



## Albemarle County **AGRICULTURAL & FORESTAL DISTRICTS**



*Established "to conserve and protect and to encourage the development and improvement of the Commonwealth's agricultural and forestal lands for the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products..."and "...to conserve and protect agricultural and forestal lands as valued natural and ecological resources which provide essential open space for clean air sheds, watershed protection, wildlife habitat, as well as for aesthetic purposes."*

### ***Agricultural and Forestal Districts***

Ag/For Districts are rural conservation areas reserved for the production of agricultural products, timber, and the maintenance of open space land as an important economic and environmental resource. Districts are voluntary. They are initiated by a landowner or group of landowners as a mutual undertaking with the local government.

By establishing a District, property owners agree not to convert their farm, forestland and other open space lands to more intense commercial, industrial or residential uses during the term of the District, currently 8 years for local districts and 10 years for state districts. In return, the county and Commonwealth agree not to take actions or make infrastructure investments that will place increased pressure on landowners to convert land in the district to more intense land uses during the term of the District.

### ***Albemarle County Agricultural and Forestal District Program***

Ag/For Districts are rural zones reserved for the production of agricultural products and timber and the maintenance of open space land as an important economic and environmental resource. They are established according to state guidelines with the approval of the local governing body. In essence, a district constitutes a voluntary agreement between landowners and the government that no new, non-agricultural uses will take place in the district.

By voluntarily establishing or joining districts, landowners have committed to continuing rural land uses such as farming or forestry, and agree not to subdivide their land to a more intensive non-agricultural use during the term of the district (with the exception of family subdivisions). Participating in a district does not change the zoning of property.

Landowners can withdraw land from the district any time during the district review process. Heirs can withdraw land within two years of the death of the landowner. In addition, for "good and reasonable cause," an owner can petition the Board of Supervisors for permission to withdraw land.

## *Joining or Establishing a District*

**Qualifications:** Any landowner may submit an application. There are two kinds of Ag/For Districts: local and state. State districts must have at least 200 acres in one or more contiguous parcels to establish a core. A parcel not contiguous may be included if it is within one mile of the boundary of the core. A local district must have at least 25 acres in one or more contiguous parcels to establish a core. There are no minimum or maximum size requirements for individual parcels. There are fees associated with the creation of a district and the withdrawal of a parcel from a district that is not undergoing its periodic review. There are no fees to add to an existing district.

**How to Apply:** Applications are available from the Community Development Department, North Wing, County Office Building, 401 McIntire Road, Charlottesville, Virginia, 22902, or online at [www.albemarle.org](http://www.albemarle.org). A copy of Albemarle County's Agricultural and Forestal District Ordinance is also available online at [www.albemarle.org/agfor](http://www.albemarle.org/agfor).

## *Benefits of AF Districts*

**Tax Benefits:** Qualified land in **state** Ag/For Districts only is eligible for use-value, or land use taxation whether or not the local government has a county-wide use-value program. In addition, if the county decides to rescind general land use value assessment, landowners in Districts would continue to pay lower taxes so long as the land continued to meet state eligibility standards. **Contact the Albemarle County Real Estate Department with any questions pertaining to use-value or land use taxation.**

**Community Benefits:** Districts help protect productive farm, forest, and other open space lands which contribute significantly to a communities rural appeal and character. The districts help protect surface and ground water supplies as well as other natural resources, such as wildlife, by open space, farms, and forests. Ag/For District also help promote efficient community development pattern by helping concentrate new development in and around existing communities where services can be provided in the most cost effective manner.

**Restrictions on Government:** Districts offer some protection from eminent domain. Acquisition of land for power lines, roadways, and other infrastructure within a District is subject to a special public review process. Local governments may not enact laws within a district that would unreasonably restrict farm structures, farming, or forestry.



For more information, contact the Community Development Department at 434-296-5832.