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AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION ENHANCEMENT AND SPRAWL PREVENTION PROGRAM

Protecting Our Most Endangered Farmland

The Pennsylvania Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program was developed in 1988 to help slow the loss of prime farmland to non-agricultural uses. Each farm is rated against other eligible parcels according to a host of criteria, including:

- ❖ **Quality of the Farmland** – Easements must be purchased on farms of a minimum of 50 acres in size. Parcels as small as 10 acres may be preserved if adjacent to existing preserved farmland or used for the production of crops unique to the area. At least half the tract must either be harvested cropland, pasture or grazing land and it must contain 50 soil capability class I-N.
- ❖ **Stewardship** – Farms are rated on the use of conservation practices and best management practices of nutrient management and control of soil erosion and sedimentation.
- ❖ **Likelihood of Conversion** – Easements offered for sale to counties will be scored and ranked for acquisition based on a variety of factors, such as:
 - Proximity of farm to sewer and water lines.
 - Extent and type of non-agricultural uses nearby.
 - Amount and type of agricultural use in the vicinity.
 - The amount of other preserved farmland in close proximity.

The Agricultural Preservation Enhancement and Sprawl Prevention Program would take the new revenue generated from the dedicated funding proposed from the realty transfer tax on “agricultural lands” and direct that those funds be returned to the counties in which they originated to be used for farmland preservation.

The program is specifically designed to target resources to areas of the Commonwealth where development pressure is greatest, which is, in part, measured by the amount of land transactions that are occurring in a county. The realty transfer tax measures both the amount of pressure in an area as well as the value of land in an area. As such, taking the Commonwealth’s collections of the realty transfer tax on the transfer of “agricultural lands” and returning those funds to the counties in which the transaction occurred directly targets development pressure where it is being applied the most.