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The Purchase of Development Rights, Agricultural Preservation and Other Land Use Policy Tools: The Pennsylvania Experience

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The protection of farmland from development is emerging as a major policy initiative in several states and dozens of counties and municipalities. From a national perspective, the loss of farmland—estimated at about one million acres a year—does not appear to be a threat to America's food supply or food prices. However, from a local and regional perspective, farmland loss to suburban and ex-urban development can have a major negative impact on the local agricultural industry, drive up the cost of public services, and clutter the appearance of the countryside.

Federal Role

The federal government has had only a very small role in the direct protection of farmland. The 1981 Federal Farmland Protection Policy Act[1] directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture to review all proposed projects of federal agencies that would result in the conversion of farmland. The Act also authorized the creation of the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system as a way to analyze land use decisions regarding whether specific farmland parcels should be protected or allowed to be developed. The 1996 farm bill (the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996) (P.L. 104-127) included $35 million in grants to state and local governments for the purchase of development rights to farmland. This money will be spent or committed by the end of 1998, and additional funding has not yet been authorized. The federal government has indirectly helped farmland protection through lending programs, soil conservation, and crop subsidies, although the subsidies for most crops is due to expire in 2002. On the other hand, federal spending programs for roads and sewer and water facilities, and federal tax laws such as the mortgage interest deduction for homeowners, have resulted in huge subsidies for sprawling development which consumes hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland every year.

State Role

The state role in farmland protection has largely been limited to tax breaks, right to farm laws, purchase of development rights, and agricultural districts.

Every state offers owners of farmland some form of property tax relief to encourage farmers to hold onto their land. Nearly all states have adopted right-to-farm laws to discourage nuisance suits against farmers who follow standard farming practices. Property tax relief and right-to-farm laws are important but are relatively minor elements in the nation's leading farmland protection programs.

Sixteen states have enacted voluntary purchase of development rights programs whereby farmers agree to sell the right to develop their land in perpetuity in exchange for a cash payment.

[1] Congress passed the Farmland Protection Act as Subtitle I of Title XV of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 (P.L. 97-98).

Twenty-one states have authorized local governments to provide for the voluntary creation of agricultural districts by landowners. The benefits of enrollment vary from state to state, but may include reduced property taxation, exemption from sewer and water assessments, greater protection against eminent domain actions, and eligibility to participate in the purchase of development rights programs.

Two states, Oregon and Hawaii, require agricultural zoning as part of their state land use planning programs. Wisconsin uses the carrot of farm property tax breaks to encourage counties and municipalities to adopt agricultural zoning with a 35-acre minimum lot size.

Local Government Roles

Land use decisions are primarily under the control of county and municipal governments. In most cases, local governments have been left to devise farmland protection programs on their own. Most local efforts have not resulted in a farmland protection strategy.

Farmland protection is a complex issue. No one protection technique can address all the dimensions. Farmland protection programs can be judged according to whether they have achieved five goals:

- The protection of a critical mass of land—a sufficient base of farmland to enable support businesses to survive.
- The maintenance of affordable land prices for farm expansion and the entry of new (young) farmers.
- A reliable, long-term protection program.
- Cost-effectiveness—protection must come at a reasonable cost relative to its benefits.
- Sustained social and political capital through the support of the general public and elected officials (Daniels 1990).

A successful farmland protection program will include most, or all, of the following results:

- Affordable property taxes breaks for commercial farmers and foresters.
- Comprehensive planning at the county or multi-township level, together with restrictive rural zoning that allows only a low density of residential development and very little commercial or industrial development.
- The sale or donation of development rights to the county or state, reflecting a commitment to farming.
- Protection for farmers against nuisance suits for standard farming practices, and against eminent domain.
- Limitations on the extension of sewer and water lines and, thus, limits on urban sprawl.
- Rural residential zones on lower quality soils and in locations that will not interfere with commercial farming (Daniels 1990).

Farmland Protection in Pennsylvania

State zoning enabling legislation lays the foundation for land use controls at the county or municipal level. Many state enabling laws date back to the 1920s and 1930s, and have been minimally revised since. Pennsylvania's zoning enabling legislation was substantially amended in 1968 (53 Pa. Cons. Stat. Sections 10601 to 10605). The law states that:

"Zoning ordinances may permit, prohibit, regulate, restrict and determine: (5) Protection and preservation of natural resources and agricultural land and activities."

There have been two landmark court cases upholding the use of agricultural zoning by Pennsylvania townships: *Boundary Drive Associates v. Shrewsbury Township Board of Supervisors* (507 Pa. 481, 491, A.2d 86 (PA 1985) and *Codorus Township v. Rogers*, 492 A2d. 73 (Pa. Commw. 1985). In the first case, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court upheld a sliding scale agricultural zone. In the second, the Commonwealth Court (an appeals court) found that agricultural zoning served a public purpose and did not amount to a taking of private property without just compensation. The case, in effect, supported the use of agricultural zoning as strong as one building lot per 50 acres.

In 1974, the legislature passed Act 319—the so-called "Clean and Green" law—which allows for use-value assessment of farmland parcels of 10 or more acres and includes a rollback penalty for land sold before the 7 year escape period. The rollback includes back taxes that would have been due at the "highest and best use" assessment, together with 6 percent interest.

Act 43 of 1981 (3 Pa. Cons. Stat. Sections 901-915, as amended) established the agricultural district law. The law was amended by Act 149 of 1988 which more clearly defined "agricultural security areas" and created the joint county-state conservation easement purchase program. The 1988 legislation followed a statewide referendum in 1987 in which the voters of the Commonwealth approved a $100 million bond program to purchase development rights (conservation easements) to farmland. The referendum passed 2 to 1.

Municipalities may allow landowners to voluntarily enroll their land in a security area of at least 250 acres. The security areas do not impose any land use restrictions and offer landowners three benefits:

- Township supervisors agree not to enact nuisance ordinances that would restrict normal farming practices—this, in effect, strengthens the state right-to-farm law of 1982 (3 Pa. Cons. Stat. Sections 951-957).

- There is greater protection against eminent domain actions—a review by the Department of Agriculture is required.

- The landowner becomes eligible to apply to the respective county to sell development rights. As of 1998, Pennsylvania farmers had enrolled over 2.5 million acres in security areas.

In 1994, Governor Robert Casey signed Executive Order Number 3 which called for the state department of agriculture to review the proposed projects of all state agencies that might involve the conversion of farmland to other uses. The Executive Order essentially puts in place the type of review at the state level that the 1981 Farmland Protection Policy Act instituted at the federal level.

Also in 1994, the purchase of development rights program switched from funding through the sale of bonds to reliance on a two cent a pack tax on cigarettes. This tax has generated about $21 million a year. As of mid-1998, over 115,000 acres of farmland had been preserved through the joint state-county program at a cost of about $240 million.

Lancaster County: Pennsylvania's Leader in Farmland Protection

Lancaster County covers 603,000 acres of Southeast Pennsylvania and contains some of the most pro

ductive farmland in the United States. About 75 percent of the county has soils rated Class I, II or III by the NRCS. About 54 percent of the county has Class I and II soils considered "prime" farmland. In 1992, according to the U.S. Agricultural Census, almost two-thirds of the county, or 388,000 acres, were in farm use (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1993). The 4,700 farms in the county average 86 acres, but this small farm size is deceptive. In 1993, the county generated over $750 million in farm gate sales, ranking it first among counties in Pennsylvania and in the entire Northeastern United States, and 18th among all counties in the nation. Dairy, cattle and poultry are the leading enterprises. Crops grown include hay, corn, wheat, tobacco and vegetables.

The strength of Lancaster's farming sector suggests that a farmland protection program should not be aimed so much at preserving open space or "rural character," but rather at sustaining a working rural landscape in which the farming industry is an important component of the local economy. Lancaster County also has a strong retail sector, in part tied to tourism, and a diversified manufacturing base. The open space that farms provide contributes both to a thriving tourist industry of an estimated 5 million visitors a year and $500 million in annual revenues in 1993, and to the overall quality of life which has made the county a very desirable place to live.

Lancaster is also the heart of the Pennsylvania Dutch country. About 30 percent of the county's farmers belong to the Plain Sect community—Amish, Mennonite and Brethren. Their presence is another major contribution to the tourist industry and to the refreshing diversity of the county.

Development pressures in Lancaster County have risen steadily over the past 40 years. Between 1950 and 1980, the county population increased by 127,000 people. By 1992, over 422,000 people were living in the county. In April 1994, *U.S. News and World Report* named Lancaster County as one of the top ten booming areas of the United States, (*U.S. News*, p. 69). Thus, Lancaster County has been confronted with the commercial, industrial and residential growth pressures that have occurred in metropolitan areas throughout the United States (see Lockeretz). According to the Lancaster County Planning Commission, the population of Lancaster County is projected to increase to 600,000 residents by the year 2020 (1998). Lancaster County growth has come from increases in the indigenous population, a reflection of the conservative, family-oriented society, and of newcomers who work in the county or in Greater Harrisburg, Wilmington, Delaware and Greater Philadelphia—all of which are within a 45-minute drive of the county.

The visible loss of farmland and open space, together with serious traffic congestion, has convinced many county inhabitants that managing growth is essential if the landscape and quality of life it provides are to be sustained. A March 1995 poll by the *Lancaster New Era* newspaper found that farmland preservation was the number two priority among county residents, second only to crime and just ahead of traffic congestion (*Lancaster New Era*, p. 1).

Farmland Protection in Lancaster County

Lancaster County has employed a complementary set of farmland protection techniques to help channel growth away from productive farmland. These techniques include: agricultural zoning, agricultural districts, purchase of development rights, and urban growth boundaries.

Agricultural Zoning. The 1975 Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan identified 278,000 acres of farmland for long-term preservation. In 1976, East Donegal Township adopted the county's first agricultural zoning ordinance, and other townships soon followed. This

total rose to 320,000 acres in 39 townships by 1994. Most townships employ a zoning standard of one building lot of up to two acres for every 25 acres owned. For example, a landowner with 100 acres would be allowed to subdivide up to 4 lots and a total of 8 acres, retaining 92 acres for the farming operation. Three townships have adopted a standard of one building lot per 50 acres. Zoning is by no means permanent. Zoning may be changed through a petition process to the township. But, thus far, there have been relatively few rezonings of agricultural land to non-farm uses. Agricultural zoning could also be rescinded by township officials, but this has not happened in a single township that has adopted agricultural zoning.

Restrictive agricultural zoning remains somewhat controversial because farmers may not easily sell out for development and, hence, the value of their land is limited. On the other hand, there is recognition that agricultural zoning serves to separate farming (which is essentially an industrial land use) from potential conflicts with residential and commercial development. The key ingredient here is the commitment of the farming community to remain in farming. If the farm economy sours for several years, then pressure for rezonings out of agriculture could become common. At present, however, it is not politically popular for elected township officials to openly favor the conversion of farmland to non-farm uses.

Agricultural Security Areas. Agricultural security areas are voluntary. The creation, modification or termination of a security area is a matter of landowner initiative and township supervisor approval or denial. As of June 1998, there were 30 security areas in Lancaster County—comprising over 127,000 acres.

The creation of a security area or additions of land to a security area may occur at any time, but a landowner or group of landowners must submit a petition to the township supervisors requesting the creation of a security area or addition of their land to an existing security area.

Every seven years, a township will conduct a review of the security area to determine whether to reestablish the security area for another seven years, terminate the security area, or make modifications to it. During the review, landowners may apply to the supervisors to remove land from the security area.

Agricultural security areas have helped stabilize the farmland base. Although a security area does not impose any land use restrictions on a farmland owner, it does provide some important protection from nuisance suits and condemnation actions by government agencies. Relatively little land in security areas has been developed. The ability to sell development rights has not been the most significant part of the success of agricultural security areas simply because of limited public funds to buy development rights. However, interest in selling development rights has compelled many farmers to apply to join security areas.

The Purchase or Donation of Development Rights (Conservation Easements). In 1980, the Lancaster County Commissioners appointed a nine-member Agricultural Preserve Board to develop and administer farmland protection programs. The Preserve Board determined that the county should pursue a purchase of development rights programs and accept the donation of development rights. For the donation of a perpetual easement, a landowner may receive a deduction for federal income tax purposes. There are no tax incentives for the donation of a less than perpetual easement, such as a 25-year easement.

In America, a landowner essentially owns a bundle of rights that go with the land. These rights include water rights, air rights, the right to sell the land, the right to pass it along to heirs, the right to use the land, and the right to develop it. Any of these rights can be

separated from the bundle and sold, donated or otherwise encumbered.

Under a purchase of development rights arrangement, a farmland owner voluntarily sells the development rights (also known as a conservation easement) to a government agency or private land trust and receives compensation in return for the restrictions placed on the land. The farmer retains title to the land and can sell or pass along the farm, although the use of the land is limited to farming and open space. An easement is placed on the landowner's deed and "runs with the land," either in perpetuity or for a period of time specified in the easement document. The easement typically prohibits residential development except for the owner, the owner's children, or farm labor. Public access is not normally allowed, nor is the dumping of garbage or the removal of soil. Normal agricultural practices and structures are permitted as long as they comply with state and federal statutes.

In 1982, the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board received its first donation of a perpetual conservation easement. In 1984, the Board purchased its first conservation easements, using an allocation from the county general fund. Between 1984 and 1988, the Board offered only $250 an acre for perpetual easements or 25-year term easements. This easement price was generally well below the true value of the permanent development rights, and most landowners opted for the 25-year term easement. In 1988, the Board authorized the use of appraisals to determine easement value.

From 1989 to 1998, the Board received 378 easement sale applications and purchased 172 easements on 15,800 acres at an average price per acre of just under $2,000, or a total cost of about $30 million. The Board currently holds 247 easements totaling over 22,000 acres. Of these easements, 38 were donated by landowners (see Table 1).

The increase in easement purchases in 1989-1998 was made possible mainly through funding from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Farmland Protection. From 1989 through 1998, Lancaster County received $27.2 million from the state for easement purchases.

In order to receive state funds, a county first had to develop program guidelines which would then be approved by the State Agricultural Land Preservation Board, an appointed 17-member body. Second, a county had to appropriate funds for easement purchases. The amount of state funds a county received was deter

Table 1. Conservation Easements Donated and Purchased, 1982-1998.

	25-Year Term	Perpetual	TOTAL
Easements Donated			
Number	1	37	38
Acres	51.9	2,675.9	2,727.8
Easements Purchased			
Number	17	192	209
Acres	1,913.2	17,692.9	19,606.1
TOTAL			
Number	18	229	247
Acres	1,965.1	20,368.8	22,333.9

Source: Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, 1998.

mined by the appropriation made by each county and by the amount of money appropriated by all counties with approved program guidelines. Lancaster County appropriated an average of $1 million a year between 1989 and 1998—more than any other county in the state. Lancaster County raised some of the funds through the sale of general obligation bonds, and some from the county general fund—based mainly on property tax revenues.

The Preserve Board uses two policies to guide the easement purchase program. The first policy is to preserve farms that are close to each other. The second policy is to preserve farmland to help create urban growth boundaries.

Over three-quarters of the farmland that the Preserve Board has preserved is either contiguous to or within half a mile of another preserved farm. This policy serves three purposes:

- Large blocks of preserved ground for farming are likely to help farm support businesses remain profitable. One of the great strengths of agriculture in Lancaster County is the availability of transportation, processing, marketing, and farm input services. If these support businesses remain strong, agriculture as an industry will remain strong as well.

- The more farmland that is preserved in a neighborhood, the less likely it is that there will be non-farm development that can cause conflicts with farming neighbors.

- Under Pennsylvania law, if a farm has been preserved for at least 25 years, and if the farm becomes surrounded by development and there are no markets for what the farm is producing, the landowner may apply to buy back the development rights (at the appreciated value). The Preserve Board believes that by preserving farmland in large blocks, such buy backs of development rights will rarely occur.

Urban Growth Boundaries. The Preserve Board pursues a policy that is unique in the United States. This policy involves a strategic effort to the purchase development rights on farms fairly close to development to help create "Urban Growth Boundaries" and "Village Growth Boundaries" which will limit "sprawl out" onto productive farmland. In turn, these growth boundaries will help to encourage more compact development which is cheaper and easier to service. An urban growth boundary is drawn through an agreement by a city or village and surrounding townships with the aim of providing enough buildable land for the next 20 years within the boundary; and urban services—particularly public sewer and water—will not be extended beyond the boundary. The boundary may be changed upon review every three to five years.

As of mid-1998, 20 urban growth boundaries have been created in Lancaster County. Only eight proposed boundaries have not been formed. The county has acted as a catalyst in getting jurisdictions to accept growth boundaries. Significantly, the development community has supported the growth boundary concept because it creates a 20-year supply of buildable land and developers will not face the struggles over approvals that they have on rural land without public sewer and water. The biggest obstacle to creating growth boundaries is to get jurisdictions to cooperate. Some jurisdictions fear they will be relinquishing power and control by agreeing on a growth boundary.

The first growth boundary was formed in 1993. Since then, a total of 20 boundaries have been formed, and no boundary, once adopted, has been removed. The incentive for the townships is that more compact development means more manageable property taxes.

A 1998 study by the Lancaster County Planning Commission showed that among those townships with growth boundaries, 1,914 acres were developed inside the boundaries and 847 acres were developed outside the boundaries in the three years 1994-1996. Those townships without growth boundaries had 742 acres developed within proposed growth boundary areas, and 2,699 acres developed outside the proposed boundaries.

A Performance Evaluation of Lancaster County's Farmland Protection Efforts

Between 1982 and 1987, Lancaster County experienced a reduction of 14,000 acres of farmland. But, more notable was the decline of 17,000 acres among farms with annual sales of $10,000 or more (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1988). Meanwhile, the number of acres involved in subdivisions topped 50,000 in the 1980s, compared to just under 6,000 acres placed under easement (see Table 2). From 1987 to 1992, the County lost another 15,000 acres of farmland. However, since 1991, an average of 2,500 acres of farmland a year have been preserved through conservation easements—slightly ahead of the rate of farmland loss.

The addition of state funding for easement purchases has helped preserve several key farms, created significant blocks of preserved farmland, channeled development away from farming areas, and stabilized local land markets. Lancaster County has had about $3.5 million a year in state and county funds for easement purchases. This level of funding means that at least 1,500 acres a year can be preserved.

However, to look only at the amount of farmland under easements is somewhat misleading. Often the knowledge that a neighboring farm has been preserved through an easement will convince farmers to remain in farming. This can be deemed the "Permanence Syn

Table 2. Acres Placed Under Easement and Land Subdivision Activity in Lancaster County, 1980-1998.

Year	Acres Placed Under Easement	Number of Lots	Acres in Lots
1998 (Thru May)	1,600.0	N/A	N/A
1997	2,700.1	N/A	N/A
1996	2,400.0	N/A	N/A
1995	2,300.2	N/A	N/A
1994	2,293.4	2,009	8,200
1993	1,921.5	1,947	9,427
1992	2,578.4	1,897	5,180
1991	4,263.4	2,794	7,383
1990	1,349.6	4,352	7,225
1989	460.0	3,582	7,133
1988	766.9	3,232	4,456
1987	258.6	3,357	7,620
1986	1,964.2	5,376	7,886
1985	1,266.3	3,851	5,635
1984	1,044.6	3,688	4,377
1983	177.8	2,225	3,771
1982	291.5	1,816	3,193
TOTALS	**27,636.5**	**43,841**	**77,295**

Source: Lancaster County Planning Commission Annual Reports, Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust

drome," the opposite of the "Impermanence Syndrome" in which farmers reduce investment in their farms as they perceive the inevitable approach of development. The combination of agricultural security areas and agricultural zoning further strengthens the perception of permanence. Although it is possible for a township to re-zone farmland in a security area to a non-farm use, most townships appear reluctant to allow such re-zonings. The use of easement purchases to help create urban and village growth boundaries is an especially noteworthy achievement. Promoting more compact development and discouraging the extension of public sewer and water lines out into productive farming areas will reduce the conversion pressure on farmland.

An additional aspect to the Lancaster County farmland protection effort is the cooperative agreement between the county government and the Lancaster Farmland Trust, a private, non-profit organization. The County and the Trust have jointly preserved two farms, one of which was the farm where much of the movie "Witness" was filmed. This public-private partnership has been copied in several other counties in Pennsylvania to boost farmland protection efforts. The Trust has preserved over 5,300 acres of farmland since 1988.

The Lancaster farmland protection effort has three main shortcomings. First, because of limited funds, only a relatively few landowners will receive easement payments. Moreover, the payments primarily benefit the current generation, not future landowners.

A second shortcoming is that, in Pennsylvania, there are as yet no property tax advantages to landowners for joining a security area or selling an easement. All Pennsylvania farmers may qualify for use-value assessment, which means that farmland is taxed at its use-value rather than fair market value as potential development property. While this generally keeps farm property taxes low, it does not hold down the property tax rate. There are some cases in which taxes are becoming a determining factor as to whether or not a landowner will stay in farming.

A third shortcoming of Lancaster County's farmland protection effort is the voluntary nature of the security area and easement program. There may be key properties that will not be protected or preserved because the landowners do not want to participate or they wish to hold out for eventual development.

Lancaster County is making good progress toward the protection of a critical mass of farmland to enable support businesses to survive. Land prices for farmland, however, continue to be high—averaging $5,000 to $6,000 an acre. These prices make it difficult for existing farms to expand and for the entry of new (young) farmers. So far, the integrated package of agricultural zoning, agricultural security areas, easement purchases, and urban growth boundaries has been a reliable landscape protection program. The real test will come in the next 20 years when an additional 150,000 people are expected to reside in Lancaster County. Also, the cost of farmland protection has been reasonable. Zoning and urban growth boundaries are low cost techniques, and even easement purchases averaging $2,000 an acre appear to be good long-term investments, especially compared to easement costs in suburban Philadelphia counties which average over $5,000 an acre.

Manheim Township's Transfer of Development Rights Program

Manheim Township, a suburban community of 28,000 in North Central Lancaster County, adopted a transferable development rights program in 1991. (Pennsylvania law does not allow for the use of transferable development rights on a county-wide basis, as is done in some Maryland counties). The purpose of the program was to protect the remaining agricultural area in the northeast corner of the township. As a first

step, the township down-zoned 1,300 acres from one dwelling per two acres to one dwelling per 25 acres. Then, landowners in this "sending area" were given transferable development rights (TDRs) at a ratio of one TDR per 1.25 acres. In the northwest corner of the township, a "receiving area" was designated where developers could apply the TDRs they had purchased and receive permission to build at a higher density than the zoning would ordinarily allow.

Manheim Township also established a TDR bank whereby the township could purchase TDRs from landowners and then re-sell them to developers. The township set a price of $5,500 per TDR. This also served to establish a floor price that developers would at least have to match.

To date, the township has completed three TDR transfers, resulting in the preservation of 214 acres.

Farmland Protection in Other Pennsylvania Counties

As of mid-1998, 44 Pennsylvania counties were participating in the joint county-state purchase of development rights program. Not including Lancaster, the other counties have preserved about 100,000 acres. However, only a few counties have agricultural zoning ordinances, and many townships have no zoning at all. This brings into question the wisdom of trying to preserve farmland that will have a high cost—as in the case of suburban Philadelphia counties where development rights purchases average over $5,000 an acre. Also, without agricultural zoning, adjacent preserved farms could act as magnets for developers who look to build next to a preserved view. The resulting conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors could defeat the purpose of preserving the farmland.

Conclusion

The Lancaster County farmland protection program is noteworthy for two reasons. First, the county is a leading agricultural area, unlike other counties with farmland protection programs such as King County, Washington or states such as Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. Thus, open space protection is not the primary concern in Lancaster County—the purpose of protecting farmland is to maintain a strong agricultural economy while accommodating growth.

Second, Lancaster County is employing a complementary set of farmland protection tools. The County Comprehensive Plan identified lands that should remain in agricultural use. Nearly all of the townships have placed important farmland in agricultural zones with one small building lot allowed per 25 acres. Landowners, in conjunction with the townships, have placed over 127,000 acres in agricultural security areas. Also, the purchase and donation of conservation easements have preserved nearly 28,000 acres of farmland. Moreover, the use of easement purchases to create large blocks of preserved farmland and to help create growth boundaries has strengthened the overall effort to channel growth to appropriate locations.

Continued public support and funding will be essential, if farmland in Lancaster County is to be protected and preserved through the purchase of conservation easements. The easement approach is rather slow, generally preserving 2,000 acres a year. Over the long run, however, the purchase of conservation easements can have the effect of stabilizing the land base for agriculture, and discouraging the intrusion of non-farm uses.

Ultimately, the success of farmland protection depends on the farmland owners. So far, in Lancaster

County, landowners have demonstrated a fairly strong commitment to remain in farming. This commitment comes partly from the Plain Sect community for whom farming is an integral part of their culture, and partly from the fact that farmers can make a living in farming. However, should the economics of farming become less attractive and the lure of development dollars rise, then greater development pressure could be brought to bear on agricultural zones and security areas. In such a scenario, public offers to purchase development rights may not be competitive with non-farm offers. A crucial point is that local and even state policies directed at maintaining a landscape of working farms can attempt to restrict and channel development, but the economics of farming are greatly influenced by federal farm and interest rate policies.

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