

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA

What is agricultural economic development?

Agricultural economic development (AED) addresses the creation, retention, expansion, and recruitment of agricultural and food-related businesses in a town, county, or region. AED projects are planned and implemented in conjunction with farmland preservation planning, strategic planning, and traditional economic development. Agricultural economic development can provide important institutional support for local food systems, and can help connect farmers and food entrepreneurs to resources at the local level. NCGT's Local Food Economies Initiative provides research, resources, and information for communities and local government staff.

Who handles agricultural economic development?

AED is typically managed either by hiring specific staff, such as an Agricultural Economic Developer or Director, or integrating duties into existing staff job descriptions in departments such as economic development or planning.

What are the policies and strategies that support agricultural economic development?

Communities are using a number of different strategies to incorporate the goals of AED into their strategic and comprehensive plans, and taking steps to create policies that support innovative AED programs:

- Create a Farmland Protection Plan and its associated advisory board;
- Include an agriculture or food system goal in the Comprehensive or Strategic Plan and assign resources;
- Adopt a specific policy statement through planning, such as inclusion of specific regulations in the UDO (Unified Development Ordinance) or individual ordinances;
- Establish a department or division with this focus and allotted budget funds;
- Incorporate AED into the economic development strategy or plan; and/or
- Establish cross-sector partnerships, such as public-private partnerships or nonprofits, focused on this work – typically through an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with other partners.

What's happening with AED in North Carolina?

Currently, there are three Agricultural Economic Developers in the state, funded and authorized in different ways - reflecting the many factors that inform decisions about establishing AED. There are at least ten counties or cities that are researching how to establish and fund AED at the local and regional government level. In addition, the [Economic Development Partnership of NC](#) is pursuing statewide recruitment of food manufacturers.

- **Mark Williams, Henderson County | Focus: Apple Industry | www.agrihc.org**
 2020 Plan: http://www.hendersoncountync.org/planning/ccp/sections/13_ag_element.pdf
This position was created as part of the comprehensive planning process, which emphasized the importance of the apple industry in Henderson County, and was county-funded. Mr. Williams directed the recruitment of Bold Rock Hard Cider company to Henderson County as a new market for the apple industry.
- **Dawn Jordan, Polk County | Focus: Markets and Mill Spring Ag Center | www.polkcountyfarms.org**
 Polk County: http://www.polknc.org/agricultural_economic_development.php#.V4Y5t7grJ_M
Ms. Jordan works in the first county to have an AED, a position created in 2011 in response to a land use planning process to balance preservation of farmland and natural resources with second-home and tourism development. The position works closely with small and mid-scale farmers, market gardens, and community advocates of local food systems.
- **Mike Ortosky, Orange County | Focus: Regional Markets & Processing | www.growinorangenc.com**
 Piedmont Food & Agriculture Processing Center: <http://pfapnc.org/>
Orange County created this position as a response to the impending loss of a university research farm and the need for county-level control of a community certified kitchen incubator. Mr. Ortosky focuses on creating new markets for farmers to encourage their continued farmland use, and on preservation and recruitment of additional food businesses.

Additional Information

More information about these AEDs, and agricultural economic & community development strategies, can be found on the Local Food Economies initiative page at www.cefs.ncsu.edu. For more information, contact Emily Edmonds, NCGT Extension & Outreach Program Manager, at emily_edmonds@ncsu.edu.