

Three Pennsylvania counties ready

Prime farmland mapped, explained

HARRISBURG - The first of hundreds of county maps to show locations of the nation's "prime farmland" has been published by the Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. The map is of Peach County, Georgia, one of 122 counties in 48 states being inventoried this year for a nationwide "important farmlands inventory." In Pennsylvania, prime and unique lands have been identified in three counties - Adams, Columbia and Erie. Maps are now being prepared for these counties.

Support urged

HARRISBURG - Secretary of Agriculture Raymond J. Kerstetter last week urged Pennsylvania dairymen shipping milk to the Federal Order 4 (Middle Atlantic) marketing area to support a referendum calling for a seven-cent per hundredweight checkoff to support milk advertising and promotion.

"Such an increase for the present five-cent rate is necessary to maintain the level of present milk promotion activities at the national and local level," Kerstetter said. "Like everything else, the cost of advertising and promotion is going up. Failure to keep in step will mean that vitally important milk promotion will slide backward from want of funds. Only by maintaining a high level of fluid milk consumption can dairymen hope to obtain a favorable blend price."

Kerstetter made the recommendation at the urging of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Advisory Council, made up of representatives of the leading farmer organizations and milk cooperatives.

The Council pointed out that the U. S. Department of Agriculture has recommended amending the rate of deduction from five to seven cents as the result of a public hearing requested by four cooperative members of the Penmarva Dairymen's Federation, Inc.

The advertising and promotion program conducted with the deducted funds is voluntary in that each producer, on a quarterly basis, may request a refund of the money withheld from his pool proceeds.

If this referendum fails, there will be no checkoff for milk promotion. Another referendum must be held to revert to the five-cent checkoff.

Most of these counties have been under intense pressure from urban development. An additional 154 counties have been selected for inventory in 1977.

Pennsylvania counties to be mapped in 1977 include Bucks, Philadelphia, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Berks and Lancaster.

The agency hopes to complete inventories and publish colored maps for each of the 1200 counties, or more than one-third of the nation, by 1980.

Prime farmland, for purposes of the SCS inventory, is that land best suited for producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oil seed crops. Farmland already converted to urban uses or highways is not considered prime farmland, even though it may have been at some earlier time.

Technical criteria for identification of prime farmland are based on soil characteristics.

The county by county survey will provide the detailed information needed to support new department policy to help keep the nation's best farmland, range and forest lands from going into nonagricultural uses.

USDA has urged all federal agencies to adopt the policy that federal activities that take prime farmland should be carried out only when there are no suitable alternative sites and when the activities meet an overriding public need.

Many state, county and municipal officials and planning agencies share USDA's concern for preservation of prime farmlands and are expected to find the maps useful in

making their own land use decisions.

SCS estimates that 250 million acres of U. S. lands presently in croplands are prime farmland. That is about two-thirds of the present cropland acreage. Some 24 million additional acres of prime farmland not now being used for crops could be converted to cropland simply by beginning tillage. Other prime farmland already has been committed to such use as high density forest, wildlife areas, farmsteads, and farm roads.

Of prime farmlands still available for future cropland use, a sizeable bite is taken each year by urban expansion. Another bite goes under water for lakes and reservoirs. Still more acres are "leap-frogged" by suburbs that build some distance from urban centers.

Leap-frogged acres seem destined eventually to be urbanized unless legislative action is taken to keep them in farming, according to the conservation agency.

Each county map published by SCS will show the location of prime farmland, additional farmland of statewide or local importance and unique far-

mland. The latter are those acres particularly well suited for growing a specific crop of high value, such as grapes in Erie County and fruit in Adams County.

Each inventory is being conducted by SCS field personnel and appropriate state officials using completed soil surveys as the basis of the inventory.

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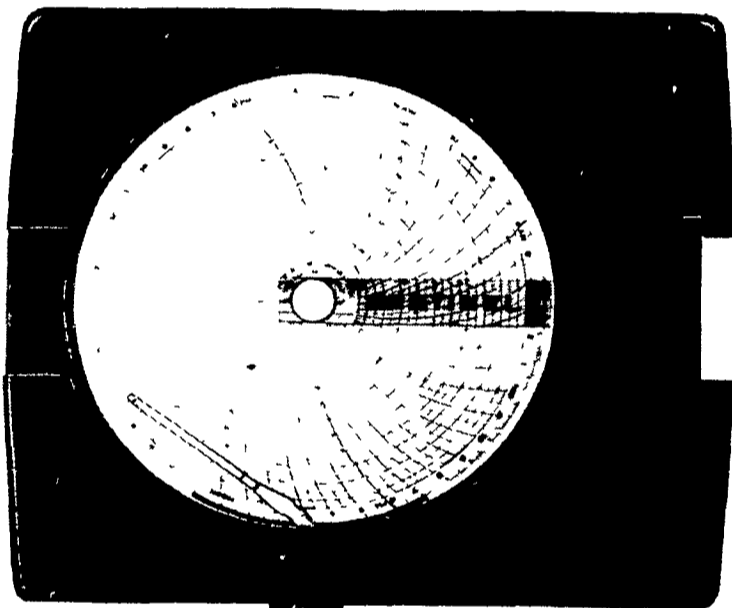
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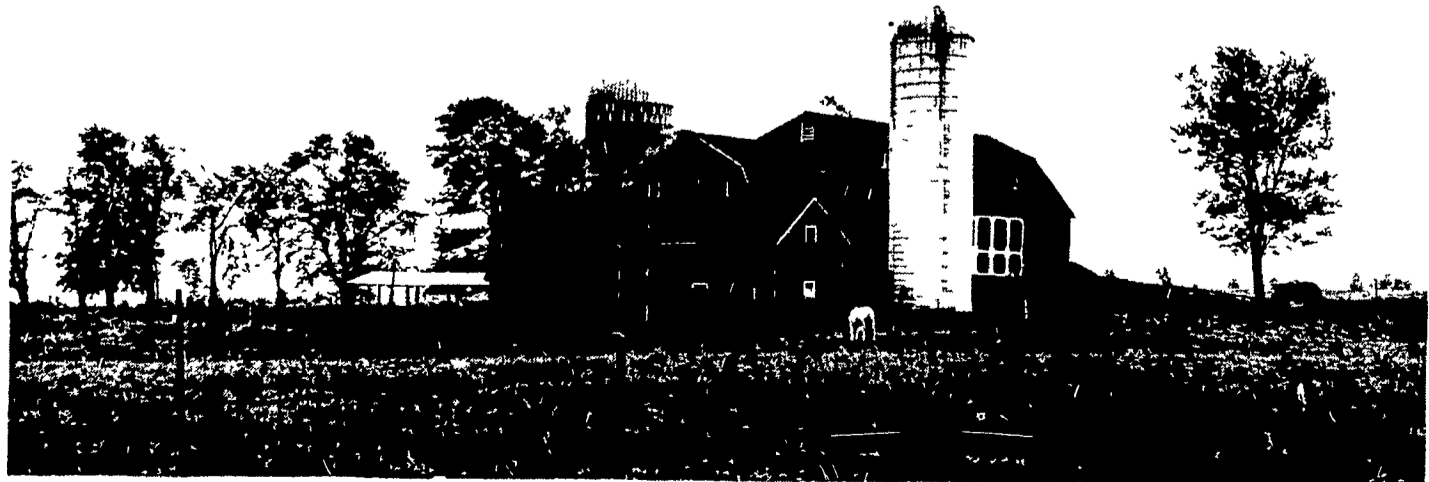
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