

AGRICULTURAL ZONING

PRESERVING FARMLAND FOR HAPPY COMMUNITIES



WHAT IS AGRICULTURAL ZONING?

Agricultural Zoning preserves productive farmland from commercial development by limiting the number of dwellings and lot sizes for non-agricultural use. This prevents fragmenting farmland, while accommodating agriculture and ag-related tourism use.

HOW DOES AGRICULTURAL ZONING WORK?

A well-designed Agricultural Zoning program combines several approaches. Municipalities can combine techniques to address their individual farmland production and preservation needs. Agricultural Zoning plays an important role in a municipality's comprehensive approach to farmland preservation, which can include creating agricultural security areas, conservation easements, and transferable development rights.

The PA Municipalities Planning Code leaves the interpretation and implementation of farmland preservation to individual municipalities. When done in tandem with the municipality's comprehensive plan, the community's objectives for local land use will be evident in the ways it treats prime agricultural land.

AGRICULTURAL ZONING



Lancaster, PA

BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURAL ZONING

- Stabilizes the agricultural base in a community
- Preserves and protects productive farmland
- Limits land speculation where land has been zoned for agricultural use
- Helps new residents and established farmers avoid conflicts, since there are fewer neighbors exposed to the effects of farming
- Buffers the municipality against legal challenges

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Governor's Center for Local Government Services provides technical assistance on a variety of planning, land use, and development matters to planning commissions, zoning officers, zoning hearing boards, and other local government officials. For more information visit dced.pa.gov/planning.

For county-specific information about Agricultural Zoning, contact Penn State Cooperative Extension Service at extension.psu.edu/county-offices

5 TYPES OF AGRICULTURAL ZONING

- ✓ **AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY ZONING** allows for various forms of agriculture production, farm dwellings and buildings, and farm-related businesses including roadside stands.
- ✓ **NON-EXCLUSIVE AGRICULTURAL ZONING** includes large minimum lot size zoning and area-based allocation. It limits the number of non-farm dwellings built in an agricultural zone, and often allows conditional uses if they're located on low-quality farmland.
- ✓ **EXCLUSIVE AGRICULTURAL ZONING** is rarely used because it is often subject to legal challenges. It prohibits all non-farm residences and most non-agricultural activities. Exceptions may be granted for parcels that are not suitable for farming.
- ✓ **FIXED AREA RATIO ZONING** sets a building density formula assigning a specific number of acres for each dwelling. The ratio in most Pennsylvania communities is one unit per 25–50 acres, the typical acreage of a productive farm.
- ✓ **SLIDING SCALE ZONING** varies the number of permitted dwellings based on the size of the agricultural tract and allows some non-farm development to occur without overuse of valuable farmland.