

3/24/05 SADC Meeting Highlights

Soil and Water Conservation Grants

The SADC approved 41 applications to provide up to \$608,000 for soil and water conservation cost-share funding to farms enrolled in permanently preserved or eight-year programs. This is the highest single amount approved under the program and can be attributed, in part, to the SADC recently increasing its cost-share from 50 percent to 75 percent of eligible project costs. For the first time, the SADC approved soil and water conservation grant funding for a farm preserved through the transfer of development rights. This was made possible by recent TDR legislation that makes landowners who sell their TDR credits for permanent preservation eligible for this grant funding and other benefits of traditional preservation programs.

Funding News

The SADC will submit a proposal by the deadline of April 5th to apply for up to \$6.5 million in federal farmland preservation funds available under the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. These funds would be targeted for use in the Highlands preservation region, for military installation buffers, environmentally sensitive areas and for preservation of farmland where impervious cover limits are compatible with other land uses in those areas.

The SADC expects to go before the Garden State Preservation Trust at its May meeting to seek approval of 2006 appropriation funding requests for farmland preservation projects.

County Easement Purchase Program

The SADC certified development easement values on 156 farms covering approximately 10,000 acres under the 2006 county easement purchase program. The SADC has approved allocating a total of \$45 million to this round.

Highlands Definition of a Farmer

The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act that amends the Garden State Preservation Act provides for use of an alternate appraisal valuation based on the zoning, state environmental laws and DEP regulations in effect as of January 1, 2004. The alternate appraisal valuation applies to the preservation of farms statewide in the following circumstances: The owner is the same person who continuously owned the lands on the date the Act was enacted; the landowner is an immediate family member of that person, or the landowner is a farmer as defined by the SADC. To define "farmer" for the purposes of the Act, staff submitted a first draft of a definition to the SADC. Staff will rework that definition based on comments received and will provide a revised draft to the committee at its April meeting.