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November 12, 2021

**In support of a \$10 million budget item for farmland preservation
Presented at Dept of Agriculture Hearing on FY 2023 Budget Request
Before the Office of Management and Budget
November 2021**

The League of Women Voters of Delaware supports a \$10 million funding allocation for farmland preservation. Delaware's agland preservation program was not only ranked second in the nation in terms of effectiveness by the American Farmland Trust,¹ but it also has the ongoing support of all three counties, as evidenced by their annual monetary commitments to the program. We know that farmers themselves love the program when we see that they willingly give up an average of 59 percent of their development rights value in order to preserve their farms.

A couple of years ago, I heard a senator say something along the lines of, "Well, yeah, Delaware's agland preservation is good, but we've already preserved enough farmland." The truth is, we still have a long way to go. We've now preserved 141,000 acres of farmland, but our total farmland acreage is about 530,000.² So 141,000 is only about 27% of the whole. With a goal of 50%, that leaves a lot of acreage still to preserve.

In July of this year Gov. Carney commented on the importance of growing our food locally during COVID19. "Delaware's Aglands Preservation Program has been critical to keeping our farms in production. We can all agree through the pandemic we learned how important family farmers are to ensuring food including fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and meat are readily available. Preserving farmland is not just about passing a farm down to the next generation. It's about making sure future generations have food grown locally available to feed their families."³

Ensuring that our agricultural community thrives also makes good sense when you consider how important it is to reduce vehicle miles traveled, and to slow the advance of climate change.

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 <https://downloads.usda.library.cornell.edu/usda-esmis/files/5712m6524/tq57pj927/rx914h75j/fnlo0221.pdf>

³ <https://news.delaware.gov/2021/07/21/delaware-has-preserved-143000-acres-of-farmland-after-25th-round/>

Of course, the farmland preservation program supports the farming industry by which many residents earn their living, but it also supports the farms which add value to our quality of life. Delaware farms provide the idyllic beauty which we all enjoy as we drive through the countryside. Researchers have computed the ecosystem service benefits of Lancaster County at \$483 million, in addition to the economic production value of the agriculture itself.⁴ With agriculture the largest industry in Delaware, the ecosystem value would also be sizable in our own state.

The League urges the Governor to include in his budget an allocation of \$10 million for farmland preservation.

⁴ Aaron Schwartz and Maya Kocian, "Beyond Food: The Environmental Benefits of Agriculture in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania," *Earth Economics* (2014)