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PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Joining Resources to Preserve Farmland

The Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program was developed in 1988 to help slow the loss of prime farmland to non-agricultural uses. The program enables state, county and local governments to purchase conservation easements (sometimes called development rights) from owners of quality farmland.

As public funds for farmland preservation efforts are strained to meet the current demands of the farmland preservation program, developing new partnerships with private non-profit entities whose mission includes preserving farmland makes good sense.

Under current law, only governmental entities are permitted to fund agricultural conservation easements provided under the Commonwealth's farmland preservation program. By permitting private non-profit entities to join the Commonwealth in preserving agricultural lands, new funding can be made available and a combination of public/private monies can be leveraged to preserve more farmland.

Creating new partnerships also permits the Commonwealth to potentially reach more program participants. Many farms in Pennsylvania, especially in central and southeastern areas, are owned by Amish and Plain-sect people who would like to preserve their farmland but whose beliefs discourage them from accepting public funds. Non-profit organizations, as partners with the state, can help solve this issue by working with these landowners and helping to preserve their lands with private funds and/or other state incentives (such as the property tax rebates proposed).

Non-profit entities also bring valuable expertise and experience to farmland preservation efforts. Together, the Commonwealth and these groups can work on a common goal of preserving farmland and preserving Pennsylvania farmers.