

# GASTON CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM

**GASTON COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT  
GASTON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**



# BACKGROUND – WHAT IS A CONSERVATION EASEMENT?

- A VOLUNTARY LEGAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN A LANDOWNER AND A LAND TRUST OR GOVERNMENT AGENCY
- KEEPS LAND PERMANENTLY AVAILABLE FOR OPEN SPACE BY RESTRICTING DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS
- LAND STAYS PRIVATELY OWNED





# WHY AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION MATTERS

- FARMS PROVIDE LOCAL FOOD, OPEN SPACE, AND RURAL CHARACTER
- PRESERVES SOIL HEALTH, CLEAN WATER, AND WILDLIFE HABITAT
- SUPPORTS LOCAL ECONOMY - JOBS, FARM TOURISM, AND AGRIBUSINESS
- ONCE FARMLAND IS LOST TO DEVELOPMENT, IT'S GONE FOREVER





# CURRENT STATE

- NORTH CAROLINA IS PROJECTED TO LOSE 1,197,300 ACRES OF FARMLAND BY 2040 (20.1% OF FARMLAND)
- GASTON COUNTY IS PROJECTED TO LOSE 11,400 ACRES OF FARMLAND BY 2040 (30.9% OF FARMLAND)
- DEVELOPMENT IS NECESSARY – BUT WE MUST BALANCE IT WITH AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION



# THE LANDOWNER'S DILEMMA

- FARMLAND OFTEN REPRESENTS A FAMILY'S RETIREMENT SAVINGS
- DEVELOPERS OFFER TOP DOLLAR, FAR BEYOND WHAT FARMING YIELDS
- WITHOUT ALTERNATIVES, FARMERS ARE CONVINCED TO SELL
- EASEMENT PAYMENTS PROVIDE A FAIR-MARKET, NON-DEVELOPMENT SOLUTION





# PROPOSED SOLUTION – COUNTY SUPPORTED EASEMENT FUND

- CREATE A PERMANENT ENDOWMENT FUND TO PURCHASE CONSERVATION EASEMENTS
- LEVERAGE STATE, FEDERAL, AND PRIVATE MATCHING DOLLARS
- TARGET FARMS WITH PRIME FARMLAND SOILS IN PRIORITY AREAS





# FINANCIAL ASK: FUNDING THE ENDOWMENT

- **INITIAL ASK WILL COME FROM REVENUE ASSOCIATED WITH LAND LOST TO DEVELOPMENT**
  - **10% OF REVENUE FROM NATURAL RESOURCES FEES: ~\$100,000 ANNUALLY**
  - **20% OF REVENUE FROM CIVIL PENALTIES LEVIED BY NR: ~\$10,000 ANNUALLY**
  - **PUV ROLL BACK FUNDS: ~\$65,000 ANNUALLY**





# KEEPING GASTON GROWING - SUSTAINABLY

- CONSERVATION EASEMENTS GIVE FARMERS OPTIONS
- AGRICULTURE IN GASTON IS BEING LOST TO DEVELOPMENT
- FINANCIAL SUPPORT EXISTS BUT IT IS OFTEN NOT ENOUGH
- LOCAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT WOULD HELP PRESERVE SOIL AND WATER QUALITY AND THE AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITY

