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Urban Agriculture in New Hanover County

By Evan Folds

Elected Member

New Hanover Soil & Water Conservation District's Board of Supervisors

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All concerns of human life belong in some way to agriculture. With more than 46,000 farms and cash receipts of more than \$11 billion, North Carolina knows this very well. But for a state at the top of so many agricultural categories, New Hanover County is unique – we are not an agricultural county.

Not only is New Hanover County geographically small, but it is almost completely urbanized. In fact, in May of 2019 the [Star News reported](#) that less than 10% of the city of Wilmington was left to be developed. Because our area is growing rapidly in population and land value is going through the roof, it is not surprising that we don't have many farms left. This can also be seen in the numbers, according to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture in 2007 there were 4,416 farms in New Hanover County, and in 2017 there were only 879.

It is safe to say we are not going to see the return of traditional farming here, but we can absolutely save farming in New Hanover County by adopting a focus on "urban agriculture".



Urban agriculture involves all forms of agricultural production occurring within or around cities. It can be as simple as a backyard hobby garden or as involved as a commercial farm on a vacant lot, and can involve techniques such as keeping chickens or bees, hydroponics, aquaponics, growing mushrooms, container gardening, or traditional in-ground farming.

One of the exciting things about urban agriculture is that, with attention to maximizing the value of space, it can be lucrative. One example is a farmer in British Columbia named Curtis Stone who makes [\\$100,000 per year](#) on a ¼ acre residential property. This sort of return may not be realistic for the average homeowner, but even a fraction of this value generated by homeowners in our area can significantly enhance the quality of life for many people.

Beyond economic development, there are many other important reasons for adopting urban agriculture as a regional focus. The average meal travels more than 1,500 miles to the plate, and the closer our food is to where we eat it the better it is for the environment and for our health. Natural farming methods also improve the quality of soil and water by increasing the microbial diversity and the amount of organic matter in the soil, which acts as a filter for toxins and a sponge for stormwater. In fact, an increase of only 1% in soil organic matter holds 25,000 gallons of water, or the equivalent of a 20x40' swimming pool that is 4' deep!

The New Hanover Soil & Water Conservation District is working hard to develop tools for urban agriculture and bring it to greater public awareness. For instance, we include in our strategic vision the goal of developing Outdoor Learning Centers at all area schools, and aim to increase the number of farms in New Hanover County by 25% over time.

If you want to become an urban farmer contact our office to get started, we can direct you to local resources, including the experience of our Board of Supervisors, the NHC Extension at the Arboretum, or our federal partner the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Be a farmer, start a garden!

Cost Share Programs Benefit Property Owners with Water Issues

By Haley Moccia
NHSCWD Field Technician

The New Hanover Soil and Water Conservation District (NHSWCD) mission is to protect and enhance water quality throughout New Hanover County through land conservation, stormwater management, technical support to citizens and organizations, and conservation education and outreach activities. We strive to accomplish this mission by

offering New Hanover County property owners the ability to participate in cost share programs that either partially or fully covers the installation costs of devices that benefit water quality initiatives on our area.



Some of the more popular devices that have been installed through these programs include beautiful rain gardens that attract interesting wildlife and cisterns that capture roof runoff and can be used to water backyard landscaping. This year we have added tree plantings to our installation agenda! Not only do these trees provide a great water quality benefit by taking in the polluted stormwater runoff, but trees also provide shade, soil stability, and wind shelter.

If you are interested, there are three different cost share programs offered, and eligibility for each is dependent on property location. If you would like to find out what program you may be eligible for, please contact Haley Moccia at hmoccia@nhcgov.com or give her a call at 910-798-7138.

Matt Collogan Elected to the Board of Supervisors

By Staff

Matt Collogan was elected to the Board of Supervisors in November 2020. He joins the board for a four-year term that began on December 7, when he was sworn in to the position.

Collogan is an environmental educator, gardener, and advocate for sustainable farmers and agriculture. His mission with New Hanover Soil and Water Conservation District is to share with residents the very resources he's benefitted from offered through the District and its state and federal partners. For example, he's utilized programs like CCAP for financial assistance to install a cistern at his house and NRCS funding to construct seasonal high tunnels (similar to greenhouses) for growing organic produce.



During his 18 years living in Wilmington, Collogan says that he realizes that the work of the District is indispensable as we all face the growing challenges of ensuring access to clean water, healthy food, and resilience from environmental change like increased flooding,

hurricanes, and sea level rise. As a graduate of UNCW's Environmental Studies Department, Matt is a *proud* member of the Seahawk family. An avid birder, kayaker, grower, and composter, you can often find Collogan at functions of the Coastal Composting Council, Cape Fear Food Council, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, and the Tidal Creek Cooperative grocery store where he is one of over 1,600 owners. He is also an honorary member of the Cape Fear Garden Club.

Conservation Contests Are Underway in New Hanover County

This year, students can compete in these creative categories: essay, poster, graphic design, and public speaking. The theme of the 2021 Student Conservation Contest is "We All Live in a Watershed." To learn more, visit: <https://soilwater.nhcgov.com/programs/education-and-outreach/> .



Questions or Comments? Contact New Hanover Soil & Water Conservation District at (910) 798-7137 or soilwater@nhcgov.com.