



Department of Open Space Preservation (DOSP)

We use funds allocated by the County Commissioners to help keep farmers on the land, provide safe and accessible places for children and families to play, and protect the woods and wildlife that make Chester County special.

Accomplishments

The County has funded the preservation of over 57,000 acres of farmland, open space, nature preserves, and parks in partnership with farmers, municipalities, non-profits, and landowners in all 73 municipalities.

Funding Programs

- **Agricultural Preservation Programs**

The DOSP works with the County Agricultural Land Preservation Board (ALPB) to preserve land for Chester County's leading industry - agriculture. A landowner can preserve their farm by selling or donating a farmland easement. After granting an easement, the owner still owns and can farm or even sell the land, but it may only be used for agricultural purposes.

The amount offered by the ALPB is based on an independent appraisal with a maximum of \$12,000/acre. Owners can

choose lump sum or installment payments.

The ALPB oversees two programs - the Commonwealth/County Program and the Municipal Challenge Grant Program. To be eligible, a farm must be located in an Agricultural Security Area and have at least 50% (but no less than 10 acres) of harvested cropland, pasture, or grazing land.

The Commonwealth/County program requires a minimum of 50 acres unless the farm is next to preserved land. The Challenge Grant has a minimum "stand alone" size of 25 acres. Both programs allow 10-acre farms if they are next to preserved land. Also, Challenge Grant projects require 50% of the funding come from sources other than the State or County such as donated value from the landowner, funds from the municipality where the farm is located, or conservation organizations.

- **Municipal Grant Program**

The goal of this program is to help municipal governments meet local demands for parks, recreational facilities, and open spaces. Acquisition Grants reimburse a maximum of 50% (maximum county grant of \$500,000) of the appraised market value to buy land, conservation easements, or trail easements. Development Grants reimburse park facility and trail construction costs up to 50% (maximum county grant of \$250,000) for parks greater than 20 acres,

and up to 25% (maximum county grant of \$100,000) for smaller parks. Property purchased or improved with County grant funds must be open to the public.



- **Preservation Partnership Program (Conservancy Grant Program)**

This program helps conservation organizations preserve natural, agricultural, historic, and culturally significant land resources and promotes responsible public access. Natural Area Grants are capped at 50% of the property or easement value up to \$350,000 plus eligible transaction costs. Farmland Grants provide up to 33% of the appraised value capped at \$3,000 per acre plus eligible transaction costs.

Public Benefit Improvement Grants reimburse up to 50% (maximum county grant of \$50,000) of the eligible costs to build permanently preserved public trails and trail related amenities, and up to 50% (maximum county grant of \$25,000) of the eligible costs for water

quality improvement projects on permanently preserved land.

- **Water Quality Improvement Programs (for Municipalities and Conservancies)**

The Brandywine Headwaters Preservation Program (BH) and Northern Conservation Initiative (NCI) advance the complimentary goals of water quality improvement and land preservation by focusing on high priority areas and partnerships.

The BH program is limited to land in or adjacent to Priority Preservation Areas delineated in the City of Wilmington (Delaware) Source Water Protection Plan. The NCI is limited to land in the following northern Chester County municipalities: North, South, and East Coventry; East and West Nantmeal; East and West Pikeland; East and West Vincent; and Warwick Townships, as well as Elverson and Spring City Boroughs.

In both programs, County funds are limited to the lesser of \$2,000/acre or 25% of the appraised value of land or easement. Funds can be used for both land and transaction costs.

Stewardship

Preserving soil is a critical element of land preservation. The DOSP offers conservation planning by certified plan writers at government rates to owners of farmland in priority areas. Farms that are permanently

preserved or those who are in the process of applying are the top priority. A conservation plan and implementation agreement is required for participation in the County's agricultural preservation programs. Owners of farms along impaired waterways will also receive priority consideration.

Regulations and Applications

Applications to the Agricultural Preservation Programs, Municipal Grant Program, and Conservancy Grant program are accepted by a specific deadline once a year, while BH and NCI applications are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year. Program regulations, applications, and related information are posted on our website at www.chesco.org/openspace.

Contact Us

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