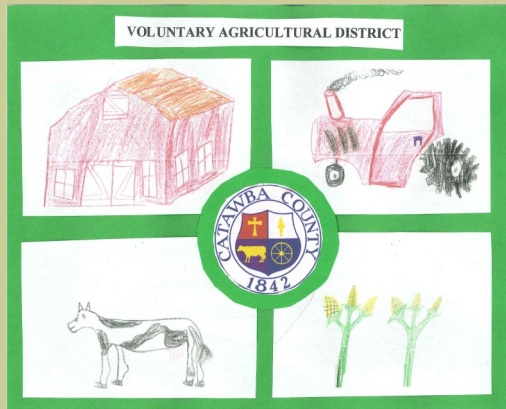


What are the benefits of joining an Agricultural District?

- Developers of major subdivisions must note all agricultural districts within 1/2 mile radius on final recorded development plats. This will give added protection from nuisance suits.
- The County will notify the public of approved agricultural districts by posting agricultural district maps in various County offices.
- The County's land records system will include information as to the location of all approved agricultural districts.
- The districts will help to increase the identity and pride of the agricultural community and its way of life.
- Signs will be placed on the property to identify the farm as a Voluntary Agricultural District. These signs will tell the public that the farm owner is committed to the preservation of the agricultural way of life in Catawba County.



What is the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District program?

The enhanced voluntary agricultural district program meets the same standards as the voluntary agricultural district program with the following addition:

- Participant must enter into an irrevocable 10-year conservation agreement

In exchange for this higher level of participation, the landowner receives the following additional benefits:

- Up to 25% of gross sales from the sale of non-farm products is allowed and still remain exempt from zoning
- Eligible for higher percentage of cost share funds
- Priority consideration from State departments, institutions and agencies that award grants to farmers



For more information about the County's Agricultural District program please contact:

Catawba County Cooperative Extension
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P.O. Box 389
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Voluntary Agricultural Districts



Pride in our farming heritage

Voluntary Agricultural Districts

Catawba County's history is deeply rooted in farming. Within decades after Adam Sherrill crossed the Catawba River, pioneers began settling the land that was to become Catawba County. These men and women were engaged mostly in farming, drawn to the area by cheap land and abundant opportunities for farming.

Today, the farming heritage of the County is still evident in areas such as Balls Creek, Vale and Sherrills Ford. However, the rapid urbanization of the County is beginning to have impacts on the farming community. The most recent agricultural census indicates that in the last 40 years, the county has lost over 40,000 acres of farmland, with 6,600 acres being lost during the five year period of 2002-2007.

In order to assist farmers to remain in the agriculture business, different programs have been made available at the State and local levels. One program adopted by the County Board of Commissioners in October 2008 is a voluntary agricultural district program. With the program, the Board of Commissioners established an Agricultural Advisory Board to work with farmers on establishing new agricultural districts throughout the County. The Advisory Board will review and approve applications from farmers to participate in an agricultural district. The Advisory Board will also help promote the preservation and protection of agriculture in the County.



What is the Voluntary Agricultural District Program?

The purpose of the voluntary agricultural district program is to increase the identity and pride in the agricultural community and its way of life. It also helps to provide protection for farmers from non-farm development including nuisance suits and other negative impacts on properly managed farms.

The agricultural district program is a **voluntary** opportunity for farmers to have their land identified as a farming district. By having land designated as a district, the farmer lets the community know that he is actively engaged in farming and to expect the various types of activities which are associated with a farm. This program is **not zoning** nor is it a regulatory process.

The County is interested in assisting farmers to stay in the farming business. Through a voluntary agricultural district, farmers may benefit by being identified as a special district which will highlight their contributions to the community.



What are the qualifications to become a member of an Agricultural District?

Following are the qualifications to be approved as an agricultural district:

- Be participating, in, or otherwise qualify for, the farm present-use value taxation program. The following types of land qualify for the present-use program:
 - Agricultural land consisting of one or more tracts, one of which consists of at least 10 acres and for the preceding 3 years have produced an average gross income of at least \$1,000 per year.
 - Horticultural land consisting of one or more tracts, one of which consists of at least 5 acres and for the preceding 3 years have produced an average gross income of at least \$1,000 per year.
 - Forestland consisting of one or more tracts, one of which consists of at least 20 acres that are in actual production and has a written forestry management plan.
- Be managed, if highly erodible land exists on the farm, in accordance with a Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) farm plan.
- There are two options for participation in the agricultural district program: the general voluntary or enhanced voluntary. In either case, participants must sign a conservation agreement that prohibits non-farm use or development of the land for at least 10 years, except for the creation of not more than 3 lots that meet the County's ordinances. If you participate in the **general** voluntary district program, the conservation agreement can be revoked with written notice to the Advisory Board. If you apply for the **enhanced** voluntary district program, the 10-year agreement is irrevocable.