

*Cecil County – November 2002*

**Certification of County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs**  
**Re-Certification Request – Cecil County**  
**(Report Summary dated October 31, 2002)**

**ATTRIBUTES OF LOCAL PROGRAM**

- The County participates in MALPF Matching Funds Program County.
- The county adopted property tax credits for land subject to MALPF District Agreements and Easements (50% and 75% respectively).
- The County adopted acreage goals of 30,000 acres protected in the Resource Protection District (RPD) (north) and 25,000 acres protected in the Rural Conservation District area (RCD) (south) by the year 2025.

**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.

**PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD**

- FY 2002: Five new districts were approved totaling 700.74 acres.
- FY 2002: Nine MALPF Easement Offers were accepted totaling 1,146.55 acres.
- FY 2002: Four Rural Legacy Easements totaling 836.8 acres were finalized within the Cecil County portion of the Sassafras Focus area which is part of the Agricultural Security Corridor Rural Legacy Area (ASCRLA).
- Two other Cecil County properties totaling 264 acres are currently under contract in the Sassafras Focus Area.
- In December 2001, the Anchorage Farm TEA-21 Scenic Easement was finalized with Eastern Shore Land Conservancy and Maryland Environmental Trust preserving 179 acres.
- FY 2002 Three Cecil County properties totaling 327.11 acres were preserved within the Fair Hill Rural Legacy Area.

**EVALUATION OF COUNTY'S ANNUAL REPORT**

- Within the past year, an Economic Development Commission Agricultural Advisory Board was established to assist the Economic Development Agricultural Coordinator with the development of strategies for the marketing and development of Cecil County agricultural products, farmer's markets, etc.
- An Equine Industry Task Force was formed to measure the economic impact of the equine industry in Cecil County.
- The Economic Development Commission Agricultural Advisory Board successfully established a second farmer's market in the Chesapeake City Area.
- Two community outreach/education workshops were held for Cecil County landowners to promote the awareness of conservation easements. A third workshop was held as part of the Cecil County Fair Agriculture Showcase Day.
- Cecil County is continuing its efforts to implement the Urban Growth Boundary Plan through increased cooperation with the municipalities. Its Urban Growth Boundary Plan provides for coordination between County and Towns for provision of water and sewer infrastructure around towns and the ability of towns to provide those services outside its boundaries.
- The draft for the County Master Water and Sewer Plan has been received and public comment is expected soon.
- A draft of the county's TDR program has been developed and is expected to go out for public comment before the end of the calendar year.
- Smart Code Regulations are presently under development, complementing the work being done under the TDR program to relieve pressure on agricultural areas of the county and encourage growth in designated area.

## **COUNTY'S FOCUS ON PRESERVING AGRICULTURAL LAND**

- The County appointed an Agricultural Land Preservation Task Force to develop a comprehensive agricultural land preservation strategy and program for the county. Two of the seven land-use districts identified in Comprehensive Plan are primarily, if not solely, dedicated to the preservation of agricultural land use. Specifically, these two land use districts, encompassing approximately 72% of the County's overall area, are the Rural Conservation District and the Resource Protection District.
- Cecil County has continued its partnerships with private non-profit land conservation organizations and other Eastern Shore counties to preserve agricultural lands. The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC), along with Cecil, Kent, Talbot, Caroline and Dorchester Counties, has continued to apply and receive funds for the Agricultural Security Corridor Rural Legacy Area (ASCRLA).
- Cecil County continues its partnership with Cecil Land Trust and The Conservation Fund relative to the Fair Hill Rural Legacy Area (FHRLA).
- The County does not purchase its own easements, but works through the MALPF Program. The County is one of the many counties that uses its own local prioritization method to rank easement applicants. During FY 02 Cecil County made revisions to that formula.
- The County has committed \$50,000 as a local match to MALPF's FY 2003 Matching Funds Program. Additionally, the County has been awarded a \$132,250 grant from the Federal Farmland Protection Program which will be used as local match to the MALPF FY 2003 Matching Funds Program.
- The County is considering establishing a check-off box program to raise funds for agricultural easement purchases. A draft brochure has been developed, and the County is awaiting an opinion from the office of the State Attorney regarding if the County has the legal authority to establish such a program.

## **FOUNDATION STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

- Cecil County has many strategies proposed that support traditional agriculture and promote non-traditional agriculture. It continues to assist and partner with local land trusts, searches for ways to raise funds for agricultural easement purchase and works to direct growth away from agricultural areas of the county.
- With this in mind, the County program appears likely to be successful in supporting viable agricultural operations and preserving agricultural land in perpetuity. Staff recommends approval of recertification for another two-year term.