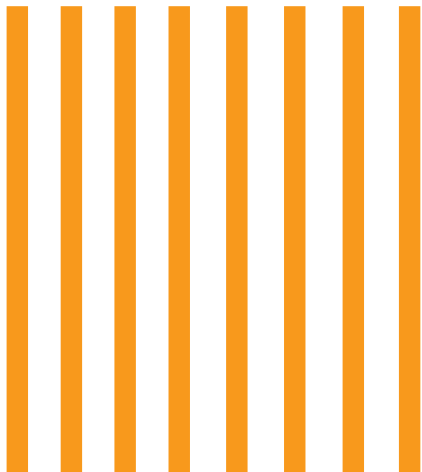




Serving Counties Since 1886

## Integrity of Farmland Preservation

# COUNTY GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES



## Fact Sheet 2008

Pennsylvania's farmland preservation program is recognized as a national leader, and counties are an important partner in protecting farmland and open space. Recently the state made significant investments in farmland preservation through efforts including the Growing Greener 2 bond initiative. Counties have invested more than \$300 million in local dollars toward purchase of conservation easements through the state program since its inception.

Rapid development and increasing land values are creating an urgency to protect farmland and open space in many parts of the state. Counties currently have only two options to increase their investment in purchasing conservation easements—either through property tax revenues or borrowing on a bond initiative. Counties support authority to enact a county realty transfer tax of up to one percent, with revenue dedicated to farmland preservation and open space. Municipalities are already authorized to increase the earned income tax for investment in open space. A dedicated county revenue source for farmland preservation will allow county officials to use a “pay-as-you-go” approach, and also increase the amount of local dollars available to contribute to the program.

Counties are also partners in other state-created programs designed to protect farmland, including Clean and Green, and the optional millage freeze on preserved farmland. Counties seek clarifications to the millage freeze law to address issues such as how “frozen” property tax millage rates can be adjusted when a county chooses to do a reassessment. Counties also support allowing properties, for which a conservation easement is held by a conservancy or land trust, to be eligible for the optional millage freeze as long as the property remains under easement.

As the Commonwealth continues its debate on alternative energy investment strategies, and officials work to bring more energy companies to the state, updates to the Clean and Green law are needed. Specifically, the law must be clarified to provide county assessment offices with clear guidelines on how to administer preferential assessment for Clean and Green-eligible properties where tracts of land are leased to an alternative

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energy developer for projects such as wind towers. Counties also remain concerned about eligibility standards in the existing law, which allow non-farmer-owned mini-estates to receive preferential assessment at the expense of other local taxpayers.

**For more information on county farmland preservation and related assessment issues, contact Kristen Goshorn at 717-232-7554 x 3113 or [kgoshorn@pacounties.org](mailto:kgoshorn@pacounties.org).**