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### **Ohio Farmland Preservation: Assuring a Strong Agricultural Future**

REYNOLDSBURG, Ohio (July 21, 2014) – Agriculture is a land-based industry, and farmland preservation is a key component of the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s work to maintain the state’s farming heritage while positioning Ohio for agricultural growth. Food and agriculture together constitute the state’s largest industry, contributing more than \$105 billion annually to the state’s economy and providing jobs to one in seven Ohioans. The department’s Office of Farmland Preservation assists farmers, landowners and local communities with their farmland preservation efforts.

Between 1950 and 2000, Ohio lost more than 6.9 million acres of farmland, representing nearly one-third of Ohio’s agricultural land. The department works to provide tools to farmers who want to preserve their land for future generations. The easement programs within the department have preserved nearly 315 farms totaling more than 54,200 acres (as of December 31, 2013). These voluntary, legal agreements among the landowner, the local community and the state ensure that 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.

#### **Programs to Protect Farmland**

Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP) - 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.

The LAEPP is the farmland preservation component of the Clean Ohio Fund initiative, which was originally approved by Ohio’s voters in 2000, and further supported at the ballot for continuation in 2008. The Clean Ohio Fund preserves farmland and grows green space, improves outdoor recreation and encourages redevelopment of communities by cleaning up brownfields.

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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 farming 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 agricultural buildings, structures, or improvements on the property.

Ohio Century and Bicentennial Farms Program – The Ohio Department of Agriculture recognizes the economic and historic contributions of Ohio's family farms through the Ohio Century and Bicentennial Farms 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](mailto:centuryfarms@agri.ohio.gov).

For more information on Ohio's farmland preservation programs, visit [www.agri.ohio.gov](http://www.agri.ohio.gov).

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