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WESTMORELAND COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION  
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### AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT OPEN APPLICATION PERIOD

Farmland owners enrolled in local Agricultural Security Areas\* in Westmoreland County may now apply to the Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Program to protect farmland from development through an Agricultural Conservation Easement\*. Each year that funds are available, applications will be accepted for review, (with an annual cut-off date of September 1st), and considered for the sale of an Agricultural Conservation Easement.

### APPLYING FOR A CONSERVATION EASEMENT IN 2018

The application for an Agricultural Conservation Easement provides the agricultural preservation board with preliminary information about the farm. If the farm meets the minimum criteria for consideration by the Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Board and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Farmland Preservation, a farmland preservation staff member will meet and discuss the application process and benefits of land protection with the farm family.

#### Minimum Criteria

Minimum guidelines have been developed by the Pennsylvania State Agricultural Land Preservation Board and the Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Board.

Farms must:

- Be in an Agricultural Security Area.
- Be at least 50 acres in size, unless adjacent to a tract protected by an agricultural easement. Farms of 35-49 acres may also be considered.
- 50% of the soils on the farm must be in USDA Capability Class I-IV as established by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- 50% of the farm must be harvested cropland, pasture, or grazing land.
- The owner/operator must maintain the farm following a USDA Conservation Plan, or a conservation plan developed with a USDA certified Technical Services Provider.

Please contact our office at 724.837.8971 for more detailed information regarding permitted uses of protected farmland and the application requirements. Application forms are available at our office, or by mail, or you may download an application from our website: [www.WCALP.org](http://www.WCALP.org)

7-30-18 re All Comm. Admin & Min.

## LAND EVALUATION AND SITE ASSESSMENT RANKING FOR FARMLAND

### How is an Easement Chosen for Purchase?

In addition to being a part of an Agricultural Security Area (ASA), the parcel of land is ranked against other eligible parcels according to criteria established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, using a Land Evaluation & Site Assessment (LESA), a weighted scoring system that considers the following criteria:

**Quality of Farmland:** State guidelines require that easements be purchased on farms of a minimum of 50 acres in size. Parcels as small as ten acres may be preserved if adjacent to existing preserved land. At least half of the tract must be harvested cropland, pasture or grazing land, and it must contain 50 percent farmland soils classified as I, II, III or IV, according to US Department of Agriculture's Soil Survey Data. Farms are ranked on the use of conservation practices implemented by the landowner to protect soil and water quality. Environmentally sensitive and historical areas that help to buffer farmland from non-compatible land uses are also considered.

**Likelihood of Conversion:** The farmland is scored and ranked for possible uses other than agricultural based upon a variety of factors such as: 1. Proximity of farm to sewer and water lines. 2. Extent and type of non-farm development nearby. 3. The amount and type of agricultural use in the vicinity and the combined acreage of other preserved farmland in close proximity.

**Determination of Value:** An independent state-licensed general real estate appraiser is selected by the county board to determine the agricultural conservation easement value of the farmland. A decision to purchase is based on the appraisal and the amount of funding available for that year.

**\*Agricultural Security Areas** The Agricultural Security Area Law (PA Act 43 of 1981) provides a tool for strengthening and protecting agriculture in Pennsylvania. Agricultural Security Areas (ASA'S) promote more permanent and viable farming operations over the long-term by strengthening the farming community and their right to farm. Township governments create ASA's at the request of farmland owners. ASA's provide three main benefits to landowners: 1. The Township agrees to support agriculture by not passing nuisance laws that restrict normal farming operations. 2. Limitations are placed on the ability of government to condemn farmland in the ASA for highways, parks, schools, or municipal projects. 3. Landowners will be eligible to voluntarily apply to sell or donate an agricultural conservation easement to the County Agricultural Land Preservation Program. Applications are available from our office, 724.837.8971 or on our website at [www.WCALP.org](http://www.WCALP.org).

**\*Agriculture Conservation Easements** An Agricultural Conservation Easement is a voluntary legal agreement between the farmer (landowner), the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the County of Westmoreland that permanently protects the land from development. The landowner retain ownership of the protected land and continue to make all managements decisions, within the limits of the agricultural conservation easement. Landowners receive financial compensation (\$\$) for placing their land under an Agricultural Conservation Easement. An offer to purchase the agricultural easement is based on an independent appraisal report prepared by a state certified general appraiser following the guidelines set by the Commonwealth for farmland preservation.

Program Made Possible By:

Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Farmland Preservation, Doug Wolfgang, Director  
Westmoreland County Commissioners: Gina Cerilli, Chairman ~ Ted Kopas ~ Charles W. Anderson

Directed By: Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Board: Duane E. Hutter, Chairman - Mary L. Trunzo, Vice-Chairman  
Fr. Warren Murrman, Treasurer, William Ebert, Alquin Heinnickel, John M. Jamison, Lon Sinemus, Ralph Frye, Ryan Harr  
Administrative Director: Betty J. Reefer Solicitor: Denis P. Zuzik, Esquire