

PURPOSE

This study examines the potential use and benefits of transforming preserved open space that is not currently farmed to sustainable farm enterprises in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Parkland and utility corridors within Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia, along with vacant lands within Philadelphia, were examined to generally assess current sustainable agriculture enterprises, determine obstacles to increased sustainable farming, recommend ways to overcome these barriers, and estimate the amount of protected land that may be available for this use and the potential economic benefits of increased sustainable farming.

ACCESS TO FOOD

Access to healthy food and local food production is increasingly seen as a key environmental issue, as it is becoming the focal point for discussions about preserved open space, health and social issues in both urban and suburban areas. The "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" movement is growing in popularity. Buy Fresh Buy Local has successfully built a network of vibrant local food systems linking producers and vendors with consumers and is an important resource promoting awareness about the importance of locally produced food. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) where local residents purchase "shares" in return for a portion of a farmer's harvest is also growing in popularity.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Given the centralized nature of food production and the increasing costs to transport food, locally produced food is seen by some as a national security issue. On the world stage, food production and distribution is thought by many to be an increasingly important issue, since food production and distribution is predicted to become increasingly marginal as the rapid rate of climate change affects crops, arable land and the ability to equitably distribute food.

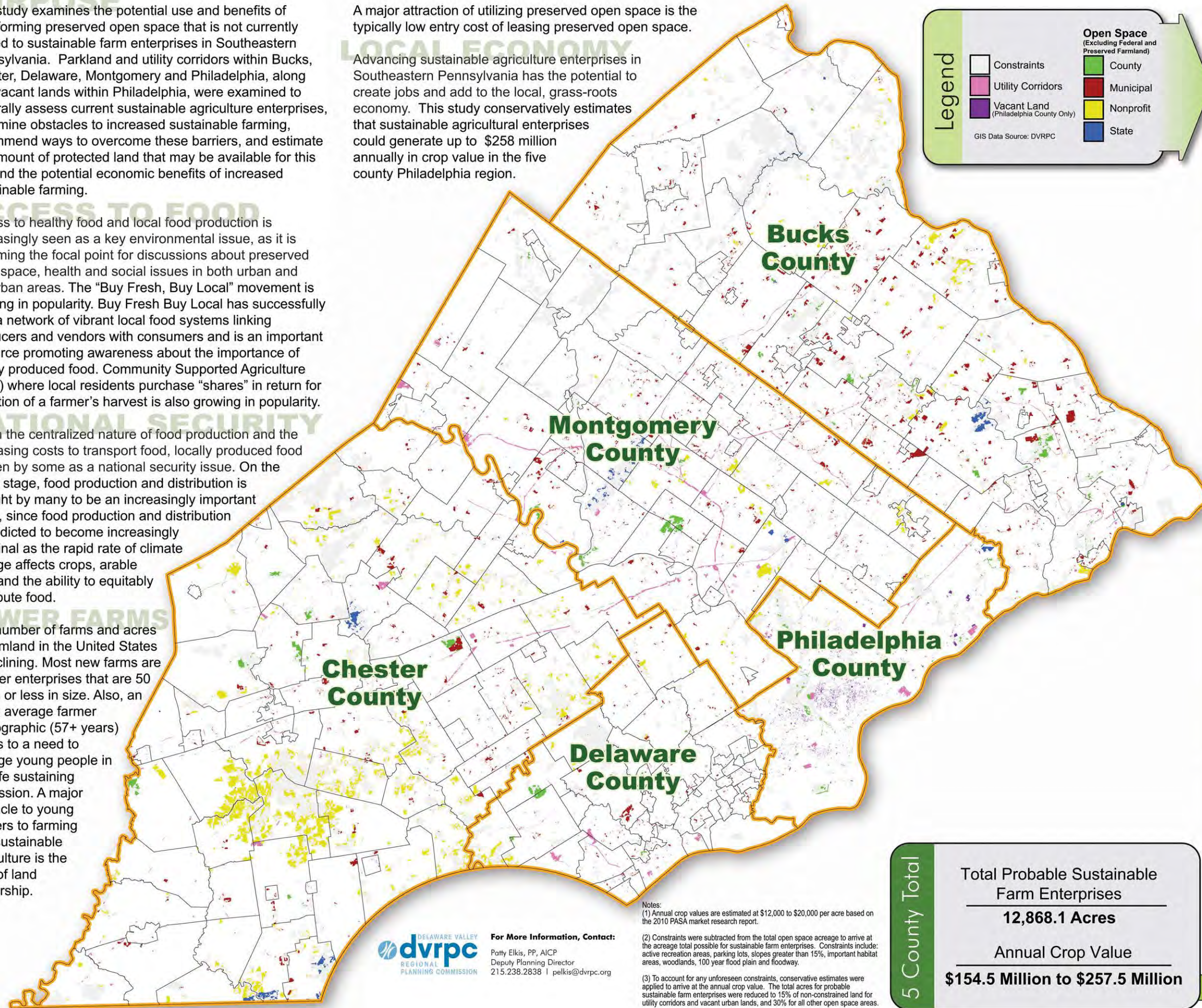
FEWER FARMS

The number of farms and acres of farmland in the United States is declining. Most new farms are smaller enterprises that are 50 acres or less in size. Also, an aging average farmer demographic (57+ years) points to a need to engage young people in this life sustaining profession. A major obstacle to young farmers to farming and sustainable agriculture is the cost of land ownership.

A major attraction of utilizing preserved open space is the typically low entry cost of leasing preserved open space.

Advancing sustainable agriculture enterprises in Southeastern Pennsylvania has the potential to create jobs and add to the local, grass-roots economy. This study conservatively estimates that sustainable agricultural enterprises could generate up to \$258 million annually in crop value in the five county Philadelphia region.

LOCAL ECONOMY



Legend

- Constraints
- Utility Corridors
- Vacant Land (Philadelphia County Only)
- Open Space (Excluding Federal and Preserved Farmland)
 - County
 - Municipal
 - Nonprofit
 - State

GIS Data Source: DVRPC

For More Information, Contact:
 Patty Elkins, PP, AICP
 Deputy Planning Director
 215.238.2838 | pelkis@dvrpc.org

Notes:
 (1) Annual crop values are estimated at \$12,000 to \$20,000 per acre based on the 2010 PASA market research report.
 (2) Constraints were subtracted from the total open space acreage to arrive at the acreage total possible for sustainable farm enterprises. Constraints include: active recreation areas, parking lots, slopes greater than 15%, important habitat areas, woodlands, 100 year flood plain and floodway.
 (3) To account for any unforeseen constraints, conservative estimates were applied to arrive at the annual crop value. The total acres for probable sustainable farm enterprises were reduced to 15% of non-constrained land for utility corridors and vacant urban lands, and 30% for all other open space areas.

5 County Total

Total Probable Sustainable Farm Enterprises
12,868.1 Acres

Annual Crop Value
\$154.5 Million to \$257.5 Million

Bucks	Total Probable Sustainable Farm Enterprises 3,072.5 Acres	Annual Crop Value \$36.9 Million to \$61.5 Million
Chester	Total Probable Sustainable Farm Enterprises 6,441.5 Acres	Annual Crop Value \$77.3 Million to \$128.9 Million
Delaware	Total Probable Sustainable Farm Enterprises 617 Acres	Annual Crop Value \$7.4 Million to \$12.3 Million
Montgomery	Total Probable Sustainable Farm Enterprises 2,194.4 Acres	Annual Crop Value \$26.4 Million to \$43.9 Million
Philadelphia	Total Probable Sustainable Farm Enterprises 542.7 Acres	Annual Crop Value \$6.5 Million to \$10.9 Million

to sustainable

What are the benefits of hosting sustainable farm enterprises in your community?

The benefits of sustainable farms are almost too numerous to mention. A few benefits include:

- Availability of fresh, healthy food in your community.
- Many health benefits are directly linked to access to fresh, healthy food.
- Sustainable farms create unique habitats for birds, other pollinators and local wildlife.
- In urban locations, sustainable farms can help infiltrate storm water, reducing runoff and flooding.
- Sustainable farms create small-scale economic development.



Rushton Woods Preserve is part of the Willistown Conservation Trust located in Willistown Township, PA. Since 2008, the farm has demonstrated ways in which sustainable agriculture and important natural areas can coexist. This property contains a community supported agriculture (CSA) operation and public trails with a trailhead serving parking needs for both uses. The farm occupies 6 acres of the 80 acre preserve.

Why should you support making more land available for sustainable farm enterprises in your community?

Sustainable farming makes good use of sometimes little used open space. While traditional agriculture utilizes large tracts of land for one crop, sustainable farms are typically modest-scaled, multi-crop farms on compact tracts of land. Sustainable farms can be harmoniously developed in close proximity to residences, open space preserves and almost any other land use. In fact, one of the benefits of sustainable farms is that they function best close to their ultimate consumers – you.

Sustainable farms are often supported by the community, sometimes as “CSAs” (community supported agriculture). These CSAs often become community activity centers where neighbors meet neighbors. Sustainable farms can also provide fresh food to local restaurants, grocery stores, schools and other institutions. Growing and harvesting food in your community also conserves energy by significantly reducing food transportation costs.

Young farmers are in search of lands for sustainable farms in close proximity to local markets. These farms also bring grass-roots jobs to your community.



Pennypack Farm and Education Center is located on land owned by another non-profit, College Settlement Camp (CSC). CSC provides the land to the farm, and Pennypack Farm and Education Center provides the educational programming. This farm serves 380 families with the summer CSA program and 115 families in the winter. It provides three area food cupboards with over 4,000 pounds of fresh produce yearly. In addition, it provides community service learning opportunities for teens and corporate groups as well as educational programming for its members and CSC.

What can your community do to encourage the establishment of more sustainable farms?

Often, municipal land use regulations restrict agriculture to just a few zoning districts - typically large-lot residential zones such as R-1 and R-2. These restrictions make perfect sense since, unlike sustainable farms, traditional agriculture utilizes large tracts of land. This study recommends rethinking zoning regulations in the context of sustainable agriculture to allow smaller farms in more areas of a municipality. Smaller, sustainable farms can be harmoniously operated in concert with many other uses, putting unused lands into production.

Encourage your elected officials to review this study and to consider ordinance revisions to allow sustainable farms. Typical revisions are outlined in this study and can be utilized by your municipality as a guide.



Josie Porter Farm is part of the Stroud Preserve located on land leased from Stroud Township in northeastern PA. In operation for 6 years, this local food hub provides over 100 CSA shares to the community and offers a diversity of healthy, whole foods from local and regional sources to CSA members and also through a seasonal market.

farm enterprises

Major study recommendations include:

Public Outreach and Awareness Recommendations:

- Develop and implement an outreach / publicity campaign directed at local municipalities, conservancies and land trusts to raise awareness about sustainable farm enterprises;
- Conduct workshops to promote the use of preserved open space for sustainable farm enterprises. Conduct these workshops in coordination with County Planning Departments;
- Organize a network of professional speakers from allied organizations and professions to speak at conferences about the use of preserved open space for sustainable farm enterprises;
- Establish liaisons with area secondary schools and colleges to introduce / expand this initiative to those educational institutions; and,
- Seek out interested municipal / conservancy partners to fund and establish new model sustainable farm enterprises to be publicized as pilot projects for this initiative.

Planning and Zoning Recommendations:

Generally, create county and municipal comprehensive plan goals and strategies to encourage sustainable agriculture enterprises.

More specific recommendations include revising and enhancing municipal zoning ordinances to:

- Create specific ordinance definitions for sustainable agriculture;
- Permit sustainable farm enterprises in more municipal zoning districts;
- Create area, bulk, setback, buffer and other standards for sustainable farm enterprises;
- Create standards for parking, waste storage and removal, hours of operation and farm management plans specific to sustainable farm enterprises; and,
- Allow specific ancillary and related uses to sustainable agriculture that fit within community goals. These ancillary uses include but are not limited to farm sales stands, farmers markets, farm structures, infrastructure, etc.

Recommendations for Urban Settings:

- Create incentives for the establishment of sustainable farm enterprises in urban areas based on enhanced stormwater management through the removal of impervious surfaces, increased availability of fresh food in urban areas, and the creation of jobs in urban areas and enhancement to the neighborhood economy.

Other Recommendations:

- In the development of the next Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), investigate and consider allowing sustainable farm enterprises on lands purchased with funds that now restrict such use based on the unique characteristics of sustainable agriculture, the ability of this activity to generate income for local municipal parks, health benefits to the community and the fact that sustainable farm enterprises can be temporary.
- Consider revisions to current DCNR regulations which prohibit farm enterprises on lands secured with DCNR funds since the unique attributes of sustainable agriculture create unique habitats, offer substantial health benefits to the local community, and enhance the local economy.

study prepared by:



GREEN SPACE ALLIANCE



transforming open space

