

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Preserving Pennsylvania farmland

Although it's perfectly legal to preserve farmland through zoning, effective agricultural zoning is rarely used in Pennsylvania outside of Lancaster and York counties, which have a historic agricultural ethic.

The only surefire way to conserve farmland elsewhere is by purchasing deed restrictions — easements — from property owners.

In the last 30 years, more than \$1.3 billion has been spent to protect nearly 540,000 acres of farmland in the state, most of it in southeastern Pennsylvania.

In 1987, Rep. Sam Morris, head of the House Agricultural Committee, whose district covered much of northern Chester County, spearheaded an effort to create a statewide program to buy development rights from

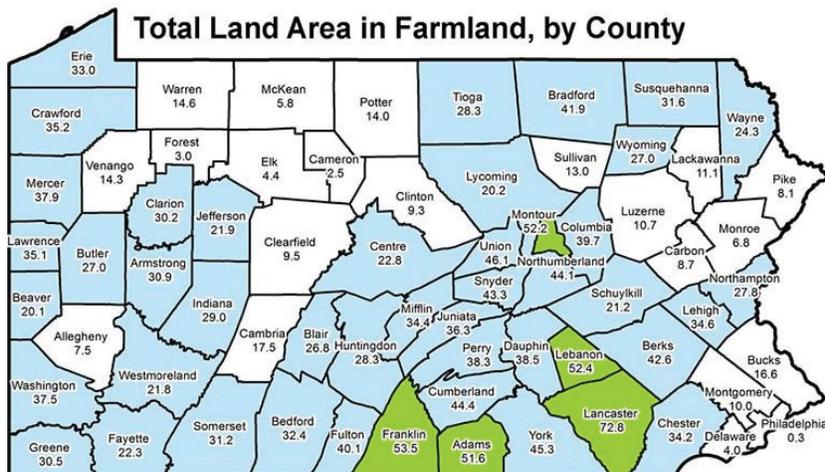
farmers. He encouraged me to write articles for The Mercury about ways to preserve farmland, including a landmark \$26 million bond issue in Suffolk County, Long Island, in the 1970s to buy development rights from farmers.

Later in 1987, Rep. Morris persuaded Gov. Bob Casey to sponsor a referendum on the November ballot asking Pennsylvanians to approve a \$100 million bond issue to buy development rights from farmers. The referendum passed easily, and within a few years, counties — particularly in southeastern Pennsylvania — allocated millions of their own tax dollars to match state funds.

As the charts below demonstrate, farmland preservation has had a significant positive impact on land use, especially in southeastern Pennsylvania.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton



GREEN—more than 50 percent of total land area in farms
BLUE — 20% to 49% of total land area in farms
WHITE— Less than 20% of total land area in farms
BERKS 43% farms/CHESTER 34% farms/ MONTGOMERY 10% farms

County	Acres in farms	Acres protected (easements)	Percent protected (easements)	Total cost
Berks	233,744	71,666	30%	\$153,023,784
Chester	164,495	27,566	17%	\$153,416,736
Montgomery	30,780	9,368	30%	\$106,684,003
Lancaster	439,481	70,115	16%	\$180,234,917
Pennsylvania	7,704,444	538,180	7%	\$1,385,692,305