# Hoke County Working Lands Protection Plan

**February 2010**

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

Agriculture is an important element of Hoke County, contributing economic diversity, open space and rural heritage to the benefit of county residents. The agricultural industry has experienced major changes in the past decade, including the end of the federal tobacco program and increased globalization. Farmers in Hoke County today face thin profit margins as the cost of production has risen disproportionately to sale prices. Hoke County has lost numerous farms in recent years because of residential development and an aging farmer population.

Despite these challenges and trends, there are opportunities to maintain a viable agricultural industry in Hoke County. Large processors of cotton, turkeys, broilers, and hogs are in or near the county, the local food movement is increasing demand for locally grown produce and meats, and the demand for renewable energy offers potential for corn, soybeans, and timber. To help ensure that the industry remains viable, Hoke County officials must take action and implement programs that will help preserve farmland, reduce conflicts between the farms and their non-farm neighbors, and stimulate economic development.

Numerous programs exist that Hoke County can implement to stem the loss of farmland and strengthen the agricultural industry's viability. Programs like the Present-Use Value tax and Voluntary Agricultural Districts provide farmers relief from escalating land values and help prevent conflicts with non-farm neighbors. Conservation easements are one set of tools that provide financial benefits to landowners who protect farmland from conversion. Other programs can be developed to provide economic development incentives.

The purpose of this plan is to provide an assessment of the agricultural industry in Hoke County, identify its challenges and opportunities, and develop a set of recommendations to assist government leaders in developing and preserving agriculture in the county.

# Agriculture in Hoke County: A Need for Action

Agriculture is an economic and cultural element of Hoke County that is valued by Raeford residents and the rural communities. Agriculture—including traditional row crops, livestock, forest products, ornamentals, and specialty crops and products—offers economic diversity, entrepreneurial opportunities, open space, environmental services, and a living link to simpler times. However, agriculture is not simple, and times have changed for the industry.

The purpose of this plan is to provide an assessment of the agricultural industry in Hoke County, identify its challenges and opportunities, and develop a set of recommendations to assist government leaders in developing and preserving agriculture in the county. The recommendations of this plan are intended to encourage long-term policy formation in support of agriculture while providing a specific short-term framework to guide local programs regarding agricultural economic development and land-use initiatives.

The agricultural industry has evolved over the decades, and significant changes have occurred in recent years. One of the most significant changes was the end of the federal tobacco program in 2005. As a result, the number of tobacco farms in Hoke County dropped from 23 in 2002 to 11 in 2007 and to four in 2009, with producers opting out of production entirely or producing other commodities. Many of the markets have undergone a fundamental transition from auctions to contract production affecting tobacco, hog, and poultry farmers. Competition from Florida, California, Mexico, and South America has increased for the county's produce farmers. The costs of land, equipment, and production inputs have risen disproportionately to sale prices. The high risks and low profits of farming combined with expanding service and professional job markets have led children and grandchildren off the farms, leaving a dearth of young farmers to take over operations from retiring farmers. Additionally, where farms were once viewed as integral parts of the community, they are vilified by some as nuisances and impediments to progress.

But for all of the challenges, there remain opportunities for Hoke County farmers that are important to both the local economy and the rural character of the county. Cotton remains a leading crop, though at lower levels than in the past; corn and soybean production are on the rise as are turkeys and broilers. Furthermore, an increase in the middle class population and the local food movement presents opportunities for small-scale and part-time farmers growing produce, ornamentals, and specialty products for direct sales. Carbon sequestration and biomass as a source of renewable energy may provide new opportunities for forest owners. The equine community offers a balance between growth and conservation. On the growth side, the community brings demand for new homes, above average household incomes, and opportunities for specialized professionals such as veterinarians and farriers. On the conservation side, the equine community requires open space for pasture and riding and is a large consumer of hay, providing opportunities for landowners and farmers. And many

residents still view farms as an integral component of the rural community valuing the food, scenery, heritage, and environmental benefits that farms provide.

To address the challenges to agriculture, Hoke County's farmers, residents, and officials will need to work together to implement a strategy that ensures the long-term viability of the industry's farms, forests, and businesses. Farmers will need to work cooperatively with each other, participate in community affairs, and be creative business operators to adapt to the changing markets. Residents will need to support farms as elements of the community by purchasing their products, adapting to the inconveniences of rural life, and supporting county interventions outlined in this plan. The county's government will need to plan growth and development so that impacts to agriculture are minimized and invest in the programs designed to assist farmers with infrastructure, marketing, and conservation.

Because of agriculture's diffuse nature, with hundreds of independent farms and businesses scattered across the county, the industry does not attract economic development attention like manufacturing does; but agriculture helps diversify the local economy, provides working-class jobs, and brings revenue to the county. When the cultural and environmental benefits of agriculture are factored into the equation along with the economic benefits, it is clear that Hoke County needs to support and invest in its farms and forests and maintain a place for them as the county grows and evolves.

Ft. Bragg presents opportunities and challenges for the BRAC region. Military personnel reside in Hoke County, and the military actively utilizes federal land within the county for training operations. This dichotomy represents the relationship that Ft. Bragg maintains with surrounding counties. Fort Bragg provides economic stability for Hoke County while affording interesting challenges for continued compatibility. Ft. Bragg's continued presence in North Carolina will again undergo review in 2016 as the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process continues. To overlook the population growth predictions for the area around Ft. Bragg and to reactively address impending encroachment issues in the BRAC counties is not a viable option if a long-term military presence is desired. Therefore a proactive approach needs to ensue to address issues of encroachment and necessary services to retain this obvious economic engine in the area.

# Data Sources

Data for this plan were collected from numerous sources. Most statistical data were collected from three sources: the 2007 *Census of Agriculture*, which is published every five years by the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA NASS), and is compiled from surveys completed by farmers; an annual report published jointly by NASS and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS), *2008 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics*, that is also compiled from surveys completed by farmers; and from a report published every three years by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service (NCCES) at North Carolina State University (NCSU), *North Carolina Estimated Income From the Sale of Farm Products and Government Payments by County Extension District and State,* which are estimates generated by county extension agents. Statistics on forest ownership and timber products output were taken from the United States Forest Service (USFS) Forest Inventory and Analysis Program's online database and the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources, Hoke County. In addition to these and other technical reports, paper and electronic surveys were conducted for this plan: one administered to farmers, one to agribusiness operators, and one to residents. See Appendix B. Additionally the planning team interviewed individual farmers, residents and business operators to gain additional information.

# Importance of Agriculture to Hoke County

## Economic Impact of Agriculture

Agriculture and agribusiness contributes significantly to the Hoke County economy. In 2006, the Hoke County business sector added $540,840,000 of value to the economy (*Agriculture and Agribusiness in Hoke County,* Walden, 2006) This figure reflects the value of sales minus the cost of non-labor inputs. In 2006, farming operations contributed $48,510,294 of value to the county's total economy, accounting for 9 percent of the total business sector. Agribusinesses include the manufacturing, wholesaling, and retailing of food, fiber, and forest products. The combined value of farming and agribusiness for 2006 was $100,439,482, or 18.6 percent of the total for the county (Ibid).

Farms employed 851 workers and had a payroll of $5,774,000 in 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture, 2007). Hoke County experienced a 30.3 percent increase in agricultural employment from 2002 to 2007. There were 593 workers in 2002 and 851 workers in 2007. There was a 44.4 percent increase in farms using migrant workers for that same time period from 68 farms to 89 farms (Ibid).

The forestry industry is strong in Hoke County. Hoke is ranked 60$^{th}$ in the state for income from harvested timber (Bardon and Jeuck, 2009). There are 114 timber-related businesses that operate in the county, comprised of consulting foresters, mills, and logging companies (N.C. Division of Forest Resources Hoke County, 2009).

In 2007, farm owners paid $1,097,000 in property taxes to the county (USDA, 2007). American Farmland Trust has conducted and reviewed 128 county-level studies that evaluate the contribution of property taxes and the consumption of public resources by land use: residential, commercial and agricultural. In all but one county, including five in North Carolina, the studies found that agricultural lands, including acreage in the Present-Use Value tax program, contribute more in property taxes than the cost of the community services they receive. A cost of community services study conducted for Franklin County, N.C., (Renkow) reports that farm and forest land in Franklin County generates $1.32 in revenue for every $1 it receives in community services. Similar studies in various North Carolina counties indicate working lands generate more revenue than the cost of community services received.

## Ecological Benefits

Farms and forestland provide many environmental benefits to the public: storm water retention and filtration, flood control, air filtration, and wildlife habitat. In the past, agriculture has been depicted as a source of air and water pollution, but today, farmers continue to employ numerous Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect soil, water, and air quality. The Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Soil and Water Conservation District provide financial and technical assistance to farmers to implement BMPs.

To manage animal waste, farmers use waste storage buildings, composters and incinerators that benefit air and water quality. Forest management practices like prescribed burns, firebreaks, non-commercial thinning, tree and shrub establishment, and site preparation prevent soil erosion and improve plant conditions and habitat for declining species. Farmers protect water bodies from pesticides and soil erosion by practicing conservation tillage techniques, no till planting, pest management, nutrient management, residue management, and by converting marginal cropland back to natural conditions.

Many of the practices listed above benefit wildlife, but farmers and foresters also implement other practices for the specific purpose of addressing declining, threatened, and endangered species; declining habitat; and native plant diversity. This is not to say that agriculture does not contribute any pollution, but when the river turns muddy during a rainstorm, the erosion point is more likely to be a road or construction site than a farm. Another indicator of the environmental benefits of agriculture is the increasing number of farm and forest owners who lease hunting and fishing rights to sportsmen. Farm and forest land provide outstanding resources for local outdoorsmen, an amenity that is frequently overlooked but one that is irrecoverable if lost.

## Rural Character and Heritage

Farms and forests are the primary land uses in rural areas providing scenic beauty and relief from urban closeness to residents and visitors. But more than just scenic, rural landscapes provide a connection to the county's history and the foundations for which its communities were built. Today, the remoteness and quietness of rural communities are serving to form a comparative economic advantage over urban and suburban communities as retirees and professionals who can work from home are seeking refuge from the confinements of large cities. It is important that residents understand that agriculture is a defining characteristic of rural communities and that farming is a production activity that involves noises, odors and other inconveniences.

## Citizen Attitudes

The Hoke County resident survey was conducted by Ft. Bragg BRAC Regional Task Force (BRAC RTF) and Mount Olive College to solicit the attitudes of Hoke County citizens about the importance of agriculture and the need to support the industry and its farmers. Respondents represented a broad age range with 35 percent being over the age of 65, 29 percent between the ages of 50 and 64, and 35 percent between the ages of 25 and 49. The majority of respondents, 73 percent, had lived in Hoke County for more than 20 years, while 3 percent had been in the county between 10 and 14 years, 13 percent between five and nine years, and 10 percent had been in the county less than five years.

Many of the non farming respondents were familiar with life in a farming community. Seventy-two percent of respondents had lived near a farm or timber operation, and 50 percent were living within one-quarter of a mile of a farm or timber operation. Eighty-eight percent of those respondents described their farm neighbor as a good neighbor while only 12 percent reported

discontent with a farm neighbor. Primary complaints noted were slow-moving vehicles and occasional odors. Eighty-two percent of respondents had visited a farm or timber operation within the last year.

Respondents held a generally positive view of the current state of agriculture in Hoke County. Sixty percent felt that "agriculture is holding its own as an industry and may have some future growth potential." Seventeen percent responded that "agriculture is an expanding industry with significant future growth potential." Twenty-three percent stated that "agriculture is a declining industry with no future growth potential," (Figure 1). When asked if Hoke County should take steps to help preserve farmland, 94 percent of non-farm survey respondents indicated they would support this effort. This same support was noted in all non-farm Hoke County residents that were interviewed. Whether interviewed or surveyed, respondents expressed an interest in the retention of scenic open space and rural heritage. Additionally, they felt it imperative that agricultural businesses should be encouraged to expand in Hoke County.

Respondents also were active in supporting agriculture as an industry, not merely as a land use. Ninety percent made purchases at fruit and vegetable stands, and many of them participated in farm tourism sites, Community Supported Agriculture, and U-Pick fruit or vegetable farms. Seventy-nine percent of respondents shopped at stores featuring local vegetables and 62 percent shopped at stores featuring other local farm products (Figure 2).

Ninety percent of the **r**espondents and those interviewed believed that farming enhances the scenic beauty of Hoke County and that farming is positive for the environment. Over 80 percent said that farmers deliver generally high-quality products, but that they get paid too little for their labor. Over 75 percent of respondents believed that tax breaks for farmers are important, that farming represents a good career for enterprising persons, and agreed with providing loans and grants to develop local farm enterprises. Of the respondents answering the survey question, all supported local government funding for farmland preservation. Citizens who were interviewed echoed the opinions of the survey respondents and support funding for farmland preservation to protect the future of agriculture and its contribution to the economy and to rural heritage and green space.

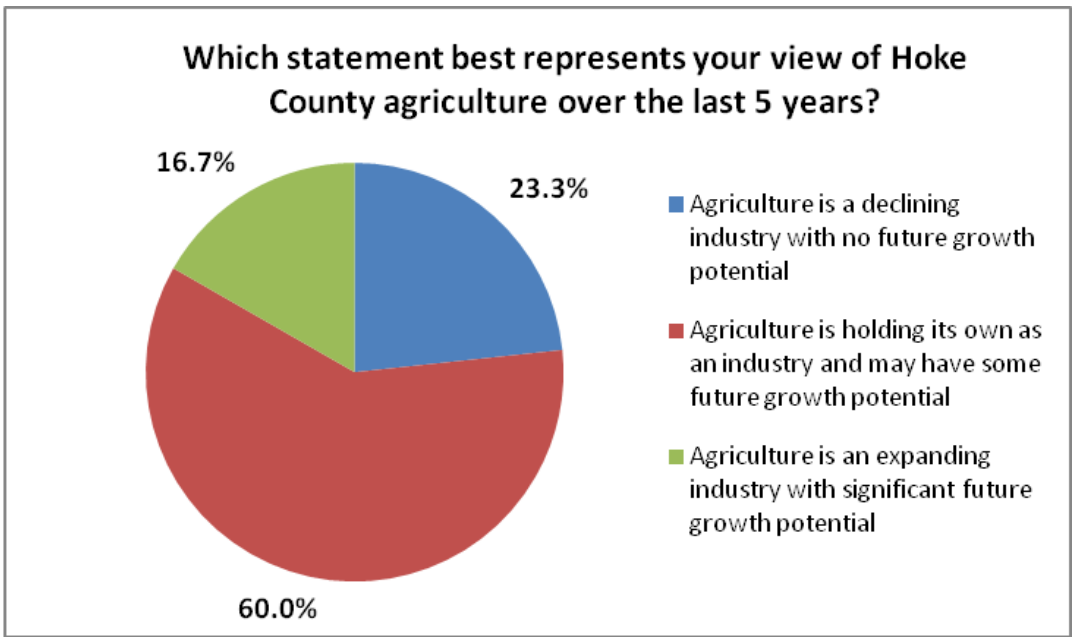


**Figure 1: BRAC RTF Non-Producer Survey**

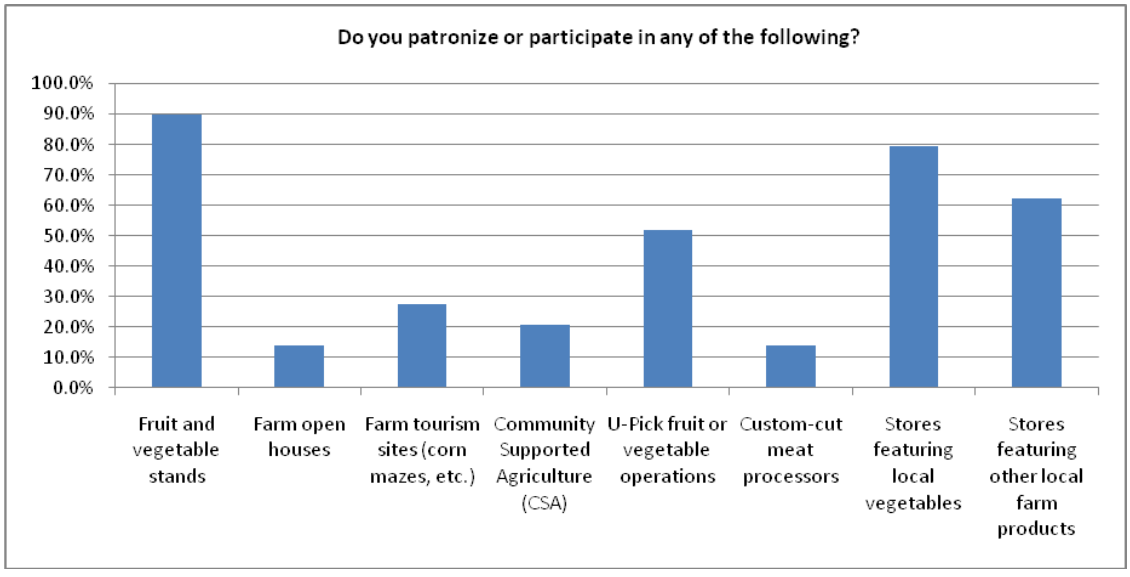


**Figure 2: BRAC RTF Survey of Non-Farming Citizens 2009**

# Attributes of Hoke County

Hoke County lies in the Upper Coastal Plains and the Sandhills of North Carolina. It is part of the Lumber River and the Cape Fear River Basins. The county has a temperate climate with a USDA Hardiness Zone of 8A (USDA). It has a mean annual air temperature of 60-70 degrees Fahrenheit and a mean annual precipitation rate of 45-55 inches. The county also has 200-270 frost-free days (USDA/NRCS: http://www2.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/osd/dat/D/DELOSS.html ).

The droughts of 2003 and 2007 still resonate with the county. Water is a precious commodity and is also a limited resource for the county. All water in the county comes from wells that pull from the Black Creek Aquifer. This aquifer is relatively shallow and has a high iron content that has to be removed as part of treatment (LRCOG, Southern Coastal Plain Comprehensive Ground Water Study & Assessment, 2003). Water and water quality will become more of an issue should commercial and residential development increase in the county.

Soil is a primary ingredient for healthy, valuable crops. Soil scientists have identified the types of soil that are most productive for crops in Hoke County. Soil types classified as most compatible for agronomic use are located in the southeastern part of the county (Figure 3). Soil types are classified, rated, and mapped to reveal the pattern shown in the map below. Land capability classification is a system of grouping soils primarily on the basis of their capability to produce common cultivated crops and pasture plants without deteriorating over a long period of time.

The criteria used to determine soil types are: non-irrigated soil; class 1 has the least limitations/highest capability and class 8 has the greatest limitations/lowest capability. Soil capability is highest (class 1-2) or high (3) in much of the county.

Soil types for loblolly and longleaf pine production are similar (Figures 4 and 5). High ratings have site indexes of 66 to 85 and greater than 85 for loblolly, and 65 to 75 and greater than 75 for longleaf. The source is the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Data Mart http://soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov/. Soils tend to be productive for loblolly production in much of the county and productive for longleaf away from the streams and wetlands.

Another way to look at the land is the land cover or what is visible from an aerial view as the apparent land surface (forest, farmland, wetland, water body, pavement or rooftop, pasture, grassland, or lawn). Some land cover types (e.g., grasslands) are more likely to support farmland than others (e.g., developed areas). See Figure 6. Developed areas (rooftops and pavement) are evident in the urban areas. Cultivated areas (yellow) are more common south of Raeford. Hoke County is rural and has a strong agricultural industry. Ft. Bragg's presence in the northern/northeastern part of the county is obvious with much of the land managed as forest.

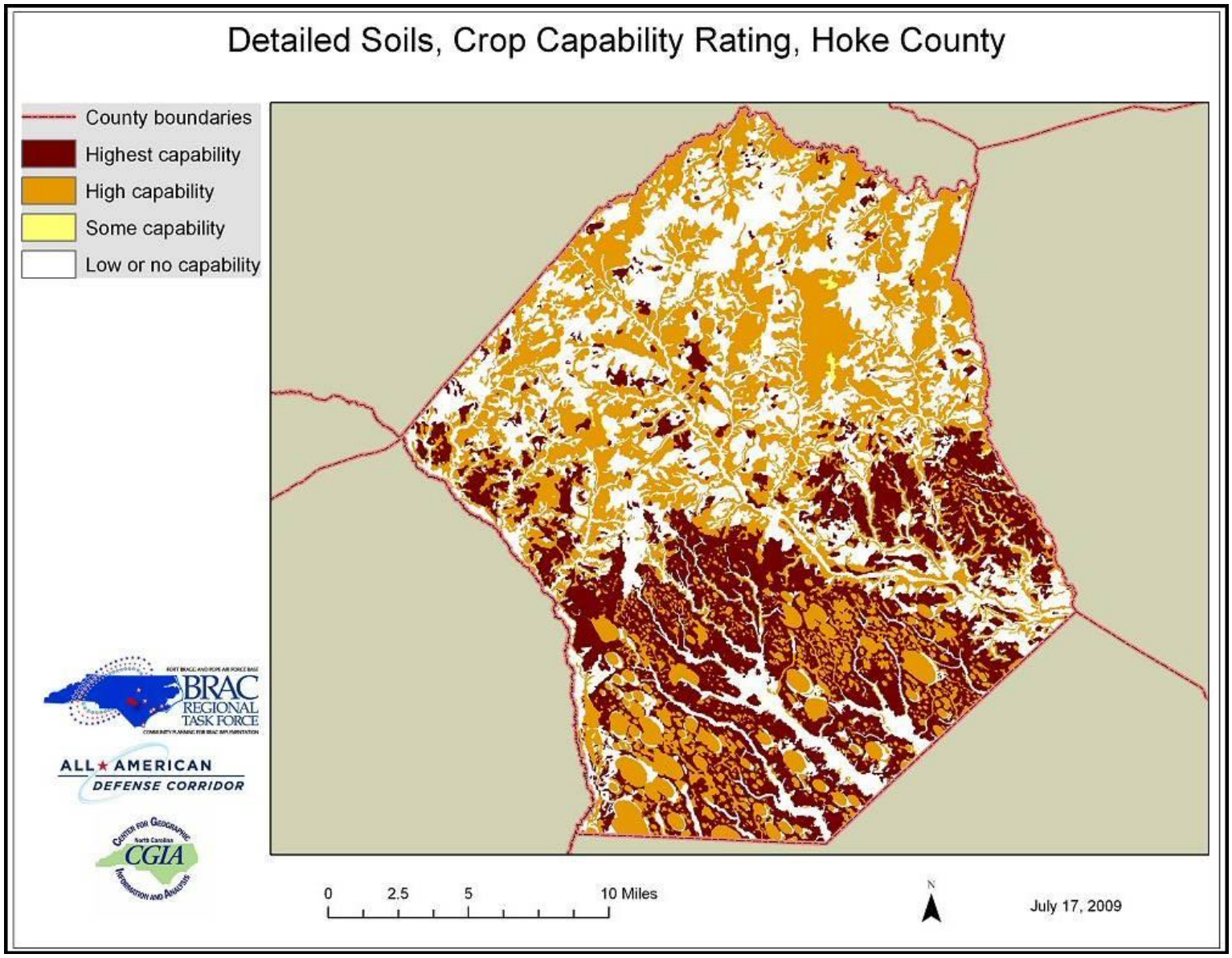


**Figure 3: Crop Capability Rating from Detailed Soil Survey. Source: Natural Resources Conservation Service**

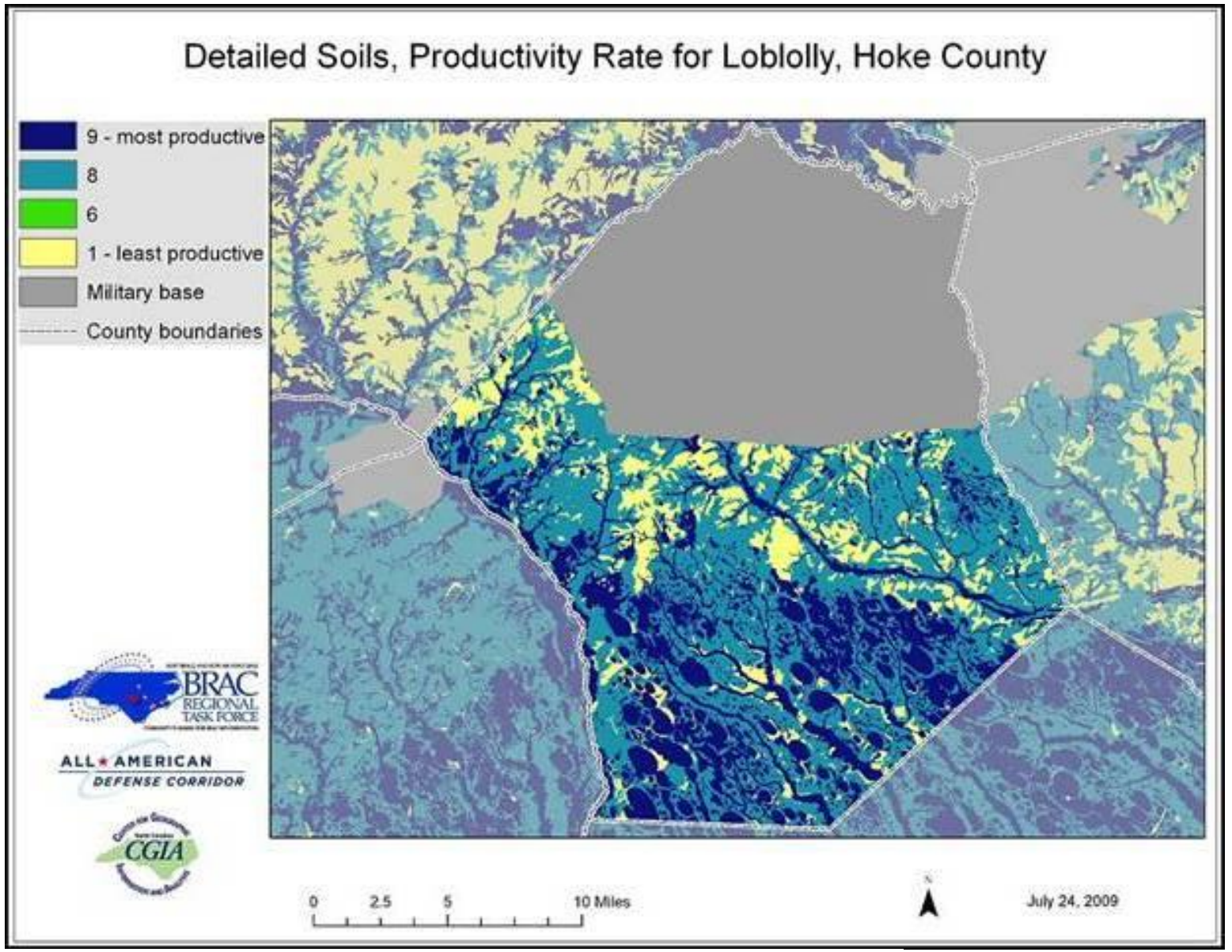


**Figure 4: Detailed Soils, Rating Based on Site Index for Loblolly Productivity**

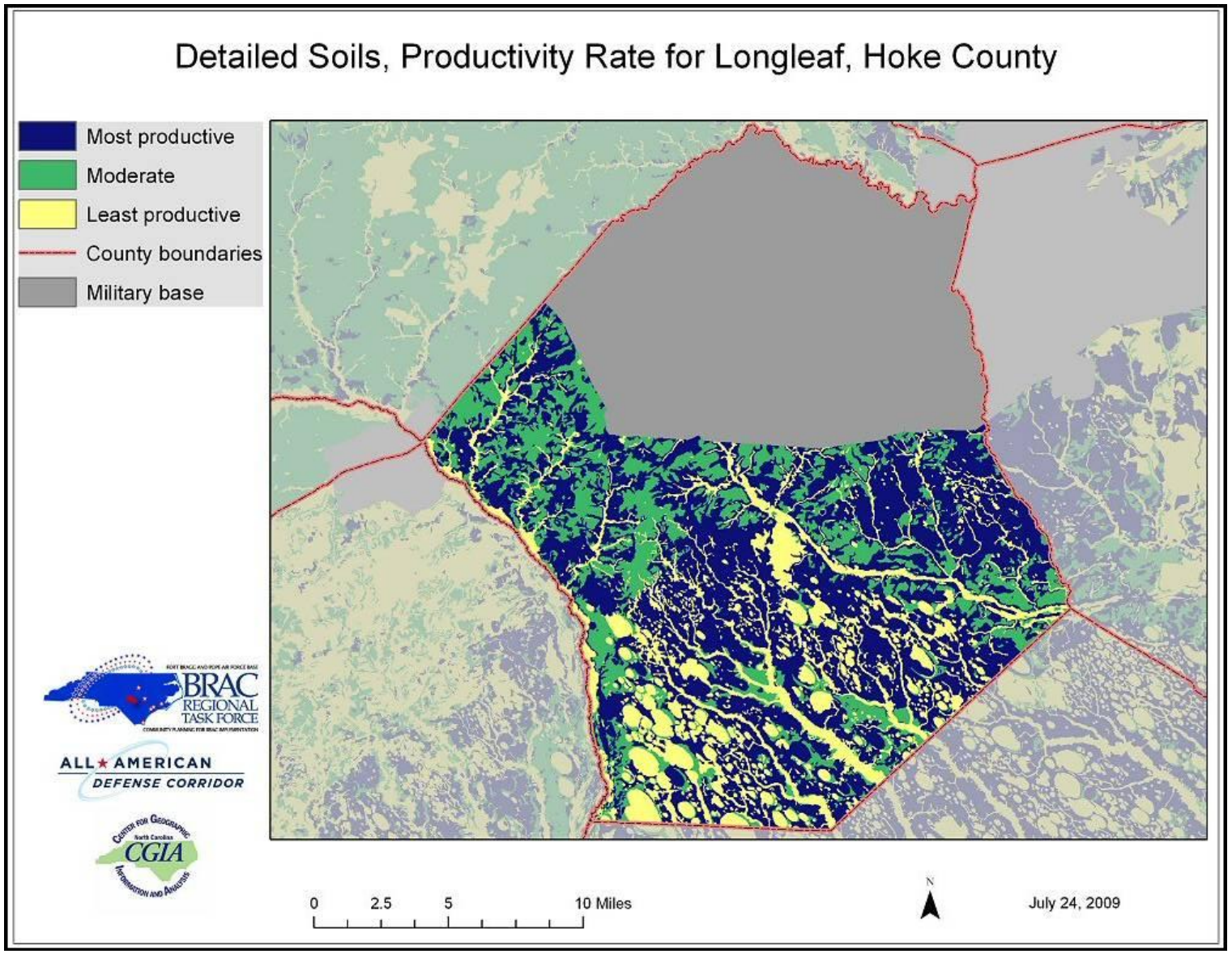


**Figure 5: Detailed Soils, Rating Based on Site Index for Longleaf Productivity**

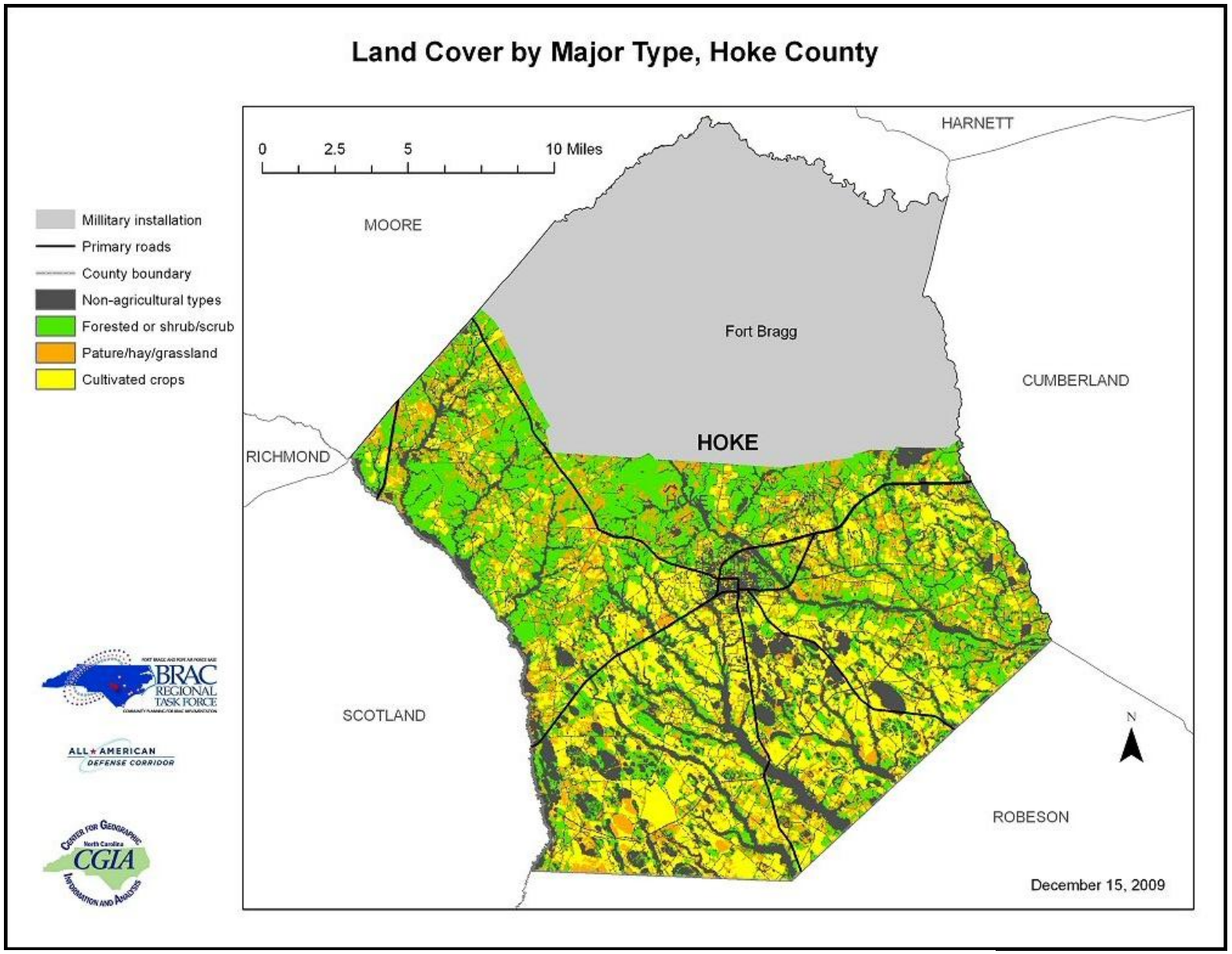


**Figure 6: Land Cover by Type. Source: U.S. Geological Survey**

# The State of Agriculture in Hoke County

In 2007, Hoke County had 249 farms operating on 60,219 acres of land. Farmland represents 24 percent of the county's total land area of 250,881 acres. Of the farmland, 35,385 acres (58.76 percent) was cropland, 19,144 acres (31.79 percent) was woodland, and 5,691 acres (9.45 percent) was in other uses (USDA, 2009). See Figure 7. Private forest land in the county represented 47 percent of the county's total land area in 2006 with 116,782 acres. Agriculture is in a state of transition as farmers' average age increases, population growth spurs residential development, commodity processors change their business models, and tobacco growers adjust to life without the federal quota and price program.

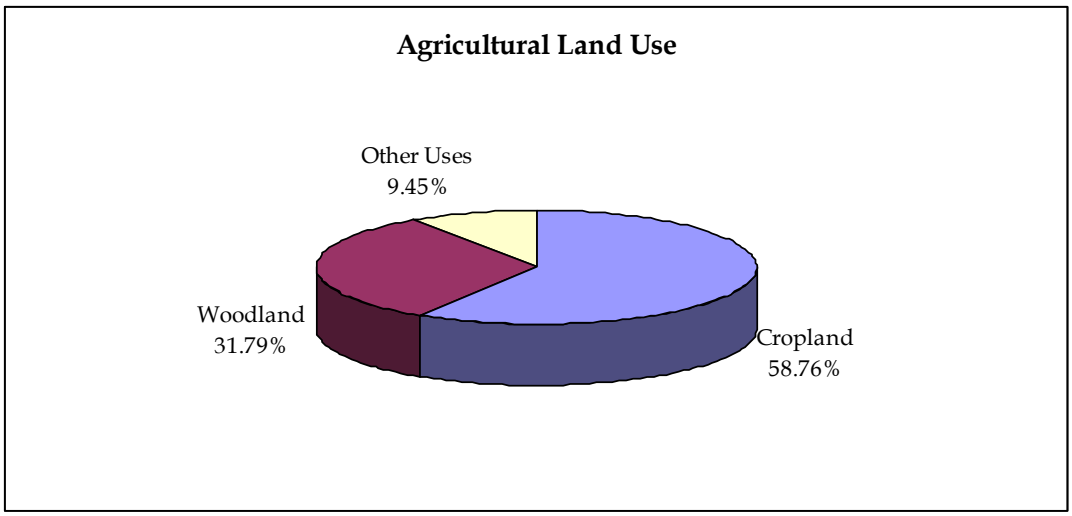


**Figure 7: USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture**

## Agricultural Production (USDA, 1999, 2004, 2009[1])

Farmers in Hoke County produce a variety of crop and livestock products. Table I lists the top agricultural items produced in the county in 2007 and the county's rank within the state for each item. The primary commodities produced are cotton, broilers, turkeys, and hogs. Those and the other products grown on Hoke County farms generated $67,045,000 in cash receipts in 2007.

At the end of 2007, poultry farms in the county had an inventory of 1,384,154 broilers, which ranked 26th out of the 100 counties in North Carolina, and 176,566 turkeys, which ranked 16th in the state. All poultry operations generated $36,449,000 in cash receipts for the year. In 2008,

[1] Unless cited otherwise.

poultry income was estimated to be $21,960,469 from broiler, turkey, and egg production (Hoke County Cooperative Extension, 2009).

## Table I. Leading Crop & Livestock Items for 2007

| Top Crop Items | Acres | State Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Cotton | 10,305 | 21 |
| Soybeans for beans | 9,129 | 49 |
| Forage | 4,177 | 52 |
| Corn for grain | 3,766 | 52 |
| Wheat for grain | 3,715 | 42 |
| **Top Livestock Inventory Items** | **Number** | **State Rank** |
| Broilers & other meat-type chickens | 1,384,154 | 26 |
| Turkeys | 176,566 | 16 |
| Cattle & calves | 1,031 | 84 |
| Horses & ponies | 722 | 46 |

**Source: USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture**

Hoke County ranked 21st in the state in hogs with an inventory of 74,109. Those operations generated $22,843,000 in revenue in 2007. Hoke also ranked 21st in cotton production with 10,305 acres planted. Cotton brought $4,127,000 in cash receipts to the county in 2007. Other crops such as grains, tobacco, and nursery products generated over $6,000,000 in cash receipts in 2007.

Table II lists the agricultural enterprises reported by farmers in the county, including: vegetables, tree fruits, small fruits, grapes, corn, sweet potatoes, peanuts, hay, sheep, goats, and horses. Farmers sell these products through three primary channels: an estimated 53 percent are sold wholesale through auction, brokers, and other third parties; 41 percent directly to consumers through farm stands, U-Pick, the internet, and Community Supported Agriculture subscriptions; and six percent wholesale through a cooperative (BRAC RTF Survey of farmers). Additionally, there are currently greenhouse operations, nurseries, and a sod farm in Hoke County which represent a $2 million industry (Hoke County Cooperative Extension).

## Table II. Agricultural Enterprises

| Crop Enterprises | Livestock Enterprises |
|---|---|
| Cotton | Broilers |
| Tobacco | Turkeys |
| Soybeans | Layers |
| Corn for grain | Hogs |
| Corn for silage | Dairy |
| Sweet potatoes | Beef cattle |
| Wheat | Grass-fed cattle |
| Vegetables | Horses |
| Tree fruits | Dairy goats |
| Small fruits | Meat goats |
| Grapes | Range chickens |
| Greenhouse | |
| Nursery | |
| Herbs | |
| Hay | |
| Peanuts | |
| Timber | |

**Source: BRAC RTF Survey of Hoke County Farmers**

Many farms in the county contain woodlands that generate supplemental income. Farmers received $6,610,000 in revenue from forest products in 2007 (USDA and NCDA&CS). According to the USDA's National Survey of Woodland Owners, the forest acreage in the state was split almost evenly between being managed as a component of a farm and being managed exclusively as forestland (Figure 8).

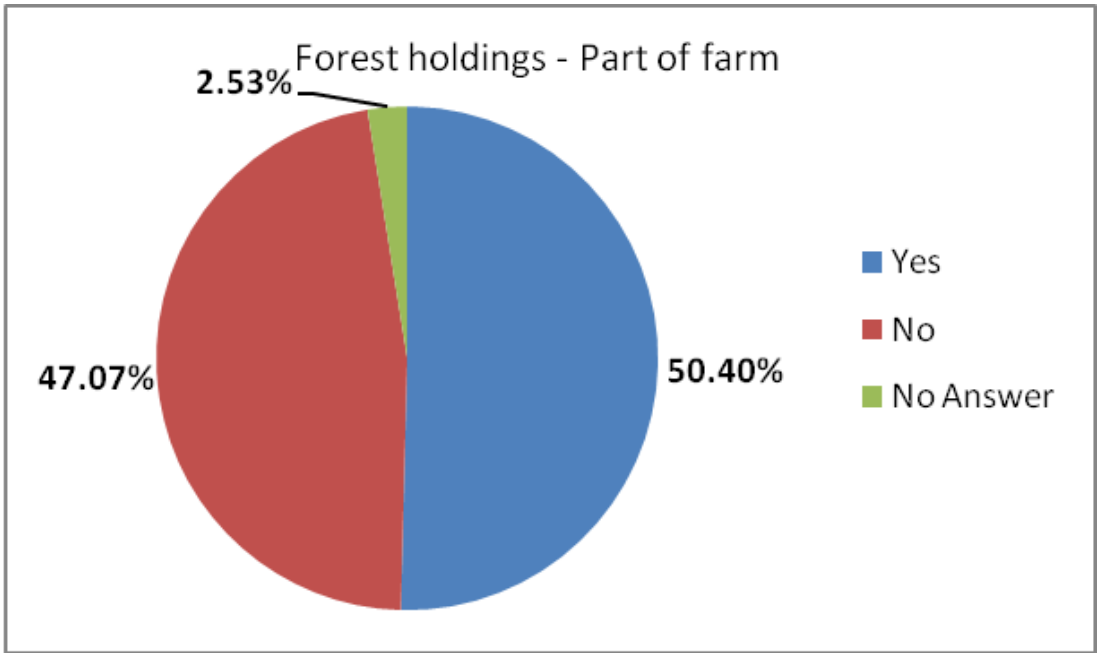


**Figure 8: USDA National Woodland Owners Survey, 2006**

Hoke County Division of Forest Resources has worked hard to educate landowners about the necessity of having a forest management plan and following through with the plan's recommendations. For the past four years, the county ranger has worked with landowners in the county to rectify the absence of management plans and help carry out the management plans (Hoke County Division of Forest Resources, 2009). However, information received in conducted interviews suggests that the county is facing similar problems that the rest of the state is experiencing: that industrial but primarily residential development has impacted the decline in timber and agricultural acreage in the county.

Just over 28 percent of the forested acres in North Carolina have a current forest management plan (USDA, National Woodland Owner Survey, 2006). Therefore, statewide over two-thirds of privately held forests are not managed under a certified management plan. This reported lack of management planning has implications not only for the future of this natural resource base, but has additional financial implications as well. The lack of a certified management plan removes the opportunity for these properties to be included in the Present-Use Tax Value Program (http://fiatools.fs.fed.us/NWOS/tablemaker.jsp). This percentage may not be extrapolated to Hoke County, but information received in conducted interviews supports this trend is regional as well.

Tax parcel records from Hoke County indicate the location of agricultural properties that are designated as taxable at present value (Figure 9). Hoke County does not currently have a Voluntary Agriculture District (VAD) program. The development of a VAD ordinance would result in heightened attention to farmland sustainability. Figure 10 represents the presence of Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinances existing across the state.

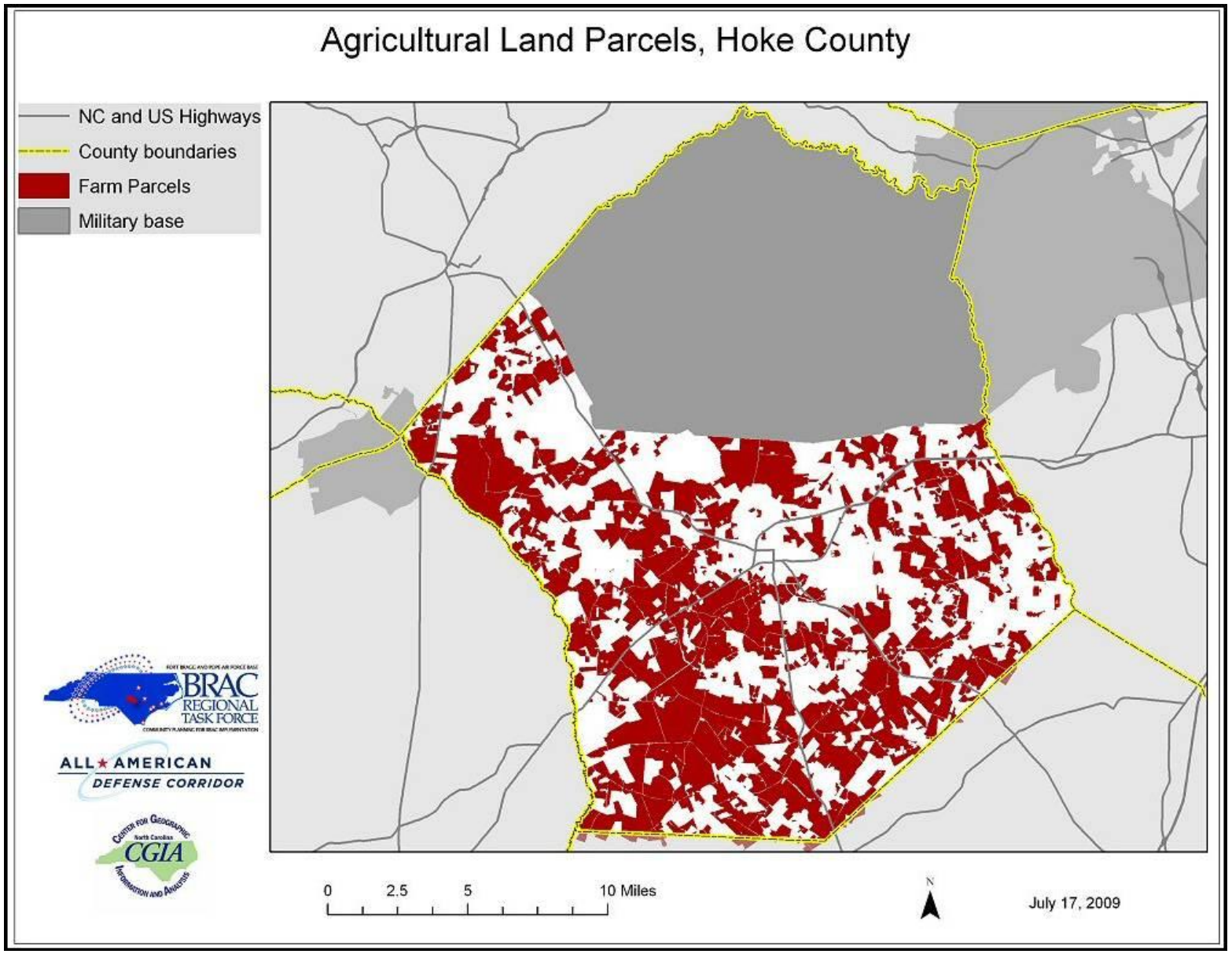


**Figure 9: Hoke County Parcels With Farm Fields. Source: CGIA, Hoke County, N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services**

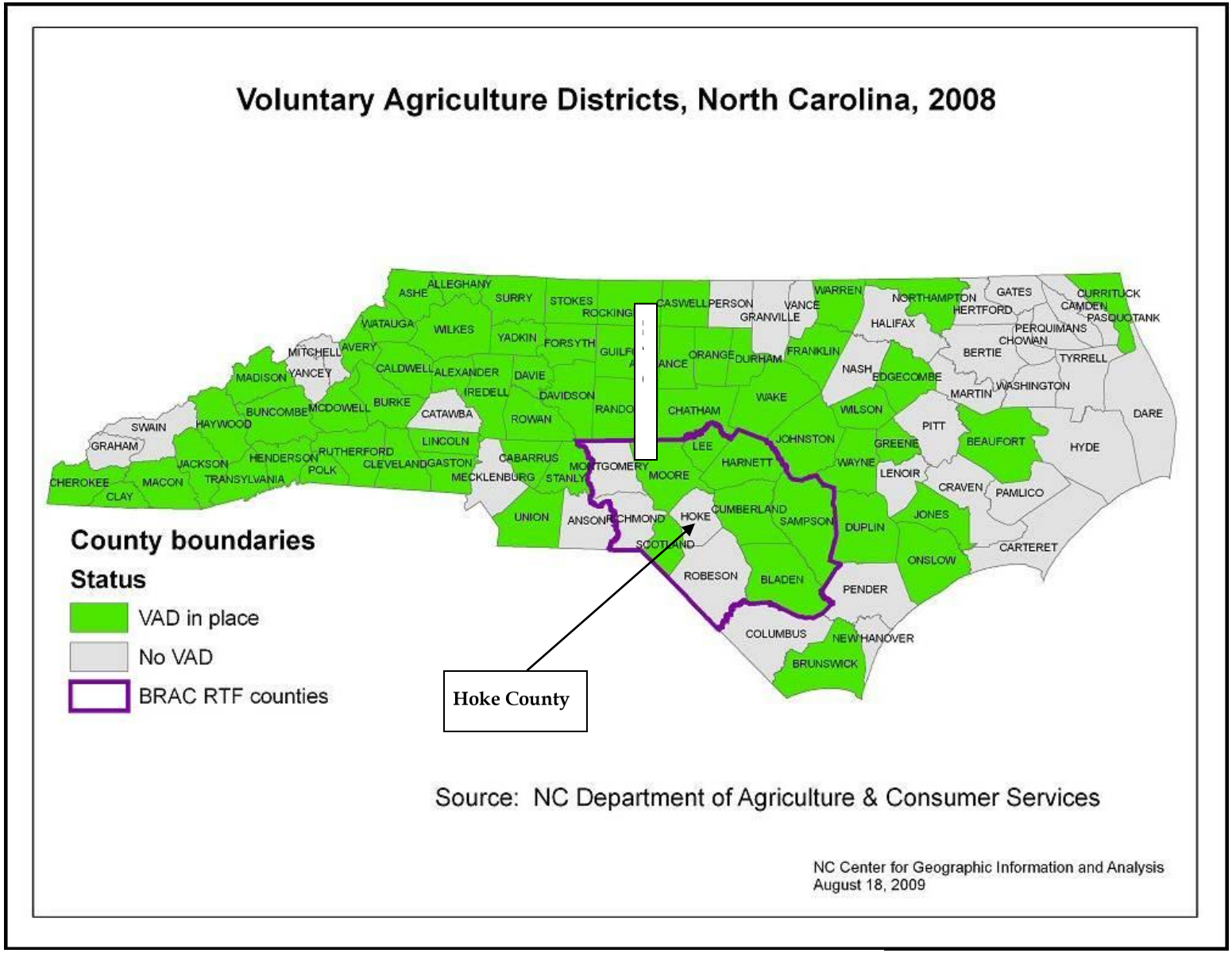


**Figure 10: Voluntary Agricultural Districts in North Carolina**

## Farm Statistics and Trends (USDA, 1999, 2004, 2009[2])

In 2007, there were 249 farms in Hoke County operating on 60,219 acres of land. Since 1997, Hoke County has lost 6,701 acres of farmland, or ten percent. In 1997, there were 162 farms on 66,920 acres and in 2002, there were 201 farms on 63,356 acres. Although the area of farmland has decreased, the number of farms in the County has risen since 1997.

Table III summarizes the number of farms in Hoke County based on land area. The number of farms with less than 180 acres has increased 80 percent since 1997, while the number of farms larger than 1,000 acres has decreased by 38 percent. A consequence of this shift in number of farms and farmland was a decrease in the median size of farms from 70 acres in 1997 to 54 acres in 2007.

This data suggests that the trend in Hoke County differs from surrounding counties in the region. While overall acreage has decreased in surrounding counties so have the number of farms indicating a trend toward fewer, but larger farms. Conversely, Hoke data suggest an increase in the number of farms and a decrease in the acreage which may indicate a shift to more part-time and more diversified farming operations. In addition, there were four fewer farms between 180 and 499 acres in 2007 than in 2002, which represented a decrease of 25 percent.

Table IV summarizes the number of farms in the county based on annual revenue. The number of farms earning less than $1,000 per year and those earning more than $50,000 increased from 1997, while the number of farms earning between $1,000 and $49,999 decreased. Agribusiness operators who were surveyed have observed more sophisticated farm operations and more diversification, which may account for the data trends reported.

Table V summarizes farm statistics for the years 1997, 2002, and 2007. In 2007, there were 249 farms in Hoke County operating on 60,219 acres of land. The median size of farms increased from 70 acres to 76 acres between 1997 and 2002, but then decreased to 54 acres in 2007.

Average farm revenue in 2007 was $269,257; higher than in 2002 ($221,433) but lower than in 1997 ($407,920). Average farm net income in 2007 was $43,295; higher than in 2002 ($33,622) but lower than in 1997 ($107,734). The average value of farm land and buildings increased between 1997 and 2007 at both the farm and acre levels. In 1997, the average value of buildings and land was $593,849 per farm and $1,500 per acre. In 2007, the average value per farm and acre was $818,889 and $3,386, respectively. As is shown in Table V, the average value of land and buildings in 2002 was $867,176 per farm, $48,287 higher than in 2007, even though the value per acre was $696 lower than in 2007. This seeming contradiction may be due to the large increase in the number of smaller farms during the period.

[2] Unless cited otherwise.

Rent values for Hoke County have held relatively steady over the past three years, ranging from $39 to $56 per acre. (NCDA&CS, 2008). Land values vary within the county from $15,000 an acre in the center of the county to $6,000 an acre in the western part of the county (Hoke County WLPP Team, 2009). This steady increase shows the direct competition for land that landowners and developers face.

## Table III. Number of Farms by Size (Acres)

| Acreage | 2007 | 2002 | 1997 | Change from 1997 to 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1 to 9** | 32 | 24 | 18 | 14 |
| **10 to 49** | 86 | 74 | 42 | 44 |
| **50 to 179** | 83 | 50 | 53 | 30 |
| **180 to 499** | 21 | 25 | 16 | 5 |
| **500 to 999** | 12 | 10 | 9 | 3 |
| **1,000 or more** | 15 | 18 | 24 | (9) |

**Source: USDA Census of Agriculture**

## Table IV. Number of Farms by Income

| Income | 2007 | 2002 | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Less than $1,000** | 110 | 60 | 50 |
| **$1,000 to $2,499** | 21 | 25 | (4) |
| **$2,500 to $4,999** | 25 | 14 | 11 |
| **$5,000 to $9,999** | 15 | 25 | (10) |
| **$10,000 to $24,999** | 16 | 26 | (10) |
| **$25,000 to $49,999** | 2 | 4 | (2) |
| **$50,000 to $99,999** | 11 | 6 | 5 |
| **$100,000 or more** | 49 | 41 | 8 |

**Source: USDA Census of Agriculture**

## Table V. Farm Statistics

| | 2007 | 2002 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of Farms** | 249 | 201 | 162 |
| **Land in Farms (Acres)** | 60,219 | 63,356 | 66,920 |
| **Median Farm Size (Acres)** | 54 | 76 | 70 |
| **Average Farm Revenue** | $269,257 | $221,433 | $407,920 |
| **Average Farm Net Income** | $43,295 | $33,622 | $107,734 |
| **Average Value of Land & Buildings (Per Farm)** | $818,889 | $867,176 | $593,849 |
| **Average Value of Land & Buildings (Per Acre)** | $3,386 | $2,690 | $1,500 |

**Source: USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture**

## Farm Operators

Table VI shows that over the last decade there has been a 43 percent increase in the number of operators who define their primary occupation as agriculture. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of farm operators with farming depicted as a secondary occupation. In summary, this trend suggests that agricultural producers, whether full time or part time, are increasing in Hoke County. Statistics indicate that this occupation is filled by an aging population, which is consistent regionally and statewide. The surveys conducted by BRAC RTF and Mount Olive College support this trend as noted in Figure 11.

## Table VI. Farm Operator Statistics

| | 2007 | 2002 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Number of Operators With Farming as Primary Occupation** | 129 | 121 | 90 |
| **Number of Operators With Farming as Secondary Occupation** | 120 | 80 | 72 |
| **Average Operator Age** | 56.2 | 55.4 | N/A |

**Source: USDA Census of Agriculture**

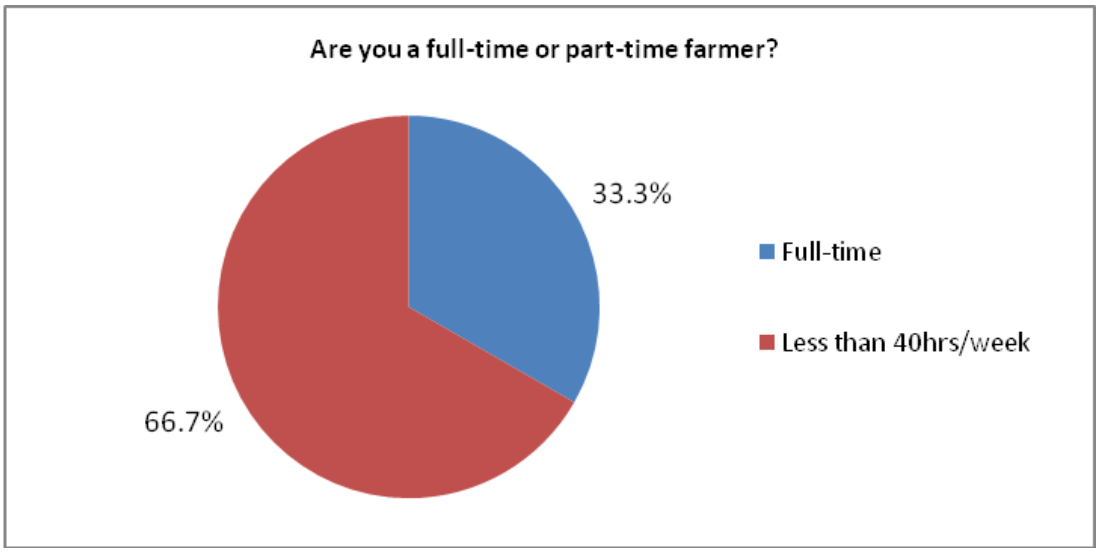


**Figure 11: BRAC RTF Survey of Producers 2009**

From 2002 to 2007, there was a 50 percent increase in Latino operators, 70 percent increase in American Indian operators, 50 percent decrease in black operators, and 25 percent increase in white operators in the county. There was also a 40 percent increase in female operators in Hoke County. The increase in operator diversity may account for the reported increase in both full and part-time farmers that has occurred over this same time period. (USDA Census of Agriculture 2002 and 2007).

In the surveys of landowners and producers, conducted by BRAC RTF and Mount Olive College, the total acreage represented in the surveys was 4,273 acres or 12 percent of the existing cropland. Farmers who were surveyed and interviewed reported average farm size as 237 acres of land; 70 percent had been farming for over 20 years; 67 percent farmed less than 40 hours a week; 40 percent earned less than $10,000 in a year; and 91 percent had income from off the farm. Of the total respondents, 41 percent expected to farm for over 20 more years, 27 percent for 10 to 20 years, 23 percent for five to 10 years, and 9 percent expected to farm for less than five more years (Figure 12).

When asked what they will do with their land at retirement, 67 percent said they will transfer land to a family member to remain in agriculture, 19 percent said they will transfer land to family for non-farm use, and 14 percent said that they would consider selling land to other farmers.

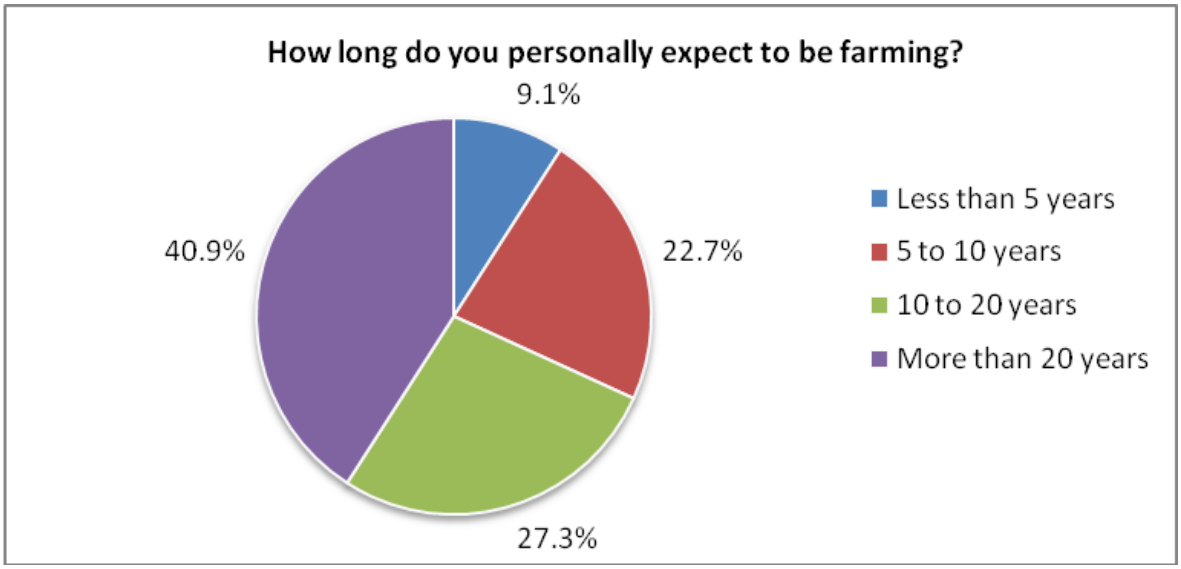


**Figure 12: BRAC RTF Producer Survey 2009**

For the most part, the respondent farmers were unfamiliar with conservation programs like Voluntary Agricultural Districts and conservation tax credits; however, most (62 percent) were familiar with the Present-Use Value tax program. Farmers surveyed and interviewed expressed familiarity with government support systems—support payments, disaster relief payments, and right-to-farm laws—and considered them to be very important. They also considered environmental and energy issues such as water-use restrictions, carbon sequestration, green space retention, and other environmental issues to be very or somewhat important as farmers look to the future retention of their farming operations.

When asked about financial and tax issues, the farm community respondents overwhelmingly found the following issues to be very important: income tax reform, capital gains and estate tax reform, the Present-Use Value tax program, reducing property/liability insurance costs, reducing health insurance costs, availability of financing, risk management, and estate planning/farm transition. They also consider marketing and education to be very important.

The survey respondents are not idle and continue to make investments in their operations. Seventy-nine percent have purchased equipment in the past five years, 47 percent have constructed new buildings, and 63 percent have either purchased or rented additional land. Many of them also intend to purchase or rent more land, construct new buildings, add new technology, and make other investments in their operations in the coming five years. Indications from respondents support an expansion of agricultural operations in Hoke County as has been the case over the last decade.

## Forestry Operations

Hoke County has 171,000 acres of timber land according to the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources Hoke County office. Of that acreage, 87,000 acres is owned by the federal government, and 77,000 acres is owned privately. Ft. Bragg has 55 percent of its total forestry

acreage in Hoke County, which presents a different take on the military's involvement in the county (Ft. Bragg Forestry Branch, 2009). The base has a federal mandate to protect the red-cockaded woodpecker and to maintain the habitat suitable for that species. There is also a need to create buffers around the base to maintain its viability and readiness as well as to deal with the urbanizing area around it.

The Readiness and Environmental Preparedness Initiative (REPI) is the Department of Defense program to protect endangered species and protect against encroachment. Ft. Bragg has worked with various groups in the region, such as The Nature Conservancy, to procure land easements within the areas identified by the Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) through the REPI program. The JLUS was updated in 2008 to increase the base's buffer area to five miles in order to maintain its effectiveness. This creates opportunity for interested landowners in the county to participate in the REPI program to ensure the land remains in agriculture production.

In 2007, timber product output was 5,177,000 cubic feet. Table VII summarizes output by product, which was primarily pulp wood and saw logs (USFS). The stumpage value, or the price paid to landowners for standing timber in 2006 was $3,980,747, which ranked 57th in the state (Jeuk and Barton). The delivered value, or the price paid to timber buyers upon delivery of timber to the mill, was $6,444,713, which ranked 61st in the state (Ibid). The forestry sector also includes loggers, saw mills, over 85 consulting foresters and 25 timber buyers who operate in the county.

**Table VII. 2007 Timber Product Output**

| Timber Products | Cubic Feet |
|---|---|
| **Saw logs** | 1,062,000 |
| **Veneer logs** | 322,000 |
| **Pulpwood** | 2,051,000 |
| **Fuel wood** | 234,000 |
| **Posts, poles and piles** | 23,000 |
| **Not used** | 1,485,000 |
| **Total Output** | 5,177,000 |

**Source: USFS Forest Inventory & Analysis**

## Agribusinesses

The agricultural industry is much farther reaching than just farms and forests. Farm and timber operators use equipment, seeds, feed, fertilizers, pesticides, and other supplies to grow their

products. They also use custom and professional service providers such as veterinarians, insurance agents, bankers, loggers, pest scouts, and consultants.

Businesses that work primarily within the agricultural industry were surveyed for this plan. These businesses are involved with seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs, nursery and greenhouse production, forestry, finance, consulting, and insurance. Other representatives of the agribusiness industry were also interviewed to further investigate implications of the future of agribusinesses in Hoke County. Most interviewees readily disclosed the importance of farm customers to the viability of their businesses in Hoke County.

None of the businesses surveyed or interviewed had reported a decrease in size or scope and most had grown or expanded in the previous five years and/or were planning to grow or expand in the next five years, including new product lines for farmers. These product lines would indicate a shift to more technology. The majority of the businesses believe that their customers, sales volume, and revenue will increase over the next five years and anticipate that their profits will increase in that period.

Hoke County residents who were interviewed felt that Fort Bragg's expansion has contributed to the increased development in the county. Those interviewed felt that the new residents' desire to live in Hoke County was due to lower property tax rates and reduced land costs for residential development. Concern was expressed over an expected decline in farm acreage due to development pressure and lack of land-use planning. Business owners interviewed indicated they felt that development in the county was based on monetary compensation to landowners and/or developers. Among agribusinesses surveyed and interviewed, there was a perceived lack of planning for infrastructure and service provision with concern for agriculture in the county. They believe that agriculture is of great importance to the county's economic viability and that land-use planning is important to the retention of farm and forest land.

The agribusinesses also provide demand for other services. For those businesses anticipating expansion in the next five years, they estimated that they will need a total of more than $500,000 in capital. Business operators who were interviewed believed that both commercial and residential development have impacted the decline in forest and farm acreage in the county, and these business operators support government funding for farmland preservation programs.

Hoke County is home to several major agribusiness operations. House of Raeford, an integrated poultry business, is headquartered in Raeford where it also has a turkey processing facility. Tarheel Turkey Hatchery, Inc., located in Raeford, raises and sells turkey poults and eggs. Cross Creek Seed of Raeford produces seeds for flue-cured, burley, and dark tobacco varieties and has a partner company, Cross Creek Coating of Raeford, that produces a melt coat for the seeds. Agribusiness is an essential component of Hoke County, and the continued growth of agribusinesses is important to the county as noted in surveys and interviews conducted.

## Challenges and Threats

The most fundamental challenge to most farmers is profitability, and the typical cause of low profitability is high production costs relative to wholesale prices. Although retail food prices have risen over time, the wholesale value of crop and livestock products received by farmers on average has not kept up, although prices have fluctuated widely. Small-scale and part-time farms that can sell directly to consumers and receive higher retail prices generally lack the volume to operate as full-time farms or are unable to generate over 50 percent of their household's income. The current agricultural systems favor very large farms that can produce the volume necessary to survive on low profit margins. Farmers who participated in the survey described tax and insurance costs as very important issues, which implies that these are factors limiting profitability.

Small and part-time farms are more inclined to sell their products directly to consumers. However, developing an effective marketing strategy is challenging, especially to new farmers. Several of the farmers who participated in the survey stated they need help with direct marketing, citing internet site development as a specific area of need.

Land is a limiting resource for many farmers and available acreage is in decline. As Fort Bragg has increased in size, so has the need for off-base housing. Population growth in Hoke County has consumed many cotton and soybean farms around the base, and developers have put pressure on other farmers to sell. Hoke County was the 61st fastest growing county in the country from 2007 to 2008 (Hoke County Manager, 2009). Carolina Horse Park at Five Points has drawn equine enthusiasts who have purchased small ranchettes, further reducing available cropland.

The area around Highway 401 up to Fayetteville is prime land for development and has been developed over the past decade. County planning has zoned this corridor as Commercial and Medium Density, which will increase the likelihood of development. The zoning districts in Figure 13 were compiled in the Sustainable Sandhills project in 2008 to provide a picture of local concepts of appropriate land use.

Forty percent of farmers surveyed said that they did not own a sufficient amount of land to expand and had trouble finding available land to rent. Twenty percent of survey respondents stated that they had not expanded in the past five years because there was no land available to purchase, and 46.7 percent said that there was a lack of land available to rent. Hoke County's population grew 29 percent from 2000 to 2008 (U.S. Census, 2008). This is tied to military installation growth, which has significant impacts on land availability in surrounding counties. In addition to consuming valuable cropland, the increase in population has led to traffic congestion on Hoke County's roads, making it difficult and dangerous to move farm equipment between fields and farms.

The forestry sector has been affected and continues to be threatened by residential development and global competition. In addition, restrictions have been placed on some operations in order to protect the red-cockaded woodpecker, a federally endangered species. The economy has impacted forest management and harvest operations, with reductions in sawmills and harvest operations.

Ft. Bragg also needs to be figured in to the challenges and opportunities for Hoke County. The Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) conducted in 2008 shows that there are numerous parcels of land that have been identified as critical or important land to protect. This is based on the JLUS criteria for noise, accident areas, and environmentally sensitive sites. There are 274 agricultural parcels indentified in the JLUS area that are in critical or important criteria areas. This represents 27,331 acres (Figure 14).

Another challenge that the county faces is to keep land in production. Sustainable Sandhills and BRAC RTF created a method to identify the best areas for farmland. Highly suitable locations for farmland meet the following criteria:

1. In an area with soils classified as high in cropland capability
2. Current land use is cropland with some crops having higher productivity value
3. Current land use is cultivated, grasslands or pastures
4. Not adjacent to a primary road
5. Not in urban areas based on population density
6. Farmland viability based on NCDA&CS Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund's Farmland Assessment
7. Location is not out of bounds for sustainable farmland (developed land, water bodies, conservation land except preserved farmland, or military bases)

Figure 15 shows suitability ratings for areas that are not in the present-use program. The areas of most concern are shaded dark blue to indicate high potential (or actual) and non-participation in the county present-use tax program.

Farms benefit from North Carolina's network of "farm-to-market" roads to get crops to buyers. On the other hand, highways enable stores, factories, and offices to reach and serve their markets. Highways and secondary roads also provide widespread homes with access to jobs and services. Figure 15 indicates highway improvements likely to occur in the future and the N.C. Department of Transportation's "Transportation Improvement Program" locations. Infrastructure improvements change the face of the county and put additional pressure on landowners to consider options for future utility of land resources. No major highway projects were identified in Hoke County. However, the new I-295 loop is planned for Cumberland County, and it touches the Hoke County line, providing an infrastructural improvement allowing active-duty personnel quick access to a major highway while opening up development possibilities for Hoke County.

Other infrastructure likely to change the pattern of farmland in the region includes public water and sewer systems. Public systems support commercial, industrial, and residential development. Farms are not reliant on public water and sewer systems, and Hoke County's public water is sourced from wells. Areas identified as having planned public sewer are shown in pink hatching in Figures 16 and 17. The City of Fayetteville owns the delineated pump station creating a somewhat unique situation with an out-of-county municipality's infrastructure located in an adjacent county. This pump station is located in an area identified as having suitable farmland based on the criteria created by BRAC RTF and Sustainable Sandhills (Figure 15). The pump station is also located near agricultural parcels (Figure 16). Zoning, taxation, and infrastructure all present challenges and threats potentially impacting the continued viability and suitability of land for agriculture in Hoke County.

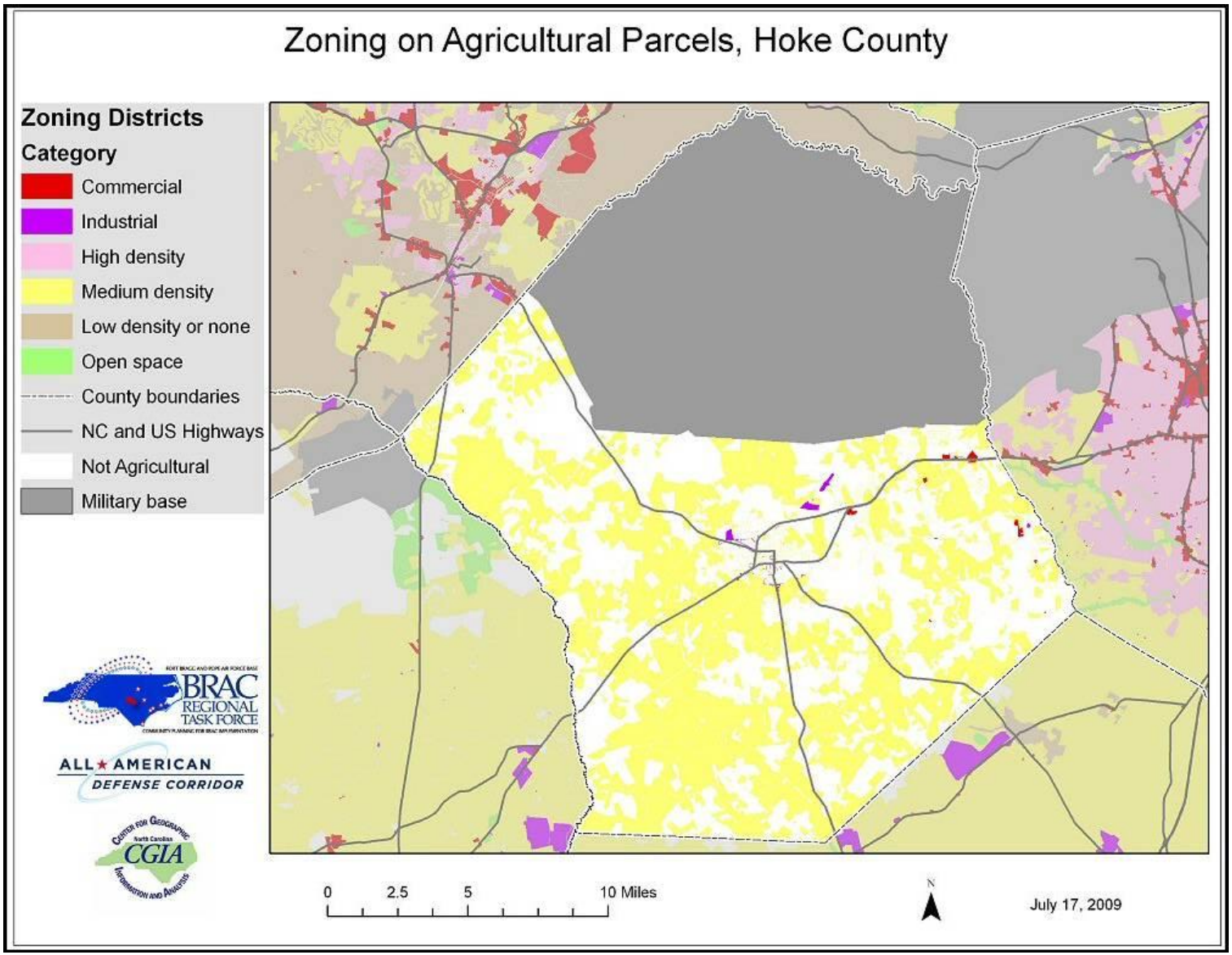


**Figure 13: Zoning Within Farm Program Parcels. Source: CGIA, Hoke County, and N.C. Department of Commerce**

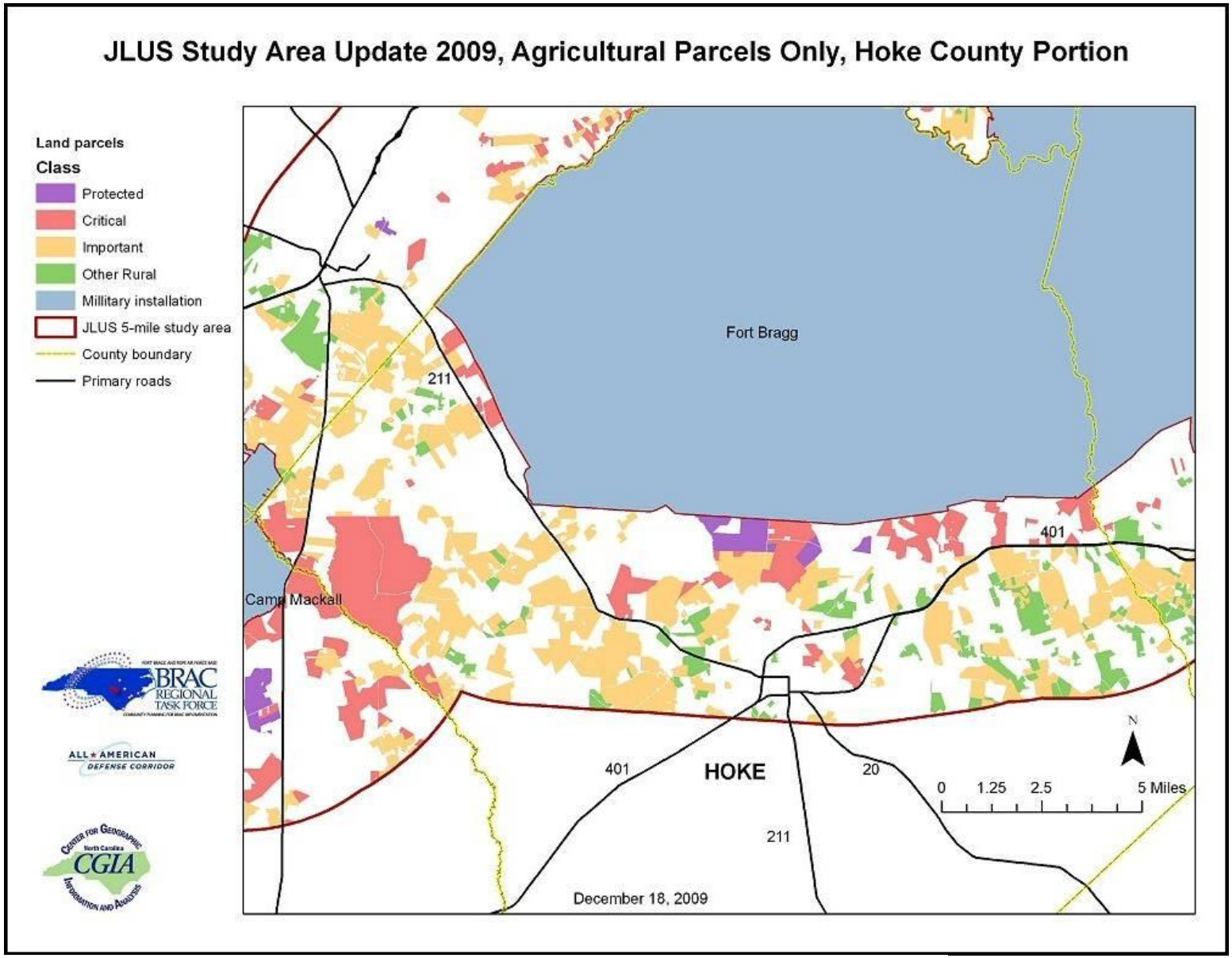


**Figure 14: JLUS Agricultural Parcels. Source: JLUS and CGIA**

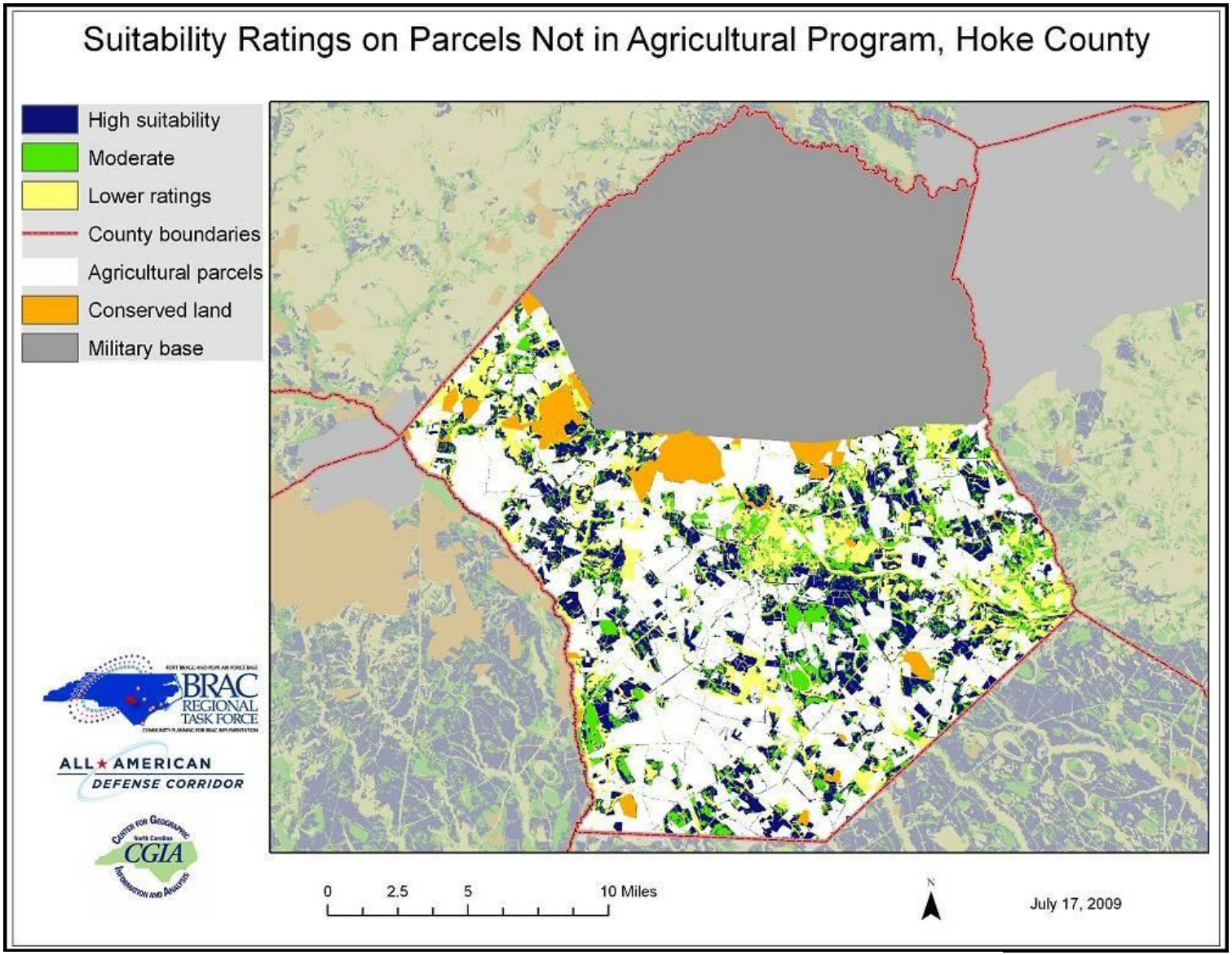


**Figure 15: Suitability in Areas Not in Present-Use Tax Status. Source: CGIA and Hoke County**

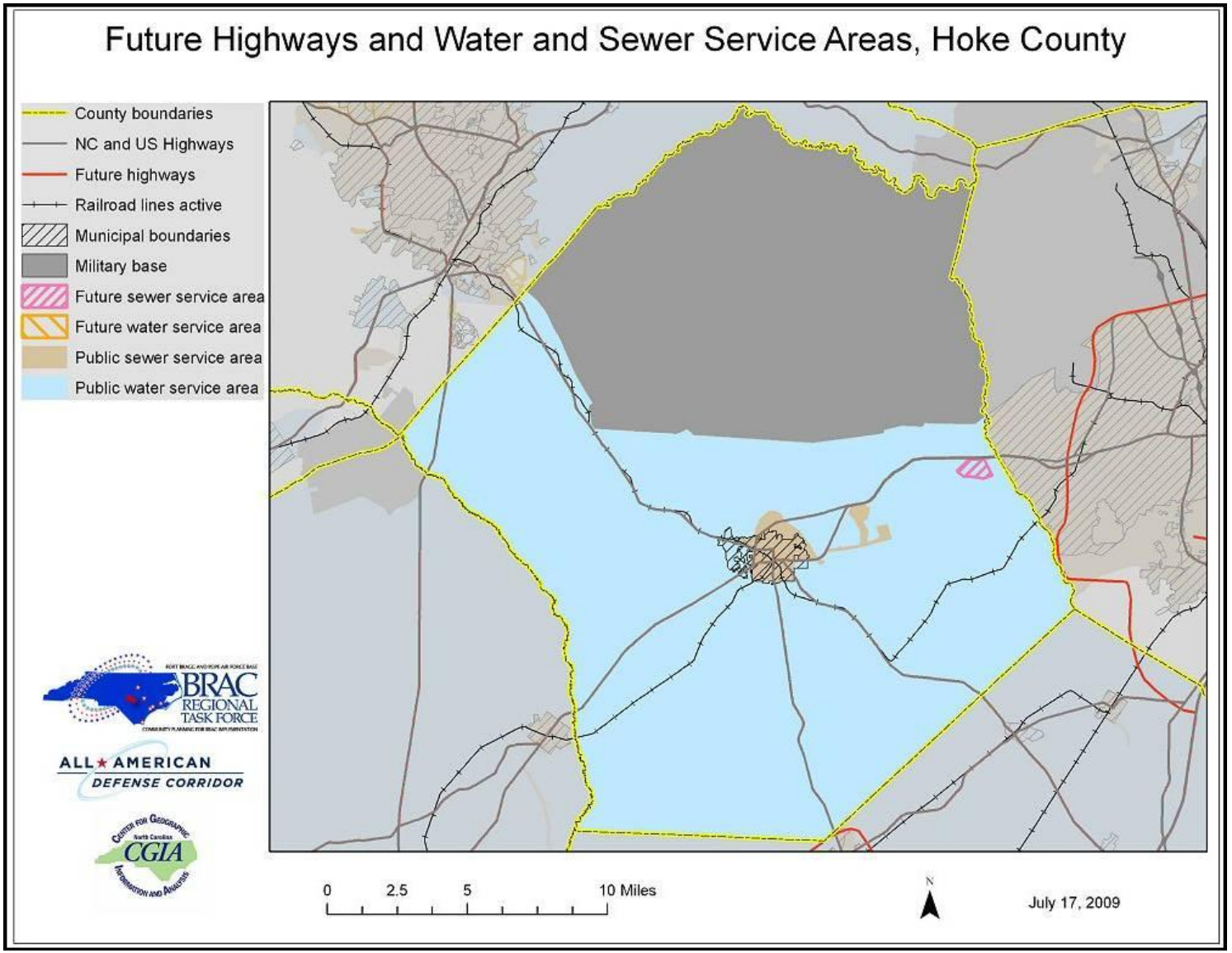


**Figure 16: Infrastructure in Hoke County. Sources: N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, CGIA, and N.C. Department of Transportation**

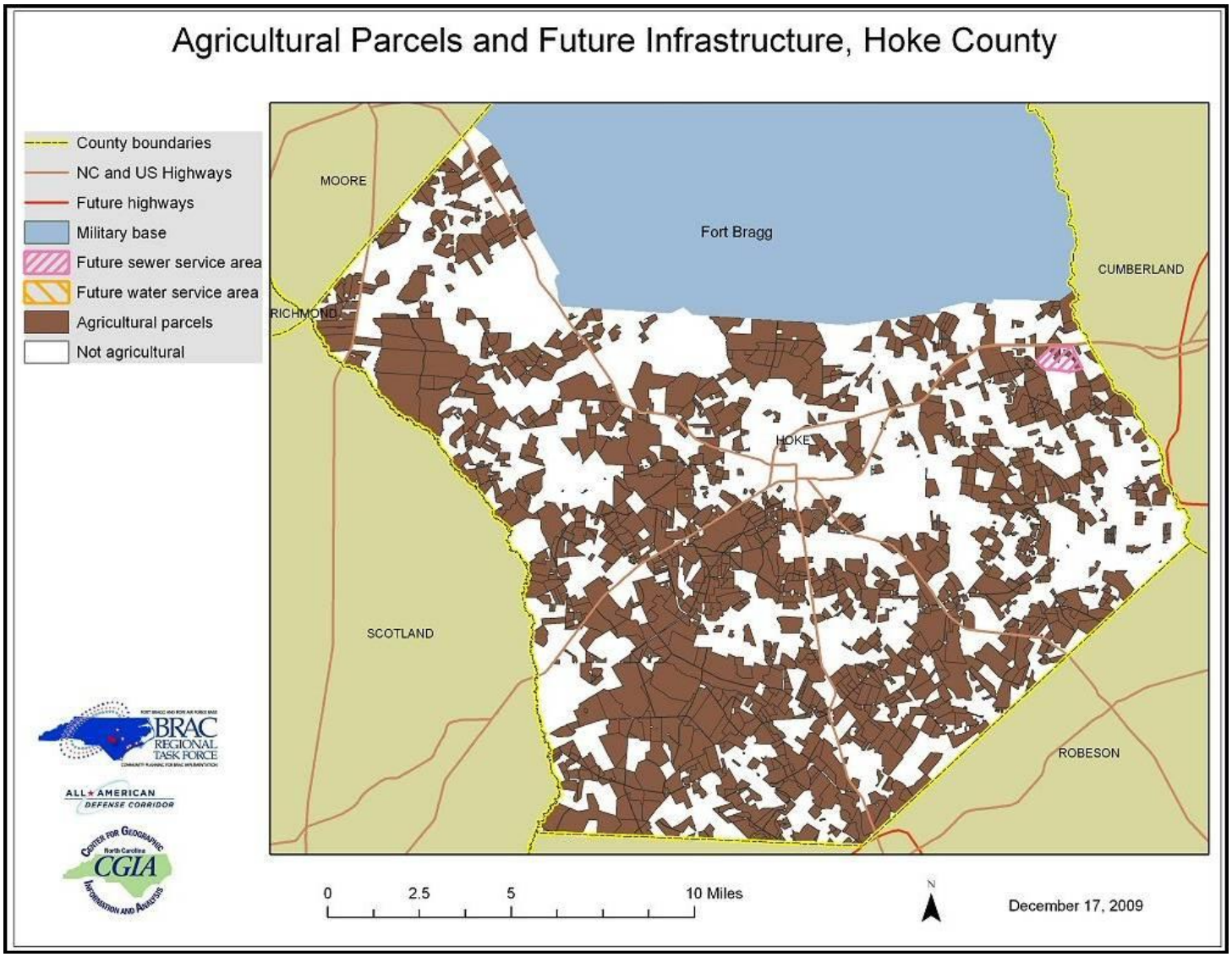


**Figure 17: Farmland Suitability and Future Infrastructure. Source: CGIA, N.C. Department of Transportation, and N.C. Rural Economic Development Center**

## Strengths and Opportunities

Although farmers face a myriad of challenges, the news is not all bad, and the future looks promising. Over 50 percent of agricultural producer respondents expect customers, sales volume, revenue, and profit to increase over the next five years.

One strength Hoke County farmers have is the diversity of the products they grow. Fifty percent of producer respondents plan to further diversify their operations in the next five years. The local-food movement is an opportunity for many farmers, especially small and mid-sized farmers who market most of their products directly to consumers. Although the Carolina Horse Park has attracted residential development, that has come at a cost to cropland since the equine community is a source of opportunity for farmers as consumers of hay. High corn prices led many farmers to plant corn in recent years. An ethanol plant being built may become a significant buyer for corn producers. It is anticipated that the plant will be on line by 2010.

Horticulture is a strong entity in the county. The horticulture/green industry is estimated to be over $2 million in revenue a year in the county. One business has had a contract with Ft. Bragg to deliver flowers to the commissaries for over 25 years. There is anticipation of expansion of horticulture/green industries with the continued expansion of commercial and residential developments in the county (N.C. Extension, Hoke County, 2010).

The equine industry also presents a strong opportunity for growth in Hoke County. This industry may increase as population increases and people seek a quality of life that equine industry and pastoral landscapes can provide. There are numerous developments springing up across the  county that cater to horse lovers, and the Carolina Horse Park is evidence of the growing opportunities for equine activities in the region. The businesses that support the equine industry, such as veterinarians and hay farms, can also benefit from the anticipated growth in the field.

# Farmland Protection Programs

## Present-Use Value Tax Program

Present-Use Value, or PUV, is a program established by N.C.G.S. §§ 105-277.2 to .7 and administered by the county assessor through which qualifying property can be assessed, for property tax purposes, based on its use as agricultural, horticultural, or forest land. The present-use value is the value of the land based solely on its ability to produce income. Qualifying property is assessed at its present-use value rather than its market value. The tax office also maintains a market value for the land, and the difference between the market value and the present-use value is maintained in the tax records as deferred taxes. When land becomes disqualified from the program, the deferred taxes for the current and three previous years, with interest, will usually become payable and due.

***Basic Requirements***

- Minimum acreage of production land:
  - 10 acres for agricultural use
  - 5 acres for horticulture use
  - 20 acres for forest use
- Production must follow a sound management plan.
- Agricultural and horticultural land must have at least one qualifying tract that has produced an average gross income of at least $1,000 for the three years preceding the application year.
- Forest land must be following a forest management plan.

***Benefits***

- Protection from increasing land values that are based on development potential, and the potential increase in property taxes.

More information can be found at http://www.dor.state.nc.us/publications/property.html.

## Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD)

Established by N.C.G.S. §§ 106-737 to 743 and administered at the county level, Voluntary Agricultural Districts are designated areas where commercial agriculture will be encouraged and protected. The purposes of the districts are to increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and to increase protection from nuisance suits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

***Requirements***

- Land must be enrolled in the Present-Use Value program or otherwise be determined to meet the qualifications of the program.
- The landowner must enter into a revocable agreement to limit development for a ten-year period.

***Benefits***

- Notification to buyers of nearby property that they're moving into an agricultural area.
- Abeyance of water and sewer assessments.
- Public hearings on the condemnation of farmland
- Stronger protection from nuisance suits.
- Representation by an appointed board regarding concerns on threats to the agricultural sector.

## Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts

Established by N.C.G.S §§ 106-743.1 to .5, an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District is a VAD formed of one or more farms that are subject to an IRREVOCABLE ten-year agreement to limit development. In return for the condition of irrevocability, the landowner receives the added benefits of being able to receive 25 percent of gross revenue from the sale of non-farm products and still qualify as a bona fide farm, and being eligible to receive up to 90 percent cost-share assistance from the Agricultural Cost-Share Program.

## Conservation Easements

A conservation easement is a written agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization or public agency under which the landowner agrees to keep the land available for agriculture and to restrict subdivision, non-farm development, and other uses that are incompatible with commercial agriculture.

***Basic Requirements***

- Permanently foregoing the right to subdivide or develop the land being conserved. There will be other limitations on activities to preserve the land's productivity, environmental values, and rural character.
- Cash payments in the range of $20,000 to $40,000 are needed to cover the costs of the transaction. These costs are for legal services, a survey, an appraisal, long-term stewardship services provided by the conservation partner, and other miscellaneous activities. In some cases, grant funds will cover these costs.

***Other Information***

- A portion of the property can be left out of the easement, thereby providing an area for future homes and other non-farm activities.
- Agricultural activities, including forestry, are allowed under the agreement.
- Despite the term "easement," access to the public is not provided by the agreement.
- The value of a conservation easement is determined by a licensed land appraiser and is typically between 25 percent and 75 percent of the land's market value.
- A periodic inspection of the property is required to ensure that development does not occur. This provision will be included in the agreement.

- The agreement is recorded on the county's land records and runs with the title. All future landowners must comply with the terms and conditions of the agreement.

***Financial Benefits***

- If the conservation easement is donated, then the landowner will likely qualify for a federal income tax deduction and a state income tax credit. The value of these benefits depends on the appraised value of the easement and the income tax situation of the landowner.
- A conservation easement can also be sold by the landowner through a transaction commonly referred to as a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) or Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE). Funds to purchase a conservation easement can be raised from private and government sources. North Carolina and the federal government have programs to purchase agricultural conservation easements. Funding through these programs is very competitive and will generally amount to a percentage of the easement's value. The tax benefits described above can be claimed for any of the easement's value above the purchase price.

## Term Conservation Easements

Also called Agricultural Agreements, these agreements are similar to conservation easements but apply for a finite period of time agreed to by the landowner and conservation partner.

## Transfer of Development Rights

A program set up by local units of government that utilize conservation easements to preserve farmland by providing incentives to increase development density in a designated area. The program identifies the "sending area" where conservation is being encouraged and the "receiving area" where development is preferred. A landowner in the receiving area can purchase a conservation easement on a property in the sending area and receive additional density allowances. In North Carolina, counties must receive authorization from the General Assembly to develop and implement a TDR program.

## Lease of Development Rights

As recommended by the 2008 Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) that was conducted by the Regional Land Use Advisory Council (RLUAC) and Ft. Bragg, the county should consider adoption of the Cumberland County lease of development rights ordinance model. It is designed to encourage property owners in the JLUS identified "critically important" or "important" land along military boundaries to enter into a lease of development rights with the county. Property owners lease their development rights to the county for a specified number of years. The county, in return, provides an annual payment to the property owner for the leased development rights—which is equivalent to the county property taxes on the land. Property owners can opt out of the agreement at any time but must give one year's notice. This notice gives agencies and groups time to organize purchase of the property if possible. This program is necessary for the county to preserve "critically important" or "important" lands in the county's

jurisdiction. The county and the landowners who opt to participate in this program should consult with their attorneys and tax advisors as they enter this agreement. A sample of a *Lease of Development Rights* agreement is attached in the appendix of this document.

## Farm Transition Planning

Making careful plans for the transfer of ownership of farm property and assets from the current owner to the next can be enough to preserve a farm for decades. Many options are available when planning an estate or land transfer. Farm owners can increase the likelihood of a successful transition that maintains the viability of the farm by obtaining professional assistance early in the process. The N.C. Farm Transition Network provides educational and technical resources to professionals and landowners.

## Right-to-Farm Law

North Carolina has a state right-to-farm law (N.C.G.S. §§ 106-700 to 701(2006)) protecting farm and forestry operations from being declared a nuisance as long as they have been in operation for at least one year and are operated properly and without negligence.

## N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund

N.C.G.S. § 106-744(c) established a trust fund to be administered by the Commissioner of Agriculture. The purpose of the trust fund is to provide monies to purchase agricultural conservation easements and to fund programs that promote the development and sustainability of farming, and the transition of existing farms to new farm families. Counties and nonprofit conservation organizations can apply for grants for these purposes. The General Assembly appropriated $8 million to the trust fund for the 2008 fiscal year and $4 million for the 2009 fiscal year.

# Recommendations

A review of farmland preservation plans from other counties and states finds a wide range of activities that communities can undertake to develop the agricultural industry and protect farmland from conversion. The actions described below are recommended because they are believed to be feasible for Hoke County, which, as a relatively small county, has limited resources and government infrastructure. The set of actions is not exhaustive, and community leaders are encouraged to adopt additional strategies to protect agricultural land and enhance the industry's viability. Each action is followed by a proposed time of implementation. However, the actual implementation will be contingent upon financial and human resources.

## Evaluate and educate property owners of the Present-Use Tax Value Program.

Identify land that qualifies, but currently is not enrolled in the agricultural present-use value tax program. Educate agricultural and forest landowners to take appropriate steps to engage their property in the program.

There is significant land, as illustrated in Figure 15, not enrolled in the county's present-use value program. Education is essential to ensure that landowners and their heirs are aware of the program and the requirements to enroll in the program. Forest landowners of 20 or more acres are eligible with a certified forest management plan in place.

***Implementation and timeline:***

Authorize action through the Farmland Preservation ordinance. An evaluation of existing properties enrolled in this program should be conducted in concert with their present land use and parcel acreage. The Division of Forest Resources in Hoke County has the capability to evaluate and write forest management plans for landowners meeting requirements for entry into the Present-Use Tax Program. This is a no-cost option for forest landowners and, more importantly, will be instrumental in resolving the growing issue of under-managed timber countywide. The Hoke County Cooperative Extension would develop an educational program for agricultural producers and property heirs of this tax incentive program. The result of these educational and service programs by county agencies would reduce costs to landowners without compromising tax revenue collections for the county.

Evaluation of current acreage in the program and land use should be conducted with the assistance of the county tax office. This information should be accumulated as quickly as possible after plan approval and certification in an effort to initiate educational programs in concert with commodity and forest product meetings to be held in the county. This effort should begin in early 2010 and be completed by the summer of 2011.

## Establish an Agricultural Advisory Board.

Farmland preservation and agricultural development requires the use and coordination of many different public and private entities. Many programs require the action of the Board of Commissioners while others require sponsorship by a non-profit organization or local

government. An Agricultural Advisory Board reporting to the Board of Commissioners can provide recommendations, take comments from citizens, initiate research, apply for grants, and coordinate Hoke County's efforts to develop the agricultural industry and preserve farmland.

An Agricultural Advisory Board is required to establish and maintain a Voluntary Agricultural District program; however, its commission should not be limited to that role alone but rather should be directed to lead and assist in all matters related to the agricultural and forest industries. Members of the Agricultural Advisory Board should not be limited to farmers and forestland owners but should include representatives of agribusiness and others who are active in, and have knowledge of, the various issues related to agriculture, forestry, economic development, and farmland preservation. Members should also be more than successful in their field—they should be community leaders engaged and interested in the future of the industry. Members should be representative of the different districts or areas of the county and should be a good cross-section of the industry size and commodity representation.

The Agricultural Advisory Board should also include enough members to ensure a quorum at each meeting, especially those held during times of peak activity when farmers may have trouble leaving the field. Finally, the Agricultural Advisory Board should have a designated staff—even if shared with another department or board—that can coordinate meetings and execute the board's actions.

***Implementation and timeline:***

County WLPP planning team should nominate potential Advisory Board members for approval by the Board of Commissioners. This action will be authorized through a county Farmland Preservation ordinance, and nominations should be provided by summer 2010 with appointment and VAD ordinance draft completed by fall 2010.

## Establish a Voluntary Agricultural District program.

The establishment of a Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program is an essential second step of the Board of Commissioners after establishing the Agricultural Advisory Board. As described above, a VAD can serve to "increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and to increase protection from nuisance suits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms." The VAD can also serve to organize the agricultural community, strengthen solidarity and provide a mechanism for farmers to speak with a unified voice. Voluntary Agricultural Districts can also be used in land-use planning and in a transfer of development rights (TDR) program.

***Implementation and timeline:***

Authorize through the Farmland Preservation ordinance. Develop the administrative framework in 2010. Begin educational sessions and enrollment in early 2011. The Hoke County Cooperative Extension, in concert with the Hoke County Soil and Water Conservation District, will provide guidance in this program with assistance from the Tax Assessor and Land Records.

## Establish an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Program .

The regular VAD is an excellent program to organize and promote the farming community; however, since farmers do not have to commit to anything—they can revoke the agreement to not develop the farm at any time without penalty—it does not go very far in protecting farmland from development. An Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District (EVAD), which requires an irrevocable ten-year agreement to retain property as a working farm, will provide Hoke County with a tool to protect farms in the short-term against conversion. The temporary nature of the agreement gives a landowner the opportunity to experiment with deeded restrictions if they are skeptically interested in a permanent conservation easement. Farms enrolled in an EVAD may also be more competitive for economic development grants, especially those from the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.

***Implementation and timeline:***

Authorize through the Farmland Preservation ordinance. The VAD Board will develop the administrative framework by the summer of 2012. Educational sessions will begin in the winter of 2012 and be administered concurrently with commodity meetings. This effort will continue through agency meetings with farmers and farm businesses. The Hoke County Cooperative Extension, in concert with the Hoke County Soil and Water Conservation District, will provide guidance in this program with assistance from the Tax Assessor and Land Records.

## Develop an Agricultural Education Action Plan for Hoke County.

The education of Hoke County agencies and governmental officials is imperative to assuring continued growth and diversification of the agricultural sector. The importance of agriculture and agribusiness needs to be recognized by local officials and promoted by economic developers in county and region. Identification of incentives that the county may offer to agribusinesses should not differ from any other industry opportunity. The lack-of-services cost of agriculture and other commercial opportunities are comparable. Incentives may include zoning to allow for farmers' markets, distribution centers, roadside stands, or vendors as well as others. Embracing agriculture is essential to the perpetuity of the economic engine in the county.

It is additionally suggested that agricultural agencies, producers, and agribusinesses cooperatively conduct agricultural awareness events/ tours to educate elected officials, economic developers, and citizens as to the role of agriculture in the county.

***Implementation and timeline:***

Schedule periodic meetings with Economic Development Commission, Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Agriculture Advisory Board, Division of Forest Resources, Farm Bureau, and other county agencies involved with agriculture to explain and explore the promotion of agriculture in Hoke County. Additionally, it will be imperative to include multiple agricultural producers and agribusinesses in this effort. This effort should begin early in 2010 for planning, and a marketing strategy should be developed by early 2011 with phased implementation beginning the spring of 2011 and the plan implemented by the beginning of 2012.

## Develop an Infrastructure and Utility Citizen Awareness Program.

Authorize in the Farmland Preservation ordinance. As Fort Bragg continues to grow, increased need for utilities also expands. Information gathered during the development of this document indicates the perceived disregard of utility companies for property owners and land use. A number of landowners expressed extreme discontent with utility companies' disregard for agricultural and timber land and the impact of their infrastructure patterns and placement for land and right-of ways. Thus, it is proposed that a mechanism be developed by local county government to notify potential property owners of public comment opportunities on utility placement. Local government officials should utilize land use information to determine paths of least impact and recommend alternate property options for right–of-way acquisition to minimize impact to agricultural production.

***Implementation and timeline:***

This should be implemented immediately and an infrastructure identification network developed through existing information channels within local government agencies. Once established, this effort should remain intact so landowners may be notified and given the opportunity to attend and assess impact to properties associated within utility requests. The Agricultural Advisory Board could serve as the mechanism to disperse notification to landowners. Education of local government officials as to the impact of poorly planned utilities to the economic viability of occupations depending on land use is essential to better guide and plan for expected growth and development.

## Develop an economic development assistance program.

Annual investment in agricultural economic development will improve the industry's viability. Grants can be made to individual farmers or to non-profit organizations, and can be independent or in conjunction with other grant funds. This program will be used for transaction costs, signage, agriculture easements, perpetual easements and their costs, etc. with the VAD program.

***Implementation and timeline:***

Authorize in the Farmland Preservation ordinance. Develop the administrative framework in late 2011 and determine strategies for investment both publicly and privately. Begin soliciting and developing investments in 2012. This program should be administered jointly by the Agricultural Advisory Board and the Economic Development Director.

## Develop a conservation easement program.

Conservation easements are an invaluable tool for permanently protecting farmland from parcelization and development. Both the county and the Soil and Water Conservation District have the legal authority to hold conservation easements. Hoke County needs to build the knowledge and capacity to develop and receive conservation easements and to promote them to landowners. The county should become proactive in applying for grants to purchase conservation easements and provide matching funds for those grants and for transaction costs associated with the development of easements.

***Implementation and timeline:***

The Agricultural Advisory Board, Cooperative Extension, the Soil and Water District Advisory Board, and county Division of Forest Resources, with assistance from the county manager and attorney, will begin investigating this program in 2011 and be prepared to begin developing and receiving easements in 2012. Education and training can be requested from the Conservation Trust for North Carolina, North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources' One North Carolina Naturally program, and the American Farmland Trust, as well as independent consultants. Funding for the purchase of conservation easements is available, depending upon state and federal fund appropriations, on a limited basis —from the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund, and the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service.

## Develop a land lease recruitment program.

Existing farm operators need rental land to expand and/or to replace fields previously rented, but lost to development. Beginning farmers need rental land to establish their operations. The Present-Use Value program and other incentives can be used to get the owners of inactive farmland to lease their properties and put them into production. Additionally, landowners should be educated about the possible incentives of long-term leasing to farmers while concurrently entering into agricultural term agreements to retain land holdings as working farms. Land assessments can yield percentages of value back to landowners who enter term agreements. This will add income to those who commit to long term leases or retention of land for their own agricultural production systems under these term easements. Educating landowners about the incentives and the potential land stewardship benefits may serve to increase the supply of rental land and slow the conversion of farmland to development.

***Implementation and timeline:***

The Cooperative Extension, in concert with other county agencies, will develop the program and educational strategy in 2012 with assistance from land records and the tax assessor. Implementation of the educational programs will begin in the fall of 2012 if not before, based on the priority of this program to the county and as determined by the Agricultural Advisory Board and Cooperative Extension.

## Establish an Agriculture Advocacy Action Team for Agriculture.

Agricultural Impact Assessment Policies set by state and federal governments and their agencies can have adverse effects on Hoke County farms and businesses. The Board of Commissioners should be proactive in advocating to elected officials and agency leaders, on behalf of Hoke County farmers and business operators, both to prevent adverse policies and to promote beneficial policies. Evaluating the effects of county ordinances, plans, and programs on agriculture before they are passed or implemented will prevent adverse impacts and maintain awareness of agriculture's existence and needs.

***Implementation and timeline:***

This action should begin immediately and should continue in order to allow for the protection of agriculture in Hoke County. The Board of Commissioners, being the elected officials of Hoke County, should be responsible for advocating for agriculture in state and federal affairs. The Agriculture Advisory Board should advocate at the county level and make requests to the Board of Commissioners when action is needed at the state and/or federal level. The team should make impact assessments mandatory through the Farmland Preservation Ordinance. All offices and boards will be responsible for making assessments with consultation from the Agricultural Advisory Board.

## Provide Education to Hoke County Residents.

Educating the public of the benefits of Hoke County working lands and the threats to them will reduce conflicts between farmers and their non-farm neighbors as well as stimulate the market for locally grown products. The campaign can take many forms and utilize multiple outlets such as mass media, workshops, schools, and civic organizations. Developing public events and agritourism options are also a means to highlight the attributes of agriculture and to educate all residents.

Although most Hoke County farmers indicated they had a transition plan for their land and agricultural operations, education about estate planning, farm transition, and conservation easements will help keep farms in production as this farm transition begins. Forest landowners also need specific education for their tracts that are often in combination with farms. These education efforts can provide updated information for landowners and operators to determine the best decision for their lands. Annual workshops with the various county and state agencies that work with landowners would be an opportune way to explain which services each agency offers and how farmers can incorporate the information into their operations.

Additionally, youth education about opportunities in agriculture should be cultivated through existing youth organizations such as FFA and 4-H. Educating youth and promoting youth involvement in agriculture is imperative to the economy of Hoke County.

***Implementation and timeline:***

Develop education campaigns for farmers, non-farmers, and youth. Begin campaigns in 2012. The education campaigns should be coordinated by Cooperative Extension and a committee of other pertinent agencies, industry representatives, and agricultural and forest landowners. These campaigns can be workshops, trainings, meetings, and other opportunities identified by the committee to reach the target audiences. Education of farm transition issues can be accommodated by a number of educational and non-profit organizations as well.

# Action Steps

To maintain the viability of the agricultural community, the Hoke County Board of Commissioners will consider each of the recommendations of this plan and will implement each action determined to be feasible. Furthermore, the Board of Commissioners will request an annual report on the state of agriculture and the county's programs and actions. This should be a concerted effort of the Agriculture Advisory Board and other supporting agencies.

Funding for these and other programs will come primarily from the county's annual budget. Other sources of funds might include North Carolina State University through Cooperative Extension, the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, and other government and non-governmental organizations. A directed effort should be made to acquire funds from state and federal grant programs related to agriculture and local food systems. The Board of Commissioners will set an allocation goal for funding agricultural development and farmland preservation and will work within reason to meet that goal each year during the budgeting process.

Funds acquired will be used to implement appropriate farmland preservation easements and agreements, to fund designated agricultural and forest infrastructural needs in the county, for educational programs for the citizenry of Hoke County, including farm and non-farm residents, youth and transitioning and beginning farmers.

It is imperative that the Agricultural Advisory Board be a barometer for agriculture and an information resource for the county commissioners to assure stability through growth of the agricultural economy.

# Supporting Agencies and Organizations

***U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)***
USDA provides a wide range of services to the agricultural industry and farm owners and operators through its 17 agencies. USDA has a service center in Raeford that is staffed by agents of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). FSA provides farm loans and services, disaster assistance, and conservation programs. NRCS works with private landowners to help them conserve, maintain and improve their natural resources. NRCS also administers several programs that purchase or provide grants to purchase conservation easements. Information about USDA's agencies and programs can be found at their website www.usda.gov.

***N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDA & CS)***
NCDA & CS provides many valuable services to the agricultural industry and individual farmers. It provides services covering agronomy, animal health, commodity distribution, marketing and promotion, grading, seed and fertilizer inspection, nursery and plant pest eradication, and more. NCDA & CS also operates the five state farmers markets, 18 state research stations and farms, and the two state fairs.

***N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)***
DENR has a program called One North Carolina Naturally, which provides the science and incentives to inform and support conservation actions of North Carolina's conservation agencies and organizations. The One North Carolina Naturally website, www.onencnaturally.org, contains numerous tools and information to assist conservation organizations, including local governments, to develop and implement their land protection strategies. Working lands is one of their three focus areas.

***Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)***
SWCD provides assistance to private landowners implementing practices to prevent soil erosion and protect water quality. Landowners can receive technical and financial assistance through the Agricultural Cost Share Program and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. SWCD also conducts several education programs for students and is working with its partners to develop a North Carolina Plan for Working Lands Conservation.

***N.C. Cooperative Extension***
The N.C. Cooperative Extension provides educational programs to farmers and non-farm residents based on research conducted at N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University. The Hoke County Extension Center has agents for horticulture, poultry, agriculture, livestock, forages, youth and family.

***N.C. Division of Forest Resources (NCDFR)***
DFR in Hoke County is staffed with rangers who help landowners maintain their forests, regulate and control forest fires, maintain the forest health in the county, as well as conduct education and outreach to the general public. The rangers can help landowners write forest

management plans as well as review those plans, assist with pesticide management, and provide landowners with contacts of consulting foresters and buyers of timber.

***N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC)***
NCWRC has a mission to conserve North Carolina's wildlife resources and their habitats and provide programs and opportunities that allow hunters, anglers, boaters, and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy wildlife associated recreation. An important part of the vision of the NCWRC is to provide safe comprehensive, effective and efficient fisheries, wildlife and boating programs that sustain working lands and their associated wildlife communities.

***U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)***
USFWS coordinates the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker recovery program in the Sandhills through conservation, restoration, and sound management practices of longleaf pine.

***Sustainable Sandhills***
Sustainable Sandhills is a regional nonprofit that promotes coordinated and cooperative regional planning to maintain the green quality of life in the Sandhills region.

***The Nature Conservancy***
The Nature Conservancy is a national nonprofit with a Sandhills region office. The organization protects ecologically important land and water through easements and education.

***The Sandhills Area Land Trust***
The Sandhills Area Land Trust works with private landowners to put land in voluntary conservation easements in the Sandhills area.

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# Appendix

## Cumberland County Lease of Development Program

Cumberland County has developed a lease of development rights program that targets landowners who are in the "critically important" or "important" designations by the Joint Land Use Study of 2008. A sample of a Lease of Development Rights agreement is below.

Tax Parcel PIN #(s) – _____
This instrument prepared by and should be returned to:
Grainger R. Barrett County Attorney P.O. Box 1829 Fayetteville, N.C. 28302

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF CUMBERLAND**

**MILITARY MISSION AND OPERATIONS AREA CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION AGREEMENT FOR A DEFINITE TERM**

This MILITARY MISSION AND OPERATIONS CRITICAL AREA CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION AGREEMENT FOR A DEFINITE TERM ("Agreement") is made on this 1st day of October, 2005, by _____ ("Grantor"), and the COUNTY OF CUMBERLAND, North Carolina, ("Grantee"), a body politic and corporate and a subdivision of the State of North Carolina, P.O. Box 1829, Fayetteville, N.C. 28302.

RECITALS & PURPOSES

A. Grantor is the sole owner in fee simple of the property ("Property"), being approximately ____ acres, in the County of Cumberland, State of North Carolina and being that tract or portion of a tract identified in Exhibit A attached hereto and by this reference incorporated herein; and

B. The Grantee has authority in Part 4, Art. 19, of Chapter 160A of the North Carolina General Statutes to acquire, lease and/or enter into deeds, easements and other agreements to preserve and conserve open space and natural resources; and

C. The Property is located in the Fort Bragg Land Use Study Area conducted by the Fort Bragg Regional Land Use Advisory Commission, and is designated a military mission and operations critical or important tract in the Cumberland County Planning Department Small Area Land Use Study for such area; and

D. Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base missions are critical to the security and well-being of the nation, and are central to the identity, quality of life and economic vitality of the Cumberland County community; and

E. The overall aggregate pattern of development of land uses around Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base directly affects the suitability and compatibility of military missions which can be performed at the bases; and

F. It is in the public interest to maintain and enhance the military missions of Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base, and that further intense and/or urban development of tracts five acres or larger designated military mission and operations critical and important in the study area be minimized, while protecting property owners' property rights, economic interests and investment expectations; and

It is in the public interest that Cumberland County afford owners of tracts five acres or larger designated military mission and operations critical and important in the study area a voluntary opportunity to enter into Agreements intended to minimize further intense and/or urban development of their tracts during the term of the Agreement by maintaining (i) open spaces, or (ii) woodland, agricultural, or rural settings, scenic vistas and natural views, or

(iii) natural resources such as pastures, meadows, fields, rock outcroppings, creeks, streams, wetlands, croplands, etc.

NOW, THEREFORE the Grantor hereby unconditionally and irrevocably bargains and sells and conveys to Cumberland County, its successors and assigns, an easement for the term stated below for conservation and open space and natural resources protection purposes. Grantor covenants and agrees, for the direct benefit of Cumberland County, to preserve and conserve the Property substantially in the same condition and state of development as exists on the effective date hereof for the term of ten (10) years from the date this Agreement is recorded in the Cumberland County Registry, terminable as set forth herein.
The effective date of this Agreement shall be the date it is recorded in the Cumberland County Registry. Grantor may terminate this Agreement effective no sooner than five years from the commencement hereof, but only on at least one year's prior written notice to County.

Article I. Uses and Activities.

A. Definitions.

1. Current Uses include agriculture generally, such as farming, livestock, husbandry, horticulture, silviculture, nursery, timber, forest products, and other miscellaneous uses. Activities associated with livestock uses include raising, feeding, breeding, herding, moving, loading, buying and selling horses, cattle, goats, chickens, and dogs. Current Activities associated with agriculture uses include disking, fertilizing, and applying herbicides, insecticides, pesticides and fungicides to cropland and pasture. They also include planting, sowing, harvesting, cutting, raking, baling, milling, grinding, and storing row crops, hay, grass, and straw. Current Activities associated with timber uses include planting, fertilizing, burning and applying herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and pesticides to timberland. They also include harvesting, felling, logging, loading, transporting, and selling timber, logs, poles, pulpwood, and firewood. Current Activities associated with forest products include clearing, burning, and applying herbicides, insecticides, pesticides and fungicides to timberland. They also include raking, baling, loading, storing, and selling pine straw. Other Miscellaneous Uses and Activities include hunting, fishing, trapping; leased hunting, fishing and trapping rights; riding horses, mules and ponies; clearing land, removing stumps; drilling wells; installing water and electric lines, and building driveways, unimproved roads, fire lines, farm residences, farm buildings, well houses, and sheds in support of farming and agriculture. Current Uses and Activities also include the rental and maintenance of the three dwellings that currently exist on the Property.

2. Commercial Uses. Industrial, manufacturing or commercial uses and activities not directly related to or supportive of agricultural, horticultural, silvicultural, forestry, nursery or other uses permitted under the A-1 zoning classification.

3. Development. Development includes the construction, building, sale, lease, rent, and maintenance, of houses, offices, plants, facilities, buildings, roads, parking lots, grounds and associated infrastructure not directly related to or supportive of agriculture, horticulture, silviculture, forestry, nursery or of other uses permitted under the A-1 zoning classification.

B. Prohibited and Restricted Uses and Activities.
During the term of this agreement, the following activities are prohibited or restricted:

1. "Commercial Uses" and "Development" as described in Article I, Paragraph A. are specifically prohibited.

2. Grantor may not itself, or permit others to, dump trash, ashes, garbage, waste, abandoned vehicles, appliances, or machinery, or other materials on the property.

3. Filling, excavation, dredging, mining or drilling, or removal of topsoil, sand, gravel, rock, peat, minerals or other materials, or changes in the topography of the land shall be prohibited except as necessary for the purposes of combating erosion or as incidental to Permitted Uses and Activities allowed by this Agreement.

4. Although permitted uses in the A1 zoning classification, quarries, airports, assemblies, motor vehicle service stations and borrow source operations shall not be permitted under this Agreement.

5. The Property may not be subdivided, or partitioned, except that the Property may be subdivided into tracts five acres in size or larger.

C. Permitted Uses and Activities.

1. Current Uses and Activities described in Article I, Paragraph A. are permitted and can be expanded or extended without limitation or restriction.

2. Additional Uses or Activities, i.e., any uses or activities that are not Current Uses and Activities and that are not Prohibited and Restricted Uses and Activities, but are related to or extensions of Permitted Uses and Activities shall be considered Permitted Uses and Activities, however, Best Management Practices associated with those Additional Uses or Activities must be implemented. The term "related to or extensions of Permitted Uses and Activities" shall be construed and interpreted broadly consistent with the intent of this Agreement, to allow the widest variety of agricultural uses, including, by way of example but not of limitation, directly supporting retail uses such as feed stores or blacksmith shops and retail outlets for agricultural products such as nurseries or wineries, while avoiding urban-type development not appropriate, consistent with proper land use planning, to be located near active military uses now existing or existing during the term of this Agreement. The term "related to or extensions of Permitted Uses and Activities" shall be construed and interpreted broadly to allow Grantor wide flexibility in adapting to and evolving changed agricultural conditions and best management practices.

Such Additional Activities may include, for example, farming, silviculture, husbandry, timber, forestry, horticulture, nursery or related uses or businesses (such as, by way of example but not by way of limitation, agricultural supply or nursery wholesale and retail sales). Best Management Practices may include, for example, taking appropriate steps to maintain water quality, minimize sedimentation in or over the Property or into surface waters, etc.

In adopting Additional Uses and Activities, the parties desire to conserve, where consistent with such uses, the Property's (i) open spaces, and/or (ii) woodland, agricultural or rural settings, and/or (iii) scenic and natural vistas, and/or natural resources such as meadows, pastures, fields, woods, croplands, rock outcroppings, creeks, streams, wetlands, etc.

Article II. Enforcement and Remedies.

A. Upon any breach of the terms of this Agreement by Grantor that comes to the attention of the Grantee, the Grantee shall notify the Grantor in writing of such breach. The Grantor shall have ninety (90) days after receipt of such notice to begin undertaking actions that are reasonably calculated to correct promptly the conditions constituting such breach. If the breach remains uncured after ninety (90) days, the Grantee may enforce this Agreement by appropriate legal proceedings including for injunctive and other related relief.

B. Grantee, its employees and agents and its successors and/or assigns, shall have the right, with reasonable notice and at reasonable times, to enter the Property for the purpose of inspecting the Property to determine whether the Grantor and its successors and/or assigns are complying with the terms, conditions and restrictions of this Agreement. Grantor shall not be liable to Grantee, its employees and agents and its successors and/or assigns, for any personal injury or damage which may result from Grantee's exercise of this right of inspection, and Grantee shall, to the extent allowed by law, hold harmless and indemnify Grantor against any such personal injury or damage which may result from Grantee's exercise of this right of inspection.

C. Nothing contained in this Agreement shall be construed to entitle Grantee to bring any action against Grantor for any injury or change in the Property caused by third parties, resulting from causes beyond the Grantor's control, including, without limitation, fire, flood, storm, and earth movement, or from any prudent action taken in good

faith by the Grantor under emergency conditions to prevent, abate, or mitigate significant injury to life, damage to property or harm to the Property resulting from such causes.

Article III. Documentation and Title.

A. Property Condition. The parties acknowledge that the Property is currently developed to the following extent, as generally described in Exhibit B, attached hereto and incorporated by reference, which sets forth a narrative description of the general extent of use and/or development of the property as of the date hereof. Exhibit C, attached hereto and incorporated by reference, is an aerial photograph of the Property from the County's GIS system.

B. Title. The Grantor covenants and represents that the Grantor is the sole owner and is seized of the Property in fee simple and has good right to grant this Agreement and convey the easement rights hereby conveyed, that the Property is free and clear of any and all encumbrances, except agreements of record, and Grantor covenants that the Grantee shall have the use of and enjoy all of the benefits derived from and arising out of the aforesaid Agreement. .

Article IV. Compensation.

A. In consideration of this Agreement, Grantee shall pay to Grantor $____ annually on each February 1 that this Agreement is in effect, contingent upon (i) Grantor's compliance herewith, and (ii) Grantor's timely payment of ad valorem property taxes attributable to the calendar year preceding such February 1. Grantor acknowledges that such payment is made in consideration of the term hereof being at least ten (10) years. If Grantor shall terminate this Agreement in his, her or its discretion prior to expiration of the stated term hereof, then Grantor shall reimburse to Grantee a pro rata portion of the compensation payments made hereunder, as follows: (I) if termination occurs during the first five years, Grantor shall reimburse Grantee all amounts paid by Grantee as compensation hereunder; (II) if termination occurs after the fifth year, then Grantor shall reimburse Grantee half [50 percent] of all amounts paid by Grantee as compensation hereunder attributable to any period after the fifth year of the term hereof. Grantor shall make such payment to Grantee within 45 days after the effective date of a termination triggering such reimbursement obligation.

B. In further consideration of this Agreement, Grantee shall assess, during the term of this agreement, Grantor's Property for ad valorem property tax purposes at the lower of its current assessment or the assessment which Grantee's Tax Administrator would apply to the Property were the Property zoned CD (Conservation District). The Grantor and Grantee acknowledge that Grantee's Tax Administrator assesses CD real property at the rate of $___ per acre.

C. Nothing in this agreement shall be construed to affect or otherwise alter the zoning classification of the Property at the end of the term of this agreement. Nothing in this agreement shall be construed to affect or otherwise alter the Grantor's use of the Special Use tax program at the end of the term of this agreement.

Article V. Miscellaneous.

A. Subsequent Transfers. Grantor agrees for itself, its successors and assigns, to notify Grantee in writing of the names and addresses of any party to whom the Property, or any part thereof, is to be transferred after the effective date hereof at least ten business days prior to the time said transfer is consummated. Grantor, for itself, its successors and/or assigns, further agrees to make specific reference to this Agreement in a separate paragraph of any subsequent lease, deed or other legal instrument by which any interest in the Property is conveyed.

B. Conservation Purpose. Grantee, for itself, its successors and assigns, agrees that this Agreement shall be held by it exclusively for conservation of natural resource, agricultural, agroforestry, silvipasture, forestry, horticulture, silviculture, open space purposes or related uses as more fully described above.

C. The parties hereto agree that the benefits of this Agreement are not assignable.

D. Construction of Terms. This Agreement shall be construed to promote the purposes of the North Carolina enabling statute set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-401 et seq., which authorizes the creation of open space and natural resource conservation agreements, easements, deeds, etc. for purposes including those set forth in the recitals herein.

E. Entire Agreement. This instrument sets forth the entire agreement of the parties with respect to the Agreement and supersedes all prior discussions, negotiations, understandings or agreements relating to the Agreement. If any provision shall be found to be invalid, the remainder of the provisions of this Agreement, and the application of such provision to persons or circumstances other than those as to which it is found to be invalid, shall not be affected thereby.

F. Recording. The Grantee may record this instrument and any amendment hereto in timely fashion in the official records of the Cumberland County, North Carolina Registry.

G. Notices. Any notices shall be sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, addressed in the case of Grantor, to_____, and in the case of Grantee to Cumberland County, c/o County Manager, P.O. Box 1829, Fayetteville, N.C. 28302, or to such other addresses such party may establish in writing to the other.

H. Environmental Condition of Property. The Grantor warrants and represents to the Grantee that to the best of its knowledge as of the date hereof there are no hazardous materials, substances, wastes, or environmentally regulated substances located on, in or under the Property or used in connection therewith. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Grantor expressly advises Grantee that asbestos was a common building material at the time many structures on the Property were constructed, and Grantor makes no warranty or representation to Grantee as to the presence or absence of asbestos in any particular structure on the Property. Grantor further expressly advises Grantee that use of regulated or restricted chemicals incorporated into pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, etc. is customary, common and normal incidental to the activities carried on by Grantor and permitted hereunder, and Grantor makes no warranty or representation to Grantee as to the presence or absence of such regulated or restricted chemicals on the Property.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD unto Cumberland County, North Carolina, its successors and assigns, forever on the terms above stated. The covenants agreed to and the terms, conditions, restrictions and purposes imposed as aforesaid shall be binding upon Grantor and Grantor's successors and/or assigns, and shall continue as a servitude running during the term of this Agreement with the Property.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, Grantor and Grantee by authority duly given, have hereunto caused these presents to be executed by their respective officers and their corporate seals affixed, as of the date first appearing hereinabove, to be effective upon the date of recordation in the public registry of Cumberland County, North Carolina.

GRANTOR:

WITNESS:

_____ By: _____

By:

_____

GRANTEE: CUMBERLAND COUNTY,

ATTEST NORTH CAROLINA

By: _____

_____ Chairman of the Board of Commissioners

## Agricultural Producers, Agribusiness and Non-Farm Surveys

Surveys and interviews were conducted in the county to account for the trends, issues, and opportunities the community as a whole identifies for agriculture. The populations targeted were: producers/landowners, agri-businesses, and the general non-farm public.

The county team distributed the surveys through their meetings, to their advisory boards, and on their websites. The team also provided names of key people in the county to interview. All the survey and interview responses were compiled to determine the response.

Copies of the three surveys are below.