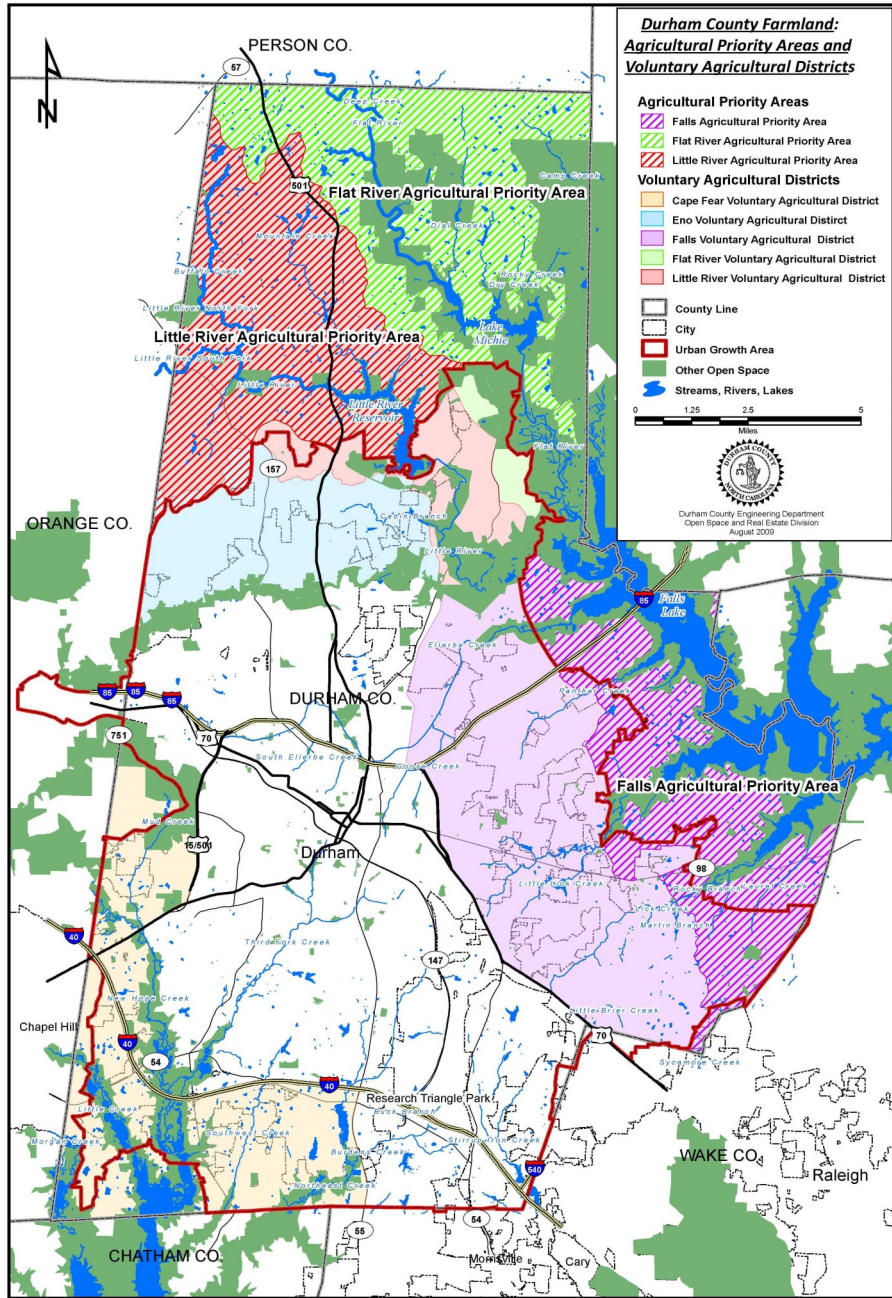


This map shows the five Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) in Durham County. Participating farms join to show their pride in farming, and receive several benefits.

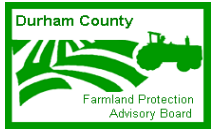
Three Agricultural Priority Areas (APA's) are identified for the Little River, Falls Lake and Flat River areas. These APA's are located outside the area intended for urban development in Durham, and are outlined in red. The APA's were adopted by the Durham Board of County Commissioners in 2003, and provide focal areas for staff time and County funds towards potential farmland easements.



Please feel free to call Durham County Open Space staff Jane Korest at 919-560-7955 (email is jkorest@dconnc.gov) or Wendy Seddon at 919-560-7956 (wseddon@dconnc.gov) with any questions about the Durham County open space program or farmland conservation easements.



The Durham County Farmland Protection Program



Farmland preservation is a unique and important part of Durham County's Open Space Program. Durham County helps to preserve farmland for future generations of farming by purchasing the development rights of the farm and by placing a conservation easement on the farm that prohibits non-farm use in perpetuity. The land stays privately owned, for farming and forestry uses, but cannot be developed for non-farm uses. The program relies heavily on grants and partial donations to keep down the costs of preserving farmland.

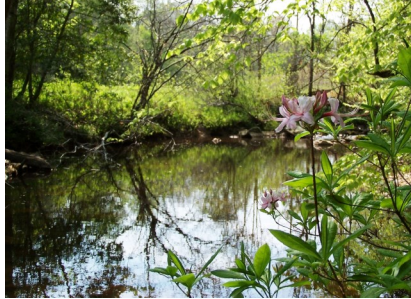


Conservation Easements

Conservation easements have become increasingly popular around the country as a cost effective way to permanently protect open space and farmland. The farm remains privately owned with a conservation easement, but restrictions are permanently placed on the farm to restrict future development. A conservation easement is tailored to the unique qualities of the farm and the needs of the individual landowner, working within any requirements of the funding agency. The conservation easement is permanent and runs with the land so any future landowner must abide by the rules. The easement is recorded with the Register of Deeds and becomes part of the chain of title. In this way the land remains in private ownership but cannot be developed in the future.



Little Mountain farm preserves more than 900 acres of permanent farm and forest land along Moore's Mill Road, which is part of a state designated scenic byway.



Benefits from preserving farmland

- Preserving farmland with conservation easements retains the land for farming uses for future generations.
- There is a strong and growing interest from Triangle consumers for locally available foods. This interest is from consumers, restaurants, and institutions like Duke University.
- Retaining farmland in our watershed areas helps to keep down car traffic, houses, new roads and other impervious surfaces from our drinking water supply watersheds.
- Farms preserved with Durham’s farmland easements must maintain best management practices (BMP’s) on the farm.
- Farms contain valuable wildlife and native plant habitats.
- Historically, farming was an integral part of Durham’s economic base and way of life.
- Today, working farms remain an attractive part of our community’s rural character.
- Several farms are located along the “North Durham Scenic Byway”, a scenic byway drive designated by the State.
- New “agri-tourism” farm businesses attract visitors from greater triangle area and beyond.
- Preserving farmland also makes economic sense. Farmland does not create new demand for additional roads, schools, libraries or sheriff’s services.
- Nationwide studies have documented that farmland, even when taxed at “present use” levels, brings in more tax dollars than it uses in services.
- Recent cost of community studies conducted by NCSU for Durham, Wake, Orange and Chatham Counties each found that farmland generated more county tax revenue than it costs in county services.

How are farms selected?

Placing a permanent conservation easement on farmland is a big decision for landowners, and Durham staff is happy to work with interested landowners to explore this voluntary possibility. The first step is for staff to meet with landowners to learn how the landowner’s farm and personal goals work with the County farmland preservation objectives, and assess the best chances for funding success using a variety of potential grant sources.

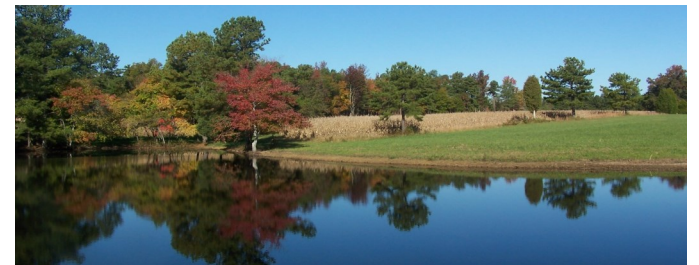
The Farmland Protection Advisory Board has an Evaluation System used to score interested farms and the Advisory Board considers this score as well as other farm factors in making an advisory recommendation to the Durham Board of County Commissioners regarding which farms they recommend be chosen. The Board of County Commissioners makes the final decision on what farmland projects the County will undertake.

Leveraging Durham’s Dollars

Durham County has been fortunate to receive strong federal and state support for its farmland preservation efforts. Durham County has received over \$5,466,551 in grants towards farmland protection projects, including seven federal grants from the federal Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program totaling \$3,994,058, three N.C. Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund grants totaling \$787,500, and a \$457,000 Clean Water Management Trust Fund Grant. In addition, landowner donations that have taken place or been pledged total another \$3,198,600 in land value.

In all, Durham County has contributed \$2,453,800 towards farmland conservation easements out of a total project value of \$11,126,640. When projects underway are completed, Durham County will have permanently preserved over 2,139 acres of farmland at an average cost to Durham taxpayers of \$1,147 per acre. **This means Durham has leveraged \$78 dollars in outside grants or landowner donations for every \$22 that the County has spent!** (as of Sept 2014)

Farm ponds like this one on the Van Ellis Farm help to control sediments and hold back rainwater, helping to maintain the water quality in watershed areas and providing valuable wildlife habitat.



Open space staff meet on site with local landowners to discuss a conservation easement.