

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT – AGRIBUSINESS

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Agriculture has traditionally been an important aspect of Frederick County, not only in terms of its economic impacts but also its value to the identity and character of Frederick County. The rural areas are not a mere scenic backdrop for the urban areas, but also a source of jobs and a way of life worth preserving. A thriving rural economy is a critical component of the future vision for the rural areas.

While the County has seen a continuous decline in the total acreage of farmland, Frederick County's interest and support of its agricultural economy remains strong. From 2002 to 2007, Frederick County experienced a reduction in the number of farms (676 from 720), the amount of land in farms (98,278 acres from 112,675) and the average size of a farm (146 ac. from 156). However, the market value of products sold (71% crop and 29% livestock) increased by 29% to \$27.9 million, an average of 38% per farm according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture. Top crops were forage, apples, corn, and soybeans. Leading livestock inventory included cattle, hogs, laying chickens, horses, and goats.

This period of time included significant population growth and residential development in the County that spilled into the rural area. The amount of housing in the Rural Area now represents 50% of the current total of 28,338 homes in the County. The Rural Area has both a low housing density and by right development (see Residential chapter). Residential conversion because of rising value of agricultural land was likely a major cause of the above reductions.

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 2010, there were six Districts covering approximately 10,000 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

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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.

Not insignificant is the location of the Alson H. Smith Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Frederick County operated by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

FUTURE FOCUS

Frederick County agriculture will evolve in a way that is likely to be more intensive. Ultimately, this will require less acreage than traditional farming activities, while increasing the income from operations. It will also continue a trend of diversifying into related enterprises that support the land base, such as new value added products, new processes, new retail opportunities, and agritourism. Agriculture will also change to take advantage of the technical results of research and development.

The County should not only protect and promote its agricultural industry, but should do so while accommodating development that is appropriate for the rural area.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

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, including transportation. It is agriculture which contributes to Frederick County's extraordinary viewsheds while providing a living to its farmer citizens, and a place of enjoyment for its visitors. Agriculture also has a role in preserving structures that are part of the historic fabric. Most importantly, an active, profitable agriculture operation reduces the amount of land converted to more dense uses.

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POLICIES/IMPLEMENTATION

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

IMPLEMENTATION:

- Diversified uses on the farm site such as farm markets, alternative fuels, animal boarding, Pick-Your-Own operations, agritourism 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 enable the full range of agriculturally related activities in the rural areas. 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. The County should also pursue new permitted policies in support of agriculture as they are developed and become available.

POLICY: THE COUNTY SHOULD EXAMINE THE BROADER CONTEXT OF THE BUSINESS OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSIDER ACTION TO ACCOMMODATE THE VARIETY OF USES WITHIN THE RURAL AREA.

IMPLEMENTATION:

- Ancillary agricultural operations such as a livestock market or fruit growers' labor camp should be looked at if the preference of the agriculturalists and appropriate locations are identified in the Rural Area.

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- Frederick County should be proactive in providing opportunities for combining agricultural operations with recreational uses, resulting in a cooperative enterprise which strengthens both. Ready examples include equine operations, and golf courses.
- Frederick County should engage agricultural associations, County organizations and private business associations to proactively promote agriculture as an important element of the local economy. Specifically, these organizations should be challenged to undertake community education initiatives, industry and market research, as well as strategic marketing and small business development in support of local agriculturalists.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

- Frederick County Farm Bureau
- Frederick County Fruit Growers Association
- Old Time Apple Growers Association
- Virginia Cooperative Extension Service

SUPPORTING MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Alson H. Smith Agricultural Research and Extension Center, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

V. TRANSPORTATION

