

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD

415 South Pine Street - Walhalla, SC



TEL (864) 638-4218

AGENDA

6:30 PM, Monday September 9th, 2019
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
OCONEE COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX

1. Call to Order
2. Public Comment (3- minutes per person)
3. Approval of Minutes
4. Agricultural Element of the Comprehensive Plan
 Public Comment (3-minutes per person)
 Discussion / Vote
5. Old Business
6. New Business
7. Adjourn

Anyone wishing to submit written comments to the Agricultural Advisory Board can send their comments to the Planning Department by mail or by emailing them to the email address below. Please Note: If you would like to receive a copy of the agenda via email please contact our office, or email us at achapman@oconeesc.com.

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD

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TEL (864) 638-4218 FAX (864) 638-4168

Minutes

6:30 PM, MONDAY, August 12, 2019
 COUNCIL CHAMBERS
 OCONEE COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX

Draft Minutes – Monday, August 12, 2019

Members Present

Berry Rickard
 Sandra Gray
 Edward Land
 Rex Blanton
 Doug Hollifield
 Debbie Sewell
 Vickie Willoughby

Staff Present

Adam Chapman
 Vivian Kompier

Media Present

None

1. **Call to Order** – Mr. Blanton called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm
2. **Public Comment** - None
3. **Approval of 2/11/19, 4/8/19 and 7/8/19 Minutes** – Add Sandra Gray to 4/8 minutes, Correct Mr. Rikars' name on all minutes, Motion to approve with changes by Ms. Gray, seconded by Ms. Willoughby and approved 7/0.
4. **Agriculture Element of the Comprehensive Plan** –
 - Public Comment (3-minutes per person)** - Email from Chris Starker attached.
 - 8.1.1.1 – A motion was made by Ms. Sewell to replace encourage with advocate, remove soil and water conservation (duplicated) from accountable agencies, and add Clemson Cooperative Extension and State Forestry Commission. Mr. Land seconded and was approved 7/0.

8.1.1.2 – Ms. Sewell made a motion to switch the words “forests and farmland” to “farmland and forests.” Ms. Willoughby seconded and was approved 7/0.

8.1.1.2 – Mr. Blanton made a motion to add Clemson Cooperative Extension and Conservation Groups to the accountable agencies. Ms. Gray seconded and approved 7/0.

8.1.1.3 – Mr. Land made a motion to add municipalities to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Blanton, approved 7/0.

8.1.1.3 & 8.1.1.4 – A motion was made by Mr. Blanton to add Oconee Economic Alliance to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Ms. Gray and approved 7/0.

8.1.1.6. – Mr. Blanton made a motion to add Conservation Groups to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Land and approved 7/0.

8.1.1.7 – A motion was made by Ms. Sewell to change the wording to: Ensure that the impacts to adjacent farms and forest land is part of deliberation and decision making for proposed public projects. Seconded by Ms. Willoughby, approved 7/0.

8.1.1.8 – A motion was made by Mr. Rikard to Approach the LLR to add a disclosure saying you are moving next to a farm when you purchase an adjacent property. Seconded by Mr. Land and approved 7/0.

Add 8.1.1.9 – Ms. Sewell made a motion to add strategy – Create a program that invites entrepreneurs, non-profits and residents to apply for a program that allows them to adopt a vacant county owned property or building and start a new garden or farm. Not seconded or voted upon.

Add 8.1.1.10 – Ms. Sewell made a motion to add a Director of Agriculture and Forestry staff position to coordinate and communicate with foresters, farmers, county administrators, and the public on agriculture and forestry matters. Position would be under the Planning Commission. Seconded by Ms. Gray and approved 7/0.

8.1.2.7 – Ms. Sewell made a motion to add “local food hub with adjoining counties.” Seconded by Mr. Land and was approved 7/0.

8.1.2.8 – A motion was made by Mr. Rikard to strike this strategy and seconded by Mr. Land. Approved 4/3.

8.2.1.2 and 8.2.1.3 – A motion was made by Mr. Blanton to add US Forestry and Conservation Groups to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Rikard and approved 7/0.

8.2.1.4 – A motion was made by a Mr. Blanton to add US Forestry and Clemson Cooperative Extension to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Rikard and approved 7/0.

8.3.1.1 and 8.3.1.2 – Mr. Blanton made a motion to add Oconee County Schools to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Land and approved 7/0.

8.3.1.3 – Ms. Sewell made a motion to add “support and incentivize businesses”. Seconded by Mr. Land and approved 7/0.

8.3.1.3 – Mr. Blanton made a motion to add Clemson Cooperative Extension to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Land and approved 7/0.

8.3.1.4 – Needs to be reworded.

8.3.1.5 – Mr. Hollifield made a motion to add Farmers Markets to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Land and approved 7/0.

8.3.1.7 – Mr. Land made a motion to add a period after standards and strike the rest of the paragraph. Seconded by Mr. Hollifield and approved 7/0.

8.3.1.8 – Mr. Land made a motion to add Private Organizations, Nonprofit, and Disaster Relief Organizations to the accountable agencies. Seconded by Mr. Hollifield and approved 7/0.

Mr. Land made a motion to add “Educate and assist in mitigating the harmful effects of Climate Change in Oconee County through Agricultural means.” to the Comprehensive Plan. Seconded by Mr. Blanton and approved 7/0.

5. Highway 123 Corridor Plan – Mr. Chapman mentioned to the board that the Highway 123 Corridor Plan is moving to County Council.

6. Old Business – None

7. New Business – September 10, 2019 meeting at Chattooga Belle.

Heritage Fair last weekend in September.

Farm Bureau annual meeting at Westminster Middle School.

8. Adjourn – The meeting adjourned at 8:20pm

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A. OVERVIEW

Agriculture and forestry are critical components of both the landscape and the economy of Oconee County. Based on Oconee County tax data, **51% of the County's land area** is currently in use for agriculture or forestry. However, of County land that is not included in the Sumter National Forest, nearly two-thirds is in agriculture or forestry use.

According to the Oconee Economic Alliance, Oconee County has nearly 900 farms encompassing more than 67,000 acres of land. Together these farms have a market value in products worth more than 121 million dollars. In addition to the economic benefits of agriculture and forestry, both land uses can contribute social, environmental, and health benefits. These benefits are explored in more detail throughout this element.

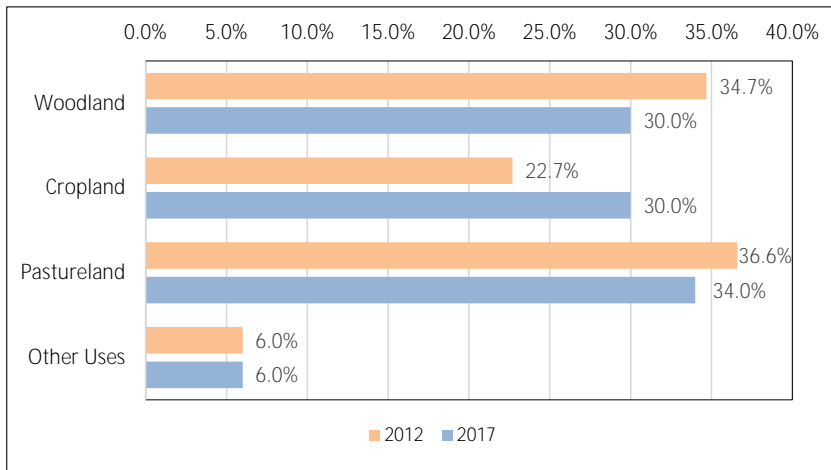


Figure 8-1. Oconee County Land in Farms by Land Use, 2012 and 2017

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture

Forestlands are important to the economy, character, environment, and overall health of Oconee County. **Agricultural and forested lands are home to many of the area's critical natural resources** and provide valuable wildlife habitat, windbreaks, enhanced water quality, decreased ambient temperatures, groundwater recharge areas, mitigation of stormwater run-off and erosion, and open space. This link to natural resource protection should be respected and enhanced when possible through the use of easements, education, and value-added land use policies such as proper regulation, prevention and mitigation of incompatible land uses, and the appropriate location of public lands and infrastructure.

Farming and food security would appear to go hand in hand, but even counties with significant farm production can have areas where access to healthy foods is non-existent or challenging.



Reliable, convenient access to fresh fruit, vegetables, and proteins is a cornerstone of community sustainability and resilience. A healthy population contributes more to the local economy, uses fewer healthcare resources, and is central to community well-being and quality of life.

B. AGRICULTURE

Over the past century, agriculture in the U.S. has become more mechanized, industrialized, and dependent on and threatened by globalization. While much of the agriculture in the Upstate consists of relatively small farms, these trends have affected farming in Oconee County as well. More than half of Americans were farmers at the turn of the 20th century, and their farms typically were diverse in plants and animals, had a focus on family subsistence, and supported the local area. While this is still true on some small farms, the trend towards specialization and truck farming (producing products primarily for shipment often bypassing local markets) has had its impacts on the Upstate as well. However, a recent return to market-farming or direct-to-consumer farming is changing how some farmers do business.



AGRICULTURAL LAND PROVIDES BENEFITS BEYOND FOOD



open space and scenic views



biodiversity and wildlife habitat



fire suppression, floodplain management, and carbon sequestration

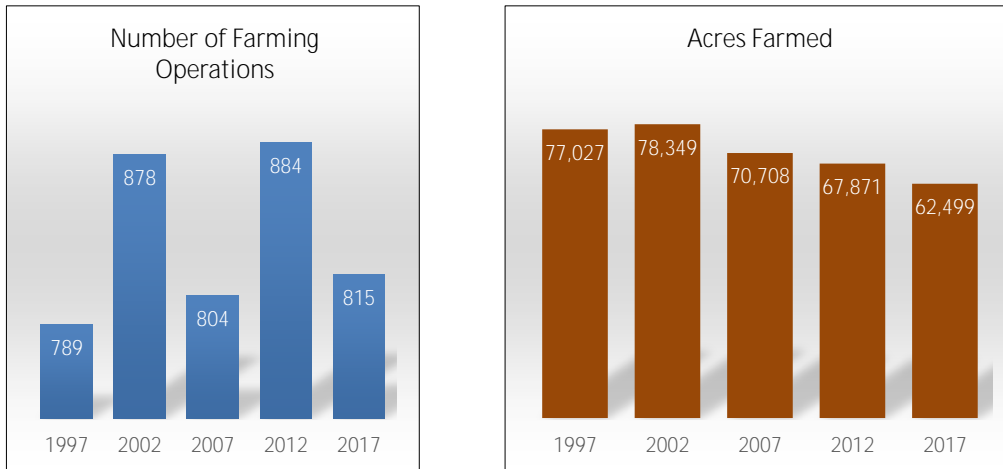


recreation

Source: American Farmland Trust, "Farms Under Threat: The State of America's Farmland," May 9, 2018



Figure 8-2. Farming Operation Characteristics in Oconee County



Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

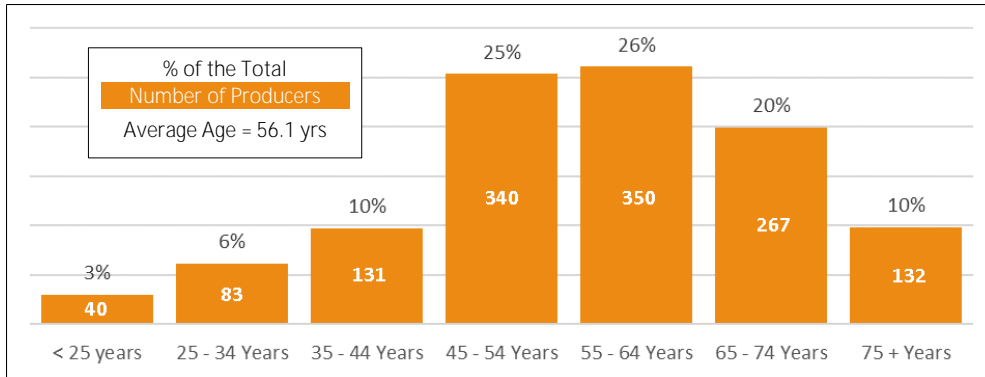
The number of farming operations in Oconee County has fluctuated over the past 30 years from a low of 789 in 1997 to a high of 884 in 2012. While the number of farm operations fell from 884 in 2012 to 815 in 2017, the average farm size remained 77 acres. In 2007 there were only 804 farms, but the average farm size was larger at 88 acres and the total acreage in farms was almost 71,000.

1. Producer and Income Characteristics

Commonly known as farmers, **people who work on farms are called “producers” by the U.S. Census Bureau.** The Census Bureau expanded its definition of producer in the 2017 Census to include anyone involved in making decisions for a farm. This change resulted in an increase in the number of people who were reported as producers as compared to previous years. The latest Census also collected information on young producers and new and beginning producers. These new data provide additional insight into the profile of farmers in Oconee County and should help to identify trends that might be significant in supporting local farming.



Figure 8-3. Age of Oconee County Producers, 2017



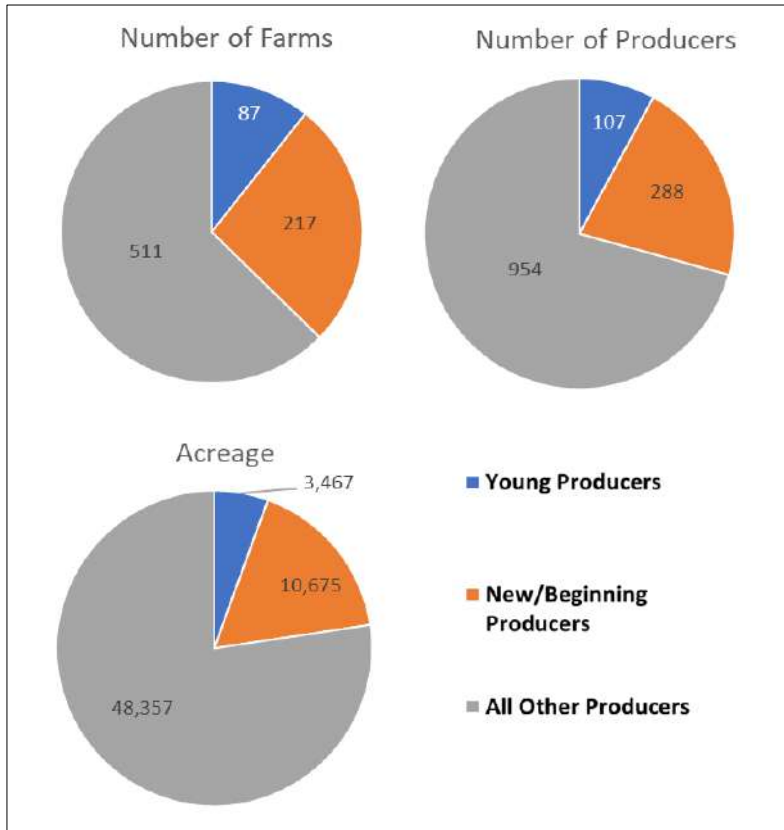
Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Of the 1,343 producers working Oconee County farms in 2017, 749 were aged 55 years or older. The average age for all producers is 56.1 years (Figure 8-3), slightly less than the U.S. average of 57.5 years. Fewer than one-third of all producers in Oconee County has been in operation less than 11 years and less than 40 percent indicated that farming was their primary occupation. The future of farming depends on the successful transition of farms from one producer to another, for young people to see value in the farming way of life, and on successfully supplementing farming income with diversification and non-farming related jobs that provide greater income stability. Only a small portion of the primary producers are young, aged 35 or less years, as characterized by the 2017 Census of Agriculture (Figure 8-4). A larger percentage of all producers were characterized as “new or beginning,” defined as no more than ten years of experience, which is a title irrespective of age.



Figure 8-4. Characteristics by Producer Type in Oconee County, 2017



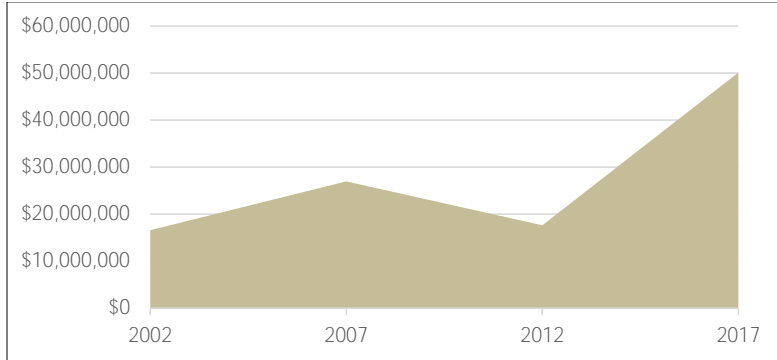


Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Although the number of acres farmed in the County is declining, the net income of farm operations has increased. The greatest increases in the number of farms by farm sales has been in categories with annual sales of \$50,000 or more.

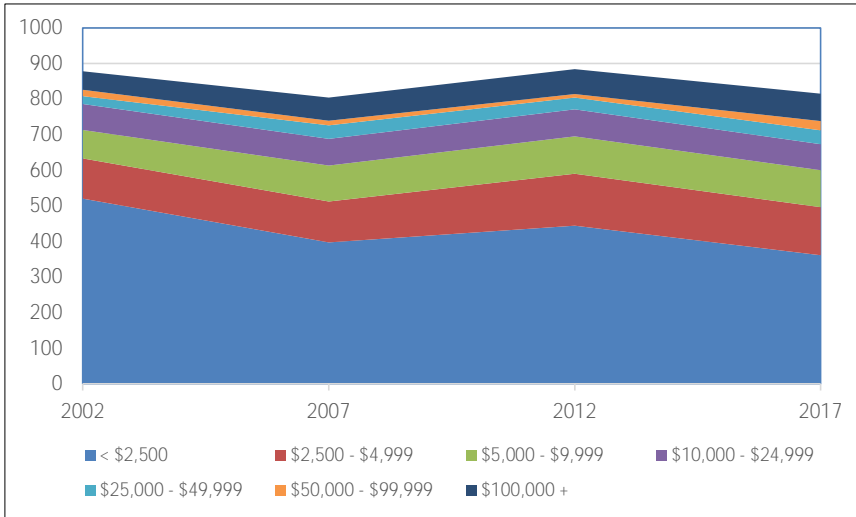


Figure 8-5. Net Farm Income in Oconee County



Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Figure 8-6. Number of Farm Operations by Sales in Oconee County



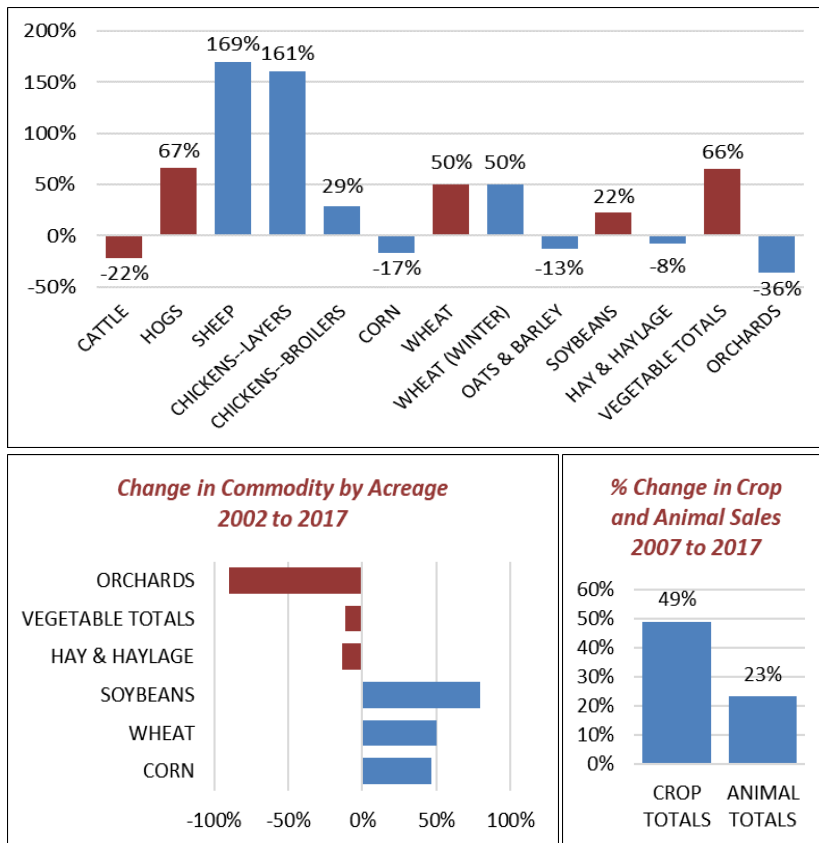
Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture



2. Commodities

A variety of vegetable, fruit, and animal products are produced on Oconee County farms, but livestock, poultry, and animal products represent 97 percent of the total share of farm sales. **Oconee County is South Carolina’s number 1 poultry and egg-producing county.** It ranks 77th nationwide out of 3007 counties. A distant second, in terms of sales and rank, is the production of cattle and calves, followed by milk, hogs and pigs, sheep and goats, equine, and aquaculture. As Figure 8-7 indicates, the number of sheep farms increased significantly between 2002 and 2012, but sheep remain a minor contributor to farm sales overall.

Figure 8-7. Changes in Farm Commodities



Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture



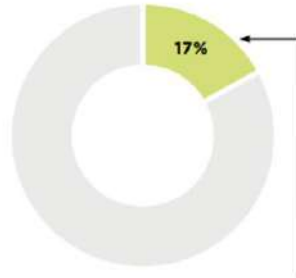
Agricultural Land

Soil data provided by the USDA reveals that only 7% of the County’s land area (30,650 acres) is prime farmland. Prime farmland, as defined by the USDA, is “land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses.” Prime farmland soils produce the highest yields with minimal inputs of energy and economic resources and the least damage to the environment. Soils that have a high water table or are subject to flooding may also qualify as prime farmland if protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during growing season. These soils comprise 2.4% of the land area in Oconee County, encompassing 10,138 acres of land.

It is possible for states to define and delineate soils that, while not designated as prime farmlands, may be farmlands “of statewide importance” for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. In general this land includes soils that nearly meet the requirements for prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops – some as high as prime farmlands given favorable conditions – when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Based on criteria set by the State of South Carolina, 10.4% of the land area of Oconee County (44,829 acres) is considered to have soils of statewide importance to agriculture.

Map 8-1 illustrates the location of prime and other important farmlands in Oconee County. Prime farmlands are located throughout the County but are sparser in the higher elevations in the Sumter National Forest.

U.S. AGRICULTURE RELIES ON HIGH-QUALITY FARMLAND

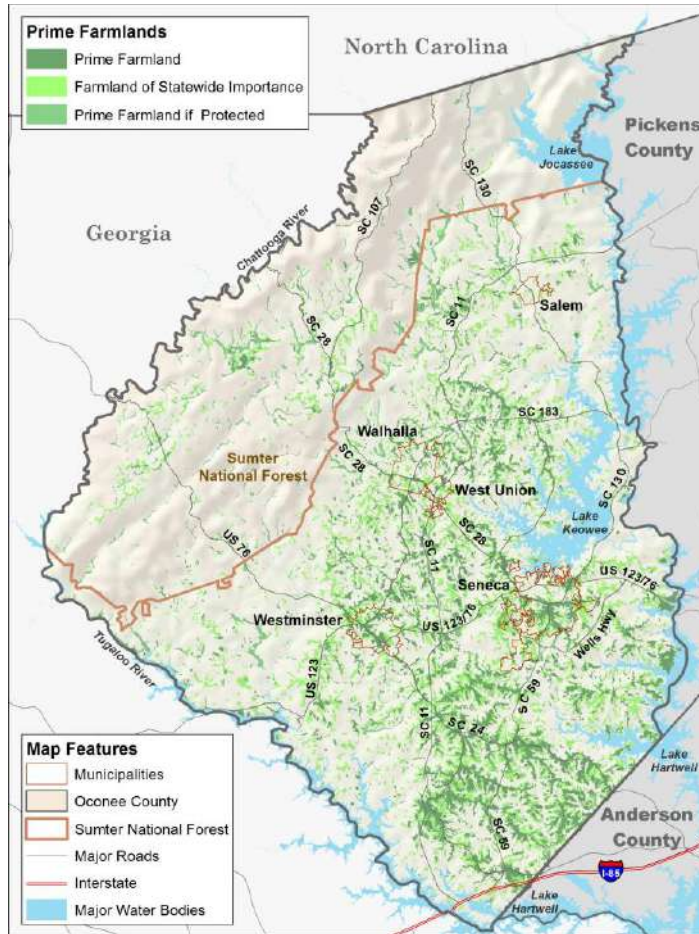


Only 17 percent of the land in the continental U.S. is agricultural land with the productivity, versatility, and resiliency (PVR) to produce a wide variety of crops with minimal environmental limitations.

Source: American Farmland Trust, “Farms Under Threat: The State of America’s Farmland,” May 9, 2018



Map 8-1. Prime Farmlands



Source: USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey, 2019



4. Threats to Prime Farmland

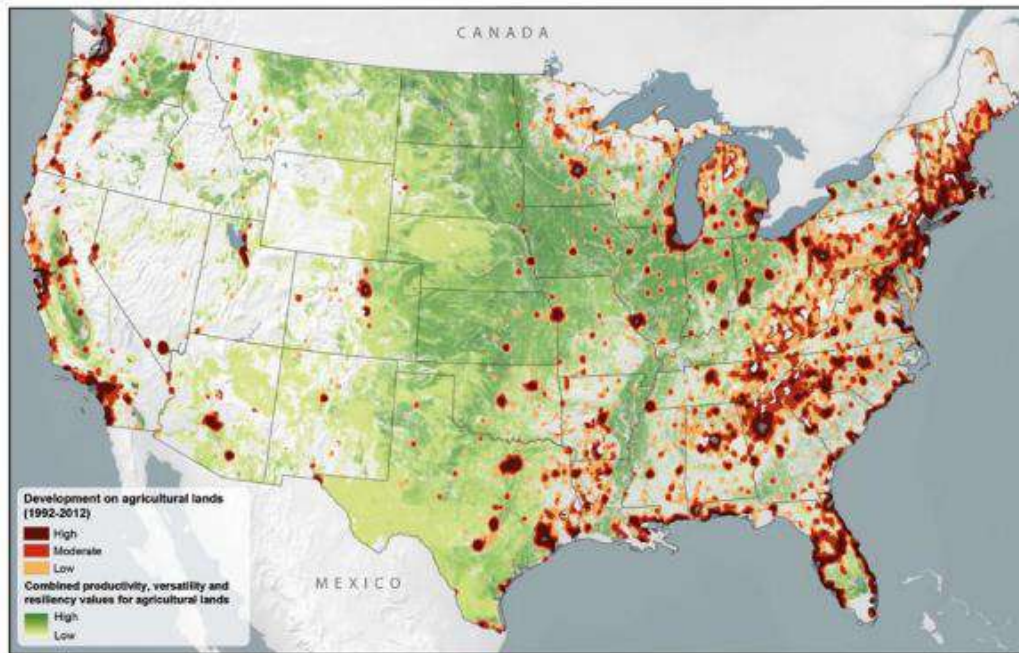
Prime farmland has been disappearing across America as urbanization has crept, leap-frogged, and, in some cases, steamrolled across the landscape. The sharp increase in road and utility expansion in the 20th century divided many rural farms, opening vast areas for urban and suburban development. The relatively flat, cleared land preferred by farmers is also preferred by developers looking to minimize the cost of land preparation. However, the loss of farmland is not caused solely by the need for land to accommodate growth. It is also caused by the low relative value placed on farmland as compared to suburban and urban development.

Farm loss **isn't just market economics at work, it also represents the collective valuation of farmland by the public.** Studies conducted by the USDA Economic Research Service indicate that when people were asked to rank the appeal of various landscapes, farms, particularly cropland, received a low ranking. However, farms were ranked above developed sites in general. Their research provides some insight into the dynamics of farmland conversion, and perhaps is worth considering when crafting public education materials and arguments for farmland preservation.

Between 1982 and 2012, an estimated 395,900 acres of South Carolina's prime farmland were developed (*Farmland Information Center, 2016*). Conversion of prime farmlands to non-agricultural use is a concern, as the farming industry is forced to bring more marginal agricultural land into production. Marginal farmland has less productive and more erodible soil, often with irregular topography such as steeper slopes that require greater labor, equipment, and material costs. Map 8-2 indicates the entire Upstate experienced moderate to high rates of land conversion from 1992 to 2012.



Map 8-2. Conversion of U.S. Agricultural Land to Urban and Low-Density Residential Development Between 1992 and 2012



The development of agricultural land is shown in relationship to the low-to-high continuum of productive, versatile, and resilient values for agricultural land. The conversion of agricultural land to urban and low-density residential uses between 1992 and 2012 is shown as high (dark brown-red, > 25% conversion within a 10-kilometer (6.2 miles) radius), moderate (light brown-red, 10-25% conversion) and low (tan, 5-10% conversion). Urban areas are shown in gray.

Source: American Farmland Trust, "Farms Under Threat: The State of America's Farmland," May 9, 2018

An essential step in protecting valuable farmland is to ensure that policies on growth and development recognize the importance of local farming to the health, well-being, and economy of Oconee County. To accomplish this, the County will need to educate its citizens on the value of local farming activity, the need to promote and support local farmers through right-to-farm policies and similar measures, why it is necessary to allow value-added and farm-related land uses and activities in agricultural areas, and other topics that may arise that are central to **preserving Oconee County's farmland**. South Carolina has adopted laws to help protect farms from nuisance suits. These laws can be found in *Title 46, Chapter 45 of the S.C. Code of Laws §§ 46-45-10 to 46-45-70* (2004).

Farmers often need to diversify to stay in business. Diversification could mean using a part of the cornfield for a Halloween maze, turning raw products like grapes into other products like jelly, direct selling through farm stands, establishing restaurants and ice cream shops, or

inviting schools and tourists to tour or participate in farm life and production. Zoning that tightly separates land uses by type ignores the interdependence of different uses and synergies that these types of mixed uses can create. An example is a code that restricts agricultural land to primary production but not the processing of agricultural products. Policies that limit options may make farmland preservation very difficult.

The lack of policies to protect farming from the encroachment of inappropriate land uses can lead to additional problems. Agriculture can be noisy and smelly. Farmers often work in the very early morning hours and late evening hours. Farmland can require chemical application that non-farming residents find offensive or scary. For these reasons and many others, conventional residential subdivisions often do not make good farm neighbors. Clustering, buffering, and controlling residential density near farm borders are ways the County could help protect farmers from nuisance complaints. Another way to protect farmland and provide for **residential growth is a new trend called “agrihoods.”** These are subdivisions that integrate farmland into their overall design, making it a core feature much like golf courses have been in the past. Agrihoods appeal to people who want good, steady access to local farm produce. Agrihoods already exist in the Upstate, including one in the City of Greenville.

Land subdivision is a threat to many prime agricultural areas in the Upstate. Many communities have tried to deal with this through a policy of requiring very large minimum lot sizes, but is this right for agriculture? Just how small is too small for a legitimate farming enterprise? The answer to these questions has changed over time, especially with the recent **emphasis on “eat local” and organic farming.** Answers also vary by farming technique and product. For example, hydroponic greenhouses may only need an acre, while cattle farming can require more than 35 acres. Subdividing land into estate lots or gentleman farms and allowing land splits to accommodate family lots can eat away at Oconee **County’s prime farmland over time.** At the same time, it is crucial to permit subdivisions that support housing for farm laborers and businesses that provide goods and services to the farming community, issues that often are overlooked in local land use policies.

Some counties, such as Charleston County and Henderson County, N.C., have created or are in the process of creating Voluntary Agricultural and Forestal Areas programs. These programs seek to prevent the low-density sprawl development pattern and non-agricultural/forestal use encroachment that can lead to destruction of the agricultural and forestry industry.

C. FORESTRY

Roughly 63 percent of Oconee County’s land area is forested, totaling 251,354 acres (S.C. Forestry Commission, www.state.sc.us/forest/oco.htm, 2019). Much of the county’s forestland lies within the Sumter National Forest. Hardwoods and some pines are the dominant native trees (USDA, *Soil Survey of Oconee County, S.C., 1963*). While forestry is a key component of the economy in the state and region, Oconee County ranks 45th out of 46 counties in delivered



value of timber. This is at least partially due to the lack of major processing mills that exist in or near other counties.

Statewide, the total annual economic impact of South Carolina’s forest industry is over \$21 billion, employing over 84,000 residents (*S.C. Forestry Commission, Economic Contribution of South Carolina’s Forestry Sector, 2017*). Oconee County ranks 45st statewide in delivered value of timber sold, with a harvested timber delivery value exceeding \$4.7 million (*S.C. Forestry Commission, Value of SC’s Timber Delivered to Mills in 2017*). South Carolina forest products go to many places including international destinations.

Table 8-9. Top 10 S.C. Forest Products Markets, 2016*

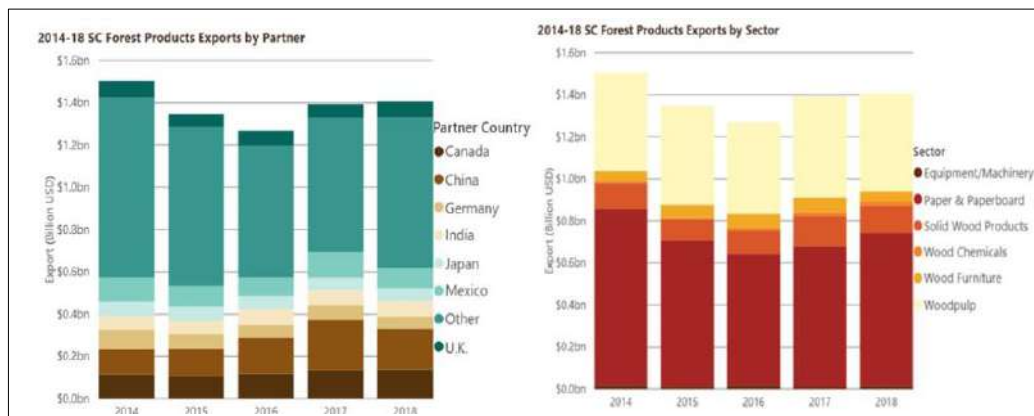
Rank	Wood-based chemical products	Solid wood products	Wood Pulp	Paper and paperboard	Paper manuf. machinery	Furniture	Prefabricated buildings
1	Finland (13)	China (0)	China (0)	Canada (0)	Poland (11)	Russia (0)	Chile (11)
2	Korea, South (1)	Canada (0)	India (2)	United Kingdom (2)	Canada (-1)	Thailand (3)	Spain (10)
3	China (-2)	India (0)	Japan (-1)	Germany (0)	Malaysia (0)	Canada (-1)	Canada (-1)
4	Brazil (-2)	Australia (0)	Mexico (3)	Mexico (-2)	Germany (0)	Egypt (2)	Bahamas (-1)
5	Canada (2)	Japan (1)	Korea, South (0)	China (0)	Argentina (11)	Germany (-1)	China (7)
6	Thailand (-2)	United Kingdom (2)	Italy (0)	Italy (0)	Mexico (-4)	Malaysia (2)	Romania (6)
7	Mexico (1)	Vietnam (0)	Colombia (3)	Ecuador (1)	Australia (2)	India (0)	Australia (5)
8	Kuwait (6)	Bangladesh (10)	Poland (-5)	India (1)	Colombia (-2)	China (3)	Korea, South (4)
9	India (-3)	Pakistan (1)	Netherlands (-1)	Netherlands (11)	Brazil (6)	Brazil (1)	Colombia (3)
10	Netherlands (-1)	Korea, South (2)	Belgium (1)	Egypt (9)	Netherlands (11)	Australia (19)	France (-6)

Legend: Asia | Europe | Central/South America & The Caribbean | North America | Oceania | Africa

* 2015-2016 ranking changes are shown in parentheses

Source: S.C. Forestry Commission, South Carolina Forest Products Industry Export Report: 2016

Figure 8-10. Forest Export by Partner and by Sector, 2014 to 2018



Source: S.C. Forestry Commission, South Carolina Forest Products Exports: 2018



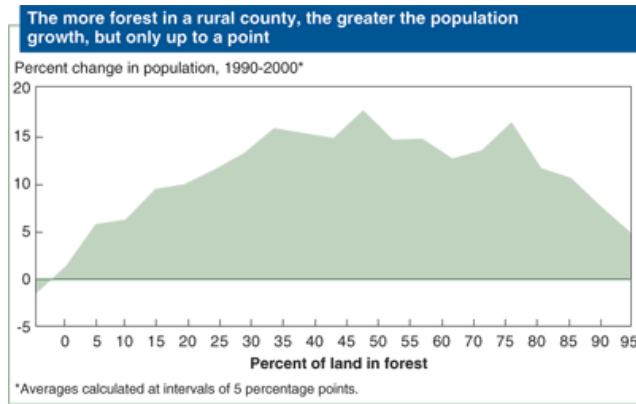
In addition to providing commercial wood-based products, forestland is productive in many other ways. It converts carbon dioxide into oxygen, provides shade to help mitigate hot summer temperatures, serves as critical habitat and food sources for many wildlife and plant species, lessens wind impacts, and conserves water and reduces stormwater impacts by filtering pollutants and aiding groundwater recharge. In light of these benefits, the South Carolina Forestry Commission works with communities across the state to develop urban forestry programs to promote the conservation and re-establishment of forests in developed areas.

Forestland and tree canopy also contribute significantly to the character of Oconee County. Studies conducted by the USDA Economic Research Service indicate that forestland is a compelling factor for where people choose to live.

Tree canopy has a positive impact on community appearance and forests are important recreational resources. State-level data recently released by the S.C. Forestry Commission indicate that forest-based recreation contributes \$1.6 billion annually to the state’s economy.



Figure 8-11. Relationship Between Forestland and Population Growth



Source: *USDA, Economic Research Service, "Farm Programs, Natural Amenities, and Rural Development," February 1, 2005*

1. Threats to Forestry

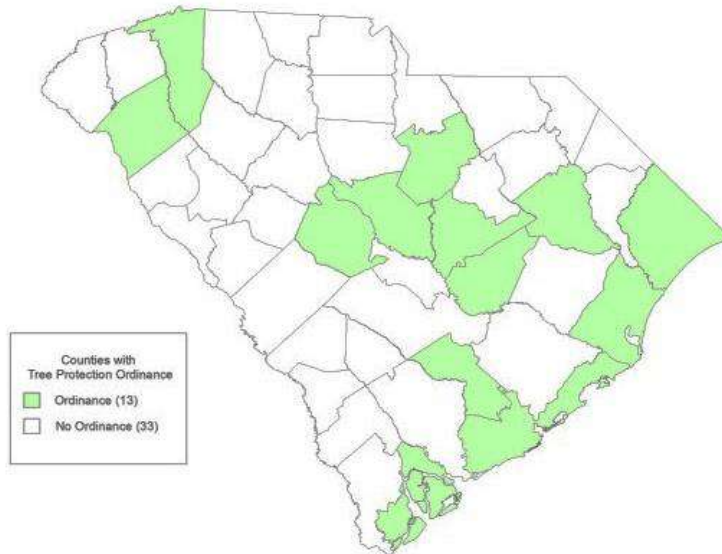
There are many threats to forestlands such as clearing, grubbing, and grading for development, insect infestations and disease, invasive species, inadequate forestry management, and fire. Historically, the greatest loss in forestland occurred when land was cleared for farming. This trend reversed as a result of incentives that encourage the conversion of farmland into forests. Urbanization is now the primary cause of deforestation in South Carolina. The South Carolina Forestry Commission is working with communities across the state to develop urban forestry programs that protect remaining forestland and encourage the re-establishment of forests and tree canopies in urban areas.



Source: *Clemson University*



Map 8-2. Counties with Tree Protection Ordinances



Source: South Carolina's Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy (Forest Action Plan)

<http://www.trees.sc.gov/scfra.htm>

Wildfire is a threat to all South Carolina forestland and the urban areas which it abuts. On average, the South Carolina Forestry Commission fights 3,000 forest fires across the state each year. Nearly all are human-related, meaning that humans directly caused or indirectly contributed to fire creation or spread.

Forests contain “fuels” that are highly flammable, including any natural material, living or dead, that will burn. Common fuels include leaf litter, limbs, pine straw, and certain species of shrubs and trees that ignite easily. The greatest area of wildfire concern is in the wildland-urban interface, where development abuts forestland. Wildfires in and adjacent to developed areas present many challenges, not the least of which is access to the fire through developed sites. Business owners and residents often unwittingly provide fuel for fires by using of one or more of the fuels mentioned above in site landscaping. The South Carolina Forestry Commission works with communities to develop community wildfire protection plans to lessen risk to buildings and forestland. Plans provide an assessment of risk and a list of mitigation measures that can be undertaken to minimize wildfire risk. The goal of the Commission is to have as many “fire-adapted” communities in South Carolina as possible. A fire-adapted community is one in which the citizenry is informed, prepared, and taking action to reduce wildfire-related incidents.

South Carolina has many communities that are recognized nationally through the Firewise USA program established and managed by the National Fire Protection Association where residents are actively reducing wildfire risks. Ten of the 33 communities currently listed are in Oconee County including:

- Keowee Key (2006)
- Wynward Pointe (2007)
- Lake Yonah (2009)
- Keowee Harbours (2009)
- Chickasaw Point (2009)
- Waterford Pointe (2009)
- Waterford (2010)
- Beacon Shores (2015)
- Port Santorini (2016)
- Emerald Pointe (2017)



Funding for the USDA Forest Service's **National Fire Plan** is available through grants to communities wishing to implement a fuels mitigation and educational program. The International Code Council has also created an *International Wildland-Urban Interface Code* to assist communities interested in using regulation to help reduce wildfire risk.

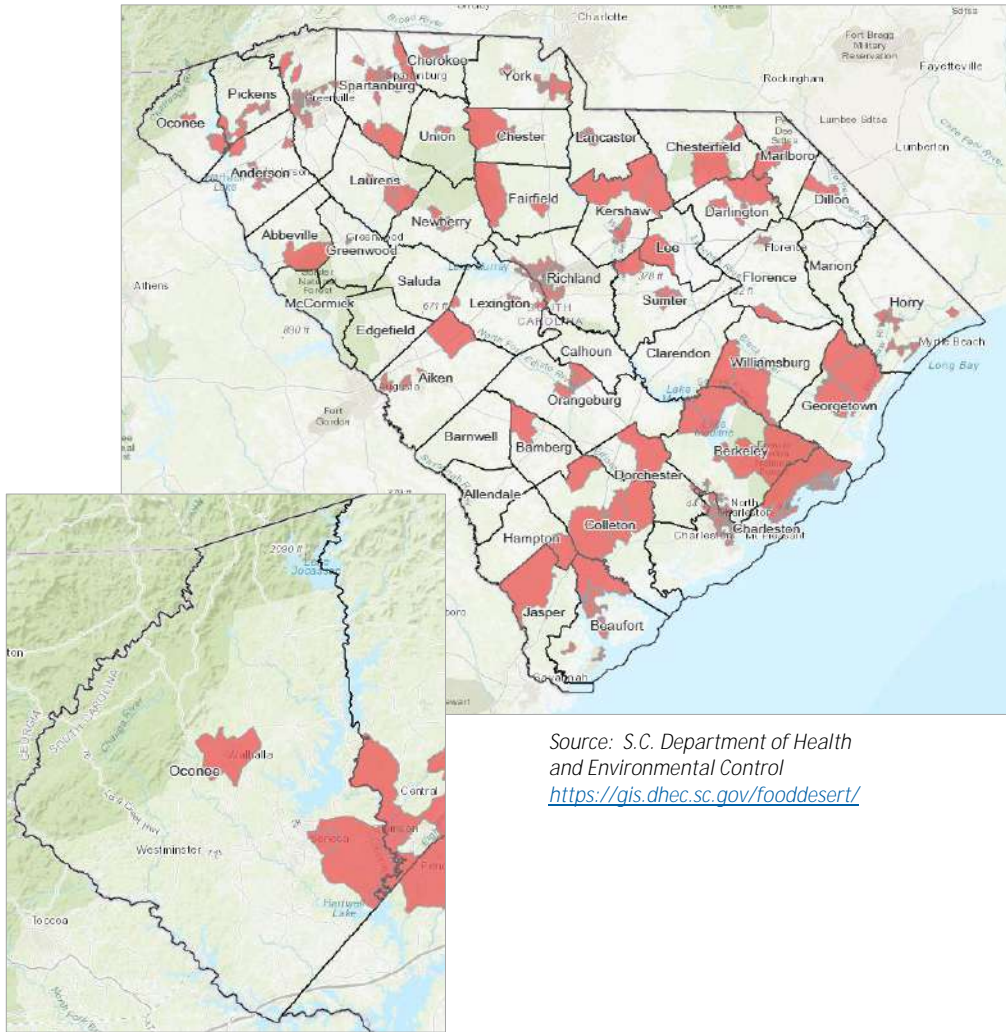
D. FOOD SECURITY

Food access is a critical element of community prosperity and security and should be an integral feature of planning at regional, county, community, and neighborhood levels. Successfully addressing food security requires cooperation and coordination from the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and collaboration with a variety of entities including retailers, transit services, and non-profits focused on healthy food education and childhood nutrition. Collaborative efforts to identify potential funding sources to address needs are also needed.

The lack of access to a variety of fresh and healthy foods can be a problem for many low-income and other transportation-challenged populations. The USDA Economic Research Service defines individuals lacking access as those who live more than one mile from a grocery store or supermarket. Low-income residents in areas without access to a grocery store who cannot raise their food and frequently lack reliable access to transportation often rely on neighborhood convenience stores which typically stock foods that are highly processed, high-caloric, and have a low-nutritional value. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity.

The USDA has mapped areas that lack access to fresh and healthy foods, known as food deserts. The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control has published the USDA map for the state. This map is shown in Map 8-3 along with a focused map of Oconee County.

Map 8-3. Food Deserts in South Carolina and Oconee County



Although these maps are based on 2015 data, there is little reason to believe food access has improved significantly since then. As the maps indicate, there are likely significant access issues around Walhalla and from Seneca to Pickens and Anderson counties.

Ensuring access to healthy food is both a land use and a transportation issue and requires a holistic approach to successfully address the problem. Such an approach can include increasing public transit; making sure land use policies allow a mix of uses in residential areas that allows grocery stores, farmers markets, and similar fresh food outlets; and educating citizens on



backyard gardening and food preservation to encourage a certain amount of self-sufficiency where possible. Land use policies that do not allow grocery stores and supermarkets in residential areas create food deserts. Being aware of where food deserts likely exist, as indicated by Map 8-3, and using that information to inform transit service routes is also vital since the market forces that drive retail location favor moderate and high-income areas over low-income communities.

Many communities are turning to gardening as one solution for healthy food access. Backyard gardens may significantly improve healthy food choice. Community gardens are also becoming more popular across the country, as are subdivisions centered around gardens or small community farms, referred to as agrihoods. Some communities have also begun to plan edible gardens instead of ornamentals in public spaces. Gardening encourages physical activity and provides the benefits associated with other outdoor activities. The National Recreation and Park Association now offers advice on how to integrate gardening (backyard, community, public) into parks and recreation programs for children and adults. These programs teach important skills including food preservation.

There is a growing movement centered on eating locally grown and produced foods. To support this in Oconee County, the County should ensure it has no unnecessary barriers that restrict accessory processing on farms and in commercial areas (e.g. jams, jellies, wine, pickles), encourage **farmer's markets and farm stands, work cooperatively to link producers with retail consumers** (restaurants, bars, etc.) as part of a broader economic development strategy, and assist with marketing local farm products.

Food security can be a much larger problem and impact many more people than shown on Map 8-3 during natural disasters and other emergencies that affect transportation systems and food production. Few emergency management plans currently address food access and security, but more communities are beginning to add this very critical link. In 2010, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), in cooperation with USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) developed best practices and guidelines for state and local emergency **response efforts for incidents involving the nation's food supply**. Oconee County can request state assistance in developing a local food security and response element for the County's Emergency Preparedness Plan. It should also coordinate planning, prevention, and response efforts regionally since disasters and emergencies frequently affect multiple jurisdictions at one time.



Source: S.C. Farm Bureau

E. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The table of goals, objectives and implementation strategies (GOIS) summarizes the actions that will be undertaken in the coming decade to achieve the goals and objectives identified in the Agriculture Element. The Agricultural Advisory Board of Oconee County will be a driving force and an accountable agency for all goals, objectives, and strategies below.

Goals/Objectives/Strategies	Accountable Agencies	Time Frame for Completion
Goal 8.1. Support and Protect the Agricultural Industry in Oconee County.		
Objective 8.1.1. Recognize important agricultural land as a valuable natural resource to protect for future generations.		
Strategy 8.1.1.1. Encourage <u>Advocate</u> use of "Best Management Practices" in farming and forestry <u>farmland and forest</u> operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Planning Commission</u> • + <u>Soil & Water Conservation Commissions</u> • <u>Oconee County</u> • Soil & Water Conservation • <u>Clemson Cooperative Extension (CCE)</u> • <u>State Forestry Commission</u> 	<u>On-going 2025</u>
Strategy 8.1.1.2. Encourage and support collaboration between landowners and public and private agencies in the development of ecologically and economically sound plans for preservation and restoration of forests and farmland <u>farmland and forests</u> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Oconee County</u> • <u>CCE</u> • <u>Conservation groups</u> 	<u>On-going 2025</u>
Strategy 8.1.1.3. Work with SCDOT and other state and regional agencies to ensure projects for infrastructure facility maintenance and expansion will not be detrimental to the continuation of agriculture and silviculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Oconee County</u> • <u>SCDOT</u> • <u>Oconee County Chamber of Commerce</u> • ?? <u>Municipalities</u> • <u>Planing Commission</u> • <u>Oconee Economic</u> 	<u>On-going 2021</u>



	<u>Alliance(OEA)</u>	
Strategy 8.1.1.4. Limit non-agricultural development in productive and prime agricultural areas to densities and development patterns that are consistent with the continuation of economically viable agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County ??OEA 	On-going 2021
Strategy 8.1.1.5. Support state legislation that links incentives to continue farming (such as state income tax credits or differential assessment for property taxes and affirmative supports for the business of agriculture) with controls preventing conversion of the recipient's agricultural land to non-farm uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County Oconee County Chamber of Commerce ?? 	On-going 2025
Strategy 8.1.1.6. Seek grants and take advantage of state and federal programs to assist with the purchase of development rights and agricultural easements on prime agricultural land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service Oconee County Chamber of Commerce ??Conservation groups 	On-going 2023
Strategy 8.1.1.7. Ensure that the impacts of proposed projects on surrounding farms is part of deliberation and decision-making for public projects to adjacent farms and forest land is part of the deliberation and decision making for proposed public projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service Oconee County Chamber of Commerce ?? 	On-going 2021
Strategy 8.1.1.8. Require a farm disclosure. Work with the state Real Estate Licensing commission to add an "Agricultural Disclosure Act" to ensure that potential home/land/business purchasers are made aware that agricultural activity is occurring on land adjacent to the purchaser's property of interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County State Real Estate Licensing Commission 	2023
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<p>Strategy 8.1.1.89. Require a farm disclosure process. Activate vacant and underutilized County owned property to facilitate a program that invites entrepreneurs, non-profits, residents, and other groups to begin entry-level agricultural businesses, community gardens, and pilot programs for engaging residents in the agricultural processes. (A motion was made but no second and no vote occurred)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County NGO Not-for-Profit organizations CCE Municipalities Ag. organizations School Board?? 	<p>On-going 2023</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.1.10. Create a staff position of Agricultural communication and coordination to coordinate and communicate with farmers, foresters, local governments, agricultural groups, and the public on agricultural and forestry matters. Words slightly different than voted upon motion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County 	
<p>Objective 8.1.2. Enhance agricultural operations and opportunities.</p>		
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.1. Work with state and federal agencies to attract agribusiness-related grants and revenue sources and support efforts to establish pilot programs related to new agricultural technologies and products.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County 	<p>On-going 2025</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.2. Provide appropriate assistance to expand non-traditional and specialty agribusiness opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County 	<p>On-going 2021</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.3. Ensure the ability of a farm to have a farm-related business onsite.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County ?? 	<p>On-going 2021</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.4. Promote the establishment of new farm enterprises through support of training for interested persons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service ?? 	<p>On-going 2023</p>
<p>Goals/Objectives/Strategies</p>	<p>Accountable Agencies</p>	<p>Time Frame for Completion</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.5. Allow agricultural products processing facilities to locate in areas with convenient access to farms, but ensure that they do not negatively impact rural character or scenic vistas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County ?? 	<p>On-going</p>

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<p>Strategy 8.1.2.6. Support South Carolina right-to-farm laws and consider adopting a county right-to-farm policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service • Oconee County Chamber of Commerce • ?? 	<p>On-going 2021</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.7. Promote farm stands and farmers markets in rural and urban areas <u>and local food hub(s) with adjoining counties-</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service • ?? 	<p>On-going 2023</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.8. Eliminate subdivisions that allow the division of important agricultural land into parcels that are too small to support commercial farming and businesses that do not serve the farming community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • ?? 	<p>On-going</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.9. Consider adopting a Voluntary Agricultural and Forestal Areas program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service • ?? 	<p>XXX 2023</p>
<p>Strategy 8.1.2.10. Encourage and support programs that educate and engage residents of all ages in aspects of farming and agriculture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Oconee Cooperative Extension Service • Agriculture Advisory Board • Organizations such as FFA and the Oconee Cultivation Project 	<p>On-going 2023</p>
<p>Goal 8.2. Protect Oconee County’s Forest Resources.</p>		
<p>Strategy 8.2.1.1. Maintain an accurate inventory of important forestland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee CountyDNR • SC Forestry Commission • US Forest Service • ?? 	<p>On-going 2025</p>
<p>Strategy 8.2.1.2. Coordinate and plan infrastructure and development to protect forestland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • SC Forestry Commission • SCDOT • ??US Forestry 	<p>On-going 2025</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commission Conservation groups 	
Strategy 8.2.1.3. Support efforts to permanently preserve important forestland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County SC Forestry Commission US Forestry Service Conservation groups?? 	On-going 2021
Strategy 8.2.1.4. Work with the Forestry Commission to educate citizens about wildfire hazards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County SC Forestry Commission Rural fire departments US Forestry Commission ??CCE 	On-going 2025
Strategy 8.2.1.5. Consider adopting the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code, or relevant portions, to help mitigate wildfire risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County Rural fire departments ?? 	XXX 2030
Goal 8.3. Ensure continuing access to healthy, fresh food.		
Objective 8.3.1. Eliminate food deserts and ensure access to healthy food.		
Strategy 8.3.1.1. Integrate food system policies and planning into County land use, transportation, and capital improvement plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County Local food banks Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service ??Oconee County School Board 	On-going 2025
Strategy 8.3.1.2. Encourage residents to supplement personal food sources with gardening and fresh food preservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oconee County Oconee County Cooperative Extension Service ??Oconee County School Board 	On-going 2027
Goals/Objectives/Strategies	Accountable Agencies	Time Frame for Completion
	.	

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<p>Strategy 8.3.1.3. Recruit and support and <u>incentivize</u> businesses that provide healthy food choices in all areas of the County.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Oconee County Chamber of Commerce • ??CCE 	<p><u>On-going 2023</u></p>
<p>Strategy 8.3.1.4. Revise land use policies to require healthy food access as a part of development standards, <u>prohibit private restrictions that limit gardens, and community gardens, in residential areas when economic incentives are offered by the County to a developer and to discourage or prohibit regulations and private restrictions that limit gardens in residential areas.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Municipalities • ??OEA 	<p>XXX 2023</p>
<p>Strategy 8.3.1.5. Work collaboratively with non-profits and other entities to address the needs of vulnerable populations (e.g. elderly, children, homeless).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Municipalities • Local non-profits • Faith-based community • ??Farmers' markets 	<p><u>On-going 2023</u></p>
<p>Strategy 8.3.1.6. Support new opportunities for distribution of locally and regionally produced food.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • ?? 	<p><u>On-going 2025</u></p>
<p>Strategy 8.3.1.7. Revise the zoning code to require healthy food access as a part of development standards, <u>and discourage or prohibit regulations and private restrictions that limit gardens in residential areas.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ?Oconee County • <u>Planning Commission</u> • Municipalities • ?? 	<p>XXX 2030</p>
<p>Strategy 8.3.1.8. Work collaboratively to ensure that regional emergency preparedness programs include food access and distribution and are working toward the goal of establishing regional capacity for feeding the population for 2-3 months in an emergency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Municipalities • SC Emergency Management • ??Private organizations • NFPO • Disaster relief organizations 	<p><u>On-going 2023</u></p>
<p><u>Strategy 8.3.1.9. Educate and assist in mitigating the harmful effects of Climate Change in Oconee County through agricultural means</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • School Board • CCE • Agricultural groups • Private organizations • Municipalities • Conservation 	<p><u>2024</u></p>



	<p><u>groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Local non-profits</u> • <u>Faith-based community</u> • <u>Farmers' markets</u> • <u>Oconee County Chamber of Commerce</u> • <u>Local food banks</u> • <u>SC Forestry Commission</u> • <u></u> 	
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Note: GOIS are coded for ease of review

- *Black text is directly from the current comprehensive plan*
- *Blue text was developed per input from focus group meetings*
- *Red text was developed by consultants to address issues in background data*
- *Green text added per the Planning Commission*
- *Brown text from OEA/County plan, Upstate SC Alliance regional economic plan and ACOG CEDS*
- *Purple text derived from Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)*
- *Time frames in yellow cells should be added by staff and PC*



*Some strategies are derived and consolidated from multiple sources

***Although all of the strategies noted for Goal 8.3 are indicated as consultant-created, concern was expressed about food deserts during stakeholder meetings.*





Oconee County South Carolina

Total and Per Farm Overview, 2017 and change since 2012

	2017	% change since 2012
Number of farms	815	-8
Land in farms (acres)	62,499	-8
Average size of farm (acres)	77	(Z)
Total	(\$)	
Market value of products sold	159,422,000	+31
Government payments	635,000	+66
Farm-related income	1,901,000	+34
Total farm production expenses	111,850,000	+6
Net cash farm income	50,107,000	+185
Per farm average	(\$)	
Market value of products sold	195,609	+42
Government payments (average per farm receiving)	4,736	-31
Farm-related income	10,562	+16
Total farm production expenses	137,240	+15
Net cash farm income	61,481	+209

5 Percent of state agriculture sales

Share of Sales by Type (%)

Crops	3
Livestock, poultry, and products	97

Land in Farms by Use (%) ^a

Cropland	30
Pastureland	34
Woodland	30
Other	6

Acres irrigated: 390

1% of land in farms

Land Use Practices (% of farms)

No till	9
Reduced till	4
Intensive till	6
Cover crop	8

Farms by Value of Sales

	Number	Percent of Total ^a
Less than \$2,500	361	44
\$2,500 to \$4,999	135	17
\$5,000 to \$9,999	104	13
\$10,000 to \$24,999	73	9
\$25,000 to \$49,999	39	5
\$50,000 to \$99,999	26	3
\$100,000 or more	77	9

Farms by Size

	Number	Percent of Total ^a
1 to 9 acres	102	13
10 to 49 acres	378	46
50 to 179 acres	248	30
180 to 499 acres	74	9
500 to 999 acres	11	1
1,000 + acres	2	(Z)



United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus



Oconee County
 South Carolina, 2017
 Page 2

2017 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE *County Profile*

Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold

	Sales (\$1,000)	Rank in State ^b	Counties Producing Item	Rank in U.S. ^b	Counties Producing Item
Total	159,422	4	46	709	3,077
Crops	4,582	37	46	2,406	3,073
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas	981	32	46	2,124	2,916
Tobacco	-	-	13	-	323
Cotton and cottonseed	-	-	31	-	647
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, sweet potatoes	470	26	46	986	2,821
Fruits, tree nuts, berries	745	11	45	548	2,748
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod	1,043	27	41	843	2,601
Cultivated Christmas trees, short rotation woody crops	26	16	31	452	1,384
Other crops and hay	1,316	29	46	1,625	3,040
Livestock, poultry, and products	154,840	1	46	286	3,073
Poultry and eggs	148,903	1	45	77	3,007
Cattle and calves	3,850	9	46	1,852	3,055
Milk from cows	(D)	18	26	(D)	1,892
Hogs and pigs	40	18	44	1,182	2,856
Sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk	53	17	46	1,702	2,984
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, donkeys	674	5	46	307	2,970
Aquaculture	(D)	2	22	(D)	1,251
Other animals and animal products	42	13	45	1,056	2,878

Total Producers ^c	1,343	Percent of farms that:	Top Crops in Acres ^d
Sex		Have internet access 75	Forage (hay/haylage), all 11,240
Male 854			Soybeans for beans 1,892
Female 489		Farm organically (Z)	Wheat for grain, all 1,344
Age			Corn for grain 601
<35 123		Sell directly to consumers 7	Barley for grain (D)
35 – 64 821			Livestock Inventory (Dec 31, 2017)
65 and older 399		Hire farm labor 19	Broilers and other meat-type chickens 7,242,210
Race			Are family farms 98
American Indian/Alaska Native 6			
Asian 4			Hogs and pigs 404
Black or African American 25			Horses and ponies 950
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 1			Layers 49,766
White 1,301			Pullets (D)
More than one race 6			Sheep and lambs 356
Other characteristics			Turkeys 21
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origin 22			
With military service 162			
New and beginning farmers 377			

See 2017 Census of Agriculture, U.S. Summary and State Data, for complete footnotes, explanations, definitions, commodity descriptions, and methodology.
^a May not add to 100% due to rounding. ^b Among counties whose rank can be displayed. ^c Data collected for a maximum of four producers per farm.
^d Crop commodity names may be shortened; see full names at www.nass.usda.gov/croplnames.pdf. * Position below the line does not indicate rank. (D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations. (NA) Not available. (Z) Less than half of the unit shown. (-) Represents zero.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.





Additional Resources (If you are interested)

<http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org/node/46376>: has basic info and good links.

<https://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/>: organic farming info

http://www.sfoodaccess.com/uploads/2/3/0/2/23029886/hffi_statewide_report.pdf: has some policies/actions that might be worth repeating, although there are many references to SNAP and I don't know how that will play in OC.

<http://newsstand.clemson.edu/mediarelations/clemson-extension-working-to-eliminate-food-deserts-through-feeding-innovation-program/>: very recent article

https://www.farmlandinfo.org/sites/default/files/Henderson_2020_Plan-13_Agriculture_Element_1.pdf: Henderson County (NC) ag element

<https://www.farmlandinfo.org/planning-agriculture/about-planning-agriculture>: Many links to other ag plans/elements

<https://www.farmlandinfo.org/policies-programs/protect-farm-and-ranch-land>: same website as above just different good info on easements etc.

