

# Alternatives for Preserving Farmland

*I've Got Bad News – and Good News!*

December 3, 2008

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- ❖ Term Easements – preserving farmland/forest with less than “in perpetuity” agreements
  - Poor financial choice
    - Typically around 70% of the cost for perpetuity
    - No tax advantages for owners
    - Fewer financing alternatives
  - Not politically popular
    - Citizens will spend for permanent – not temporary
    - Other means for short-term protection are cheaper
  
- ❖ Permanent Easements – permanent preservation with capital outlays
  - Up to 50% match from federal Farmland Protection Program
  - Significant leveraging of local and private resources
  - ½ the cost for state of term easements (see 70% above)
  - Doesn't happen often!
  
- ❖ Environmental Services Payments (ESP)
  - An alternative that avoids many pitfalls of term easements, improves the environment, and preserves farmland and keeps environmentally friendly farming profitable!
  - Concept:
    - Farmers can provide a number of “environmental services” to our community
    - Farms provide many of these at no cost to the public today!
    - Farms could provide more in the future – but they will need our help
    - Providing many of these services, with no compensation, makes it harder for farms to stay profitable – they may have to sell out!
    - By compensating farmers for these services citizens benefit both –
      - Higher quality of life
      - Cleaner environment
      - More farmland and open space
      - Local food and economic activity

- What are “environmental services?” Things like . . .
  - Air cleansing
  - Water filtration
  - Reduction of runoff and sedimentation
  - Flood abatement
  - Carbon sequestration
  - Wildlife habitat
  - Weather moderation
  - . . . and the list could go on!
- What could a program look like?
  - First, would require many stakeholders’ input to the program
    - Farmers, Conservation Districts, universities, citizens, etc.
  - 20-year contracts
  - Comprehensive BMPs; some examples of potential items
    - No-till cultivation
    - Forest management plan
    - Grassed waterways
    - Nutrient management
    - Filter strips
    - Integrated Pest Management
    - Reforestation
    - . . . and the list could go on
  - Landowners might bid per-acre rents for the term of the agreement
  - BMP performance would be monitored
  - Land would be protected from development for the term of the agreements
- **BOTTOM LINE!**
  - County and citizens improve their environment and quality of life
  - Farmers have greater assurances of BMPs and profitability for “environmental services”
  - Land is protected
  - Annual cost structure

**And who knows we might help stop GLOBAL WARMING!!**