

Washington County – February 2007

Certification of County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs
Re-Certification Request – Washington County
(Report Summary dated February 27, 2007)

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION GOALS

- Washington County's goal is to preserve 50,000 acres by the year 2021.
- During the reporting period, 4,501 acres were preserved through MALPF and Rural Legacy (with 930 acres pending settlement).
- During FY 2006, five MALPF easements were purchased, covering 666 acres.
- 3,227 acres (24 farms) have been protected with Rural Legacy funds.
- A total of 20,200 acres are permanently preserved in Washington County.

ATTRIBUTES OF LOCAL PROGRAM

- The County participates in MALPF's Matching Funds Program.
- The County uses protective zoning and is in the process of establishing Priority Preservation Areas to continue to meet the certification requirements.
- During 2005 the County made significant improvements to its rural zoning.
- The County uses a combination of MALPF, Rural Legacy, MET and local land trusts, a local PDR program, FRPP funds, and TEA-21 funds, and is in the process of creating a local TDR program.
- Washington County has a Right-to-Farm ordinance.
- The Rural Business zones allow businesses that support agricultural businesses and the farming community.

QUALIFYING EXPENDITURES AND USE OF CERTIFICATION FUNDS

- The County meets/exceeds the certification requirements for qualifying expenditures and use of certification funds and has provided a record of revenues and expenditures.
- Agricultural transfer tax revenues over the reporting period have been used for the purchase of easements.
- For FY 2003, the County committed \$477,000 in MALPF matching funds.
- For FY 2005, the County committed \$667,000 in MALPF matching funds.
- For FY 2006, the County committed \$989,550 in MALPF matching funds.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

- MALPF settled easements on 2,679 acres.
- Rural Legacy settled easements on 1,822 easements.
- 930 acres are pending settlement of easements (total of 5,431 acres preserved).

Other highlights

- During the reporting period, 5,431 acres were preserved, while 5,481 acres of farmland were converted to non-agricultural use.
- The County continues to have a Right-to-Farm Ordinance.
- A consultant has been hired to design a TDR program, which should be presented to the County Commissioners in 2007.

EVALUATION OF COUNTY'S ANNUAL REPORT

- During the reporting period, FY 2002-2006, the County permanently preserved 2,679 acres of agricultural land and woodlands through MALPF.
- The rate of land converted to non-agricultural purposes is still slightly higher than the number of acres permanently preserved.
- Washington County has identified four (4) possible Priority Preservation Areas.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

a. Evaluation

Strengths:

- Updated zoning reduces development on rural land.
- The County has made a significant commitment of local funds to the local PDR program.
- A TDR program is being designed.
- The County utilizes federal funds (TEA-21) for the permanent protection of farmland.
- The County continues to have strong participation in the Rural Legacy (\$7.3 million to date).
- The County has a Right-to-Farm Ordinance.

Weaknesses:

- Washington County continues to have high development pressure.
- Newly created down-zoning allows extra units on each farm parcel.
- There is a need for consistent/increased dedicated local funding for agricultural land preservation.
- It is unlikely the County will meet its goal of 50,000 acres by 2021.

b. Description of Updated Program Development Strategy

Achieving objectives depends on the following:

- Designation of a priority preservation area.
- Implementation of the TDR program.
- Create a timetable for achieving the 50,000-acre preservation goal.

COUNTY'S FOCUS ON PRESERVING AGRICULTURAL LAND

- The County is in the process of developing a TDR program.
- Beginning with the updated 2005 Zoning Ordinance, three agricultural zoning classifications have been implemented to support agricultural uses.
- The agricultural-zoning district has been purposely drawn to enclose large blocks of the best soils for intensive agricultural production as well as gently rolling topography for farming.

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.