



YOUR OCONEE

Planning for the Future



July 2019: Agriculture and Land Use

THE OCONEE COUNTY 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

THE OCONEE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ...

is a state-required document that provides guidance for the county — the administration, council and private citizens — for the coming decade.

To get input from the community for the goals and strategies in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the county is producing a series of special sections to break down the data and offer you a chance to provide feedback.

This is the fifth and final monthly section that covers the 10 elements of the plan.

Agriculture and Land Use

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.

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.

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. 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.

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 — jams, jellies, wine, pickles — encourage farmers 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.

Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.
— Gloria Steinem

Questions or comments?

You can reach the Oconee County Planning Department at planninginfo@oconeesc.com or (864) 638-4218



UPCOMING MEETINGS

District Drop-Ins

Thursday, July 25
Fair-Oak Youth Center • 6 p.m.

Monday, August 5
Planning Commission • 6 p.m.

Monday, August 12
Agricultural Advisory Board
6 p.m.

Monday, August 19
Planning Commission • 6 p.m.

Tuesday, August 20
Oconee County Council • 6 p.m.

All meetings take place in council chambers at 415 S. Pine Street, Walhalla.

▶ Can't make the meeting but still want to keep up?

Oconee County meetings are recorded live and available to watch at [YouTube.com/YourOconee](https://www.youtube.com/YourOconee)



OCONEE COUNTY AGRICULTURE



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.

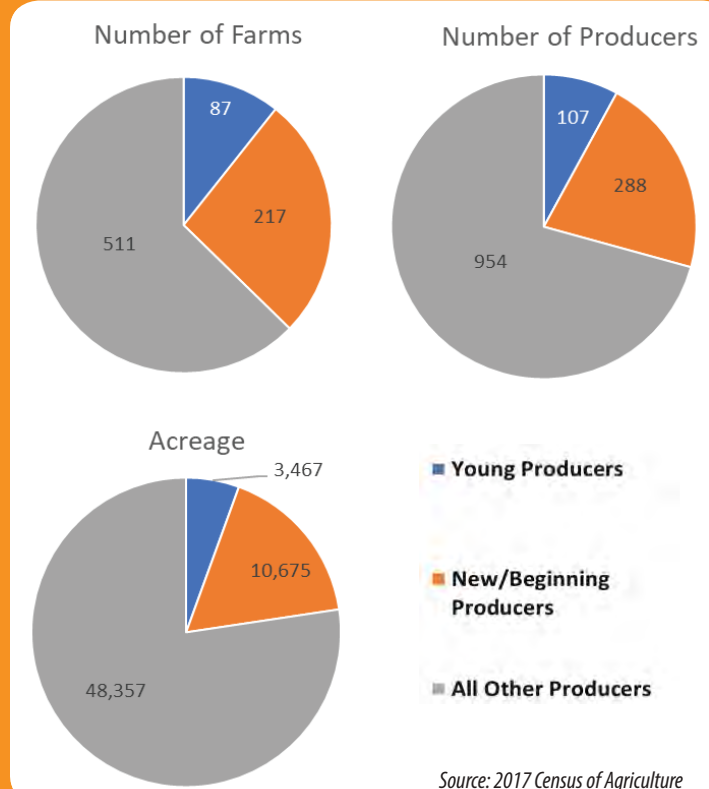
Prime farmland has been disappearing across America as urbanization has taken over the landscape. The sharp increase in road and utility expansion in the 20th century divided many rural farms, opening vast areas for urban and suburban development. The relatively flat, cleared land preferred by farmers 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.

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.

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 has been those with annual sales of \$50,000 or more.

A variety of vegetable, fruit and livestock are produced on Oconee County farms,

CHARACTERISTICS BY PRODUCER TYPE IN OCONEE COUNTY, 2017



but livestock, poultry and animal products represent 97 percent of the total share of farm sales. Oconee County is South Carolina's No. 1 poultry and egg-producing county. It ranks 77th nationwide out of 3,007 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.

Based on criteria set by the State of South Carolina, 10.4 percent of the land area of Oconee County — 44,829 acres — is considered to have soils of statewide importance to agriculture.

Forest lands 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.





Russell Farmstead Historic Site

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, which already exist in the Upstate, appeal to people who want good, steady access to local farm produce.

Roughly 63 percent of

Oconee County’s land area is forested, totaling 251,354 acres. Much of the county’s forest land lies within the Sumter National Forest. 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.

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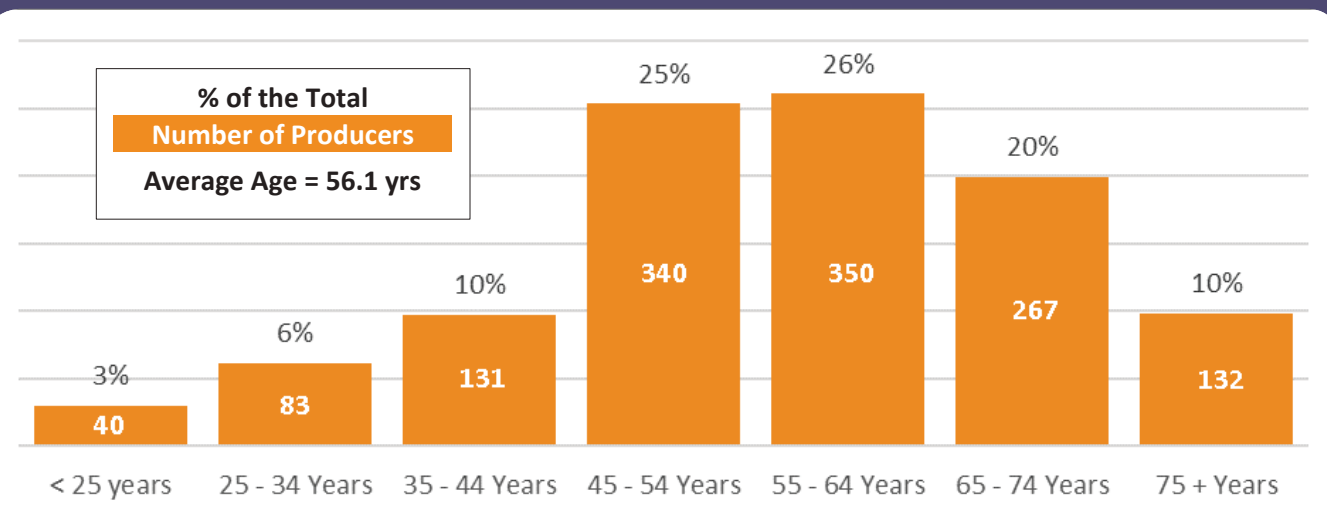


Forest land and tree canopy also contribute significantly to the character of Oconee County. Studies conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture indicate that forest land is a

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.

AGE OF OCONEE COUNTY PRODUCERS, 2017

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture



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 that require greater labor, equipment and material costs.

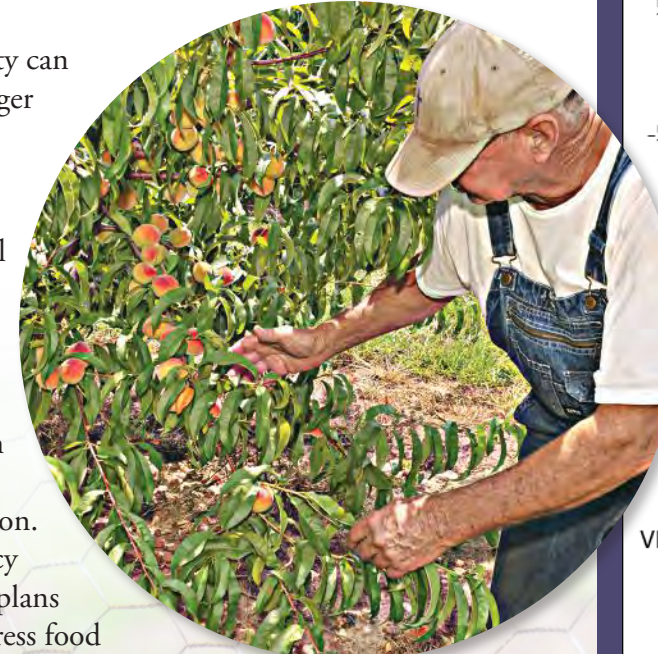
An essential step in protecting valuable farmland is to ensure that policies on growth and development recognize the importance of local farming to the health, well-being, and economy of Oconee County.

The lack of policies to protect farming from the encroachment of inappropriate land uses can lead to additional problems.

Conventional residential subdivisions often do not make good farm neighbors. Clustering, buffering and controlling residential density near farm borders

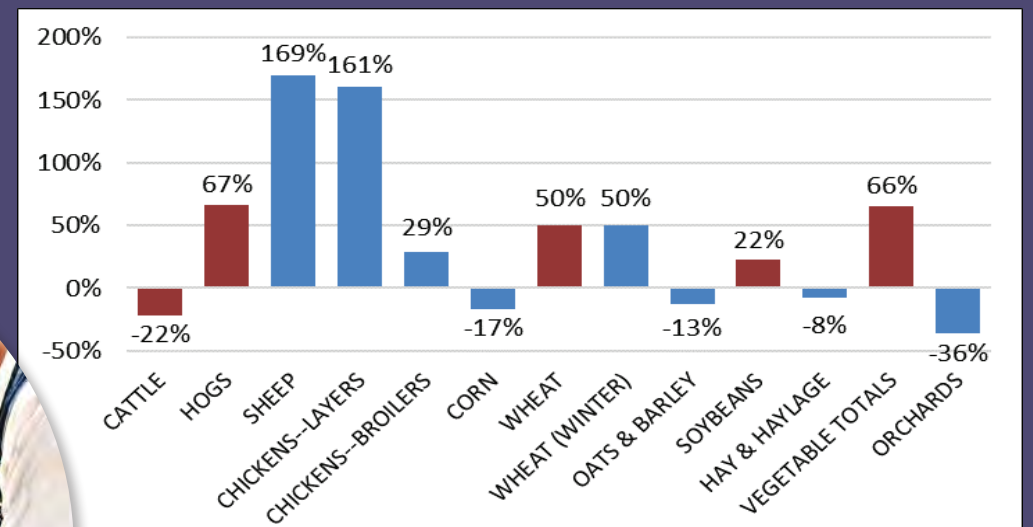
Food access is a critical element of community prosperity and security, and should be an integral feature of planning at regional, county, community and neighborhood levels. Successfully addressing food security requires cooperation and coordination from the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and collaboration with a variety of entities including retailers, transit services, and non-profits focused on healthy food education and childhood nutrition.

Food security can be a much larger problem and impact many more people 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.

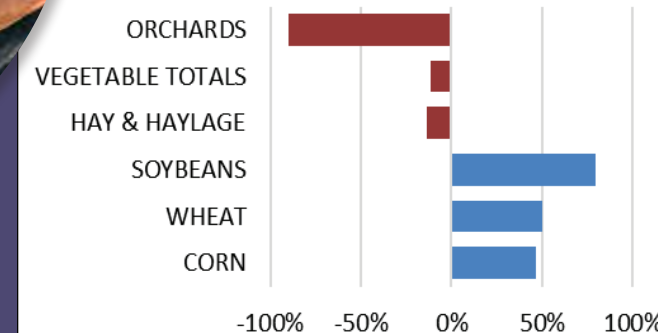


CHANGES IN FARM COMMODITIES

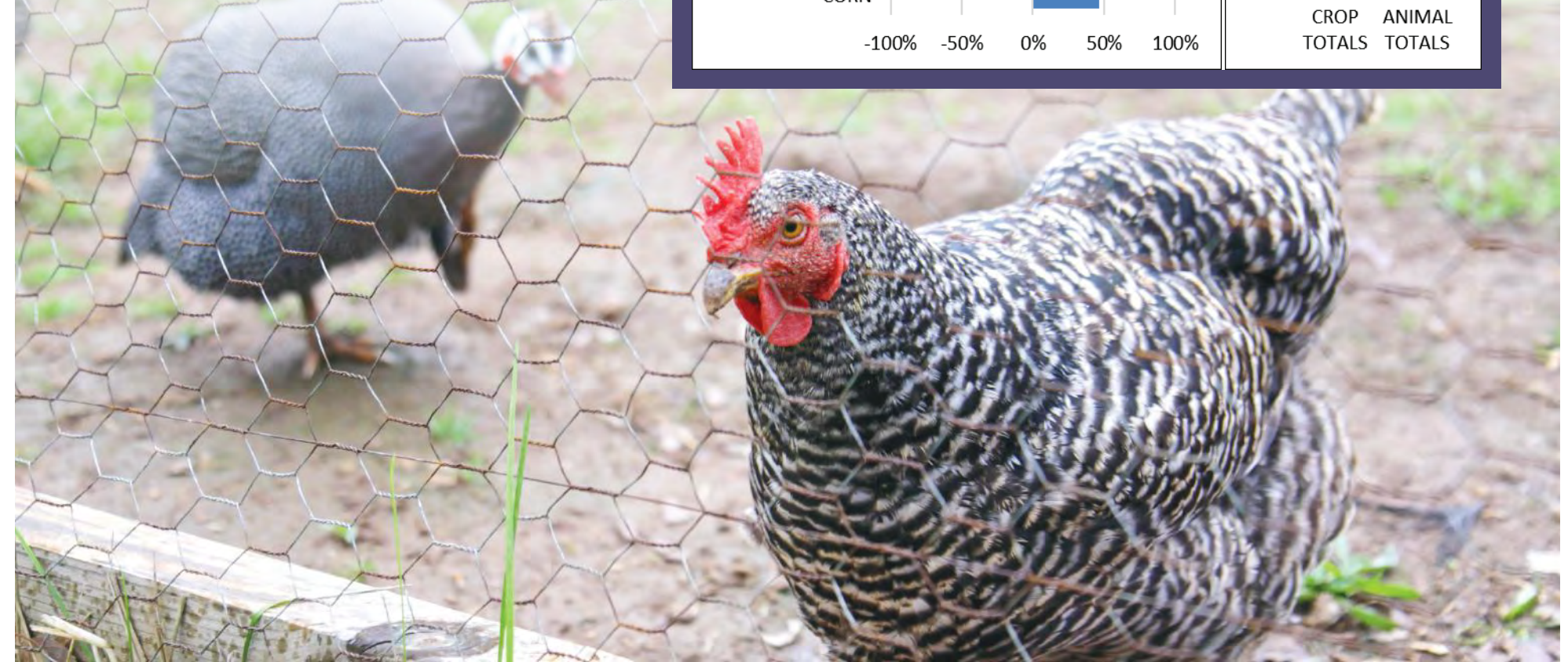
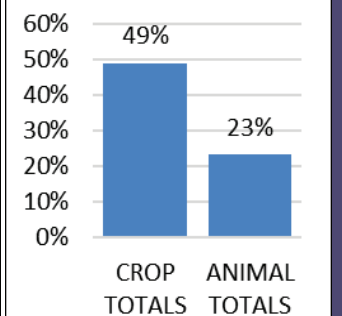
Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture



Change in Commodity by Acreage 2002 to 2017



% Change in Crop and Animal Sales 2007 to 2017

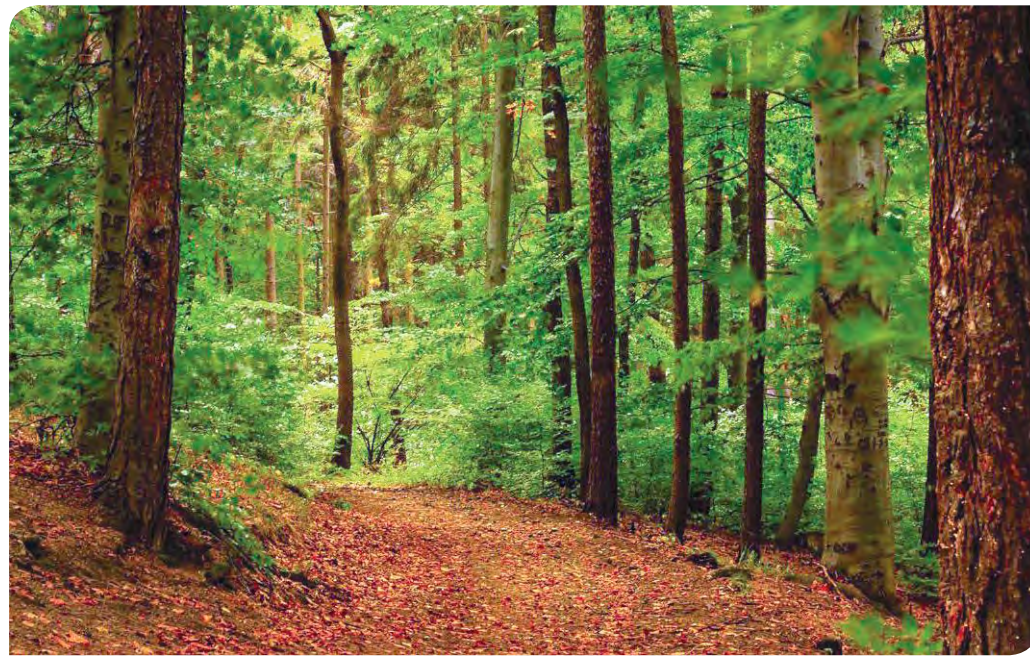




OCONEE COUNTY LAND USE

This element focuses on the way land is used in Oconee County and seeks to establish the direction that citizens desire their community to grow, as well as identifying the various tools deemed appropriate to guide this growth. Additionally, it examines existing usage by category — residential, commercial, industrial, etc. — and attempts to anticipate the relative amount of land needed to accommodate future changes. The way land is utilized in a community impacts most aspects of our lives, therefore, the other elements of this comprehensive plan are a major consideration throughout the creation of this element.

Land use in the Oconee County area has primarily been focused on using the region's abundant natural resources. The county has distinct differences in its types of land that have traditionally offered a variety of opportunities for sustenance and economic gain — mining, timbering, farming and similar operations are dependent on direct utilization of resources.



The demand for housing has also continued to grow. Higher-end, single-family development remains a strong component of land use, with much of that focus on lakefront communities on the eastern side of Oconee County.

In addition, a student housing boom is underway, due primarily to growth at Clemson University. The Clemson Epoch project, located near lake Hartwell west of Clemson, will feature more than 900 beds. The Pier, another major development, features apartments, cottages and tiny homes.

The boundaries of Oconee County encompass a total area of approximately 670 square miles with 600 square miles being land. It should be noted that, due to large federal and state property holdings — including Sumter National Forest and

LAND USE ISSUES ARE SOME OF THE MOST CRITICAL ELEMENTS that a community deals with.

amount of land available for development has continued to drop due to an expansion of both public lands and the conservation of larger tracts of private lands. Therefore, when it comes to anticipated growth, it is necessary to remember that a significant portion of Oconee County is unavailable.

New housing production is needed as primary residences for working-age families moving to the county for jobs or existing residents who may presently be renting or living with another family member.

Growth management is not limited solely to governmental action. The most effective growth management programs are often a combination of public and private efforts.

Recently, council and the planning commission have taken on several issues involving growth and development. The commission is looking at strategies for improving the principle highway corridors in the county, with an immediate focus on U.S. Highway 123 between Seneca and Clemson.

The way we choose to utilize the land impacts our lives far beyond simply determining what is built on it. Any benefits derived from investment can be partially or wholly negated by nearby activity.

Precious natural or cultural resources, impossible to replace, can be taken by the careless act of a neighbor. Even the cost of purchasing and maintaining a home is directly affected by the way

Due to large federal and state property holdings — including Sumter National Forest and Clemson University — APPROXIMATELY 25 PERCENT OF THE COUNTY IS PRESERVED AS FOREST LANDS.

Clemson University — approximately 25 percent of the county is preserved as forest lands.

Sumter National Forest alone occupies almost 80,000 acres of the county, with Clemson University and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers possessing thousands of additional acres. In spite of the rapid growth experienced in the county during the last several decades, the overall

surrounding properties are developed and maintained. Without a doubt, land use issues are some of the most critical that a community deals with.

There are many potential benefits associated with growth and development, provided it occurs in a manner that does not create negative impacts that outweigh the positives.

Although no two communities develop and evolve in exactly the same way, over time, most communities find themselves forced to deal with similar issues. This can be seen in Oconee County today, for we are increasingly being faced with similar development pressures felt years earlier in some neighboring counties.

The ability of a property owner to use their land as they wish has been a cherished ideal throughout Oconee County's history. This, and similar issues, are often discussed in various forums throughout the county on a regular basis. In the past, when

the population density was much lower, and when the variety of land use was in one way or another centered on agriculture, the chances of significant instances of incompatibility of use were limited.

Today, however, we as a community do not live as we used to. Already,

A HIGH VALUE IS PLACED ON OCONEE COUNTY'S TRADITIONALLY RURAL CHARACTER, with farming at the heart of it.



thousands of acres previously devoted to farming or timbering are covered with homes; rural lanes are increasingly being widened to accommodate the traffic of busy commercial centers; and remote, forested hillsides have become densely populated lakeshore communities.

Still, for those born here, as well as many of those that move here to escape the grasp of urban areas, a high value is placed on Oconee County's traditionally rural character, with farming at the heart of it.



OCONEE COUNTY PRIORITY INVESTMENT

Pursuant to the requirements of the South Carolina Priority Investment Act (PIA), adopted in 2007, local governments are required to include an element in their comprehensive plans that focus on anticipated capital expenditures over the coming 10 years, prioritizing those deemed most critical.

The element must also discuss potential methods of funding for the projects, considering all likely federal, state, and local sources.

Additionally, the PIA mandates that the list of projects includes all projected needs in public infrastructure and facilities, including water, sewer, roads, and schools, and that the list is provided to all "adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies" for their review and comment.

The Oconee County Planning Commission is charged with identifying a list of those capital projects anticipated to be funded with public money in next 10 years. The list of projects is

to be reviewed and considered as part of the Planning Commission's annual recommended prioritization of projects for County Council. The source of projects to be considered on the list may be, but is not limited to, the listed needs of various County agencies on their 5-year Capital Improvement Plans (CIP), school board building programs and other public infrastructure and facility requirements identified as critical to the citizens of Oconee County.



Citizen Survey of Agriculture and Land Use

This survey was developed as a means of providing the county with some understanding of the things you like about Oconee County, as well as the issues that concern you. The survey is also your chance to dream a little, to give us your vision of the county's future and how you think we might arrive at that destination.

Visit upstatetoday.com/survey to submit online or drop off completed survey at your local library, The Journal at 210 W. North 1st Street in Seneca, or the Oconee County Planning Department at 415 S. Pine Street in Walhalla.

1. Are you now, or have you been, a farmer or rancher?

- Yes No

2. Do you know any farmers who farm in Oconee County?

- Yes No

3. How important is having your food grown or raised in the United States of America?

Not Important

Very Important

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. When is the last time that you knew where the food on your plate came from?

(The supermarket does not count.)

- Today
 More than a week ago
 More than a month ago
 More than a year ago
 Never
 Other _____

5. Oconee County is losing farms and farmers. Would you support legislation that promotes, protects and preserves our agricultural past, present and future?

- Yes No

6. Do you know where to buy locally grown or produced farm products in Oconee County?

- Yes No

7. Farmland, generally, is flat and cleared, and great for farming. Flat, cleared land is also great for building homes. How do we preserve our irreplaceable farmers and farmlands while still providing enough housing for our growing population?

(Select all that apply)

- Promote managed growth surrounding farmlands
 Get the next generation of farmers to stay on the farm
 Access to land for beginning farmers
 Easements, buffers, and other legal tools to protect farmlands
 Educating and communicating the economic, national security and community benefits of farms to county residents.
 Preserve "small-town" feel by preventing our cities from encroaching on farmlands
 Other _____

8. Do you grow any of your own food?

- Yes No

9. What is your zip code?

10. What is your gender?

- Male Female

YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO

WIN \$100
just for voicing
your opinion!

Submit your completed survey and be entered to win one of two \$100 Visa gift cards! Surveys must be submitted by August 7 to be eligible to win. Winners will be drawn and announced August 9.

*Name: _____

*Ph. #: _____

*E-mail: _____

*Indicates required field so prize winners may be contacted. Personal information for contest will not be kept or sold. Must be age 18 or over to be eligible to win prize. Employees of Oconee County or The Journal and their families are ineligible. Limit of one prize per household. Please note that survey prizes are not being funded by Oconee County but have been generously donated by The Journal.

11. Please select the range that includes your age.

- 12 or under
 13-17
 18-24
 25-34
 35-44
 45-54
 55-64
 65-74
 75-84
 85 or older

Additional comments/suggestions may be attached or emailed planninginfo@oconeesc.com.