“Food and Fuel for the Force” Initiative
By Paul Friday, USMC

In North Carolina, the Marines are promoting the purchase of local food as part of an effort to manage potential encroachment near Marine Corps training areas.

The desired end state of a regional “Food and Fuel for the Force” (FF4F) initiative is to promote the Marine Corps’ strategic, long term compatible land use goals in eastern North Carolina (ENC). These goals include preserving military-compatible land uses, sustaining rural communities, supporting existing crop, livestock, poultry and fishing industries while developing biofuel and biofeed industries, protecting ecological values, encouraging cooperation and program coordination among federal, state and regional land and natural resources management agencies and leveraging the program funds of these agencies to maximize their impact. The crux of the program is the recognition that working lands adjacent to and near Marine Corps training areas provide myriad benefits to the region, including protection of our vital training lands.

One key component of this effort is the tangible support that the Marine Corps, DoN, and DoD are pushing to provide, specifically, the purchase of more local goods, such as foods, forest products, bio-feedstocks, biofuels and other bio-based products to serve our institutional as well as individual consumer needs. The DoD’s expanded role will fit in with the state’s overall “10% Campaign” aimed at encouraging its citizens to buy ten percent of their total food purchases from local growers and producers. Focusing on the fuel aspect of FF4F, developing a robust alternative fuels industry within the region also serves to make the Marine Corps more readily compliant with federal energy mandates and as a key step in establishing energy security.

There are other existing land protection programs that assist in preserving lands near training areas, and FF4F will serve as a supplementary and complementary program to provide land owners a full suite of financial incentives for land preservation as well as provide federal, state, and local agencies, and the military community with the tools and guidance to offer and supply them. These tools will help to develop a robust, market-based conservation landscape framework, but will also enable partners such as the Marine Corps to become an active consumer of the local food and fuel products grown and produced on these lands.
While FF4F is in its nascent stage, partners have already made progress on such initiatives as:

- The Military Growth Task Force (MGTF) partnership with the Biofuels Center to develop a market for canola oil as a biofuel.
- A MGTF and Marine Corps Installations East (MCIEAST)-established working group incorporating county economic developers, agriculture extension personnel and academics, into the overall working lands preservation mission. The group has held discussions to identify key needs for local farms and farmers as well as potential solutions for those issues.
- Development of a program by working lands and other conservation proponents to provide financial incentives for land owners to retain their land that is adjacent to and/or near military training areas, with an initial focus on away space, and to utilize it in a way that is compatible with our training mission footprint.

A critical take away of FF4F is that preservation of lands near military training areas requires a holistic approach and philosophy from all stakeholders. Integrating missions, information, and resources will provide a larger pool of solutions to build a system of sustainable economic growth, ecological and cultural preservation, military training lands protection, and overall regional collaboration.

Note: This article was originally published in the Spring 2011 issue of Networks, the publication of the Federal Planning Division.

Mr. Paul Friday is the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff for the Marine Corps Installations East G-5 and the Director of Government and External Relations. He can be reached at paul.Friday@usmc.mil