

[Delaware Aglands Hits Milestone Permanently Preserving Over 150,000 Acres](#)

DOVER, Del. (September 21, 2023) — With the announcement of the 27th round of easement selections by the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation, Delaware has reached a new milestone, permanently preserving 151,257 acres of farmland.

“Preserving farmland protects Delaware’s agriculture heritage and its number one industry. That’s why we allocated \$20 million in last year’s budget to help preserve farms from the ground up,” said **Governor Carney**. “This year’s process was very competitive. After a review of 121 offers submitted, the Foundation selected 60 farms encompassing 5,353 acres to purchase the development rights, with an average discount rate of 47%, up 3% from the last round. I want to thank the Aglands team at the Department of Agriculture, the members of the General Assembly, and all who work to preserve this important part of Delaware’s history and economy.”

Four farms in New Castle County, 16 in Kent County, and 40 in Sussex County were preserved in this round.

“I want to thank the Governor and members of the General Assembly for increasing the funding for Aglands in last year’s budget to \$20 million,” said **Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse**. “It allowed us to greatly expand the program and permanently protect over 151,000 acres of Delaware farmland.”

The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation selects those farms approved for easement purchase using an impartial discounted ranking system that maximizes benefits for taxpayers. The Foundation does not own the land but purchases landowners’ development rights and places a permanent agricultural conservation easement on the property. Landowners must first voluntarily enroll their farm into a 10-year preservation district and are eligible for permanent preservation the year after they apply. In addition to more than 151,000 acres in permanent easements, Delaware’s Aglands Preservation Program has more than 45,500 acres of land enrolled in 10-year farmland preservation districts.

Along with the state funding, Delaware’s success in preserving farmland would not be possible without the assistance of the county governments and federal partners, such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and the Department of Defense’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program (REPI).

“Sussex County is proud once again to join in protecting farms and preserving our great agricultural heritage by taking part in the Delaware Aglands Program,” **Sussex County Administrator Todd F. Lawson** said. “Ag is the No. 1 industry in Sussex County, and it’s important now, more than ever, with a growing population and increased pressure on the agriculture industry, that we work hard to keep ag as the centerpiece to Delaware’s economy. The County Council’s contribution to Round 27, totaling nearly \$1 million, is the most ever, and it’s the boldest statement yet of the County’s unwavering commitment to ensuring agriculture remains a part of the landscape for generations to come.”

County governments can partner with the state program and add county funds to select properties in their areas, leveraging state resources for the greatest impact. In today’s announcement, the county governments provided over \$1.6 million to help purchase 22 easements in this round.

Levy Court President Terry L. Pepper said, “Kent County Levy Court is once again pleased to participate in Farmland Preservation in conjunction with the State of Delaware. We are pleased to announce that Kent County contributed \$200,000 in this round. Levy Court has helped to preserve over 75,019 acres of farmland since we have been participating in this program, not including this year’s 1,451 acres preserved in Round 27.”

Delaware’s statewide program made its first round of easement purchases in 1996 and has since preserved 22.6% of New Castle County farmland, 41.9% of Kent County farmland, and 21.7% of Sussex County farmland.

“New Castle County is dedicated to the preservation of open space and set an ambitious goal of preserving over 7,000 acres,” said **County Executive Meyer**. “Preserving the Dempsey Farm, which is a high-quality farm in the Level 4 growth area, is an efficient use of funds and will get us 3% closer to the County’s open space goals.”

The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation Easements are available for viewing through an online dashboard at <https://de.gov/agdashboard>.

At their last meeting, the Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation voted to extend district enrollment until October 31, 2023, to any agricultural landowners who want to preserve their farms. These landowners will have the opportunity to apply for Round 28 in 2024. Before the landowner can submit a bid to sell an easement, the farm must be enrolled in a preservation district.

Delaware farmers interested in preserving their farms should be sure they meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Property must be zoned for agriculture and not subject to any major subdivision plan.
 - The property meets the minimum Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) score of 170. LESA is a process that attempts to estimate the farm’s long-term viability based on the farm’s soil productivity, land use, and agriculture infrastructure on and around the farm. Scores range from 0-300. Aglands program staff calculate the LESA score when applications are received.
 - The property must be working farmland with at least \$1,000 in agricultural sales annually and, in general, have at least 10 acres of cropland.
 - Farms of 200 acres or more constitute an agricultural district.
 - Farms under 200 acres can enter the program if it is within 3 miles of an existing agricultural district.
- With 1,212 farms already preserved, it is rare that a farm under 200 acres does not meet these criteria.

Entirely forested properties in managed timber production can also enroll in the Forestland Preservation Program, which purchases Forestland Preservation Easements similar to Aglands Preservation.

For more information or to obtain applications related to the Delaware Aglands Preservation Program, interested landowners can visit <https://de.gov/aglands> or call (302) 698-4530.

The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation’s Board of Trustees includes representatives from agriculture and state agencies. Trustees are Mark Collins, chairman; James G. Vanderwende, vice-chairman; Janice Truitt, treasurer; William H. “Chip” Narvel Jr., secretary; Secretary of Agriculture Michael T. Scuse; State Treasurer Colleen C. Davis; Secretary of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Shawn Garvin; Peter Martin; Theodore P. Bobola Jr.; Robert Emerson; and H. Grier Stayton.

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Delaware

AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION

ROUND 27 SELECTIONS
SEPTEMBER 2023



Agriculture Selection

CURRENT PRESERVATION PROPERTIES

-  Agriculture District
-  Agriculture Easement
-  Forestland Preservation Area
-  Forestland Preservation Easement
-  Young Farmer Loan Easement
-  Public Lands

