

**WESTMORELAND COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND  
PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

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**2019 ANNUAL REPORT**

**PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE, ONE FARM AT A TIME**



Derry Township



*Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation*  
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**WESTMORELAND COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND  
PRESERVATION PROGRAM  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2019**

**“Preserved farmland represents an investment in our best agricultural land for not only our state economy, environment, and food supply, but for our generations to come.”**


**PA Secretary of Agriculture, Russell Redding 12/2019**

**OVERVIEW**

The Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Program has been protecting county farms for nearly three decades to keep farmland available for growing farm products in perpetuity. Our purpose and our mission have not changed as we continue to protect land by acquiring voluntary agricultural conservation easements, preventing the conversion of the land for any purpose other than agricultural production. As we see more farms passing on to the next generation, we know that the purpose envisioned by the Commonwealth over thirty years ago is working, and we are proud to be a part of this important cause.

In addition to establishing Agricultural Security Areas and securing Agricultural Conservation Easements, we encourage landowners to make a long-term commitment to agriculture by offering them financial incentives and security of land use. Making the most of agricultural conservation easement purchase funds and protecting the investment of taxpayers in agricultural conservation easements is a key goal of the State and County Agricultural Land Preservation Board of Directors.

Pennsylvania is a national leader in farmland preservation with 5,636 farms and 577,092 acres protected through permanent agricultural conservation easement. No other state has done more to protect its prime farmland soils for future generations. Pennsylvania has some of the most fertile, non-irrigated soils found anywhere in the world.

  
*“The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways.”*  
– John F. Kennedy

**2019 EASEMENT PURCHASE GRANTS & MATCHING FUNDS**

Annually the State Agricultural Land Preservation Board approves funding for county programs to purchase agricultural conservation easements. The annual appropriation for 2019 to the counties who have certified programs was \$38,000,000. Matching funds and grants for Westmoreland County totaled \$1,091,287.

County Easement Purchase Grant-	\$200,000
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania State Grant -	\$617,905
Commonwealth of PA Matching Funds -	\$252,064
Commonwealth Redistributed Funds for Preservation -	\$21,318

## ***PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION***

Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation Program is authorized to protect farmland under the guidelines of the Pennsylvania Agricultural Security Areas Law (Act of June 30, 1981, P.L. 128, No. 43). As required by law, the County program must be recertified by the state board every seven years, with any changes to the policy approved by the State Agricultural Land Preservation Board for compliance with the state regulations. The following policy changes have been approved for Westmoreland's program:

**Applications:** Applications for easement purchase will be accepted by the County Board at any time, with no deadline to apply. Applications received by September 1 of the calendar year will be evaluated as a group. Previous applicants will need to update application information under the same time frame. We will continue to require a conservation plan and the implementation of the plan at the time an application is filed with our office.

**Additional residential structure & subdivision guidelines:** House Bill 370 was signed in to law on July 1 as Act 33 of 2019. The legislation amends the Ag Area Security Law regarding farms under an Agricultural Conservation Easement as follows:

- \*Allows the landowner to relinquish the right to the additional residential structure by recording an affidavit.
- \*Allows for the existing residential structure to be subdivided *in lieu of* the additional residential structure (still limited to two acres or less).

This does not take away the landowner's right to the additional residential structure—however, if the existing structure is subdivided, then the additional structure may not be subdivided. This right only applies to farm owners who do not relinquish the right to the additional residential structure. Act 33 clarifies that the residential subdivision may be for the landowner, immediate family member, or employee of the farm.

**Inspections:** Each farm under an agricultural conservation easement will now be inspected biennially (every two years, rather than once a year) to assure that the provisions of the Conservation Easement are being followed. This site visit by a representative of the agricultural land preservation board also provides an opportunity to update the landowners on new provisions or changes to the Agricultural Security Areas program and their protection rights. Research of recorded documents related to the protected farm is also conducted annually to identify any changes in ownership or leases/subdivisions that may not be in compliance with the conservation easement.

## ***AGRICULTURAL SECURITY AREAS ~ PARTICIPATING TOWNSHIPS***

Agricultural Security Areas (ASA's) promote more permanent and viable farming operations over the long-term by strengthening the farming community's sense of security in the land use and their right to farm. Township governments create Agricultural Security Areas (ASA) at the request of farmland owners. ASA's in Westmoreland County are currently established in twenty municipalities, a total of 79,312 acres of farmland, 1,344 farm parcels owned by 1,080 landowners.

On December 9, 2019, Cook Township formally agreed to accept the petitions of farm owners in the municipality and begin the process to establish ASA's in the township, creating the 21<sup>st</sup> ASA district in Westmoreland County. Landowners interested in becoming a part of the Cook Township ASA should contact the township supervisors to file a petition to include their land in the review. The petition is available on our website at [www.wcalp.org](http://www.wcalp.org)

## ***CHARACTERISTICS OF PROTECTED FARMS FOR 2019***

The county agricultural land preservation board has selected four new farms for 2019 preservation that will bring the total acres of farmland protected in Westmoreland County to over 14,000 acres on 120 farms. Three of the new farms await state approval in early 2020, and represent diversified farm operations. The properties are located in Unity Township, South Huntingdon and East Huntingdon. Two of these farms have been in the same farm family for several generations and with the conservation easement, will continue the farming legacy. The protection of each farm provides a ripple effect in the agribusiness community. Farmers often use the easement proceeds for capital improvements to their farm operations and equipment purchases, all benefiting our local economy. The support services for our agricultural community are a key element in the long term preservation of the farming industry.

### ***CONSERVATION PRACTICES***

Farmland under an agricultural conservation easement must be maintained following USDA recommended conservation practices to protect soil and water quality. Typical practices include crop rotation, contour farming, rotational grazing and pasture improvement, streambank fencing and buffers. We encourage landowners to participate in USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service programs and to also consider using USDA approved Technical Service Providers to develop conservation plans for their farms. USDA Technical Service Providers can be found by searching the USDA website at <https://techreg.usda.gov/CustLocateTSP.aspx>

### ***PA BUREAU OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAMS FOR PRESERVED FARMLAND***

**The Preserved Farms Resource Center** was created in 2015 to assist preserved farm owners with business, succession and transition planning needs. Act 85 of 2016 amended the fiscal code to expand use of grant assistance program funds to include grants of up to \$3,000 each to owners of preserved farms for succession planning. Grant funds may be used for reimbursement on a match basis for costs incurred by applicants. The funds are administered by the bureau. In 2018, there were 13 grants awarded to farm owners totaling \$37,150.

## **THE PROTECTORS**

**“We who have a hand in preserving these farms can reap a satisfaction that few people can ever feel in a mere ‘job’. We are involved in keeping in this country one of the real touchstones of our civilization.**

**Daniel Webster once said in a speech, “When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilization.” If he was correct, and I believe he was, then we who toil in the vineyard of preservation are the protectors of human civilization.”**

*Mike McGrath, Director,  
Delaware Agricultural  
Lands Preservation  
Foundation*

*PA BUREAU OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAMS - CONTINUED*

PA Act 40 of 2019 expands on this effort through creation of the **Agriculture Business Development Center**, which will absorb the duties of the Preserved Farms Resource Center. The legislation was a key component of the 2019 Pennsylvania Farm Bill. The Center will support business planning, marketing, diversification, and transition planning services to Pennsylvania farmers, with a focus on preserved farms. Funds will go toward capacity building and direct grants to farm owners.

Westmoreland County Agricultural Land Preservation will co-host a special meeting at the Loyalhanna Watershed Association education barn in late February 2020 to explain the programs offered by the PA Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Farmland Preservation.

*ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS WITHIN THE PA BUREAU OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION*

**Clean & Green:** Assistance is provided on a continual basis for landowners who wish to complete an application for Clean & Green Preferential Tax Assessment through the county tax office.

**Century and Bicentennial Farms:** The Department of Agriculture recognizes Pennsylvania families who have been farming the same land for 100 and 200 years through the Century and Bicentennial Farm Programs. Criteria for recognition include:

- The same family must own the farm for at least 100 (Century Farm) or 200 (Bicentennial Farm) consecutive years;
- A family member must live on the farm on a permanent basis; and
- The farm must consist of at least 10 acres of the original holding, OR gross more than \$1,000 annually from the sale of farm products.

***WESTMORELAND COUNTY***

***ACRES PROTECTED BY MUNICIPALITY AS OF 12/2019***

<b>Bell Township – 538</b>
<b>Derry Township – 562</b>
<b>Donegal Township - 172</b>
<b>East Huntingdon Township – 2,273</b>
<b>Hempfield Township – 1,340</b>
<b>Ligonier Township – 982</b>
<b>Loyalhanna Township – 916</b>
<b>Mount Pleasant Township – 1030</b>
<b>South Huntingdon Township – 1,215</b>
<b>Salem Township – 2,790</b>
<b>Sewickley Township – 310</b>
<b>Unity Township – 1,619</b>
<b>Washington - 164</b>
<b>Total Lands Protected = 13,911</b>

***2019 APPLICATIONS RECEIVED***

***FOR CONSIDERATION OF A CONSERVATION EASEMENT***

**Applicants – 10 farms, 996.4 acres offered in 7 Municipalities**

***OUR SINCERE THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS***

**The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Governor Tom Wolff**

**Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Russell Redding, Secretary**

**The Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Preservation Board Members**

**PA Bureau of Farmland Preservation, Doug Wolfgang, Director**

**Westmoreland County Commissioners**

**Gina Cerilli, Chairman, Commissioner Ted Kopas and Commissioner Charles Anderson**

**The Township and Local Governments who have listened to their local farming community and established Agricultural Security Areas to protect and preserve our agricultural lands:  
Allegheny, Bell, Derry, Donegal, East Huntingdon, Fairfield, Hempfield, Ligonier, Loyalhanna,  
Murrysville, Mount Pleasant, Penn, Rostraver, Saint Clair, Salem, Sewickley, South Huntingdon,  
Unity, Upper Burrell and Washington**

***WESTMORELAND COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS***

**Duane E. Hutter, Chairman; John M. Jamison; Vice-Chairman, Mary L. Trunzo; Treasurer  
William Ebert; Alquin F. Heinnickel; Ralph Frye; Ryan Harr; Fr. Frederick Byrne; Samuel Smail  
STAFF & SUPPORT**

**Betty J Reefer – Executive Director**

**Denis P. Zuzik, Esquire – Solicitor**

***Why do farmers farm, given their economic adversities on top of the many frustrations and difficulties normal to farming? And always the answer is: "Love. They must do it for love." Farmers farm for the love of farming. They love to watch and nurture the growth of plants. They love to live in the presence of animals. They love to work outdoors. They love the weather, maybe even when it is making them miserable. They love to live where they work and to work where they live. If the scale of their farming is small enough, they like to work in the company of their children and with the help of their children. They love the measure of independence that farm life can still provide. I have an idea that a lot of farmers have gone to a lot of trouble merely to be self-employed to live at least a part of their lives without a boss.***

***Wendell Berry, American Novelist & Farmer***