

TCRPC

Planning Toolkit Factsheet

Agricultural & Natural Resource Protection Zoning

INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of Pennsylvania one often imagines rolling farm fields, forests and lots of space. According to the 2017 Natural Resources and Conservation Service's Inventory, only 15.5% of Pennsylvania's land is actually developed. Over 50% of the state is forested, and approximately 24% is taken up by crop and agricultural land. Why, then, do municipalities need to enact zoning to protect their agricultural and natural features?

Like many other states in the nation, Pennsylvania is growing. Already the sixth most populous state with a total residency of over nearly 13 million, Pennsylvania is projected to see more growth in both urban and rural areas through 2040. As the population grows, residential and commercial developments will grow, too. Many municipalities already see urban and suburban sprawl starting to eat their way in to their open and agricultural spaces---and are quickly finding out that their zoning ordinances do not have strong enough provisions to protect them.

BENEFITS

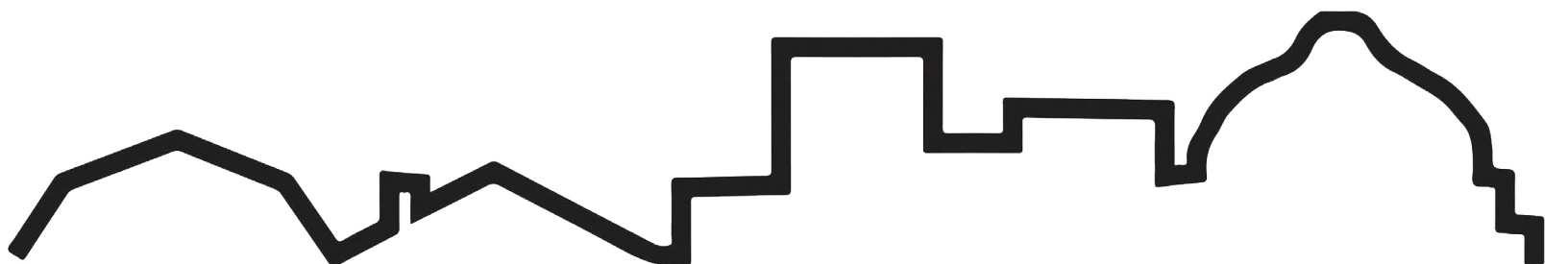
- Protects recreational, habitat, hydrological and aesthetic value
- Provides support and stability for the larger farming community
- Can protect endangered species
- Provides economic support through return on investment principle, the delivering of goods and services, job creation and tax revenue
- Relieves development pressure and reduces sprawl
- Produces additional benefits with other issues such as stormwater management, wellhead protection, and conservation easements

Besides the history and aesthetic value of these spaces, Pennsylvania has long benefitted from agricultural and outdoor recreation as economic drivers. In 2019 the state ranked sixth in the nation for 'recreation economy', bringing in approximately \$13B from recreational and related sources. Pennsylvania is intersected by the Kittatinny Ridge, a globally important bird area and migratory corridor, as well as the Appalachian Trail. Additionally, revenues from agricultural, food and wood products exceeded \$1B in export dollars in 2000, and the 2017 Census of Agriculture shows that 21% of active farms take in \$100,000 or more in annual sales.

Having a strong protective zoning ordinance in place can give municipalities a firm footing for protecting their agricultural and natural resources. Additionally, measures such as conservation easements and agricultural easements can also be encouraged to add additional protection.

DRAWBACKS

- Not everyone in local government may support protection zoning
- Environmental issues can sometimes result from certain types of farming activity
- Preservation does not have the immediate, short-term tax benefits provided through conversion to residential, commercial, or other uses

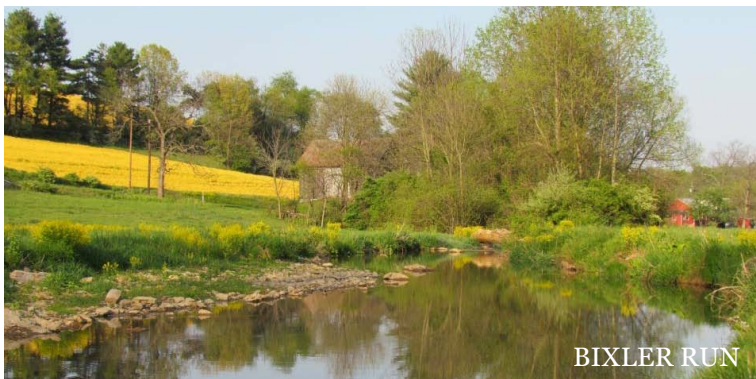


PRACTICAL TIPS

- Promote enrollment of farms as Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs), which is the first step in the agricultural easement program
- Provide incentivized zoning that keeps development close to towns and highways
- Focus on environmentally sensitive/valuable areas and prime agricultural areas within in the municipality
- Consider working with local conservancies and preservation groups to create a natural resources inventory
- Establish agricultural protection and conservation districts, zones or overlays
- Once established, the rules of the zoning district, zone or overlay should be upheld to the best of the municipality's ability

RELATED TOOL KIT FACT SHEETS

- **Conservation Easements**
- **Historic Resource Protection**
- **Stormwater Management**
- **Official Maps**
- **Cluster Subdivisions**
- **Traditional Zoning Ordinances**
- **Wellhead Protection**



RESOURCES

Zoning Guides and Examples

- **WeConserve PA - Agricultural Protection Zoning**
- **Lancaster County - Agricultural Zoning District Guidelines**
- **Chester County Planning Commission – Effective Agricultural Zoning**
- **Pennsylvania Dept. of Agriculture – A Guide to Farmland Preservation**
- **Lancaster County – Model Conservation Zoning District and Natural Resource Protection**
- **Conservation Tools – Conservation by Design and Case Studies**
- **Delaware Valley Planning Commission - Model Ordinances**
- **Township of North Coventry – Overlay Districts**

Agricultural Easements and Security Areas

- **We Conserve PA – Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program**
- **Farmland Information Center – Agricultural Conservation Easements**
- **PA DEP – Agricultural Security Areas**
- **Lancaster Farmland Trust**
- **Dauphin County Conservation District's Farmland Preservation Program**
- **Perry County Conservation District Farmland Preservation Program**
- **PA Farmland Preservation Association**

Supporting Documents and Statistics

- **Audubon Pennsylvania – Return on Environment Page**
- **Pennsylvania's Outdoor Recreation Plan**
- **2017 Census of Agriculture**
- **2019 Biennial Census - PA Land Trust Association**
- **USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service**
- **Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Programs – County Natural Heritage Inventories**