

NEW YORK'S

Farmland Protection Program

CONSERVING OUR FARMS FOR THE FUTURE



Support Grows for New York Farms and Farmland

Across New York, municipalities, farmers and community members are coming together with a common goal: to protect our state's working farmland for future generations of New Yorkers. Communities across the state have found that working farms preserve the quality of their drinking water, protect wildlife and natural areas, and contribute greatly to local economies.

A ground-swell of support for the protection of New York farmland has risen up in urban-edge areas such as Long Island and the Hudson Valley, where residents value the farms in their communities. Support has also grown in rural parts of the state that depend on agriculture for their economic livelihoods. Even residents of New York City are now appreciating the bounty of New York farms at the urban Greenmarkets and restaurants that offer fresh products from upstate farmers.

New York's Farmland Protection Program: An Investment in the Future

In 1996, New York responded to the loss of state farmland by establishing the Farmland Protection Program. The program, which is administered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, provides grants to eligible municipalities for the purchase of conservation easements (also called development rights) from farmers. To qualify, counties and towns must have state-approved "agricultural and farmland protection" plans.

Why Protect Farmland Now?

New York's farmland is at risk. Economic factors have made it harder for many of our state's working farms to stay in business. New York farmland also is threatened by poorly planned development that sprawls out from our cities and suburbs into the countryside. In the five year period between 1997 and 2002, New York lost 127,000 acres of farmland. That's an average rate of 70 acres of New York farmland disappearing every day.

Growth doesn't threaten our farmland. Poorly planned development does. Last year, a report by the Brookings Institute and Cornell University, *Sprawl Without Growth: The Upstate Paradox*, found that from 1982 and 1997, the amount of urbanized land in upstate New York grew 30 percent while the population grew less than 3 percent.

Funding for Farmland Protection

Funds for the Farmland Protection Program are currently allocated from the state's Environmental Protection Fund, a dedicated environmental fund paid for with revenue from the state real estate transfer tax. The Farmland Protection Program has been very popular among the state's communities, residents and farmers since its inception. Between 1996 and 2004, eight

Conservation Easements: Everyone Benefits

Conservation easements are voluntary land preservation agreements that restrict all future non-farm development while encouraging farming, forestry and other land uses that are compatible with agriculture. They allow land to stay in private ownership and on the tax rolls.

By purchasing conservation easements from willing farmers, the state is able to protect more farmland from development, because the agreements are more cost-effective than buying land outright.



The Hanehan Dairy in Saratoga

is a family operated farm in one of the fastest growing counties in the state.

In 2000, the family, along with their farm neighbors the Halls, used state Farmland Protection Program funds and private dollars to preserve 250 acres across from the Saratoga National Veteran's Cemetery. The land is also within view of the Saratoga National Battlefield and Park.



Tunis Sweetman, an Orange County

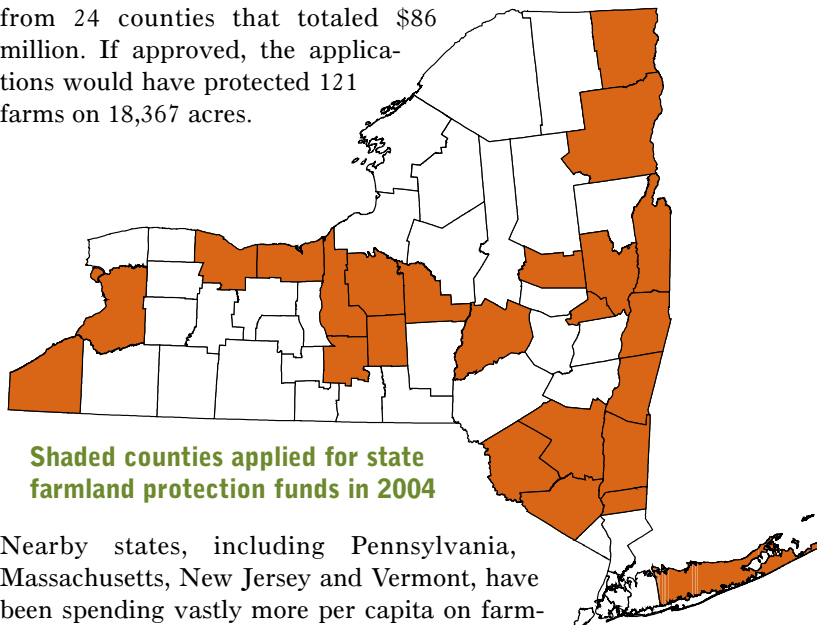
dairy farmer, used state and federal funds to purchase the farm that his family had been renting in the town of Warwick. The removal of development rights from the property reduced its value, allowing the Sweetmans to buy the land they otherwise couldn't afford.



PHOTO CREDIT: Kirsten Ferguson

rounds of farmland protection grants were awarded to counties and towns in New York. The grants, totaling over \$80 million, have protected more than 30,000 acres of farmland.

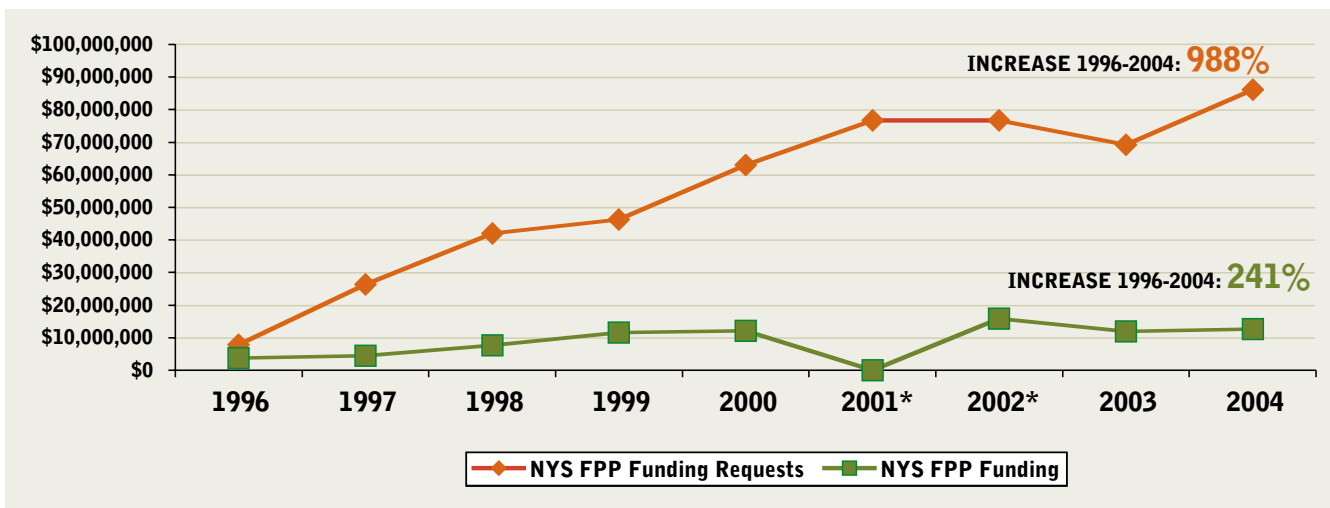
Limited funding is the primary factor preventing this popular program from saving even more of our state's farmland. In 2004, the state made \$12.6 million available for the program. However, the Department of Agriculture and Markets was inundated with requests from 24 counties that totaled \$86 million. If approved, the applications would have protected 121 farms on 18,367 acres.



Shaded counties applied for state farmland protection funds in 2004

Nearby states, including Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Vermont, have been spending vastly more per capita on farmland protection than New York. Pennsylvania, which has protected over 2,500 farms on nearly 300,000 acres of farmland since 1989, made \$43 million available for farmland protection in 2003. New Jersey offered up a whopping \$80 million for its state program in the same year. For New York to succeed at protecting our rapidly vanishing farmland, we must greatly accelerate our efforts.

NYS Farmland Protection Program Funding vs. Funding Requests



*There was no funding for NYS Farmland Protection Program in 2001. Grant requests submitted in 2001 were carried over to 2002. In 2002, \$16 million was allocated for the program to cover 2 years of funding.

Statewide Successes

Since its creation, New York's Farmland Protection Program has conserved thousands of acres of farmland for future generations of farmers and residents. The program has successfully leveraged funding from local governments, private sources and the federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, drawing in \$24 million in matching funds since 1996.

This is a program that has been popular throughout the state, from rural farm counties like Wayne and Washington, to urban-edge areas such as Long Island's Suffolk County and the Hudson Valley. Funds from the program have been used by farmers to make investments in their businesses, purchase land they previously had been renting or to facilitate the transfer of land from one generation of farm family to the next.

Farmland preservation is an investment in the future. Our state's farmland is a finite and irreplaceable natural resource. Once we pave it over, we cannot get it back. The state Farmland Protection Program is popular because everyone benefits from it. Private landowners are fairly compensated for agreeing to protect their land from future development, while the community gains the assurance that residents will continue to have locally grown food, clean drinking water, wildlife habitat, scenic views and a natural buffer against development.

To Find Out More

For more information about farmland protection in New York, please contact:

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American Farmland Trust is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1980 to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment.

All photos by Jim Newton unless noted.

New York state purchased a conservation

easement on 305 acres of farmland in Jamesport, Long Island, from the Trust for Public Land. The organization had acquired the property from KeySpan Energy Corporation. Peconic Land Trust then worked to transfer the property to local farmers.



PHOTO CREDIT: Jeff Heatley

In 2003, American Farmland Trust

protected the Hourigan farm, a 660-acre family dairy farm outside of Syracuse. The Hourigan PDR project—supported by federal and state funding—is the second of six land projects that AFT is engineering in Onondaga County.

