

## **The Future of Farmland Preservation Programs: From Retention and Viability to Resiliency (45)**

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A key strategy for repositioning agriculture in the US is Farmland Preservation. Many states, local governments, and nonprofit organizations have established preservation programs. Since 1979, state programs in the US have acquired approximately 76,000 easements/development restrictions, protecting a total of 1.25 million acres of farmland (AFT, 2004a). Local governments have acquired an additional 1,900 easements, protecting approximately 25,000 acres since 1977 (AFT, 2004b).

Two features common to most of these programs are the goals of preserving productive and viable agriculture. “Productive farms” have appropriate soils, topography, infrastructure, location and adjoining land uses, regulatory environment, local and community support, farm size, and other factors that add to their technical functionality. Adequate protection from nuisance complaints, wildlife damage, and excessive regulation also enhance technical functionality and competitiveness. “Viable farms” tend to have appropriate crop and product mix, adequate entrepreneurial skills and profitability, effective marketing strategies, adequate protection from right-to-farm conflicts, and a nurturing business climate. Farms managed by better educated operators, that engage in innovative practices, and are responsive to emerging market opportunities are generally known to be more viable (Adelaja, 1988).

As in Europe, the emphasis on public benefits of agricultural retention programs is growing in the US - they increasingly recognize public benefits to the non-farm public. As minorities in their communities, farmers must involve a broader group of stakeholders to achieve their preservation goals. Farms provide a wide array of non-market public benefits, to which non-farmers can connect. As many preserving agencies now involve increasingly balanced oversight boards, the preservation of these benefits will be increasingly featured in the mission of preservation programs.

Drawing from lessons from Europe, this paper explores the emerging goals of society, with respect to land retention. It summarizes the selection criteria of state farmland preservation programs in the U.S., compares them, and further identifies emerging ecological/environmental, social and market characteristics which must increasingly be considered for farmland preservation programs to receive greater acceptability. It presents a set of farmland preservation priority indicators that are termed “resiliency indicators”, including such indicators as: biodiversity; demographic factors; ethnic diversity; tourism; amenity value; proximity to consumers, grain elevators, processors, and markets; value added potential; and product diversity. Resiliency is defined as: (1) efficient production while providing quality and safety; (2) environmental compatibility and enhanced environment and quality of life; (3) adequate fresh produce access by underserved communities; (4) adequate flexibility to withstand market instabilities and uncertainties; (5) adequate production of environmental and scenic amenities; (6) adequate exploitation of supplemental farm income opportunities.

An application of this resiliency model to agriculture in a Midwestern U.S. state suggests a different set of outcomes from what might otherwise be expected, with respect to nature, type, cost, and location of targeted acreage for preservation. Hence, the vision for agriculture's future is an important determinant of preservation outcomes. The distributional implications of alternative visions and strategies are evaluated. Results suggest future changes not only in the dynamics of farmland preservation but also in the outcomes of such dynamics.

#### References:

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