

Agriculture Recommendations

Educational and Public Programs

- Work with the County Conservation Service, Farm Bureau, Penn State Ag Extension Service, and other conservation related groups to sponsor pro-grams on good conservation practices and the programs available to fund and/or to support them.
- Increase participation among Township farmers in conservation programs designed to enhance water quality, wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, and promote better farming practices.
- Create natural trails, or greenways, along streambanks that could be developed with the assistance of DCNR, the county conservation office and others; seek easements to accomplish this objective.
- Promote and create, in concert with adjoining townships, a watershed group for each of the two watersheds in the Township: Middle Creek and Penns Creek.
- Encourage the watershed group to develop grant programs and other initiatives designed to focus on these important watersheds and develop better practices among farmers and other property owners along the stream banks.

- Attempt to conduct informative sessions for members of the Amish farming community to help build more effective bridges to this group and encourage them to participate in stream bank protection and water quality practices as well as to become more active participants in state programs.

Economic Incentives and Programs

- Encourage the expansion of the Ag Security Program among all contiguous property owners who are not participating in the Ag Security Program.
- Consider some type of township subsidy, which can be driven by grant programs, to steer development away from prime agricultural areas except where these areas may be adjacent to existing built up areas.
- Assure the addition and/or inclusion of all Ag related or supported businesses and industries in the industrial and commercial zones of the Township as well as a special exception on non-prime farmland.
- Encourage the direct marketing of agricultural products along the 522 commercial corridor as a permitted use in all commercially zoned areas.

- Encourage the formation of farm cooperatives within the Township and County to create more direct marketing efforts.
- Consider Township sponsorship and possible capital contribution to the creation -- lease or rental -- of a direct marketing facility for locally grown farm products.
- Promote increased silviculture activities, particularly in the wooded hilly areas in the northern part of the Township and promote good forestry management practices among private Christmas tree and other growers.
- Encourage farmers to participate in the Act 6 Nutrient Management Act and similar programs that provide financial incentives to improve the quality of the environment and farm practices at the same time.

Nutrient Management/ CAOs/Code Enforcement

The Nutrient Management Act regulates concentrated animal operations in all areas where an animal equivalent unit exceeds two per acre (or 2000 pounds). Since no farm in the Township meets that threshold, however, the opportunity for monitoring and enforcement is virtually eliminated.

The County Conservation Service is anxious to increase voluntary participation in the Nutrient Management Program -- and there are significant financial incentives to do so.

The following steps are recommended:

- Assign the code officer on a regular basis to check farms for violations of the Nutrient Management Act, improper or inadequate fencing, excessive soil erosion, encroachment on the stream bank, and other infractions.
- Secure training for the code officer to enable him/her to understand the type of infractions that can be cited as Township code violations and referred to the county conservation office for appropriate action.
- Increase setbacks for residential developments that border productive farmland in order to minimize the effect of farm nuisances and reduce the likelihood of residential objections to these farm practices. (See discussion on buffer yards in Land Use Chapter)
- Review zoning and subdivision ordinances to determine steps and/or procedures that can be taken to incorporate Nutrient Management Program elements and other legislation regulating farmland practices.

Regulation/Protection Of Farmland

- Create an agricultural protection zone as a possible overlay zoning district to protect the practice of farming and to encourage farming as a way of life in the Township. (See Land Use Chapter)
- Consider the impact on prime farmland whenever the extension of water and/or sewer lines is proposed in the Township.
- Consider the importance of contiguous parcels when establishing agricultural zones in order to assure a critical mass of land available for agricultural uses; limit development in these areas to farming and farm related occupations.
- Protect the extensive farming areas by providing a continuing market for agricultural support services including equipment and equipment parts dealers, repair facilities, feed mills, fertilizer and pesticide suppliers, food processors, marketing facilities and other services that make commercial and agricultural industry possible.
- Discourage division of agricultural tracts into parcels smaller than a typical core farm. Smaller tracts tend to make land more affordable for development and thus take land out of agricultural production.
- Establish a minimum parcel size that can be created by subdivision

based on the typical farm "core" which includes the farmstead, barns, equipment sheds and agricultural facilities within contiguous tracts. The farm core provides good criteria for defining a size below which it is undesirable to divide prime agricultural land. By contrast, outlying parcels which are frequently rented and not contiguous to the farm core can be used for non-farm purposes.

- The Township should distribute information on agricultural programs helpful to farmers, not to duplicate the work of the Conservation Service, but to have all appropriate material relating to help educate all constituencies in the Township, including public officials and planning commission members.

Development and Zoning Alternatives

- Direct development to the poorest soils while avoiding the top of ridges or in the middle of fields and encourage the clustering of houses immediately adjacent to existing development.
- Encourage and look at the potential to finance package-type treatment systems that require planning modules and other innovative sewer alternatives to increase ability to develop areas of poorer soils.

- Permit increased development on smaller farms with non-prime soils that are not contiguous to larger prime agricultural tracts in order to maximize development of parcels unsuited for agriculture either by soil type, size or location (distance from existing agricultural zone) or typography.
- Recognize, in Township ordinances that farm families often need other economic activities to support the farm and family; activities that should be permitted include farm stands, farm related businesses, bed and breakfast operations, small equipment repair as well as home occupations.
- Include all types of land in the agricultural zone that pertain to the overall farming operation and contribute to the quality of the soils and land. These areas include cropland, pasture land, woods, wetlands and good as well as poor soils where contiguous to and contributing to the overall practice of farming and conservation of natural resources.
- Consider developing a set of local guidelines and/or design incentives that take into account natural conditions, such as slope, wooded areas, buffer strips along country roads, erosion control, storm water management, and scenic vistas into account.
- Target preservation easements to Ag security areas that are actively farmed so that land around the easement will continue in agriculture. Developers tend to place a premium on lands with such easements because no future development can occur in that area and the viewshed is highly valued by the homeowner.