

# Agricultural Development Plan

**Brunswick County, NC**

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*Moving our farms forward*





*The well-being of people  
is like a tree.*

*Agriculture is its root.*

*Manufacturing and  
commerce are its  
branches and its leaves.*

*If the root is injured, the  
leaves fall, the branches  
break away, and the tree  
dies.*

— Chinese Proverb

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**01**



# **Status of Agriculture in Brunswick County**

# Agriculture in Brunswick County

*Brunswick County's economy and culture have historically centered on agriculture. Even after decades of rapid residential and commercial growth, agriculture continues to have a strong positive influence on the local economy and culture in Brunswick County and the Cape Fear Region.*



## Economic Impacts

Agriculture makes a major contribution to Brunswick County as well as within the Cape Fear Region. Even after Brunswick County experienced growth and changes to the landscape, agriculture continues to have a strong positive influence on the local economy. Revenue is gained from crops, livestock, agricultural-related employment, and value-added products and services. In 2016, Brunswick County agricultural producers ranked 61st among North Carolina Counties realizing \$43,081,377 in total cash receipts illustrating agriculture's importance to the local economy.

## Production

Agriculture products in Brunswick County are diverse and producers provide an array of crops, livestock, agricultural-related employment, and value-added products and services. Examples of products include, but are not limited to: tomatoes, herbs, corn, hay, timber, cotton, soybeans, wheat, turf, tobacco, and livestock. Brunswick County consistently ranks 1st in the production of tomatoes and 9th in vegetables and fruit within the State of North Carolina.

## Distribution

Farms are uniquely dispersed throughout Brunswick County. It is estimated that 542,080 acres of land in Brunswick County are in some type of farming. That is 84% of the entire landscape. Forestry has the biggest impact on farming with timberland taking up 409,872 acres or 76%. The last Census of Agriculture was completed in 2012 and depicts Brunswick County as having 254 farms that totaled 45,422 acres of non-forestry farmland or 8%. Timberlands are different and tend encompass large tracts of land in the more rural areas of Brunswick County. The average Brunswick County farm size in 2012 was only 179 acres. Total harvested cropland was 24,761 acres between 146 farms.

## Land Use And Growth Trends

Brunswick County is considered prime area for future development as it is situated uniquely between two high growth areas - Myrtle Beach and Wilmington. It is bounded by several scenic rivers and the Atlantic Ocean making it a popular destination. Therefore, Brunswick County is comprised of a collection of both rural and coastal communities with activity centers located throughout the county's 856 square miles. Nineteen (19) municipalities are spread throughout Brunswick County making it even more suited for future growth.

Brunswick County has experienced rapid residential and commercial growth over the last few decades. The 2018 Census Population Estimates for Brunswick County totaled 136,744. That is an increase of 27.3% from 2010. These high growth rates place Brunswick County in 1st place among counties in North Carolina and 4th place among counties in the nation with populations of 20,000 or more. Brunswick County is also part of the Myrtle Beach-Conway, SC-NC Metro Area which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest growing metropolitan area in the United States with a growth rate of 3.8%.



## Changing Landscape

Brunswick County also has experienced an increase of farmland. From 2007 to 2012, Brunswick County had a 3.08% increase. Although the overall farmland acres have increased recently, the loss of farmland to growth and development is very apparent. In growth corridors, farms and timber properties are not actively being farmed or have been replaced with homes and shopping centers.

Additionally, Brunswick County has experienced timber corporations “disinvesting” or withdrawing from the area. This makes large acres of land available for purchase to a new owner that may or may not keep the land in timber production. Therefore, increasing the chances of farmland of being replaced by development.

# 02

## Threats to Agriculture in Brunswick County

## Threats to Agriculture In Brunswick County

*Agriculture in Brunswick County has an array of threats. While the agricultural industry remains an important part of the county's economy, both farmers and land owners face threats and challenges including rising costs, growth impacts, and low profitability. To help address many of these threats, farmers and land owners participate in a variety of local, state, and federal programs.*

### Low Profitability

Low commodity prices coupled with rising costs of production has resulted in low profitability and inadequate farm income for farmers across North Carolina. This affects the farmer's cash flow, receivables, return on investment, and ability to invest in continues operations. Other items that affect profit margins include labor costs, regulatory compliance requirements, and utility expenses. Additionally, there have been instances in which agricultural products were not being harvested and sold due to a lack of distribution locations.

### Rising Property Values and Taxes

As growth and development occurs, it encroaches into rural areas with agriculture activity, therefore raising property values. Increasing land values affect a farmer's ability to purchase more land on which to expand. This restricts their flexibility to change agricultural models, diversify, and produce supplementary income. Increased land values also affect the amount of property taxes a farmer must pay. Brunswick County does offer the Present-Use Value Property Taxation Program (farm tax deferral program). Even with this program, an increase in property taxes can be harmful to a farm operation.



### Aging Farmers and Land Owners

In Brunswick County, the average age of a farmer is 59, whereas in the rest of North Carolina it is 55. With fewer young farmers available to take over production of these farms, many may be divided up and sold. Additionally, generations of farming expertise may be lost, an invaluable asset to the local agricultural economy

### Lack of Agricultural Support

Agricultural support businesses and services are very limited within Brunswick County and do not provide the needed support for agriculture. Most farmers must travel outside of the county for agriculture related equipment, supplies, and repairs. Lack of these support businesses and services create an increase in costs due to delays, in production and travel expenses.

## Wildlife

Wildlife such as deer, wild hogs, turkeys, coyotes, and beavers have significant impacts on agriculture. Both native and non-native animals pose threats to agriculture production. Deer and wild hogs love to eat crops such as corn and soybeans. Coyotes are known to be a nuisance to livestock production. Wild hogs can be destructive and destroy an entire field of crop. Beavers can have a significant negative impact to forestry production. Farmers must employ specific strategies to deter wildlife from impacting their revenue.

## Unsuitable Regulations

There are a multitude of regulations that impact farmland and agriculture production. The amount of regulations has significantly increased over the last few decades. Regulations that directly or indirectly affect agriculture can be imposed by the federal government, the state of North Carolina, as well as counties and municipalities. Farmers are often required to complete tasks that are time consuming and costly. Regulations affect every aspect of agriculture from preparing the land for farming to processing and selling a farm product. The type of regulation can include, but not limited to food safety requirements, labor laws, environmental requirements, local zoning and land use permitting.

## Loss of Pollinator Habitat

Two-thirds of crop pollination is done for free by non-domestic native bees, wasps, flies, beetles, ants, hummingbirds, and other pollinator species. North Carolina alone is home to 500 species of native bees. These pollinators have declined dramatically due to the loss of native flowers and grasses that provide sufficient pollinator nutrition. Native bees have also suffered from Colony Collapse Disorder just like our domestic beehives that have been destroyed in certain areas.





### **Growth Impacts**

Brunswick County has experienced rapid growth over the last few decades. The projected increase in population for Brunswick County will change the community and transform the landscapes. Some impacts will be positive while others may be negative. Positive impacts to agriculture range from increasing the consumer base for farm food and participation in agritourism businesses. Negative impacts to agriculture would likely be limited growth of agriculture operations, lack of farmland to expand, loss of usable field space, loss of products, as well as the loss of farmland to development and other emerging rural land uses and technologies.

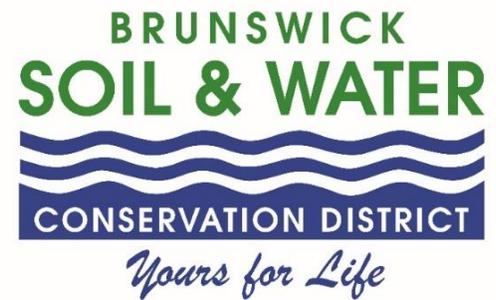
# 03



## **Supporting Agriculture in Brunswick County**

## Supporting Agriculture

*There are many organizations that focus on supporting agriculture through funding opportunities and programming. These vital organizations provide the needed tools, programs, funding, and resources to the agriculture community to enable agriculture to thrive.*



## State and Federal Support

There are programs, services and agencies at every level of government that foster the agriculture industry. Federal State and local governments support and enact specialized laws that protect and enhance agriculture. Agencies such as the US Natural Resources Conservation Service and the NC Department of Agriculture work to preserve working farmland through grants, planning services, and legislation.

Other government entities provide incentives to use best management practices and improve conservation of natural resources on the farm that also often enhance production.

*“Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real weath, good morals, and happiness.”*

— Thomas Jefferson



## Non-Profit Support

There are also many private organizations and non-profits which play a role in preserving and supporting the agriculture industry. They do this through supplemental grants, lobbying, and planning services.

Cape Fear Resource Conservation and Development  
 The Nature Conservancy  
 American Farmland Trust  
 North Carolina Coastal Land Trust  
 North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation

## Government Support

### US Federal Government

Conservation Reserve Program  
 Conservation Stewardship Program  
 Environmental Quality Incentives Program  
 Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program  
 Regional Conservation Partnership Program

### State of North Carolina

NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund  
 NC Cooperative Extension  
 NC Farmland Preservation Trust Fund  
 NC Natural Heritage Program  
 NC Forestry Service  
 NC Conservation Reserce Enhancement Program  
 NC Soil and Water Conservation  
 Agricultural Cost-Share Program  
 NC State University

### Brunswick County

Brunswick County Voluntary Agricultural District Program  
 Brunswick County Soil and Water Conservation District  
 Brunswick County Farm Bureau  
 Present-Use Value Property Taxation Program

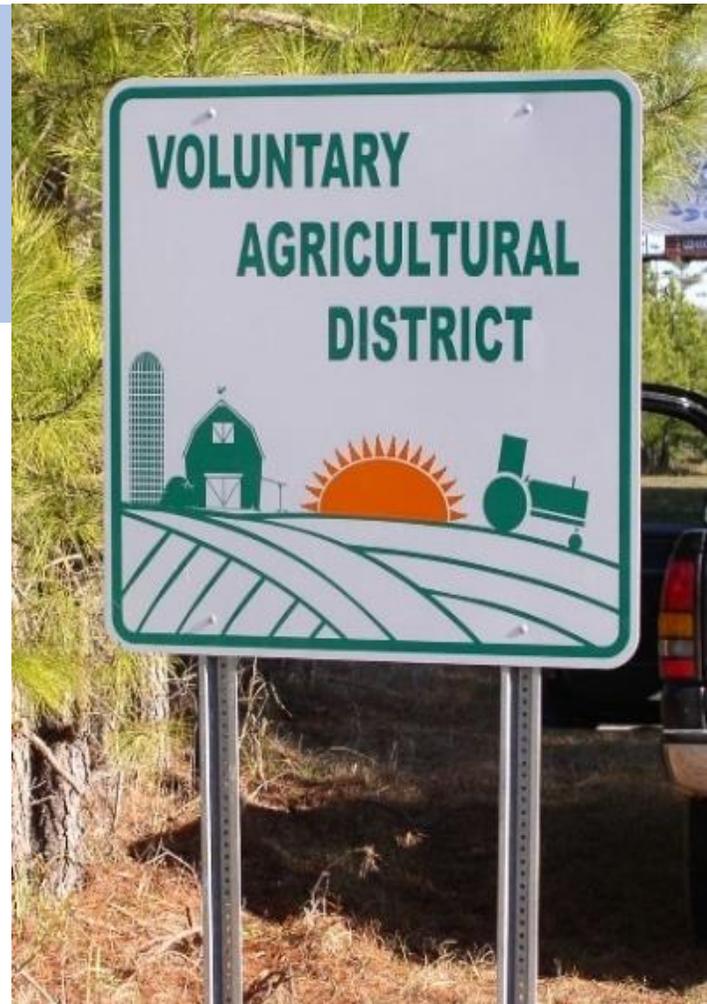
### Laws

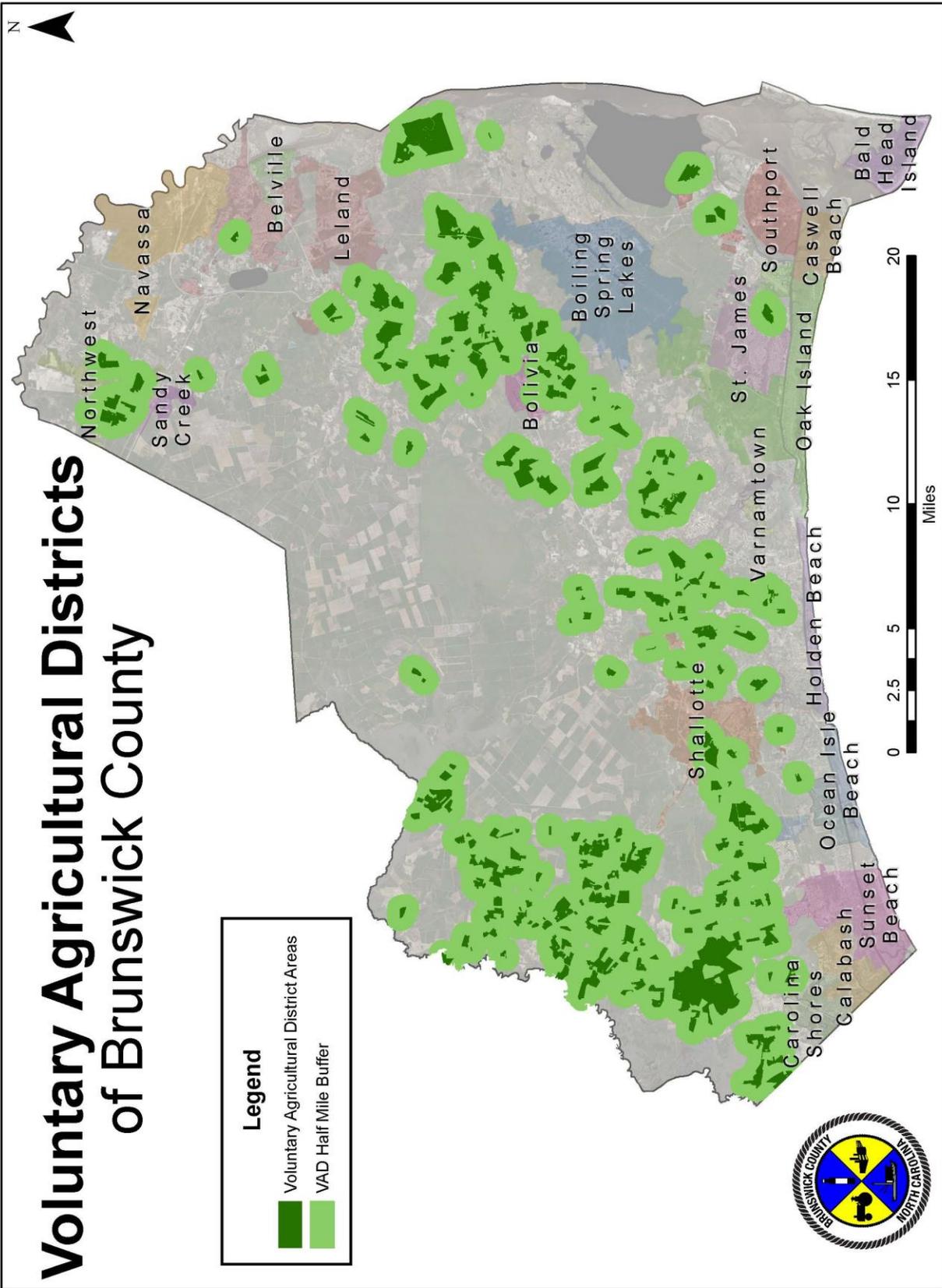
Clean Water Act  
 Endangered Species Act

## A Voice For Agriculture

### Voluntary Agricultural District Program

The Voluntary Agricultural District Program (VAD) has been a very successful program for helping preserve farmland and the rural character of Brunswick County. A primary goal of the VAD is “to increase identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life and to increase protection from nuisance suits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.” The Brunswick County Voluntary Agricultural District Advisory Board acts as the voice for farmers through education and advocacy. Additionally, by enrolling into the VAD Program, Farmers can have benefits that include the waiver of water and sewer assessments, notice to neighbors that a farming operation is near-by, and the requirement of a public hearing prior to condemnation of farm property by eminent domain. While the VAD encourages investment in agriculture, it is not a permanent land protection measure. Many farmers have opted to join the program. In 2017, the VAD Program had 202 producers and 27,528 acres enrolled.





# 04



## **Goals and Strategies for Enhancing Agriculture in Brunswick County**

## Goal #1 – Strengthen farm and forestry viability and the agricultural economy through economic development, education, and marketing

### Strategies:

- a) Offer workshops to farmers and forest landowners on business planning and development, research, marketing, financing, conservation funding, and estate planning
- b) Work with the organizers of the local farmers markets and assist with their marketing efforts
- c) Improve access to financing and capital by providing assistance in obtaining grants and low interest loans for start-ups, expansions, retention, and diversification
- d) Educate farmers and forest landowners about Brunswick County’s Present-Use Value Property Taxation Program (Farm Tax Deferral Program) that is available for land in active agricultural production.



## Goal #2 – Maintain and expand farm businesses, local agricultural infrastructure, and support services

### Strategies:

- a) Encourage private investment of capital in the local agriculture industry
- b) Establish a business development program to provide farmers and agribusiness investors with business planning and development assistance
- c) Encourage support services in Brunswick County such as farm equipment sales and service, farm supply stores, and businesses that market or process farm products



## Goal #3 – Encourage the diversification of agricultural products to the production base

### Strategies:

- a) Promote market trends
- b) Encourage utilization of new technologies and innovative practices such as multi-species cover crops
- c) Develop a series of marketing workshops that focus on farm diversification and direct product marketing
- d) Provide grant-writing assistance for federal, state, and other non-profit funding opportunities to assist with innovative practices and diversification



## Goal #4 – Expand efforts to promote locally grown food and products

### Strategies:

- a) Promote locally grown food and agricultural products for tourism
- b) Encourage farm to table distribution to farmers markets and local restaurants
- c) Develop a directory of the local agricultural businesses
- d) Work with local institutions such as schools to purchase locally grown food
- e) Expand cooperative efforts with neighboring counties to create a regional food system



## Goal #5 – Protect farmland as a valuable natural resource

### Strategies:

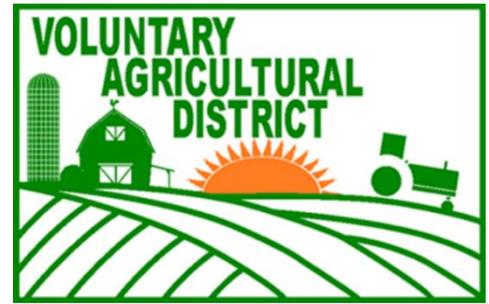
- a) Support organizations that provide needed tools, programs, and resources for farmland preservation initiatives
- b) Support programs that implement best management practices and innovative technologies
- c) Provide technical assistance on farmland protection initiatives and conservation options
- d) Educate landowners on the benefits of having land in farming and forestry
- e) Promote prime and unique farmlands for agriculture land uses
- f) Encourage agriculture on lands where soils and other land related factors are favorable to farming while directing other land uses to areas not as favorable

## Goal #6 – Foster greater recognition of public support for agriculture through increases in education and awareness

### Strategies:

- a) Promote local farm products through festivals, agri-tourism businesses, farmers markets, farm tours, and other events
- b) Encourage respect for farm property by increasing non-farmer neighbor education and awareness of the right-to-farm laws
- c) Encourage local farms to offer education opportunities to improve awareness within their own communities
- d) Continue to support the coordination with Farm Bureau “Ag in the Classroom” and “Life of the Farm” programs
- e) Create an easy-to-understand brochure on the realities of living in agricultural areas, make it available for distribution, and add it to the county website
- f) Build a coalition of organizations and citizens to promote the awareness of local, state, and national issues affecting agriculture

## Goal #7 – Strengthen the Voluntary Agricultural District Program to Improve Identity, Networking, and Unity within the Agricultural Community



### Strategies:

- a) Ensure VAD parcels are recorded at the Brunswick County Register of deeds and are documented as part of the official VAD GIS Layer Database.
- b) Provide a yearly report to county officials on the VAD Program
- c) Post official VAD maps at the following locations:
  - Brunswick County Planning Department
  - Brunswick County Tax Department
  - Brunswick County Register of Deeds
  - Brunswick County Soil and Water Conservation District Office
  - North Carolina Cooperative Extension
  - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- d) Use the VAD as a vehicle to cultivate local and state media coverage of the benefits of agriculture to the well-being of the county, and regularly communicate with media about achievements reached under this plan
- e) Develop educational programs for county farmland owners
- f) Continue to use the Brunswick County VAD Advisory Board as the voice of the agriculture community
- g) Provide the VAD newsletter to VAD members
- h) Encourage communication among farmers and agribusinesses to help create a sense of community
- i) Hold an annual meeting and appreciation dinner for participants in the VAD Program that provides the opportunity to network



## Goal #8 – Foster collaboration and communication between Local Governments, Leaders, and Organizations to Promote Brunswick County Agriculture and to Support the Right to Farm



### Strategies:

- a) Educate county and municipal officials, planning boards, and staff on farming issues and the basics of agricultural law
- b) Continue efforts to keep members of the agricultural community involved in local government and planning.
- c) Develop a greater appreciation for agriculture among government officials and non-farm residents through education and outreach
- d) Foster dialogue between non-farmers, government officials, and the agriculture community to help connect supply with demand and to reduce land use conflicts
- e) Encourage county and inter-municipal cooperation to support agriculture
- f) Work with NC Cooperative Extension, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Brunswick Soil and Water Conservation, NC Forest Service and other partners to expand their knowledge of agriculture
- g) Develop stronger connections between schools and local farms



## Goal #9 – Increase Agriculture Development through Agriculture- Friendly Regulations, Plans, and Policies

### Strategies:

- a) Promote balanced land use planning and growth management that preserves agricultural and rural heritage while enhancing quality of life for all of Brunswick County
- b) Incorporate agricultural related best management practices into regulations, plans, and policies
- c) Create a list of tolls that reduce pressure on farming operations and prevent conflicts between farmers and neighbors
- d) Regularly review all existing land-related development regulations, plans, and policies to ensure they are agriculture friendly and allow for new technologies and practices
- e) Provide flexibility within regulations and policies to allow farm businesses to adapt, diversify, and expand their current operations
- f) Encourage and incentivize alternate development types that promote land conservation such as cluster developments, conservation subdivisions, and agricultural developments
- g) Consider implementing an agricultural zoning district
- h) Encourage and incentivize compact development and higher densities in areas accessible to public water and sewer service and in areas designated for higher density development. Encourage lower density in areas without public water and sewer service.
- i) Tailor zoning and subdivision regulations to guide growth away from farming areas
- j) Consider encouraging and incentivizing buffers between new development and existing farms to reduce impacts and conflicts
- k) Provide buffers between new developments and farms to prevent future conflicts
- l) Incorporate elements of this plan into any new planning documents and any future land use plan
- m) Offer officials, land designers, and land owners training in smart growth, NC Wildlife Green Growth Toolbox, and infrastructure planning
- n) Regularly review all land-related development regulations, plans, and policies to ensure that farmers can expand their wealth through accessory businesses, new ventures, and value-add products.
- o) Support migrant and farm worker housing
- p) Consider adopting a Purchase of Developments Rights (PDR) Program and/or Transfer of Developments Rights (TDR) Program

# 05



## **Summary of Goals and Implementation Schedule**

## Summary of Goals And Implementation Schedule

### Intent

The intent of the Brunswick County VAD Advisory Board in developing this plan was to create a living document to be used by both the agricultural community and local governments to implement economic development programming, improve public policy, and create a generally supportive environment for agriculture within Brunswick County. Implementing the goals and strategies outlined within this plan will be determined by factors such as annual goals, funding availability, and priority of issues facing Brunswick County.

### Integration

The Brunswick County Agricultural Development Plan is intended to provide policy and programmatic guidance to local, county, and state agencies and elected officials. It should therefore be integrated with or within other plans and policy guidance documents as appropriate.



## IMPLEMENTING PLAN GOALS

NUMBER	GOAL	SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
1	STRENGTHEN FARM AND FORESTRY VIABILITY AND THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND MARKETING	X		
2	MAINTAIN AND EXPAND FARM BUSINESSES, LOCAL AGRICULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE, AND SUPPORT SERVICES			X
3	ENCOURAGE THE DIVERSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS TO THE PRODUCTION BASE		X	
4	EXPAND EFFORTS TO PROMOTE LOCALLY GROWN FOOD AND PRODUCTS		X	
5	PROTECT FARMLAND AS A VALUABLE NATURAL RESOURCE	X		
6	FOSTER GREATER RECOGNITION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR AGRICULTURE THROUGH INCREASES IN EDUCATION AND AWARENESS		X	
7	STRENGTHEN THE VOLUNTARY AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT PROGRAM (VAD) TO IMPROVE IDENTITY, NETWORKING, AND UNITY WITHIN THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY	X		
8	FOSTER COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, LOCAL LEADERS, AND ORGANIZATIONS TO PROMOTE BRUNSWICK COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AND SUPPORT THE RIGHT TO FARM		X	
9	INCREASE AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AGRICULTURAL FRIENDLY REGULATIONS, PLANS, AND POLICIES			X

# Acknowledgements

This plan was coordinated by the NC Cooperative Extension's Brunswick County Voluntary Agricultural District Program in conjunction with the Brunswick Soil & Water Conservation District and the Brunswick County Planning Department.

## Brunswick VAD Advisory Board

Chip Carroll, Chairman	Jody Clemmons, Vice Chairman
Sam Bellamy	Mamie Caison, Ex Officio
Marc Green	Kirstie Dixon, Ex Officio
Jim Stanaland	Mark Blevins, Ex Officio

## Special Thanks To:

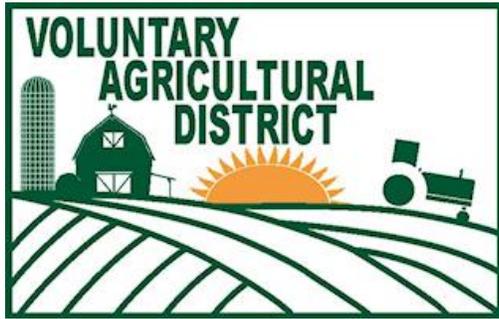
All the farmers and other individuals that participated in the drafting of this plan and the organizations that helped facilitate this plan including:

Brunswick Soil & Water Conservation District Staff

Brunswick County Planning Department Staff

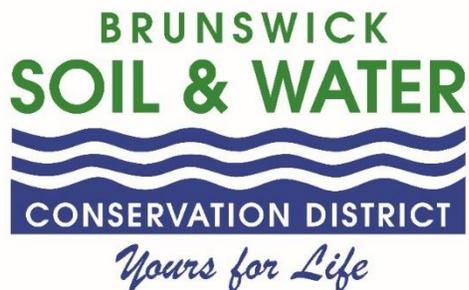
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Soil & Water Conservation District**

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