

§ 105-277.3. Agricultural, horticultural, and forestland – Classifications.

(a) **Classes Defined.** – The following classes of property are designated special classes of property under authority of Section 2(2) of Article V of the North Carolina Constitution and must be appraised, assessed, and taxed as provided in G.S. 105-277.2 through G.S. 105-277.7.

- (1) **Agricultural land.** – Individually owned agricultural land consisting of one or more tracts, one of which satisfies the requirements of this subdivision. For agricultural land used as a farm for aquatic species, as defined in G.S. 106-758, the tract must meet the income requirement for agricultural land and must consist of at least five acres in actual production or produce at least 20,000 pounds of aquatic species for commercial sale annually, regardless of acreage. For all other agricultural land, the tract must meet the income requirement for agricultural land and must consist of at least 10 acres that are in actual production. Land in actual production includes land under improvements used in the commercial production or growing of crops, plants, or animals.

To meet the income requirement, agricultural land must, for the three years preceding January 1 of the year for which the benefit of this section is claimed, have produced an average gross income of at least one thousand dollars (\$1,000). Gross income includes income from the sale of the agricultural products produced from the land, grazing fees for livestock, the sale of bees or products derived from beehives other than honey, any payments received under a governmental soil conservation or land retirement program, and the amount paid to the taxpayer during the taxable year pursuant to P.L. 108-357, Title VI, Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of 2004.

- (2) **Horticultural land.** – Individually owned horticultural land consisting of one or more tracts, one of which consists of at least five acres that are in actual production and that, for the three years preceding January 1 of the year for which the benefit of this section is claimed, have met the applicable minimum gross income requirement. Land in actual production includes land under improvements used in the commercial production or growing of fruits or vegetables or nursery or floral products. Land that has been used to produce evergreens intended for use as Christmas trees must have met the minimum gross income requirements established by the Department of Revenue for the land. All other horticultural land must have produced an average gross income of at least one thousand dollars (\$1,000). Gross income includes income from the sale of the horticultural products produced from the land and any payments received under a governmental soil conservation or land retirement program.
- (3) **Forestland.** – Individually owned forestland consisting of one or more tracts, one of which consists of at least 20 acres that are in actual production and are not included in a farm unit.

(b) **Individual Ownership Requirements.** – In order to come within a classification described in subsection (a) of this section, land owned by an individual must also satisfy one of the following conditions:

- (1) It is the owner's place of residence.
- (2) It has been owned by the current owner or a relative of the current owner for the four years preceding January 1 of the year for which the benefit of this section is claimed.
- (3) At the time of transfer to the current owner, it qualified for classification in the hands of a business entity or trust that transferred the land to the current

owner who was a member of the business entity or a beneficiary of the trust, as appropriate.

(b1) Entity Ownership Requirements. – In order to come within a classification described in subsection (a) of this section, land owned by a business entity must meet the requirements of subdivision (1) of this subsection and land owned by a trust must meet the requirements of subdivision (2) of this subsection.

- (1) Land owned by a business entity must have been owned by one or more of the following for the four years immediately preceding January 1 of the year for which the benefit of this section is claimed:
 - a. The business entity.
 - b. A member of the business entity.
 - c. Another business entity whose members include a member of the business entity that currently owns the land.
- (2) Land owned by a trust must have been owned by the trust or by one or more of its creators for the four years immediately preceding January 1 of the year for which the benefit of this section is claimed.

(b2) Exceptions to Ownership Requirements. – Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (b) and (b1) of this section, land may qualify for classification in the hands of the new owner if all of the conditions listed in either subdivision of this subsection are met, even if the new owner does not meet all of the ownership requirements of subsections (b) and (b1) of this section with respect to the land.

- (1) Continued use. – If the land qualifies for classification in the hands of the new owner under the provisions of this subdivision, then any deferred taxes remain a lien on the land under G.S. 105-277.4(c), the new owner becomes liable for the deferred taxes, and the deferred taxes become payable if the land fails to meet any other condition or requirement for classification. Land qualifies for classification in the hands of the new owner if all of the following conditions are met:
 - a. The land was appraised at its present use value at the time title to the land passed to the new owner.
 - b. The new owner acquires the land and continues to use the land for the purpose for which it was classified under subsection (a) of this section while under previous ownership.
 - c. The new owner has timely filed an application as required by G.S. 105-277.4(a) and has certified that the new owner accepts liability for any deferred taxes and intends to continue the present use of the land.
- (2) Expansion of existing unit. – Land qualifies for classification in the hands of the new owner if, at the time title passed to the new owner, the land was not appraised at its present-use value but was being used for the same purpose and was eligible for appraisal at its present-use value as other land already owned by the new owner and classified under subsection (a) of this section. The new owner must timely file an application as required by G.S. 105-277.4(a).

(c) Repealed by Session Laws 1995, c. 454, s. 2.

(d) Exception for Conservation Reserve Program. – Land enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program authorized by 16 U.S.C. Chapter 58 is considered to be in actual production, and income derived from participation in the federal Conservation Reserve Program may be used in meeting the minimum gross income requirements of this section either separately or in combination with income from actual production. Land enrolled in the federal Conservation

Reserve Program must be assessed as agricultural land if it is planted in vegetation other than trees, or as forestland if it is planted in trees.

(d1) Conservation Exception. – Property that is appraised at its present-use value under G.S. 105-277.4(b) shall continue to qualify for appraisal, assessment, and taxation as provided in G.S. 105-277.2 through G.S. 105-277.7 without regard to actual production or income requirements of this section as long as (i) the property is subject to a qualifying conservation easement that meets the requirements of G.S. 113a-235(a); and (ii) the taxpayer received no more than seventy-five percent (75%) of the fair market value of the donated property interest in compensation. Notwithstanding G.S. 105-277.3(b) and (b1), subsequent transfer of the property does not extinguish its present-use value eligibility as long as the property remains subject to a qualifying conservation easement. The exception provided in this subsection applies only to that part of the property that is subject to the easement.

(d2) Wildlife Exception. – When an owner of land classified under this section does not transfer the land and the land becomes eligible for classification under G.S. 105-277.15, no deferred taxes are due. The deferred taxes remain a lien on the land and are payable in accordance with G.S. 105-277.15.

(d3) Site Infrastructure Exception. – When an owner of land classified under this section (i) does not transfer the land and the land becomes eligible for classification under G.S. 105-277.15A or (ii) does transfer the land but the land becomes eligible for classification under G.S. 105-277.15A within six months of the transfer, no deferred taxes are due. The deferred taxes remain a lien on the land and are payable in accordance with G.S. 105-277.15A.

(e) Exception for Turkey Disease. – Agricultural land that meets all of the following conditions is considered to be in actual production and to meet the minimum gross income requirements:

- (1) The land was in actual production in turkey growing within the preceding two years and qualified for present use value treatment while it was in actual production.
- (2) The land was taken out of actual production in turkey growing solely for health and safety considerations due to the presence of Poult Enteritis Mortality Syndrome among turkeys in the same county or a neighboring county.
- (3) The land is otherwise eligible for present use value treatment.

(f) Sound Management Program for Agricultural Land and Horticultural Land. – If the property owner demonstrates any one of the following factors with respect to agricultural land or horticultural land, then the land is operated under a sound management program:

- (1) Enrollment in and compliance with an agency-administered and approved farm management plan.
- (2) Compliance with a set of best management practices.
- (3) Compliance with a minimum gross income per acre test.
- (4) Evidence of net income from the farm operation.
- (5) Evidence that farming is the farm operator's principal source of income.
- (6) Certification by a recognized agricultural or horticultural agency within the county that the land is operated under a sound management program.

Operation under a sound management program may also be demonstrated by evidence of other similar factors. As long as a farm operator meets the sound management requirements, it is irrelevant whether the property owner received income or rent from the farm operator.

(g) Sound Management Program for Forestland. – If the owner of forestland demonstrates that the forestland complies with a written sound forest management plan for the production and sale of forest products, then the forestland is operated under a sound management program. (1973, c. 709, s. 1; 1975, c. 746, s. 2; 1983, c. 821; c. 826; 1985, c. 667, ss. 2, 3, 6.1;

1987, c. 698, ss. 2-5; 1987 (Reg. Sess., 1988), c. 1044, s. 13.1; 1989, cc. 99, 736, s. 1; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 814, s. 29; 1995, c. 454, s. 2; 1997-272, s. 1; 1998-98, s. 22; 2001-499, s. 1; 2002-184, s. 2; 2005-293, s. 1; 2005-313, s. 3; 2007-484, s. 43.7T(c); 2007-497, s. 3.1; 2008-146, s. 2.2; 2008-171, ss. 4, 5; 2011-9, s. 1; 2013-130, s. 2; 2014-3, s. 14.14(a); 2017-108, s. 3(a); 2022-13, s. 6.1.)