



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF DELAWARE

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November 13, 2023

Re: Office of Management and Budget hearing for the Delaware Department of Agriculture, in support of \$10 million funding for Aglands protection

The League of Women Voters of Delaware encourages the Office of Management and Budget to support farmland preservation at \$10 million for 2025.

The League considers this funding an investment not an expense. All Delawareans benefit from farming in our state, with over \$1 billion in agricultural sales,¹ more than 8,500 jobs, and food security and resilience provided by the wide range of locally grown crops such as sweet corn, watermelons, lima beans, soybeans, plus dairy and chickens.² We must support this way of life upon which we all depend by keeping Delaware's productive farmlands dedicated to food production and keeping Delawareans deeply connected to our food sources by protecting our local farms.

In addition, loss of Delaware's forestlands need attention. Delaware's forests, protected and working alike, ensure quality of life in our state with cleaner water, flood protection, wood resources, wildlife habitat, protection against climate change and recreational space. Yet reports show 43,000 acres of forest cleared in Sussex County since 1998 - almost an acre of forest alone cleared for each of the new 55,000 Sussex homes and businesses.³

Such low density growth (one home or less per acre) points to a concerning national trend in which relatively few homes spread out over large areas lead to wholesale loss of farming and forest in these areas.⁴ Protecting Delaware's farm and forest lands needs to be funded urgently before these resources are lost permanently.

The League applauds the permanent protection of over 151,000 farmland acres achieved this past year, much thanks to Governor Carney's historic \$20 million farmland preservation investment in 2023.⁵ While 60 farms were protected with this extra funding, farmers are clearly in need with 300 farms currently applying for farmland preservation.⁶

¹ Delaware Prosperity Partnership. (2019, August 5). *Agribusiness Thrives in Delaware*. Business in Delaware | Delaware Prosperity Partnership. <https://www.choosedelaware.com/success-stories/agribusiness-thrives-in-delaware/>

² Delaware Prosperity Partnership. (n.d.). *Choose Delaware: Food & Agriculture*. Delaware Prosperity Partnership. <https://www.choosedelaware.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Food-Production-Agriculture-Sector-Sheet.pdf>

³ Barrish, C. (2023, September 18). Without legal protections, Sussex County has lost at least 43,000 acres of forest in 25 years. *WHYY*. <https://whyy.org/articles/delaware-sussex-county-woodlands-vanishing-development-consevation/>

⁴ American Farmland Trust. (2020). *Farms under Threat: The State of the States Executive Summary*. American Farmland Trust. https://farmlandinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/AFT_FUT_SoS_ExecutiveSummary.pdf

⁵ Delaware Department of Agriculture. (2023, September 21). Delaware Aglands Hits Milestone Permanently Preserving Over 150,000 Acres. *State of Delaware News*. <https://news.delaware.gov/2023/09/21/delaware-aglands-hits-milestone-permanently-preserving-over-150000-acres/>

⁶ Scuse, M. T. (2023). *Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Talking Points for OMB*. <https://budget.delaware.gov/budget/fy2025/documents/agency-remarks/ag.pdf>

The League strongly supports every effort to protect these resource lands, with at least a \$10 million investment in farmland preservation this coming year.

Respectfully submitted by Peggy Schultz, schultz_peggy@yahoo.com.