

GASTON CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM

GASTON COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

GASTON SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



GASTON COUNTY
Natural Resources

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**

