

Durham County



Farmland Protection
Advisory Board



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ANNUAL REPORT

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The Farmland Protection Advisory Board (FPAB) is pleased to share the 2024 Annual Report summarizing another exciting year of supporting our 2009 Durham County Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Plan mission and goals. In the report you will see that we partnered with multiple county, and state agencies to support impactful investments in preserving Durham County agricultural land, infrastructure, and capabilities amid unprecedented growth.

This year, the Farmland Board focused our efforts and annual budget to support a number of farmland and farmer capacity building efforts. This included the approval of 7 new Voluntary Agriculture District (VAD) applications and budget allocation for construction of signs to mark these and existing VAD farms. In the early Spring, the Farmland Board partnered with Durham County Soil and Water to engage over 50 farmers and landowners through two educational Farmer and landowner breakfasts focused on introducing farmers to critical partners and programs focused on enabling farming and farmland ownership. Finally, the Board provided funding to four Durham Public School agricultural projects helping to bring agricultural capabilities and awareness to our students and communities.

The Durham Farmland Board was thrilled to partner again this year on the Durham Agricultural Economic Development Grant process which saw the distribution of \$250,000 to 30 farmer led projects and one school project. These investments in the community funded a broad span of infrastructure and capacity building efforts and included nearly 80% women and minority owned businesses. We also were grateful to support the Open Space program in submitting applications for conservation easements for an additional 30-acre property as part of the ongoing cornerstone work of permanently preserving farmland in Durham County.

Finally, we are very excited to be embarking on a Farmland Preservation Plan update in the coming months and will be working with a contractor to ensure that our plan meets the needs of an evolving Durham County. We will be able to leverage and build upon insights coming from the work the Open Space and Cooperative Extension teams are doing around the 129-acre purchase for a Durham County agriculture and recreation preserve to ensure the Farmland Preservation Plan meets the ongoing and future needs of an evolving Durham County.

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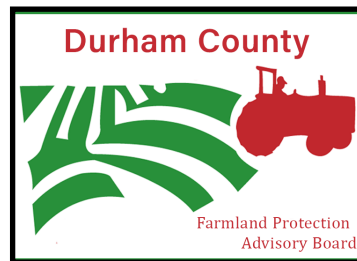
Looking into 2025 and 2026, in addition to working on the Preservation Plan updates we look forward to continuing to support the VAD, Conservation Easement, DPS, Agricultural Economic Development Grant, and agricultural and recreation preserve programs and projects. We are requesting ongoing funding the VAD, Conservation Easement Program and Agricultural Economic Development Grant Program in 2026 budgeting to continue to secure Durham County’s farmland, farmers and foodshed going forward.

We are very grateful to be working with exceptional partners from the Durham Board of County Commissioners, Open Space, Soil and Water Conservation and Cooperative Extension to support agricultural development and farmland preservation – the progress in this report would be impossible without the dedication of these professionals. We would like to specifically thank Heidi Carter for her partnership and active support these last few years. Her enthusiasm has been infectious and empowering and has benefited the farmers of this county.

With Gratitude,

Nicole Connelly

Durham Farmland Protection Advisory Board Chairperson and Little River VAD Representative





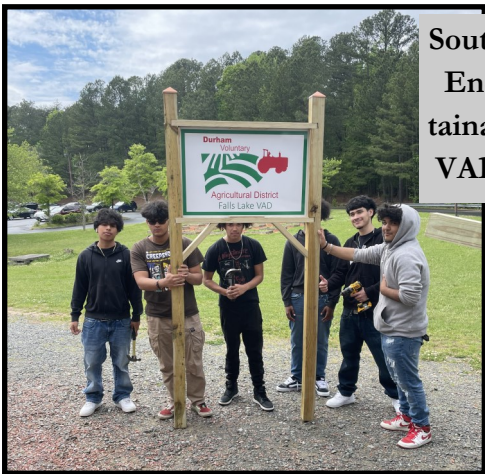
MISSION

The Farmland Board shall foster the wise use of our farmland resources by working with farmers, the community, government entities and agencies, and other resources to identify and implement strategies for the preservation and enhancement of our farming community while protecting the land and soils for future generations.

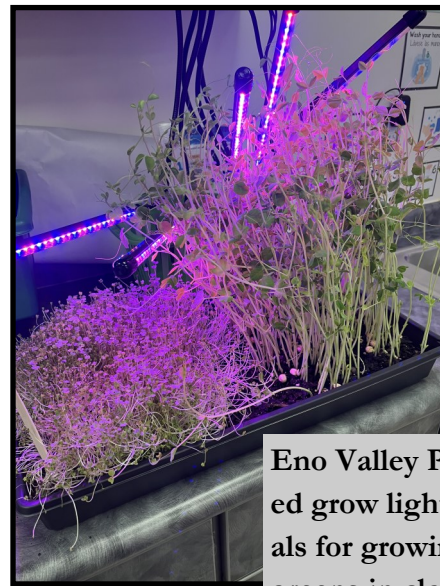
FY 2024 FPAB Budget Highlights

FPAB Budget	VAD Supplies	Farmer Breakfasts	Ag Program School Donations	Farmland Plan Revision Contractor Fee
\$3,375.00	\$982.63	\$334.22	\$1,029.13	\$1,000

VAD supplies fund signage costs.



Southern School of Energy and Sustainability built the VAD sign frames.



Eno Valley Pre-K requested grow lights and materials for growing microgreens in classroom.

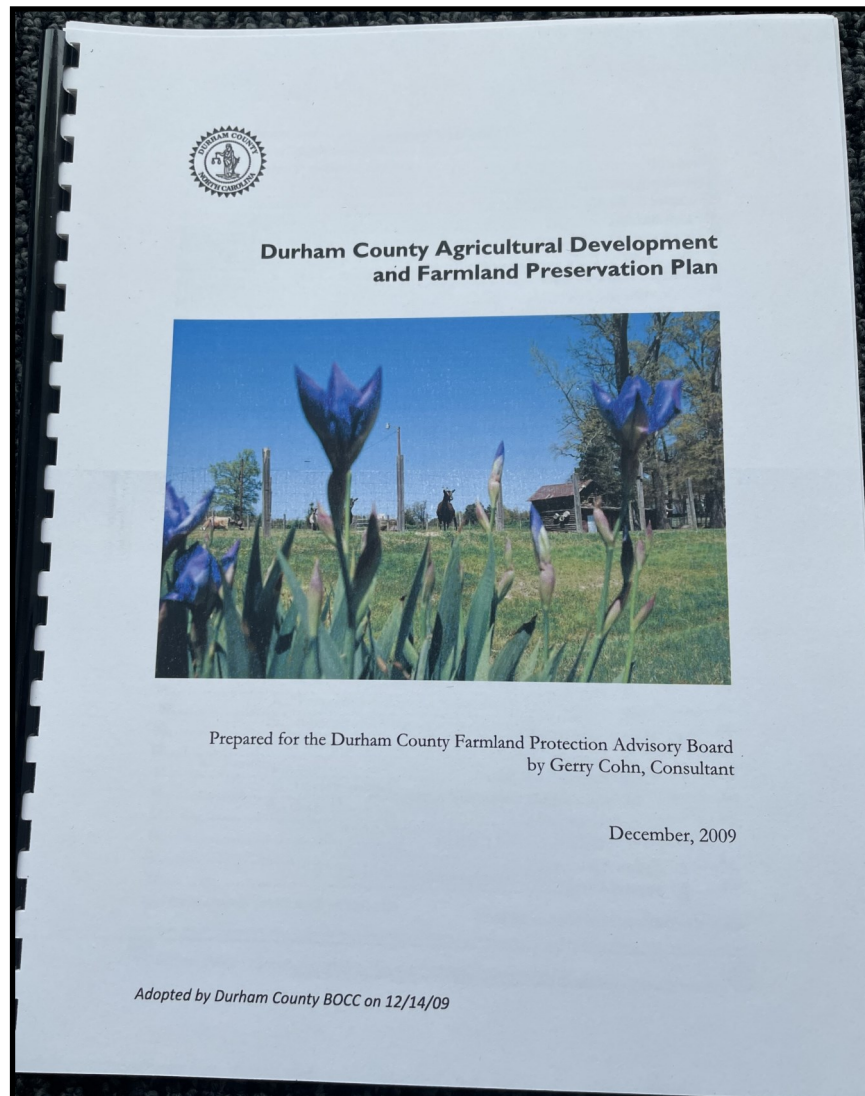


Items to support Jordan High School's ag program.

Buckets provided to RN Harris' Make and Take Event to support families growing at home.



Grant funding secured for Farmland Protection Plan Revision



The NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund will help support a contract with foothills Regional Commission to complete the revised plan. Community input will play a vital role in the development of this plan.

Farmer & Landowner Breakfast Series

Each winter the FPAB hosts a monthly breakfast and information session for farmers and landowners on various topics. This year in two hybrid sessions, 54 Durham Landowners and/or Farmers joined us.



January Breakfast Presentations on Program Opportunities were a success!

The February Farmer Breakfast topic was found very informative by the audience.



Breakfast #1 - Thursday, January 18, 2024 at 8-10am

Farmers and Landowners met at Durham Cooperative Extension to hear from a panel of professionals to discuss opportunities available to Durham County Farmers and Landowners. Program Specialists were available from Soil and Water Conservation District, Durham Open Space and Real Estate Department, Durham Cooperative Extension, NC Forest Service, NC Wildlife Resource Commission, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Breakfast #2 - Thursday, February 15, 2024 at 8-10am

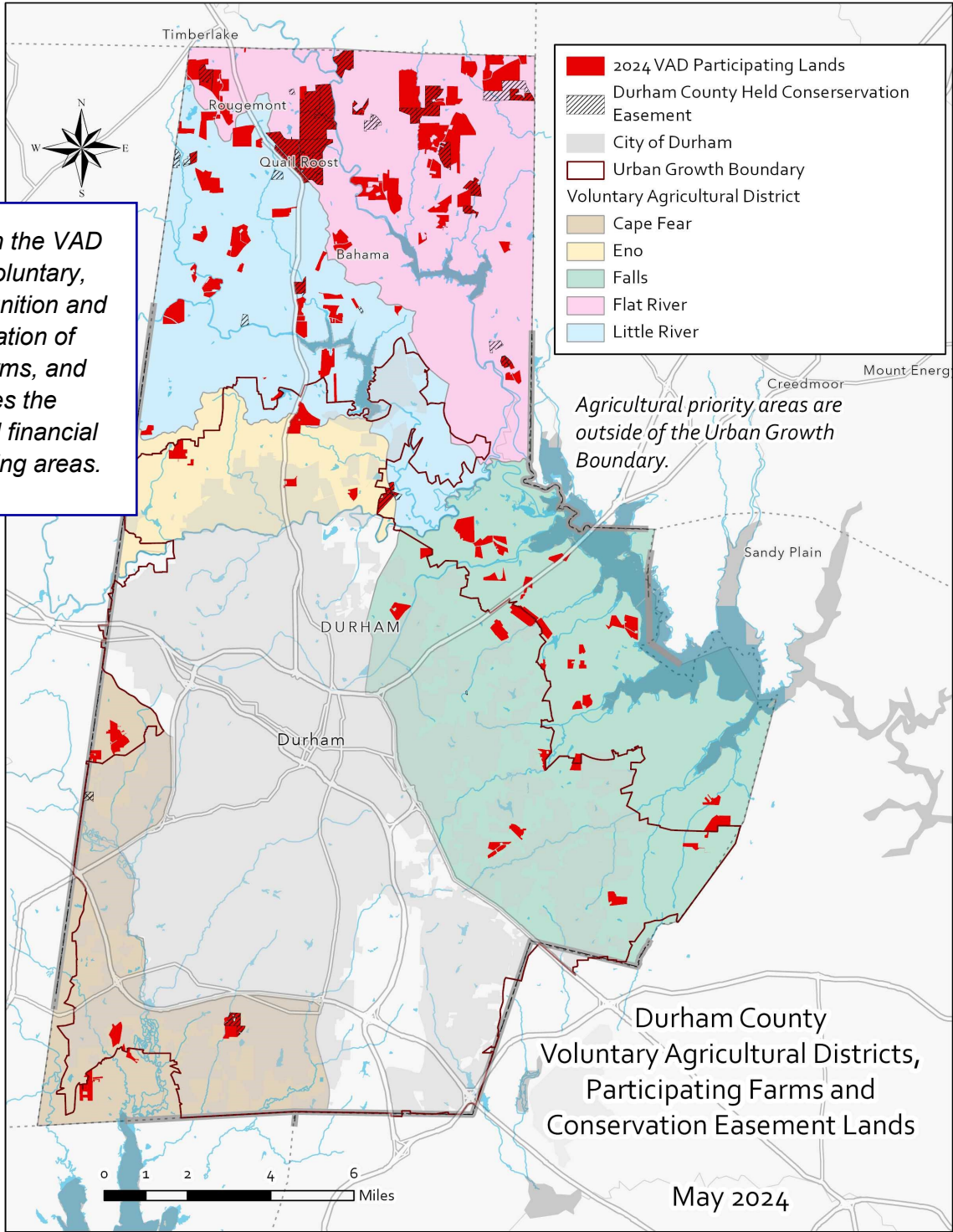
Landowners joined the Farmland Board members at the Durham Farm Bureau meeting room to hear a presentation on Estate Planning and other farm laws from Cedar Grove Law's, Anna Williams. Great information was shared and questions asked. This breakfast snack was provided by Cedar Grove Law.



2024 Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD)

105 VAD participants
248 land parcels
8,911 acres

Participation in the VAD program is voluntary, provides recognition and public education of Durham's farms, and encourages the economic and financial health of farming areas.



Farmland Protection & Conservation Easements

Farmland preservation is a significant part of Durham County’s Open Space Program, staffed by the County’s Open Space Division in the Department of Engineering and Environmental Services.

Since 2001 Durham County, with guidance from the Durham Farmland Protection Advisory Board, has preserved farmland and forestland by purchasing development rights through conservation easements that permanently protect the land. County staff work with interested landowners and seek grants and donations that keep the program affordable. The land stays privately-owned, for farming and/or forestry uses, but cannot be developed. **Durham County has leveraged approximately \$4.33 dollars in outside grants and donations for every \$1 that the County has spent.** To date Durham County has permanently protected **2,422 acres on 19 farms.**

# of Farms	Farm Acres Protected	Overall Easement Value	Grant and Partner Contributions	Durham County Easement Cost
19	2,422	\$14,534,030	\$11,177,395	\$3,356,635
Percentage of overall cost:			77%	23%

In the past year we applied to USDA-NRCS to support the protection of an additional 30 acres of pastureland in north Durham County. The County also purchased 129 acres on Orange Factory Road to protect as a future County agricultural and recreational preserve. In 2024-25 we will finalize two currently-funded easement projects, continue outreach and communications with interested landowners, and steward currently-held conservation easements. We anticipate applying to federal and state agencies to support protection of several new farm protection projects in 2024 to continue this important work.



Patricia Russell’s 2005 easement was the first project supported with federal funding through USDA-NRCS’s Agricultural Land Easement Program, now called ACEP-ALE. One of her property, Honah Lee Farms, is now under new ownership and managed as a wildlife and forestry preserve with eco-tourist opportunities. Along with woodlands and open land, Honah Lee Farms protects 131 acres with significant frontage along the Flat River and Deep Creek in north Durham County. These habitats support rare aquatic species and are integral to critical regional wildlife corridors.

2,422 acres of farmland on 19 farms are permanently protected with Durham County-held conservation easements.




Agriculture Economic Development Grant

The Durham County Board of County Commissioners Agricultural Economic Development Grant Program was allocated \$250,000 in 2023 for FY2024. The program purpose is to offer cost share and financial support to farms, new and beginning entrepreneurs and to support agriculture education in schools.


Program Impact & Data	FY 24
Funding level	\$250,000
Request for funding from applicants	\$282,920
Number of applications	34
Number of farm applications	33
Number of M/WBE applications (farms)	21
Number of farm projects funded	30
Percentage of M/WBE contracts awarded	79%
Number of farms funded for food safety compliance	4
Number of schools funded	1

Project Examples:




Solar Panels




High Tunnels



Agriculture Economic Development Grant Program

Project Examples:



Egg Washer



Infrastructure Improvement



Cold Storage

Project Types funded	FY24
Number of farm operations that raise livestock only	10
Number of operations that raise livestock & produce	5
Number of farms that grow produce only	7
Projects that improved access/equity/non-profits with direct sales	4
Schools supporting Agricultural Education	1
Other agriculture commodities produced	5



Program Goals for Calendar Year 2025

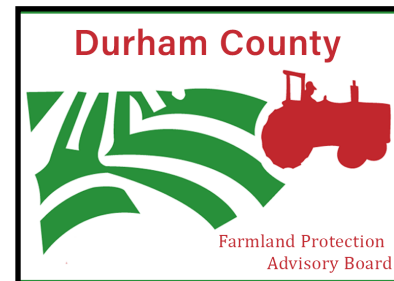
- 1. Continue to support and promote the Voluntary Ag District (VAD) Program, Conservation Easement Program and the Agricultural Economic Development Grant Program.
- 2. Continue to support agricultural education through adult programming and in Durham County Public Schools.
- 3. Update the 2009 Farmland Protection Plan, including ordinance, through grant funding.


Funding Requests for FY 2026

- 1. Agricultural Economic Development Grant Program – Through this program, the Farmland Preservation Board assists local farmers and schools by providing cost-share grants for projects.
- 2. Conservation Easements – The FPAB requests the BOCC continue funding the county’s Farmland Protection Easement Program through the Capital Improvement Plan.
- 3. Voluntary Ag Districts—Continuation of funds allows for the construction of signs for this statewide program.


FY 2024 Members:

Nicole Connelly Chair/Little River VAD	Mark Waller Vice Chair/Farm Bureau Representative
Kenny Browning 2nd Vice Chair/Eno River VAD	Nancy Herndon Cape Fear VAD
Neil Frank At large (Farmland Board appointed)	Talmage Layton Falls VAD
Samantha Gasson At Large (Farmland Board appointed)	S. Douglas Daye Flat River VAD
David Harris SWCD Board Representative	David Heeks At Large (Farmland Board Appointed)
Matthew Eagle At Large (Farmland Board appointed)	Lindsay White At Large (Farmland Board appointed)
Chris Young Business Representative	Shakira Campbell Open Space & Trails Representative
Heidi Carter County Commissioner	





Soil & Water



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Staff support provided by Soil and Water Department, Open Space and Real Estate Division, and Cooperative Extension.