



Greene County Comprehensive Plan

- **Agriculture and Forestry Chapter**

Review: March 17, 2021

From: [Sarah Weaver Sharpe](#)
To: [Stephanie Golon](#)
Subject: Comp Plan Update
Date: Monday, December 14, 2020 2:56:49 PM

Hi Stephanie!

I had a few updates/comments on the ag section of the comprehensive plan to pass along.

- I don't believe that the Buy Fresh, Buy Local from PEC is still in existence. The last I heard they were attempting to merge with the VT Market Maker program, which is definitely not the same as the Buy Fresh Buy Local program. They are having a hard time getting buy in from growers and buyers. I'm working to see if I can get more clarification/information.

Here's the data from the 2017 ag census if you don't already have it!

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Virginia/cp51079.pdf

Just some comments as I read through it.

Investigate county measures to encourage and retain farming and land use operations o Maintain land use taxation and promote awareness of tax incentives for farmers. o Partner with other organizations to encourage conservation easements for agriculture and forestry. o Concentrate future development into growth areas in accordance with the land use section of the comprehensive plan. o Partner with the Greene County office of Virginia Cooperative Extension to help recruit young farmers and reduce the barriers to entry inherent to farming in the area.

- Why the emphasis on conservation easements? While helpful, they aren't the end-all, be-all for farming enterprises. I think that each farm has to think through it themselves and decide if it's a good fit for them. Some of the newer easements aren't as bad, but the older ones create major headaches for anyone looking to purchase the farm in limitations on what can be done on the farm.

- I had no idea about the local program that you referenced in the document to the land conservation. Is that an on-going program or an option still available to producers? Other than land-use tax help, is there anything else that would benefit the farmer out of it?

- Perhaps encouraging landowners/prospective farmers to utilize the VDACS Farm Link program?

- Are there specific barriers that you think should be addressed?

Encourage farming techniques that help protect farmland and water quality o Encourage organic and/or hydroponic farming.

- I would not specifically list organic farming. In theory, yes, better for the environment- in practice, questionable. Also not sure I see the correlation between hydroponic farming and protecting farmland/water quality.

Achieve recognition of farming and farmers as a vital part of the county's future and make them part of tourism o Encourage annual events such as the County Fair and the Strawberry Festival. o Promote agritourism businesses targeted toward the Richmond and D.C. metro areas.

-Thinking about the strawberry festival- with no strawberries grown in Greene (or very few for limited consumption), is there a better way that farmers could achieve that recognition? Now with the County Fair no longer in existence, I suppose that needs to be updated as well. PERHAPS an idea in the future would be to host some type of Farm Tour like Culpeper does and like Orange did many years ago. It would take a lot of time/effort/manpower/willing farmers but could be an interesting concept.

Encourage and promote specialty and niche farming such as equestrian, vineyard, nursery and greenhouse crop activities.

-Yes, diversification is critical. However, I would perhaps change the "such as" in this. Just a minor wording issue. I would instead promote the diversification of on-farm activities and items grown/produced.

- Should there be wording in there about increasing agritourism opportunities?

Things I see being issues in the next 5 years:

- Increased demand for local food (Stanardsville FM is great, but I think a key audience in Ruckersville is being missed)

- Beginning farmers- number increasing, need for good educational programs (that's me! :))

- Access to affordable land- personally, this is something my husband and I are facing. Trying to find land we can afford that will sustain a farming operation that he has elsewhere and we can't afford land due to retirees moving in with more secure financing and able to go much higher on prices than we can. I see a similar problem in Greene, but also everywhere. This also goes back to conservation easements- retirees move in, put their land in the easement, use the tax credits to their benefits, and then want to sell at ridiculously high prices later- new farmers can't afford the land and the restrictions from the easement limit what they can do)
- Mandatory fencing out of streams (CSWCD can provide more information on this)
- Growth in agriculture areas. Good, but also provides many challenges to the adjoining landowners.

Let me know if you want to chat more. Happy to help!

Thanks!
Sarah

--

Sarah Weaver Sharpe

Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources
Virginia Cooperative Extension- Greene
10013 Spotswood Trail, Stanardsville, VA 22973
Office:(434)985-5236

E-mail: seweaver@vt.edu

Due to coronavirus, my work schedule is as follows:

Office: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday

Remote work: Wednesday, Friday



AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

INTRODUCTION



Greene County has a tradition of farming and forestry that goes back to its earliest days, and residents have repeatedly confirmed their strong desire to see this heritage into the future. Not only does agriculture contribute to the aesthetic values and sense of place Greene County possesses, but it is also an important industry and source of employment in its own right. The goals presented in the Comprehensive Plan outline the county's vision for the future of agriculture and forestry.

Like many other communities in Virginia that are growing, Greene County is facing the prospect of gradually losing farmland and forests. Each year a portion of land in the county is converted from growing food or harvesting timber to other uses, such as residential or commercial development. At the same time, some individual farmers are finding it more difficult to sustain a viable business or recruit the next generation to carry on their role of providing food. Preserving farmland and forestland lies at the crossroads of many aspects of the Comprehensive Plan, from caring for the county's natural resources and heritage to ensuring continued economic development through production and tourism. Efforts to focus new residential, commercial and industrial growth into the County's Designated Growth Areas also play a key role in preserving our rural areas.

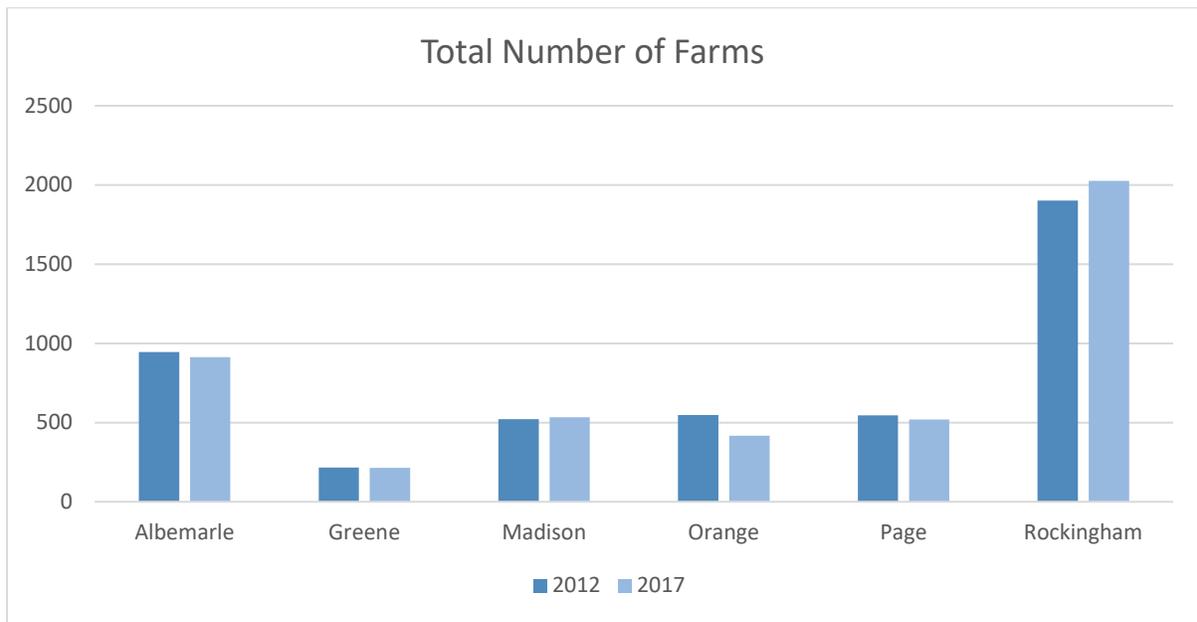
Having a safe, nutritious, and fresh supply of food is important for quality of life in Greene County, and the growing demand for locally grown foods in the region presents a renewed opportunity for Greene County farmers. Forests also provide benefits to the community and environment far in excess of their commercial use. Each of these elements of the agricultural and forestal system is a part of the comprehensive vision for the future of Greene County.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture in Greene County has been undergoing a transition for many years. Variables such as the residential and commercial development and the economy over the last several decades has put pressure on agricultural land. Between 1987 and 2007, as the population in Greene County grew by an average of 3.5% per year, the amount of land dedicated to farming decreased by an average of 1.19% per year. Furthermore, the total number of farms in the county actually decreased, between ~~2007-2012~~ and 2017, by 3.71%.

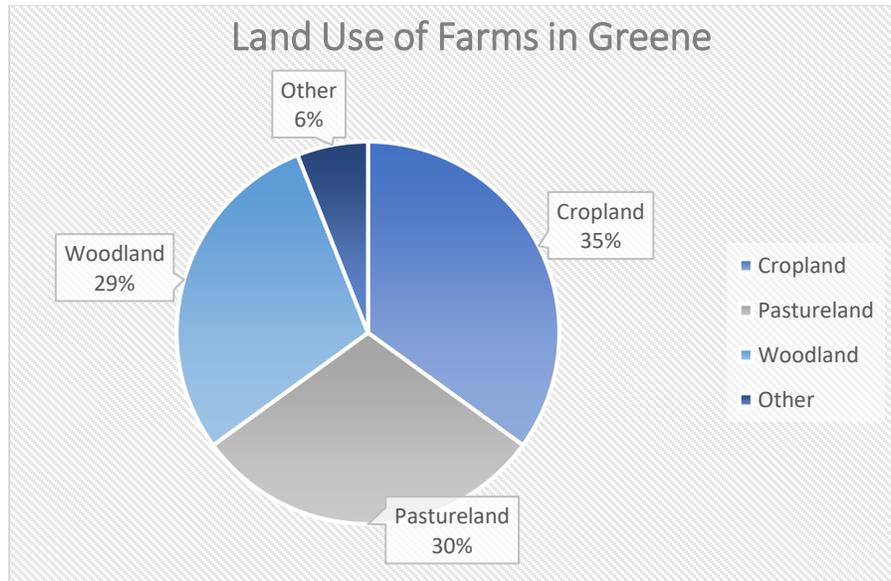


Source: ~~2012~~ and 2017 USDA census

Most of the principle operators of farms in Greene County have other sources of income to supplement their farming. Of all principle operators of farms in 2012, 50% list running the farm as their primary occupation. This is up from 2007, when 38% of all farmers were considered “full-time.” The part-time farming could be due either too difficult economic situations that require farmers to take alternative jobs to maintain their standard of living, or from small-scale farming conducted by households in addition to preexisting employment in another sector. The average age of farmers in the county is 61.5. This is not unusual for the occupation throughout the country, but it does raise the issue of whether workforce supply will be able to meet the demand for agricultural production in the future.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is the local connection to Virginia's land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. They offer educational programs in agriculture in their Greene County extension office. Their Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) programs help sustain the profitability

of agricultural and forestry production and enhance and protect the quality of our land and water resources.



Source: 2017~~2~~ USDA census

PROMOTING FARMLAND RETENTION

Greene County has recognized the value of maintaining a vital agricultural industry and has employed various measures to meet this goal. The Land Use Taxation system, used by 63 other counties in Virginia, assesses the taxes of qualified parcels according to the productive potential of the land rather than the market real estate value. This often relieves farmers of some tax burden, particularly for parcels with higher potential for development, and helps makes the use of this land for farming financially feasible. There are currently approximately 978,976 parcels in the county receiving this tax benefit. A study conducted by Piedmont Environmental Council of the region indicated that for every dollar in tax revenue received from farm land and open space, 11 to 21 cents were expended for services for that land. Whereas for every dollar received from residential developments, anywhere from \$1.16 to \$1.39 was expended for services. Reducing the tax rate for farmers and landowners of open space helps align these land uses with costs of county-provided services they typically incur.

The county has also used Agricultural and Forestal Districts as a support measure. These are voluntary agreements between landowners and the local government to decline from development in exchange for eligibility for land use taxation and limitations of eminent domain. When the program began in 1982, 23,315 acres were enrolled. The number of acres in the program had fallen to 3,4663,812 acres in 20195.

Conservation easements, legal agreements to keep land open or in agricultural use in perpetuity, are another available tool. Greene County does not directly purchase conservation easements at this time, but several parcels in the county have been preserved specifically for farming through the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. A total of ~~10, 64813, 133~~ acres in Greene County are under a conservation easement. ([source: https://www.pecva.org/resources/press/local-land-conservation-total-in-2020/](https://www.pecva.org/resources/press/local-land-conservation-total-in-2020/))

Greene County also encourages the development of niche farming, specialty crops, agriculture-based tourism opportunities, event venues and transient lodging facilities to add to revenue options on local farms.

LOCAL FOOD

The market growth in local foods over the last several years has benefited farmers in Greene County. For ten years, the Greene County farmers' market was held June through October at the Greene County Technical College on Route 33. ~~Currently, efforts are underway to establish a permanent farmers Market in the Town of Stanardsville.~~

Getting Updates from ED&T



~~About a dozen other farmers' markets are in operation seasonally in the region, at which Greene County farmers have the opportunity to sell their produce directly to customers. A growing number of grocers, restaurants, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups in the Charlottesville area are providing food from farmers in the region.~~

~~The Piedmont Environmental Council runs a "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" campaign to encourage residents to purchase food from farmers in the region. Several Greene County producers currently participate in this program. The Virginia Independent Consumers and Farmers Association (VICFA) also works to promote small-scale agriculture in Greene County, mostly at the level of the state legislature.~~

FORESTRY

~~64% of all land in Greene County is forest cover, as identified by aerial photos from 2009. 77% of Greene County forest cover is in private ownership, and 23% in federal ownership, mostly the Shenandoah National Park. There is no statistically significant state or locally owned forest land. Most of the forest is comprised of hardwoods, with Oak-Hickory being especially prevalent.~~

VDOF sending updates

Forests provide an important economic function to residents of Greene County. Based on annual averages collected between 2003 and 2013, 185,000 board feet of pine sawtimber and 652 cords of pine are harvested annually, which brings the total value of pine harvested to \$47,285 annually. There were

798,000 board feet of hardwood sawtimber and 845 cords of hardwood pulpwood, bringing the average total value of hardwood harvested to \$177,042. Between 2003 and 2013 timber harvests generated a total average value of \$224,327 to Greene's forest landowners. Timber harvests drastically decreased from 2008 to 2010 and have rebounded during the 2011-2013 time frame. The 2011-2013 total harvest value is \$311,672 which is well above the 11 year average.

In addition, every \$1 in rights to harvest timber paid to the landowner yields \$41.82 in value added to Virginia's economy. When all of the economic activity generated from the forestry sector in Greene County is taken into account, over \$9 million dollars annually is added to the Virginia economy from this sector.

The USDA provides estimates of annual economic output and jobs generated from the forestry industry in the county. Direct activities include logging, hauling, milling, and manufacturing of wood products. Indirect output includes local businesses that serve the forestry industry, and induced includes multiplier effects generated from the forestry workers incomes being spent within the community.

The value of Virginia's and Greene County's forests don't stop at the timber industry. Taking into account the societal and ecological benefits – recreational opportunities, clean air and water, carbon sequestration, biodiversity and a sense of place – Virginia's forests have an additional \$4 billion value to the Commonwealth. Other studies, not specific to Virginia, indicate that the ecosystem value of forest land far outweighs the value of any commodities derived from the land. It is just difficult to quantify.

There is potential for more timber production in Greene County, but it is limited by the level of production occurring in surrounding counties and the fact that there is currently only one mill in operation in the county. On the other hand, Greene County's location along the transportation corridors of Route 29 and Route 33 are well suited for transporting products. Overall, forests in Greene County are currently more highly valued for their aesthetic properties and range of ecological services, such as water filtering, soil conservation, plant and animal habitat, and sequestering greenhouse gases, than they are for timber harvesting.

There is no good data on how many landowners in the county lease to timber companies, but the Virginia Department of Forestry has worked with landowners on over 8000 acres of land in Greene County (including logging, tree planting, management plans, prescribe burning among other activities). The department offers a set of Best Management Practices to assist landowners in preserving site productivity and water quality as part of an overall forest management program. Virginia also has a Silvicultural Water Quality law that protects against excessive sedimentation originating from forestry operations.

GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES: AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

- Investigate county measures to encourage and retain farming and land use operations
 - Maintain land use taxation and promote awareness of tax incentives for farmers.
 - Partner with other organizations to encourage conservation easements for agriculture and forestry.
 - Concentrate future development into growth areas in accordance with the land use section of the comprehensive plan.
 - Partner with the Greene County office of Virginia Cooperative Extension to help recruit young farmers and reduce the barriers to entry inherent to farming in the area.
- Protect forest resources in parallel with protecting agricultural resources.
- Encourage and promote specialty and niche farming such as equestrian, vineyard, nursery and greenhouse crop activities.
- Encourage farming techniques that help protect farmland and water quality
 - Encourage organic and/or hydroponic farming.
 - Promote use of riparian or vegetated buffers to a minimum width of 35 feet on either side of streams to protect fish and help keep water clean.
 - Encourage Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as no-till, contour plowing, cover crops that conserve soil integrity and health, rainwater filtration, and the reduction of overland flow of water to area streams.
- Achieve recognition of farming and farmers as a vital part of the county's future and make them part of tourism
 - Encourage annual events such as the County Fair and the Strawberry Festival.
 - Promote agritourism businesses targeted toward the Richmond and D.C. metro areas.
- Actively celebrate farming heritage
 - Collect stories from generational farmers to produce a pamphlet or documentary about the area's farming heritage.
- ~~Support local agriculture through the Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign and promote a year-round farmer's market in Stanardsville.~~