

FARMLAND PRESERVATION AND PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

Lancaster County, home to the richest, most productive agricultural soils in the country, faces a tough battle in efforts to preserve our home, our harvest, and our heritage. Development is closing in on the county from all sides. Approximately 1000 acres of farmland are lost every year in Lancaster County. As a citizen of the county, you are a critical component in our fight to save farmland. Please consider becoming an active supporter of farmland protection efforts and use your vote, dollars, and voice to encourage and support agriculture-friendly policy decisions.

Lancaster County Growth Management

The Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan is the blueprint used in carrying out the vision and mission of the county.

The Update to the Growth Management Element of the Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan is designed to help achieve and sustain Lancastrians' Vision of a balanced community where urban centers prosper, natural landscapes flourish, and farming is strengthened as an integral component of our diverse economy and cultural heritage.

Lancaster County stands at a critical crossroads in its history. The decisions that are made over the next 25 years regarding new development, reinvestment, and preservation of treasured resources will shape the quality of life and character of the County for generations to come. The Growth Management Element establishes the overall direction, tools, and an agenda for action by municipalities and the County to work together to realize the future to which Lancastrians aspire.

For detailed information on Lancaster County's Comprehensive Plan, visit <http://www.co.lancaster.pa.us/planning/site/default.aspt>

PA Route 23

Lancaster Farmland Trust has taken a position in opposition to any new highway to replace the existing PA Route 23.

The following is an excerpt of testimony to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation on the issue of building a new Route 23 presented by Karen Martynick, Executive Director of Lancaster Farmland Trust:

The Board of Trustees of Lancaster Farmland Trust has taken a position **in opposition** to any new highway to replace the existing Route 23. While PennDOT has proposed a new "right-sized" two-lane alternative for Route 23, it will still cut through the heart of this beautiful valley and through the soul of the Amish who have lived here for generations and continue to farm in the tradition of their ancestors and preserve a culture and way of life.

There is absolutely no way to insure the farmers and this precious soil will be protected over the long term if a new Route 23 drives development through this corridor. Splitting this community, these farms, this culture in two with a road built simply for convenience is not only unconscionable, it is also an economic nightmare to a County that is so dependent on agriculture and tourism.

To find out more information on the current status of the PA Route 23 project as well as history and background information, please visit: <http://www.paroute23.com/>.

To voice your opinion in opposition of a new highway Route 23, please fill out the form provided at http://www.paroute23.com/sign_up.htm.

POLICY AND PRESERVATION ISSUES:

Resource and Enhancement Protection Act (REAP)

Farmers in Pennsylvania are under increasing pressure to improve water quality in the state, and Lancaster County farmers are no exception. Farmers need financial assistance if they are to remain profitable and protect our watersheds and water supplies.

Unfortunately, money for state and federal conservation programs has not kept up with demand. In July 2006, Senate Bill 1286 known as REAP, or the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act of Pennsylvania, was introduced by Senators Wenger, Waugh, and O’Pake, and as House Bill 2878 by Representatives Stern, Hershey, Dailey, and others. This bipartisan proposal is an action-oriented plan to support pollution reduction projects on Pennsylvania farms. This plan is the first of its kind in the country, and it would provide state tax credits to farmers willing to install water quality improvement projects on their farms.

REAP would work as follows:

- Qualifying farmers would receive a state tax credit equal to 50 to 75 percent of the cost of eligible conservation practices, up to \$150,000 per farm. This tax credit is a dollar-for-dollar tax reduction that can be applied to business and individual state taxes.
- The tax credit is different from a tax deduction, which only reduces taxable income.
- Farmers could use the tax credit to reduce their own tax bill or sell it to another taxpayer for cash.
- REAP would also allow a business to help finance a project on a private farm, and in turn, receive the tax credit.

- The Pennsylvania Department of Revenue would pre-approve eligible projects and award the tax credit after the project is completed.

REAP is not yet available to Pennsylvania farmers since it is currently proposed as legislation. It will not pass without the support of Pennsylvania citizens like you. Please contact your state Representative, Senator, and the Governor and urge them to pass this new program.

For more information on the proposed REAP plan, please call the Pennsylvania Office of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation at 717-234-5550 or visit cbf.org/reap.

Lancaster Farmland Trust and Lancaster County Agriculture Preserve Board Create Joint Resolution

Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Lancaster County Agriculture Preserve Board met this year to create a resolution urging Lancaster County Commissioners to recognize the community's steadfast commitment to preserving agriculture as a way of life in the county. The following resolution was passed unanimously by both organizations and urges Lancaster County government to continue funding for farmland preservation in the 2008 budget.

RESOLUTION

Lancaster County Agriculture Preserve Board

And

Lancaster Farmland Trust

Whereas, Lancaster County has the richest, most productive, non-irrigated soils in the United States; and,

Whereas, Lancaster County's farmland and the industry it supports provide more than 51,000 jobs and contribute more than \$4 billion to our local economy each year; and,

Whereas, Lancaster County's farm families provide fresh, local food for County residents and people across Pennsylvania and the United States; and,

Whereas, Lancaster County's farmland protects watersheds; recharges groundwater, helps control flooding, improves air quality and provides food and cover for wildlife; and,

Whereas, Lancaster County's farmland is directly responsible for the exceptional quality of life and low tax rate enjoyed by our 500,000 residents, and;

Whereas, Lancaster County's farmland is our cultural heritage and an irreplaceable natural resource that defines Lancaster County as a unique place; and,

Whereas, the economy, quality of life and cultural heritage of Lancaster County are being threatened by the loss of more than 1100 acres of farmland each year; and,

Whereas, the permanent preservation of Lancaster County's farmland is an investment in the future of Lancaster County; and,

Whereas, Lancaster County is a leader in the nation and in the Commonwealth in the number of acres of farmland preserved with 57,101 acres and 675 farms preserved by the Agriculture Preserve Board and 16,441 acres and 262 farms preserved by Lancaster Farmland Trust; and

Whereas, 300 farm families in Lancaster County are currently waiting to preserve more than 21,000 acres; and,

Whereas, recent public opinion surveys indicate that more than 80 percent of the citizens of Lancaster County identify issues related to growth as a top priority for County government and are willing to pay additional taxes to preserve farmland; and,

Whereas, a reduction in funding for farmland preservation would have devastating consequences to the future of Lancaster County and to one of the most successful and most popular programs ever initiated by County Commissioners.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Lancaster County Agriculture Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust, partners in the permanent preservation of Lancaster County's rich farmland and in this resolution; hereby urge all current and future County Commissioners to continue the initiative to preserve and protect Lancaster County's lands and communities by supporting programs and policies and by dedicating funding to permanently preserve and protect our home, our harvest and our heritage.

Adopted unanimously this 21st day of June, 2007 by the Board of Trustees of Lancaster Farmland Trust. John Cox, Chairman.

Adopted unanimously this 28th day of June, 2007 by the Lancaster County Agriculture Preserve Board. Gene Garber, Chairman.

Ag Security Areas and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board:

An Agricultural Security Area or ASA is a special area created at the municipal level that comprises at least 250 acres of viable agricultural land. The properties within an ASA do not have to be contiguous. Approval by the Agricultural Lands Condemnation Approval Board is required for Commonwealth agencies to condemn productive agricultural land within an ASA. Projects involving improvements to highways related to (on or near) existing facilities are exempt from this requirement.

For farmland to be eligible for preservation through the County Agricultural Preserve Board, it must be located within an Agricultural Security Area.

In 1980, the Lancaster County Commissioners appointed a nine-member Agricultural Preserve Board to devise ways to protect the County's agricultural lands. In 1983, the Preserve Board added staff and was made a County department. Since 1983, the Preserve Board has administered a purchase of development rights program to preserve land for farming.

Over 54,000 acres of farmland have been preserved by the Board with 642 conservation easements that were acquired as of December 31, 2006. The Preserve Board has a responsibility to monitor these farms for compliance

with the terms of the conservation easement placed on the landowner's deed when the development rights are sold.

For more information on Agricultural Security Areas and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, please visit www.co.lancaster.pa.us.

Federal Eminent Domain Threatens Pennsylvania

The US Department of Energy is in the process of creating a federal eminent domain zone across more than 200 Mid-Atlantic counties including 50 in Pennsylvania. This designation will threaten landowners in Lancaster County and across the state by forcing new interstate high voltage lines upon the landscape.

The federal government has taken steps to allow new electric transmission lines across Pennsylvania by undermining state regulation, impact assessments, and planning for other alternatives. Two-thirds of the Commonwealth has been designated as part of the Mid-Atlantic National Electric Transmission Corridor and *50 Pennsylvania counties* are included in the corridor.

More information on this topic and opportunities for action may be found at <http://conserveland.org/pp/Transmission/index>.

Farm, Nutrition, and Community Investment Act:

The Farm, Nutrition, and Community Investment Act recently was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY) and in the House by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD). This bipartisan approach to farm and food policy promises to strengthen Pennsylvania's agriculture and ensure fresh, healthy food supplies while better protecting the environment.

For more information on how you can support this important legislative package, please visit <http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/pa>.

[Links to PALTA and AFT](#)