



ROUTE 57
CORRIDOR PLAN

FARM SUPPORT SERVICES

Farming is a crucial component of both the local economy and statewide. There are over 82,000 acres of farmland in Warren County, more than 13,000 of which have been preserved. Preservation of working farms, where possible, is an important overall strategy for conservation of Route 57's scenic vistas and the rural character valued by many residents. However, Warren County farmers face numerous challenges in their efforts to remain profitable. A variety of support services are available to help farmers stay in business, find new outlets for farm products, and in some cases, diversify into new areas including tourism.

New Jersey's vision for protecting farmland is an integral part of smart growth and NJDOT's focus on integrated land use and transportation planning. This vision is articulated and described in detail in the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey.

<http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/agsmartgrowth.htm>

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) administers this voluntary program which offers a variety of options for landowners to preserve land in perpetuity or for a limited term of eight years. Once the land is preserved there are no additional maintenance costs to the taxpayer; the land remains on the tax rolls, stabilizing the local tax burden, and because only easements are purchased, the state is able to stretch its funds to preserve many more farms than if the land were purchased outright.¹



Methods of farmland preservation include the following:

County Easement Purchase: Landowners sell the development rights to their county, retaining ownership, but agreeing to permanent deed restrictions that prohibit nonagricultural development. The state provides grants to fund the bulk of the purchase price; the county, municipality, or both come up with the balance.



Direct Easement: The state purchases the development rights on farmland directly from the landowner, and the landowner retains ownership of the land.

Fee Simple: Farms are purchased outright from willing sellers, permanently preserved for agricultural use and resold or leased with deed restrictions attached.

Grants to Nonprofits: The state provides cost-sharing grants of up to 50 percent to assist nonprofit organizations in permanently preserving farms.

Planning Incentive Grants: These are grants to municipalities or counties that have identified specific project areas where they intend to permanently protect large blocks of reasonably contiguous farmland. Municipalities must have an agricultural advisory committee and their master plan must contain a farmland preservation plan.

Eight Year Program: An eight-year program allows landowners to voluntarily restrict nonagricultural development on their property for eight years in exchange for selected easement-purchase benefits, such as protection from emergency water restrictions and access to soil and water conservation matching grants.



STRATEGIC TARGETING AND LOCAL LAND USE PLANNING

Because agriculture is an industry in which land is the primary instrument of production, it is important to retain the land base by identifying and prioritizing key parcels for preservation. Through its Strategic Targeting Project, the state is working with counties to develop a more strategic approach to farmland preservation efforts among all levels of government. This coordinated approach will improve preservation efforts and guide decision making across a wide variety of programs, agencies, and committees, and ultimately enhance the agriculture industry. On the local level, municipalities are encouraged to employ planning techniques that accommodate growth in rural areas while retaining productive agricultural lands. Land use planning tools that support these goals include: Agriculture Friendly Zoning, Clustering, Density Transfer, Lot Size Averaging, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), County Participation in Subdivision Review, Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), and Local Development Ordinance Reform.²

AGRICULTURE SMART GROWTH TOOL KIT

The NJDA created this tool kit as an online resource for those looking to implement the objectives outlined in NJDA's Agriculture Smart Growth Plan. The tool kit aims to inform local officials, businesses, and citizens in those efforts, and is divided into several sections:

- Farmland Preservation
- Innovative Conservation Planning
- Economic Development

- Natural Resource Conservation
 - Agricultural Industry Sustainability
- The tool kit can be found on the NJDA's website, and contains many links to internal and external sources of information:

<http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/toolkit.htm>

NEW JERSEY'S RIGHT TO FARM ACT

Although many people like the idea of living near a farm, once they move in they often discover that rural character means more than pretty open spaces and traditional, small-town values. Farm vehicles, activities, noise, and even odors may be considered by some to be an undesirable neighbor. As such, these conflicts are a principal concern to many farmers. New Jersey's Right to Farm Act provides eligible farmers who operate responsibly with protection from overly restrictive municipal ordinances, and public and private nuisance actions. The Act, the strongest in the nation, provides increased protection to those farmers who operate in accordance with agricultural management practices that have been adopted by the State Agriculture Development Committee.³

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES (A&RDS)

The A&RDS is a program run by the NJDA that intends to provide information and guidance for those in the agricultural industry. The program does not provide grant funding or loan programs, but serves strictly as a source for outreach and the technical exchange of information. Areas where the A&RDS provides information includes:

- Farm Building Construction Code Regulations
- Federal and State Motor Vehicle Policies
- Agricultural Tax Guidance
- Technical Assistance with Recycling Programs
- Renewable Energy Technical Guidance



Olde Lafayette Village Farmers' Market



The Sussex County Farmers' Marketing Association sponsors a weekly farmers' market in Lafayette Township. All items sold at the market are grown and processed within Sussex County, and conform to Jersey Fresh Quality Standards. The mission of the Sussex County Farmers' Marketing Association "includes fostering growth throughout the agriculture community of Sussex County and northern New Jersey and assuring the integrity of the products offered through the direct-marketing concept." Communities along Route 57 may wish to consider this example as a model for use in Warren County.

Washington Borough Farmer's Market

The Washington Business Improvement District (BID) will host its 3rd Annual Farmer's Market, starting Friday, June 23rd, 2006. This Market showcases Warren County area farms and farm products. The market will be located near the intersections of Routes 57 and 31. For more information, contact the Washington BID at (908) 689-4800

<http://www.washingtonbid.org/>

AGRI-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The NJDA Division of Marketing and Development offers assistance to organizations and municipalities which aim to take advantage of local and regional agricultural-related attractions. Jersey Fresh matching grants can be used by organizations to help produce and promote local festivals, markets, events or outreach programs.

The Route 57 corridor is home to 18 farms that offer a variety of produce to the public; eleven of these include roadside markets, and six allow visitors to pick their own fruits and vegetables.

FARM LINK PROGRAM

The New Jersey Farm Link Program is offered by NJDA to provide a venue to link prospective farmers with landowners seeking farmers, and vice versa. The program can serve farm owners that are looking to sell their land, as well as those simply looking to lease their land.

(Endnotes)

- ¹ Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey, NJ Department of Agriculture, November 2003, p 12
- ² Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey, NJ Department of Agriculture, November 2003, pp 15, 20-27
- ³ Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey, NJ Department of Agriculture, November 2003, p 48