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February 10, 2020

RE: Joint Finance Committee hearing

The League of Women Voters of Delaware encourages the Joint Finance Committee to support a \$10 million funding allocation for farmland preservation, as recommended by Gov. Carney.

Our state's farmland preservation program is known to be so even-handed in its conservation easement process that it is a certified agency with the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, subject to fewer reviews when it requests this federal assistance. Last year that assistance was \$5 million, and this year the same grant is expected. In 2009 our farmland preservation program was honored by The Nature Conservancy of Delaware with its Public Service Award, another testament to its fairness.¹

Consistency on the part of the State Legislature in allocating an annual \$10 million is important and effective in keeping the program viable. In the years when full funding (\$10 million) is available, applications to the program experience a major uptick in number, compared to years when few or no funds are available. The program's popularity, in turn, helps to support the state's largest economic driver. Agriculture brings in close to \$8 billion annually to Delawareans.²

The farmland preservation program not only supports the farming industry by which many residents earn their living, but it supports the farms which add intangible values to our quality of life. Delaware farms provide locally accessible foods and they provide the bucolic loveliness which we all enjoy as we drive through the countryside. Researchers associated with the nearby Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (Philadelphia's "WILMAPCO") have even computed the dollar value of the ecological value of farmland and other open space.³

The League urges the Joint Finance Committee to support a \$10 million allocation for farmland preservation.

¹ Austin Short, in an email communication dated Feb. 6, 2020.

² US Dept. of Agriculture, "Delaware Agriculture," ~2010 https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Delaware/Publications/DE%20Ag%20Brochure_web.pdf

³ "The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania," 2017 <https://www.dvrpc.org/Reports/11033B.pdf>