

Programs and Incentives

Promoting Good Design:

Because the bottom line is often the dollar, it's sometimes not enough that a conservation-minded approach is an environmentally sound alternative which preserves the rural character and promotes more enjoyable and interesting spaces. It needs to make economic sense as well. Fortunately, it usually does, if one knows what incentives and other benefits are available, and if the developer stops to examine the benefits and savings included in better design. In many cases, it actually can result in a significant *increase* in the value of the land, especially when one considers how much easier it is to sell well-designed spaces and developments than poorly-designed, cookie-cutter ones. Here, then, are details on some of the direct and indirect sources of value and funding for encouraging and supporting good design.

Overview and setup of listings:

The following pages contain a listing of programs already in place, potential programs that planning boards can implement to encourage good development, and other tools or incentives which developers and planners have at their disposal to facilitate environmentally and regionally responsible design which also makes economic sense.

The listings are broken down and organized as follows:

Title of Program or Type of Tool/Classification

Purpose: Brief overview of the intent of the program.

Eligibility: Requirements for participation, if any.

Description: A brief explanation of the program or tool, including method of administration and subsequent division of responsibilities.

Benefits: A listing of the additional benefits to the landowner or developer, including potential overlaps with other design goals.

Other notes: Such issues as extent of use, commentary, potential drawbacks, and other issues.

Financial Incentives:

Direct financial benefits of the program or tool, whether a rental rate paid on the land, the percentage split of cost-share between the agency and the landowner, or tax or other benefits.

Organized Government or Agency Programs:

New York State Farmland Protection Program

Purpose: To maintain active farmland and protect it from development.

Eligibility: Owners of private active farmland which is in an area facing significant development pressure and serves as a buffer to a significant natural public resource such as [example]. Soil quality, size, likelihood to stay in farming, and level of farm management are also criteria. The county or the municipality must have a local agricultural protection plan endorsed by the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board (AFPB). The municipality or the AFPB makes the application to the state.

Description: In 1996 the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets began providing funds to purchase development rights by offering up to 75% of the fair market easement value; the municipality or the landowner covers the other 25%. Eligible costs include surveys, legal fees, baseline reports, title abstracts, insurance, and stewardship fees to cover future monitoring and enforcement costs. There is a funding cycle. Contact STCPDRB for this year's deadlines.

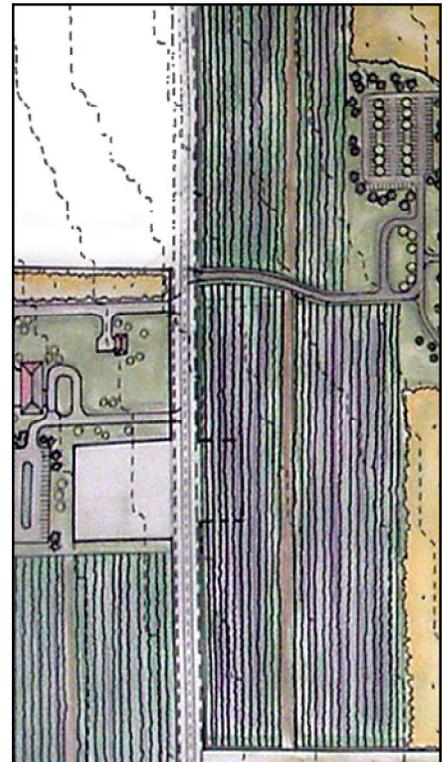
Benefits: Farmers stay in business, providing the backbone of the rural economy. Steuben and Schuyler Counties have adopted county farmland protection plans, making their farms eligible for this assistance. Local Master Plans may also include farmland protection, but will need endorsement by the AFPB.

Other notes: Housing and other non-farm development must be designed and located on non-agricultural land which will not conflict with farmland protection.

Financial Incentives:

Cost Share:

75%/25% match (Municipality or landowner pays 25% share).



Federal Farmland Protection Program

Purpose: To maintain active farmland and protect it from development.

Eligibility: Owners of private active farmland which has a conservation plan, is large enough to sustain agricultural production, is supported by agricultural services and markets, and is surrounded by other active farmland. The farm must be part of a pending offer from a state, tribal, or local farmland protection program.

Description: The USDA, working with the partner state farmland protection program, provides funds to purchase development rights by offering up to 50% of the fair market easement value. States compete for the funds on an annual basis. Contact STCRPDB for this year's info.

Benefits: Farmers stay in business, providing the backbone of the rural economy. Steuben and Schuyler Counties have adopted county farmland protection plans, making their farms eligible for this assistance.

Other notes: Housing and other non-farm development must be designed and located on non-agricultural land which will not conflict with farmland protection.

Financial Incentives:

Cost Share:

50%/50% match.



Forestry Incentive Program

Purpose: To promote the conservation, improvement, or reclamation of forested areas on private property.

Eligibility: Any private landowner of up to 1000 acres of non-industrial forest land.

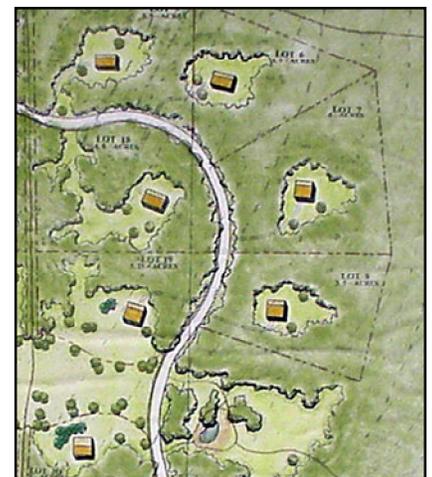
Description: The program provides cost share assistance for tree planting, timber stand improvement, and related practices to improve private forest land.

Benefits: A landowner could use the program to improve the wooded portions of his/her land as part of the overall development plan. Previously clear-cut land could be restored to wildlife habitat, open space, or well-managed timber harvesting operations (which could generate additional income). Care should be taken, however, when designing new house lots near timber management areas to avoid conflicts between the uses.

Financial Incentives:

Cost Share:

65%/35% match, up to \$10,000 per person per year.



Conservation Reserve Program - Erodible Land

Purpose: To reduce erosion from highly erodible, marginal land through planting/maintaining cover crops.

Eligibility: Owner/Renter/Lessee of 50 or more acres of active farmland. Land in cultivation must have been in a commodity crop (wheat, corn, oats, etc.; not hay) for two of the last five years.

Description: Contracts are issued for ten to fifteen years through a competitive bidding process. Sign-ups are on a continuous basis. Land should not be taken out of agricultural production.

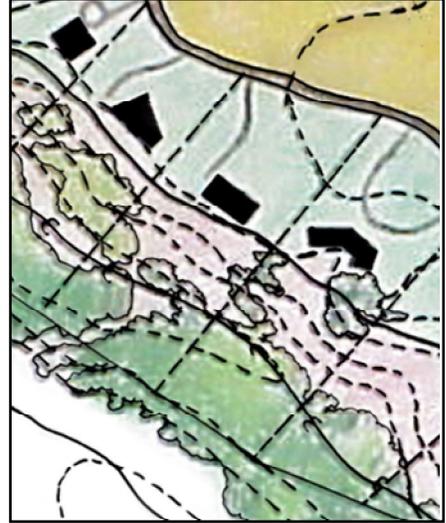
Benefits: This would be an excellent tool for a farmer who is developing non-farming acreage for other compatible uses. Being paid to reclaim steep slopes would be a bonus, since local planning boards often prohibit development in such areas.

Other notes: This program is used extensively in the region. Retired and part-time farmers make up the majority of the participants.

Financial Incentives:

Rental rate:

approx. \$32/acre/ year (based on site conditions)



Conservation Reserve Program - Streamside Buffer

Purpose: To create a vegetated strip or “buffer” along a stream which filters out agricultural nutrients and/or chemicals before they reach the stream.

Eligibility: Owner of land with “agricultural input” (crop or grazing) to adjacent stream. Not for abandoned pasture.

Description: Contracts are issued for ten to fifteen years through a competitive bidding process. Sign-ups are on a continuous basis. Funding is also available for alternate water sources for livestock now restricted from the stream.

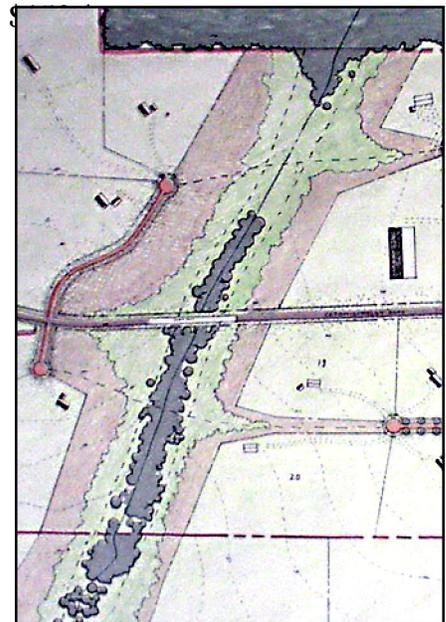
Benefits: There are long-term savings to a farm operation as they avoid costly environmental cleanup from runoff. Stream corridors are restored as wildlife habitat and open space as part of good development design.

Other notes: Since the program incentives are usually less than the active value of the farmland along the stream, a farmer may not be willing to lose the income. This program is not used extensively in the region to date.

Financial Incentives:

Payment to Landowner:

50% cost share, PLUS one time incentive payments of an additional 40%, PLUS \$100 to \$



Wetlands Restoration Program (WRP)

Purpose: To maintain or increase wetland acreage for wildlife habitat and flood reduction.

Eligibility: Any landowner, public or private, of land easily convertible to wetlands or existing wetlands, of any size.

Description: Applications for land which meets top wetlands priorities will be selected for the program. A soils scientist or biologist will conduct a site visit to choose the right site and develop a restoration plan. The land, once restored, must be maintained at the owner's expense, which is usually minimal. Landowners retain ownership and may use the land for hunting or recreation. Public access is not required.

Benefits: Landowners considering additional uses on existing or former farmland can get personal tax benefits and create a pleasing open space within a creative development. The landowner would gain a monetary value for land which municipalities would restrict from development.

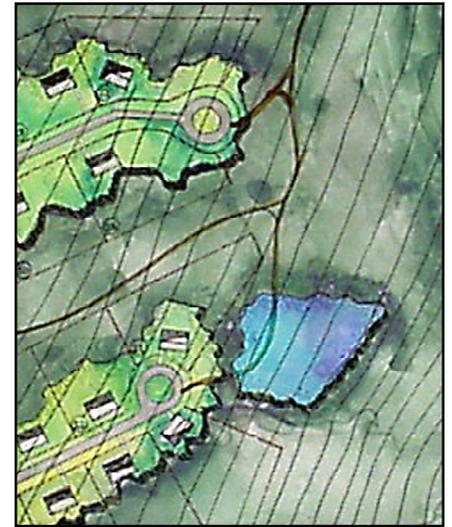
Other notes: The value of the easement is based on the agricultural value of the land. Preference is given to land which has been in farming within the past 20 years.

Financial Incentives:

Cost Share:

10 yr. contract: 75%/25% match
30 yr. conservation easement: 75% of agricultural value of the land and 75% of restoration costs.

Permanent easement: 100% of restoration costs and of ag. value.



Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

Purpose: To increase or preserve wildlife habitat.

Eligibility: Any private landowner with open land of any size which can be managed for birdbreeding/nesting habitat.

Description: Competitive program. Land with diverse habitat suitable for birds will be selected. Biologist conducts site visit, NRCS staff creates plan and recommends cost-share practices which yield the most benefit. Often, warm or cool weather grasses are planted. Owner obligation is usually 3-year mowing rotation, brush management, and lime/fertilizer application.

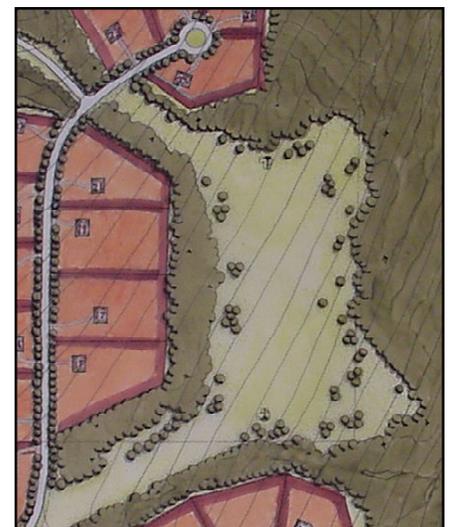
Benefits: An excellent opportunity to create attractive open space which would add value to adjacent lots as part of a creative development. Homeowner's association or open space landowner would coordinate ongoing maintenance.

Other notes: Especially appropriate for former farmland, since abandoned pasture is easy to reclaim as habitat.

Financial Incentives:

Cost Share:

75%/25% match. Landowner's 25% share can be equipment time. \$10,000 cap.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Purpose: To protect and improve water quality of streams and aquifers on the Priority Waterbody List (PWL).

Eligibility: Farmers who own active farmland which faces serious threats to soil, water, and related natural resources. The land must be located within the watershed of a stream or aquifer on the PWL.

Description: Incentives are provided through 5 to 10 year contracts to encourage producers to undertake nutrient, manure, irrigation water, wildlife habitat, and/or integrated pest management practices. At least half the funds must be directed to livestock-related concerns.

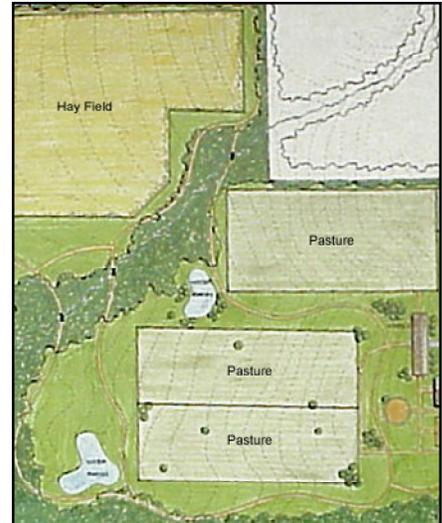
Benefits: Excellent assistance which is available to help keep farming in business, through practices which decrease the risk of significant later cleanup or mitigation costs.

Other notes: Applications with the highest environmental benefit are preferred. Competition is high and eligible areas are limited. Any non-farm use must be carefully planned so that farming operations may continue.

Financial Incentives:

Cost Share:

75%/25% match.



Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Conservation of Private Grazing Land Initiative

Purpose: To help keep land in farming and preserve rural character while encouraging better practices and environmental health.

Eligibility: Private landowners with active grazing lands which are *not* located within PWL watersheds.

Description: Technical assistance and information on better land management, erosion reduction, water conservation, wildlife habitat, and improving soil structure is available.

Benefits: Grazing land is compatible with non-farm development such as housing and can provide idyllic country scenery for the new resident. The land stays in active farm use and new rural residents can enjoy a true country setting.

Financial Incentives:

Cost Share:

None; technical and information assistance only.

