



WESTMORELAND COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION
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AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT APPLICATION PERIOD OPENS FOR 2018

Farmland owners enrolled in local Agricultural Security Areas* in Westmoreland County may now apply to the Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Program for farm preservation consideration in 2018. Applications will be accepted until December 15, 2017.

Conservation Easements are a voluntary legal agreement between the farmer, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the County of Westmoreland that permanently protects the land from development. The landowner(s) retain ownership of the protected land and continues to make all management decisions, within the limits of the conservation easement. On average, Westmoreland County landowners are compensated \$2100 per acre for land placed under an Agricultural Conservation Easement. The final offer is based on an independent appraisal report prepared by a state certified general appraiser. In addition to normal farming activities on protected land, a landowner may also use the land for some of the following incidental activities, including:

- Direct sale to the public of agricultural products produced on the farm.
- Structures for production, processing, direct marketing & storage of agricultural products produced on the farm.
- Structures associated with the production of energy for use principally on the farm including wind, solar, hydroelectric, methane, wood, alcohol fuel and fossil fuel systems and structures for storage of animal wastes.
- Structures or facilities associated with irrigation, farm pond improvements and soil & water conservation practices.
- The production and sale, by persons in residence, of incidental agricultural goods, services, supplies, and repairs and/or the conduct of traditional trades and the production and sale of home occupation goods, arts and crafts, so long as these uses remain incidental to the agricultural and open space character of the farm.
- The accommodation of tourists and visitors within principally family residential and/or agricultural structures otherwise permitted under the law so long as the accommodation of tourists and visitors is undertaken as a part-time or off-season minor or rural enterprise and is incidental to the agricultural and open space character of the property.
- Agricultural-related services or activities associated with customary part-time or off-season minor rural enterprises and activities incidental to agricultural production as long as they remain incidental to the agricultural and open space character of the farm.

Beginning January 1, 2018, applications may be submitted any time, with an annual cut-off date of September 1. To be eligible for funds in 2018 be sure to file an application by December 15, 2017.

Please contact our office 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

We are here to help you complete the application and determine eligibility of your land.

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 Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and Westmoreland County, a farmland preservation staff member will discuss the application process 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* with 500 acres or more of farmland enrolled in the municipality's ASA where the farm is located.
- 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 if the farm is 80% or more harvested cropland or pasture and located in an important agricultural area identified by the county board.
- 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. Cropland must be capable of producing sustained yields per acre equal to the county average yields, as published by the PA Agricultural Statistical Service.
- Be maintained under a USDA Conservation Plan, or a conservation plan developed with a USDA certified Technical Services Provider who is qualified to write a conservation plan. A copy of your Conservation Plan must be submitted with the application.

In addition to meeting the above minimum criteria, the parcel of land is ranked against other eligible parcels according to a point-based Land Evaluation & Site Assessment ranking that considers the following information:

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 also 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 market value and agricultural value of the farmland. The difference between these two values is the maximum value of the conservation easement. The county board has the option to offer a purchase price that is less than the appraised easement value. The current average value paid for a conservation easement in Westmoreland County is approximately \$2,100 per acre. A decision to purchase is based in part on the amount of funding available for the protection of the farmland.



Preserving Our Heritage, One Farm at a Time

***Agricultural Security Areas ~ aka: Step One**

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.

Since 1990, the Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Board has successfully protected over 13,150 acres of farmland in 14 municipalities. Pennsylvania continues to lead the nation with the most successful farmland protection program with over 520,619 acres under perpetual conservation easements. Preserving our farmland isn't just about keeping the farmer farming. It's about protecting the land that provides food for our nation, whether we are talking about local sweet corn or beef cattle that are shipped and processed somewhere else, adding to the national supply of food commodities. The value of farm products is the backbone of this country and helps make America a world leader.