



New Jersey Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Customer Focus

A 1026-home River Walk development was slated for development in Pohatcong Township, Warren County. However, with the help of USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), 564 acres of farmland were protected. The River Walk Farm, contains not only valuable farm land soils but also has significant ecological value.

"This farm lies within a highly viable agricultural and ecological area. . . Over 90 percent of the farm's soils are listed as prime, unique or of state wide importance, and it is home to four grassland nesting bird species on the State's threatened and endangered species list," says Wayne Maresch, former NRCS State Conservationist.

The 564-acre tract is the largest purchase of farmland by the State Agriculture Development Committee. With assistance from FRPP, the New Jersey Audubon Society, the Phillipsburg Riverview Organization, the New Jersey Conservation Fund, and Warren County's farmland preservation program, New Jersey's Department of Agriculture kept the farm in agriculture.

Eyed by developers since the 1980s, the River Walk Farm will now be leased to a farmer who will grow crops, as well as harvest certain types of grasses to support the breeding and migration of the threatened and endangered birds.

"It (The River Walk purchase) was a big and complicated deal," Riverview member Laura Oltman said. "It's not going to be a housing development, and that's the best part."

Overview:

The USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) helps farmers and ranchers keep their productive land in agriculture. The program partners with States, Tribes, local governments and non-profit organizations to purchase conservation easements for the purpose of protecting topsoil by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land. NRCS provides up to 50% of the fair market value of the easement to the cooperating entity, which acquires, manages, and enforces the easement. Landowners participate voluntarily, and protected farms remain in private ownership.

Conservation plans are developed on all highly erodible cropland. Nationally, over \$101.3 million have been obligated to state and local entities since establishment of the program in 1996. The 2002 Farm Bill produced some changes in the program, including the addition of a provision providing for the protection of historical and archaeological resources on farm and ranchlands, and the inclusion of nongovernmental organizations as eligible entities. The Farm Bill also significantly increased the amount of financial assistance available under FRPP, authorizing nearly \$600 million through Fiscal Year 2007. Sixty-seven million dollars was allocated to states to purchase easements in FY 2003.

Accomplishments:

Cooperating entities' proposals are selected through a competitive process designed to protect parcels that will help accomplish FRPP and local land use goals. FRPP easements protect entire working farms, woodlands, wetlands, important natural areas, and historical and cultural resources. Through FY 2002, \$5.6 million in FRPP funds have been awarded to purchase easements on approximately 8,994 acres of valuable agricultural land in New Jersey.

Due to increasing development pressure throughout the state, requests for FRPP funds have increased dramatically in recent years, far outpacing the program's funding capacity. In FY 2003, partners in New Jersey requested \$17,200,000 in FRPP funds. This request represents over 26 percent of the total amount of FRPP funds available nationwide in FY 2003. New Jersey was allocated \$3,463,000 to purchase conservation easements in FY 2003.

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Outlook:

There are over 10,000 farms in the "Garden State," and many of them are under intense development pressure. New Jersey's average per acre cost of farmland is among the highest in the nation. In 1999, Governor Christine Todd Whitman signed into law the Garden State Preservation Trust Act to greatly enhance preservation efforts. This act became a national model for farmland and open space preservation. The law set the frame work for preserving 500,000 acres of farmland over 10 years. If successful, the result will be the permanent preservation of approximately 40 percent of New Jersey's total landmass. As of June 2000, 432 farms covering 64,739 acres had been permanently preserved under the program.

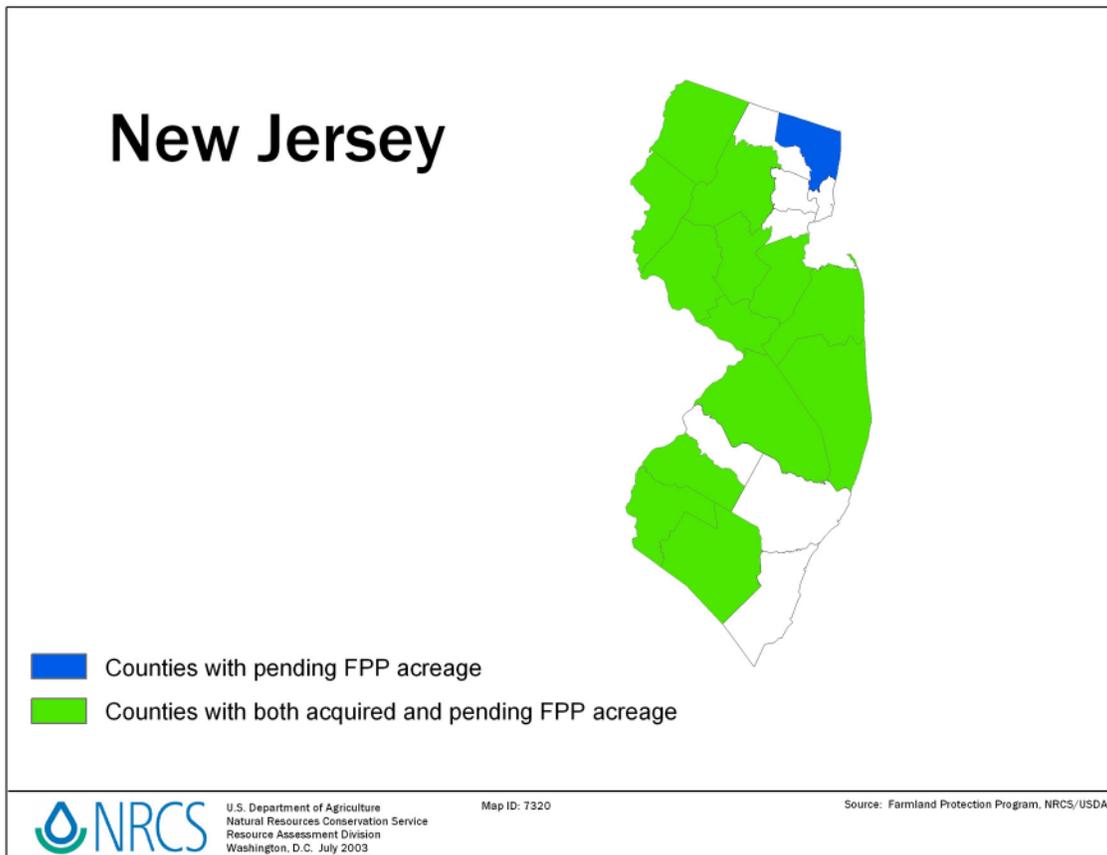
**Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program - New Jersey Easements
as of June 2003
Number, Acres, Easement Costs by County**

New Jersey					
County	Acres	Easement Cost		Federal Payment	
		Total (\$)	Avg. (\$/acre)	\$	%
Burlington	884	2,655,705	3,004	336,151	13%
Cumberland	178	349,046	1,961	53,861	15%
Gloucester	177	614,915	3,474	86,847	14%
Hunterdon	943	5,200,199	5,515	465,367	9%
Mercer	227	2,280,891	10,048	256,028	11%
Middlesex	553	4,613,218	8,342	501,169	11%
Monmouth	350	2,300,542	6,573	212,052	9%
Morris	130	897,331	6,903	104,009	12%
Ocean	399	956,499	2,397	182,751	19%
Salem	1,693	3,021,887	1,785	344,615	11%
Somerset	116	886,971	7,646	108,237	12%
Sussex	725	1,298,540	1,791	170,924	13%
Warren	1,259	3,524,944	2,800	491,389	14%
Total*	7,634	28,600,688	3,746	3,313,400	12%

*Totals do not include FY 2002 pending easements

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Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program - New Jersey Easements as of June 2003



Trends in Population by County - New Jersey 1990 to 2000 (Census Data)

