

farmland preservation report



*Policies & practices that protect farmland & urban edge agriculture
Since 1990 ~ Deborah Bowers, Editor*

Virginia spurs private sector conservation

RICHMOND, VA – Before the Virginia General Assembly adjourned its budget session in mid-March it passed a bill that creates a permanent funding source for grants to land trusts and local governments to pay for easement monitoring. But while the legislature boosted the Commonwealth's private sector-based land conservation with what appears to be upwards of \$2 million annually, it mightily snubbed its Office of Farmland Preservation, allocating to it just \$100,000 to assist 21 localities in purchasing easements on working farms.

HB 447, effective July 1, designates easement monitoring funds from transfer fees imposed on land preservation tax credits when they are sold. The credit is awarded to landowners who donate easements.

Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit pro-

gram allows a credit on income tax of 40 percent of the value of land or interest in land that has been donated for conservation purposes. Through 2008, the Department of Taxation had awarded tax credits totaling \$907 million for nearly 2,000 easements.

One of the features of the tax credit is that it is transferrable, that is, once awarded, it can be sold. The transfer option may be used by those whose income is not large enough to make the credit usable.

A fee was levied on such sales, with the revenues used to support administration of the tax credit.

Now, those fees will be split, with at least half going to the Virginia Land Conservation Fund for distribution to local governments and conservation organizations for stewardship of preserved properties.

Until now the credit transfer fee has been two

Continued on page 2

New Mexico enacts \$5 million land fund

SANTA FE, NM – Gov. Bill Richardson signed into law March 8 legislation that creates a land preservation program with \$5 million in initial appropriations. The program will be administered by the state Department of Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources (DEMNR), State Forestry Division.

Agricultural conservation easements are among the projects authorized under the Natural Heritage Conservation Act, which will award grants to local governments, which can in turn award monies to nonprofits. DEMNR was authorized to either hold or co-hold easements with local governments or nonprofits. No dedicated funding source was

established.

Agricultural easements will compete with projects focused on water quality, forests, wildlife, natural areas, outdoor recreation and cultural and

Continued on page 4

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 5

MARCH 2010

CA counties to fight for Williamson Act - p. 5
Suffolk Co. updates farm use rules - p. 5
Md. estate tax bill for preserved farms - p. 6
Spotlight: Karen Martynick - p. 6
Back page briefs/Conferences - p. 8

VIRGINIA

Preservation tax credit gets millions, PDR \$100,000

Continued from page 1

percent of the value of the donated easement or land, or \$10,000, whichever is less. That cap will now be lifted. The estimated revenue from removing the \$10,000 cap on the fee is \$2 million annually above the current fee revenue, which was \$2.1 million for FY 2009, indicating about \$2 million will be available for easement stewardship grants. The grants will be awarded based a grantee's three-year average for number of donated easements accepted.

According to Joel Davison of the Department of Taxation, collections from the tax credit transfers in this fiscal year, since July 1, have amounted to \$1.5 million as of Feb., an amount equal to that collected in all of 2008.

Kevin Schmidt, director of the Office of Farmland Preservation, said he is disappointed the amount allocated to his program was not larger, but that following a legislative session that was "pretty dire," "anything that isn't zero makes me feel good." The last allocation to the program, awarded by Gov. Tim

Kaine in Dec. 2009, was \$636,000, making this latest amount even more disappointing. But Schmidt said something is better than nothing.

"At least this way we keep running the mechanics of the program. If it were gutted, it would be much harder to bring it back."

The state's \$4 billion deficit had all departments starting out with "low expectations," Schmidt said.

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation is the state's quasi-public entity that accepts easement donations, and currently holds 3,008 easements comprising 581,165 acres. VOF saw a sudden and dramatic increase in the number of easement deals beginning in 2000, the first year following enactment of the Land Preservation Tax Credit. Along with other similar entities, it stands to benefit most from the new stewardship fund.

In Oct. 2009, VOF completed a strategic plan in which the need for easement stewardship funding was front and center. "[T]he recent dramatic growth in conservation activity throughout the state has pushed VOF's capacity to the limit," the plan stated. "Over the next four years, it will be critical for VOF to maximize management efficiency and secure additional revenue to maintain its lead role in conserving new land and carry out its stewardship responsibilities."

According to Jason McGarvey, legislative liaison for the VOF, donated easements, and the incentives that drive them, are perceived in the legislature as the technique carrying the day for land preservation in Virginia. He said donated easement benefits are reaching average income farms because of the transferrable feature of the credit.

"Where land values remain high, the donated value can trump what a locality is able to pay," if the locality even has a funded PDR program - most Virginia counties do not. Farmers whose income won't allow them to benefit from the tax credit, McGarvey said, can receive funding assistance from the state to offset the costs of an easement deal, "then they sell it. We don't know who buys the credits," McGarvey said, adding that they know of farmers using credit sale proceeds to "reinvest in the farm."

McGarvey said he knows of cattle and dairy

farmland preservation report

is published monthly except for August & December by

Bowers Publishing, Inc.
900 La Grange Road
Street, Maryland 21154

Telephone: 410 692-2708 Email: bowerspub@hotmail.com
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farmers in Southwest Virginia and in the Shenandoah Valley who have sold credits.

Conservation Partners LLC was formed eight years ago as a brokerage for the transfer of land preservation tax credits, handling deals from start to finish. Taylor Cole, a principal in the firm, said they promote conservation easements to groups of farmers. They only work with properties that have solid conservation values, he said. That scrutiny is warranted not only by more vigorous reviews of conservation easements at the IRS, but by an audit by the Virginia Dept. of Taxation in 2004, which found claims with questionable easement valuations.

Cole said for the last four years his firm has paid 84 cents on the dollar for transferrable tax credits, with a six percent fee. The firm will pay a landowner's credit transfer fee to the Dept. of Taxation and get reimbursed when the credit is sold, and also will pay the bills associated with easement deals. While Cole said his firm doesn't collect data on the type of farm operations or income level of his clients, he said land-rich and cash-poor farmers make up part of their client base.

"For people not so wealthy, the ability to release the value in the land and to be able to sell the credits for cash, it's a wonderful opportunity for these folks," Cole said.

While some county PDR program administrators are seeing use of the tax credit program in their counties, others are not.

Ray Pickering, agricultural development director for Fauquier County, administers a purchase of development rights program funded through public and private sources. But the county also holds about 40 easements that were donated. Pickering's department includes a staff person who monitors easements, but he said any grants awarded for stewardship will be welcome.

Pickering said the low level of funding for PDR will hurt county programs, particularly those that are just getting started.

Rachel Chieppa, PDR program manager for Isle of Wight County recently completed that county's first purchase of development rights using an installment purchase agreement, protecting 630 contiguous acres in eight parcels. While local leaders are

pleased with the closing, "our revenue from our local government is substantially less in 2011 and 2012 budget years. It will be hard to find any other funding, even though our board is extremely supportive."

In Isle of Wight County, where nearly 70 percent of land in farms is cropland and the predominant crops are cotton and hogs, there are no VOF easements, Chieppa said.

"That's unfortunate, but I wonder if that's indicative of lack of education, lack of interest, or inability. I don't run across a lot of farmers interested in donating whether for financial reasons or otherwise. My question is, is [the tax credit] helping the working farmer?"

Ed Overton of James City County, where agriculture makes up just \$2.8 million in market value of products sold, said that of the eight farms the county has either completed easements on, or have in the pipeline, he felt some "would have been better off donating," but "they all needed the cash."

Overton said the distance between the \$106 million available for easement donations and the \$100,000 allocated for easement purchase matching funds is "not equitable."

"It must be easier for politicians to open the door for a credit of \$100 million than to appropriate \$100,000. If they were really serious about preserving prime farmland, we ought to be saving the very best that's left. I would just as soon see them cut the tax credit to \$50 million and put \$50 million in the farmland program."

But Heather Richards, director of land conservation for the Piedmont Environmental Council, said the tax credit has made land preservation possible all over Virginia, something that was not happening prior to the tax credit.

"The transferability is the key for making the tax credit useable statewide," Richards said.

Richards said prior to the tax credit, only 19 of the Commonwealth's 98 counties had more than 1,000 acres protected. Now, that number is 70.

"The tax credit is not a panacea. There's still a need for PDR. But the spread of land conservation across the state is remarkable."

New Mexico enacts land conservation program

Continued from page 1

historic sites. Amount of matching financial support is among the criteria for prioritizing projects submitted for consideration.

The goal of the State Forestry Division is to publish the rule for the new program by June 30, according to department spokesperson Jodi McGinnis Porter. "But that may not be doable - it's not written in stone," she said.

Michael Scisco, conservation specialist with the New Mexico Land Conservancy, said about 85 percent of the 80,000 acres the organization protects are agricultural. The federal Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP) will figure significantly into matching funds for the new state dollars.

"We have some projects ready now for federal funding," he said. Easement activity for the organization, which has just four employees, has doubled each year over the last two years, Scisco said.

One of the reasons for that is the state's new land conservation tax credit, passed in Jan. 2008. The program allows a deduction of 50 percent of appraised easement value up to \$250,000 per individual donor. The credit can be applied for up to 20 years. Also, like Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit (*see p. 1, this issue*) it is transferrable. Since passage, the Conservancy has seen only "a modest increase in easements. Outreach needs to be done," Scisco said. "We're seeing it make traction now. This is the most incentive we've had, ever."

According to Scisco, for "land rich and cash poor" operations, the tax credit "helps a little bit." He said several tax credit brokers work the state.

NRCS in New Mexico has had \$3.7 million in FRPP funds to acquire 12 easements covering a total of 3,215 acres. Sponsors include the Corrales Farmland Preservation Committee, the New Mexico Land Conservancy, the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust, the Taos Land Trust, and state agencies.

news briefs

Ohio governor, ag chief, take tour to promote food system development

REYNOLDSBURG, OH - Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland visited agricultural businesses and farms Mar. 18-19 in western Ohio to promote his Ohio Neighborhood Harvest initiative, which seeks to get locally grown foods into underserved areas. An advisory council appointed by Strickland coordinated the initiative, which brings together producers and distributors.

The day before the governor's tour, state Agriculture Director Robert Boggs met with legislators, community leaders and food policy advocates at the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank as part of Ohio Agriculture Day, which this year highlighted relationships between state food producers and distributors.

The Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank is a model for the Ohio Neighborhood Harvest initiative. The foodbank partners with a nonprofit organic farm that grows and provides fresh food to the foodbank for distribution to area hunger agencies.

The Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council and the Department of Agriculture is on task to identify "food deserts" and find ways to build a state food system.

Food system development is active elsewhere in the state. The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission will soon complete a food plan for Central Ohio, according to Brian Williams, farmland protection specialist for the Commission. The plan's objectives include bringing about new food cooperatives and helping producers get assistance to extend the growing season with techniques such as hoop houses.

Fresno County model farmland plan runs into snags late in the game

FRESNO, CA - Although the process of creating and publishing a model farmland protection plan seemed to include all stakeholders, some farmers and municipal officials stepped up to object to certain aspects of the plan when it was presented this month.

The Council of Fresno County Governments sponsored preparation of the plan, which must be approved by the county board of supervisors.

The plan designated the county's most valuable farming areas, and placed limits on urban growth. Some farmers are objecting to the limits because they

may affect land values on the urban edge. Municipal officials, too, are concerned about growth limits.

The plan called for “strategic agricultural reserves” comprising 559,000 acres, where development would be prohibited. Planners are hoping for a consensus in the next few months.

Williamson Act funding cut has counties in fighting mood; some farms cut off

FRESNO, CA - The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) met in Fresno Mar. 24 to decide how best to mitigate the pain of losing the state’s support for the Williamson Act, the state law that taxes farmland at its present use in return for 10-year agreements restricting development. The consensus: convince Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to reinstate the reimbursements called subventions, that enable counties to provide the property tax relief, in place since 1971.

Fresno County, and a lobbying firm, along with the CSAC, sponsored the meeting.

Since the governor chopped subventions from the budget last year, counties have been on their own in providing the tax relief, but some say they won’t be able to continue. The counties plan to take on “an aggressive lobbying campaign” to pressure the governor.

In Tulare County, 255 property owners with fewer than 10 acres in production were cut from the county’s list of recipients and no new properties will be added.

Some counties have stated they will discontinue the Williamson Act program unless subventions are reinstated. The state budget will be revisited in May.

Suffolk County to “modernize” its PDR program; focus is on ag use rules

HAUPPAUGE, NY - The nation’s first purchase of development rights program, created in 1974, is in need of some updating that will help when preserved farms make requests such as constructing a wind turbine, according to Suffolk County planning director Tom Isles.

Since towns have zoning powers, the county cannot apply ag use allowance via zoning, so “we’re applying it through PDR properties to modernize and do some housekeeping.” Isles said vague language in the code and a need for assurances when it comes to enforcing easements was also the driving force behind the move to update the program rules.

Isles said the county farm bureau and the farmland protection committee are on board with the changes, which he said should be finalized later this Spring.

state briefs

In Ohio ... Between 2002, when the program first began purchasing easements, and the end of 2008, the Ohio PDR program received 1,800 applicants. But with an annual budget of just \$3 million, the program was only able to make offers to 135 farms, comprising 26,814 acres, during the period. The program has also received donated easements on about 6,000 acres.

In California ... A number of counties plan to campaign for reinstatement of payments to local governments to make up for lost revenues when giving property tax breaks for farmland use restrictions under the Williamson Act; the reimbursements, referred to as subventions, were cut from last year’s state budget and many counties say they will not be able to carry the cost on their own.

In Maryland ... The MALPF and Rural Legacy programs are waiting for the budget process to finish to learn whether any funds will be available for easement purchase. A task force has been created to study what measures could be developed to preserve land without cash outlays.

In Colorado ... Developers won’t be able to get farmland on the edge of cities and towns rezoned after June 1, once Gov. Bill Ritter signs HB 1107, and it appears he is likely to. But farmland preservation doesn’t appear to have been the key motive of

lawmakers. Instead the state sought to stop abuses of tax-increment financing for urban renewal projects and reclaim forgone revenues. A number of projects were being approved on the urban edge instead of in the underserved neighborhoods the program was enacted to help.

In Michigan ... Having allocated \$275,000 in Dec. to qualify for a \$300,000 private grant, Kent County Commissioners, formally accepted that grant from the Grand Rapids Community Foundation Mar. 11.

In New York ... Town of Riverhead will consider creating a transfer of development rights (TDR) bank in an attempt to continue open space and farmland protection as revenue from its real estate transfer tax is depleted.

In Connecticut ... Gov. M. Jodi Rell was on site for the preservation of a 77-acre farm with a “stunning view” of Long Island Sound. The owners received \$13,956 per acre and had been on the waiting list for seven years. The farm produces cattle, pigs and vegetables. Rell said the state has a preservation goal of 130,000 acres; it has preserved to date 35,518 acres and 268 farms. A selectman from the town of Seymour said the project will keep the town from having to build a school.

MARYLAND

Bill would erase estate tax for preserved lands

ANNAPOLIS, MD - Maryland residents are known to be among the nation's most taxed, and their state's tax on a decedent's estate of 16 percent above \$1 million of value is among the nation's highest and a little known part of the equation. Farmland protection advocates have long sought exemptions for conserved lands from the federal estate tax, but state-imposed estate taxes have largely gone under the radar.

Sen. Rob Garagiola on Mar. 10 told the Md. Senate Budget & Taxation Committee that Maryland farmers who have preserved their land should have the value of that land, and of personal property that is used for agriculture, subtracted from the taxable value of their estates.

He was explaining SB 790, which he introduced with three cosponsors last month. As proposed, the law would apply to donated or purchased easements under the state's Agricultural Lands Preservation, Rural Legacy and Maryland Environmental Trust programs as well as county-operated farmland preservation programs.

Estates would be eligible for the tax abatement if being passed on to family members. Benefits would be phased in, beginning in 2010 at a 20 percent exclusion; a 100 percent exclusion would begin in 2013.

This year there is no federal estate tax. It is scheduled to be reinstated next year with an exemption of \$1 million.

Testifying for the bill was Kelly Carneal of 1000 Friends of Maryland; Deborah Bowers, editor and publisher of *Farmland Preservation Report*; Wayne McGinnis, a Baltimore County farmer with sons in partnership; Ann Jones of the Howard County Conservancy and Baltimore County Land Trust Alliance; and representatives of the state Farm Bureau and Conservation Districts.

Bowers told the Committee the Maryland estate tax had been a burden for her family during an estate settlement that involved preserving the family's 80-acre farm in Harford County. McGinnis testified that farmers generally are not in a financial position to bear the burden of the tax, and that the tax is unfair because the land values upon which it is based bear no relation to agricultural income.

No reliable estimate of forgone revenues was available because the number of deaths per year of preserved farm owners is unpredictable.

About 18 states levy an estate tax, imposing percentages that range from one percent to about 16 percent, with wide ranges of exempted values.

In an examination of the states that levy their own estate taxes, *Farmland Preservation Report* found that only a few provide relief for lands under conservation easement.

In Pennsylvania, estate tax can be reduced by 50 percent for preserved farms under a provision passed in 2006 in a tax reform bill. In the State of Washington, the value of a charitable contribution through a conservation easement can be deducted from the estate tax.

spotlight

KAREN MARTYNICK

Nation's top PDR county eyeing funds

Karen Martynick is executive director of the Lancaster Farmland Trust, the leading land trust in Pennsylvania for number of easements completed annually. Lancaster County has budgeted \$4.6 million for PDR this year, roughly half the allocation of just a few years ago. The Lancaster County program has preserved 64,500 acres, and LFT works with the county on a number of deals and holds easements on 20,000 acres. FPR spoke with Martynick about the security of funding for preservation.

FPR: Karen, how long have you been with Lancaster Farmland Trust now?

MARTYNICK: Six years in June.

FPR: And before that you were a commissioner in Chester County...

MARTYNICK: Yes, I was a county commissioner for three terms.

FPR: I remember that. Chester County has a good program and now you have Kevin Baer there in Lancaster, so lots of expertise...

MARTYNICK: Yes.

FPR: Lancaster Newspapers recently did a series of articles on farmland preservation, that marked the 30th anniversary of the program. One of the stories said Lancaster Farmland Trust is cutting back on accepting easements to put more time into monitoring, is that correct?

MARTYNICK: I think a better way to portray it is that we are putting more effort into stewarding the easements that we currently have, than we used to do, by necessity, because we've reached the point where it takes a lot more time to monitor easements and to enforce easements. We're not really cutting back on the number of farms we preserve but our board has given additional resources and put more importance on the need to steward the easements we already have, recognizing the legal and fiduciary responsibility we have to do so.



Karen Martynick

FPR: But does this mean fewer easements taken on because you have insufficient funds to monitor?

MARTYNICK: At this point we have at least for this year - as a nonprofit you never know

what funding looks like from year to year - but at this point we have sufficient funds to maintain preservation programs at the same level that it has been for the last couple of years. The issue of funding for acquisitions as we go forward is a challenge and uncertain.

FPR: There seems to be some concern that this is a trend because of the county's financial situation and borrowing capacity. But farmland preservation has survived some past economic downturns. How do you feel about the future of farmland preservation in Lancaster County? Is funding in a downward trend?

MARTYNICK: On the plus side there continues to be a great demand from farmers who want to preserve their land. The only trend we've seen in that regard is for demand to go up. The interest seems to increase. The second thing is, the public support here in Lancaster County is overwhelming, for preservation generally and farmland preservation specifically, is pretty popular wherever you go, but there's no question in Lancaster County it is really part of the fabric that makes the community. So there are two things that are very much in favor of the program continuing.

FPR: You stated in one of the articles in Lancaster New Era, that you foresaw the possibility that farmland preservation would not be a priority in future years. Do you think that's actually possible, given the support you just spoke of?

MARTYNICK: Well I think that the ongoing question for the next couple of years is, what the level of funding will be, given what's going on in the economy and how difficult it is for government to meet their obligations, something I'm very familiar with, having been a county commissioner. Getting back to your point on having seen this before, we definitely have. A downturn in funding for a couple of years probably would not have a significant impact on the program but if it continued for

more than a couple of years I think it could. In watching Chester County grow over the last 25 years, I'm a strong believer in this idea of there being a window of opportunity to accomplish what you want. Once that window starts to close, obviously, it becomes much more difficult to accomplish those goals. The goal in Lancaster County is to sustain agriculture. Nobody knows how long we have before that window of opportunity closes. After that, it could just be about preserving land, and that's a noble goal in itself, but the goal to sustain agriculture you really have to get enough acres preserved. A couple of years won't make a big difference, but if it extends beyond a couple of years and farmers start to get discouraged they'll never get their farm preserved because it's such a long waiting list, and a farmer says, no, it's not worth it for me, that will have potential to permeate the program and hurt it in the long run. For a couple of years, given the fact that funding has gone up and gone down, won't hurt, but if it's a long term trend, it definitely will.

FPR: Do you think the commissioners are indicating this is a trend? Are they leaning toward not borrowing money for the program?

MARTYNICK: No, I don't think they're indicating we're entering a trend. I think they are committed to the program and understand the importance of the program to the county. I do think the idea of how the program is funded is probably more of what they are looking at than not funding it. The idea that you continue to borrow money is something they're looking at very carefully, given the multitude of projects they need to fund from borrowed money.

FPR: What alternative do they have?

MARTYNICK: They just got some capital needs for the county, all of which would require them to do longterm borrowing, so now what they're looking at is, are there alternative sources of funds, or could alternative sources be developed that would sustain funding for the program. I think that is a very smart thing to do. It will require the cooperation of the legislature, which is always a challenge. But I think it makes sense to look at alternative sources.

FPR: You mean a dedicated fund, like a fee on something...

MARTYNICK: Some kind of tax on something that would be earmarked specifically for farmland preservation.

FPR: Are those discussions happening right now?

MARTYNICK: They are. They've been happening, but now those discussions have been reinvigorated.

FPR: Have any particular fees been mentioned?

MARTYNICK: Everything from an additional percentage on the real estate transfer tax to increasing the sales tax. Perhaps giving the county an option to maybe add on one or one-half of a percent for land preservation - there is a proposal that includes that - some of the issues are different at the state level, where there are also discussions on how to continue to fund projects. The county is involved right now in building a manure digester that might be able to generate funds that could be used for land preservation.

FPR: That's interesting. Given the level of support for preservation in the county, do you think a sales tax increase would be supported by the voters?

MARTYNICK: What Commissioner Leyman's proposal recognizes is because Lancaster County has such a large tourist industry, you would be using those funds to protect the amenities they come to enjoy.

FPR: Right. Let me ask you, turning the subject a little bit. You do transfer of development rights projects with three municipalities. Is there anything going on with TDR at the moment?

MARTYNICK: Not much. We continue to work in other townships to encourage them to put TDR in place so that when growth pressures rise again they will have it in place to deal with. But we haven't sold any TDRs in a while - the last was in '08. We're banking some from a couple of townships, but projects are on hold.

FPR: I understand you were recently accredited by the Land Trust Alliance. Was the process very cumbersome?

MARTYNICK: It was a grueling, time-consuming and worthwhile process.

FPR: Well, congratulations on that.

MARTYNICK: You know, you don't very often get an opportunity to look inward, at what we are doing well, and not so well, and it gave us the opportunity to do that, but it did take a lot of time and effort.

back page briefs

NY environmental groups stage creative campaign for EPF funds

ALBANY, NY - Environmental groups pulled out all the stops on their campaign to get the governor and the legislature to restore funding to the Environmental Protection Fund, which supports the farmland protection program. One billboard in view of the state capitol sports the state mammal, the beaver, looking for love in the form of greenbacks.

The campaign includes billboard, online and print advertisements, including personal ads, asking state leaders to demonstrate their love for New York by supporting the Environmental Protection Fund. Campaign ads are available at KeepProtectingNY.org.

The EPF was cut by 33 percent, or \$69 million in Gov. David Paterson's 2011-12 biennial budget. The groups are calling on the state legislature to restore the fund to \$222 million in the final enacted budget. This is the second year the EPF has had severe cuts. In addition to farmland and open space preservation, the fund is used for air and water pollution cleanup, sewage treatment facilities upgrades, historic preservation, waterfront revitalization, pesticide use monitoring, and much more. Last year, state lawmakers restored some EPF dollars during budget negotiations. The Senate's budget resolution restores the EPF to \$222 million.

Mass. governor hands out land preservation grants

WORCESTER, MA - Massachusetts Gov. Deval L. Patrick was lauded at the 20th Annual Mass. Land Conservation Conference Mar. 27. He received not one, not two, but three standing ovations for his support of land conservation.

Bernie McHugh of the Mass. Land Trust Coalition reminded the governor of his election promise to commit \$50 million for land conservation.

"And you have stuck to it even in these challenging times," McHugh said to the governor. He then presented him with a framed map of the state that shows in green the land protected during the Patrick administration.

In the last three years, the Patrick

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administration has invested more than \$140 million in conservation, preserving more than 61,000 acres at a cost of approximately \$2,500 per acre. The open space projects include the preservation of about 5,200 acres for farmland.

When development went south, farmer bought back his farm

MANHATTAN, IL - A Will County farmer has bought back his farm at a quarter of the price a developer paid him just two years ago, according to a story by Steve Daniels in *Crain's Chicago Business*, Mar. 22. He bought back his 106-acre farm from Bank of America Corp. Other farmers may be having the same luck, the article hinted. "The sellers are struggling banks, from giants like B of A to mid-sized commercial lenders like Chicago's Cole Taylor Bank and Itasca-based First Midwest Bank, digging out from real estate loans that have led to big losses over the past two years," the story said.

conferences

March 27, Worcester, MA: 20th Massachusetts Land Trust Conference. See massland.org

March 27, New Haven, CT: *Plowing Ahead: Farmland Preservation in 2010*

and Beyond, conference of the CT Working Lands Alliance. This marks the 10th anniversary of the group. Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy Chief, USDA, is keynote speaker. Creative funding solutions among four panels. See workinglandsalliance.org.

April 8 - 10, Malvern, PA: 8th Annual Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference. Held at the Desmond Hotel & Conference Center. Special Saturday address by Rand Wentworth; Standards and Practices seminars; Upholding conservation permanence; tracks include farmland preservation; See conserveland.org.

April 15- 17, Columbus, OH: Midwest Regional Land Trust Conference. See training@LTA.org.

May 13 - 15, Walla Walla, WA:

Northwest Regional Land Trust conf.

May 19-20, Martinsburg, PA: Annual Spring Conference of the Pa. Farmland Preservation Assn. Day 1: dinner & roundtable; Day 2: meeting & conference. See PFPA.org.

May 27, Reisterstown, MD: Maryland Land Trust Alliance annual conference to be held at the Pearlstone Retreat & Conference Center. Rand Wentworth, keynote speaker. Contact Beki Howey at 410-514-7915.

Oct. 2-5, Hartford, CT: The call for presentations has gone out, and preliminary information on this year's rally is available at lta.org.