

Chapter Six:

Agriculture

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Goal

Preserve 100,000 acres of tillable agricultural land for the production of agricultural products and promotion of related agribusiness

The Significance to Carroll County

The preservation of agricultural land and the continuation of viable farming and agribusiness uses has traditionally been a major priority in Carroll County. Approximately 160,000 acres, or 55 percent of the land area of the County, is currently being used for agriculture. The majority of the active farms in the County are on lands currently zoned Agriculture or Conservation. The agricultural goal and threshold are directed at preserving the land used for agriculture. Maintenance of a large agricultural land base will assure that farming can continue into the future.

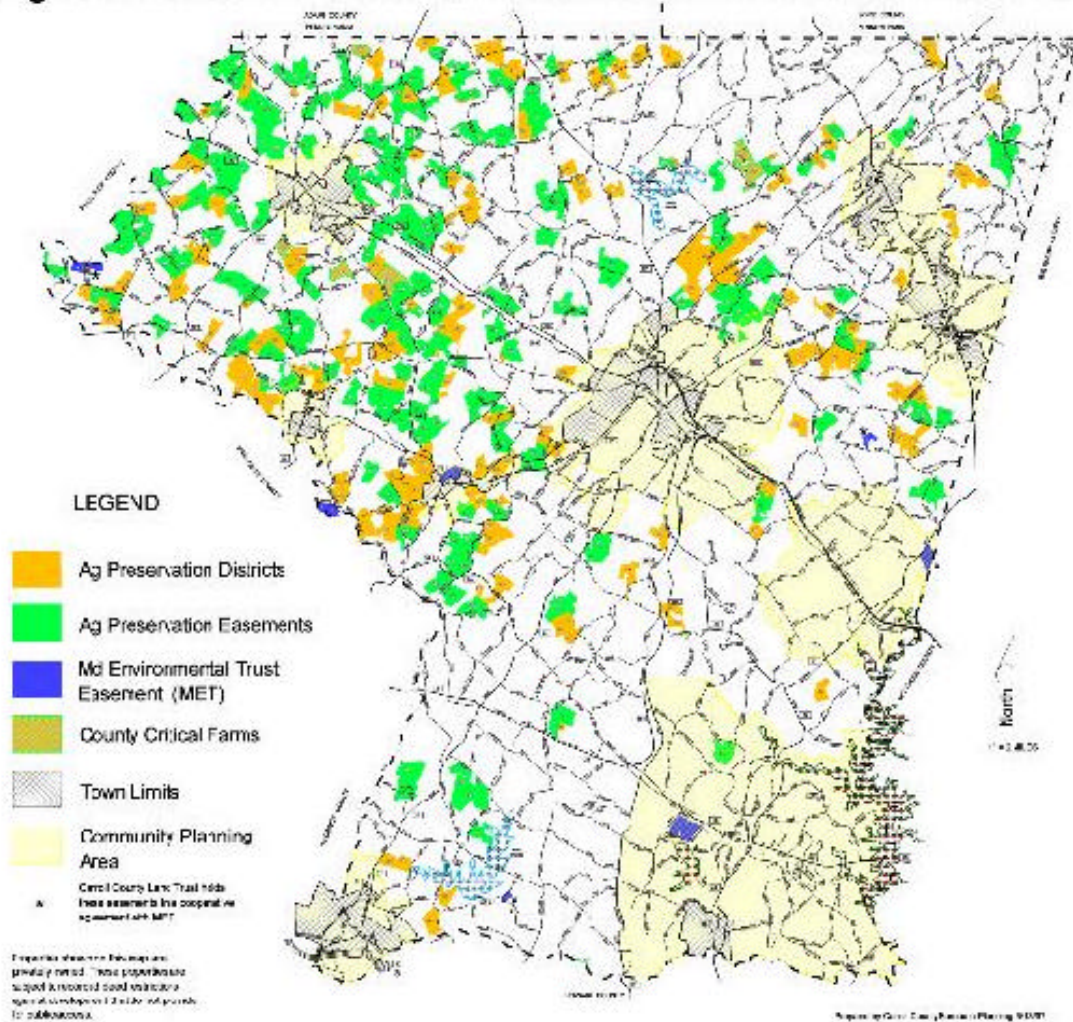
With a market value of all products sold of \$71.27 million dollars, according to the 1997 Agriculture Census, agriculture continues to be an important industry in Carroll County. Of the major grain crops produced in Maryland, Carroll ranks third in corn, second in oats, fifth in barley, and eighth in wheat. The County is ranked third in dairy, first in table eggs, third in beef, eighth in hogs and pigs, fourth in sheep, and fourth in the number of horses and ponies. Approximately 9,400 people are directly employed in farming in the County. Additional jobs are created and revenues generated in the agribusiness sector which supports the farming industry.

Preserving farmland provides many additional benefits to the citizens of Carroll County over and above any economic gains. Environmental and water quality are preserved through the careful stewardship of the County farmer. The rural working landscape provides open space and unparalleled views across the countryside. The overall “quality of life” experienced in Carroll County is enhanced through preserving agricultural lands and the agricultural heritage. Preservation also reduces the future need for provision of services to these areas, thereby reducing the cost of providing services.

The Challenge to Carroll County

Agricultural lands in Carroll County were converted to other uses at a rate of 1,800 acres/year between 1982 and 1992, according to the U.S. Farm Census. Some of this farmland had been planned for residential and industrial/commercial uses. On average, 300 lots per year were created in the Agricultural Zoning District during that same time period. With an average lot size of four acres, this development reduced acreage in the zone available for agricultural uses by 1,200 acres per year. Even though there was relatively little development in the Conservation District before 1988 because of the

Carroll County Agricultural Land Preservation & Donated Conservation Easements



economic feasibility of developing on large 3-acre lots, a total of 1,500 lots were created in the Zone during the 1982-92 period, reducing farm land by more than 4,500 acres.

Carroll County has been actively working to preserve agricultural land since the Maryland State Agricultural Land Preservation Program was developed in 1979. As of July of 2000, a total of 33,758 acres were permanently preserved with purchased easements prohibiting future development. At the current funding level and easement value per acre, it will take at least 20 years to permanently preserve 100,000 acres, the

estimated acreage needed to keep agriculture and agribusiness strong. Development trend analysis predicts that the zoning capacity will be reached in 12 years in 2012.

If the preservation trends continue, only 73,000 acres will be permanently preserved. Additional acreage will be available for farming in “zoning remainders”, that portion of a farm remaining after all lot rights are exhausted, but a change in zoning could change this. Residential sprawl development will also have increased throughout the District. From an historical perspective in the County, as the density of non-agricultural uses in an area increases, animal intensive agriculture operations and major investments in agriculture are reduced. Conflicts between the farmer and non-farm neighbors increase, and the confidence in the permanence of farming decreases.

The Choice: Goals, Policies, Thresholds, & Recommendations

Goal

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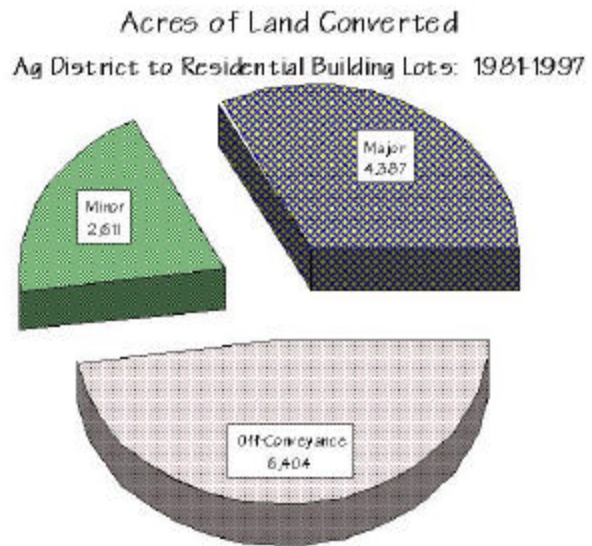
Policies

A. The permanent preservation of at least 100,000 acres of tillable agricultural land will be accomplished primarily through agricultural land preservation easement programs. Agriculturally-zoned land will not be further downzoned.

B. In the County easement program, all parcels with Agricultural zoning that meet the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation criteria will have an equal opportunity to offer to sell an easement.

C. Funding for Agricultural Land Preservation will be a priority in Carroll County to uphold the County’s goals and policies and reinforce its commitment to preserving the County’s rural character.

D. Non-traditional agricultural pursuits will be actively supported in recognition of the important role they play in the agricultural community.



Source: Carroll County Department of Planning 1997

E. Funding for Agricultural Land Preservation will be a priority in Carroll County to uphold the County’s goals and policies and reinforce its commitment to preserving the County’s rural character.

F. Non-traditional agricultural pursuits will be actively supported in recognition of the important role they play in the agricultural community.

COMMUNITY VIABILITY THRESHOLD

PERMANENTLY PRESERVE 100,000 ACRES OF TILLABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND BY THE YEAR 2020, PRESERVING A MINIMUM OF 3,750 ACRES OF AGRICULTURAL LAND PER YEAR FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS.

In 1996, the County increased the funding dedicated to preserving agricultural land to allow the permanent preservation of 2,000 acres per year. The threshold of 3,750 acres per year nearly doubles this commitment. The rationale for the increase is that a more aggressive program up front is necessary to prevent the loss of major agricultural areas currently at risk of changing to a more residential character. At any time, there is a certain portion of landowners who want or need to receive equity from their farmland. By expanding the options for preserving the land, it is hoped that less land will be converted to other uses.

Acreage to Achieve Threshold		
	Current Funding Status	To Achieve Threshold
Acreage Needed Under Permanent Easements	100,000	100,000
Acres Acquired Through 1999	34,000	34,000
Acres Remaining to Achieve Goal	66,000	66,000
Annual Acquisition (including Rural Legacy)	3,000	3,750
Years Required to Meet Threshold	22	18
Source: Carroll County Planning Bureau		

Recommendations

A. Exploring alternative funding mechanisms to accelerate the purchase of development rights.

B. Increase program participation by using an “installment purchase agreement” alternative, which provides tax-exempt interest for property owners who agree to sell an easement and defers the payment of principal for a set number of years.

C. Review, and update if necessary, areas zoned Conservation in the County and the provisions of the District as specified in the Carroll County Zoning Ordinance.

- D. Establish a public education program in the County on the value of preserving agricultural land for economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits to gain widespread commitment to agriculture preservation from the public.
- E. Support the Extension Office in improving the profitability and competitiveness of County farmers in both traditional and non-traditional agriculture, thereby reducing the turnover of agricultural lands.
- F. Review, and update if necessary, the principal and conditional uses and permitted lot sizes in the Agricultural and Conservation Zoning Districts to assure uses are appropriate and the lot sizes preserve the option for agriculture use.
- G. Encourage local residents to fund the purchase of adjacent farmland, either by outright purchase or funding the easement fee, to retain the property for perpetuity.
- H. Explore additional methods to preserve agricultural land, such as, but not limited to, tax incentives, abatements, and zoning overlays.

Fiscal Impact to the County

Preserving agricultural land has a positive fiscal impact on the County. The land that is preserved reduces the cost and need to extend facilities and services to those areas in the future. Although it may be less than the cost to extend and provide facilities and services to these areas, there is a cost to preserve this land.

The current Agricultural Land Preservation Program is funded through a combination of County General Funds, the County share of the Agricultural Transfer Tax, and General Obligation Bonds. The County utilizes State funds through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) and the Rural Legacy Program.

Ag Transfer Tax	\$.3 Million
County General Fund	3.0 Million
County Bonds	2.0 Million
State (Rural Legacy)	1.5 Million
State (MALPF)	<u>1.2 Million</u>
Total	\$8.0 Million

Eight million dollars acquires easements on approximately 3,636 acres per year at an average cost of \$2,200 per acre.

Funding for preservation easements increased considerably in fiscal year 2000 due to a State grant and the County's matching funds for the Little Pipe Creek Rural Legacy Area. Funding increased again in 2001 when the County added \$2.0M of revenue from bonds to provide for an Installment Purchase Agreement Program for the acquisition of easements.

The ability to sustain this level of easement acquisition depends on the willingness of the State to continue funding Rural Legacy beyond the initial 5 years and willingness of the Board of County Commissioners to continue the current level of County funding.

No one method alone is probably sufficient to permanently preserve 100,000 agricultural acres; therefore, a combination of the recommendations if implemented may make accomplishing the threshold financially feasible. The following table shows current funding sources and how the additional easement purchases could be financed.