

**Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and Lancaster Farmland Trust
Legislative Breakfast Public Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March, 24, 2016, 8:00 A.M.
State Room, Eden Resort, 222 Eden Road, Lancaster**

Present: County Commissioner Dennis Stuckey, Lancaster County
County Commissioner Josh Parsons, Lancaster County
County Commissioner, Craig Lehman Lancaster County
Representative Steve Mentzer, 97th District
Representative Brett Miller, 41st District
Representative Mike Sturla, 96th District
Representative Dave Zimmerman, 99th District
State Senator Lloyd Smucker, Pennsylvania
Ms. Rebecca Sollenberger, for Senator Ryan P. Aument
Mr. Bill Dondero, for Honorable Patrick Meehan
Ms. Aubrey Yanzito, for Senator Patrick J. Toomey
Mr. Chris Eddows, for Senator Lloyd K. Smucker
Mr. Gene Garber, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board
Mr. Richard Hurst, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board
Mr. Gary Landis, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board
Mr. Matthew Young, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board
Mr. Roger Rohrer, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board
Mr. Daniel Zimmerman, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board
Mr. Matthew Knepper, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board Staff
Mr. Kevin Baer, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board Staff
Ms. Nancy Ambler, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board Staff
Ms. June Mengel, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board Staff
Ms. Christine Le, Lancaster Ag. Preserve Board Staff
Mr. Dick Lundgren, Lancaster Farmland Trust – Trustee
Mr. Don Robinson, Lancaster Farmland Trust – Trustee
Mr. Dave Breniser, Lancaster Farmland Trust – Trustee
Ms. Caroline Morton, Lancaster Farmland Trust – Trustee
Mr. Ted Bowers, Lancaster Farmland Trust – Trustee
Mr. Dale Hershey, Lancaster Farmland Trust – Trustee
Mr. Dave Miller, Lancaster Farmland Trust – Trustee
Ms. Karen Martynick, Lancaster Farmland Trust Staff
Mr. Jeffrey Swinehart, Lancaster Farmland Trust Staff
Ms. Karen Dickerson, Lancaster Farmland Trust Staff
Ms. Amanda Hickle, Lancaster Farmland Trust Staff

Guests: None

I. Call to Order

Mr. Gene Garber called the meeting to order at 8:12 A.M.

II. Review of Mission Statement

“To forever preserve the beautiful farmland and productive soils in Lancaster County and its agricultural heritage; and to create a healthy environment for the long-term sustainability of the agricultural economy and farming as a way of life.”

III. Introductions

All individuals present introduced themselves via name and organization.

IV. Issue Discussion

A. PATH Act of 2015

As of the end of last year, Congress passed a bill (Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes of 2015, a.k.a. PATH Act) that included a federal income tax deduction for landowners that granted their conservation easements towards preservation programs. This deduction could incentivize landowners to donate a greater portion of their conservation easement value.

B. Lancaster Farmland Trust (LFT) Preservation Update

Lancaster Farmland Trust has preserved a total of 463 farms, representing 28,000 acres. The easement market value was approximately \$85 million, \$70 million of which landowners have donated.

C. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) Program

There are frustrations and concerns regarding the current state of the ALE program, particularly in regards to NRCS regulations. The additional NRCS requirements not originally stated in the legislation passed are delaying projects, as the program has become overcomplicated and cumbersome. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find landowners willing to accept offered funding, even with immediate consideration incentives. There is a lack of clear direction on the State and County level. Representatives in Washington, D.C. are encouraged to pressure NRCS to improve the ALE program.

D. Growing Greener III

The Growing Greener Coalition is seeking to bring PA's environmental groups together to create a Growing Greener III. The program is the leading source of funding for environmental programs in the State, much of which is needed to address the Chesapeake Bay issues. Environmental organizations are currently working on a proposal to funnel most of the funding for Growing Greener III towards agricultural issues. There is also a proposal being drafted to allow private land trusts to have access to State funding. Current state funding is only available for private land trusts to preserve natural lands, but not farmland.

E. Presentation of Public Opinion Poll Results

In December 2015, LFT conducted a blind public opinion poll, with the help of Susquehanna Polling and Research, to understand how Lancaster County's residents perceive farmland preservation. The sample size was of a broad-based demographic. The majority of respondents indicated that there was an overall strong support for farmland preservation in the County, and that residents were willing to pay additional taxes to support farmland preservation efforts. The majority of respondents also indicated that they believed State and County officials should do more towards farmland preservation efforts, as residents believe it is an important investment in their future.

V. Comments from Elected Officials

A. Budget

There is a final budget (approx. \$30 billion) in place. Initially blue-lined agricultural line items will soon be fully funded. However, the governor will likely veto the fiscal code, which will put several construction projects on hold. There is a general belief that the State needs to address its structural deficit.

B. Growing Greener III

There is currently a draft legislative bill that proposes to tax 1/100th of a cent per gallon for all Pennsylvania (PA) water users, with the exception of agriculture and municipal water systems. This is likely to generate \$383 million per year for the State's environmental programs. There is also another proposal for an agricultural innovation/technology fund that could provide policymakers the hard data needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of Best Management Practices (BMPs).

C. Public Opinion Poll Results

There was a general consensus the results of the public opinion poll confirms that County residents see the value of farmland preservation and the agricultural industry. It was pointed out that farmers are a crucial part of the public opinion poll, and that the confidentially aspect of the poll should be highlighted.

D. Chesapeake Bay Cleanup/ Compliance vs. Stewardship

Several concerns regarding the Chesapeake Bay cleanup focused on the lack of an existing farm practices inventory, the legacy sediment issue, and the potential change in the collaborative relationship between the Conservation District and the farmers. There were concerns that only 50% of existing farm practices are documented, making it difficult to address Chesapeake Bay issues. It was suggested that much of the nutrient-rich soil flowing into the Bay could be better managed if elected officials would advocate funding for legacy sediment projects, which are currently difficult to attain. It was also suggested that funding and clear guidance from the Federal and State is needed to assist farmers with BMPs. Representatives in Harrisburg are particularly concerned that the change of the Conservation District focusing more on enforcement would complicate the farmers' willingness to work with them. It was argued that compliance regulations have hindered existing stewardship efforts, much of which could address with the Chesapeake Bay cleanup.

VI. Concluding Comments

There was a unanimous sense of appreciation for the partnership between Lancaster Farmland Trust and Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board. Many agreed that their respective efforts and dedication towards farmland preservation have helped preserve the County's heritage and way of life that Lancaster residents have confirmed to support. The State and Federal representatives, as well as the County Commissioners, were also commended for demonstrating their strong support for agriculture.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 A.M.

The next schedule meeting of the Agricultural Preserve Board:

Thursday, April 28, 2016, at 8:00 A.M.
Lancaster County Government Center
150 North Queen Street, Room 104
Lancaster, Pennsylvania 17603