INTRODUCTION

“There is no single greater threat to our way of life in New Jersey than the unrestrained, uncontrolled development that has jeopardized our water supplies, made our schools more crowded, our roads congested, and our open space disappear.”

That is how Gov. James E. McGreevey in his 2003 State of the State address summed up the challenge facing New Jersey.

He vowed to say “no more” to mindless sprawl and instead to say, “yes” to smart growth.

But what does smart growth have to do with agriculture? A lot.

Of the approximately 1.7 million acres of remaining undeveloped or unpreserved land in New Jersey, 1.2 million are actively devoted to agricultural production.

That means farmland is in high demand for development in what is already the most densely populated state in the nation.

Too often farmland is viewed as just another location for more houses. If New Jersey is to fight sprawl and retain its farmers, this thinking must change.

Maintaining an agricultural land base to allow the industry to flourish and continue contributing positively to the quality of life of Garden State residents must be an integral part of New Jersey’s smart-growth efforts.

Productive farmland

- helps keep municipal taxes down,
- increases property values,
- benefits the environment,
- adds to a community’s character,
- is part of New Jersey’s heritage,
- ensures that New Jersey residents continue to have access to an abundant supply of locally produced fresh food and agricultural products.

New Jersey is one of the nation’s top ten producers of a variety of vegetables from spinach and bell peppers to tomatoes and sweet corn. The state ranks second in blueberry production, third in cranberry production and fourth in peach production.
This is likely what led Abraham Browning, a well-known political leader in Camden County in the 1800s, to compare New Jersey to “an immense barrel filled with good things to eat and open at both ends with Pennsylvanians grabbing from one end and the New Yorkers from the other.”

Browning’s remark, at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia on Jersey Day, August 24, 1876, is believed to have led to New Jersey garnering the nickname Garden State.

Today, New Jersey is home to more than 9,000 farmers who are stewards of the agricultural working landscape. Many are growing crops that make Jersey Fresh produce known nationally. Others are raising livestock, primarily horses, which are recognized across the country. New Jersey’s horticultural industry is among the strongest in the Northeast, and aquaculture continues to grow.

In order to sustain this modern-day, diverse food and agricultural industry, New Jersey must have a comprehensive Agricultural Smart Growth plan that ensures the farming community and local and county governments have the necessary guidance, education and tools to accommodate growth while protecting the state’s most valuable natural resources.

Agriculture is at a critical crossroads today, as farmland is disappearing at an approximate rate of 10,000 acres a year.

Nonetheless, since 2000, the State Agriculture Development Committee through the Farmland Preservation Program has preserved more farmland annually than has been lost to development. In 2002, the Program surpassed the 100,000-acre mark for preserved farmland, marking a major milestone in its 20-year history. The Garden State’s Farmland Preservation Program has permanently preserved 13 percent of its agricultural land base, more than any other state in the nation.

In his State of the State speech, Governor McGreevey pledged to preserve a record 20,000 acres of farmland during each year of his administration, continuing to accelerate the pace of the program. That ambitious goal is also reflected in the New Jersey Department of Agriculture’s Strategic Plan.

While farmland preservation may be the cornerstone of the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan, the future of New Jersey agriculture in an expanding, worldwide market
also depends upon innovative planning techniques, economic development, natural resource conservation, and programs and policies to sustain the industry.

These five components make up the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan and are inextricably linked. New Jersey cannot preserve the agricultural industry by protecting the land alone. Public policy must support farms and agriculture-related businesses. Agriculture must be integrated into economic development efforts. Growth planning must consider the needs of the industry and of New Jersey’s rural communities. Education and training must equip the next generation of farmers to succeed in a rapidly changing agribusiness environment.

This Agricultural Smart Growth Plan reflects the definition of smart growth as set forth by the New Jersey Office of Smart Growth.

“Smart growth is the term used to describe well-planned, well-managed growth that adds new homes and creates new jobs, while preserving open space, farmland and environmental resources. Smart growth supports livable neighborhoods with a variety of housing types, price ranges and multi-modal forms of transportation. Smart growth is an approach to land-use planning that targets the state’s resources and funding in ways that enhance the quality of life for residents in New Jersey.

Smart growth principles include mixed-use development, walkable town centers and neighborhoods, mass transit accessibility, sustainable economic and social development and preserved green space. Smart growth can be seen all around us: it is evident in larger cities such as Elizabeth and Jersey City; in smaller towns like Red Bank and Hoboken, and in rural communities like Chesterfield and Hope.

In New Jersey, smart growth supports development and redevelopment in recognized centers – a compact form of development – as outlined in the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, with infrastructure that serves the economy, the community and the environment.”

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan provides a two-pronged approach to sustaining agriculture. First, under the plan, statewide policies are designed to provide an effective agricultural strategy that creates a supportive climate for farming and plans for its future economic growth and development in ways that promote the continuation of land use without undermining property values. Second, planning area
policies guide development into centers to protect the outlying agricultural areas by encouraging the use of planning and equity mitigation tools.

In January 2003, the delegates to the State Agriculture Convention, including the State Board of Agriculture, endorsed a resolution recognizing that the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan will chart the course for the future of agriculture in New Jersey.

The resolution stresses the need for innovative planning and design to stem the loss of farmland to development, while making it very clear that maintaining the land’s value is central to the economic viability and retention of farming operations.

The resolution also reflects the agricultural community’s opposition to down zoning, large lot zoning and any other zoning that has the practical effect of large-lot zoning. These zoning practices fracture and consume farmland, promote land consumptive sprawl, adversely impact landowner equity and are counterproductive to the principles of smart growth.

Instead, the agricultural community supports equitable and feasible density-transfer methods, such as clustering, to coordinate preservation planning in conjunction with regional growth management.

New Jersey’s smart growth efforts must include agriculture, as that is what keeps farmlands green and productive, brings farm-fresh products into our homes and makes New Jersey a better place to live and visit. A strong and vibrant agricultural industry will help the Garden State achieve its smart growth goals and help preserve the character of New Jersey’s rural regions.

By preserving this rural character, New Jersey continues to provide a traditional way of life for its farm families and enables the rural regions to continue contributing to the economic success of a diverse Garden State.

This plan, developed by the Agriculture Smart Growth Working Group under the leadership of Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus, is a roadmap for agriculture in the 21st century and will be integrated into the statewide comprehensive plan for smart growth. The plan is not meant to replace the good planning work that is taking place throughout the state, but is meant to focus on five components that are critical to agriculture.
Like the agricultural industry itself, this plan will evolve as New Jersey moves forward with its smart growth efforts. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is committed to working with other state agencies, county and local governments and the farming community to evaluate and refine the plan as necessary to maintain its effectiveness.

This plan ensures farmers, who are on the front lines in the fight against sprawl, have a voice in ongoing discussion about how and where New Jersey will grow.

Perhaps most importantly, the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan puts the interests of farmers in the forefront, as the state considers important decisions related to managing growth. This plan re-positions agriculture for a strong future – a future that protects the state’s farms, creates new economic opportunities for farmers and ensures a better quality of life for all New Jerseyans.
FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Permanently preserving privately owned productive agricultural land ensures a stable land base for the future of the agricultural industry. Farmland preservation, the foundation of the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan, is an important investment in our economy, our farming heritage and the overall quality of life for each and every New Jerseyan and for generations to come.

Overview

Agriculture’s very existence is dependent upon a stable land base. Without farmland, where would farmers grow their crops? Or raise their livestock? What would happen to our local food supply?

These are serious questions as New Jersey’s farmland faces an imminent threat of permanent conversion to non-farm uses. The state’s citizens have already made it clear that the retention and development of an economically viable agricultural industry is a high priority, voting time and again to approve bond issues and dedicated property taxes to preserving farmland.

Since the establishment of the Farmland Preservation Program in 1983, New Jersey has permanently preserved nearly 110,000 acres of agricultural land.

In November 1998, New Jersey citizens voted unanimously to amend the State Constitution to dedicate a portion of existing sales tax revenues to farmland, open space and historic preservation.

The Garden State Preservation Trust Act, signed in 1999, further boosted the Farmland Preservation Program by establishing, for the first time in history, a stable source of funding for preservation efforts.

Because of this public commitment, New Jersey continues to be a national leader in preserving farmland, with approximately 13 percent of its agricultural land base preserved.

Clearly, New Jersey recognizes the important benefits of preserving farmland. Preserved farmland stabilizes municipal taxes because a farm demands little in public
services and increases property values by providing privately-maintained open, scenic
spaces.

Preserved farmland has a positive environmental impact locally and statewide as
productive farmland provides open space necessary to manage watersheds, recharge
aquifers, manage wildlife and protect stream corridors.

And preserved farmland also preserves a way of life for farmers and non-farmers
alike. Where else could families go to pick their own strawberries in the spring and hunt
for pumpkins in the fall? Who hasn’t slowed at least once to marvel at cows in a pasture
or horses in a field as they drove along the state’s more scenic byways?

Many hard-working farmers who sell their rights to develop their land reinvest the
capital back into their farm operations or retire debt. Others use the income to acquire
land and expand their existing agricultural operation.

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) administers the Farmland
Preservation Program. The Program offers a variety of options for landowners that
provide for the preservation of land in perpetuity or for a limited term of eight years.

County Easement Purchase: Landowners sell the development rights to their
county. Landowners retain ownership of the land, but agree to permanent deed
restrictions that prohibit nonagricultural development. The state provides grants to
counties to fund between 60 to 80 percent of the cost to purchase the development rights
on approved farms.

Direct Easement: The state purchases the development rights on farmland
directly from the landowner and the landowner retains ownership of the land.

Fee Simple: Farms are purchased outright from willing sellers, permanently
preserved for agricultural use and resold with deed restrictions attached.

Grants to Nonprofits: The state provides cost-sharing grants of up to 50 percent
to assist nonprofit organizations in permanently preserving farms.

Planning Incentive Grants: Planning Incentive Grants are grants to
municipalities or counties that have identified specific project areas to permanently
protect large blocks of reasonably contiguous farmland. Under this program,
municipalities have the flexibility to apply directly to the State Agriculture Development
Committee for funding or apply to the county first, providing another funding source.
Municipalities must have an agricultural advisory committee and their master plan must contain a farmland preservation plan, providing a commitment to future agricultural viability.

**Eight-Year Program:** An eight-year program allows landowners to voluntarily restrict nonagricultural development on their property for eight years in exchange for specified benefits such as, protection from drought restrictions and access to soil and water conservation matching grants. There are two types of eight-year programs: municipally approved, which requires a formal agreement among the landowner, county and municipality, and non-municipally approved, which requires an agreement between only the landowner and the county.

The New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee recognizes the importance of focusing preservation efforts in viable agricultural areas and primarily preserves farms in Agricultural Development Areas. Agricultural Development Areas are defined as regions of productive agricultural lands where agriculture is the preferred use and that have a strong potential for future production.

In keeping with the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, the State Agriculture Redevelopment Committee, through its Strategic Targeting Project, is working with counties to use current technology to develop a more strategic approach to prioritizing farmland preservation investments among all levels of government. This coordinated planning approach will improve preservation efforts and ultimately enhance the agricultural industry.

The Strategic Targeting Project has three primary goals:

- Coordinate farmland preservation/agricultural retention efforts with proactive planning initiatives;
- Update and when necessary create maps to more accurately target preservation effort in areas of prime agricultural land;
- Coordinate farmland preservation efforts with open space, recreation and historic preservation investments.

A landowner’s decision to permanently preserve land is a serious commitment. Therefore, it is imperative that efforts to preserve productive agricultural land are
efficient, coordinated and manageable and serve to encourage greater participation in the Program.

Objectives & Strategies

- To accelerate the preservation of important agricultural land in order to secure the maximum land base possible to maintain and enhance a viable agricultural industry.
  - Permanently preserve 20,000 acres of farmland per year.
  - Incorporate the Strategic Targeting Project and the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan into the criteria for ranking applications and streamline the process of application reviews, value certifications and closing reviews.
  - Develop a proactive outreach strategy to coordinate and streamline local, regional and state resources, and effectively communicate among all levels.
  - Develop partnerships with various environmental, historic, scenic and agricultural organizations to minimize potential conflicts and ensure the preservation of land that best serves the surrounding region.
  - Encourage counties and municipalities to pursue farmland preservation grants from the State Agriculture Development Committee and promote the establishment of dedicated funding sources as a tool for leveraging state funds.
  - Share and coordinate the data of the Strategic Targeting Project to ensure consistency between municipal, county and state preservation goals.
  - Collaborate with counties to prepare Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plans.
  - Establish criteria to evaluate Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plans in conjunction with the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan.
  - Assist municipalities in preparing and adopting a farmland preservation element to incorporate into their municipal master plan and establishing agricultural advisory committees to their planning boards to consider the impact of municipal actions on the local agricultural industry.
- Create additional incentives and tools that will result in permanent or long-term easements, and facilitate farmland transfers to beginning and expanding farmers.
INNOVATIVE CONSERVATION PLANNING

Under the innovative conservation planning approach, land conservation is the central organizing principle around which livable communities are created. By developing in ways that consume less land, a balance between growth and preservation efforts can be achieved.

Overview

New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation. Farmland is disappearing at an estimated rate of 10,000 acres a year. Fields where dairy cows once grazed and peach trees once blossomed are now home to shopping malls, houses and highways.

Many New Jersey towns are fed up with this development and want to stop growth completely. Some scramble to preserve any parcel of land slated for development. Others downzone open land – typically active farmland – to reduce the number of homes that are built and to limit infrastructure costs associated with residential development.

Some municipalities believe downzoning or requiring larger lots will help retain remaining farmland by making development less attractive to builders.

Often, the opposite is true.

Downzoning creates a fragmented landscape and a more dispersed pattern of development or large lot sprawl and results in the loss of farmland. Large lot zoning may reduce the number of homes that can be built, but it also spreads out those homes in such a way that consumes more land with none of the remaining land useable for farming, forestry or recreation. Lots become “too large to mow, but too small to plow” and the greater distance between homes stifles any sense of neighborhood.

Large lots increase infrastructure costs, create environmental problems and make it more difficult to control crop damage from wildlife by creating refuge areas for animals.

Large lot development also increases reliance on automobiles, requiring residents to spend more time in their vehicles and less time at home with their families. Extended drive times make it more difficult for New Jerseyans to find time to be active members of their communities.
When a town considers large lot zoning as a way to preserve farmland, many farmers feel a sense of urgency to sell before their land is devalued. Maintaining the land’s development potential is critical to farmers, whose land is their key financial asset. When a municipality decreases the land’s development potential, it is also reducing a farmer’s net worth and hurting the farmer’s ability to obtain flexible financing at competitive interest rates. This in turn increases the financial pressure on New Jersey’s farmers who remain dedicated to an already financially risky enterprise.

The American Farmland Trust found the problem does not lie in growth itself, but in wasteful land use. From 1982 to 1997, the population in the United States grew by 17 percent, while urbanized land grew by 47 percent. Furthermore, the nation’s farmland disappeared 51 percent faster in the 1990s than it did in the 1980s. Clearly, New Jersey is not alone in its struggle with the difficult task of managing growth.

While New Jersey should not stop growth, it can plan for it in a way that protects the state’s most valuable farmland and other natural resources and ensures the continued viability of its agricultural industry and rural communities.

A primary goal of the State Agriculture Development Committee’s Strategic Targeting Project is to encourage counties to coordinate farmland preservation and agricultural retention efforts with proactive planning initiatives that consider growth, open space, recreation and historic preservation. This type of land use planning can be accomplished using an array of planning techniques that accommodate growth in rural areas while retaining productive agricultural lands.

Because agriculture is an industry in which land is the primary instrument of production, it is important to retain the land base by identifying and prioritizing key parcels for preservation. Once these critical agricultural areas are identified, efforts can be made to steer development away from them and into areas with existing infrastructure or to marginal lands where infrastructure can be provided. Prioritizing the importance of agricultural lands in a regional context, as called for in the Strategic Targeting Project, allows for the coordination of farmland preservation and agricultural retention efforts with proactive land use planning at all levels of government.

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan outlines many agricultural policies and specific land use techniques that should be implemented in the
rural regions of the state. These are areas with most of New Jersey’s prime farmland, which has the greatest potential of sustaining the agricultural industry in the future. In these planning areas, growth should be focused in rural centers where development is mixed in use and compact. Ideally, the areas outside of these centers are maintained for agriculture by using planning techniques that address landowner equity.

Rural municipalities and counties should also use tools such as capacity analysis and build-out analysis to determine opportunities for -- as well as the implications of -- future growth and preservation. Capacity analysis evaluates the ability of the environment and infrastructure systems to support projected growth. Build-out analysis illustrates what a town, region or county will look like if built to the full extent allowed by existing zoning. Such an illustration can be a very inexpensive and effective way to demonstrate the importance of proactive planning.

Below are some of the land use techniques and infrastructure systems that support rural development and redevelopment. These techniques and systems enable the accommodation of growth, the preservation of farmland and the continued viability of the agricultural industry. These techniques must be used in tandem with the other components of the Agriculture Smart Growth Plan to sustain agriculture in New Jersey.

**Reform Ordinances:** Municipalities have the ability to reform local zoning ordinances to encourage more compact growth and mixed-use development patterns in and around existing town centers or in new centers. To encourage this type of development pattern, municipalities can:

- Provide incentives to cluster development in centers.
- Reduce lot sizes, setbacks and yard requirements.
- Allow a mix of commercial and residential uses in centers.
- Increase permitted building heights.
- Encourage pedestrian and bicycle-friendly features.
- Provide for shared parking areas.
- Permanently preserve a majority of the area’s farmland.

(More information is available in the Office of Smart Growth publication, “Designing New Jersey.” This document offers design principles and guidelines as a tool to build better communities.)
**Agricultural-Friendly Zoning:** Agricultural-friendly zoning establishes agriculture as the primary land use in an area. Other land uses are secondary and are only allowed under certain conditions. Active farms, farm product processing and farm support businesses are the primary permitted uses. Establishing these areas can highlight and bring resources to these farm businesses in the same way that industrial or commercial zoning does. Creating this type of economic development zone for agriculture supports the farmland base and attracts the support industries needed to sustain the industry.

**Clustering:** Clustering is a development design technique that concentrates buildings on a portion of land to allow the remainder to be used for agriculture, recreation, common open space or the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas. Ideally this is accomplished regionally, but often the technique is applied on a single parcel of land. Clustering is easy to administer. It should not reduce the landowner’s equity by removing development potential and is effective in permanently protecting a substantial portion of the development tract. Clustering conserves land, cuts infrastructure costs and reduces the cost of government services.

Clustering can be implemented on a voluntary or mandatory basis. Typically, strong incentives are provided to encourage the use of clustering as opposed to existing conventional zoning. Clustering in agricultural areas should be used to preserve the most productive farmland while accommodating development on marginal land.

Clustering can occur on 1- to 1 1/2- acre lots with standard wastewater technology. However, for most clustering schemes to be viable on smaller lots, alternative wastewater treatment systems must be used. Towns in New Jersey and across the country are using a variety of wastewater technologies that provide treatment for small-scale communities ranging from 10 units to several hundred. These systems can be utilized to enable compact growth patterns and can improve water quality in areas where septic systems are failing. These systems produce clean water at the point of discharge that can replenish critical groundwater resources or can provide effluent for irrigation, municipal-street cleaning and other suitable uses.

When these systems are used to cluster development on marginal lands with the majority of the remaining land set aside with an easement restricting development, hundreds of acres of farmland can be preserved at no cost to the public. Having pre-
approved designs for these “stand-alone” wastewater treatment systems can reduce the
cost and limit the number of hookups. The use of innovative infrastructure systems gives
municipalities and counties the ability to plan for the future development of their
community according to their own vision. These systems have been serving several
communities in Hunterdon County and surrounding areas for a number of years and are
well functioning and well designed.

Density Transfer: New Jersey amended its Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) in
1996 to “provide for the clustering of development between non-contiguous parcels in
order to encourage the flexibility of density, intensity of land uses, design and type,
authorize a deviation in various clusters from the density, or intensity of use, established
for an entire planned development.” This density transfer tool can be used to engage
landowners in a specific region of a municipality to change traditional land use patterns.
For example, the development potential from four farms can be transferred to one farm,
allowing for the accommodation of growth and the permanent protection of four out of
five farms.

Lot Size Averaging: Lot size averaging is a simple method to permit flexibility in
lot size on a parcel of land. This is an effective technique for smaller parcels (10-20
acres) that are proposed for subdivision where flexibility in lot size may help to preserve
resources. The overall density remains the same. Only the lot sizes vary.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR): Transfer of development rights (TDR)
programs can protect farmland by shifting development from agricultural areas to areas
targeted for growth. TDR is the clustering of development on a township-wide or
regional scale. Unlike cluster zoning, which usually shifts density within or among
parcels, TDR allows landowners to transfer the right to develop from one parcel of land –
called a sending area, the area to be preserved -- to a different parcel of land – called a
receiving area, the area to accommodate growth. At present, only Burlington County is
empowered to implement TDR programs in New Jersey.

To implement TDR, receiving areas and sending areas are designated and mapped
in accordance with a comprehensive plan. The sending area may include agricultural
land, but the receiving districts must have the capacity and infrastructure needed to
support increased development and must be designed to meet other smart growth
principles. Specific guidance is needed regarding infrastructure criteria in the receiving area.

Once the development rights are transferred from the sending area, the land is permanently restricted from development. For this program to succeed, communities must agree on its use as a tool to protect special resources and direct future growth. A market must exist for both the development rights and the higher density development that will result.

Flexibility is a key component. TDR programs can be voluntary or mandatory. In a voluntary program, the owner of property in a sending area can either transfer the development potential of that property to a receiving area or develop the property in accordance with the land use ordinance in effect prior to the adoption of the TDR ordinance. In a mandatory program, the owner of property in a sending area can either transfer the development potential of that property at the full value to a receiving area or develop the property at a much-reduced density.

The following elements are critical to the development of a successful TDR program:

- Identification of “sending” and “receiving” areas.
- Protection of landowner equity in the sending area when creating a basis for credit allocation.
- Economic balance between the capacity of the receiving and sending area to ensure that development credits are used and that they have the appropriate value. Growth must be feasible, permitted, well designed and coordinated with infrastructure investments in the receiving area.
- Permanent development restrictions on lands in the sending area when the credit option has been used.
- Performance standards, such as progress reports, sunset provisions and economic analysis, to ensure a TDR program will be implemented.
- An appropriate level of state agency review to assure that performance measures are met and program components are working effectively.
- Distinction between voluntary and mandatory programs to clarify program criteria and ensure the use of proper safeguards for landowners.
Preliminary Subdivision Review: Requiring developers to provide sketch plans of their development proposals during the initial stages of subdivision review can be a valuable municipal planning tool. Most towns require highly detailed design drawings during the preliminary planning process. Typically these plans are expensive to prepare and most developers are not inclined to radically change the plans after the public hearings are held. Requiring an applicant to submit a conceptual sketch plan as the first layout document allows the planning board and the public to provide meaningful input early in the process.

Planned Unit Developments (PUDs): Under planned unit developments, zoning provisions permit large lots to be developed in a more flexible way than allowed by the underlying zoning. These ordinances may allow developers to mix land uses and develop at greater densities with more design flexibility. Typically these provisions require developers to compensate for the impacts of their projects by setting aside significant open space, providing infrastructure needed to service the development or offering other community facilities and services. These ordinances can be used to negotiate significant design and use changes in development applications.

Objectives & Strategies

- Municipalities, counties and regions where significant farmland exists should work on a regional level to ensure that innovative conservation planning techniques are employed to help accommodate growth in an equitable manner that preserves and supports agriculture.
  - Work aggressively to promote and facilitate the State Planning Commission’s plan endorsement process to encourage consistent land use plans at all levels of government.
  - Use tools such as build-out analysis and capacity analysis to help land-use planners make informed decisions.
  - Strengthen and promote the use of existing alternative planning tools and create new tools that facilitate the accommodation of growth in ways that consume less land and allow for the preservation of the most productive farmland.
Develop a technical support network that will promote and facilitate the use of innovative conservation planning efforts.

Work to provide and promote the use of “pre-approved” alternative wastewater treatment systems as a feasible and cost-effective way to facilitate less land consumptive land-use patterns.

Develop an agriculture-friendly “Planners Tool Kit,” with model ordinances and geographical representations of a variety of land-use planning techniques, for rural municipalities and counties.

Extend the provision in the Garden State Preservation Trust Act that requires the valuation of land considered for preservation to be determined by zoning laws in place as of November 1998, the date voters passed the farmland/open space referendum.

The conservation of land and resources should be a key organizing principle upon which state agency infrastructure decisions are made.

- Work with the Department of Environmental Protection to encourage the use of alternative wastewater treatment systems in their wastewater rules.
- Use the data of the Strategic Targeting Project to make informed land use planning decisions regarding the preservation of farmland and the accommodation of growth.
- Work with the Department of Transportation to identify potential Transit Village locations to encourage compact, mixed-used development around transit hubs in rural areas.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Stabilizing and fostering an active and productive agricultural industry is critical to retaining viable farms. Facilitating investments in agricultural infrastructure supports, maintains and expands the business of farming.

Overview

Just as important as preserving the state’s farmland is preserving the state’s farmers and the agricultural industry that sustains them.

New Jersey’s diverse food and agriculture complex is valued at approximately $63 billion and benefits not only the state’s economy, but also all New Jerseyans who enjoy locally grown food and farm products and privately maintained open space in their community. From fruits and vegetables, nursery stock and aquacultured shellfish to corn, grain, field crops and livestock -- New Jersey is far from a one-crop state.

Helping the industry to grow and expand is essential to maintaining the various working landscapes of agriculture. A strong and vibrant agricultural industry will be in a position to resist development pressure and help New Jersey contain sprawl and achieve its smart growth goals.

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan recognizes agriculture as a significant contributor to the state’s economy and supports the industry’s future economic growth in ways that promote the continuation of agricultural land use. Several of the agricultural policies in the plan address economic development specifically.

However, most municipalities and counties do not consider agriculture when they plan for economic development activities in their region. Although farmland preservation efforts have increased significantly throughout the state, protecting farmland from development alone does not guarantee that the land will be actively and viably farmed. Formulating strategies that address farming as an economic sector supports farmland preservation efforts and strengthens the business of farming.

The geographical data contained in the Strategic Targeting Project will be a valuable tool to help municipalities and counties as well as the state identify key areas
based on the agricultural production of the region to locate agricultural industries and support businesses. Identifying the state’s key agricultural regions will help focus agricultural retention efforts and enable the implementation of the objectives outlined throughout this Agriculture Smart Growth Plan.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture’s approach to smart growth planning connects farmland preservation efforts with economic development strategies and marketing opportunities for today’s farmers.

New Jersey’s proximity to large, affluent markets has always been an advantage for the state’s food and agriculture industry. In addition, the state’s increasing immigrant population creates a new demand for agricultural products. As consumer demands change, so too must the agricultural industry. Identifying these new markets and providing the products consumers demand is an ongoing effort in the ever-changing agricultural industry.

In January 2003, the delegates of the 88th State Agricultural Convention endorsed economic development strategies for nine key sectors of New Jersey’s food and agriculture industry. These strategies address horticulture, produce, dairy, aquaculture, field crops, livestock, organic farming, equine and wine production. The Department is currently implementing those strategies.

The Department recognizes that a healthy agricultural industry is largely dependent on healthy plants and animals. The Department administers numerous programs to ensure the health of livestock and poultry and plant stock. These programs help to safeguard animal and human health and ensure pest-free plants in the marketplace.

At the same time, the Department realizes that promoting the wide variety of agricultural products the Garden State offers is critical to sustaining the industry. The Department’s Jersey Fresh promotion program is a long-standing economic development tool. This nationally recognized marketing and grading program promotes the consumption of Jersey produced agricultural products and ensures consumers a high-quality product. For nearly 20 years, the Jersey Fresh program has been successful at strengthening consumer awareness of the traditional New Jersey-grown fruits and vegetables. The Department will build on the success of this program and broaden the
umbrella of products that are identified as Jersey Fresh. In addition, strategies for supporting value-added products will be developed to increase farmer participation in the market chain and allow for additional income beyond the sale of fresh market New Jersey grown commodities. Value-added agriculture refers to taking raw agricultural products and refining them in some way to add further value to them, for example, through processing or packaging.

Another tool for ensuring a strong food and agriculture industry statewide is for various state agencies to commit to ensuring regulations and programs are flexible and supportive of the farming community. It is critical that other state agencies, especially the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Labor and the New Jersey Commerce Commission, consider the Agricultural Smart Growth Plan when making important decisions regarding existing and proposed infrastructure, developing and amending programs and regulations, and protecting environmental and historic resources. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is committed to working with these state agencies to promote economic development activities and other improvements that will support and grow New Jersey’s agricultural industry.

Objectives & Strategies

- Develop new growth opportunities to help agriculture meet the needs of a changing marketplace.
  - Work cooperatively with state agencies to facilitate and promote infrastructure and market opportunities like an ethanol plant, food-processing facilities and farm markets to strengthen and expand New Jersey’s agricultural industry.
  - Implement key economic development strategies, including: broadening the Jersey Fresh promotion effort to include organic, horticulture, aquaculture and other New Jersey Grown products; increasing consumer awareness, and identifying new markets for New Jersey products.
- Work with Rutgers University’s Cook College to continue demographic research into the ethnically diverse marketplace of the Northeast corridor and develop new products to meet the needs of the marketplace.
- Collaborate with the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station’s Food Innovation Research and Extension (FIRE) center to launch proactive and innovative programs and activities that address new opportunities and the needs of the agricultural and food industries.
- Identify new emerging trends in agricultural markets and develop 10 new markets per year.
- Explore funding options to advance the development and expansion of agricultural facilities and infrastructure systems.

- Municipalities and counties with significant agricultural resources should incorporate agriculture into their economic development plans.
  - Include agricultural representation in local and regional business organizations.
  - Integrate agriculture into traditional business support systems.
  - Promote agri-tourism and eco-tourism activities to support the farm economy by allowing farmers to benefit from additional sources of income.
  - Coordinate historic preservation, open space and recreation efforts with agricultural preservation/retention efforts.
  - Create economic development incentives for agricultural businesses to support the expansion of food and farm-related businesses.
  - Use the Strategic Targeting Project priority areas to identify locations for agricultural support businesses.
NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION

As stewards of the land, farmers must protect the quality of our environment and conserve the natural resources that sustain it by implementing conservation practices that improve water quality, conserve water and energy, prevent soil erosion and reduce the use of nutrients and pesticides.

Overview


That is why protecting and conserving these and other natural resources should be a priority of all who live and work in New Jersey, including farmers. This is not a new idea for New Jersey or the nation. Since 1935, when the Soil Conservation Act was passed -- during the worst of the Dust Bowl -- this country has recognized the importance of the land and its relation to the overall well being of the nation.

Various state and federal programs have been initiated to protect natural resources. The programs have evolved over the years to take advantage of advances in agricultural practices.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture helps to protect and conserve the state's soil, water and related natural resources through the stewardship efforts of its natural resource conservation program. This program offers technical, financial and regulatory assistance and provides educational outreach to landowners throughout the state.

In addition to the Department’s program, a variety of other federal and state programs exist to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners for the conservation, protection and improvement of soil, water and related resources.

A number of programs provide assistance to eligible landowners to address wetlands and wildlife habitat. A few of the voluntary programs even provide payments to producers who have historically practiced good stewardship on their land and provide incentives to those who want to do more.

The 2002 Farm Bill placed a greater emphasis on the implementation of new and expanded conservation programs that help protect our soil resources and improve water
quality. The Department, through the State Soil Conservation Committee is planning for the strategic implementation of these programs as well as state conservation programs. In the fall of 2003, the Committee will coordinate an initiative for Soil Conservation Districts to perform a natural resource assessment to determine conservation needs and priorities at the local level. This effort will help to identify the appropriate conservation programs to implement and the technical and financial assistance needed in each district area.

The 2002 Farm Bill also provides funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which provides technical, financial and educational assistance to farmers for conservation practices that address natural resource concerns. However, based on past experience it is unlikely this funding will provide the much-needed technical and engineering assistance for conservation planning and design.

In 1999, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture established three regional Agricultural Conservation Service Centers and provided annual funding for technical and engineering assistance in order to reduce backlogs and meet new application demands. The Department is currently working in conjunction with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to continue to provide and enhance these service centers and increase the necessary technical assistance to farmers.

Outside of the Farm Bill programs, the Department and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection jointly developed a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) proposal that Governor James E. McGreevey submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture. New Jersey’s proposed program seeks to enroll 30,000 acres of agricultural lands into conservation practices that will improve the quality of runoff from these lands. This program encourages farm owners to voluntarily implement conservation practices on their land by offering financial incentives for participation. The program provides a 10-year enrollment period and targets the implementation of riparian buffers, filter strips, contour buffer strips and grass waterways. Farmers will be able to enroll their land in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program by installing conservation practices under 10-15 year rental agreements and/or permanent easement contracts.
Recent droughts have sensitized farmers to the need for adequate farm water supplies, efficient water conservation irrigation systems and an irrigation water management regimen that reduces unnecessary water use. The availability of an adequate and sustainable water supply for agricultural purposes is becoming more problematic in light of competing user demands, limitations in critical water supply areas and the reduction in recharge due to impervious cover. The Department is working with Rutgers Cooperative Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Services, the United States Geological Survey, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the farm community to assess the water needs of agriculture and to assist in the development of essential rules, policies and guidelines to ensure an adequate water supply to meet the current and future needs of the agricultural industry.

Finally, as part of a national Clean Water Action Plan, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have proposed a unified national strategy for addressing water quality concerns on animal farm operations. At the request of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the state Department of Environmental Protection prepared a statewide strategy outlining how Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs) will be managed and/or regulated. The strategy, under existing legislative authority and through cooperative agreements, calls for the state Department of Environmental Protection to administer the required permits for CAFOs and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to administer the appropriate measures for AFOs. A CAFO general permit is now available through the Department of Environmental Protection. The primary requirement of the permit is the development and implementation of a comprehensive waste management plan. The Department of Agriculture is developing an animal waste program with criteria and standards for the proper disposal of animal wastes, including the waste generated from aquaculture. This program will emphasize the use of voluntary measures and limit the need for permits, primarily through the implementation of farm conservation plans.
Objectives & Strategies

- All farms should prepare and implement farm conservation plans to address total natural resource concerns, including soil, water and air resources.
  - Work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Soil Conservation Districts to ensure that an adequate technical assistance delivery system is in place to meet the anticipated demand for conservation cost-share funding under the 2002 Farm Bill and other federal and state conservation programs.
  - Re-examine the role of the Soil Conservation Districts and restore their duties to more traditional natural resource protection functions. Soil Conservation Districts can play a key role in planning, managing and monitoring the growing inventory of public open space, including public acquired farmland. They can also become more involved in environmental restoration and sustainability.
  - Provide outreach information to ensure farmers take full advantage of conservation programs and to educate them about the benefits of having and implementing a farm conservation plan.
  - Establish local working groups through New Jersey’s Conservation Districts to perform natural resource assessments to determine conservation needs and priorities at the local level.
  - Develop a comprehensive animal waste program that provides for the proper disposal of animal wastes, including the waste generated from aquaculture, to guide the development of farm conservation plans for livestock operations.
  - Aggressively pursue the approval of the proposed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program in New Jersey to allow for the creation of riparian buffers and appropriate improvements to protect and enhance water quality.
- Work cooperatively with the Department of Environmental Protection to develop a healthy forest strategy.

- Ensure that agricultural water needs are adequately considered and met on a long-term and sustainable basis.
  - Work in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Protection to update New Jersey’s Water Supply Master Plan in order to identify the water needs of farmers. Represent agricultural interests on the Water Supply Advisory Council, the Public Advisory Committee and its subcommittee to ensure water needs are met not only for today’s farmers, but for future generations.
  - Work to accelerate the use of and conversion to efficient water conservation systems. Promote new irrigation water supplies, including farm ponds and water reuse methods.
  - Encourage the use of water conservation technologies and look for new and efficient methods to conduct water distribution on farms.
  - Develop accurate data regarding agricultural water use by using GIS technology to maintain an agricultural water use database and track information on water use by location, types of systems and crops.

- Promote the use of innovative technologies, recycling, energy conservation and renewable energy systems on New Jersey’s farms.
  - Examine the solid waste stream generated by the state’s farming operations and determine the feasibility of expanding the Department’s existing recycling program.
  - Inform and promote the agricultural community about new and existing energy conservation and renewable energy programs.
  - Promote the use of current technology systems utilizing precision agriculture to reduce inputs and increase productivity on farms.
AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY SUSTAINABILITY

Creating an environment that supports the agricultural industry at the municipal, county and state levels demonstrates that agriculture is a preferred land use in New Jersey and encourages the retention of thriving and diverse farming operations.

Overview

Sustaining a profitable, modern-day agricultural industry ensures that Garden State residents will continue to have access to an abundant supply of locally grown food and agricultural products.

Preserving the land base is the initial step. The next is ensuring the farmer can continue to work profitably on the land.

A thriving industry is largely dependent upon public policies, including laws, rules and programs that are tailored to meet the agricultural industry’s unique needs. At the same time, the industry must have access to a well-trained and educated workforce to be successful.

As the preferred land use in major regions of New Jersey, agriculture must be recognized as a priority by state and local leaders when making policy decisions regarding taxation, regulations and financial incentives.

Tax incentives, such as the Farmland Assessment program, keep land in farms by reducing the property tax on active farmland.

Regulatory programs, such as the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Water Allocation Program, give special consideration to the industry’s water needs and provide for a separate certification and registration process.

Financial incentives, such as the income averaging legislative proposal introduced in March 2003, help to increase a farmer’s bottom line by recognizing the high-risk, cyclical nature of farming. Under income averaging, New Jersey farmers can average out yearly gains and losses over a four-year period to even out their tax liability.

Just as important is New Jersey’s Right to Farm Act, which provides eligible responsible farmers with protection from restrictive municipal ordinances, and public and private nuisance actions. The Act, the strongest in the nation, provides increased
protection to those farmers who operate in accordance with agricultural management practices that have been adopted by the State Agriculture Development Committee.

The Act gives primary jurisdiction in resolving complaints against agricultural operations to County Agriculture Development Boards, and ultimately to the State Agriculture Development Committee if decisions of the County Boards are appealed. The Committee also offers a voluntary mediation program that disputing parties can use instead of going directly to court and has the authority to review municipal actions in Agricultural Development Areas to determine their potential impact on agricultural operations.

Still, right-to-farm conflicts are typically the number one concern of farmers.

Many people want to live near a farm to enjoy the rural character it provides. However, once they move in they often discover that rural character means more than pretty open spaces and traditional, small-town values.

Rural character includes tractors on local roads, odors and early morning noise.

As the New Hampshire Office of State Planning points out:

“Everyone wants the calendar-photography scenes of rural character, but along with the pretty side of rural character comes a gritty side.”

That gritty side can create conflict between farmers and neighbors and often municipal governments.

Many people don’t want to see or live near farm worker housing.

Neighbors and municipal leaders often would prefer acres and acres of open fields rather than greenhouses.

Municipal officials sometimes enact overly restrictive ordinances that can hamper a farmer’s ability to run a profitable farm market operation.

With increased pressures from local development, agricultural operators need a strong commitment from their municipalities. The most effective right-to-farm support is at the municipal level. Municipal right-to-farm ordinances that mirror the state’s model indicate to residents that the local community supports agriculture as an industry and a land use.

In addition to right-to-farm ordinances, municipal regulations must also be sensitive to the needs of farmers. Small changes to or exemptions from certain municipal
regulations can protect agricultural operations from unnecessary costs and create a farmer-friendly environment. Local officials need to be aware of changes to building and tax codes as well as fees as they relate to agricultural operations.

Some municipalities may also take advantage of the variety of grant and loan programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development program. Grants and loans are available in three key areas: Rural Business-Cooperative Service, Rural Housing Service and Rural Utilities Service. Unfortunately, many rural municipalities in the state may not qualify for many of the programs offered because most are unavailable to cities with more than 50,000 residents or municipalities with more than 10,000 residents. While the population criteria for these programs may make sense in a large portion of the country, they do not make sense for New Jersey.

Efforts are underway to reevaluate specific program criteria to make these programs available to New Jersey’s rural communities, especially the regional centers serving the state’s most rural regions.

It is also important farmers understand and participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s risk management programs to insure their operations against potential losses. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, conducted a farm risk management and crop insurance education program to assist farmers in understanding what assistance is available to reduce agricultural risks.

Understanding and addressing the labor needs of the industry are also critical to sustaining viable farming operations. Hired farm workers, although less than 1 percent of the nation’s total workforce, make an important contribution to agricultural production in New Jersey. Hired farm workers in New Jersey help provide labor during critical production periods. The supply of farm laborers must also meet demand. When U.S. workers are not available to meet the demand for hired farm workers, employers have traditionally looked to foreign workers for temporary relief. Currently, nonimmigrant foreign workers can be employed temporarily in agriculture under specific provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Although very important to agriculture, hired farm workers continue to be one of the most economically disadvantaged groups in the United States, with low wages,
seasonal employment and limited participation in the non-farm labor market. More needs to be done to ensure a well-trained farm labor workforce and to improve farm worker living and working conditions. Housing and training opportunities for the seasonal workforce of agriculture need to be considered in areas where agricultural operations are labor intensive. Quality housing, along with an educated workforce, will provide greater opportunities for a high-performance, customer-focused industry.

Agricultural education equips the next generation to lead and manage New Jersey’s food, agricultural and natural resource industry and takes many forms. High school agricultural education programs provide classroom instruction, work-based learning, and career and leadership development for FFA members and other students considering careers in agriculture or related fields. The national Agriculture in the Classroom program helps to make K-12 students aware of the importance of agriculture. 4-H is an informal, practical educational program for youth, while the New Jersey Agricultural Society’s Agriculture Leadership Program provides young adults in agriculture with leadership development skills and opportunities. While these programs are valuable, it is imperative they are coordinated to eliminate duplication of effort and to maximize educational opportunities for New Jersey’s next generation of agricultural managers and leaders.

The industry’s leadership and employment needs must be identified and communicated to educators preparing young people for careers in agriculture. An educational curriculum that addresses the needs of the food and agricultural industry, and the natural resources that sustain it, is needed at the secondary and post-secondary education level.

Educational programs in agriculture must be offered as an optional and viable opportunity for the youth and adults of New Jersey who are interested in pursuing such careers. Education in agricultural production and business practices for those currently involved in agriculture is just as important as programs for those who have an interest in changing to or initially choosing a career in agriculture.

**Objectives & Strategies**
Create an environment that is supportive of agriculture to maintain the profitability of the industry.

- Sustain tax incentives like Farmland Assessment to keep land in farms.
- Recognize agriculture as a priority when making policy decisions regarding regulations, taxation and financial incentives at all levels of government.
- Develop agricultural management practices for agri-tourism, farm markets, greenhouse operations, equine operations and other activities as needed to ensure Right to Farm Act protection for these operations.
- Encourage counties and municipalities to participate in the Agricultural Mediation Program when right-to-farm disputes arise.
- Work with all levels of government to create and advocate for appropriate public policies that support the food and agricultural industry.
- Encourage municipalities with significant agricultural resources to adopt a Right to Farm ordinance that provides the same level of protection as the state’s model, including regular notices to all residents and landowners.
- Promote and develop tools that municipalities and counties can use to strength and support agriculture.

Examine and address farm labor training and housing needs.

- Work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development program to reexamine program criteria to enable New Jersey’s rural communities to qualify for more programs.
- Link neighborhood revitalization efforts with housing opportunities for farm workers to ensure a safe and stable workforce.
- Develop and promote training opportunities for farm workers.

Equip the next generation to lead and manage the industry.

- Collaborate with Cook College and Rutgers Cooperative Extension to promote research and provide training and educational programs for New Jersey farmers and agribusiness professionals.
- Promote agricultural education programs that provide professional development training for high school teachers.
- Support the Agricultural Education program and FFA as it seeks to enhance the instructional program at the local, state and national levels.
- Promote educational programs that train and equip people for careers in natural resource conservation and the food industry.
- Provide educational grants for agricultural education programs.
CONCLUSION

This Agricultural Smart Growth Plan provides realistic and practical approaches to ensuring that as New Jersey continues to grow, its food and agriculture industry remains strong.

It details the contributions productive farmland makes to the quality of life for Garden State residents and outlines the critical role agriculture plays in the state’s smart growth efforts.

By considering agriculture as a key component of its overall Smart Growth Plan, New Jersey can take a leadership role in the national fight against sprawl.

It is hoped that this plan may be used as a starting point for agricultural leaders in neighboring states to embark on a collaborative and cooperative process to develop a similar plan for the entire Northeast region.

We all rely on a strong food and agriculture industry. By preserving our farmland and helping our farmers achieve economic success, we can retain our farms and the quality of life in our communities, and position the industry for a bright future.