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RMP Program: Agricultural Management & Sustainability
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<p>Issue Overview</p>	<p>Agriculture, if it is to remain viable in the New Jersey Highlands, requires a land base. The Highlands Region contains over 859,000 acres of which over 118,000 acres were agricultural land in 2002. These agricultural acres serve not only as important agricultural resources, but are essential to the residents of New Jersey for local availability of agricultural products, for the economic benefits of agricultural production, and for the rural landscape associated with agricultural areas.</p> <p>In order to protect these important farmland resources, preservation of farms throughout the Highlands Region must be encouraged and funded. Additionally, programs are needed that focus more on the practices farmers can use to achieve sustainable profitability, sustainable use of natural and management resources, and sustainable coexistence with non-farmers in a densely populated state.</p> <p>The preservation of farmland and the promotion of agriculture in the Highlands Region are two essential objectives of the Highlands Act. The New Jersey Legislature declared that the agricultural lands in active production in the Highlands Region are important resources of the State that should be preserved, and that the agricultural industry in the Highlands Region is a vital component of the economy, welfare and cultural landscape of the Garden State. The Legislature also declared that the maintenance of agricultural production and a positive agricultural business climate should be encouraged to the maximum extent possible wherever appropriate in the Highlands.</p>
<p>RMP Policies and Objectives Addressed</p>	<p>Policy 3.1.5. To promote farmland preservation within the Agricultural Resource Areas and accord priority to the preservation of agricultural lands within Agricultural Priority Areas, through less than fee acquisition, TDR, and other agricultural land conservation techniques.</p> <p>Policy 3.1.6. To ensure land uses within an Agricultural Resource Area minimize conflict with or support sustainable agriculture, or are compatible with cluster development that preserves agricultural lands, and support the resource protection requirements of the RMP.</p> <p>Objective 3.1.6.1. <i>Implementation of regulations which limit non-agricultural uses within an Agricultural Resource Area to those uses that support the preservation of farmland, the</i></p>

continued viability of the agricultural industry, are compatible with cluster development that preserves agricultural lands, and the resource protection requirements of the RMP.

Policy 3.1.7. To permit human development, including family and farm worker housing in Agricultural Resource Areas which are accessory to and/or supportive of sustainable agriculture, subject to compliance with the resource management programs of the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

Policy 3.1.10. To establish and implement resource management programs which protect agricultural resources during site plan or subdivision review and approval.

Objective 3.1.10.1. *Implementation of regulations which ensure non-agricultural land development within an Agricultural Resource Area protects and enhances agricultural production, protects important farmland soils, or other natural resource management and protection requirements.*

Objective 3.1.10.2. *Implementation of regulations which provide that all non-agricultural development which is proposed in an Agricultural Resource Area comply with open space design requirements to avoid conflicts between such development and agricultural activities and protect farmland and sensitive environmental resources.*

Objective 3.1.10.3. *Implementation of regulations which require mandatory clustering for residential development in a Agricultural Resource Area such that at least 80% of the parcel proposed for residential development is preserved as farmland or natural resource area.*

Objective 3.1.10.4. *Implementation of regulations which require that all land preserved as farmland or natural resource area as a result of clustering be subject to a conservation easement enforceable by the appropriate municipality and the Highlands Council.*

Policy 3.1.13. To advocate for the amendment of the Farmland Assessment Act to permit the inclusion of credits for the control of invasive species, white-tailed deer reduction programs, and the water value of a well-managed agricultural lands.

Policy 3.2.1. To encourage private and public owners of lands within an Agricultural Resource Area in the Conservation Zones to lease open lands to farmers and/or to manage open space lands in a manner which is compatible with adjoining agricultural uses.

Policy 3.2.2. To promote research and study, and support proposals to enhance the long-term viability of the agriculture industry in the Highlands Region through innovative programs with regard to health care, banking practices, housing, and labor.

Policy 3.2.3. To seek additional funding from any and all state and federal funding programs for agriculture within the Highlands Region.

Policy 3.2.4. To coordinate with other municipal, County, state, and federal agencies to ensure to the maximum extent practicable that other agency programs are coordinated with the resource protection requirements of the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

Policy 3.2.5 To promote and enhance innovative agricultural practices including direct marketing, farmers markets, road side stands, agro-tourism and community supported agriculture.

Policy 3.3.1. To prohibit the development of additional water and wastewater infrastructure in a Agricultural Resource Area within the Protection Zone and the Preservation Area, except where such additional infrastructure is necessary to address an existing public health concern, a redevelopment waiver, or to provide for minimum practical use in the absence of any alternative through issuance of a waiver by NJDEP.

Policy 3.3.2. To prohibit the development of additional water and wastewater infrastructure in a Agricultural Resource Area in a Conservation Zone, except

	<p>where such additional infrastructure is necessary to address the needs of an existing public health concern, mandatory clustering, or open space design development as approved by the Highlands Council.</p> <p>Policy 3.4.1. To promote the use of appropriate alternative and innovative wastewater treatment systems to provide enhanced protection of surface and ground water quality in the Conservation Zone.</p> <p>Policy 3.4.2. To promote efforts to increase Integrated Pest Management and Integrated Crop Management programs and other innovative management techniques that reduce pesticide and fertilizer use in conjunction with agricultural activities.</p> <p>Policy 3.4.3. To identify subwatersheds with elevated nitrate levels, develop management plans for enhancing water quality, and implementing those plans in ways that enhance agricultural viability wherever feasible.</p> <p>Policy 3.4.5 - To work with the State Agriculture Development Committee and the Garden State Preservation Trust to establish incentives for any landowner in the Highlands Region seeking to preserve land under the farmland preservation program that would be provided in exchange for the landowner agreeing to permanently restrict the amount of impervious surface and agricultural impervious cover on the farm to a maximum of five percent of the total land area of the farm.</p>
Program Summary	<p>This program inventories existing agricultural lands; establishes the resource value of agricultural lands; utilizes the ranking criteria in support of farmland preservation programs; maximizes the existing federal, State, and county farmland preservation and agricultural sustainability programs; and develops stewardship and sustainability programs that are essential to the residents of New Jersey for local availability of agricultural products, for the economic benefits of agricultural production, and for the rural landscape associated with agricultural areas.</p>
Identification of Agricultural Lands	<p>Program Description</p> <p>Agriculture is a vital component of the culture and the landscape of the Highlands Region. It provides economic benefits through agricultural production and maintaining the rural character of Highland’s communities. The loss of farmland over recent decades emphasizes the crucial need to promote and encourage a positive agricultural business climate. In order to accomplish this goal, agriculture lands the Highlands Council, collaborating with the NJ Department of Agriculture (NJDA), Highlands County Agriculture Development Boards (CADBs) and the State Agriculture Development Council (SADC) must first identify and inventory the scope of the agriculture industry in the Highlands Region, through use of NJDEP land use/land cover data, aerial photography, data on lands eligible for farmland assessment, agricultural surveys and other data sources.</p>
Establishment of Agriculture Preservation Priorities	<p>Program Description</p> <p>The viability of Highlands Region farming depends upon a healthy agricultural environment and land base that encourages long-term, commercially significant agriculture. To continue to achieve the objective of protecting farmland in the Highlands Region, the Council will identify productive agricultural lands through an assessment of their agricultural and natural resource and other values in order to prioritize those values for preservation. The purpose for designating resource values in agricultural areas is to preserve, stabilize, and enhance the primary agricultural land base that is being used for, or offers the greatest potential for continued, commercially significant agricultural production. High priority areas for agricultural preservation will be established in consultation with the SADC.</p>

<p><i>Implementation of Strategies for Agriculture Preservation by Maximizing Current Agriculture Preservation Funding Programs</i></p>	<p>Program Description One of the fundamental aspects of the Highlands Act is the emphasis on farmland preservation to ensure that public funds and other resources are focused on protection of critical Highlands resources. The <i>Sustainable Agriculture Technical Report</i> identifies nine federal, State, county, municipal, and nonprofit farmland preservation funding programs. The Highlands Council will collaborate and coordinate with agencies (in particular the NJDA and SADC), local governments, and local organizations to target and preserve natural and agricultural spaces in support of the RMP.</p>
<p><i>Implementation of Strategies for Agriculture Stewardship by Maximizing Current Agriculture Stewardship Funding Programs</i></p>	<p>Program Description The <i>Sustainable Agriculture Technical Report</i> also identifies 16 federal, State, county, municipal, and nonprofit conservation and stewardship funding programs. The Highlands Council will collaborate and coordinate with agencies (in particular the NJDA, SADC, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council (NJRC&D)), governments, and local organizations to properly manage the preserved natural and agricultural spaces in support of the RMP. This effort is necessary to ensure that the natural resources targeted for acquisition are not later lost through insufficient stewardship.</p>
<p><i>Establishment of Alternative/New Agriculture Preservation Programs</i></p>	<p>Program Description SADC in association with CADBs preserves farmland through the purchase of development easements. One criterion for prioritizing farmland is the percentage of land in crop production. As a result, a farm that is heavily forested may not be considered a priority for preservation by the SADC. Additionally, lots that are entirely forested with woodland management plans and are farmland assessed are not considered farms for purposes of SADC preservation. However, such lands are productive woodlands and also critical to protection of Highlands natural resources. The Highlands Council will collaborate with NJDEP and SADC to develop an adequate method to preserve forested lands through easements to allow them to remain in private ownership and properly maintained through woodland management, in addition to the TDR mechanism established through the Highlands Act.</p>
<p><i>Establishment of Alternative/New Agriculture Stewardship/Sustainability Programs</i></p>	<p>Program Description For long-term sustainability of the natural and agriculture resources in the Highlands Region, stewardship and sustainability programs should include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive reduction of deer populations and non-native species, reduction in the rate of forest fragmentation and the creation of incentives for landowners to retain property in its natural or agricultural state • Innovative management techniques that reduce pesticide and fertilizer such as integrated pest and crop management • Innovative agricultural practices including direct marketing, agri-tourism, and community supported agriculture <p>The Highlands Council will collaborate with the NJDEP, NRCS, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Soil Conservation Districts, CADB and the NJDA to develop these management techniques and incentives. Additionally, intrinsic values for forests and agriculture including water quality protection must be established.</p>
<p>Establish Incentives for</p>	<p>Program Description Because the preservation of contiguous acres of farming soils is vital to the</p>

<p>Voluntary Impervious Cover Limitations on Agricultural Lands</p>	<p>viability of agriculture in the Highlands Region, incentives need to be in place in order to maximize the utilization of those soils. In many cases, the creation of extensive impervious land cover on Highlands farms will result in significant environmental impacts, similar to the increase of impervious land cover from residential, commercial and transportation development. Impervious cover that involves soil compaction and concrete pads can also permanently damage soil productivity potential. Finally, intensive impervious cover can harm the rural nature of agricultural areas. As a result, impervious cover limits on farmland through incentives, voluntary programs and easements that supplement SADC easement purchases need to be made available. The Council will seek to limit the potential for added impervious cover on farmland through such initiatives, including but not limited to the use of federal Farm Bill programs. These voluntary efforts are distinct and separate from Highlands Act requirements for NJDA review of increased impervious cover for farms in the Preservation Area and the requirement for farm conservation or resource system management plans for such development activities.</p>
<p><i>Development of Open Space/ Conservation Design Standards</i></p>	<p>Program Description Not all agricultural lands that are considered critical can be preserved because of limited funds and other factors. As a result techniques and systems that enable limited growth and the preservation of farmlands are needed. The Highlands Council will develop Open Space/ Conservation Design development layout standards that support the RMP and which take advantage of, but are not limited to, techniques such as residential clustering and lot-size averaging and the establishment and implementation of resource management programs which protect agricultural resources during site plan or subdivision review and approval. In the case of clustering, which requires retention of the undeveloped land by a homeowners association or a municipality, the standards will emphasize layouts that maximize the potential for continued farming under leases.</p>
<p><i>Cluster Development</i></p>	<p>Program Description Preservation cluster development with a minimum of 80 percent open space will provide for a development that allows agriculture to continue. The clusters should use public sewer systems where feasible and appropriate to maximize the amount of open space and eliminate the impact of septic tank systems. (see <i>Cluster Program</i>)</p>
<p><i>Additional Land Use Opportunities</i></p>	<p>Program Description Additional business opportunities should be provided to the owner/operators of farm to increase the economic potential of the farm unit. Alternates to a home occupation business types; home business and cottage industry, should be permitted on farms above a minimum land area threshold should be permitted as a matter of right. The ability of a farm family to have a bed and breakfast, agricultural product processing facility, artisan or craft business with several employees other than family members enhances the ability of the farm to continue as an agricultural operation.</p>
<p><i>Identification of Willing Sellers</i></p>	<p>Program Description The Garden State Preservation Trust legislation requires that direct acquisitions by Green Acres and the SADC be from willing sellers. The Highlands Council will develop an outreach and education program for Highlands landowners to help them be aware of and take advantage of funding opportunities and incentives available for land preservation.</p>

<p><i>Establishment of a Farmland Preservation and Stewardship Technical Assistance program</i></p>	<p>Program Description The Highlands Council, in cooperation with other entities, will implement a technical assistance program for farmland preservation and stewardship. For example, 28 Highlands municipalities do not have open space trust funds and the municipalities and counties that do may not be maximizing their potential; the Council can provide assistance in creating or amending their open space trust funds. Additionally, land acquisition by fee purchase or by easement is a major tool to protect natural resources and agricultural lands. Guaranteeing that these resources remain intact and viable is an overarching responsibility of the preserved landowner and easement holder. The Highlands Council will implement a program to aid in the development of federal, State, municipal, nonprofit, and individual stewardship plans which will include, but not be limited to, baseline documentation, monitoring, landowner/user relations, and enforcement.</p>
<p><i>Identification of Subwatersheds with Elevated Nitrate Levels & Development of Management Plans</i></p>	<p>Program Description The Highlands Council will identify subwatersheds with elevated nitrate levels, develop management plans for restoring water quality, and implement those plans in ways that enhance agricultural viability wherever feasible through focused application of stewardship and sustainability programs, such as those described above. (See <i>Water Quality Restoration Program</i> for more details.)</p>