



NEWS

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SADC Purchases Sturgis Farm in S. Harrison Township, Gloucester County

Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher announced today that the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) has purchased the 128-acre Sturgis Farm in South Harrison Township, Gloucester County, to permanently preserve the farm, which is located in the midst of an active farmland preservation project area and was the proposed site for a 72-unit housing development.

“The preservation of this farm culminates four years of efforts by the SADC to protect it from development and also to protect the substantial public investment that has been made in preserving farmland in the surrounding area,” said Secretary Fisher, who chairs the SADC. “These efforts were well worth it to ensure this quality farm remains in agricultural production and to reinforce the SADC’s rights to preserve other farms under similar circumstances.”

The farm became the subject of a legal dispute when the former owners, Edward and Susan Sturgis, entered into a contract of sale with a developer while the farm was enrolled in an eight-year farmland preservation program. Eight-year programs differ from the permanent farmland preservation program in that landowners in the eight-year program voluntarily agree to restrict nonagricultural development for a period of only eight years. An owner who wants to sell the farm while enrolled in an eight-year program must provide the SADC with an executed contract of sale. The SADC then has the right and first option to pursue purchase of the property itself by making an offer that is “substantially similar” to contract conditions.

When the SADC was notified in 2005 that the Sturgis property was about to be sold, it offered to purchase the farm on terms it determined were substantially similar to those offered by the developer. The developer then sued the SADC to have the offer invalidated. Superior and Appellate Court decisions ultimately found the SADC acted properly in its actions to protect the farm and that its offer – while not identical to the developer’s offer – was substantially similar and therefore valid.

The SADC purchased the farm from the Sturgises for \$2,557,600 and intends to re-sell it as a permanently preserved farm at a public auction later this year or early next year.

The SADC administers New Jersey’s Farmland Preservation Program. To date, more than 1,800 farms covering approximately 176,000 acres have been permanently preserved through the state Farmland Preservation Program, including 110 farms covering 9,329 acres in Gloucester County. More than 200 farms are currently enrolled in eight-year preservation programs, including 22 farms in Gloucester County.

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