

Agricultural Advisory Board Agenda

November 6, 2023

1. Call to order
2. Moment of silence
3. Invocation
4. Pledge of allegiance
5. Approval of minutes
September 11, 2023
6. Public discussion session [3 minutes per person]
7. Discussion [to include Vote and/or Action on matters brought up in discussion if required]
 - **Invitation to Dr. Adam Kantrovich- Extension Specialist, Agribusiness Asst. Director of Clemson Extension Agribusiness Team Clemson University, to participate and present at future meeting(s) of the Board**
8. Presentations [to include Vote and/or Action on matters brought up in discussion if required]
 - **Mr. Isaac Quaye- Voluntary Agricultural Districts**
9. Adjourn



Oconee County Agricultural Advisory Board

When & Where

5:00 PM

October 9, 2023

Council Chambers
415 S Pine St
Walhalla SC 29691

Staff contact

846-638-4218

planninginfo@oconeesc.com

BOARD MEMBERS

Kim Alexander, Chairman, District I
Rex Blanton, District III
Charlie Whiten, District V
Tessa Moxley, Secretary, At-Large

Trent Smith, District II
OPEN, District IV
Joshua Owens, At-Large
Chris Talley, Ex-Officio

Minutes

6:00 PM, Monday, September 11, 2023
MOUNTAIN REST

Members Present

Joshua Owens
Charlie Whiten
Rex Blanton
Tessa Moxley
Kim Alexander
Trent Smith

Staff Present

James Coley

Media Present

None

1. **Call to order-** Ms. Alexander called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.
2. **Moment of silence**
3. **Invocation**
4. **Pledge of allegiance-skipped, due to lack of flag**
5. **Approval of minutes-** August 14, 2023. Mr. Owens made a motion to approve the minutes seconded by Mr. Smith and approved 6/0.
6. **Presentations**
 - **Mission goals and vision**
 - **Members of the board and contact information**
 - **Partner organizations**
 - **Citizen initiated zoning**
7. **Public discussion Session** [*3 minutes per person*] *If you are not able to attend in person and you have a comment, you may submit it by contacting the Planning Department at planninginfo@oconeesc.com or 864-638-4218, so that we may receive your comment and read it into the record*
8. **Discussion** regarding establishment of an "Agricultural 2" zoning district and other matters related there to.
 - Sumter National Forest Service:
 - i. Roughly 1/3 of oconee is Sumter national forest, which relies heavily on the wood industry to help manage forest, maintain healthy habitats, etc.
 - ii. 65% of wood material that went to the canton mill came from upstate SC
 - iii. Grant opportunities through USDA
 1. Community wood grant:1-1.5 million in funding. Pays up to

- 35% of capital start up costs. Can be used to expand or start.
 - 2. Wood innovation grant: 1:1 match.
 - iv. Staff available through the forest service to help folks write competitive grants.
 - v. Marvin Prater-timber sales administrator
 - 1. Timber industry was very robust in the 90s and early 2000s. Has been in decline since.
 - 2. We need to prioritize bringing in more diverse wood industry
 - vi. Matthew Durham recommends that we get in touch with Jamie Gilbert
 - 1. AAB has tried to reach out and invite Mr. Gilbert to a meeting. So far he has not attended any meetings or reached back out.
 - vii. Mr. Blanton: a lot of counties have an Agricultural component on the board for economic development. Right now, Oconee County does not.
 - Discussion ensued regarding the state of forestry and the forestry industry in Oconee County
 - Mr Land: Oconee County seems to have lost all of its agricultural infrastructure. Farmers need a larger scale way to market their products. Agriculture needs to be at the forefront. The County Council is not doing enough. Production is not the issue.
 - i. Discussion ensued regarding the feasibility of having more local processing facilities, as well as the attempts that have been made to do so.
 - Mr. Land: wants to see the AAB write a letter to the County Council asking for something specific.
 - i. Discussion ensued regarding which agricultural need is top priority. Finding a partner is crucial. Blue Ridge Electric, for example, could benefit off of pulp wood/chips for clean energy. The industrial park is still sitting vacant.
 - Discussion/vote
- 9. Adjourn:** Ms. Moxley made a motion to adjourn at 7:45pm, seconded by Mr. Whiten and approved 6/0.

Voluntary Agricultural Program

Department of Planning and Zoning, Oconee County Government

Agricultural Advisory Board



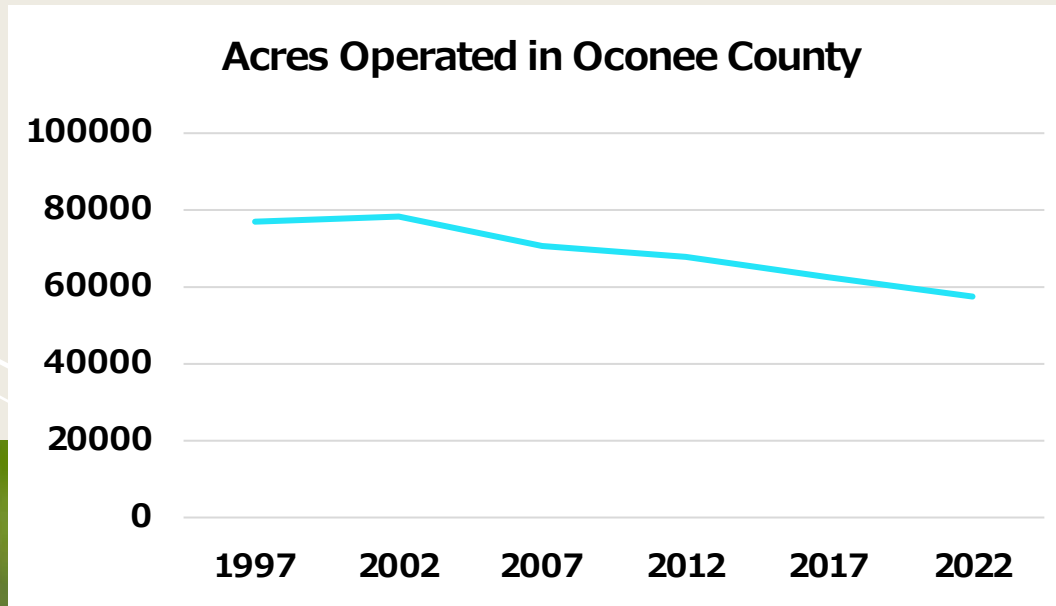
Agenda

- Program Overview
- Industry Performance
- Demography of Producers
- Land uses changes
- Issues
- Goals and Project Planning
- Programming
- Applicable Code of Ordinances
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

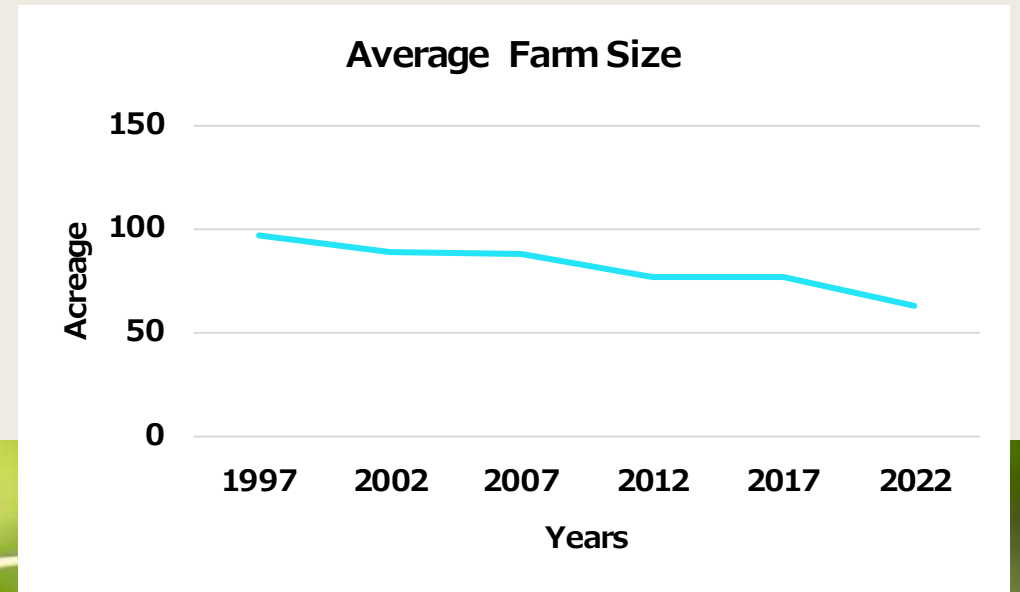


Background

- ❖ The county is noted for its profound role in agriculture, in the area of poultry and egg production and ranked number in this production.
 - livestock rearing with a market value of 121 million dollars
- ✓ The US data for Oconee county indicates agriculture is a big business in the region. According to the most recent U.S. Census data, a typical farm gear and building is worth more than \$450,000.
- ✓ Oconee County tax data, 51% of the County's land area is currently in use for agriculture or forestry



Source: Comprehensive Plan 2020



Source: USDA, Agriculture census

Agriculture Performance by Farm size

51

OCONEE COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA

HIGHEST ONE – ACRE CORN YIELD PRODUCED IN THE COUNTY
BY L. P. ARVE, OF THE MADISON COMMUNITY ---- .141.9 BUSHELS
IN YEAR 1952.

HIGHEST FIVE – ACRE COTTON YIELD PRODUCED IN THE
COUNTY BY A. D. BOWEN, OAKWAY COMMUNITY ---- 5,7 10
POUNDS LINT COTTON IN YEAR 1928.

NO. FARMS IN THE COUNTY ----- 3,288
LAND IN FARMS ----- 248,309 ACRES
AVERAGE SIZE OF FARM ----- 75.5 ACRES
APPROXIMATE LAND AREA IN COUNTY ----- 428,800 ACRES,
OR 670 SQUARE MILES.
POPULATION ----- 39,050
NO. ACRES IN FOREST ----- 279,149 ACRES

CHIEF CROPS AND LIVESTOCK:

CROPS: COTTON – SMALL GRAIN – CORN – AROMATIC
TOBACCO, PIMIENTO PEPPER – APPLES
PEACHES.

LIVESTOCK: DAIRYING – BEEF – POULTRY & HOGS.

LARGEST APPLE PRODUCING COUNTY IN STATE.

FIRST COUNTY IN SOUTH CAROLINA TO IMPORT BROWN
SWISS CATTLE.

FIRST IN AROMATIC TOBACCO PRODUCTION.

OCONEE COUNTY WAS THE FIRST SOIL IN WHICH THE
TOMATOE PLANT WAS CULTIVATED IN NO. AMERICA.

ELEVATION ----- 950 – 1100 FT.

Agriculture Performance by Farm size

Year	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017	2022
Acres operated	77,027	78,349	70,708	67,871	62,499	57,499.08
Median Farm Size	97	89	88	77	77	63
Number of farms	789	878	804	884	815	-

Source: USDA, Agriculture census

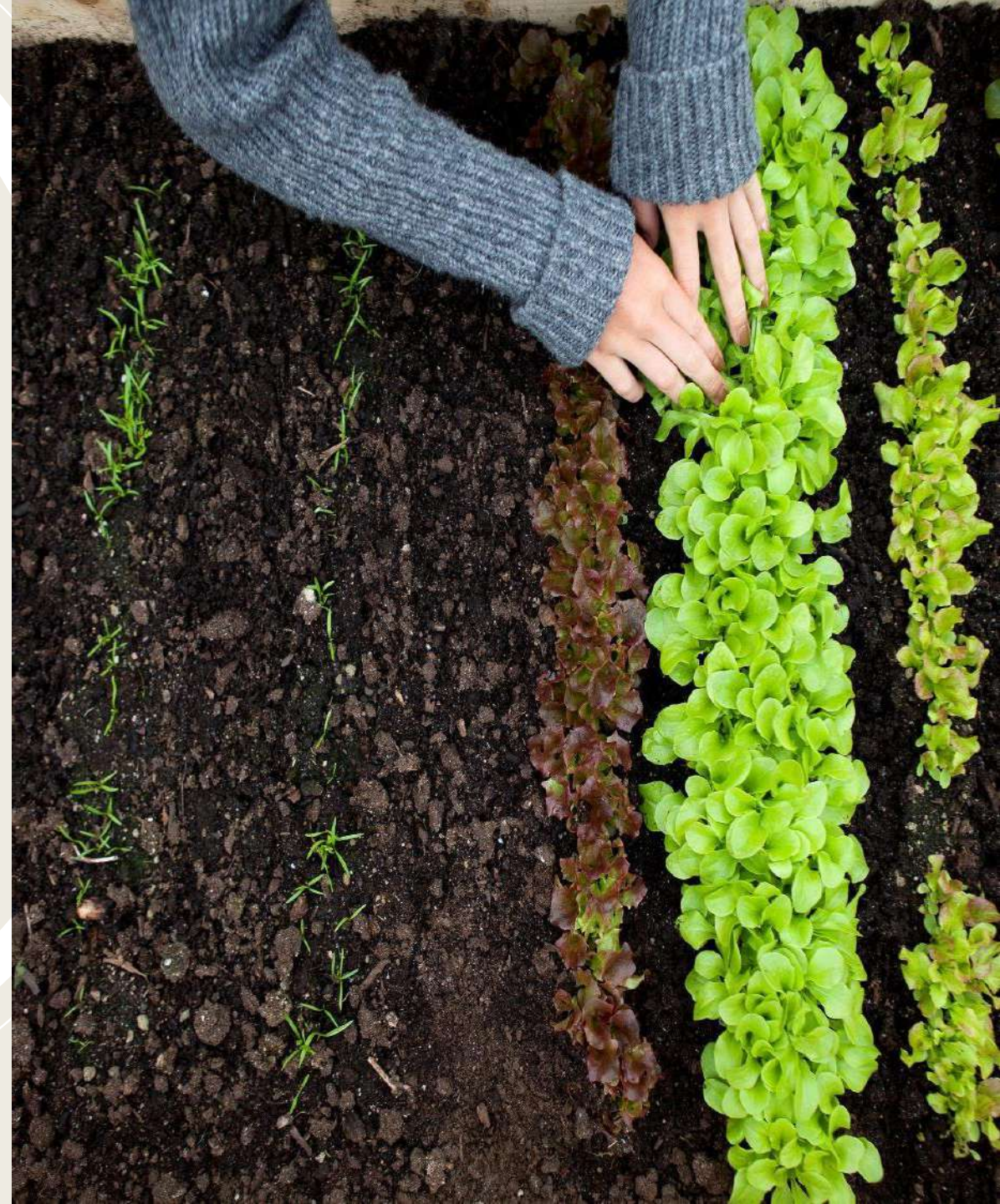
The US census reported a significant increase in population between 2010 and 2020 in the County.

The county grew by 27.4 percent,

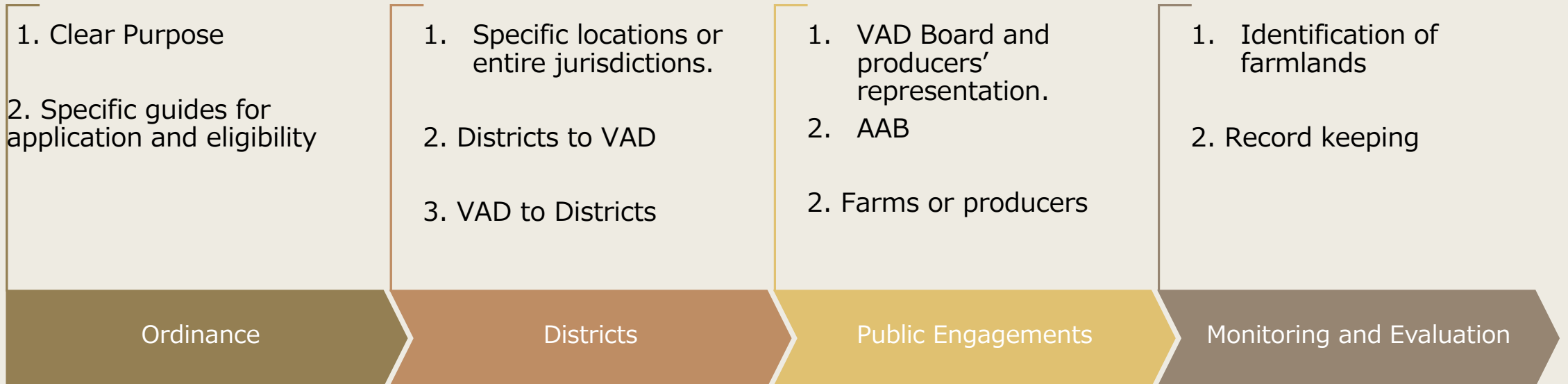
Agricultural lands would be heavily impacted and as such loss of agriculture land is expected.

Voluntary Agricultural Program

- ❑ This program purports to support the development of sustainable agriculture while safeguarding the natural resources in Oconee County through the establishment of Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VADs).
 - Pride and Recognition in agriculture
 - Protection of producers, forest resources and farmlands
 - A strong sense of community involvement in agricultural practices
 - Promoting sustainable agricultural practices



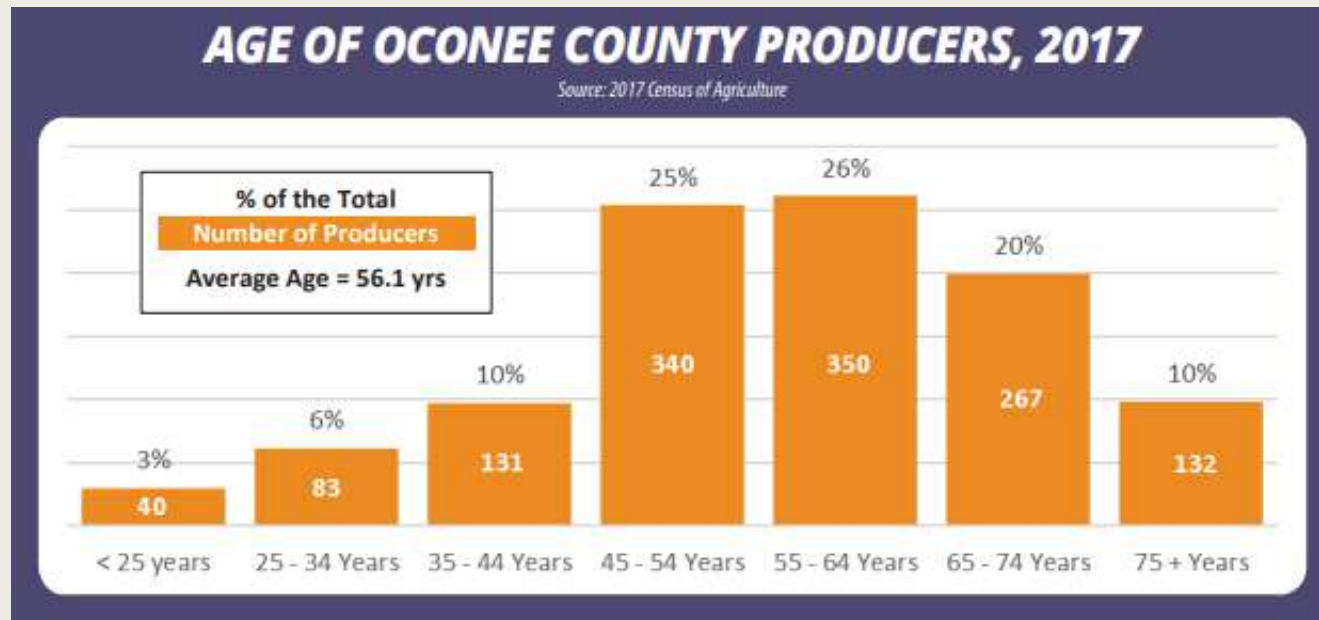
Voluntary Agricultural Program





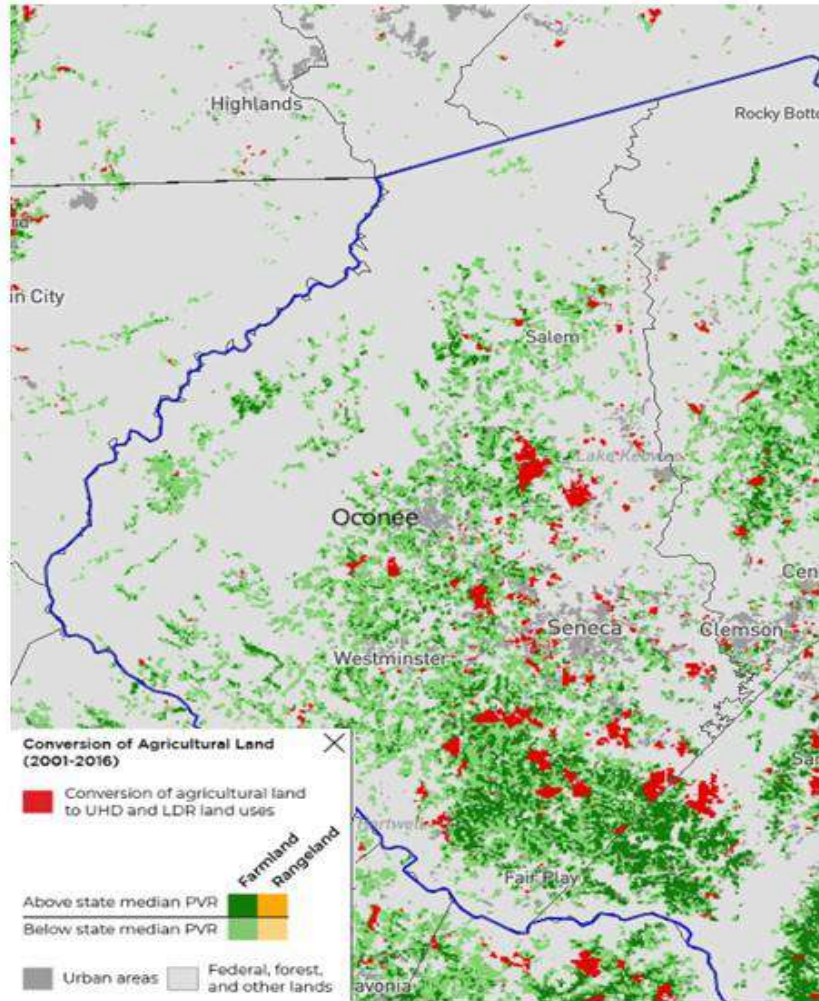
Overview of Agriculture

- ❖ Producers in the county are about 1343 with an average of 56.1, USDA Census
- ❖ males dominate the agricultural sector of the county, males form 63% of the producers, whereas females form 37%.
- ❖ Close to 60% of farmers in the County are secondary jobs.
- ❖ Average farm density is 1.65, this implies multiple farming , shared practices and collaboration on a single farm.
- ❖ Livestock and poultry, is ranked number with about 7,242,210 acres and their impacts are significant.

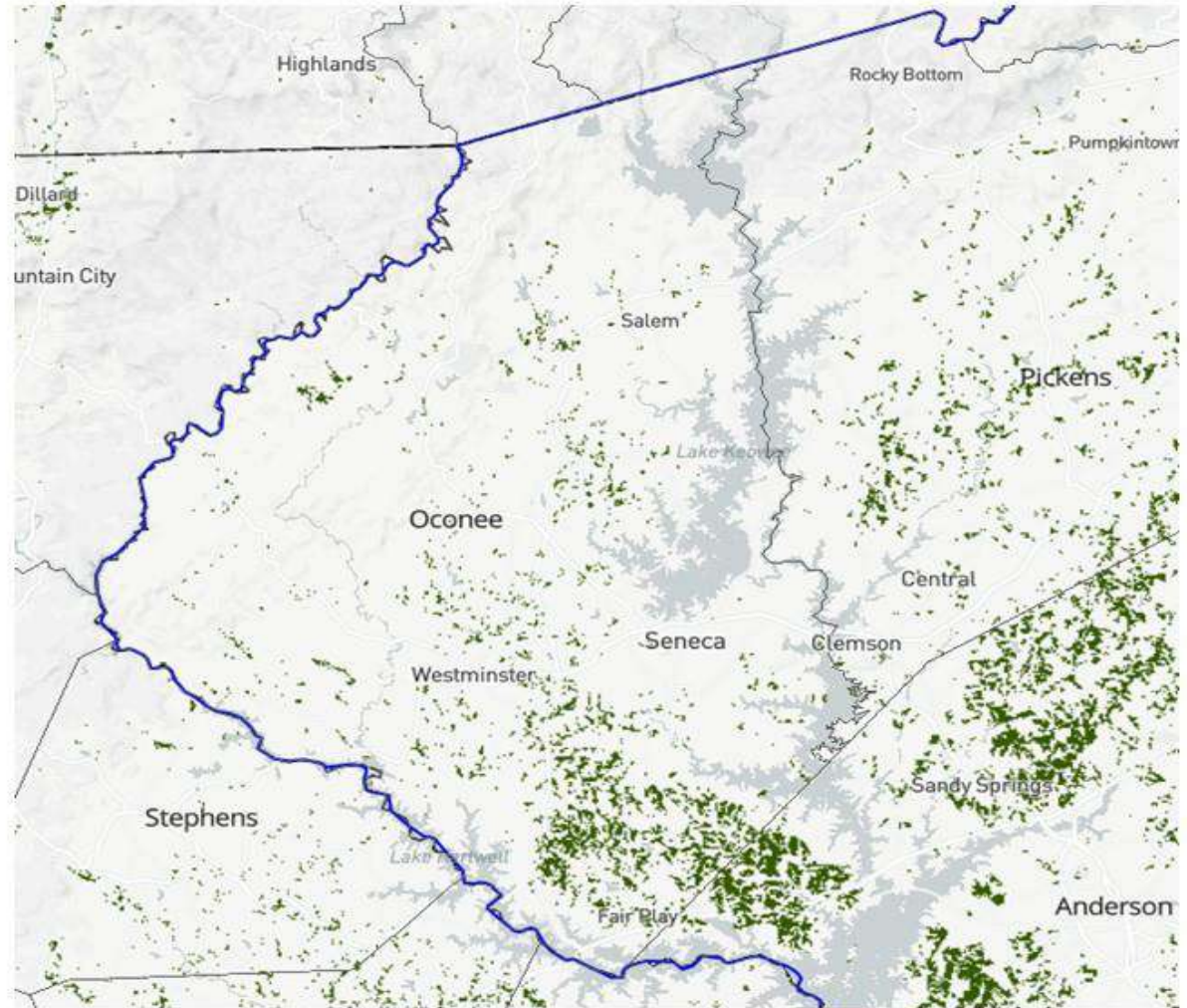


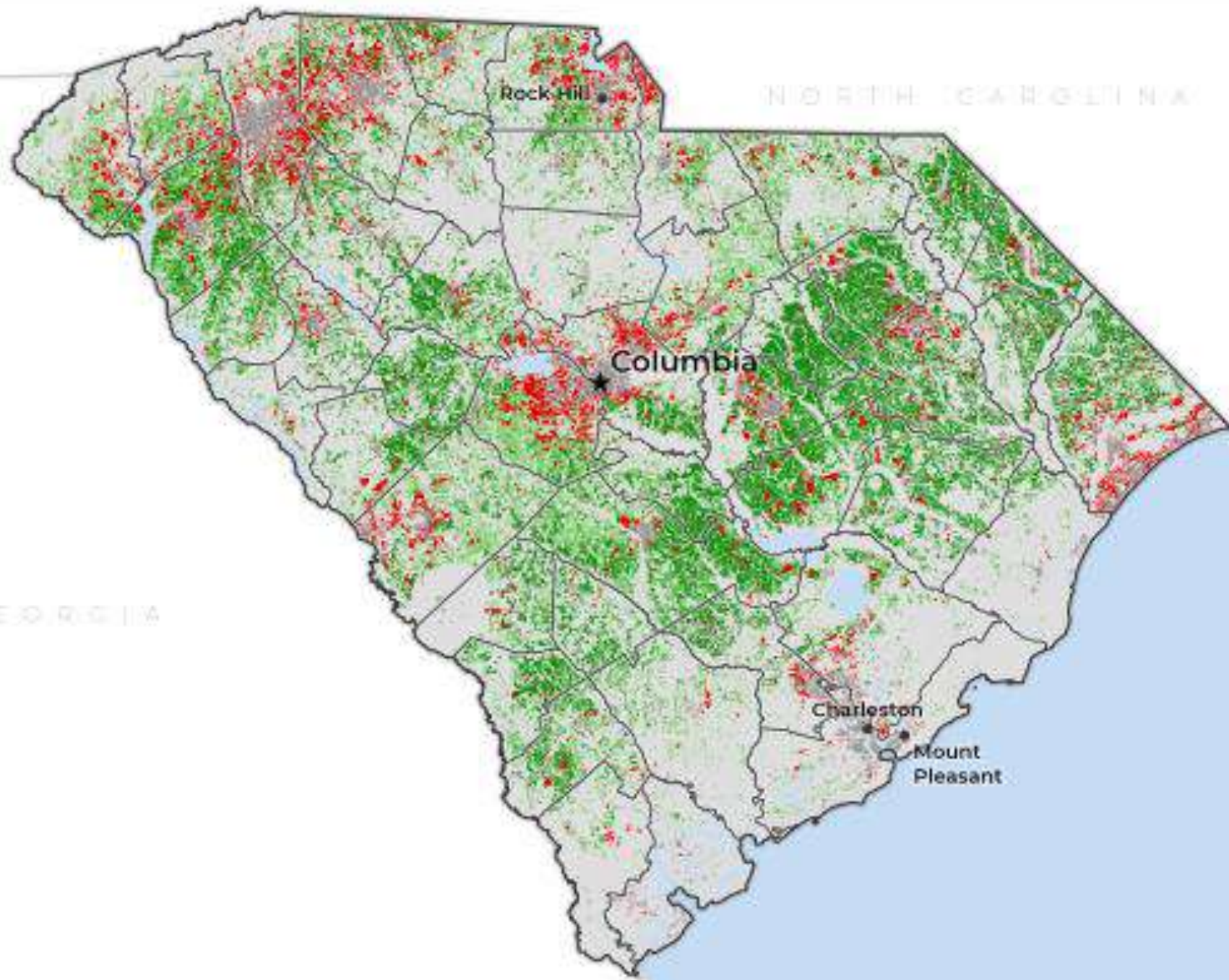
Geographic Assessment

Conversion of Agricultural Land into UHD AND LDR Land uses



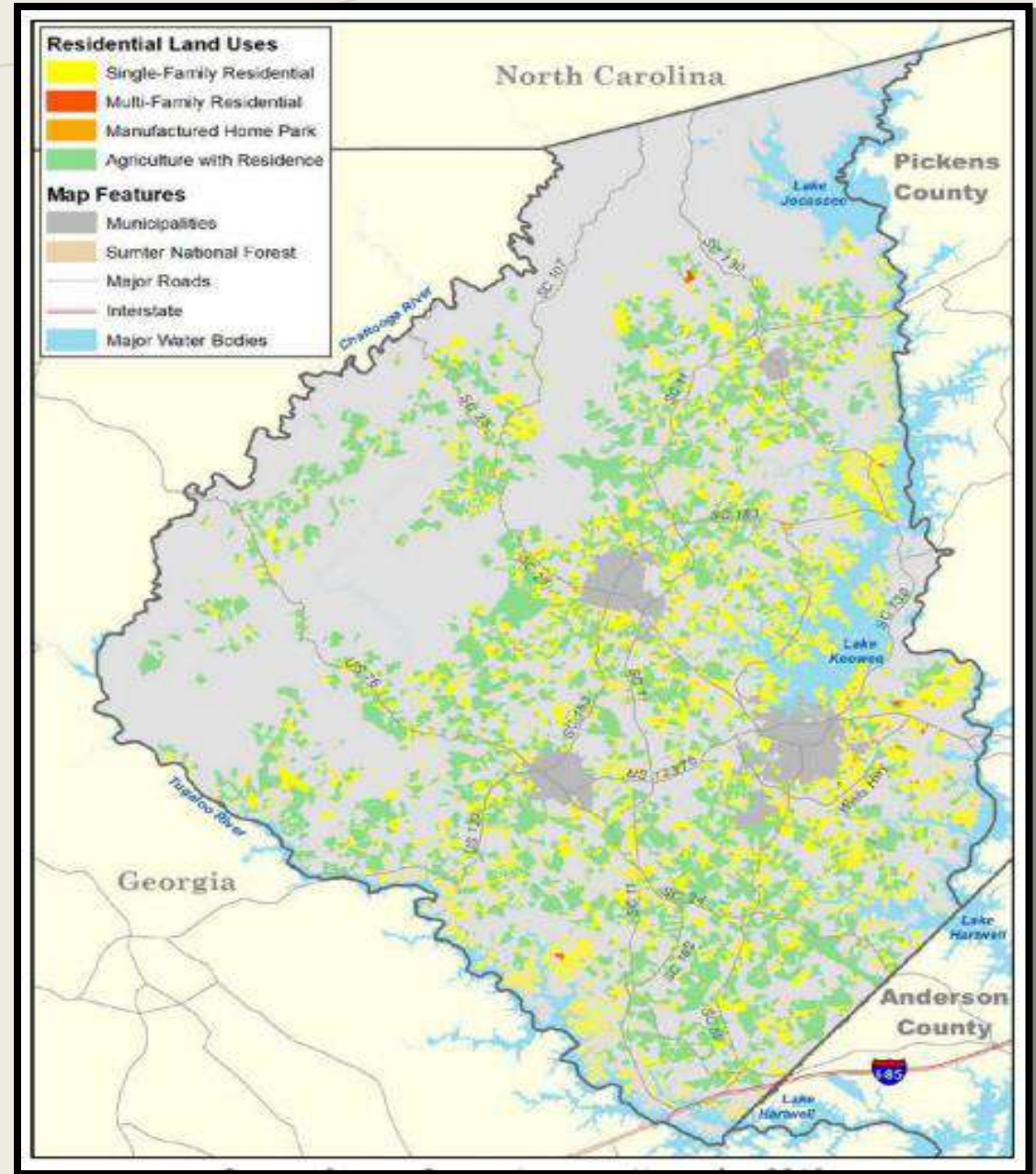
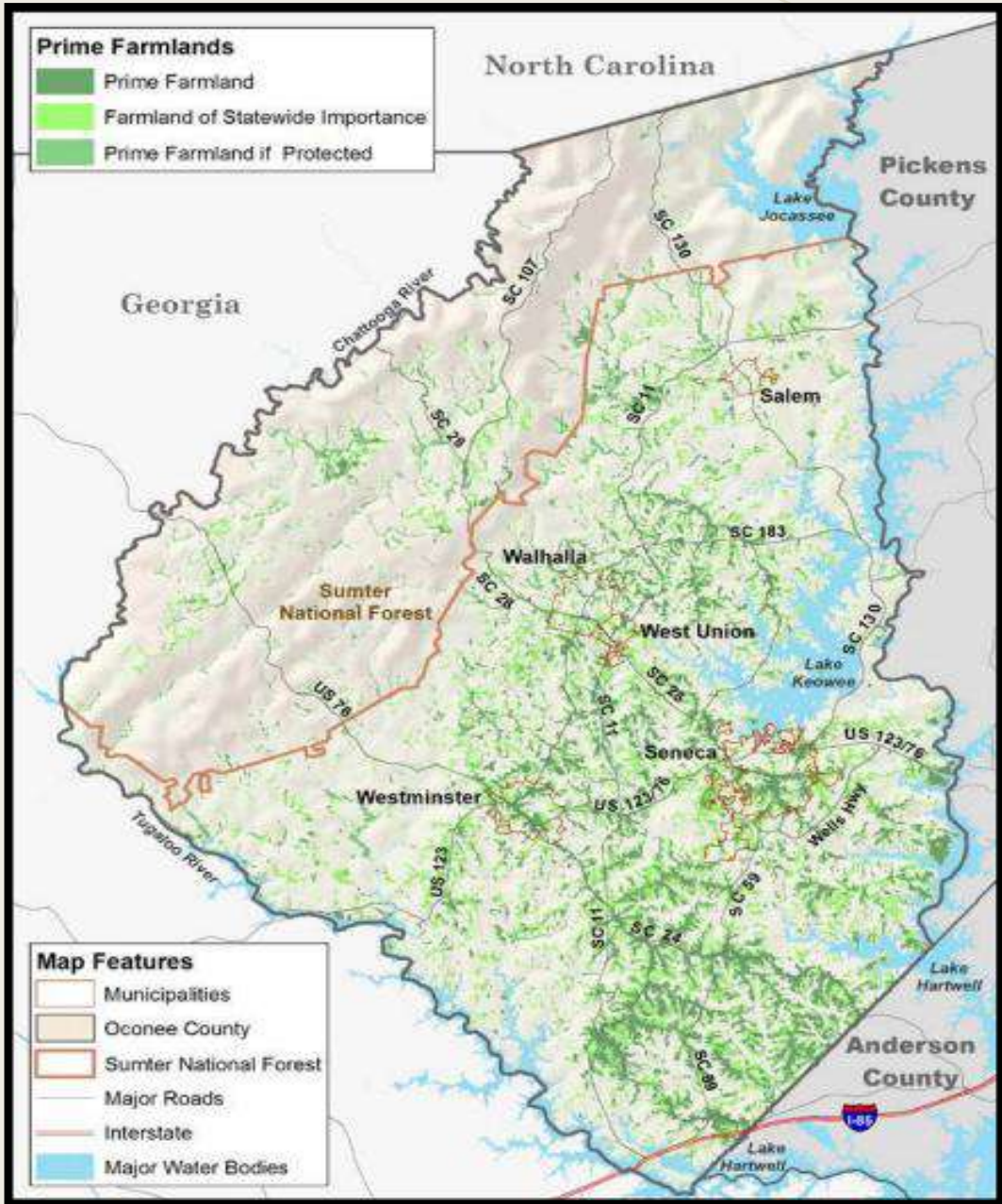
Conversion of Agricultural Land into UHD AND LDR Land uses

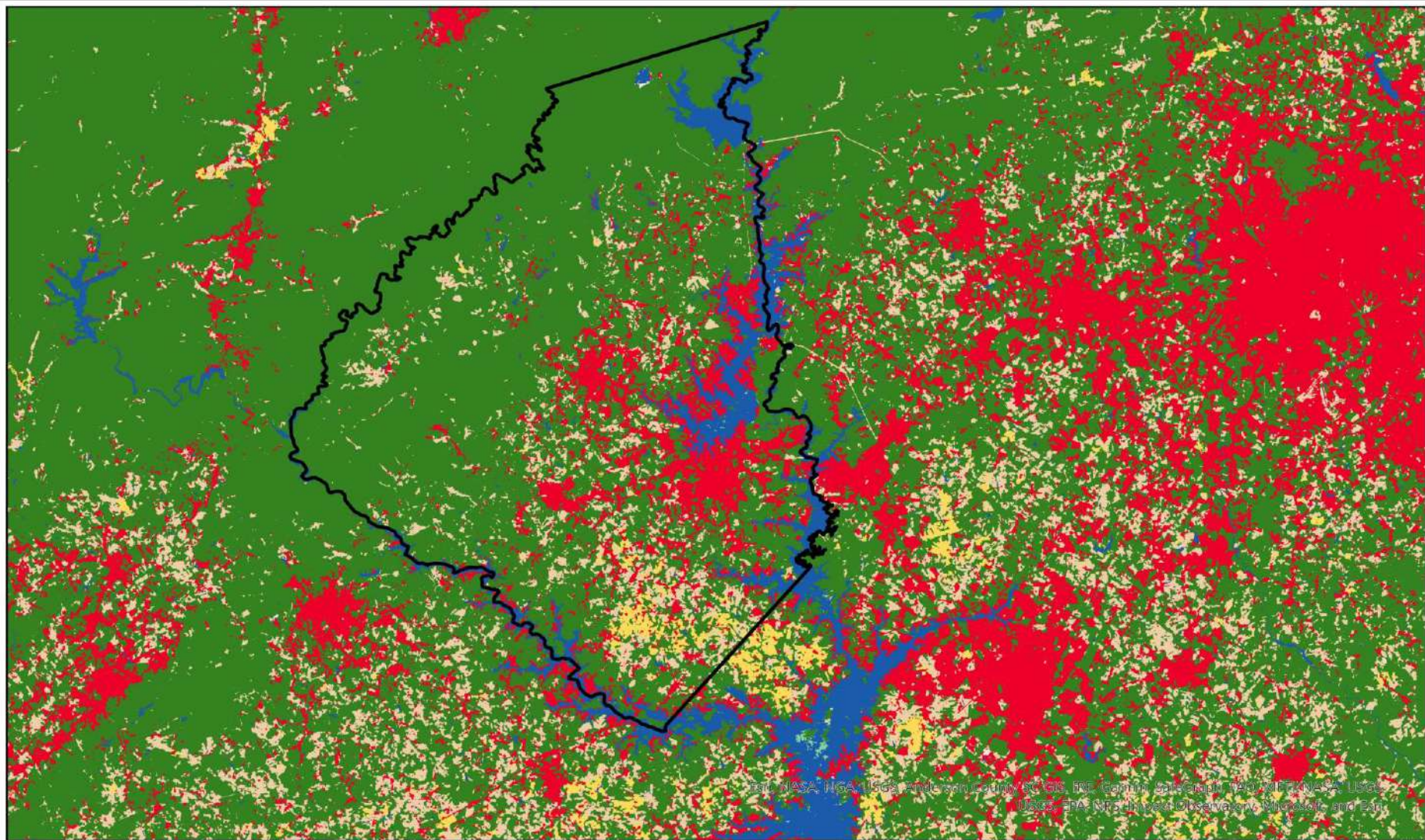




**Agricultural land in the within Prime Lands, USDA
NRCS Web Soil Survey, 2019**

**Land use changes, Oconee County Assessor, November
2018**



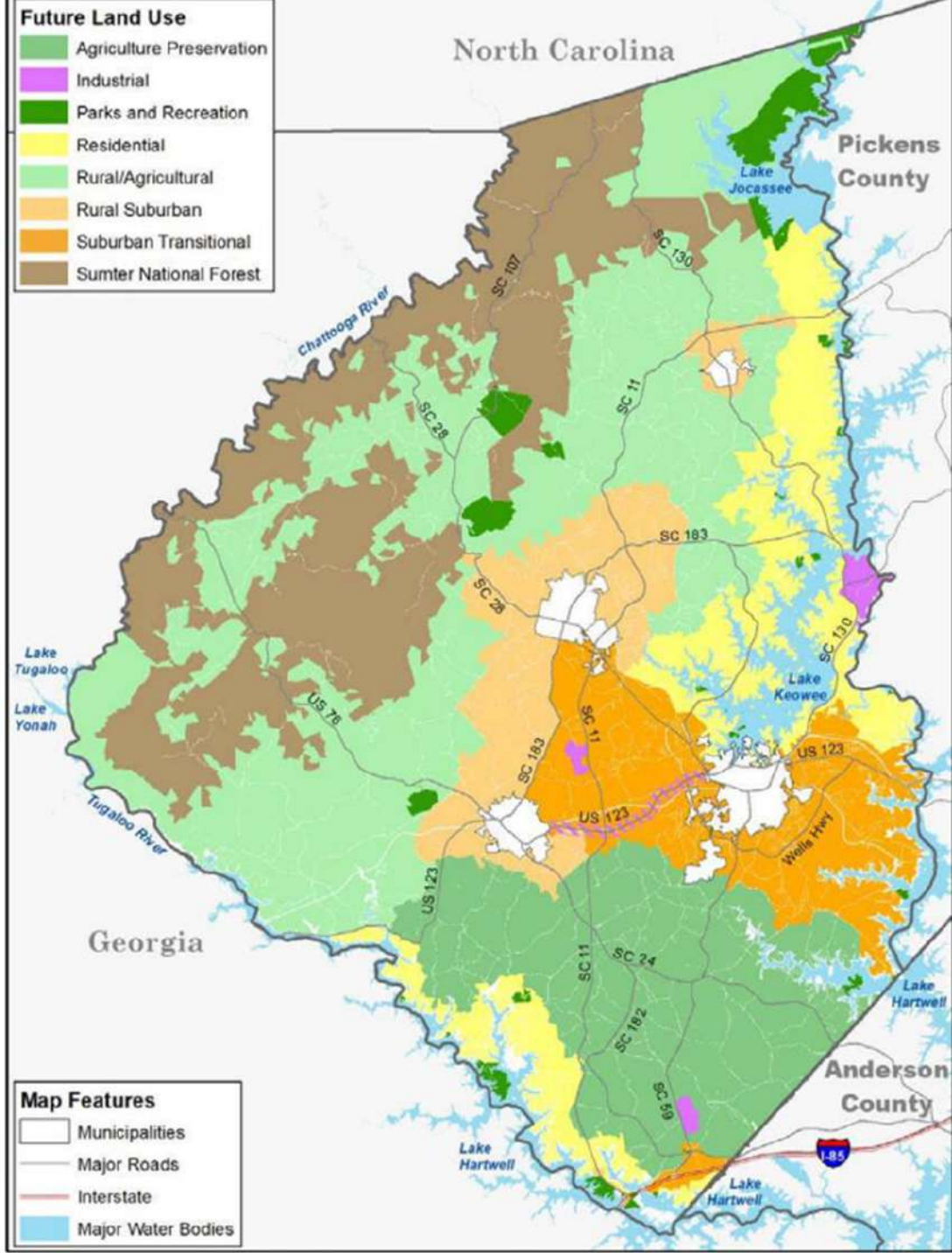


Land use Cover for Oconee Cover, 2023
 Sentinel-2 10m land use/ of the world.
 Data Source: Impact Observatory, Microsoft, and
 Esri.



Sentinel-2 10m Land Use/Land Cover Time Series		
ClassName		
Oconee county boundary	Trees	Rangeland
Water	Flooded Vegetation	No Data
	Crops	
	Built Area	
	Bare Ground	
	Snow/Ice	
	Clouds	

Future land use



- ❑ The Comprehensive Plan projected an increase of 8.4% in housing units
- ❑ This development is expected along the highway 76 and 123 corridor as well as around the municipalities.

Issues

- ❖ There's high rate of conversion of agricultural land into other land uses.
- ❖ Increasing livestock farming and mitigating conflicts with existing and potential development.
- ❖ Enhancing agricultural succession.
- ❖ How do we make the VAD attractive to the prime working population and as well as promote farming as a secondary occupation.
- ❖ Identification of all agricultural lands and extending the VAD to property owners.
- ❖ Documentation, tracking and monitoring of agricultural lands.
- ❖ Cultural barriers to VAP'S

Project Goal

The goal of this program is to enhance agriculture in the county while safeguarding nature and protecting farm communities through the establishment of Voluntary Agricultural Districts.

Agriculture Sector
Performance for the
3 decades and
Economic Prospects

Sustainability
Environment – forest
Economic Development
Social Capital

Protecting farming
communities



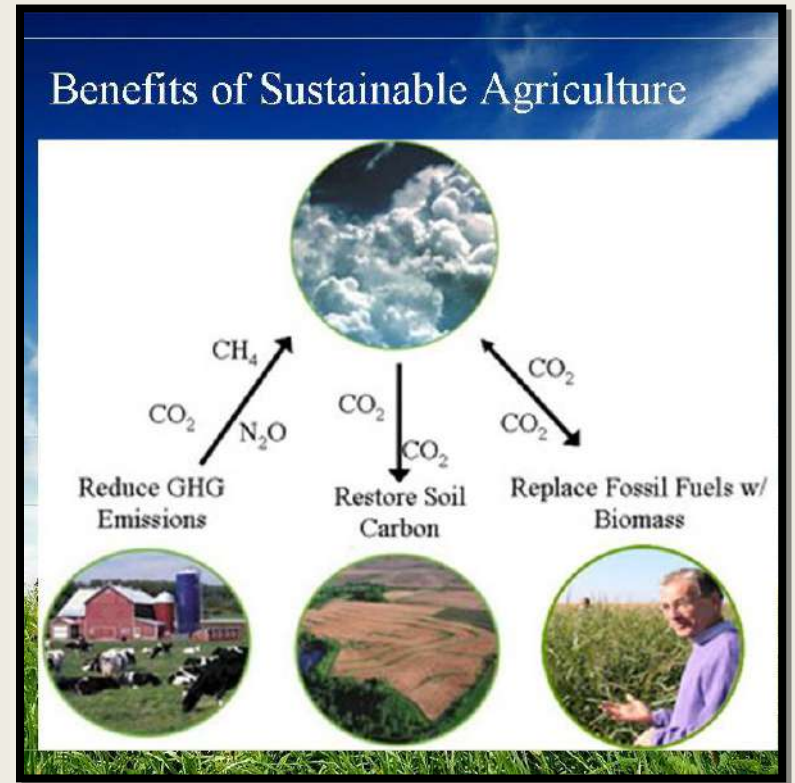
Goal of Voluntary Agricultural Project

Objective 1: Promote the practice of sustainable agricultural practices within the VAD's to ensure the protection of environment, a sound economic and livable communities.

- Establish overlay zones as VAD's where landowners willing commit to undertake agriculture.
- Encourage and train participants to adopt sustainable farming practices

■ **Objective 2:** Revitalize the County's agricultural sector and encourage farming through incentives and community programs.

- Flexible and diverse volunteering options and (once, short term or long term)
- Participant's recognition and awards (certificates, badges etc.)
- Partnership and visibility



Goal of Voluntary Agricultural Project

Objective 3: Develop Agri-Tourism to create awareness and promote the Agric- heritages of the county.

Strategies

- Introduce farms tour programs in VADS agricultural fairs
- Introduce Agric festivals, contests, farmers markets and farm to table experiences.
- Establish recognition; signage about owner's *"commitment to the agricultural way of life in Oconee County"*

Objective 4: Minimize conflicts and shocks associated with farming communities.

Strategies

- Promote visibility and notice through signage to potential developers about the existence of farming communities
- Draft participatory and public sensitive ordinance to protect farming communities



Objective 5: Facilitate commitment, engagement and collaboration between volunteers, neighborhoods and relevant sponsors

Strategies

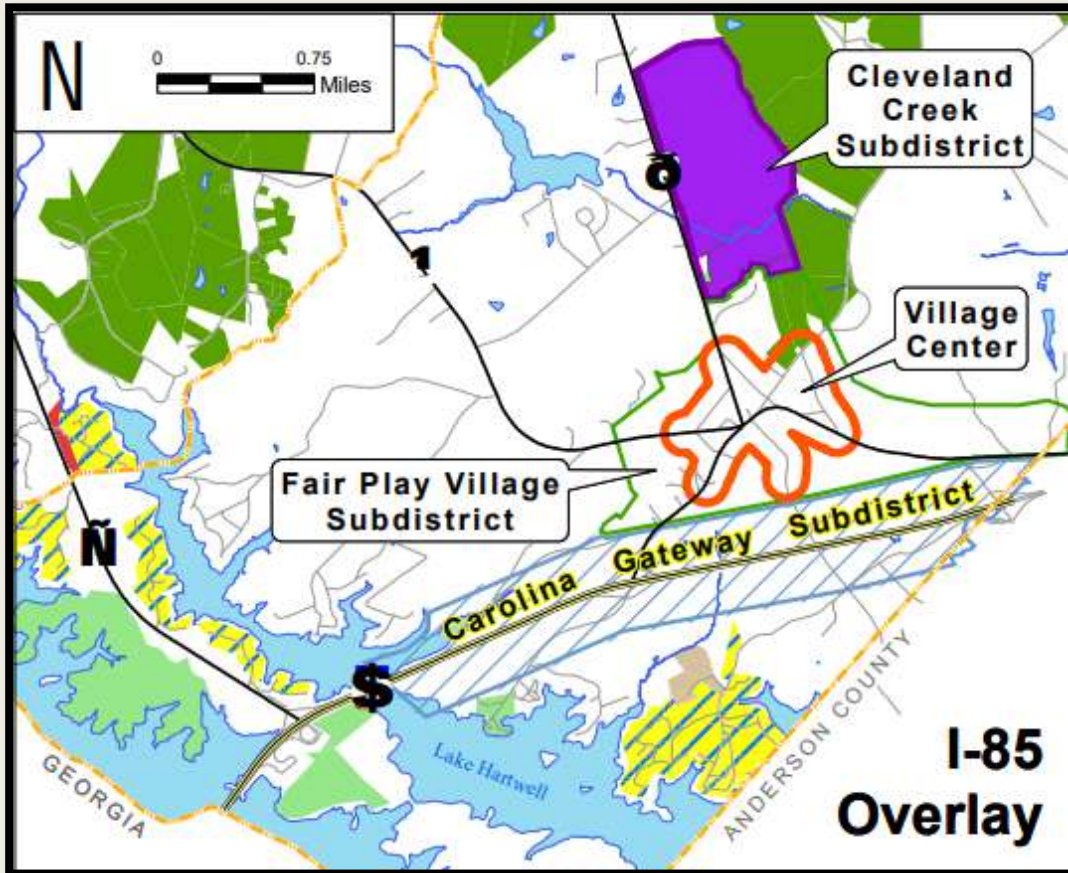
- Attract sponsorships and resources for participants
- Organize community field days and encourage local communities to support program



Zoning and Applicable ordinances (Southern County Oconee)

Land use	Zoning type	Acreage
Lake Residential (LRD)	Shall discourage uses that may affect quality life of lake communities.	347
Industrial (ID)	Shall discourage use not suited for light and heavy industries.	431
Agricultural	Protecting farmlands, activity should have “ economic impact to the area ”	
Agricultural Residential (ARD)	Allows for agricultural and forestry, prohibits certain uses, in the zone. Key consideration to nearby residential uses For areas that maintained their rural character and uses	31
Traditional Rural Areas (TRD)	Defines smaller communities with greater freedom in manners of land usage.	1840
Public Lands and Recreation (PRLD)	federal, state, and county owned lands (parks or forests) typically maintained for the benefit of the public	320.55

Applicable Code of Ordinance for Overlay Zones



Overlays	Acreage	Overview of Restrictions
Carolina Gateway	898	<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural uses have special provisions in this area. Given the intent of the overlay districts with great emphasis on marketability, agriculture needs to be designed with a third eye on this.
Fair Play village	503	
Fair Play village center	387	<input type="checkbox"/> Economic development intent of the ordinance needs to be emphasized in any agricultural activities situated in this area. <input type="checkbox"/> Most importantly, caution may be taken on existing uses within the area.

Source: Oconee county code of ordinance, Article 11, section 38.

A thick white curved line starts from the top center and curves downwards and to the left, ending near the bottom center. It is set against a light beige background.

Program

Design

Program Design and Implementation Strategies



Identification and Mapping of Agricultural Land

- Mapping and Documenting all locations for potential and existing agricultural Districts
- Agricultural Interactive map
 - Buffer tools
 - Distance measurement
 - Type of farming operations

Program Ordinance

- Creating District
- Member of VAD to serve on regulating board/ADB
- Application for building permit would require an acknowledgement of VAD map
- Eligibility, application, administration

Tourism

- Introducing Agric Festivals,
- farm cook contests, farmer markets and farm to table experiences.
- Organic Food APP- Long run
- Designating enrolled prominent farms as heritage

Sustainable Voluntary Agricultural Program

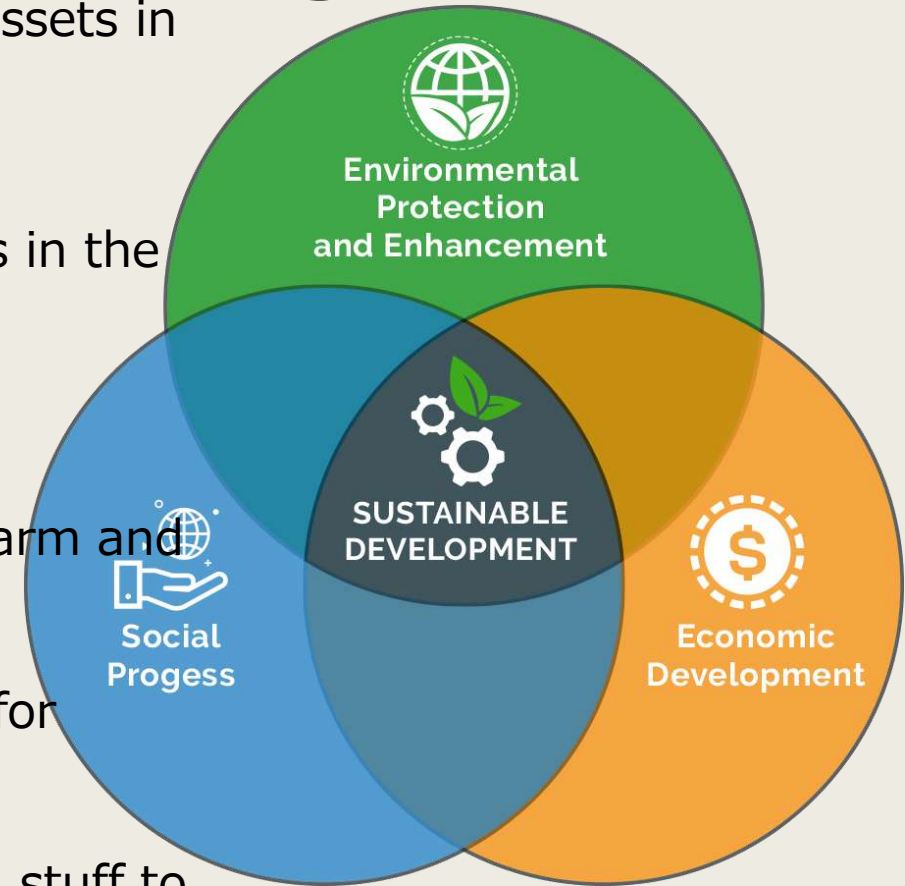
- The long-term focus of the project is safeguarding environmental assets in the county and making the sector relatively attractive.

Economic

- Making agricultural viable; increasing market size and opportunities in the local schools' systems.
- Recognition for Best preserving agricultural lands.
- Regionality: Including making the project part of a regional goal. Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program is an opportunity for conservation
- Planning for Agricultural Future: making future land use proposals for agricultural development.
- Building Organic Food APP; This will enhance freshly delivered food stuff to residents.

Social

- Introduction of Sustainable or Organic Certification. This will help produce healthy food in local communities and increase market opportunities, such as local school systems.
- Maintaining and Preserving historic farms.

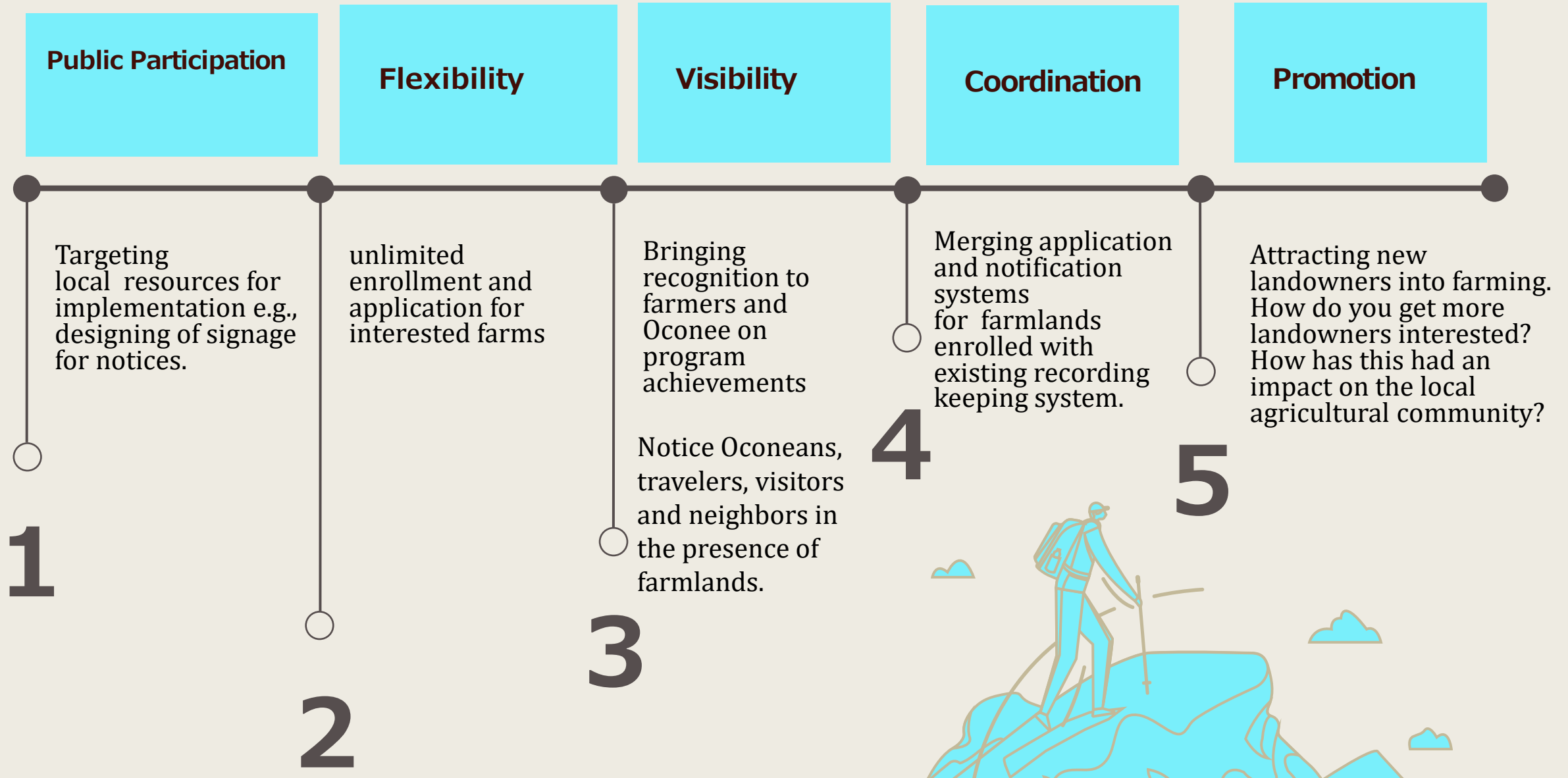




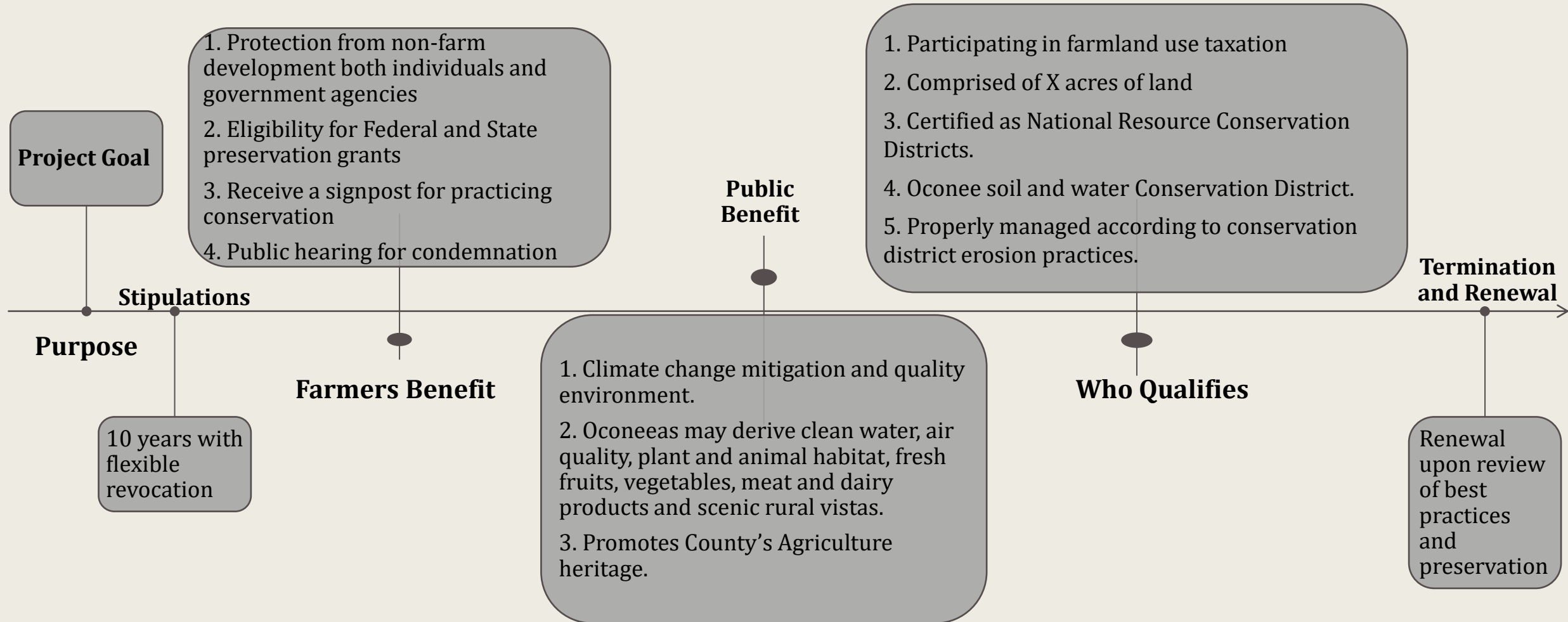
“Developers and promoters of this program followed the philosophy that if you protect and take care of the farmers, you will protect and take care of the farmland.” - Chatham County

- ❖ Farmers centered not Farmland centered; signifies stewards and recognition to the farmer.
 - ❑ Ability to enrolled at any time and revoke agreement

PROJECT PRINCIPLES



Program Structure



Recommendation

- 1. Developing a farmland finder:** An Interactive Map with all parcel info, overlay with all agricultural uses and potentials one with geometric tools (buffer, distance computation) for assessment

Potential sources of Data: comprehensive plan, Tax information, Aerial photographs, US Cropland maps, Satellite imagery, county zoning maps, Comprehensive plan.

- 2. Developing Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program:** This is usually a statute protected program, collecting information on all farmlands and maintaining an accurate amount of land in agricultural uses. These programs are used for environmental quality control as well as Right to Farm Disclosure



Conclusion



- ❑ The contribution of agriculture can not be underestimated. VAP holds potential for advancing sustainable agriculture and have been successful in other jurisdictions.
- ❑ Even, though there are economic and socio-cultural barriers, paying attention to community needs and increasing participation would enhance the program implementation
- ❑ The program informs new landowners of farm presence and potential of dust, noise and smells associated with agriculture and possibly reducing conflicts between neighbors.
- ❑ Ensures farmland be used as a last resort if land is considered for a public project that may condemn land.