Sampson County Working Lands Protection Plan

December 2010

This project received support from the N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 3

Executive Summary 4

Statement of Need for Action 6

State of Agriculture in Sampson County 9

Natural Attributes of Sampson County: Soil and Water 19

Farmland Protection Programs 25

Challenges and Opportunities Facing Agriculture 29

Recommendations 45

References 51

Appendix A 52

Appendix B 63

Acknowledgements

The Sampson County Working Lands Protection Plan was written by W. Stan Dixon, Ed.D. Dr. Dixon, retired County Cooperative Extension Director Greene Center, served with Cooperative Extension for more than 34 years. The plan was edited by Grace Lawrence and Sandy Maddox, Ed.D. Ms. Lawrence has a master's degree in education and has worked in the environmental field for more than 15 years. Dr. Maddox is the associate director of the Lois G. Britt Agribusiness Center at Mount Olive College. She has more than 30 years of experience in agriculture with Cooperative Extension and NCDA & CS.

Research and assistance was provided by:

N.C. Cooperative Extension Sampson County Center
Kent Wooten, Extension Director

Sampson County Division of Forest Resources
Grant Jones, County Ranger

Sampson County Economic Development
John Swope

Sampson Clinton Planning Department

Mount Olive College, Lois G. Britt Agribusiness Center

Executive Summary

Sampson County agriculture is extremely important to the local economy and the quality of life for all citizens. Working lands are identified as agricultural lands that are in production and represent farming, forestry and horticultural operations. Ft. Bragg's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program has brought to light the important role working lands play not only in the military's readiness, but also in the well being of local counties, municipalities and communities. The BRAC Regional Task Force received a grant from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture to create Working Lands Protection Plans for the counties in the BRAC region to protect these valuable resources.

The goal of this Working Lands Protection Plan is to understand and market the importance of Sampson County agriculture and to address the challenges and opportunities that farmers and landowners face. This plan utilizes a broad definition of agriculture that encompasses all aspects of the cultivation and production of crops and animal products as well as the marketing, processing and distribution of these products and other on-farm enterprises such as forestry and agricultural tourism.

Agriculture is a valuable asset that provides 73 percent of the total economic output of the county and 37 percent of the total county employment. (2008, Walden, NCSU, IMPLAN, Mig. Inc.) Sampson County is fortunate to possess abundant natural and human resources that will enable agriculture to prosper in the future.

In December 2008, the United States Census named North Carolina the fastest growing state in the country. North Carolina was third in actual numbers gained. Sampson County is also experiencing growth. From 1990 to 2008, the county's population increased by 27.2 percent. Sampson County's growth is expected to be impacted by an influx of military transfers relocating to Fort Bragg. Both military and civilian personnel are expected to seek housing in the rural countryside as they also seek affordable land prices. Currently, this growth has not had an adverse effect on the county's farmland. Instead, farmland actually increased by 8 percent from 2002 to 2007, which is counter to what has occurred elsewhere in the state. (http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/County_Profiles/North_Carolina/cp37163.pdf).

However, Sampson County farmers are facing challenges to their operations. Among these are the age of farm owners (55.8 years of age average), increasing input costs, youth not interested in agricultural careers, competition for land and other challenges that will be discussed in this plan. Conversely, there are a number of opportunities available to educate landowners and the public and to expand agriculture with the support of local government and citizens.

Agriculture equals economic prosperity for Sampson County. The following is a snapshot of the impact of agriculture in Sampson County. These commodity rankings validate the tremendous value the agricultural sector affords the county.

In 2005, Farm Futures ranked Sampson County the number-one best place to farm in the United States. Statewide Sampson County ranks:

Number one in:

- Gross farm income
- Total field crop production
- Cash receipts for vegetables, fruits and nuts
- Flue cured tobacco production

Number two in:

- Livestock production
- Hay and oat production

Number seven in:

- Corn production
- Wheat production

Number 19 in:

- Cash receipts from nursery, greenhouse and floriculture.

This plan contains a list of recommendations and actions that focus on supporting the agricultural economy of the county and are based on data provided by farmers, agribusinesses and non-farm residents through surveys and personal interviews. The recommendations provide guidance in protecting working lands. Successful accomplishment of the recommendations will require the teamwork of local government, agricultural agencies, farmers, agribusiness and citizens of Sampson County. The recommendations are:

1. Expand Farm and Forest Land Preservation Programs
2. Promote an Appreciation and Awareness of Agriculture to Citizens and Elected Officials
3. Develop a Youth Agricultural Leadership Program
4. Support farm-friendly policies and programs that protect and grow agriculture.
5. Support Agriculture Policies and Programs that Protect Farming and Agribusiness

This Working Lands Protection Plan should be reviewed annually to celebrate accomplishments and to add new recommendations as needed.

Statement of Need for Action

Sampson County and agriculture are synonymous. In 2007, Sampson County ranked first in North Carolina in agriculture sales recording 12 percent of the state's agricultural income (U.S. Census of Agriculture, 2007). Sampson County's economy revolves around farming and agribusiness with 37 percent of the county employment coming from this sector (2008 Walden, NCSU).

This Working Lands Protection Plan acknowledges the importance of agriculture not only to the local economy but also to the environment. Good agricultural and forestry practices provide soil stabilization to reduce erosion and sedimentation, which can affect water quality. Once land is developed, it rarely goes back to agricultural production. Agriculture also provides green space, water management, wildlife habitat, recreation, agricultural tourism and retention of the county's rural heritage. One of the main attractions of the county is the pastoral setting that working lands offer. As reported in the Fayetteville Observer on November 23, 2009, when Fort Bragg's personnel expansion occurs, Sampson County is expected to be a county of preference for the new residents who are moving to North Carolina for many of the attributes noted.

The Sampson County Working Lands Protection Plan will serve as a guide for county efforts to preserve farm and forest lands and will encourage the continued diversity of the agricultural industry. This plan recognizes that:

- Agriculture is a vital component of the county's economy,
- Preserving farming is in the best interest of all citizens and
- Farmland is an irreplaceable resource.

Sampson County Historic and Geographic Characteristics

Sampson County was established April 1784 by the North Carolina General Assembly from an area taken from neighboring Duplin County. Additional land was annexed from Wayne and New Hanover counties at a later date. The county is named for John Sampson an early settler in the county who was the first register of deeds in Duplin and a general in the local militia. The county seat, Clinton, is named for his stepson Richard Clinton, who served in the N.C. General Assembly and secured the passage of the bill to create the new county (Sampson County Webpage).

Sampson County is the second-largest county in North Carolina with a land area of 947 square miles. The county is 60 miles long and 35 miles wide and is about the same size as Rhode Island. The population of Sampson County in 2008 was reported as 63,927 citizens. This number represents a 6.1 percent rate of growth since 2000, when the population was reported as 60,161.

Since 1990 the county has grown by 27.2 percent, an increase of 15,630 citizens (U.S. Census Bureau).

The county is home to 15 towns and communities other than Clinton, including Autryville, Bonnetsville, Delway, Garland, Harrells, Ingold, Ivanhoe, Keener, Newton Grove, Plain View, Roseboro, Salemburg, Spiveys Corner, Turkey and Vann Crossroads.

Sampson County is located in the coastal plain with a topography that is mostly level to gently sloping. The majority of the county is within the Cape Fear River Basin and is drained by the Black, the South, the Great Coharie and the Little Coharie rivers. The county is only one hour from the state capitol, Raleigh, and one hour from Wilmington, a major port in the state. The county is also served by a good highway system, with the northeastern section of the county bisected by Interstate 40. Highways 701, 421, 24 and 13 also provide ready access to and through Sampson County. With the current road system and future expansions of roads in the southern part of the county, growth will naturally occur along these corridors. Sampson County has a seasonal climate that is conducive to growing most crops. Rainfall averages 49 inches annually with more than 50 percent falling during the growing season (Sampson County Webpage).

Business Profile

Sampson County is a state and national leader in agriculture and agribusiness. The county is home to many large businesses including numerous agribusinesses that are major employers. These are located across the county. The largest employer in the county is Smithfield Foods, an agribusiness that operates a processing operation plant in Clinton. The 800,000 square foot facility can process fresh pork and further processed items such as bacon, sausage, loins, hams, ribs, butts and picnics. Ready-to-eat products for restaurants and consumers are also made at this facility. The facility can process approximately 2.6 million pigs annually and employs more than 1,200 people. Prestage Farm, Inc., a producer of quality pork and poultry, is also located in the county and is the second-largest employer with up to 1,000 employees. Piggly Wiggly, a regional grocery store, is located across the county and is the seventh-largest employer.

There are several agribusiness companies located along the Highway 24 corridor—Bay Valley Foods, Carroll's Food, Dean Pickles and Allen Canning. Allen Canning grows and distributes canned and frozen vegetables entirely within the U.S. and employs up to 250 people. Newton Grove is home to TMS, Inc. and Hog Slat, Inc., the fourth-largest employer in the county.

Martins Abattoir and Wholesale Meats located in Godwin is also noted to be among the top 10 employers in the county. Garland has the Garland Shirt Factory, which employs over 200 people and supplies clothing for Brooks Brothers. The outlet at the factory is utilized by customers from throughout the region. The largest producer of corrugated plastic pipe, Crumpler Plastic Pipe and Plastic Tubing, is located in Roseboro. The Sampson Southeast

Business Center in Clinton is home to Steel Technologies, Schindler Elevator Corporation, Dubose Strapping and Dubose National Energy. These companies provide needed diversification and skilled jobs (http://www.clintonsampsonchamber.org/) The county is also developing a new industrial site in the northeastern sector of the county that is a proposed location for the Fibrowatt Company and is developing additional sites along Interstate 40, which bisects the county (Sampson County Economic Development). Manufacturing and agriculture account for one-third of the industry base in the county.

Production Profile

Crop and livestock production are vitally important to the economy of Sampson County. The market value of products sold in 2007 was $1,196,332,000. Row crops accounted for 13 percent or $150,109,000, and livestock accounted for 87 percent or $1,046,223,000. Sampson County ranks first in the United States in turkeys, second in swine and first in tobacco production (U.S. Census of Agriculture 2007, NCDA&CS Ag Statistics, 2009).

Forestry is another important component of agriculture in the county. The county has 334,200 acres of forest, with 322,100 acres owned privately. The North Carolina Division of Forest Resources (NCDFR) estimated timber value in 2008 to be more than $207,000,000 in Sampson County. In 2007 to 2008, through NCDFR's reforestation activities, $1,100,000 was added to the county economy (2008 Summary of Accomplishments in Sampson County NCDFR).

Sampson County has experienced growth in population while also experiencing growth in farm and forest production and agribusiness. As competition for land continues between development and agriculture in Sampson County, it is important for county leadership to continue supporting the economic engine on which the county relies. The challenges and opportunities that farmers and agribusiness owners reveal in the Working Lands Protection Plan serve to provide leaders the insight and direction they need to continue to support the industry.

The State of Agriculture in Sampson County

Agriculture, Agribusiness: Sampson County's Number-One Industry

Sampson County farms produce a variety of crops and livestock agricultural products. Sampson County consistently ranks statewide and nationally in the top 10 in the production of many commodities. According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, Sampson County ranks number one in total value of agricultural products sold and in value of crops including nursery and greenhouse, and it ranks number two in value of livestock, poultry and their products. A review of Sampson County agriculture and agriculture producers reveals the following data:

- Land in Farms: 321,454 acres
- Harvested Cropland: 187,087 acres
- Average Farm Size: 267 acres
- Number of Farms: 1203
- Average Age of Farmers: 55.8 years
- Market Value of Products Sold: $1,196,332,000 (2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, County Profile)
- Land in Forest: 334,200 acres (NCDFR Sampson County)
- Estimated Timber Value: $207,000,000 (2008 NCDFR Summary of Accomplishments in Sampson County)

Sampson County actually experienced an increase in farmland acreage of 8 percent over a five-year period. The county had 298,483 acres in farmland in 2002, which increased to 321,454 acres in 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2007). Figure 1 depicts farmland acreage in the county since 1950. Farmland has been on the increase since 1992, with the only reduction occurring from 1950 to 1992 when farmland decreased by 179,282 acres. This reduction is attributed to the historic change in farming from small farmsteads to larger farms. Over the 15-year period from 1992 to 2007, farm acreage has steadily increased in Sampson County which is contrary to a large number of other North Carolina counties.

While farm acreage has increased, the number of farms has stayed about the same over this same time period with a slight increase of 25 farms since 2002.

The largest decrease in the number of farms was noted from 1950 to 1992. This trend was noted to be similar in other counties across North Carolina. This decline in farm numbers was attributed to increased mechanization and new technologies that allowed for more efficient and

effective cultivation of crops and livestock. The smaller farms that could not afford expansion often sold out or rented their land to other growers.

Agricultural production and manufacturing combine to account for a large portion of the economic and employment impact in the county. Sampson County ranked number one in the state in total value of agriculture products sold in 2007, which was reported as $1,196,332,000. This represented a 77 percent increase in value of products sold from 2002 when the value was $675,691,000. The average per farm market value in 2007 was reported as $994,457. Again this represents a large increase (73 percent) from 2002. The vast majority of the products sold were contributed by livestock with 2007 income reported as $1,046,223,000.

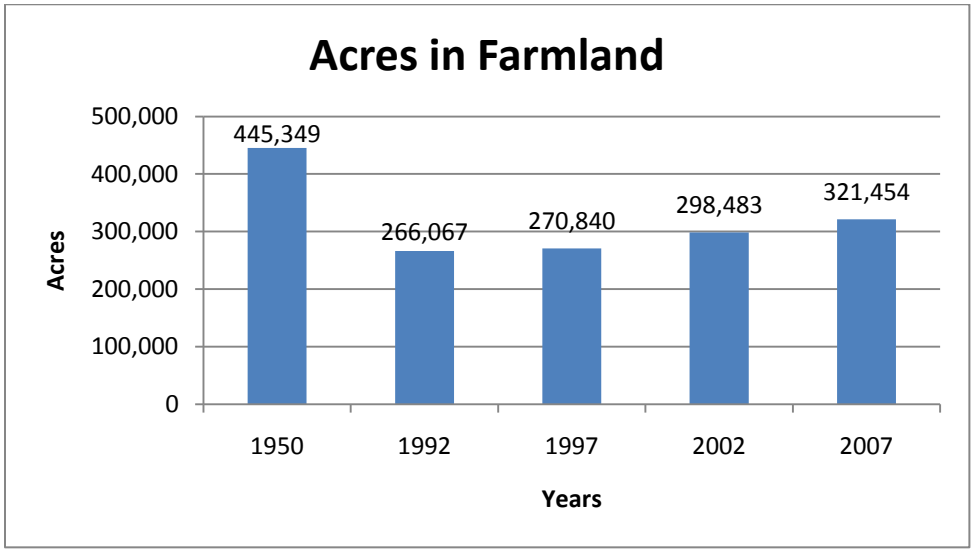

Figure 1. Acreage in Agricultural Production (USDA Census of Agriculture 1950 to 2007)

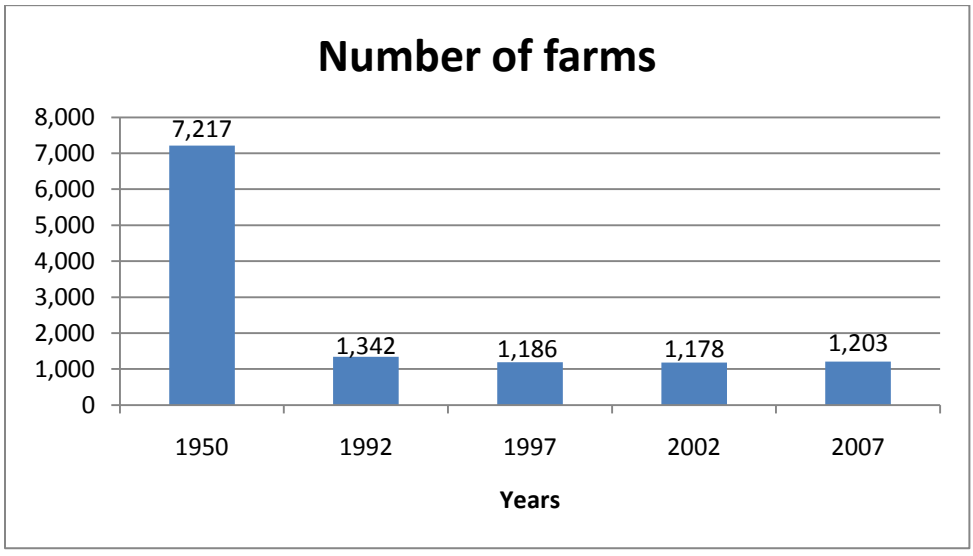

Figure 2. Number of Farms in Sampson County (USDA Census of Agriculture 1950 to 2007)

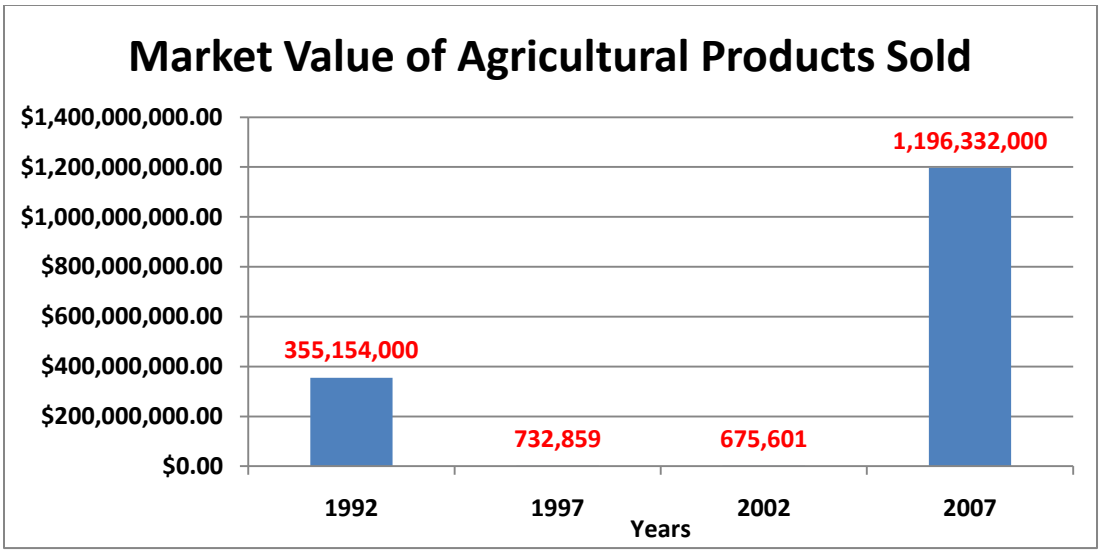

Figure 3. Market Value of Agricultural Products (Census of Agriculture, 1992 to 2007)

Sampson County Ranked as the Number-One Best Place to Farm in the United States

In September 2005, *Farm Futures* magazine declared Sampson County as the best place to farm out of 3,000 counties in the United States (Sampson County Economic Development). *Farm Futures* staff researched USDA Census of Agriculture data from 1987 to 2002 to determine the most profitable counties for farming according to net profits, sales, asset and profit growth. Additional assets used as attributes for determination of the best places to farm included the ability of counties to put their assets to work (support for agribusiness growth); ability of producers to manage risk wisely (progressive farming community) and a citizenry that is supportive of farming. All three are found in abundance in Sampson County. Sampson County is home to a citizen-based organization aptly named the Friends of Agriculture, which promotes agriculture and agribusiness in the county and educates the citizenry about agriculture, its importance and the impact of agricultural issues on the county's economy.

Sampson County Ranked Second in the State in Livestock Receipts

Sampson County is home to a vibrant livestock industry that has grown tremendously over the past 15 years according to USDA Census of Agriculture data. The value of livestock almost doubled in five years from $597,159,000 in 2002 to $1,046,223,000 in 2007 (2007 USDA Census of Agriculture). There was a significant decline in livestock receipts of $733,344,000 in 2008 due to a reduction in hog numbers and a decrease in hog prices.

As Figure 4 indicates, livestock value has increased by over $750 million from 1992 to 2007. The majority of this phenomenal growth was due to the hog industry, which almost doubled since 1992 when hog inventory was reported at 1,085,425 compared to 2,155,000 in 2008 (NCDA

Agricultural Statistics 2009). A great deal of this growth can be attributed to the vertically integrated contract growing system that assures farmers of a market for their animals to an integrator who supplies them inventory and feed. Several large companies are located in the county and surrounding area.

Sampson County ranked second in the state in swine inventory in 2008 with 2,000,000 head reported on farm. The county ranked second in the state for turkeys with 10,381,000 raised in 2008. Broilers were also an important commodity in Sampson County with 22,000,000 produced in 2008. The county ranked seventh for all cattle in the state with 25,000 head (NCDA Agricultural Statistics 2009). The cattle numbers in the county have expanded in concert with the swine industry as optimum utilization of land is important as is the utility of land for waste management.

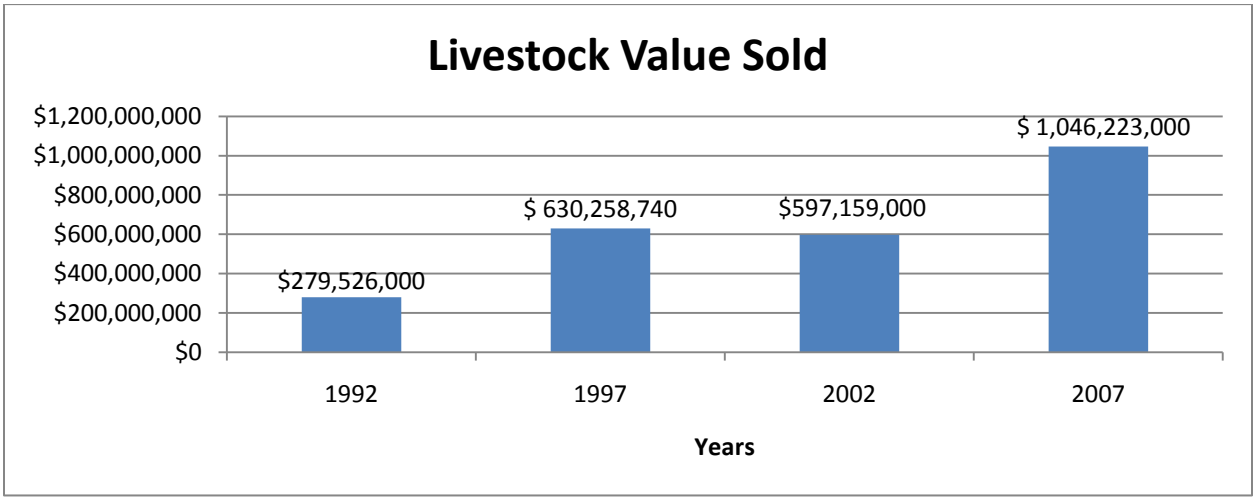

Figure 4. Market Value of Livestock Sold (Census of Agriculture, 1992 to 2007)

Agriculture and Agribusiness Income in Sampson County

According to Walden, agriculture and agribusiness contributed $1,109,449,714 or 72.9 percent in total income to the county economy in 2008. This sector also accounted for 37.4 percent (10,435 jobs) of total county employment. Of the 10 major employers in the county, six are agribusinesses. The forest industry also must be recognized as an important contributor to the overall income and employment in the county.

Sampson County Leads the State in a Diversity of Commodities

(*Data from NCDA Agricultural Statistics, 2008, 2009*)

In 2008, Sampson County ranked first in North Carolina in total farm cash receipts for crops reporting at $157,370,000. This number-one ranking was due to the cornucopia of crops that

were produced in the county, ranging from tobacco to vegetables to corn and hay. Following is a description of the top crops produced.

Vegetables, Fruits and Nuts

Sampson was number-one in cash receipts for vegetables, fruits and nuts with $50,652,000 reported. Sampson County was second in cucumber harvested acres and third in blueberry and cabbage harvested acres. Sampson County ranked first in sweet potato production in 2008 with 7,300 acres producing 1,480,000 hundredweight and in 2009 reported 7,500 acres and 1,690,000 hundredweight. The 2007 Census of Agriculture reported that fruits, vegetables, sweet potatoes, nuts and berries contributed a combined value of $70,933,000.

Tobacco Acreage and Value Increases

Tobacco is still a cash crop in Sampson County. Even with the buyout of the tobacco quota system, the crop acreage increased, and the county was ranked first in flue cured production in 2008 and 2009. In 2002, the county raised 5,421 acres of tobacco. By 2008, flue-cured tobacco acreage doubled to 12,180 acres, and 12,190 acres were reported in 2009. According to USDA Census of Agriculture figures, the market value of tobacco increased by 64.8 percent, from $21,293,000 in 2002 to $32,843,000 in 2007. Tobacco remains a very viable and valuable crop in the county.

Sampson County Second in the State, Hay and Oats

In 2009, Sampson farmers grew 40,500 acres of hay, which produced 144,000 tons. This was an increase of 32 percent from 2007 when 27,500 acres produced 60,000 tons. This increase can be attributed to the increase in production of cattle and other livestock. A majority of the hay was used for livestock effluent or waste products.

Oats were raised on 1,700 acres with 132,300 bushels in 2008. It is interesting to note that in 2007, 1,800 acres were grown with total production of only 23,000 bushels due to the devastating drought of that year. This clearly shows the precarious task farmers have in producing crops—they do not control the weather.

Sampson County Fourth in the State, Soybeans

Soybeans have been a consistently grown crop in the county over the years. In 2002, 47,244 acres were produced, but this dramatically increased to 59,900 acres in 2008 with 2,126,000 bushels harvested. Production continued to increase in 2009 to 67,500 acres and 2,313,400 bushels produced. This increase may be attributed to the rapid rise of commodity price for soybeans. Since 2007 when the value of soy beans was $8,242,000, the value has increased markedly as a result of continued commodity price increases (Census of Agriculture 2007).

Sampson County Seventh in the State, Corn

Corn acreage has fluctuated greatly from year to year primarily because of commodity price. In 2002, farmers grew 23,803 acres compared to 47,600 acres produced in 2007. In 2008, production decreased by 5,600 acres to 42,000 acres, and in 2009 acreage was reported at 39,500 acres. Corn market value in 2007 was $13,058,000.

Sampson County Seventh in the State, Wheat

From 2007 to 2009, farmers grew an additional 2,000 acres of wheat in Sampson County. The total acreage that year was 25,000. Wheat is often used as a double crop with soybeans. Yield more than doubled from 26 bushels per acres in 2007 to 58 bushels in 2008, which was a direct impact of the drought in 2007. Wheat income in 2007 was $3,204,000.

Sampson County Seventh in the State, Cotton

Cotton acreage has fluctuated in Sampson County over the last decade. Cotton production, however, has experienced an increase. In 2008, 29,600 bales were produced. Additionally, the northern corner of the county houses two cotton gins– Corner Gin and Sampson Gin. Cotton and cottonseed brought Sampson County $7,970,000 in cash receipts in 2008.

Sampson County Nineteenth in the State, Nursery, Greenhouse and Floriculture

Other rapidly expanding commodities in the county were greenhouse and floriculture value-added products. These specialty market crops increased dramatically in value over a three-year period with receipts reported as $5,048,000 in 2002, increasing to $9,791,000 in 2007 and increasing to $11,973,000 in 2008. In a six-year period, there has been a 58 percent market value growth. This trend in income growth is expected to continue as growth in population and development requires more nursery landscape products.

Sampson County Forestry

Forestry is a very important component of the county's agricultural economy. According to the N. C. Division of Forest Resources, 55 percent of Sampson County's land mass, or 334,200 acres, is in commercial forest land. The overwhelming majority of the forested land, 316,000 acres, is privately owned. The forestry industry owns and manages 12,100 acres, and the state owns and manages 6,100 acres.

In 2008, the N.C. Division of Forest Resources estimated timber value as $207,000,000 from an estimated forest volume of 324,100,000 cubic feet. Data from IMPLAN Mig, Inc. indicates that forestry industries in Sampson County accounted for $25,952,968 in value-added dollars for 2006. The forestry industries used in this analysis included loggers, foresters, mills, processing facilities, manufacturing plants and other businesses associated with forests and forest

products. The income breakdown was $10,836,600 from farming, $12,914,000 from manufacturing and $2,202,368 from wholesaling/retailing.

The USDA Forest Service's 2006 National Woodland Owner Survey reported that approximately 28 percent of the forested acres in North Carolina had an up-to-date forest management plan. This indicates that 72 percent of the landowners need to develop a plan to more effectively and economically manage their forest resources. These plans assist landowners with the goals and management of their forests and document that the land is being actively managed for the Present Use Value tax available to all qualified farms and forests.

The N. C. Division of Forest Resources in Sampson County is working diligently to prepare forest management plans. In 2008, they wrote 106 management plans for forest owners. These plans were for 4,090 acres. The staff estimate that through management and reforestation efforts, the future economic benefit could be $8,800,000 to the county (2008 Summary of Accomplishments in Sampson County NCDFR).

Figure 5 depicts forested land use in the county and indicates that productive land is widespread. Forest land is predominately, but not exclusively, located along major waterways in the county. Loblolly pine is the predominant species in the region, and soils suitable for loblolly are found throughout the county as illustrated in Figure 6.

Larger land holdings (parcel size) are more likely to remain forested than smaller properties. Figure 7 illustrates that the majority of forest parcels in the county are large to moderate sizes. The larger the parcel is, the more conducive for landowners to manage for timber production. Smaller land parcels, especially those located adjacent to highways and homes, are more difficult to manage due to difficulty in implementing management practices including, but not limited to, aerial herbicide sprays, prescribed burning, harvesting operations and others.

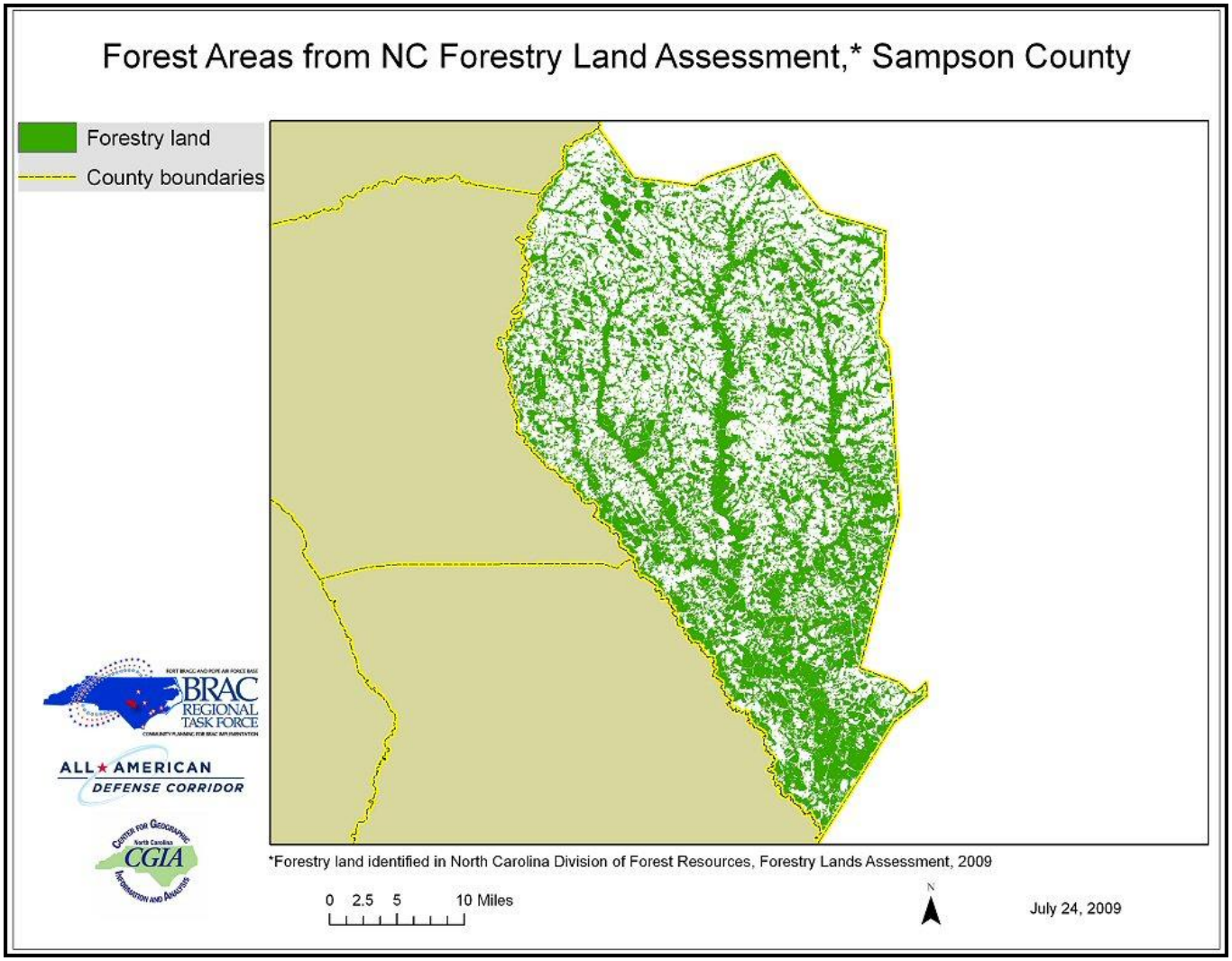

Figure 5. Forestry Land Identified in the N.C .Forestry Land Assessment, 2009

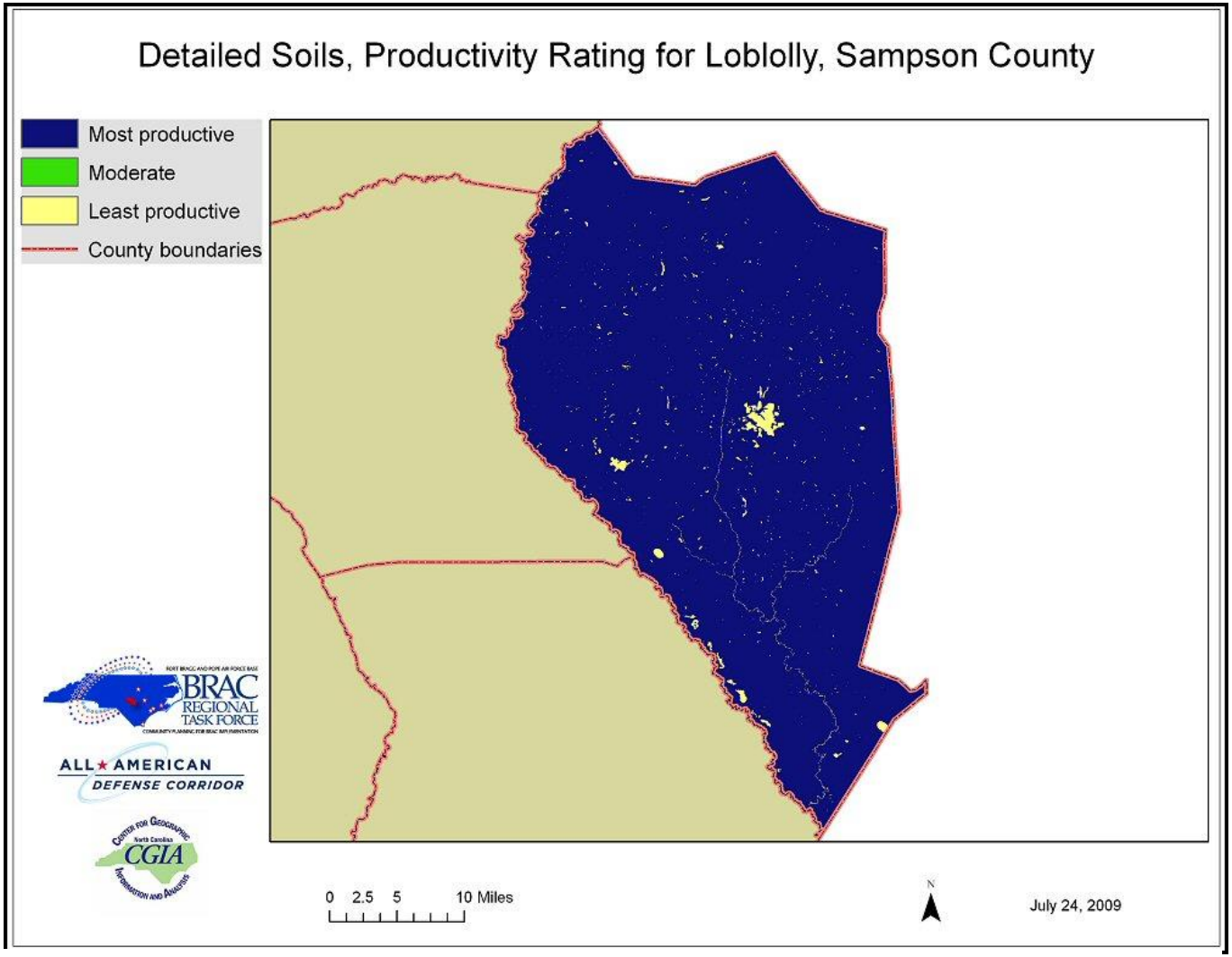

Figure 6. Detailed Soils, Rating Based on Site Index for Loblolly Productivity

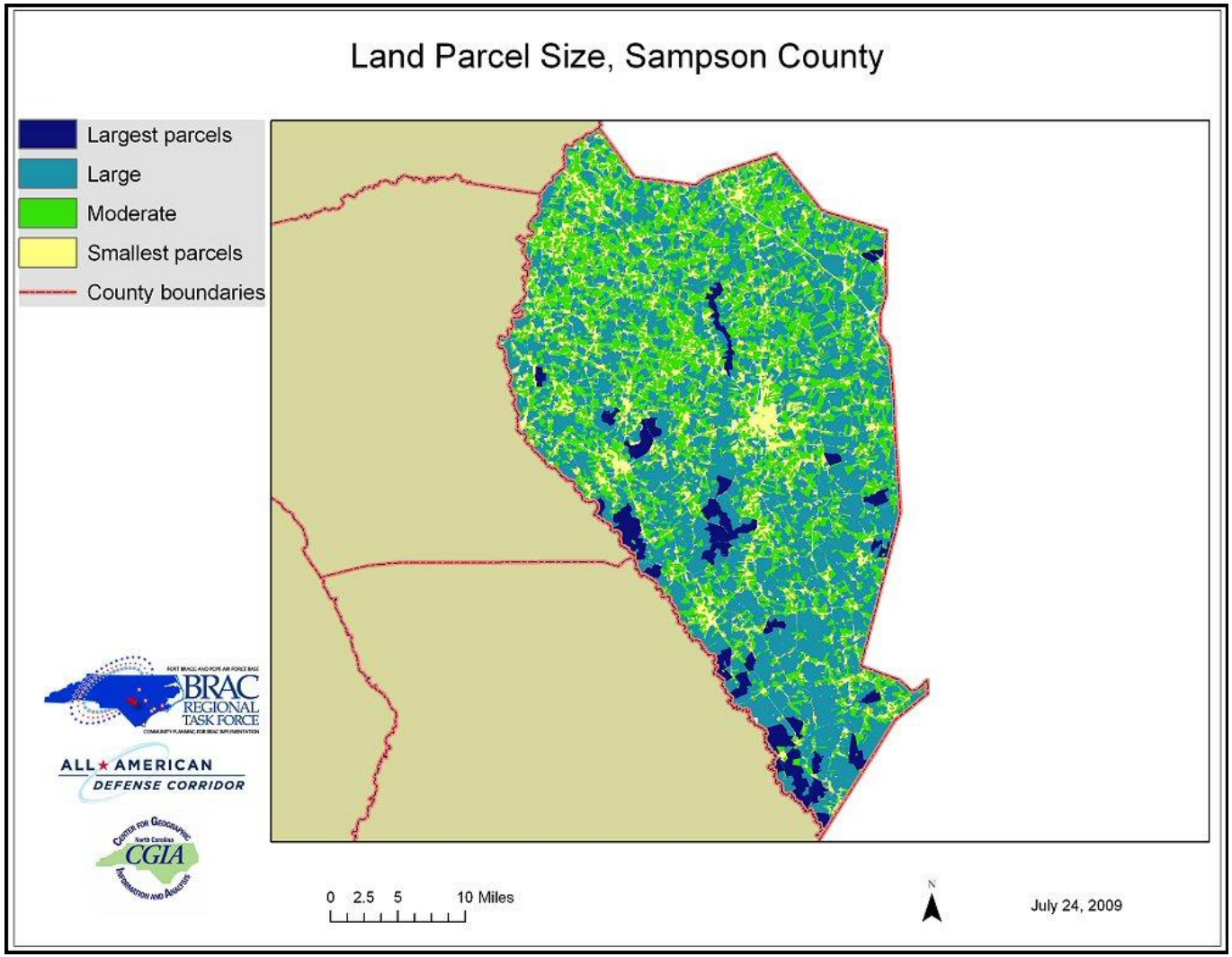

Figure 7. Land Parcel Size, Sampson County

Natural Attributes of Sampson County: Soil and Water

Sampson County is rich in natural attributes as a result of its location in the coastal plain and within major watersheds which supply and drain the county. The topography of Sampson County is mostly flat uplands, known as interstream terraces, that are located between the county's waterways. Gentle to steep slopes are found along the rivers and streams, especially southward, where some slopes rise more than 75 feet above the adjacent river floodplain. Perhaps the most striking topographic feature of the county is the series of small to large Carolina bays, primarily concentrated in the southwestern and northwestern parts of the county.

There are 17 significant Natural Heritage Areas designated in the county with the vast majority of these located in the southern and southwestern portion of the county and along the Black River floodplain. Among these is Cutgrass Bay, an area noted as a high quality natural habitat that is an important rare plant and animal site in the Middle Inner Coastal Plain. One such animal is the little known Carolina gopher frog, which is dispersed in the Sandhills and southeastern coastal plain (One N.C. Naturally Newsletter, March, 2009).

Figure 8 denotes existing land cover in the county and vividly illustrates the waterways and network of wetlands found extensively in the southern part of the county. Cultivated areas are more prominent in the northern two-thirds of the county but are distributed throughout the county. Forested land cover appears more common in the southern part of the county, which again denotes the incidence of forested acreage along waterways. Developed areas (rooftops and pavement) are most evident in the Clinton area.

Soils are a main ingredient for healthy and viable crop and timber production. Soils occurring in the Sampson County fall in five major map unit descriptions according to the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Soil Survey. A general overview of major soil units as described by the Sampson County Soil Survey gives insight into the agronomic capability of soils. This detailed survey was issued in August 1985 and highlights limitations and hazards inherent in the soil and the best uses for land.

1. Wagram-Autryville-Blanton is a naturally level to gently sloping soil that is well drained to moderately well drain. The soil has a sandy surface layer with loamy subsoil. This unit comprises 25 percent in the western, central and southern areas of the county. Wagram, which makes up 35 percent, is nearly level, is well drained and is well suited for cropland. Autryville soils are level and well drained and are also well suited for crops. Blanton soils are level, moderately well drained and poorly suited for crop production. Their best use is pasture land.

2. Norfolk-Rains-Goldsboro soils are from well drained to poorly drained and level to gently sloping. The soils are found in the northern region of the county, with a few areas in the eastern and southern regions. They make up 40 percent of the soils in Sampson County. Norfolk soils (25 percent) are found on higher lying and more sloping parts of the county and are level to gently sloping and well drained. Rains soils are nearly level and poorly drained. Goldsboro soils are level and moderately well drained and comprise 13 percent of this unit. This unit is well suited for cropland and pasture and not for urban and recreation use due to a high water table.

3. Aycock-Exum-Grantham soils are nearly level but are a combination of well, moderately and poorly drained. This unit only makes up four percent of the county and is found in the northwestern area of the county. Aycock soils (31 percent of this unit) are well drained and level. Exum soils (20 percent) are level and moderately well drained. The Grantham soils (10 percent) are poorly drained and are nearly level. These soils are mainly utilized for cropland and for pasture and forest in some areas.

4. Lynn Haven-Leon-Cainhoy soils found in the southern and southwestern parts of the county are poorly and somewhat excessively drained. This unit comprises 12 percent of the county and is level to gently sloping. Lynn Haven soils are poorly drained and are located on flat areas of the county. Leon soils are nearly level and also poorly drained. Cainhoy soils are somewhat excessively drained and found on low sand ridges. These soils, which are poorly suited for crops, are best used for woodlands. They are not at all suited for urban use.

5. Johnston-Bibb soils make up 19 percent of the county, are level, poorly to very poorly drained and usually located on flood plains. Johnson soils are very poorly drained. Bibb soils are poorly drained. Both soil units are best suited for woodlands. They are not suited for urban development (Soil Survey of Sampson County, August, 1985).

Based upon the major soil classifications, Figure 9 depicts crop capability rating. The majority of soils in Sampson County are highly capable of producing a variety of high quality crops emphasizing the compatible use of land resources for agronomic and forest production. Figure 10 designates soils by crop type. Soils that presently support crops clearly indicate that the county has an abundance of productive soils. Sampson County is endowed with good soils and ample water for production of crops and livestock. Figure 11 graphically depicts the unique assets of Sampson County.

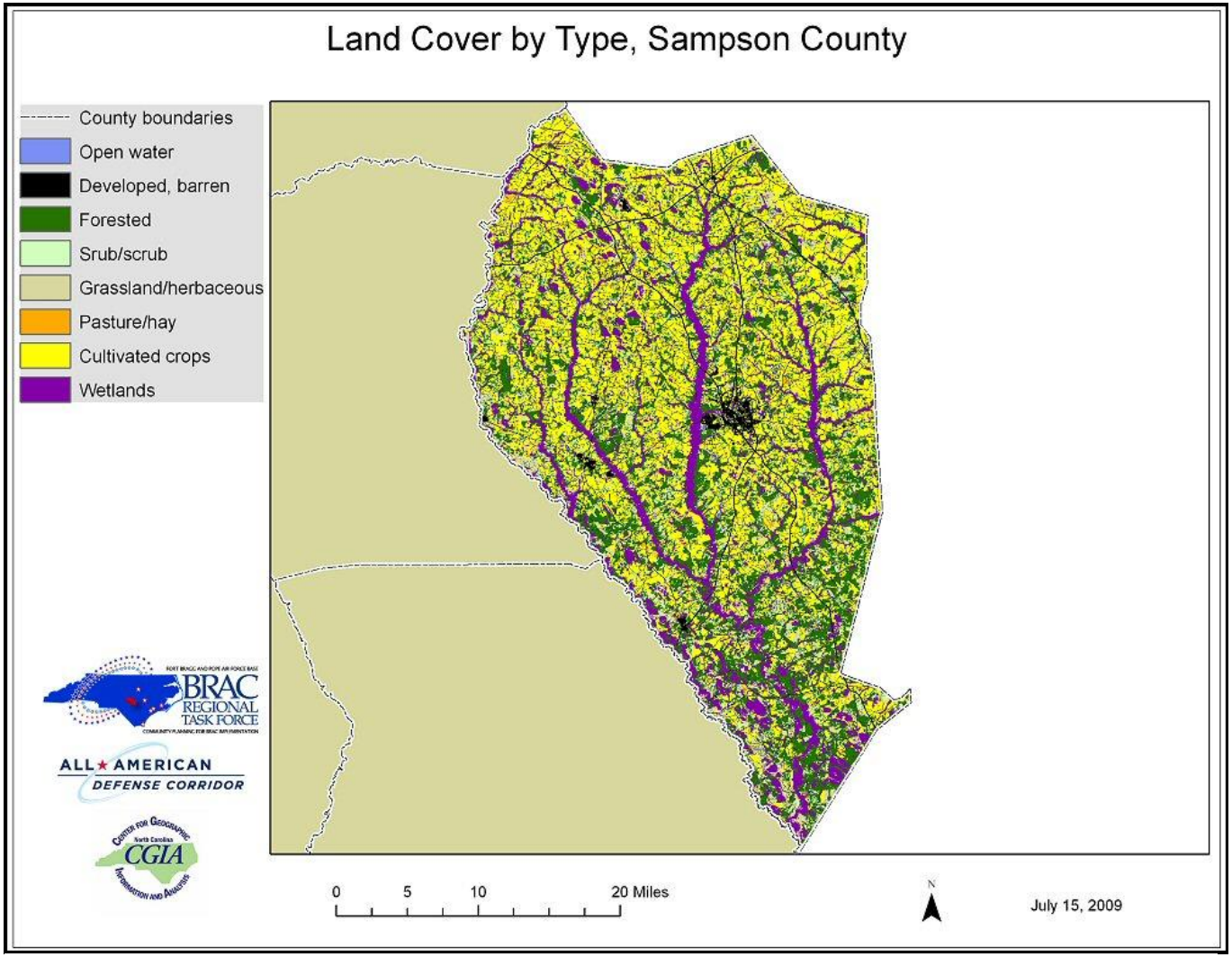

Figure 8. Land Cover by Type. Source: US Geological Survey.

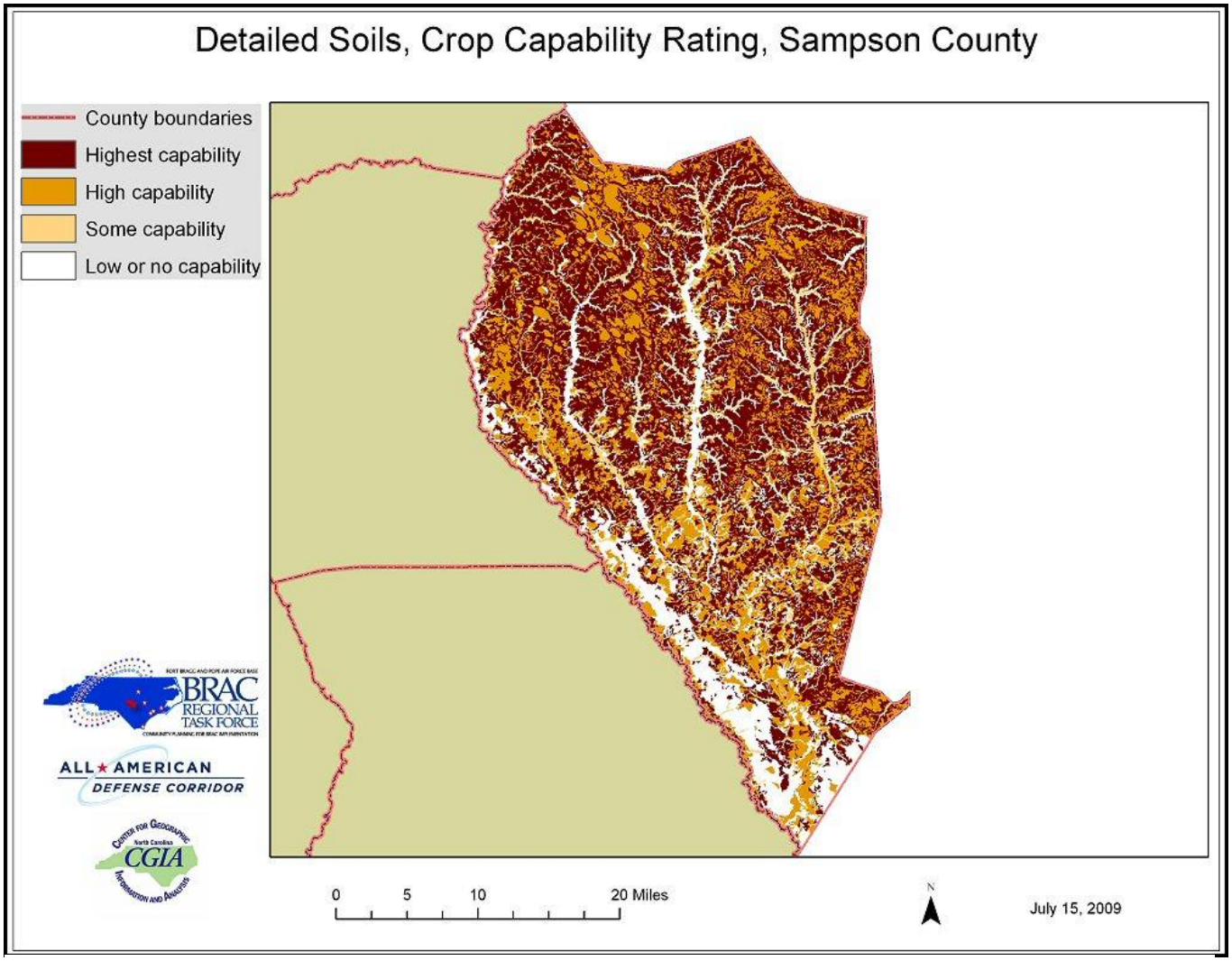

Figure 9. Crop Capability Rating from Detailed Soil Survey. Source: Natural Resources Conservation Service.

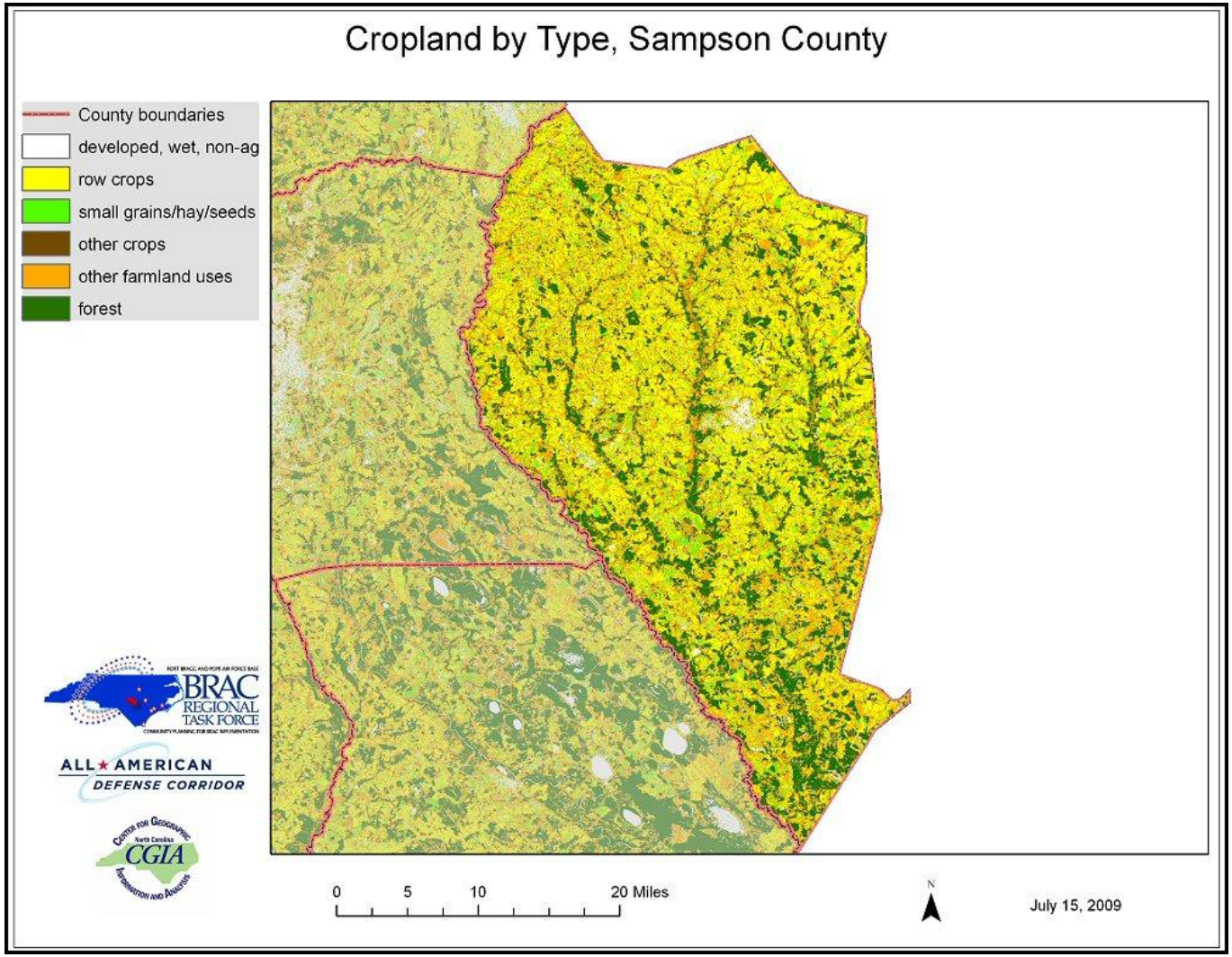

Figure 10. Cropland Type. Source: US Department of Agriculture.

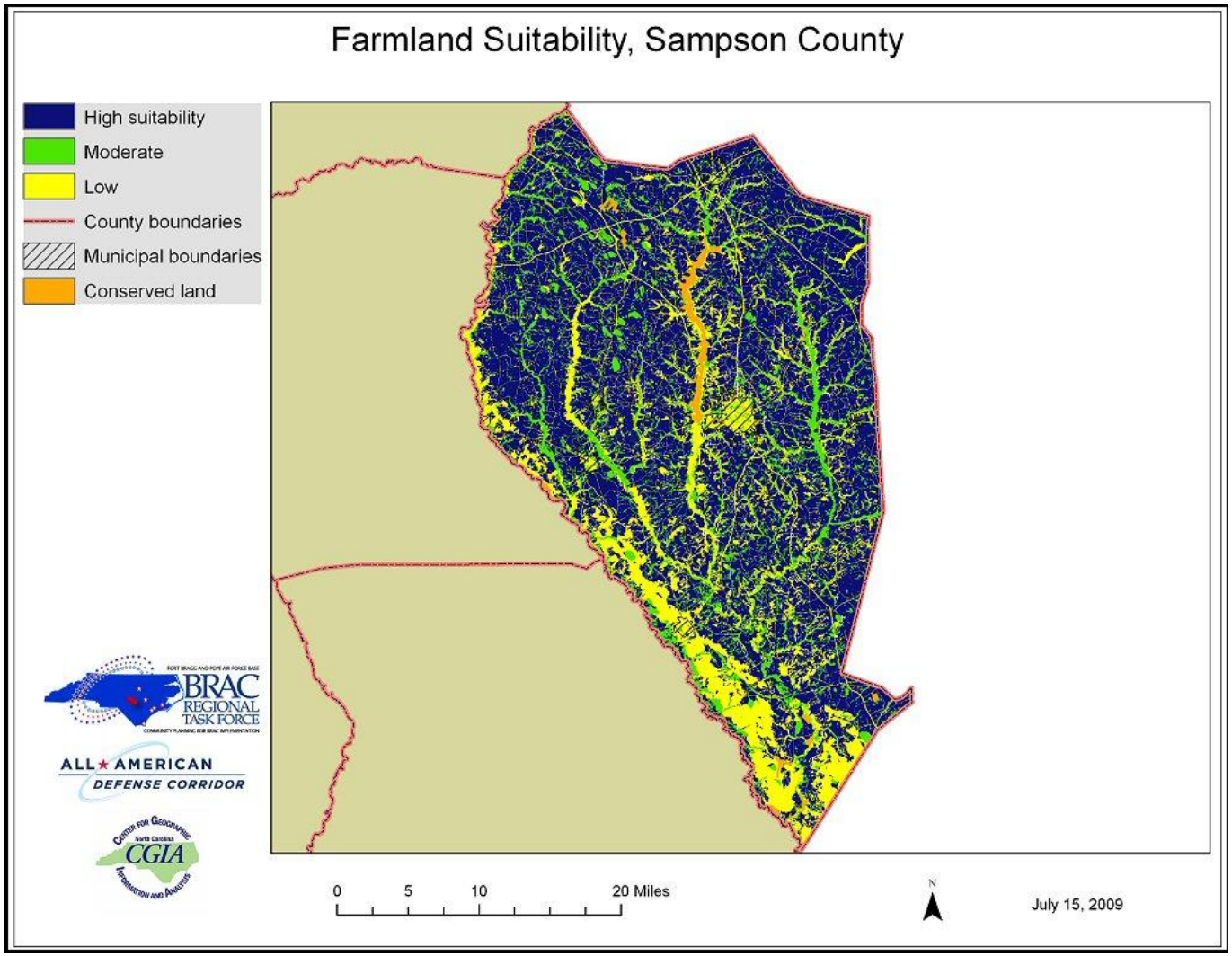

Figure 11. Farmland Suitability. Sources: CGIA, Sustainable Sandhills and BRAC Regional Task Force

Farmland Protection Programs

(*Compiled by John Bonham, 2009*)

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
- Five 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 prior to the application year. Forest land must be enrolled and implementing 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

Sampson County currently has 7,964 parcels enrolled in the PUV program.

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 lawsuits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

Basic 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 10-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 lawsuits.
- Representation by an appointed board regarding concerns or threats to the agricultural sector.

Sampson County established their VAD Ordinance in August 2001 and currently has more than 18,000 acres enrolled and a total of 86 farm parcels. The Sampson County Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance is found in Appendix A.

Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts

Established by N.C.G.S §§ 106-743.1 to .5, an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance is an IRREVOCABLE 10-year agreement to limit development. In return for the condition of irrevocability, the landowner receives all the protections afforded by the VAD and 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 if requested by the local board and approved. Sampson County does not currently have an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance.

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 also can 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.

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)) that protects 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.

Challenges and Opportunities Facing Agriculture

To obtain pertinent information on agriculture, surveys, focus groups and personal interviews were conducted with Sampson County farmers, agribusinesses and non-farm residents. The data was collected in the spring and fall of 2009 by the Sampson County Working Lands Protection Plan (WLPP) team members and the Mount Olive College Lois G. Britt Agribusiness Center. The surveys were dispersed at various meetings and events. The personal interviews were directed to key members in the community from all three target audiences. All descriptive statistics contained in this plan were calculated using data obtained through these processes. The results identify specific challenges and opportunities affecting the future of agriculture in the county.

Agribusiness Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities

Sampson County is home to a large agribusiness sector that illustrates the county's strong farming roots. Agribusiness is defined as "an industry engaged in the producing operations of a farm, the manufacture and distribution of farm equipment and supplies, and the processing, storage, and distribution of farm commodities" by Merriam Webster Dictionary. According to Sampson County Economic Development, more than 12 percent of the workforce is employed by agribusiness firms such as Smithfield Foods, Prestage Farms, Allen Canning, Carrol Foods, Hog Slat and Dean Foods. The county also has a supply sector that provides equipment and supplies needed by farmers such as Clinton Truck and Tractor, Carver Equipment, B.B. Hobbs Company, Williamson Greenhouses, Jones Poultry and Livestock Equipment. As reported by Mike Walden (IMPAN, Mig., Inc. NCSU 2008), agriculture and agribusiness contributed 73 percent of the total county value-added income in Sampson County.

Agribusiness and farmers face an ever changing and continually challenging set of circumstances that positively or adversely impact the profitability of their operations. Many of these events may be completely disassociated with the individual farmer but have a profound impact on their individual operations or the industry as a whole. An example of an event that resulted in a particularly difficult challenge affecting the pork industry during 2009 and 2010, was the H1N1 outbreak. The H1N1 virus, referred to initially as the swine flu, impacted pork sales through a reduction in both domestic and foreign sales. This brought about an 11 percent decrease from 2008 to 2009 and a persistent decline in domestic consumption. Kelly Zering, an agriculture and resource economics professor at North Carolina State University, stated that over a 10- to 12-month period, the virus cost U.S. hog producers about $1.4 billion. Kim Decker, marketing specialist with NCDA&CS, said that the virus, combined with several years of rising feed cost leading to higher input cost, created "a perfect storm" leading to the closure of several

hog companies in North Carolina (Carolina Journalism Network, 2010). Three of the four major hog companies in the state that were forced to close due to the outbreak were located in Sampson County—Coharie Hog Farms, Coastal Plains Pork and Perfect Pig (Carolina Journalism Network, 2010). This challenge resulted in the loss of hog production contracts for farmers and the loss in value of the farmers' capital in the growing facilities. This placed economic hardship on their families and entire farming operations.

Participating agribusinesses surveyed or interviewed represented a wide range of services from equipment dealers, farm supply, feed stores, consultants, equipment repairs and financial institutions. Agribusiness respondents indicated that 58.3 percent of the businesses had been in operation for more than 20 years, and 58.3 percent indicated that 75 percent to 100 percent of their sales were from the farm community (Figure 12).

This clearly shows the importance of farmer purchases to the economic well being of local businesses. Seventy-five percent of the surveyed businesses stated that farm customers were valuable to their operation. This has encouraged 64 percent of the respondents to increase operation size and 82 percent to add new product lines. This depicts their confidence in the farming sector. As is true in other counties, agribusinesses in Sampson County have witnessed new trends in farming such as more sophisticated operations, increased diversification and larger operations (Figure 13). This is a result of greater farm mechanization, global markets driving commodity prices, and producing and processing valued-added products on the farm.

Agribusiness leaders see the need for farmland preservation and government support programs and policies that will sustain the viability of farms and ultimately agribusiness operations. The program noted to be of importance was the right to farm (92 percent). North Carolina General Statue 106-700 to 106-701 declares the policy of the state being to conserve and protect and encourage the development and improvement of its agricultural land and forest land for the production of food, fiber and other products. This statute is invaluable to protecting farming and keeping it prosperous. Other important issues are easy access to support businesses, farm/land values and government support payments, which provide farmers some measure of price stability.

The support for local government funding for programs and policies for farmland preservation was perceived as important to 83 percent of agribusiness owners responding. Agribusiness owners believed additionally that farm management and tax issues are extremely important to continued prosperity. Other issues of importance to agribusinesses were:

1. Reducing health care costs (100 percent), which is a tremendous financial burden on farm families and small businesses that have to pay their own premiums.
2. Immigration reform (92 percent), which can have an effect on available and affordable labor force.
3. Reducing property/liability insurance rates (83 percent), reducing a costly input.

4. Reducing workmen's compensation cost (75 percent), another input cost that reduces income.
5. Farm transition (67 percent), the average age of farmers in Sampson County is almost 56 years old.
6. Present use value taxation (67 percent), which provides farmers with deferred property tax for working lands.
7. Understanding risk and risk management (67 percent)

These issues often require governmental intervention, which leads to a need for the agricultural sector to be politically involved at all levels of government. Agricultural leaders need to develop relationships and educate lawmakers as to the impact of proposed legislation or regulations on the agricultural industry as a whole.

Issues identified to be of importance to Sampson County agribusiness owners involved training opportunities that could benefit their total operation. Education and training on the development of new products and markets as well as direct marketing of products were noted to be of interest to business owners. Programs that address these needs may result in increased income for farmers and businesses through diversification into new crops and adding value through on-farm processing, which can lead to direct sales to the public. More income would have a multiplier effect through the county as farmers purchase new equipment and resources from local businesses. Agribusiness owners recognize the importance of youth education. Businesses that support the agricultural industry recognize the importance of engaging youth in agriculture careers, from production to processing, to the future of agriculture (Figure 14).

Figure 14 also indicates the need for continued education in development of new markets, local product marketing, regional branding, direct marketing options, marketing of products and organizing buyer groups. The trend from these responses clearly outlines the need for marketing education for farmers and business owners. There is a realization that to increase sales and income, consumers must be enlightened about the value and quality of local foods.

These challenges and opportunities were substantiated by interviews with agribusiness leaders in Sampson County as noted below.

Challenges

- Continued profitability of livestock industry
- The global economic downturn affecting all areas of agriculture
- Competition between farmers for land
- Estate tax impact on farm transition from generation to generation

- Recruiting and hiring employees with the needed education and skills to effectively utilize technology
- Understanding and use of present-use tax valuation by landowners
- Burden of healthcare on the family budget
- Lack of understanding of agriculture by elected officials and non-farm residents (especially important with expected growth in parts of the county from regional military expansion)

Opportunities

- Youth education program about agriculture and potential career opportunities (mentoring)
- Neighbor education program about farming operations and benefit to the county
- Implementation of an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District
- Estate planning and farm transition training programs
- Development or revitalization of a vocational skills training program for technological advances in agricultural mechanics
- Risk management, futures and hedging as well as marketing training for farmers to assist them in maintaining and increasing profitability

The data collected from agribusinesses in Sampson County indicated a realization of the importance of a viable agricultural community to the economy, environment and general well being of the citizens in Sampson County. Opportunities and challenges noted by business owners may also resonate with farmers and non-farm residents as important and, if so, will assist local agencies and leaders in developing ways to embrace the opportunities and overcome the challenges.

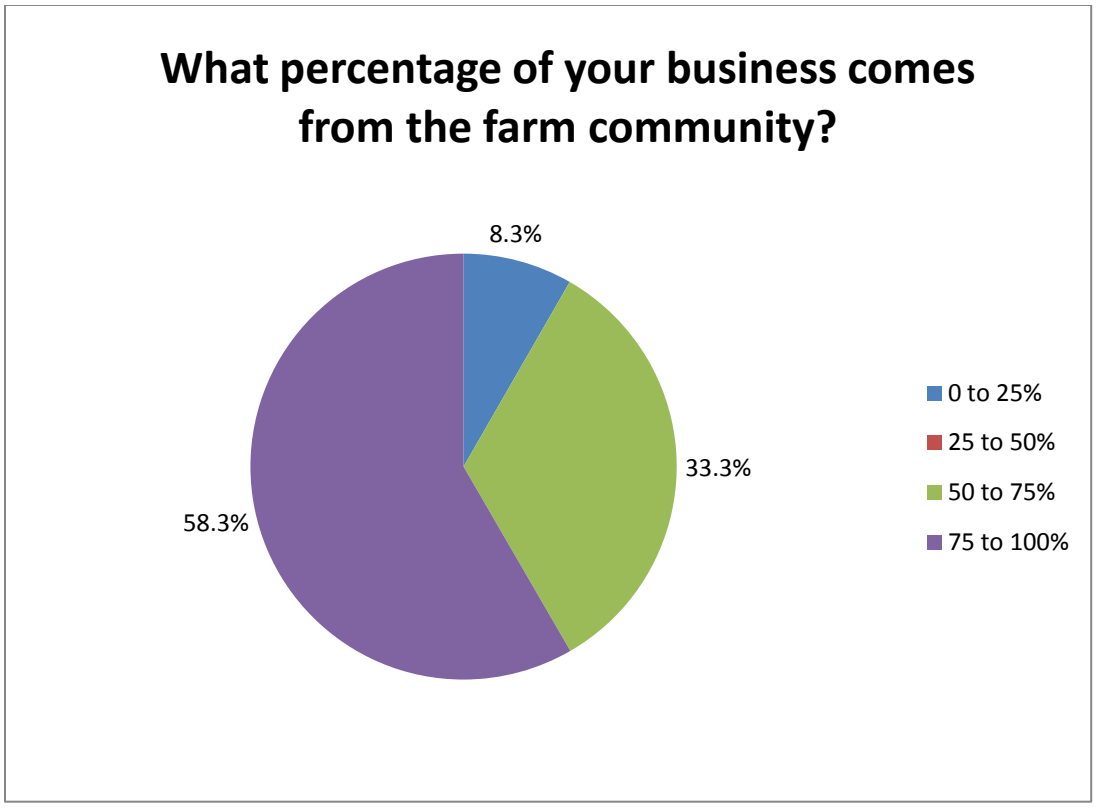

Figure 12. Percentage of Business from the Farm Community

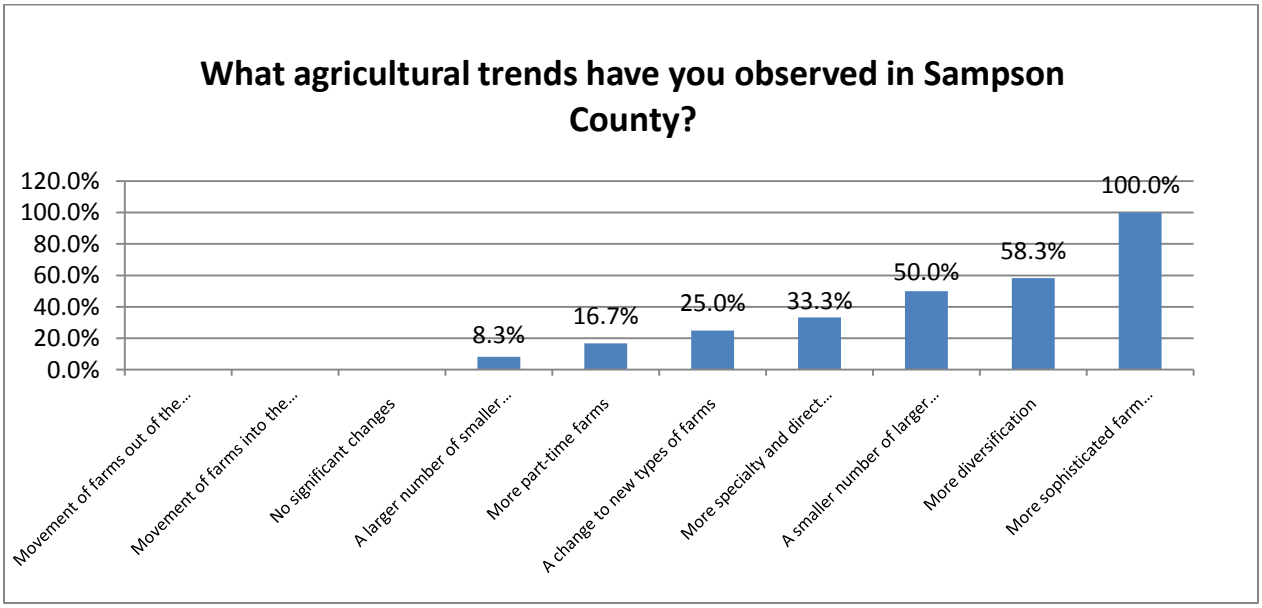

Figure 13. Agricultural Trends

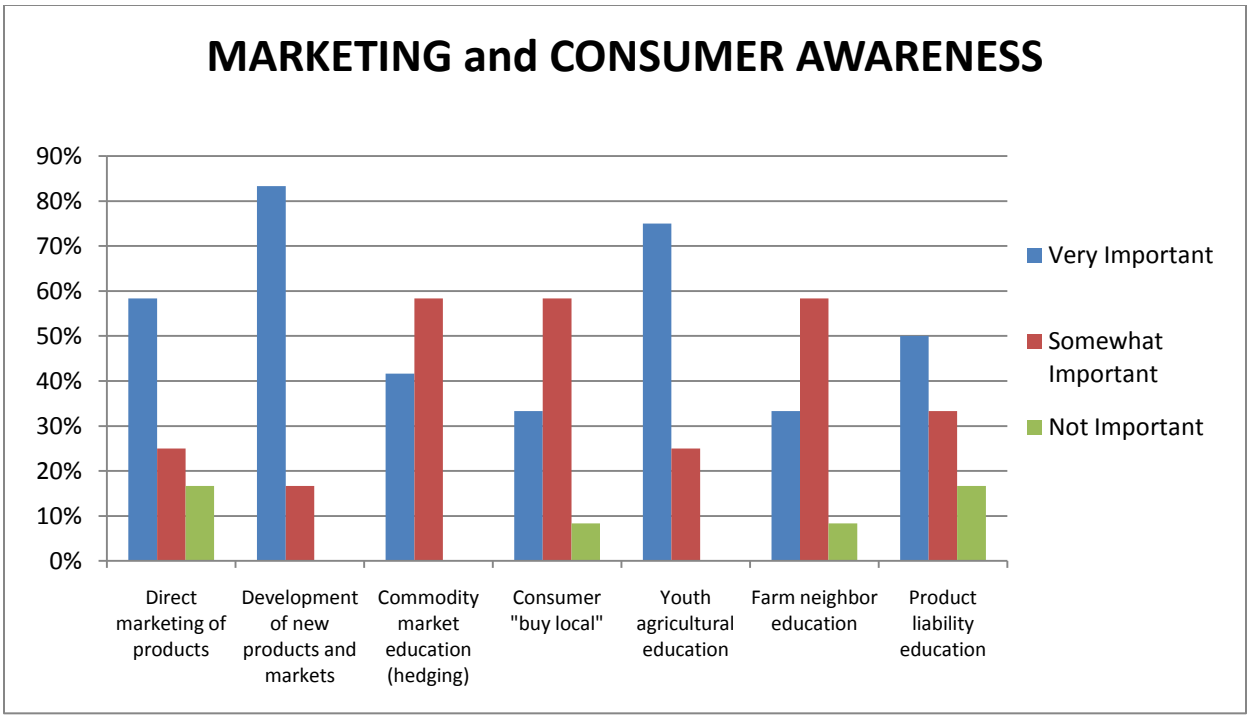

Figure 14. Sampson County Agribusiness Survey

Farmer Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities

According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, there were 1,203 farms in Sampson County farmed by 1,101 male and 102 female principal operators with the vast majority of these operators being white. The average age of the principal operator was 55.8 years, which reflects an aging demographic and the need to expand the operational control to a more diverse and youthful population.

The surveys conducted for this document were completed by farmers representing operations from across the county, from Turkey to Roseboro and Plainview to Harrells. The data provided by farmers' surveys shows insight into the challenges and opportunities facing agriculture in Sampson County.

Seventy-seven percent of the respondents were full-time farmers, and 71.4 percent have been farming more than 20 years. Of these respondents, 81 percent expect to be farming 10 to 20 more years. Seventy-five percent have other family members involved in the operation, and 86 percent expect to transfer the farm to other family members when they retire (Figure 15). This implies a need for estate and farm transition education to equip a majority of farmers with knowledge and tools to assist them in passing the farm on to interested heirs wishing to continue farming. The need to institute retirement and financial plans is imperative if a family is to maintain the family farm. So often without planning, estate taxes or issues related to the need

for operations to support multiple families occur, and farm retention and profitability become difficult if not impossible.

The struggle to keep farms in operation is apparent as respondent producers indicated that 43 percent of them received only up to 75 percent of their income from the farm, and 46 percent reported income generated from off-farm occupations. More than 50 percent reported that their spouse also had income from off the farm.

Farmers who responded farmed 45,269 acres and reported tending an average acreage of 1,616. This supports the general local, regional and national trend toward larger operations. Respondents represented 9,300 acres enrolled in Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD). When asked, only 33 percent of producers were aware of the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts Program (EVAD). Enrollment in the VAD program has waned over time, and a concerted effort has not been pursued to encourage enrollment in this program nor the establishment of an EVAD in Sampson County.

The top five crops cultivated by acreage by responding producers were traditional crops such as soybeans (81 percent), corn (69 percent), hay (65 percent), wheat and small grains (58 percent) and tobacco (42 percent). Sixty percent of the farmers operate hog topping floors, and 55 percent raised cattle, two of which grew natural grass-feed beef. Forestry and woodlot management accounted for 35 percent of crop acreage represented by surveyed producers.

Eighty-one percent of the farmers surveyed sold commodities through auction, broker, dealer or third party. Only about 19 percent of the respondents reported sales to military bases, schools and government. Interestingly, in a BRAC-RTF/UNC-Pembroke focus group meeting conducted in Sampson County, the question was raised, "How can farmers interact and sell products to the BRAC community?" This is a marketing area that needs future research to assist farmers in learning how to secure contracts with the military.

In an effort to determine the county climate toward agriculture, respondents were asked if they had experienced problems with neighbors. Eighty percent of the farmers had not experienced any problems with neighbors. If problems were reported, the problems were related to boundary or trespassing conflicts (80 percent) or odors related to manure applications (60 percent). All conflicts were reported as resolved and were handled through compromise.

Farmers readily reported the importance of farmland preservation and government support programs to their continued success in agricultural production. Figure 16 depicts that right-to-farm and farm/land values are very important to the future profitability of farmers. Programs related to cost-share and development rights, while deemed somewhat important, were not found to be as important to farmers as other programs. Lack of development pressure on land in Sampson County may be a reason for this lack of reported interest and importance.

Farmers were asked about their current knowledge of various programs that could provide additional or alternative support for their farming operations. With the exception of one program, less than 40 percent of those responding were aware of the programs presented in the survey (Figure 17). Seventy-seven percent did express knowledgeable of present-use value taxation program. This indicated lack of knowledge about alternative programs presents another educational opportunity for producers that may help them develop additional strategies to maintain the family farm.

There are several factors affecting farmers' ability to expand their operations. Fifty percent stated that poor profit margins, lack of available land and environmental or other governmental regulations were challenges to expansion. Sixty percent do not own sufficient property to expand. This is another opportunity to link farmers with landowners who may be transitioning out of farming but wish to retain their land assets and are willing to lease.

Most farm expansion reported resulted in the purchase of new equipment (95 percent), which could be attributed to crop diversification or the need for equipment upgrades. When purchasing equipment and supplies, 56 percent purchase 75 percent or more from enterprises located in Sampson County. This percentage and support of local agribusinesses is important to the local economy.

Farmers also expressed a need for assistance with developing additional selling and buying cooperatives (Figure 18). Selling and buying cooperatives would provide new marketing avenues and a way to cut input costs through purchasing power.

In summary, Sampson County farmers expressed a need for additional training and assistance to align growers with tools that would assist their continued operational success. Table 1 indicates the areas farmers would like to have more information on. Farmers did not indicate an absence of assistance with these issues, but expressed the need for additional efforts to better align growers with best management practices. Data in Table 1 also notes that farmers understand the need for new marketing options and techniques to increase their profit margins.

When seeking new information and training farmers use a variety of sources (Figure 19). Farmers most frequently reported using N.C. Cooperative Extension, USDA, friends, other farmers and printed materials when seeking information. Slightly over 50 percent of the farmers indicated that they use the internet, which is an important tool for information, direct marketing and consumer awareness for locally grown products.

In an effort to fully reveal the opportunities and challenges that growers in Sampson County encounter, Mount Olive College's Lois G. Britt Agribusiness Center conducted a large number of personal interviews with crop and livestock producers from across the county. The input from these interviews assists in the validation of analyzed survey information. Challenges and opportunities expressed are found in Table 2.

The most important implication drawn from the survey and interview data is that farmers continue to need training in a variety of areas to ensure they are positioned to make decisions to reduce risk and encourage profitability. Technical, financial and marketing training were indicated to be of importance to maintaining and expanding agricultural operations.

Producers need assistance from all levels of government to preserve agriculture as the vital economic engine it is in the county. Farmers need to be continually educated about VAD and EVAD as tools for farmland protection. Currently, only 81 farms in the county representing 17,502.11 acres are enrolled in VAD.

Farmers also desire education on income opportunities like leasing property for utilities and agricultural tourism activities such as recreation, hunting and fishing. Farmers want to better understand the possibilities associated with all these potential diversification opportunities so that they can determine how they may strengthen existing operations.

One other area of concern to farmers is the increasing generational gap between current farm operators and the potential pool of future farmers. There is an expressed need for educational programs to acquaint youth with agriculture and potential careers in agricultural production, service or processing operations. As the average age of farmers continues to increase, the need exists to link youth to this aging demographic.

Concurrently, the aging farm population needs to seek information and assistance with estate planning and farm transition options. If these options allow farmers to consider alternative, innovative strategies to plan for their future while encouraging and supporting family farm preservation, multiple benefits will be attained.

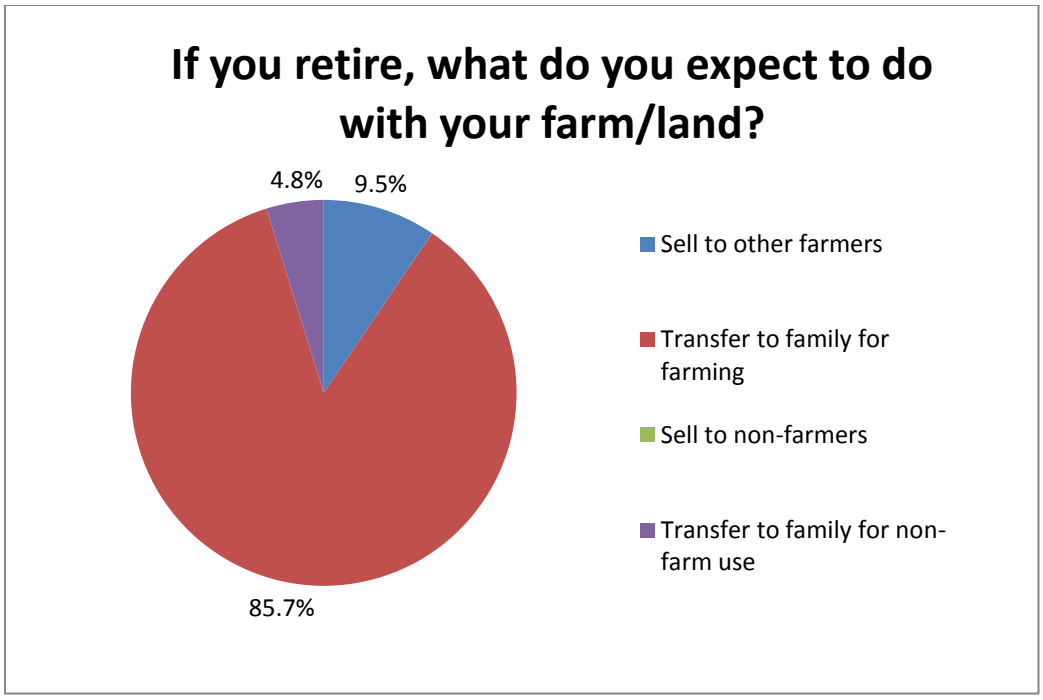

Figure 15. BRAC RTF Survey of Producers

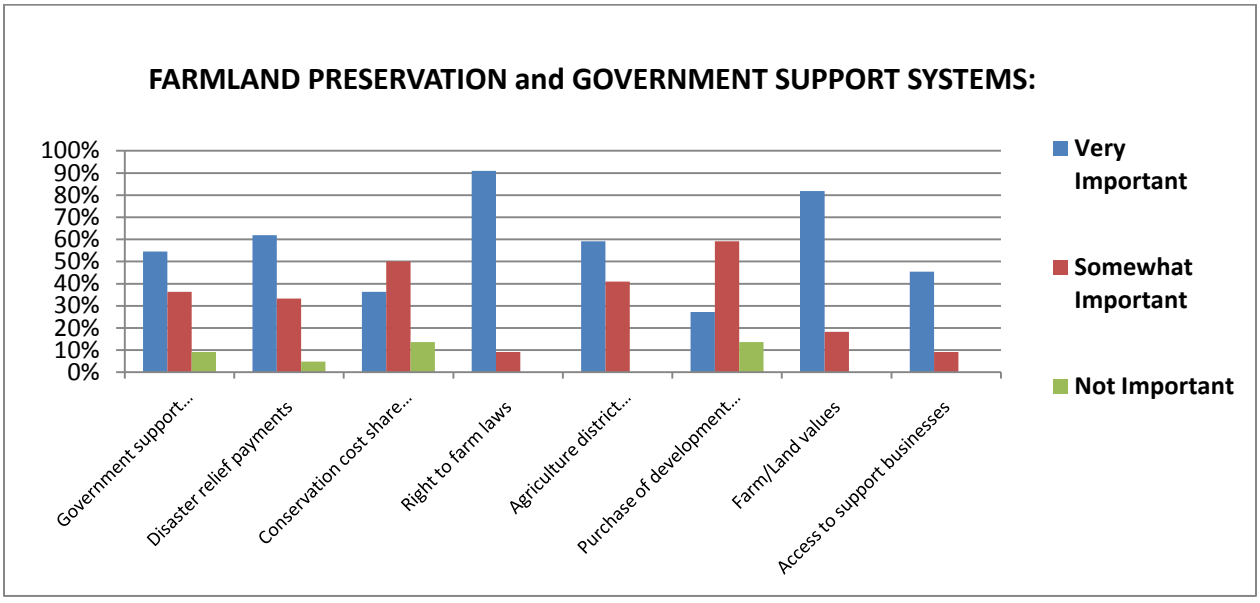

Figure 16. BRAC RTF Survey of Producers

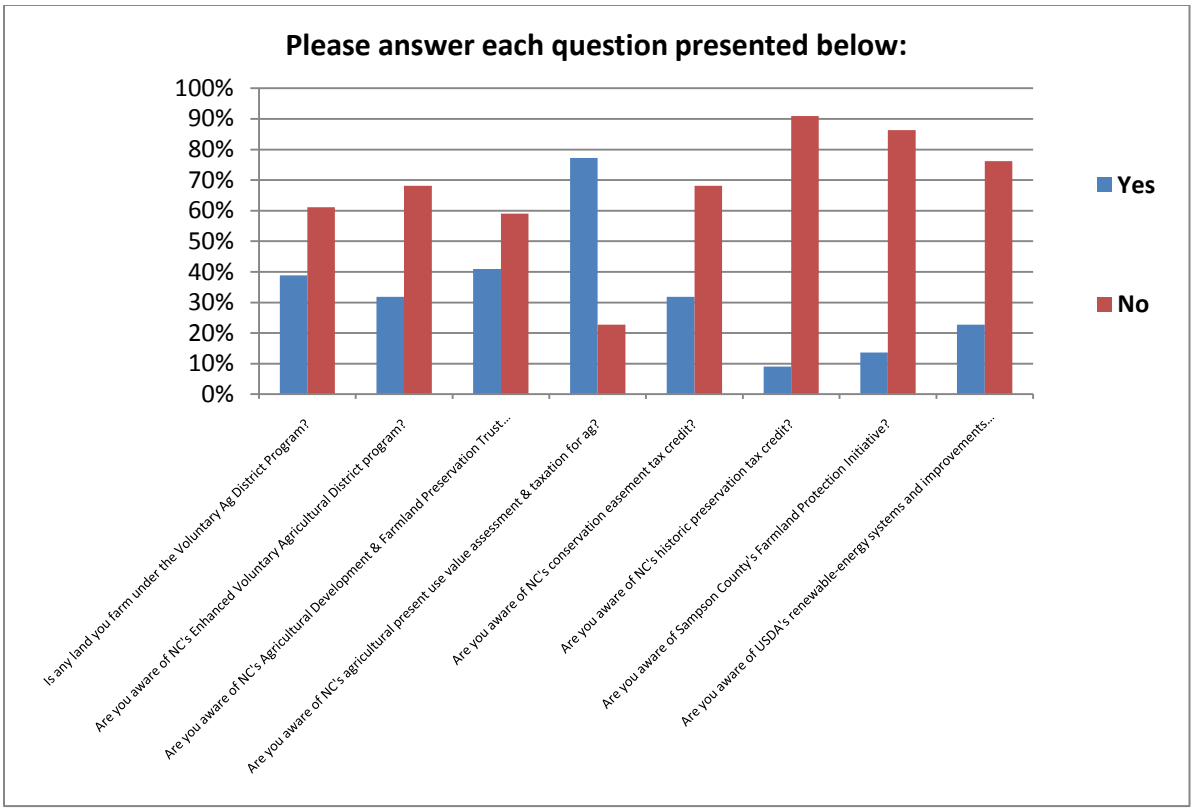

Figure 17. BRAC RTF Survey of Producers

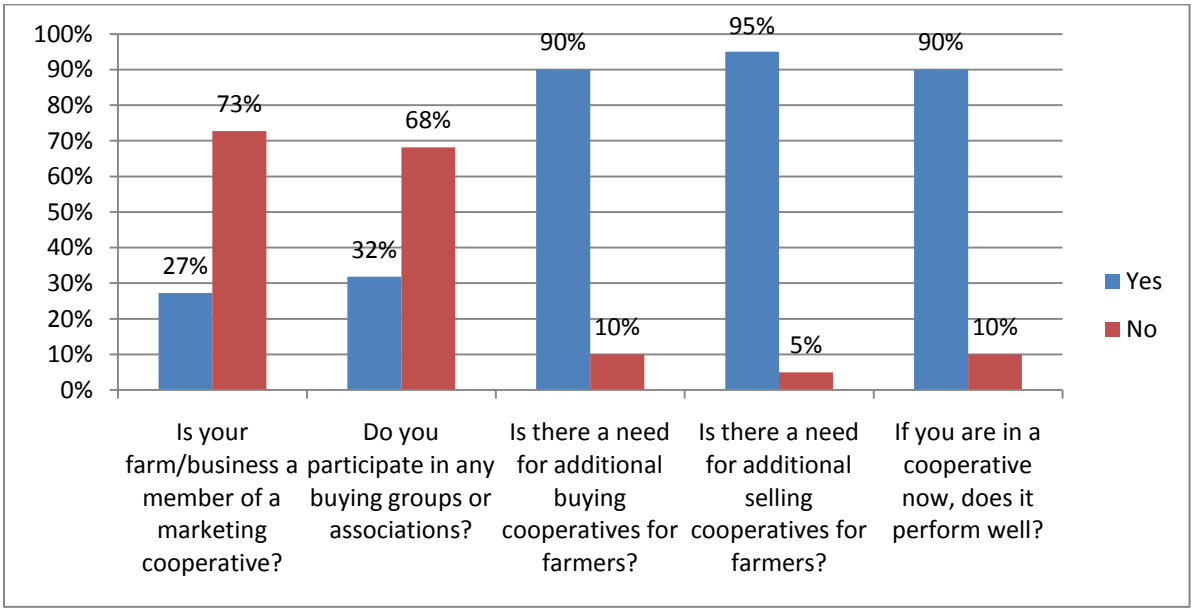

Figure 18 BRAC RTF Survey of Producers

Topics of Interest to Farmers

Technical Assistance and Practical Training:
Pesticide Management
Nutrient Management
Environmental Management
Developing product quality certification
Agriculture awareness and career training
On farm bio-security
Securing migrant and other labor
Woodlot management
Farm Management and Taxes Training:
Tax abatement for new agricultural ventures/diversification
Forward pricing/hedging
Farm transfer and estate planning
Business planning assistance
Marketing and Consumer Awareness Training/Assistance
Identification and development of niche markets
Assistance with Community Supported Agriculture
Marketing and sales promotion
Increased opportunities of local product marketing
Assistance in creating direct marketing options
Additional promotion of Agricultural Tourism/Recreation (95 percent of the respondents do not lease land for recreation and 86 percent do not lease their land for hunting/fishing)

Table 1. Source: BRAC RTF Survey of Producers 2009

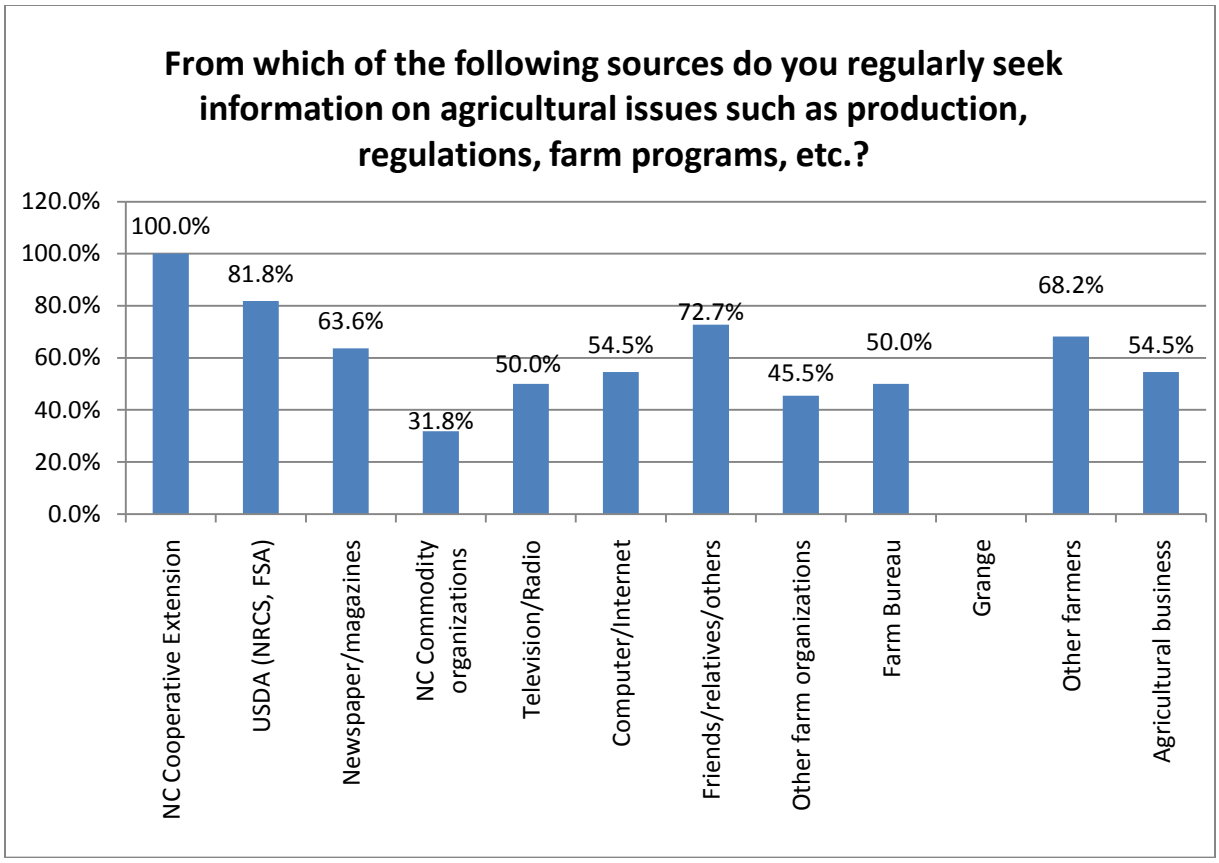

Figure 19. BRAC RTF Survey of Producers

Challenges	Opportunities
Growing impact of global economy on local farm profits	Consumer/neighbor agricultural education awareness program/campaign
Increased input cost (feed, fertilizer, fuel and equipment)	Farm transition planning to equip farmers with the tools to keep the family farm if so desired
Addition of environmental regulations and reporting requirements	Youth agricultural education training program/institute
Public attitude toward agriculture	Cost of services study
Estate tax dilemma	Educate farmers on the value of the Voluntary Agricultural Districts, Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural
Immigration issue and effect on labor	Districts and Farmland Protection and Agricultural Development opportunities
Cost of county services – residential, agricultural, and commercial	Consolidation of environmental regulations for easier understanding and enforcement Training for and participation of farmers in local, state and national legislative processes to ensure education of policy-makers as to the impact of programs and legislation on agricultural profitability
	Assistance with attainment of certification to diversify marketing options - Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and others

Non-Farm Resident Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities

In Sampson County there is a growing non-farm resident population; however, Sampson County is not experiencing the exploding population growth occurring in other counties across the state. As a result, data was collected from non-farm residents of Sampson County representing Garland, Newton Grove, Kenner, Harrells, Clinton, Salemburg, Roseboro, Autryville, Taylors Bridge and Small Friendly.

Of the non-farm residents reporting, 71 percent have lived in the county more than 20 years. A majority of respondents (88 percent) are living or have lived near a farm with 93 percent reporting that their farm neighbor was a good neighbor (Figure 20) with limited complaints noted and most associated with odors, manure applications and slow moving vehicles.

Non-farm residents believe agriculture in the county is stable and has potential for future growth (82.3 percent). (Figure 21). To proactively protect this industry, a campaign to educate and increase awareness about the value of agriculture is essential. While not knowledgeable of the current impact of agriculture to the economy, residents (85 percent) believe that agricultural operation expansion should be supported (Figure 22). Additionally, 100 percent of the surveyed non- farm residents expressed support for local government funding of farmland preservation in Sampson County. There is no doubt that residents of the county, though not involved directly in the business of agriculture, do for a myriad of reasons support the agronomic industry in Sampson County.

Sampson County residents believe in patronizing local businesses. Ninety-four percent shop stores that feature local vegetables, 91 percent purchase from fruit and vegetable stands, and 67 percent utilize u-pick operations. Conversely, only 42 percent visit agricultural tourism sites, and 36 percent support Community Supported Agriculture. These reduced percentages may not be indicative of a lack of support but more likely a lack of such marketing avenues in the county.

Residents were given the opportunity to liberally express themselves after survey completion and many opinions were submitted. The vast majority of these statements emphasized support for agriculture and agribusinesses of Sampson County. They recognize the importance of agriculture to the rural heritage and quality of life in Sampson County. But it is still apparent that this target audience needs a heightened awareness of agriculture's importance to the economic well-being of the county.

Educating the citizenry of Sampson County as to the importance of the industry can only serve to strengthen the county's commitment to agriculture and agribusiness. As growth continues in rural counties the knowledge of the impact of agriculture will help to formulate the development that is ultimately expected and do so in a manner that protects the rural character and quality of life that those living in rural communities seek.

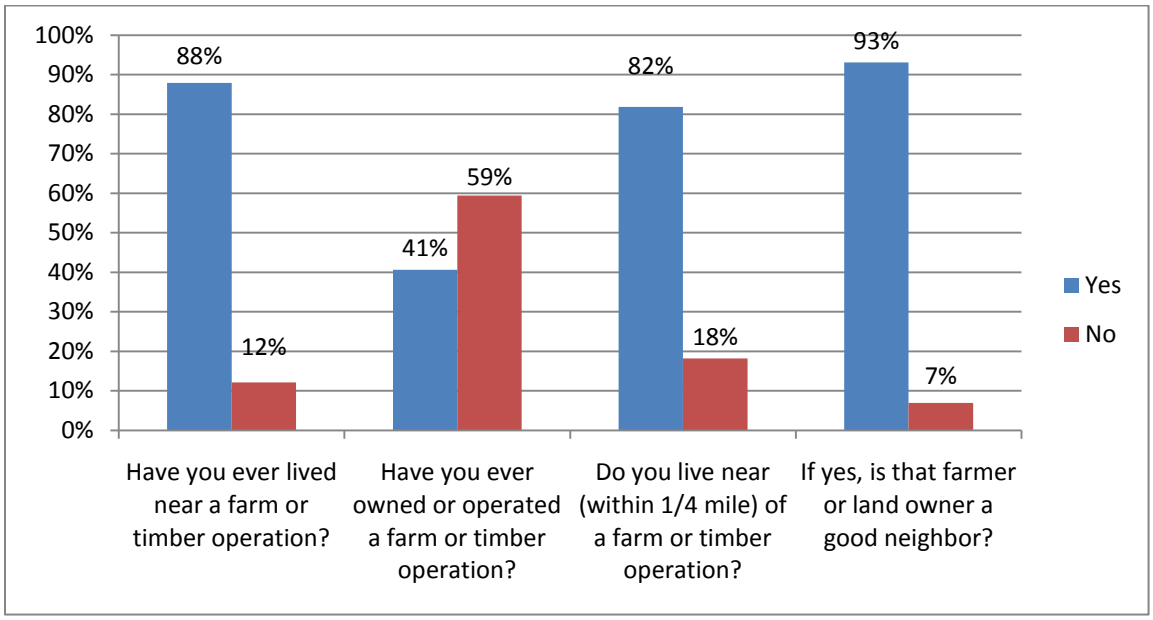

Figure 20. BRAC RTF Survey of Non-Farm Residents

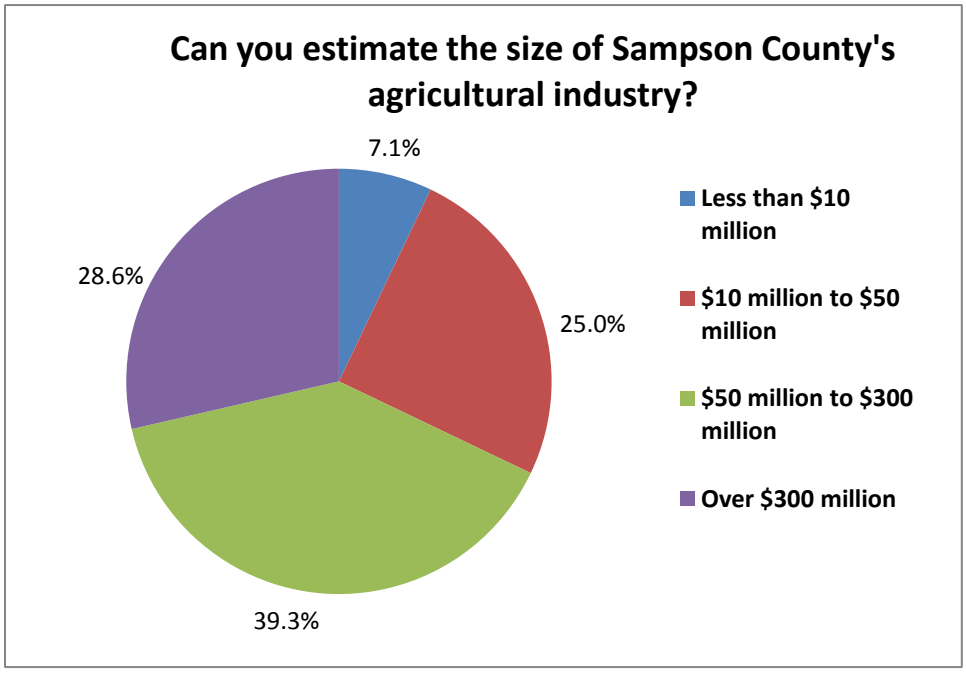

Figure 21. BRAC RTF Survey of Non-Farm Residents

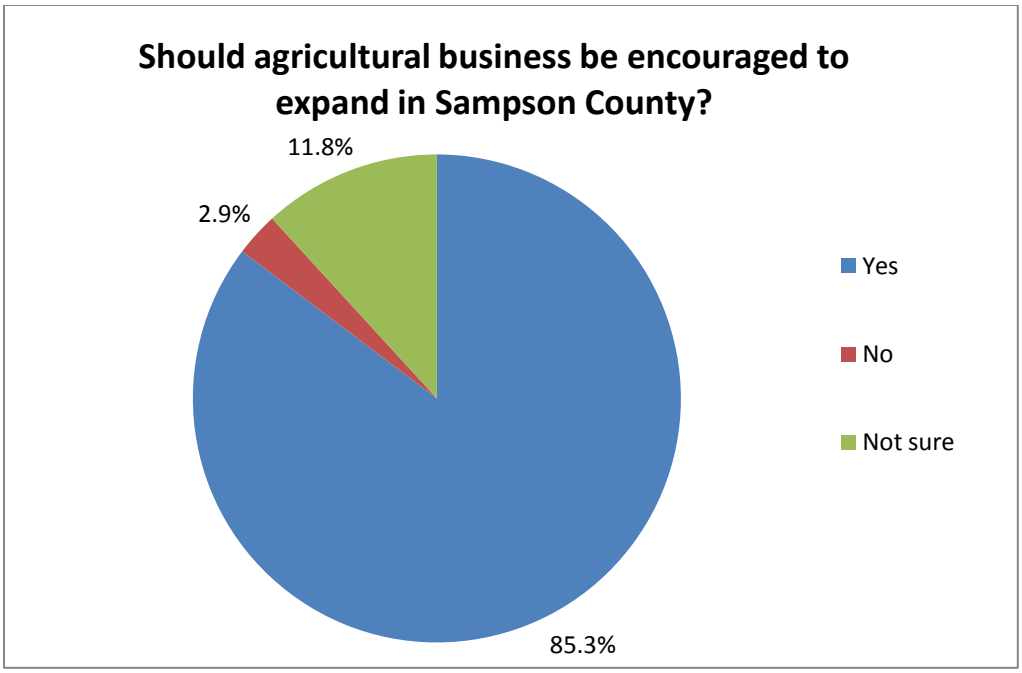

Figure 22. BRAC RTF Survey of Non-Farm Residents

Recommendations

The heart of any strategic plan is the recommendations that are derived from the input of citizens affected by the plan. The Sampson County Working Lands Protection Plan is no exception. The following recommendations are extrapolated from the data obtained through surveys and interviews of farmers, agribusiness owners and non-farm residents. These recommendations will only be effective if Sampson County leaders, organizations and agencies follow through with support and action. It is important that this plan be evaluated annually to keep it viable and up to date. An annual update will ensure that recommendations are being successfully accomplished and new ones added as the need arises. Implementation of the recommendations is the key to providing opportunity for the preservation of agriculture.

Recommendation One

Expand county farm and forest land preservation programs

Increase efforts to educate farmers, landowners and non-farm residents on the importance of utilizing available farmland preservation tools to protect agriculture. Of the farmers surveyed, 61 percent did not have land enrolled in the VAD, and 68 percent were not aware of the EVAD.

Action Steps:

- Design a marketing plan using all available media to educate farmers and landowners on the protective value of VAD.
- Explore the feasibility of developing an EVAD ordinance.
- Have appropriate agency staff encourage and assist landowners with understanding and enrollment in VAD.
- Engage livestock integrators in the promotion of VAD with their contract growers.
- Develop a program to educate non-farm county citizens and local elected officials on the benefits and importance of working lands preservation and the protection of agriculture.
- Explore the possibility of organizing a county forestry association as a vehicle for educating landowners on the benefits of forest management plans, which can lead to increased enrollment in the present-use value taxation.
- Educate farmers and landowners about the various incentive and tax credit programs such as renewable energy credits, historical preservation opportunities, conservation easements and potential North Carolina's Agricultural Development Projects.

Implementation Responsibility:

Sampson County Voluntary Agricultural District Board, Sampson County Board of Commissioners, Sampson County Economic Development Commission, Sampson/Clinton Planning Department, N.C. Division of Forest Resources Sampson County, Sampson County Soil and Water Conservation District, Sampson County Tax Office, Cooperative Extension Sampson County Center, Sampson County Farm Bureau, USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Timeline:

Efforts will begin after the adoption of the Working Lands Protection Plan by the Sampson County Board of Commissioners in February 2011. Start the VAD promotion and enrollment campaign in March 2011. This process will be an on-going operation. The county team will reviewthe outreach efforts yearly.

Recommendation Two

Promote an appreciation and awareness of agriculture to citizens and elected officials

Create a marketing awareness campaign that will educate local officials and the general public about the value of agriculture to the county. The non-farm residents' survey depicted that 64 percent estimated the size of Sampson County agriculture at $300 million or less when in fact the impact is in excess of $1 billion. A comprehensive, well-planned educational campaign on the importance of Sampson County agriculture (farming and agribusiness) will result in improved relations and understanding of the benefit and needs of agriculture.

Action Steps:

- Organize an agricultural marketing committee that will provide leadership to development of a comprehensive awareness plan and research all feasible delivery methods (internet sites, brochures).
- Plan and conduct annual local and state government leaders' awareness tours of Sampson County's diverse farm and agribusiness operations.
- Conduct rotating town hall forums on pertinent agricultural issues with municipal leaders and citizens.
- Develop a presentation that shows the role of agriculture in Sampson County that can be utilized with civic, school and religious organizations.
- Organize an Agricultural Speakers Bureau consisting of farmers and agribusinesses that will advocate for agriculture.

- Involve youth in the promotion of agriculture using FFA and 4-H members.
- Expand and promote events to highlight agriculture to the community including but not limited to Community Ag Day and other events of community interest.

Implementation Responsibility:

Cooperative Extension Sampson County Center, Sampson County Schools, Sampson County Farm Bureau, Sampson County Soil and Water Conservation District, N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Clinton Sampson Chamber of Commerce, Sampson County Friends of Agriculture, local and regional colleges and universities.

Timeline:

Action steps will begin after adoption of the Working Lands Protection Plan in early 2011. The first step to be implemented is organizing the Agricultural Marketing Committee in early 2011 with planning and marketing plan developed by the end of 2011.

Recommendation Three

Develop a Youth Agricultural Leadership Development Program

Plan and promote a Youth Agricultural Leadership Development Program that targets all ages from pre-school to high school. All surveyed target audiences and interviewees expressed the importance of youth education and involvement to the value of agriculture and potential career opportunities. This leadership program will be an integral tool for working lands protection.

Action Steps:

- Encourage youth to actively participate in all agricultural organizations such as FFA and 4-H.
- Plan a Youth Agricultural Leadership Institute for selected high school students from across the county that will focus on Sampson County agriculture, careers, issues, challenges and opportunities impacting agriculture.
- Develop a farm and agribusiness mentoring and workforce preparedness program that provides interested high school and college students hands-on learning experiences in farming and agribusiness.
- Support the expansion of Ag in the Classroom and 4-H agricultural education programs with primary and elementary students.
- Develop an inventory of agribusinesses willing to participate in an internship cooperative for high school and college students.

Implementation Responsibility:

Cooperative Extension Sampson County Center, Sampson County Public School System, local and regional colleges, Sampson County Farm Bureau, N.C. Agribusiness Council, Sampson County farmers and Sampson County agribusiness owners

Timeline:

Programming efforts will begin in the summer of 2011 in order to provide adequate time for planning and marketing. Stakeholders should be identified by late 2011 and mentoring and intern programs initiated by the spring of 2012.

Recommendation Four

Develop a strategy for technical, marketing and business training for the retention and expansion of agriculture

Sampson County's most important asset is agriculture, which greatly impacts the economy and environment of the county. In order for agriculture to remain viable, a major effort must be targeted on education and training for current and new farmers to keep them up to date with the rapid changes in technology. Individuals need to be assisted and encouraged as they try new commodities, develop value-added products and create new market channels.

Action Steps:

- Develop an informational network of support agencies and people who can assist new farmers with training and knowledge accumulation as they plan and begin new enterprises.
- Promote and conduct training to educate farmers and landowners on a variety of topics related to marketing (niche market, sales promotion, Community Supported Agriculture, local foods movement, direct market options). Encourage farmers to utilize existing marketing programs such as NCDA&CS's *Got to Be N.C.*, *Goodness Grows in N.C.*, *Farm Fresh* and *Certified Roadside Market*.
- Develop assistance programs to help farmers interested in receiving certification to open additional market share – Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, organic certification, etc.
- Conduct training on technical skill subjects that will increase farmer knowledge about pesticide, nutrient and environmental management, product quality certification, labor, bio-security and woodlot management.
- Provide training to educate landowners and farmers on topics related to taxes, farm transition, estate planning, business management, agricultural agency programs and changing policies affecting agriculture as they arise.

- Educate farmers on new revenue opportunities, agricultural tourism, carbon credit, energy production and leasing of land for recreation (hunting and fishing).

Implementation Responsibilities:

Sampson County Voluntary Agricultural District Board, Cooperative Extension Sampson County Center, NCDA&CS, N.C. Division of Forest Resources Sampson County, USDA Farm Service Agency, Sampson County Soil and Water Conservation District, local and regional colleges and universities, and Sampson County Friends of Agriculture.

Timeline:

Action steps will begin in late 2011. Schedules for training workshops and conferences will be developed by members of the implementation team. Workshops will begin early in 2012 or earlier as determined by planning and development team.

Recommendation Five

Support farm-friendly policies and programs that protect and grow agriculture

Adoption and active advocacy of this plan will help ensure sensible policy and regulation adoption to protect the agricultural sector. With this support, Sampson County will continue to rank as one of the top two counties in the state in agriculture.

Action Steps:

- Encourage local government, planners and developers to engage and inform the VAD Board and other county agencies as to the impact of infrastructure activities on agricultural operations. Actively work to inform landowners and farmers of potential adverse impacts to infrastructure placement and encourage positive dialogue to minimize negative impacts when other alternatives exist.
- Adopt the Sampson County Working Lands Protection Plan and evaluate it annually for accomplishments and the need for new recommendations.
- Conduct annual updates and reports on progress to all involved parties in the plan. Market successes to the general public through all available media.
- Develop an educational program on Present-Use Value Taxation that will encourage enrollment of farms and forestland. A strategy would be tying program education to the VAD.
- Evaluate the impact of regulations on agriculture production and educate local leaders to advocate for policies supportive of agriculture.

- Educate farmers and landowners on all available agricultural incentive programs through meetings or through the distribution of materials to inform affected producers or businesses.
- Develop a system for handling citizen complaints about farming in a positive manner for all parties involved.

Implementation Responsibility:

Sampson County Voluntary Agricultural District Board, Sampson County Friends of Agriculture, Sampson County Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension Sampson County Center, USDA Farm Service Agency, Sampson County Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, NCDA&CS, N.C. Division of Forest Resources Sampson County, Sampson County Board of Commissioners, Sampson/Clinton Planning Department, Sampson County Tax Office and Sampson County Economic Development Commission.

Timeline:

Efforts should begin immediately upon adoption of the Workings Lands Protection Plan in February 2011. Agencies should meet to develop a strategy to prioritize initiatives of the recommendation and to designate lead agencies. Marketing and education efforts should be initiated by the end of 2011 with programmatic outline developed. Distribution of materials through existing communication channels should commence at this time and additional channels for information dissemination should be developed.

References

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture, 1950, 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007. http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/

North Carolina 2009 Agricultural Statistics, Number 211

North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Public Affairs Division Press Release February 4, 2009

Clinton Sampson County Chamber of Commerce, 2009
www.clinton**sampsonc**hamber.org/pdf/Facts&DemographicsEV.pdf

Sampson County Government Webpage
http://www.sampsonnc.com/aboutthecounty.asp

United States Census, State and County Quick Facts
http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37163.html

Clinton Sampson Chamber of Commerce
http://www.clintonsampsonchamber.org/communities.html

Mig, Inc. *IMPLAN for North Carolina*, Raleigh, N.C., 2008

Walden, Michael, *Agriculture and Agribusiness in Sampson County*, N.C. Cooperative Extension, 2008
http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/agecon/counties/sampson.pdf

2008 Summary of Accomplishments in Sampson County, North Carolina Division of Forest Resources

Sampson County Soil Survey, August 1985
http://soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov/manuscripts/NC163/0/sampson.pdf

Farm Futures: *Business and Marketing Tools for Profitable Farmers*, September 2005
http://farmfutures.com/main.aspx

One N.C. Naturally Newsletter, March 2009
http://www.onencnaturally.org/pages/newsletter_March2009.html

Carolina Journalism Network, *N.C. Pork Welcomes Much Needed Profit,* March 29, 2010
http://cjn.jomc.unc.edu/node/549

Sampson County Economic Development Commission
http://www.sampsonedc.com/

Appendix A

SAMPSON COUNTY
VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS
ORDINANCE

ARTICLE I
TITLE

This program, adopted by the Board of Commissioners of Sampson County, North Carolina, shall be known as the **Sampson County Voluntary Agricultural Districts Ordinance.**

ARTICLE II
AUTHORITY

The articles and sections of this program ordinance are adopted pursuant to the authority conferred by N. C. General Statutes 106-735 through 106-743.

ARTICLE III
PURPOSE

The purpose of this program ordinance is to promote the health, safety, rural agricultural values, and general welfare of the County, and more specifically, increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life; encourage the economic and financial health of agriculture; increase protection from non-farm development; and increase the protection of farms from suits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

ARTICLE IV
JURISDICTION

The Sampson County Voluntary Agricultural Districts will follow the lines/boundaries of the existing five school districts within the County and will cover all unincorporated areas within those five school districts.

ARTICLE V
DEFINITIONS

Agricultural Board: The Sampson County Agricultural Board.

Board of Commissioners: The Board of Commissioners of Sampson County, North Carolina.

Chairman: Chairman of the Sampson County Agricultural Board.

District: A voluntary agricultural district established under the terms and conditions of this program by the Board of Commissioners.

ARTICLE VI
QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATION OF FARMLAND

Section 600. Requirements

In order for farmland to qualify for participation under the terms of this program, it shall meet the following requirements:

(1) The farmland shall be real property;

(2) The farm property shall be participating in the farm present-use-value taxation program established by G.S. 105-277.2 through 105-277.7, or is otherwise determined by the County to meet all the qualifications of this program set forth in G.S. 105-277.3;

(3) The property shall be certified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Cooperative Extension Service and the Farm Service Agency, as being a farm on which at least two-thirds of the land is composed of soils that:

(a) are best suited for providing food, seed, fiber, forage, timber, and horticultural crops, including Christmas trees and ornamentals;
(b) have good soil qualities;
(c) are favorable for all major crops common to the county where the land is located;
(d) have a favorable growing season; and
(e) receive the available moisture needed to produce high yields for an average of eight out of ten years; or
(f) soils on which at least two-thirds of the land has been actively used in agricultural, horticultural, or forestry operations as defined in G.S. 105-277.2

(4) The property, if highly erodible land exists on the farm, is managed in accordance with the Natural Resources Conservation Service defined erosion control practices that are addressed to said highly erodible land; and

(5) The property is the subject of a conservation agreement, as defined in G.S. 121-35, between the County and the owner of such land that prohibits non-farm use or development of such land for a period of at least ten years, except for the creation of not more than three lots that meet applicable County watershed and subdivision

regulations, or the regulations of any municipality which apply to the farm property. The property owner may voluntarily revoke this conservation agreement by submitting a written request to the Board in accordance with Article VIII.

Section 601. Certification

The owner of the farm seeking to qualify his property for participation in the farmland preservation program ordinance shall submit written evidence that the property conforms with the requirements of Section 600 of this program. This written information shall be submitted to the Chairman of the Agricultural Board or the designated staff person on forms provided by the Board. The certification may be submitted at the same time the owner applies for inclusion in a district.

ARTICLE VII
APPLICATION, APPROVAL AND APPEAL PROCEDURES FOR VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS

Section 700. Creation of Voluntary Agricultural Districts

In order to implement the purposes stated in Article III, this program provides for the creation of voluntary agricultural districts which shall meet the following standards:

(1) The district, when initially established, shall contain a minimum of 25 contiguous acres of qualified farmland, OR, two or more qualified farms which contain a minimum of 25 acres and are located within one mile of each other;

(2) The landowner(s) requesting inclusion in the district shall execute an agreement with the County to sustain agriculture in the district in accordance with Section 600 (5) of this program. Said agreement shall be in a form which is reviewed and approved by the Agricultural Board; and

(3) For each district created under the terms of this program, one of the existing Agricultural Board members shall be assigned to represent the district.

Section 701. Application to Participate

A landowner may apply to participate in the program by making application to the chairman of the Agricultural Board or to a designated staff person. The application shall be on forms provided by the Agricultural Board. The application to participate in a district may be filed with the certification of qualifying farmland.

Section 702. Approval Process

Upon review by the staff of the written certification and application submitted by the property owner, the Board shall meet within 30 days if possible to approve or disapprove the

application. The chairman shall notify the applicants by first class mail of said approval or disapproval of participation in the district.

Upon receipt of an application, the chairman of the Agricultural Board will forward a copy of the application to the County Manager, the County Tax Assessor, and the County Planning Board which may be asked to provide comments, if any, to the Agricultural Board prior to the vote on the application.

Section 703. Appeal

If an application is denied by the Agricultural Board, the petitioner has 30 days to appeal the decision to the Sampson County Board of Commissioners. Such appeal shall be presented in writing. The decision of the Board of Commissioners is final.

ARTICLE VIII
REVOCATION OF CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS

By written notice to the board, a landowner of qualifying farmland may revoke the preservation agreement formulated pursuant to Section 600 (5) of this program, or the board my revoke same preservation agreement based on noncompliance by the landowner. Such revocation shall result in loss of qualifying farm status, and consequently, loss of eligibility to participate in a voluntary agricultural district and the benefits thereof. Revocation by a landowner of a preservation agreement and the resulting loss of qualifying farmland status for the purpose of participation in a voluntary agricultural district shall in no way affect the eligibility of the land to be taxed at its present use value as provided in N.C.G.S. 105-277.2 through N.C.G.S. 105-277.6. If a portion of a district is removed for any reason after being established by this program, the remaining qualified farms may remain in the program, provided they meet all other requirements except the minimum area requirements of Section 700 (1).

ARTICLE IX
AGRICULTURAL BOARD

Section 900. Creation

In accordance with N.C.G.S. 106-739, the Board of Commissioners hereby establishes an Agricultural Board to implement the provisions of this program ordinance.

Section 901. Appointments and Memberships

The Agricultural Board shall consist of seven members appointed by the Sampson County Board of Commissioners.

(1) Requirements. Each Board member shall be a County resident or land owner of Sampson County.

(2) Membership

(a) The Agricultural Board shall consist of no less than seven members which will be appointed by the Sampson County Board of Commissioners. One member that is actually engaged in farming shall be appointed from each of the five school districts plus the Director of the Sampson County Cooperative Extension Service and the District Conservationist of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

(b) The five members actively engaged in farming shall be selected for appointment by the Board of Commissioners from the names of individuals submitted to the Board of Commissioners by the Sampson Cooperative Extension Service, the Soil and Water Conservation District, the Farm Service Agency Committee, and the Sampson County Farm Bureau, with an effort to have the broadest geographical and commodity representation possible.

(3) Tenure. The initial Agricultural Board shall consist of two members appointed for a term of one year, two members appointed for a term of two years, and three members appointed for a term of 3 years. Thereafter, all appointments to the Agricultural Board will be for a period of three years with reappointment permitted. The terms for the appointment of the initial Agricultural Board will be determined by lottery.

(4) Vacancies. Any vacancy on the Agricultural Board is to be filled by the Board of Commissioners for the remainder of the unexpired term following the same procedure as for the initial appointment.

(5) Removal for Cause. Any member of the Agricultural Board may be removed for cause by the Board of Commissioners upon written charges and after a public hearing.

(6) Funding. *Appropriations for Performance of Duties.* Funds shall be appropriated by the Board of Commissioners to the Agricultural Board to perform its duties. A budget request will be presented to the County Commissioners annually.

Section 902. Procedures

The Board shall adopt rules of procedure which are consistent with the enabling legislation and other applicable statutes.

(1) Chairperson. The Board shall elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson each year at its first meeting of the fiscal year. The chairperson shall preside over all regular or special meetings of the Board. In the absence or disability of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson shall preside and shall have and exercise all the powers of the chairperson so absent or disabled. Additional officers may be elected as needed.

(2) Jurisdiction and Procedures: Supplementary Rules. The jurisdiction and procedures of the Board are set out in this article, except that the Board may adopt supplementary rules of procedure not inconsistent with this article or with other provisions of law.

(3) Board Year. The Board shall use the County fiscal year as its meeting year.

(4) Meetings. Meetings of the Board, following such notice as required by this article, shall be held at the call of the Chairperson and at such other times as the Board in its rules of procedure may specify. A called meeting shall be held at least quarterly. A quorum shall consist of a majority of the members of the Board.

(5) Voting. The concurring vote of a majority of the members of the Board shall be necessary to reverse any order, requirement, decision, or determination of any administrative official or agency to decide in favor of an applicant or to pass upon any other matter on which it is required to act under this article.

(6) Records. The Board shall keep minutes of the proceedings showing the vote of each member upon each question, or if absent or failing to vote, indicating such fact, and shall keep records of its examinations and other official actions all of which shall be immediately filed in the office of the Board and shall be a public record.

(7) Administrative Services. The Cooperative Extension Service Office shall serve the Agricultural Board for recordkeeping, correspondence, and application procedures under this article together with such other services the Board needs to complete its duties.

Section 903. Duties

The Agricultural Board shall:

(1) Review and approve applications for qualified farmland and voluntary agricultural districts;

(2) Advise the Board of Commissioners on projects, programs, or issues affecting the agricultural economy or activities within the County and that will affect agricultural districts;

(3) Perform other related tasks or duties assigned by the Board of Commissioners;

(4) Review and make recommendations concerning proposed amendments to this ordinance;

(5) Develop a county-wide farmland protection plan as defined in N.C.G.S. 106-744(e)(1) for presentation to the Board of Commissioners; and

(6) Study additional methods of farmland preservation and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners.

ARTICLE X
LAND USE INCENTIVES TO VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT FORMATION

Section 1000. Purpose

The purpose of this section is to help meet the needs of agriculture as an industry and prevent conflicts between voluntary agricultural district participants and non-farm landowners in proximity to districts.

Section 1001. Public Notification

(1) When Sampson County Government computerizes its County Land Records System, the following requirements shall be implemented and enforced, Upon certification of qualifying farmland and designation of real property as an agricultural district, the title to that qualifying farmland and real property, which is contained in the Sampson County Land Records System, shall be changed to include a notice reasonably calculated to alert any person researching the title of a particular tract that such tract is located within one-half aerial mile of a Voluntary Agricultural District.

(2) The Agricultural Board, in cooperation with the County, shall take measures as set forth below to provide notification to property owners, residents, and other interested persons in and adjacent to any designated agricultural district with a goal of informing all current and potential residents and property owners in and adjacent to an agricultural district that farming and agricultural activities may take place in this district any time during the day or night.

(a) Signs identifying approved agricultural districts shall be placed along the rights-of-way of major roads leading into the County. Members of the Agricultural District will place signs on their individual farms denoting their agricultural district membership in a way calculated to reasonably notify the public and adjoiners of the presence of the farm property.

(b) Information identifying approved districts shall be provided to the Register of Deeds Office, the Sampson Soil and Water Conservation District, the Cooperative Extension Service Office, the Farm Service Agency, the Sampson County Planning Department, and the Sampson County Tax Department.

(c) The following notice shall be displayed in a prominent position in the Office of the Register of Deeds and the public access area in the Sampson County Tax Department:

NOTICE TO REAL ESTATE PURCHASERS IN SAMPSON COUNTY
SAMPSON COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS
Sampson County has established agricultural districts to protect and preserve agricultural lands and activities. These districts have been developed and mapped to inform all purchasers of real property that certain agricultural activities, including but not limited to pesticide spraying, manure spreading, machinery and truck operations, livestock operations, sawing, and similar activities may take place in these districts any time during the day or night. Maps and/or information on the location and establishment of these districts can be obtained from the Cooperative Extension Service Office, County Planning Department, Register of Deeds, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency Office, and the County Tax Department.

(3) Limit of Liability -- In no event shall the County or any of its officers, employees, or agents be held liable in damages for any misfeasance, malfeasance, or nonfeasance occurring in good faith in connection with the duties or obligations imposed by this ordinance.

(4) No Cause of Action -- In no event shall any cause of action arise out of the failure of any person, including a person researching the title of a particular tract, to report to any person the proximity of the tract to a qualifying farm or voluntary agricultural district as defined in this ordinance.

Section 1002. Expenditure of County Funds for Non-Farm Uses

Prior to expending any monies which would convert land in a voluntary agricultural district to non-farm uses, the County or any other local unit of government shall submit to the Agricultural Board detailed information showing that said governmental unit has considered alternatives.

Section 1003. No Districts in Designated Growth Corridors

Agricultural districts will not be permitted in designated growth corridors as delineated on the official County planning map without the approval of the Board of Commissioners. Districts located in growth corridors designated after the effective date of this program may remain, but shall not be expanded within the growth corridor area, without the approval of the Board of Commissioners. Districts located in growth corridors designated after the effective date of this

program may expand to include adjoining property purchased by a landowner presently participating in the Sampson County Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinance. The approval of the Board of Commissioners will be on a case by case basis.

Section 1004. Waiver of Water and Sewer Assessments

(1) Purpose of Section. The purpose of this section is to help mitigate the financial impacts on farmers by some local and state capital investments unused by such farmers.

(2) Procedure. The waiver procedure shall be as follows:

(a) Landowners belonging to voluntary agricultural districts shall not be assessed for, or required to connect to, water and/or sewer systems.

(b) Water and sewer assessments shall be held in abeyance, without interest, for farms inside a voluntary agricultural district, until improvements on such property are connected to the water or sewer system for which the assessment was made.

(c) When the period of abeyance ends, the assessment is payable in accordance with the terms set out in the assessment resolution.

(d) Statutes of limitations are suspended during the time that any assessment is held in abeyance without interest.

(e) Assessment procedures followed under G.S. 153A-185 et seq. shall conform to the terms of this article with respect to qualifying farms that entered into preservation agreements while such article was in effect.

(f) Nothing in this section is intended to diminish the authority of the County to hold assessments in abeyance under G.S. 153A-201.

ARTICLE XI
SUBDIVISION ORDINANCE AND ZONING ORDINANCE REVIEW

Developers of major subdivisions or planned unit developments shall designate on preliminary development plans, the existence of the agricultural districts within one-half aerial mile of the proposed development.

ARTICLE XII
NORTH CAROLINA AGENCY NOTIFICATION

Section 1200. Consultation with N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Other Agencies

The Board may consult with the Cooperative Extension Service Office, the Natural Resources Conservation Service Office, the Farm Service Agency Office, the N. C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and any other such agency the Board deems necessary to properly conduct its business.

Section 1201. Recording the Program Ordinance

An official copy of this program ordinance shall be recorded with the North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture's Office after adoption. At least once a year, the County shall submit a written report to the Commissioner of Agriculture, including the status, progress and activities of the County's farmland preservation program and voluntary agricultural districting information regarding:

(1) Number of landowners enrolled;
(2) Number of acres applied;
(3) Number of acres certified;
(4) Number of acres denied; and
(5) Date certified.

ARTICLE XIII
LEGAL PROVISIONS

Section 1300. Severability, Conflict with Other Ordinances and Statutes, and Amendments

(1) Severability. If any article, section, subsection, clause, phrase or portion of this ordinance is for any reason invalid or unconstitutional as determined by any court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this ordinance.

(2) Conflict with other ordinances and statutes. Whenever the provisions of this ordinance conflict with other ordinances of Sampson County, this ordinance shall govern. Whenever the provisions of any federal or state statute require more restrictive provisions than are required by this ordinance, the provisions of such statute shall govern.

(3) Amendments. This ordinance may be amended from time to time after a public hearing, notice of which shall be sent to program participants by first class mail 30 days prior to the hearing, and in consultation with the Agricultural Board to the Board of Commissioners.

ARTICLE XIV
ENACTMENT

The Sampson County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts and enacts the preceding articles and sections of this ordinance.

Adopted this the 20th day of August , 2001

H. Quincy Edgerton, Chairman
Sampson County Board of Commissioners

Attest:

Jerry D. Hobbs, Clerk to the Board

Approved as to form:

Ted B. Lockerman, County Attorney

Appendix B

Agricultural Producer, 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.