

## What does preserving farmland mean to residents of Berks County?

Preserved farms strengthens a community by securing a local food source, contributing to the economy, stabilizing the tax base, providing scenic openness and areas for wildlife habitat, improving water quality, and preserving the historic integrity of our area. There is a wide variety of agricultural products grown in Berks County. Orchard and vegetable farms provide an array of produce that can be purchased at local farmer's markets, while dairy operations ensure safe, locally produced milk and ice cream. Agribusiness is a large employment sector of the County and includes food production and processing.

Farms stabilize the local tax base. Residential development increases the demand for services such as schools, police, and roadways. The increased services require more in taxes than what is generated from the residential development. Conversely, a farm costs less on the dollar than what the farmer pays in taxes and costs the citizens less in taxes than any other land use.

The rural landscape of Berks County benefits both residents and visitors. The rolling farmland provides the scenic character of the County while providing wildlife habitat and improving water quality through infiltration. Included in the landscape are historic farmhouses, barns, and accessory buildings, a reminder of the rich heritage of the area.

## Program Statistics

Number of Preserved Farms 494

Number of Acres Preserved 53,306

Update date 05/21/08



### FACT

Only 12% of the prime agricultural soil in Berks County has been permanently preserved with an agricultural conservation easement.

**Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board**

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**BERKS COUNTY**  
*agricultural land*  
**PRESERVATION BOARD**

**Agriculture is  
Everyone's Business!**



**Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board**

**Telephone: 610-378-1844**

## Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

The Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board (BCALPB) is responsible for the implementation of the Agricultural Conservation Easement (ACE) Program. The goal of the ACE Program is to permanently preserve large clusters of farms to help ensure the future of agriculture in Berks County.

Funding for easement purchases, which is allocated annually, is provided by both Berks County and the State. Landowners are compensated up to \$2,500 per acre in exchange for complying with the specific restrictions placed on the land.

These restrictions include devoting the land to agricultural uses, regulating subdivision,



**Zweizig Family Farm  
Perry Township**

and implementing a prescribed conservation plan. Conservation plans are designed to maintain or improve soil quality on a farm. All preserved farms are inspected annually to ensure compliance with the easement. An easement is a legal document, recorded at the Recorder of Deeds Office. The easement remains with the property during changes in ownership, thereby protecting the land in perpetuity.

This Program is successful because of its applicants! Since 1989, 490 landowners have voluntarily preserved their farms, and have donated \$26,500,000.00 worth of acreage in bargain sales.

### Eligibility Requirements

In order to qualify for the ACE Program, a farm must:

- be located in a township's Agricultural Security Area.
- have at least 35 contiguous acres. If the tract is at least 10 acres in size and is utilized to grow a unique crop, or is adjoining a property that already has a perpetual easement, it is also eligible.
- contain 50% of soils in capability classifications I-IV, which are available for agricultural production.
- contain the greater of 50% or 10 acres of harvested cropland, pasture, or grazing lands.
- have less than 20% of the parcel in a Future or Designated Growth Area, as defined by the current Berks County Comprehensive Plan. Otherwise, the parcel is subject to further review.

*The annual application deadline is December 31<sup>st</sup>.*

***"We have not inherited the world from our forefathers – we have borrowed it from our children."***

*- Kashmiri proverb*

## FACT

Only 28% of the land area designated for agricultural preservation, according to Berks County's 2020 Comprehensive Planning Map, has been permanently preserved with an agricultural conservation easement.

### Benefits to Farm Owners

Farmers feel confident in investing money and energy into their operations because they can be assured that their farm and other protected farms in the area will be available for agricultural production for generations. Competing land uses, such as residential development, are minimized in areas of protected farms.

Proceeds from the sale of the easement, a tangible asset, allow farmers to

expand their operations or to pass on the farm. Landowners often use the proceeds to improve their operation, purchase additional farmland, or access



**Glen Farms  
Oley Township**

some of the equity in the land while ensuring the land remains in agricultural production for the next generation of farmers since most farmers have a connection to the land far beyond using the land to earn a living.

Preserving farmland offers farmers the piece of mind that their farm will be available for agriculture in perpetuity.