

THE  
State of Farmland Preservation  
IN LANCASTER COUNTY



**Project Name:** The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County Report

**Award Category:** Taking Care of What We Have

**Participants:** Lancaster Farmland Trust; Tom Daniels, Ph.D.

**Nominee Information:**

Lancaster Farmland Trust

125 Lancaster Avenue

Strasburg, PA 17579

(717) 687-8484

[jswinehart@lancasterfarmlandtrust.org](mailto:jswinehart@lancasterfarmlandtrust.org)

[www.lancasterfarmlandtrust.org](http://www.lancasterfarmlandtrust.org)

**Nominator Information:**

Matt Knepper – Director, Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board

150 N. Queen St.

Suite 325

Lancaster, PA 17603

717-299-8355

[knepper@co.lancaster.pa.us](mailto:knepper@co.lancaster.pa.us)

**Project Summary:**

Increasing population pressure, coupled with a decline in funding for farmland preservation, leaves Lancaster Farmland Trust (LFT) and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board with more than 250 farmers waiting to preserve their farms. Acknowledging the need for thoughtful planning and decisive actions to protect the land that sustains our food, economy, and quality of life, LFT and Tom Daniels, Ph.D. created *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County*. The first initiative of its kind, this report integrates *places2040* to analyze municipal-level data on quality of farmland and development threats, providing a collaborative action plan to make meaningful change.

## **Project Narrative:**

For over 30 years, Lancaster Farmland Trust (LFT) has demonstrated a deep commitment to protecting Lancaster County farmland and supporting farmers. As crucial as farmland preservation was in the 1980s, it is much more critical now as we face a rapidly growing population and changing demographics evidenced in *places2040*. As development pressure increases, land values will rise and conservation will become more difficult – if not impossible – to achieve.

Today, Lancaster County has permanently protected over 1,500 family farms on more than 115,000 acres of the most productive, non-irrigated farmland in the country. Much of this success is due to the public/private partnership that the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board is proud to share with Lancaster Farmland Trust. Yet, as Lancaster County leads the nation in preserved farmland, the county continues to lose 1,200 acres of prime agricultural land to development every year - jeopardizing sustainable food production, economic opportunities, and the environmental benefits afforded by well-managed farmland.

According to population projections by the Lancaster County Planning Department, Lancaster County will add 110,000 residents by 2040. This, coupled with a decline in funding for farmland preservation, leaves Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board with a combined waiting list of 250 farmers who want to preserve their farms. With a small window of opportunity, thoughtful planning and decisive actions are needed to protect the land that grows our food, supports our economy and enhances our quality of life.

Recognizing that Lancaster County is at a crossroads, LFT collaborated with Tom Daniels, Ph.D. to create a comprehensive report on farmland preservation in Lancaster County. Daniels, a professor at University of Pennsylvania, frequently serves as a consultant to state and local governments and land trusts. He is known as one of the leading practitioners of farmland preservation, and – having served as the Director of the Agricultural Preserve Board of Lancaster County from 1989 to 1998 – he is well-versed in trends and challenges of farmland preservation in Lancaster County.

Using the American Farmland Trust's *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States* – an analysis of state-level farmland protection policies – as a model, LFT and Daniels set out to compile data to assess municipalities' policy solutions, raise awareness, and ultimately re-ignite conversations about farmland preservation. During the development of the report, they collaborated with experts from community organizations to harness knowledge and advice, including: the staff of the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, Planning Department, and IT-GIS Department; the Economic Development Company of Lancaster County; Warwick Township; Penn Township; Caernarvon Township; Manheim Township; and West Hempfield Township.

In June 2021, LFT released *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County*. The first initiative of its kind, the report provides critical insights into the status of Lancaster County farmland, demonstrating what the county has accomplished so far, what is envisioned for the future, and how the community can achieve that vision. In analyzing municipal-level data, LFT provides actionable information on quality of agricultural land, threats posed by development, and programs that can help protect farmland. Most importantly, it lays out calls to action from the federal-level down to neighbors and local businesses.

*The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County* anticipates future challenges and opportunities in the protection and preservation of land while demonstrating how municipalities have – or have not – responded to the threats of development. The report highlights the urgency that municipalities, especially those with high rates of conversion, must “step up” to save their farmland. While results show each township has taken steps to retain land for agriculture, all 60 municipalities – each with its own elected officials, zoning ordinances, and planning commissions – could do more to achieve efficient growth and preservation goals. Using *places2040* as roadmap, the report offers various “tools” for municipalities to implement to achieve regional planning goals and targets.

For one – LFT recommends various zoning and planning land-use approaches. As *places2040* calls for compact development within designated urban and village growth areas to accommodate the growing population and protect agricultural and natural areas, the report furthers these objectives by urging townships to adopt zoning policies that increase density within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) and Village Growth Areas (VGAs). It also encourages citizens to support development at 7.5 dwelling units per acre or greater within those UGAs and VGAs.

Moreover, *The State of Farmland Preservation* aims to break down boundaries – because landscapes do not end at township lines. *Places2040* identifies key activities that must be accomplished to achieve the goal of preserving high-quality farmland land and protecting the industry of agriculture. These include preserving large, contiguous areas of agricultural land and preserving the farmer as well as the farm. LFT’s report advocates that as municipalities take actions to protect farmland, there must also be a concerted effort to preserve these contiguous blocks of farmland to maintain the long-term viability of agriculture. It presents replicable case studies of Lancaster County municipalities who already participate in Transferable Development Rights (TDRs), which could be enhanced to allow for cross jurisdictional coordination between the county’s rural communities and urban areas to move industrial, residential, and commercial properties to communities where feasible.

Acknowledging that there is no “silver bullet” to save our farms, *The State of Farmland Preservation* also lays out several other actions to protect our agricultural resources. Since land conversion is driven by several factors, it makes clear we need a multi-level strategies to achieve change from the federal-level to civic engagement. Following are the calls to action we can take now to secure our agricultural land base and achieve the goals in *places2040*:

- **Federal:** Simplify the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP); make it less restrictive and more accessible to farmers; and increase level of funding.
- **State:** Allocate funds for private organizations to preserve farmland.
- **County:** Initiate a referendum to approve a bond issue or dedicated tax for open space and farmland preservation; double the investment made to date in farmland preservation over the next 10 years (\$125 million by 2030); and create a challenge grant program for townships to encourage participation in farmland preservation.
- **Townships:** Develop a farmland preservation strategy and implement it; engage local farmers to understand their needs; create a dedicated source of funding for farmland preservation; and adopt effective agricultural zoning of one dwelling unit per 50 acres and zoning to increase density within Urban Growth Areas and Village Growth Areas as outlined in *places2040*.
- **Preservation Organizations:** Advance strategies that link the preservation and conservation of farmland; double the amount of preserved farmland in the county by 2040; and advocate for state and legislative initiatives that preserve farmland, protect farmers and support agriculture.
- **Neighbors:** Attend township zoning meetings; be informed about land use and zoning in your community; provide public support for policies and programs that preserve farmland and control growth; volunteer to serve on township boards and commissions; and support development at 7.5 dwelling units per acre or greater within UGAs and VGAs.

Compounding the impacts of policies, the report also conveys a direct correlation between numbers of acres protected on an annual basis to available funding. Funding for preservation has dropped by 200% between 2010 and 2020, with only \$2 million being dedicated to it during 2021 – during which time the pace of preservation has slowed, contributing to the backlog of farmers waiting to preserve. LFT recommends that the county double the investment made to date in farmland preservation over the next 10 years to \$125 million by 2030. This investment could double the amount of preserved farmland in the county by 2040 – accounting for over half of all Lancaster County land zoned for agriculture. Using Honeybrook Township in Chester County as an example, where in 2005 voters approved a half-percent increase to a local income tax to fund preservation efforts, the report advises townships and voters to take similar steps to fund preservation programs.

In an effort to educate the public about the report’s findings and engage stakeholders in the conversation about land use planning and protection, LFT sent an executive summary of the report to 2,500 supporters, including townships, and community leaders. LFT also organized a panel discussion about the report in partnership with LNP Media Group. The panel was moderated by Bob Krasne, Chairman and CEO of Steinman Communications and included: Karen Martynick, former LFT Executive Director; Jeff Swinehart, LFT Chief Executive Officer; Tom Daniels, Ph.D.; Gary Kennedy, preserved farm owner and Fulton Township Planning Commission member; Scott Standish, Executive Director of Lancaster County Planning Department; Alice Yoder, Executive Director of Community Health Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health and former chair of

Lancaster County Planning Commission. The June 17<sup>th</sup> livestream was viewed by over 1,800 people.

Central PA's NPR syndicate, WITF, also featured Lancaster Farmland Trust on their July 13th edition of Smart Talk. Jeff Swinehart, CEO, and Karen Martynick, former Executive Director, spoke with Marie Cusick about historic efforts to preserve farmland in the Garden Spot, the recently released "State of Farmland Preservation" report, and what the future holds for agriculture and farming in Lancaster County. The July 13th program also included interviews with PA First Lady, Frances Wolf, PA Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Food Assistance, and York County Food Bank.

Not only did the release of this report cause waves in Lancaster County, but also in other Pennsylvania communities facing similar development. *The Morning Call* – a Lehigh Valley-based newspaper that ranks among the nation's top 100 largest-circulation daily newspapers – featured the report on the front page of their June 20<sup>th</sup> edition. The article, titled "What happened? What happened to our farms?: In Lancaster County", a call for massive acceleration of money, effort to preserve farmland", was part of a series of recent articles from the Lehigh Valley focused on saving farmland.

Perhaps the most indicative implication of the report is the increase of private funding. At the same time the report was published, LFT had announced the public phase of its first-ever capital campaign, Honoring the Promise, to preserve the 50 farms on their waiting list - totaling 4,000 acres of farmland - and to ensure the long-term stewardship of the land protected. Leveraging the report as a case for support, LFT surpassed its \$7.5 million dollar goal – raising nearly \$8.4 million. With this funding, LFT has permanently protected an additional 38 farms in Lancaster County, with 12 more in the queue.

### **Demonstrating Leadership and Effectiveness in Implementing *places2040***

Farmland preservation is essential to achieve the goals and objectives of *places2040*, and the dissemination and implementation of recommendations stated in *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County* is a leap forward towards achieving them. This project incorporates Lancaster County Planning Department's identified leadership principles and addresses the "Taking Care of What We Have" award category:

#### Planning Leadership Principles

- **Effectiveness:** *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County* is effective in advancing the goals and objectives of *places2040* by presenting a clear multi-level strategy to compact development within designated urban and village growth areas. It also provides digestible calls to action from the federal-level down to citizens to: invest in Lancaster County's future by creating new sources of funding and increase existing levels of funding for farmland preservation; follow the plan and embrace all aspects of *places2040*;

implement ordinances, polices and guidelines to ensure the success of the plan; and cooperation among local governments and the private sector to promote walkable communities to accommodate growth and to protect and preserve farmland. The result of the report – a reenergized conversation around farmland preservation and smart growth. With the valuable information and tools the report provides to our community, we are better informed and prepared to “Take Care of What We Have” through balanced growth and development while retaining working lands and an agricultural industry.

- **Innovation:** *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County* is the first comprehensive report on farmland preservation in the history of agricultural initiatives in Lancaster County. Using the American Farmland Trust’s national-level report, *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*, as a model, LFT sought to dig deeper into local preservation efforts by providing an analysis of municipal-level data on agricultural quality, threats, land-use policies and programs. The report also offers innovative planning techniques such as transferable development rights (TDRs), effective agricultural zoning, and agricultural security areas.
- **Use of Best Practices:** Farmland preservation makes it clear where farming is best suited. Separating productive farming areas from designated growth areas for commercial and residential development minimizes the potential for conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors. To achieve this, LFT’s report offers agricultural planning techniques and programs which have been proven to be reliable in the permanent protection of farmland.
- **Replicability:** By presenting several case studies in Lancaster and Chester Counties where ordinances protecting the right to farm have yielded positive results, LFT provides insight into how similar policies and programs can be implemented in other municipalities who support and want to fund the protection of agricultural land.
- **Partnerships / Collaboration:** In addition to working in partnership with Tom Daniels, Ph.D. on the creation of the report, LFT also collaborated with experts from the community to harness knowledge and advice, including: the staff of the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, Planning Department, and IT-GIS Department; the Economic Development Company of Lancaster County; Warwick Township; Penn Township; Caernarvon Township; Manheim Township; and West Hempfield Township. The report also calls for a regional approach to coordinate across municipal lines and work collaboratively in regards to zoning and in-fill of urban and village areas.
- **Effective Communication:** In an effort to educate the public about the report’s findings and engage stakeholders in the conversation about land use planning and protection, LFT sent an executive summary of the report to 2,500 supporters, including townships, and community leaders. LFT also organized a panel discussion about the report in partnership with LNP Media Group on June 17<sup>th</sup> –viewed by over 1,800 people. Further dissemination of the report’s finding also included press releases, social media posts, and op-ed pieces. Three pieces were written about the report in Lancaster Online (LNP), Lancaster Farming, and the Morning Call (attached).

- **Civic Engagement:** Often, there is disconnect among people who want to protect farmland and our natural landscape but do not want to reside in higher density neighborhoods. LFT's report provides information to the community on how in-fill and higher density in our urban and village areas directly impact the availability of viable farmland in rural areas, while presenting action items for citizens to do now to support farmland preservation. Additionally, LFT's report calls for civic engagement via: attending township zoning meetings, becoming informed about land use and zoning in their community, and providing public support for policies and programs that preserve farmland and control growth.
- **Advocacy:** The report demonstrates the county is losing farmland each year largely due to a growing population, and uses this as a torch to advocate for an increase of funding and support for planning practices that restrict commercial and residential developments to areas slated for new development. LFT's feat in raising nearly \$8.4 million of private funding to permanently protect more farmland is a testimony to this campaign.
- **Consistency with Planning:** *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County* integrates *places2040*'s blueprint to create a comprehensive plan that uses zoning and agricultural security to create balanced growth, while preventing sprawl and protecting natural resources. LFT's report calls for all to embrace all aspects of *places2040* and lays out tools to implement policies and programs to preserve large, contiguous areas of farmland; preserve the farmer as well as the farm; improve water quality and work together on stormwater management; maintain public infrastructure; and help local businesses grow. Similarly, the report references the importance of well managed farms, which when implemented, achieves goals as highlighted in the Countywide Action Plan for Lancaster County – a plan focused on improving water quality in the county. This plan identifies goals associated with the implementation of agricultural best management practices along with goals for land protection. Finally, all but one municipality in Lancaster County have agricultural zoned lands, and all of those zoning ordinance reference the importance of protecting farmland.

### Taking Care of What We Have

- **Preservation of Large Contiguous Areas of Agricultural Land - *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County*** advocates that as municipalities take actions to protect farmland, there must also be a concerted effort to preserve these contiguous blocks of farmland to maintain the long-term viability of agriculture. It presents replicable case studies of Lancaster County municipalities who already participate in Transferable Development Rights (TDRs), which currently are effective in preserving farmland in its own jurisdiction, but if enhanced, could allow for cross jurisdictional coordination between the county's rural communities and urban areas to move industrial, residential, and commercial properties to communities where feasible.
- **An Interconnected Network of Greenways and Open Space -** LFT recommends various zoning and planning land-use approaches to preserve open space. As *places2040*

calls for compact development within designated urban and village growth areas to accommodate the growing population and protect agricultural and natural areas, the report furthers these objectives by urging townships to adopt zoning policies that increase density within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) and Village Growth Areas (VGAs). It also encourages citizens to support development at 7.5 dwelling units per acre or greater within those UGAs and VGAs.

- **Strategies to Preserve the Farmer as Well as the Farm** - *The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County* keeps the farmers on the farm by enacting laws and adopt policies that support farmers and help make farming economically viable. Because preserved farmland can never be developed for residential, commercial or industrial uses, the value of the land is often lower, thereby, keeping the cost of the land affordable to those interested in purchasing it for farmland.
- **Regional Management of Stormwater:** Open farmland absorbs large amounts of stormwater and re-charge groundwater. Also, improved farm management for water quality helps townships meet their federal and state stormwater management requirements. Both the Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust state in their conservation easements that a preserved farm must be managed according to a soil and water conservation plan to decrease agricultural runoff. These measures can comprise riparian buffers, grass waterways, and improved manure storage – all of which are designed to intercept and infiltrate runoff before it can reach a waterway. Other conservation practices encouraged on preserved farms include no-till farming, cover crops, crop residue management, terraces, strip cropping, and contours to reduce the runoff of soil, nitrogen, phosphorus, and herbicides into waterways.
- **Protection and Restoration of Natural System:** In addition to the critical role farmland plays in producing food, farmland is also a valuable environmental resource. Well-managed farms help control stormwater, mitigate flooding, recharge groundwater, and sequester carbon while providing valuable habitat for wildlife.
- **Maintenance and Improvement to Community Infrastructure:** Preserving farmland improves Lancaster County’s green infrastructure by leveraging our natural areas to provide services. For example, Lancaster County is home to some of the world’s most productive, non-irrigated soil, meaning Lancaster County farmers can grow more food with less water than other areas of the world, which makes our community more naturally water efficient. Also, having local sources of commodities reduces infrastructure costs and the amount of truck traffic on our roads. Likewise, preserving agricultural areas ensures our communities grows where we already have development with infrastructure facilities and services.
- **Maintenance, Rehabilitation, and Reuse of Existing Buildings:** Density is important to eliminate sprawl. By encouraging density through policies and programs, our community is less likely to build new structures and facilities, and instead reuse existing buildings and lots.

- **A Sustainable Supply of Clean Water:** Preserving farms and open spaces serve as precious natural filters for our water. Vegetated lands act as a filter for rainwater runoff, reduce flooding and prevents soil erosion. Well-managed farms are the most cost-effective way to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus pollution to our local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.
- **Stewardship of Our Heritage:** With the development of Lancaster County, the agricultural heritage of Lancaster County is threatened. Our beautiful landscapes, unique cultures, fresh food, and work ethic and values of the people, all contribute to the exceptional quality of life in Lancaster County and draw people to the area. If big box shopping centers, outlet malls, and industrial centers continue to pave over our bountiful farmland - the very essence of what makes Lancaster County a special place would be lost forever. LFT's report demonstrates why a concerted effort to retain the agricultural heritage that is so important to the region's character.
- **Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Local Businesses:** Lancaster County's farms offer an abundance of fresh, local foods with farmers markets and roadside stands where people can buy fresh fruits and vegetables, cheeses and other products that are fresh off the farm. LFT's report calls on our community to promote our local economy by buying farm fresh products; while supporting local restaurants and stores that do the same.

### Web Links:

*The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County* – Full Report, Lancaster Farmland Trust: [https://issuu.com/lancasterfarmlandtrust/docs/sfp\\_report\\_v16](https://issuu.com/lancasterfarmlandtrust/docs/sfp_report_v16)

“What happened? What happened to our farms?: In Lancaster County, a call for massive acceleration of money, effort to preserve farmland”, The Morning Call: <https://www.mcall.com/news/pennsylvania/mc-nws-pa-lancaster-county-farmland-preservation-20210620-ohsxxhrnrvf3lpjpsbtt4u6kba-story.html>

“Watch: Panel discusses the importance of farmland preservation and the threat of suburban development [video]”, LancasterOnline (LNP): [https://lancasteronline.com/news/local/watch-panel-discusses-the-importance-of-farmland-preservation-and-the-threat-of-suburban-development-video/article\\_8d401038-cf78-11eb-bbc7-3379f00fd314.html](https://lancasteronline.com/news/local/watch-panel-discusses-the-importance-of-farmland-preservation-and-the-threat-of-suburban-development-video/article_8d401038-cf78-11eb-bbc7-3379f00fd314.html)

“Watch: Panel discusses the importance of farmland preservation and the threat of suburban development [video]”, Lancaster Farming: [https://www.lancasterfarming.com/news/main\\_edition/watch-panel-discusses-the-importance-of-farmland-preservation-and-the-threat-of-suburban-development-video/article\\_50c49506-28b4-573f-b4e8-a4d0c3b4fdc8.html](https://www.lancasterfarming.com/news/main_edition/watch-panel-discusses-the-importance-of-farmland-preservation-and-the-threat-of-suburban-development-video/article_50c49506-28b4-573f-b4e8-a4d0c3b4fdc8.html)

“Food insecurity and hunger plagues older population”, WITF:

<https://www.witf.org/2021/07/12/food-insecurity-and-hunger-plagues-older-population/>

Healthy landscapes, healthy communities [column], LancasterOnline (LNP)

[https://lancasteronline.com/opinion/columnists/healthy-landscapes-healthy-communities-column/article\\_2bd0fa0c-1c89-11ec-8de2-33594a7642f3.html](https://lancasteronline.com/opinion/columnists/healthy-landscapes-healthy-communities-column/article_2bd0fa0c-1c89-11ec-8de2-33594a7642f3.html)

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Cover photo: Sean Heisey, Midland Media



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# THE State of Farmland Preservation

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Executive Summary	iii
Introduction	2
A Shifting Landscape in Lancaster County	5
What is Farmland Preservation?	8
Programs to Preserve and Protect Farmland	12
Township-by-Township Land Use Comparisons	18
Township Efforts to Preserve Farmland	28
The Future of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County	32
Resources, References, and Footnotes	35



Sean Heisey, Midland Media

# Executive Summary

*Agriculture is important to all sectors of the Lancaster County community. Population growth will continue to put development pressure on farmland. Support from township, county, state, and federal governments, and from the private sector, will be essential to protecting the county's rich, productive farmland.*

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of efforts to preserve and protect Lancaster County's rich, productive farmland. The report examines programs and policies initiated by county and township governments, as well as private organizations such as Lancaster Farmland Trust, to support the agricultural industry and protect the most productive, non-irrigated farmland in the country.

Lancaster County leads the nation in acres of farmland preserved. Landowners have permanently preserved 115,238 acres across 1,539 farms, roughly 19% of the county's land area. Farmland preservation efforts by Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, together with township planning and zoning, contribute to orderly development and economic growth. Preservation also supports a strong agricultural sector, maintains the beautiful landscape enjoyed by residents and visitors, and protects our environment.

Lancaster County's population is growing at a rapid pace. Between 1980 and 2018, the county added 180,000 residents. This 4.6% growth rate was nearly five times the average growth rate of the state. Looking ahead, the Lancaster County Planning Department projects 108,000 new residents will be added by 2040.

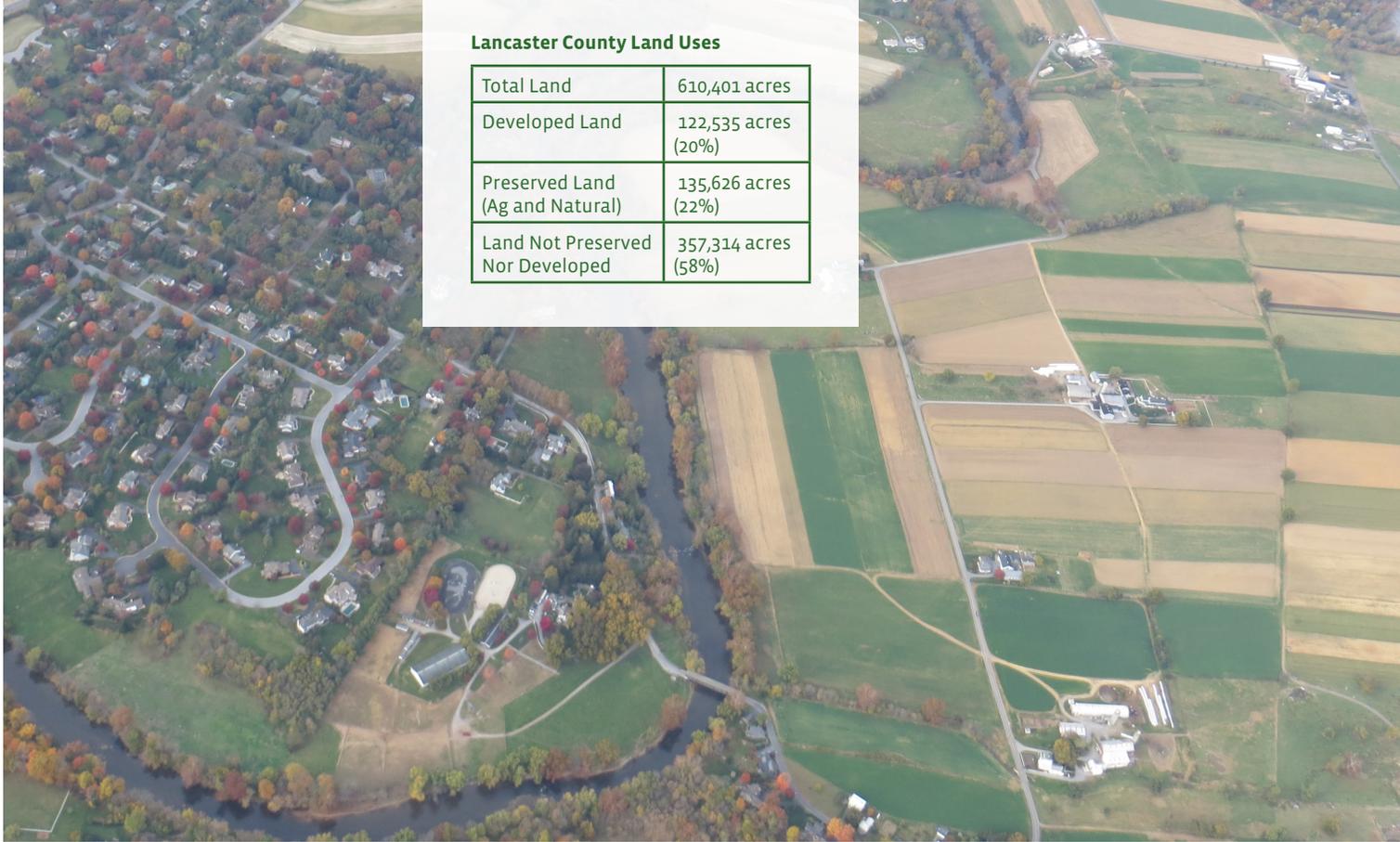
In 2018, the Lancaster County Planning Department developed a new comprehensive plan, *places2040*, which sets goals and guidelines to manage the county's expected growth. The plan calls for compact development within designated urban and village growth areas to accommodate the growing population and protect agricultural and natural areas. Farmland preservation is identified as an essential tool to achieve the goals of *places2040*.

The availability of public funding directly impacts efforts to protect Lancaster County farmland. Funding to preserve farmland comes from the federal, state, county, and township governments as well as private individuals, foundations, and businesses. Government funding for farmland preservation in Lancaster County has declined significantly in the last two decades, and has averaged slightly more than \$5 million per year for the past five years. While the investment in farmland preservation by the county has exceeded the state's investment since the inception of the program by 6%, state funding has exceeded county funding by 46.5% in the past five years. The county's investment in farmland preservation dropped by 40% between 2010 to 2020, continuing a decline since funding peaked in 2001 at \$16 million.

Growth and development pressures, plus a reduction in public funding for farmland preservation, leave the county's two primary options for farmland preservation, Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board, with a combined backlog of 250 farmers who want to preserve their farms.

Though farmland preservation has been successful in Lancaster County, efforts to preserve our best farmland face greater challenges than ever before.

Townships play a critical role in advancing farmland preservation efforts through effective agricultural zoning, agricultural



**Lancaster County Land Uses**

Total Land	610,401 acres
Developed Land	122,535 acres (20%)
Preserved Land (Ag and Natural)	135,626 acres (22%)
Land Not Preserved Nor Developed	357,314 acres (58%)

security areas, and innovative farmland preservation programs that complement the work of Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board. Decisions by township supervisors about the location, type, and size of new developments significantly influence the continuation of farming in their townships and across the county.

In addition to the critical role farmland plays in producing food, farmland is also a valuable environmental resource. Well-managed farms help control stormwater, mitigate flooding, recharge groundwater, and sequester carbon while providing valuable habitat for wildlife.

Agricultural land helps townships hold the line on taxes. Cost of community services studies have shown that for each dollar of property tax paid, farmland requires less than one dollar in public services. Protected farmland can also help townships plan for growth and direct it to places that already have existing or planned infrastructure in place.

The protection of productive farmland – whether through permanent conservation easements or temporary protection measures – benefits all community sectors, including the economy, the environment, and the social and cultural features that provide a high quality of life and make Lancaster County a unique and special place.

*\*The size, in acres, of Lancaster County can be calculated a number of ways. For the purposes of this report, we calculated the size of Lancaster County as 610,401 acres. Since water bodies form a part of the county's total area, the total land area depends on which of them are included. In this case, we removed the Susquehanna River.*

**FARMLAND PROTECTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19**

COVID-19 has only deepened the need for action to prevent farmland loss. For many Americans, the pandemic has been their first glimpse of food insecurity, illustrating the importance of a resilient food system. This can only be achieved if we protect and retain our agricultural lands. Furthermore, the weakened agricultural economy potentially places more land at risk of development as farmers struggle to make ends meet.

**RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

- **Townships:** Create and fund township farmland preservation programs.
- **County:** Double the lifetime investment in farmland preservation by 2030 (an additional \$125 million).
- **Preservation Organizations:** Double the amount of preserved farmland in the county by 2040.
- **Neighbors:** Speak Up! Provide public support for policies and programs that preserve farmland and control growth.

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*“[T]he preservation of our productive farmland ensures that land will always be available for the next generation of farmers — and the generations after that — to grow the food we need to feed our families.”*

*– Karen Martynick, Executive Director  
Lancaster Farmland Trust*

*(LNP | Lancaster Online, August 18, 2019)*

Sean Heisey, Midland Media

# Introduction

*Prime farmland – because of its well drained soil and level to gently sloped topography – is often the easiest land to develop, adding urgency to preservation in the county, which loses 1,200 acres of farmland every year to development.*

Farmland covers two-thirds of Lancaster County’s land mass and contributes more than \$1.6 billion in agricultural sales from the county’s 5,108 farms. Farmland also provides valuable environmental benefits, such as flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, air pollution removal, carbon storage and sequestration, and wildlife habitat.

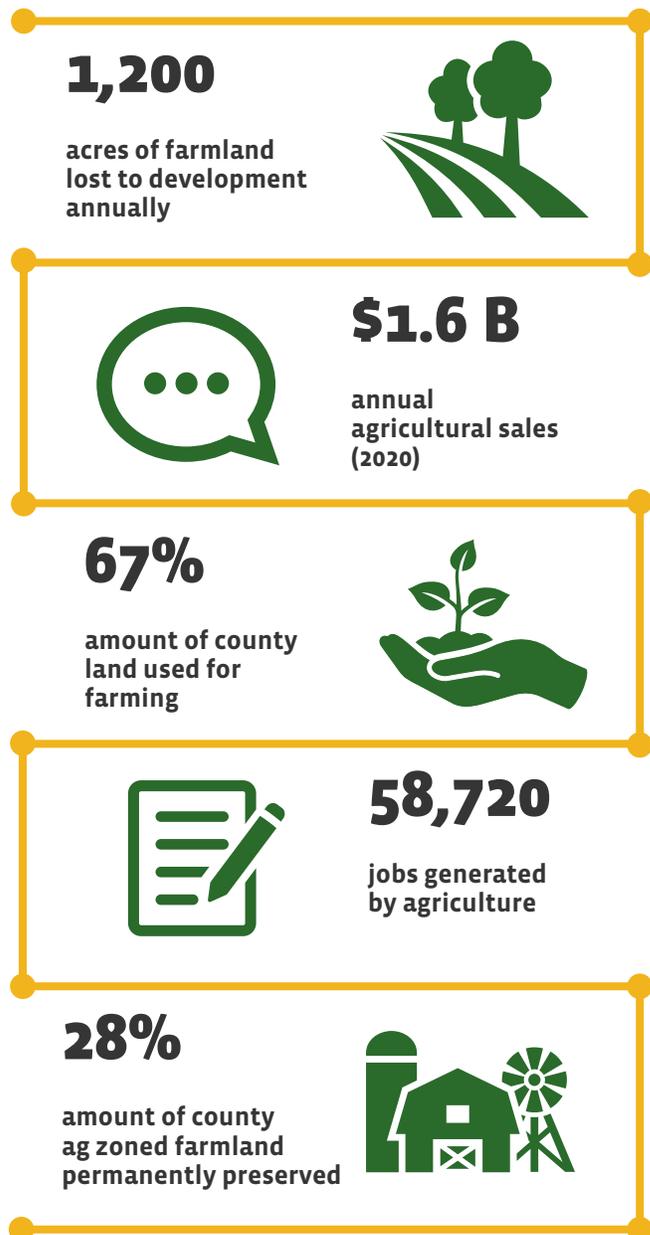
Agriculture is a critical industry in Lancaster County, providing more than 58,720 jobs and 13.7% of all earnings in the county.

Protecting local agriculture, contributes to food security in our region. Food security means that people have economic and physical access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. Producing food locally, helps to support the goal of food security.

Farmland preservation is one element in the effort to sustain and expand Lancaster County’s agricultural industry.

The pressure to convert farmland to housing or commercial uses is moderate to high across Lancaster County. Prime farmland – because of its well drained soil and level to gently sloped topography – is often the easiest land to develop, adding urgency to preservation in the county, which loses 1,200 acres of farmland every year to development.

Lancaster County’s beautiful farmland is a significant contributor to the county’s thriving \$2.9 billion tourism industry. In the past two decades, Lancaster County has evolved into a destination for tourists looking for both arts and culture in our urban centers and sprawling farm vistas and traditional values across the county. Lititz Borough claimed the “Coolest Small Town in America” designation in a 2013 national contest hosted by *Budget Travel Magazine*. In 2016, the *New York Post* proclaimed, “Lancaster [City] is the



*“Ensuring that our farms and our farmers remain viable is going to be critical to the overall economic aspect of Lancaster County, as well as the quality of life”*

*– Jeff Swinehart,  
Chief Operating Officer,  
Lancaster Farmland Trust  
(places2040)*

new Brooklyn,” and in 2019, the *U.S. News & World Report* named Lancaster County the number one place to retire.

These national accolades have brought the county more than tourists; the publicity has also attracted new residents. Between 2010 and 2018, the county grew by 4.6% – nearly five times the state average. In 2018, the Lancaster County Planning Department responded by publishing a new county comprehensive plan – *places2040*. The plan sets out both a vision for the county’s future growth and priorities for achieving that vision.

*places2040* also advocates for a “more effective and efficient development and preservation incorporating infill, redevelopment, and reuse; effective agricultural zoning and land protection; and maximum natural resource and landscape protection” (p. 66). At least 85% of new dwelling units should be built within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) and Village Growth Areas (VGAs) which have supporting infrastructure. Building within existing UGAs and VGAs slows population growth in rural areas, helps maintain land in agricultural use, and allows for the preservation of large, contiguous blocks of farmland in the rural areas of the county.





## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- **Invest in Lancaster County's future.** Create new sources of funding and increase existing levels of funding for farmland preservation at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels.
- **Follow the plan.** Embrace all aspects of *places2040*. Implement ordinances, policies, and guidelines to ensure the success of the plan.
- **Keep the farmers on the farm.** Enact laws and adopt policies that support farmers and help make farming economically viable.
- **Shop local.** Buy locally grown and produced farm products; support restaurants and stores that do the same.

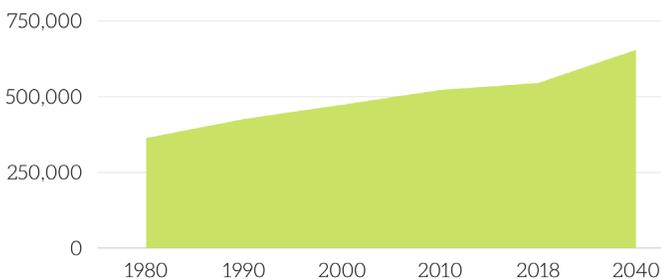
# A Shifting Landscape in Lancaster County

Lancaster County is the fifth fastest-growing county in Pennsylvania. According to *places2040*, the county is projected to add 108,000 people over the next 20 years reaching a population of 654,000.

To accommodate the growth and protect the quality of life Lancaster County residents enjoy, *places2040* calls for communities to reimagine their Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) over the next decade by increasing density and reducing the land consumed by development. “We’re consuming more land than necessary, because we’re building at lower densities than we should. From 2002–2015, average residential density in UGAs was 4.4 dwelling units per acre – significantly lower than the 7.5 units per acre target set in [the county’s 2006 growth-management plan]. As a result, we’re consuming 70% more land than we would at the target density” (*places2040*, p. 50).

Land use authority is vested in Lancaster County’s 60 municipalities. These municipalities face increasing pressure to balance the need to accommodate a growing population with the desire to protect what is unique and attractive about Lancaster County.

Chart 1. Lancaster County Population Change and Population Projection, 1980-2040.



Source: Lancaster County Planning Department

Farmland preservation plays a vital role in helping townships welcome new residents while protecting the county’s rich, productive agricultural land that supports the economy and contributes to the high quality of life that continues to draw new residents.

## POPULATION GROWTH IN THE TOWNSHIPS

The overall growth pattern in Lancaster County has shifted away from the metro core around the city of Lancaster and toward rural townships. A continuation of this pattern will put farmland at increasing risk of development.

Chart 2 shows that, of the 16 fastest growing townships, only two are suburban. The other 12 fastest-growing townships are more rural. Mount Joy and Rapho townships, which had the fastest growth rates by percentage, also have large amounts of land zoned for agriculture: 14,446 and 27,462 respectively.

Between 2010 and 2018, each of the six townships in the county’s northwest region experienced growth rates greater than 7.5% which was greater than the 4.6% population increases for the county as a whole.

During the same time frame, three townships in the northeast region grew by more than 8% while three rural townships in the east region had growth rates of more than 6.9%. Two townships in the south region and two townships in the west region grew by more than 6.5%.

If the growth trend in rural townships continues, pressure to rezone farmland to accommodate the growth in these communities will increase. Development in rural communities will increase pressure on farmland and the agricultural industry.

**Defining Terms:**

**Rural:** Low to moderate density; automobile-oriented. Typically does not have traditional village scale and character.

**Suburban:** Low to moderate density; automobile-oriented. Land uses and residential types typically separated from one another.

**Urban:** Highest density; traditional urban scale and character. Transportation network is highly connected; pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is more extensive. (*places2040*)

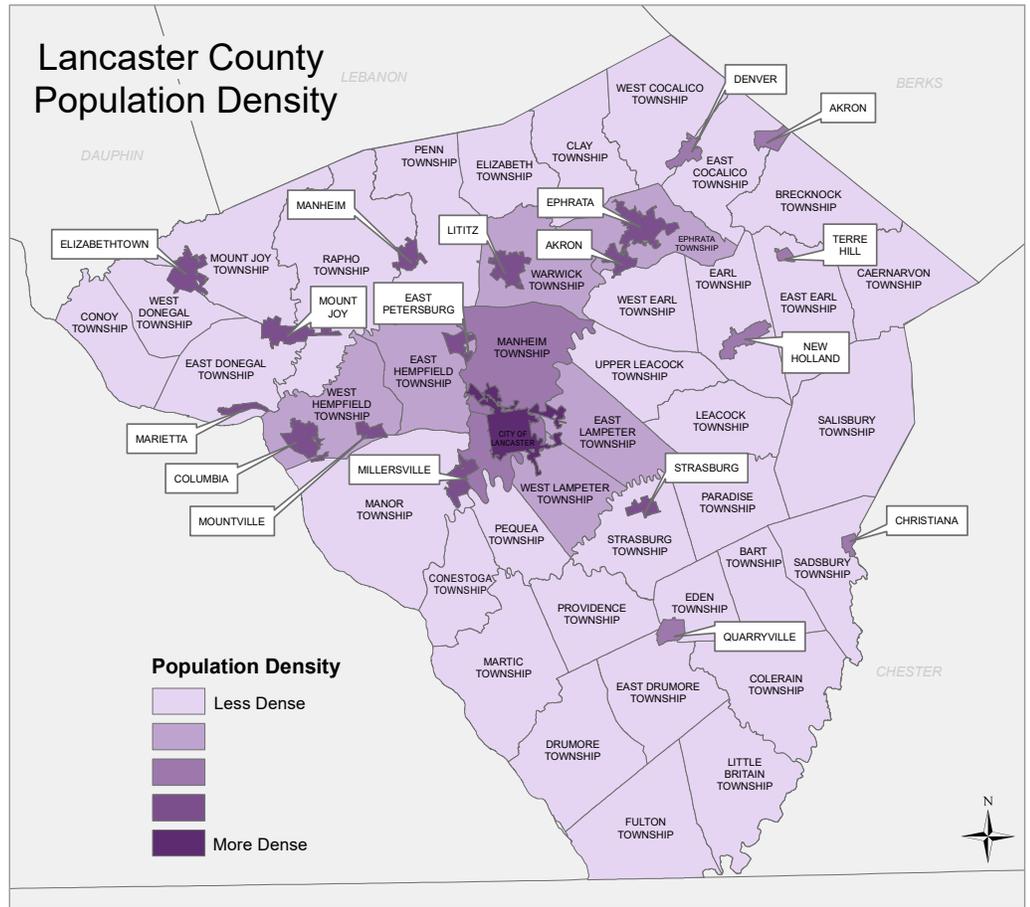
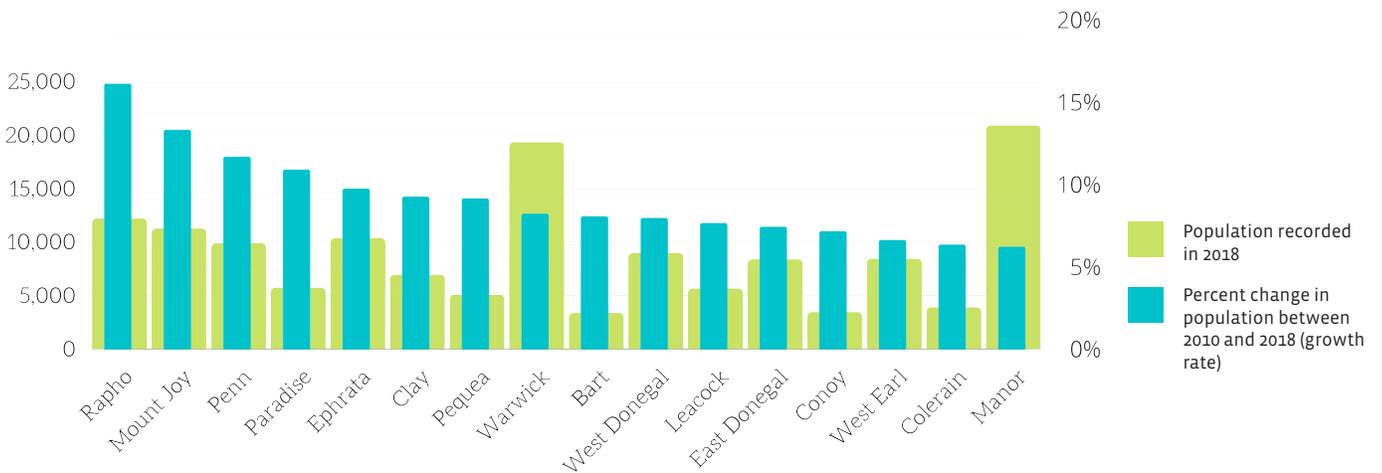


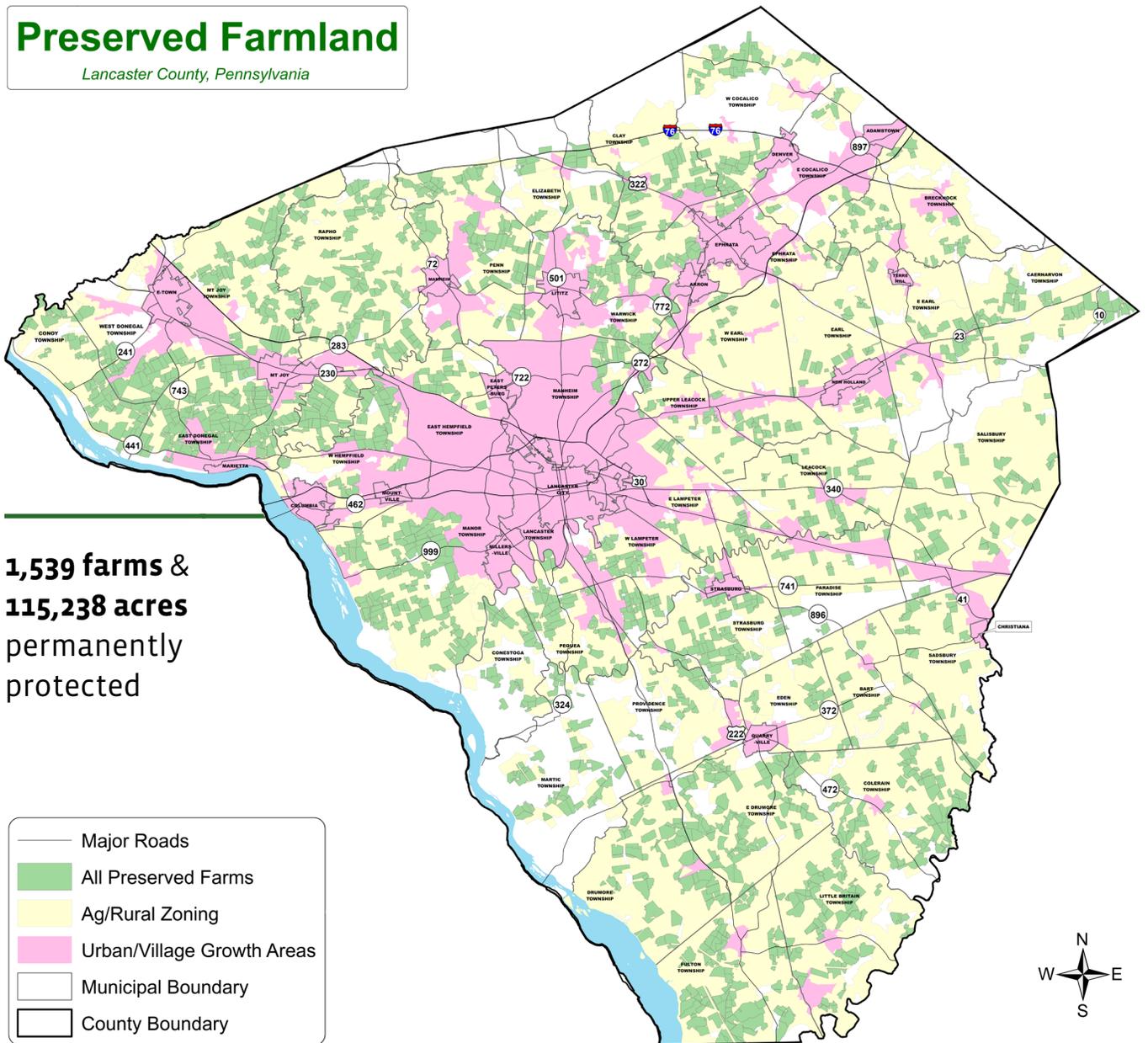
Chart 2. The Top Sixteen Townships by Growth Rates, 2010-2018



Source: Lancaster County Planning Department, U.S. Census Bureau.



Figure 1. Preserved Farmland in Lancaster County, 2021



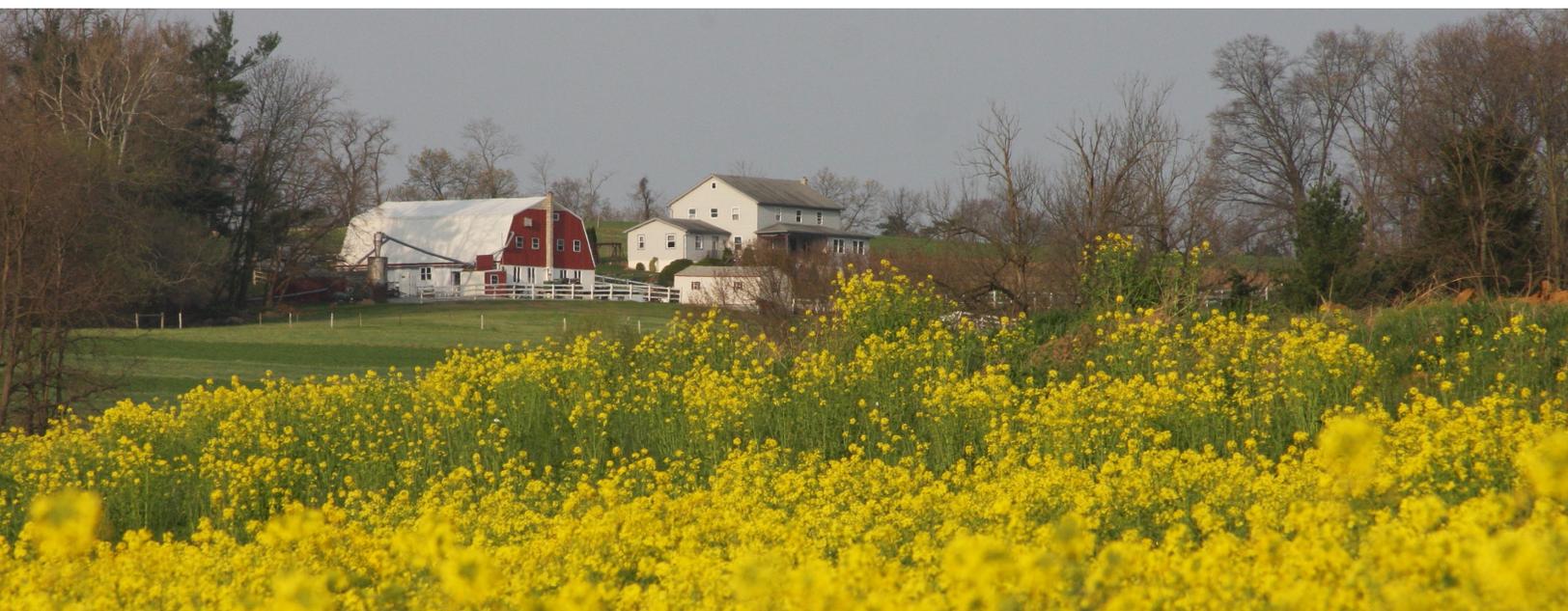
# What is Farmland Preservation?

The permanent preservation of a farm occurs when a landowner voluntarily places a deed of conservation easement on their property. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a third party (most commonly a land trust or government agency) that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation value. The restrictions in a conservation easement “run with the land,” meaning they apply to all future landowners. The land remains private property and remains on the tax rolls. The landowner may sell or transfer the property at any time.

When a landowner preserves their land, they may choose to receive a payment from the land trust or government agency in exchange for relinquishing the development rights and placing a conservation easement on their land. A landowner may choose instead to forgo a payment for the development rights and may choose to donate the value of the development rights or take a payment less than the appraised value of the easement. If a landowner chooses to donate the value of the easement – in entirety or in part – the value of that donation may be used as a federal income tax deduction.

Once a property is preserved, the land trust or agency that preserved the farm – known as the easement “holder” – is then responsible for upholding the easement for the term of the easement which is usually perpetual. This typically involves monitoring the farm on an annual or biennial basis to ensure the land is managed according to the provisions of the conservation easement.

In Pennsylvania, the legal authority for government entities to purchase or accept the donation of conservation easements was granted by Act 43 of 1981, the Agricultural Area Security Law. Act 149 of 1988 amended the Agricultural Area Security Law to create the Commonwealth’s farmland preservation program. Although land trusts could execute and hold conservation easements as a real estate transaction, the ability to purchase or accept the donation of a conservation easement was formally granted to private land trusts by The Conservation and Preservation Easement Act of 2001.



## THE BENEFITS OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Farmland preservation provides benefits to the economy, environment, and society, making up a triple bottom line of sustainability and value to the community.

**1) Protection of high-quality agricultural soils.** Lancaster County is home to the most productive, non-irrigated soils in the country and, thereby, some of the best farmland in the world. More than half of the county's farmland consists of soils rated Class I and II – prime farmland – by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Another 26% is rated Class III – farmland of statewide importance. Prime soils can produce more food per acre with less amendments and inputs.

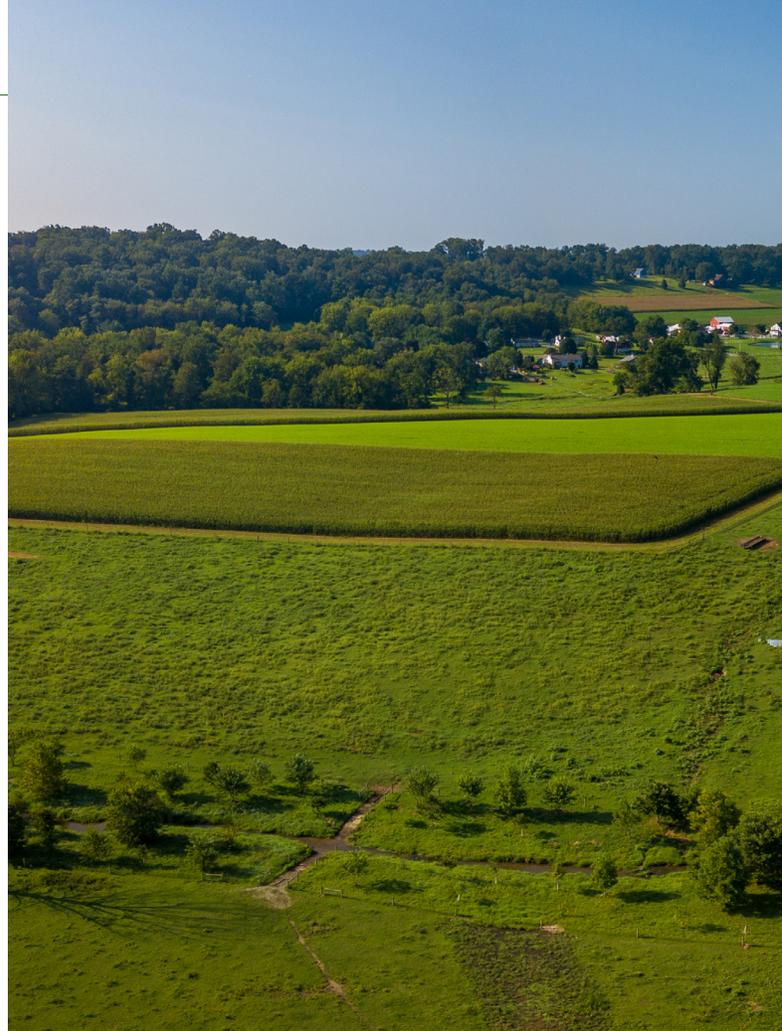
**2) Environmental benefits.** Keeping land available for farming provides a range of local and regional environmental benefits. Open farmland, as well as forested tracts on farms, absorbs large amounts of stormwater helping to mitigate flooding, offsets major rain and snow-melt events, and recharges groundwater. The same farm fields remove pollutants and store and sequester carbon, helping to offset the impacts of climate change.

Farmland and forested areas provide critical habitat for wildlife and food, shelter, and water for pollinators. Properly managed farmland can help landowners and townships meet federal and state environmental regulations. While these environmental benefits are not traded in markets, they provide real dollar-value benefits to the community. (See inset on opposing page)

**3) Land planning and growth management.** Farmland preservation can be used as a tool to separate productive farming areas from designated growth areas for commercial and residential development. Managing these areas in large, contiguous swaths minimizes the potential for conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors. Agricultural zoning and Agricultural Security Areas also help to maintain this separation, but remain subject to change at the discretion of township supervisors. Farmland preservation goes a step further in providing strong, permanent protection to retain farmland.

Protected farmland promotes redevelopment and infill of urban growth areas. A well-organized community with preserved farmland can balance growth and development while retaining working lands and the agricultural industry.

**4) Locally produced foods.** Increasingly, consumers want to know who is growing their food and how their food is grown. Lancaster County is a national leader among counties in direct sales through



Sean Heisey, Midland Media

farmer's markets, roadside farm stands, and community-supported agriculture programs where families buy shares in the food a farm grows.

Fresh, locally harvested fruits and vegetables are more nutritious and taste better than their shipped and shelved counterparts. Food grown and raised on farms in Lancaster County can be found on menus and shelves up and down the East Coast.

**5) Reduced cost of municipal services.** Studies conducted by the [American Farmland Trust](https://www.americanfarmlandtrust.org/) have shown that farmland contributes more in property taxes than it uses in services such as schools, police, fire, and sewer and water. For each dollar of property tax paid, farmland requires less than a dollar in public services. By comparison, residential development generally requires more than a dollar in public services for each dollar of property tax it pays. Permanently protected farmland helps municipalities and school districts control costs, hold the line on taxes and plan more effectively for the future.

**6) Next generation farmers.** The average age of farmers in Pennsylvania and Lancaster County is steadily increasing. Access to affordable, high-quality land is often a barrier for young farmers entering the farming business. The cost of farmland is high in Lancaster County, frequently reaching above \$22,000 an acre. The



## Environmental Impact of Preserving Farmland

conservation easement payment can provide a farm family with more options when selling the preserved farm to the next generation at an affordable price.

Because preserved farmland can never be developed for residential, commercial or industrial uses, the value of the land is often lower, thereby reducing the cost of the land to those interested in purchasing it for farmland.

**7) Economic impact.** The preservation of farms and farmland enables farm-support businesses, such as equipment dealers, feed mills, large animal veterinarians, and agricultural lenders to survive and maintain local and regional agricultural economies. A recent study for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture estimated that two dollars of economic activity results for every dollar spent on preserving farmland (Daniels, 2019). This is known as the multiplier effect; so, farmland preservation has an estimated multiplier effect of two.

A recent study of environmental benefits of preserved land in Chester County noted that the environmental benefits of preserved farmland differ according to the type of land cover.

The report estimated the following per acre and per year value of the environmental services of preserved farmland:

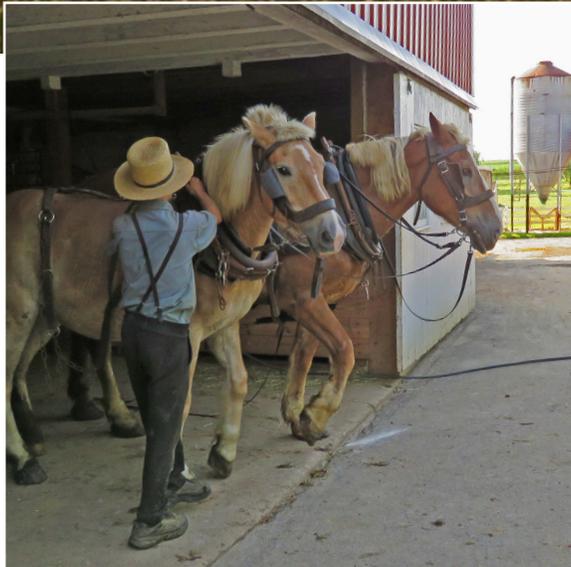
1. Water re-charge benefits at \$185 per acre
2. Water quality benefits at \$73 an acre
3. Flood control benefits at \$135 an acre
4. Wildlife habitat benefits at \$120 an acre

Forests on preserved farms produced the following estimated benefits:

1. Air pollution removal benefits at \$286 per acre
2. Carbon sequestration benefits at \$97 an acre
3. Carbon storage benefits at \$2,543 an acre

The total value of the farmland preservation benefits was estimated at \$3,439 per acre each year. (*Return on Environment Partners, 2019, pp. 57-61*)

\*The value of the environmental services of preserved farmland in Lancaster County may differ somewhat from those in Chester County. Still, the 2019 report demonstrates that preserved farmland makes a substantial contribution to environmental quality.



Today, nearly 250 farmers in Lancaster County are waiting to preserve their farms with either Lancaster Farmland Trust or the county's Agricultural Preserve Board.

# Programs to Preserve and Protect Farmland

There are multiple tools available to county and local governments to preserve agricultural lands and protect farming. In addition to conservation easement programs that permanently protect farmland, other tools, including agricultural zoning, right-to-farm laws, and preferential tax assessment for farmland, can also be effective in protecting farmland. These tools, however, are not permanent. An act of the legislature or a board of supervisors can eliminate or modify the programs at any time.

## PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

### Federal Farmland Preservation Program

In 1996, Congress created the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program to provide funding to state and local governments to purchase conservation easements on agricultural land. In 2002, Congress included land trusts in the program.

The 2014 Farm Bill merged the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program with the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Grassland Reserve Program to create the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Congress authorizes funding for ACEP through the Farm Bill. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized \$450 million for ACEP annually over the next 10 years.

Since 1996, federal grants for farmland preservation have totaled more than \$1.7 billion and have helped preserve almost two million acres of agricultural land in 44 states. The ACEP program is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Both the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust have received federal funds. Townships are eligible to receive ACEP funding although no township in Lancaster County has participated in the program.

### Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Program

In 1987, voters of the Commonwealth approved a \$100 million bond to purchase conservation easements to preserve farmland. The following year, Pennsylvania established its statewide farmland preservation program. After the \$100 million was exhausted, subsequent funding was approved by the state legislature. Currently, funding comes from “\$25.5 million annually from cigarette taxes and a variable amount of roughly 18.7% of the Environmental Stewardship Fund” (PA Department of Ag, 2019 Annual Report, p. 4). In 2020, \$43 million was available for purchasing conservation easements across the 58 counties that participate in the state farmland preservation program.

The farmland preservation program is administered by the Bureau of Farmland Preservation in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. The state legislature and governor determine the annual funding for the purchase of conservation easements. The State Agricultural Land Preservation Board then allocates that funding to counties who participate in the program.

The Bureau of Farmland Preservation uses a formula to determine how much state funding a county receives each year. The formula is based on: 1) the amount of matching funds allocated by each of the 58 participating counties; and 2) real estate transfer tax revenues of a county compared to the other participating counties. Real estate transfer tax revenues favor counties with more people and development activity.

In 2020, Lancaster County was second to Chester County in county matching funds authorized and the amount of state dollars received. At the time of this writing, no state funding is available for private land trusts to preserve farmland. Senate bill 64, which is currently under consideration by the House, would make available a limited amount of funds to land trusts to acquire conservation easements on farmland.

### Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board

The Lancaster County Commissioners created the Agricultural Preserve Board (APB) in 1980 to protect and preserve the county's agricultural land. The APB became a department of county government in 1983 and, in that same year, acquired its first conservation easement on a farm in Martic Township.

Lancaster County began participating in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Program in 1989. Each year, the Lancaster County Commissioners appropriate funds that are matched by state funds according to a formula. For a farm to be preserved by the APB, the farm must be within an Agricultural Security Area, at least 10 acres in size, within effective agricultural zoning, and outside of a designated village or urban growth area.

The mission of the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board is "to forever preserve the beautiful farmland and productive soils of Lancaster County and its rich agricultural heritage; and to create a healthy environment for the long-term sustainability of the agricultural economy and farming as a way of life."

Landowners interested in preserving their farm must apply to the Agricultural Preserve Board by September 1 of each year. The APB ranks applications on several factors and makes formal offers to the top ranking landowners in that year. The APB has established a cap of \$4,000 per acre for the purchase of a conservation easement.

Since 1989, the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board has invested more than \$235 million in municipal, county, state, and federal funds across 1,023 easements to preserve 84,750 acres of farmland, or an average cost of about \$2,800 per acre.

### Lancaster Farmland Trust

Lancaster Farmland Trust (LFT) was founded in 1988 to provide a private option for landowners interested in preserving their land. This includes Amish and Mennonite farm families who want to protect their land but prefer to work with a private organization because of their religious and cultural beliefs.

Recognized as a 501(c)3 by the IRS, LFT's mission is "to preserve and steward the beautiful, productive farmland of Lancaster County that reflects our heritage, supports our economy, protects our environment, nourishes our health, and enhances our quality of life." LFT is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is recognized as one of the 50 largest land trusts in the country based on number of easements held.

LFT uses a conservation easement similar to the APB to permanently protect farms. Landowners working with LFT, who are interested in a payment for the development rights, agree to accept a payment well

below the appraised value of the easement. The landowner may be eligible to use the donated portion of the easement as a charitable deduction on their federal income taxes. If a landowner chooses to donate the entire value of the easement, the entire appraised value of the easement may be eligible as a tax deduction.

LFT evaluates and scores farms utilizing the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system, which considers characteristics of the farm such as soil type, size, water resources, proximity to other protected land, and potential for development. The amount paid to a farmer for their development rights is based on the LESA evaluation. The maximum LFT will pay is \$1,500 per acre. Since it preserved its first farm in 1988, LFT has paid an average of \$545 per acre. Today, LFT holds conservation easements on 529 farms totaling more than 32,180 acres and has a waiting list of 46 farms.

Of the more than \$95 million of easement value, Lancaster Farmland Trust has only paid \$16.9 million for perpetual conservation easements – or 17.8% of the easements' appraised value.

### Transferable Development Rights

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is a municipal zoning tool used to permanently protect farmland and open space by directing development away from an area to be protected (sending area) to an area planned for development (receiving area). TDR programs are established by municipal ordinance. The provisions of the TDR ordinances vary from township to township.

In TDR transactions, landowners are financially compensated for extinguishing the development rights on their land. Depending on the specific ordinance and policies of a township, the development rights may be sold to the township, to a private organization such as a land trust, or directly to a developer who intends to build in another area of the township designated for growth. The land from which the development rights are severed is then permanently protected with a conservation easement or restrictive covenant.

A TDR ordinance specifies the development enhancement permitted with the use of TDRs. These include such things as greater density, increased permitted impervious surface coverage, special uses, as well as other options that would not be permitted within that zoning district without the use of TDRs.

Table 1. Government funding for the Preservation of Farmland in Lancaster County, 1985-2021

YEAR	County Funding	County Challenge Grant	Act 319 Rollback Tax Interest & Other	State Funding	Federal Funding	ANNUAL TOTAL
1985	\$317,540					\$317,540
1986	\$350,000					\$350,000
1987	\$300,000					\$300,000
1988	\$330,000					\$330,000
1989	\$500,000			\$2,433,387		\$2,933,387
1990	\$656,000			\$1,992,180		\$2,648,180
1991	\$1,250,000			\$1,967,027		\$3,217,027
1992	\$650,000			\$2,164,747		\$2,814,747
1993	\$845,000			\$3,192,729		\$4,037,729
1994	\$950,000			\$2,097,719		\$3,047,719
1995	\$950,000			\$2,403,538		\$3,353,538
1996	\$1,000,000			\$2,972,462	\$306,947	\$4,279,409
1997	\$1,500,000			\$3,509,808		\$5,009,808
1998	\$1,500,000			\$2,739,628	\$71,000	\$4,310,628
1999	\$3,500,000			\$9,682,584*		\$13,182,584
2000	\$7,000,000			\$5,687,589*		\$12,687,589
2001	\$16,000,000**		\$17,648	\$4,776,844		\$20,794,492
2002	\$4,000,000		\$17,916	\$3,553,292	\$260,000	\$7,831,208
2003	\$4,000,000		\$27,910	\$3,486,851	\$419,500	\$7,934,261
2004	\$4,000,000		\$39,896	\$3,589,177	\$351,397	\$7,980,470
2005	\$5,500,000	\$500,000	\$57,450	\$2,362,879	\$110,100	\$8,530,429
2006	\$8,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$26,156	\$9,312,198***	\$353,656	\$18,692,010
2007	\$8,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$306,201	\$3,938,159***	\$1,111,341	\$14,355,701
2008	\$8,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$359,016	\$3,090,699***	\$1,729,402	\$14,179,117
2009	\$6,800,000	\$850,000	\$275,497	\$2,380,847	\$1,009,933	\$11,316,277
2010	\$3,500,000	\$800,000	\$607,351	\$1,956,423	\$1,354,400	\$8,218,174
2011	\$3,250,000	\$750,000	\$815,385	\$2,313,360		\$7,128,745
2012	\$3,000,000	\$700,000	\$282,205	\$2,551,085	\$748,734	\$7,282,024
2013	\$2,750,000	\$500,000	\$272,185	\$3,373,146	\$228,632	\$7,123,963
2014	\$2,138,000	\$250,000	\$535,576	\$2,852,565		\$5,776,141
2015	\$1,350,000	\$200,000	\$254,696	\$2,607,880		\$4,412,576
2016	\$1,350,000	\$250,000	\$240,311	\$3,123,810	\$105,740	\$5,069,861
2017	\$1,500,000	\$250,000	\$325,115	\$2,962,770		\$5,037,885
2018	\$1,500,000	\$250,000	\$235,653	\$3,035,472		\$5,021,124
2019	\$1,500,000	\$250,000	\$260,639	\$3,017,906	\$266,244	\$5,294,789
2020	\$1,500,000	\$250,000	\$355,775	\$2,990,337		\$5,096,112
2021	\$1,500,000	\$250,000	\$257,654	\$2,923,565	TBD	\$4,931,219
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$110,736,540</b>	<b>\$9,050,000</b>	<b>\$5,570,234</b>	<b>\$111,042,663</b>	<b>\$8,427,025</b>	<b>\$244,826,462</b>

\*PA Growing Greener I

\*\*\$10 million bond dedicated for farmland preservation

\*\*\* PA Growing Greener II

Source: Lancaster Farmland Trust; Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board

Since the inception of the county's farmland preservation program in 1980, more than \$244 million has been invested in preserving Lancaster County's important agricultural lands by federal, state, and local governments.

Local funding has totaled more than \$125 million\* in comparison to the state's investment of \$111 million.

County funding, which reached a high of \$16 million in 2001, has declined since.

In 2005, the county initiated a Challenge Grant to provide funding to LFT to preserve farmland primarily for those who did not wish to participate in a government-sponsored farmland preservation program. Over its 15-year history, the grant has ranged from \$1,000,000 (2006-2008) to \$200,000 (2015) and has helped preserve 13,841 acres.

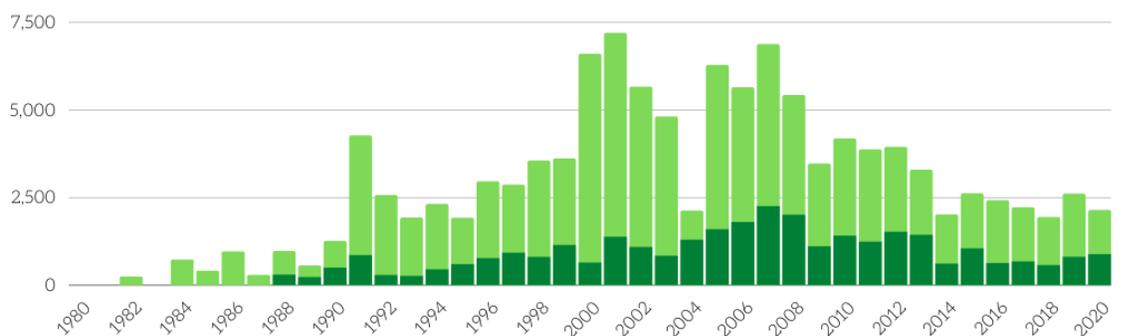
To date, the county's Challenge Grant has leveraged \$49 million in private funding for farmland preservation.

\*County and municipal funding, challenge grants, and 319 rollback tax

Chart 3. Acres of Farmland Preserved in Lancaster County, by year

The number of acres preserved each year generally corresponds to the level of funding allocated.

■ Lancaster Farmland Trust  
■ Agricultural Preserve Board



Six townships in Lancaster County have enacted TDR ordinances: Caernarvon, Manheim, Penn, Warwick, West Hempfield, and West Lampeter. The development enhancement, procedures for the sale and purchase of the TDRs, and the role of the township in the TDR transaction is different in each of these townships and is determined by the TDR ordinance enacted by that township and policies adopted to support the program.

LFT has purchased TDRs in Caernarvon, Manheim, Penn, Warwick, and West Lampeter townships. (To see how TDRs work, review page 13).

### Transferable Development Rights (TDRs)

TDR is a zoning technique that preserves land by redirecting development that would otherwise occur on the land (the sending area) to a receiving area suitable for denser development.

Six townships in Lancaster County have TDR programs through which the following acres have been preserved:

<b>Caernarvon:</b> 2,169	<b>Warwick:</b> 1,617
<b>Manheim:</b> 1,305	<b>West Hempfield:</b> 1,460
<b>Penn:</b> 583	<b>West Lampeter:</b> 146

### PARTNERSHIPS FOR FARMLAND PRESERVATION

#### Agricultural Preserve Board, Lancaster Farmland Trust, Townships

In 1989, the Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust entered into a public-private partnership to preserve farmland jointly. This partnership has resulted in 43 jointly preserved farms covering 3,144 acres. Landowners may request their farm be preserved jointly

for a number of reasons, including to increase their farm’s ranking with the APB. Other projects are preserved jointly due to their uniqueness, or to celebrate a county preservation milestone.

Since 2005, the Lancaster County Commissioners have made an annual challenge grant to Lancaster Farmland Trust. The grants total \$9.05 million, for which LFT raised matching funds equal to the amount of the grant. To date these grants have helped preserve 227 farms, 13,841 acres, and leveraged more than \$49 million in support.

### FARMLAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS

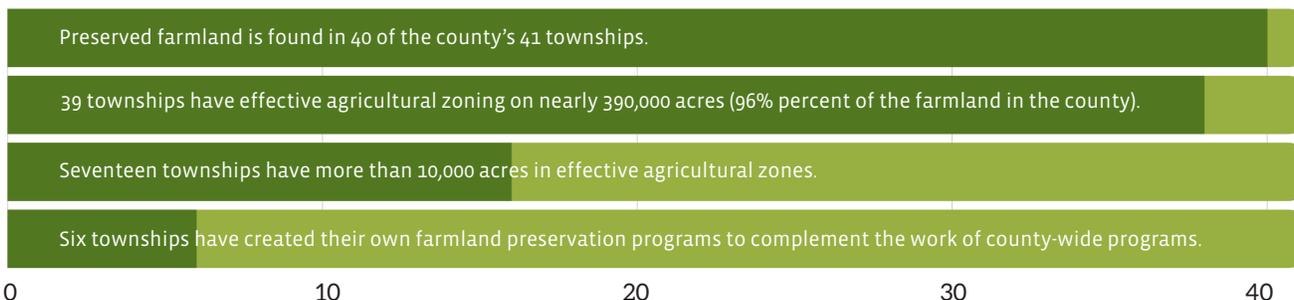
#### Right-to-Farm Law

Pennsylvania’s Right-to-Farm Act of 1982 limits the circumstances under which agricultural operations can be subjected to nuisance ordinances and lawsuits. The Act also prohibits townships from enacting ordinances that designate agricultural practices as nuisances and limits a township’s ability to take legal action against a lawfully operating farm unless the farm is causing adverse impacts on public health and safety. An example of such may include a noise ordinance that prohibits farm operators from harvesting time-sensitive crops late at night or early in the morning.

#### Act 319: Clean and Green Program

The Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act, more commonly known as Act 319 or Clean and Green, was enacted in 1974. Clean and Green is a preferential tax assessment program that bases property taxes on agricultural use values rather than fair market value. This method bases property taxes on the value of the income that land can generate when it is put to its best agricultural use. Use values are established annually by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. The intent of Act 319 is to encourage property owners to retain their land in agricultural, open space, or forest land use, by providing some real estate tax relief.

Chart 4. Township Programs, by the numbers



A landowner must apply to the county property assessment office to enroll farmland in the Clean and Green program. To qualify, a farm must have at least 10 acres or be capable of generating at least \$2,000 annually in farm income. If a landowner changes the use of his land to a use not permitted by Act 319, the landowner must pay rollback taxes for up to seven years, plus 6% simple interest. The Clean and Green program is administered by the Bureau of Farmland Preservation in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and county property assessment offices.

### Agricultural Security Areas (ASA)

In 1981, the state legislature passed Act 43, better known as the Agricultural Area Security Law. Act 43 was established to provide the means by which agricultural land may be protected and enhanced as a viable segment of the Commonwealth’s economy and as an economic and environmental resource of major importance. The act defines an ASA as “a unit of 250 or more acres of land used for the agricultural production of crops, livestock and livestock products under the ownership of one or more persons.” ASAs help to protect farmland and farmers, however, ASAs can be changed, decreased or eliminated and does not permanently protect farmland.

Townships must create an ASA if there is sufficient interest from landowners whose land totals at least 250 acres. A landowner applies to the township to include their land in an ASA. Parcels of 10 or more acres are eligible to be included in an ASA. Landowners may add or remove land from an existing ASA at any time after review and approval of the township supervisors.

It’s important to note that farmland is often located in a township’s effective agriculture zone and also enrolled in the Agricultural Security Area.

Landowners who enroll their farms in an Agricultural Security Area receive three benefits:

1. The Township Supervisors agree not to enact nuisance ordinances that would restrict standard farming practices.
2. Landowners have greater protection against eminent domain actions by government agencies.
3. Landowners are eligible to preserve their farms through the Agricultural Preserve Board.

### Effective Agricultural Zoning

The Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code allows townships to adopt zoning ordinances that protect prime agricultural land and farming activities (Act 247 of 1968 as amended, Section 603(b)(5), Section 603(c)(7), Section 603(g)(1), and Section 603(h)). Zoning may be used to separate land uses that are incompatible or may cause conflicts between neighboring uses.

The Lancaster County Planning Department’s (LCPD) definition of effective agricultural zoning calls for no more than one house or subdivision per 50 acres, but has acknowledged agricultural zoning designations of one house or subdivision per a minimum of 20 acres as effective in the past. East Donegal Township was the first township in the county to adopt an effective agricultural zone in 1976. By 1984, 24 of the county’s 41 municipalities had enacted effective agricultural zoning, protecting over 184,000 acres. Currently, 11 townships in Lancaster County have adopted LCPD’s recommendation of one house or subdivision per 50 acres. An additional 28 townships have adopted a version of one house or subdivision per 20, 25, 30 or 40 acres. Two townships – Lancaster and Paradise – have not adopted effective agricultural zoning.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- **Townships:** Adopt effective agricultural zoning of one house or subdivision per 50 acres.
- **County:** Create a challenge grant program for townships to encourage participation in farmland preservation.
- **State:** Allocate funds for private organizations to preserve farmland.
- **Federal:** Simplify the ACEP program; make it less restrictive and more accessible to farmers; increase level of funding.
- **Neighbors:** Get involved! Attend township meetings. Understand the issues. Volunteer to serve on township boards and commissions.
- **Preservation organizations:** Advocate for state and legislative initiatives that preserve farmland, protect farmers, and support agriculture.



# Township-by-Township Land Use Comparisons

*We're consuming more land than necessary, because we're building at lower densities than we should. From 2002–2015, average residential density in UGAs was 4.4 dwelling units per acre – significantly lower than the 7.5 units per acre target set in Balance. As a result, we're consuming 70% more land than we would at the target density. (places2040)*

The success of farmland preservation cannot be solely based on the dollars spent and the acres preserved. It is also important to look at the pattern of farmland preservation on the landscape.

Contiguous blocks of preserved farmland are important for maintaining the long-term viability of agriculture in an area. With the average farm size of 78 acres in Lancaster County, achieving a contiguous block of preserved farmland requires several landowners agreeing to preserve their land. In many cases, contiguous blocks of preserved farmland cross township boundaries and can include multiple townships.

To achieve blocks of preserved land, townships must coordinate zoning so that agricultural zoned areas abut one another wherever possible. Creating large contiguous blocks of preserved land is a key strategy for both Lancaster Farmland Trust and the Agricultural Preserve Board.

## MULTI-MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

To date, 44 of Lancaster County's 60 municipalities have completed, or are working on, multi-municipal comprehensive plans. Lancaster County Planning Department staff facilitate the preparation of regional comprehensive plans through funding support, project management, and dedicated staffing of the projects. These multi-municipal planning partnerships have been an essential and successful component of community planning in Lancaster County since 1993.

Multi-municipal planning regions are color coded in Figure 2, p 20.

## COUNTY PLANNING AREAS

The Lancaster County Planning Department has divided the county into six planning areas: Metro, East, Northeast, Northwest, West, and South (see Figure 2, p 20, bolded outlines crossing over color-coded multi-municipal planning regions). Outside the Metro area – which follows urban growth area boundaries – the planning areas generally follow municipal boundaries. The planning areas take into account existing partnerships among neighboring municipalities that share school districts, and/or regional comprehensive plans. These planning areas help townships with similar characteristics collaborate and create joint comprehensive plans if one isn't already in place.

The Lancaster County comprehensive plan, *places2040*, highlights the challenges of planning on a countywide basis. "Lancaster County is comprised of 60 separate municipalities, including one city, 18 boroughs, and 41 townships. Each municipality is responsible for making its own land-use decisions, so there are also 60 municipal planning commissions and 60 separate zoning ordinances containing more than 500 zoning districts." *places2040* encourages municipalities to "think beyond boundaries" when they are creating land-use plans and collaborate with each other when appropriate.

Table 2 on the next page shows the acres of farmland preserved and the acres in effective agricultural zoning by region.

Table 2. Six Planning Regions: their municipalities, total acres, and acres of preserved farmland, acres of effective agricultural zoning, and acres in agricultural security areas (ASA)

REGION & Municipalities	Total Acres	Preserved Acres	Ag Zoning Acres	ASA Acres
<b>EAST</b> Brecknock Twp, Caernarvon Twp, Earl Twp, East Earl Twp, Leacock Twp, New Holland Boro, Paradise Twp, Salisbury Twp, Strasburg Twp, Strasburg Boro, Terre Hill Boro, Upper Leacock Twp, West Earl Twp, West Lampeter Twp	164,783	22,755	125,678	48,655
<b>METRO</b> Columbia Boro, East Hempfield Twp, East Lampeter Twp, East Petersburg Boro, Lancaster City, Lancaster Twp, Manheim Twp, Millersville Boro, Mountville Boro, West Hempfield Twp	52,971	265	1,685	535
<b>NORTHEAST</b> Adamstown Boro, Akron Boro, Clay Twp, Denver Boro, East Cocalico Twp, Elizabeth Twp, Ephrata Boro, Ephrata Twp, Lititz Boro, Warwick Twp, West Cocalico Twp	90,683	14,005	39,210	23,549
<b>NORTHWEST</b> Conoy Twp, East Donegal Twp, Elizabethtown Boro, Manheim Boro, Marietta Boro, Mount Joy Boro, Mount Joy Twp, Penn Twp, Rapho Twp, West Donegal Twp	121,669	34,160	88,859	45,519
<b>SOUTH</b> Bart Twp, Christiana Boro, Colerain Twp, Drumore Twp, East Drumore Twp, Eden Twp, Fulton Twp, Little Britain Twp, Martic Twp, Providence Twp, Quarryville Boro, Sadsbury Twp	154,715	32,769	121,441	47,118
<b>WEST</b> Conestoga Twp, Manor Twp, Pequea Twp	45,293	11,284	29,155	15,954

Several townships are divided into two or more planning areas. For the purpose of this table, those townships are included in the planning area where the majority of their land mass falls.

**South:** The South area has preserved 32,769 acres of farmland. More than 88,000 acres are within effective agricultural zones that could be preserved.

**Northwest:** The Northwest area has preserved 34,160 acres – 38% of the farmland within effective agricultural zones.

**Metro:** In the Metro area’s five townships, 16% of the land within effective agricultural zones has been preserved.

**West:** The West area’s three townships make up the smallest land mass of the six areas, and has more than 64% of the region in effective agricultural zones. Thirty-nine percent of land in the effective agricultural zones are preserved.

**East:** Eighteen percent of the land in effective agricultural zones has been preserved in the East area. Nearly 103,000 acres in effective agricultural zones could be preserved.

**Northeast:** Forty-three percent of the Northeast area is in effective agricultural zones and 36% of the land in effective agricultural zones has been preserved.

John Martin Photography

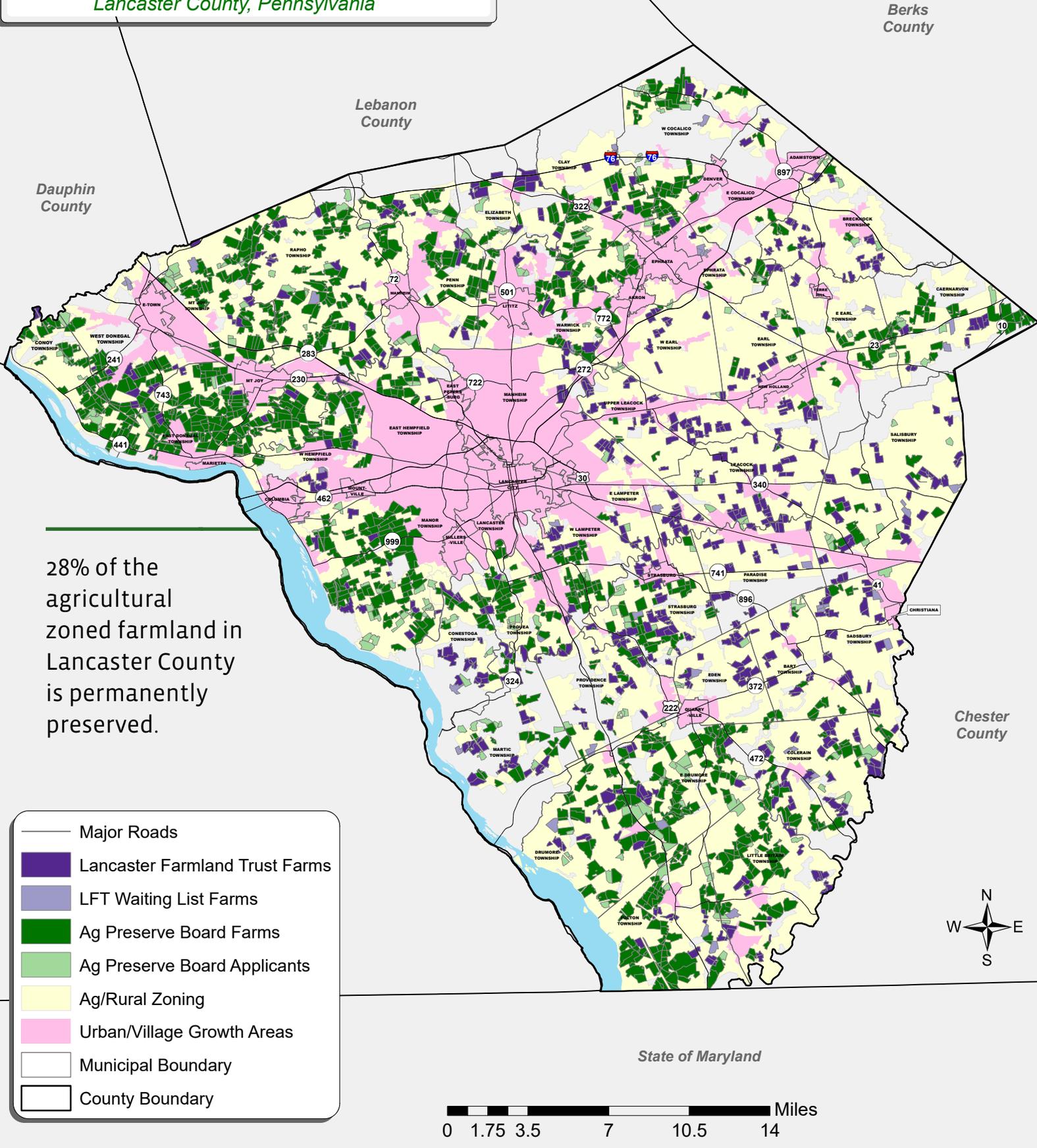




Figure 3. Preserved Farmland, Farmland on waiting lists, Agricultural Zoning, and Urban/Village Growth Areas in Lancaster County

# Preserved Farmland

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania



28% of the agricultural zoned farmland in Lancaster County is permanently preserved.

**PRESERVED FARMLAND**

A 2017 study found 17 blocks of 1,000 or more acres of preserved farmland in Lancaster County, totaling almost 50,000 acres (see Table 3 on the right). The largest block of contiguous farmland stretches across Conoy, East Donegal, and West Donegal Townships and has 10,733 acres. There were also 22 blocks of 500 to 999 acres across the county containing a total of 14,500 acres.

**7,206 acres have been preserved in East Donegal Township making up 47% of the township’s total area.**

Another 15 townships have preserved 20% or more of their land area:

- East Drumore (32%)                      Mount Joy (24%)
- Rapho (30%)                                Little Britain (24%)
- Colerain (29%)                             Manor (23%)
- Fulton (29%)                                Warwick (23%)
- West Donegal (27%)                      Drumore (22%)
- Pequea (26%)                              West Lampeter (21%)
- Conoy (26%)                                Penn (20%)
- Strasburg (25%)

Sixteen townships have between 1,000 and 2,000 acres of preserved farmland:

- Ephrata (1,744)                            Brecknock (1,491)
- Upper Leacock (1,741)                    East Lampeter (1,407)
- Elizabeth (1,699)                         Bart (1,335)
- Leacock (1,683)                            East Earl (1,329)
- Sadsbury (1,647)                         Manheim (1,305)
- Earl (1,637)                                East Hempfield (1,189)
- Conestoga (1,634)                        Paradise (1,163)
- Providence (1,581)                        Eden (1,048)

Only two\* of the 41 townships with preserved farmland have fewer than 1,000 preserved acres:

- East Cocalico (797)
- West Earl (578)

Table 3. Preserved Farms and Contiguous Blocks of Two or More Preserved Farms, Lancaster County, 2016.

	Number of Blocks	Acreage in Block
<b>Total Preserved Farms</b>	358	102,678
<b>Contiguous Blocks of Two or More Preserved Farms</b>	244	96,325
1000 or more acres	17	47,809
500-999 acres	22	14,594
250-499 acres	41	14,810
Less than 250 acres	164	19,508
<b>Stand Alone Preserved Farms</b>	114	6,353
<b>Stand Alone Preserved Farms Within 1/2 Mile of a Contiguous Block</b>	80	4,880
<b>Stand Alone Preserved Farm Parcels Beyond 1/2 Mile of a Contiguous Block</b>	34	1,473

Source: Daniels and Payne-Riley, 2017, p. 73.

Every township except Lancaster Township has some preserved farmland. Table 4 (next page) shows that Rapho Township has the most preserved farmland at 9,056 acres. A total of 14 townships have preserved at least 3,000 acres:

- Rapho (9,056)                              Drumore (4,188)
- Manor (7,229)                                Little Britain (4,168)
- East Donegal (7,206)                      Penn (3,871)
- Fulton (5,477)                                Strasburg (3,188)
- Colerain (5,407)                            Salisbury (3,188)
- East Drumore (4,770)                      Conoy (3,016)
- Mount Joy (4,317)                          Warwick (3,060)

\*Lancaster Township is not included in the numbers in this section as it is entirely made up of urban growth area and contains no preserved farmland, Ag Zoning, or Ag Security Areas.

### EFFECTIVE AGRICULTURAL ZONING

The Lancaster County Planning Department’s (LCPD) definition of effective agricultural zoning calls for not more than one house or subdivision per 50 acres. The LCPD also recognizes effective agricultural zoning of one house or subdivision per 20 acres or more. Agricultural zoning is intended to ensure that intense residential or commercial development does not happen within agricultural areas.

Ninety-six percent of preserved farmland in Lancaster County is located in effective agricultural zones.

Seventeen townships have more than 10,000 acres in effective agricultural zones:

Rapho (27,462)	Earl (12,009)
Salisbury (21,004)	Penn (11,887)
Drumore (18,114)	Leacock (11,712)
Manor (17,742)	Brecknock (11,053)
Fulton (17,524)	East Donegal (11,015)
Little Britain (16,185)	Sadsbury (10,824)
Colerain (15,107)	Strasburg (10,664)
Mount Joy (14,446)	East Earl (10,399)
East Drumore (13,352)	

Seventeen townships have between 5,000 and 10,000 acres within effective agricultural zoning. Five townships with effective agricultural zoning have fewer than 5,000 acres in those zones.

Drumore Township has the highest percentage of its total land area within effective agricultural zones at 97%. Another 16 townships have more than 75% of their total area zoned for effective agriculture:

Fulton (93%)	Eden (84%)
Bart (92%)	Strasburg (83%)
Little Britain (92%)	West Earl (83%)
East Drumore (90%)	Colerain (81%)
Rapho (90%)	Mount Joy (81%)
Leacock (89%)	Pequea (81%)
Sadsbury (86%)	Upper Leacock (81%)
Earl (85%)	Salisbury (78%)

Fifteen other townships have 50 to 75% of their land area in effective agricultural zones, seven townships have less than half of their land area in effective agricultural zones, and two townships – Lancaster and Paradise – do not have effective agricultural zoning. See Table 4 on the next page for more information.

A 2017 report by the LCPD indicated that even with effective agricultural zoning and farmland preservation, almost 16,000 residential lots in effective agricultural zones are vulnerable to development. Five townships have the potential for more than 1,000 new residential lots in their effective agricultural zones: Drumore, Earl, Little Britain, Manor, and Rapho. Eleven other townships have the potential for 500 to 999 new residential lots in their effective agricultural zones.

### AGRICULTURAL SECURITY AREAS

Forty townships in Lancaster County have created Agricultural Security Areas and have enrolled 181,330 acres.

Salisbury Township has the largest Agricultural Security Area with 12,610 acres. A total of 15 townships have more than 5,000 acres enrolled in Agricultural Security Areas.

Because farmland can be both within effective agricultural zoning and enrolled in the township’s Agricultural Security Area, the totals of those two columns in Table 4 on the next page may be larger than the total land-mass of the township.



Table 4. Township Total Land Area, Preserved Farmland, Agricultural Zoning, and Agricultural Security Areas (ASA) *\*all numbers are in acres*

Township	Total Acres	Preserved Farmland	Ag Zoning	ASA
MANOR	31,124	7,229	**17,742	10,348
RAPHO	30,608	9,056	***27,462	10,611
SALISBURY	26,841	3,188	**21,004	12,610
MARTIC	20,932	2,768	**4,532	4,216
PENN	18,985	3,871	***11,887	5,431
FULTON	18,814	5,477	**17,524	6,996
DRUMORE	18,722	4,188	**18,114	9,244
COLERAIN	18,571	5,407	**15,107	7,110
MOUNT JOY	17,938	4,317	**14,446	7,608
LITTLE BRITAIN	17,678	4,168	**16,185	7,738
WEST COCALICO	17,672	2,917	***8,195	4,187
BRECKNOCK	15,883	1,491	**11,053	7,290
EAST EARL	15,833	1,329	***10,399	2,749
MANHEIM	15,421	1,305	**2,149	1,228
EAST DONEGAL	15,173	7,206	**11,015	9,652
EAST DRUMORE	14,855	4,770	**13,352	6,237
CAERNARVON	14,741	2,684	**9,644	7,245
CLAY	14,532	2,373	***9,112	5,232
EARL	14,144	1,637	***12,009	3,461
EAST HEMPFIELD	13,558	1,189	**4,526	1,443
WEST HEMPFIELD	13,452	2,565	**6,928	3,599
LEACOCK	13,203	1,683	**11,712	720
EAST COCALICO	13,179	797	**3,713	1,540
STRASBURG	12,884	3,188	***10,664	7,411
PROVIDENCE	12,815	1,581	***8,118	2,114
WARWICK	12,767	3,060	**6,915	4,148
EAST LAMPETER	12,761	1,407	**7,098	1,218
SADSBURY	12,604	1,647	**10,824	1,482
PARADISE	11,976	1,163	*6,045	888
CONOY	11,689	3,016	**7,687	4,393
UPPER LEACOCK	11,675	1,741	**9,464	968
WEST EARL	11,485	578	***9,530	1,695
ELIZABETH	11,310	1,699	**5,596	3,063
WEST LAMPETER	10,632	2,238	**5,824	2,529
CONESTOGA	10,624	1,634	**3,863	2,742
BART	10,529	1,335	**9,722	1,632
EPHRATA	10,511	1,744	***6,963	4,156
WEST DONEGAL	10,132	2,758	***6,118	3,279
PEQUEA	8,710	2,295	**7,046	2,757
EDEN	8,035	1,048	**6,741	360

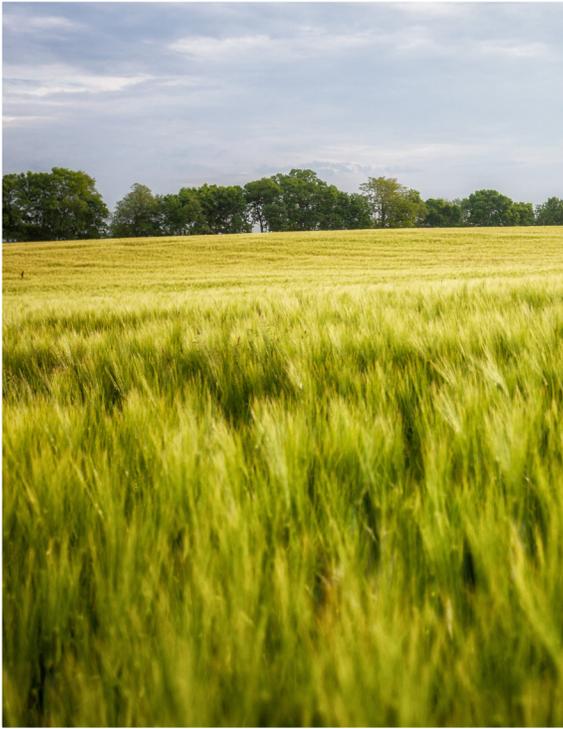
Note:

\* = Not effective agricultural zoning.

\*\* = Effective agricultural zoning at one house per 20, 25, 30, or 40 acres.

\*\*\* = Effective agricultural zoning at one house per 50 or more acres.

Source: Lancaster County Planning Department, 2017, 2020



In Lancaster County, there are 17 blocks of 1,000 acres or more of contiguous preserved farmland.



### URBAN AND VILLAGE GROWTH AREAS

Urban and village growth areas – jointly referred to as designated growth areas – are determined by municipalities, with guidance from the Lancaster County Planning Department, to accommodate the majority of expected population growth. While the city of Lancaster is the most obvious example, designated growth areas also include inner suburbs, villages, larger boroughs, and the adjacent lands that have public services. The goal of the growth areas is to allow for compact development that minimizes sprawl and enables convenient access to necessary infrastructure – including sewer, water, and roadways – in existing developed areas.

The first urban growth area in Lancaster County was established in 1993. Since then, 13 more urban growth areas have been put in place (see Table 5 below). Today, urban growth areas contain nearly

100,000 acres. Village growth areas encompass another 12,000 acres. In total, more than one-sixth of the total acreage of the county lies within urban or village growth areas.

If designated growth areas are developed at an average density of 7.5 dwelling-units per acre, the LCPD projects these areas will have enough buildable land to accommodate the county’s future growth through 2040. However, development within growth areas has occurred at an average of about four dwelling units per acre between 2006 and 2018. If this trend continues, designated growth areas will reach capacity more quickly and will need to be expanded.

Table 5. Lancaster County's Urban Growth Areas

Urban Growth Area and Planning Area(s)	Total Acres	Buildable Acres	Percent Buildable
Central Lancaster County – Metro	50,199	12,851	26%
Elizabethtown – Northwest	8,609	2,574	30%
Ephrata-Akron – Northeast	6,518	2,305	35%
Cocalico – Northeast	6,119	1,911	31%
Lititz-Warwick – Northeast	6,005	1,443	24%
Elanco South – East	4,014	1,397	35%
Columbia-Marietta - Metro, Northwest	3,970	1,029	26%
Donegal – Northwest	3,632	1,005	28%
Manheim – Northwest	3,568	918	26%
Solanco – South	2,013	858	43%
Christiana-Gap – South, East	1,987	656	33%
Strasburg – East	1,236	349	28%
Leola-Bareville – East	1,135	340	30%
Elanco North – East	520	185	36%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99,526</b>	<b>27,821</b>	<b>28%</b>

Source: Lancaster County Planning Department, 2018.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- **Municipalities:** Adopt zoning to increase density within Urban Growth Areas and Village Growth Areas as outlined in *places2040*.
- **Neighbors:** Support development at 7.5 dwelling units per acre or greater within designated growth areas.



# Township Programs to Preserve Farmland

A few townships in Lancaster County have created farmland preservation programs to supplement the efforts of the Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust. This section provides case studies on these townships, as well as a township in neighboring Chester County, which have implemented successful strategies to preserve farmland.

## LANCASTER COUNTY TOWNSHIP PROGRAMS

As described on page 13, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is a municipal zoning tool used to permanently protect farmland and open space by directing development away from an area to be protected (sending area) to an area planned for development (receiving area). TDR programs are established by municipal ordinance. Provisions of TDR ordinances vary from township to township.

### Warwick Township

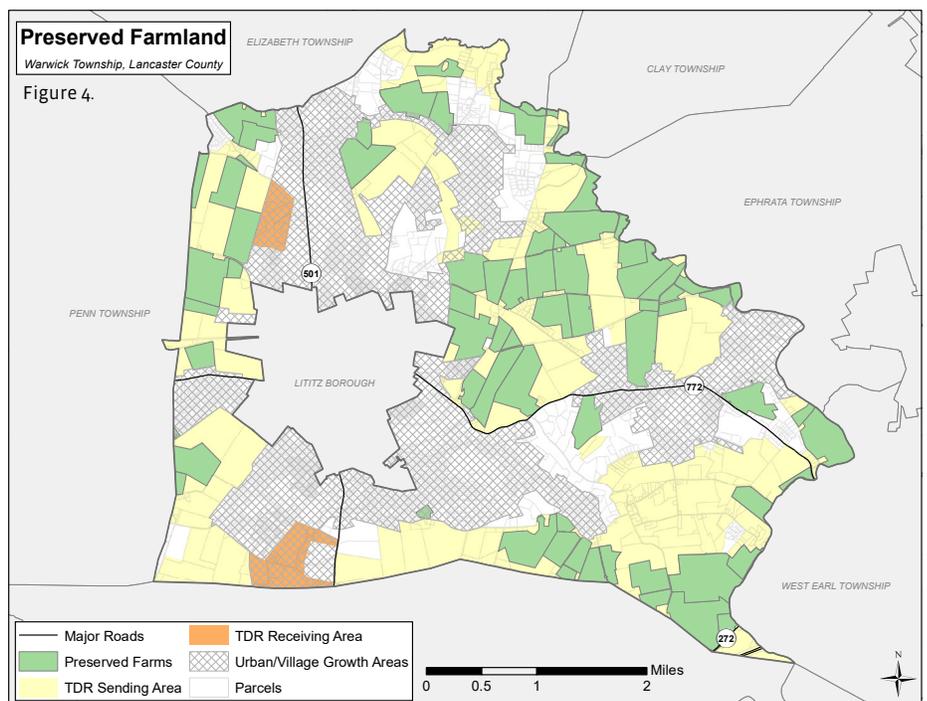
Warwick Township surrounds Lititz Borough in the north-central section of Lancaster County. The township has a population of 19,323 and covers 12,767 acres, of which 6,915 acres are within effective agricultural zoning. There are 30 preserved farms encompassing 3,060 acres.

The township launched its TDR program in 1993, allocating one TDR for every two acres of farmland on every farm within their agricultural zone. Next, the township designated “campus industrial zones” to receive TDRs (see Figure 4 to the right). In these zones, the township limited impervious

surface coverage – roads, buildings, and parking areas – to 10%. A landowner or developer in the campus industrial zone can purchase TDRs to increase the lot coverage up to 70% – 4,000 ft<sup>2</sup> per TDR.

A total of 833 TDRs have been purchased and 592 TDRs have been sold through a cooperative program with the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust.

The Warwick TDR program has expanded the property tax base and enabled economic development while preserving 1,617 acres of farmland. Purchasers of TDRs include: UPMC Lititz (formerly the Heart of Lancaster Hospital), Listrak, Target, and the Rock Lititz business campus.



*“One key ingredient is the township’s partnership with the Ag Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust to buy and sell TDRs so we can provide full service to the farmers and the developers.”*

*– Dan Zimmerman,  
Warwick Township Manager*

In 2019, Rock Lititz proposed an expansion of their 96-acre campus to add five facilities – a rehearsal studio, an attached multi-tenant space (Pod 1A), two free-standing multi-tenant buildings (Pod 1B and Pod 5), and a community theater – totaling 333,300 square feet of additional, roofed impervious surface coverage. To bring the project to fruition, Rock Lititz purchased 149 TDRs for a sum of \$450,000.

In November of 2019, Warwick Township reached the milestone of 3,000 acres of preserved farmland. The TDR program has accounted for more than half of these preserved acres. Today, Warwick Township has the leading TDR program in Lancaster County and ranks highly among townships throughout Pennsylvania.

**Caernarvon Township**

Caernarvon Township, on the eastern end of the county’s limestone valley, has a population of 4,818 and covers 14,741 acres, of which 9,644 acres are within effective agricultural zoning. There are 31 preserved farms encompassing 2,684 acres.

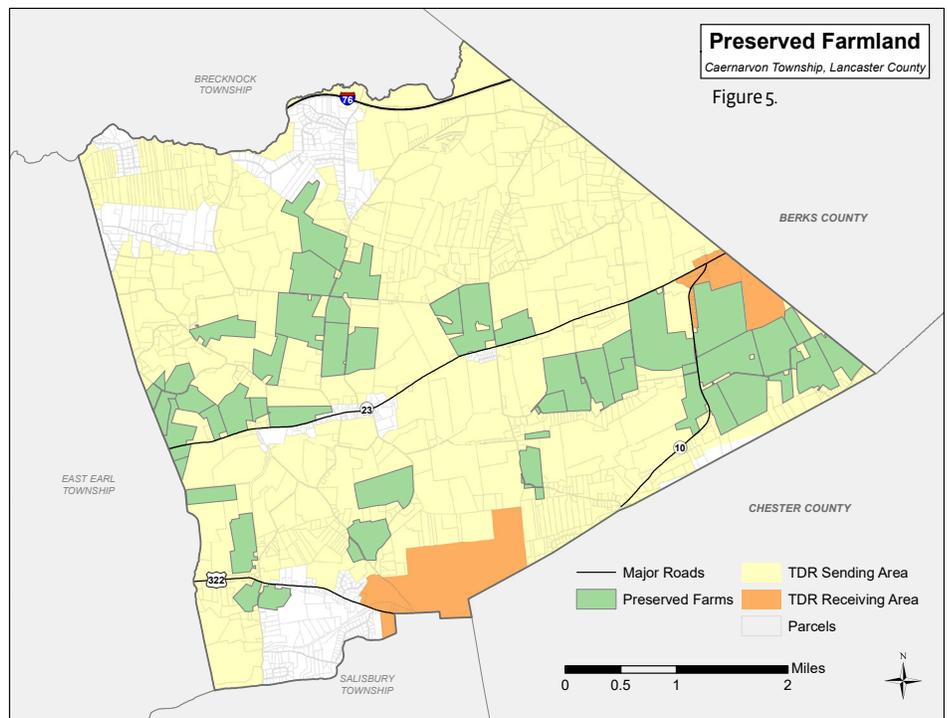
In 2015, the township established a TDR program with sending and receiving areas (Figure 5 to the right). Unlike in Warwick Township, the TDRs have not yet been sold to developers and are still being held by the township and LFT. The township also explored the idea of creating a regional TDR program with neighboring townships, though nothing has been established to date. The transfer of development rights across municipal boundaries has been allowed in Pennsylvania since 2000, but it has not yet occurred.

Since 2006, the Caernarvon Township supervisors have made an annual donation to Lancaster Farmland Trust to preserve farms in the township. By combining this annual donation with donations from the Lanchester Landfill and private individuals, LFT has preserved 476 acres in Caernarvon Township.

Caernarvon Township also provides \$1,000 an acre up to 50 acres per farm for farmland preservation projects completed by the Agricultural Preserve Board. Because of the supplemental township funding, the APB is able to prioritize Caernarvon Township farms. The APB has preserved almost 2,000 acres in the township.

Former township supervisor and member of the township’s Agricultural Advisory Board, Gary Van Dyke, credits the success of farmland preservation in the township to “a cooperative effort of the township supervisors, the township planning commission, the Agricultural Advisory Board, and the farmers.”

Twenty-eight percent of the land zoned for agriculture in Caernarvon Township is permanently preserved. In total, Caernarvon Township has invested more than \$1 million in farmland preservation.



OTHER TOWNSHIP PROGRAMS

**Honey Brook Township, Chester County**

Honey Brook Township in Chester County borders Caernarvon and Salisbury Townships on the eastern edge of Lancaster County. The township has a population of 8,311. Across its 16,108 acres, they have 7,900 acres in Agricultural Security Areas. Honey Brook has more than 4,500 acres of preserved farmland (Figure 6 to the right).

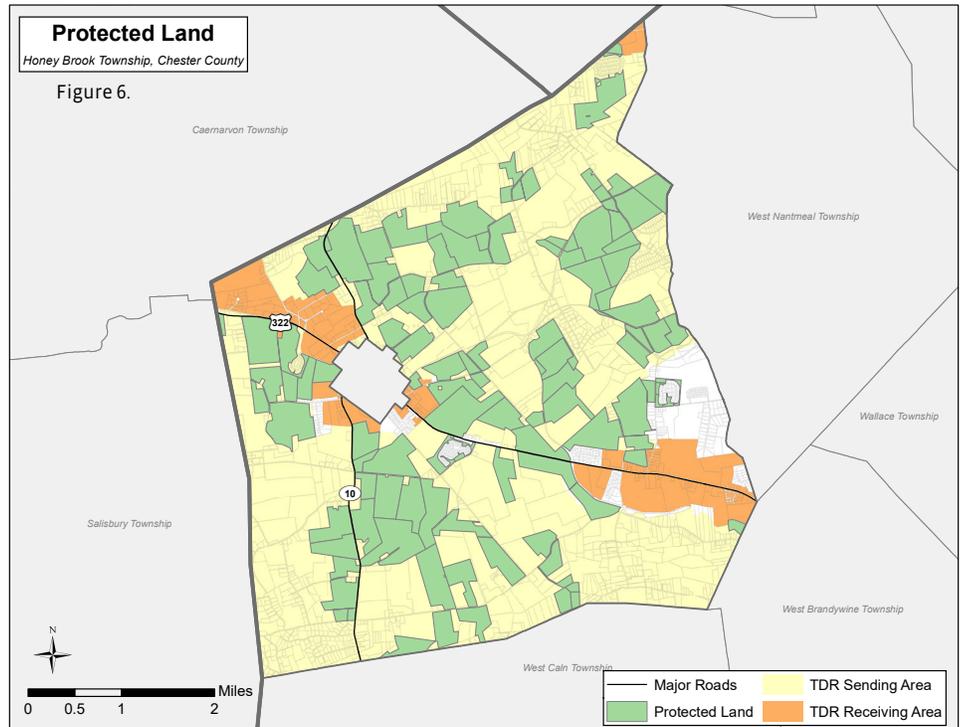
Honey Brook Township uses several funding mechanisms to preserve farmland including two county grant programs and an Earned Income Tax (EIT) that helps fund their TDR program.

Just as in Lancaster County, farms in Honey Brook township participate in the county/state farmland preservation program which is administered by the Chester County Agricultural Land Preservation Board.

Honey Brook township also takes advantage of Chester County’s Municipal Challenge Grant program. This grant program provides 50% funding for the acquisition of agricultural easements (up to a maximum of \$12,000 per acre). Matching funds for the challenge grant can be provided by the township, donated value from landowners, other private funds such as a land trust, or a combination of funding from these sources. Farms must meet eligibility criteria set by the county.

In 2005, Honey Brook township residents voted to approve a 0.5% increase in the local Earned Income Tax to fund farmland preservation. The EIT provides approximately \$500,000 annually for the township’s program. According to the Delaware Valley Planning Commission, Honey Brook township is one of 33 municipalities in Chester County that have enacted a tax to protect open space and farmland totaling over \$10 million annually for preservation.

With funding from the EIT, Honey Brook Township created a Transfer of Development Rights program. As of 2019, the program severed and sold 29 of the available 253 TDRs in the township. The township also established the Honey Brook Land Preservation Committee that promotes preservation through outreach and education. The



Committee has also developed a land preservation plan (Honey Brook, 2019, Land Preservation Plan Update).

Honey Brook Township has spent more than \$7 million in township funds to preserve farmland. Most of this funding has come from the township’s voter-approved 0.5% Earned Income Tax. The township has used this money to help leverage an additional \$16 million in funds from Chester County, the commonwealth, federal farmland preservation programs, and the Brandywine Conservancy.



# The Future of Farmland Preservation

*“Stewardship of our heritage should be a priority for all of us, not just because we like the view outside our window, but because it makes the county more attractive to investment – particularly visitors and prospective employers. Retaining community character depends on cultivating a careful balance between what the land provides, what others have done to shape it, and what we want to build in the future.”*

*– places2040*

Lancaster County is a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Many people who are born in Lancaster County choose to stay here and many newcomers are attracted to the quaint towns, rural landscapes, and strong economy. The beautiful vistas created by our farms and farmland, serve as the backdrop for an exceptional quality of life. The fresh foods grown on local farms nourish our bodies and the open land improves our environment and enriches our economy.

The Lancaster County Planning Department projects that the population of Lancaster County will grow by 108,000 people by 2040. In addition, the growth patterns in the county are shifting away from the metro core around the city of Lancaster and out into rural townships. The challenge of a rapidly increasing population is creating places for people to live and work without sacrificing large amount of farmland. While land use decisions are made by municipalities, *places2040* encourages municipalities to create zoning ordinances that require compact development so that accommodating the expected growth uses less land and helps to save productive farmland.

Lancaster County has made great strides in preserving its most valuable natural resource - its rich productive farmland. In just over three decades, the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust have permanently protected 115,238 acres – or 28% – of the area zoned for agriculture. These figures are impressive but, looked at through another lens, almost 58% of the

total area of the county – including 322,000 acres of land outside of designated growth areas – remains unprotected and vulnerable to development.

While the investment made in farmland preservation has made Lancaster County the leader in the nation, the county continues to lose 1,200 acres of farmland each year. A rapidly growing population and shifting growth patterns will continue to put development pressure on farmland unless bold and decisive actions are taken by the public and private sectors to protect the investment already made and ensure that farmland – and, more importantly, farming – continues to be viable in the county.

A successful farmland preservation program requires two primary elements – farmers willing to sacrifice future financial gain to ensure their land will remain in farming, and sufficient funding from public and private sources to meet the demand of farmers interested in preservation.

## THE FARMERS

Lancaster County is fortunate to have a rich agricultural heritage, strong agricultural economy, robust agricultural infrastructure, and farmers committed to continuing the tradition of their ancestors. There is, however, much uncertainty about the future of farming and many challenges facing today’s farmers.



Technology has changed how farmers farm. Markets and consumer preferences have changed both the products farmers grow and the way it is grown. Increasing regulations have changed the operations on farms. Climate change is increasing the already uncertain weather conditions farmers must deal with on a daily basis. Earning a living from farming is a constant challenge requiring long hours of hard work, dogged determination, vast knowledge, and an undying commitment to working the land.

Increasing prices for farmland, driven by both competition among farmers for land and development pressure, along with the other costs of establishing a farm operation, makes it increasingly difficult for new farmers to enter the farming business.

In spite of the many challenges, farmers continue to farm Lancaster County's farmland and continue to embrace farmland preservation.

Working with either the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board or Lancaster Farmland Trust, almost 1,500 farm families have made the decision to permanently protect their land. Interest in preservation continues as more than 250 landowners are currently on waiting lists with either the APB or LFT with no guarantee that their farm

will eventually be preserved. This level of interest in preservation is unprecedented and could provide the foundation for maintaining farming in Lancaster County for generations to come.

Being able to meet the demand of farmers wanting to preserve their land is critical to the success of the county's preservation efforts. The inability of the APB or LFT to meet the demand of farmers interested in preservation will eventually lead farmers to seek other options and will discourage others from applying to participate.

## THE FUNDING

A successful program to preserve farmland is not possible without adequate funding. The fact that the APB and LFT have 250 farms waiting for preservation suggests that additional funding is necessary to meet demand, achieve the goals of *places2040*, maximize outside funding, and build on the investment already made in farmland preservation.

Since 2001, when the county commissioners took the step of issuing a bond to invest in farmland preservation, county funding for

farmland preservation has steadily declined. Although funding levels are correctly dependent upon economic forces, failure to invest in preservation when the economy has done well has resulted in the loss of matching funds as well as the loss of opportunity to preserve more acres when land values were lower. As the graph on page 14 shows, the number of acres preserved annually corresponds to the amount of funding allocated.

The county is the most critical piece in the funding puzzle but other sources must also be increased or initiated if Lancaster County is to achieve its goals for farmland preservation. In neighboring Chester County, 33 municipalities have enacted dedicated taxes for the preservation of farmland and open space contributing over \$10 million annually. While a dedicated tax may not be an option for every township, it may be an option for townships under development pressure that want to pick up the pace of preservation.

A referendum can be used to determine public support for a dedicated tax for farmland preservation. According to WeConservePA, “between 1987 and 2017, Pennsylvania voters approved 129 of 164 proposed conservation ballot measures (79%), allocating nearly \$1.6 billion for conservation purposes. 126 of the 129 referenda were at the county and municipal level; three were statewide.”

Other options for townships interested in accelerating preservation include creating TDR programs either individually or in partnership with other townships and budgeting funds to contribute to preservation projects done in partnership with either the APB or LFT.

State and federal preservation programs provide much needed funds but have limitations and restrictions that could be reconsidered. The federal ACEP program would be used more if it was simplified and less restrictive. Senate Bill 64, which was introduced by Senator Scott Martin, would make a small amount of state funds available to private organizations. The 50% match requirement in the legislation would incentivize private investment in preservation.

Finally, the success of farmland preservation in Lancaster County over the past 30 years would not have been possible without the commitment of individuals, businesses, and foundations who have generously provided financial support. This commitment, going forward, will be critical to meeting the demand for preservation and ensuring the future of farming in Lancaster County.

## THE FUTURE

Lancaster County is blessed with the most productive, non-irrigated farmland in the country. The stewardship of that farmland is not

only the responsibility of the farmers who tend the fields, it is the obligation of the community that reaps its benefits on a daily basis. Preserving that land is a legacy we can leave for future generations if we are willing to make the investment.

Because of the early efforts of farmland preservation pioneers like Amos Funk and Senator Noah Wenger, Lancaster County had the first organized farmland preservation program in Pennsylvania and was instrumental in the creation of the state program. Through the investment of funds by government officials over the past three decades and the commitment of farmers who were willing to protect their land, Lancaster County now leads the nation in preserved farmland.

But, the past does not predict the future. A rapidly growing population, increasing land values, and declining funding will make it difficult for preservation to keep up with development. Fortunately, we have solutions to reverse the trends. *places2040* offers a blueprint to accommodate the expected growth while protecting the county’s valuable farmland. Support for farmers will help keep them financially viable and help transfer the land to future generations of farmers. And, finally, increased funding from all levels of government as well as from the private sector, will ensure that every farmer who wants to preserve their land is able to do so.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- **Townships:** Develop a farmland preservation strategy and implement it. Create a dedicated source of funding for farmland preservation.
- **County:** Consider a referendum to approve a bond issue or dedicated tax for farmland and open space preservation.
- **Preservation Organizations:** Advance strategies that link the preservation and conservation of farmland.
- **Neighbors:** Sign up for LFT’s newsletter to find out more about our work at [lancasterfarmlandtrust.org](http://lancasterfarmlandtrust.org)

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## RESOURCES

### **Lancaster Farmland Trust**

Website: <https://lancasterfarmlandtrust.org>

E-mail: [info@lancasterfarmlandtrust.org](mailto:info@lancasterfarmlandtrust.org)

Phone: (717) 687-8484

Location: 125 Lancaster Avenue, Strasburg, PA 17579

The Lancaster Farmland Trust welcomes applications to sell or donate a conservation easement at any time of the year.

### **Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board**

Website: <https://www.co.lancaster.pa.us/126/Agricultural-Preserve-Board>

Phone: (717) 299-8355

Location: 150 N. Queen St., Suite 325, Lancaster, PA 17603

The Agricultural Preserve Board accepts applications to sell a conservation by September 1 of each year. Applications are available from the Agricultural Preserve Board office or website.

### **Lancaster County Planning Department**

Website: <https://lancastercountyplanning.org/>

Phone: 717-299-8333

Location: 150 N. Queen Street, Suite 320, Lancaster, PA 17603

The Planning Department meets on the second and fourth Monday of each month from 2:30 pm until 5 pm. Meetings are held at the Lancaster County Government Center, or available to be watched online.

### **American Farmland Trust - Farms Under Threat**

State of the States - [Full Report](#)

State of the States - [Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Conversion Summary](#)

State of the States - [Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard Summary](#)



# Lancaster Farmland Trust

125 Lancaster Avenue

Strasburg, PA 17579

717-687-8484

[www.lancasterfarmlandtrust.org](http://www.lancasterfarmlandtrust.org)

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## Watch: Panel discusses the importance of farmland preservation and the threat of suburban development [video]

LANCASTERONLINE | Staff : 2-2 minutes

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Declining levels of local-government funding and intruding suburban development are threatening long-term progress on farmland preservation, according to a new report from [the Lancaster Farmland Trust](#).

A panel of local of five community leaders and members met Thursday at LNP Media Group to discuss the importance of farmland preservation in Lancaster County.

Watch the livestream, below.

Those in attendance include:

Tom Daniels, PhD – Professor, University of Pennsylvania; collaborator on the State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County report.

Gary Kennedy – Preserved farm owner; Fulton Township Planning Commission

Scott Standish – Executive Director, Lancaster County Planning Department

Jeff Swinehart – Chief Operating Officer, Lancaster Farmland Trust

Alice Yoder – Executive Director, Community Health; Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health; Chair, Lancaster County Planning Commission



## Watch: Panel discusses the importance of farmland preservation and the threat of suburban development [video]

LANCASTERONLINE | Staff : 3-4 minutes

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A farmer takes a break under some shade trees along Farmland Road in East Lampeter Twp. Wednesday September 9, 2020.

Declining levels of local-government funding and intruding suburban development are threatening long-term progress on farmland preservation, according to a new report from [the Lancaster Farmland Trust](#).

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### **What to Read Next**

Support local journalism. [Click here](#) to learn more about the role the Lancaster County Local Journalism Fund plays in Lancaster County and to make a tax-deductible donation.



Credit: Tyler Huber – Digital Media Producer, LancasterOnline



Credit: Tyler Huber – Digital Media Producer, LancasterOnline



Credit: Tyler Huber - Digital Media Producer, LancasterOnline

## **‘What happened? What happened to our farms?’: In Lancaster County, a call for massive acceleration of money, effort to preserve farmland**

Tom Lisi : 7-9 minutes : 6/20/2021

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For 40 years, Lancaster County has been a trailblazer in farmland preservation, but a report from the Lancaster Farmland Trust released Wednesday says declining levels of local-government funding and encroaching suburban development are threatening long-term progress.

The report, “The State of Farmland Preservation in Lancaster County,” claims the county is losing farmland each year largely due to a growing population, and recommends county officials devote \$125 million to farmland preservation by 2030 — about the total amount local officials allocated in the previous 37 years, according to data from the report.

Such a large increase in funding from the county would follow a recent decline, according to the report. Between 2010 and 2020, the county’s funding to preserve farms dropped by 40%, the report says. In 2021, such funding totaled about \$2 million.

It’s part of an ultimate goal to double the 115,238 acres already preserved by 2040. That would account for more than half of all land in Lancaster County zoned for agriculture, according to the report.





“We know that growth is coming and we know that we’re losing farmland, and at some point in the future those two are going to come together,” said Karen Martynick, executive director at the Lancaster Farmland Trust. “If we’re not careful and don’t make the right decisions, we’re going to look around and say, ‘What happened? What happened to our farms?’ ”

In emails, all three county commissioners said they remain strong supporters of farmland preservation and cited the fact that the county has more acres of farmland than anywhere else in the nation.

But that success ironically contributes to the growing challenge to preserve more farmland, according to Liam Migdail, a spokesperson for the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

“You have access to really fresh local food, you have these pastoral kinds of views, this rural-type atmosphere that’s also a population center ... people want to live there,” said Migdail, who lives in Manheim Township. “So, you have this situation where there’s incredible pressure on that farmland because there’s so much of a push for development.”

For that reason the report also recommends municipal officials, mainly in rural and suburban townships, double down on zoning and planning practices that restrict commercial and residential developments to areas already slated for new development.

The release of the report comes as the LFT delivers a final fundraising push to reach its \$7.5 million goal in a capital campaign started more than two years ago. The organization

needs just \$600,000 to get there, Martynick said.

The \$7.5 million is what's needed to clear the trust's list of 50 farm owners waiting to sell their land's development rights, which essentially precludes future owners from building there.

Last year the Steinman Foundation announced a \$2 million grant to the capital campaign, its largest-ever single contribution. The Steinman Foundation is a local family foundation funded by the companies that comprise Steinman Communications, including LNP Media Group.

The county's Agricultural Preserve Board, which also buys development rights from farmers, has a backlog of its own, about 200 property owners waiting to strike a deal, according to the report.

"I think I can say this with certainty: there is not another county in the United States where there are 250 farms waiting to be preserved," Martynick said.

The demand is there, but it's an expensive undertaking for government agencies and nonprofit groups like the LFT, which assists mainly Plain-sect families who want a preservation option outside the public sector.

The process works through a type of deed restriction called a conservation easement. A farm owner who wants to make sure the land remains farmland in perpetuity essentially sells the rights to develop the land for other purposes to an outside entity like the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board or a trust like the LFT. In so doing, the owner removes the ability for future owners to build on or convert the farmland to something else.

Because land where a developer can potentially build a new subdivision or shopping center is more valuable than property restricted to farming, buying those development rights doesn't come cheap.

According to the report, the Preserve Board has paid on average about \$2,800 an acre over more than 1,000 conservation easements since 1989. Farm owners have to agree to sell their development rights to LFT for well below market value, the report says. The nonprofit has bought development rights through 529 easements for an average of \$545 per acre since 1988, and has a maximum purchase price of \$1,500 an acre.

## **All options on the table**

The biggest responsibility in protecting farmland lays with municipalities, Martynick said, where officials control land-use and zoning rules in Pennsylvania.

Rural townships in particular are ground zero for the collision of farms and population growth, according to the report. The LFT report cites data from the county's "places2040"

comprehensive plan showing that Rapho, Mount Joy and Penn townships saw the biggest growth in population between 2010 and 2018 in the county.

The report recommends various zoning and planning tools for township officials to use for farmland preservation. One, transfer of development rights, is a program that allows farm owners to sell their development rights to a developer who can then use those rights to build elsewhere with some privileges otherwise not permitted by zoning. That can be more density than otherwise allowed, or fewer stormwater management requirements, for instance.

Caernarvon, Manheim, Penn, Warwick, West Hempfield and West Lampeter townships have all enacted transfer of development rights ordinances already, according to the report.

Other recommendations for townships include agricultural zoning that limits how many homes or subdivisions can exist on each property. This precludes future owners from splitting up a farm into a new residential development.

The report also highlights Honey Brook Township in Chester County, where in 2005 voters approved a half-percent increase to a local income tax to fund preservation efforts.

Republican County Commissioner Josh Parsons said in an email that Lancaster County's preservation program is still a leader and that county funding has been stable since he entered office. He said funding has allowed the county to steadily work through the list of people who want to preserve their farms.

"Obviously, we have to balance the cost with the rest of our budget needs," Parsons said, citing the county's improved fiscal picture in recent years.

Republican Commissioner Ray D'Agostino pointed to his support of proposed legislation in Harrisburg that would provide private land trusts like LFT with some direct state funding for farmland preservation.

"This is not universally supported around the state because it can be seen as competition for funding," D'Agostino said. "However, given the close working relationship between the County and the LFT, we would see it as a win-win."

Democratic Commissioner Craig Lehman said he will continue to support farmland preservation funding.

[www.witf.org /2021/07/12/food-insecurity-and-hunger-plagues-older-population/](http://www.witf.org/2021/07/12/food-insecurity-and-hunger-plagues-older-population/)

## Food insecurity and hunger plagues older population | WITF

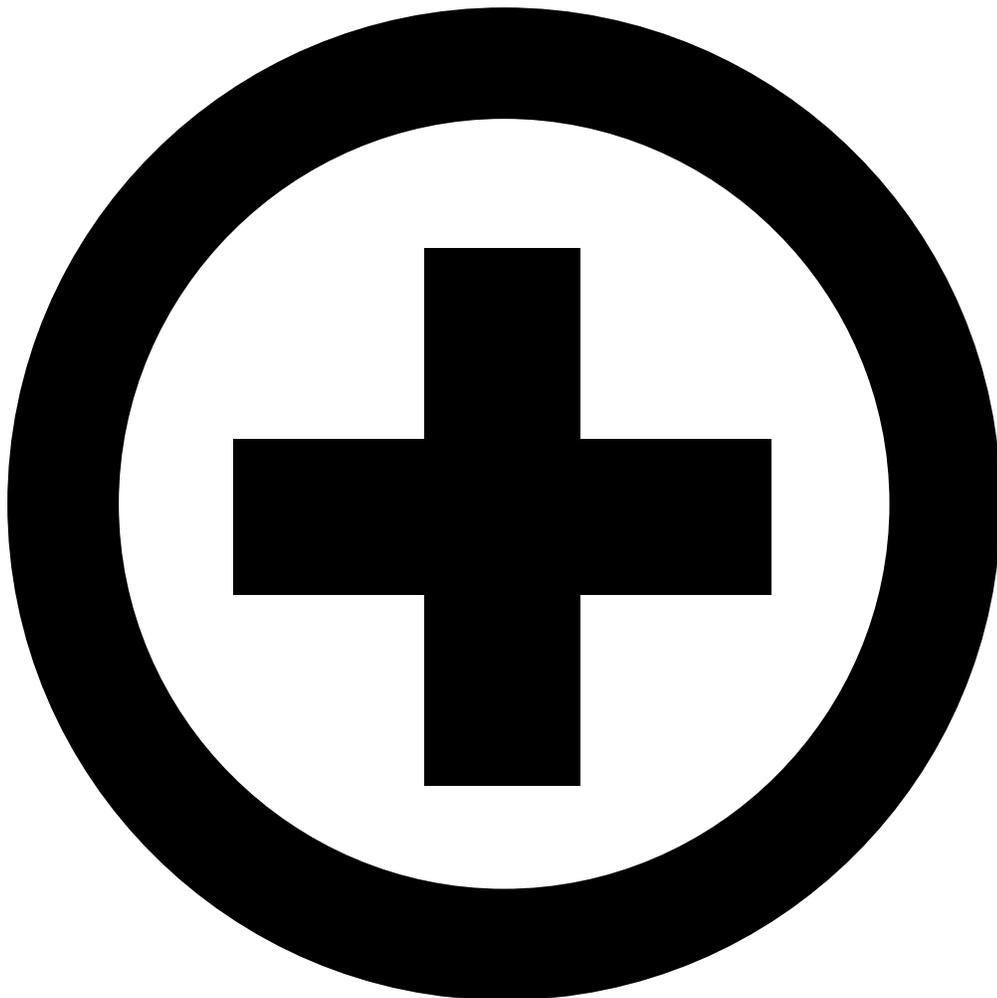
3-3 minutes : 7/12/2021

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July 12, 2021 | 3:00 PM

### Also on the program: Advocacy group calls for greater effort to preserve local farmland

- Merideth Bucher



Listen to **Smart Talk** every weekday at 9am and 7pm on WITF 89.5 & 93.3. You can also stream WITF radio live [on our website](#) or ask your smart speaker to “Play WITF Radio.”

Airdate: Tuesday, July 13, 2021

It is often hard to imagine that hunger exists in a state with so many abundant resources. The truth is that disparities remain and many people face the absence of basic needs.

The pandemic has impacted seniors in particular, with many experiencing food insecurity.

The Wolf administration is organizing state agencies and area non-profits to offer food assistance to this vulnerable population.

Pennsylvania First Lady Frances Wolf joins **Smart Talk** Tuesday, along with Caryn Long-Earl, director of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Food Assistance and Jennifer Brillhart, President & CEO, York County Food Bank, to share details of the initiative.

## **Advocacy group urges greater effort to preserve local farmland**

Suburban encroachment and a lack of local funding is causing one central Pennsylvania county's farmland preservation efforts to stall.

The Lancaster Farmland Trust published a report in June calling for increased funding by local governments to preserve farmland. The LFT recommends a goal that would put more than half of all agricultural land in Lancaster County into preservation status by 2040.



Marie Cusick/StateImpact Pennsylvania

A farm in Stevens, Lancaster County. Photo Marie Cusick, for StateImpact Pennsylvania

Appearing on **Smart Talk** Tuesday to discuss the recommendations in the report are [Jeff Swinehart, Chief Operating Officer](#) and [Karen Martynick, Executive Director](#), both with the Lancaster Farmland Trust.

## Tags

## Categories

## Healthy landscapes, healthy communities [column]

ALICE YODER | For LNP | LancasterOnline : 4-5 minutes

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In June, I participated in a panel discussion on Lancaster Farmland Trust's new report titled, "The State of Farmland Preservation." As a health care administrator, nurse and chair of the Lancaster County Planning Commission, I understand the connection between the health of our community's landscape and its people.

Over the years, I've come to realize how much a person's health and well-being are influenced by what happens outside the walls of a hospital.

My extensive experience as a health care professional has provided me the opportunity to see the connection between our community landscapes — where we live — and our personal health. We can educate people about how to live a healthier life, but the environment in which they live matters.

For example, abundant access to farm-fresh fruits and vegetables can allow for a more nutritious diet and contribute to a healthier overall body weight, reducing an individual's risk for heart disease, cancer and stroke. Further, the Lancaster Farmland Trust supports a healthy environment by assisting farmers with using conservation practices that help protect land, water quality and wildlife.

Many people in Lancaster County value our farmland and natural landscape, and enjoy being able to access those spaces. However, they may not recognize that they can play a part in preserving those places. By supporting more compact development in our urban and suburban areas and villages, everyone can help prevent sprawling growth from taking over viable farmland.

Often, the opportunity to preserve farmland happens locally; municipalities play a significant role in planning and preserving farms. The decisions made at local municipal meetings matter.

Lancaster County's current comprehensive plan — Places 2040 — published by the Lancaster County Planning Commission, offers sound guidance and tools. Still, the real substance of the work has to be done at the municipal level. Lancaster County's 60 municipalities may create independent zoning ordinances and planning goals — but protecting Lancaster County's farmland and open spaces will take teamwork.

We can do many things to break down silos across municipal lines and work collaboratively in regards to zoning and in-fill of urban and village areas. Transferable development rights are a good example of a practical tool available to all municipalities.

During my time on the West Hempfield Township Planning Commission, there were several times when a farmer would sell their transferable development rights and we were able to use those to develop in an area more suitable for denser development. Through the sale of transferable development rights, the farm became protected, yet the township didn't lose the ability to accommodate new residential or commercial growth.

I often refer to my fellow Lancaster County Planning Commission members and other municipal leaders as health care workers — that is how important I believe zoning and planning are to community health.

How we build our communities matters. It matters to those in our urban centers and to those in our most rural places. Our farmland benefits all Lancaster County residents, so use your voice, attend your local municipal meetings and let your elected officials know why you cherish our farmland. Encourage them to act now so future generations can also reap its benefits.

*Alice Yoder, MSN, RN, is chair of the Lancaster County Planning Commission.*

## **What to Read Next**