

Collaboration leads to largest round of Delaware farmland preservation in four years

DOVER, Del. – More than 127,000 acres of Delaware farmland are now permanently preserved for future generations, with the purchase of the development rights of 41 farms totaling 3,534 acres. This is the 22nd consecutive year of easement selections by the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation. Many of the farms in this round would not have been preserved without matching funds from multiple sources, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Sussex County Council, and Kent County Levy Court.

“I am proud to announce the largest round of Delaware farmland permanently preserved through the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Program in the last four years. This is a result of federal funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and funding from both Sussex County and Kent County,” said Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse. “It is because of the importance that the General Assembly and the Governor’s office have placed on this program and the commitment of our partners in preserving farmland, that we can make it possible to keep Delaware land in agriculture.”

In this round of easement selections, there was one farm in New Castle County, thirty in Kent County, and ten in Sussex County preserved.

The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation selects those farms approved for easement purchase using an impartial discounted ranking system that maximizes benefits

for taxpayers. The Foundation does not own the land, but rather purchases landowners' development rights and places a permanent agricultural conservation easement on the property. Landowners must first voluntarily enroll their farm into a 10-year preservation district before they can sell an easement. In addition to over 127,000 acres in permanent easements, Delaware's Aglands Preservation Program has over 45,000 acres of land enrolled in farmland preservation districts.

This year the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is celebrating 25 years of conservation easements, including wetland and agricultural easements. In Delaware, NRCS has provided more than 50 million dollars of funding to help preserve 302 farms and more than 40,300 acres since 1997.

County governments can choose to partner with the state program and add county funds to select properties in their areas, leveraging state resources for the greatest impact. In the round announced today, both Kent and Sussex County governments provided funding to assist with the purchase of development rights for farms in their respective counties.

"Kent County is thrilled to partner once again with the Delaware Department of Agriculture in the preservation of significant productive farmland in Kent County" said County Administrator Mike Petit de Mange. "Through this partnership we are preserving an additional 1,273 Acres of high quality working land in support of our number one industry in Central Delaware. The Levy Court is grateful to our local farmers for their commitment and contributions to the economy and quality of life in Kent County and to their commitment to the Agland Preservation Program."

Delaware's statewide program made its first round of easement purchases in 1996, and has since preserved 22 percent of New Castle County farmland, 38 percent of Kent County farmland and 16 percent of Sussex County farmland.

“Sussex County supports the agriculture sector and is excited to partner with the State to help preserve our number one industry,” said Sussex County Administrator Todd F. Lawson. “Because of these efforts, ten farms representing 780 acres will be preserved in Sussex County, ensuring the long-term viability of agriculture in our State.”

The Foundation’s Board of Trustees includes representatives from agriculture and state agencies. Trustees are: Bob Garey, chairman; Bill Vanderwende, vice-chairman; L. Allen Messick Jr., treasurer; William H. “Chip” Narvel Jr., secretary; Secretary of Agriculture Michael Scuse; State Treasurer Ken Simpler; Secretary of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Shawn Garvin; Peter Martin; Theodore P. Bobola Jr.; Robert Emerson; and Janice Truitt.

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