

Determining the Easement Value

An independent, licensed real estate appraiser is selected by the county board to determine the market value and agricultural value of the land. The difference between these two values is the maximum value of the conservation easement. Landowners may receive up to 100% of the appraised amount of the conservation easement for a perpetual easement.

For Example:

\$10,000 Market Value/Acre
\$ 8,000 Agricultural Value/Acre
\$ 2,000 Easement Value/Acre

The county board has the option to offer a purchase price less than the full value of the easement. Landowners also have the right to hire their own appraiser should they disagree with the county board's offer. Differences in the two valuations may be resolved by a formula as set forth in the law.



Blair County's Easements Process

Applications for the program are accepted annually through October 15th of any given year for approval and ranking for the following year's program funds.

The Blair County Conservation District administers the program for Blair County with District Staff serving as the points of contact.

The Easement process generally takes 8 to 12 months from the landowner's payment of an appraisal deposit. The process steps include: Application; Acceptance and Ranking; Landowner Appraisal Deposit; Appraisal; County Board Offer; Offer Acceptance; Survey; Title Clearance; Sales Agreement; County Commissioner Signature; State Board Approval; Easement Closing with Easement Payment to the Landowner.

For More Information:
Blair County Ag Land Preservation
Program
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Blair County Agricultural Land Preservation Program for Easement Purchase

Pennsylvania leads the Nation and Blair County leads our region in saving our prime agricultural land through the Ag Land (Farmland) Preservation Program! The program was authorized through the Agricultural Security Area Law (Act 43 of 1981 and subsequent amendments).

Blair County was approved to purchase Agricultural Conservation Easements beginning in 1991, which provided an option to farmers who want to continue farming but are impacted by nearby nonagricultural development. By voluntarily selling agricultural conservation easements, farmers will be paid a portion of the nonagricultural development value of the property and may have an alternative to selling the farm for conversion to non-farm uses. The land with an easement placed upon it to prevent development can continue to be farmed and will remain in agricultural use for perpetuity.

Preserving Farms Since 1991



What is an Agricultural Conservation Easement?

Property ownership is like a “bundle of sticks,” with each stick in the bundle representing a separate right. Each right may be used, or disposed of, separately. For example, it is common in PA for owners to separate coal or mineral rights. Other rights in the “bundle” include: the right to sell, lease or mortgage, surface rights, easement of access, etc.

Agricultural easements are another example of this principle. The holder of the conservation easement has the right to prevent development or improvement of the land for purposes other than agricultural production. In other words, the holder of the agricultural easement has purchased the right to say “no” to non-ag development on the farm from which it was bought.

Blair County’s Easement Purchase Program

Under the provisions of the Agricultural Security Area Law, county governments may establish a program to purchase agricultural conservation easements from farmers who voluntarily offer to sell easements. **Long-term preservation is the goal; therefore, easements are purchased in perpetuity.**

Blair County’s program began with the program approval in 1991 and the first easement purchased in 1993.

The Blair County Board is comprised of five members of the community - two of which are farmers, one from the development community, one with municipal ties and one appointed as an at-large member. Board members are appointed to serve 3-year terms by the County Commissioners.

Funding for easement purchases comes from both County and State sources and at times Federal Funds may be available. Blair County continues to lead the region in financial support to the program with a recent (2012-2026) average county allocation of \$100,000. The county allocation translates into match funds from the state along with grant funds for an average of \$330,000 annually.

Who is Eligible?

To be eligible to sell agricultural conservation easements, the farm **must be located in an Agricultural Security Area.** Additional requirements for purchase and ranking criteria include consideration of the following:

Quality of Farmland

As a minimum, easements may be purchased from farms where **at least 50% of the tract is either harvested cropland, pasture or grazing land, and it must contain at least 50% of soils in capability classes I-IV.**

Size of Tract

The tract offered for easement purchase **must be at least 50 acres.** Larger tracts offered for sale receive a higher ranking.

Stewardship

Applicants will be ranked based upon their use of conservation practices for nutrient management and control of soil erosion on their farm.

Likelihood of Conversion

Applications offered for sale will be scored and ranked for possible acquisition on a variety of factors such as: proximity of the farm to water/sewer lines, extent of development nearby, amount and type of agricultural use in the vicinity.

Ranking

The county board has developed a ranking system to provide guidance in the review of all applications and the purchase of Blair County Easements.