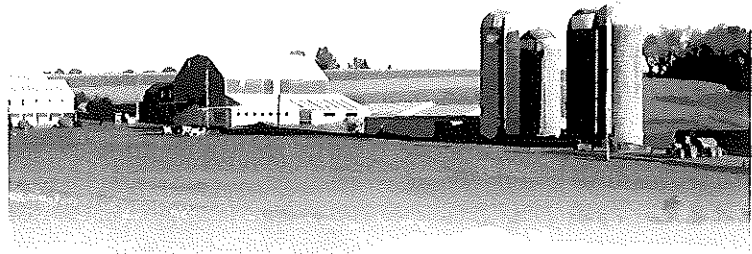


FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania



Spring 2016

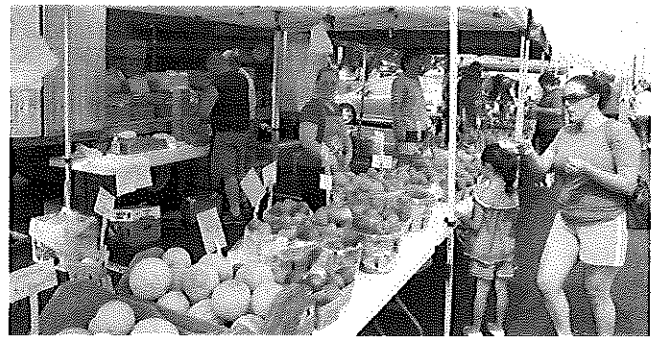
Montgomery County's *Farmland Preservation* newsletter is written for owners of farms preserved under the Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Program, commonly called the farmland preservation program, but is available to anyone who would like to learn more about the significant role of farming in our county. While farming often seems like a simple idea, there are many elements to producing food and other farm products. All the food we eat starts on a farm, and keeping the food supply sustainable, inexpensive, and healthful takes participation from businesses, legislators, government agencies, consumers, and even the weather.

Farmland Preservation Program Update

In 2016, there were 9 new applications and 24 applications from previous county cycles. Each year, the farms associated with these applications receive a score and ranking. The law requires the Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Board (farm board) to select farms in ranked order to proceed to the next step of getting a real estate appraisal for the value of an agricultural easement. This year, the five highest-scoring farms were selected for appraisal. The remaining farm applications are still active but presently on hold.

The most common question heard from farmers and others is whether there is still funding in our program. The answer is yes! Not only are we finishing with approximately \$1.25 million allocated to us in 2015, but we are also working on about \$1.27 million from 2016. If you see or talk to a legislator

or commissioner, please thank him or her for providing this funding to help save farmland in the county and state. Like many good programs, spending allocated money may not be a fast process, but the well-planned procedure yields worthwhile outcomes. Saving more land for farm products is truly a worthwhile outcome.



This newsletter now is primarily distributed by email, but paper copies are available upon request. We can supply up to 10 paper copies for municipal offices, etc. We also offer our newsletter in key farm-related locations, such as the Penn State Extension office in Creamery and the Montgomery County Conservation District office in Collegeville. Please feel free to forward this newsletter to your family, friends, and colleagues. They can join our email list by visiting www.montcopa.org/MCPCpublications. For additional farmland preservation information, contact Elizabeth Emlen, Senior Farmland Preservation Administrator, at eehlen@montcopa.org or 610-278-3754.

Upcoming Events

May 14 – Master Gardener Plant Sale in Montgomery County
9 a.m. – 2 p.m. • Montgomery County 4-H Center in Creamery, PA
www.extension.psu.edu/montgomery • 610-489-4315

May 19 to 21 – 2016 Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference
The Penn Stater Hotel and Conference Center in State College, PA
www.conserveland.org

June 9 – State Farm Board Bi-Monthly Meeting Harrisburg, PA

August 11 to 13 – Montgomery County 4-H Fair
Montgomery County 4-H Center in Creamery, PA
www.extension.psu.edu/montgomery • 610-489-4315

August 16 to 18 – Ag Progress Days
Russell E. Larson Agricultural Research Center
Rock Springs, PA
www.apd.psu.edu

February 1, 2017 – Applications Due for Next Farmland Preservation Cycle

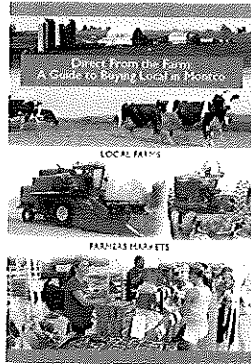
February 2017 – *Keep Farming in Montgomery County* Conference (TBD)

County Farm Board Meetings – 4th Tuesday May through Oct.
(3rd Tuesday Nov. & Dec.) www.montcopa.org/FarmlandProgram

News and Notes

Local Food Guide

Thank you to farm owners and operators who contributed information about their farm businesses to the recently revised 2016 local food guide, *Direct From the Farm: A Guide to Buying Local in Montco*. The guide is intended to be helpful both to farmers marketing their products and to consumers and food businesses who desire locally produced food and other value-added farm products. The guide is being distributed across the county and is available at www.Montcopa.org/FarmlandProgram.



New Farm Board Member

Brett Altman of Allied Construction Services in Fort Washington joined the farm board earlier this year. Brett is an honors graduate of Michigan State University, having earned a Bachelor of Science degree in building construction. Our five-member board, appointed by the Montgomery County Commissioners, consists of two farmers, one elected municipal official, one builder, and one member at large. We welcome Brett to the board and appreciate his experience with local real estate values.

Inspections of Preserved Farms

Each farm in the farmland preservation program is required to be inspected annually or biennially. During the inspection, a staff member visits the farm to ensure soil conservation plan compliance and no new non-agricultural development. We also meet with new owners of farms recently sold and answer questions that an owner might prefer to ask in person. The 2016 inspections will be conducted primarily by Montgomery County Conservation District staff. As always, we will notify you by mail at least 10 days in advance of the visit.

Financing for Farmers

First-time farmers in Montgomery County can qualify for federally tax-exempt financing to purchase agricultural land, finance improvements to agricultural lands, and to purchase equipment. A lending institution provides a tax-exempt mortgage to the borrower with the assistance of the Montgomery County Industrial Development Authority (MCIDA). Interest earned by the bank is exempt from federal and state income taxes. The lender, in turn, passes on a lower interest rate to its borrower, the first-time farm buyer. Please contact Greta Milles at 610-275-5300 for more information.

Current farmers looking to launch or expand a commercial enterprise should also consider low-interest financing offered through the Montco Opportunity Loan Program. The money can be used toward capital investment, land acquisition, and equipment purchases. Visit the www.montcopa.org/1713/Loan-Program for more details.

Question and Answer

Q: If my development rights are bought by the county and state, does that mean the state and county are allowed to develop on the farm?

A: The expression *development rights* is frequently used in our program because it is easily understood. However, to be correct, the state and county (and sometimes municipality) actually buy an agricultural conservation easement (A.C.E.) from the farm owner. A conservation easement is similar to the purchase of development rights, but the holder of the conservation easement does not have the right to develop the property for a non-agricultural use or to transfer development rights to another location. The holder of a conservation easement has purchased the right to say no to non-agricultural development on the farm corresponding to the easement and to enforce the agreement that the land will remain farmed and that a soil conservation plan will be followed.

Program Status

As of March 2016, there are 154 preserved farms in Montgomery County under the farmland preservation program. These farms total 9,089 acres. In Pennsylvania, there are 4,919 preserved farms in 57 participating counties. Those farms total 518,827 acres.



Montgomery County Board of Commissioners

Josh Shapiro, *Chair*
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Farmland Preservation Board

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About the Program

The Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Program permanently preserves farmland in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania through the purchase of agricultural easements from land owners. These easements restrict the use of the land to farming only.

