



2400 W. 17th St., Clash Wing
Wilmington, DE 19806-1311
lwvde@comcast.net
February 16, 2021

RE: Joint Finance Committee hearing for the Department of Agriculture; in support of \$10 million for farmland preservation

The League of Women Voters of Delaware supports a \$10 million funding allocation for farmland preservation. As we explore the importance of funding for this program, please keep in mind that the initial amount allocated to farmland preservation in 1995 from all state sources was \$12 million. Accounting for an accumulated inflation rate of 2.10% per year, that would be about \$20 million in today's dollars. The amount the Department of Agriculture is requesting from the Legislature is modest in comparison.

As you know, the League has a rich history of fairness and equity. There may be no program in all of Delaware that is more fair than this one, designed to keep viable our state's most economically significant industry. The American Farmland Trust puts Delaware's farmland preservation second only to New Jersey's in terms of effectiveness, according to a report published in 2020.¹

Crucial to the success of this program is consistency in funding. Although this year has been fairly disastrous in many ways, it's important to keep the funding steady for this \$8 billion industry. Another American Farmland Trust report points out Delaware as number 10 of the 12 states with the most threatened agricultural land, noting that a successful agriculture industry is crucial in the face of extreme disruptions.² The particular threat, according to the report, is low-density residential development, a phenomenon that fragments the landscape and disrupts agricultural economies.

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

¹ Coastal Point, *Delaware Aglands Program ranks second in U.S. for preserving farmland* June 22, 2020 https://www.coastalpoint.com/news/business/agriculture/delaware-aglands-program-ranks-second-in-u-s-for-preserving-farmland/article_5570b2fa-b4d2-11ea-b555-2fc550145c39.html

² American Farmland Trust, 2020 *What's at stake when we pave over, fragment and otherwise fail to protect farmland from the disruptions of development?* <https://farmland.org/fut-national-pr/>

³ Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission *The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania*, 2017 <https://www.dvrpc.org/Reports/11033B.pdf>

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