

# Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission

## Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2015

### Agricultural Lands Preservation Program

Rhode Island's farms contribute to the state's economic development and provide Rhode Islanders with local food and local character – as well as tourism opportunities and wildlife habitat. According to the 2014 update to the Green Industry Economic Impact Study put out by URI, agriculture contributes \$238.9 million annually to the local economy. And according to the RI Agricultural Partnership, the state's farmland also provides approximately \$90 million in ecosystem services such as habitat value, flood prevention, carbon sequestration, and improved air quality. With such significant contributions to the economy and to the health of our natural communities, protecting Rhode Island's farmland is a good investment.

The Agricultural Lands Preservation Program, run by the Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission (ALPC) and staffed by the Department of Environmental Management, preserves agricultural lands through the purchase of farmland development rights. Purchasing development rights from farmers enables them to retain ownership of their property while protecting their lands for agricultural use. At the same time, it provides farmers with a financially competitive alternative to development. The State's farming industry, which contributes \$238.9 million annually to the local economy, is dependent on access to productive land. This program helps to ensure that farming remains viable in the state.

All program applications are reviewed and scored at monthly meetings of the ALPC according to parcel size; soil quality; agricultural operation and viability; protection of water supplies and quality; open space, cultural and scenic features; flood protection; relative development pressure; and consistency with state and local plans.

Funding for this program is obtained through the Open Space Bond and matched with local and federal contributions from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, The Nature Conservancy through grants from the Champlin Foundation, and various land trusts and municipalities.

#### **Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission**

The Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission (Commission) was formed in 1981 pursuant to RIGL 42-82 (Farmland Preservation Act) for the primary purpose of acquiring the development rights to farmland in Rhode Island.

- George Mason, *Chair*
- Kevin J. Nelson, *Vice Chair*, Supervising Planner, Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program
- Kenneth Ayars, DEM Director's *Designee*, Chief of Division of Agriculture
- Martha Neale, Public Member
- Jon Reiner, Public Member
- Fay Strongin, Public Member
- Everett Stuart, Public Member
- David Wallace, Public Member
- William Wright, Public Member

*Operating statement*

In FY 2015 the ALPC held six regular meetings to conduct business (August, September, December, February, March, May). It scored the following applications into the program: St. Mary’s on East Main Road in Portsmouth, DiMEO at 396 Greenville Avenue in Johnston, Adams on Hog Hill Road in Exeter, and Gordon at 1090 Liberty Lane in South Kingstown. Several other applications did not receive a high enough score to be accepted into the program. The ALPC dedicated funding to the following projects: St. Mary’s (\$200,000), Bettencourt (voted to contribute an additional \$257,500, bringing total ALPC contribution for this project to \$395,000). The Commission made several other significant decisions: it accepted the donation of the Development Rights to Madison Farm in Westerly (not yet closed), it approved underground utility lines and gave conceptual approval for a barn on Payne Farm on Block Island, and accepted the South Kingstown Land Trust’s proposal for a land swap at Weeden Farm, subject to legal review.

*Consolidated financial statement*

In FY 2015 \$1 Million in bond funds were apportioned for farmland preservation. No other funds were received by the program. The ALPC does not receive funding for staffing. The Department of Environmental Management, Division of Planning and Development provides staff support for the Commission using both in house staff and a contract employee.

*Summary of any training courses*

In March of 2015, DEM staff and ALPC held a training for the two new members of ALPC. Topics covered included ethics, ALPC rules, and the Commissioners manual.

*Summary of land acquired and conserved*

Since its inception in 1981, the State Farmland Protection Program has protected 102 farms totaling 7061 acres. This year, the program completed 3 farmland projects totaling 173.4 acres.

<b>PROPERTY</b>	<b>Date Acquired</b>	<b>CITY/TOWN</b>	<b>ACRES</b>
Lial Farm	12/22/14	Warren	40.5
St. Mary’s	1/30/15	Portsmouth	73.1
Bettencourt	3/24/15	Tiverton	59.8
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>173.4</b>

*Briefing on anticipated activities in the upcoming fiscal year*

It is anticipated that the ALPC will dedicate funding to three projects, now under appraisal and will close on two Deeds to Development Rights.