

Certification of County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs
Re-Certification Request – Baltimore County
(Summary of Certification Letter dated October 12, 2004)

The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation and the Maryland Department of Planning thank you for submitting the Recertification Report for Baltimore County's Agricultural Land Preservation Program. We are pleased to advise you that Baltimore County's Agricultural Land Preservation Program is recertified for the period July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2006.

We noted the following highlights of the County's farmland preservation efforts during the recertification period were:

- The rate of preservation was greater than the rate of development in agricultural areas in the County for all three years covered by the report.
- Over 41,000 acres have been preserved in the county through FY 2003. This is more than half of the acres required for the 80,000-acre goal.
- The County continues to acquire easements in such a way as to create sizable contiguous tracts of preserved land.
- The County has the largest amount of properties and acreage under MET easements in the State.
- Nearly 9,500 acres have been preserved in agricultural priority areas over the three years covered by the report.
- The County continues to fund land preservation at levels beyond that required for Agricultural Program Certification.
- The County recently down-zoned portions of RC-4 zoned land to the more restrictive RC-2 and RC-7 zoning categories.

The County's data on sub-division in its agricultural areas supplement the findings from our enhanced Master Parcel database. Between 1990 and 2000, Baltimore County had one of the lowest rates of development in its agricultural zoning districts out of all metropolitan counties. The County's data shows that since 2000 this pattern continued. The County also has preserved the fourth highest percentage of land in its agricultural zones in the State. Easement costs in the county, though high, are comparable to or lower than those in most other metropolitan counties.

While the County has relatively low potential for contiguity in its agricultural zoning districts, it has done a good job creating sizeable tracts of contiguous protected lands. In fact, over 9,000 acres of contiguous easements have been purchased in the Piney Run Rural Legacy Area, one of the largest blocks of land in the State to be preserved in such a manner. In spite of the obstacles, the County appears to be succeeding in preserving a land base that will support a variety of agricultural operations.

Overall the County's program is making good progress towards achieving its land preservation goals. The County continues to adapt its program to accommodate changes in both agriculture and development. Even in these tough fiscal times, the County continues to fund land preservation, albeit at reduced levels. In all, the County continues to be a leader in land preservation in the State.

As the County nears its land preservation goals, it will become increasingly important to maintain adequate funding for the County's efforts to maintain a pool of landowners interested in land preservation. Monitoring of existing preserved lands will also take on greater importance, not only to ensure that development is not adversely impacting farm operations, but also to make sure agriculture remains a viable part of the County's economy. We are glad that the County recognizes and is addressing these priorities.