

Study Broadens Knowledge Of Farm Conservation Easements

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A new study on agricultural easement programs finds that use of this land conservation tool is most prevalent in suburban and semi-rural parts of major metropolitan areas-counties with populations of more than 100,000 that have been experiencing rapid population growth for years.

"A National View of Agricultural Easement Programs" is the most in-depth and comprehensive analysis of agricultural easement programs undertaken in the United States. This report, the first in a series to be issued from the study, profiles 46 agricultural easement programs in 15 states-nearly half of all publicly funded farmland protection programs in the nation.

The 46 programs studied have spent a total of \$1.8 billion to protect 887,000 acres on 5,800 farms. The study was done by American Farmland Trust and the Agricultural Issues Center, University of California, in collaboration with Farm Foundation.

"This study reveals a diversity

of ways that farm conservation easement programs are conceived, managed and funded," said project director Alvin D. Sokolow, University of California-Davis. "What all of the programs have in common, however, is that they were launched by a show of strong public support for farmland protection. This common conviction supported the bond issues, revenue measures and public deliberations needed to establish and maintain the programs."

Agricultural easements allow landowners to sell the development rights on their farms to government or nonprofit organizations in exchange for agreeing to keep the land permanently available for agriculture. The use of farm easements has grown exponentially since the 1970s; today twenty-six states have at least one publicly funded easement program at the state or local level.

One interesting finding was that the cost of agricultural easements-generally the difference between the market and agricultural values of the land-varies tremendously. "The per acre cost

of individual easement transactions ranges from a few hundred dollars in rural areas, to close to \$100,000 in a few metropolitan locations with intense development pressure," Sokolow explained.

Although the average price of easements for all 46 programs studied was approximately \$2,000 per acre, the report explains that easements are often worth far more than their price tags. "Donations by landowners for tax benefits can help lower the price of easements and sweeten the deal for communities wishing to protect farmland," said Julia Freedgood, director of American Farmland Trust's Technical Assistance Services.

The report, "A National View of Agricultural Easement Programs," along with maps of land protected through most of the 46 programs studied, is available at www.farmland.org and www.farmfoundation.org. Additional reports from the study will address acquisition strategies, land use planning and the impacts and effectiveness of easement programs.

'Cook's Miss Attitude' At First Annual Sale

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — "The bidding starts at \$2,000," said auctioneer John Spiker at the first annual Keystone of Excellence Simmental Sale.

The cattle auction was conducted in the Sale Arena of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex on Sunday. Bidding ranged from \$225 for embryos of KCF Lorin 6G, exhibited by J & J Farms, to \$3,900 for a polled purebred, Cook's Miss Attitude, exhibited by John W. Cook.

Cook's Miss Attitude was noted as the sale feature. Her dam was grand champion female at the 2000 Keystone International Livestock Exhibi-

tion (KILE) at the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, and won her division at the American Royal in Kansas City.

The show and sale were sponsored by the Pennsylvania Simmental Association. Joe Messick, association president, kicked off the sale when he said, "We have an impressive lineup of cattle to be sold today. They have proven to be excellent at the state, national and international shows. I'm positive that they can take each of us to that level."

Ten embryos, four bred females, 21 open heifers, and two bulls were sold at the event.

Raw Milk Information Meeting Oct. 20

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) announces a day-long symposium for concerned producers who sell, or would like to sell, raw milk and raw milk products directly to the public.

This informational gathering will be Monday, Oct. 20, at the Lan-

caster Farm and Home Center. Doors open at 8 a.m. and activities are scheduled to begin promptly at 9 a.m. In addition to farmers, others attending will include representatives of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, as well as interested consumers and activists.

The morning session will feature three speakers — Tim Wightman, Lee Dexter, and Mark McAfee — who will share their creative approaches to complex raw milk sales regulations. Hailing from Wisconsin, Texas, and California respectively, these three will weave together their unique stories with a common thread: finding effective responses to the growing public demand for fresh, unpasteurized dairy products. After lunch, a question-and-answer panel with speakers and other invited guests will be followed by a short planning and strategy session.

A requested donation of \$10 per adult and \$5 per child will be collected at the door. Lunch is potluck style. Sandwiches will be provided — please bring a non-meat dish to share.

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