REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION / CONTRACT CONTROL FORM

Tracking Number: 3.

Date of Request: March 7, 2008

Date Request Received: March 7, 2008

Board Meeting Date Requested: March 17, 2008

Board Meeting Date Assigned: March 17, 2008

Short Title: Presentation On Voluntary Agricultural Districts.

Background: Jerry Dorsett, Working Lands Coordinator with NC DENR, will give a presentation on Voluntary Agricultural Districts.

Specific Action Requested: Review and accept the presentation.

Requested by: Jason Turner
Department: Natural Resources Conservation
Title:
Contact Phone: 910-259-9123
Contact Fax:

Request Status:

- ☒ Request is proceeding to Board of Commissioners
- ☐ More information is needed – see attached
- ☐ Request on hold – no further information needed
- ☐ Other:

(Administrative Use Only)

CONTRACT TYPE

- ☐ Renewal
- ☐ Revision
- ☐ For Service(s)
- ☐ For Equipment
- ☐ Intergovernmental – County as Grantee
  - ☐ Federal Grantor
  - ☐ State Grantor
  - ☐ Grant or
- ☐ County as Grantor
  - ☐ County Funds
  - ☐ Other Funds:

PURCHASING
Date Rec'd:
Budgeted Item: ☐ Yes ☐ No
☐ Reviewed and Approved
☐ Comments on Reverse

Date Sent:
Signed:

ATTORNEY
Date Rec'd:
☐ Reviewed and Approved
☐ Legal Problem(s)
☐ Comments on Reverse

Date Sent:
Signed:

FINANCE
Date Rec'd
Sufficient Funds ☐ Available ☐ Not Available
☐ Budget Amendment Necessary
☐ Budgeted Amendment is Attached
☐ Comments on Reverse

Date Sent:
Signed:

CLERK
Signature(s) Required:
☐ Board Chairman/County Manager
☐ Other:

Date Rec'd
Approved by Board: ☐ Yes ☐ No
At meeting on

WHY PRESERVE FARMLAND?

It is estimated that between 2000 and 2010, nearly 50,000 new residents will relocate to Union County. Many of these people come because they are attracted to the rural lifestyle and pastoral beauty Union County offers. This unique culture is in large part due to Union County's strong foundations in agriculture. Despite the significant urbanization that is occurring, Union County remains one of the state's largest agricultural and agribusiness communities, providing over 10% of the employment and contributing over 300 million dollars in annual farm-level income to the economy. Cropland, grassland, and forests are critical to the infrastructure of this industry. A major consequence of the continued rapid development is the loss of these farmlands.

Well managed farms, in addition to supporting a balanced economy, provide benefits such as wildlife habitat, water quality and recharge of water supplies, and open and greenspace for public enjoyment. It is also important to recognize that farmland costs government less than does residential development as development requires more expense in public services, such as roads, schools, water and sewer, and fire and police protection. Based on these hosts of benefits, citizens and local governments are becoming increasingly aware of the need to preserve their agricultural lands through the creation of voluntary agricultural districts.

WHAT ARE FARMLAND PRESERVATION DISTRICTS?

The state of North Carolina enacted legislation in 1986 to allow for the administration of a statewide farmland preservation program. Article 61 of Chapter 106 of the North Carolina General Statutes allowed for the creation of a fund to receive monies and administer the program as well as give counties authority to establish agricultural districts. On May 7th, 2001, the Union County Board of Commissioners adopted the "Union County Voluntary Farmland Preservation Ordinance". The purpose of the ordinance is to promote agricultural values and general welfare of the county and more specifically, increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life; encourage the economic and financial health of agriculture; and increase protection from non-farm development and other negative impacts on properly managed farms. The Board of Commissioners established an Agricultural Advisory Board to implement the provisions of this ordinance.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR MEMBERSHIP ON THE AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD?

The Advisory Board consists of nine members appointed by the Board of Commissioners. Members must be county residents and at least 6 of the nine members must be actively engaged in farming and at least one member must be a representative of the Union County Farm Bureau. A list of current board members is available from county government or Cooperative Extension at 704-283-3738.

WHAT DEFINES A VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT?

In order to be accepted as an agricultural district the tract must contain a minimum of 20 acres of qualified farmland or contain two or more tracts of qualified farmland located within one mile of each other.

WHAT IS MEANT BY QUALIFIED FARLMAND?

For farmland to qualify it must be real property that:

a. Is participating in the farm present-use-value taxation program.

b. Is certified by the Natural Resource Conservation Service as being a farm on which at least two-thirds of the land is composed of soils that are best suited for providing food, seed, fiber, forage, timber, and oil seed crops.

OR

At least two-thirds of the land has been actively used in agricultural, horticultural or forestry operations during each of the five previous years.

c. Is managed, if highly erodible, in accordance with defined erosion control practices.

d. Is the subject of a conservation agreement between the County and the owner of such land that prohibits non-farm use or development.

HOW DO I APPLY TO ENTER MY FARM IN A VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT?

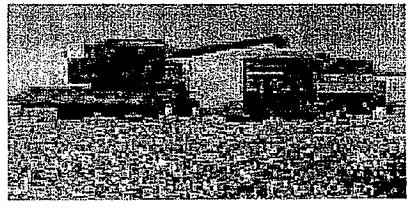
A landowner may apply to establish a district or to add qualifying farmland to an existing district by making application to the Chairman of the Advisory Board. Applications are available from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Union County Farm Bureau, and Cooperative Extension at 500 N. Main Street, Room 506, Monroe, NC 28112 or (704) 283-3801.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF BELONGING TO AN AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT?

As a part of a Farmland Preservation District, a public hearing will be required on a proposed condemnation by state or local public agencies. Landowners in certified districts will not be required to connect to water and/or sewer systems, or be assessed water and sewer charges until that property is connected to such service.
Will help increase the identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life. Members of a district will have increased protection from undesired non-farm development and other negative impacts on participating farms. Protection from nuisance suits will be increased. Maps designating Agricultural Districts will be posted in appropriate county offices and signage will be provided each farm identifying it as lying within an agricultural district.

CAN I WITHDRAW MY FARM FROM A DISTRICT AT ANYTIME?

Yes, a landowner in an agricultural district may revoke the conservation agreement for a parcel of land in the preservation program by giving written notice to the Board. This revocation will result in loss of eligibility for that parcel to participate in a voluntary agricultural district.



FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Natural Resources Conservation Service
604 Lancaster Avenue
Monroe, NC 28110
Phone: (704) 289-3212
Fax: (704) 291-2191

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North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service
Union County Center
Room 506, 500 North Main Street
Monroe, NC 28112-4796
Phone: (704) 283-3801
Fax: (704) 283-3734

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Union County Farm Bureau
PO Box 866
Monroe, NC 28111
Phone: (704) 289-4509
Fax: (704)283-6801

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Agricultural Advisory Board Chairman:

Allan Baucom
Phone: (704) 753-4264
Fax: (704) 753-2016

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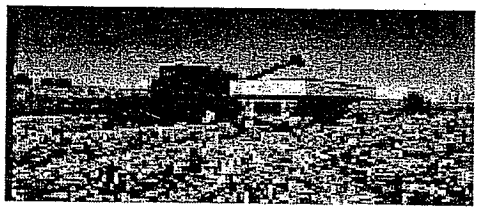
Union County Board of Commissioners Representative:

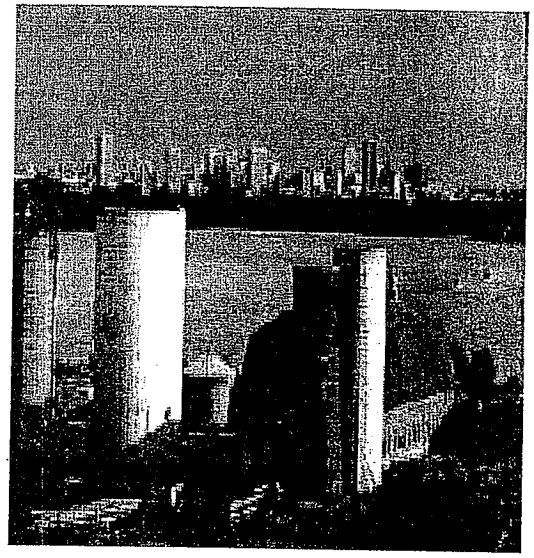
Stony Rushing
Phone: (704)764-7960



NC STATE UNIVERSITY
A&T STATE UNIVERSITY
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
Helping People Put Knowledge to Work

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS



The Union County Farmland Preservation Program

Benefits of VAD's

- Recorded notice of proximity to farmlands
- Reduction of nuisance actions
- Official role in county government
- Increase public awareness of Agriculture
- Ability to have abeyance of Water & Sewer assessment
- Public hearing on condemnation
- Voice for farmers
- G.I.S. map of VAD farms
- Recognizes agriculture for value (input into the economy, pulls farming interest together and helps to even the playing field with other boards and interests
- Once most, or all NC Counties have a VAD, the state legislature will be ready to add extra incentives to enrolled farms

Suggest steps to a VAD:

1. The district if interested needs to come up with 2 to 3 ordinance examples from NC via the web site.
2. Staff discuss the VAD concept with county planning, tax office and the Register of Deeds. You can do this per instruction of the district board via motion.
3. Individually contact members of the county commissioners to garner support for a VAD program.
4. Hold a meeting with farmers and or county leaders with a session that includes a presentation on the VAD. (Example of a program get someone to talk about 1) loss of farmland, 2) the VAD ordinance and 3) a successful VAD program such as the one in Alamance County.

5) At this same meeting a committee may form to pursue adoption of a VAD, or the SWCD board can follow-up with a motion to send a letter to the county commissioners asking them to either adopt a VAD or to form a committee to pursue this goal.

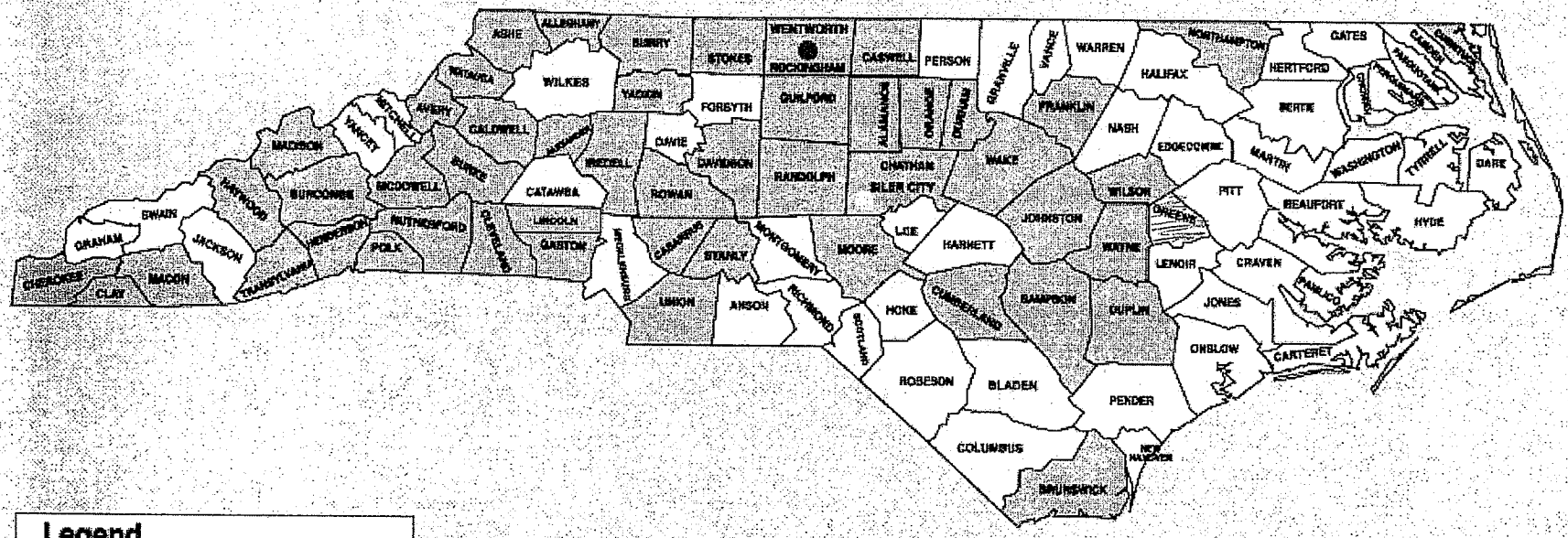
6) Once the ordinance is adopted and a board is put in place, conduct training at the first meeting as follows:
- Roberts Rules of Order (how to conduct meetings) - county attorney could do this
- The state of farmland and changes in land use trends (Jerry Dorsett could do this)
- What the VAD ordiance says and means (Ted Fitshans, or Brandon King of NCSU are good at this)
- Talk to the board about having a vision for agriculture in your county (District/NRCS staff or Dorsett)

Other notes:

- Find out if extension wants to be involved, you can work towards getting them a slot on the VAD board as an ex-officio member
- Since the district has started this process and has a high level of interest, consider having NRCS/district be the group that rates all applications that are received and work to get one slot on the VAD board as a district supervisor.
- Once the ordinance has been adopted, get press coverage for the ceremony when it passes.

At first some folk, especially real estate agents are likely to be skeptical of this program. Once a VAD is in place, realtors are some of the biggest supporters. Land next to a VAD district is easier to sale and usually commands a higher price.

VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURE DISTRICTS



This map was updated February 2007 to reflect the 50 county VAD programs.