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Conservation District
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<div>LAKE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT 125 E. Erie St., Painesville, OH 44077 440/350-2730 FAX 440/350-2601 Toll-free Numbers: 428-4348 x 2730 Madison/Perry 918-2730 Cleveland/Western Lake County 800/899-LAKE outside Lake County only E-mail: soil@lakecountyohio.gov Web site: www.lakecountyohio.gov/soil Office Hours: Mon.-Fri. 7:30 am-4:00 pm</div>	<div>BOARD OF SUPERVISORS BILLIE KAMIS (2006), WILLOUGHBY HILLS, CHAIR DWAYNE BAILEY (2007), MENTOR, VICE-CHAIR DENISE BREWSTER (2006), CONCORD, TREASURER BRUCE LANDEG (2007), MENTOR, FISCAL AGENT CHRIS LEGROS (2007), WAITE HILL, SECRETARY</div>
	<div>MEMBER OF: American Farmland Trust Lake County Farm Bureau Nursery Growers of Lake County, Inc. National Association of Conservation Districts Ohio Federation of Soil & Water Conservation Districts</div>
<div>STAFF PAUL BOWYER, Stormwater Specialist PAM BROWN, District Secretary/Treasurer DAN DONALDSON, District Administrator CHAD EDGAR, Urban Stream Specialist BETH LANDERS, Education/Info Coordinator MAURINE ORNDORFF, Ag Programs Tech MATTHEW SCHARVER, Resource Protection Tech AL BONNIS, District Conservationist, NRCS JOHN NIEDZIALEK, WR RC&D Coordinator, NRCS</div> <div>Lake County Commissioners Ray Sines Robert Aufuldish Dan Troy</div>	<div>The public is invited to attend Lake SWCD's monthly Board meetings, held the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm at 125 East Erie St., Painesville. Meeting announcements appear under the public agenda in the News-Herald and on the District website. Please call in advance to let us know you will be attending.</div>
	<div>AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER All Lake SWCD and USDA programs and services are available without regard to race, age, gender, national origin, political beliefs, color, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.</div>

Fall 2007

The Seedling
Cultivating Agricultural Sustainability

Agricultural Newsletter of the Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District

Volume 3, Issue 4

AEPP Update

Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District submitted two applications to the 2007 Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP) funding cycle on behalf of landowners in Leroy and Madison Townships. These two families have applied to the program every year since its inception. Although neither application has yet met with success, one made it into the second tier of the scoring system this year for the first time, giving us hopes that it may be possible for a Lake County landowner to be accepted into the AEPP.

This year, in the sixth round of the AEPP, the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Office of Farmland Preservation plans to purchase agricultural easements on 3,316 acres of farmland from 20 farms in 11 counties. The Office of Farmland Preservation received 235 applications from 31 counties, requesting funding to protect 34,292 acres. With only \$3.1 million available for 2007, only a small portion of the requests could be funded. One last round in the pilot program will offer \$3.1 million in 2008.

Mark Forni, a farmer and former Monroe County Commissioner was appointed as the Director of the Office of Farmland Preservation earlier this year by Ohio Department of Agriculture Director Robert Boggs. Director Forni has expressed great interest in determining whether or not the AEPP has met the objectives of the voter approved Clean Ohio initiative. Lake SWCD took him on a tour of our Northeast Ohio viticultural area in the spring to hear first-hand the issues of the Concord and vinifera growers and winemakers. We have maintained a dialog with Director Forni and have encouraged him to consider changing the scoring system to give more value to agricultural operations of a

perennial nature that are close to urban markets, such as grapes and other fruits, and make it possible for the more urbanized counties in Ohio to benefit from the program. Members of the Ohio Farmland Preservation Advisory Board are supportive of this idea, but there is not enough money in the current program to address this need.

The AEPP will be discussed by legislators in the coming months and shaped into a new program, based upon the experiences of the pilot program. Since the inception of the pilot in 2002, the Office of Farmland Preservation has received 1,603 applications, totaling approximately 251,961 acres. About \$21.7 million in Clean Ohio Funds and \$7.2 million in federal grant funds have been allocated to purchase agricultural easements on 117 farms in 23 counties, totaling 23,616 acres. These figures show that only 7% of the applications have been funded.

According to ODA Director Robert Boggs, "In the last 50 years more than 6.9 million acres of Ohio farmland have been converted from agricultural use. Agriculture in Ohio is a multi-billion industry adding nearly \$92 billion into the economy. It is imperative that we work to save our

most valuable resource through farmland preservation."

The AEPP has taken an important first step in preserving Ohio's agricultural heritage. Let us encourage our legislators to step up the parameters of the program and create a new Clean Ohio program that will protect Ohio's most valuable farmland in a more ambitious and critical way. To obtain contact information for your State Senator and Representative, call the Legislative Information Office toll free at 800/282-0253.



View of vineyards from South River Winery

This summer was a busy time as we worked on implementing the two segments of The Cleveland Foundation (TCF) Grant project. For the study of the economic impact of the grape industry, we have been surveying patrons of area wineries, the Concord and vinifera growers and the wineries. The surveys of the winery patrons will be completed during the fall season. Our partnership with Ohio Wine Producers Association and Ohio Cooperative Extension Ashtabula Office have made it possible to create and conduct the surveys, and we expect the data entry and analysis to be completed by early January 2008.

Also during the summer, the Cost of Community Services study was being conducted for us by American Farmland Trust. A draft of the report has been completed and is currently undergoing the review process.

We will present the findings of the both studies at a public meeting at Madison High School, 6741 North Ridge Road in Madison on January 17, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. Save the date!!

The Cleveland Foundation awarded a grant to Lake SWCD early in 2007 to undertake a viticultural/vinicultural economic impact study in Ashtabula, Geauga and Lake Counties and to update a Cost of Community Services study in Madison Village and Township. The goal of the study is to gather information which will help the public and elected decision makers understand the importance of preserving agricultural land uses in this unique growing region. More information about the grant can be found in the Winter 2007 issue of The Seedling (<http://www.lakecountyohio.org/soil/seedling.htm>).

One for the Grape

The One for the Grape program would like to thank the following businesses and their customers for helping to preserve the vineyard lands in Northeast Ohio:

- The Lakehouse Inn
- Laurello Vineyards
- The Lodge at Geneva State Park
- Grand River Cellars
- Ferrante Winery
- St. Joseph Vineyard
- Debonne Vineyards
- Emerine Estates Winery
- Markko Vineyard
- Tarsitano Winery

If your business would like to collect donations for One for the Grape, please contact Maurine Orndorff, Lake SWCD at 440/350-5863. To make an on-line donation and see scenic summer vineyard photographs, visit oneforthe葡萄.org. Take a drive through the vineyard country this fall and see why the Grand River Valley Viticultural Area ranked sixth in the nation in a recent Orbitz survey as a popular destination for wine and culinary travelers.

Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council

Governor Strickland announced the creation of the Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council this past August at the Ohio State Fair. The council is charged with planning for the future of healthy food systems and productive farm businesses. With increasing concerns about food safety, food security and loss of farmland, the formation of the council is very timely.

“Ohio can create more prosperity by tapping into the growing demand for local food. Food policy councils focus on food systems as an economic development strategy that links farm production, conservation and farm viability with public health, food security and community well-being. The Strickland administration has taken a proactive step in planning for health and prosperity in the state”, said Amalie Lipstreu, Program Coordinator for the Countryside Conservancy’s Farmland Center, and a member of the new Council.

“Increasing the percentage of food grown, processed and consumed in Ohio will provide significant financial benefits to the state and our farmers and give our citizens access to fresh Ohio grown produce”, Strickland commented.

The council will be comprised of representatives from government, food and farm businesses, hunger advocates and civil society organizations.

Wisdom in the Land

Innovative Farmers of Ohio (IFO) offers a program for beginning farmers. New farmers (young and not so young) are invited to apply to *Wisdom in the Land 2008*, a 9-day program of small group conversations with mentors, on-farm mentoring, advisory discussions with other beginning farmers in Ohio, seminars, and networking with providers of farm services. This is the third year of the program, which is funded by a USDA-North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant.

Applications will be accepted through December 15th. Twenty farmers will be chosen for the program. To request an application, call Sharon Sachs at 800/372-6092 x 3, or via email at sharon@ifoh.org.

Sylvia Zimmerman, IFO Board President, recently stated that, “nationally half of all current farmers are likely to retire in the next decade and young entry-level farmers are not replacing them at the same rate. Without new farmers land will be concentrated in large farms. Now is the chance to shift to a more sustainable system of agriculture by focusing training, resources and research on smaller farmers, those inheriting farms, and on mid-sized family farms.”

The Building Blocks of Agricultural Land Conservation

THE FOUNDATION

Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV)

Ohio’s Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) law has protected farmers from unrealistic real estate taxes since 1975. CAUV protects the land at the *parcel level* by taxing the land at its agricultural value and not its potential market value. CAUV helps to keep the agricultural land owner’s tax burden from rising in response to increases in land values caused by development. Agricultural landowners apply for CAUV through the County Auditor. There is an annual renewal. All farms larger than 10 acres qualify for CAUV if they are devoted exclusively to commercial agricultural use. Farms smaller than 10 acres are eligible if the average yearly gross farm income for the past three years is at least \$2,500 from agricultural products. If the land is converted to non-agricultural land uses, the owner is required to pay back the tax savings for up to three previous years.

THE MORTAR

Agricultural District Program

The Agricultural District Program provides protection at the *individual farm level* by giving a deferment or exemption from utility assessments and defense against nuisance lawsuits and eminent domain proceedings. Farm owners apply to the County Auditor. The requirements are the same as for the CAUV program, which causes some landowners to believe they are enrolled in the Ag District Program if they are in CAUV. Agricultural District designation does not affect real property valuations and landowners must apply for the CAUV program separately. Ag Districts are renewed every five years and there is a penalty for withdrawing from the Program before the five-year period has expired.

THE WALLS

Agricultural Security Areas (ASA)

Agricultural Security Areas (ASA) provide protections at the *farming community level* from development pressures. Ohio’s Agricultural Security Area legislation went into effect in May 2005. ASAs are designed to protect farmland by creating special areas where agriculture is encouraged and protected. They can be the perimeter defense of the farm community. ASAs require 500 acres or more of contiguous land (which may be comprised of more than one landowner). Each landowner must be enrolled in both the CAUV and Ag District programs. ASAs are implemented for 10-year periods, after which time they may be renewed. Landowners must apply to the township trustees and county commissioners to form an ASA. Properly assembled ASAs keep utilities and roads from extending into the farming community, helping to discourage intense development. Participants may be eligible for real property tax exemptions on new or expanded farm buildings, up to 75% for up to 10 years.

THE ROOF

Agricultural Easements

Agricultural easements provide a stronger protection option for *landowners*. They are also the ultimate protection available for the entire agricultural structure. If a landowner chooses to protect his or her property with an agricultural easement, the right to develop the property is forever extinguished. A landowner may be compensated for severing the development right, or may “donate” that right and receive tax benefits by giving up the development value of the property. An agricultural easement is a restriction placed on the deed which applies to all future landowners. The land remains in private ownership and the landowner retains all other rights of ownership. Easements offer an opportunity for landowners to keep their land intact as agricultural land and help increase the potential for their heirs to keep the property in the family by reducing or eliminating estate taxes. There are currently two easement purchase programs available that provide compensation to qualifying landowners: the Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP) and the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). The AEPP is very competitive (see the AEPP article on page 1 of this newsletter); it requires a 25% match and it uses a ranking system that is designed to protect farmland with intermediate development pressures. The FRPP requires a 50% match from the local community. Easement donations are accepted by Lake SWCD as well as the Ohio Agricultural Easement Donation Program; no compensation is given to the landowner, but substantial tax benefits may apply.

Please contact Maurine Orndorff, our Agricultural Programs Technician at 440/350-5863 for more information about these programs, or to discuss specific farmland preservation options for your land.

Thanks to Jonathan Ferbrache with Fairfield SWCD for the building blocks concept of agricultural land conservation.