

# Farmland Preservation News



Published by the New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee

Summer 2005

## Record \$141.6M in New Funds Available for Farmland Preservation

A record annual request of \$141.6 million for farmland preservation efforts statewide was approved by the Legislature in June. The request includes \$45 million for grants to counties – the largest single amount ever dedicated to the county program – as well as \$15 million specifically targeted to preserve farmland in the Highlands region.

The approved funding covers a number of projects in which the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), county and local governments, and nonprofit

organizations purchase development easements on farmland or purchase farmland outright for preservation purposes. It includes:

- \$45 million in grants to counties to fund the majority of costs to preserve 122 farms covering 7,540 acres;
- Up to \$1,225,000 to Atlantic County to preserve one farm under the Pinelands county easement purchase program;
- \$44 million for the SADC to purchase development easements or

farmland outright on an ongoing basis throughout the year;

- \$31,415,464 in grants to municipalities and counties to preserve farms in 49 project areas under planning incentive grants;
- \$5.015 million in grants to nonprofit organizations seeking to preserve farmland in six counties; and
- \$15 million in supplemental funding for preservation in the Highlands region to be distributed on an as-needed basis among all programs.

## Welcome to 'Farmland Preservation News'

*By Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus*

More than 1,200 farms covering approximately 138,000 acres have been preserved statewide.

That's an impressive achievement for all of the landowners who made the commitment to preserve and for the preservation partners who funded the permanent protection of that land.

During the farmland preservation process, every effort is made to keep landowners and funding partners informed each step along the way. If applicants have questions, they generally know where to call to get answers.

There is no reason for that dialogue to stop once a farm has been preserved. In fact, because landowners and farmland preservation staff are not in contact on a frequent basis, there may be an even greater need for an exchange of information.

This newsletter is intended to answer common questions landowners may have and provide them – as well as other stakeholders – with regular updates on the latest developments in the Farmland Preservation Program and other issues that affect them.

Preserving farmland is only the first step in saving our farms. We need to continue to keep the lines of communication open and work together to ensure our farms not only remain protected for agriculture, but remain in production and are profitable as well.



## Farm Link Helps Farmers Find Land, Variety of Info

Farmers work hard enough that they shouldn't have to devote a lot of time to finding the information they need to maintain and improve their farming operations.

That's why the Farm Link Program is so important. Farm Link is a resource and referral center for new and established farmers. One of its primary services is connecting farmers seeking access to land and farming opportunities with farmland owners who have land and opportunities available.

Farm Link also offers a wealth of other information, including resources on everything from how to get started in farming, to how to undertake farm transition and estate planning.

Here's how the program's linking  
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## New Appraisal Provision Offers Enhanced Equity Protection

An amendment to the Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT) Act provides for an alternate way of valuing farms appraised for preservation purposes in areas where the land may have been devalued as a result of recent regulatory and zoning changes.

The amendment was included in the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and applies to the appraisal of farms statewide, not just in the Highlands.

The amended GSPT Act directs that appraisals be conducted two ways: using the zoning, environmental laws and Department of Environmental Protection rules and regulations in effect at the time of the proposed acquisition, and using those in effect on January 1, 2004. The landowner will receive a Farmland Preservation Program offer based on the higher of the two values.

Because the provision is scheduled to expire June 30, 2009, any landowner in the state whose land may have been devalued by regulation should consider applying for farmland preservation now to ensure eligibility for this provision.

The alternate valuation is available only to a landowner who has continuously owned the land since enactment of the Highlands Act on August 10, 2004, an immediate family member of that person or a farmer as defined by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC).

For the purposes of this provision, the SADC has proposed a rule defining a farmer as “an owner or operator of a farming operation who, during the calendar year immediately preceding submittal of a farmland preservation application, realized gross sales of at least \$2,500 of agricultural or horticultural products produced on the farming operation, exclusive of any income received for rental of lands.”

Governmental units or nonprofit organizations that acquire easements from farmers also would be eligible for the alternate appraisal valuation under specified conditions.

The SADC will accept public comment on the rule, which is posted on its website at [www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/sadc.htm](http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/sadc.htm), through September 3rd.

## Farm Link

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service works: Those interested in buying or leasing farmland, or in farm manager, partnership or internship opportunities, fill out a Farm Seeker form, which details their areas of interest. Those looking for farmers to fill these types of opportunities complete Farm Owner forms. Once registered as farm seekers or owners, they have access to an online listing that summarizes the opportunities available and sought.

Farm seekers or owners interested in

learning more about particular online listings contact the Farm Link Program, which then exchanges the Farm Seeker and Owner forms in the mail. It is up to the individual parties to contact one another to see if a match is possible.

For more information on the Farm Link Program, visit its website at [www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/farmlink.htm](http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/farmlink.htm) or contact Dave Kimmel, Farm Link coordinator, at (609) 984-2504.



## Preserved the Farm, Now Want the Sign?

While the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) is proud of New Jersey’s ever-growing number of preserved farms, we know landowners take great pride in them as well. That’s why we’re making available a “Preserved Farmland” sign to any owner of a preserved farm.

Landowners have a choice of two signs. The large sign is 3 feet by 4 feet and is surrounded by a wooden frame and mounted on two wooden posts approximately 9 feet tall. When installed into the ground, the sign stands about 6 feet high. The sign features a barn in the background with the message “Preserved Farmland: Private Land, Public Legacy.” A smaller metal sign – measuring 1.5 feet by 2 feet, featuring the same design and mounted on a metal pole – will be available again in the coming weeks.

The signs are free of charge and will be delivered and installed for any interested landowner. If you would like to receive a sign, complete and return a sign request form available on the SADC website at [www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/sadc.htm](http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/sadc.htm) or by contacting the SADC at (609) 984-2504.

## Craft Takes Helm at SADC

There's a new executive director at the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), and she's very familiar to those involved in Burlington County's farmland preservation program.

Susan Craft – the former coordinator of Burlington County's farmland preservation and transfer of development rights programs – assumed the top post at the SADC at the beginning of the year.

Craft, of Moorestown Township, Burlington County, is a professional planner who helped build Burlington's farmland preservation program into the national model that it is today. In May, Burlington County surpassed the 20,000-acre mark in preserved farmland – the first county in the state to reach that milestone. Burlington County's farmland preservation program is ranked as one of the top 10 county programs in the country, according to the *Farmland Preservation Report*.

At the SADC, Craft has initiated a comprehensive review of all preservation programs with a goal of streamlining and improving processes to make the Farmland Preservation Program more predictable, efficient and effective. This includes identifying ways to expedite the preservation process and improve coordination with counties, municipalities and nonprofit organizations.

Craft also is in the midst of reorganizing the office by establishing separate units solely devoted to acquisition and post-preservation activities, including review of requests for agricultural labor housing and divisions of premises, as well as monitoring. She also plans to hire staff for new northern and southern New Jersey field offices to provide landowners with a local source of information on the SADC's programs and procedures.

One of Craft's early goals is developing a better understanding of county preservation priorities to improve coordination between county and state preservation efforts. As part of this effort, she is visiting all of the county farmland preservation offices and touring their farmland preservation project areas.



## Highlands Act Places New Focus on Preservation

With the signing of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act in August 2004, efforts to preserve farmland and protect agricultural viability have assumed heightened importance in the Highlands region.

The Highlands Act divided the 1,250 square-mile region in northwest New Jersey into two areas: a preservation area where development will be strictly limited and regulated, and a planning area where development will be monitored.

An estimated 121,000 acres are in active agricultural production in that region, with a substantial additional amount of managed woodlands. About a third of that is in the preservation area and two-thirds in the planning area.

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) is committed to preserving farms in both the preservation and planning areas.

The Highlands Act draws an important distinction between major development, and agricultural use and development in the preservation area.

Those undertaking nonagricultural development projects are subject to a Department of Environmental Protection permitting review and approval process. However, farmers who want to construct barns and other agricultural-related structures will be required instead to secure and implement farm conservation plans if they exceed certain agricultural impervious cover thresholds.

The Department of Agriculture has hired agricultural resource specialist David Clapp, who is assigned to the Hackettstown and Frenchtown Natural Resources Conservation Service field offices, to help farmers obtain these plans. He can be reached in Frenchtown at (908) 782-4614, ext.

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Photo Courtesy of Burlington County

## Burlington Tops 20,000-Acre Milestone

The preservation of the Reuben Greenberg Farm in Mansfield Township helped put Burlington County over the 20,000-acre mark for preserved farmland. Burlington County was the first in the state to achieve this goal.

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## Highlands Act

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3, and in Hackettstown at (908) 852-2576, ext. 117.

A Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council has been established and charged with preparing and implementing a master plan for the entire region. The Council is required to include a farmer member, and Morris County farmer Kurt Alstede is serving in that role. The Department of Agriculture and SADC have a team of staff fully engaged in the Highlands regional master planning process.

An important component of the regional master plan is a well-designed transfer of development rights program, which would help further the goals of the Highlands Act while minimizing impact to property owners.

Increased funding is available for preservation in the Highlands region

and additional resources are being sought. The SADC will receive a total of \$30 million in supplemental funding, which it has dedicated specifically for Highlands preservation. The Legislature in June approved the first \$15 million for appropriation. These funds are in addition to existing sources of funding, including State, county, municipal, federal and nonprofit resources.

The SADC and Department of Agriculture are continuing to work to protect the viability of agricultural operations in the Highlands. This includes analyzing and providing comment on DEP interim rules adopted in May, to seek amendments clarifying the separate track for agricultural development and other issues of importance to the agricultural community.



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sadc.htm](http://www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/sadc.htm)

**Cover Photo:** The Csiszlak Farm in Alpha, Warren County, was preserved in 2000 through the county easement purchase program.