

## **Cost of Hunterdon's Farmland Preservation Plan Update Will Be Shared With State**

### **County Ag Board To Hold Public Information Session On Plan April 14th**

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) will share the cost with Hunterdon County for the required update of County's Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan and the County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) will hold an in person Public Information session on the plan, at the Board's April 14 regular meeting, County Board of Commissioners Deputy Director Zach Rich announced at the March 1<sup>st</sup> Commissioner meeting.

Rich, the Commissioner Board's liaison for the Planning and Land Use Department, stated, "We greatly appreciate the SADC's financial support for updating the farmland plan.

While the county has preserved over 35,000 acres of farmland since the program was initiated over thirty years ago, I think we are all excited to embark on the next 10 years of preservation, continuing the county's long and valuable relationship with the SADC, and maintaining Hunterdon County's agricultural heritage."

The CADB will hold a Public Information session as part of its April 14 regular meeting, at 8pm in the Building 1 Assembly Room at the Route 12 County Complex.

The Plan update is required for continued participation in the SADC County Planning Incentive Grant Program, a critical source of farmland preservation funding.

Rich reported, "The Land Conservancy of New Jersey will be providing plan development consulting services to the County, working with the Department of Planning and Land Use and the CADB over the next year to fully examine the goals and purposes of the Farmland Preservation Program.

The SADC will reimburse up to 50% of the cost of the Plan upon adoption."

CADB Chairman Dave Bond, reflecting on his 26 years on the Board, remarked that "Farmland Preservation has been an important part of keeping agriculture in Hunterdon County."

Hunterdon purchased the first development easement on a family farm in New Jersey in 1987. Hunterdon County now leads New Jersey in the number of preserved farms (469) and is second only to Salem County in preserved acreage (35,000+).

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Since the adoption of the original Plan in 2008, the SADC has contributed 70% of the funding, while 11% percent is covered by outside federal and non-profit sources. The remainder is split between the County and the host municipality. The SADC has contributed \$209 million of the \$300 million that has gone directly to landowners by selling development easements.

The Farmland Preservation Program purchases development easements that keep the land in agricultural use while maintaining the farm in private ownership and allowing flexibility for evolving agricultural trends. 45% of Hunterdon County is taxed as farmland, roughly a quarter of that acreage is protected by a permanent easement.

Hunterdon County has 1,600 farms, 97% family owned and operated, producing \$92 million in annual market value. Nursery is the leading crop by value and hay leads in acreage.

Hunterdon County welcomes public input at this early stage of the process and the CADB continues to accept farmland applications on a rolling basis.

Please contact [CADB@Co.Hunterdon.NJ.US](mailto:CADB@Co.Hunterdon.NJ.US) or (908) 788-1490 for more information.