

Agriculture

Delaware has one of the best-regarded and most productive farmland preservation programs in the nation. Administered by the Department of Agriculture, farmers and other landowners sell easements to their land to the state, which essentially extinguishes their right to develop the land, but continues to allow a wide range of agricultural uses.

The Agriculture Lands (Aglands) Preservation Program chooses farms to preserve based on the percentage discount that the owners offer from the appraised value of their farms' development rights. The farms with the highest percentage discounts are preserved.

Table A.8 Farmland preservation by easement, fiscal years 2020-2024

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Farms Preserved	63	46	49	60	39
Acres Preserved	5,300	3,563	3434	5,353	2,199
State Funds	\$6,342,690	\$6,162,976	\$7,985,856	\$19,422,858	\$9,958,726
Federal Funds	\$3,417,090	\$2,537,607	\$1,628,585	\$1,213,557	\$245,874
County/Other Funds	\$572,473	\$1,527,626	\$200,000	\$1,646,355	\$657,666
Legal and Survey*	\$300,000	\$239,242	\$235,235	\$250,000	\$175,000
Total Funds	\$10,632,253	\$10,467,451	\$10,049,676	\$22,532,770	\$11,037,266
Cost per Acre**	\$1,949	\$2,871	\$2,858	\$4,163	\$4,940

Source: Delaware Department of Agriculture

* State Funds - Estimated values for settlements that have not occurred.

** Cost per acre paid to land owner excludes legal and survey costs.

Young Farmer Loan Program

The Young Farmer Loan Program was established in FY 2012 by the Department of Agriculture to help individuals acquire farmland. Applicants who meet the criteria for the program (age 18 to 40, net worth not exceeding \$300,000, and at least three years of farming experience) can apply for a loan to help purchase a farm (the property must have at least 15 acres of cropland). If approved, an applicant can receive a thirty-year, no-interest loan for up to 70 percent (not to exceed \$500,000) of the appraised value of the property's development rights.

Table A.9 Young Farmer Loan Program, fiscal years 2020-2024

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Farms Preserved	1	0	2	2	1
Acres Preserved	99	0	250	248	104
State Funds	\$258,836	0	\$837,679	\$862,832	\$500,000
Legal and Survey*	\$6,071	0	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$8,877
Total Funds	\$264,907	\$0	\$847,679	\$872,832	\$508,877
Cost per Acre**	\$2,615	N/A	\$3,351	\$3,519	\$4,808

Source: Delaware Department of Agriculture

* State Funds

** Cost per acre paid to landowner excludes legal and survey costs

Forestland Preservation

The Forest Preservation Program was established in FY 2010, and nine forest tracts were preserved at that time, totaling 872 acres. The funding for these easements included state funding combined with funding from The Nature Conservancy, a private conservation organization.

Table A.10 Total forest preservation easements, fiscal years 2020-2024

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023 *	FY 2024
Forest Tracts Preserved	2	4	2	0	1
Acres Preserved	122	432	107	0	63
State Funds	\$111,946	\$393,064	\$248,002	0	\$57,341
Federal Funds	N/A	\$0	\$0	0	0
Local Funds	\$9,500	\$0	\$0	0	\$57,341
Private Conservation Funds	N/A	\$0	\$0	0	0
Legal & Survey**	\$6,500	\$12,000	\$9,218	0	\$5,000
Total Funds	\$127,946	\$405,064	\$257,221	\$0	\$119,682

Source: Delaware Department of Agriculture

* No Forestland Preservation bids received in FY23

** State Funds