

Chatham County Celebrates Cattle's Important Role in the Community

By Administrator

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PITTSBORO, NC— In order to celebrate Chatham County's long history with cattle and bring greater attention to its quality beef and dairy products, the Chatham County Agriculture Advisory Board presented the Chatham County Cattle Celebration resolution to the Chatham County Board of Commissioners on August 18, 2021. The Board subsequently adopted the resolution.

2021 is a landmark year for cattle as it is the 500th anniversary of the arrival of cattle in North America. Recorded history places cattle on the continent as early as 1521 when the appointed viceroy of New Spain, Gregorio de Villalobos, decided to take his chances and go against a Spanish law prohibiting cattle trading in Mexico. He acquired six Spanish cows and a bull from what is known today as the Dominican Republic and brought them to Veracruz, Mexico. The opportunity and its potential for growth and profit were too good to pass up. This marked the beginning of cattle cultivation in North America.

Since then, cattle have become an integral part of American agriculture – especially in Chatham County, NC. The county's cattle production, which ranks third in North Carolina's total cattle population, are a major part of Chatham's community and local economy. Around 34,000 head of cattle reside on Chatham County pastures, resulting in one cow per 2-3 people. In addition to sheer numbers, Chatham ranchers produce high-quality cattle among a diversity of breeds including Brown Swiss, Pineywoods, Texas Longhorn, Belted Galloway, Hereford, Angus, Guernsey, South Poll, and Holstein to mention a few. This variety of breeds helps preserve a diversity of genetics for future farmers and land managers. Cattle can be raised as an environmentally friendly tool for maintaining pastoral, rural landscapes, while also yielding a local source of nourishing protein. Chatham cattle farmers pride themselves in producing both high quality products that focus on animal welfare and land management.

With several century farmers in Chatham County, many farmers are multi-generational and have learned the trade from their parents who learned from their parents. This deep history and appreciation for livestock creates an unmatched passion for the industry that is represented in the products they sell and the farms they operate. Chatham's cattle farms may not all look the same or use the same practices, but they share the common goal of promoting agriculture, producing food to feed the community's families, and seeing their way of life pass on to future generations.

Public surveys in Chatham County have made evident that preserving rural character is the most important goal among surveyed residents. Continued support of local farms is more important now than ever. Residents can support Chatham County farmers by buying local through the Chatham County Buy Local Guide:

<https://growingsmallfarms.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms-chathamfarms>