

Designating Farmland of Local Importance in New Jersey



What is Farmland of Local Importance and How is it Classified?

Farmland of Local Importance is land that is locally important for crop production, but not categorized as prime farmland, unique farmland, or farmland of statewide importance.

Farmland classification is one of the tools utilized by government entities and private organizations to value the soil for farmland protection. The farmland classification classes found in New Jersey are prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, farmland of statewide importance (if drained), farmland of unique importance, and Farmland of Local importance.

This classification is based on optimal inherent physical and chemical soil properties for unique crop production or for ideal crop production at a local level. Some soils in New Jersey in current production do not fit these classes. The chart below details the designation process to request soils in agricultural production be classified as Farmland of Local Importance. Farmland of Local Importance classifications are made at the county level and do not impact the same soil mapped in other counties in New Jersey.

Conditions to Consider for Farmland of Local Importance Classification

Criteria	Description
Soil in agricultural production	Soil in agricultural production is any evidence not limited to recent aerial imagery or crop history that could be of assistance to NRCS determination.
NCCPI	The National Commodity Crop Productivity Index (NCCPI) is an interpretation in the National Soil Information System (NASIS). It is for non-irrigated commodity crops only. The interpretation uses natural relationships of soil, landscape, and climate factors to model the response of commodity crops.
LCC	The Land capability classification (LCC) is one of a number of interpretive groupings made primarily for agricultural purposes. In this classification the soils are grouped according to their potential and limitations for sustained production of the common cultivated crops that do not require specialized site conditioning or site treatment
EI	The Erodibility Index (EI) is a numerical expression of the potential of a soil to erode, considering climatic factors and the physical and chemical properties of the soil. The higher the index, the greater the investment needed to maintain the sustainability of the soil resource base if intensively cropped. The EI for a soil map unit is determined by dividing the potential erodibility for the soil map unit by the soil loss tolerance (T) value established for the soil in the FOTG as of Jan. 1, 1990.
HEL Criteria	Soils with an EI of 8 or greater are soils with a maximum annual rate of soil loss that could cause a decline in long-term productivity (Title 7, Code of Federal Regulation, Part 12, Subpart B). A soil map unit with an EI of 8 or greater is considered to be highly erodible land (HEL) as set forth in the regulation and subsequently under the HEL provision (NFSAM, Part 510).
LESA (LE) Manual 601.10)	The Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system helps state and local officials make sound decisions about land use. LESA can provide a technical framework to numerically rank land parcels based on local resource evaluation and site considerations. In agricultural land evaluation (LE), soils are rated and placed into groups ranging from the best to the least suited for a specific agricultural use, such as cropland, forestland, or rangeland. The land evaluation is based on data from the National Cooperative Soil Survey

Why Designate Farmland of Local Importance?

Organizations and municipalities interested in the conservation of land suited for agricultural production and open space should know that the Code of Federal Regulations includes a section about important farmlands which states:

The Nation needs to know the extent and location of the best land for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops.

The regulation directs USDA-NRCS to identify and inventory prime and unique farmland and specifies that farmlands that are of statewide and local importance for producing these crops also need to be identified.

These designations are applicable to USDA and other conservation program eligibility.

[New Jersey](#)

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Designation process*

Activity	Entity responsible	Possible source of information
Recognize soil map units not classified as prime farmland	State, local government, or organizations concerned with farmland protection and open space, land trust, or easement program partner may appeal to NRCS for assistance	Important farmland classes are provided at the Web Soil Survey or NRCS Prime and other Important Farmlands
Compile evidence of the suitability for crop production. Crop production includes cultivated crops, perennial fruit and nut crops, hay and other feed crops, and improved pasture	State or local government unit or organization concerned with farmland protection	Evidence may include aerial imagery or other documentation of crop history
Evaluate the Soil Survey map unit associated with the land in question for mapping accuracy throughout the locality	NRCS Soil Scientist	The evaluation process may extend to multiple map units where the potential for additional farmlands of local importance are recognized
Consider resource concerns	NRCS Compliance Specialist	For example, ensuring that the important farmland designation will not compromise the wetland conservation compliance provisions of the federal Food Security Act
Verify those Soil Survey map units that meet criteria for Farmland of Local Importance, with qualifiers as applicable	NRCS Soil Scientist	For example, Soil Survey map units on steep slopes that are highly erodible if disturbed may be qualified as Farmland of Local Importance where suitable for hay or perennial fruit production
Sign a document identifying the Soil Survey map units as Farmland of Local Importance within the locality	The NRCS State Conservationist and the local agency or organization representative	The designation is recorded in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide which is available to the public

*Modified from Farmland of Local Importance Designations factsheet.

For More Information

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