News from
SALEM COUNTY
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FREEHOLDERS APPROVE FARMLAND PRESERVATION BALLOT QUESTION FOR NOVEMBER

(SALEM, NJ)-- Freeholder Director Lee Ware, liaison to the County Agriculture Development Board, and Freeholder Beth Timberman, liaison to the County Open Space Committee, today announced that the Board of Chosen Freeholders have decided to place a question on this November's ballot concerning an increase of two-cents for the dedicated tax which funds the Agricultural Land Preservation Program in Salem County. Specifically, the question on the ballot will ask residents if the 2002 approved two-cent tax should be increased to four-cents. The two-cent tax has comprised a large portion of the county's farmland preservation funds and has been overwhelmingly supported in the past. The resolution supporting this referendum was approved unanimously at the August 16 Freeholder Meeting.

"Presently we have 21,509 acres of preserved farmland," said Director Ware. "Residents have chosen to preserve this farmland because they prefer to keep Salem County rural. These farms are a tremendous asset to Salem County in that they are a major player in our economy and provide beautiful landscapes that are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike."

The Board of Chosen Freeholders has maintained a commitment to use smart growth in developing and preserving the County. Farmland preservation is a tool that helps focus development to areas that have the necessary infrastructure to sustain growth, while at the same time preserving areas that are essential to maintaining the County's rural character. The Agricultural Land Preservation Program is voluntary and has been utilized by many farms throughout the County that want to ensure that their land is farmed for all time.

"There are roughly about 750 farms right now in Salem County," said Freeholder Timberman. "Our biggest challenge when it comes to preserving farmland is the constant threat of development. The Agricultural Land Preservation Program has been in place since the early 1990's, and has been very successful in giving our farmers an alternative from the developers that benefits the farmers' financially and preserves our way of life for future generations."

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Salem County Farmland Preservation efforts began in 1990 when the Board of Chosen Freeholders adopted a resolution authorizing the creation of the Agricultural Land Preservation Program. The first farm preserved in Salem County was in 1990 when the County made settlement with the Harris Farm located in Pilesgrove Township. Since the programs inception, approximately 157 farms have opted to participate in the plan. As of 2002, there were 753 farms in the County of Salem covering 96,238 acres.

The ballot question regarding the two-cent increase will serve as an indicator to the Board of Chosen Freeholders as to the County's interest in maintaining this program. The final decision rests with the Freeholders who will decide whether they will increase the dedicated tax. Currently, the two-cent tax generates approximately $800,000 per year and the dedicated funds are used to pay for a bond of $9 million which was obtained in 2005.

"Salem County is the garden spot of the garden state," said Freeholder Timberman. "Residents of Salem County take pride in their farmland and most families who have farms do not want to sell their farms for the simple fact that they want to pass their farms down through the generations. We are proud of our farmland and look forward to many more successful years of farming in Salem County."

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