



# CONSERVATION CONVERSATIONS

1. REOPENING STATEMENT
2. FARM HERITAGE TRAIL WINS NATIONAL AWARD
3. CAMP WILD CANCELLED
4. BUNCOMBE LEADS THE WAY IN FARMLAND PRESERVATION
6. FOREIGN SEED ALERT
7. AG BREAKFAST CANCELED



The Ag & Land Resources office is now open to the public. On-site staffing is limited so appointments are high recommended.

For the protection of our staff, we are asking for clients to wear a mask. If you do not have a mask, we will provide one for you. If there is a client inside the building ahead of you we ask that you wait outside the front door until the person in front of you has left. Restrooms are open but are limited to one person at a time. We will have hand sanitizer placed at the front window for your convenience and protection.

We know everyone is facing usually high levels of stress however, we are encouraged by your resilience. This crisis has demonstrated your innovation and creativity which has contributed to our community's continued access to vital resources. If there is any way we can support you, please let us know. We look forward to continuing to serve your needs.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact us below:

Buncombe County Soil & Water, (828) 250-4785.

N.C. State Cooperative Extension, Buncombe County, (828) 255-5522.

Master Gardeners will continue to work remotely. To contact, please call (828) 250-4878 or email [buncombemg@gmail.com](mailto:buncombemg@gmail.com).



Buncombe County's innovative programs continue to garner national recognition. The National Association of Counties (NACo) has recognized Buncombe County with three Achievement awards. The awards honor innovative, effective county government programs across the country that strengthen services for residents.

Buncombe leads the state in Farmland Preservation efforts and now a keystone project, the Farm Heritage Trail, has been nationally recognized with the National Association of Counties (NACo) 2020 Achievement Award.

Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District's Farm Heritage Trail has been honored with the NACo Achievement Award for creating and implementing the trail. The Farm Heritage Trail is a scenic driving route through the rural agricultural communities of Alexander, Leicester, Newfound and Sandy Mush in northwest Buncombe County.

The public is welcome to travel the public roads of this trail and enjoy viewing the conserved family farms, with designated signage, that are along the route. The entire route is a leisurely two hour drive while enjoying farm stops along the way. Trail riders may choose to follow the specific route or enter and exit at any point, selecting farms they may want to drive by or visit along the way.

"We appreciate this national recognition of our Farm Heritage Trail. We initiated this effort to increase awareness of our farmland conservation efforts and support our farms. It is vital to Buncombe County's future that we have strong and resilient family farms; therefore, we must conserve farmland, and we must ensure that our farms are economically viable. The Farm Heritage Trail provides an opportunity for both Buncombe County residents and tourists to visit and support our farms, as well as learn about our conservation efforts," said Terri Wells, Buncombe County Agricultural Advisory Board, Vice-Chair.

The Farm Heritage Trail recognizes the importance of protecting farmland, honoring agricultural heritage and supporting the future of agricultural operations within Buncombe County. Through

agritourism, the trail informs citizens and tourists about the importance of our local food system, and that in order to protect our view sheds, we must protect our farmland. The outcome of this project is a stronger agritourism community within the county, a network of farmers for the public to connect to, and increased awareness of the experiences offered on farms in Buncombe County.

“This award shows how Buncombe County’s farmland preservation efforts stand out nationally and that the Farm Heritage Trail is a prime example of the innovativeness and resourcefulness of the county,” states Ariel Zijp, Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District Farmland Preservation Coordinator. “The Farm Heritage Trail was launched in 2016 in the Northwest of the county and continues to grow with future plans to expand to a countywide trail. This is a model that can be replicated nationwide to encourage agritourism and the protection of farmland.”

Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District’s mission is to conserve the soil, water and natural resources of Buncombe County by providing, education, technical assistance, economic incentives and farmland preservation to meeting changing needs. The Farmland Preservation Program encourages the voluntary preservation and protection of farmland from non-farm development as well as supporting the agricultural heritage and economic success of the farming community within Buncombe County.

Learn more at [farmheritagetrail.org](http://farmheritagetrail.org). or click here for an interactive map.

Interested in our Farmland Preservation Program? Contact Ariel Zijp, Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District, (828) 250-4794 or [Ariel.Zijp@buncombecounty.org](mailto:Ariel.Zijp@buncombecounty.org).



With heavy hearts, we are canceling Camp Wild 2020. We simply cannot risk the health and safety of our campers, staff, and surrounding community posed by COVID-19. Guidance from the CDC and American Camp Association recommends camps like Camp Wild implement strict sanitation, testing, and social distancing practices. Having limited staff along with transporting students in a 15-passenger van make

these recommendations very difficult to execute. Please stay tuned for alternative program opportunities in the fall. We look forward to Camp Wild 2021, until then stay safe and healthy!



As development continues to bustle in Western North Carolina, Buncombe County is also diligently working toward preserving farmland. Our Soil & Water Conservation District is on the cutting edge of conservation methods and providing financial assistance for conservation. In fact, the County has 314 farms representing more than 24,000 acres in our conservation programs.

So, why is Buncombe County so concerned with farmland preservation? Farmland plays a vital role in the County's environment, food security, economic impact, community heritage, scenic view sheds, and our overall livelihood. "Agricultural land is a finite natural resource because fertile soils take thousands of years to develop, and once they are destroyed by development there is no way of getting the soils back," explains County Soil Conservationist Ariel Zijp. Below, you can learn more about why Buncombe County is advocating for protection of more farmland and learn about conservation resources.

### ***2020 Farmland Protection Plan Update***

We have submitted the 2020 Farmland Protection Plan update for Buncombe County. In March 2019, Buncombe County Commissioners voted to conduct a Farmland Protection Plan update in order to assess the state of farmland within the county at least every decade. The last Farmland Protection Plan was conducted in 2007 and you can view a copy of the original plan [here](#).

### ***Why do we need a farmland protection plan?***

As we see a higher demand for housing in the mountains, we can expect to see farmland continue to disappear. "Agricultural land is typically desirable to development because it tends to be flat and much more affordable to developers than to farmers, because of this developers offer significant asking price

that many farmers cannot refuse,” says Zijp. “It’s impossible to put a value on the importance of farmland, when it affects so many different aspects of our livelihood, our culture, and our environment.”

## ***What does a farmland protection plan do?***

Documents rates of farmland loss and creates a baseline: “We are trying to update the farmland protection plan every 10 years. In order to do this, it is important to see what is changing and to access where we are starting since the last plan was completed,” says Zijp. “By doing this, we create our baseline for the next 10 years of action towards protecting farmland.”

Identifies land under greatest threat of development: “Our greatest threat is growing development. Developers are offering landowners significant amounts of money for undeveloped land,” explains Zijp. Potential development areas are now being prioritized for conservation. “Once we create these priority regions, the Ag Advisory Board can adjust our ranking criteria to promote priority regions and therefore we would be able to focus our efforts on these regions.”

Creates a plan for the future: Buncombe County’s Farmland Protection Plan was adopted in 2007 and we are updating it. The plan is still in draft mode, so we don’t have quantifiable goals at this time and the plan will be presented to the Commissioners in August 2020 for their vote.

Allows local leaders to set priorities and goals for farmland preservation: Buncombe County is working with the USDA and NCDA Agricultural conservation easement programs; NC Forest Service to provide forest management plans; NC wildlife commission to provide wildlife management plans; and USDA NRCS to provide conservation plans. We also work within the Soil & Water District to help address resource concerns on farms by encouraging agricultural conservation practices on the farms we are protecting.

## ***How can I preserve my farmland?***

Buncombe County’s Soil & Water Conservation District has a variety of methods available that allow property to be preserved and/or continue its agricultural use for generations to come.

**Voluntary Ag District (VAD) Preservation Program:** This program that allows farmers to voluntarily enroll their farm property in an agricultural district by signing a conservation agreement stating that they will do no nonfarm development on their property for a period of 10 years. Participating landowners will sign an agreement to sustain, encourage, and promote agriculture and this agreement can be revoked at any time. Some benefits include: Increased protection from nuisance suits and waiver of water and sewer assessments. Find an application [here](#).

**Enhanced Voluntary Ag District (EVAD) Preservation Program:** EVAD has all the same benefits and requirements as VAD except that EVAD is a 10 year binding conservation agreement with a conservation deed recorded at register of deeds. This agreement cannot be revoked, and the properties in EVAD are eligible to receive a higher percentage of cost-share funds under the Agriculture Cost Share Program in order to improve their conservation practices on farm. Find an application [here](#).

**Permanent Conservation Easement Agreement:** These binding agreements are aimed at keeping land available for farming and forestry in perpetuity while meeting property owners’ needs and production

goals. This program permanently protects land to ensure that Buncombe County will have farmland left for future generations. Find an application here.

For more information about farmland preservation, contact Ariel Zijp, 828-250-4794, [ariel.zijp@buncombecounty.org](mailto:ariel.zijp@buncombecounty.org).



### **From NCDA&CS Plant Industry Division**

North Carolina residents who have received seed shipments that they did not order from China or other foreign sources are advised not to plant these seeds because they could be a pathway for introduction of invasive species, insects and plant diseases.

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has been contacted by numerous people who have received the seeds, which are likely the product of an international internet scam known as “brushing.” “According to the Better Business Bureau, foreign, third-party sellers use your address and Amazon information to generate a fake sale and positive review to boost their product ratings,” said Phil Wilson, director of the Plant Industry Division.

“Seeds are just one of the items used in this scam, however, you could receive other inexpensive items such as rubber bands, plastic toys, or empty bags.” This type of international shipment of plant material is unlawful and NCDA&CS asks anyone who received one of these unsolicited foreign shipments to save the contents along with all shipping labels and contact the Plant Industry Division toll free at 800-206-9333 or email at [newpest@ncagr.gov](mailto:newpest@ncagr.gov). Plant Industry staff will contact you to gather information and pick up the package.

North Carolina residents are not in violation of any regulations if they received these shipments, but they are the key to identifying and stopping future shipments.



Unfortunately, due to the increasing challenges of COVID-19 and the safety of our community, the Aug. 11 Friends of Agriculture Breakfast will be canceled. The safety of our community is our first priority. We are encouraged by the efforts in our community to implement the best practices to slow the spread of COVID-19. We will get through this difficult time together.