



NEWS:

More than 127,000 Acres of Delaware Farmland Permanently Preserved

JUNE 1, 2018 -- Delaware's Agricultural Lands Preservation Program hit a new milestone this week.

The foundation announced Thursday the purchase of the development rights for 3,534 acres on 41 farms. With this acquisition, more than 127,000 acres of Delaware farmland are now permanently preserved.

More than 45,000 additional acres are enrolled in Farmland Preservation Districts awaiting the potential purchase of their easements.

The latest round of selections included one New Castle County farm, 30 Kent County farms, and 10 in Sussex County.

Matching funds from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Sussex County Council, and Kent County Levy Court contributed significantly to the acquisitions.

State Rep. Dave Wilson, R-Cedar Creek Hundred, a longtime advocate for the program, championed its funding in the current Bond Bill. Although the law calls for the program to receive \$10 million annually from the state's share of Real Estate Transfer Tax revenue, the law has repeatedly been ignored. Former Gov. Jack Markell was a serial offender, appropriating the earmarked money for other uses during most of his two-term administration.

Facing a large budget gap last year, Gov. John Carney called for the program to receive no funding in the current fiscal year. Rep. Wilson, who sits on the Bond Bill Committee, lobbied for the program to get at least a portion of the money it was due and ultimately secured \$3 million for the initiative.

With the state presently facing a much better financial outlook, the Agricultural Lands Preservation Program is expected to receive its full \$10 million allotment in the new fiscal year that begins July 1.

"The economy is picking up steam and housing demand is growing," Rep. Wilson said. "We need this program fully funded now more than ever."

Rep. Wilson and other program supporters note that keeping large contiguous blocks of land in productive agriculture is essential to maintaining needed farming infrastructure, as well as avoiding conflicts with homeowners and motorists. "Farming is our top industry, and this program not only preserves open space but the tens-of-thousands of jobs tied to agriculture," Rep. Wilson said.



State Rep. Dave Wilson