2026 ANNUAL

RURAL LAND
TRENDS REPORT

Know the land. Know the market.

Here's our outlook for buyers and sellers in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Request a free consultation to talk through your land ownership goals with our team.

Info@poplarland.com | Request a Consultation

336-749-8024

Why 2026 is a Year That Rewards Preparation

The rural land market across North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia has entered a new phase in the second half of 2026. It's one that rewards buyers and sellers who approach it with clear eyes and good information.

The frenzy of 2021 and 2022 is behind us. What's replaced it isn't a downturn. It's something more useful: a market where the fundamentals matter again.

Values have stabilized at historically strong levels. Inventory is beginning to loosen, but desirable parcels with water, access, timber value, or proximity to growth corridors still move quickly and on seller-friendly terms.

For buyers, that means more options than you had two years ago, but not unlimited time. For sellers, it means that positioning and presentation matter more than they did when everything sold regardless.

This report pulls together national data, regional trends, and on-the-ground perspective from brokers active in these markets every week. Our goal is simple: To give you what you need to move with confidence.

Rural Land
The National Picture

The national rural land market entered 2026 in a stabilized position. After several years of significant appreciation driven by pandemic-era lifestyle shifts, remote work migration, and a surge of investment capital seeking tangible assets, values have normalized — but they have not retreated.

What's driving value nationally isn't speculation. It's a confluence of durable factors: land is finite, farmland generates income, and recreational land satisfies something that suburban and urban living cannot.

An increasing number of high-net-worth buyers are also treating land as a legitimate portfolio diversifier. Many want a hedge against inflation and equity market volatility with the added benefit of being somewhere you actually want to spend time.

The buyer pool has also evolved. Today's rural land buyer is often more sophisticated, more patient, and more focused on long-term utility than the panic-buyers of 2021. That's a healthy development for everyone in the market.

Latest Land Values

Average Price Per Acre in 2025

	NATIONAL	OUR REGION (S. CAROLINA/N. CAROLINA/VIRGINIA)
FARM REAL ESTATE	$4,350	$5,437
PASTURE LAND	$1,920	$5,217
CROPLAND	$5,830	$5,177

DATA SOURCE

USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, August 2025

As you can see from this 2025 data, agricultural land values in the Carolinas and Virginia reflect premium productivity. We get more rain, we can grow more feed, and producers can run more cows per acre than in other parts of the country. Working land in particularly desirable locations with proximity to amenities goes for even more.

Pasture Land in the Carolinas & Virginia Commands Significantly More:

2.7x National Average

That premium reflects what buyers are willing to pay for land with year-round growing seasons, strong recreational utility, and sustained demand from lifestyle buyers and investors who understand these markets hold their worth.

POPLAR
LAND COMPANY

Inventory vs Demand

For most of 2024 and into late 2025, rural land inventory across the Southeast remained constrained. In the Carolinas and Virginia, inventory was growing, but many sellers were still stuck on COVID price points, listing at 1.5 to 2 times the market value and stigmatizing their properties with buyers. In the second half of 2026, we're closer to market value listing prices, and sellers who were waiting for economic clarity, watching interest rates, and in some cases simply unwilling to part with land they'd held for decades are beginning to shift.

The more important story isn't total listings, it's qualified listings. In all three states covered by this report, there remains a meaningful shortage of parcels that check every box: clear title, legal access, buildable topography, usable zoning, and proximity to infrastructure. Those properties continue to attract multiple interested parties and sell without deep discounting. Properties that lack one or more of these characteristics are the ones sitting longer and require stronger positioning.

LISTING CHECKLIST

Our brokers help landowners to:

- **Eliminate pain points (poor aesthetics, downed trees, no access)**
- **Make targeted improvements that increase immediate value**
- **List with a map that's easy to understand**
- **Take photos and videos that showcase the greatest features of the tract**

For buyers, the practical takeaway is straightforward: More options are available than two years ago, and you have more room to be selective. But waiting indefinitely in hopes of a significant price correction is a strategy with limited upside. The underlying demand drivers in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia — population growth, in-migration, lifestyle-driven buying, and sustained investment interest — aren't going away.

For sellers, the market is telling you that preparation matters. A well-positioned parcel with good photography, accurate mapping, clear use-case articulation, recreation improvements, and a broker who understands how to reach qualified buyers will outperform a listing that relies on market momentum to do the heavy lifting.

Three Trends

Shaping the Market in the Carolinas and Virginia Right Now

1 Multi-Use Properties Command a Growing Premium

The strongest-performing parcels in the current market aren't purely agricultural, purely recreational, or purely timber investments. They're properties that give the buyer flexibility. Land that can be hunted now, has appreciating timber value in the medium term, and potentially subdivided or developed down the road if the owner chooses. Buyers are increasingly sophisticated about optionality, and they're willing to pay for it. Sellers who can clearly articulate multiple legitimate use cases for a parcel are consistently achieving stronger outcomes.

2 The Deliberate Buyer Has Replaced the Reactive One

The land buyer of 2026 is not the same as the land buyer of 2022. Elevated interest rates have created a more deliberate buyer pool, even though many rural land transactions are cash-based or use agricultural financing structures. These buyers are taking more time, asking sharper questions about carrying costs, management requirements, and exit strategies, and doing genuine due diligence before committing. For sellers and brokers, this means the pre-sale work of educating the buyer and answering objections before they arise has never mattered more.

3 Savvy Investors Are Using Legacy Tracts As a Portfolio Diversifier

An increasing number of buyers in this market, particularly those in higher income brackets, are motivated not just by financial return or recreational use, but by a sense of stewardship. They want to own land they can protect, manage, and eventually pass down. Native plant communities, wildlife habitat improvements, and sound timber management are no longer niche conversations. They're increasingly central to how buyers evaluate a purchase and justify it internally and to their families. Sellers who have invested in land management and can document it are finding that it materially supports their asking price.

On the Ground

Our brokers specialize in the sale and purchase of legacy properties, multigenerational compounds, recreational lands, and wildlife, agriculture, and timber tracts and have sold thousands of acres. Here's our read on what buyers and sellers are actually experiencing in the market right now.

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In parts of the Carolinas, buyer hesitation isn't about price. It's about finding the land that fits. My advice: Don't mistake a stabilized market for a slow one. The right buyer is out there and often already searching. What determines how quickly they find you and what price you can command is almost entirely about how well the property is presented and how effectively it reaches the right audience. Properties where the seller has actively managed timber, maintained food plots, or invested in access improvements are commanding meaningful premiums over comparable raw tracts.

Forrest Breedlove
OWNER

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In Virginia and the Piedmont right now, patience looks different depending on which side of the transaction you're on. Buyers who wait for the perfect moment are often watching good properties go to buyers who were simply more prepared. Sellers who take the time to position their land correctly are seeing results that might surprise them. That's true even on the commercial and industrial side — we're widening the scope of how we present a property's potential use to attract the right buyer. The most competitive listings are the flexible ones.

Billy Parker
LAND BROKER

What This Means For You

The 2026 rural land market in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia is not a market that forgives passivity on either side of the transaction. Values are strong but not automatic. Opportunities exist but require informed eyes to identify them. The buyers and sellers who will look back on this period as a moment they captured well are the ones who came to it with clear goals, good data, and the right people around them.

Whether you're evaluating a potential purchase, considering a sale, or simply trying to understand what your land is worth in today's market, Forrest and Billy are available for a no-obligation conversation. They know these markets because they work them every day, and they're here to help you move with confidence.

If you’re looking for an experienced team to help you sell or buy raw land and build your legacy retreat, visit poplarland.com to request a free consultation.

You can also find out more about our unique Acquire, Transform, and Manage process at poplarland.com/ATM.

ABOUT POPLAR LAND COMPANY

We exist to help our clients uncover the perfect land and shape it into something they can enjoy for generations to come. We search for the hidden gems in the market and tap into their unseen natural potential. Our decades of experience working the landscape allows us to nurture the land and maximize its value for our clients. Rooted in the South, we seek to build meaningful relationships as your true partners in the pursuit of the perfect property and its ongoing maintenance.

info@poplarland.com

ABOUT FORREST BREEDLOVE

OWNER

As founder and owner of Poplar Land Company, Forrest is the Broker in Charge, Land Management Designer, and single point of contact for clients. He takes a hands-on approach to evaluating legacy properties and maximizing your return on investment, while bringing his knowledge of what's possible for the land to your property search or sale.

forrest@poplarland.com | 336-749-8024

> I gave Forrest an impossible assignment. I wanted dirt bikes. I wanted shooting ranges. I wanted fish. I wanted to be 45 minutes from home — but not 45 minutes from groceries. I wanted upside and serenity. I didn't think a property like that existed. But Forrest found it
>
> **Tom M.**
> Lincoln County, N.C.

ABOUT BILLY PARKER

LAND BROKER

Billy Parker brings years of hands-on land brokerage experience to Poplar Land Company, with deep roots in the Piedmont region of North Carolina and the Virginia border counties. Previously with National Land Realty, where he served as the North Piedmont office broker, Billy built one of the most decorated track records in the region, closing hundreds of transactions across agricultural, recreational, residential, and commercial land categories.

billy@poplarland.com | 704-575-9750

> Billy Parker is a knowledgeable land broker who enjoys what he does. He is quick to roll his sleeves up and do whatever it takes to get the job done. Billy was there from start to finish and guided us through the entire process.
>
> **Jeremy S.**

Market data sourced from USDA NASS, LandBoss, LandHub, and regional broker intelligence. For informational purposes only.