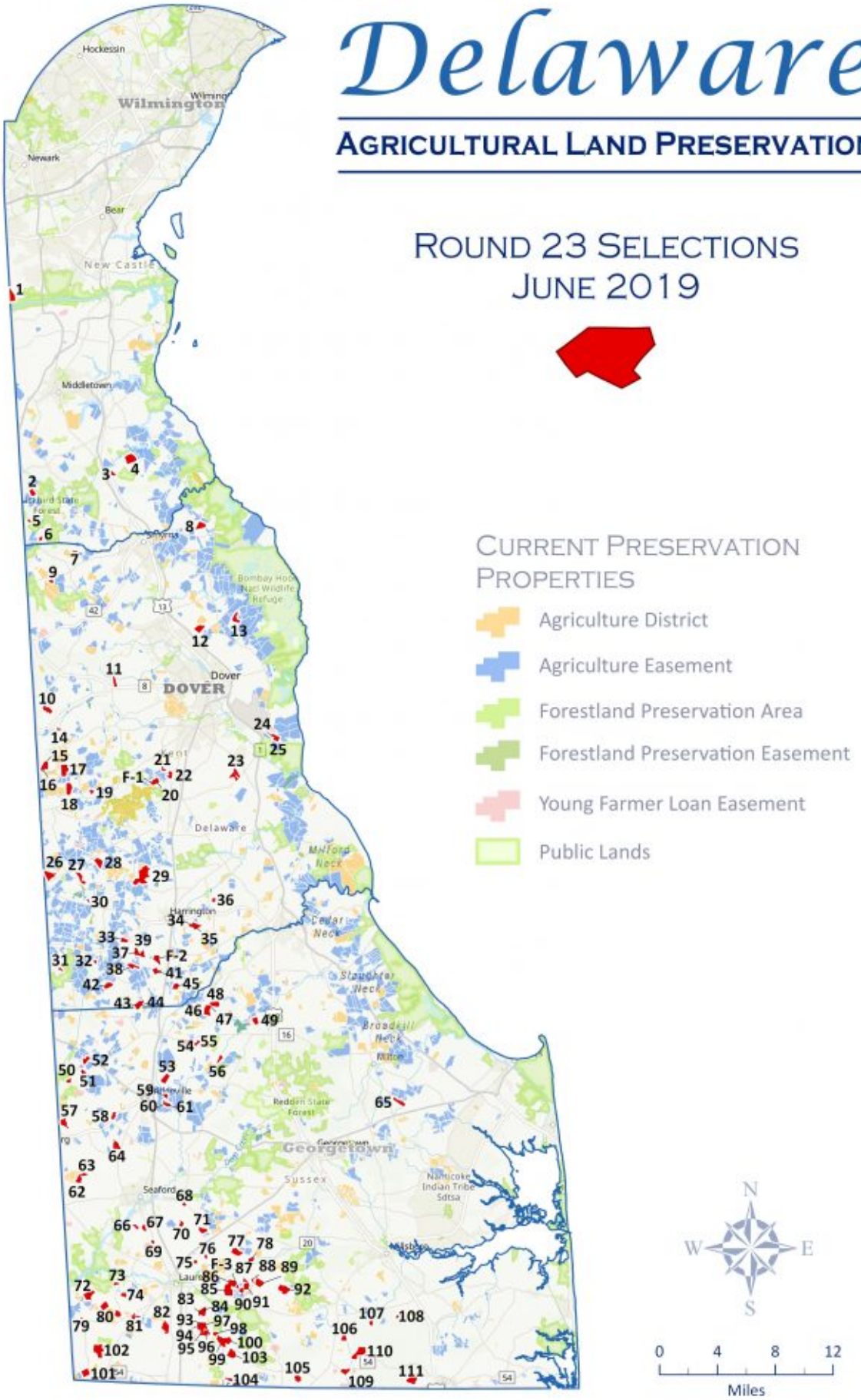
Delaware announces largest round of farms preserved in state history

Governor John Carney announced that more than 134,000 acres of Delaware farmland are now permanently preserved for future generations. This is the 23rd 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), the United States Navy’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program, Sussex County Council, New Castle County Council, and Kent County Levy Court.

“Since the start of my administration, I have



e placed a high priority on preserving Delaware's farmland so that agriculture will continue to be our state's number one industry," said **Governor Carney**. "I am proud to announce the largest round of Delaware farms permanently preserved through the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Program in the history of the program. With the purchase of the development rights of 111 farms totaling 9,382 acres, we have successfully preserved 25 percent of Delaware's farmland."

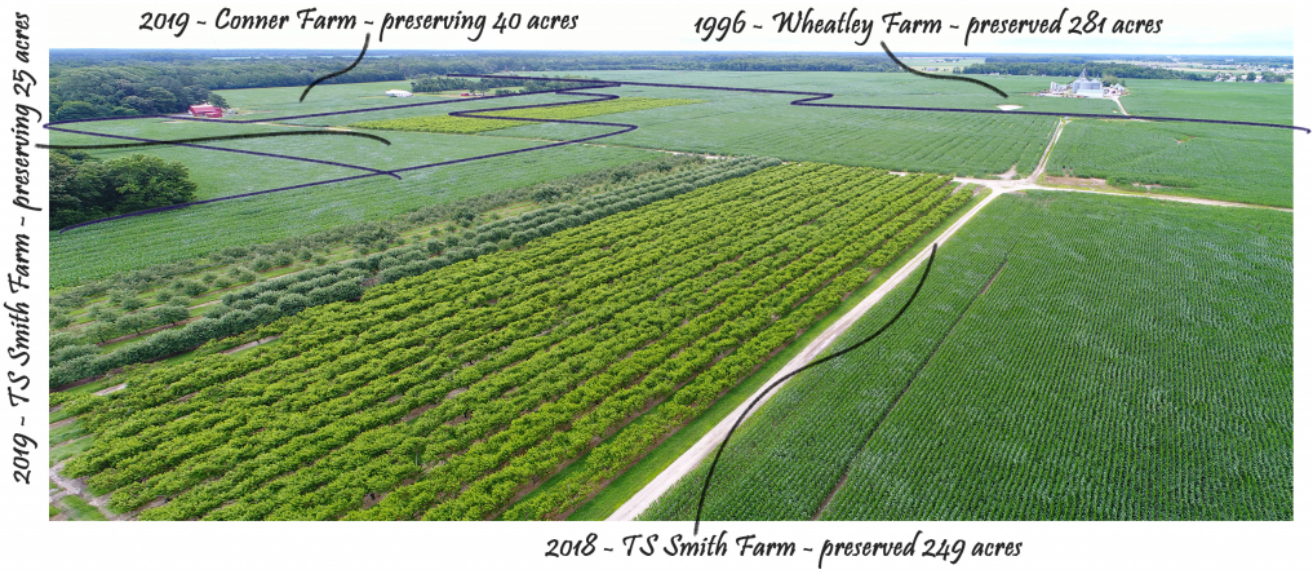
In this round of easement selections, there were six farms in New Castle County, 39 in Kent County, and 66 in Sussex County preserved.

"With today's announcement we preserved our 100th farm in New Castle County and our 400th farm in Sussex and will have almost 500 farms (496) in Kent County," announced **Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse**. Along with crediting the partners who provided funding for this round, he recognized the contributions of the landowners. "Over the life of the program, landowners have donated, on average, 58 percent of their development rights value – that is they received 42 cents on the dollar of their farm's development rights value to preserve their farm. The average discount (donation) for Round 23 is 66 percent. This is a great investment not only for agriculture but all Delawareans."

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 134,000 acres in permanent easements, Delaware's Aglands Preservation Program has over 174,000 acres of land enrolled in farmland preservation districts.

“The Navy is excited to continue our partnership with the State of Delaware to preserve land that not only benefits working farms and rural lands, but also enables military readiness and the ability of our service men and women to perform critical naval flight activities in the Atlantic Test Range,” said **Capt. Geoffrey Moore, Naval District Washington’s Chief of Staff.** “This unique partnership over the years has protected the state’s landscapes that are critical to our environment and quality of life while maintaining security of our airspace.” To date, the Navy has partnered with Delaware on three parcels and hope to partner on additional parcels over the next few years.

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, all three Delaware county governments provided funds to help purchase easements in their respective counties.



An aerial photograph taken at the press conference held at T.S. Smith & Sons in Bridgeville shows the year and farms preserved in the vicinity.

“Sussex County is demonstrating once again its support for Delaware’s agriculture industry and its commitment to

protecting open space and an enhanced quality of life," **Sussex County Administrator Todd F. Lawson** said. "With this latest round, eight more farms totaling 726 acres will be preserved and remain in production. As someone whose family has been rooted in agriculture for generations, I'm incredibly proud to be part of a collective effort that helps keep our economy strong and ensures a piece of the county's agrarian history remains visible and viable for many years to come."

This is the first time in eleven years that all three counties provided funding in the same round. The county governments provided nearly two million dollars to help with the purchase of 24 easements.

"New Castle County cherishes farmland, and this year we are pleased to leverage county funds, in partnership with the state, to preserve two additional farms at the best value for taxpayers," said **New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer**. "The significant development pressure on our county's agricultural lands is increasing and we are committed to growing the impact of the state farmland preservation program in New Castle County."

Delaware's statewide program made its first round of easement purchases in 1996, and has since preserved 21 percent of New Castle County farmland, 38 percent of Kent County farmland and 18 percent of Sussex County farmland.

"We are very grateful to Governor Carney and the General Assembly for placing high priority on Agland Preservation in Delaware" said **Kent County Administrator Mike Petit de Mange**. "Kent County is very pleased to partner with the State and our farming community once again to permanently preserve an additional 1,107 acres of working farmlands in Central Delaware."

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 T. Scuse; State Treasurer Colleen C. Davis; Secretary of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Shawn Garvin; Peter Martin; Theodore P. Bobola Jr.; Robert Emerson; and Janice Truitt.

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Photographs are available online at Flickr.