

Attendees: Caroline Siverson, Jeannie Ambrose, Linda Batley, Craig Caldwell, Ginger Cunningham, Clyde Frazier, Susannah Goldston, George Lucier, Cara Russell, Caroline Siverson, Bobby Tucker, Sharon Day, Martha Girolami, John, Mitarotondo, Kim Tyson, Hunter Glenn, Jason Sullivan

- Meeting started at 10:38 due to some technical difficulties.
- Caroline Siverson started by approving the minutes from the February 3rd Meeting and Jason Sullivan went over the remote meeting guidelines.
- Presentation by Susannah Goldston Environmental Specialist and District Director of the Chatham Soil and Water Conservation District and Ginger Cunningham County Extension Director with Chatham County Cooperative Extension. The Presentation was titled: Chatham County Agricultural Operations and Water Use.
- Susannah Goldston started the presentation by introducing the subcommittee to the Chatham County agricultural landscape. She presented the USDA Census of Agriculture for Chatham County. As of 2017, there were 1,116 ag operations in the county, a decrease of 2%; and 105,995 acres of farmland, which was down 5%. 295 of those acres are irrigated, and 27% of the 105,995 acres is woodland which does not use much or any groundwater. There was 171 million dollars worth of products sold. Ms. Goldston continued by going over the USDA Farm Service Agency. This information is gathered by farmers and ag operations that use the services of the agency such as insurance and disaster response. That data tells us that some of the major crops are corn, soybeans, wheat, hay, and pasture. Both of these reports are voluntary so there might be farmers in Chatham that do not report their crops and issues. Ms. Goldston continued to explain the forestry market in Chatham Roughly 60-70% of all land area is timberland (not including state and federal lands around Jordon Lake) and there is a strong forestry industry which contributes about 423 million dollars to the local economy.
- Ms. Goldston explained the Present Use Value Tax Deferral Program. Currently there are about 210,000 acres enrolled in that program. These eligible farms pay a reduced tax rate.
- Ms. Goldston showed a pie chart that broke down the land uses in Chatham County showing that roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all land use in the county was ag related.
- The presentation continued with Ms. Goldston going over the ag uses that require water, such as livestock and poultry watering and poultry house cooling, horticulture and plant nurseries, and greenhouse operations. Also, specialty crops such as strawberries and hemp may also require irrigation and extra water. However, Chatham does not use the quantities of water that some similarly situated counties in the eastern part of the state use. Ms. Goldston showed a pie chart of the 2014 NC water withdrawals for ag uses. Chatham is different than the state overall because we do not use our water for hogs, but probably use more on poultry than the state average.

- Ms. Goldston discussed where the Ag Community get its water. Some farmers use municipal hookups. Surface water is still used, but she has been discouraging users from doing that because of water quality issues.
- Presentation continues. Water and the Ag Community.
- Ms. Cunningham interjected that while a lot of the counties ag land is under forestry designation and those are usually not intense water users, there are some forestry products that do use more water. These would be stands with pines, and yellow poplars, black gums, etc. Oaks and Hickory's do not use as much water. If we were to estimate water usage for a typical pine stand (100 trees per acre), would be 5 million gallons per acre.
- Ms. Goldston explained that when the county enforces riparian buffer requirements on streams and creeks that farmers use to water their livestock it can have a negative effect on the farmer. Her office would then help them to utilize municipal water resources or put in a well and infrastructure to water their livestock. This is to ensure the counties overall water quality. A low yield well with only 1-2 gallons per minute would be sufficient for some of the prevalent small ag operations in the county. Some farmers even use their household wells if they do not have much livestock.
- Further discussion of water usage for livestock, chicken operations and crops. Full presentation is on the website.
- As Ms. Goldston finished up the presentation, she mentioned a few water supply concerns. Farmers are worried about he increased frequency of drought, remaining independent from municipal water system, and increasing groundwater use from non-ag users.
- George Lucier asked if there were maps available to show the predominant ag uses in the county?
- Ms. Goldston answered that there is a map of PUV farms that is a pretty good representation of where ag uses are located throughout the county. It was linked in the presentation. It is called the Present Use Parcel Map and is located on the county GIS website. There is also a map of the voluntary ag district program, but that does not have much usage yet. Ms. Cunningham also mentioned that GIS has a layer identifying poultry houses, which would also be beneficial.
- Ms. Siverson said it would be beneficial to have maps for this information.
- Ms. Goldston replied that many farmers do not want to participate in government programs so it would be hard to have all ag uses in the county mapped. You are going to have some ag uses that do not participate or give their information.
- Ms. Siverson asked what it means to have a forestry management plan, what does that entail?
- Ms. Goldston explained that if you have some timber acreage and you want to be in the PUV system you are required to have a Forestry Management Plan. You can work with the forestry service to write the plan. The plan shows when you need to harvest or that you will harvest at some point.

- Ms. Siverson asked if those plans were enforced by the forestry service, are they tracking how the timber is being managed?
- Ms. Goldston said it isn't so much regulatory, but it lays out the objectives of the acreage. The forestry service is not necessarily monitoring the operations.
- Ms. Cunningham interjected that such plans require at least 20 acres to be harvested. A great majority of our stands are pines in Chatham. Hardwood trees require better soils. Forestry management plan outlines best management practices along with a harvesting schedule and practices to follow. Harvest can occur within 20 years.
- Ms. Siverson asked Ms. Goldston how often she is called on to design water systems because of concerns over water availability?
- Ms. Goldston said the program is called AGWRAP "Water Resource Assistance Program" and the county receives only 8,000 dollars per year from the state for the program. That covers only part of one well. They call for applications every year and they can fund about one well per year through that program. Farmers can also apply at the regional level for things like ponds. They do not pay for the pumps.
- Ms. Siverson asked if they prioritize ponds for cattle operations?
- Ms. Goldston said they would not do that. They would require them to pump the water to the cows.
- Clyde Frazier asked in terms of the total agricultural use, do you have any sense how much is ground versus surface water?
- Ms. Goldston said no. USGS has some of that info. She said that data lumps the river and lake water into surface water which might be problematic. She supplied the data in the presentation.
- Mr. Frazier asked if they were encouraging farmers to move from surface to groundwater?
- Ms. Goldston said they are encouraging farmers to move from direct surface watering. They do not want the cattle in the water directly. That would destroy stream banks and the nutrients from their waste should not go into the water.
- Mr. Frazier asked if she was aware of any agricultural wells going dry?
- Ms. Goldston said yes, but it is all anecdotal information. She said she grew up on a farm with 5 or 6 abandoned wells on that farm. That is the case all over Chatham county. Lots of shallow dry wells in the county.
- Sharon Day asked how many applications they get per year for water assistance?
- Ms. Goldston said they usually get 20 application to the ag cost share program that addresses water quality and maybe 3-5 for the AGWRAP assistance. There are some federal programs that farmers apply to, but she didn't have that data.
- Ms. Siverson asked how much do these concerns come up when talking to farmers? How much does water availability come up when they look at development pressure?

- Ms. Goldston said that she gets calls from new farmers that may not have had a water quantity question. Established farms have more concerns on drought years. The concerns are usually all reactionary.
- Ms. Cunningham said that in their capacity as the cooperative extension office they are trying to educate the individual operations. She usually sends people to Ms. Goldston. She echoed that water concerns are usually reactionary. Ms. Goldston said her main concerns are water quality when she is on site visits. She tries to educate on the BMPs to improve their situation.
- Mr. Lucier asked that because the North Western part of the county does not have county water and when a development, large or small, goes in there the source of water is going to be well water, is there any information to suggest that this has caused a problem with agricultural uses in the area?
- Ms. Goldston said she didn't have a site-specific example. She echoed the information that the committee has heard before. Neighbors can drill similar wells close together and get completely different yields. She said geologists would have to answer that questions.
- Mr. Frazier asked that if farmers want to be independent of municipal water sources, what kind of farms do use it? How much and where?
- Ms. Goldston said that there are poultry farms that use county water and said that when county water was first available poultry operations took advantage and she didn't think they were charged hook-up fees.
- Ms. Siverson asked if there were any exceptions for ag when it comes to restricting water uses during a drought?
- Ms. Goldston said she believed there were exceptions for ag, but farmers are worried that one day there wouldn't be. There might even be ag rates on the municipal systems.
- Ms. Siverson asked about the surface water exclusion program. How do people find out about it?
- Ms. Goldston said that all the programs are non-regulatory, and they don't like to approach farmers and get them on the defensive. There is a lot of word of mouth. Neighbors bragging is the biggest advertisement.
- Ms. Siverson asked if there were any other question. Having none, she began to wrap up the meeting by thanking Ms. Goldston and Ms. Cunningham for the presentation and discussing what the next meeting would entail.