

# Maintaining Ag Friendly Municipalities

## We need your help to keep our sense of place here in Chester County!

The county is implementing its *Agricultural Economic Development Strategic Plan* and your involvement at the municipal level is crucial. The Chester County Ag Council can help your municipality prepare for the future by understanding modern agriculture, what it needs to thrive, and how it can help benefit the environment, maintain historic structures, and provide agrarian viewsheds, in addition to keeping our local economy strong.

Agriculture is constantly changing, adapting to current trends, adopting technology, and embracing environmental practices; all redefining how food, fuel and fiber are produced.



## So why should you help?

### Ag is more diverse than ever

Agriculture is not the same as it was decades ago. Business models differ, the types of operations have increased and there are many different sales models, such as direct-to-consumer (on or off-farm) that producers can use. Agriculture can provide entertainment through a variety of ways, such as pick-your-own opportunities with the kids or wine tasting with friends.

### Ag is vital to economic success

The agricultural industry is a leading employer and tax generator throughout the county. It provides open working lands, which can help keep costs of local services low, such as police and fire protection, as opposed to when the land is developed. And economically successful farms are the best way to preserve open space.

### Ag is under pressure from residential development

As part of the Philadelphia metropolitan area, Chester County is under immense development pressure, which is expected to continue. This new growth often brings new residents who neither understand nor appreciate the realities of working lands, including the county's many vibrant and active farms.

### Ag zoning regulations may be out of date

The agricultural industry is more than large acre dairy or beef operations. The industry includes many types of farming, including small acreage production and climate-controlled businesses. As such, the regulations that once worked to protect farming in your communities may no longer be suitable.



## How can you help?

### **Make your zoning ag friendly ►**

Zoning ordinances should be updated regularly to reflect modern agricultural practices and the realities of Chester County's unique position in a major metropolitan area. These ordinances should identify agricultural preservation as a community goal, allow agricultural uses throughout the community, encourage secondary farm businesses, allow controlled environment agriculture, and permit agritainment.

### **Respect a farmer's right to farm ►**

By law, local municipalities must allow normal agricultural operations. Local municipalities should be sure they are complying with the state's Agricultural Communities and Rural Environments Act (ACRE).

### **Create agricultural security areas ►**

At the request of local farmers, municipalities can create Agricultural Security Areas that protect farmers from nuisance regulations, make it more challenging for government to take agricultural land, and allow farmers to apply to the state ag land preservation program.

### **Encourage farmers to preserve their land ►**

Nearly 44,000 acres of farmland have been preserved in the county through the state farmland preservation program, and local municipalities can encourage farmers to apply to this program by providing information and technical support.

### **Work with farmers to keep their businesses strong**

Farmers are so busy running their farms, they often don't have time to learn the ins and outs of government regulations. Local municipalities can help them navigate this process, potentially providing exemptions for building code, stormwater, and waste management requirements.

**If your municipality would like assistance with agricultural issues, please contact the Chester County Ag Council.**