

## Agricultural Stakeholders Meeting

### Chatham County Comprehensive Plan

2/19/2016

Location: Dunlap Classroom

#### Introductions / Attendees:

Ronnie Vaughn, Agriculture Advisory Board

Sam Groce, NC Cooperative Extension, Chatham County

Debbie Roos, Chatham County Food Council

Charlotte Glen, NC Cooperative Extension, Chatham County

#### Staff:

Hillary Pace, Chatham County Planning Department

Jake Petrosky, LandDesign

Meg Nealon, LandDesign

- Ronnie Vaughn
- Sam Groce
  - Ag agent
  - Excited about New Ag Center
  - Farm is near Century Farm Status
- Joe Wachs
  - Commercial beef cattle
  - Legacy farming in Chatham
- Charlotte Glen
  - Extension agent works with landscapers and nursery production.
- Debbie Roos
  - Conventional and organic vegetable and plant production.
  - Top 10 in timber income in the state
  - Works with 1<sup>st</sup> generation farmers
    - Small acreage, high value.
    - Career switchers. Small farms. Intensive horticulture and livestock production.
  - Under reported, direct market farming
  - Ag Census- growth in farms, but decline in income
  - Statistics can be underreported. Esp for small farms with direct market farming. I.e. 5 acres grossing \$50k per acre.
  - Direct marketers. Ag census may be off, due to poultry. Other measures. Farmers markets. CSAs, etc.... Local farmers sell directly to consumers so not likely to fill out specific census surveys that capture impact or growth.
  - What is the current number of CSAs?
- Public Attendees: Jim Elza, Sharon Garbutt

Accomplishments 2009 forward

- Ag Land Use Plan 2009
- Growth and constantly changing, # of CSAs, farmers markets
  - About 10 in the county
- Food Council (started by Health Dept 2 years ago)
  - Strategic planning effort will begin
  - Goals
    - Facilitate and affect policy
    - SWOT Analysis conducted... GOAL: Local access to local food
    - Still many underserved communities
- Tremendous growth but challenges: access to affordable land and water.
  - Small producers need to scale up. Local food - increasing demand from institutions (hospitals, schools, etc).
  - Demand for local food is up, but more people need to go to farmers markets.
- Strong ext. service. Regional leader in extension classes. Community College with ag programs.
- Alternative Agriculture = beekeeping, herbs, flowers, roots, etc.
- Pollinators gardens- pollinator tourism,
  - 75% spend \$ in town about \$100/yr.
- Growing businesses, organic farms
  - They have to travel to make \$\$\$. Lack of people attending the Chatham market. Should be farm here, sell here
- Nurseries and Landscaping
  - Nursery production is a challenge due to water issues, soils and topography. Johnston County is the hub of nursery production in NC.
  - Native plant, small boutique nurseries, increasing with development.
    - Online sales, boutique, direct to consumer sales, diverse approach to nursery production (not trying to compete with large scale of Johnson Co)
    - NC strong in nursery production. Directly tied to development, housing. Production shortage of trees and shrubs (especially ornamentals) in NC predicted.
  - Landscapers- Green industry is a fast growing sector of farming.
    - Education offered about use of pesticides, etc.
  - Housing growth and demand points to opp for growth in landscaping industry – design, installation, maintenance
- Traditional farming
  - Western Chatham
  - Rented pastures, rent prices are increasing
  - Chatham is no. 2 in beef cattle in the state.
  - 4 in all cattle. 8 in hay. 17<sup>th</sup> in poultry.
  - Good years and bad years
  - Processing facilities for beef in Siler City
  - Marion the only poultry processing plant.
  - Poultry a major part of Chatham farming.
  - First vertical integration poultry farm in Chatham County
  - Rural character is attractive to new residents.
  - Adjacent to high growth areas.
  - Poultry houses provided a continuous income for farmers... now lost
  - Conventional row crop farmers vs. small lot farmers.

- Conventional farmers have issues to own the farmland due to prices. Rental land is used commonly.
    - Need for inclusivity for traditional row crop farmers
    - Grain farmers, corn, large scale need a market.
  - If Chatham could do... distribution facility, grain bins, transportation to help get goods to market. Would need to partner with adjacent counties to make it viable.
- Growth
  - Work with municipalities to reach out to farmers in the town's ETJs
  - Encourage park pockets that display our rural character
  - Problem is agricultural land has higher growth pressure. Developers know that ag land will perc.
  - Water may be a limiting factor. Concerns for water availability.
  - Chatham a bedroom community to Chapel Hill, etc. County should include more industry that will attract people to spend \$ here and live/work in county
  - Coordination with CCCC for programs for trades. Focus on community college system is important. Blue collar and white collar jobs are both important. Need workforce training to meet demand.
- Status of / Support for Agriculture
  - 4.4% increase in farms last Ag census, increase in smaller sized farms. Statewide loss of farms 5%.
  - Great support Ag, elected and non-elected. In 1999 (or 2009?), county stepped in to fund agriculture extension salary. During state funding crisis.
  - Ag Center (decision to fund in 2012, open in 2016)
  - Cooperative Extension strategic plan increased Chathams budget.
  - Existing farm owners that used to farm lease out to farmers.
  - Regional market- Carolina Stockyard.
    - 200k cattle/yr sold
    - 36k cattle in Chatham
  - Pilgrims Pride and then Townsend poultry shutting down put many farmers out of business
  - Look at Ag at a global level. Chatham is a global player
  - 1968- 220 USDA grade A dairies, now only 7.
    - Dairy farms sold out in the 70s and switched to poultry and beef cattle.
    - Global conglomerates purchased out many farms/industries
  - Chatham county agriculture has been in a constant state of change in the last 60 years..
  - Infrastructure- water an issue
    - Farmers are sold water from the county at a bulk rate. A policy that supports Ag (an accomplishment).
  - Ag is a diverse field. Internal strife among farmers. Divisive topic, in-fighting.
  - High average income, slanted to the NE part of the county.
    - Poorer in the SW.
  - Strength of extension programs. i.e. 100 people from 30 counties. I.e. pollinator demo gardens. Visits from across the state. 75% are spending \$ in the town. \$100/person.
  - Agribusiness – country farm and business supply in Pittsboro has grown a lot.
  - Regional draw. I.e. 20k lbs of sweet potatoes.
  - Proximity to population centers is a benefit.. distribution is an issue, still need to get product to urban centers

- 2 counties within one. NC 87 as the dividing line.
- 2009 Farmland Plan an accomplishment

How would you like the plan to address goals?

- 10k grant in Orange County for new farmers, Ag summit everywhere
  - County government can assist in attracting and keeping farmers.
  - County paying for extension positions.
  - May develop a survey \*\*we can add questions for comp plan\*\* Jake said late spring/early summer. Econ development survey to be prepared as well.
- Orange County has seen a decline in farming, and have seen a decrease in farmers
  - Have grant - \$10K for new farmers but are they seeing results?
  - Agr summit
- People are content in what they're doing and reluctant to asses needs of the larger picture. Lifestyle, reaching out to that community is important. In depth input critical from West Chatham.
- Zoning as it relates to ag.
  - Strategic farmland map will be customized to Chatham Co. This is key to additional farmland protection measures called for in the 2009 plan.
- Education/promotion
  - This comp plan will educate non-Ag folks about benefits and challenges. Education is major piece.
  - 2007 Cost of services study showed that farms cost 47 cents in county services for every dollar paid in taxes