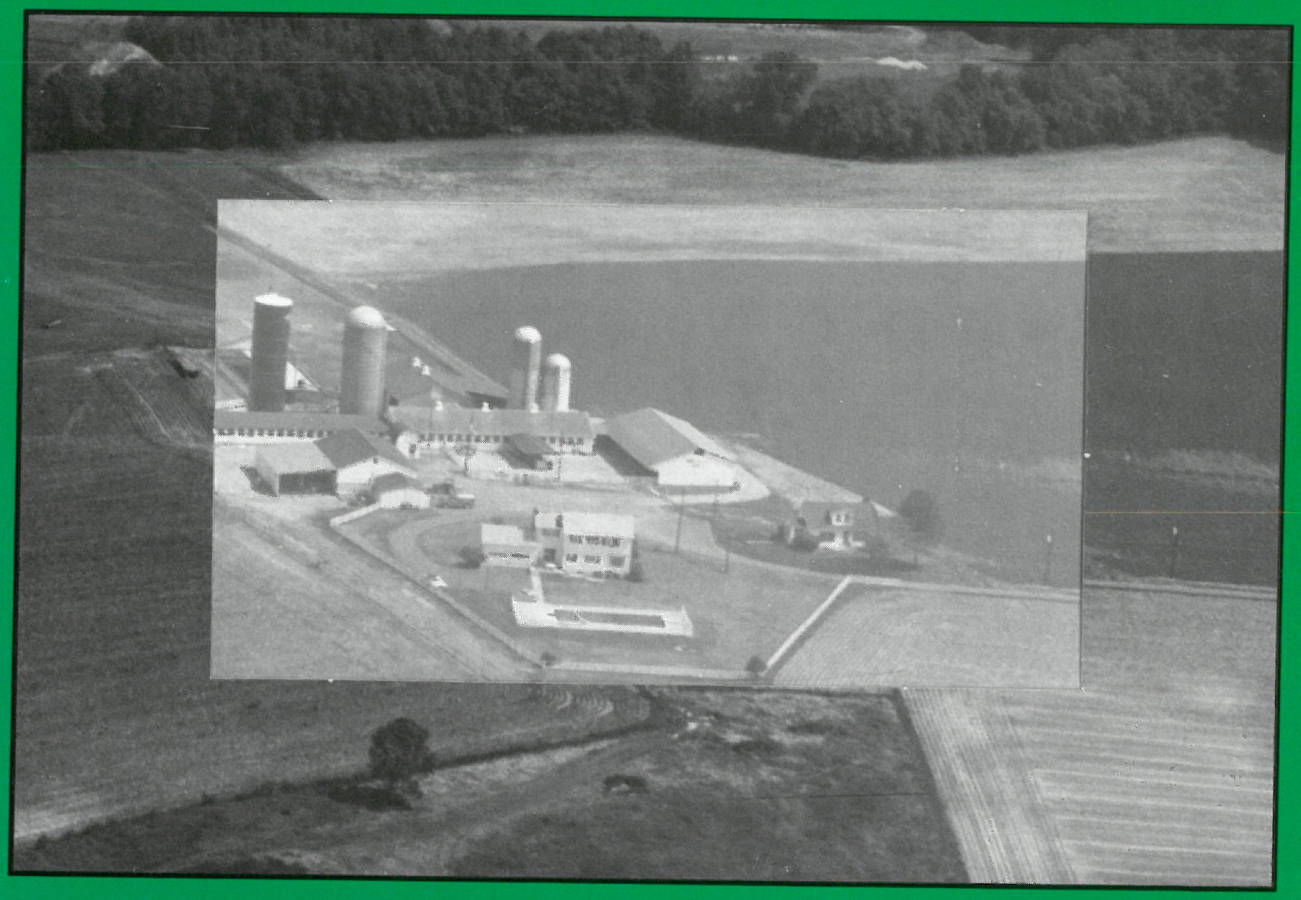
FARMLAND PRESERVATION



1988 Annual Report of the

STATE • AGRICULTURE • DEVELOPMENT • COMMITTEE

1988: Turning the Corner

Governor Kean foresaw success for the Farmland Preservation Program in fiscal year 1988 when he predicted it would "be remembered as the year New Jersey turned the corner" on these efforts.

This forecast could not have been more accurate.

Legislative support brought much-needed flexibility to existing program funds, county and landowner participation swelled, and the program funded more soil and water conservation projects than in any other year.

Most importantly, the public demonstrated strong, statewide support for the Farmland Preservation Program's goals and methods in a variety of state and local referenda.

New priorities set the stage for these achievements.

Agriculture Secretary Art Brown explains the program's need for new flexibility as proposed in a November 1987 referendum. Statewide voter support increased the flexibility of existing funds and spurred dramatic growth for the Farmland Preservation Program.

In the state's largest Farmland Preservation ceremony to date, Secretary Brown presents a check to Hunterdon County for permanent preservation costs on four farms totaling 340 acres.

SADC Sets New Goals

At its reorganization meeting for fiscal year 1988, the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) took steps to forge new strength for the Farmland Preservation Program.

(The program is administered by the SADC, an independent committee in but not of the Department of Agriculture, and chaired by Agriculture Secretary Arthur R. Brown, Jr.)

SADC members analyzed the challenges faced by the program since its inception, sorted out the successes, and developed a plan of attack to add new power in protecting a vital part of New Jersey's heritage: Garden State agriculture and the precious land base which supports it.

This plan gave top priority to stimulating permanent farmland protection through "development easement purchase."

Easement Purchase: New Yields for Permanent Protection

Fiscal year 1988 quickly saw the dramatic rise of a new trend for the Farmland Preservation Program: skyrocketing interest in *permanent* preservation.

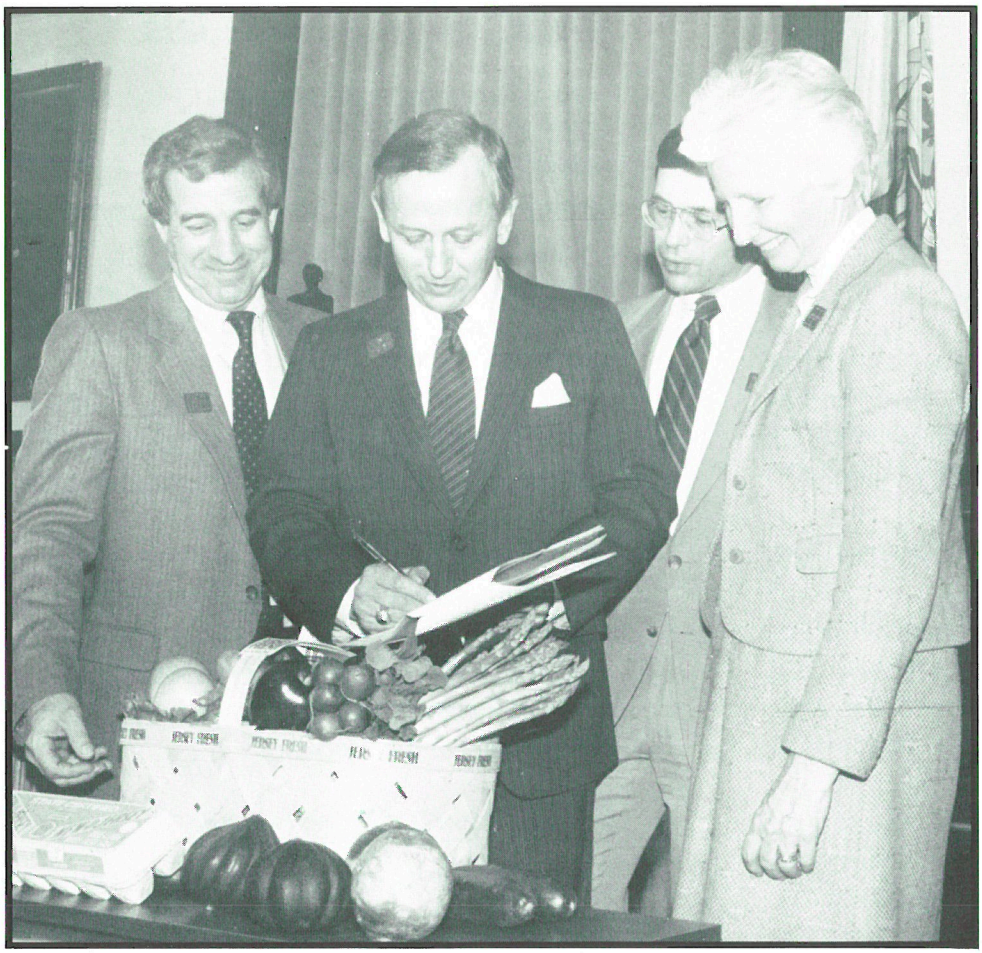
More farmland owners than ever before applied to sell "development easements" on their land.

(Easement purchase protects farmland forever by paying interested landowners the appraised value of their development rights in return for permanent agricultural deed restrictions on the land. *See p. 9.*

This approach is even more durable than zoning, which is subject to variances and to change over time.)

This new trend contrasted with the program's first few years, when activity was highest in *eight-year* preservation commitments.

The new shift in focus took off when the SADC began working with legislators to remove hurdles which had previously checked the success of permanent preservation efforts.



Acting Governor Assemblyman Chuck Hardwick signs voter-approved program changes into law, as (left to right) Agriculture Secretary Art Brown, Senator Richard Zimmer and Assemblywoman Maureen Ogden show their support.

November '87: A New Mandate

The public provided the answer in November 1987, when overwhelming voter support carried a referendum to increase program flexibility and provide new punch in stemming the tide of farmland loss.

Instead of being limited to a 50-50 cost-share ratio with counties, the state can now pay up to 80 percent on easement purchases, making farmland protection a more cost-effective local effort.

The potential buying power of local farmland preservation funds effectively quadrupled: each county dollar which previously leveraged a single state dollar could now command up to four.

Voter support for the referendum also allowed the state to pay up to 100 percent of easement purchase costs in emergency situations, where critical farmland is threatened and no local funds are available to protect it.

The third change gave the program the ability to buy farmland outright, or in "fee simple" (not just the development rights), then resell it after protecting it with a permanent agricultural deed restriction.

The net effect — permanent preservation — is the same as when a development easement is purchased, with the new ability making the program's reach much broader.

> *"new punch in stemming the tide of farmland loss"*

While easement purchase is the choice for those who want to continue farming their protected land, fee simple purchase meets the needs of a new group: those who must sell the farm, but want to ensure it stays in farming.

The effect of these three changes was dramatic.

Within two months, landowner applications for permanent preservation had risen to a level *five times* the total for the three previous years.

By the end of fiscal year 1988, *13,342 acres* had won preliminary approval — an impressive increase from the 2,133 acres of applications pending at the end of the previous fiscal year.

(At press time, preliminary state approvals had climbed to 17,449 acres in 10 counties, with more applications still coming in.)

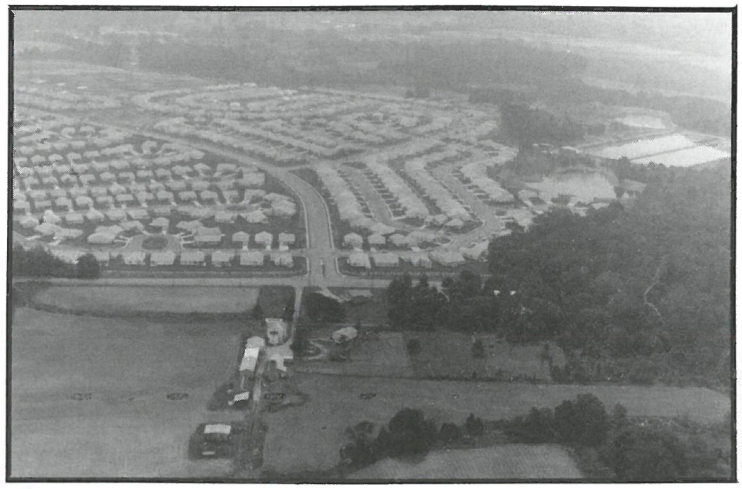
More Farms Permanently Protected

The year also saw eight new easement purchase closings in five counties, for a cumulative total of 1,776 permanently preserved acres — a more than 70 percent increase over the 1,017 acres of easements purchased at the end of fiscal year 1987.

(At press time, completed easement purchases totaled 1,855 acres, with nearly 300 more acres under final approval.)

Easement purchase also became more "statewide," with six counties sharing in the state's permanently preserved agricultural land base as compared to just two the year before.

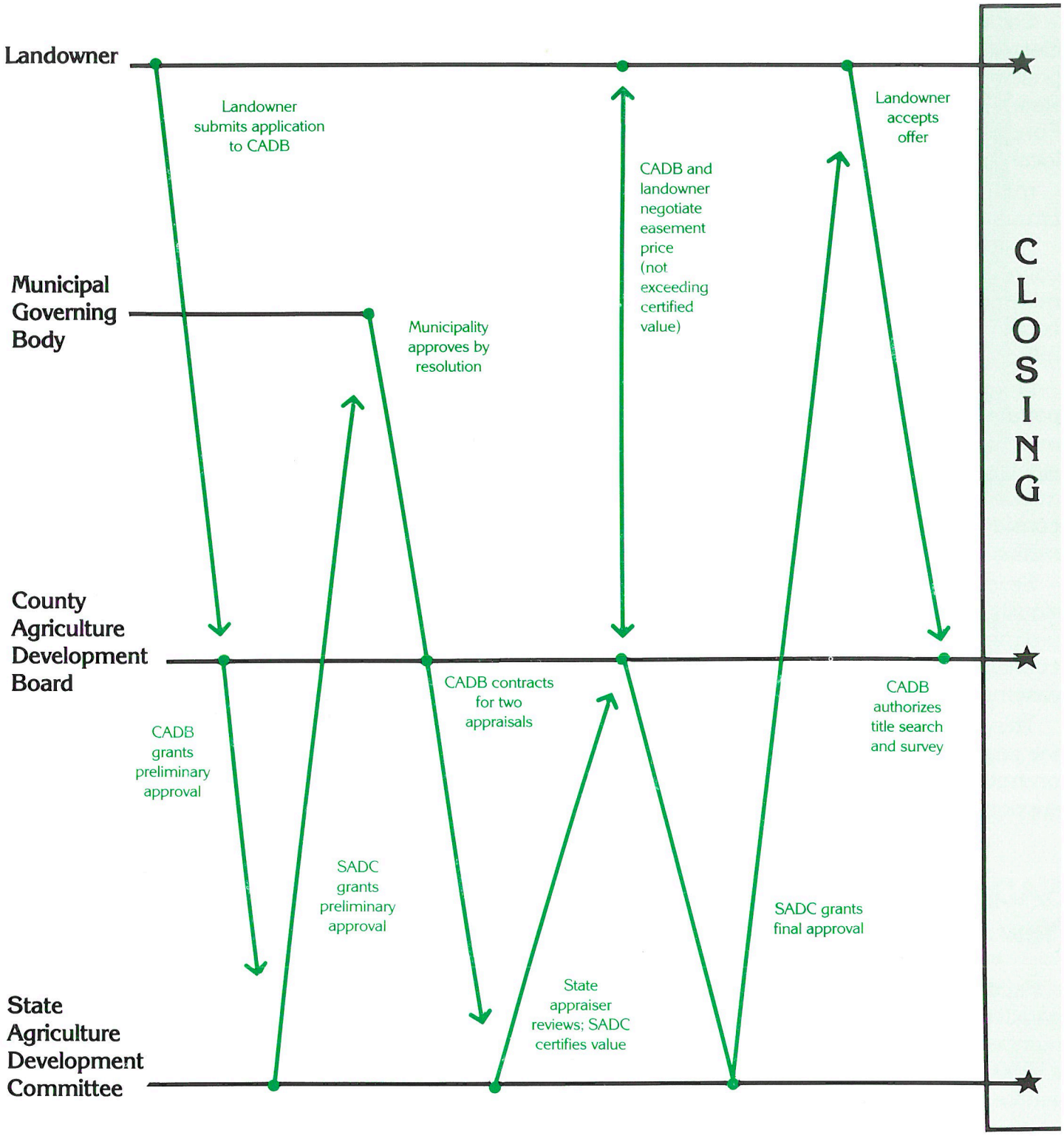
Pending applications also showed wider geographic spread in 1988. With pending applications in just six counties at the end of fiscal year 1987, eight counties *(10 at press time)* had preliminary or final state approval this year.



Urban development in rural areas often brings the interests of farm and non-farm neighbors into conflict. Farm realities such as dust, odor and early morning noise may be perceived as nuisances by non-farm neighbors unfamiliar with standard farm management practices. This is one reason the Farmland Preservation Program focuses on enrolling large, contiguous masses of land. The SADC also helps solve related "right to farm" disputes.

Farmland owners Stanley and Nancy Baron (center), flanked by Agriculture Secretary Art Brown, former Somerset County Freeholder Christine Todd-Whitman and local officials, prepare to cut the ribbon celebrating permanent protection of their Branchburg grain farm.

How Development Easements are Sold



Easement purchased by state-local cost share.

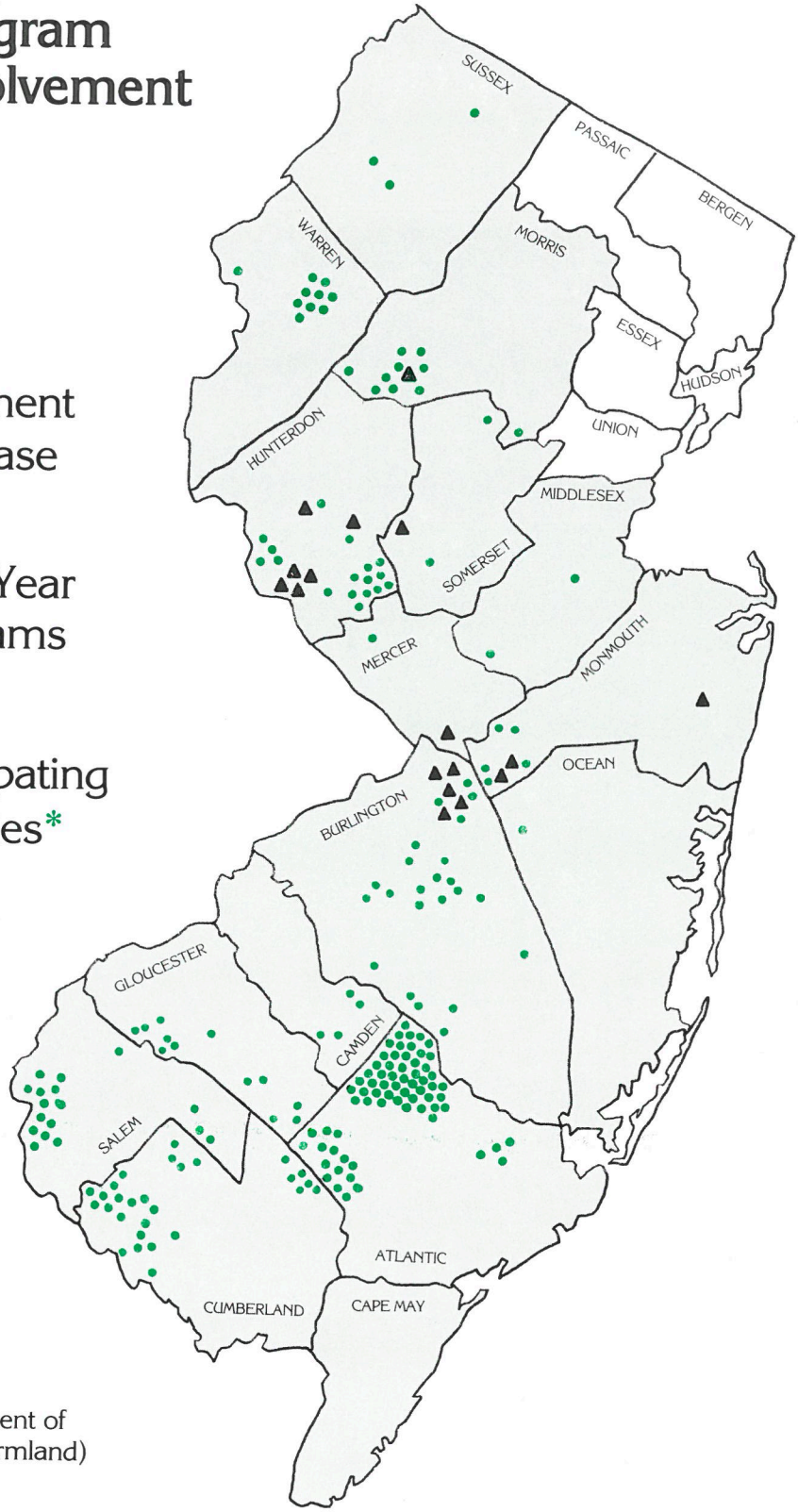
Farmland Preservation

Program Involvement

▲ Easement Purchase

● Eight Year Programs

□ Participating Counties*



*(Contain 99 percent of New Jersey's farmland)

Commitment to Conservation

While easement purchase activity climbed, the Farmland Preservation Program was also making strides in new eight-year preservation commitments. This tally grew more than 25 percent to 24,467 protected acres in 15 of the program's 16 participating counties.

Along with the assurance that this land will remain in productive agricultural open space for at least eight years, the public also benefits from these enrollments in another way: active conservation of New Jersey's precious soil and water resources.

Eight-year program participants are not paid for development easements, since development rights are not permanently sold.

Qualified participants, however, do become eligible for state cost-sharing on conservation projects approved by the State Soil Conservation Committee.

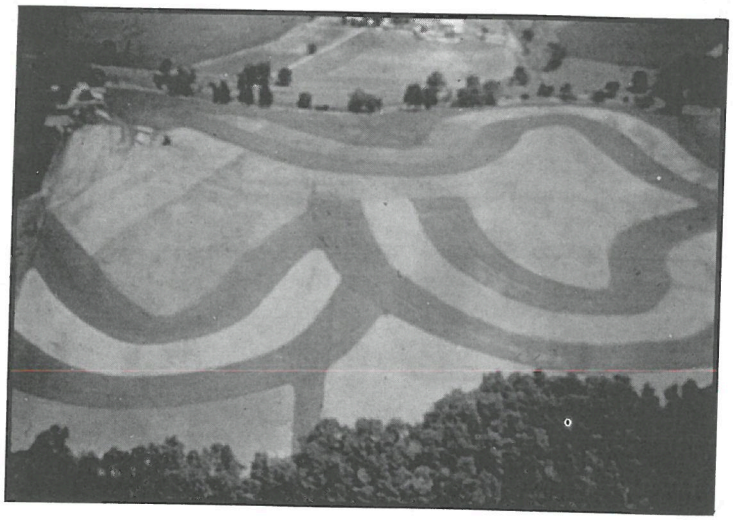
Designed to protect the quality of New Jersey's farmland, projects such as grass waterways and on-farm impoundments of water promote sound, conscientious use of limited natural resources.

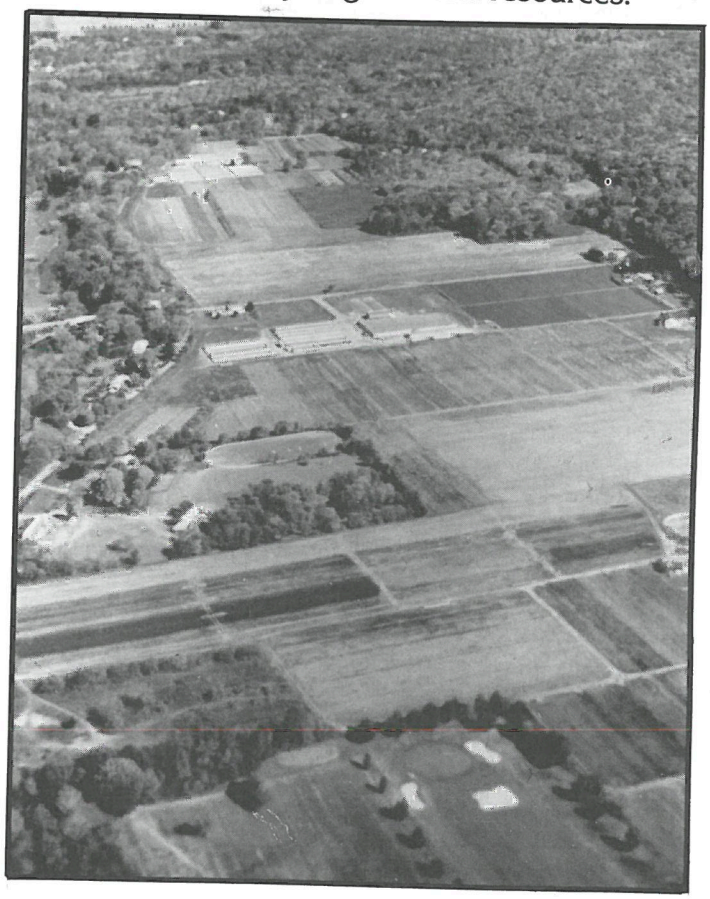
Water and energy efficient, these practices allow farmers to fine-tune irrigation, minimize run-off and reduce erosion of irreplaceable topsoil.

In fiscal year 1988, Atlantic, Cumberland and Salem counties showed the most activity in this area, ranking as the top three counties statewide for completed soil and water conservation projects.

The SADC approved $524,400 in cost-sharing for such projects throughout the year, and paid farmland owners $446,100 in reimbursement costs for completed projects.

Coupled with the 50 percent landowner contribution which this state match leverages, the soil and water program has yielded a cooperative public-private investment of over $4.7 million to date in New Jersey's agricultural resources.





Scenic beauty is not the only benefit of agricultural open space. Undeveloped farmland also promotes environmental balance. Open fields allow rain to recharge aquifers, while windbreak borders minimize topsoil loss. Agricultural lands also promote diversity of wildlife habitat. The Farmland Preservation Program encourages conservation practices (such as contour farming, above) to protect the integrity of these precious resources.

Forging Stronger Links

The SADC continued to strengthen the partnership between county and state, with staff attending nearly 200 County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) and other local meetings throughout the state in fiscal year 1988.

Dozens of on-site farm visits by SADC staff helped take state thinking to the field and communicate local needs and interests to the state.

And a stronger media outreach effort kept the public more informed about the program's growth.

Agricultural Management Practices

SADC responsibility includes another important area of agricultural land use policy.

The committee's mission and multi-disciplinary nature make it an ideal agency to mediate in "right to farm" cases — disputes which sometimes arise when the interests of farm and non-farm neighbors conflict.

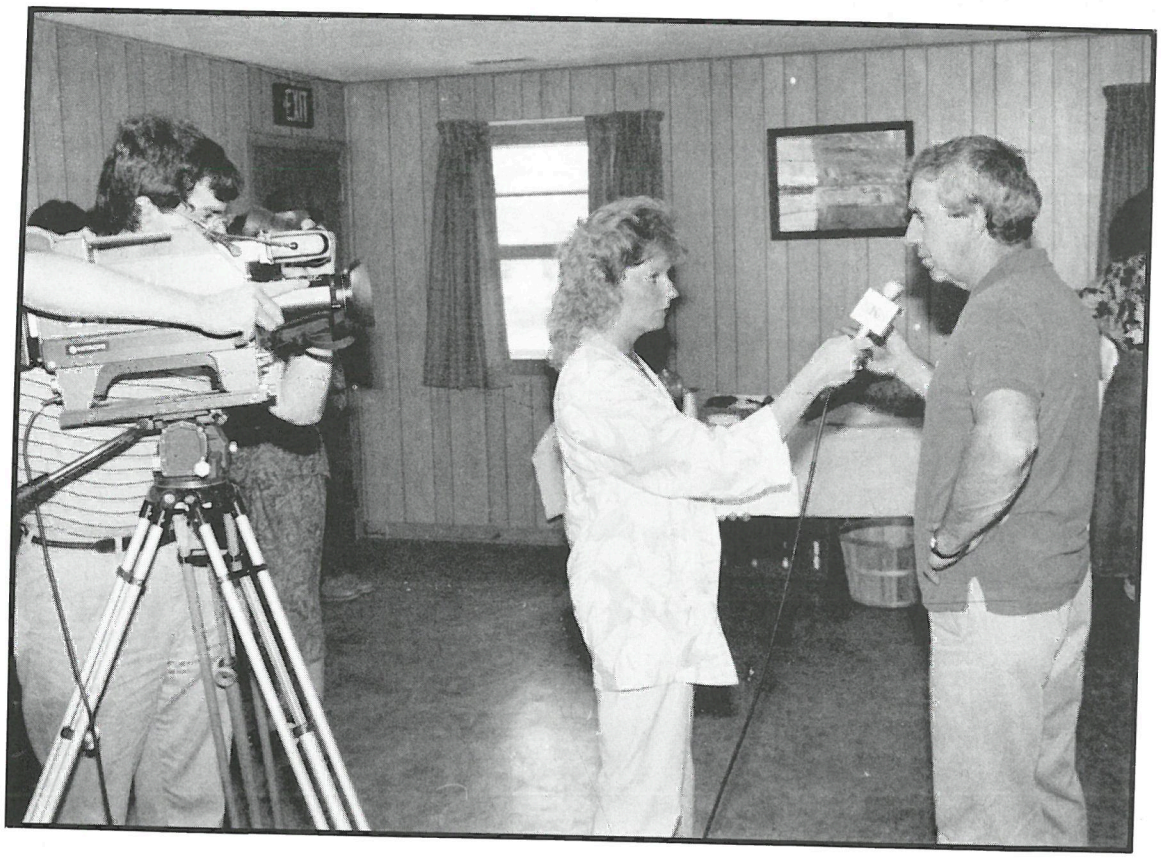
People unfamiliar with standard agricultural management practices may perceive the occasional results (dust, odor, early morning noise) as nuisances.

SADC staff handled dozens of right to farm issues in fiscal year 1988. Farmers, non-farming neighbors, attorneys and state agencies brought a wide variety of agricultural management cases to the SADC's attention throughout the year.

The SADC drew on the expertise of a wide variety of public and private agencies in resolving cases from insect population problems to tree-cutting practices to standards for some agricultural construction.

Cooperation fuels the Farmland Preservation Program, which brings county, state and farmland owner together in a partnership to keep New Jersey green. Here, Morris County farmer Stanley Andrews (center) gives Agriculture Secretary Art Brown and local program staffer Jennifer Johnson a tour of his Long Valley farm, now under application for easement purchase.

The media took strong interest in the program in 1988. Editorial endorsements and other statewide coverage reflected strong public support for the Farmland Preservation Program, and helped inform citizens of its success.



Agriculture Secretary Art Brown explains how state, local and landowner cooperation made the permanent protection of this Somerset County grain farm possible.

Interagency Cooperation

A prime example of such success was the Columbia Gas pipeline project in Warren, Hunterdon and Morris counties.

SADC and CADB cooperation with state legislators, the state Board of Public Utilities, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the gas company resulted in a solution satisfactory to all.

This interagency cooperation led to an alternate pipeline route, avoiding the negative farmland impacts of the initial proposal and achieving what one farmer called "a significant victory."

The SADC's continued emphasis on the necessity of strong local input also helped build a stronger relationship with New Jersey's planning community.

Most CADBs now staff local Farmland Preservation efforts through county planning departments, promoting harmony and cooperative goals for the state's planning and agricultural communities.

Planners also report that the program promotes agriculturally-sensitive planning; enhances local awareness of the economic and environmental imperatives of farmland preservation; and provides a unique tool which both protects farmland and meets farmers' needs.

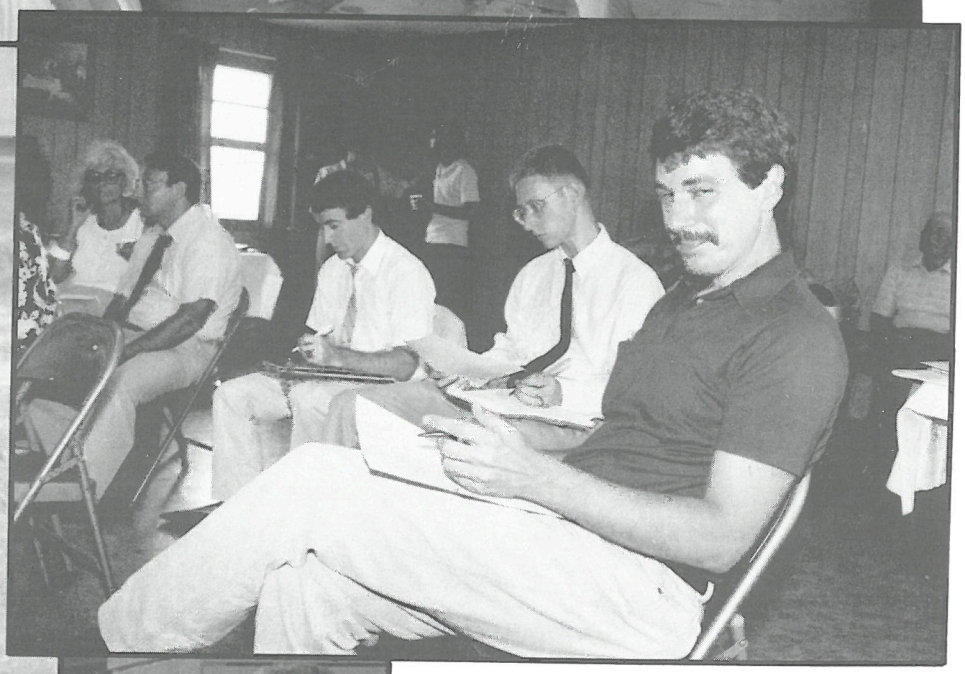
> *"harmony and cooperative goals"*

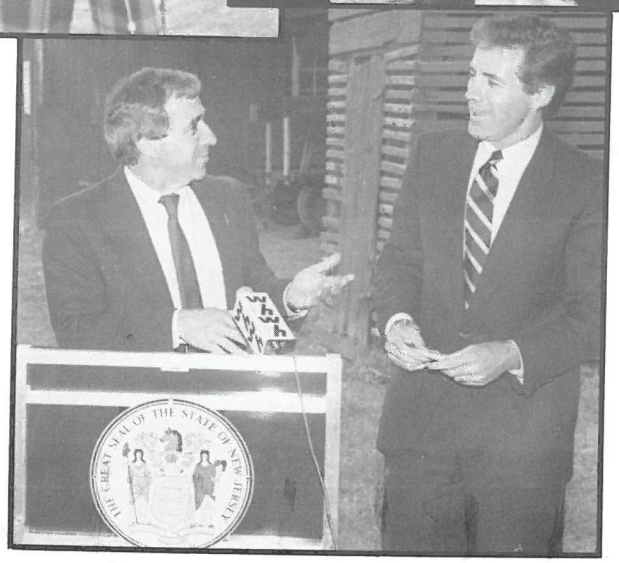
The multi-purpose role of the Farmland Preservation Program was also noted by the State Planning Commission.

In its draft preliminary master plan to guide New Jersey's growth, the commission endorsed continued funding for the Farmland Preservation Program, recognizing it as an important, effective tool for protecting state agriculture.

(At press time, the preliminary plan also called for a CADB role. As local farmland preservation experts, CADBs will assist county planning departments in refining the agricultural tiers in the state plan.)

(Clockwise from top) *An SADC meeting goes on-the-road to the Vineland Produce Auction in Cumberland County where SADC member Erwin Sheppard displays fresh produce; CADB and Department of Transportation staff offer input at an SADC meeting; Agriculture Secretary Art Brown and Mercer County Executive Bill Mathesius celebrate permanent protection of a local farm; landowners Edward and Hannah Hendrickson preserved their Mercer County farm forever.*





1981 Farmland Preservation Bond Fund:

Summary of Spending Trends

1981 Farmland Preservation Bond Fund Expenditures and Obligations[1]

(Cumulative by County through FY 1988)

	Program Development Grants[2]	Soil/Water Projects (Approved)	Soil/Water Projects (Completed)	Completed Easement Purchases[3]	County Totals
Atlantic	$16,000	$1,237,387	$492,501	$—	$1,745,888
Burlington	30,784	309,149	50,095	423,174	813,202
Camden	9,000	31,905	24,608	—	65,513
Cape May	9,000	—	—	—	9,000
Cumberland	25,162	191,995	80,789	—	297,946
Gloucester	15,000	111,359	72,553	—	198,912
Hunterdon	17,000	21,114	595	872,107	910,816
Mercer	15,000	1,587	—	479,403	495,990
Middlesex	6,000	23,225	—	—	29,225
Monmouth	18,066	25,860	4,860	816,655	865,441
Morris	17,500	47,942	14,267	86,793	166,502
Ocean	12,000	15,944	—	—	27,944
Salem	13,760	185,896	108,953	—	308,609
Somerset	15,000	7,915	2,048	303,909	328,872
Sussex	12,000	59,106	14,723	—	85,829
Warren	17,000	28,453	875	—	46,328
State Total	$248,272	$2,298,837	$866,867	$2,982,041[4]	$6,396,017

[1] Rounded to nearest dollar
[2] Estimated through calendar year 1988
[3] State share only, including cost-share reimbursement for ancillary costs
[4] For comparison: estimated potential state costs for pending easement purchase applications at end of FY 1988 were $139.6 million (high-end estimate based on landowner *asking prices* and calculated at 80% state share; actual costs based on appraisals and on cost-share % agreed on at final approval)

1981 Farmland Preservation Bond Fund Expenditures

by Fiscal Year [1,2]

	Easement Purchase[3]	Soil/Water Grants	Administration	Program Development Grants	Total Expended
1984	$ —	$—	$ 85,520	$48,566	$ 134,086
1985	423,174	—	172,443	34,500	630,117
1986	74,493	4,000	114,871	29,232	222,596
1987	272,914	412,083	126,573	62,374	873,944
1988	2,211,460	450,784	308,696	73,600[4]	3,044,540
Cumulative	*$2,982,041*	*$866,867*	*$808,103*	*$248,272*	*$4,905,283*

[1] Rounded to nearest dollar
[2] Program development grant figures provided by calendar year
[3] State share only, including cost-share reimbursement for ancillary costs
[4] Estimated, through calendar year 1988

For more information, please contact:

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