



August 23, 2010

I am pleased to present the executive summary for *Ohio's Agricultural Easement Purchase Program: From Pilot to Permanent Presence*. This report explains findings from a survey completed by Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP) participants that was commissioned by the Ohio Department of Agriculture with the Ohio State University's Center for Farmland Policy Innovation.

The Clean Ohio AEPP compensates farmland owners who place an agricultural easement on their farms, with the goal of preserving Ohio's valuable farmland for future generations. An agricultural easement is a deed restriction that prohibits any future non-agricultural development. The easement allows for agricultural development and the land to stay under private ownership. Currently, the program is funded at \$6.25 million per year.

Since 2002, the AEPP has transitioned from a pilot program into a regular component of Ohio's conservation efforts. Because of this transition, the department wanted to look back over the seven operational years to understand the impact of funds dispersed, and gauge satisfaction and explore improvements for the AEPP.

The survey provided incredibly positive feedback about the program including:

- **AEPP participants are overwhelmingly satisfied with the program.** A combined 91.7% of respondents stated they are satisfied with the program;
- **AEPP results in the implementation of on-farm conservation measures.** Over half of the respondents indicated that since receiving AEPP funds, they already have and/or are planning to establish new conservation practices on their farms; and
- **AEPP expands the farm business.** Twenty-three respondents have and/or are planning to diversify. Seventeen respondents have and/or are planning to establish new or additional farm businesses.

With that said, we continue to seek out opportunities for improvement. The Office of Farmland Preservation is currently working to:

- Review the program's application and closing process using Kaizen, a week-long efficiency study and evaluate program rules within the Ohio Administrative Code;
- Explore ways to assist unique agricultural properties that are not currently successful in the Clean Ohio AEPP, including a potential second agricultural protection program; and
- Conduct regular surveys of participants every five years to utilize this assessment as a benchmark.

This program and farmland protection efforts rely on the collaboration among federal, state and local entities to work together with interested farmland owners toward a common goal of protecting a valuable natural resource. I appreciate the work and assistance from the program's partners as we gather around this common goal for the betterment of the program, the land it protects and the Ohioans it serves.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Boggs, Director
Ohio Department of Agriculture

