

Certification of County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs
Certification Request – Worcester County
(Summary of Certification Letter dated November 18, 2004)

The Department of Planning and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation are pleased to certify Worcester County's Agricultural Land Preservation Program. Certification is based on the application for certification and supplemental materials received from Worcester County, as required by COMAR Title 14, Subtitle 24, Chapter 08, "Guidelines for the Certification of County Agricultural Land Preservation Programs," under Regulation .05 "Requirements for Certification of County Programs."

The State recognizes the steps Worcester County has taken to preserve agriculture, especially given the increasing demands for development in the County. The County's zoning of resource land, among the most protective in Maryland, has been relatively effective in limiting the conversion of agricultural land in County. It is complemented by a strong right-to-farm law. Although the County's easement acquisition effort began late in comparison to other counties, the rate of acquisition has increased through both the MALPF and Rural Legacy programs.

As stated in the guidelines, certification of the County program is effective for two years from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2006. As a result of certification Worcester County is authorized to retain 75% of the Agricultural Transfer Taxes collected in the County, effective as of July 1, 2004.

Normally there are two annual reports due during the certification period, but since 2004 is almost over, Worcester County will be responsible for only one report during the certification period. It will be due on October 1, 2005. Because your application for certification did not include financial information for FY 2003, that information should be included in that report, along with the required data for FY 2004 and FY 2005. The report will also serve as the County's request for recertification.

Consistent with requirements for local program development, we will look for annual reports to demonstrate program performance and development in the following areas:

- Establishment of an acreage goal for preservation in the County's agricultural zone.
- Monitoring of preservation versus loss of agricultural land in the agricultural zone.
- An evaluation of the ability of the Comprehensive Plan, zoning and other land use management tools, and easement acquisition efforts to achieve State and County's preservation goals.
- An evaluation of the supply and adequacy of funding to support easement purchases and achieve State and local goals.

With regard to this last point, your application indicates that the County will be contributing the minimum amount of qualifying expenditures from a County source other than agricultural land transfer taxes, equal to roughly 9% of the agricultural land transfer taxes collected annually in the County. Based on revenues from that source in recent years, the County contribution will amount to approximately \$10,000.

In light of the increasing development pressure on the County's agricultural land resource, we encourage you to explore and hopefully implement some of the funding measures mentioned in your application. These future options included providing additional matching funds for the purchase of MALPF easements, establishing a bonus incentive program for high priority farms, and providing additional funds for insufficient funds offers made by MALPF. All of these are sensible ways to improve the ability of your program to achieve State and local goals. Many other counties have supplemental, dedicated revenue sources to enhance that ability, and in doing so generate far more than that needed to satisfy the minimum qualifying expenditure requirement. We would be glad to discuss ways of doing this with you and your staff.

The Department and the Foundation are eager to work with Worcester County to ensure the long-term success of the County's program and of the State's efforts to preserve agriculture and agricultural land. We hope that you and your staff will not hesitate to call us if you have any questions.