



Credit: McAdams Farm

# ORANGE COUNTY Voluntary Agricultural District Program



## Agricultural District Benefits

In addition to providing direct benefits to landowners, VADs offer the following benefits to the community:

- Providing a voluntary way to support the conservation of rural communities
- Conserving rural lands without adding significant expenses to local government or impacting the tax base
- Supporting each community's rural heritage and economy, while providing local jobs and tax income
- Maintaining scenic views and tourism based economic activity
- Providing fresh food, flowers, and other local farm products for residents and visitors
- Supporting clean air and water
- Providing wildlife habitat
- Maintaining lower levels of traffic and noise
- Minimizing the infrastructure burden on County and municipal governments

Voluntary Agricultural Districts are one way for farmers to preserve their land, and can provide a stepping stone to more permanent means of limiting development, such as conservation easements.

For more information about other farmland protection tools, please visit [www.orangecountync.gov/VAD](http://www.orangecountync.gov/VAD)

### Orange County Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks, and Recreation

*David Stancil, Director*  
1020 US 70 West, Hillsborough, NC 27278  
919.245.2510  
[deapr@orangecountync.gov](mailto:deapr@orangecountync.gov)

### Agricultural Conservation Easements

*Land Conservation Manager; Lands Legacy Program*  
919.245.2510  
[deapr@orangecountync.gov](mailto:deapr@orangecountync.gov)

### Voluntary Agricultural District Program Orange Soil & Water Conservation District

*Jessica Perrin*  
*Resource Conservation Coordinator*  
919.245.2750  
[jperrin@orangecountync.gov](mailto:jperrin@orangecountync.gov)

[www.orangecountync.gov/VAD](http://www.orangecountync.gov/VAD)



Department of Environment,  
Agriculture, Parks & Recreation



# Orange County Voluntary Agricultural Districts



**Agriculture is North Carolina's number one industry**, generating more than \$70 billion annually. In recent years, however, North Carolina has led the nation in loss of farms.

Orange County has followed the national trend with a shift toward smaller farms. The number of individual farms is increasing, but the amount of acreage under cultivation, is decreasing. As a whole, Orange County is losing active farmland.

Orange County recognizes agriculture is a vital part of its economy and farmland provides the rural character that makes this part of our community such an attractive place to live and visit. The **Voluntary Agricultural District Program** provides a way for farmers to preserve their land voluntarily and protect active farmland from development not related to farming.

## Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD)

**Voluntary Agricultural Districts** must meet specific eligibility criteria, including minimum size requirements. Qualifying farmland must consist of at least one contiguous acre of land in production for horticultural or agricultural purposes or at least twenty total acres of land under management for forestry.

### Benefits

- Signage to publicize the land's enrollment in the VAD program
- Greater public awareness of the local agricultural community and increased pride in the farming way of life
- Increased protection from nuisance lawsuits if notice is provided through County land records systems
- Public hearings for proposed condemnation of VAD land
- Suspension or waiver of water and sewer assessments if the VAD land is not connected to the utility in question
- Possible flexibility in the Orange County Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) related to farming operations

### Requirements

According to NCGS 106-737, the land must be subject to a conservation agreement between the landowner and the County that prohibits non-farm development for a period of at least 10 years, except for the creation of not more than three lots that meet applicable County subdivision regulations.

This agreement may be revoked by the landowner at any time. Ending the agreement will result in the property no longer qualifying for the VAD program and its benefits.

## Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD)

**Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts** must meet the same criteria for eligibility as Voluntary Agricultural Districts.

### Benefits

- Landowners are eligible to receive a higher percent of cost-share funds under the Agricultural Cost Share Program—as high as 90% assistance
- State agencies, departments and institutions that award grants to farmers are encouraged to give priority considerations to landowners participating in EVADs
- All utility assessments may be suspended or waived if the land is in EVAD, but not connected to the utility in question
- The farm may receive up to 25% of gross sales from the sale of non-farm products and still maintain its zoning exemption as a bona fide farm
- Landowners may experience fewer unsolicited requests from developers to sell the land, due to the 10-year irrevocable conservation agreement
- Landowners can stabilize the use of their land while considering longer-term options, such as permanent agricultural conservation easements

### Requirements

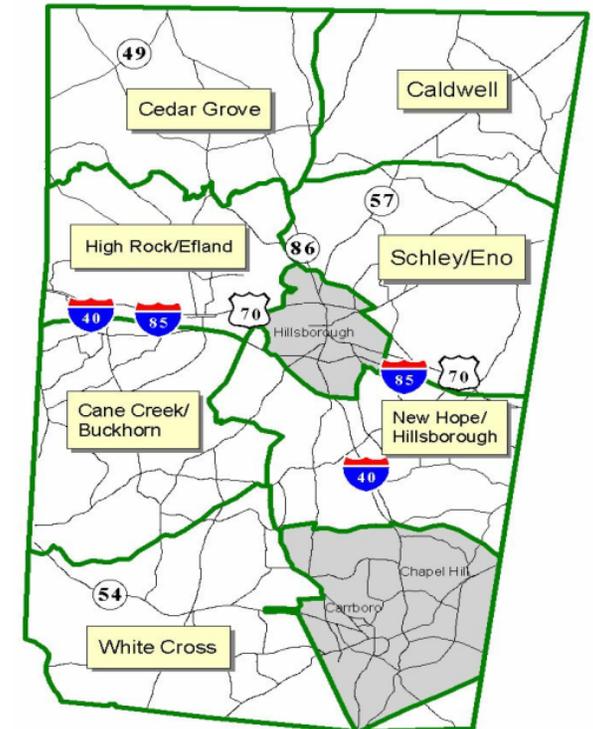
Same conservation agreement required as VAD, except the agreement may not be revoked during the term of the agreement.

The **Agricultural Preservation Board (APB)** reviews VAD and EVAD applications for eligible farms and makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners.

The APB consists of eight at-large members, plus one member from each of the seven Agricultural Districts.

Members are appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to advise Orange County government on a broad range of agricultural topics.

**There are seven Agricultural Districts throughout Orange County.** Each district has at least one Certified Qualifying Farm enrolled as a VAD or EVAD and each district is represented by a member of the Agricultural Preservation Board.



The land must be managed in accordance with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation defined erosion-control practices.

