

### Issue Brief 1: Manalapan's Lost Farms

New Jersey is steadily losing more and more of its farmland each year. Not only are farms disappearing, but all open space in New Jersey is at risk for being built upon. New Jersey is an ideal state to live due to its closeness to major cities such as New York and Philadelphia, where many people in New Jersey commute to. This is one of the main reasons why New Jersey is the most densely populated state. Every available open space and farm land is being converted into developments, shopping malls, and roadways. Specifically, the township of Manalapan has transformed from a farming town to a commercial and over-developed town. The Farmland Preservation Act was put in place to protect agricultural land and ensure that agricultural land would only be used for agricultural purposes, however, this program is voluntary, and has proven ineffective in the township of Manalapan.

The Farmland Preservation Program is an incentive program for farmers to sell their development easements. When the land's development easements are sold, the farmer still owns the land, but the land can only be used for agricultural purposes, and future owners cannot develop the land. The sale price is based on the difference between what a developer would pay for the land and what it is worth for agriculture. The Farmland Preservation Program is administered by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), which coordinates with County Agriculture Development Boards, municipal governments, nonprofit organizations and landowners in the development of plans that best meet the needs of individual landowners (New Jersey Farmland Preservation Program Overview).

According to Money Magazine, Manalapan was rated the number two most desirable place to live on the east coast. Manalapan itself has a population of about 33,423 people (in the year 2000), and the population density of 1,084.6/mi<sup>2</sup>(New Jersey). With a high population, and more people wanting to move into Manalapan, all open space and farms are at risk.

The Western Monmouth Development plan states that their intentions are to “Provide citizens of Manalapan with a community that benefits from well planned growth and development that is in harmony with and balanced by the conservation and protection of farmland and open space to protect the natural environment and cultural resources”( Orth-Rodgers and Associates). However, this seems to be the opposite of what is actually happening in Manalapan. I believe that the Farmland Preservation Act proves to be ineffective, at least in Manalapan, because developers are offering more money to farmers while the government is only offering the average market value for the farmland, and farmers make more of a profit selling their land to developers rather than selling it to the government or another farmer. In the past 2 years, farms on Taylor Mills Road, Gordon’s Corner Road (one near Rout 9 intersection and one near Clark Mills Elementary School), and Tennant Road have all been transformed from farms into developments with large houses. It is possible that the Farmland Preservation Act is being too strict with the criteria of what farms can be preserved, and some farmers may be fearful that the value of their land will decrease if the land is no longer available for any kind of development. The governments will either have to offer more money to farmers to join the act (as many farmers are in debt already), or a law must be issued saying that a certain percentage of original farmland must be maintained in that town (in 1976, 70% of Manalapan was farmland, while in 2001 only 30% was farmland (Jordan)). Once a minimum percentage of farmland has been determined, development should not be allowed to lower the percentage of farmland any further. So, for example, since 57% of Manalapan’s farms have been developed, and a minimum percentage of lost farmlands are 60%, then the remaining 40% should remain untouched, with 3% available for development. This would also encourage developers to develop abandoned properties. If nothing is done, it is possible that all of Manalapan’s farms will be lost.

Works Cited

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