

North Carolina Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Strategic Plan



Funding Strategies
Supervisor Training
Conservation Education
External Partnerships
Communications
Marketing

Acknowledgement

The NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts expresses appreciation to the NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation, Inc. and to the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund for their overall support in the development of this strategic plan. This strategic plan was made possible through funding provided by the Trust Fund.



**North Carolina Foundation for
Soil & Water Conservation, Inc.**



Cover photo taken at the John Langdon Farm in Benson, N.C.
The Langdons were named North Carolina's 2010 Outstanding Conservation Farm Family

Cover design and photo by
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NORTH CAROLINA ■ ASSOCIATION OF ■ SOIL & WATER ■ CONSERVATION ■ DISTRICTS

August 2, 2010

Dear Fellow Conservationists:

All my life I have heard the old adage, “if you fail to plan, you plan to fail” and I know from experience that is correct. If you consider the natural resource challenges facing North Carolina, I believe that adage is even more relevant today, especially for conservation Districts and their Association. If local Districts and the Association are to remain the State’s predominant advocate for voluntary, incentive-based conservation on working lands, looking down the road with vision, foresight, and purpose is critically important. For the sake of present and future generations that depend on us to protect the State’s natural resources, we cannot afford to fail.

The Association’s three-year strategic plan evolved from a grassroots planning effort that provided an opportunity for all 492 district supervisors to engage in the process by offering ideas and other input gained through experience in the Districts. Technical staff and a number of very important external partners also provided valuable input. Collectively we put our best foot forward in the development of a meaningful plan that will move the Association forward today, and in the years to come. Now, we must embrace the challenge to fully implement the plan in order to realize our vision: *A viable state association that enhances the effectiveness of soil and water conservation districts to protect and conserve natural resources for future generations.*

I want to express appreciation to the NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation, Inc. and to the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund for their support in the development of this plan. Without funding made possible through the Trust Fund and overall support from the Foundation, the development of this plan would not have been possible.

These are exciting times for our Association as the plans and programs we’ve initiated begin to move forward. Implementing the strategic plan will maintain forward momentum as we work individually and collectively to conserve, protect, and use wisely all the State’s natural resources.

Sincerely,

James M. Ferguson
2010 President

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Executive Summary

The purpose of The North Carolina Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' (Association) 2010-2013 Strategic Plan is to provide direction and guidance, through established goals and concrete measurable objectives that will help the Association realize its recently established vision:

A viable state association that enhances the effectiveness of soil and water conservation districts to protect and conserve natural resources for future generations

The strategic plan should be considered a dynamic document. Timely updates and reviews will help insure its relevance and effectiveness as the Association moves forward.

The Association realized that the best strategic planning process would be a process that would be deep-rooted in the belief in locally led conservation, with input flowing directly from the 96 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the 492 District Supervisors that serve those Districts. The Aycock Group was hired to facilitate this "bottom up" strategic planning process and provide assistance in creating this document.

The strategic planning process began with written surveys being sent to all 492 District Supervisors and phone surveys conducted with a smaller group of supervisors chosen at random. The Association also believes that the opinions and ideas from its external partners are important. Different surveys were completed by external partners, both electronically and by phone. The marketing firm, Sheer and Associates Inc, assisted The Aycock Group in conducting the surveys and the analysis of the surveys.

Utilizing the information from the surveys, The Aycock Group facilitated eight strategic planning meetings across the state at the regularly scheduled area spring meetings, giving every District and each individual District Supervisor an opportunity to be engaged. District staffs were also engaged in the spring area meeting discussions.

Eight broad categories of priorities, as listed below, emerged from the individual spring area meetings. Priorities were identified by consensus during spring area meetings.

These priorities are not listed in order of importance. (The number of spring area meetings and the number of priorities (8) are unrelated)

- Advocate better to County Commissioners and other local leaders
- Educate ourselves, our partners, political leaders and citizens
- Maintain and increase funding
- Hire an Executive Director
- Improve advocacy
- Develop outreach efforts
- Create a comprehensive marketing strategy
- Improve communication internally and externally

A final leadership retreat was facilitated by The Aycock Group and included the Association's Executive and Strategic Planning Committees. The priorities from the spring area meetings and the information from the internal and external surveys were used to develop the vision, mission, goals and objectives for the Association.

Association's Mission Statement:

The purpose of the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts is to connect, coordinate and build the capacity of soil and water conservation districts to help all citizens protect and conserve natural resources.

Unique Characteristics of the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

What we do

The NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts are unique in comparison to other organizations. The Association and the local Districts focus broadly on all natural resources of the state, unlike many other organizations that focus on a specific environmental issue or natural resource. Also, Districts do not focus solely on landowner or environmental issues but work to balance these topics for the benefit of the citizens at large and the long term sustainability of the land, water, and related natural resources. Therefore, the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Association have the unique advantage of understanding how different aspects of the environment relate to each other and how these issues affect landowners and the State's natural resources.

How we do it

The NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts are distinctive because of their belief and adherence to the concept of locally led conservation through voluntary, incentive based programs and assistance. Soil and Water Conservation Districts work with people through one on one relationships, partnerships, and collaborative efforts, unlike other organizations that work through regulatory control and enforcement.

Where we do it

The NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts has the unique characteristic that it has 492 District Supervisors spread across the state's 100 counties who direct local conservation programs. This strength in numbers and geographical distribution gives the Association opportunity for even greater influence and positive effects.

Why we do it

The Soil and Water District Supervisors are engaged in their work for many reasons. However one unifying reason is, as the established vision states, *"to protect and conserve natural resources for future generations"*

The Strategic Planning Process for This Project

The NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts successfully implemented a “bottom up” strategic planning process that would actively engage the entire organization while also obtaining feedback from outside partners. The Aycock Group was engaged to facilitate this process.

The 492 elected and appointed District Supervisors from across the state of North Carolina, who direct their local District's conservation programs began the process, shaped it and led it to the outcomes presented in this plan. There was also significant engagement of the professional district staff that serves the local Districts.

Surveys

The Aycock Group collaborated with Sheer and Associates Inc, to utilize surveys as tools to gather information from local conservation Districts, individual District Supervisors, and a number of external partners.

Surveys of District Supervisors and Districts December 2009 and January 2010

1. District Written Surveys (one survey per District)
96 Districts surveyed; 47 responses (49%)
2. Supervisor's Individual Written Surveys
452 supervisors surveyed; 103 responses (22.7%)
3. Supervisor Surveys Conducted by Phone Interview
24 of 37 supervisors surveyed by telephone (64.8%)
(Phone surveys allowed for follow up questions and for probing into why supervisors answered questions in the manner they did.)

External Partner Telephone and Electronic Surveys December 2009 and January 2010

1. 12 of 17 partners responded electronically or were surveyed by phone; (70.5%)

See Appendix A and B for additional information.

Eight Spring Area Meetings – Strategic Planning Throughout the State

Utilizing the results of the mail and telephone surveys, The Aycock Group facilitated eight strategic planning sessions at regularly scheduled spring area meetings. (Area meetings are held by the Association in geographical regions of the state as an opportunity for Districts in an area to meet together). The meetings were well attended and produced lively discussion and engagement.

Eight Spring Area Meetings

February and March 2010

Area 1	March 2	Lake Junaluska Conference Center, Haywood County
Area 2	March 11	Silver Spoon Supper Club, Alleghany County
Area 3	March 4	Festival House, Person County
Area 4	Feb 25	Johnston County Ag Center
Area 5	Feb 18	Deadwood Restaurant, Martin County
Area 6	March 9	Pamlico Community College
Area 7	Feb 11	Cumberland County Ag Center Auditorium
Area 8	March 3	Lincoln County Ag Center

Attendees at each area meeting discussed the following two questions:

1. What are the specific needs and opportunities of your District and your area?
2. How can the Association best help you address these needs, problems and opportunities?

Each spring area meeting concluded with a small group and large group exercise where consensus was reached on a list of priorities for the Association. (Consensus Workshop Method was used, from Technology of Participation, The Institute of Cultural Affairs in the U.S. A.)

The Aycock Group analyzed the priorities for the Association from each of the spring area meetings. From this analysis, it was clear that common themes and priorities for the Association emerged. The fact that there were eight meetings and eight priorities is a coincidence and not related.

Priorities from the Spring Area Meetings

Advocate better to County Commissioners and local leaders

- Train supervisors on how to advocate to local officials and political leaders.
- Develop statewide support for advocacy at the local level.

Educate ourselves, our partners, political leaders and citizens

- Continue to develop leadership training for supervisors and staff.
- Develop and implement programs on many topics.

Maintain and increase funding

- Pursue normal sources of funding, grants and alternate sources of funding.
- Advocate for funding and market successfully to increase funding.

Hire an Executive Director

- Define role and job description.
- Define how the Association will pay for an Executive Director.

Improve advocacy

- Develop a system to involve all supervisors in advocacy.
- The Executive Director will be an advocate as part of his/her role.

Develop outreach efforts

- Create programs in schools and programs for non-agricultural citizens.

Create a comprehensive marketing strategy

- Articulate a clear message and identify clear tools to deliver this message.

Improve communication internally and externally

- Develop a communication plan

See Appendix C for summaries of each of the eight spring area meetings.

The Leadership Retreat

The leadership retreat held on March 31, 2010 focused on the future of the organization. The Association's Executive and Strategic Planning Committees created the vision, mission, goals and objectives at this retreat. These were based directly upon the list of priorities from the spring area meetings as well as the overall information gathered from the spring area meetings and the surveys. For example, each priority stated previously is reflected in the goals and objectives.

Therefore, the core of the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' Strategic Plan 2010-2013, which consists of the vision, mission, goals and objectives, is deep-rooted and flows from ideas and input from Districts, their supervisors, and staff, as well as input from external partners.

Vision and Mission of NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Vision

A viable state association that enhances the effectiveness of soil and water conservation districts to protect and conserve natural resources for future generations

Mission

The purpose of the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts is to connect, coordinate and build the capacity of soil and water conservation districts to help all citizens protect and conserve natural resources.

Goals and Objectives

Definitions

Goals are what the Association plans to accomplish to meet its vision, mission and current needs.

Objectives are what the Association plans to do in order to accomplish the goals it has established and are often measurable.

Goal 1: Prepare supervisors to advocate to all local and state officials.

- Objective 1A: Offer assistance on storm water practices, watershed protection and sedimentation control efforts to cities and counties as well as The NC Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) and The NC League of Municipalities (NCLM) (ongoing).
- Objective 1B: Develop model cooperative arrangements with cities and counties to provide needed environmental conservation assistance (ongoing).
- Objective 1C: Provide advocacy training (including training on how to advocate to County Commissioners / City Councils) in all eight areas at either the spring or fall area meetings each year. Additional training will be offered at the Association's annual meeting.
- Objective 1D: Encourage new supervisors to attend advocacy training as offered by external partners as funds are available.
- Objective 1E: Continue to promote and implement one Legislative Awareness Day each year. The Legislative Committee will be the lead for this objective.

Goal 2: Develop and implement an advocacy program for the Association.

Objective 2A: Develop an advocacy policy/agenda which targets local, state (executive and legislative) and federal levels of government, annually.

Goal 3: Develop relationships with other organizations and governmental entities.

Objective 3A: Present at the NCACC and NCLM annual meetings and other meetings on the role of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and their relationship to county and city governments.

Objective 3B: Offer to serve as a non-voting member of NCACC/NCLM environmental committees.

Objective 3C: Ask the NCACC and NCLM, how The NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts can collaborate in other ways with these associations.

Objective 3D: Attend the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners' and the North Carolina League of Municipalities' annual conferences as well as other meetings as appropriate-- Executive Director, President, and possibly other officers.

Objective 3E: Invite leaders of external partnering agencies and other key organizations to attend area meetings and the Association's annual meeting.

Goal 4: Provide training for District Supervisors and staff on leadership topics.

Objective 4A: Continue The Leadership Initiative training program. A new class will be held bi-annually.

Objective 4B: Coordinate at least one training session in each area for **District Supervisors** each year on leadership. This

training can be provided at anytime during the year including during the fall or spring area meetings.

Objective 4C: Coordinate at least one training session in each area for **District staff** each year on leadership. This training can be provided at anytime during the year including during the fall or spring area meetings.

Objective 4D: Develop a District Supervisors' Manual by March 2012.

Goal 5: Provide conservation education for students and the general public.

Objective 5A: Work with other organizations to plan an Education Summit in 2011 which provides conservation education material to local districts and informs them of other available resources.

Goal 6: Develop and implement a funding strategy for the NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts which will increase the capacity of the Association and local conservation districts.

Objective 6A: Maintain the annual operating budget.

Objective 6B: Maintain a dues structure to support Association operations-annually.

Objective 6C: Address payment of District dues, and actions when dues are not paid. By October 2010.

Objective 6D: Implement a plan to encourage affiliate, non-voting memberships. By October 2010.

Objective 6E: Develop a strategy for raising funds. Examples include: grants, raffles, etc. By November 2010.

Implement strategy according to timeframes established.

Objective 6F: Pursue legislative funding to support local District operations that complement achievement of state responsibilities and priorities. By July 2011 and then ongoing.

Goal 7: Develop and implement a marketing plan and improve website

- Objective 7A: Develop a Marketing Plan by April 2011, implement plan and revise it as needed.
- Objective 7B: Update current webpage including adding the vision, mission and strategic plan. By October 2010.
- Objective 7C: Update the current website by January 1, 2011. Complete new website by July 2013.
- Objective 7D: Develop a long range plan for webpage creation and maintenance which will include a protocol for posting information to the site. (Ongoing)

Goal 8: Develop and implement internal and external communication plans.

- Objective 8A: Evaluate, with assistance from the Division of Soil and Water, the current management, guidelines, and parameters for using the list serve and pursue opportunities to enhance it as a communication tool for Districts.
- Objective 8B: Enhance use of the list serve and email delivery with a goal of 100% of the Districts subscribing to the listserve by July 2013.
- Objective 8C: Encourage all Association officers, Standing Committee Chairs, Area Chairmen, and Executive Committee members to have access to email.
- Objective 8D: Maintain close communications with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Goal 9: Establish and maintain an Executive Director position for the Association.

Objective 9A: Review the job description as needed. The job description of the Executive Director will include the roles and responsibilities regarding implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Objective 9B: Continue to explore options for funding an Executive Director position (ongoing).

Appendix A: Internal Survey Summary

Supervisor's individual written surveys

The same questions were asked on both written and phone surveys with follow up questions on the phone survey added.

Of the District Supervisors responding, 27.18% have held multiple positions with the Association while 43.6% have never served in any of the mentioned positions or in positions other than at the local level. The respondent's length of service as a supervisor is as follows; 1-2 Years 8.8%, 5 Years 25.2%, 6-10 Years 21.4%, and over 10 years 44.6%.

The North Carolina Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts is an old and proud organization. Times have changed since its inception and the pace of this change continues to quicken. Most of the supervisors have been and continue to be farmers or in an agricultural related industry. Today's economy requires a significantly different lifestyle than before to make ends meet. This puts pressure on an organization that excels primarily through meaningful participation based on volunteerism and altruism.

Most organizations struggle to get into the field while the Association already has District Supervisors in every part of the state. The Association has a grassroots structure that allows it to get input at local levels throughout the entire state. This is valuable for an outward dissemination of information and obtaining local input. By being in every county the ability to be "out there" makes the Association and local Districts a cost effective delivery mechanism. On the receiving side, conservation Districts also collectively become a barometer on issues and a potential force with the state legislature. But, this same grassroots structure also encourages fragmentation with susceptibility to tunnel vision. There is the potential for each supervisor to have their own agenda and not see the larger goals and wider issues, thereby making the Association less effective.

District surveys answered together as a District

District Surveys

The Districts reinforced the comments of the individual supervisors by offering similar comments.

Appendix B: External Survey Summary

External Partner Telephone and Electronic Surveys

The external partners offered some keen insight. To the external partners, District Supervisors seemed to be asking themselves “are we doing things right”. The external partners, on the other hand, commented more on “are they doing the right things”. This led to a difference in perspective, but did not result in a set of different answers. The same general issues surfaced:

Communications

- Internal needs vast improvement
- Externally the Association is unknown

Leadership

- Needs to be stronger and more visible
- Executive Director is important
- Plan needed with goals and objectives
- Leadership development and selection is a concern

Organizational structure

- Structure has strengths and weaknesses
- Offers many unique qualities

Networking

- Partnerships are important
- There is a desire and recognition for improvement with external partners
- Grassroots structure allows many benefits

People

- Good people; many are highly committed
- Little diversity
- Volunteer perspective

Mission, goals, activities and benefits

- Need to be established and clearly stated
- Need to be aligned with partners
- Need to be communicated internally and externally

Appendix C: Summaries for Each of the Eight Spring Area Meetings

Area 1 Meeting Notes for Strategic Planning

March 2, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

The meeting for Area 1 was productive and much great information was gathered. However, it was also a day when a large snow storm caused people to leave early.

- More Association training and meetings that reach across the entire state, not just centrally located, so that all will have access and opportunities for training and meetings
- Training on how to work better with county and city officials, and county and city managers
- Hire Executive Director
- Improve communication including using tools such as newsletters
- Increase funding
- Marketing and advocacy at all levels

What are the specific needs of your District and your Area? What are some problems you face?

- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) pull back affects funds, services and resources
- The mountains have different conservation needs than other areas in the state in many respects, one size does not fit all
- Lack of funding from other sources such as state and local also affects funds, services and resources
- Often training and meeting opportunities are not provided in this region of the state
- Changes in conservation happen at a rapid pace and we must keep up with this
- We need better communication within the Association
- There needs to be a specific point person to ensure coordination and advocacy in the Association (Executive Director)

How can The Association best help you address these needs and problems?

See previous section on priorities for the Association for focus on.

Area 2 Meeting Notes for Strategic Planning

March 11, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

- How will the Executive Director be paid for?
- Defining job description of Executive Director
- Accountability
- Marketing and advocacy
- Increase funding
- Statewide communication – external and internal

What are the specific needs of your District and your Area? What are some problems you face?

- There are fewer farmers growing a larger variety of crops.
- Legislative body not in touch with farming- where food comes from.
- Legislative body (state and local) lack of knowledge on need for conservation.
- Projected increase of NC urban population increases development pressure on farmland.
- Definition of agriculture evolving to include non-traditional types such as wineries.
- Districts need a voice in planning and development process from the local to the state level – stakeholder meetings, attend other local meetings, county commissioner meetings.
- Each time counties have issues dealing with soil and water, the District should be consulted. Sometimes District opinions are ignored.
- Pull back of federal services offered to Districts.
- Less of population actively involved in agriculture, so knowledge of District diminishes.
- Need to serve all land/resource needs, not just agriculture – include urban issues.
- Be active in local politics and be informed of regional and state committee structures, power distribution.
- Good networking skills – know your politicians.
- Executive Director would need to have wide vision - understandings need to take on emerging issues and community conservation.

- Executive Director would need to have good people skills – understand how to bring a group to consensus made decisions, bring people together that come from different perspectives.
- Each District has unique needs, need leadership that understand needs of all.
- Under-staffing affects what you can offer to a county. The need to attend trainings causes the office to shut down. They would be more effective with more staff.
- Need for District Supervisors to take on larger role to free up staff to attend trainings/meetings.
- Sharing NRCS staff across county lines.
- County budget cuts and furloughs, large drop in operational funds leads to lack of resources for programs.
- Need to educate community so they understand importance of conservation.

How can the Association best help you address these needs and problems?

- Need to identify role of Executive Director and what the position can do for Districts that they can't do for themselves
- Executive Director can manage affairs of Association.
- Executive Director can be involved in process of increasing financial resources for Districts.
- Executive Director can organize an advocacy system within District community – rally supervisors.
- Executive Director can develop training for supervisors for how to get funds for the benefit of all.
- How to raise funds to pay for Executive Director position
- Be sensitive to each District's unique needs, attend local board meetings.
- Executive Director can provide continuity for the Association from one president to the next.
- Won't get good candidates if sustainable funding not in place.
- Determine most important conservation problem and bring right groups together to solve problem.
- Collectively speak for needs of Districts.
- Increase internal communication – update website, newsletters – in concise format.
- Getting word out to general public – external communication

Area 3 Meeting Notes for Strategic Planning

March 4, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

- Training
- Increase funding
- Hire Executive Director
- Outreach and marketing
- Advocacy

What are the specific needs of your District and your Area? What are some problems you face?

- We do not have enough influence.
- Lack of funding and reduced funding at all levels.
- We are not known.
- We are often not invited to the table for important decisions.
- Partners have to think we have something to offer.
- Our issues are broad; rural and urban.
- County Commissioners do not understand the economic impact of farming.
- Farmers are not on boards as much as they used to be.
- Urban community and rural community need to better understand each other.
- Need a person with time, who is paid, can coordinate (Executive Director).

How can the Association best help you address these needs and problems?

- Programs in schools.
- Do not set up barriers creating "us versus them", community means all within the community.
- Importance of the Community Conservation Assistance Program, advocating for and funding it.
- Develop relationships with The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and other important groups.
- Develop relationship with Chamber of Commerce in different places.
- Common marketing message needed.
- Explore taxes for conservation purposes. What is feasibility? What do we want to do?
- Hire Executive Director.

Area 4 Meeting Notes for Strategic Planning

February 25, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

- Outreach, public relations and communication
- Networking at all levels local, regional and state
- Accountability and integrity
- Developing financial resources and other resources needed

What are the specific needs of your District and your Area? What are some problems you face?

- Agencies “above us” need also to be held accountable for their responsibility in terms of development issues.
- Often asked opinion about development issues and then that opinion is ignored and often then have to correct problems that could have been avoided.
- Explore name of association *The NC Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts*: Is this name clear to others? Is this still the right name that reflects who we are?
- Emotional attachment to land itself is a challenge.
- Lack of time of farmers and others to participate.
- Supervisors need to be committed to giving time.
- Is it possible that the way and time meetings are conducted needs to be evaluated?
- We have done a “poor job educating the public” when there are more ways now to educate the public than there has ever been.
- Are supervisors willing to change? Do supervisors realize that making changes is needed, because it is a “life or death for our Districts”?
- Do supervisors realize that the “ratio of power” is changing and that there are not as many political leaders who understand farming and the importance of farming as there used to be?
- Focus efforts on “protect the land” not on “people”.
- Change focus from protect “the land” to protect the “environment” (not just land issues).
- Loss of funding.
- Need better relationships and better ways of reaching county commissioners.
- Need better relationships and better ways of reaching county managers.
- All of us need to be committed to learn more about the Association.

How can The Association best help you address these needs and problems?

- Develop relationships with The Association of County Commissioners and other county leaders so that local relationships between supervisors and county commissioners/county managers can be more easily developed.
- Market and educate soil and water issues to county commissioners and other local and state groups (explain “who we are and what we do”).
- Explore idea of focus not on “land” but on “environment”.
- Work to increase funding.
- Explore possible alternative sources of funding other than “the usual ones”.
- Association develops a culture that is “willing to change”.
- Association continues to protect the land for future generations.
- Explore name of the Association.
- Explore how the Association can best meet the time commitments of its members

Area 5 Meeting Notes for Strategic Planning

February 18, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

- Outreach and training
- More exposure
- Help develop grassroots leadership
- Increased funding
- Work to increase participation
- Association should have ability to adapt with change

What are the specific needs of your District and your Area? What are some problems you face?

- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) pull back affecting many issues including loss of technology support, vehicles, manpower (often also more funds needed from Districts).
- General public needs to be educated more on importance of conservation.
- Need to ensure that environmental regulations are balanced and do not “put farmers out of business”.
- District Supervisors caring “more about home” and less about the region or state.
- Lack of knowledge by the public about the Association and Soil and Water Districts.
- Farmer indifference.
- Lack of participation due to lack of time, not being compensated, not seeing value.
- Need statewide answers instead of many District answers to issues.
- Loss of funding including county, state, loss of positions.

How can the Association best help you address these needs and problems?

- Advocate with a united voice in “a larger voice than the District alone”.
- Leaders in different Districts need to be connected more.
- Develop better public relations.
- Improve communication -- examples being newsletters and advertisements.
- Help Districts use the programs that already exist.
- Communicate better with broader agriculture world.
- Association develops statewide education to non-agricultural people.
- Create a “bottom up” Association.

Area 6 Meeting Notes Strategic Planning March 9, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

- Educate all levels internal to Association and external to Association
- Win-Win relationships / mutual benefiting partnerships, develop closer relationships with new and existing partners.
- Increase funding from diverse sources, increase funding through advocating and increase representation; increase assistance to SWCDs to get real results
- More and better communication between SWCDs, NCASWCD, partners, government and the public
- Advocacy
- Mission of protecting natural resources still central and important

What are the specific needs of your District and your area? What are some problems you face?

- Budget / funding cuts – special attention should be paid at the state level; these are state special purpose SWCDs
- Marketing for SWCDs could be improved – staff needs to focus on conservation; capitalize on partnerships; need training on marketing.
- Advocacy/Marketing efforts – federal, state, local, community (farmers and urban).
- Marketing strategy may be SWCD specific based upon land use.
- Increasing partnership is important; different partners – CCAP has led to some of this.
- Leadership initiative is underway.
- Need improved attendance at local, area and state meetings.
- Need younger leaders active and engaged.
- Consider term-limits for elected/appointed positions to allow opportunity for younger farmers to participate.
- Experience and connections of board members are important.
- Time commitment / financial commitment of supervisors
- SWCDs need to provide services to support changing demographic – critical to continue existence – SWCDs need broad focus; urban and rural.

How can the Association best help you address these needs and problems?

- Represent/advocate for the NCASWCD in the halls of state government – Executive and Legislative.
- Navigate ethics rules.
- Keep a close relationship with existing partners (Farm Bureau, Department of Agriculture).
- Develop a closer relationship with other partners (NCACC, League, etc.).
- Foster relationship with NACD – make them more aware of state issues; line of communication should come back down to local SWCDs as well.
- Pursue grant opportunities.
- Provide/assist with training – introduction and education in schools (re: farming practices and need for certain applications).
- Funding for training from more diverse sources.
- Fundraising

Area 7 Meeting Notes for Strategic Planning

February 11, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

- Keeping supervisors informed and exploring ways to improve participation
- Active advocacy at all levels with all engaged
- Help with managing urban sprawl
- Work on not being a well kept secret anymore
- Increase funding

What are the specific needs of your District and your Area? What are some problems you face?

- Smaller pool of farmers, therefore harder to get participation.
- Committees often have no clear time table, therefore harder to get participation.
- Farmers in modern times have less time than in the past.
- Need more influence with county commissioners.
- Loosing best farmland.
- Government officials often do not value agriculture.
- Urban growth and urban sprawl is a challenge.
- Developers and new homeowners often do not know soil and water issues exist.
- Farmers are not as represented in politics as they once were.
- Counties in this area do not include agriculture in economic development plans.

How can the Association best help you address these needs and problems?

- Advocate and provide advocacy at all levels of government: local, state and national.
- Hire an Executive Director that will advocate and market.
- Market and work to overcome being “best kept secret”.
- Finding ways to recognize supervisors and Districts that contribute to the Association

Area 8 Meeting Notes for Strategic Planning

March 3, 2010

Priorities for the Association To Focus On

- Value motivation and commitment of leaders of the Association and all supervisors
- Improve internal and external communications
- Education including programs, equipping districts, educating the public, preparing the next generation
- Market soil and water at all levels
- Hire Executive Director
- Advocating
- Maintain and increase funding

What are the specific needs of your District and your Area? What are some problems you face? This area also added the word opportunities to this question.

- Urban sprawl, urban development
- People often supporting this urban development with their votes.
- In down economy, good time to show value of agriculture, good time to work on having more influence ("urban crawl")
- Voluntary Agricultural Districts are important.
- Opportunity Department of Commerce and Department of Agriculture hold joint meetings.
- Challenge of working with non-traditional partners and also opportunity.
- Advantage to have people who are non-agriculture people on board like lawyers.
- Common sense
- Profit is the motive of some that we work with and comes before the community needs.
- Is best kept secret a good thing? Good to stay out of political public world and press.
- Is it good to become more involved in political world, especially planning boards?
- Leadership - active and commitment area the most important.
- Politically ambitious supervisors have upsides and downsides.
- Green spaces are important issues for us.
- Diversity of issues, how do we prioritize?

- Keeping employees up to speed, having enough employees.
- Loss of funding.
- Bigger and smaller farms.
- Money for cost share.
- Loss of positions.
- Efficient budgets.

How can the Association best help you address these needs and problems?

- Advocate, and educate state associations and state leaders such as The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners of the importance of our work.
- Find and partner with nontraditional partners.
- Broader focus needed, not just agriculture, agriculture is critical but need broad focus.
- Provide talking points to districts and common messages to speak as one voice.
- Hire Executive Director.
- Education of ourselves and public.
- Advocate.
- Improve communication to Districts.
- Build relationships with county and city public officials, and county and city managers.
- Increase funding.

Participants in the Strategic Planning Process

District Supervisors and Staff

The 492 district supervisors from across the state who direct their local district's conservation programs were engaged through written surveys and through eight area spring meetings held within the eight Association areas. Professional District staff were engaged in the process through supporting these Supervisors at each of the eight area spring meetings.

2010 Executive Committee

William Pickett	Immediate Past President, Duplin SWCD Supervisor
James Ferguson	President, Haywood SWCD Supervisor
Craig Frazier	1 st Vice President, Ralldolph SWCD Supervisor
Donald Heath	2 nd Vice President, Craven SWCD Supervisor
Elizabeth Leonard	Secretary, Davie SWCD Supervisor
Bruce Whitfield	Treasurer, Person SWCD Supervisor
James Mason	Chair, Finance Committee, Hertford SWCD Supervisor
Ben Knox	Chair, Legislative Committee, Rowan SWCD Supervisor
John Finch	NACD Board Member, Nash SWCD Supervisor
Bill Yarborough	Area 1 Chair, Haywood SWCD Supervisor
Bobby Evans	Area 2 Chair, Alleghany SWCD Supervisor
Cal Berryhill	Area 3 Chair, Person SWCD Supervisor
John Langdon	Area 4 Chair, Johnston SWCD Supervisor
Jeff Harris	Area 5 Chair, Martin SWCD Supervisor
Derek Potter	Area 6 Chair, Pamlico SWCD Supervisor
Gary Hendrix	Area 7 Chair, Hoke SWCD Supervisor
Carl Beam	Area 8 Chair, Lincoln SWCD Supervisor

Strategic Planning Committee

Grover McPherson	Chair, Forsyth SWCD Supervisor
Marvin Cavanaugh	Stokes SWCD Supervisor
James Ferguson	Haywood SWCD Supervisor
Jeff Harris	Martin SWCD Supervisor
William Hart	New Hanover SWCD Supervisor
Ned Hudson	Cabarrus SWCD Supervisor
Talmage Layton	Durham SWCD Supervisor
James Mason	Hertford SWCD Supervisor
David Smith	Davidson SWCD Supervisor
Bobby Stanley	Columbus SWCD Supervisor
Franklin Williams	Duplin SWCD Supervisor