



Flying Cloud Farm, located in Fairview, was used in the Farmlands Value Project, a study conducted by UNCA faculty and students. Ialiaferro Pollock- Staff Photographer

Project shows residents will pay to protect farmlands

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UNC Asheville faculty and students conducted the Farmland Values Project and determined that the farmlands of Western North Carolina are so valued that residents are willing to pay to ensure they remain a permanent fixture of the community.

"The project is important for people that live in WNC because it helps us to understand what it is we value about farmland," said Leah Mathews, associate professor and the director of the project.

Mathews, along with 17 UNCA students and faculty members from Old Dominion

University and Appalachian State University, conducted research over a four-year period.

"We confirmed that people really treasure farmland in WNC. They value it for many reasons, including access to local food, jobs and income for farmers and other people involved in agriculture, scenic beauty, a link to cultural heritage and open space," Mathews said.

The project conducted focus groups and surveys as part of the research process. The research covered Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson and Madison counties.

"Our results confirmed that people do see farmland as more than just a farm. It's

providing lots of benefits to the community," Mathews said.

Of the resident respondents who took part in the research, 83 percent agreed that more could be done to protect farmland in their community, according to the project.

"Respondents said they would be willing to pay \$185 a year if they knew that monetary contribution went directly to protect farmland," Mathews said. "People are willing to put their money where their mouth is, basically."

Their research also found that nearly two-thirds of respondents would be willing to pay more for their food if the money went to protect farmland. Mathews said.

The funding for the project came from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Mathews received a grant from the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, a program within the USDA.

UNCA students got involved because of the extensive work the project required, according to Mathews.

"It required many tasks to be done that obviously one person can't do by themselves," Mathews said.

The students that were hired came from a variety of majors including biology, economics and environmental studies.

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