



Building Relationships and Meeting Needs of Small Farming Operations

East National Technology Support Center (ENTSC) Small Farm Assistance Webinar Series - August 30, 2017

Presenters:

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South Carolina NRCS District Conservationist

Moderator:

Eric Fleming

ENTSC, Agricultural Engineer





Building Relationships and Meeting Needs of Small Farming Operations

Welcome



- Overview
- Meet Our Presenters
- How to Submit Questions
- Follow-up After the Webinar
- Future topics in the Small Farm Assistance series will be:
 - Strategies for Mitigating Small Farm Site Limitations, September 27, 2017
 - Conservation Systems for Micro-scale Livestock Operations, October 25, 2017
 - Conservation Planning Assistance for Supporting Small Farm and Community Garden Productivity, November 29, 2017





Building Relationships and Meeting Needs of Small Farming Operations

White House Special Council for Strong Cities Strong Communities



- Rocky Mount – Nash and Edgecombe Counties
- Goals
 - Talent Development, Jobs and Education
 - Community Health and Development
 - Growing The Regional Food Economy
 - Focus on Community Gardens, and Revitalizing the Small Scale/ Limited Resource Farms Economy Within City Limits





Building Relationships and Meeting Needs of Small Farming Operations

White House Special Council for Strong Cities Strong Communities



Growing The Regional Food Economy – The Urgent Need!

- Education and Training
- Historically High Under Employment in Minority Communities
- Historically Distressed Communities and High Levels of Hunger
- Economically Distressed Community





Building Relationships and Meeting Needs of Small Farming Operations

Engaging – Where to start...before you start.

History

- What is the history of the market segment (i.e. small farm ag. in the region)?

Secondary Target Audience and Future Partners

- Other than farmers - who has a known and vested interest in the market segment?
- Other than farmers - who has an unknown interest in the market segment?

Building your Case

- And, why are these important questions to ask?





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Engaging – Where to start...before you start.



Primary Target Audient (The Farmer)

- Demographics
- Socio-demographics
- Trends
- Psychographics.....*History and Perceptions*





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Pre-engagement – Dipping a toe in.



Paint a Profile Picture - From data gathered on primary and secondary audiences, gauge perceptions related to the economic sector, the target audiences and partners, and of “boots on the ground”.

- Questions asked around - feel, view, history, positive steps, hurdles, needs, wants





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Identify and Accept Perceptions.

“Our minds influence the key activity of the brain, which then influences everything; perception, cognition, thoughts and feelings, personal relationships; they're all a projection of you.” –Deepak Choprah

Perceptions are our biggest hurdle in outreach

Perceptions are individualized based off of first-hand, inter-familiarly shared or generational experience. You can not fight them. However, you can learn about and respect them, and know how not to feed into negative perceptions - making them larger hurdles.





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Perceptions, what makes them so important to identify

- They can build walls between partners and customers
- They can keep you from communicating
- They can make or break trust
- They can spread to other identified groups
- They can make it nearly impossible to establish relationships



Identify

- Identify Perceptions
- Learn the history of those perceptions and trends
- Respect perceptions and use that knowledge to help you organize your outreach, partnership building and method of communications





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Real life Example of Using This Information and Approach to Make an Impact



Rocky Mount – Nash and Edgecombe Counties
Growing The Regional Food Economy
Focus on Community Gardens, and
Revitalizing the Small Scale/ Limits
Resource Farms Economy Within City Limits

Talent Development, Jobs and Education
Community Health and Development





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Real life Example of Using This Information and Approach to Make an Impact



Jumping Right In Head First

- The good and the bad
- Outcomes

Following the steps we've talked about

- The lightbulb moments





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Perceptions – Working with Historically Underserved Customers in a Charged Environment



- Identify Perceptions
- Learn the History of Those Perceptions and Trends

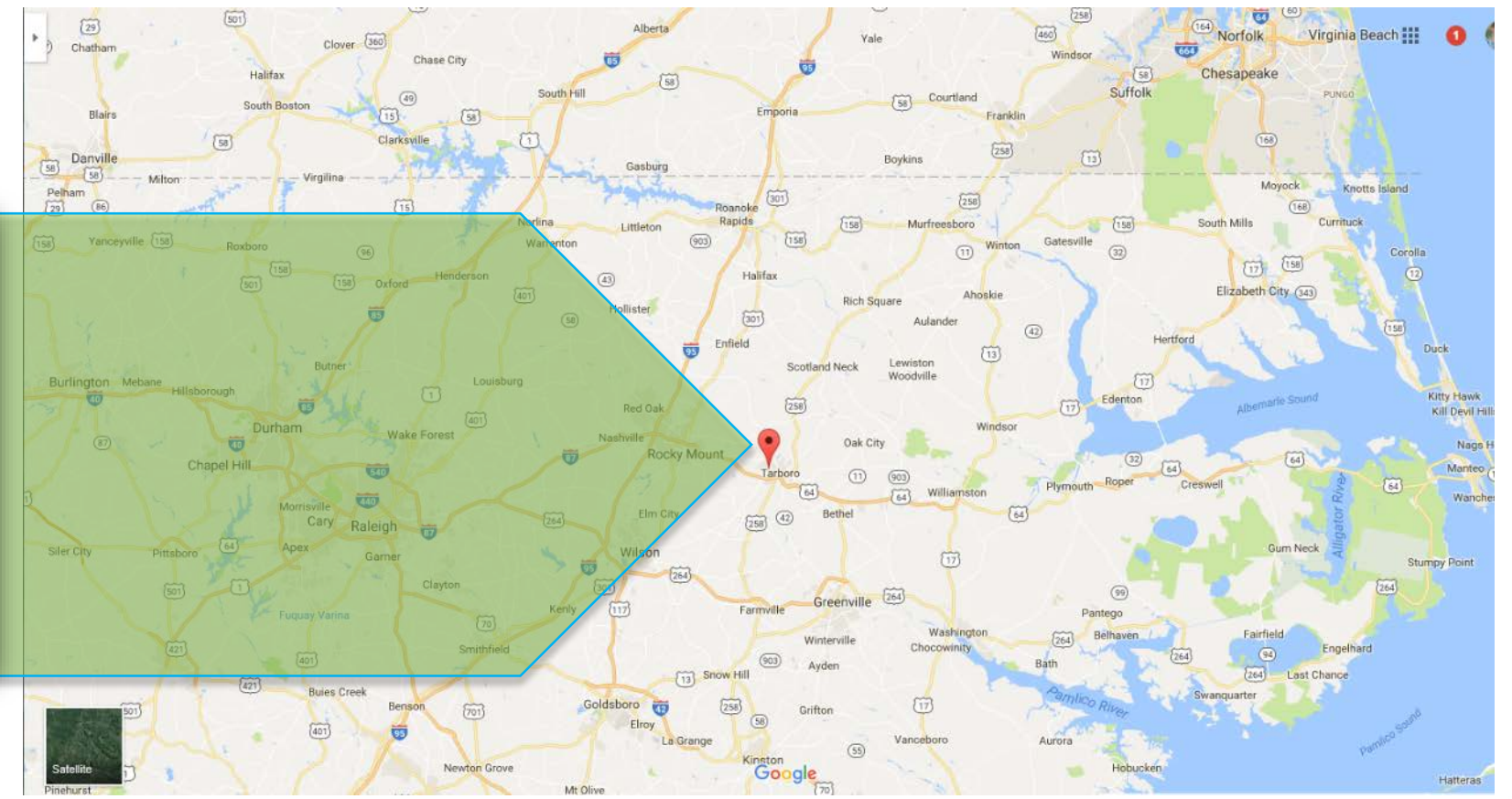
How one spot can make all the differences!



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Perceptions – Layers



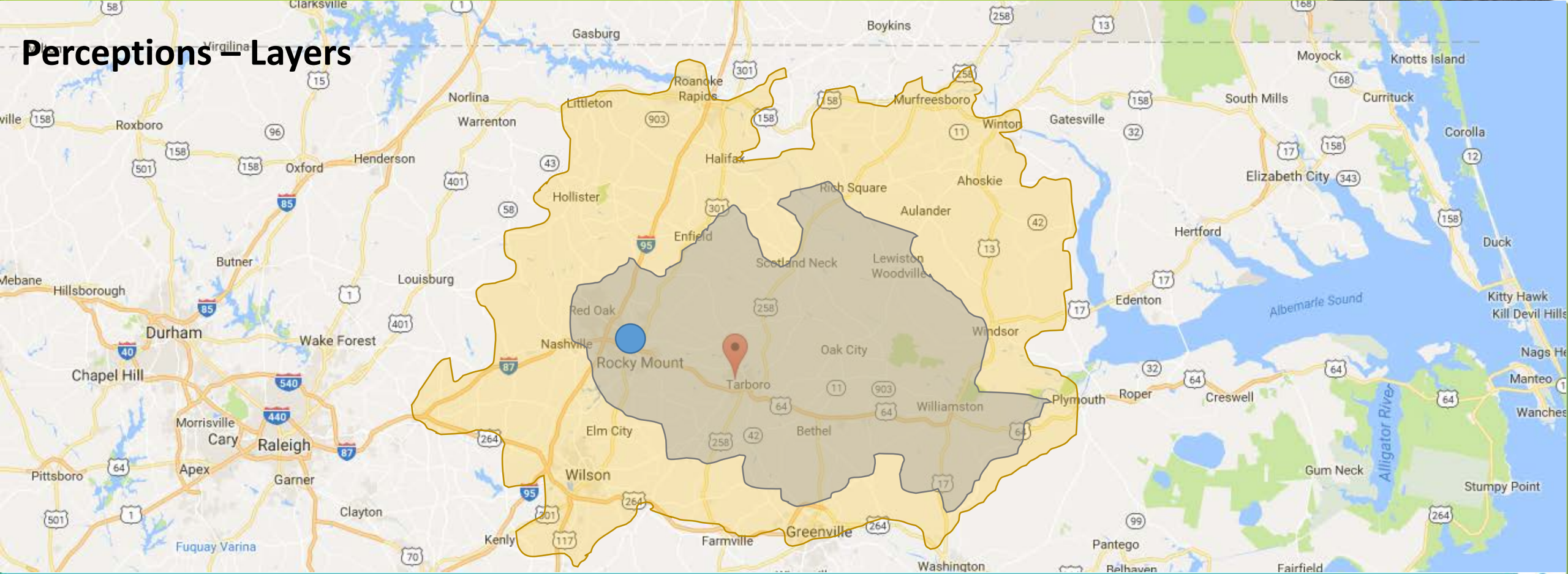
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Perceptions – Layers



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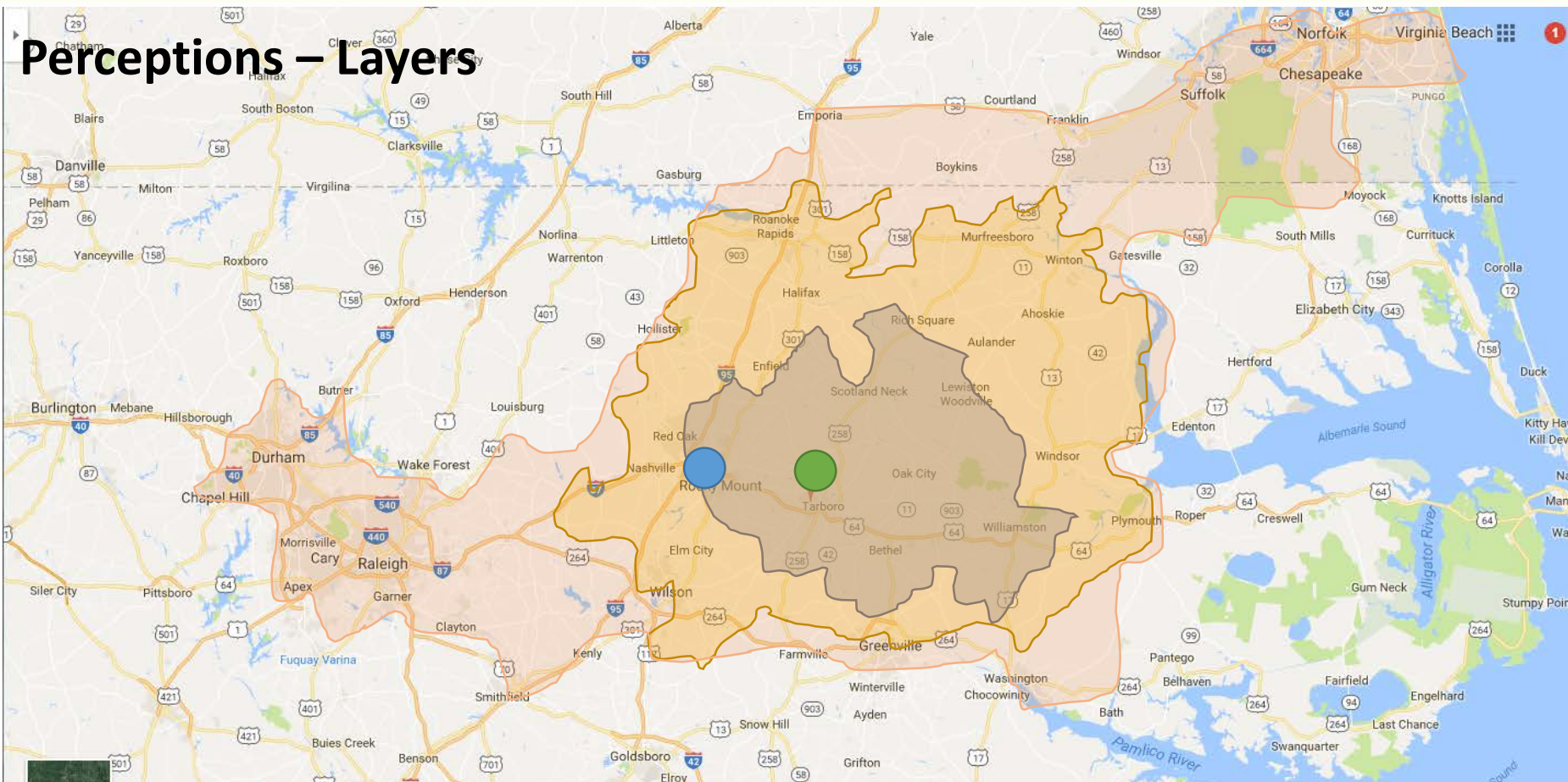


Perceptions – Layers





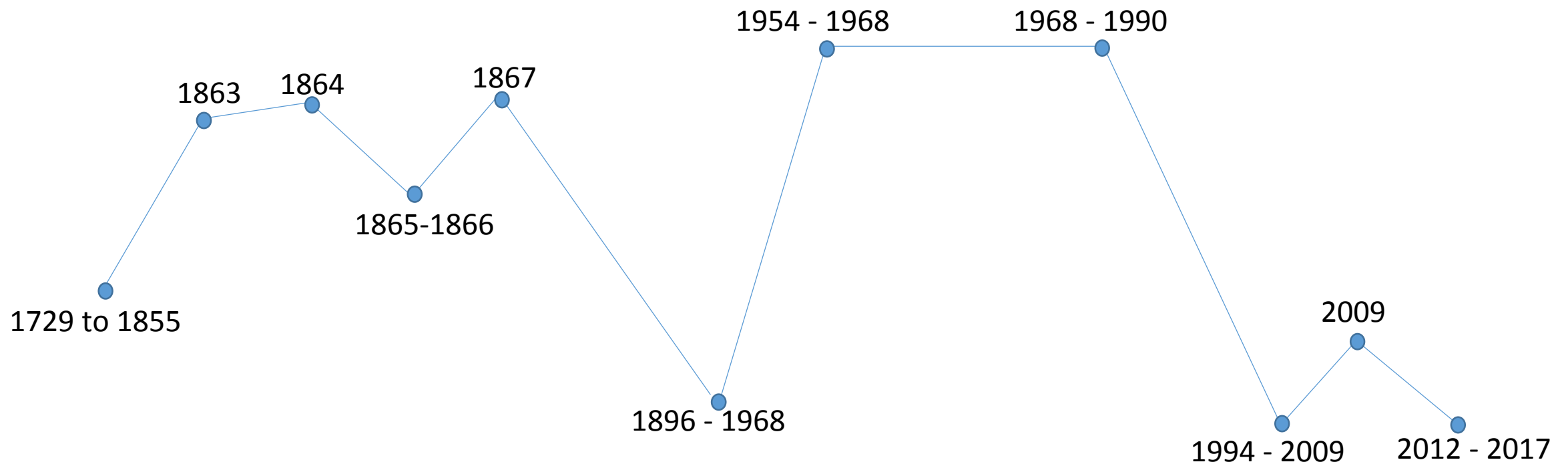
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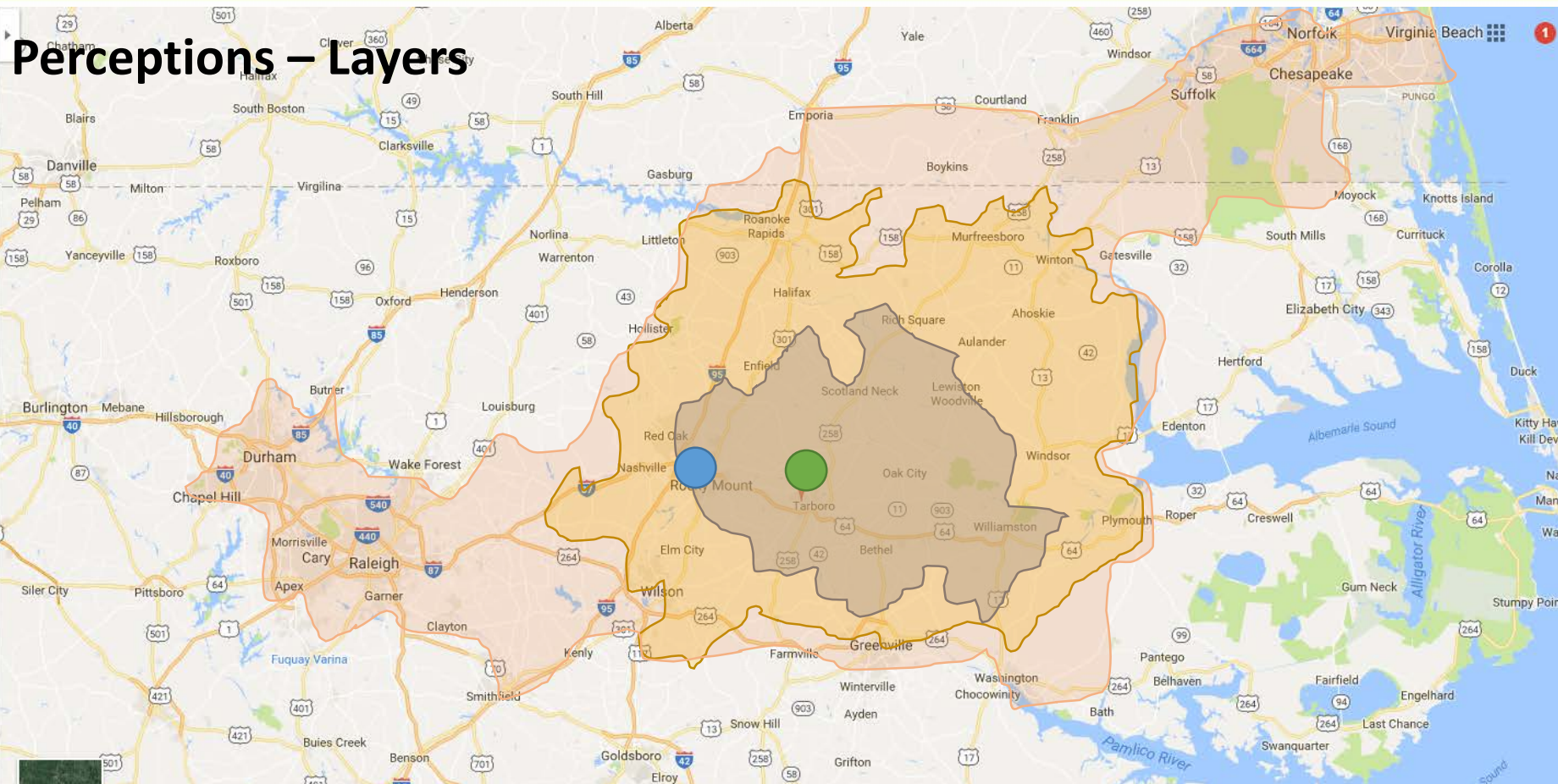
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Perceptions – Layers That Build Over Time





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Change in Tactics



Not feeding into the perceptions

- Finding the best gatekeepers to reach the target audiences
- Identifying traditional partners that need to be kept in the loop, but maybe at arms length
- Build a coalition
- Reevaluating your approach and your steps
- Learning that it's the thought that counts...but





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Messages



Establishing Trust and Building it Up

- Give Ownership
- Help Build Value
- Show How the Customer is a Vital Piece of a Much Larger Picture
- Locally Led is needed
- Provide Creative Alternatives – Individualized
- Communicating to the Customer - Repeat After Me, No Acronyms





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Messages

One Size Doesn't Fit All

- Delivering the not so great news
- Pointing out other issues

Place Based Work

- Build your network – you cannot solve it all and you need alternatives

Locally Led Process

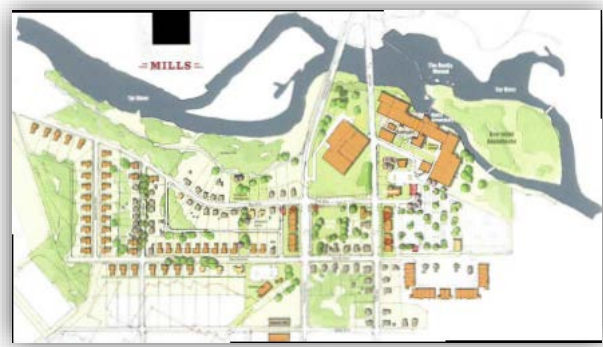
- Giving power in the process builds trust with all of your audiences



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Your Success in Outreach CAN Have a Ripple Effect.



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- Lori Bataller, District Conservationist, Berkeley and Charleston, SC

- Bishopville, SC larger farms
- Established customer base, many generations
- Outreach here vs. there
- Getting to know the groups
- Berkeley Outreach meetings
- Willingness to learn and an open mind
- Speak at events





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Beginning Farmer

versus

Established Farmer

- Need to explain everything, we use acronyms
- May take many tries to get everything in place for farm registration
- Doesn't understand NRCS Timelines
- Does not understand that financial assistance does not cover the full cost of practice installation

- Easy to understand terminology
- Aware of the process to register farm
- Cognizant of timelines in the process
- Understands financial assistance is not full payment for practice installation





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Case Study: Wabi Sabi Farm, LLC

- Small strawberry and vegetable farm in Cordesville, SC
- Johnna Livingston, Farm Owner and Operator
- Jimmy Livingston, Property Owner and Manager
- Employees range as needed between 2 and 4
- Property is approximately 20 acres, Farm size is 13 acres
- Began farming in 2011, 1 acre vegetable garden
- Brought strawberries into the mix the next year
- Currently farming 9 acres of vegetables and strawberries





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NRCS Program Assistance

Steps to assistance

- Met with Producer on the farm initially in the fall of 2011
- Provided her with information about establishing farm records
- Discussed options, many farm visits were made to ensure they understood NRCS guidelines
- Worked with her to obtain eligibility for programs, including Farm and Tract number, SAM.gov and DUNS



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NRCS Program Assistance

- Steps to assistance

- Hesitant to sign documents
- Transitioning to Organic
- Importance of talking to producer, direct deposit forms, deadlines, locations of practices
- In the words of Johnna when discussing the initial farm visit “Opened doors, they did not realize existed”



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Conservation Activity Plans

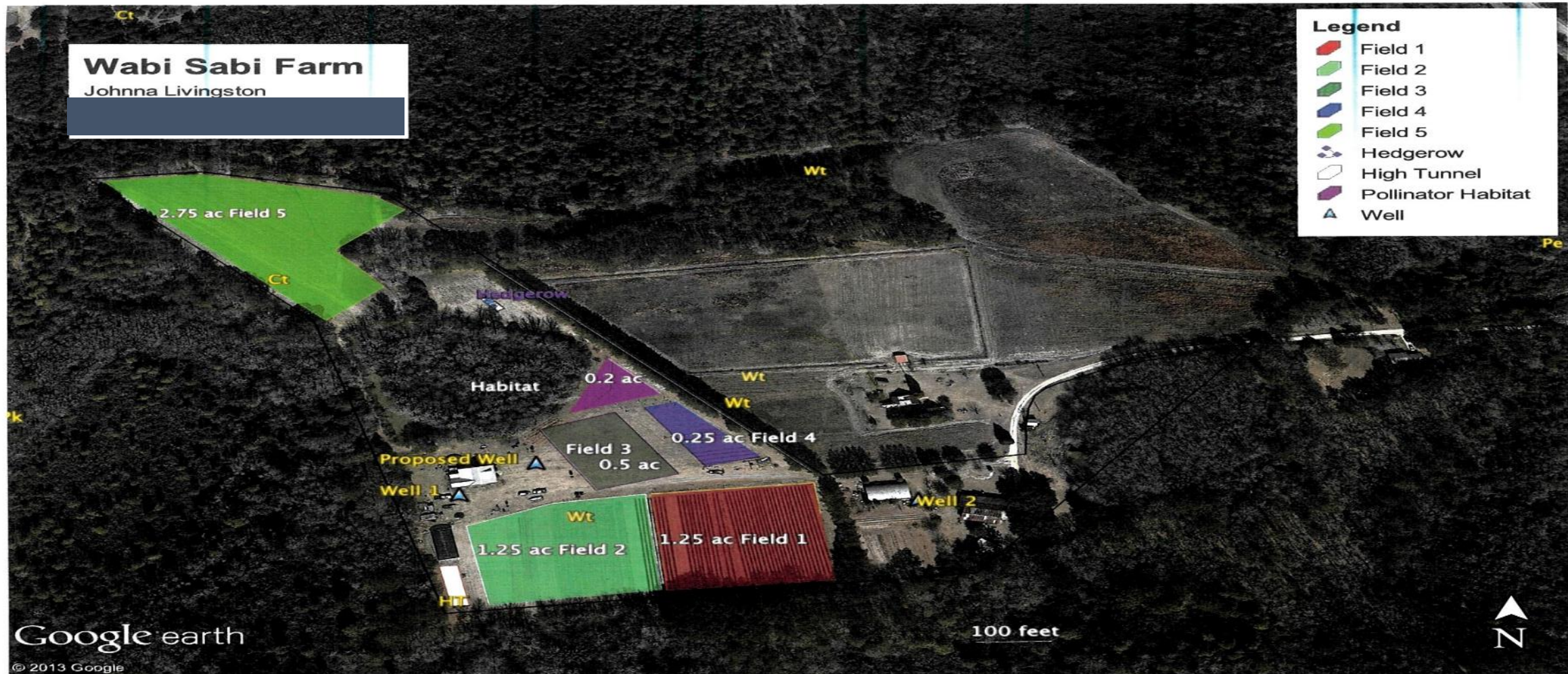
Transitioning to Organic or any CAP plan

- Make sure the producer understand what product they are going to receive
- The producer needs to be aware of the cost and the process to receive payment
- Timelines, Waivers, Finished products
- Is this necessary?





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Fast forward three to five years

- Participant has installed two High Tunnels, well, irrigation system, irrigation pipeline
- Flooding of October 2015, 1000 year rainfall event, lost winter crop that had been planted
- Hurricane Matthew, October 2016 damage to both High Tunnels including plastic loss and bent poles, more rainfall than the previous years flood
- Cold snaps in the spring that killed strawberry plants
- Able to remain farming during tough times due to diversification
- “Without the assistance of NRCS we could not have installed so many conservation practices” Johnna Livingston





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Current work on the farm

- Contract signed for new practices on field 3 of the conservation plan map
- Practices include cover crop to help minimize weed pressure, working with the State Agronomist to help determine the best types of cover crop
- High Tunnel, they are also going to have the company repair the other two and replace the plastic that was damaged during the storm, this work is paid for by the participant not NRCS
- Pollinator Habitat, permanent vegetation instead of annual flower seeding
- Irrigation well, pumping plan and pipeline
- Johnna has indicated “without the assistance of NRCS, the infrastructure would have been almost impossible to obtain”



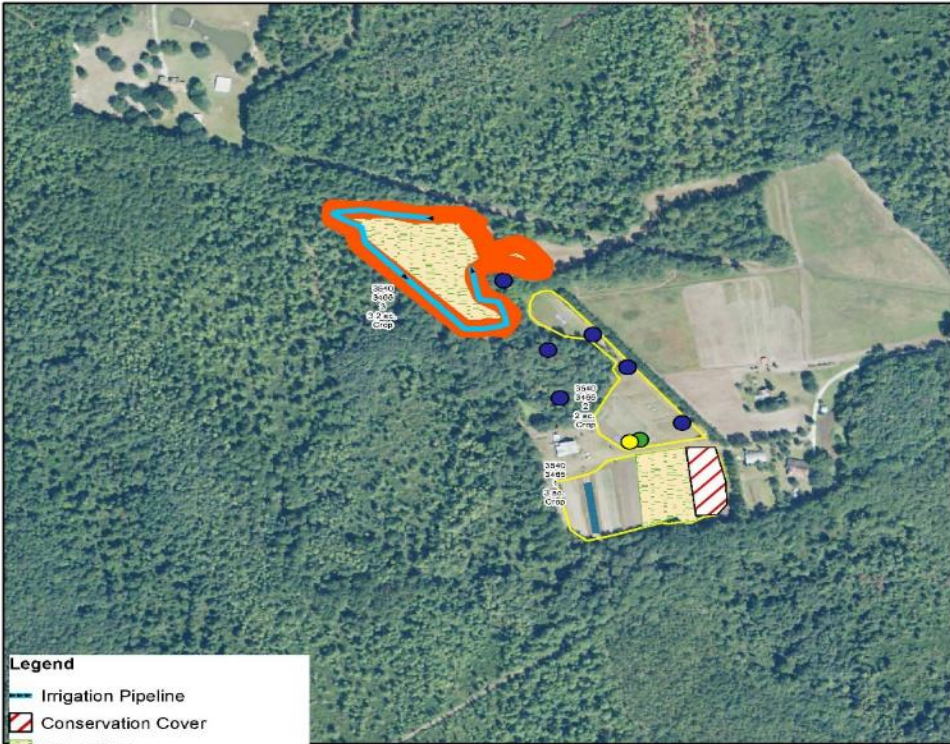
Coservation Plan Map

Date: 7/11/2017

Customer(s): WABI SABI FARM LLC
District: BERKELEY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Field Office: CHARLESTON SERVICE CENTER
Agency: USDA NRCS
Assisted By: LORI BATALLER



Prepared with assistance from USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

- Legend**
- Irrigation Pipeline
 - Conservation Cover
 - Cover Crop
 - High Tunnel System
 - Irrigation System, Microirrigation
 - Pumping Plant
 - Structures for Wildlife
 - Water Well
 - Consplan

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• Conservation Plan Map

- Make the map easy for participant to understand
- Work with the producer and their contractor to tie together the map and Conservation Plan/Schedule of Operations
- Review the map over the course of working together, remember their needs may change over time, be prepared to work with them to incorporate the changes

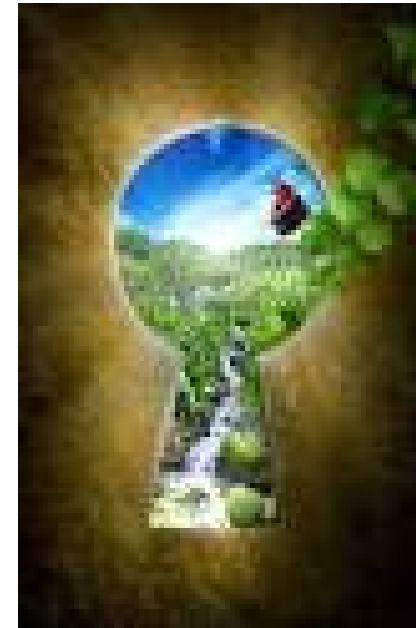


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Benefits to our office

- They have become community advocates for NRCS
- They are willing to speak to others about NRCS
- They often have ideas that are new to us
- It is refreshing to work with new producers, to see our agency through their eyes



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Case Study: Fresh Future Farms

- Fresh Future Farm grows healthy, chemical free foods (livestock coming soon!) and makes them available, along with basic grocery items at affordable prices in an underserved community in the North Charleston neighborhood of Chicora-Cherokee community



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Outreach Counts!!

- Met Ms. Jenkins through a participant in the New and Beginning Farmers Class.
- Those initial contacts did not lead to a contract, they were not ready but, they found out details about farm registration and the process of making an application for financial assistance
- We currently have a contract with Fresh Future Farms for a High Tunnel and Pollinator Habitat





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Conservation Plan Map

- Simple map
- Easy to locate practices for the landowner
- Make sure this is their vision and they understand where everything is located
- Use the Conservation Plan to discuss standards and implementation schedule

Conservation Plan Map

Date: 3/16/2017

Customer(s): FRESH FUTURE FARM
District: CHARLESTON SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
Approximate Acres: 0.8

Field Office: CHARLESTON SERVICE CENTER
Agency: USDA NRCS
Assisted By: LORI BATALLER
State and County: SC, Charleston County



Prepared with assistance from USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

- Legend**
- Practices (polygons)**
- Conservation Cover
 - High Tunnel System
 - Consplan





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Key Points to Remember

- The process is new to the beginning farmer
- Be patient and explain everything in layman's terms
- The new farmer may require a few more site visits
- Don't expect the new farmer to simply go along with your recommendations
- Listen to them and pay attention to clues, especially the questions they have concerning all steps of the process
- Be prepared to review their contracts often
- Keep in contact, don't let too long of a time pass between contacts



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