



Collaborations with county and municipal governments

Good Hope Farm

Good Hope Farm is a collaborative partnership between the Town of Cary in Wake County and four non-profit organizations: the NC Community Development Initiative, the Conservation Fund, Piedmont Conservation Council, Inc., and the Conservation Trust. The twenty-nine acre farm is located in Cary, North Carolina. This initiative supports and honors Cary's agricultural heritage by licensing up to two acres of land to farmers, which includes readily available equipment and infrastructure on site, while increasing the community's access to farmland and local food. Currently, Good Hope Farm hosts five farmers and provides educational opportunities for the community. Erin Crouse, Program Manager for the farm project, provided insights on the effort. For more information, go to goodhopefarm.org.

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NCACC / Dominique Walker: What are the short- and long-term goals for Good Hope Farm?

Erin Crouse: Our long-term goals for Good Hope Farm are:

1. Create a financially sustainable model of increasing land access to beginning and expanding farmers.
2. Connect new farmers with local market opportunities.
3. Serve as a demonstration site for environmentally responsible farming practices.
4. Provide educational opportunities for the community regarding agriculture and nutrition.

The first phase of the project focused on completing infrastructure improvements to host farmers on the property, including water and electrical hookups, irrigation, parking, storage, fencing, and a washing and packing station. By the end of the year, we hope to expand our community outreach efforts, and finish construction on our educational garden and cold storage



unit. Our goals for 2018 are to complete field infrastructure improvements (irrigation, fencing) on an additional 7 acres to serve more farmers, achieve Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) certification

to expand market opportunities, provide more on-farm educational programming, and launch farm community-supported agriculture (CSA) and gleaning programs.

DW: What role did the county play in the establishment of the Good Hope Farm and how does the county contribute to the ongoing operations?

EC: In addition to the strong support of our municipal partner, the Town of Cary, we have received technical assistance from Wake County on several aspects of this project. Wake County Soil and Water Conservation District has supported Good Hope Farm since the beginning of the project. Staff from Wake County SWCD developed a water budget and irrigation plan for the property, which was instrumental in identification and construction of needed water infrastructure improvements. They have continued to provide assistance through development of the farm's soil conservation plan, and are currently working with us to address a field drainage issue. Wake County has also assisted the Town of Cary with abandonment of historic wells and a septic system on the property. We are fortunate to have great county and municipal support of this project.

DW: What economic development impact does the Good Hope Farm have in your county?

EC: Good Hope Farm assists farmers who want to launch or expand their small business. Over 5,000 farms in Wake County have been lost since 1950, but the population has increased by 900,000 residents in that time, creating a large demand for fresh, local food. Produce grown at the farm is sold at local markets to help meet this demand, supporting the farmers' businesses.

DW: How can other communities and counties with similar needs replicate this initiative? Who should they involve in the process and what first steps would you recommend?

EC: Communities and counties considering replication of this project will need to:



1. **Identify a potential property.** Look at infrastructure currently in place, property visibility, and access to markets. Water is the most important infrastructure need. Develop a water budget and find a solution that will meet your needs for both field irrigation and post-harvest processing, which have different water safety considerations.
2. **Identify project partners.** There must be strong local government interest in the project, including financial support and a staff member who will serve as a project lead for the agency and coordinate between departments. The leaseholder should be an organization with experience working on agricultural projects, since they will manage the day-to-day operations of the farm. County Soil and Water Conservation District staff and Cooperative Extension agents can provide important technical expertise, including helping to develop a concept plan and water budget for the site.
3. **Consider staff capacity.** Once the farm moves into the implementation phase, there will need to be a dedicated farm manager for this project, in addition to any support provided by local government staff and other project partners. Outside of on-site management, staff time will be needed for fundraising, marketing, and events.
4. **Develop an internal communication plan.** Communication among multiple partners can be challenging, and your communication plan may need to change as the project progresses from the planning to the implementation stage. Early planning sessions should include ample time for stakeholder discussion and buy-in, but each organization should have a designated point person who will handle the workload and will be in frequent contact with the other organization designees. Subcommittees may need to be formed to address specific issues, such as fundraising. Recordkeeping is important both for tracking accomplishments (including measureable outcomes such as volunteer hours, amount of produce grown), and being able to regularly create progress reports for the partners and any current or potential funders. Deciding what to track and who is responsible for handling this data is part of a healthy internal communication plan.

5. **Decide how you will handle property improvements and permitting.** There may be improvements made by both the land owner and the lessee. Ownership of any permanent property improvements will need to be addressed in the lease. While there are permitting exemptions for agricultural use (see NC General Statutes for description of a bona fide farm and how you can qualify), the local government and other project partners should decide during the planning stages how to address any permitting needs that arise.

DW: Due to residential development throughout the Research Triangle, the price of land has increased, creating a variety of challenges for farmers. How can county commissioners and other elected officials contribute to raising awareness about this issue affecting similar communities across the state?

EC: Elected officials can provide support for farming in several ways: funding, technical assistance, and policy changes. Funding can include financial assistance for farmland preservation efforts, either through land banking or providing funding to conservation nonprofits. Increased funding for county Soil and Water Conservation Districts would provide farmers assistance with farmland transition (connecting seekers and sellers). Elected officials can also offer tax incentives to farms within Voluntary Agricultural Districts. Finally, local governments should consider UDO/zoning/internal policy changes to open non-traditional farmland to agriculture, such as the use of public land for farming, or development of small-scale farms on urban property.