

# Farmland Preservation Program

## County Easement Purchases

**How They Work** Landowners sell the development rights on their farmland to their county. When landowners sell their development rights — also known as development easements — they retain ownership of their land, but agree to permanent deed restrictions that allow only agricultural use.

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) provides counties with grants to fund 60-80 percent of the costs of purchasing development rights on approved farms. It generally holds one funding round per year for this program.

**Application** Landowners apply to their county agriculture development board (CADB). The CADB reviews applications and forwards approved ones to the SADC.

**Criteria** Farms must be in an Agricultural Development Area and be eligible for Farmland Assessment. The SADC prioritizes applications for preservation funding through a ranking system that assigns points for the following factors: percentage of high-quality soils; percentage of tillable acres; suitable boundaries and buffers, such as other nearby preserved farms and open space; the local commitment to agriculture (e.g., right to farm ordinances, financial commitment); size of the farm and agricultural density of the area; imminence of development, and prioritization by the CADB. These quality scores establish the SADC's preliminary priority list for preservation.

**Valuation** The SADC certifies development values for each farm based on independent appraisals conducted by two licensed appraisers and a review by an SADC staff appraiser. Counties hire appraisers from an SADC-approved list.

**Special Considerations** Once the SADC certifies development easement values, landowners have 30 days to submit their offers. A landowner can improve a farm's ranking on the preliminary priority list by offering to discount — or sell the development easement for less than the certified value. For every one percent a landowner discounts, two points are added to the farm's quality score. Landowner offers establish the final priority list for preservation. The number of farms that will be preserved each round depends on available state, county and sometimes municipal funding.

**For More Information** Interested landowners should contact their county agriculture development board.