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**AGRICULTURE
AND
THE STATE PLANNING PROCESS
BUILDING CONSENSUS
STEP BY STEP**

prepared by:
The New Jersey Office of State Planning

OCTOBER 1991

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AGRICULTURE AND THE STATE PLANNING PROCESS BUILDING CONSENSUS STEP BY STEP

The Cross-acceptance component of the State planning process was designed as a means for local governments, interest groups and citizens to participate in the preparation of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The agricultural community has been one of the most active groups involved and it has consistently voiced its concerns about the State Plan. This discourse prompted the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the New Jersey Board of Agriculture to organize public meetings to develop an effective response that would reflect their dissatisfaction with the policies of the Preliminary State Plan.

This effort led to a two-day seminar devoted to identifying the critical issues facing the agricultural community. Participants included: the board of directors of the New Jersey Farm Bureau; members of the State Board of Agriculture and the State Agriculture Development Committee; presidents of the County Boards of Agriculture; members of the Board of Managers of the New Jersey Agriculture Experiment Station and their technical staff; staff from Cook College and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture; representatives of the county Cross-acceptance Negotiating Committees; county planners from 16 counties concerned with agricultural issues; and members of the Future for Agriculture-Resources, Mission and Strategies (FARMS) Commission. The Department of Agriculture followed-up the seminar

with an Agricultural Policy Statement, which included policy recommendations and implementation measures for consideration by the State Planning Commission. This Agricultural Policy Statement became the foundation for the development of the agricultural policies of the Interim State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

The Statement addressed six broad categories: land use, economic development, capital facilities financing and development, intergovernmental coordination, natural and cultural resource protection, and housing. The discussion below summarizes the Agricultural Policy Statement's recommendations and points out how many of these are supported in the Interim State Plan.

LAND USE

The Agricultural Policy Statement encouraged the State Planning Commission to consider treating agriculture as a business activity that is conducted throughout the State and to be concerned with its viability and sustainability wherever it is practiced, rather than limit these concerns to a single tier (or planning area).

This recommendation is fully supported in the Interim State Plan. A new section of agricultural policies has been created that treats agriculture as both a land use and an economic activity. The Plan recognizes agriculture as an industry that should be protected and enhanced throughout New Jersey.

The Agricultural Policy Statement suggested that a single rural tier would better reflect the interrelationships between the rural community, the agricultural industry and natural resource production. The Policy Statement suggested that merging Tiers 5, 6 and 7 would accomplish this goal.

The Interim Plan's Rural Planning Area (PA 4; formerly Tier 6 & 6A) affirms this association. However, the State Planning Act clearly requires the Commission to "...provide a coordinated, integrated and comprehensive plan for the growth, development, renewal and conservation of the State and its regions and identify areas for growth, agriculture, open space conservation and other appropriate designations." The Act also requires a public investment program that assures the provision of public services at a reasonable cost.

These multiple or competing goals cannot be achieved by grouping all of these lands into one broad tier. No longer strictly viewed as an agricultural area, Planning Area 4 includes rural areas,

farmland and natural resource production areas which lack water distribution, wastewater collection and treatment facilities, storm drainage and public transportation. Those agricultural lands that fall within the Rural Planning Area are considered to be among the most valuable agricultural resources, and will receive priority for State- funded agricultural preservation programs.

The Agricultural Policy Statement recommended that the identification and determination of agricultural areas should occur at the local level, with responsibility for regional coordination resting with the counties.

The State Planning Commission agrees with this recommendation and therefore did not release a map with the Interim Plan. Moreover, as recommended by the Agricultural Policy Statement, the Commission incorporated the mapping criteria used by the County Agriculture Development Boards into its own criteria. However, the State Planning Commission does have a statutory obligation (via the State Planning Act) to identify and protect farmland. If local officials are unable to identify lands for agriculture, the Commission will have to fulfill its mandate and identify these lands itself.

The Agricultural Policy Statement is very concerned about the lack of equity protection for farmland identified and mapped as such. The Policy Statement suggested a number of programs, planning techniques and options to protect against equity loss.

These recommendations have been built into the Interim Plan and its accompanying Report on Implementation Issues.

Agricultural Policy 5 suggests that the expenditure of public funds for preservation of farmland should be considered as an infrastructure investment.

Agricultural Policy 7 supports using creative land use tools, such as clustering development and transfer of development rights programs to accommodate growth per the recommendations in the Agricultural Policy Statement .

The State Planning Commission Report on Implementation Issues recommends creating a stable source of funding for the Farmland Preservation Program; passing legislation to permit counties and municipalities to undertake tax-exempt installment purchases of farmland with State funds, amending the tax code to provide incentives for the conservation of natural lands; and, approving enabling legislation for the creation of Transferable Development Rights (TDR) programs throughout the State.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Agricultural Policy Statement explained the importance of easing access to capital for agricultural development as well as the importance of reducing the reliance on land as an asset for collateral.

The Interim Plan's **Agricultural Policy 8** supports improved access to loans, rural venture capital and operating funds.

The Agricultural Policy Statement recommended continuing the Jersey Fresh campaign in order to improve the market for New Jersey's products.

Agricultural Policy 11 supports this effort and recommends marketing programs to enhance the sale of agricultural products.

In addition the State Planning Commission's Report on Implementation Issues recommends amending the New Jersey Constitution to allow tax exemption for certain farm improvements as a means of encouraging reinvestment in agriculture.

The Agricultural Policy Statement suggested establishing Agricultural Enterprise Zones to bolster the economy in agricultural communities.

While the State Planning Commission did not make this recommendation in the Interim Plan, it is monitoring Cumberland County's Agriculture Enterprise District program and is considering it for the Final State Plan.

CAPITAL FACILITIES FINANCING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Agricultural Policy Statement called for public investment in infrastructure, capital facilities and related services at fair and equitable levels throughout the State.

Several Plan policies support this recommendation:

Agricultural Policy 4 and Water Resources Policy 23 emphasize the need to consider the water supply needs of the agricultural industry when creating water supply plans.

Agriculture Policy 5 recommends including farmland preservation funding in the public budget, which would improve its status relative to investments in capital assets.

Agriculture Policy 6 recommends providing capital facilities in rural areas in order to support agricultural activities.

Transportation Policy 8 recommends the protection of rights-of-way that may serve future

transportation needs, as suggested by the Department of Agriculture.

The Agricultural Policy Statement called for access to training and technical assistance for agriculture and agriculture-related businesses to help farmers compete.

The Interim Plan incorporates this suggestion in three Statewide Agricultural Policies:

Policy 17 recommends the creation and expansion of training and technical assistance for agriculture;

Policy 18 recommends the creation and expansion of agricultural education opportunities on the secondary, college and university levels; and

Policy 19 recommends the development of statewide leadership training that is responsive to the needs of the agricultural community.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

The Agricultural Policy Statement suggested coordination between policy, planning and decision-making at the State and local levels to help support the agricultural industry.

The Interim Plan supports this recommendation in several ways:

Agricultural Policy 1 calls for coordinated planning at all levels of government, in order to promote agriculture.

Agriculture Policy 12 recommends simplifying the permitting and licensing processes so that they become sensitive to agricultural needs.

Agriculture Policy 13 suggests promulgating building code criteria that is sensitive to the special purposes and seasonal use of agriculture.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

The Agricultural Policy Statement reported that farmland plays a major role in organic waste recycling.

Agricultural Policy 15 recommends continued use of appropriate farmland for recycling biodegradable materials.

The Agricultural Policy Statement expressed concern that the designation of environmentally sensitive farmland may hinder the ability of a landowner to farm profitably. The Policy Statement suggested use of Acceptable Management Practices as a means of protecting natural resources.

Agricultural Policy 14 promotes Acceptable Management Practices as a means of ensuring profitable farming and protecting natural resources. Agricultural activities in the Environmentally Sensitive Rural Planning Area (PA 4B) are subject to the same policy objectives as those included in PA 4, and will not be subject to additional environmental regulations.

HOUSING

The Agricultural Policy Statement stressed the necessity of adequate, safe and reasonably-priced housing for agricultural employees.

This recommendation is also supported in the Interim Plan.

Agricultural Policy 16 recommends using federal and State funding to expand the supply of housing to benefit agricultural employees.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the State Planning Commission has learned much about the concerns of the agricultural community over the last five years. The Interim State Development and Redevelopment Plan responds to these concerns. The Interim Plan acknowledges the obstacles facing farmers and supports constructive recommendations to overcome these hurdles. The Commission is confident that by working together it is possible to craft a State Plan that supports farming and the farmer in the Garden State.

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