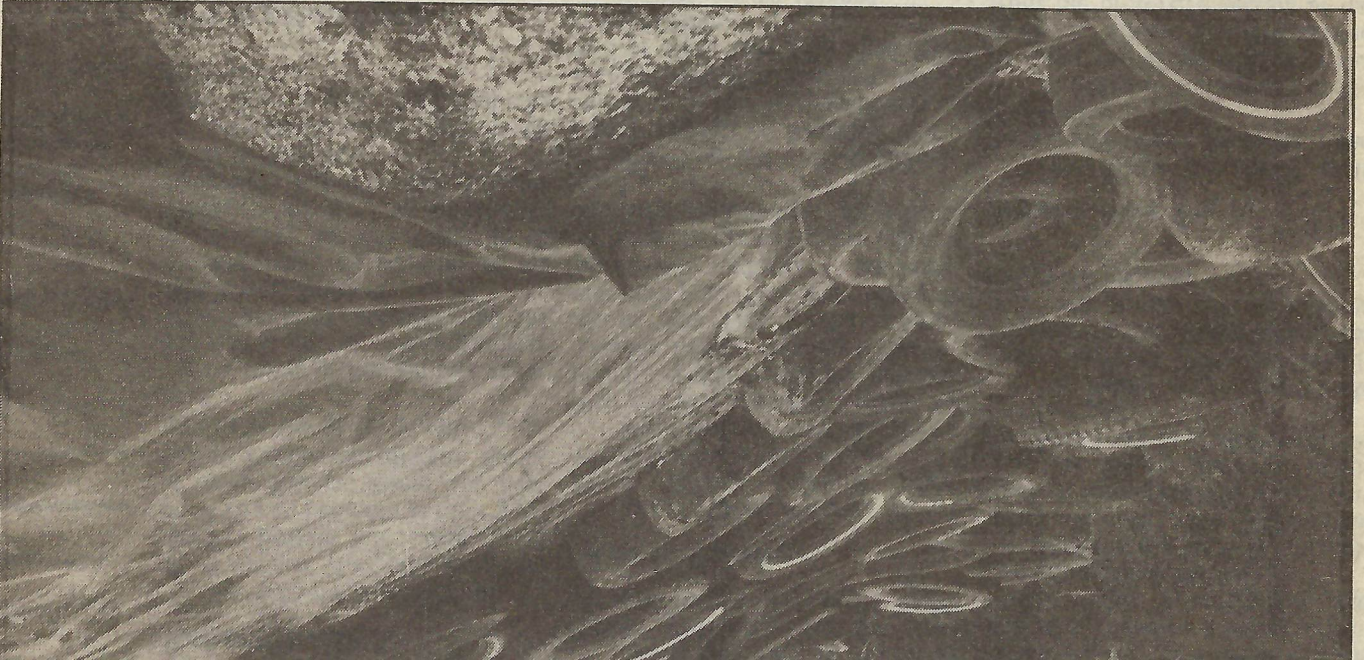


Farmers aim to preserve way of life

Dan McKay, chairman of Pisgah Dairymen's Association, uncovers silage at his dairy farm in southeastern Henderson County. McKay must use a huge tarp and used tires to protect the mounds of feed he depends on to feed his herd. But newcomers to rural parts of Henderson County have increasingly objected to such farming practices. Local farmers are backing a new Voluntary Farmland Preservation Ordinance to help resolve the differences and safeguard their way of life.



TONY ENDS/CITIZEN-TIMES

By Tony Ends
CITIZEN-TIMES CORRESPONDENT

HENDERSONVILLE — Farmers

in Henderson County have more on their minds these days than milking cows and picking apples.

Tough threats is still one of the top four industries in the county, both the number of farms and farming acreage have been dwindling in recent years.

And farmers have increasingly felt the pressure of area development and growth.

This week, leaders of the local agricultural industry formally approached Henderson County officials with a plan to help them keep their place in the local economy and protect their livelihoods.

They presented a Voluntary Farmland Preservation Program Ordinance to the Board of Commissioners Monday, and commissioners sent the 18-page draft ordinance to the county planning board for review.

The ordinance would set up an agricultural advisory board with five members. The board would review and approve farmers' applications to set up agriculture districts.

The districts would contain at least five qualifying farms that lie within one mile of each other, or they would have at least 200 contiguous acres of qualifying land.

Maps would be made up and publicly displayed, showing where the districts are. And anyone who registers for a deed or applies for a building permit would have to certify they have noted the location of the districts in relation to their land.

"I understand that activities such as pesticide spraying, manure spreading, machinery operation, livestock operations and other common farming activities may occur around the clock in these areas," reads the disclosure statement the buyer or builder would have to sign under the proposed ordinance.

For farmers the program is voluntary. But if they choose to form or be part of an agriculture district their farms must be taking part in the state's use-value taxation program, and their soil must be suitable for farming. They also must submit to erosion-control practices and a conservation agreement.

For their neighbors — including developers, builders, and other industries already in the county — the agriculture districts would not be permitted in designated high-growth areas.

Just how important is such an ordinance to farmers here and the larger Henderson County community? Agriculture income in this county generated an estimated \$87.4 million in 1990.

That's more than the value of residential and commercial building construction permits in that same year — \$52.9 million, and it's greater than travel and tourism related income — \$62 million — in 1988, the most recent years for which statistics are available.

It is also not far behind Social Security payments, valued at \$117 million annually in Henderson County, according to the Chamber of Commerce.

Farmers, however, on farms where \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold, have watched the number of farms in Henderson County fall from

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