

Ag land changes studied in Md.

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — How well do local appointed and elected officials follow ordinances that govern changes in land use in rural areas?

In one study area - Frederick County, Md. - they generally do a good job of following zoning ordinances, according to a team of agricultural and resource economists at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Planning commission staff and members of the board of county commissioners decided or recommended in favor of approving 86% of the rezoning requests that conformed to the county's Comprehensive Zoning Plan over a 10-year period.

Of the two bodies, planning commission staff members

adhered more closely to the plan, say the researchers, who conducted their study for the university's Agricultural Experiment Station (UMAES).

In spite of that fact, however, "It appears relatively easy to move land out of agriculture in Frederick County" and into other land uses, says Neal Bliven, the study's senior investigator.

Of the 59 rezoning requests analyzed by Bliven, Billy Lessley and Tim Phipps, 73% of those involving applications for change from agricultural to other land use were approved.

Those changes seemed to lean more toward industrial land use, rather than commercial land use.

While their study indicates the relative ease of removing land

from agricultural production, it also shows that it is more difficult to remove large sections of land from the county's Agricultural Zoning District.

Says Bliven: Land parcels most likely to be preserved for agricultural use are 150 acres or larger and exist in areas designated for agricultural use by the county's Comprehensive Plan.

Agricultural land with the greatest propensity to "leak" into the broader land market, say the researchers, included parcels smaller than 150 acres and intended for industrial activities.

The 10-year study period indicated that the county commissioners tended to favor zoning changes to industrial, rather than commercial land use.

The three researchers say the

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models they used to evaluate Frederick County's zoning performance can be used in other jurisdictions to predict the outcome of rezoning requests.

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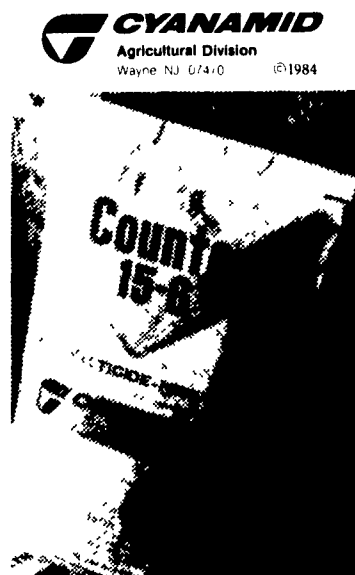
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