



Rutherford County Farmland Protection Plan

Prepared by Foothills Regional Commission



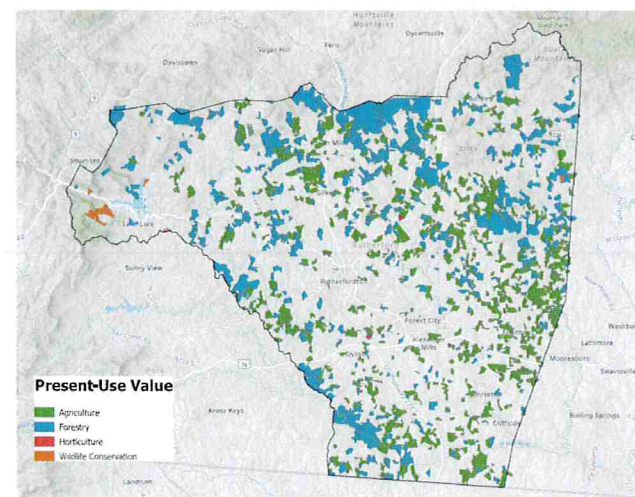
Methodology

- Commissioned by Rutherford County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Survey: February 1 - March 13, 24 questions, 33 respondents
- Interviews: 6 farmers, 1 agribusiness owner
- Census of Agriculture: 2007, 2012, 2017



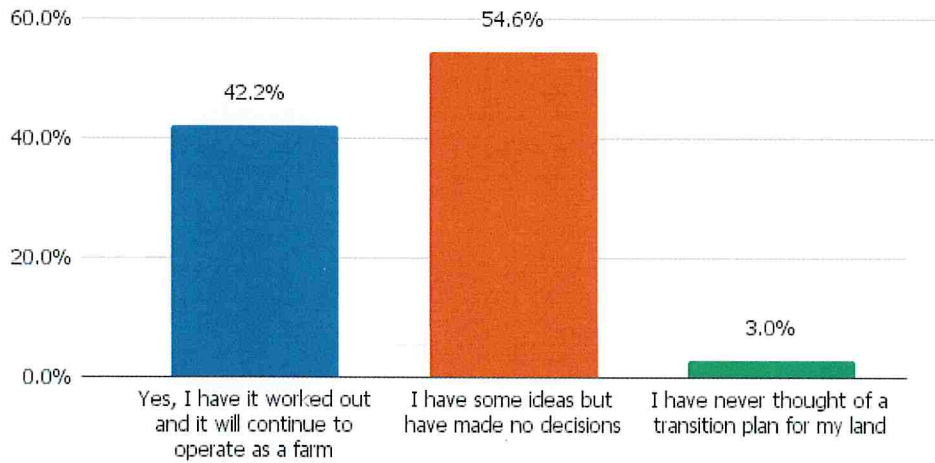
State of Agriculture

- \$45 million in sales (4th in WNC)
 - 91.2% are livestock/poultry sales (2nd in WNC)
- Hay is the leading crop in acres and sales
- 705 farms (2007) -> 620 farms (2017)
 - 9% decrease in land
 - Average & median farm size has increased
- 46% of farms are less than 50 acres (289)
- 972 producers
 - Average age: 58.6
 - 430 producers with farming as the primary occupation (44%)
 - Increased 67% from 2007
 - 539 producers with farming as the secondary occupation (56%)
 - 259 new and beginner farmers



Producer Input to Farmland Preservation

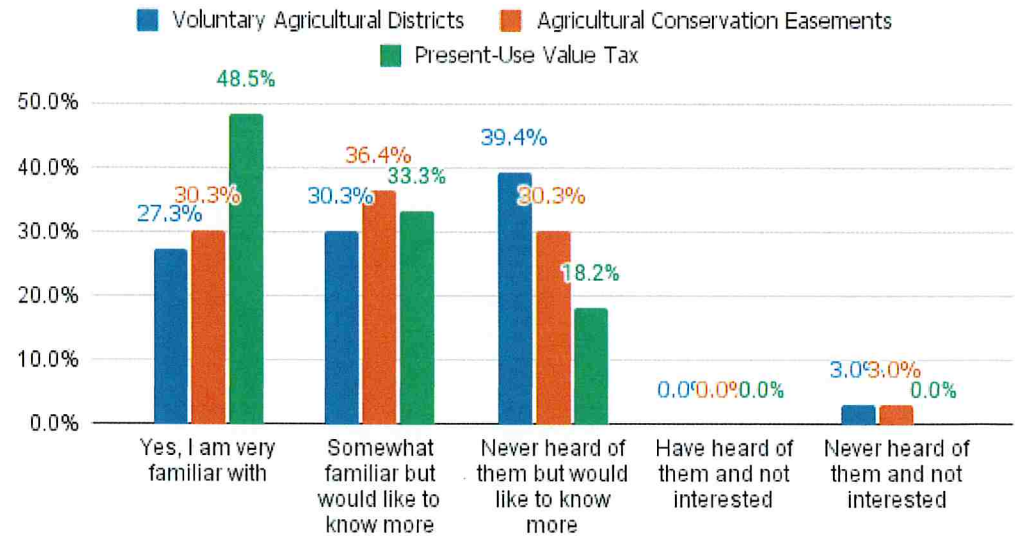
Do you have a transition plan for what will happen to your land after you pass?



60% of respondents want to expand their farming operation in the next 5 years

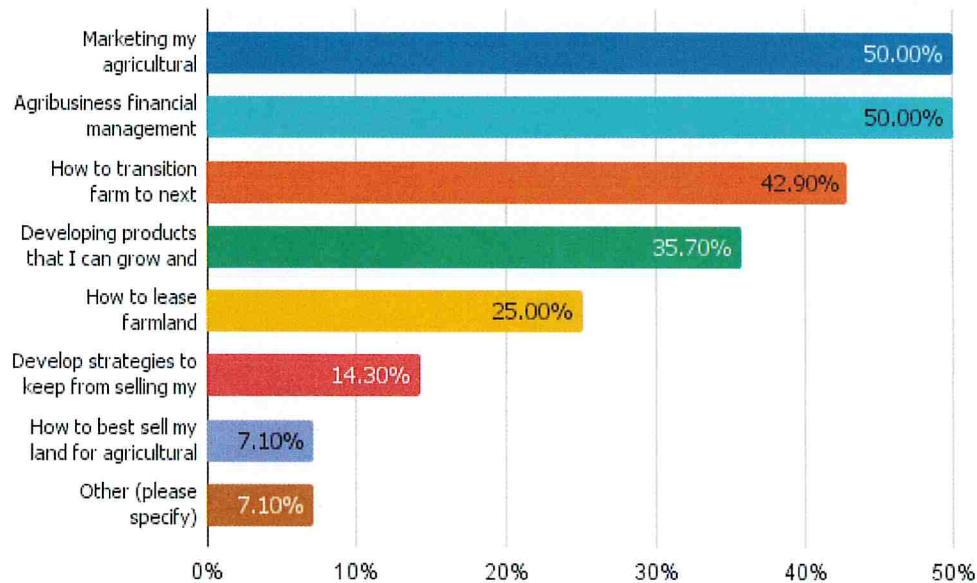
88% of respondents believe it is important their land operates as farmland after they pass.

How familiar are you with the following programs?



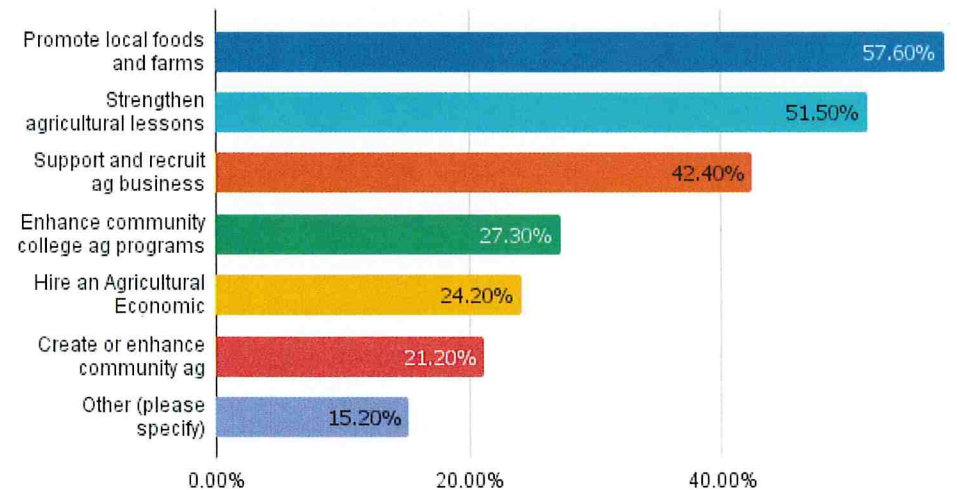
Producer Input to Farmland Preservation

Would you like to know more about any of the following? Select all that apply.



88% of respondents believe it is important their land operates as farmland after they pass.

Which activities do you recommend the county engage in to help preserve agriculture and farmland in Rutherford County?



SWOT Analysis

S

Strengths

1. Climate
2. Location
3. Heritage
4. Water Quality
5. Knowledge base
6. Local Govt agencies

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Weaknesses

1. Cost of Inputs
2. Cost of Land
3. Profitability
4. Aging Farmers
5. Lack of Public Awareness
6. Agriculture Infrastructure

1. Business Opportunities/ Local Markets
2. Local Food Movement
3. Marketing
4. Agri-tourism
5. Community/ farm Groups

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Opportunities

1. Residential/ Commercial Development
2. High Start-Up Costs
3. Low Supply of Labor
4. Lack of Ag Support Vendors
5. Lack of Transition Plans

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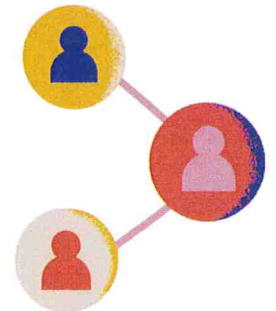
Threats



Recommended Actions: Strengthen Agricultural Economy



- *Create an Agricultural Economic Development Director position for Rutherford County.*
- *Continue to invest in the success of Rutherford County's farmers markets.*
- *Support the expansion of the Foothills Food Hub located in McDowell County.*
- *Increase awareness about opportunities and resources provided by local government entities.*
- *Provide marketing assistance and support to farmers and agribusinesses.*



Recommended Actions: Protect Farmland as a Valuable Resource



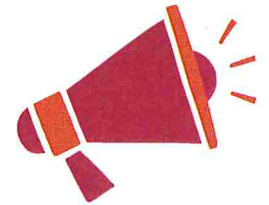
- *Review the VAD minimum acreage requirement.*
- *Set enrollment goals for the VAD and establish an EVAD ordinance.*
- *Develop a land lease recruitment program.*



Recommended Actions: Foster Awareness & Public Support for Ag



- *Increase awareness and support for those interested in transition planning.*
- *Increase awareness around conservation easements through outreach.*
- *Establish an agricultural exhibit.*
- *Support agricultural training and education at the K-12 levels.*
- *Increase awareness of the agribusiness programs and hands-on learning opportunities at Isothermal Community College.*
- *Form a sector partnership between industry stakeholders and key private and public entities throughout Rutherford County.*



Timeline for Implementation

Action	Short-Term	Near-Term	Long-Term	Action	Short-Term	Near-Term	Long-Term
Hire an Agricultural Development Director.		✓		Develop a land lease recruitment program.			✓
Invest in the success of Rutherford County's farmers markets.		✓		Increase awareness and support for those interested in transition planning.	✓		
Establish an agricultural exhibit.			✓	Increase awareness around conservation easements through outreach.	✓		
Increase awareness about opportunities and resources provided by local government entities.	✓			Support agricultural training and education at the K-12 levels.		✓	
Provide marketing assistance and support to farmers and agribusinesses.		✓		Increase awareness about opportunities and resources provided by local government entities.	✓		
Support the expansion of the Foothills Food Hub located in McDowell County.		✓		Increase awareness of the agribusiness programs and hands-on learning opportunities at Isothermal Community College.	✓		
Review the VAD minimum acreage requirement.	✓			Form a sector partnership between industry stakeholders and key private and public entities throughout Rutherford County.		✓	
Set enrollment goals for the VAD and establish an EVAD ordinance.	✓						