



# PLANNING TOOLKIT FACT SHEET

## *Agricultural & Natural Resource Protection Zoning*

[planningtoolkit.org](http://planningtoolkit.org)

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the 2017 Natural Resources and Conservation Service's Inventory, only 15.5 percent of Pennsylvania's land is developed.

Over 50 percent of the state is forested, and approximately 24 percent is taken up by agriculture.

So why do municipalities need to enact zoning to protect their agricultural and natural features?

Like many other states, PA is growing. Already the sixth most populous state with a total residency of over nearly 13 million, PA 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.

Besides the history and aesthetic value of these spaces, PA has long benefitted from agricultural and outdoor recreation as economic drivers. In 2019, the state's "recreation economy" brought in \$13 billion, placing PA in sixth place nationally.

Additionally, revenues from agricultural, food and wood products exceeded \$1 billion in export dollars in 2000, and the 2017 Census of Agriculture shows that

21 percent of 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 and agricultural easements can also be encouraged to provide protection.

### **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 for stormwater management, wellhead protection and conservation easements.

### **DRAWBACKS**

- Not everyone in local government may support protection zoning.



- Some farming activity can cause environmental challenges.
- Preservation does not have the immediate, short-term tax benefits provided through conversion to residential, commercial or other uses.

## **RESOURCES**

### ***Zoning Guides and Examples***

- [WeConserve PA - Agricultural Protection Zoning](#)
- [Lancaster County - Agricultural Zoning District Guidelines](#)
- [Chester County Planning Commission – Effective Agricultural Zoning](#)
- [PA 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 - Farmland Preservation Program](#)
- [Perry County Conservation District - Farmland Preservation Program](#)
- [PA Farmland Preservation Association](#)

### ***Supporting Documents & Statistics***

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

## **RELATED FACT SHEETS ON PLANNINGTOOLKIT.ORG**

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

### **TIPS TO CONSIDER**

- PROMOTE ENROLLMENT OF FARMS AS AGRICULTURAL SECURITY AREAS (ASAS) -- THE FIRST STEP IN THE EASEMENT PROGRAM.
- PROVIDE INCENTIVIZED ZONING TO KEEP DEVELOPMENT CLOSE TO TOWNS & HIGHWAYS.
- FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE/ VALUABLE AREAS & PRIME AGRICULTURAL AREAS WITHIN THE MUNICIPALITY.
- CONSIDER WORKING WITH LOCAL CONSERVANCIES & PRESERVATION GROUPS TO CREATE A NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY.
- ESTABLISH AGRICULTURAL PROTECTION & 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.



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