



Testimony of Community FARE in support of raising the recordation fee by \$1 per \$500 of value to generate about \$6.8 million in annual revenue for agricultural preservation programs.

Good Evening. I am Janice Wiles, Director for Community FARE (Food-Advocacy-Resources-Education) here to support the Ag Preservation proposal in full. Through two of our initiatives, the Frederick County Food Council and Frederick County Farm to School, FARE is actively working in partnership with over 50 local, state, regional organizations, government departments and farm related businesses to:

- support growing more food using biological production systems
- improve market access for Frederick County farmers
- improve healthy food access for Frederick County citizens

This excellent Ag Preservation proposal aligns with our work to support food production and public health in Frederick County. But perhaps more importantly, preservation of farmland is what the citizens of Frederick County want:

- Citizen surveys from Livable Frederick showed that well over 95% of the public wants more agricultural preservation, more local food and more open space. (Ninety. Five. Percent!)

This county is at a crossroads. With 30,000 new housing units already planned or in the pipeline, we are on our way to losing our unparalleled rural heritage and vibrant agricultural economy. Without a strong Ag Preservation program and a commitment to targeted growth, Frederick County will be just another suburban county, with more traffic, more crime, more pollution, and higher taxes to pay for the services that unbridled growth demands.

But it is more than just preserving vital open spaces and ag land. Protecting farmland creates the potential for a strong local food economy, with more jobs on the farm and in distribution, marketing and processing. Consider the following:

1. **Security** Our region has some of the best farmland in America. Once it's gone, you can never get it back.
2. **Prosperity** Increasing our local production and access to it will support local businesses. For every 100 full time on farm jobs there are 68 jobs in related industries. As just one example, an aggregation/distribution facility for local food in Frederick County has the potential to pump nearly \$8 million into the county over 5 years.
3. **Public Health** More ag land means more access to healthy locally-grown food.
4. **Environment** Farm and forest lands are critical to protection of drinking water for our communities, and through proper conservation practices can mitigate climate change, run off and erosion.

Ultimately this decision is about our values. Do we value ag land, open spaces, historic landscapes, our rural heritage and agricultural economy enough to take action to protect them? Or will we fail to take action and let slip away this rare opportunity to chart a future not dominated by residential and commercial development interests - where values and growth opportunities are shared by all who will become the Frederick County of tomorrow.

Thank you.

Additional justification:

Farmland Preservation Anchors the Farm Economy

Farms do not stand alone. Each is an anchor of stability for other nearby farms. Each is a thread in a web of neighboring farms, farm businesses, and other human endeavors that support and rely upon each other. When one thread is lost, the negative consequences ripple through the community. When many threads are lost, there comes a point when the web fails—when farms and farm businesses no longer have the mutual support needed to keep the local farm economy viable.

A farmer nearing retirement decides to sell his land to a developer. His neighbor worries about the disruptions the development will cause, and downsizes his operation. Having already struggled with declining revenues due to the loss of other farms, the local agriculture supply store closes. It lays off its employees, and they move their families elsewhere to find new jobs. Then a few farmers decide it's not worth the longer drive to buy supplies, and they sell. The nearby processing plant loses business and is forced to lay off workers too. Other farmers in the area watch their options narrow and fear that others will also sell their land for development. They conclude that their farms will inevitably be lost, so they stop investing in new machinery and labor. Eventually, they leave their fields fallow in anticipation of selling for development.^[3] The downward spiral of the local farm economy eventually becomes irreversible.

Farmland preservation aims to prevent the downward spiral. It aims to secure enough farms as permanent anchors so that people can see that their local farm economy can weather the loss of a number of non-protected farms without capsizing. Farmland preservation provides assurance that farming is there to stay in a community.

https://conservationtools.org/guides/147-why-preserve-farmland#_edn9