



Field Notes:

An Overview for New Owners of Preserved Farmland



About the Program

The Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Program, also known as the Farmland Preservation Program, started in 1990. Under this program, landowners choose to preserve their land through the sale of development rights, permanently placing a conservation easement on the property. The county's first preserved farm was the 164-acre Wismer Farm in Trappe Borough. Since then, the county has preserved over 9,900 acres of farmland on more than 170 farms in 18 municipalities. The county is committed to preserving agricultural land and promoting farming as an asset in the local and regional economy. The county's comprehensive plan, *Montco 2040: A Shared Vision*, has a goal to preserve an additional 6,000 acres of farmland by 2040.



Moser farm

What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a permanent deed restriction on a property's development rights, recorded with the county's Recorder of Deeds. The land, must be formed in perpetuity and can no longer be developed; if it stays in private ownership and management while remaining on the property tax rolls. Funds to purchase easements come through a partnership with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Montgomery County, and frequently the municipality.

Post-Preservation Actions

One Additional Residential Opportunity

After preservation, a landowner may build an additional residence or subdivide an existing home one time only, with approval from the Farmland Preservation Board for its location. Building an additional residence can be done concurrently with any municipal permit applications, which may be required for new construction. Once built or subdivided, no subsequent landowners retain this right.

The Farmland Preservation Board will approve or disapprove an application based upon the impact of the residence on the viability of the land for agriculture. The proposed residence must have as minimal an impact as possible. The curtilage shall not exceed two acres, and shall leave the greater of at least 10 acres or 50% of the preserved farmland in cropland, pasture, and/or grazing land.

Before proceeding, the landowner must determine whether the land needs to be subdivided to build the additional house (or subdivide the existing residence). The guidebook permits a two-acre subdivision for the additional residence and the guidebook Appendix contains two distinct applications for this purpose, based on whether or not subdivision is required.

Subdivision of a Preserved Farm

Subdivision of a preserved farm into two smaller farms will not be permitted unless the subdivision meets the criteria in the program guidelines and is approved by the Farmland Preservation Board.

For any subdivision request, please complete a subdivision application (found in the program guidebook's Subdivision Guidelines). Only farms 100 acres or greater are eligible.

Preserved Farm Signs

A roadside sign is required on all farms preserved after September 2007. The sign states that the farm is preserved by the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program. There is no cost to the landowner for the sign. Owners with frontage on more than one road may request one sign on each road.



For More Information

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Part-time or Off-Season Activities

Activities listed here are permissible in addition to the main farm operation, and shall not substitute for the required agricultural production or a commercial equine activity. Please refer to the program guidelines for full descriptions. The provisions below do not supersede local ordinances.

- A. On-site farm markets and vendor markets provided that at least 50 percent of items sold are produced on-site by the farm operator.
- B. The construction of agricultural buildings.
- C. Hunting and the production and stocking of game birds.
- D. The construction of wind, solar, hydroelectric, geothermal, methane, wood, and alcohol fuel systems, and structures and facilities for the storage and treatment of animal wastes. Please see the Program Guidelines for details and restrictions. Solar farms are not permitted.
- E. Irrigation, farm pond improvements, and soil and water conservation practices.
- F. Production and sale of arts and crafts.
- G. The accommodation of tourists and visitors within residential and/or agricultural structures otherwise permitted under the law.
- H. Minor rural enterprises and activities including beekeeping, corn mazes and similar farming activities, hayrides, hunting, and educational tours.
- I. Other similar uses upon approval by the Montgomery County Agricultural Land Preservation Board and the State Agricultural Land Preservation Board.





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