

Surroundings



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Farms, Preservation, and Transportation

Ms. Kelly is experienced in conducting and managing environmental studies for a variety of projects in the public and private sectors throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. She has managed projects involving cultural, natural, and socioeconomic resources. Ms. Kelly has seamlessly integrated public involvement activities into the NEPA process, particularly in the form of outreach to farmers and special interest groups. Activities have included the use of GIS in conjunction with farmer interviews, formal and informal public information meetings, and impact assessments.

Since 1989, the Pennsylvania Agricultural Land Preservation Board has preserved a total of 2,073 farms, which combined totals 247,157 acres. With these numbers, Pennsylvania leads the nation in number of farms and total number of acres preserved (Pennsylvania Bureau of Farmland Preservation).

With the increase in farm preservation, there has also been an increased awareness by the general public, conservation organizations, and PENNDOT to the importance of keeping farmable acreage actively farmed. These astounding figures bring to light the importance of working with and helping the farmers in their conservation and preservation techniques.

An agricultural assessment is conducted for each PENNDOT project that has the potential to impact farmland. During this assessment, which is of varying magnitude depending on the size of the improvement project, input is received from the farming community. This usually involves direct contact with the farm property owner and tenant farmer. It is also important to receive the input of the various governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations that have an interest in the preservation of farmland.

Early coordination with the farming community is key to transportation projects involving active agricultural lands. This coordination comes in many forms. It can involve letters to the community, booths at public meetings, and/or special meetings set up specifically for the farming community. This coordination may occur at the preliminary alternative analysis stage as well as the detailed alternative analysis stage.

After the initial contact with the property owner is made, an interview is scheduled. It is best to conduct these interviews at the farm; however, if this is not possible, a telephone interview or a meeting at another location can also be appropriate. These interviews provide pertinent information on the farm, including, but not limited to, the following: type of operations, crop acreage and yields, livestock numbers and markets, primary water sources, access routes to farm parcels, and agricultural-related buildings and equipment on the property. Ultimately, this information is collected to minimize as many



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impacts to farmland as possible.

Geographic Information System (GIS) may also be utilized during the interview process. As the farmer identifies features, they can be directly added to the GIS database. This GIS database provides an excellent tool during the impact analysis in determining which alternative will impact the least amount of farmland.



Ms. Kelly confers with a property owner to conduct an agricultural

During the alternative analysis, identifying those that are more disruptive to farm operations helps establish which alternatives should be dismissed. Specific impacts to farm parcels and access routes are determined. Also important is determining whether a farm will be bisected, whether a portion of the farm will be left inaccessible to farm, and whether the primary access will be lost.

Throughout this process, PENNDOT recognizes the federal and state laws and policies relating to farmland. These policies include PA Act 1979-100; PA Act 1981-43; 4 PA Code Chapter 7, Agricultural Land Preservation Policy (ALPP); PA Act 515 of 1966; PA Act 319 of 1974; and 7 USC 4201 Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA). Prior to the condemnation of productive agricultural land, PENNDOT must prove to the Agricultural Lands Condemnation Approval Board (ALCAB) that there are no other prudent or feasible alternatives to this acquisition.

To continue to minimize the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses and help Pennsylvania maintain its lead in farmland preservation, farmland assessments should be used as a tool to avoid as many impacts to these resources as possible.



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