

Carroll County – January 2006

Certification of County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs
Re-Certification Request – Carroll County
(Report Summary dated January 24, 2006)

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION GOALS

- Carroll County's goal is to preserve 100,000 acres. This number represents over 60% of the total land in the county that is used for agriculture. More than 44,709 acres have been preserved through a combination of MALPF, Rural Legacy, MET, and the Carroll County Land Trust. As of June 30, 2004, Carroll County had preserved 52,445 acres through five-year district agreements with MALPF. Of these, 38,076 acres have been preserved with permanent agricultural preservation easements with MALPF.
- Carroll County's Community Viability Threshold enhances the overall County goal by aspiring to "permanently preserve 100,000 acres of tillable agricultural land by the year 2020, preserving a minimum of 3,750 acres of agricultural land per year for the next 10 years. The Community Viability Threshold is meant to serve as a gauge against which the County periodically can measure its progress at achieving its goals.

ATTRIBUTES OF LOCAL PROGRAM

- The County participates in MALPF's Matching Funds Program.
- The County consistently supplements the MALPF program by augmenting funding available to the County. In 1996 Carroll County began committing funds to MALPF in excess of the Matching Funds to enable MALPF to acquire additional easements with 100%-County funding.
- From 1996, MALPF has purchased 66 easements with 100%-County funding.
- During FY 2004, even though MALPF did not run an easement cycle due to limited funds, Carroll County was able to acquire nine (9) MALPF easements with 100%-County funding (\$3,231,216).
- The Carroll County Critical Farms Program received and processed four (4) applications (368 acres) for FY 2003-2004.

QUALIFYING EXPENDITURES AND USE OF CERTIFICATION FUNDS

- The County meets the certification requirements for qualifying expenditures and use of certification funds and has provided a record of revenues and expenditures.
- For FY 2003, the County collected \$1,297,505 in agricultural land transfer tax. Actual amount spent on easements was \$3,693,352. The County received \$227,700 from the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program.
- For FY 2004, the County collected \$924,060 in agricultural land transfer tax. The actual amount spent on easements was \$564,422. The County received \$330,400 from the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program.
- Agricultural transfer tax revenues over the reporting period have been used for the purchase of easements.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

FY 2003

- Eleven MALPF easements on 984 acres were purchased in FY 2003.
- Twenty MALPF agricultural districts were established totaling 1,880 acres.

FY 2004

- Nine MALPF easement on 923 acres were purchased in FY 2004 (using 100% County funds).
- Four MALPF agricultural districts were established totaling 253 acres.

Other highlights

- Adoption of the clustering provisions for the Rural Development Guides and Standards.
- In 2004, the County began accepting easement applications from landowners who were not willing to commit five (5) years to a MALPF district. These easements are purchased through

the Installment Purchase Agreement Program.

- In 2003, the County celebrated 25 years of land preservation, having preserved 45,000 acres.
- The County increased its capital budget appropriation for land preservation.
- MALPF approved a policy of co-holding easements with the County Commissioners when easements are acquired using 100%-County funding.
- During FY 2004, the County received an FRPP grant of \$330,400.
- The July-August 2004 Farmland Preservation Report ranked Carroll County 4th among the top 12 local farmland preservation protection programs.

EVALUATION OF COUNTY'S ANNUAL REPORT

- During the reporting period, FY 2003-2004, the County permanently preserved 1,907 acres of agricultural land and woodlands through MALPF.
- In FY 2000-2004, 54.5% of new residential lots were located in unincorporated areas, while 45.6% were in incorporated cities or towns.
- The rate of land converted to non-agricultural purposes has been declining. During the period 1984-1992, 1,773 acres per year of land were converted. In the period 1998-2002, 1,140 acres per year were converted. The County has permanently preserved 44,709 acres.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Evaluation

- *Strengths:*
 - Ongoing strong financial commitment to easement purchases (millions of dollars each year).
 - Established in 1992, the Critical Farms Program saves farms that are vulnerable to development.
 - The County's IPA Program, started in 2002, attracts additional landowners to participate in land preservation.
 - Easement payments on County-funded offers are limited to no more than 70% of fair market value.
 - The County's subdivision and development regulations require clustered residential lots to be located in lower priority woodlands or on pastureland, rather than productive cropland.
 - The County has a Right-to-Farm Ordinance.
- *Weaknesses:*
 - Unless the County is able to preserve an average of 3,750 acres per year, it is unlikely it will reach its goal of 100,000 acres by the year 2020. The average of the last five (5) years has been 2,800 acres preserved per year.
 - In FY 2000-2004, 54.5% of new residential lots were located in unincorporated areas, while 45.6% were in incorporated cities or towns.

Description of Updated Program Development Strategy

Achieving objectives depends on the following:

- Restore Program Open Space funding and implementing the funding recommendations of the MALPF Task Force.
- Elimination of the MALPF district.
- Institute a Critical Farms Program at the State level.
- Continued participation in MALPF's matching funds program.

COUNTY'S FOCUS ON PRESERVING AGRICULTURAL LAND

- The County Commissioners have significantly increased the level of county funding. The FY 2005-2010 Capital Improvement Plan provides for \$45.6 million for agricultural preservation.
- There is a likelihood of the Agricultural Zone being rezoned from 1:20, or portion of 20, to further reduce the residential density of parcels that remain undeveloped.
- There have been recent changes to improve the effectiveness of clustering in the Agriculture Zone, but the current Master Plan endorses the recommendation of the citizens work group that land zoned Agriculture not be further down-zoned.

- MALPF is the most heavily used tool for the permanent preservation of agricultural land (86% of the total lands preserved).
- The County's land preservation goal is targeted specifically at maintaining the long-term viability of farming in the County, including the businesses that support that sector of the economy.

FOUNDATION STAFF RECOMMENDATION

- The County program continues to appear to be likely to succeed in supporting viable agricultural operations and preserving agricultural land in perpetuity. Foundation staff recommends approval of recertification for another two-year period.