



## ***Documenting the Economic Benefits of Agriculture***

Agriculture contributes to state and local economies as well as to the U.S. balance of trade through sales of farm products, job creation, support services and businesses. Farms and ranches give communities a sense of history, and distinctive landscapes often become lucrative magnets for tourism. AFT documents the local economic benefits of agriculture and develops strategies to enhance agricultural viability as part of economic development plans to ensure communities will enjoy the many public benefits of sustainable farms and well-managed farmland.

### **San Mateo County, California - Agricultural Industry Profile & Strategic Farmland Maps**

The Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) commissioned AFT to develop a profile of San Mateo County's agricultural industry, interview farmers and produce maps of trends on the county's best quality farmland. In our research, AFT found that less land is available for farming and that San Mateo County's agriculture is consolidating and becoming increasingly intensive. Over the past 25 years, the county's land in farms decreased by 45 percent—much of that in the last five years. Farmer interviews highlighted concern about increasing pressures from environmental regulations, changing federal trade policy (NAFTA), the lack of agricultural infrastructure and high input costs—including rental land and labor and the shrinking agricultural land base.

### **Santa Barbara County, California - Agricultural Resources Environmental/Economic Assessment Study (AREA)**

To demonstrate the importance of local agriculture in Santa Barbara County, AFT conducted research on the environmental and economic benefits local agriculture provides. We also identified challenges faced by farmers to expand and intensify their operations. AFT found that agricultural land has a direct and positive impact on environmental quality and that agriculture is up against many challenges, including that livestock industries are endangered; costs of land, labor and housing are increasing; land use patterns threaten the agricultural land base; and little land is available for agricultural expansion and intensification. While opportunities remain for agriculture to thrive in Santa Barbara, these were dependent on farm-friendly land use policies that support retail and value-added agriculture, keeping land available and affordable for agriculture, and the mediation of high land values and housing costs.

### **Delaware, State Department of Agriculture - Trends in Delaware's Growth and Spending**

Working with the Delaware State Department of Agriculture, AFT analyzed Delaware's development patterns and capital spending from 1900 to 1970 (every 10 years), and for selected years between 1974 and 2002, to identify connections between increasing growth, state spending and land consumption. AFT's analysis focused on population, total housing units, land use and land cover, acres of land consumed per housing unit, state capital spending, including cash expenditures and bonded debt, and spending for school bus transportation. The research revealed a clear connection between sprawl, the loss of farmland and increases in state spending. Since 1984, the land consumption rate in Delaware has tripled, while the capital budget per person has increased at a similar rate.

### **Manatee County, Florida - Economic and Fiscal Contributions of Agriculture**

To inform the development of a Rural Land Stewardship Program (RLSP) and planning decisions, Manatee County hired AFT to collect and analyze agricultural land use, economic and fiscal data. AFT conducted a three-part study to determine the current state of agriculture, the contribution of farmland and the larger agricultural industry to the county economy, and the feasibility of conducting a Cost of Community Services study to demonstrate how different land uses require and pay for public services.

### **Lake County, Illinois - Protecting the Future of Agriculture**

In order to develop recommendations for the future of agriculture in Lake County, Illinois, AFT analyzed the county's agricultural industry's contributions to the local economy and led focus group sessions with farmers to learn how they view the future of farming in the county. The Lake County Board of Supervisors incorporated AFT's recommendations into its land use plan.

### **Washington County, Illinois – Agriculture Helps Local Economy**

The Ozaukee Washington Land Trust asked AFT to illustrate the importance of agriculture to the local economy. AFT prepared an Agricultural Industry Profile for the county that included graphs about the average size and number of farms, number of agriculture-related businesses, employment impact of agriculture, agricultural industry output, market value of agricultural products sold, and the average value of farmland sales per acre.

### **Maryland's Upper Eastern Shore - Regional Economic Development Strategy for Resource-Based Industries**

The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) in Maryland sought to identify the key challenges facing agriculture, forestry and fisheries and to develop an economic development strategy to address those challenges. ESLC convened a Working Landscapes Task Force of local leaders to serve as project advisors and to advance the regional strategy, and then hired AFT to facilitate the process. AFT conducted background research, prepared a white paper, organized focus groups to elicit community input, and developed an agricultural economic development strategy for a six-county region of Maryland. The strategy offers an innovative model for communities where commodity-based agriculture and a variety of resource-based enterprises must adapt to globalization and development.

### **Berks and Schuylkill Counties, Pennsylvania**

The Berks County Community Foundation asked AFT to analyze the agricultural industry in Berks and Schuylkill counties. AFT conducted an eight-month assessment of agriculture in the two counties, including research, economic analyses, and discussions with farmers and local leaders. Working with a local advisory committee, AFT identified key issues and developed recommendations to address them and ensure a vital, sustainable agricultural industry in Berks and Schuylkill counties.