

How Baltimore County plans to save its farms

BALTIMORE, Md. — Today Baltimore county, Maryland could be characterized as a land of suburbs and steel plants, shopping centers and industrial parks. Once upon a time, this county adjoining the city of Baltimore was mostly farmland. In the last three decades

the population has increased two-and-a-half times, from 270,000 in 1950 to 686,000 in 1977. Continued steady growth is predicted for the remainder of the century. There are still 850 farm operators in Baltimore County, but just about all the farm supply dealers and food processors are gone. The citizens of Baltimore

County, like citizens in many other parts of the nation, have decided to try to hold on to their remaining farmland — an irreplaceable natural resource. Their new and still evolving plan for farmland preservation shows real promise, says Gerald F. Vaughn, Delaware extension community and resource development coordinator, and may be worth looking into for our own future needs in Delaware.

It relies on restrictive zoning plus compensation to farm-owners for losses in land value caused by the zoning.

According to a report by the Farmland Preservation Institute, Inc. of Bethesda, Md., Baltimore County Council has adopted the master plan formulated over the past three years.

The Council has also established new regulations for an agricultural zone and three other resource conservation zones; has passed enabling legislation to permit the county to participate in the state farmland preservation program; and has committed itself to use a growth management system to carry out the master plan.

Growth will be encouraged in the areas with adequate roads, sewers, and other public services, but discouraged in the agricultural zone and some of the resource conservation zones. To enforce the con-

trolled growth philosophy, no building permits will be issued anywhere in the county lacking adequate facilities such as water, sewerage, and transportation.

While all of the techniques in the Baltimore county approach to farmland preservation have been used elsewhere, the combination of agricultural zoning, voluntary agricultural districts, and purchase of development rights is unique.

According to Vaughn, one of the most promising aspects of the approach is that agricultural preservation is treated as part of a larger framework involving a master plan and a growth management system.

Most of the county's farmland and forest acreage has been placed within the agricultural zone, in which no lot smaller than two acres may be subdivided; a lot of two to 100 acres may be subdivided into no more than two lots; and lots of more than 100 acres may be subdivided into no more than one lot for every 50 acres.

Permitted use within the agricultural zone include homes for farmers and their tenants, roadside stands, and, by special exception, such agricultural support uses as farm machinery sales and service, farm supply companies and food processing plants.

This provision was in-

cluded at the behest of farmers in the hopes that it may provide the opportunity for agribusiness to re-establish itself in the county.

Under the terms of Maryland's farmland preservation plan, the county is setting up voluntary agricultural districts and instituting a program for purchase of development rights.

The particulars of this aspect of the county plan are still under discussion, but farmer acceptance of restrictive zoning was conditioned on having a development easement program in place quickly.

The state provides 60-40 matching funds to counties

that wish to purchase development rights.

Baltimore County's Agricultural Advisory Board has recommended the purchase of development rights on roughly 85,000 acres, or about half the total farmland acreage in the county, over the next 20 years. The county plans to buy development rights to 4200 acres each year, at an average cost of \$1800 per acre.

This averages out to an annual cost of over \$7.5 million and a total cost of \$150 million — certainly a major item in the county budget.

But Baltimore County is relatively affluent and anxious to preserve its remaining farmland.

E-town Pig and Rabbit

Club elects officers

MARIETTA — The Elizabethtown Pig and Rabbit Club held its reorganizational meeting at the home of Warren Heisey, the club leader.

Officers elected were: Stanley Heisey, president; Kirby Umholtz, vice-president; Bruce Sipling, secretary-treasurer; Wayne Gish and Steven Heisey, song leaders; Jeff Wagner

and Randy Watts, game leaders; and Scott Sipling, news reporter.

Kirby Umholtz and Bruce Sipling were also appointed County Council representatives.

Nancy Meyers gave a brief rundown on future 4-H activities.

The club's next meeting is set for May 2 at Jean Wagner's home.



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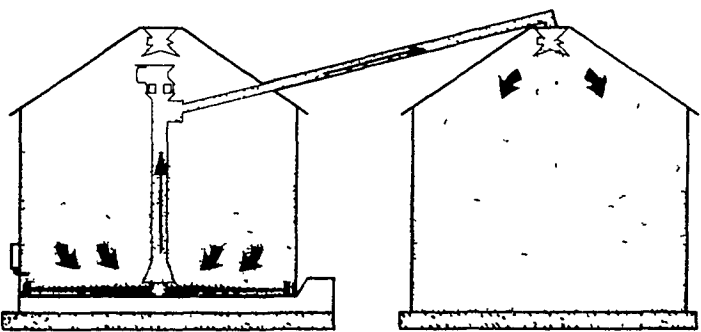
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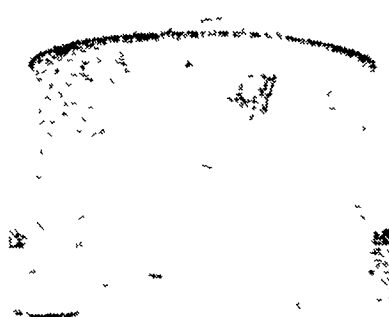
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