary George and Susan Ballbach, Planning, Parks, and Development, Haley Kadish and Mary Furtado, County Managers Office

REVIEW OF INPUT FROM COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Mary George welcomed the members of the Working Committee and asked for everyone to re-introduce themselves for the benefit of staff from the County Managers Office. She then referred everyone to the handouts of the results from the three community meetings held in July. She indicated that the turnout was very good with over 100 people in attendance who provided excellent ideas for the Committee to consider. The format of the community meetings asked three questions in regards to enhancing agriculture and promoting local foods:

- 1) What are encouraging trends?
- 2) What are limitations, in particular for fruit and vegetable production?
- 3) What are opportunities we should explore?

Mary asked the Committee members to provide their observations for each of the three question areas. The Committee responded with the following:

Encouraging Trends

- Public awareness about the importance of local foods
- Reverting to old processing/share use facilities such as canneries
- Technology being used by farmers to market their products

- Record high commodity prices
- Farmers have the opportunity to grow more variety
- Have more young people now interested in agriculture since they can make more money on less acreage

Limitations – Agriculture as a whole

- Land availability and costs since most land is now being used for forage crops due to the high commodity prices
- Present-use taxation acreage requirements based upon State law
- General public and children have limited knowledge about agriculture and where their food comes from
- Need more curriculum for agriculture in the schools. The Farm Bureau's course for 4th graders is a good start but need to follow up with education in the middle school.
- Unification of traditional and organic agriculture
- Funding sources for programs and projects
- Need more meat processing facilities

Limitations – Fruit & Vegetable Production

- Labor to get product out of fields since it has to be done within a very short period of time
- GAP certification
- Water availability
- Marketing system – need more than farmers markets and a reliable location where farmers know they can sell

In regards to the opportunities, Mary indicated that this will now be the focus of the remaining meetings with the Committee. The opportunities will be categorized into three P's: **P**olicies, **P**roject and **P**rograms. Each category will have a Guiding Principle which is the overall goal with a further breakdown into strategies and action items. Each action item will have a department assigned for taking responsibility to implement.

DRAFT POLICIES DISCUSSION

Mary began reviewing the draft policy recommendations that was submitted to the Committee to review, asking for input from the Committee members. In regards to the Guiding Principle, it was suggested that an advocacy role be added to the statement.

Following are the discussions on each of the strategies and action items:

Strategy #1: Promote present-use tax valuation program – no changes but noted that one of the issues of concern was about the transfer of property where the new owner needs to be aware of the timeframe to register for the PUV otherwise won't be eligible for the program.

Strategy #2: Evaluate local zoning regulations – no changes

Strategy #3: Establish economic development initiatives to promote/market agriculture

- Mitigation fund program – Mary showed the Committee a map of the County's prime farmland and observed that most all of the County is in the prime farmland category, which is based upon soil type. Danny suggested that an alternate map be prepared which includes the land capability classifications - #1, 2 and 3 with the growth corridors overlaid. This will then be further discussed at the next meeting.
- Re-use of buildings – a comment was made about old industrial buildings in other counties being used for mushroom production and aquaculture (raising sturgeon)

Strategy #4: Funding support for agricultural programs

- Mitigation fund program – discuss further based upon alternate mapping
- Staff person with Cooperative Extension – possibility of public/private partnership with MDI

Strategy #5: Advocate for farm-friendly State & National policies

- Add NCDA to agencies for GAP certification
- Study opportunities and "threats" in utilizing cost-effective reliable water sources. Comments were made that the NCDA conducts a survey of farmers on annual water usage and that their usage accounts for less than 1% of the water in the State. It was also noted that public water could be suitable for irrigation, especially if raising fruits and vegetables. This could be tied into the program section under education of farmers.

Mary asked for other ideas that should be included in the Policies recommendations. Danny stated he would like to see a statement about incorporating more active and passive

agricultural education courses in all grade levels of the schools. Also he wanted to include a recommendation that the School Board support maintaining or expanding the current vocational agriculture programs in the high schools. It was also suggested that CVCC incorporate a horticultural program with a focus on fruit and vegetable production (note: this will be included in the Programs section as this is not a policy that the County can influence but rather an outreach to the school to consider the value/opportunities for developing the curriculum).

There being no further discussions, Mary referred the Committee to their agenda where the upcoming meeting dates were listed. At the next meeting on September 20, the Committee will be asked to finalize the Policies Recommendations and begin discussing the Projects Recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary George, Project Manager