

farmland preservation report

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



Obama announces new lands initiative

WASHINGTON, D.C. – President Obama launched a conservation initiative April 16 calling for the Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture and other named agencies to support and promote programs underway nationwide that conserve land. The Great Outdoors Initiative will send agency leaders to communities to hear how they are conserving landscapes and bolstering public enjoyment of the outdoors. The president spoke of working lands initiatives and the work of land trusts in saving private lands as a significant part of how “we must adjust our strategy” to meet the fiscal constraints of the nation.

“So rising to meet these challenges is a task and an obligation, but it’s one that government cannot and should not meet alone. There are roughly

1,600 privately run land trusts in this country that have protected over 10 million acres through voluntary efforts... And that’s the kind of collaborative spirit at the heart of the America’s Great Outdoors Initiative that we’re launching today... Understand, we’re not talking about a big federal agenda being driven out of Washington. We’re talking about how we can collect



President announces Great Outdoors Initiative (Live web photo: FPR)

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MARYLAND

Land programs get funding, innovations

ANNAPOLIS, MD – The Maryland General Assembly approved Gov. Martin O’Malley’s proposed Program Open Space budget of \$22 million, and his request for the Rural Legacy Program of \$12.6 million. The funding comes from the state’s capital budget, made up of borrowed money.

The Rural Legacy Program will have its funds spread over two fiscal years, however, with \$6.3 million for FY11 and \$6.3 million for FY12.

The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation will have \$7.8 million in borrowed funds for FY11 - its transfer tax revenues removed for the state’s deficit reduction. With local matching funds, about \$20 million will be spent in the state for

farmland preservation, according to Jim Wallace, administrative officer for the agriculture department.

Gov. Martin O’Malley has persistently championed Program Open Space and each land protection program despite fiscal constraints.

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Md. garners bond funds, innovations

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In addition to the budget bill, two bills submitted by MALPF were passed.

MALPF Partnership Program

Passage of SB 95 creates the Partnership Program, authorizing MALPF to work with other programs to increase or complement easements.

“It gives us explicit authority to solicit money from outside agencies to get easements, whether co-held or not,” said MALPF executive director Jim Conrad. “Basically it gives us a lot more flexibility. It let’s us think more creatively.”

Conrad said sources of partnership funding could include clean water state revolving loan funds as well as nutrient credit trading, an innovation that has been slow to get on the mark, but is beginning to provide opportunities for farmers.

Daniel “Pat” O’Connell, president of Evergreen Capital Advisors, Inc., said nutrient credit trading is a way farmland preservation programs can bolster easement deals while at the same time make gains in Chesapeake Bay restoration.

“If a farmer can reach baseline in terms of compliance, then anything they do above baseline generates credits they can sell to buyers who are interested in offsets,” O’Connell told *FPR*.

“For example, yesterday I was talking to DC-WASA, the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority, and they have enormous obligations with EPA for stormwater and wastewater. You reach a point where you can’t do anything more to wastewater, so my comment to them was, that, obviously there’s not much farmland in D.C., so they should be looking at Maryland and Virginia and seeing whether they can be buying nutrient credits from farmers in those states. And of course my pitch is, nutrient credits are very valuable to an institutional buyer if they are longterm, enforceable and fixed-price; so my thought is that you embed the BMPs in the ag conservation easement. Not only are you buying an easement to preserve farmland, the seller is obligated under the easement to maintain the BMPs that are put in place that will generate the credits.”

O’Connell has been pushing the margins with nutrient credit trading, and he is seeing it begin to take off, sometimes in unexpected places. In West Virginia, a state that doesn’t yet have a process in place for certifying credits, the Jefferson County Public Service District (JCPSD) recently approved purchasing nutrient credits in Lancaster County, Pa.

Susanne Lawton, general manager of the JCPSD, said it has approved a contractual agreement to purchase credits from Lancaster County.

“We would prefer to purchase the necessary credits here in our own county or state if a suitable program is established, but until this occurs we will need to reach out to other states in the Chesapeake Bay watershed,” Lawton said. The District purchased the credits through Red Barn Trading Company, which aggregates, certifies and verifies nutrient credits for resale.

A township in York County is purchasing nutrient credits from nearby farms for 75 percent less cost than upgrading its sewage treatment plant under federal and state mandates. It began the purchases in 2008 and was the first local government to meet its water quality requirements com-

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900 La Grange Road
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www.farmlandpreservationreport.com

Deborah Bowers
Editor & Publisher

Tom Daniels
Senior Contributing Editor

Robert J. Heuer
Contributing Editor

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pletely through credits, according to *Ecosystem Marketplace*.

State revolving loan funds for Clean Water Act

Like nutrient credit trading, state revolving loan funds administered through the EPA to implement the Clean Water Act are now seen as a source for land preservation, according to O'Connell, who attended the recent White House Conference on America's Great Outdoors April 16.

State revolving funds, or SRFs, have been around since the late 1980s when the EPA's Clean Water Act grants for sewage treatment construction were converted to low-interest rate loans.

"For the last 20 years the EPA has been pumping billions of dollars into these revolving funds and states have all been matching," O'Connell told *FPR*.

"When the EPA set it up they provided specifically for the use of this money for both sewage treatment plants and nonpoint source, therefore land conservation improves water quality," O'Connell said. "But if you look over the last 20 years, 95-plus percent of the money has been used for sewage treatment plants. And what's happening now, and the White House conference is more evidence of this, is that everyone is looking at this huge pot of money that actually has not been used as efficiently as it could have been. And they're identifying that as a potential source of funding for land conservation. You can only do it in places where it will improve water quality, so it ties back into this BMP issue, but I think it has huge potential for providing inexpensive financing for farmland preservation programs."

Installment purchases

Passage of SB 59, another departmental bill, relieves MALPF of the requirement that \$4 million of its agricultural transfer tax funds be distributed to the Maryland Agriculture and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) to fund installment purchases, while assuring that up to \$4 million can be used for them.

"That's probably enough for next year," said Steve McHenry of MARBIDCO, the go-through entity for installment contracts.

MARBIDCO's dedicated fund came out of the

state agricultural land transfer tax, which is paid when farmland is transferred for non-ag purposes. Those revenues plummeted from \$23 million in 2005, to \$3.3 million in 2009.

MALPF's installment purchases, through MARBIDCO, are offered in 10 or 15-year agreements. Easement sellers receive semi-annual tax-exempt interest payments, and then the principal at the end of the period.

In the world of installment purchases for farmland preservation, these are short payment periods that don't provide the attractive leveraging, or attract as many sellers as longer tax-free interest periods of 20 or 30-year agreements, said Pat O'Connell, who devised the installment method first used by Howard County, Md., in the 1980s. But the state treasurer advised lawmakers last year that constitutional clauses relating to tax-supported debt would not allow for contracts exceeding 15 years.

Also hampering use of IPAs are low interest rates, resulting in only a handful of farm operators choosing to receive easement payment through installments. The state program's first installment agreement was completed last fall on a 121-acre farm in Talbot County. The second installment agreement will be settled on a 69-acre farm in Frederick County this spring. Three other deals are in the pipeline, McHenry said.

Until interest rates rise further, deferring capital gains tax is the primary attraction of IPAs.

Watered down Md. estate tax relief

Another new law will defer payment of the Maryland estate tax for three years for farms that remain in agriculture. Those farms would then have three years to pay, and without interest penalties.

That bill, however, was a last minute effort and substitute for SB 790, which didn't pass due to its fiscal note. It would have forgiven estate tax for farms that were preserved or applied for preservation during estate settlement. The substitute bill was considered better than nothing, according to Kelly Carneal of Partners for Open Space.

"It was felt it was better to do something. Otherwise it might be several years before anything else could be done," Carneal said.

Obama: protecting land good for the economy

Continued from page 1

best ideas on conservation; how we can pursue good ideas that local communities embrace; and how we can be more responsible stewards of tax dollars to promote conservation.”

The president said that conservation “is an integral part of economic growth,” and that the initiative would help “create jobs preserving and maintaining our national heritage.”

The president focused extensively on private lands conservation. He said the Great Outdoors Initiative would “help farmers, ranchers, property owners who want to protect their lands for their children and their grandchildren,” and largely “build on successful conservation efforts being spearheaded outside of Washington – by local and state governments, by tribes, and by private groups – so we can write a new chapter in the protection of rivers, wildlife habitats, historic sites, and the great landscapes of our country.”

The presidential memorandum calls on the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to schedule listening sessions and work together on an action plan, to be completed by Nov. 15, for bolstering the efforts of private organizations and local and state governments in land conservation.

The president said the initiative was launched not despite fiscal constraints, but because of them, and that the Initiative would help strengthen the economy.

“It’s how we’re going to spur job creation in the tourism industry and the recreation industry. It’s how we’ll create jobs preserving and maintaining our forests, our rivers, our great outdoors.”

The president delivered his remarks at the White House Conference on America’s Great Outdoors held at the Department of Interior. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsak and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar served as moderators for two panels, one on working lands, and one on public lands.

news briefs

West Virginia program spurs county board creation; \$16.5 million allocated

CHARLESTON, WV - Roane County, in the west central area of West Virginia, has added itself to the list of counties stepping up and enacting local transfer taxes as dedicated funding sources for farmland preservation. Roane ranks 21st of the state’s 55 counties in value of agricultural products, with cattle and hay predominating. Roane has an estimated 2008 population of just 15,169.

Roane joins 16 other counties with operational programs that have preserved 89 farms and 11,475 acres, according to Lavonne Paden, state program coordinator. Not all counties have yet completed their first easement, she said.

West Virginia authorized local transfer taxes and county PDR programs in 2000. Jefferson and Berkeley Counties in the Eastern Panhandle are out in front with number of easements and acres. Berkeley has appropriated nearly \$8 million in local dollars and Jefferson has spent half that sum. A total of \$16.5 million in local funds have been spent statewide.

The federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program has assisted local efforts with \$10.5 million. A total of \$27 million in both local and federal dollars has been allocated.

Mapping project examines Maryland food systems, food deserts

BALTIMORE, MD - A data and GIS mapping project underway in Baltimore is focused on understanding who produces food for human consumption in Maryland, and who consumes that food.

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future is host to the GIS Food System Mapping Project, which has identified 800 farms in Maryland “that sell locally,” said project director Amanda Behrens. An online interactive map will soon be underway, she said, that will allow users to select layers of data and produce their own maps. Three maps were recently released on the project’s website that detail food availability in the city. One map delineates neighborhoods that have no food stores within walking distance, defined as one-quarter mile, called food

deserts. Behrens said the number of specialty crop growers who sell directly to supermarkets is unknown but could be determined through surveys the project will conduct.

Behrens said the Baltimore City School Board attempted last year to arrange a cooperative as a means of procuring locally grown food, but was unsuccessful.

The maps are available at http://www.jhsph.edu/clf/programs/eating/proj_foodsystem.html.

NRCS: delays in FRPP reimbursements in Pa. due to faulty appraisals

HARRISBURG, PA - A number of Pennsylvania counties have been experiencing delays in reimbursements from the federal Farm and Ranchland Protection program due to review appraisals that didn't meet federal requirements, not to funding snafus, according to Hathaway Jones of the state NRCS office.

"We've obligated \$6 million and agreements were sent out for signatures," Jones said. "The hold-up was issues with the 2007-2008 cooperative agreements and getting appraisals through the review process." No funding has disappeared or been reallocated, she said.

According to Jones, a review appraiser erroneously approved appraisals that in fact did not meet NRCS standards in a batch of 40 appraisals that were sent to NRCS for review.

"Some were OK, some were not. We contracted with a different review appraiser and sent NRCS specs so everyone was clear on what we needed," Jones said. A new contractor who has had 30 appraisals to correct since December "has gotten through most of them."

Jones said there are no problems for 2009 grants.

York County's Agricultural Advisory Board has grown impatient waiting for reimbursement, according to program director Patty McCandless.

"They are wondering if the money is really there."

Jones said in addition to York, several other counties have long been waiting for projects to clear. Berks County has agreements from 2006 and 2007 that have not been reimbursed due to appraisal problems at both the state and county end, she said.

"It's been a struggle because counties are waiting for reimbursement," Jones said. "We don't have any flexibility to bend the rules."

The Pa. state NRCS works with some counties and land trusts directly, including Berks, Lebanon, and Lancaster, but most counties receive FRPP funds through the state Bureau of Farmland Preservation.

state briefs

In Pennsylvania ... A Berks County municipality is unhappy that a farm within its boundaries has been preserved and township commissioners say the easement is inconsistent with plans for the area. The 24-acre farm is near I-78.

In Ohio... First Lady Frances Strickland and Agriculture Director Robert Boggs celebrated Sustainable Agriculture Week by praising the conservation practices of a family farm in Canal Winchester. The Schacht family uses conservation practices that include crop rotation, irrigation and integrated pest management. The family's on site market also offers other locally grown produce and opportunities to pick-your-own product.

In Michigan... Washtenaw County Commissioners are amending the county's Natural Areas Preservation Program (NAPP) so that monies spent in the program can include farmland. The program's funding source, a property tax millage that raises \$3 million annually, is due to expire at the end of 2010. A ballot question is being drafted to renew the dedicated fund, and to include farm properties as eligible to qualify. Since NAPP was enacted in 2000, about 1,800 acres have been acquired for nature preserves. Language is being drafted that will enable the use of PDR and define agriculture as a type of natural area.

In Connecticut ...

Passage of HB 5419 will be a boost to direct sales of ag products, allowing home preparation of acidified foods such as pickles and tomato sauce; the bill also provides for direct sale of poultry, under certain circumstances, to consumers and businesses such as restaurants and hotels. The bill also makes new funds available for dairy promotion and research.

In Washington, D.C. ... House Agriculture Chairman Collin Petersen began hearings in April to prepare for the next farm bill. A field hearing will be held in Texas May 17.

In North Carolina ... Cabarrus County has created a food policy council to "develop a robust, sustainable local-food economy and a healthier population," county officials said in announcing a call for applicants. A state-level Sustainable Local Food Advisory Council was established last fall.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This PDF includes articles posted online in both April & May 2010; this PDF is posted as the May 2010 edition; there is no April 2010 pdf edition. We did this to put the PDF in line with the actual posting dates of the content as Bowers Publishing continues to adjust to digital news delivery. Thank you for your loyal readership.

*Deborah Bowers
Editor & Publisher*

spotlight

DON BELK, AICP

Buffer for Army base means boosting local agricultural economy

Donald Belk serves as regional planner for the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Regional Task Force at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, NC. The task force is comprised of 11 counties and 73 municipalities surrounding Ft. Bragg and Pope Air Force Base and its mission is to gauge community needs as the population of the area increases due to BRAC. Strengthening agriculture as a means of preventing incompatible development near the base is a primary objective. FPR spoke with Belk on April 16.

FPR: Don, the last time I talked with you was in 2008 and you were working on your plan to protect Fort Bragg from encroachment by development. What progress have you been able to make in getting farmland protection plans adopted in the counties surrounding Fort Bragg?

BELK: Well, late in 2008 we received a grant from the Ag Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund of North Carolina, through the Dept. of Agriculture, for \$400,000. Our proposal was to set up a Working Lands Protection Program, and our intention was to bring all of our counties up to a level of new awareness and responsibility with regard to farmland and forest land protection. We have hired a director who has been on the job now for about 18 months and the project is being conducted by the Lois G. Britt Agri-Business Center at Mt. Olive College. ... We talked before about the need for military installations, not just Fort Bragg, but every facility, particularly where there's training going on — to have a suitable buffer around the installation because there are things that impact areas beyond the boundaries, as you may imagine - noise, dust, explosions... and in our case, people jumping out of airplanes.

The Dept. of Defense has placed a real emphasis on what they call preserving compatible land uses around the installations. This does not prohibit all development, only the worst type of development — specifically residential and commercial activities. There are numerous types of industrial activities that would pose no difficulty to the military, however, because of the status of agriculture in our region and the significance of our longleaf pine ecosystem, we're very much focused on protecting farmland and forestland, which is in abundance around Fort Bragg. In fact, through a previous effort, the Joint Land Use Study, we have mapped those areas and identified the parcels that are deemed important or critical in terms of the military's needs. So we actually know the areas we want to target for protection. Given that baseline information, we developed a strategy to give the counties a range of approaches they could take, either through tax incentives, providing funding for conservation easements, or any local

program they could bring to bear. For the State of North Carolina, their tool of choice is the Voluntary Agricultural District. Two of our 11 counties do not have VADs at this point, so a primary goal of the Working Lands Protection Program is to establish VADs in those counties. And for the counties that have existing programs we would want them to take that to the next level, which would carry additional benefits. So, we are crafting our plans. At the end of the project, each County will have a customized farmland protection plan, which, upon certification by NCDCA, will give them priority status for preservation funding.

FPR: You said two years ago that Ft. Bragg was looking at farmland preservation through the lens of economic development...

BELK: I think what is different about our approach, is that we are really focused on enhancing economic opportunities for these landowners. First, we want to open up the markets that will be growing at these military installations, for example, for food products.

FPR: Have you had any luck in changing procurement rules for that?

BELK: That is being addressed at the federal level. This concept, which we have named "Feed the Forces" has gained some traction. Hopefully, we can address a 'local food procurement preference' in the next farm bill. So between now and then we will continue to keep our legislative delegation informed and continue to press the issue.

But really the focus is opening those markets. The local foods movement as it has evolved in North Carolina - very robust - has recognized our efforts. The NC State University Center for Environmental Farming Systems designated our program as their case study for establishing a local food system around a large institution. Feed the Forces has also been taken on by an interagency group at the state level, the North Carolina Working Lands Group, that brings in representatives from the military services and other federal agencies. They are looking at similar issues of compatible land use for the entire defense region of North Carolina. Agriculture and defense in North Carolina are our state's number one and number two industries, respectively, so we believe our approach to working lands protection is an ideal way to benefit both economies, both at the local level by providing new opportunities for producers, and then at the military level by providing that compatible land use buffer - a simple concept, something people can grab on to.

FPR: Yes, I like that - "Feed the Forces..."

BELK: And it's more than food.

FPR: Really? How so?

BELK: Probably the most exciting avenue now is this notion, which we first suggested to NCDCA, of a 'closed loop biofuels cycle', that is, the local production, distribution, processing and consumption of biofuels. Our counterparts in Eastern North Carolina could just as easily refer to this as "Fuel the Forces"... and interestingly, there are two things happening. First, the military is very focused on reducing their dependence on fossil fuel and they have specific targets they've been charged to meet. Likewise, the state of North Carolina also has targets - a goal of 10 percent of liquid fuels in North Carolina to be locally grown and produced by 2017. That is 600 million gallons per year. We intend to promote this concept to the NC Biofuels Center, and we're going to be meeting with them. Obviously we're talking about a considerable amount of land for feedstock production.



Don Belk

Our thought is, if we're going to pursue this, then we believe that first priority should be given to the critical agricultural areas near installations

that can actually produce this.

FPR: That's an excellent strategy.

BELK: Yes. This is really at the heart of what we're trying to do; for food, for fuel, for building products, what have you, and if we can work it out with the producers, the distributors, we have the local processing capacity in North Carolina now, for producing biofuels, and we've started building the capacity for a local food system. We want to put policies in place that will give priority to those military-specific areas. Obviously if you have a farmer who is growing switchgrass for biofuel production and he has a long-term contract and 600 acres right next to the base, that kind of contract is a win-win. That's really what we're striving for.

FPR: Where are you in developing a regional food system?

BELK: We are involved in a partnership led by the Southeast North Carolina Food Systems Program. They were working on this before we came on the scene in 2007, but after a few meetings and our exhortations about Feeding the Forces, we ended up partnering and submitting a proposal to the North Carolina Golden LEAF Foundation, an organization that distributes tobacco settlement funds to worthy projects. Our partnership just on April 1st was awarded a \$375,000 grant to set up a processing and distribution center for local producers.

FPR: Wow, that's great, Don.

BELK: This facility will be located in Warsaw, and it's equidistant between Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune. One distributor provides fruits and vegetables to all of North Carolina's military installations, and we have reached a tentative agreement with this distributor. They are willing to negotiate with these key landowners that we've identified, for contracts to grow the produce to meet the military's needs.

FPR: That's incredible, Don.

BELK: It's really coming along. In the beginning we kind of hit a wall; a few years

back the procurement regulations were such a bureaucratic stone wall we didn't know what to do, but... [laughter] we were kind of taking the wrong approach. What we really needed to do is work with the distributor. As long as the distributor's requirements are met and they're under contract with the military, then we don't really need to involve them directly in this process. We have, of course, and the installations are fully on board with it, but it's kind of funny we realized we were taking the hardest route possible.

FPR: In other words, you don't really have to change the rules as long as the distributor will bring the products that you want.

BELK: That is true. And we're fortunate we have a progressive, young company that cherishes their contract with the military and this fits their business plan nicely, not to mention the positive PR that can be gained from it. The qualifier here is, yes, it will be local products, and yes, it will be coming from many of these key, strategically located farms. But most important is getting the opportunities to the farmers. If they can get a long-term contract with a distributor, that's as good as a conservation easement. I always go back to what I heard from Bob Strayhorn, a wonderful farmer I got to know back when I was at Orange County. When we were going through our travails back in the early 90s to try to get a PDR program started, he supported it. But when it didn't pass, he would remind us that, "if you want to preserve farmland, just make it possible for me and my colleagues to make a living farming and you won't have to spend one public dime on this program. We'll preserve those farms for you, for free."

FPR: Yes, it's preservation through profitability.

BELK: That's it, that's a great way to put it. So that's our approach. Again, I'll mention biofuels and the ambitious goal North Carolina has. We are just perfectly positioned to start setting up that system as well, and that's actually going to be more readily implemented, Deborah, because we already have that processing and distribution capability right here in the region. For example, there is a new ethanol plant getting ready to open no more than five miles from Fort Bragg...

FPR: No kidding, wow.

BELK: And believe me, we're going to do all we can to get local supplies to this plant, to the extent we can. So, again, there's such a major emphasis on that, we feel like that it's an easier fix than food, and we know we'll be able to get that started soon. BRAC RTF will receive a portion of the Golden LEAF grant to hire a coordinator to work with the counties. When we received the Working Lands grant from NCDA, our first task was to set up what we refer to as 'county land teams.' Basically, the team consists of the county planner, the soil and water district conservationist, the cooperative extension director, the economic developer and, of course, the county manager.

We thought that was significant, because the cooperative extension people, the planners - they *never* talk to each other [laughter]. So we felt we could do a lot of good just by bringing them in, focusing on our program; they could really begin to see how their own efforts could fold into that. As it turned out, the counties, by agreeing to establish those teams, fulfilled their contribution, their match to the grant. So each county is getting significant planning services for no cost but their employees' time. So we're pleased about that. This coordinator for the local food project will work with those teams to help us identify the producers, and helping those producers get the certification they need, and other technical assistance.

FPR: That's an important link for you then, those teams.

BELK: Absolutely. We couldn't begin to reach the agricultural community without them. They're in the field, they know the farmers and landowners, they speak the language, they have the expertise, and we don't... [laughter].

FPR: You've got the great ideas...

BELK: We do what we do, we get the funding, the state supports it, and the farmers are interested. If anything, we're moving too slow for them. They're ready.

FPR: I imagine so... they've been waiting for you since tobacco went south.

BELK: Well, that's true, that's true. The first part of this actually started from another grant we got, from the Tobacco Trust Fund. So that kind of got the whole thing rolling. That program has now expired but we transitioned successfully and now we're looking forward to opening up this processing center. We've made some progress... since we last talked, I'm happy to report.

back page briefs

Rail figures heavily in ag transportation report to Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The USDA released to Congress Apr. 27 the largest report to date on agricultural transportation. Congress asked for the report in the 2008 Farm Bill. The study covers the four major modes of transportation commonly used by ag producers in the United States: truck, rail, barge, and ocean vessel.

Rail figures heavily in the report. A full 127 pages are devoted to rail transport, including rail competition and its importance to agriculture, rail rates, rail service performance and rail capacity and investment.

"Agriculture is the largest user of freight transportation in the United States, with 31 percent of all ton-miles recorded in 2007 being used in the movement of agricultural products," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in a press release. "This report provides policy makers the vital information needed to make strategic infrastructure and policy decisions to meet rural America's transportation needs, now and in the future."

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said infrastructure improvements that benefit freight are underway as stimulus initiatives, which include a push to double U.S. exports within five years. Domestic ag markets got a boost early this year when a Kansas City rail operator began a freight line between Washington State and the Chicago region.

The report, "Study of Rural Transportation Issues," examines some of the major issues facing agricultural transportation, including the dramatic effect of deregulation on the rail industry, and the infrastructure needed to support a projected increase in biofuel transportation.

The report also discusses the current approach to transportation policy in the United States, in which each mode of transportation is often considered separately without an overarching view of the flow of freight through all the modes.

The study may be found on the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service website.

Evergreen Capital Advisors

Financial advisor
to governmental
farmland
preservation
programs

5819 Chevy Chase Pkwy NW
Washington, D.C. 20015

609 915-9886
pat@evergreenca.com
www.evergreenca.com

Daniel Patrick O'Connell
President



Land Evaluation & Site Assessment Plan Development

Consultant to Local & State Governments

LLOYD E. WRIGHT

301 681-7764
LEW52841@aol.com

Cell: 301 221-3423
Fax: 301 681-3260

11307 Baritone Court, Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

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conferences

May 13 - 15, Walla Walla, WA: Northwest Regional Land Trust conf.
May 19-20, Hollidaysburg, PA: Annual Spring Conference of the Pa. Farmland Preservation Assn. Day 1: dinner & roundtable; Day 2: meeting & conference. Google Pa. Farmland Preservation Association.

May 20 -21, Easton, MD: Maryland's Annual Preservation & Revitalization Conference. Sessions on the Maryland Heritage Area Program, state grant money, Main Street Maryland, the PlanMaryland initiative, transportation enhancements, and the War of 1812 Bicentennial. See Md. Historical Trust website.

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: Land Trust Rally 2010: More than 120 workshops to be offered. See Land Trust Alliance website. Registration available in May.

Oct. 5-8, Denver, CO: CommunityMatters, 2010, sponsored by the Orton Family Foundation. For information contact John Barstow at jbarstow@orton.org.