



## The League of Women Voters of Delaware Supports FUNDING of \$10 MILLION FOR FARMLAND PRESERVATION AND \$9 MILLION FOR OPEN SPACE

### FARMLAND

- The Farmland Preservation program is administered by the Department of Agriculture. Farmers meeting certain criteria can give the state an opportunity to buy their development rights; the greater the percentage discount s/he agrees to offer on these rights, the greater likelihood that the state will purchase them. In recent years, the average discount has been a whopping 65%. Funds for the program come from the Realty Transfer Tax Fund.
- What about N.C.C.; the soils there are said to be much richer than in the other 2 counties. Shouldn't N.C.C. farms get more money for their development rights? Yes, farms are chosen for the program based on the percentage discount, not on the absolute value of either the rights or the whole farm.
- Delaware counties can contribute funding to the state's Aglands Program and, if so, they can decide which of the farms (that have submitted bids within their county) that they wish to preserve with their funding. When possible, the State provides matching funds to the counties for these easement purchases. In the past, this was a 50% match; current funds may be too low for that level of support.
- This year the owners of 202 farms within ag districts requested to have their farms appraised to possibly sell their development rights. The Ag Department has money for only about 20 farms.
- A U.D. study shows that 80% of money expended for farmland preservation goes back into the local economy for purchase of additional farmland and farm equipment.
- Delaware farming creates \$8 billion in economic activity every year and generates about 30,000 jobs.

### OPEN SPACE PROGRAM

- The Open Space program is administered by DNREC. DNREC usually prefers to buy open space outright so that the public can use the land. Prospective properties are graded on a scale based on location, utility, value, likelihood of development, etc. So far over 56,000 acres of open space have been preserved by DNREC in this manner, mostly purchased fee simple. Sale by the owner is entirely voluntary.
- Tourism is the state's 4th largest employer, employing nearly 42,000 people. In 2015 the state's tourism industry generated \$3.1 billion in goods and services. Tourism generated \$486 million in state and local government taxes and fees in 2015. Without tourism, each Delaware household would pay an additional \$1,417 in taxes.
- The Open Space Program needs at least \$4 million in order to leverage \$5.6 million in other funds. This amount would protect 1,273 acres. The Dept. proposes 13 projects beyond what is currently scheduled for purchase, for a total of a little over \$10 million. Once built upon, the land is gone forever.

### BOTH PROGRAMS

- Community services for agricultural or open land cost the community 35 cents for every tax dollar. Community services for residences cost \$1.16 for every tax dollar which the homeowner pays to the community.<sup>1</sup> It is clearly more cost-effective to keep land in open space or farmland, rather than allow it to be developed. An American Farmland Trust study done in Delaware in 2006 shows a clear connection between sprawl and state spending.
- Had seasonal home rental spending been subject to the state's Public Accommodation Tax, an additional \$88 million in state revenue could have been generated in one year...money that could have gone toward funding both open space and farmland preservation programs.

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<sup>1</sup> American Farmland Trust, "Cost of Community Services Studies," Aug., 2010.  
[www.communitypreservation.org/community\\_services.pdf](http://www.communitypreservation.org/community_services.pdf)