

Certification of County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs
Re-Certification Request – Talbot County
(Summary of Certification Letter dated November 5, 2003)

The Maryland Department of Planning and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation would like to thank the county for submitting Talbot County's 2001 and 2002 annual reports for the Agricultural Certification Program. We are pleased to advise you that the County's agricultural preservation program has been recertified for the period from July 2003 through June 30, 2005.

Highlights of the County's farmland preservation efforts during the recertification period were:

- During the certification period four properties totaling 539 acres were preserved through the MALPF program. The County reported an increase of 1,606 acres of preserved land over last year, bringing the total amount of acreage preserved to 27,375 acres.
- The County reached settlement on its first two Rural Legacy easements in the Tuckahoe Focus Area of the Eastern Shore Agricultural Security Corridor, preserving a total of 551 acres.
- The County Planning Office and the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy conducted a Land Protection Workshop with people who own more than 50 acres of farmland. The presentation resulted in four new preservation districts that total 519 acres.
- Donations for land preservation activities through the County's new Check-Off Box program resulted in over 200 donations totaling \$5,369 from Talbot County residents.

The report also addresses new Development Strategies that are planned for the upcoming 2003 Comprehensive Plan. We look forward to hearing about progress made on these strategies in the next Certification Report. The ambitious recommendations outlined in this certification report include the following: a reduction in the County's Growth Area Boundary, the creation of a greenbelt, an inter-jurisdictional TDR Program, and the development of design standards.

Also, thank you for resolving in the recertification report our previous concern regarding qualifying expenditures. We recognize the County's calculations were correct in its current and previous reports.

During FY 02, there were 95 acres of residential development in Talbot County; 70 acres were located within the Certified Priority Funding Area (PFA) and planned growth areas. This is a significant improvement over the FY 01 annual report when the County indicated that only 35% of new subdivision development (188 of 535 acres) took place inside the PFA.

Our research and evaluation finds that, compared to other counties in Maryland, development pressure in Talbot County is low. The County's agricultural zone is not heavily subdivided into small parcels, and the amount of unprotected agriculturally zoned land consisting of parcels greater than 20 Acres is among the highest in the State. The percentage of agriculturally zoned land protected is relatively low, while the current easement acquisition cost per acre is slightly above the State average. This suggests that Talbot County has a good opportunity to increase the number of easement acquisitions before its large tracts of agricultural land are fragmented by rural development and prices significantly increase, as is occurring throughout Maryland. While the county has contributed \$50,000 from the County General Budget towards its program, farmland preservation efforts could be greatly assisted with further investment of county funds while development pressures remain comparatively low and before the window of opportunity closes.

Overall, the County is taking positive steps towards improving its Land Use and Land Conservation strategies. In particular, the County is to be commended for considering an Inter-Jurisdictional TDR program, reducing the County's Growth Area Boundary, and creating strict design standards for development near the Chesapeake Bay. We look forward to seeing the County implement its recommendations for its comprehensive plan. We also hope the County will look into ways it could increase the use of county funding to further strengthen a program that is moving forward. We thank you for your commitment to improve your program and the overall effectiveness of the State's efforts.