

Wake County Farmland Preservation Program

August 24, 2023

Loren Hendrickson, Farmland Preservation Coordinator
Wake Soil and Water Conservation District



@wakegov    

wakegov.com

Background

New Growth



Over the next decade, Wake County is expected to add another 250,000 new residents.

PlanWake Response



The response from residents and stakeholders through the PLANWake process identified the protection of natural areas, farms, forests, and meadows as the number one change they would like to see in the County.

Current Growth Projection



Under current growth rates, 28,000 additional acres of new development could occur and all remaining unprotected land in the County could be converted to development within 25-50 years.

PlanWake Goal



PlanWake sets the goal of protecting 30% of the county's land area as permanently protected.

2040 Farms Under Threat Report

- Wake County is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation and adds approximately 62 new residents per day.
- The county has roughly 91,000 acres of active agricultural land (agriculture, horticulture, and forestry), but in the last 9 years, has lost nearly 23,000 acres of agricultural land.
- The recent 2040 Farms Under Threat Report from the American Farmland Trust shows North Carolina as the #2 state in the country for projected farmland loss.
- Wake County is one of the 3 most heavily impacted counties in the state for projected farmland loss.



FUT 2040 Conversion for Wake County

**Better Built Cities =
31,949 acres converted**

**Business as Usual =
46,587 acres converted**

**Runaway Sprawl = 56,673
acres converted**

Background

2002
Wake County's first
Voluntary
Agriculture District
(VAD) Ordinance
was adopted.

2016
VAD Ordinance was
amended to meet G.S.
changes and revise
acreage qualifications
recommended in the Wake
County AEDP.

2022
Wake County BOC
approves the new
Farmland
Preservation
Ordinance.

1985
NC passed the
Farmland Preservation
Enabling Act which
authorized counties to
establish farmland
preservation programs.

2013
BOC approves Wake
County Agricultural
Economic Development
Plan (AEDP).

2021
Senate Bill 605, NC
Farm Act of 2021,
was approved which
requires changes to
current VAD
Ordinance.



**Farmland
Preservation**

Wake County

Farmland Protection Program – Goal



The goal of the new Farmland Protection Program is to provide multiple strong conservation options to Wake County landowners to ensure the environmental and economic strength of agriculture into the future.

Farmland Preservation Program



- New Wake County Farmland Preservation Program adds Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District and conservation easement options for landowners.
- Customized online system to manage applications.
- New design and marketing materials to rebrand the improved program.
- Additional staff resources and funding.
- County commitment to conservation with new funding appropriation for land protection.

Farmland Preservation Program Funds



- Annual Rollback tax revenue will be used to fund permanent protection of agricultural land in the form of conservation easements.
- Newly allocated funding from the Wake County Board of Commissioners will allow for county funds to be leveraged as match on recommended conservation easement projects.
- The new allocation will ensure prioritized projects receive the funding needed to be completed.

Voluntary Agricultural Districts

- Requires a 10-year agreement that is revocable with 30 days written notice to Agricultural Advisory Board.
- May renew for 10 years after initial period unless notice is given by landowner.
- May provide assessments for utilities provided by city or county be held in abeyance, with or without interest.



Voluntary Agricultural Districts



Additional benefits to landowners include:

- Recognition and public education about agriculture.
- Increased protection from nuisance suits.
- Receive additional bonus points on applications for cost share funds under the Wake Soil and Water Conservation District's Agricultural Cost Share Program ranking sheets.

Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District

- Requires a 10-year irrevocable agreement.
- Must be recorded on deed.
- May renew for 3 years after initial period unless notice is given by landowner.
- May provide assessments for utilities provided by city or county be held in abeyance, with or without interest.



Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District



Additional benefits to landowners include:

- May receive up to 25% of its gross sales from the sale on non-farm products and still qualify as a bona fide farm that is exempt from zoning regulations under G.S. 153A-340(b).
- Eligible to receive higher percentage of cost share funds (90%) under the Wake Soil and Water Conservation District's Agricultural Cost Share Program.

Agricultural Conservation Easements

Purpose: To protect the County's best agricultural land in perpetuity for environmental health, food security and economic strength.



Agricultural Conservation Easements



Benefits:

- Places a permanent protection on the land by removing the development rights.
- Can receive funding to compensate for the sale of development rights in conservation easement acquisition.
- Can include tax incentives and federal tax deductions.

Agricultural Conservation Easements

Ag Advisory Board

The Agricultural Advisory Board and Farmland Preservation Coordinator position will administer the new program as another voluntary option for landowners within the overall farmland preservation program.

Easement Application

Staff will work with the Agricultural Advisory Board to apply for federal, state, and/or county funding for agricultural conservation easements and guide landowners through the conservation easement process.

Easement Holding

The Soil and Water Conservation District in partnership with the Triangle Land Conservancy, may acquire agricultural conservation easements consistent with the new Farmland Preservation Ordinance.

New Online Systems and Marketing

Home ▶ Departments & Government ▶ Farmland Preservation

Farmland Preservation Program



Wake County is losing farmland every year and that's why the Soil & Water Conservation District, with the full support of the Wake County Board of Commissioners, created the Farmland Preservation Program. As one of the fastest growing counties in the U.S., protecting family farms and forestland is a priority for Wake County.

In the last nine years, Wake County lost 22,964 acres of its farm and forest land – that's almost 20%. If the county continues at its current growth rate, all unprotected land will be developed in the next 25 to 50 years. A new Farmland Preservation Program aims to conserve Wake County's nearly 700 farms and help combat North Carolina's disappointing [ranking as the second highest state in the nation for farmland loss.](#)

- Check out our webpage update!
- Applications can now be submitted online for VAD and EVAD.
- Go to **Wake.gov/farmland**.
- Online interest form application for conservation easements.
- New database behind the scenes greatly enhances ability to track and monitor old VADs as well as future applications.

New Farmland Preservation Signs



Summary

- The new Farmland Preservation Program was born out of the need to protect the vibrant natural resources in Wake County.
- The program is a culmination of effort put forth by county staff, the Wake Soil & Water Board, Agricultural Advisory Board, and County Commissioners.
- With this program, staff will work to increase enrollment in the VAD, add new properties to the EVAD, and permanently protect farmland with conservation easements.
- County support from rollback tax revenue ensures that real protections can be implemented to conserve farmland.



**Voluntary
Agricultural
District**



**Enhanced
Voluntary
Agricultural
District**



**Permanent
Conservation
Easement**

Questions?



@wakegov    

wakegov.com



Conserving the Farm for the Next Generation
Leigh Ann Hammerbacher,
Director of Land Protection and Stewardship East



Triangle Land Conservancy Wake County 2023

What is a land trust?

- <https://landtrustalliance.org/land-trusts>
- Land trusts are private not-for-profit organizations whose mission is land and water conservation.
- Land trusts conserve natural areas by purchasing or accepting land from willing sellers or by negotiating private, voluntary conservation agreements (referred to as easements) with property owners to leave the land undeveloped.
- There are ~30 local land trusts in North Carolina that collectively have conserved more than 400,000 acres of farms, forests, rivers, wetlands, urban parks, coastlines and vistas.

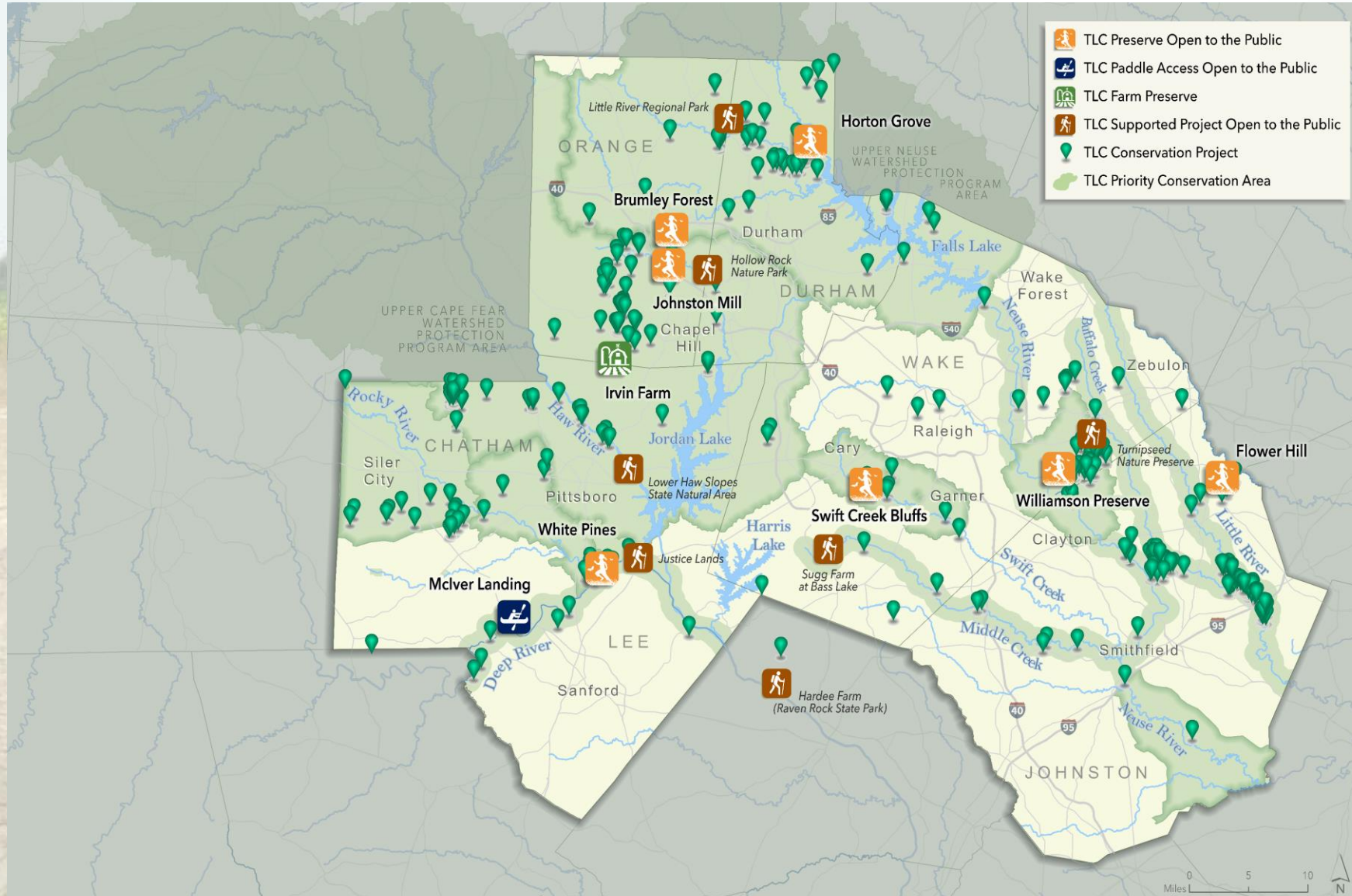


TLC Mission

TLC strives to create a healthier and more vibrant Triangle region by safeguarding clean water, protecting natural habitats, supporting local farms and food, and connecting people with nature through land protection and stewardship, catalyzing community action, and collaboration.

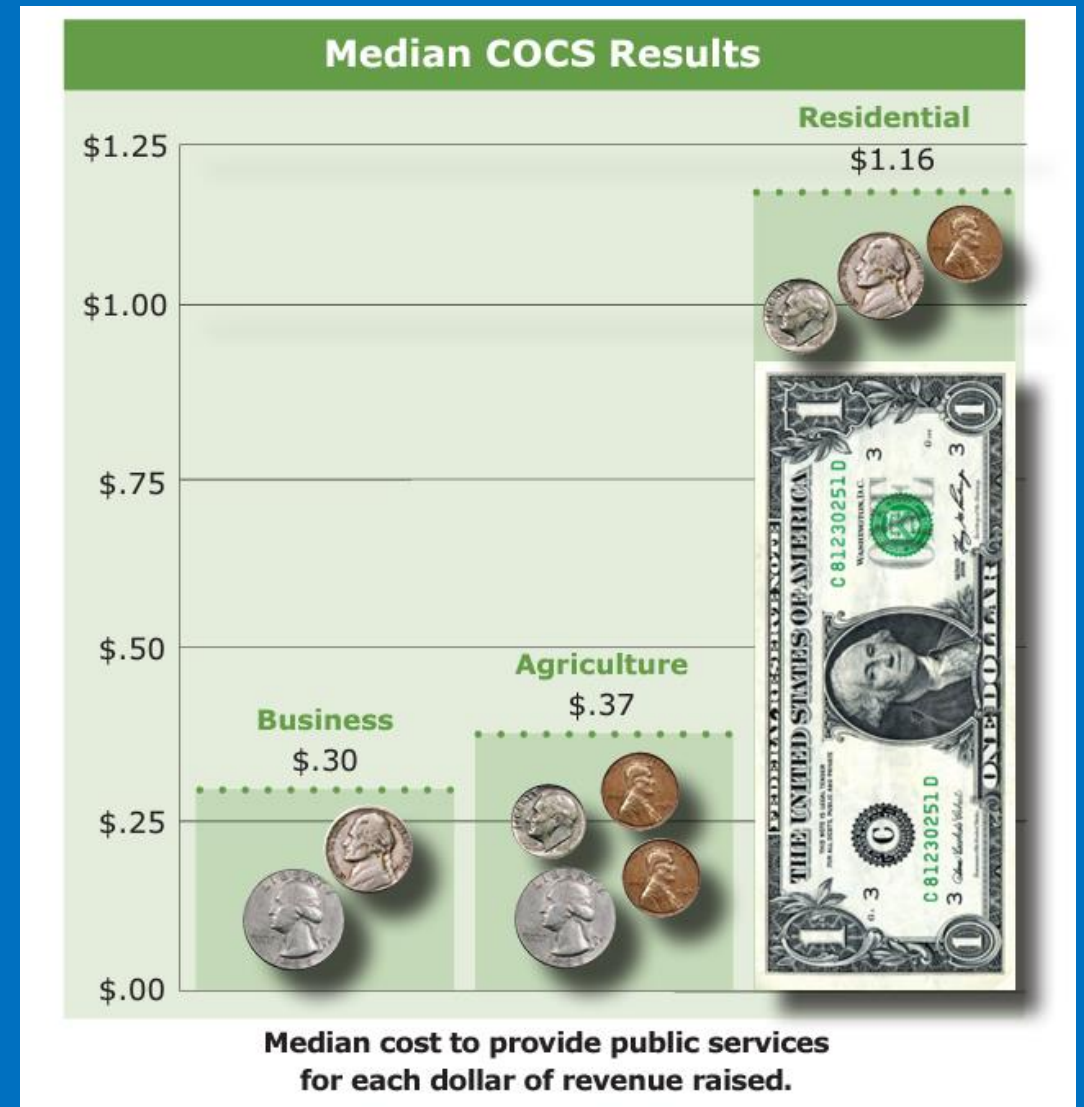


Where we work



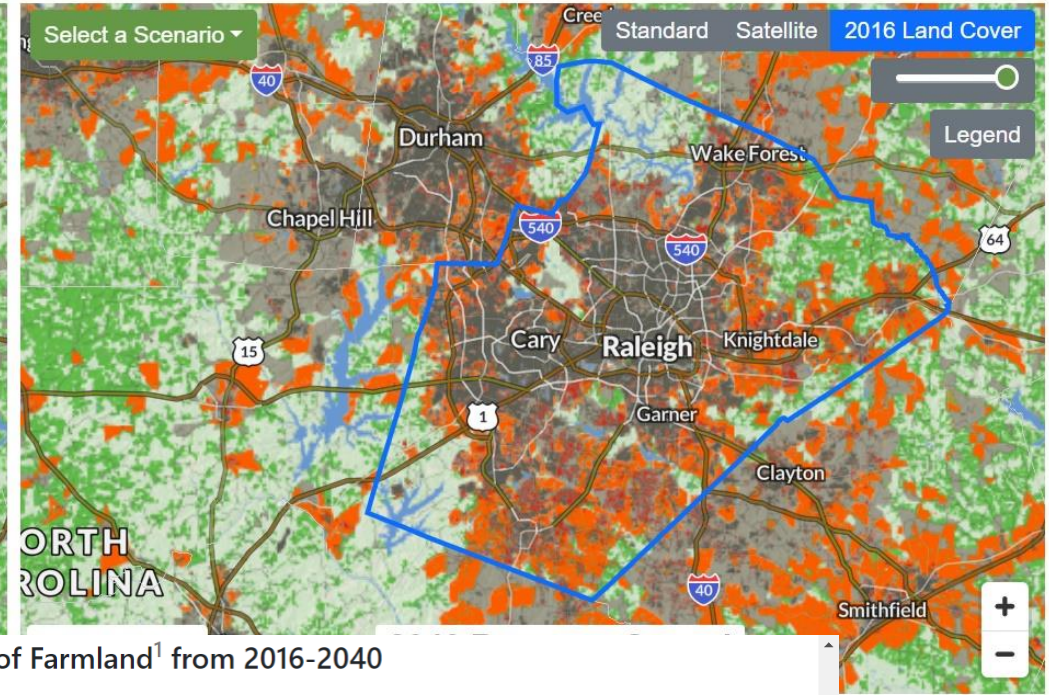
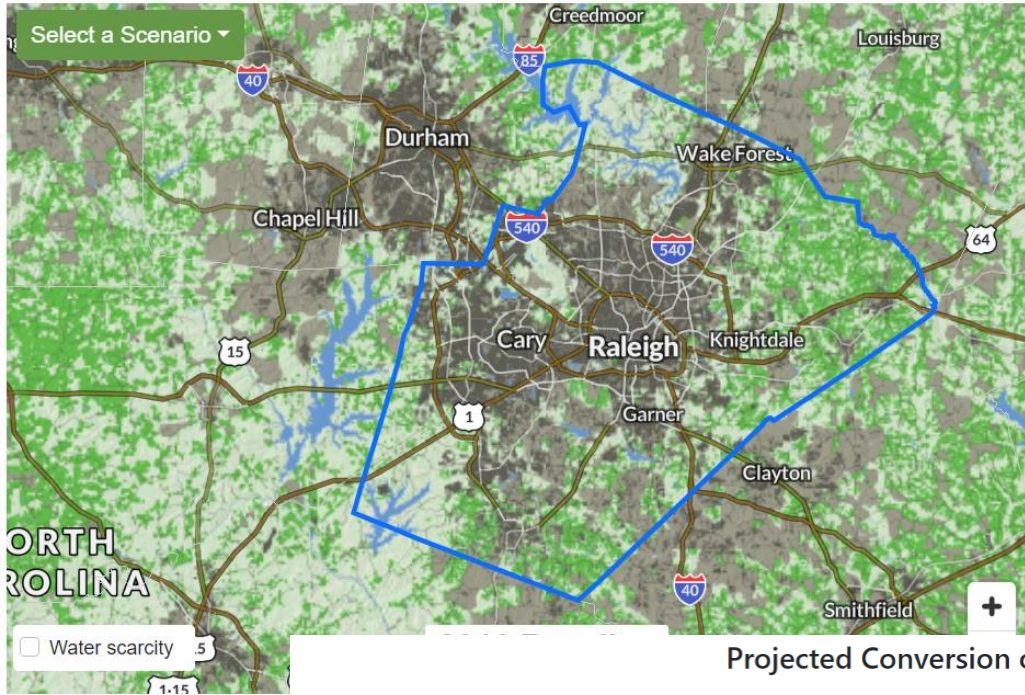
Why should counties support farmland protection?

- Associated ecosystem benefits
- Economic Development
- Food Security
- Natural and Cultural Heritage
- Cost of Community Services
- Agriculture is NC's #1 industry. This is a \$93 billion industry in North Carolina
- Rapid loss of farmland!!

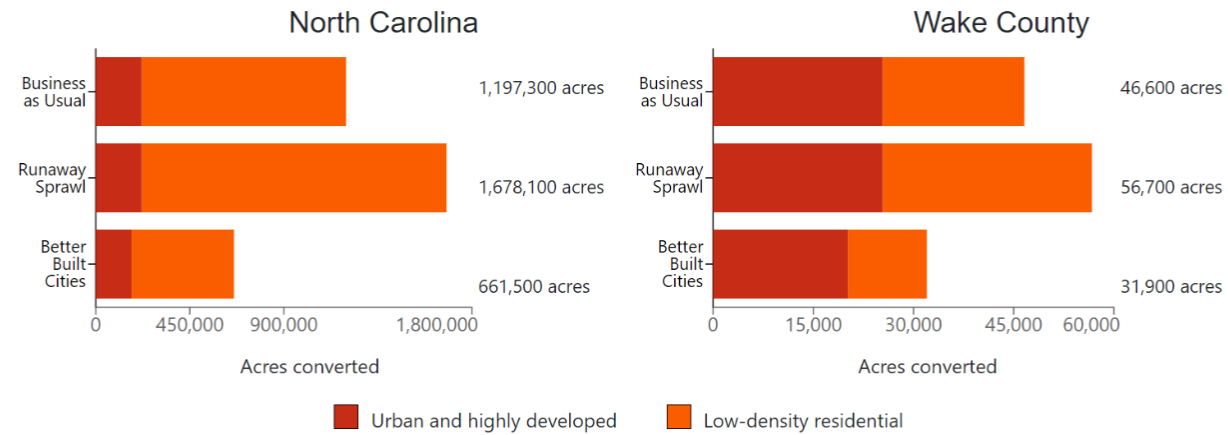


North Carolina is losing farmland at a rate of 133 acres a day. On the 46,000 farms that remain in North Carolina, there are five times as many farmers over the age of 65 as under 35. Between 2001 and 2016 more than 731,600 acres of agricultural land were developed or compromised, making North Carolina farmland the second most threatened in the nation. [American Farmland Trust *Farms Under Threat: State of the States Report*](#)





Projected Conversion of Farmland¹ from 2016-2040



Urban and highly developed (UHD) land use includes commercial, industrial, and moderate-to-high density residential areas.
Low-density residential (LDR) land use includes scattered subdivisions and large-lot housing, which fragment the agricultural land base and limit production.

¹Farmland includes cropland, pasture and woodland associated with farms.

NC Counties

Four North Carolina counties rank in the top 40 of all the counties in the United States in projected acres to be converted by 2040:

- Johnston: 19th
- Union: 23rd
- Wake: 32nd
- Iredell: 38th

AFT says North Carolina ranks number two in the nation behind Texas in the probability of the loss of farmland between now and 2040

Less Acreage in Present Use Value

Talking: Bra

	2013	2022	Percent Change
Acreage	119,128	96,164	-19.3%



~18% of land in County is still in Farms!



What can you do?

Supporting Local Farms & Food



- Farmland Preservation Plans
- VAD, EVAD
- Supporting incubator and training farms
- Ex. Wake County Next Gen Program
- Working Lands Easements
- Farm Preserves



Supporting Local Farms & Food



- TLC has protected almost 8000 acres of farmland in 40 years
- Partnering with farm organizations- Ucan, Transplanting Traditions, Karen Community Farm Williamson
- Farmland Plans
- Farm Preserves
- Working Lands Easements



1: What is a conservation easement?

- A voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a qualified conservation organization that permanently limits certain uses of the land to protect its conservation values
- In effect, conservation easements remove the right to develop the property from the landowner's "bundle of sticks"



TLC Wake County
Conservation Easement

Why?



"Sometimes being good stewards of the land means going beyond the daily blood, sweat and tears of working the farm; it means taking a stand for what you believe in."



Eddie Culberson

TLC Easement Grantor





Why?

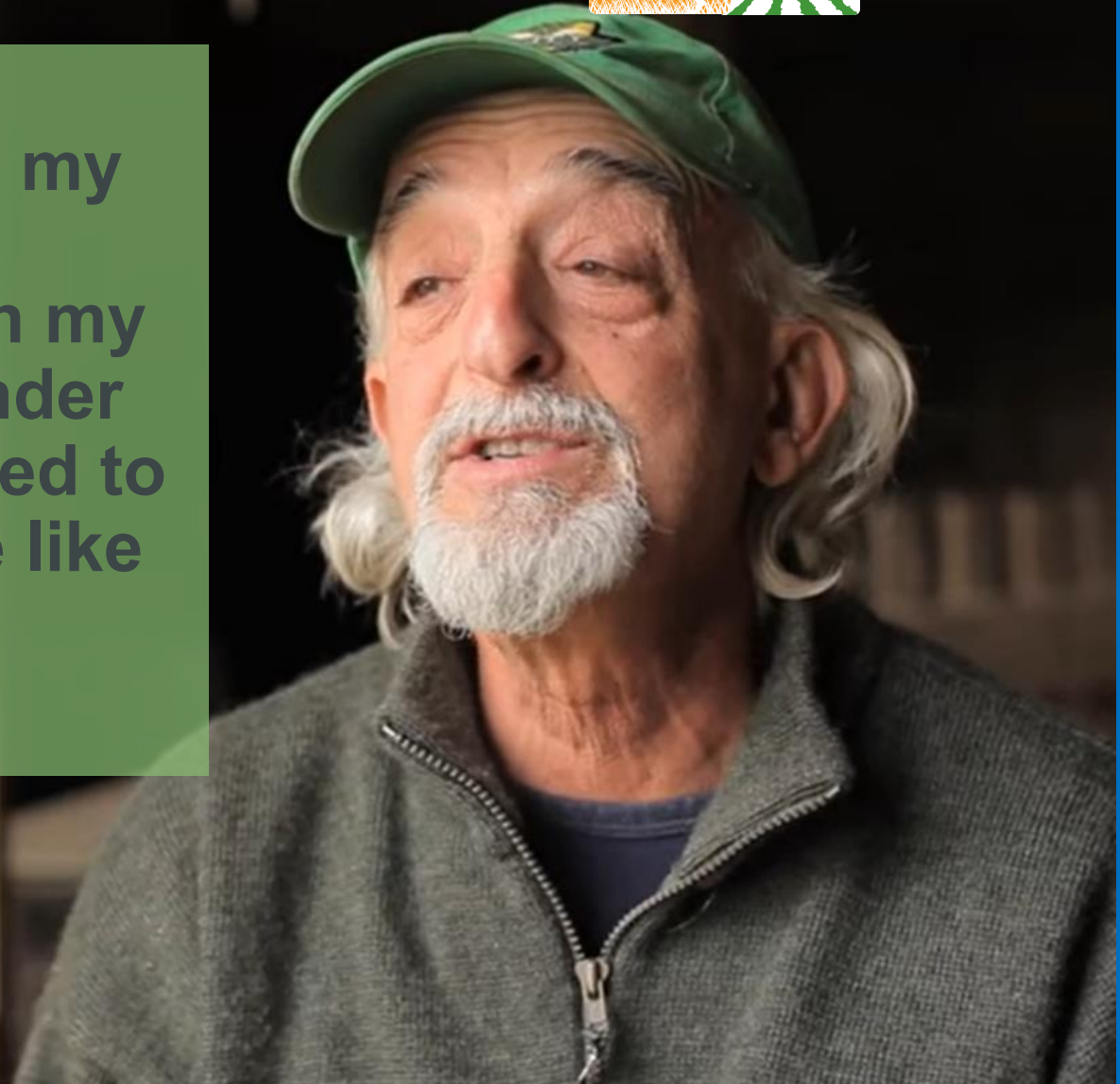


“After all these years of putting all this work into my farm I didn’t want a development to go up on my land as soon as I was under the ground 6 feet, I wanted to keep this beautiful place like it is”

- Murry Cohen

MURRAY COHEN

COHEN FARM



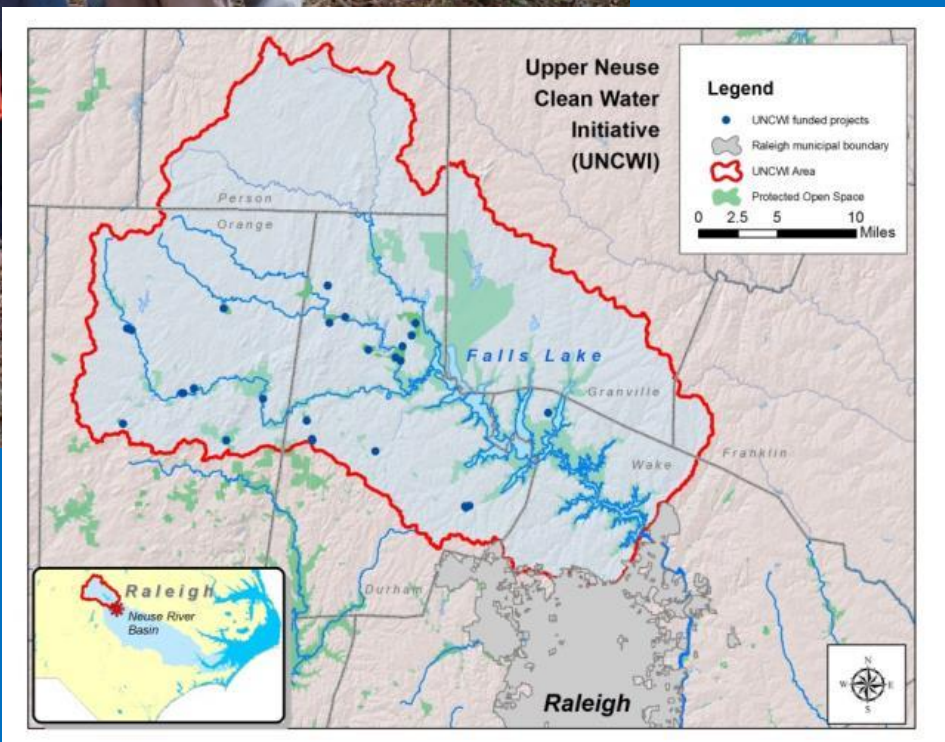
“We wanted to protect our land so that people sitting here 50 or 100 years from now could see exactly what we are seeing today”

Janice Lindley





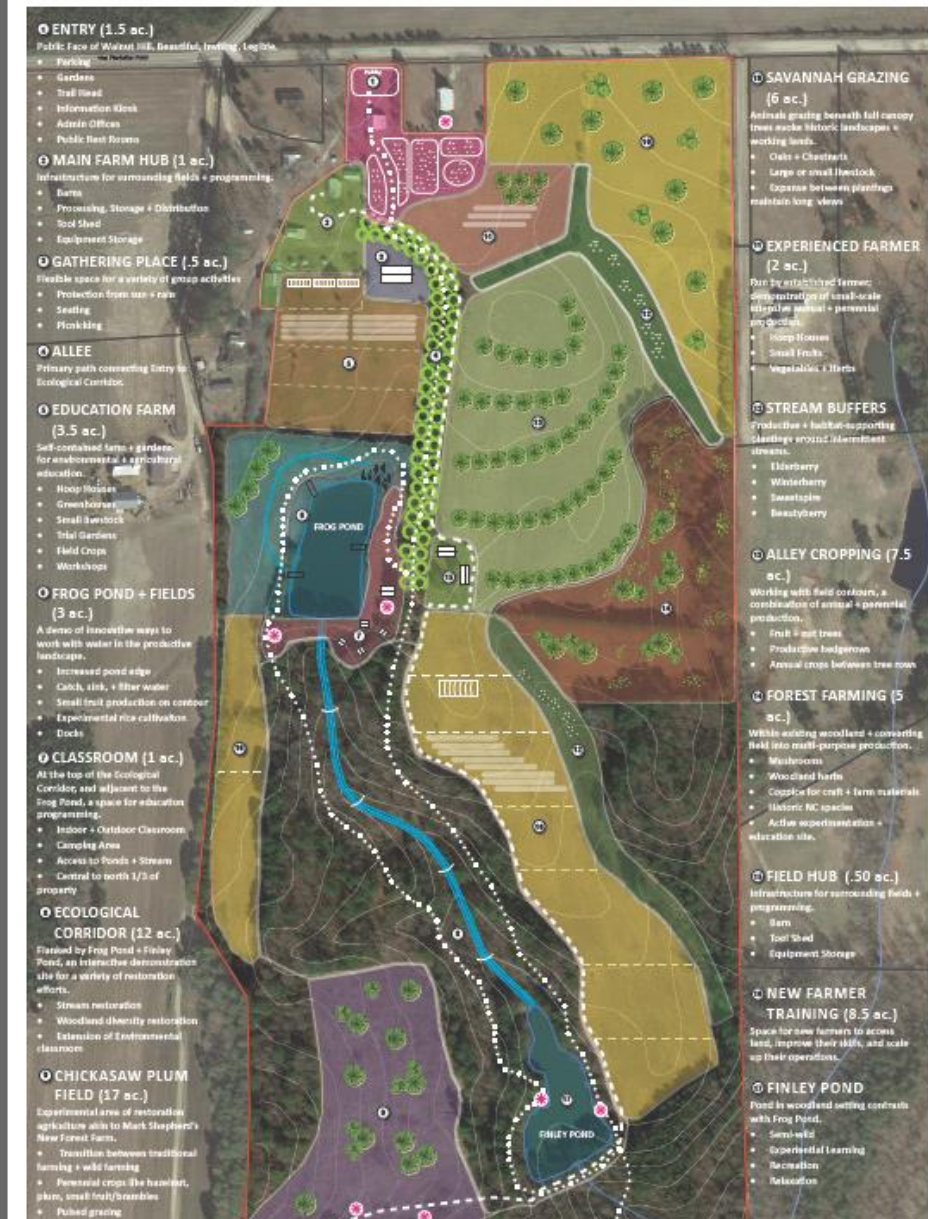
Earthseed, Durham County
Falls Lake Watershed



How can you fund permanent farmland protection?

- Provide a local match!!
- How
 - Annual appropriations
 - Bond funding
 - Watershed Protection Funds
 - Rollback taxes!!!

CONCEPT B: AGRICULTURAL TRAINING + DEMONSTRATION





**Example
Project:**

**Oaky Grove
Farm
Conservation
Easement**

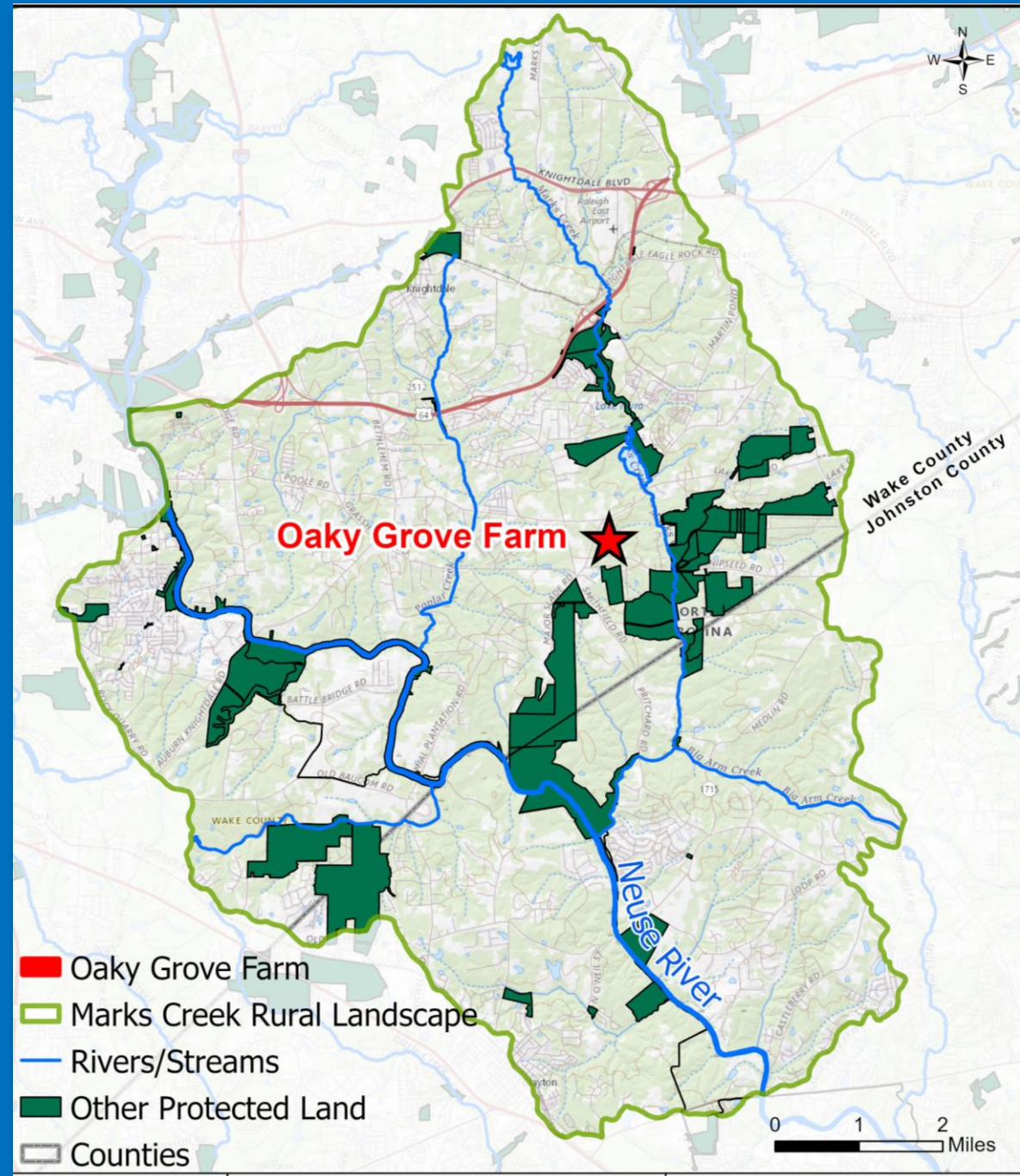


Oaky Grove Farm

- **Wendell, Wake County**
- **Bicentennial farm**
- **113 acres**
 - **Forest**
 - **Two crop fields**
 - **Horticulture – Karen Community Farm**
- **Designated as a National Register Historic District, and the plantation house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places**

Priority Area

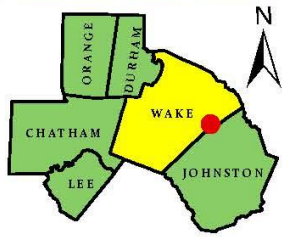
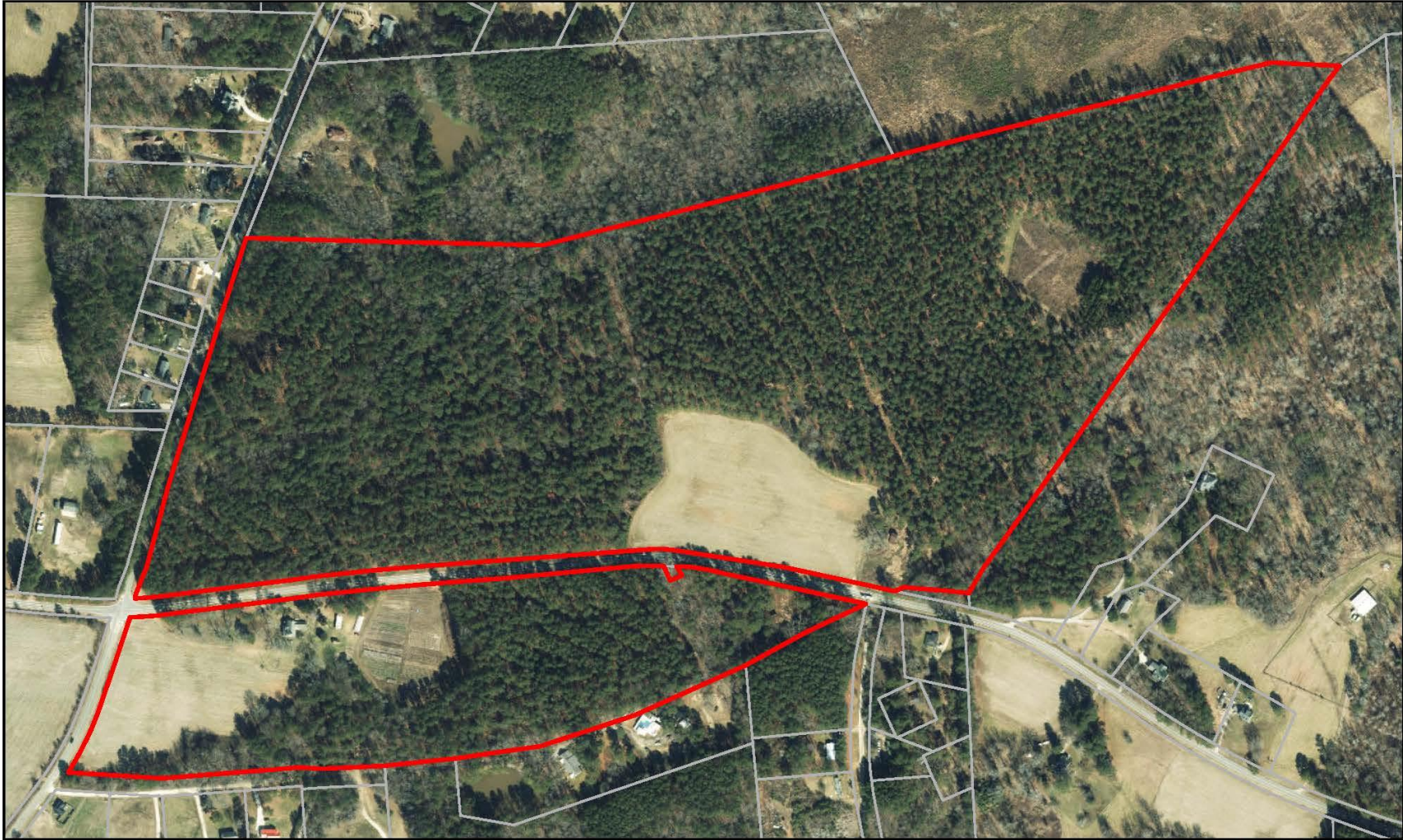
- Located in Marks Creek Rural Landscape
- Priority area for TLC and Wake County
- Over 2,000 acres protected through fee simple acquisitions and easements






Project History

- **TLC first started speaking with landowners about a conservation easement in 2008**
- **Very challenging funding landscape, trying to match six different funding sources**
- **Landowners decided to wait**
- **In 2020 we began working on the easement again**



Oaky Grove Farm

 Oaky Grove Farm

 Wake County Tax Parcels



Map created by TLC: 12-28-22

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 StatePlane North Carolina FIPS 3200 Feet

Funding

- **2022 Secured Funding:**
 - USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
 - NC ADFP Trust Fund
- **Still had funding gap**
- **First project brought to Wake County Farmland Preservation Program**
- **Funding from Wake County closed the gap**
- **Closing in next few months**



Long Term Benefits

- Continued production of food and fiber
- Scenic character of Shotwell Community maintained
- Historic district and farmhouse preserved
- Long term home for Karen Community Farm
- None of this would be possible without funding from Wake County





Karen Community Farm at Oaky Grove

Wendell, North Carolina



Htoo Saw



Jenn



What is the Karen Community Farm at Oaky Grove?

Karen Community Farm at Oaky Grove

has

5 Main Focuses

- Provide land
- Provide education
- Provide guidance
- Provide support
- Preserve farmland.

Oaky Grove Farm



Who are the Karen people?



FARMERS



Htoo Saw & Kee Lar





Kree's Flowers

GROW • PICK • DESIGN

Kree Paw Sain

GARDENERS



Shilar



Maisy Lucky



Eh Kaw Thaw

BAMBOO HOUSE



FARM STAND





CONTACT INFORMATION

Instagram

@karencommunityfarmatoakygrove

Facebook

Karen Community Farm at Oaky Grove

Website

karencommunityfarmnc.org

Location

5800 Turnipseed Road
Wendell, NC 27591





Questions ?