

AGRIBUSINESS

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Frederick County's rural character is a key component in its identity and one of the primary items that draw visitors and new residents to the area. Historically, these rural areas have supported a wide array of agricultural uses, which at one time was the primary industry in the County. Today those agricultural activities not only generate roughly \$30 million per year but they preserve close to 100,000 acres of rural land. While the number of farms and the amount of land dedicated to agricultural uses has declined in the last 20 years the market value of the products produced has actually increased. 'Farm to Table' trends, 'Buy Fresh, Buy Local' initiatives and the willingness for families to invest in higher quality, locally sourced and environmentally friendly produced groceries will continue to help drive additional market growth.

To protect the amount of land available for agricultural use, the County makes a variety of tools and programs available to land owners. The County continues to allow land owners to participate in the Land Use Tax Deferral Program which allows taxpayers to apply for specially reduced assessments, such as qualifying agricultural, horticultural, and forestry uses. Participation in one of County's many Agricultural and Forestal Districts is available to County property owners. As of 2016, there were eight Districts covering approximately 11,281 acres.

Over the past few years, Frederick County has worked on implementing new tools to not only help protect the agricultural lands in the County but at the same time also help the farmer capture value of the property without actually developing or selling the land. These programs include the Purchase of Development Rights Program and the Transfer of Development Rights Program. These programs are discussed further in the Rural Areas chapter.

FOCUS FOR THE FUTURE

Frederick County agriculture will evolve in a way that is likely to be more intensive and by necessity more diverse. While this will require less acreage than traditional farming activities, activities it is expected that income from agricultural operations will increase. As such the County should focus on implementing policies that seek to prioritize the protection of these rural areas as well as streamline the process for approving the diversified land uses as described within this section. Reduction in permit fees and taxes generated from these new opportunities should be considered as well.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Once land is converted from agricultural use it is unlikely that it will ever be reclaimed.

The rural economy of Frederick County plays a significant role in the life and livelihood of its inhabitants. In addition to providing food products for the region, agriculture is a revenue generator which requires very few local services. Agriculture contributes to Frederick County's extraordinary viewsheds while providing a living to its farmers, citizens, and a place of enjoyment for its visitors. Most importantly, an active, profitable agriculture operation reduces the amount of land converted to more dense uses. Diversification of land use for the agricultural not only generate notable income and drive more tourism dollars to the County, it can also offer future protection the land from conversion to residential uses.

GOALS/STRATEGIES

GOAL: THE COUNTY SHOULD CONTINUE TO SUPPORT ITS AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES WHILE ALSO RESPONDING TO CHANGES IN THE INDUSTRY.

STRATEGIES:

- Diversified uses on the farm site such as farm markets, alternative fuels, animal boarding, Pick-Your-Own operations, agritourism vineyards, wineries, distilleries and micro-breweries and specialty crops, etc., should be encouraged to help preserve farming and agricultural uses in Frederick County.
- The ordinances of Frederick County should be reviewed to reference and enable the full range of agriculturally related activities. Care must be taken to ensure that such activities are compatible in scale, size and intensity with surrounding land uses and the rural character.
- Value added processes and support businesses should be examined for location within the Rural Area. These processes currently are permitted in the business districts.
- Continue to allow and encourage the use of the Land Use Tax Deferral Program, Agricultural and Forestal Programs, Purchase of Development Rights Program and the Transfer of Development Rights Program.