

The York County Agricultural Preservation Program

by Patty McCandless, Program Director

More on Preserving York County Farms -

An agricultural conservation easement is a legal agreement the property owner makes restricting the land to agricultural production in perpetuity while retaining private ownership. Should private ownership change, the restrictions remain with the land.

Farmland preservation ensures local farmland is available for agricultural production, while ensuring fresh and local foods are available to county residents. Another benefit of farmland preservation is to guarantee that these open spaces remain pervious to the natural water cycle, permitting ground water and aquifers to continually

recharge wells and water reservoirs. Preserving natural lands also protects wildlife habitat and creates riparian buffers along stream banks and stabilizes other sensitive wetland areas.

Because lands considered for preservation are subject to restrictions, the Ag Preservation staff strongly encourages landowners planning to preserve their family farm to meet with them early in order to understand the qualifications required. Eligibility requirements include acreage size, agricultural uses on 50% of the farm, enrollment in an Ag Security Area, and having a written soil and water conservation plan.

The Ag Preservation Office conducts mandatory annual farm visits of each preserved farm to review easement restrictions, discuss conservation concerns, or share important information, such as a possible deed conveyance, or farm sale. Certified letters of notification inform landowners of the planned visit - who are not required to be present. Landowners are encouraged, however, to share any changes to the farm deed or operation as they occur. Copies of the final inspection report are forwarded to each landowner for review. When a farm deed requires recording, the landowner must add the easement restrictions to their new deed - ensuring the perpetual nature of the easement program. Ag Preservation staff can review proposed deeds prior to recording, saving costly dollars.

Commissioners Chronister, Reilly, and Hoke approved 2008 funding for York County's Ag Preservation Program totaling \$4.1 million dollars. Douglas Wolfgang, Director of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture - Bureau of Farmland Preservation, released the 2008 State Farmland Preservation Allocations to counties with farmland protection programs listing \$2.5 million in state funds for the York County Ag Preservation Program. The 2008 York County farmland preservation funds, from all sources, total \$6.6 million.

The York County Agricultural Land Preservation Board closed its 2008 Application Round with 23 new applications (totaling 2,826 acres of productive farmlands) for consideration of farmland preservation. Past applications were also rolled into the 2008 application round - meaning the board and staff are currently evaluating 70 applications, on 6,900 acres of farmland preservation, using the current year funding. All applications are ranked to determine a 2008 Farmland Preservation Score. High scoring applications will then be selected for appraisal and preservation through the purchase of an agricultural conservation easement.

The County Ag Land Preservation Board holds public monthly meetings on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm in Room 4 of the County Annex Building, 118 Pleasant Acres Road, adjacent to the County Nursing Home.

Phone: 717-840-7400/Monday - Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.

