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Ohio Farmland Preservation: Assuring a Strong Agricultural Future

REYNOLDSBURG, Ohio (Jan. 31, 2011) – Land is the heart of agriculture, and farmland preservation is at the center of the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s work to maintain the state’s agricultural heritage while providing food, energy, products and jobs. Food and agriculture together constitute the state’s largest industry, contributing more than \$98 billion annually to the state’s economy and providing jobs to one in seven Ohioans. The department’s Farmland Preservation Office educates the public about the importance of saving Ohio’s valued farmland and assists farmers and local officials with farmland preservation efforts.

Ohio’s Farmland is Vanishing at a Startling Rate

Between 1950 and 2000, Ohio lost more than 6.9 million acres of farmland, representing nearly one-fourth of Ohio’s land. Ohio is losing farmland at a much faster rate than other states. It ranks second in the nation for prime agricultural land converted to developed land but only 31st in the nation for numeric population growth. It is up to today’s generation to take steps toward protecting the agricultural land that still exists today.

Agricultural land encounters development pressure, especially near Ohio’s metropolitan areas. For example, the six-county ring around Cleveland (Lake, Geauga, Portage, Summit, Medina, and Lorain counties) produces more than \$241 million annually in agricultural products. Protecting this valuable farmland is essential to securing agricultural production in this region for years to come.

Ohio Farmers Want to Protect Their Land

The department works to provide options to farmers who want to preserve their land for future generations. The easement programs within the department have preserved more than 270 farms totaling more than 48,000 acres since 1999. These voluntary legal agreements among the landowner, the local community and the state ensure farmland remains in agricultural use forever. Under an agricultural easement, the land itself stays under private ownership, but the easement prohibits any future non-agricultural development by landowners.

Tools to Protect Farmland

Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP) - The program provides funding to farmland owners for placing an agricultural easement on their property, which will guarantee the land remains in agriculture. Monies are issued for up to 75 percent of the points-based appraised value of a farm’s development rights. A payment cap is set at \$2,000 per acre, with a maximum of \$500,000 per farm. All easement transactions are recorded on the property deed and transfer with the land to successive owners.

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The General Assembly's Bipartisan Jobs Stimulus Plan, a \$1.57 billion investment in Ohio's economy and infrastructure, includes a \$400 million bond continuation of the Clean Ohio Fund. The fund, similar to its original form in 2001, preserves farmland, creates recreational trails, conserves greenspace and revitalizes brownfields. It allocates \$25 million, divided into four years beginning in 2009, to purchase agricultural easements on productive agricultural land.

Ohio Agricultural Easement Donation Program (AEDP) - The donation program provides landowners the opportunity to donate the easement rights on viable farmland to the department, which assures the land remains in agricultural use forever. Since 1999, the department has accepted the donation of agricultural easements from landowners who wish to protect their farm's soils and natural resource features. There are no stewardship fees or costs from ODA to the farmland owner for donating the easement, and all easement transactions are permanent. They are recorded on the property deed and will transfer with the land to successive owners. Landowners may also find financial benefits associated with easement donations.

Agricultural Security Area (ASA) – The ASA program authorizes one or more landowners with at least 500 acres of contiguous farmland to request enrollment into an ASA for a 10-year period from the boards of county commissioners and township trustees. This program promotes agricultural retention by creating special areas in which agriculture is encouraged and protected. ASAs provide certain benefits to farmers, including protection from non-agricultural development, a critical mass of land to help keep farming viable and possible tax benefits for investing in new real-agricultural property.

Ohio Century Farm Program – The Ohio Department of Agriculture recognizes the social, economic and historic contributions of Ohio's family farms through the Ohio Century Farm Program, which honors farms that have remained in the same family for at least 100 years. Information, including a registration form, is available on the department's website or by e-mailing centuryfarms@agri.ohio.gov.

For more information on Ohio's farmland preservation programs, visit www.agri.ohio.gov.

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