



North Carolina Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Customer Focus

In 1999, Robert Blackburn's family farm in eastern Forsyth County was enrolled in USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). Many years from now, the 59-acre farm that was purchased by his grandfather 114 years ago will remain in agriculture. Funding provided by FRPP and Forsyth County's matching farm land preservation program enabled Blackburn to protect his land for future generations.

"I pulled tobacco in that field," he said, pointing to a new development of \$125,000 houses. Instead of tobacco, the farm now grows brick cluster homes. "It's coming from every direction. Everywhere you turn all your farms are gone," said Blackburn. But Blackburn has done what he could to draw a line and ensure that, at least here, the houses advance no further.

By selling his development rights to Forsyth County, his land can never be turned into condominiums, strip malls or business parks. For Blackburn, the decision to sell the development rights on his land was about preserving the choice for his grand children.

"Once you fill it up with houses, it's gone. There ain't no more farming," he said. "I know I could hold off and get more money out of this eight or ten years down the line. But I wanted a place where, if my kids and my grand children wanted to grow some vegetables or something, it'll be there."

Overview:

The USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) helps farmers and ranchers keep their productive land in agriculture. The program partners with States, Tribes, local governments and non-profit organizations to purchase conservation easements for the purpose of protecting topsoil by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land. NRCS provides up to 50% of the fair market value of the easement to the cooperating entity, which acquires, manages, and enforces the easement. Landowners participate voluntarily, and protected farms remain in private ownership.

Conservation plans are developed on all highly erodible cropland. Nationally, over \$101.3 million have been obligated to state and local entities since establishment of the program in 1996. The 2002 Farm Bill produced some changes in the program, including the addition of a provision providing for the protection of historical and archaeological resources on farm and ranchlands, and the inclusion of nongovernmental organizations as eligible entities. The Farm Bill also significantly increased the amount of financial assistance available under FRPP, authorizing nearly \$600 million through Fiscal Year 2007. Sixty-seven million dollars was allocated to states to purchase easements in FY 2003.

Accomplishments:

Cooperating entities' proposals are selected through a competitive process designed to protect parcels that will help accomplish FRPP and local land use goals. FRPP easements protect entire working farms, woodlands, wetlands, important natural areas, and historical and cultural resources. Through FY 2002, \$3.1 million in FRPP funds have been awarded to purchase easements on approximately 3,706 acres of valuable agricultural land in North Carolina.

Due to increasing development pressure throughout the state, requests for FRPP funds have increased dramatically in recent years, far outpacing the program's funding capacity. In FY 2003, partners in North Carolina requested \$3,275,174 in FRPP funds. This request represents five percent of the total amount of FRPP funds available nationwide in FY 2003. North Carolina was allocated \$1,434,000 to purchase conservation easements in FY 2003.

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Outlook:

According to 1997 NRI data, North Carolina is one of the most rapidly developing states in the nation. Loss of farmland is a primary concern throughout the State; the Piedmont region (particularly the corridor between Raleigh and Charlotte), however, is currently experiencing the heaviest development pressures. Even the Coastal Plain region, which has a preponderance of agricultural land, is beginning to experience significant urbanization in several counties.

From 1999 to 2001, many counties enacted farmland preservation ordinances, established voluntary agricultural districts, and began to explore funding options for purchasing conservation easements. Land trusts continue to play a major role in preserving farm land by identifying potential participants, supplying the matching funds for the FRPP grants, and providing the administrative support for acquiring the easements.

Since 2000, the State of North Carolina has also provided substantial funds for farmland preservation. If population continues to increase as it has in the recent past, the challenge of land use planning to preserve agriculture lands, while meeting the residential and commercial needs of the increasing general public, will be a monumental task.

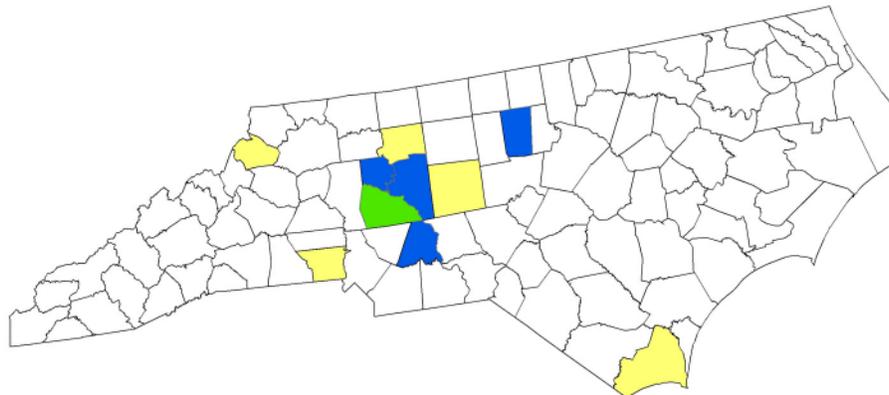
**Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program - North Carolina Easements
as of June 2003
Number, Acres, Easement Costs by County**

North Carolina					
County	Acres	Easement Cost		Federal Payment	
		Total (\$)	Avg. (\$/acre)	\$	%
Forsyth	343	706,382	2,059	331,144	47%
Gaston	170	300,000	1,765	150,000	50%
Rowan	241	327,600	1,359	163,800	50%
Brunswick	268	520,000	1,940	260,000	50%
Randolph	264	395,745	1,499	197,873	50%
Watauga	66	250,000	3,788	125,000	50%
Total*	1,352	2,499,727	1,849	1,227,817	49%
*Totals do not include FY 2002 pending easements					

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Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program - North Carolina Easements as of June 2003

North Carolina



-  Counties with acquired FPP acreage
-  Counties with pending FPP acreage
-  Counties with both acquired and pending FPP acreage



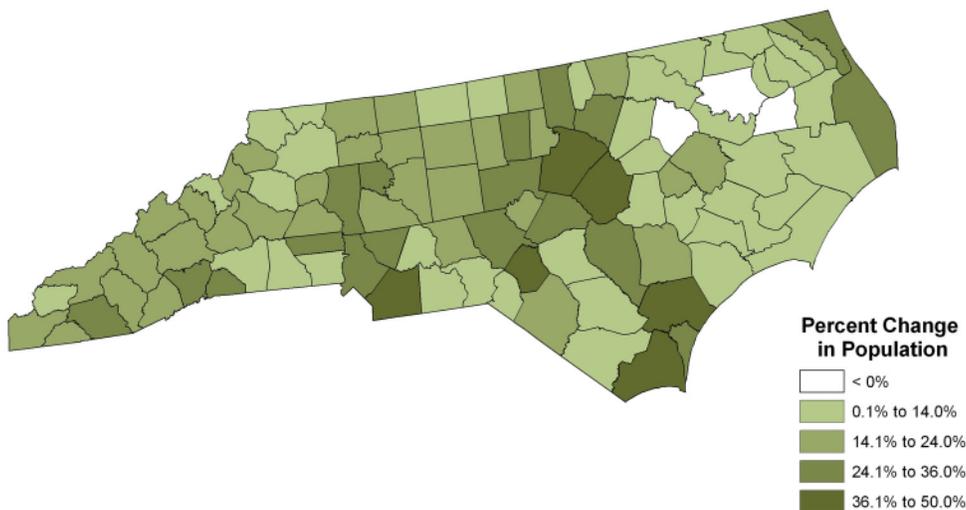
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Resource Assessment Division
Washington, D.C. July 2003

Map ID: 7321

Source: Farmland Protection Program, NRCS/USDA

Trends in Population by County - North Carolina 1990 to 2000 (Census Data)

Percent Change in Population between 1990 and 2000 North Carolina



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Map ID: 7377

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Census of Population 2000