

Appendix B - Farmland Ranking System

1. The York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board uses the Farmland Ranking System for the evaluation, scoring, and ranking of qualifying easement applications for perpetual conservation easement purchases in accordance with Regulation Chapter 138e.15.
2. All properties considered for easement purchase are evaluated regarding the soil quality, likelihood of conversion over a 20 year timeframe, proximity to other eased farmlands, land stewardship, and fair, objective, equitable, and non-discriminatory procedures.
3. The Farmland Ranking System is an objective, numerically based land use evaluation procedure. Originally developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service) as a method of evaluating the impacts of land use decisions, specifically, impacts to farmland. The York County Conservation Easement Program will use this land assessment tool to determine the relative importance, worthiness for farmland preservation, and priority of farm parcels which qualify for agricultural conservation easement purchase.
4. There are two parts to the Farmland Ranking System: (I) the Land Evaluation Category, and (II) the Site Assessment Category. The first category, Land Evaluation, is used to evaluate and compare the quality of the soils between farm parcels. The Soil Survey of York County, as issued in 2002, by the USDA, Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) in cooperation with Penn State University, College of Agriculture; the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, and the PA Department of Environmental Protection assigns the soil groups found in this county with a designation or Land Capability Class I through VIII. Prime soils are designated as Land Capability Classes I-II, statewide importance soils are Land Capability Class III, IV, and V. Land Capability Classes VI through VIII are known as Other Soils. Refer to Table 8 in the 2002 Issue of the York County Soil Survey for soil map symbol, soil name, and land capability class. Class I through IV are recognized in York County as the most productive for agriculture, specifically cropland, hayland, and pasture or grazing land uses. Other soils have limited agricultural uses, however, are recognized for their watershed, wetlands, conservation, wildlife, recreational or timberland uses.
5. Each soil mapping unit in York County has been assigned a relative value number based upon its land capability classification, soil group, and productivity. Based upon these factors, each soil mapping unit has been assigned a relative value from 100 to 0, with 100 being assigned to the most productive soils in the county for agricultural uses. See Relative Values of York County Soils listed in this section. Using a formula which multiplies the acreage of a soil mapping unit times its relative value and summing the amounts of all soil mapping units per farmland tract provides an average relative value which reflects the inherent productivity of each farm parcel. See Soil Evaluation Worksheet in this section.
6. The York County Conservation Easement Program assigns a weight of 40 % to the Land Evaluation Category of the total LESA score. The total possible score is 100 points for the soils category.
7. The Site Assessment Category of the Farmland Ranking System evaluates the non-soils related factors when comparing farmland parcels for suitability for farmland protection under the York County Conservation Easement Program. This category evaluates the farmland tract and the community surrounding the farmland tract and carries a weight of 60%. The three categories evaluated include; Development Potential, Farmland Potential, and Clustering Potential. Each category represents 100 points.
 - A. Development Potential measures the limitations, development pressures, or obstacles to the continued viability of production agriculture within the community. This category prioritizes communities that present threats to farmland conversion within the community. This category therefore is assigned a weight of 10% of the total score.

Appendix B - Farmland Ranking System (Cont.)

7. Site Assessment Category (Cont.)

B. Farmland Potential measures the potential agricultural viability of the operation. This category evaluates the productivity, efficiency, and management of the farm operation. The category tries to select the most productive and well-managed agricultural operations. This category is assigned a weight of 25% of the total score.

C. Clustering Potential assesses the land uses surrounding the farmland tract. This category prioritizes the importance of preserving large expanses of farmland for contiguous and compatible land uses. This category selects farm parcels that are surrounded by agricultural or conservation land uses to help shield the agricultural community from conflicting non-agricultural land uses which would impose restrictions upon normal farming practices. This category is assigned a weight of 25% of the total score.

Each category is assigned the following weights:

Land Evaluation	40%
Development Potential	10%
Farmland Potential	25%
Clustering Potential	25%

The weighted scores are added for all categories are summed and then ranked by priority according to the highest total weighted score to the lowest total weighted score, using the Farmland Ranking Worksheets. The farmland ranking score shall determine the order in which tracts are selected by the County Board for appraisal in accordance with Regulation Chapter 138e.63. Selection for appraisal shall be in descending order of farmland ranking score.

Appendix B - Farmland Ranking System (Cont.)

I. Land Evaluation Category Assigned Weight 40% Total Points Possible 100
Measures the soil quality numerically and indicates the agricultural productivity of the tract.

II. Site Assessment Category Assigned Weight 60% Total Points Possible 300

A. Development Potential Category Assigned Weight 10% Total Points Possible 100

1. Availability to Sewer and Water - Indicator of existing public infrastructure within close proximity to an applicant. Indicator of a potential threat of conversion to a non-farm use.

Less than 2 miles from public sewer and/or public water supply system	10 Points
2 miles to 4 miles of public sewer and/or public water supply system	5 Points
Over 4 but less than 6 miles of public sewer and /or public water supply system	2 Points

2. Road Frontage - Reflects development potential remaining with the farmland tract.

Road frontage totals 10,000 feet or greater	25 Points
Road frontage totals 9,999 feet to 5000 feet	15 Points
Road frontage totals 4,999 feet to 2000 feet	5 Points

3. Extent of Non-Agricultural Land Use In Area - Evaluates the imminent threat of conversion of the farmland tract to non-farm uses.

Non-Agricultural Land Use Adjacent to the tract is 75% or greater	10 Points
Non-Agricultural Land Use Adjacent to the tract is 50 to 74%	5 Points
Non-Agricultural Land Use Adjacent to the tract is 25 to 49%	2 Points

4. Compatibility of Farmland Tract with Local Land Use Plans - Determines the compatibility of the farmland tract with local land use plans.

Applicant is consistent with local land use plans	30 Points
Applicant is inconsistent with local land use plans	0 Points

5. Distance To Growth Areas / Rural Villages - Measures the proximity of the farmland tract to a Growth Area or a Rural Village.

Tract is within 3 miles to a growth area or rural villages	25 Points
Tract is over 3 but less than 5 miles to a growth area or rural villages	15 Points
Tract is over 5 but less than 7 miles to a growth area or rural villages	5 Points
Tracts located within an established growth area	0 Points

Development Potential Score = Total Points X .10

Appendix B - Farmland Ranking System (Cont.)

II. Site Assessment Category	Assigned Weight 60%	Total Points Possible 300
B. Farmland Potential Category	Assigned Weight 25%	Total Points Possible 100
Measures the potential for continued agricultural production and suitability of the farm for perpetual farmland preservation.		
1. Percentage of Farm In Harvestable Croplands or Pasture - Evaluates the percentage of land actually available for production.		
90% or greater in harvestable farmlands		30 Points
80 to 89% harvestable farmlands		20 Points
70 to 79% harvestable farmlands		10 Points
Harvestable lands are determined by conservation plans, FSA aerial maps, or ArcView Toolkit GIS measurements.		
2. Soil and Water Conservation Plan Implementation - Evaluates the level of conservation planning and practices installed thus protecting the soil resources and encouraging the long term agricultural productivity of the tract. (revised 9/16/97)		
80 to 100% plan implementation		15 Points
50 to 79% plan implementation		10 Points
0 to 49% plan implementation		0 Points
3. Contiguous Farm Size - Recognizing that the larger tracts of harvestable farmland are necessary to support the viability of agriculture within a community and to operate an efficient operation, this factor evaluates the tract based upon the size of the connected farmland tract.		
200 contiguous acres or more		20 Points
150 to 199 contiguous acres		15 Points
100 to 149 contiguous acres		10 Points
4. Annual Gross Farm Income - Evaluates the annual gross farm income produced by the farmland tract (application), using gross farm income as an indicator of farm production, efficiency, and contribution to Pennsylvania agricultural economy.		
\$500,000 or greater from the farmland tract		20 Points
\$400,000 to \$499,999 from the farmland tract		16 Points
\$300,000 to \$399,999 from the farmland tract		14 Points
\$200,000 to \$299,999 from the farmland tract		10 Points
\$100,000 to \$199,999 from the farmland tract		6 Points
5. Farm Capital Improvements - Evaluates the landowner investment in the farm operation and indicates viability of the tract as an ongoing operation.		
\$200,000 or greater in total farm capital improvements		10 Points
\$150,000 to \$199,999 in total farm capital improvements		8 Points
\$100,000 to \$149,999 in total farm capital improvements		6 Points
\$50,000 to \$99,999 in total farm capital improvements		4 Points
6. Proximity to historic, scenic, environmental, or cultural sites - Farmland tracts within proximity to a private, or a local, state, or federally designated historical, scenic, environmental, or cultural site shall be deemed compatible with agricultural practices and therefore prioritized.		
Tracts adjacent to a historic, scenic, cultural, environmental area		5 Points
Tracts not adjacent but within 1/4 mile to a historic, scenic, cultural, environmental area		2 Points
Tracts over 1/4 mile but less than 1/2 mile to a historic, scenic, cultural, environmental area		1 Point

Farmland Potential Score = Total Points X .25

Appendix B - Farmland Ranking System (contd.)

II. Site Assessment Category	Assigned Weight 60%	Total Points 300
C. Clustering Potential Category	Assigned Weight 25%	Total Points 100
Encourages the preservation of farmland in large contiguous blocks of farmland which will support commercial agriculture and help shield the agricultural community against incompatible non-agricultural land uses.		
1. Consistency with the easement planning and development map - Determines consistency of the application with resources identified on the York County Agricultural Land Preservation Easement Planning and Development Map. Resources identified upon the easement planning map are determined to be compatible with agricultural activities.		
Application is consistent with the easement planning map		10 Points
Application is not consistent with the easement planning map		0 Points
2. Proximity of the applying farmland tract to a public or privately* held perpetual agricultural conservation easement - Measures the proximity of applying farmland tracts to other preserved farmlands. Preservation in large contiguous blocks creates a community preferable for efficient agricultural production.		
Tract is less than 1/4 mile of a preserved farm		35 Points
Tract is 1/4 mile to 1/2 mile to a preserved farm		25 Points
Tract is over 1/2 mile but under 1 mile from a preserved farm		20 Points
Tract is 1 mile to 2 miles from a preserved farm		10 Points
* Privately held easements must also meet YCALPB minimum eligibility requirements to grant points to the adjacent applying farmland tract.		
3. Percent of land adjacent to tract duly enrolled within an Ag Security Area (ASA) - Measures the percent of farmland adjacent to the tract which are enrolled in Ag Security Areas, thus receiving the protective benefits by local municipalities and therefore creating an environment immediately adjacent to the tract which are conducive to normal farming practices. Adjacent lands in agricultural uses are compatible and preferable over non-agricultural adjacent land uses.		
75% or more of tract adjoins tracts enrolled in an ASA		10 Points
50 to 74% of the tract adjoins tracts enrolled in an ASA		7 Points
25 to 49% of the tract adjoins tracts enrolled in an ASA		5 Points
4. Percentage of land enrolled in ASA surrounding the farmland tract (applicant) - Measures the amount of farmlands within the neighborhood of a tract which are used for agricultural purposes and also receiving the protective benefits of ASA law by the municipality. Significant lands enrolled in ASA which are prevalent in the neighborhood of a tract are preferable and furthermore indicate a potential for farmland preservation activities to increase within that neighborhood. Large contiguous blocks of preserved farmlands are preferable for efficient agricultural production.		
75% or more lands enrolled in an ASA within 1 mile of the tract		20 Points
50 to 74% of the lands enrolled in an ASA within 1 mile of the tract		15 Points
25 to 49% of the lands enrolled in an ASA within 1 mile of the tract		10 Points
5. Zoning - Examines the communities level of protection provided to agricultural lands as evidenced by their adoption of agricultural preservation zoning ordinances which encourage the maintenance of large contiguous blocks of farmland necessary to the survival of commercial agriculture within the community.		
Municipalities with ag preservation zoning ordinances protecting 75% or more of the tract		15 Points
Municipalities with ag preservation zoning ordinances protecting less than 75 % of the tract		0 Points
Municipality requires lots be located on the least productive soils of the farmland tract		5 Points
Municipality ordinance includes a maximum lot size restriction		5 Points
* maximum points possible is 25 for this factor		

Cluster Potential Score = Total Points X .25